

# ***FREIGHT RAIL FACTS & FIGURES***

## ***SAFETY***

- **Overall:** Freight railroads are the safest way to move goods over land, and the last decade was the [safest ever](#) for U.S. railroads. The train accident rate down 43% since 2005 and 11% since 2023. For all railroads, the derailment rates have dropped 33% since 2005. Class I railroads' mainline accident rate is down 43% since 2005. Year-over-year human error and equipment-caused accident rates both improved, decreasing 28% and 36% respectively since 2005. Similarly, the track-caused rate decreased by 52% with 2024 being an all-time low. Class I railroads decreased yard accident rate per million-yard switching miles by 32%, reversing last year's increase.
- **Hazmat:** More than 99.99% of all [hazmat](#) moved by rail reaches its destination without a release caused by a train accident. Per carload, the hazardous materials (hazmat) accident rate is at its lowest ever and down 80% since 2005.
- **Employees:** The freight rail industry is one of the [safest places to work](#) in America. For all railroads, on-duty fatalities declined 27% since 2005; 2024 was the third lowest on record. Railroads have reduced employee casualty rates by 27% since 2005 and 4% since 2015. 2024 was the third lowest on record.
- **Grade Crossings:** In 2024, [grade crossing](#) collision rates declined slightly year over year and were down 23% compared to 2000. Since 2005, the total number of public crossings has declined 12%, while the number with gates has increased 42%.

## ***INVESTMENTS & ECONOMIC IMPACT***

- **Overall:** From 1980 through 2024, U.S. freight railroads [reinvested approximately \\$840 billion](#)—close to \$1.4 trillion in today's dollars—of their own funds, not taxpayer funds, on capital expenditures and maintenance expenses related to locomotives, freight cars, tracks, bridges, tunnels and other infrastructure and equipment.

It is \$1 billion more than the historic investments Congress has made in 2021 in rail and multi-modal programs in the IIJA and the omnibus combined. The average U.S. manufacturer historically spends about 3% of revenue on capital expenditures. The comparable figure for U.S. freight railroads between 2014 and 2023 averaged more than 18% or six times higher.

- **Economic Impact:** Rail is a major driver of [economic activity](#), generating \$233.4 billion in total economic output in 2023. In 2023, Class I railroads reinvested \$26.8 billion in modernizing infrastructure, enhancing safety and improving reliability. Every \$1 invested in rail transportation drives \$2.50 in economic activity.

## DECARBONIZATION

- **Overall:** Freight railroads account for roughly 40% of U.S. long-distance freight volume (measured by ton-miles) — more than any other mode of transportation. However, they account for just 0.5% of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, according to EPA data, and just 1.8% of transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions. Railroads are the most [fuel-efficient](#) way to move freight over land, moving one ton of freight nearly 500 miles per gallon of fuel, on average.
- **Trucks:** On average, railroads are three to four times more fuel-efficient than trucks. A single freight train can replace several hundred trucks. Greenhouse gas emissions are directly related to fuel consumption. That means moving freight by rail instead of truck lowers greenhouse gas emissions by up to 75%, on average. If 10% of the freight shipped by the largest trucks were moved by rail instead, greenhouse gas emissions would fall by nearly 20 million tons annually. That's the equivalent of removing 4.3 million cars from our highways or planting 300 million trees.
- **Technology:** Today's fuel-efficient locomotives have emitted fewer criteria pollutants and GHGs over the past decade. Idling-reduction technology, such as stop-start systems, can reduce unnecessary idle time by 50%. Advanced software improves fuel efficiency by up to 14% by calculating the most efficient speed, spacing and timing of trains.
- **Fuel Consumption:** In 2023 alone, U.S. freight railroads consumed 709 million fewer gallons of fuel and emitted 7.9 million fewer tons of carbon dioxide than they would have if their fuel efficiency had remained constant since 2000. If railroads did not move freight in the United States, it would take more than 80 million additional trucks traveling on public roadways and would take up to four times more fuel than rail to handle the freight Americans rely on every day.

## JOBS

- **Overall:** The industry directly employs 153,000 workers, but its total employment impact is far greater — supporting 749,000 jobs nationwide through supply chains and consumer spending. Every [railroad job](#) creates 3.9 additional jobs in industries like manufacturing, logistics and technology. About one in six rail employees are veterans.
- **Tenure & Pay:** The median tenure of railroad employees is 13.8 years (compared to 3.9 years for other private sector workers). The average Class I railroad employee's annual pay and benefit package is valued from \$135,000 to almost \$190,000. Career railroaders (those 60+ who have served at least 30 years) receive more than two times as much retirement income as the average Social Security recipient.
- **Healthcare & Sick Days:** Effective Jan. 1, 2025, unionized freight rail employees' monthly health care premiums will decrease by more than 10%, from \$309.21 to \$277.54. As of October 19, 2023, the [majority of the unions](#) at the NCCC carriers, representing 91% of all craft employees, now have individual [paid sick leave days](#) in addition to pre-existing short- and long-term paid sickness benefits already in effect across the industry.

