

# Track and Structures Compliance Manual

## Volume I General

### Chapter 1 Introduction and General Guidance

**2026**

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U.S. Department of Transportation

**Federal Railroad Administration**

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## **2026 Release Note (Volume I, Chapter 1)**

This document was prepared by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Office of Railroad Safety, Track and Structures Division.

This chapter contains no regulatory language. It is provided as general guidance for FRA inspectors and is not to be construed as regulatory language in any manner.

This chapter has been updated since the January 2023 release. Changes include:

- Formatting changes.
- Minor spelling, grammatical, and typographical corrections.

## **Chapter 1 Introduction and General Guidance**

### **Introduction to the Compliance Manual**

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), Track and Structures Compliance Manual provides technical guidance to Federal and State Track Inspectors. The Compliance Manual provides guidance for enforcement of 49 CFR Part 213 Track Safety Standards (TSS), Part 214 Railroad Workplace Safety, and Part 237 Bridge Safety Standards.

This document replaces all previous Track and Structures Compliance Manuals, including the previous compliance manual issued in 2023.

The guidance provided in this manual may be revoked or modified without notice by memorandum of the Associate Administrator for Railroad Safety/Chief Safety Officer. This manual does not modify, alter, or revise the regulatory provisions in the above referenced in any way.

Comments, additions, and suggestions for future changes should be directed to headquarters or district track specialists for consideration.

Inspectors should refer to this manual as often as necessary for clarification of FRA regulation interpretation and policy. When an inspector is unsure of meaning or intent in this manual, the inspector should promptly contact a district track specialist for guidance.

### **Safety**

The first priority of the FRA is safety. Therefore, all activities are to be conducted with personal safety and the safety of accompanying personnel in mind. Inspectors should conduct activities in accordance with the safety instructions contained in the General Manual. Guidance for roadway worker protection (RWP), bridge worker safety, and on-track roadway maintenance machine safety is contained in the Track and Structures Compliance Manual, Volume III. Guidance for the Bridge Safety Standards is contained in the Track and Structures Compliance Manual, Volume IV.

### **Track Inspections**

An Inspector's primary duty is to conduct inspections to determine whether the railroads are complying with the TSS and railroad workplace safety (bridge worker safety, RWP, and roadway maintenance machine safety). Effective inspection requires identification, evaluation, and reporting of conditions and practices that fail to meet minimum Federal compliance requirements.

Since the purpose of regular inspection activity is to evaluate the performance of the carrier and the carrier's representatives in conducting thorough inspections and complying with the TSS, it is important to inspect track inspection records maintained by the carrier, as required by 49 CFR §§ 213.241 and 213.369. Determine the adequacy of the carrier's inspections by evaluating what is recorded on the carrier's inspection reports, and determine if these reports reflect the actual conditions of the track structure.

To conduct a thorough inspection, the following preparations are suggested:

- Obtain the names and locations of the supervisor’s territory to be inspected.
- Advise the supervisor of the territory to be inspected and invite them to have a railroad representative accompany you.
- Set a date, time, and location for the inspection.
- If you must change the date, time, or location, make every effort to contact the carrier as soon as possible to advise them.
- Determine what, if any, transportation will be furnished by the carrier.
- Always have a copy of the TSS and the Compliance Manual as reference.
- Carry properly calibrated track measuring equipment (tape measure, level board, string line, etc.).
- If possible, have the following information before the inspection:
  - Timetables and special instruction for speeds and restrictions.
  - Current slow orders.
  - Recent carrier track inspection reports.
  - Train, tonnage, and hazardous material information.
  - Current and recent program work.
  - Current carrier RWP program.
  - Current continuous welded rail (CWR) program (if required).

For information on general FRA policy, in addition to this chapter, inspectors should also reference the General Manual, Chapter 2, for guidance about issues such as property entry, refusal to permit inspections, forcible interference with official duties, and release for entry and strike or labor disputes.

### **Opening Conference**

Before starting an inspection, inspectors should introduce themselves to all present and obtain a list of individuals participating in the inspection. An inspector may then explain the reason for the inspection as:

- Regular – to ensure the carrier’s inspection process is adequate in finding, reporting, and remedying non-TSS-compliant conditions.

- Follow-up – or “re-inspection” of a regular inspection to ensure proper remedial action.
- Complaint – of unsafe conditions by an individual, group, or entity. Caution must be used to not to identify the complainant. It is not mandatory to divulge that you are on a complaint investigation, as it may compromise the investigation. Inspectors should consult with the District Track Safety Specialist.
- Accident – investigations caused by derailments or accidents, etc.
- Waiver – investigation for relief from federal regulations.
- Automated Track Inspection Program (ATIP) – FRA geometry car inspections (Volume I, Chapter 3).
- Special Inspections – such as focused inspections or program enforcement.

During the Workplace Safety Briefing prior to the inspection, all parties involved should understand that FRA’s goal is to help the carrier improve safety, and we welcome suggestions and ideas.

### **Closing Conference**

Upon completion of an inspection, the inspector shall provide the carrier representative a report with all conditions that do not meet minimum safety requirements.

Field reporting is discussed in the Track and Structures Compliance Manual Volume I, Chapter 2. Reporting of exceptions to the standards is discussed in the Track and Structures Compliance Manual Volume I, Chapter 4.