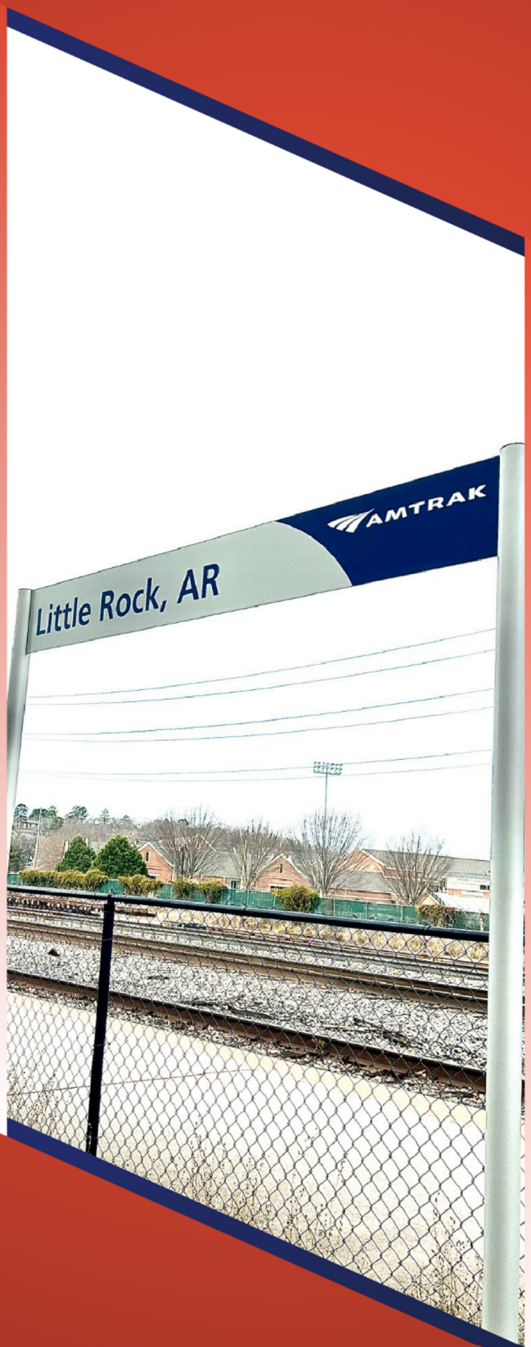
ARDOT
ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

ARKANSAS STATE RAIL PLAN 2025



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Arkansas Department of Transportation

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Arkansas State Rail Plan

prepared for

Arkansas Department of Transportation

prepared by

Cambridge Systematics, Inc.

date

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1.0 The Role of Rail in Statewide Transportation

Dating as far back as the 1850s, rail has played an important and ever-evolving role in the history, economy, and demographics of Arkansas. The 133-mile Memphis and Little Rock Railroad was the first railroad to be constructed in the state, connecting Hopefield (located in Crittenden County across the Mississippi River) and Little Rock, which at the time was a growing hub with under 4,000 residents. Serving primarily as a passenger railroad in the pre-Civil War era, the Memphis and Little Rock Railroad allowed riders a more direct means of traveling between what would eventually become two of the most prominent and important cities in the southeastern United States.

Arkansas' unique geography of fertile agricultural land and proximity to growing industrial centers ensured significant growth in rail activity through the latter half of the 19th century and beyond. The first interstate railroad to traverse the state was the St. Louis Southwestern Railroad, which linked St. Louis with cities throughout northeast Texas via Arkansas. Known as the "Cotton Belt Route", the railway provided a key link for cotton and other agricultural shipments into and out of Missouri's "Gateway City". During this period, additional railroads were constructed across Arkansas, supporting both freight and passenger service, with the statewide rail network comprising nearly 3,400 miles by the end of the century. This rapid growth led to the creation of the Arkansas Railroad Commission in 1899 to oversee development and activities of the state's railroad industry, including setting rates on intrastate freight shipments. Its responsibilities were transferred to the Arkansas Corporation Commission in 1919, to the Railroad Commission in 1921, and to the Arkansas Corporation Commission which was renamed the Arkansas Public Service Commission in 1945.

Through the first half of the 20th century, the state's railroad network continued to grow. Correspondingly, many of Arkansas' larger urban and regional population centers such as Arkadelphia, Russellville, and Jonesboro grew in large part as a result railroad service. Stations at these locations allowed for the transport of passengers and locally produced commodities such as coal, cotton, rice, and timber to larger population centers and trading hubs.

