



Photo Credit: Brian Caswell.

FREIGHT RAIL: THE ORIGINAL DISRUPTER

America has come a long way in 250 years. It's easy to think our modern speed and connectivity were born in the digital age. But railroads cracked that code nearly two centuries before Silicon Valley.

Long before apps, alerts, or overnight-anything, rail figured out how to move goods fast, coordinate across a continent, and keep a sprawling national network running like clockwork. Rail didn't just connect cities – it helped America learn how to work as a country.

Fast forward to today: freight rail is safely and efficiently moving what our country needs to be competitive – from food and construction materials to cars and energy. Looking ahead, rail's poised for the next 250 years with the same strengths that built its legacy: resilience, innovation, and a design built for the long haul. The tools evolve, the network expands, and rail keeps adapting—ready for whatever America needs next.

Here are five ways freight railroads led the



charge before the rest of the world knew what was coming.

1. THE FIRST INFLUENCERS (1850s-1910s)

Railroads didn't need likes or followers to shape behavior. They controlled access. If your town had a rail connection, you had choices – new products, newspapers, fashions, and ideas. If it didn't, you weren't even aware progress was passing you by.

Railroads also knew how to sell a story. In the late 1800s, they promoted cities, farmland, resorts, and national parks with eye-catching posters and guidebooks. Want more people to visit, move, or invest? Put it on the rail map and tell them about it. Before algorithms decided what was trending, railroads decided what mattered.

2. THE FIRST AMAZON PRIME (1860s-1920s)

Before widespread rail service in the early-mid 1800s, goods moved by horse, wagon, riverboat, or coastal ship. Speed depended on the weather, roads, and seasons. Local or regional delivery could be one to two weeks, while long-distance inland shipments often took a month or more. And ordering something wasn't about when it would arrive – just if it would.

Trains turned delivery from a waiting game into a promise. What once took weeks by wagon showed up in days – and sometimes overnight.

Mail-order catalogs only worked because railroads made fast delivery normal. Order a

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Jon Cool, President
 @MI_FreightRail

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Michigan lawmakers have recently taken several steps aimed at strengthening rail security, improving infrastructure, and reinforcing safety across the state's freight network.

In March, the House of Representatives approved a package of cargo theft bills designed to crack down on organized theft targeting freight shipments. The legislation would strengthen criminal penalties and establish clearer

sentencing guidelines for individuals involved in cargo theft operations. We appreciate Reps. Steve Frisbie and Mike Harris for introducing these bills.

For the railroad industry – where intermodal containers, rail yards, and freight terminals can be targets for organized theft rings – stronger penalties send an important signal that Michigan is taking supply-chain security seriously.

Railroads move billions of dollars in goods each year, and cargo theft can disrupt supply chains,

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FREIGHT RAIL: THE ORIGINAL DISRUPTER

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plow, a dress, or an entire house kit, and trust that the train would bring it. Today, freight rail still plays a major role in ensuring your ecommerce arrives on time through the advent of intermodal transportation.

3. THE FIRST ALWAYS-ON NETWORK (1840s–1940s)

Long before the internet, railroads built one of America's first real-time networks. Telegraph wires running beside the tracks carried constant updates on train locations, delays, and cargo, while dispatchers used Morse code to coordinate traffic across thousands of miles – because a missed message wasn't an inconvenience, it was a safety risk.

By the late 1800s, that communication web evolved into a full-blown data operation. Railroads tracked everything—arrivals, loads, fuel, maintenance, labor, revenue—and kept the whole system synchronized through telegraph updates and meticulous station logs.

By the 1910s, federal standards and detailed engineering maps turned this data into one of the country's earliest large-scale data ecosystems. Long before computers, railroads had already built a nationwide, real-time information network.

THE FIRST COMPUTER USERS (1890s)

Speaking of computers, freight railroads were among the very first businesses to adopt them—not because it was trendy, but because it was necessary. By the mid 20th century, managing freight cars across multiple rail lines had

outgrown paper ledgers and telegraph reports.

In the late 1890s, railroads had already been early adopters of punched card tabulating machines and other proto computer technologies, and as digital computing emerged, they moved fast to integrate it into operations.

Computers allowed them to track every railcar in real time, solve costly car location problems, and coordinate the nation's largest supply chain with unprecedented accuracy. In fact, one of the earliest large-scale commercial computer applications in the U.S. was built specifically for the freight rail industry to monitor and manage rolling stock across the continent.

