

GAO

Fact Sheet for the Chairman,  
Subcommittee on Commerce,  
Transportation and Tourism, Committee  
on Energy and Commerce, House of  
Representatives

February 1987

## RAIL SAFETY

# States' Reaction to Proposed Elimination of Inspection Funding



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United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Resources, Community, and  
Economic Development Division

B-226151

February 6, 1987

The Honorable James J. Florio  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Commerce,  
Transportation and Tourism  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On June 20, 1986, your office requested that we investigate what effect the elimination of federal support funds would have on the number of state railroad safety inspectors. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) provides partial funding for state rail safety inspectors through its State Safety Participation Program. To obtain information in order to respond to your question, we sent a questionnaire to the rail safety administrators for 48 states on August 20, 1986. (Alaska and Hawaii were not included in our work because of their limited rail activity.) The scope of our work did not include evaluating the effectiveness of the State Safety Participation Program. In all, 44 states responded to our questionnaire, including all 31 states currently participating in the State Safety Participation Program.

In response to our questionnaire, most of the states participating in the program said that there is at least some likelihood that their railroad safety inspection activities would be reduced if federal funds were eliminated. Almost half said that this possibility is very likely. Three states said that the elimination of federal funding would likely result in the elimination of their rail safety inspection activities. The response to your specific question on the impact of federal funding cuts is discussed in section 1. Also discussed are the states' responses to other questions where the results appeared to have some possible bearing on the actions states might take if federal funds for the program are eliminated.

The State Safety Participation Program was established in 1970 to enhance railroad safety by making it possible for participating states to assume responsibilities for planned routine safety compliance inspections. In fiscal year 1986, the 31 participating states provided 104 rail safety inspectors while FRA's own inspection force totaled 310 nationwide. The state inspectors, therefore, make up about 25 percent of the total FRA/state inspection force. The state inspectors mainly inspect track, engines, and cars. Section 2 lists the

participating states and the numbers and kinds of inspectors they provide under the program. Section 3 shows the distribution of FRA inspectors among the eight FRA regions.

FRA may provide participating states up to 50 percent of their program costs, including the costs of the personnel, equipment, and activities reasonably required for a state agency to carry out investigative and surveillance activities prescribed by FRA as necessary to enforce federal safety laws and regulations. From fiscal year 1982 to fiscal year 1985, FRA provided the full 50 percent funding. However, FRA's fiscal year 1986 payments to participating states totaled only 39 percent of these states' allowable program costs. (See section 2.) Furthermore, the program's fiscal year 1987 appropriation, which totals \$1,350,000, will only cover about 24 percent of the participating states' allowable program costs, assuming that all currently participating states continue program outlays at their fiscal year 1986 levels. FRA has not requested funds for the program in the President's fiscal year 1988 budget.

Table 1 provides FRA funding and state participation levels for fiscal years 1982 through 1986.

Table 1: 5-Year Funding and Participation Pattern

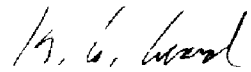
<u>Fiscal year</u>	<u>FRA funding</u>	<u>Participating states</u>	<u>State inspectors</u>
1982	\$2,236,000	31	88
1983	2,392,000	30	96
1984	2,752,000	32	102
1985	3,043,000	32	107
1986	2,189,000	31	104

As arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this fact sheet until 15 days after the date of this letter. At that time, we will send copies to the FRA Administrator and will make copies available to others upon request. If you have further questions, please contact me at (202) 366-1743.

B-226151

Major contributors to this fact sheet are listed in appendix I.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "K. M. Mead".

Kenneth M. Mead  
Associate Director



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ABBREVIATIONS

FRA	Federal Railroad Administration
GAO	General Accounting Office

SECTION 1  
QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

When reading the questionnaire results discussed below, note that some states did not answer all of the questions. For example, the responses to questions aimed at states currently participating in the FRA program frequently numbered fewer than 31 even though all 31 participating states filled in their questionnaires and returned them. Therefore, we have included the total number of states responding to each question discussed.