The increased use of automobiles and the resulting construction of the Interstate Highway System into the latter half of the 20th century greatly altered the Arkansas rail network. In 1957, the responsibilities of the Arkansas Public Services Commission with respect to transportation by air, rail, water, carrier pipelines, and motor carriers, were transferred to the Arkansas Commerce Commission. In 1971, the agency was renamed the Arkansas Transportation Commission. Interstate passenger rail service was taken over by Amtrak in 1970. At the same time, a combination of onerous economic regulations and the rise of trucking led to a decline in market share of rail, as well as increased railroad mergers. Following the passing of the Staggers Act in 1980 and the legalization of rail-shipper contracts, freight railroad's market share began to increase again.[1]

Today, railroads play a highly significant role in supporting Arkansas' economy. In fact, rail continues to be one of the most efficient and cost-effective modes for transporting bulk and heavy commodities over long distances. Many of these commodities form the literal building blocks of the houses we live in, ingredients we consume, and household items we purchase. Locally, although the state's economy is much larger and complex than it was when the railroads were first created, rail transport continues to provide direct support for some of the state's most pivotal industries, including aerospace, chemicals, rice, plastics, steel, timber, and general manufacturing industries. In 2019, total rail volume transported in Arkansas reached over 160 million

[1] https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/railroads-1185/

tons of goods valued at $300 billion. In terms of passenger rail, Amtrak's Texas Eagle intercity service operates through Arkansas and provides a direct link between Dallas and Chicago, through one of the nation's most important economic corridors. In 2024, Amtrak's Texas Eagle carried more than 37,000 passengers.

The Project Coordination Section within the Program Management Division at the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) works with rail companies, other ARDOT staff, local officials, and others to coordinate construction projects and other highway-related activities occurring within railroad right of way. It also administers the Railway-Highway Crossings Program (Section 130) and is tasked with developing this State Rail Plan (SRP) to provide a strategic assessment and blueprint for the state's railroads. The Traffic Safety and Statewide Planning Sections within the Planning & Research Division are responsible for planning activities relating to railroad crossing safety and multimodal planning activities, respectively.

1.1 Plan Organization, State and Federal Requirements

Arkansas Act 192 of 1977 designated ARDOT as the state's multimodal transportation planning agency responsible for coordinating the development of statewide transportation plans, including a State Rail Plan. This Arkansas SRP also meets all Federal requirements set forth in the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 and is in compliance with Title 49 USC Section 22102. It is meant to provide a strategic path forward for the state's railroads to continue to grow and thrive. The plan includes a comprehensive assessment of the state's railroads, including trends, needs, safety considerations, funding mechanisms, and proposed capital investments. This first chapter describes the current and anticipated role of rail in Arkansas' overall transportation system and the state's ability to provide policy, legal, and financial support for freight and passenger rail service capital improvements and operations.

1.1.1 Organization of Plan

In keeping with Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Guidance, this plan includes an inventory and assessment of existing and future conditions for Arkansas' freight rail and passenger rail systems, establishes a vision for freight and passenger rail in Arkansas, and provides an investment program for existing and proposed freight and passenger rail infrastructure and services in the state. The state's railroads, rail users, industry, and public and private stakeholders were involved in the development of this plan. The 2025 Arkansas SRP is organized as follows:

- **Chapter 1 – Role of Rail in Statewide Transportation:** Describes the current and anticipated role of rail in Arkansas' multimodal transportation system and the state's ability to provide political, legal, and financial support to freight and passenger rail service development.

- **Chapter 2 – Arkansas' Existing Rail System:** Provides an overview of Arkansas' existing freight and passenger rail systems, including ownership, operations, and facilities of the railroad system, and existing and projected rail demand. Chapter 2 also provides an overview of safety and security programs, economic and environmental impacts of rail, and economic and operations trends and forecasts.

- **Chapter 3 – Proposed Passenger Rail Investments and Improvements:** Identifies proposed investments and improvements for the Arkansas passenger rail system.

- **Chapter 4 – Proposed Freight Rail Investments and Improvements:** Identifies proposed investments and improvements for the Arkansas freight rail system.

- **Chapter 5 – Rail Service Investment Program:** Includes the vision, programs, prioritization, and implementation mechanisms utilized to carry out passenger and freight rail investments and improvements.

- **Chapter 6 – Coordination and Review:** Summarizes Arkansas' approach towards public- and private-sector stakeholder engagement and highlights findings from these outreach efforts.

The Arkansas SRP is fully compliant with the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 PRIIA, as shown in Table 1.1. The State is also in compliance with Title 49 USC Section 22102.

Table 1.1 FRA State Rail Plan Requirements

FRA State Rail Plan Requirement	Arkansas State Rail Plan Reference(s)
An executive summary that highlights key facts and findings of the state rail plan.	Executive Summary (separate document)
An inventory of the existing overall rail transportation system and rail services and facilities within the state and an analysis of the role of rail transportation within the state's surface transportation system.	Chapters 1 and 2
A review of all rail lines within the state, including all freight rail lines, intercity passenger rail lines, commuter rail lines, and proposed high-speed rail corridors and significant rail line segments not currently in service.	Chapter 2
A statement of the state's passenger rail service objectives, including minimum service levels, for rail transportation routes.	Chapter 2
A general analysis of rail's transportation, economic, and environmental impacts in the state.	Chapter 2
A long-range rail investment program for current and future freight and passenger infrastructure in the state that includes a list of rail capital projects, a funding plan, public and private benefits for projects, and a statement of correlation between public funding and public benefits.	Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5
A statement of public financing issues for rail projects and service in the state, including a list of current and prospective public capital and operating funding resources, public subsidies, state taxation, and other financial policies relating to rail infrastructure development.	Chapters 2 and 5
An identification of rail infrastructure issues within the state that reflects consultation with all relevant stakeholders	Chapters 2 and 6
A review of the major passenger and freight intermodal connections and facilities within the state	Chapter 2
A review of publicly funded projects within the state to improve rail transportation safety and security, including all major projects funded under Section 130 of Title 23.	Chapter 5
A performance evaluation of passenger rail services operating in the state, including possible improvements in those services and a description of strategies to achieve those improvements.	Chapters 2 and 3
A compilation of studies and reports on high-speed rail corridor development within the state not included in a previous plan under this subchapter and a plan for funding any recommended development of such corridors in the state.	Chapter 5
A statement that the state is in compliance with Title 49 USC Section 22102.	Chapter 1

