

Industries Freight Rail Supports

Key Takeaway: Freight rail's safe and efficient operations propel the nation's economic success. They move the raw materials and finished goods essential to a wide range of industries, from agriculture and chemicals to automotives and construction, fueling the growth and prosperity of the country.

America's freight railroads serve nearly every agricultural, industrial, wholesale, retail and resource-based sector of our economy. Railroads are the literal backbone of the American economy and Americans' modern way of life. The Federal Highway Administration projects that future freight transportation demand will only increase, rising an estimated 30% by 2040. By investing well above \$23 billion a year over the past five years back into their private networks, freight railroads are ensuring they maintain the safe and efficient freight rail network America depends on.

- Freight railroads are part of an integrated network of trains, trucks and barges that ships around 61 tons of goods per American every year. Overall, they move about 1.6 billion tons a year.
- In a typical year, railroads move about 1.6 million carloads of grain and other farm products, more than 1.7 million carloads of food products, 1.8 million carloads of motor vehicles and parts, around three million carloads of construction-related materials and about 700,000 carloads of pulp and paper products.
- In 2022, U.S. rail intermodal volume was 13.5 million units; the average carloads of crude oil originated in the U.S. was around 650 barrels of oil and freight railroads moved 3.4 million carloads of coal. Freight railroads moved 2.3 million carloads of plastics, fertilizers and other chemicals.

Intermodal

[Rail intermodal](#) is the movement of shipping containers and truck trailers by rail. It's been the fastest-growing major rail traffic segment over the past 25 years. Many of the products you find on a retailer's shelves may have traveled on an intermodal train. In 2022, U.S. rail intermodal volume was 13.5 million units, and intermodal accounted for approximately 27% of revenue for major U.S. railroads, more than any other single rail traffic segment. Around half of rail intermodal volume consists of imports or exports, reflecting intermodal's vital role in international trade.

Chemicals

Thanks to the [chemicals](#) railroads ship each year, Americans get their bottled water, thriving garden, hand sanitizer and toilet bowl cleaner safely and efficiently. Over the years, railroads have implemented special safety practices so 99.99% of these sensitive materials reach their destinations without incident. Freight railroads moved 2.3 million carloads of plastics, fertilizers and other chemicals in 2022.

Food & Agriculture

Railroads are crucial to nearly every aspect of [agriculture](#), including the movement of products essential to farming, such as finished farming equipment and agricultural chemicals, as well as the food found on grocery shelves and dinner tables across the country and around the world. In a typical year, railroads haul around 1.6 million carloads of [grain](#) and other farm products and more than 1.7 million carloads of food products.

Automotive

Railroads are involved in all stages of [auto manufacturing](#) – from moving the iron ore and coke needed to make steel to delivering semi-finished goods to manufacturing plants where they are used to produce auto parts to moving finished parts and final vehicles. Each year, freight rail moves nearly 75% of the new cars and light trucks purchased in the U.S. Railroads serve most of North America's 70-plus automobile manufacturing plants. In fact, in a typical year, railroads carry 1.8 million carloads of motor vehicles and parts.

Construction, Pulp & Paper

Freight rail is the foundation for the nation's [construction industry](#), moving steel, cement, lumber, etc. Railroads' lumber transport has become a bellwether for the American dream as rail carloads strongly correlate to housing starts. And with the paper and pulp industry one of the largest industries in the world, railroads are important to moving a commodity that protects our food and enables e-commerce. In a typical year, freight railroads move around three million carloads of construction-related materials and about 700,000 carloads of pulp and paper products.

Energy

From ethanol to crude oil, railroads move nearly every U.S. [energy product](#) and many of the raw materials needed to produce them. As energy sources and consumption patterns have changed, the freight rail industry has adjusted to customer needs to continue safely and efficiently moving energy products. Railroads account for 60 to 70% of ethanol movement. In 2022, the average carload of [crude oil](#) originated in the United States was around 650 barrels of oil and freight railroads moved 3.4 million carloads of [coal](#).