

US railroad CSX plans to reduce human track inspections following government waiver

Bill Mertz
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Beginning July 1, US railroad CSX will begin reducing the frequency of human track inspections thanks to a waiver by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employes (BMWED) announced last Friday.

The union stated in a press release, “CSX has submitted notification to the FRA that it intends to implement the Automated Track Inspection waiver beginning July 1, suspending normal visual track inspection frequencies prescribed under 49 CFR 213.233(c) and replacing a portion of those inspections with ATI [Automated Track Inspection] technologies.” 49 CFR 213.233(c) in the federal code mandates that main tracks with over 10 million gross tons of traffic or passenger train operations must be visually inspected twice weekly.

Automated Track Inspection systems consist of rail mounted vehicles that can be either self-propelled or pulled within revenue trains. They constantly measure track geometry and send anomalies to a centralized database where the compiled data can be analyzed to prioritize maintenance.

This technology, used in conjunction with human visual inspections, can be used to greatly increase railway safety and reduce derailments, which currently occur at a rate of roughly three times a day in the United States. Instead, they are being used to cut jobs on behalf of profit.

Not all track defects are detectable by ATI. A CSX track inspector told the *World Socialist Web Site*: “The automated systems can only inspect the track they run on, and due to logistical reasons, dispatchers route these trains down the same tracks every time. My territory has passenger traffic, and two additional tracks that the automated systems will never run across.

“These systems give precise numbers on gauge and geometry that are useful in the hands of the inspector, yet many inspectors are only just now getting access or still don’t have access to this data, which has been available for years. Automated systems cannot also identify the root cause of defects, such as shifting ballast, drainage and underlying ground conditions. They can give hard numbers on the trends of the types of defects that take time to accumulate but have no way of detecting cracks in joints and switches or other types of defects that can appear rapidly.

He concluded: “They should solely be used as supplementary tools out in the hands of the inspectors. They cannot detect a large portion of what an inspector finds and are prone to faults and erroneous detections in areas at switches and frogs [a type of V-shaped track intersection] and they have no way to stop, investigate or repair any defect ahead of traffic. I believe reducing visual inspection on the higher speed lines, especially where passengers ride, is a mistake that endangers human life.”

Another CSX track inspector told the WSWs: “Safety is no longer a way of life for CSX. That car doesn’t have eyes that can visually see defects such as broken bars, pull-aparts, washouts, defective ties, insufficient fasteners, broken rails inside of dead zones and a whole lot more. Can it be a tool to utilize to help us create a safer railroad? Yes, but tools break daily whereas human eyes don’t.”

There is an obvious conflict of interest in the FRA’s decision. FRA administrator David Fink was previously president of Pan-Am Railways before it was purchased by CSX in 2022.

The five-year waiver instituted by the FRA was announced in December of 2025 after years of lobbying by the Association of American Railroads (AAR).

Under the waiver, railroads can suspend one of the weekly visual inspections. This translates to elimination of track inspector positions to further line the bulging pockets of Wall Street.

The BMWED bureaucracy is directing workers into the dead end of pro-corporate regulators and the courts. It is pointed in particular to an amendment which was added to the BUILD American 250 Act in the House of Representatives to retain twice-weekly human inspections.

This is the same Congress which voted to preemptively ban a national rail strike in late 2022, after workers voted down a national deal brokered by the Biden White House. Moreover, the bill is unlikely to pass in its current form before current surface transportation funding expires at the end of September.

2022 was a critical experience for the whole working class. After years of cost cutting, job eliminations, oppressive discipline and overwork under the hated "Precision Scheduled Railroading," railroaders voted over 95 percent to strike that year. Railroad workers were poised to bring the American economy to a halt. That was thwarted only by collusion between the railroads, both parties in congress and the union bureaucracy. Congress was able to impose the rejected contract only after months of deliberate stalling by union officials, who used lies, threats and stonewalling to block a strike before the midterm elections.

At CSX, the cost cutting ramped up again at the end of 2025, when the hedge fund Ancora ousted CEO Joseph Hinrichs and replaced him with the more ruthless Steve Angel, a long-time cost cutting merger and acquisition vulture.

The installation of Ancora's puppet Angel is in preparation for a merger creating two nationwide duopolies. Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern have submitted an application to merge through the Surface Transportation Board. While the merger is currently held up by regulatory review, President Trump supports the merger and fired board member Robert Primus, the lone voice on the board that opposed the Canadian Pacific and Kansas City Southern merger in 2023. Union Pacific, meanwhile, donated to Trump's White House remodeling project.

At a White House meeting last September, Trump consulted Union Pacific CEO Jim Vena on where to deploy the National Guard. According to Trump, Vena

suggested Memphis, St. Louis and Chicago, all critical rail hubs.

Pitiful protests by the trade unions and appeals to capitalist politicians will not curtail the ruthless pursuit of profit by Wall Street. The Class I railroads are among the most profitable industries in the United States. They should be operated as public utilities under the democratic control of the working class.

To accomplish this, workers must form their own militant organizations of struggle, independent of the sellout trade union bureaucracies and both capitalist political parties. This form is rank-and-file committees consisting of workers to fight for what workers need, not just what the companies are willing to give.



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