1.2 Arkansas' Multimodal Transportation System Goals

The goals from the 2017 Arkansas Long Range Intermodal Transportation Plan (LRTIP) provide a framework to improve the multimodal freight system, including rail, to compete for quality jobs and provide for the safe and efficient movement of goods in Arkansas. Those goals include:

- **Safety & Security:** Improve statewide safety by funding projects that reduce fatal and serious injury crashes, reduce vulnerability, and improve resiliency of the system.
- **Economic Competitiveness:** Improve intermodal transportation system connectivity, efficiency, and mobility to support existing industries and strengthen national and regional economic competitiveness.
- **Infrastructure Condition:** Invest in existing infrastructure to maintain and preserve the existing system.
- **Congestion Reduction, Mobility, and System Reliability:** Invest in the multimodal transportation system to improve mobility, connectivity, accessibility, and reliability for people and goods.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Enhance the performance of the transportation system while avoiding, minimizing, and/or mitigating impacts to natural and cultural resources.
- **Multimodal Transportation System:** Partner with responsible modal agencies, local jurisdictions, and planning organizations working to improve safety, accessibility, and connectivity for the movement of people and goods.

1.3 Importance of Rail in the Arkansas Transportation System

Rail is an essential component of the Arkansas multimodal transportation system. One of the key strengths of freight rail, which comprises the majority of the state's rail operations and services, lies in its ability to transport heavy, bulk goods and containers over long distances cost-effectively. This broadly includes goods such as metals, chemicals, aggregates, agricultural products, petroleum, and various consumer products. In terms of significance, these products form the building blocks of the multi-scale economy. Key industries utilizing these goods include many of Arkansas' largest economic sectors, including manufacturing, agriculture, construction, and mining. Arkansas' Amtrak Texas Eagle passenger service provides a valuable transportation which that connects some of the nation's largest metropolitan centers, including Dallas/Fort Worth, St. Louis, and Chicago, as well as numerous smaller communities in between. This link further reinforces statewide mobility and boosts economic activity at and around Arkansas' six passenger rail stations.

The Arkansas rail network is expansive and allows people and goods to move efficiently throughout the state. Union Pacific (UP) corridors broadly run from the southwest through the northeast, roughly paralleling I-30 and I-40. Trackage owned by Canadian Pacific Kansas Southern Limited (CPKC) can be found in the western portion of the state, while BNSF trackage into and out of Memphis is found in eastern Arkansas. Class III short line trackage is found throughout Arkansas, especially in the southern portion of the state. Switching and terminal railroads, shorter in nature, are also found across the state in both urban and rural industrial and intermodal centers.

At the national scale, the Arkansas rail network plays an important role in multi-direction freight rail flows. Located between the major freight centers of Dallas and Memphis, Arkansas trackage helps to facilitate the transport of freight from east to west coast markets. Correspondingly, Arkansas is home to three Class I railroads. This includes BNSF and UP, the two largest freight railroads in the U.S. in terms of network mileage. In March 2023, Kansas City Southern, the smallest national Class I railroad, was formally acquired by Canadian Pacific, and is now known as CPKC. This created the first contiguous freight railroad to connect Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

