



Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO

December 1, 2023

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chairman
United States House Committee on
Transportation & Infrastructure
Washington, D.C. 20510

Speaker Johnson and Chairman Graves:

On behalf of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO (TTD), representing the totality of U.S. freight rail workers, I urge you to hold a hearing in the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure (Committee) on the East Palestine, Ohio rail derailment and advance robust rail safety legislation in the Committee and on the House Floor.

Sadly, yesterday marked 300 days since Norfolk Southern's toxic train derailment that devastated the lives and livelihoods of the East Palestine, Ohio community and surrounding communities in Pennsylvania and Ohio. Many residents were forced to abandon their homes and still fear the long-term environmental impacts. From the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill to the 2014 Elk River chemical plant spill, corporate environmental disasters have spurred federal safety reforms. The fact that the House has not even held a hearing to date on the East Palestine, Ohio derailment and the factors that caused the derailment is inexcusable and insulting to the community of East Palestine and surrounding communities in Pennsylvania and Ohio.

The East Palestine derailment is a result of the freight rail industry's corporate greed, driven by the adoption of the profit-seeking Precision Scheduled Railroading business model. As the freight rail industry has maximized profits in recent years, it has minimized rail safety by laying off 45,000 workers who performed safety tasks. The workers that we represent experience this stark truth everyday: the industry is unsafe for them and for surrounding communities. In fact, there are over 1,000 freight train derailments a year. Since East Palestine, there have been at least 108 train derailments in 41 states and several worker deaths. Last week, there was a CSX train derailment in [Livingston, KY that forced evacuations](#).

Still, the freight rail industry resists any voluntary safety measures and [retaliates against workers who report safety concerns](#). There is no reason to wait for the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigation into East Palestine to be completed to take action. The NTSB has completed its [preliminary investigation](#) into the East Palestine derailment and also [fully completed multiple](#) investigations into previous rail derailments that have outstanding recommendations for Congress to act on. Congress must mandate rail safety reforms by passing robust legislation to address not only the issues in the East Palestine derailment, but also other necessary rail safety improvements highlighted in the completed investigations by the NTSB, including track inspections and ensuring the safety of rail workers in the right-of-way.

Additionally, our nation's fire fighters and emergency medical responders urgently need Congress to increase its investment in hazardous materials response training. While the Department of Transportation (DOT) currently provides some support for this training, there is an overwhelming

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Greg Regan, President / Shari Semelsberger, Secretary-Treasurer



demand that exceeds the available resources. The East Palestine incident shows that our first responders must have the training and equipment to protect lives and legislation is needed to provide critical increases in funding levels to ensure more fire fighters and emergency responders can access training programs from the DOT and its partners.

Every day that passes without congressional action is another day that communities are at risk of toxic train derailments. It is outrageous that the House of Representatives has not taken a single step to address rail safety since the East Palestine derailment. Now is the time for action on rail safety. I urge you to hold a hearing in the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee (Committee) on the East Palestine, Ohio rail derailment and advance robust rail safety legislation in the Committee and on the House Floor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Greg Regan', enclosed within a hand-drawn circle.

Greg Regan, President
Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO

CC The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries, Minority Leader
The Honorable Rick Larsen, Ranking Member, United States House Committee on
Transportation & Infrastructure