THE FIRST CONNECTED ECONOMY (1850s–Present)

Rail didn't just move the economy – it structured it. In the 1850s, a rail line acted like an economic magnet: farmers planted what rail could ship, factories set up shop near sidings, and towns grew around depots and junctions. Where the tracks went, opportunity followed.

Railroads created one of America's first national markets, linking producers, consumers, and industries across vast distances. Steel from Pittsburgh, grain from the Midwest, lumber from the Northwest – rail made it all circulate, turning isolated regions into a connected economic system.

Rail offered a shared infrastructure that businesses depended on – banks, warehouses, stockyards, ports, and entire supply chains grew in sync with the network. Once rail was in place, industries didn't just use it; they scaled because of it. And that economic growth continues today with both large and small businesses breaking ground on rail-served lines.

Source: AAR <https://www.aar.org/disrupter/>



Railroads are moving America's economy by utilizing safety technology. Photo credit: AAR.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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increase insurance costs, and create operational challenges across the network.

Cargo theft also includes vehicle theft connected to rail shipments. Automobiles transported on railroads are sometimes targeted by criminals who steal vehicles directly from loaded railcars—known as auto racks – or from auto staging and distribution lots.

Given Michigan's central role in the automotive industry, these thefts represent a significant concern for both rail carriers and auto manufacturers. Addressing these crimes through stronger penalties and enforcement tools is an important step toward protecting shipments

moving through Michigan's rail network.

Rep. William Bruck's Key Facility bill was approved by the House Judiciary Committee recently. The legislation updates Michigan's Key Facility law by modernizing the definition of rail yards – an update rail stakeholders have long supported as rail operations and yard configurations have evolved over time.

The legislation adds rail tunnels to the definition as well. The bill aims to ensure rail infrastructure is appropriately covered under existing protections. Thank you Rep Bruck.

Infrastructure funding is also part of the conversation. Rep. Donni Steele recently introduced legislation to increase funding for

the Local Surface Crossing Program, which helps communities improve the driving surface at railroad crossings. These projects directly benefit motorists, school buses, and emergency vehicles. Thank you, Rep. Donni Steele, for working on this issue.

Finally, recent data from the Federal Railroad Administration highlights the industry's long-term safety progress. Over the past two decades, the overall train accident rate has dropped roughly 27% since 2000, while derailment rates have declined by about 30%. Employee safety has improved significantly as well, with on-duty fatalities down more than 70% since 2000 and employee injury rates reaching record lows in recent years.



MICHIGAN RAIL SHIPPERS COUNT ON GREAT LAKES CENTRAL RAILROAD

While Detroit may have helped put the state on the world stage, Michiganders know there's much more to the Great Lakes State when you take a closer look. It's home to thriving agriculture, plastics, petroleum, construction materials, and other manufacturing industries. And many of them rely on the Great Lakes Central Railroad (GLC) for safe and reliable freight transportation.

Formed in 2006, the GLC operates 386 miles of track across Michigan as the successor to several railroad mergers during previous decades. In October 2025, the GLC joined Watco as its 47th short line railroad. The line runs from Osmer in the southeast to Petoskey and Traverse City in the northwest, with several branching subdivisions along the way. From the short line's headquarters in Owosso, 65 team members maintain a fleet of locomotives, repair the rail, and serve about 50 customers across the state. They move roughly 22,000 carloads annually.

Agriculture is the heart of the GLC. Its diagonal line through central Michigan is perfectly positioned to carry the soybeans, corn, and wheat that thrive in the region, and the fertilizer that nourishes them. These commodities account for roughly two-thirds of the GLC's annual freight. Liquefied petroleum gases, plastics, and lumber account for the majority of the remainder.