1.4 Rail Governance

1.4.1 Arkansas Department of Transportation

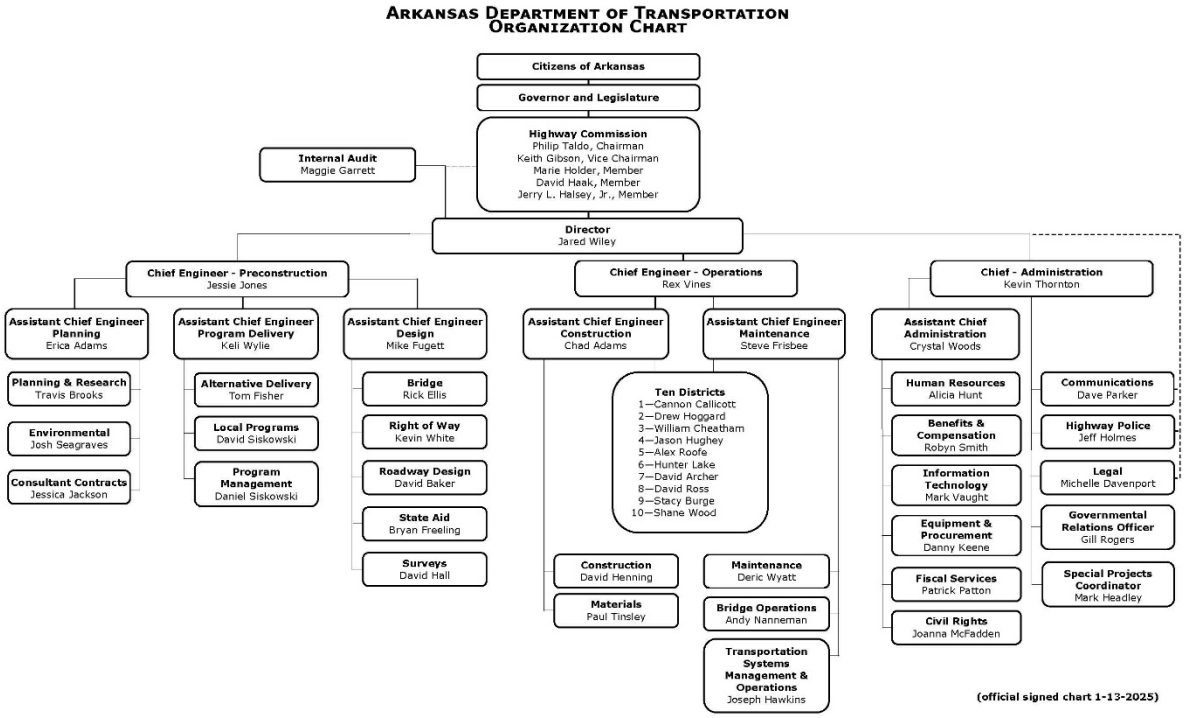
Railroad crossing safety planning and multimodal system planning at ARDOT are performed primarily by the Traffic Safety and Statewide Planning Sections with the Planning & Research Division. The Project Coordination Section within the Program Management Division is responsible for coordinating with railroads to implement ARDOT projects. The organization of ARDOT and where the Program Management and Planning & Research Divisions are situated within the agency is shown in Figure 1.1. Specific activities include:

- Administering the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Railway-Highway Crossings Program (Section 130);
- Coordination of ARDOT work (construction projects, inspections, and other highway-related activities) within railroad right-of-way with all railroad companies in Arkansas; and
- Assisting in the development of studies and statewide plans related to railroad activities.

Technical assistance is available to help with the formation of regional intermodal authorities under Arkansas Act 690 of 1997 and to help existing intermodal authorities in developing railroad projects and related rail transportation facilities.

Other railroad safety functions at ARDOT include maintaining a railroad crossing inventory database, ranking public crossings by a hazard rating using a Hazard Rating Index, and also participating in Operation Lifesaver activities. Operation Lifesaver is a nationwide program dedicated to reducing collisions, injuries, and fatalities at roadway/railroad grade crossings and on railroad rights-of-way.

Figure 1.1 ARDOT Organizational Chart



Source: ARDOT

1.4.2 Other Public Sector Rail Planning in Arkansas

Although ARDOT has primary responsibility for developing multimodal transportation plans the state, a number of other state and local agencies have an interest in the performance of the Arkansas rail system in carrying out their responsibilities.

Arkansas Economic Development Commission

The mission of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) is to develop and diversify the state's economy to enhance the quality of life for current and future Arkansans by stimulating job creation and retention in both new and existing business and industry. The AEDC has historically been involved in a number of rail projects. When state funding is made through the Arkansas general revenue fund for rail-related projects that involve economic, the AEDC is usually the state agency through which funding is passed through.

Arkansas Waterways Commission

The Arkansas Waterways Commission (AWC) is the sole state agency responsible for developing, promoting, and protecting waterborne transportation in Arkansas. The AWC also promotes economic development for ports on the commercially navigable rivers of the state. Activities of the AWC are funded from general revenue appropriated by the General Assembly. The AWC has the authority to receive and use any federal, state, or private funds, donations or grants made available for the development, use, and

expansion of river transportation resources of the state. The AWC, on numerous occasions, has worked to improve rail access to ports in Arkansas.

