

Freight Rail and Intermodal

Rail intermodal — the transportation of shipping containers and truck trailers by rail — allows railroads to provide their customers cost-effective, environmentally friendly service for almost anything that can be loaded into a truck or a container. Customers receive the flexible service that trucks provide, but at a competitive rate only rail intermodal can offer. The general public benefits, too, from the reduction in highway congestion and harmful emissions — and from the reduced cost of moving goods to market.

Starting with the advent of the modern shipping container in the 1950s, freight railroads have invested heavily to build the world-class intermodal rail network that ensures U.S. global competitiveness:

- New and expanded intermodal terminals at ports and inland use advanced technologies to transfer containers to and from trucks in minutes.
- Additional track capacity and advanced signaling systems allow for faster, more frequent intermodal trains.
- Bridge and tunnel improvements accommodate the additional height that doublestack trains require.
- New locomotives and intermodal flat cars handle traffic growth.

Most importantly, intermodal rail has benefitted rail customers with competitive rates and unmatched efficiency of scale. Thanks in part to intermodal freight rail, average rail rates have fallen 45% since 1981 — allowing most rail shippers to move nearly twice as much freight for the same price paid more than 30 years ago. Freight rail remains committed to maintaining and growing the most cost-effective and efficient intermodal rail network in the world.

Current Stats: In 2016, U.S. Class I railroads originated 8 million intermodal units (28.9% of total carloads) carrying 119 million tons (7.9% of total tons) and earning gross revenue of 8.8 billion (13.5% of total revenue).

At a Glance

- **54 Tons**
Together with trucks and maritime shippers, freight railroads annually carry nearly 54 tons of freight per American — much of it via intermodal rail. Just about everything found on a retailer's shelves might have traveled on an intermodal train.
- **16.8 Million**
In 2015, North American railroads handled 15.3 million intermodal containers and 1.5 million trailers carrying a vast array of goods: from bananas and beverages to clothing, sporting goods and home appliances.
- **23%**
Intermodal now accounts for roughly 23% of U.S. freight rail revenue.
- **468 Miles**
Intermodal on rail is environmentally friendly. Rail can move one ton of intermodal freight an average of 468 miles on a single gallon of fuel.
- **Continued Growth**
August 2017 was the best month in rail history for intermodal.