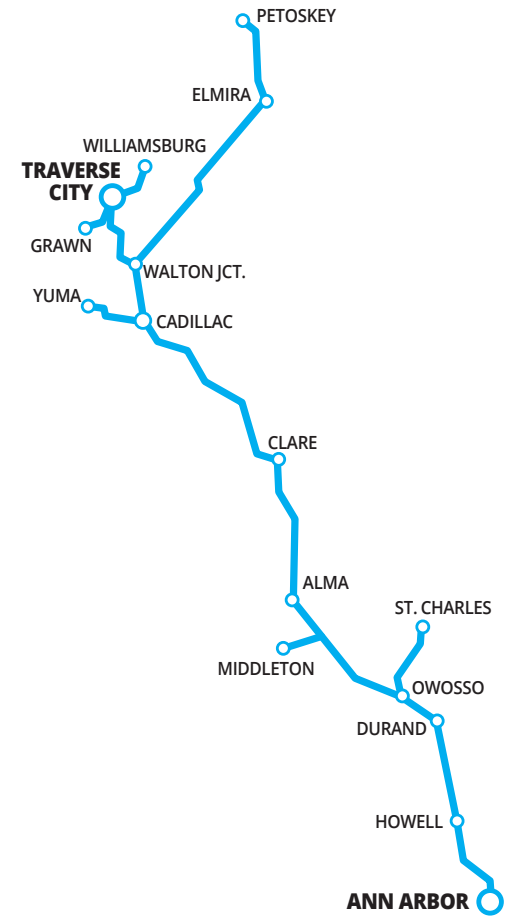
While the GLC is only 20 years old, the infrastructure it operates over has a much longer history. Its rails, bridges, and grade crossings were inherited from earlier railroads that laid the foundation for

today's network. In partnership with the Michigan and U.S. departments of transportation, GLC is modernizing these critical assets. Funding from the Michigan Rail Enhancement Program (MREP) and Federal Railroad Administration Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements grants has supported significant upgrades across multiple sections of the line.

The recent \$34 million replacement of the century-old Manistee River Train Bridge near Manton shows the GLC's commitment to improvement and ability to collaborate with state and federal agencies to benefit local customers. The new bridge allows heavier, longer trains to run at higher speeds, safely increasing the GLC's efficiency.

This commitment to growth and modernization is strengthened by Watco's scale and resources. The company's short lines in other agriculture-heavy states like Kansas, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Idaho have completed more than \$100 million in state- and federally assisted rail improvements over the past five years. That expertise gained there will support upcoming investments, including GLC's MREP grant to replace rail, ties, and ballast on the Middleton Subdivision. Running from Middleton to Ashley, the line serves one of the state's largest ag companies, Michigan Agriculture Commodities. Construction is slated to begin in summer 2026.

"We're completely rehabilitating the track," said GLC General Manager Kenny Morgan. "It's going to benefit all our customers. We're currently



under speed restrictions and can only run four-axle locomotives. This will help us provide the level of service our customers expect and we strive to provide."

Joining Watco also creates new opportunities for efficiency. Six new team members are currently in training, all of whom attended Watco's Safe Performance Center in Birmingham, Alabama. The center's safety and training teams are staffed by experts in federal, state, and Watco operating procedures. Attendees learn rules and regulations and earn required certifications before finishing their on-the-job training locally under the guidance of seasoned railroad veterans. Additionally, new locomotives from Watco's fleet are headed to the GLC. As the transition nears the six-month mark, Morgan says the benefits are clear.

"The support has been the biggest thing," said Morgan, who is also general manager of the Ann Arbor Railroad (AA). "We're constantly communicating and working to resolve issues.



Great Lakes Central WAMX 3862 near Traverse City. Photo Credit: Chase Worm.

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MICHIGAN RAIL SHIPPERS COUNT ON GREAT LAKES CENTRAL RAILROAD

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We're quicker, more efficient, better about locomotive and manpower utilization, safety, and accountability, and that's bringing customers back to the railroad. There's always someone to answer the phone for us and our customers."

Rob Bingham serves as Watco's assistant vice president for sales and marketing in the state and is the primary contact for customers on the GLC, AA, and Grand Elk Railroad (GDLK). With more than 20 years' experience in Michigan railroading, Bingham has built strong relationships across all three short lines and brings deep knowledge of the local economy. He also understands how to remain competitive with the state's unique trucking laws, a critical advantage when frost laws are in effect and highway weight limits are reduced.

"In most of the country, a railcar carries the equivalent of four trucks. In Michigan it's closer to two to one," Bingham said. "We must be very purposeful in our operations and proactive with our customers to be competitive. But when the frost laws take effect and most trucks are weight restricted, the railroad isn't affected. We can move the same amount of freight year-



Great Lakes Central WAMX 3863 northbound near Boardman Lake in Traverse City. Photo Credit: Chase Worm.

round, and that greatly benefits the industries in Michigan."

Watco's three Michigan short lines – GLC, AA, and GDLK – collectively total 753 miles of track, employ 140 team members, and handle nearly 50,000 annual carloads. They operate as separate entities but can collaborate and share resources when necessary.

