



UNITED STATES SENATE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

June 9, 2014

Admiral Paul F. Zukunft  
Commandant of the Coast Guard  
United States Coast Guard  
2100 Second Street SW  
Washington, DC 20593-7000

Dear Admiral Zukunft:

I write to ask that the United States Coast Guard immediately and substantially reduce and restrict times that the Walk Bridge in Norwalk, Connecticut is opened. I make this request after hearing from hundreds of Connecticut residents whose lives have been disastrously disrupted by unacceptable breakdowns in rail service, as well as in my capacity as a member of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee and chair of its Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety and Security.

Two major malfunctions in the past ten days have caused catastrophic delays to the nation's busiest railroad route with huge regional costs. Indeed the economic costs are national in scope. The disruptions to Metro-North commuters were immediate and severely impactful. But the delays also affected Amtrak travelers and snarled highway traffic throughout the New York metropolitan area.

These malfunctions appear to be chronic and recurring – 16 times during 2013 alone. Emergency action by the United States Coast Guard is necessary immediately to curtail hours that the bridge is swung open for boats to pass. The probability of the bridge's failing to close is so high – and the consequences so enormous and unacceptable – that urgent action is unavoidably essential. While the exact hours may be set by the United States Coast Guard after consulting with all stakeholders and interested parties, recent experience indicates that drastic restrictions should be imposed.

The Walk Bridge is over 100 years old and has been scheduled for replacement if the United States Department of Transportation provides \$349 million in Hurricane Sandy resiliency funding. This request has the full backing of Connecticut's congressional delegation. Today, members of the delegation wrote to the Department requesting expedited consideration of the application in light of the continual deterioration of the Walk Bridge. The state has already allocated its 25 percent share of the total replacement cost.

In 2007, the United States Coast Guard granted an exemption from the requirement that the Walk Bridge open on demand of boating traffic during peak commuting times. The exemption recognizes the priority of commuter rail traffic during these critical hours. Since the exemption was granted, however, the Walk Bridge's operational performance has deteriorated significantly,

halting rail traffic during peak hours. Recent reports indicate that closing the Walk Bridge usually takes approximately 90 minutes once it is stuck in the open position. However, the bridge remained stuck three hours this past week and five hours the week before. Considering that in 2013, the bridge had 16 in-service failures out of 271 openings – or a fail rate of nearly six percent, clearly and incontrovertibly, bridge openings must be reduced and restricted immediately and drastically so that commuters can travel, and national commerce move, predictably and reliably.

In light of the priority accorded to rail traffic during peak travel times, I ask that you review the type of traffic that requires the Walk Bridge to open and extend the exemption hours. This extension should be necessary only until the bridge is replaced.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard Blumenthal". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent flourish at the end.

Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senate