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Guest Column:

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The Union Pacific-Norfolk Southern Merger Gives Ohio the Tools to Compete and Win

For over 130 years, the Ohio Chamber of Commerce has championed policies that promote free enterprise, drive economic growth and elevate Ohio's position in a competitive global marketplace, serving as a trusted advocate for both employers and the workforce across the Buckeye State.

Today, in an era defined by speed, resilience and innovation, we must pursue forward-looking strategies and transformative partnerships that meet the demands of a rapidly evolving economy and position Ohioans to thrive.

The proposed merger between Norfolk Southern (NS) and Union Pacific (UP) represents a bold step toward building a future-ready logistics network — one grounded in free-market principles that streamline operations, enhance infrastructure and foster innovation. This strategic move has the potential to increase competition, generate good-paying jobs and strengthen Ohio's role in a modern supply chain built for global commerce.

By creating a seamless rail network spanning 10 international interchanges and approximately 100 ports, this merger would fundamentally reshape how American manufacturers compete on the world stage. It would unlock stronger trade routes, allowing Ohio's manufacturers to reach global markets more efficiently and cost-effectively.

For Ohio, this translates into direct access to enhanced logistics capabilities that reduce transit times, lower costs and improve reliability. The efficiencies gained from this integration will ripple through our economy, making Ohio businesses more competitive and creating new opportunities for growth across manufacturing, agriculture and retail, three of our state's most vital industries.

The Chamber understands that major corporate combinations often raise concerns about job security, among other things. But the evidence in this case points in the opposite direction. Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern have made clear commitments to preserving union jobs across train crews, mechanical staff and engineering positions. Earlier this year, the nation's largest rail union endorsed the merger, underscoring its confidence that it will protect and expand the kind of career-track positions that have long anchored middle-class prosperity.

Railroad employees remain among the best compensated in the nation. Workers in this sector earn some of the highest wages across all industries, receive superior retirement benefits and enjoy top-tier healthcare coverage. This merger preserves those quality jobs while paving the way for expansion as freight volumes increase on a more efficient network.

Concerns about reduced competition also deserve thoughtful consideration, but the broader transportation market tells a more complex story. Rail competes vigorously with trucking, maritime shipping and air freight across different regions and commodity types. The merger would not diminish this intermodal competition; if anything, a stronger and more efficient rail system would strengthen competitive pressure, encouraging other modes to innovate and enhance their service offerings.

In today's market, competition hinges as much on service quality, reliability and cost-effectiveness as on the number of carriers. A merger that accelerates infrastructure investment and technological advancement ultimately benefits shippers far more than a fragmented system struggling to maintain aging infrastructure.

At its core, this merger reflects free-market principles at work, allowing consolidation where true efficiencies exist and enabling the resulting company to invest more deeply in track upgrades, technology and innovation.

For Ohio, supporting this merger means fostering a business environment where companies can make strategic decisions to strengthen their competitiveness and ensuring our state remains a magnet for transformative investments that create lasting prosperity.

The Ohio Chamber believes in and supports all policies that position our state for long-term success in an increasingly competitive global economy. The Norfolk Southern-Union Pacific merger exemplifies the kind of forward-looking infrastructure that Ohio needs. It promises to modernize American supply chains, unleash the industrial power of our manufacturing base, and open new pathways for economic growth and workforce opportunity.

This is not a threat to be feared; it's an opportunity to be embraced. The proposed merger offers a chance to build the transportation infrastructure that will allow Ohio and America to compete, grow and win on the world stage. Investing in America's infrastructure is investing in Ohio's future.

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