Planning and Development Districts

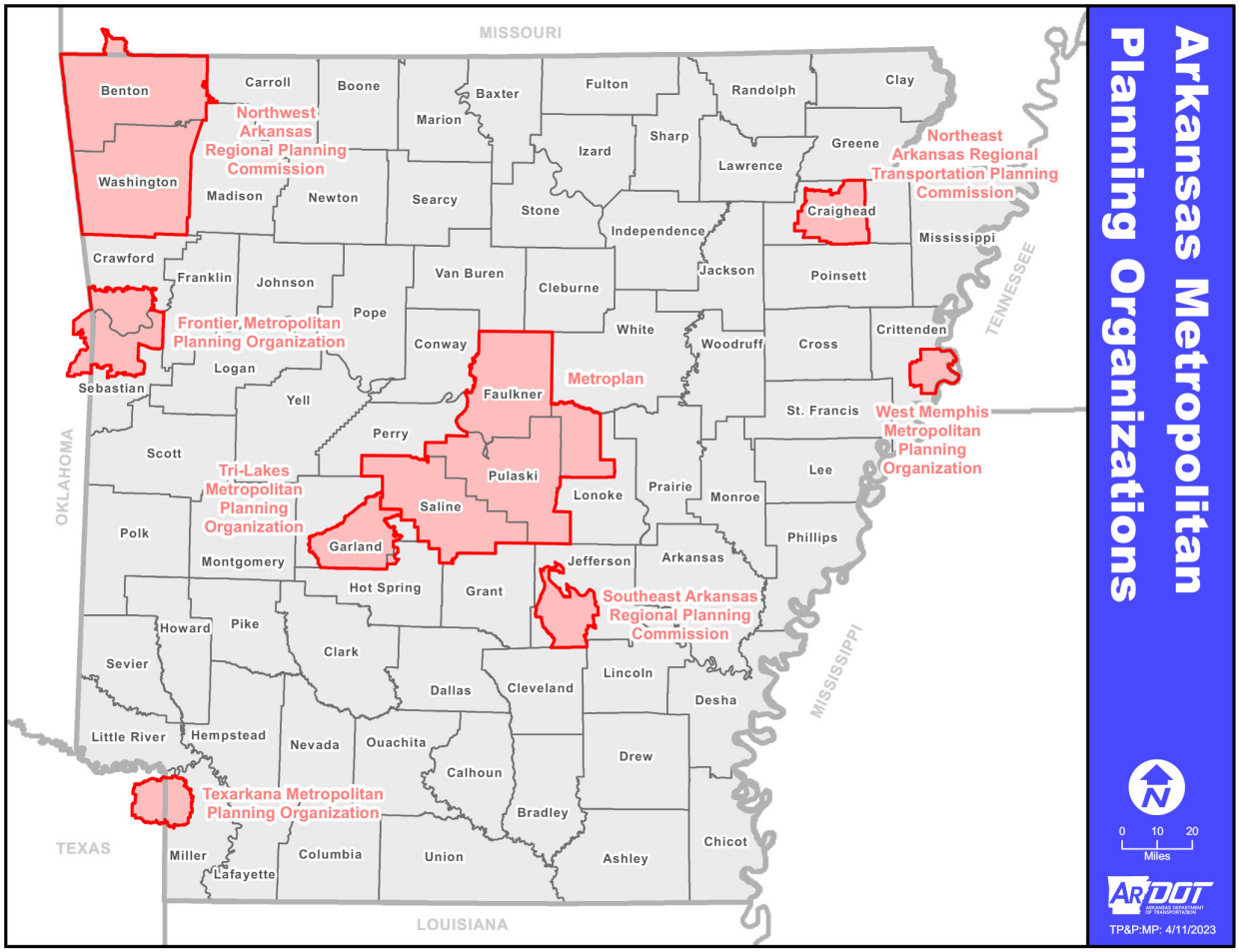
Arkansas is divided into eight Planning and Development Districts (PDD). Each PDD covers six to twelve Arkansas counties which are bound together by common economic problems and opportunities. The PDDs provide many services including grant writing and administration for economic development projects in Arkansas. Some of these PDDs have been actively involved in rail projects in recent years. The eight PDD areas include the following counties:

- **Central Arkansas Planning & Development District:** Faulkner, Lonoke, Monroe, Prairie, Pulaski, and Saline Counties
- **East Arkansas Planning & Development District:** Clay, Craighead, Crittenden, Cross, Greene, Lawrence, Lee, Mississippi, Phillips, Poinsett, Randolph, and St. Francis Counties
- **Northwest Arkansas Economic Development District:** Baxter, Benton, Boone, Carroll, Madison, Marion, Newton, Searcy, and Washington Counties
- **Southeast Arkansas Economic Development District:** Arkansas, Ashley, Bradley, Chicot, Cleveland, Desha, Drew, Grant, Jefferson, and Lincoln Counties
- **Southwest Arkansas Planning & Development District:** Calhoun, Columbia, Dallas, Hempstead, Howard, Lafayette, Little River, Miller, Nevada, Ouachita, Sevier, and Union Counties
- **West Central Arkansas Planning & Development District:** Clark, Conway, Garland, Hot Spring, Johnson, Montgomery, Perry, Pike, Pope, and Yell Counties
- **Western Arkansas Planning & Development District:** Crawford, Franklin, Logan, Polk, Scott, and Sebastian Counties
- **White River Planning & Development District:** Cleburne, Fulton, Independence, Izard, Jackson, Sharp, Stone, Van Buren, White, and Woodruff Counties

Metropolitan Planning Organizations

Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) are regional transportation policy-making organizations that are funded in part by the federal government and are required in urbanized areas with populations over 50,000. MPOs are designated by local officials in cooperation with federal and state agencies. They are required to maintain Metropolitan Transportation Plans (MTPs), as well as Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs), which include projects to be funded using federal and other sources. Federally funded transportation projects within metropolitan areas are expected to be included with the relevant MPO's TIP. As the role of MPOs has evolved to consider freight and passenger rail alternatives, these organizations, in many cases, have begun to take a more active role in rail planning.

Figure 1.2 Arkansas Metropolitan Planning Organizations



Source: ARDOT

There are eight MPOs in Arkansas, shown above in Figure 1.2, which include the following jurisdictions:

- **Frontier Metropolitan Planning Organization:** Portions of Crawford and Sebastian Counties, including the Arkansas municipalities of Alma, Barling, Bonanza, Central City, Fort Smith, Greenwood, Kibler, Lavaca, and Van Buren.