"Watco has made a significant investment in Michigan," Bingham said. "That's not by accident. We believe in Michigan, see even more potential, and want to be a significant player."

Some of that growth will come from urban centers, but Morgan and Bingham see just as much potential in rural areas. Supporting customers in small towns is important to the GLC team. They strive to find in-state moves that support jobs in multiple communities.

"A lot of these small towns were built around railroads," Morgan said. "If they lose a local business, the community suffers. Our team members are from these towns. We want to support them. That's our mindset; if we meet customer needs, we're supporting jobs and our neighbors."

"YOU ARE NOT ALONE": CN ROLLS OUT SUICIDE PREVENTION LOCOMOTIVE

The idea for Canadian National Railway's suicide-prevention locomotive began with Michigan-based CN employee Jonathan Quigley, a sales account manager who wanted to bring greater visibility to mental health awareness across the railroad industry.

Quigley sketched the concept and championed the idea internally, helping turn it into locomotive No. 8357 – painted with the message "You Are Not Alone" and the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline logo. The locomotive made its Michigan appearance December 2025.

His goal was to use the railroad's powerful presence in communities, especially across Michigan, where CN has a significant footprint, to encourage open conversations about mental health and remind anyone in crisis that help is just three digits away.



CN's suicide prevention 988 locomotive in Durand, Michigan. Photo Credit: Brian Caswell.

MICHIGAN OPERATION LIFESAVER SPRING UPDATE 2026

Michigan Operation Lifesaver is a rail safety education non-profit powered by dedicated people. The goal is to end deaths and injuries on and around railroad tracks and trains. OLI offers free in-person and virtual presentations and e-learning programs along with free materials to promote rail safety. Michigan Operation Lifesaver, and its team of Operation Lifesaver Authorized Volunteers (OLAV's), and supporters have seen a steady reduction in crashes and fatalities over the past several years.

Michigan Operation Lifesaver and its partners have seen a reduction of rail-related tragedies, including crashes involving vehicles and trespasser/pedestrian incidents, by emphasizing the three E's: **Education, Engineering, and Enforcement.**

The number of fatalities in Michigan has gone down from 40 people killed in 1972 to an average of four in recent years. Operation Lifesaver has seen a reduction of over 82% in railroad tragedies nationwide since 1972, down from over 12,000 in 1972 to less than 2,000 on average for the past several years. Michigan had 32 crashes, 6 fatalities and 5 injuries, compared to 34 crashes, 4 fatalities, and 6 injuries in 2024.

Recent activities and events for Michigan Operation Lifesaver include:

- A snowmobile enforcement detail was held on the Lake State Railway in February from Grayling to Gaylord. This was done with the cooperation of the Michigan State Police, MDNR, and local law enforcement. Two tickets were written, and two warnings were issued. The goal of this effort is to promote safe snowmobile use near rail operations.
- Six Rail Investigation Safety Course (RISC) presentations were made Y-T-D to enforcement groups to educate First Responders and



Lake State Railway, Operation Life Saver and law enforcement promoting snow mobile safety near rail corridors. Photo Credit: Bob Haworth.

Police across the state. CN and CSX Police departments have officers trained to make these Presentations.

- MI-OL and CN Police had an exhibit and presentations for the two-day Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police (MACP) Convention in Grand Rapids, where many contacts and relationships were made with law enforcement officers.
- MI-OL had an exhibit at the Michigan State Police Emergency Management Conference in East Lansing at the Kellogg Center.
- In January, our educational outreach successfully reached over 5,000 people through several key venues:

- **Great American Train Show (Novi):** 3,000+ visitors

- **Ann Arbor Train Show:** 1,500 attendees over two days
- **DNR Safety Education Facility (Detroit):** 200 patrons
- **University & Festival Outreach:** Central Michigan University and the Holland Tulip Festival.
- **Regional Presentations:** A tour of 14+ cities, including Taylor, Lansing, Sterling Heights, Durand, Saginaw, and New Baltimore.
- Rail Safety Week, now called 'See Tracks - Think Train' week, will be held September 21st - 26th, covering enhanced efforts and updates from OLI and various safety groups across the State.

