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**Subject:** BNSF Service Issues

Sen. Dave Oehlke  
Chair, Economic Impact Committee

Dear Sen. Oehlke:

Sen. Sinner has expressed concerns about BNSF Railway service levels in North Dakota and invited me to either attend the Committee meeting Feb. 3 or email comments. Unfortunately, I cannot attend the Monday meeting and offer these comments regarding our service..

First, BNSF recognizes that service issues are impacting customers in North Dakota and our employees are working diligently to bring service levels up to where they should be. This winter's persistent and severe weather has been affecting large parts of BNSF's system, as well as the railroads with which we interchange traffic.

Late last year BNSF began to experience challenges in our service. While we were investing record amounts of private capital in our capacity and maintenance programs in the region, we were experiencing significant growth across multiple business units. In North Dakota alone last year we invested more than \$200 million in our infrastructure. This occurred as traffic on some parts of our northern corridor exceeded our previous high point in 2006, prior to the recession.

Our agricultural customers added a record 20 new shuttle facilities in 2013, and ag traffic spiked during a compressed late harvest. In addition, domestic intermodal set volume records, automotive traffic experienced double-digit growth and shipments of industrial products increased. The result was similar to the delays resulting from a highway improvement project.

Among the steps we took in response to the service impacts were postponement of some projects, rerouting traffic where possible and adding more train crews. But while those measures helped, the severity of this winter has made the situation far worse.

Subzero temperatures affect equipment, structures and people. Steel in rail and equipment becomes more brittle and susceptible to fracture; more air has to be pumped into the brake systems to make them work properly (a problem compounded when gaskets shrink in the cold); track switches freeze in place; and locomotives experience more mechanical issues. Each of the dozens of cold-weather-related service interruptions that occur around the clock can affect multiple trains operating in any direction. On subzero days it is not unusual to have 20 or more service interruptions just in North Dakota in Minnesota.

To protect our employees, who must work in the bitter cold to address these issues, we implement winter-weather safety plans, limiting their outdoor time to 20 minutes followed by a 10-

minute break indoors. These safety measures extend the time required to do the work, they are essential to employee safety.

The service interruptions also affect our train crews, who are subject to federal limits on their hours of service. When a train is stopped outside of a terminal for a track or mechanical failure, the crew's hours of service may run out, requiring sending another crew to relieve them. This, in turn, has led to shortages of crews in some locations and trains being parked for extended periods of time. Members of the Committee may have been receiving complaints from communities about trains stopped for hours at a time.

Additionally, the trains themselves are usually shorter in extreme cold in order to make sure that brake system air pressure can be maintained. That, of course, cuts further into the efficient movement of freight.

It's important to note that no equipment has been diverted away to other customers or parts of the system. In fact, adding more trains or equipment would only make matters worse, much like putting more cars on a congested urban freeway during rush hour.

The national scope of the winter weather is causing eastern railroads to also experience service problems and congestion. As a result, at key interchange points, such as Chicago, delivering and receiving cars from the other railroads is a slow process.

Last Thursday, BNSF held a conference call with Gov. Dalrymple to discuss the service issues. Executives from our Marketing and Transportation Departments reviewed the history of the problem and efforts to correct it. We will continue to communicate with his office on a regular basis about the effort to restore service to the levels the marketplace requires.

Again, we recognize the severity of the problem, and our employees in North Dakota, As well as other northern states, are working diligently in extremely adverse conditions to restore high levels of service. We also know that the record investment we have made, and the continued aggressive investment planned for 2014, will grow and improve our netowrk in the longer term, benefitting all of our customers in North Dakota.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or comments regarding this or any other matter concerning BNSF Railway.

Sincerely,

Brian Sweeney  
Regional AVP  
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BNSF Railway Company

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