

Report Highlights

Improving the Safety and Security of Freight and Passenger Rail in Pennsylvania

On October 24, 2006, the Pennsylvania House of Representatives adopted House Resolution 824, which calls for the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to review Pennsylvania's statutory and regulatory authority over rail and identify possible actions that Pennsylvania might take to improve rail safety and security. The LBFC subsequently contracted with the RAND Corporation to conduct the study.

The RAND report describes the physical rail system in Pennsylvania and its operating characteristics and provides an overview of legal authority as it pertains to rail, a qualitative analysis of risk components to determine the issues of primary importance with respect to both safety and security, a review of recent studies and actions regarding rail security, and an overview of actions taken by other states.

Based on the results of these analyses, the study finds:

- Pennsylvania has a dense network of rail freight routes, though Class I railroads carry the vast majority of freight.
- Pennsylvania's passenger rail services are concentrated in the southeastern corner of the state.
- There is a documented terrorist threat to rail systems, and infrastructure will always be vulnerable.
- The extent and diversity of railroad infrastructure and operations in Pennsylvania require an equally diverse approach to security.
- Effective response is essential for minimizing casualties and economic damage resulting from rail safety and security incidents.
- There is significant flexibility within existing legal authority for Pennsylvania to play an active role in shaping its rail safety and security.

Based on these findings, the study identifies the following actions as ones that Pennsylvania may wish to pursue to improve the safety and security of rail in the Commonwealth:

- Use state rail development funding to improve rail transportation and safety and security. Existing law appears to grant such authority under the Rail Freight Assistance Program and Rail Transportation Assistance Program.
- Be prepared to provide a wide range of support services, depending on local needs. Effective response is essential to minimizing the consequences of safety and security incidents. The state can work with communities to augment local capabilities.
- Coordinate simulations and exercises including personnel from local and state agencies, neighboring states, federal agencies, volunteer organizations, and the railroads.
- Build state-level capacity in rail safety and security possibly following the examples of New Jersey and California.