For more information contact State Coordinator - Curtis Stewart frmn2009@sbcglobal.net - 517-974-1737. Or www.oli.org

See Tracks? Think Train® Week 10th Anniversary

First held in the U.S. in 2017, this **collaborative effort** among Operation Lifesaver Inc., State Operation Lifesaver Programs and rail safety partners across the U.S., Canada and Mexico is now called See Tracks? Think Train® Week throughout the U.S. to better reflect the purpose of this week-long observance:

- **Preventing railroad crossing and trespass incidents across North America**
- **Concentrating public attention on the need for rail safety education**





Legislators and local officials prior to riding the Lake State Railway from Standish to Grayling. Photo credit: MRA.

LEGISLATORS TOUR NORTHERN MICHIGAN ON THE LAKE STATE RAILWAY

Hosting elected officials on railroad tours is one of the Michigan Railroads Association's most effective ways to demonstrate the real-world value of freight rail transportation. These tours give policymakers a firsthand look at railroad operations, opportunities to engage directly with rail professionals, and insight into the businesses that depend on rail service.

In October, Lake State Railway, headquartered in Saginaw, partnered with The Andersons (Standish) and Arauco (Grayling) to host a legislative and local officials' informational tour. Participants observed rail operations and

learned how freight rail carriers support regional industry and economic activity.

The Northern Michigan Legislative Caucus played a key role in promoting the event at the Capitol. Special thanks to Rob Pallarito (Hoitenga) and Adam Hagedorn (Cavitt) for their leadership and planning efforts.

Legislators, county commissioners, and industry partners engaged with Lake State Railway personnel and representatives from The Andersons and Arauco, gaining a clearer understanding of how rail service supports Northern Michigan businesses.

A strong rail network is essential for moving Michigan-made products out of state and delivering critical commodities inbound. MRA thanks all who participated in this informative tour and helped highlight the continued importance of rail transportation to Northern Michigan's economy.



Rep. William Bruck and Natalie Bruck enjoying a beautiful fall afternoon rail tour. Photo credit: Rep. William Bruck.



Rep. Donni Steele meeting with Lake State Railway engineer. Photo Credit: Rep. Timmy Beson.



Rep. Timmy Beson learning about the railroad aboard LSRC locomotive. Photo credit: Rep. Donni Steele.



THE SHORT LINE & REGIONAL RAILROAD INDUSTRY

WHO ARE WE?

Short line railroads are a critical part of the U.S. freight network.

The nation's 603 short lines provide service for one in five cars moving each year. Operating 47,500 route miles, or 29% of freight rail in the U.S., these small business railroad entities play a vital role in the hub-and-spoke transportation network, providing the connection between farmers, manufacturers and other industries, and ultimately, the consumer. For large areas of rural and small town America, short line and regional railroads are the only way shippers can be directly connected to the national network, helping business and employment stay local.

Short lines are the All-American success story!

Short lines inherited track that had experienced years of deferred maintenance by their previous owners. Most short lines invest a minimum of 25% of their annual revenues in rehabilitation and maintenance, which is far more than almost any other industry in the country. Their ingenuity and investment has created a vibrant industry, serving a critical role in freight movement.

What is our role in the freight network?

Short line and regional railroads are a critical part of the freight transportation network, moving one in 5 carloads annually on the freight rail network. They partner with Class 1s and other short lines to serve the customer. Short lines most often provide first or last mile service for a longer journey. A smaller percentage (10%) are transferred (bridged) from one Class I to another by a short line, and 9% move solely on a short line or regional railroad network.

Credit: ASLRRA

Hallmarks of the Short Line Industry



Customer Focus

As the first and last mile of the shipment, short lines provide flexibility and responsiveness to the unique needs of each customer.



Entrepreneurial Spirit

These small businesses operate the most vulnerable segments of the railroad system. They succeed by competing aggressively for business, and investing significant revenues in rail infrastructure.



Connecting Customers to Markets

For large parts of rural and small town America, short line and regional railroads are the only direct connection to the national rail network.

RAILROAD CARGO THEFT: RISING LOSSES, RISING COSTS, & POLICY RESPONSES

Cargo theft on America's freight rail network has become a growing challenge for the industry, shippers, insurers, and supply chains alike. According to the Association of American Railroads (AAR), organized criminal groups targeted freight railroads with sophisticated theft tactics in 2024, resulting in more than 65,000 reported incidents – roughly a 40% increase over the prior year. These thefts cost the nation's largest railroads more than \$100 million in direct losses in 2024 alone, with estimates suggesting the true economic impact tied to supply chain theft could reach billions annually when indirect costs are included.