QUESTION 1: In your opinion, if FRA funds were completely eliminated, how likely (if at all) is it that your state would decrease the number of inspectors?

Program administrators in 25 participating states, out of 30 responding, said that there is at least some likelihood that the number of inspectors would decrease if FRA funds are eliminated. Of the 25, 13 said that decreases in the number of inspectors would be very likely. Program administrators in five other states thought a decrease unlikely.

QUESTION 2: In your opinion, if FRA funds were completely eliminated, how likely (if at all) is it that your state would drop the rail safety program entirely?

Program administrators in 15 participating states, out of 29 responding, said there is at least some likelihood that their states would eliminate their rail safety programs if FRA funds are eliminated. Of the 15, 3 said that it is very likely their programs would be dropped. Fourteen, however, said that it is unlikely that their states would eliminate their rail safety programs if FRA funds are eliminated.

QUESTION 3: Just prior to receiving funds for inspectors from FRA, did your state have a rail safety inspection program?

Of the 31 participating states responding, program administrators for 18 said that their states had rail safety inspection programs prior to receiving FRA funds.

QUESTION 4: How much of a reason does the need for additional funds beyond what the state can provide to support an adequate rail safety program describe why your state is currently participating in FRA's State Safety Participation Program?

Program administrators for 26 participating states, out of 29 responding, said the need for additional funds beyond what their states could provide to support an adequate program was a reason for their participation. Sixteen of the 26 listed the need for



additional funds as a major reason for their participation. Only three of those responding said the need for additional funds was not a reason for their participation.

QUESTION 5: In your opinion, if FRA funds were completely eliminated, how likely (if at all) is it that your state would continue to coordinate with FRA on inspection activities?

Program administrators in 11 participating states, out of 30 responding, said that it is unlikely that their states would continue to coordinate with FRA on inspection activities if FRA funds are eliminated. Nineteen others indicated at least some likelihood of continued coordination.

QUESTION 6: How much of a reason, if at all, does the need for a coordinated national rail safety inspection program describe why your state is currently participating in FRA's State Safety Participation Program?

Program administrators in 29 states, out of 30 responding, said the need for a coordinated rail safety inspection program is a reason why their states are currently in the program. Twelve of the 29 listed the need for a coordinated program as a major reason for their participation.

QUESTION 7: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the job FRA does in coordinating state inspection programs to prevent inspection duplications?

Program administrators for 16 participating states, out of 31 responding, indicated at least some degree of dissatisfaction with FRA's coordination with states to prevent duplication of inspection work between FRA and the states. Seven of the 16 said that they are very dissatisfied. Thirteen others, however, indicated at least some degree of satisfaction with FRA's coordination of the inspection work. Two indicated neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction.

QUESTION 8: Please describe the reasons why your state is considering withdrawing from FRA's State Safety Participation Program in the next 5 years.

Four of the 10 program administrators responding to this question indicated that FRA's desire to eliminate the program is a reason their states are considering withdrawing from the program.

QUESTION 9: In fiscal year 1986, about what percentage of your state's share of the rail safety inspection program was funded from general (public) taxes, railroad assessments, FRA, and other sources? (Specify other sources.)

For the 28 participating states that provided information on 100 percent of their rail safety inspection funding sources, program administrators for 12 said that they obtained funding from railroad assessments and 16 said that general tax revenues were a source. For the three participating states that did not provide information on all of their rail safety inspection funding sources, program administrators for two said that railroad assessments were a source while none indicated general tax revenues as a source.

QUESTION 10: In your opinion, if FRA funds were completely eliminated, how likely (if at all) is it that your state would replace federal funds through railroad assessments?

Program administrators for 18 participating states, out of 28 responding, indicated at least some likelihood that their states would use railroad assessments to replace federal funds if they were eliminated from the program while 10 did not think their states would use this approach.

