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## **Railroad-Highway Grade Crossing Safety**

Ohio's extensive roadway and railroad networks intersect at approximately 5,600 at-grade public crossings. That is more than one crossing for every mile of track (Ohio has roughly 5,100 miles of active railroad tracks.)

Given the density of crossings and the freight rail network, Ohio's crossing inventory is the fourth largest in the country (behind Texas, Illinois, and California). The number of incidents at railroad-highway crossings in Ohio has fallen significantly over time, a public safety success story that will continue in coming years. The decline in the number of crashes can be traced to decades of diligent work to improve warning devices, eliminate at-grade crossings through closure or grade separation, and driver education for the traveling public. While crashes have been dramatically reduced, Ohio continues to see roughly 80% of crashes happen at crossings with active warning devices. This percentage of crashes (where there are active warning devices alerting the motorist of an approaching train) is about 20% higher than the national average. Nonetheless, crash reduction is continuing to happen here, and that is due to the comprehensive and persistent approach taken by the involved parties.

House Bill 54 maintains funding for the Rail Commission's grade crossing safety improvement program at prior years' levels. We want to recognize the longstanding and bipartisan support for this effort over the past four decades. This program will continue to primarily focus on the upgrade of passive warning devices (crossbucks) to active warning devices (lights and gates and/or from flashing lights to lights and gates). As mentioned in the ORDC'S testimony last week, the state is continuing to use data to address the problem, and by continuing to implement other warning device improvements, install queue management features, reconstruct roadway surfaces, educate motorists, and eliminate crossings, we all believe we will see further reduction in the numbers of these preventable crashes.

### **TESTIMONY**

Ohio House Bill 54 – State Transportation Budget as introduced

Tuesday, February 11, 2025

Ohio House Transportation Committee

Chairman Willis, Vice Chair Daniels, and Ranking Member Grim, thank you for opportunity to present this written testimony with the Transportation Committee.

The Ohio Railroad Association is pleased to support HB 54. Of primary interest, the bill's language maintains Ohio's continuing and productive investments in safer highway-rail grade crossings. In addition, the Association would like to express staunch support for the outstanding work of the Ohio Rail Development Commission. Finally, the Association recommends the consideration of legislation amending the state's wayside detector statutes in HB 54.

Since the late 1980s, comprehensive efforts to reduce crashes at highway-rail grade crossings have been successful, even as rail traffic has increased, with crashes declining from nearly 900 per year to below 80 for 2024 (based on available federal data). According to that information, approximately 70% of Ohio's public grade crossings provide an active warning to motorists and pedestrians of an approaching train. These public safety improvements have been accomplished because of strong and continuing support from both past Administrations and General Assemblies and the continuing investments made by Ohio freight railroads.





## **Ohio Rail Development Commission**

The Commission, instituted in 1994, has grown into one of the top state rail organizations in the nation. As was presented in last week's testimony by ORDC Executive Director Matt Dietrich, the Commission has established a reputation for excellence at one of the most important partner agencies Ohio could have, the Federal Railroad Administration. The FRA manages both rail safety as well as rail infrastructure programs, and the ORDC has partnered with Ohio railroads and rail-served communities to access tens of millions of dollars in very competitive federal awards for both rail infrastructure improvements as well as recent grade crossing elimination funding, the most recent awards totaling more than \$81 million to build four grade separations (Circleville, Hudson, North Ridgeville, and Delaware County).

The ORDC uses its funding, provided by the General Assembly, to leverage these federal funds as well as private railroad, business, and local funds to improve public safety, ease congestion in heavily-trafficked corridors, make safer and more efficient rail service available to Ohio businesses, and in doing so, reduce the amount of commercial traffic that would otherwise be using our state and local highways if the railroads weren't there. That is an extensive list of benefits obtained by the relatively minor funding received by the Rail Commission. The ORDC could do more if it had more funding. While the \$6 million per year proposed in HB 54 is greatly appreciated, it is not meeting the demand for ORDC assistance in rail infrastructure. The Rail Commission has more project applications than it can currently support.

It is important to note in this heightened rail safety environment that the ORDC only participates in rail infrastructure projects with Ohio's small railroads (Class II and Class III) or with individual businesses who are seeking to build, improve, or expand their rail service. The biggest railroads in the eastern US, CSX and Norfolk Southern, do not seek infrastructure investments from the state. The partnership between the ORDC and Ohio's smaller railroads has helped to improve the track structure of these operations, and that is the single greatest rail safety improvement that can be made for both the smaller railroad employees and the public.

## **Wayside Detector Technology**

Following the East Palestine derailment in February 2023, the General Assembly mandated broad requirements for wayside detectors on all railroads, big and small. Detectors, located along the tracks, provide information on the operations of rail equipment and parts of that equipment. Ohio was one of, if not the first, state to mandate standards by statute on this technology. Unfortunately, these statutes were written in a one-size-fits-all manner. Small railroads often have a different operating paradigm from the largest railroads, most importantly in the areas of track miles and train speeds. Twenty-four (24) of the forty-four (44) Ohio railroads have less than forty (40) miles of track. The requirements for the location of detectors every ten (10) miles applied to all railroads are not necessary for the smaller railroads; in fact, given the operating speeds of many small railroads, some detectors will not work.