The financial toll of rail cargo theft extends beyond stolen goods. Railroads report that thefts often damage equipment, require costly repairs, and cause service delays that ripple through the broader network. These disruptions not only strain operations but also contribute to higher insurance premiums for shippers and carriers, who must absorb rising claims and invest more heavily in security technologies and loss prevention. Delays and unpredictable freight disruptions can cascade across supply chains, resulting in stockouts, late production schedules, and inflationary pressures on consumer prices.

Rail carriers are increasing investments in surveillance, physical security, and technology to deter theft, but industry leaders acknowledge that these measures add to overall operating costs and that carriers alone cannot stem the tide. With only a small percentage of reported

thefts resulting in arrests, and many involving repeat offenders, railroads are pushing for stronger legal tools and coordination.

In response to the rise in supply chain and rail cargo thefts, several policy efforts have emerged. At the federal level, railroads and supply chain partners are backing initiatives like the Combating Organized Retail Crime Act (CORCA), intended to create a coordinated enforcement response to sophisticated theft networks that span jurisdictions.

Here in Michigan, lawmakers have introduced a pair of bills aimed at tightening penalties for cargo theft. House Bill 5125 would establish enhanced penalties for theft of cargo under Michigan's criminal statutes, while House Bill 5126 would create specific sentencing guidelines for such theft – classifying significant cargo theft as a serious felony with higher potential sentences. These bills are part of a broader effort to provide law enforcement clearer tools and stronger deterrents against theft that impacts supply chains and commerce in the state.

As cargo theft continues to evolve into a more organized and costly criminal enterprise, addressing its economic impacts – from insurance costs to supply disruptions – will require continued coordination among industry stakeholders, lawmakers, and law enforcement at all levels.

*Photo: Attempted Auto Cargo Theft in SE Michigan.
Credit: Conrail.*



IN MEMORIAM: GORAIL PRESIDENT MICHAEL GAYNOR

It is with deep sadness that we share the passing of GoRail President Michael Gaynor following a courageous battle with cancer.

Michael was a respected leader, a tireless advocate for freight rail, and a valued colleague to so many across the industry. Mr. Gaynor was with GoRail for more than 17 years.

He helped shape its mission, expand its impact, and guide it confidently into the future. A passionate rail advocate, Michael was promoted to his dream role as President of GoRail in 2025 and served on its Board of Directors.

State Senator Roger Victory shared the following: "I had the privilege of working with Michael Gaynor and experiencing firsthand his dedication to advancing rail issues at every level. Michael's life was rooted in family and a deep appreciation for nature, and it was a true pleasure to work alongside someone with such passion and energy for his work."

MICHIGAN STATE CENTER FOR RAILWAY RESEARCH & EDUCATION CELEBRATES 20th RMCP WITH RECORD ENROLLMENT

Michigan State University's Center for Railway Research and Education marks a major milestone in 2025 with the 20th iteration of the Railway Management Certificate Program (RMCP). Established in 2007 with support from industry leader Ed A. Burkhardt, RMCP has become the gold standard for rail leadership development.

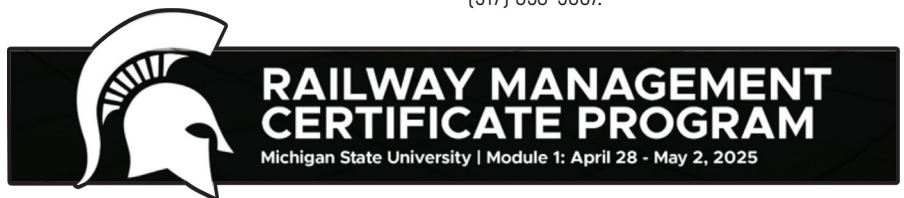
This year's cohort is the largest ever, with 41 mid- and senior-level professionals representing 27 freight and passenger rail organizations across 19 U.S. states and Mexico. Over the past two decades, more than 300 alumni have completed the program, advancing into executive and technical leadership roles throughout the rail industry. Participants consistently praise RMCP for its rigorous curriculum, immersive site visits, and unmatched networking opportunities.