## CAPACITY & SERVICE

- **Overall:** The freight rail network is [nearly 140,000 miles](#). There are six Class I railroads (railroads with revenue of at least \$900 million) and approximately 615 short line railroads (Class II and III). Short lines and Class I railroads. Class I railroads account for around 67% of freight rail mileage, 87% of employees and 94% of revenue. Freight rail accounts for around 40% of long-distance ton-miles — more than any other mode of transportation.
- **Passenger Rail:** [Amtrak](#) owns 623 route miles (primarily in the Northeast) and operates, maintains, and dispatches another 229 route miles in Michigan and New York. The vast majority of the remaining 96% of Amtrak's more than 21,400-mile system consists of tracks owned and maintained by freight railroads. Around 70% of the miles traveled by Amtrak trains are on freight-owned tracks.
- **Freight Demand:** The Federal Highway Administration forecasts that total U.S. freight movements will rise about 30% by 2040.
- **Chicago:** For 150 years, [Chicago](#) has remained the nation's busiest rail hub. All six U.S. Class I railroads operate there, as do many non-Class I railroads. Approximately one in four rail carloads and intermodal units originate, terminate or pass through the Chicago area.
- **Rates:** Average rail rates (measured by inflation-adjusted revenue per ton-mile) were 44 percent lower in 2024 than in 1981. This means the average rail shipper can move much more freight for the same price it paid more than 40 years ago.

## WHAT WE HAUL

- **Overall:** Freight rail is part of an integrated network of trains, trucks and barges that ships around [59 tons of goods](#) per American every year. In a typical year, freight railroads haul around 1.5 billion tons of raw materials and finished goods. Redesigned railcars have helped increase average tonnage. In 2023, the average freight train carried 3,948 tons, up from 2,923 tons in 2000.
- **Agricultural & Food Products:** In a typical year, railroads haul around 1.6 million carloads of grain and other farm products, more than 1.7 million carloads of [food products](#), and several hundred thousand carloads of fertilizers and the raw materials that go into making them. Railroads typically carry more than 60,000 carloads of food and agriculture products per week. One railcar can carry enough: Flour for about 258,000 loaves of bread, or Corn for the lifetime feeding of 37,000 chickens or Barley for about 94,000 gallons of beer or Soybeans for about 400,000 pounds of tofu.
- **Grain:** The United States is the world's largest grain producer. Railroads account for well over a third of U.S. grain export movements, according to the USDA. In 2022, U.S. Class I railroads moved 1.5 million carloads of grain. Corn is by far the highest-volume grain carried by railroads. As of early 2023, the North American railroad grain car fleet consisted of around 273,000 cars (owned by railroads and non-railroads) with a 1.4 billion cubic feet capacity.

- **Chemicals:** Freight railroads moved 2.3 million carloads of plastics, fertilizers and other [chemicals](#) in 2022. Chemicals help clean our water, fertilize our farms, package our food, build our cars and homes, protect our health, and enhance our well-being in thousands of other ways. One rail tank car of anhydrous ammonia carries the equivalent of around four tanker trucks and enough to fertilize 770 acres of corn.
- **Coal:** Freight railroads moved 3.4 million carloads of [coal](#) in 2022. While rail coal volumes have declined in recent years, railroads account for around 70% of U.S. coal deliveries to power plants. One rail car can carry enough coal to power 20 homes for a year.
- **Construction, Pulp & Paper:** Freight railroads move more than two million carloads of [construction-related](#) materials in a typical year. One rail car to carry as much crushed stone, sand and gravel as five trucks. The U.S. pulp and paper industry is one of the largest industries in the world. In a typical year, America's freight railroads carry around 700,000 carloads of pulp and paper products.
- **Crude Oil:** In 2023, the average carload of [crude oil](#) originated in the United States carried around 650 barrels of oil. Based on that, the 97,000 carloads of crude oil originated by U.S. Class I railroads in 2023 was equivalent to around 173,000 barrels per day, or approximately 1.3% of U.S. production. One rail carries enough crude oil to make approximately 13,500 gallons of gasoline.
- **Intermodal:** In 2023, U.S. rail [intermodal](#) volume was 12.7 million units, and intermodal accounted for approximately 25% of revenue for major U.S. railroads, more than any other single rail traffic segment. It's been the fastest-growing major rail traffic segment over the past 25 years. Around half of rail intermodal volume consists of imports or exports, reflecting the vital role intermodal plays in international trade.
- **Motor Vehicles & Parts:** Freight railroads are part of every production stage of an automobile — from moving raw materials and auto parts to delivering a finished car or truck to dealerships across the nation. Freight railroads carry 1.5 million carloads in a typical year. With a single train capable of carrying hundreds of cars, freight rail transports around 75% of the [new cars and light trucks](#) purchased in the U.S. In 2023, automakers sold nearly 15.5 million new cars and light trucks in the United States, an achievement made possible in large part by freight railroads.