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[Congress Puts Rail Safety on the Agenda](#)

TTD's rail safety agenda got a boost last week when Senator Richard Blumenthal, along with three other Senators, included several reforms that rail labor has [long championed](#) in their Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2014. Some 130,000 miles of freight rail tracks crisscross the United States, driving the economy, supporting more than 175,000 employees, and carrying crucial cargo that often includes hazardous materials. It is essential that we insist on the highest level of safety to protect workers, passengers, and communities that have trains pass by on a daily basis.

The Blumenthal bill gets it right when it mandates that all freight railroads must be operated by at least two qualified employees. Modern freight trains are large, complex vehicles that routinely carry hazardous materials throughout the United States, and it is simply ridiculous, and incredibly unsafe, to charge a single person with the responsibility of operating a train. Not surprisingly, opinion [polls consistently show](#) that the public supports the mandated use of two-person crews. The Federal Railroad Administration has announced its intention to issue a rule on two-person crew requirements, a pending House bill on the issue has 82 cosponsors, and now Senator Blumenthal and his colleagues have lent their support to this effort. Good news all around.

This bill also calls for added protections to ensure that that signal employees and other track workers are not injured or killed by moving trains. Specifically, the bill requires that back-up technology is implemented to alert train crews when signal work and other maintenance is being done on tracks. Further, the bill requires that alerters be positioned in the locomotive cab to help ensure that operating crews are responsive and can stop the train in case of an emergency. Alerters have already been installed in many trains, but this bill closes a loophole that has allowed older cars, especially on commuter rails, to go without them.

We are disappointed that the bill requires the installation of audio and video recording devices in locomotive cabs. We look forward to working with Senator Blumenthal to modify the bill on this point and to make other improvements that will enhance safety.