Freight Rail & Automotives:
Moving Nearly 75% of America’s New Cars & Light Trucks

Railroads' involvement in the automotive industry dates back to the early 1900s and Henry Ford’s innovative Highland Park assembly plant.

As demand for new automobiles grew, railroads designed a railcar specifically for the movement of automobiles. This innovation greatly increased the number of autos carried per railcar from two to ten or more. Today, a single train can move 750 vehicles at once.

Railroads are involved in many stages of auto manufacturing. They move the raw iron ore and coke needed to make steel, deliver semi-finished products to manufacturing plant where they are used to produce auto parts and move the final vehicles.

In 2017, U.S. Class I railroads moved 1.8 million carloads of motor vehicles and parts.

- **75% of New Cars:** Each year, freight rail moves nearly 75% of the new cars and light trucks purchased in the U.S. In 2017, automakers sold 17.22 million cars and light trucks in the United States, an achievement made possible by freight railroads and the larger integrated transportation network.

- **Serving Many Customers:** Railroads serve most of the 70-plus automobile manufacturing plants across North America, including in Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Texas.

- **Upgrades to Railcars:** Automobiles must arrive at the dealer in pristine condition, so railroads have made critical improvements to their operations, such as upgrading railcars used to transport autos and moving them in dedicated trains from assembly plant to destination.

- **Freight Rail Goes Big:** Using a combination of boxcars and intermodal containers, railroads transport hundreds of thousands of carloads of auto parts each year. Many larger parts — such as frames, engines, transmissions and axles — are too big or heavy to move in large quantities by truck, and as a result, are largely hauled by freight rail from auto parts suppliers to automobile manufacturing plants.