



BOB CASEY

FIGHTING for PENNSYLVANIA FAMILIES

The Rail Bridge Safety and Transparency Act

There are over 100,000 railroad bridges in the U.S., ensuring that rail service can connect communities across rivers, lakes, highways, and valleys. Despite their importance, however, there is little oversight for rail bridges. Railroad companies are allowed to inspect their own bridges based on their own guidelines, which are informed by only loose standards from the U.S. Department of Transportation. The results of these inspections are hard for the public to access, and if communities have an unsafe rail bridge in their area, they have little recourse.

This lack of oversight has real world consequences. In June of 2023, a bridge owned by Montana Rail Link (MRL) collapsed while a freight train passed over it, sending multiple rail cars into the river below and spilling molten sulfur and asphalt petroleum liquid into the water. According to MRL, the bridge had been inspected just one month prior and had been allowed to stay in service. Then, in October of 2023, a broken rail on a BNSF-owned bridge in Colorado caused a train to derail, collapsing the bridge and killing a truck driver below it. Despite these issues, railroad companies have been cutting staff from their maintenance of way divisions, making it even harder to inspect and maintain this critical infrastructure.

These incidents have demonstrated the need for the federal government to step in and set higher safety standards. *The Rail Bridge Safety and Transparency Act* would direct the U.S. Department of Transportation to set broad, comprehensive standards for rail bridges and require railroads to inspect their bridges in-line with these standards. This is the model that the U.S. Department of Transportation already uses for highway and road bridges. The bill would also direct the U.S. Department of Transportation to perform randomized audits of railroad bridges and compare its inspection results with the inspection results reported by a railroad. If there is a pattern of discrepancies between the U.S. Department of Transportation's findings and the railroad's reporting, *The Rail Bridge Safety and Transparency Act* would empower the Secretary to fine the railroad for these dangerous lapses in safety.

Additionally, this legislation would empower communities to access the results of rail bridge inspections and report unsafe rail bridge conditions. *The Rail Bridge Safety and Transparency Act* would require the Department of Transportation to keep a comprehensive, in-house database of rail bridge inspection reports and make it easier for communities to request and access those reports. The bill would also allow communities to report when a bridge is unsafe and allow the Department of Transportation to investigate these claims and shut down rail bridges if needed.

This bill is endorsed by the AFL-CIO Transportation Trades Division (TTD), the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWED), the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers-Transportation Division (SMART-TD), the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS), the Transport Workers Union of America (TWU), the International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers (IW), Freeport, Pennsylvania Borough Manager Zachary Filous, and Easton, Pennsylvania Mayor Sal Panto.