

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

NATIONAL RAILWAY SAFETY FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Issue:

Recognizing the importance of public safety and environmental health in counties across the country where rail lines are located, the Federal Railroad Administration must address key concerns around blocked crossings, freight train lengths and the routing of hazardous materials through local communities.

Proposed Policy:

NACo urges Congress and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), in collaboration with local and other relevant stakeholders, to take immediate action to address delays that result in idling freight trains, which have harmful environmental impacts in our local communities, and create blocked at-grade crossings, which adversely impact public safety and harm economic development. This should include funding for counties or recommendations on the strategic placement of grade separations, and mandating reasonable lengths of freight trains as determined by comprehensive federal studies and assessments that identify risks associated with long freight trains, including public safety impacts and any increased risks of derailment.

To enhance public safety and minimize the risks associated with the transportation of hazardous materials, NACo urges the FRA to undertake a study to determine safer, innovative methods of routing these materials through the country. Current practices have shown to be detrimental to our communities based on recent events. The study should incorporate: (1) a full assessment of railways in relation to critical infrastructure and explosive materials including fueling stations and gas lines, (2) an assessment of community communication with an emphasis on first responders, (3) a review of safety standards for rail cars, (4) should consider the use of advanced technology and risk assessment tools to determine the safest and most efficient routing options for hazardous materials, and (5) a current assessment of track conditions.

Background:

The railroad industry plays a critical role in the transportation of goods across the nation. However, certain practices and conditions associated with train operations raise concerns regarding environmental impact, public safety, and community well-being. Idling freight trains contribute to air pollution and adversely affect the air quality in nearby communities. The routing of hazardous materials throughout the country creates significant risks to public safety and the environment. Additionally, the operation of long freight trains can divide communities, impede emergency response times, and increase the risk of derailments, posing threats to both residents and infrastructure.

Additionally, the placement of grade separations increases the capacity and safety of our roadways. Capacity is increased by allowing constant flow in all directions, and roadway safety is improved by reducing vehicle-vehicle and vehicle-pedestrian conflicts. As crossing traffic is removed from the intersection, the chance of collisions is lowered.

Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:

The implementation of this resolution may involve initial costs for research, development, and collaboration efforts. However, the long-term benefits of reduced air pollution, enhanced public safety, and minimized risks of derailments can result in significant cost savings for both the government and affected communities.

By addressing these critical concerns and implementing the proposed policy measures, we can ensure train safety, protect the environment from air pollution, reduce risks associated with the transportation of hazardous materials, and promote the well-being of communities across the nation.

Sponsor: Board Member Jennifer Clark, Lake County, Illinois

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