The 2026 program's four-module framework is complemented by enhanced integration of strategic business tools, sustainability practices, and cross-modal perspectives. The 2026 calendar includes:

- **Module 1: Railway Business Administration, Strategy, and Leadership**
April 27–May 1 | MSU Campus, East Lansing, MI
- **Module 2: Railway Regulation, Safety, and the Rail Industry**
June 15–19 | Washington, DC & Newark, NJ
- **Module 3: Railway Technology, Research, and Development**
September 28–October 2 | Fort Worth, TX & Pueblo, CO
- **Module 4: Railway Operations**
November 2–6 | Indianapolis, IN & Chicago, IL

Registration for RMCP 2026 is now open, with early-bird tuition and program details available at raileducation.com. The program fee is \$19,500 per participant. Companies enrolling multiple participants are eligible for group discounts. Demand continues to exceed available seats, so prospective applicants are encouraged to secure their place early.

For more information about the program or to inquire about RMCP 2026 enrollment, contact the CRRE team at kucheren@msu.edu or call (517) 353-5667.



FREIGHT RAIL KEY TO ECONOMIC FUTURE IN GREAT LAKES STATE

From the auto industry and other manufacturers to mining and agriculture, Michigan's productive freight rail network provides key connections to keep the Great Lakes State economy moving forward. Accounting for about one-third of all U.S. exports, freight rail is a big reason Michigan is a top-10 exporter state.

Michigan's 29 freight railroads operate over 3,349 miles of track and employ 2,382 people in the Great Lakes State.*

It would have taken nearly 4 million additional trucks to handle the 71.6 million tons of freight that started, ended, or moved through Michigan in 2023. Moving freight by rail prevented 6.97 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions, the equivalent of taking 1.37 million cars off the road or planting 105.6 million trees.

Motor vehicles and parts and intermodal shipments make up the majority of freight rail shipments beginning in Michigan. Intermodal and coal are the largest rail imports to the state.

Consider being a rail champion today by visiting GoRail at: gorail.org



CELEBRATING AMERICA'S 250th: RAILROADS ROLL OUT PATRIOTIC LOCOMOTIVES



CN's Locomotive 2026 – "Air Force One". Photo Credit: CN.



CN's Locomotive 1776 – "Screaming Eagle". Photo credit CN.



Lake State Railway's SD70M No. 1776. Photo Credit: Kevin Burkholder.



Lake State Railway's SD70M No. 1776. Photo Credit: Kevin Burkholder.



CPKC 1776, a new Tier 4 ET44AC locomotive from Wabtec. Photo Credit: CPKC.

As the United States approaches its 250th birthday in 2026, railroads across the nation are preparing to honor the milestone in a distinctly American fashion: by unveiling special-edition, patriotically painted locomotives. These commemorative engines, adorned with vibrant colors, symbolic imagery, and historical motifs, serve not only as moving tributes to the nation's semiquincentennial but also as reminders of the essential role railroads have played in shaping the country.

Railroads have long been woven into the American story—from connecting distant communities to supporting industrial growth and national expansion. By decorating locomotives for the 250th celebration, railroads are embracing that heritage while engaging both train enthusiasts and the general public. The special liveries may feature stylized interpretations of the American flag, scenes from early rail history, or designs that pay tribute to the nation's founding ideals.

These locomotives are expected to operate in everyday service, allowing people across the country to encounter them unexpectedly – on mainlines, in yards, or passing through small towns. For many, spotting one becomes a moment of shared pride and reflection on the nation's journey.

Beyond their visual appeal, these commemorative engines highlight the rail industry's continued relevance. As the country looks toward the next 250 years, railroads remain central to transportation, sustainability, and economic resilience. The special locomotives symbolize a bridge between the past and future, celebrating a legacy while moving steadily forward on the rails that helped build a nation.

PROGRESSIVE RAILROADING 2026 WOMEN OF INFLUENCE IN RAIL CONGRATULATIONS SARAH PAWLANTA



Congratulations to Genesee & Wyoming's Sarah Pawlanta, assistant vice president of sales and marketing on being named a Progressive Railroading's Women of Influence in Rail. Sarah's steady and reliable work ensures that customers across Michigan receive the safe, reliable and customized rail transportation they need to keep their supply chains moving.

Sarah Pawlanta, Assistant VP of Sales and Marketing, G&W.
Photo Credit: Genesee & Wyoming Inc.

FRA DATA CONFIRM FREIGHT RAIL ACHIEVED RECORD SAFETY PERFORMANCE IN 2025

Newly released Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) data show that **2025 was the safest year on record for U.S. freight rail**. Nearly every major safety metric improved, driven by long term private investment, advanced technology, and strong workforce training.