- **Metroplan:** Pulaski, Saline and Faulkner Counties, including Little Rock and other municipalities within and a portion of Lonoke County, and the municipalities of Austin, Cabot, Lonoke, and Ward.

- **Tri-Lakes Metropolitan Planning Organization:** Portions of Hot Spring and Garland Counties, including a portion of the municipality of Hot Springs Village and the municipalities of Hot Springs, Mountain Pine, and Fountain Lake.

- **Northeast Arkansas Regional Transportation Planning Commission:** A portion of Craighead County, including the municipalities of Jonesboro, Brookland, Bay, and Bono.

- **Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission:** Benton and Washington Counties, including the municipalities and within these counties.

- **Southeast Arkansas Regional Planning Commission:** A portion of Jefferson County, including the municipalities of Pine Bluff and White Hall.

- **Texarkana Metropolitan Planning Organization:** A portion of Miller County, including the Arkansas municipality of Texarkana.

- **West Memphis Metropolitan Planning Organization:** A portion of Crittenden County, including the municipalities of West Memphis and Marion.

The Frontier and Texarkana MPOs along with the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission have jurisdictions that reach across state boundaries and include portions of Oklahoma, Texas, and Missouri, respectively.

Intermodal Authorities

Since the Arkansas General Assembly adopted Act 690 in 1997, multiple intermodal authorities have been created in the state. Intermodal authorities are public corporations authorized to acquire, equip, construct, maintain, and operate regional intermodal facilities. They can be created by two or more contiguous counties and/or municipalities. Intermodal authorities have the power to contract, raise, receive, and disburse funds; acquire property; and otherwise operate as a public corporation. Intermodal authorities can also operate as Foreign Trade Zones, with the associated tax advantages. Intermodal authorities have sponsored or are sponsoring a variety of rail projects, including rail-served river ports, transload facilities, rail-served industrial parks, rail-served industrial locations, or locations that include some combination of these elements. Currently active intermodal authorities in Arkansas include the following:

- The **Central Arkansas Intermodal Authority** was formed by Conway and Perry Counties and is working to develop a port on the Arkansas River that will help economic development in the two counties.

- The **Little River County Intermodal Authority** was formed in 2015 in Ashdown. To date, the intermodal authority has purchased and cleared land and conducted environmental studies to develop an intermodal facility.

- The **Northeast Arkansas Regional Intermodal Facilities Authority** (NEARIFA) serves Randolph, Lawrence, and Clay Counties and four cities: Corning, Pocahontas, Walnut Ridge, and Hoxie. Its mission is to create and promote intermodal and multimodal assets in the region.

- The **Southeast Arkansas Regional Intermodal Facilities Authority** was created by the cities of Warren and Monticello along with Bradley and Drew Counties and is developing a regional intermodal facility east of Wilmar, Arkansas, south of U.S. 278.

- The **Southwest Arkansas Regional Intermodal Authority** was established by Clark, Dallas, Pike, Montgomery, and Nevada Counties, and the municipalities of Amity, Arkadelphia, Caddo Valley, Fordyce, Glenwood, Gurdon, Murfreesboro and Prescott in 2010. The Southwest Arkansas Regional Intermodal Authority's mission is to support job creation and new business development, assist existing

businesses, and enhance the quality of life by working with participating counties and communities to share resources and maximize assets found in the region.

- The **Western Arkansas Intermodal Authority** (WAIA) was formed by Crawford and Sebastian Counties along with the cities of Fort Smith and Van Buren. The purpose of WAIA is to plan and provide for, and to develop initiatives and projects important to that region's future economic development, particularly improvements that support the movement of freight. In 2023, the WAIA was awarded a $15 million grant to establish a new intermodal slackwater harbor in Van Buren. Construction is expected to begin in late 2024 and should be completed by the end of 2025.[2]

