



Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives

Sam Graves
Chairman

Washington, DC 20515

Rick Larsen
Ranking Member

Nick Christensen, Staff Director

Katherine W. Dedrick, Democratic Staff Director

July 24, 2025

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary
United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave SE
Washington, DC 20590

Drew Feeley
Acting Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Ave SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Duffy and Acting Administrator Feeley:

The growing threat of freight rail theft is concerning. Freight rail is a critical component of our National supply chain, and the Committee is alarmed by the rising number of incidents that disrupt commerce, impose significant economic costs, and present serious safety and National security concerns. As part of this oversight, the Committee is seeking to understand how the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) are responding to this threat and coordinating with relevant Federal, state, and local stakeholders.

Recent data indicates a dramatic and worsening trend. Freight rail cargo theft doubled from 2019 to 2024 and is increasing at an alarming rate.¹ There were approximately 65,000 incidents of rail freight theft in 2024, a rise of nearly 40 percent from the previous year.² Some project a further 22 percent increase in 2025.³

Estimated losses in 2024 exceeded \$100 million.⁴ Roughly two-thirds of theft occur on mainline tracks, and the rest in train yards.⁵ Yet these figures likely underrepresent the true scale, as only about one in ten cargo thefts result in arrest.⁶

In January of 2025, criminals sabotaged the braking system of a BNSF train to steal \$440,000 worth of Nike merchandise, adding to the \$2 million total in Nike product expropriated

¹ Malia Wollan, *The Great Freight-Train Heists of the 21st Century*, THE NEW YORK TIMES, (Jan. 23, 2024), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/23/magazine/train-robbery-amazon-packages.html#>.

² ASS'N OF AMERICAN RAILROADS, *Freight Rail & Cargo Theft*, at 1, available at <https://www.aar.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/AAR-Cargo-Theft-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

³ Overhaul, *United States Annual Cargo Theft Report*, at 5, available at https://over-haul.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/US-and-Canada-Annual-Cargo-Theft-Report-2024.pdf?utm_campaign=7655967-Growth%20-%20Email%3A%20Intelligence%20Reports%202025&utm_source=2025%20Intelligence%20Alert.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Allan Stein, *Rail companies beef up security as freight heists increase*, THE SIGNAL, (Feb. 25, 2025), available at <https://signalscv.com/2025/02/rail-companies-beef-up-security-as-freight-heists-increase/>.

⁶ ASS'N OF AMERICAN RAILROADS, *Freight Rail & Cargo Theft*, at 1, available at <https://www.aar.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/AAR-Cargo-Theft-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

from freight trains since March 2024.⁷ The investigation also uncovered \$590,000 in headphones stolen from another BNSF shipment in 2023.⁸

In June of 2025, a Union Pacific train was the victim of rail theft in Chicago, Illinois.⁹ This incident was not the first issue of cargo theft in this area. In October 2024, a camera caught a group stealing from a train in broad daylight, late afternoon hours, looting the train of appliances and electronic devices.¹⁰ To mitigate these theft rates, Union Pacific has deployed new technology and surveillance along the tracks and rail yards.¹¹ Another Class I railroad, CSX, has built fences around the tracks where the trains are vulnerable to theft.¹² However, these measures alone are not a solution to rail cargo theft.

Rail cargo remains vulnerable to theft due to the difficulty of securing railcars in remote areas, and long stoppages for operational reasons.¹³ Criminals now use increasingly sophisticated tactics, including intercepting train manifests via insider leaks, identifying high-value cargo by lock type, and disabling signal systems. Federal law enforcement has documented use of “human conveyor belts” and severing air hoses to abruptly stop moving trains.¹⁴ These activities not only inflict economic harm but endanger crew and public safety.

Several organized theft rings have links to cross-border activity. Organized crime and cartel members have been infiltrating the United States, a lasting consequence of the disastrous Biden open border policy.¹⁵ In March 2025, Hualapai Nation police officers arrested two illegal alien suspects connected with a string of BNSF freight train robberies in Arizona.¹⁶ In another incident, nine of eleven suspects arrested for cargo theft were illegal aliens; three were charged with reentry.¹⁷ These cases underscore the intersection of border security and transportation infrastructure protection.

⁷ Alex Wigglesworth, *Inside the Mojave Desert Train heists targeting Nike sneakers*, LOS ANGELES TIMES, (Feb. 23, 2025), [hereinafter *LA Times Article*] available at <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-02-23/freight-train-heists-targeting-nike-merchandise-are-probed-as-related>.

