

Washington, DC - Congressman Charlie Gonzalez (D-TX) sent a letter today to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) opposing the granting of a waiver to Union Pacific Railroad (UP) from compliance with several safety standards and requirements. This is the second request for a waiver by UP in the last two years.

In the letter, the Congressman stated the waiver would allow UP trains originating in Mexico to enter the United States at Laredo, Texas without having to be stopped and inspected on the U.S. side of the U.S./Mexico border. "[T]hese trains would be coming from Mexico to my district in Bexar County, approximately 150 miles away without proper safety inspections on this side of the border."

"There is great concern with this request", said the Congressman, because "UP has been party to several train accidents in Bexar County." UP was involved in two accidents in 2004, a total of four individuals lost their lives. As recently as October 2006, UP suffered another accident in Bexar County when a 17-car derailment destroyed two homes.

In asking the FRA to deny the request, Gonzalez noted, "this waiver would represent a backward step contrary to recent representations by the railroads that all possible efforts are being made to ensure rail safety."

The FRA plans to hold a hearing in Laredo, TX on February 7, on the subject of the UP waiver. Congressman Gonzalez's letter was submitted as comments to Waiver Petition Docket number FRA-2006-25765. The comment period has been extended until February 21, 2007.