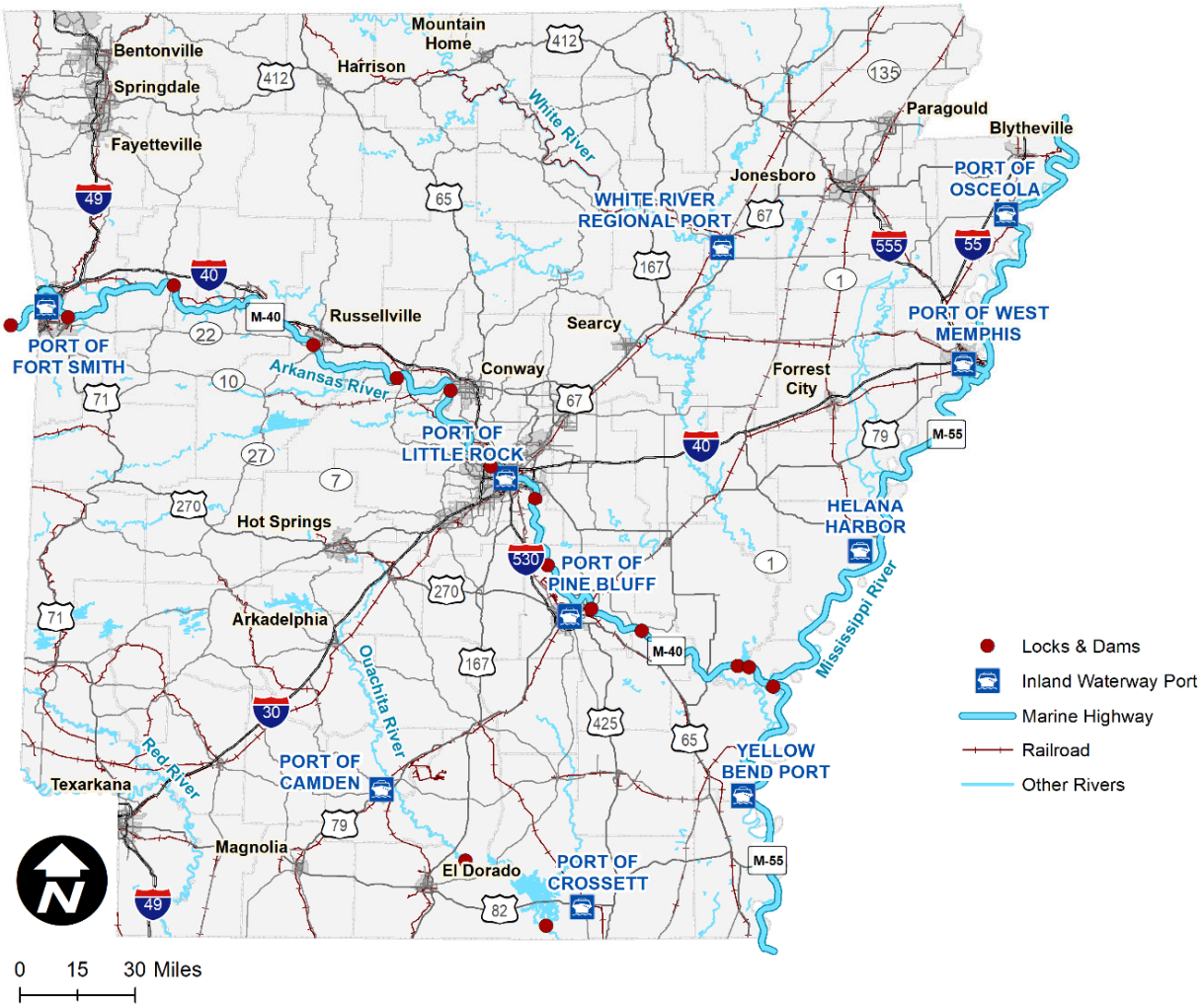
Port Authorities

River ports in Arkansas range in their ownership structure. Most are privately operated, but the physical locations of many are owned by county or local governments. Given the importance of rail access to port facilities, these port authorities have an interest in the performance of the Arkansas freight rail system. Arkansas' river ports are displayed in Figure 1.3. The network of port authorities includes the following:

- City of Camden Port Authority (Class I rail connection)
- Crittenden County (West Memphis) Port Authority (Class I rail connection)
- Crossett Port Authority (no rail access)
- Fort Smith Port Authority (Class I and Class III rail connection)
- Helena Harbor (Class I and Class III rail connection)
- Jefferson County (Pine Bluff) Port Authority (Class I rail connection)
- Little Rock Port Authority (Class I and III rail connection, including 20 miles of track)
- Osceola River Port Authority (Class I rail connection)
- White River Regional Port Authority (no rail access)
- Yellow Bend Port Authority (no direct rail access; 6-mile rail spur planned)

[2] https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2023/nov/04/189m-project-for-docks-advances/

Figure 1.3 Arkansas Public Ports and Waterways



Source: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

1.5 State Funding Authority for Rail

Arkansas has no dedicated funding programs for freight or passenger rail. However, some funding mechanisms can be used to fund rail projects within the state on a case-by-case basis. The Governor's Quick Action Closing Fund was established in 2007 as a discretionary fund aimed at supporting economic development within the state. Its funding comes from $50 million in the General Improvement Fund every two years. This fund has at times been used to fund rail projects, including the restoration of the North Louisiana and Arkansas Railroad line. Arkansas practices "contingency budgeting", meaning that the amount of general revenues that agencies receive depends upon the amount of tax dollars actually received. The Arkansas legislature establishes both maximum and minimum levels of funding for portions of the state government that rely on general revenues (as opposed to revenues dedicated for a specific purpose). Typically, activities funded by the minimum level of funding are considered "A" priorities, while secondary activities are considered "B" priorities, and so on. Because rail is not routinely funded in Arkansas, it would be more likely to be subject to contingent funding, which would be available if revenues

are higher than expected. In the past, state funding of freight rail projects related to economic development has been administered through the AEDC.

