July 6, 2020

Jim Mullen
Deputy Administrator
U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration

Administrator Mullen,

The food supply chain has been tested by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only has retail grocery faced new and unexpected challenges during this public health crisis, the resiliency of our supply chain has also been subject to a number of pressures, both new and longstanding. We, the undersigned grocery wholesalers, distributors, and industry trade representatives, appreciate the prompt actions the agency has taken to help support the grocery retail supply chain throughout this pandemic. However, we are concerned that it is too soon to rescind the flexibilities that were provided at the onset of this crisis.

Retail grocery has yet to recover from the supply shortages that were all too common in the early months of COVID-19. Coupled with low product availability – many manufacturers are operating at only 60-80% fill rates – demand on trucking for grocery delivery is at an all-time high. Many of our companies are experiencing an increase of 15-20% in outbound load traffic, which has placed added pressure on an already problematic shortage of truck drivers.

The flexibility provided by your agency’s Expanded Emergency Declaration Under 49 CFR § 390.23 No. 2020-002 has been crucial to our ability to meet the demands of retail grocery, and to make sure that stores are stocked with the necessary goods and foods that customers need during this crisis. We ask that your current extension and modification of the emergency declaration be rescinded, and that a new extension continue to include the transportation of “food, paper products and other groceries for emergency restocking of distribution centers or stores.” Additionally, we ask that your agency continue to provide guidance to states to help facilitate waivers for increased truck weight limits, allowing our drivers and loads to meet the increased demands of retail grocery.

Our country continues to face uncertainties provided by the COVID-19 public health pandemic. “Business as usual” will likely not return until next year at the earliest, and concern is growing as the country is currently experiencing a resurgence of COVID-positive test cases. We appreciate the support that the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has provided thus far, and we hope that the agency continues to provide our supply chain with the flexibilities necessary to make sure that grocery stores across the country are stocked and Americans are fed.

Sincerely,

Associated Grocers of New England, Inc.
Associated Wholesale Grocers, Inc.
Piggly Wiggly Alabama Distributing Company, Inc.
Affiliated Foods Inc.
National Grocers Association

cc: House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
    Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation