



**U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE & TRANSPORTATION**
Senator Maria Cantwell, Chair

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Railway Safety Act Press Conference

May 17, 2023

[VIDEO](#)

Thank you, Irma, and thank you to the National League of Cities for bringing us together today and for all of you who do the hard work of advocating on behalf of cities and towns across this nation.

I want to thank the leaders who are here who have traveled to Washington to show your support for this important legislation. And to reiterate that the people who are speaking today are all representatives of cities, who have Class I railroads that travel through them. So they know how important this legislation is. A special thanks to the Mayor of Port Orchard, Washington, Rob Putaansuu, for coming to D.C. as well.

We've been here on this important moment on rail safety, but it is now time to act. We have learned some hard lessons about derailments, environmental disasters, and the challenges that people in East Palestine still have to deal with today.

I know that some of you probably watched these events unfold on television, and thought -- we're just like East Palestine. This could happen to us.

The accident rates across America's rail network have increased 14% in just five years. In my home state of Washington, Class I derailments have nearly doubled in a decade.

The bipartisan Railway Safety Act is trying to prevent disasters like East Palestine from happening in any other town in America again.

We took the lessons of East Palestine and turned them into legislation.

We learned that you can improve the use of defect detectors that would have identified overheating in the wheel bearings and prevented a derailment. Under this legislation passed by the Senate Commerce Committee, railroads will use these defect detectors

more frequently. And for the first time the defect detectors will be used as a requirement and not just voluntary.

A week ago, a Norfolk Southern train derailed in Newcastle, Pennsylvania. And once again an overheated bearing was the suspected cause.

These types of accidents will keep happening unless we do something to make rail safety improvements.

We learned that not enough trains carrying hazardous materials are treated with the care that needs to be there for our communities. Under this legislation, more trains will be subject to stringent safety requirements. This will include trains carrying the vinyl chloride gas, which exploded in East Palestine.

Many communities told us they didn't even know what hazardous material was being carried on trains through their towns. This legislation requires that railroads share that information with states. Before they just had to share information about crude oil. Now they have to share information about all hazardous materials.

Local firefighters told us that they need a better equipment to fight hazardous explosions. This bill would make more money available to those brave first responders out of an existing program and resources.

This legislation would implement [these and] other important safety measures. Most importantly, it would also make sure that these rules are adhered to.

This legislation increases the maximum fine for violating rail safety laws from \$100,000 to \$10 million. Something that we think will be a more meaningful penalty for the risk and danger that might ensue if you do not follow the rules.

To those of you from the rail towns like Millcreek, Utah; Mount Pleasant, Wisconsin; Gibbon, Nebraska, and those in my home state places like Pasco, Yakima, Spokane, Bellingham and Vancouver. Your town needs to know what's being transported through your communities.

We need to make sure that we're doing our best here to make you safe.

It is only fair that we come together as a country and make common-sense rail safety laws that are important to keeping our community safe.

These are not red towns or blue towns. They are towns in which the mayors have decided that it's time that we give America more rail safety.

And I want to thank Senators Brown and Vance for their legislation and encourage all my colleagues to come out and support this legislation on the floor of the Senate, so that we can get this to the House and onto the President's desk.

