



Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO

December 1, 2023

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

On behalf of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO (TTD), representing the totality of U.S. freight rail workers, I urge you to reach a time agreement to schedule a Floor vote on S. 576, the Railway Safety Act of 2023, and allow amendments to be offered to the legislation and voted on by the full Senate. We recognize that the House's Speakership change and delays in passing appropriations bills to keep the government open this fall has delayed Senate action. Given the importance of the issue, we echo the urgency of Senators Brown, Vance, Fetterman, and Casey of bringing this rail safety legislation to the floor for consideration.

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. Congress's inaction now is inexcusable.

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](#). Congress must mandate rail safety reforms by passing robust legislation. This bill was explicitly designed to address the factors that may have caused the East Palestine derailment. Since then, [investigations by the National Transportation Safety Board \(NTSB\)](#) and other derailments have highlighted additional necessary rail safety improvements, including track inspections and ensuring the safety of rail workers in the right-of-way. Amendments are an opportunity to address these points and show your constituents where their elected representatives stand on the urgent issue of rail safety.

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 demand that exceeds the available resources. The East Palestine incident shows that our first

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Greg Regan, President / Shari Semelsberger, Secretary-Treasurer



responders must have the training and equipment to protect lives. S. 576 provides 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. Now is the time for action on rail safety. I urge you to reach a time agreement to bring up S. 576 for consideration and allow amendments to be considered and voted on by the Senate.

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