QUESTION 11: In your opinion, if FRA funds were completely eliminated, how likely (if at all) is it that your state would replace federal funds through general (public) taxes?

Program administrators for 10 participating states, out of 28 responding said that there is at least some likelihood that public taxes would be used to replace federal funds. However, the remaining 18 did not think it at all likely that public taxes would be used.

QUESTION 12: How much of a reason, if at all, does the need for more precise rail safety standards than the prior state standards offered describe why your state is currently participating in FRA's State Safety Participation Program?

Program administrators for 22 participating states, out of 30 responding, said that the need for more precise rail safety standards than prior state standards was a reason for their participation in the program. Fifteen of the 22 said that the need for more precise standards was a major reason for their participation.

QUESTION 13: How much of a reason, if at all, does the lack of state funds for a rail safety inspection program describe why your state is currently not participating in FRA's State Safety Participation Program?

Of the responding states that do not currently participate in the program, 7 out of 12 said that the lack of state funds is a major reason for not participating. Two others said the lack of state funds is a minor reason for not participating, and three said that the lack of state funds is not a reason.

SECTION 2

PAYMENTS TO PARTICIPATING STATES BY FRA FISCAL YEAR

1986 UNDER THE STATE SAFETY PARTICIPATION

PROGRAM AND NUMBER OF STATE SAFETY INSPECTORS

<u>State</u>	<u>Track</u>	<u>Motive power &amp; equipment</u>	<u>Operating practices</u>	<u>Signal &amp; train control</u>	<u>Number of inspectors</u>	<u>FY '86 FRA funds<sup>a</sup></u>
Alabama	2	2	0	0	4	\$ 112,421
Arizona	1	1	1	0	3	44,864
California	2	1	0	0	3	125,797
Connecticut	1	0	0	0	1	7,462
Florida	3	2	1	0	6	128,617
Illinois	4	0	0	0	4	82,247
Iowa	3	0	0	0	3	59,771
Kansas	1	0	0	0	1	20,024
Louisiana	1	0	0	0	1	16,004
Maryland	1	1	1	1	4	75,623
Michigan	3	0	0	0	3	62,140
Minnesota	2	0	0	0	2	34,301
Missouri	3	0	0	0	3	59,412
Montana	1	0	0	0	1	9,166
Nebraska	1	1	0	0	2	34,672
Nevada	1	0	0	0	1	16,236
New Hampshire	1	1	0	0	2	9,808
New Jersey	1	0	0	0	1	23,933
New York	3	3	0	0	6	170,231
North Carolina	2	1	0	0	3	58,891
Ohio	3	4	0	0	7	102,618
Oklahoma	1	0	0	0	1	39,126
Oregon	2	2	0	0	4	116,510
Pennsylvania	4	3	1	0	8	182,541
South Carolina	0	1	0	0	1	14,996
Tennessee	2	2	1	1	6	92,240
Texas	4	3	3	0	10	200,780
Utah	1	1	0	0	2	53,990
Virginia	2	0	0	0	2	51,080
Washington	2	1	1	0	4	83,405
West Virginia	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>100,284</u>
Total	<u>60</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>104</u>	<u>2,189,190</u>

<sup>a</sup>FRA share = 39.419 percent, state pays remaining share of 60.581 percent.