⁸ Michael Levenson, *Old-Fashioned Train Heists Yield Modern-Day Loot: Nike Air Jordans*, THE NEW YORK TIMES, (Mar. 3, 2025), [hereinafter *NYT Old-Fashioned Train Heists*], available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/03/us/train-bandits-mojave-desert-arizona.html>.

⁹ Liz Nagy, *Bellwood freight train burglary latest in rise of cargo thefts statewide; Metra Union Pacific West service resumes*, ABC7 CHICAGO, (June 3, 2025), available at <https://abc7chicago.com/post/metra-service-disrupted-police-investigate-freight-train-burglary-berkeley/16642795/>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Amy Wunderlin, *Theft on the Rails*, TIA NEWS, (Feb. 6, 2025), available at <https://news.tianet.org/theft-on-the-rails/>.

¹³ Scott Briscoe, *The Wild West Returns: Train Cargo Theft Is on the Rise*, SECURITY MANAGEMENT – ASIS INT’L, (Mar. 04, 2025), available at <https://www.asisonline.org/security-management-magazine/latest-news/today-in-security/2025/march/train-cargo-thefts-on-rise/>.

¹⁴ *NYT Old-Fashioned Train Heists*, *supra* note 7; See also, Taylor Ardrey, *Two people arrested in connection to train robberies of Nike shoes*, USA TODAY, (Mar. 31, 2025), [hereinafter *Arizona Aliens Arrested*], available at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2025/03/31/train-heists-nike-shoes-arrest/82737061007/>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *LA Times Article*, *supra* note 7.

The freight rail transportation network is a crucial part of our Nation's supply chain, the compromise of which threatens our economic security. What is needed is a comprehensive and coordinated response across Federal, state, and local agencies to confront this threat.

Therefore, we request an in-person briefing to gain further insight into how the DOT and the FRA are addressing rail cargo theft, including current initiatives, planned actions, and interagency coordination. Specifically, the Committee would like to discuss the following questions:

1. What actions has the FRA taken since January 2021 to investigate, monitor, or respond to rail cargo theft, including specific enforcement, regulatory, or interagency initiatives?
2. What coordination efforts exist between the FRA, other components of the DOT, the Department of Homeland Security, and federal law enforcement related to rail cargo theft? Please describe the structure, frequency, and scope of such coordination and provide any related interagency agreements or memoranda of understanding.
3. Has the FRA identified any statutory or regulatory gaps that limit its ability to address freight rail cargo theft?
4. What partnerships or consultations has the FRA conducted with freight rail carriers, state and local law enforcement, or industry groups to address this issue?

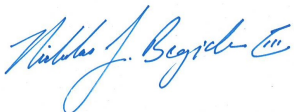
Please provide this briefing as soon as possible, but no later than August 7, 2025.

If you have any questions about this request, please contact Mark Ratto, with the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials by phone at (202) 225-9446 or by email at Mark.Ratto@mail.house.gov. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

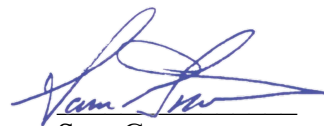
Sincerely,



Daniel Webster
Chairman
Subcommittee on Railroads,
Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials



Nicholas J. Begich III
Vice Chairman
Subcommittee on Railroads,
Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials



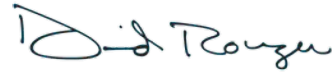
Sam Graves
Chairman
Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure



Rick Crawford
Member of Congress



Mike Bost
Member of Congress



David Rouzer
Member of Congress



Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress



Bruce Westerman
Member of Congress



Pete Stauber
Member of Congress



Tim Burchett
Member of Congress



Dusty Johnson
Member of Congress



Jefferson Van Drew
Member of Congress



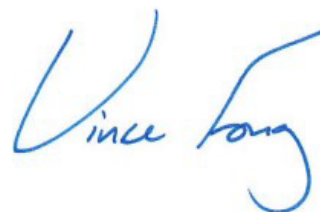
Tracey Mann
Member of Congress



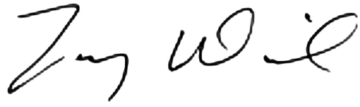
Burgess Owens
Member of Congress



Mike Ezell
Member of Congress



Vince Fong
Member of Congress



Tony Wied
Member of Congress



Tom Barrett
Member of Congress



Jeff Hurd
Member of Congress



Jefferson Shreve
Member of Congress



Addison P. McDowell
Member of Congress



David J. Taylor
Member of Congress



Brad Knott
Member of Congress



Robert F. Onder, Jr.
Member of Congress