
SUMA Position Statement

Railway safety remains a major concern for municipalities in Saskatchewan and throughout North America. SUMA members have voiced concerns about the speeds at which trains are going through their communities, the blocking of critical crossings, and the carriage of dangerous goods. These concerns will only increase as rail traffic – particularly the transportation of oil by rail – continues to grow in Canada.

Over the past five years, the transportation of oil by rail in Canada has increased by 28,000 per cent, from 500 carloads in 2009 to 140,000 carloads in 2013. Disasters, such as those occurring in Lac-Mégantic, QB and Plaster Rock, NB, have fueled calls for increased standards, regulation, and enforcement for rail companies operating in Canada. Urban governments need to know that railway companies hauling dangerous goods are operating in an up-to-date and adequately enforced regulatory framework that will best protect Saskatchewan residents, and ensure that municipalities are not left with the financial, environmental, and quality-of-life costs of railway-related disasters.

Key Messages

- The increase in the transportation of oil and other hazardous materials by rail significantly increases the chances of future disasters involving derailments, spills, fires, and explosions.
- It is clear that the current regulations and self-enforced model for railway safety are not adequately protecting the safety of Canadian residents or the public infrastructure upon which they depend.
- New standards for safety, third-party liability insurance, and operational transparency must be set, and applied uniformly to all railway companies carrying dangerous goods.
- SUMA expects that those creating and managing risks, from major operators like CN and CP to the short line operators of Saskatchewan, must develop the capacity to absorb full risk-management costs, including clean up, rehabilitation and compensation. Taxpayers should not have to shoulder the burden of risks imposed by for-profit operators.

Current Status

- There is now a registry of municipal emergency planning officials for municipalities that wish to receive information on dangerous goods passing through their community by rail. Interested municipalities can provide the following information to the Canadian Transport Emergency Centre: the name, title, organization, address, e-mail address fax number, telephone number and cell phone number of the Emergency Planning Official that the municipality has designated. This information can be sent to:

Canadian Transport Emergency Centre (CANUTEC)
Place de Ville, Tower C 330 Sparks Street, 14th Floor,
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0N5
Attention: Mr. Angelo Boccanfuso, Director of CANUTEC
Or by email to CANUTEC@tc.gc.ca

- The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) continues to work with industry and the federal government to establish minimum standards for third-party liability coverage, which would apply to all inter-provincial and international railway companies operating in Canada.
- FCM has worked with the federal government to develop regulatory changes regarding at-grade rail crossings. These regulations are currently in draft form.
- FCM is advocating for improved regulations for railway company operations, maintenance, and safety. The federal government is currently considering how best to approach these changes.
- SUMA is advocating at the provincial level for any regulatory changes made by the federal government to also be adopted as the provincial standard for short-line rail companies hauling dangerous goods.

Background

- SUMA, as part of FCM, has been strongly advocating for improved regulations for Canada's railway industry, through: improved emergency planning and response; minimum standards for third-party liability insurance; and improved regulations for the safe operations and maintenance of railways.
- Federal regulations only apply to railway companies whose operations cross provincial and national borders. The Government of Saskatchewan must choose whether or not to adopt specific federal regulations for short-line railway companies operating within the province.

Strategic Context

Urban municipalities house the majority of Saskatchewan residents, and the public infrastructure that supports them. They may also be left with the costs of responding to and recovering from a railway disaster that happens within their community, should a railway company's liability insurance prove insufficient.

It is essential to urban governments that the serious gaps in the regulatory framework developed for railway companies be addressed in order to ensure the health and safety of Saskatchewan residents, and the ongoing vitality of our urban municipalities.

Conclusion

SUMA strongly believes that public safety must be the primary consideration for any regulatory changes. We will continue to work with FCM for improved federal regulations and advocate for those same regulations to be applied in Saskatchewan to all rail companies transporting dangerous goods.

Contacts

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