



Federal Railroad Administration Railroad Bridge Safety Fact Sheet

Role of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

Ensuring the structural integrity of the nation's railroad bridges is critically important to the flow of commerce and to the safety of railroad employees, rail passengers, communities and the public. That's why the FRA conducts regular audits of rail carriers' bridge management programs to evaluate inspection and maintenance practices and identify potential weaknesses that could affect the safety of railroad operations, employees, passengers or the public. FRA's oversight includes observations of railroad bridges and routine reviews of railroad bridge inspection reports.

- FRA Bridge Safety Specialists respond to public complaints regarding the structural integrity of railroad bridges by conducting thorough evaluations when necessary.
- While the FRA does not maintain an inventory of railroad bridges, a September 2008 Bridge Survey conducted by the Association of American Railroads found that the large and small freight railroads (plus Amtrak) own and maintain approximately 77,000 railroad bridges nationwide.
- In August 2000, FRA published a final *[Statement of Agency Policy on the Safety of Railroad Bridges](#)* to establish suggested criteria for rail carriers to use to ensure the structural integrity of railroad bridges.
- In January 2009, FRA published an amendment to its bridge policy – then adopted by the industry – to include the *[Essential Elements of Railroad Bridge Management Programs](#)*.

Bridge Safety Standards Final Rule

In July 2010, FRA released a *[Bridge Safety Standards Final Rule](#)* requiring railroad track owners to adopt and follow specific procedures to protect the safety of their bridges and to strengthen federal oversight of railroad bridge programs. The Bridge Safety Standards Final Rule requires rail carriers to:

- Implement bridge management programs that include at minimum annual inspections of railroad bridges
- Conduct special inspections if the weather or other conditions warrant such inspections
- Maintain an inventory of all railroad bridges and know their safe load capacities
- Maintain design documents and to document all repairs, modifications, and inspections of each bridge
- Ensure bridge engineers, inspectors and supervisors meet minimum qualifications
- Make sure bridge inspections are conducted under the direct supervision of a designated railroad bridge inspector
- Conduct internal audits of bridge management programs and inspections

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