

# WHO TRACKS THE RAILROADS?

## THE CASE FOR TRANSPARENCY ON RAIL BRIDGES



A publication by the New Jersey Work Environment Council

### THE PROBLEM

New Jersey has approximately 1,000 miles of freight rail lines crisscrossing our state traversing hundreds of bridges. Thousands of trains carrying millions of gallons of oil and toxic chemicals pass through urban, suburban and rural environments operated by 18 freight railroads.<sup>i</sup> Freight rail bridges, some more than 100 years old, cross over waterways such as Passaic, Delaware and Manasquan Rivers, as well as sensitive environmental areas like the Oradell Reservoir.

***Yet, despite repeated calls for transparency on rail bridge infrastructure from federal agencies and the public, the rail companies refuse to release safety and inspection reports.***

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is tasked with regulating the safety of our nation's rail network, and is responsible for inspections and enforcement activities throughout the U.S. In 2015, the FRA reported that in the previous two years, only 800 of the 100,000 bridges nationwide were inspected.<sup>ii</sup> The public cannot rely on weak federal oversight to ensure our public health and waterways are protected.

According to the Association of American Railroads, the railroads are planning on spending \$22 billion in 2017, approximately \$60 million a day.<sup>iii</sup> Yet, the railroads refuse to make public safety inspection reports on freight bridges and ignore the opportunity to highlight how they are investing in our communities.

***We need transparency by rail companies and disclosure of key information on the safety of rail bridges in New Jersey. We have the right to know.***

## THE FIX

*We call on the Governor and other elected officials to take the following steps to protect our lives, jobs, health, schools and businesses:*

- Mandate a placard be posted on each bridge containing name of owner and contact phone number to report structural concerns.
- Require rail and bridge owners to submit annual bridge inspection records to NJ Department of Transportation (NJ DOT).
- Instruct the NJ DOT to create a public bridge database, in the absence of a national inventory list, including information about the safety of rail bridges, ownership, phone number, date of last inspection, summary of findings, scheduled repairs and replacements.

## **RAIL BRIDGE FAILURE CAUSES TOXIC TRAIN DERAILMENT PAULSBORO, NJ**

On November 30, 2012, nearly 700 residents were evacuated and at least 100 were sickened when more than 23,000 pounds of highly toxic, cancer-causing vinyl chloride (VC) spread through the working class and low-income town of Paulsboro, Gloucester County, after a train derailment caused a bridge to collapse into Mantua Creek. Four rail cars of VC and one car of ethanol derailed after the bridge failed to close properly. Conrail, a private company that owns the bridge and railroad tracks, ignored a failure signal before allowing the train to cross.

The National Transportation Safety Board, the independent federal agency responsible for investigating transportation accidents, reported that 23 trouble ticket work orders about this particular bridge had been written by Conrail in 2012, despite a major repair project in 2009. The latest failure report came after a train crossed the bridge the night before the incident.

## A PEAK BEHIND THE CURTAIN

There is one tool available to state and local officials to obtain information about rail bridges.

The FAST (Fixing America's Surface Transportation) Act provides a vehicle for a State or a political subdivision of a State to obtain a public version of a bridge inspection report generated by a railroad for a bridge located within the respective jurisdiction. The request can only be made by an official in their capacity as a public official and online by filing out a Bridge Inspection Report Public Version Request form. The report will include information such as the date of the last inspection; the location of the bridge; contact information; and a general statement on the condition of the bridge.

## LACK OF DISCLOSURE FUELS MISTRUST

In November 2015, Waterkeeper Alliance, Riverkeeper & ForestEthics released *Deadly Crossing: Neglected Bridges & Exploding Oil Trains* documenting how inadequate federal oversight of rail bridges combined with the lack of transparency by rail companies leaves the public in the dark about the safety of these bridges.<sup>iv</sup> Even though transport by rail is an environmentally conscious means to move large freight, the lack of transparency jeopardizes public safety, and our waterways and environment. Disclosure of infrastructure investment and safety conditions shows the public what actions the railroads have taken to ensure safety. Good actors can be rewarded and those not investing can be held accountable by the public.

In the last four years, the volume of freight trains carrying hazardous materials, particularly crude oil, traveling through our communities has been a major concern for the public sparking a call to action. Legislative measures have been introduced to address these deficiencies, but to-date none have been signed into law.

