

U.S. Sens. Baldwin, Hawley: Introduce bipartisan bill to reduce train derailments and keep communities safe

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New bill requires railroads use both automated track inspections and visual track inspections to avoid derailments

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Josh Hawley (R-MO) announced they are introducing the *Secure Tracks Act*, legislation that would require railroads to use both automated track inspection (ATI) technology and human track inspections. While ATI technology can efficiently detect defects in the track, it fails to detect a variety of key issues that cause train derailments, and therefore, human inspections continue to help reduce accidents and keep communities safe. The legislation comes as the Federal Railroad Administration greenlit waivers that allow big railroads to reduce inspections done by humans.

“Wisconsin families and businesses depend on safe and reliable railroads to get them to work, to get their products to customers, and for things they buy at the store. Railroads run through their cities and towns, and they deserve to know that every track is up to snuff and safe,” **said Senator Baldwin**. “I am all for using technology to keep our trains on the tracks and communities safe from derailments, but what we have learned is that technology can’t do it all alone. It misses things that humans see and hear, and if we want to make sure our railroads are safe, we need both technology and real people who have the experience and knowledge.”

“Safety must be our top priority when it comes to our nation’s railroads,” **said Senator Hawley**. “Technology can help us monitor our railways but there is no

substitute for in-person inspections conducted by railroad professionals. We can't cut corners, especially when it comes to keeping our trains on the tracks. Technology must serve workers—not the other way around.”

There is an average of three reportable train derailments each day, with larger, more high-profile ones, like in East Palestine, Ohio, causing loss of human life and catastrophic environmental and economic impacts. In August 2025, a freight train derailed 24 railcars carrying hazardous materials in Dodge County, Wisconsin, spilling thousands of gallons of crude oil. This was the second derailment in this location in as many years, raising serious safety concerns for the community and broader rail infrastructure as a whole. Thorough inspections, with ATI supplementing human inspections, can better stop future train derailments and keep communities safe.

ATI can more consistently and precisely measure track geometry defects. However, this technology fails to detect issues with ballast, rail wear, joint gaps, tie plate conditions, and switch components or detect trespassers, vandalism, vegetation hazards, and other real-time safety concerns. Only 26 percent of all track-related defects can be detected by ATI while the other 74 percent can only be detected by a human being. Thus, ATI should be used to supplement, not supplant, visual track inspections.

The *Secure Tracks Act* would:

- Require all main line track designated for operation at Class 3 speeds or higher to perform visual track inspections twice each week
- Require any defect or unsafe condition identified to be corrected, protected or removed from service immediately upon detection
- Require qualified inspectors, if they find a deviation, to immediately initiate remedial action and grants the inspector sole authority to authorize any subsequent movements to facilitate repairs on track that is out of service
- Prohibit the Secretary of Transportation from a waiver, exemption, or modification of any safety regulation if the proposed alternative inspection, detection, or monitoring method fails to identify or detect all defect conditions defined or recognized as unsafe under applicable Federal Railroad Administration regulations

- Require that a qualifying Track Geometry Measurement System (TGMS), a type of ATI, operates over various track classifications at specified frequencies

Senator Baldwin has long supported rail safety legislation, including introducing the [Railway Safety Act](#) and the [Crude-By-Rail Safety Act](#). As a member of the Appropriations Committee, Senator Baldwin consistently advocates for strong funding to improve freight and passenger rail safety and reliability, including the [Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements \(CRISI\) grant program](#).

The House companion bill is led by Representative Dina Titus (D-NV-01).

“Trains carrying hazardous materials run right through my District in the heart of Las Vegas,” **said Congresswoman Titus**. “The Secure Tracks Act will help ensure that any track defects that put our safety at risk are identified and addressed right away, protecting rail workers and our community from the health and environmental risks associated with derailments. This common-sense legislation will save lives and protect our property and the environment. It is a win-win-win.”

The legislation is endorsed by Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employes Division (BMWED), Teamsters Rail Conference, International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO, Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS), National Conference of Fireman and Oilers (NCFO, SEIU), International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers-Mechanical Division (SMART-MD), International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART-TD), the Transportation Communications Union (TCU), and the American Train Dispatchers Association (ATDA).

“Rail safety is not a contentious partisan issue. Americans trust the railroads to be safe. The men and women of the BMWED take that public confidence sincerely. Let’s pass the Secure Tracks Act into law so that every American can sleep soundly at night knowing that a professional human track inspector ensured that every inch of our country’s railroad is safe,” **said BMWED President Tony Cardwell**.

Full text of the legislation is available [here](#). A one-pager is available [here](#).

An online version of this release is available [here](#).