The industry invests **about \$23 billion annually** in its own infrastructure—far more than the average U.S. manufacturer as a share of revenue—to maintain safety, reliability, and supply chain efficiency.

AAR President Ian Jefferies emphasized that sustained investment, technology, and a skilled workforce continue to drive measurable safety gains while supporting an affordable and reliable national supply chain.

Source: AAR

KEY IMPROVEMENTS IN 2025:

- Overall **train accident rate fell 14%**.
- **Derailments, equipment-caused, and track-caused accidents** all reached their **lowest levels ever**.
- **Human factors-related accidents** dropped **nearly 20%**, helped by automation and data-driven operating practices.
- **Class I railroads** recorded their **lowest employee injury rate in history**.

Railroads emphasized that safety progress is ongoing and tied to modernizing regulations so that advanced technologies can be deployed more widely.

LONG-TERM PROGRESS SINCE 2005 INCLUDES:

- **40%** reduction in overall train accident rates.
- **46%** decline in derailments.
- **53%** drop in track-caused accidents.
- **41%** reduction in human factors-related accidents.
- **54%** decline in Class I employee casualties and **67%** drop in on-duty fatalities.

REMAINING CHALLENGES:

Grade crossing incidents have seen little improvement, signaling the need for more collaboration and investment through programs like the Grade Crossing Elimination Program and Section 130 grants.



LAKE STATE RAILWAY WINS GREEN SPARK AWARD

LSRC Will Be Honored at ASLRRRA's Annual Conference in April

It's no secret that older locomotive models are generally a railroad's primary source of emissions and are also very expensive to replace. That dual reality makes it a challenge to reconcile a desire for cleaner, more efficient operations with the fact that you can't run a railroad without a locomotive.

It's especially challenging for small railroads looking to improve efficiency and reduce fuel consumption and cost. Procuring higher-tier locomotives can have the most positive environmental impact but is often the most difficult to achieve.

The winner of the 2026 Green Spark Award for environmental achievement, Lake State Railway (LSRC), took a huge leap forward in this area with the recent purchase of four SD70ACe-T4 locomotives from Progress Rail. The acquisition allowed LSRC to retire five locomotives that were over 40 years old, transforming the railroad's fleet into one of the youngest and most environmentally friendly in the short line industry.

Along with being more fuel efficient, these new tier 4 units, which are also LSRC's first AC traction locomotives, will enable the railroad to reduce the total number of locomotives needed on several key long-haul routes.

Although buying new units is a significant accomplishment for LSRC, they have taken other steps to reduce their environmental impact. When it is not possible or cost-effective to procure a higher-tier locomotive, railroads can use other technology to improve efficiency.

LSRC is continually adding idle-reduction technology to its fleet, installing automatic engine shut down/start up systems (AESS), auxiliary power units (APUs) and plug-in technology. These systems work in different ways to reduce the amount of time the locomotive engine must be kept idling, which helps reduce fuel and engine maintenance costs, extend engine life and decrease harmful emissions.

LSRC even works to take care of its locomotives in an efficient way, keeping its large locomotive facility warm during the winter by using a heating system powered by the railroad's waste oil. And this commitment to recycling extends to the rest of the company. LSRC has a proactive recycling program for all materials and disposes of used railroad ties at a cogeneration facility, also known as a combined heat and power plant, which converts biomass and other organic waste into energy. LSRC also uses best practices and proactively manages waste and pollution via

third-party consultants and a full-time properties manager.

Environmental efforts do not stop at the gates of LSRC property. The railroad is active in national environmental initiatives, in part as a member of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) SmartWay Program. SmartWay Carrier Partners take advantage of sustainability accounting and tracking tools to improve efficiency and environmental performance, and LSRC is one of only a handful of ASLRRRA members to be a part of the program independent of a large holding company.

LSRC Chief Mechanical Officer Roger Fuehring has also been active with environmental initiatives on the national level, working with the EPA to write regulatory compliance guides for railroads. Fuehring has also advised development of current and potential emissions regulations to help ensure they are effective and realistic for small business railroads.

Overall, LSRC's accomplishments, both big and small, demonstrate a commitment to reducing the environmental impact of its operations without compromising service and growth. Their effort truly shows size is no barrier to impact.



Lake State Railway recently acquired four tier 4 locomotives, giving it one of the youngest and most environmentally friendly fleet in the short line industry. Photo Credit: LSRC.



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