



# NTSB 2016 MOST WANTED TRANSPORTATION SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

## PROMOTE THE COMPLETION OF RAIL SAFETY INITIATIVES



### *What is the issue?*

Even on our best days, human beings can make mistakes.

Positive Train Control (PTC) prevents mistakes from turning tragic, by keeping trains from colliding or derailing even if their operators do not.

Strong rail tank car safety rules minimize the risks to people and property if a train carrying hazardous liquid such as crude oil derails or a collision occurs.

These measures save lives – but only where implemented. They should be implemented broadly and with minimal delays.

The good news is that Congress and regulators have issued federal mandates requiring PTC and improved tank car design. The bad news is that we have already seen delays in implementation by railroads, both public and private.

In the case of PTC, Congress passed a law in 2008 after a deadly PTC-preventable head-on collision between a commuter train and a freight train in Chatsworth, California, that killed 25 people and injured more than 100. The law demanded implementation by the end of 2015.

Many railroads worked hard – and spent billions of dollars – on PTC implementation, improving the safety of many tracks and trains. Despite these efforts, however, it became clear as the implementation deadline approached that tens of thousands of rail miles, and millions of rail passengers, would be left unprotected by PTC. Late last year, Congress acted to grant the railroads an additional three years to implement their PTC systems, until 2018.

Since 2008, the NTSB has investigated a long list of railroad accidents that would have been prevented by PTC, including the May 12, 2015, Amtrak derailment in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, that killed eight and injured more than 200, and the December 1, 2013, Metro-North passenger train derailment in the Bronx, New York, that killed four and injured 61.

PTC uses GPS to prevent train-to-train collisions, overspeed derailments, and the unauthorized movement of trains into work zones. The NTSB has called for a system like this for more than 45 years, yet it still has not been fully implemented in our commuter, intercity, and freight railroads.



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In recent years, we have seen enormous growth in railroad shipments of crude oil and other hazardous materials through our communities. Industry has increasingly relied on “pipelines on rails”—unit trains of hazardous liquids—as a means of transportation.

But accident investigations have shown that present rail tank cars are not up to the task. On July 6, 2013, for example, a 4,700-foot-long train that contained 72 DOT-111 tank cars loaded with crude oil from the Bakken fields derailed in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec. At least 60 cars released an estimated 1.6 million gallons of crude oil, which triggered an intense fire. The fire engulfed the surrounding area and completely destroyed buildings and property. Forty-seven people died.

Ensuring the integrity of our railroad system—both passenger rail and freight rail—is critical to our everyday lives and the economy of the nation.

### What can be done?

Congress’ law (the Surface Transportation Extension Act of 2015) requires railroads to install PTC by 2018. The extension should allow many more railroads to comply with the law, but the NTSB encourages railroads not to wait for 2018. Implementation must be completed as soon as possible.

Furthermore, the law allows railroads to apply to the Department of Transportation (DOT) for new extensions. They should not do so.

Finally, the NTSB has recommended more frequent PTC implementation progress updates. Railroads should submit such updates to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and the FRA should post them on its website.

Safer rail tank cars should also be introduced by industry as soon as possible. In 2015, the NTSB called for an aggressive schedule for replacing

or retrofitting the current rail car fleet. The DOT issued new tank car regulations with a generous 2025 implementation deadline. It did not include a performance schedule or transparent completion reporting requirements.

Yet repeated tank car breaches during derailments demonstrate that safer tank cars are essential to the safe movement of hazardous liquids by rail. Each day that passes until our nation’s present tank-car fleet is replaced or upgraded is a day lived with elevated risk.

Bottom line: We have laws and regulations to implement PTC and improve tank car design, but we must avoid delays. Safety delayed is safety denied, and any given day without these lifesaving advances might be the day of the next Philadelphia or Lac-Mégantic.



#### \*RELATED ACCIDENTS:

May 12, 2015; Philadelphia, PA; DCA15MR010; 8 dead

December 1, 2013; Bronx, New York; DCA14MR002; 4 dead

July 6, 2013; Lac-Mégantic, Quebec; DCA13SR006; 47 dead

February 16, 2015; Mount Carbon, WV; DCA15FR005; 1 injured

*\*For detailed accident reports, visit [www.nts.gov](http://www.nts.gov)*

# Critical changes needed to reduce transportation accidents and save lives



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[www.nts.gov/mostwanted](http://www.nts.gov/mostwanted)

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The NTSB Most Wanted List highlights safety issues identified from the NTSB’s accident investigations to increase awareness about the issues and promote recommended safety solutions.

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant accidents in other modes of transportation - railroad, highway, marine and pipeline. The NTSB determines the probable cause of the accidents and issues safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. In addition, the NTSB carries out special studies concerning transportation safety and coordinates the resources of the federal government and other organizations to provide assistance to victims and their family members impacted by major transportation disasters.

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