This issue was taken to the chair of the Senate Select Committee on Rail Safety, Senator Bill Reineke. Senator Reineke, in consultation with Ohio's smaller railroads and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, introduced legislation in the previous General Assembly (SB 250) that proposed to establish more appropriate distancing requirements for smaller railroads. This bill received two hearings in the Senate Transportation Committee in 2024. There was no opposition presented to this limited proposal. On behalf of the smaller railroads in Ohio, we recommend consideration for including the proposals included in SB 250 in amendments to HB 54.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. The Ohio Railroad Association urges the Committee's support for the bill with the proposed amendment. Thank you.

Art Arnold

Executive Director

The Ohio Railroad Association



# FREIGHT RAIL IN OHIO

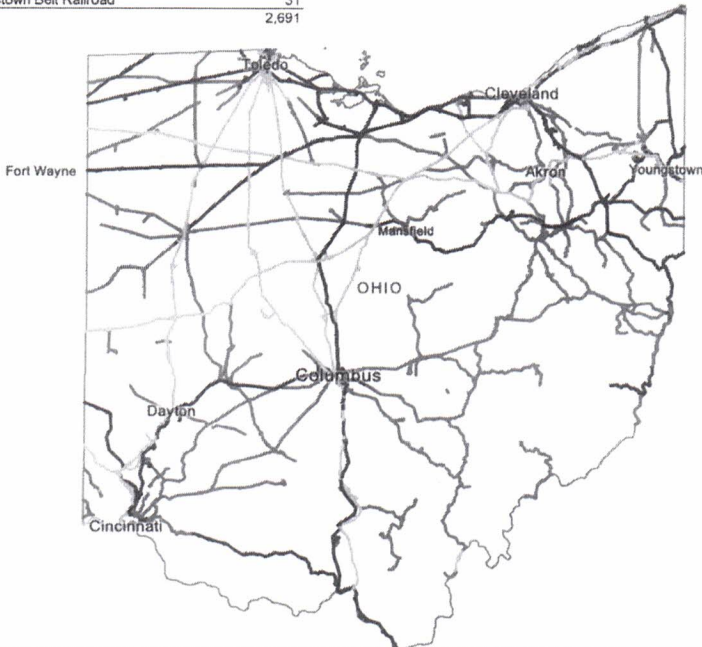


*It would have taken*  
**14.3 MILLION TRUCKS**  
*to handle the freight that moved*  
*by rail in Ohio in 2022.*

Class I Railroads	
Canadian National	4
CPKC	30
CSX	1,747
Norfolk Southern	1,905
	3,686

Short Line Railroads	
Akron Barberton Cluster Railway	68
Ann Arbor Railroad	5
Ashland Railway	56
Ashtabula, Carson & Jefferson Railroad	6
Belpre Industrial Parkersburg Railroad	48
Bucyrus Industrial Railroad	5
Camp Chase Railway	15
Central Railroad Company of Indiana	29
Chicago, Ft. Wayne & Eastern Railroad	139
Cincinnati Eastern Railroad	70
Cleveland & Cuyahoga Railway	12
Cleveland Port Railway	1
Cleveland Works Railway	10
Columbus & Ohio River Railroad	316
East Ohio Valley Railway	12
Grand River Railway	3
Indiana & Ohio Railway	594
Indiana Eastern Railroad	14
Indiana Northeastern Railroad	9
Kanawha River Railroad	127
Katahdin Railcar Services	12
Lake Terminal Railroad	6
Mahoning Valley Railway	53
Napoleon, Defiance and Western Railway	50
Newburgh & South Shore Railroad	5
Northern Ohio & Western Railway	25
Ohio Central Railroad	122
Ohio South Central Railroad	60
Ohio Southern Railroad	42
Ohio Terminal Railway	13
R. J. Corman Railroad - Cleveland Line	69
R. J. Corman Railroad - Western Ohio Lines	93
Republic Short Line	1
South Point & Ohio Railroad	1
Toledo Industrial Railroad	1
Warren and Trumbull Railroad	4
Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway	524
Youngstown & Austintown Railroad	5
Youngstown & Southeastern Railroad	35
Youngstown Belt Railroad	31
	2,691

Short Line
UP
CN
BNSF
CPKC
CSX
NS
Multiple Owners
Amtrak
GMXT



FREIGHT RR  
EMPLOYEES

4,807

FREIGHT  
RRS

44

FREIGHT RR  
MILEAGE

5,112

RR RETIREMENT  
BENEFICIARIES

23,300

RR RETIREMENT  
BENEFITS

\$543M

## RAIL TRAFFIC ORIGINATED

COMMODITY	TONS (M)	CARLOADS
Crushed stone & sand	8.5	79,600
Grain	8.1	75,000
Intermodal	7.8	507,200
Steel products	6.6	73,300
Metallic ores	5.6	56,300
Other	21.9	302,100
TOTAL	58.5M	1,093.4K

## RAIL TRAFFIC TERMINATED

COMMODITY	TONS (M)	CARLOADS
Crushed stone & sand	10.2	93,600
Coal	9.1	81,400
Waste & scrap	9.1	94,500
Chemicals	7.0	72,600
Intermodal	6.4	507,900
Other	23.6	294,500
TOTAL	65.4M	1,144.5K