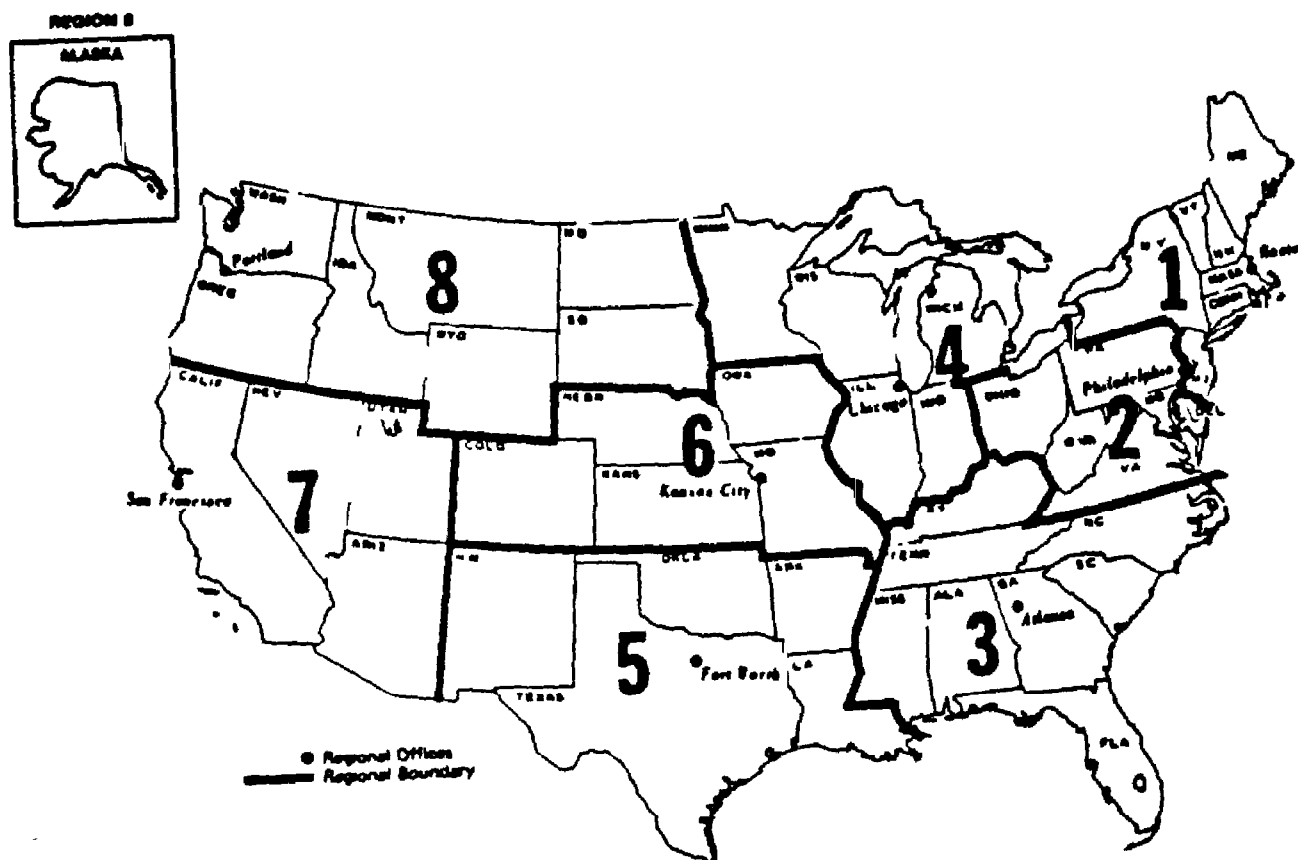
SECTION 3

NUMBER OF FRA SAFETY INSPECTORS

FISCAL YEAR 1986

<u>Region</u>	<u>Track</u>	<u>Motive power &amp; equipment</u>	<u>Operating practices</u>	<u>Signal &amp; train control</u>	<u>Hazardous materials</u>	<u>Number of inspectors</u>
1	9	12	7	4	4	36
2	10	20	13	6	7	56
3	13	15	7	6	6	47
4	9	16	7	5	3	40
5	11	14	7	6	6	44
6	10	14	8	5	3	40
7	4	6	5	4	3	22
8	<u>7</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>25</u>
Total	<u>73</u>	<u>103</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>310</u>

Figure 3.1: Federal Railroad Administration Regions



Source: Report of the Department of Transportation's Safety Review Task Force on Federal Railroad Administration Safety Programs.

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