August 9, 2018

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C 20510

Dear Senator Schumer,

On behalf of the National Society of Professional Engineers and its more than 31,000 members, I want to commend you for recently calling on the Federal Railroad Administration to add more railroad bridge safety inspectors.

Professional engineers have historically played a critical role in railroad transportation to protect the public health, safety, and welfare. Under US Department of Transportation regulations, licensure as a professional engineer is required to perform the duties of a “Railroad Bridge Engineer.” Pursuant to 49 CFR 237.51a, “a railroad bridge engineer shall be a person who is determined by the track owner to be competent … [to] prescribe inspection and maintenance procedures for railroad bridges.”

Under current law, while public roadway bridges must be inspected at least every other year, privately owned railroad bridges do not have this same requirement. Private companies are then forced to self-inspect their own train bridges, subject to oversight by the Federal Railroad Administration. With only a fraction of the nation’s nearly 100,000 privately owned railroad bridges subject to review every year, additional qualified railroad bridge safety inspectors will be critical to ensure that private railroad companies are keeping bridges safe.

NSPE believes the professional engineer’s education, experience, and professional obligations to hold paramount the public health, safety, and welfare place the professional engineer in a unique role in ensuring railroad bridge inspections are performed competently and with appropriate technical rigor. With the requested increase in Federal Railroad Administration rail bridge inspectors, professional engineers must continue to play a key role in railroad bridge inspections.

NSPE and the professional engineers we serve have been entrusted to protect the public health, safety, and welfare, including the inspection and maintenance procedures for railroad bridges. If we can answer any questions or be of service to you, please contact Arthur Schwartz, deputy executive director and general counsel, at aschwartz@nspe.org.

Sincerely,

Michael Aitken, PE, F.NSPE
President