With a pro big business agenda in Washington, DC we anticipate federal oversight to erode under the Trump administration. We are calling for the Governor and elected officials to take action to give us the right to know about the safety of freight rail bridges in our own communities.

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### ENDNOTES

- i American Society of Civil Engineers, [2016 Report card for New Jersey's Infrastructure, page 40](#)
- ii USA Today, September 10, 2015, [Feds urge railroads to share more info about safety of aging bridges](#)
- iii American Association of Railroads, [Freight Rail's Private Investment](#)
- iv Waterkeeper Alliance, Riverkeeper & ForestEthics report *Deadly Crossing: Neglected Bridges & Exploding Oil Trains*

# NEW JERSEY FREIGHT BRIDGES

## Morgan Draw Bridge<sup>1</sup>

Location: Sayreville, NJ and Old Bridge, NJ  
 Waterway: Cheesequake Creek  
 Construction Complete: 2012 (rehabilitated)  
 Material: ???  
 Owner: NJ Transit



## Point No Point Bridge<sup>2</sup>

Location: Newark, NJ and Kearny, NJ  
 Waterway: Passaic River  
 Construction Complete: 1890s  
 Material: ???  
 Owner: Conrail



## West Trenton Railroad Bridge<sup>3</sup>

Location: West Trenton, NJ  
 Waterway: Delaware River  
 Construction Complete: 1913  
 Material: Concrete  
 Owner: CSX



## Dock Bridge<sup>4</sup>

Location: Newark, NJ and Harrison, NJ  
 Waterway: Passaic River  
 Construction Complete: 1935  
 Material: ???  
 Owner: ???



## Lower Trenton Bridge<sup>5</sup>

Location: Trenton, NJ  
 Waterway: Delaware River  
 Construction Complete: 1928  
 Material: Steel  
 Owner: Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge Commission



## Arthur Kill Vertical Lift Bridge<sup>6</sup>

Location: Elizabeth, NJ  
 Waterway: Arthur Kill aka Staten Island Sound  
 Construction Complete: 1959  
 Material: ???  
 Owner: NYC Economic Development Corporation



## Delair Bridge

Location: Pennsauken, NJ  
 Waterway: Delaware River  
 Construction Complete: 1896  
 Material: Steel  
 Owner: ???



## Brielle Draw Bridge<sup>7</sup>

Location: Brielle, NJ and Point Pleasant, NJ  
 Waterway: Manasquan River  
 Construction Complete: 1911  
 Material: Steel  
 Owner: New Jersey Transit



??? illustrates lack of information available to the public

### Photo Sources:

<sup>1</sup> Morgan Drawbridge. Iron Bridge. <http://www.ironbc.com/morgan-drawbridge-3.html>

<sup>2</sup> Best, Corey. CSX Point no Point Bridge over the Passaic River. September 14, 2014. Flickr.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/nexis4jersey/15224445086/>

<sup>3</sup> Van Arnum, Bradford. West Trenton Railroad Bridge - view from Pennsylvania. August 31, 2007. Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West\\_Trenton\\_Railroad\\_Bridge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Trenton_Railroad_Bridge)

<sup>4</sup> Bridge Ko69: Amtrak Dock Vertical Lift Bridges over Passaic River, New Jersey. July 22, 2007. Flickr.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/70127529@Noo/1242094037>

<sup>5</sup> Dallara, Louis. Lower Trenton Bridge. July 22, 2012. Fine Art America. <https://fineartamerica.com/featured/lower-trenton-bridge-louis-dallara.html>

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Kill Vertical Lift Railroad Bridge over Arthur Kill, New York-New Jersey. August 1, 2009. Flickr.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/jag9889/3785089838>

<sup>7</sup> Brielle RR Bridge, the first bridge before Pleasant Point Canal. October 10, 2015. Blogspot.

<http://peasecrownsnest.blogspot.com/2015/10/>

map edited from: 2007 Edition! New Jersey Railroad Systems. 2007. Deskmap.

[http://www.deskmap.com/images/rr\\_newjersey.gif](http://www.deskmap.com/images/rr_newjersey.gif)

### About WEC

This document was produced by the New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC) with support from the Environmental Endowment of New Jersey.

Special thanks to WEC assistant director Debra Coyle McFadden and intern Megan Synek for their research and writing, and campaign organizer Norah Langweiler for her design work.

WEC is an alliance of 70 labor, community and environmental organizations working for safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment.

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