1.6 Rail Services, Initiatives, and Plans

Arkansas' latest initiatives and plans for passenger and freight rail infrastructure are documented in the 2017 Arkansas Long Range Intermodal Transportation Plan (LRITP) and the 2022 Arkansas State Freight Plan (SFP). Examples of rail projects acknowledged in the LRITP include:

- Extension & rehabilitation of trackage at the Port of West Memphis – completed in 2022, the West Memphis Base Railroad leases the rehabilitated and extended track segment from the City of West Memphis. The railroad is fully operational, includes a new transload facility, and allows for additional capacity into and out of the Port Rail Logistics Park and Mississippi River navigation system.

- Rail rehabilitation along the North Louisiana and Arkansas Railroad – the rehabilitation effort and related planning along the railroad continue in both Arkansas and Louisiana.

- Planning & environmental design phases for the replacement of an at-grade crossing between State Highway 18 and BNSF trackage in Jonesboro – the grade separated overpass was completed and opened to traffic in April 2022.

- Rail rehabilitation along the Warren Branch of the Arkansas Midland Railroad – the project is funded with $2.7 million from FRA Rail Line Relocation and Improvement program and $0.7 million from the railroad.

- Bridge rehabilitation along the Ouachita Railroad – the project is funded with $330,000 from FRA Rail Line Relocation and Improvement program as well as $40,000 from the railroad.

An additional 91 rail projects valued at $1.72 billion were identified in the LRITP through 2040 with no funding identified.

Since the development of Arkansas' LRITP, additional projects have been implemented across the Arkansas rail network. Most recently, ARDOT's 2022 SFP includes 46 freight rail projects in the plan's Unconstrained List of Priority Freight Projects. The project list includes design and construction, crossing upgrade, siding expansion, and the development of new transloading, intermodal, and industrial site projects. The full list has been carried over to the SRP and can be found in the Freight Rail Capital Program in Chapter 5.

1.6.1 Recent Rail Updates

Since the development of the 2015 SRP multiple investments have been made on Arkansas' rail network, including Positive Train Control (PTC), port sidings, rail rehabilitation, and implementation of new Amtrak locomotives.

- The Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008 mandated that Class I railroads install PTC technology on any tracks that carry passengers or toxic by inhalation (TIH) materials. This includes most of Arkansas' Class I rail network which comprises a large portion of the state's entire rail network. On December 29, 2020, the FRA announced that PTC technology is in operation on all 57,536 required freight and passenger railroad route miles, prior to the December 31, 2020 statutory deadline set forth by

Congress.[3] PTC technology includes a communication system linking locomotives and rail operations centers to communicate train speed in relation to rail speed limits. It also provides the ability warn a locomotive in advance of a violation or potential derailment, and can also take control of, and stop the locomotive.

- The Little Rock Port Authority was awarded federal funding in 2021 under the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) program. This project, funded for up to $5.5 million, includes the construction of over 11,000 feet of track at the Slackwater Harbor siding and North Marshaling Yard tracks of the Port of Little Rock. This funding will also be used for the construction of an on-site engine maintenance facility, an inspection pit, and support offices.[4]

  The Port of Little Rock has seen additional growth and investment in recent years. Prior to the awarding of the CRISI grant, the Little Rock Port Authority announced $11 million in transportation improvement upgrades across the facility.[5] In July 2022, the Little Rock Port Authority announced the groundbreaking of the South Port Commerce Center. Consisting of approximately 1 million square feet of industrial space across two buildings, the new facility provides additional barge-to-rail and barge-to-truck capabilities.[6] A CRISI grant was awarded to the city of Jonesville to construct additional rail siding to increase railcar capacity for delivery and storage to businesses in the Jonesboro Industrial Park and Craighead Technology Park.[7] The DeQueen and Eastern Railroad was also awarded a CRISI grant in 2023 for final design and construction activities for various track improvements, rehabilitation of certain bridges, modification to select grade crossings, and other associated infrastructure improvements.[8]

- In 2019, the Southeast Arkansas Economic Development District was awarded a $10.5 million Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) grant to rehabilitate a 91-mile segment of the Northern Louisiana & Arkansas Railroad between McGehee and Tallulah in Louisiana. Following the passing of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the city of Wynne received $2 million to construct a new industrial rail spur facility to support local manufacturers.[9]

- In relation to passenger rail service, Amtrak debuted new locomotives in 2022 to replace its aging stock which have been in service since the 1990s. The locomotives, which are being implemented through 2024, are able to reach speeds of 125 miles per hour, with nearly 95 percent less emissions compared to their predecessors. Known as ALC-42 locomotives, the new engines are set to be deployed along the Texas Eagle passenger service which passes through Arkansas.[10]

[3] https://railroads.dot.gov/research-development/program-areas/train-control/ptc/positive-train-control-ptc

[4] https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2022-06/FY21-CRISI-Selections_PDFa.pdf

[5] https://www.ualrpublicradio.org/local-regional-news/2020-07-06/little-rock-port-announces-11-million-in-upgrades

[6] https://www.railwayage.com/intermodal/port-of-little-rock-holds-groundbreaking-for-industrial-park/

[7] https://www.progressiverailroading.com/mow/news/FRA-awards-rail-improvement-grants-in-Arkansas-Missouri--57784

[8] https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2023-09/FY%202022%20CRISI%20Program%20Selections%20-%20Project%20Summaries_PDFa.pdf

[9] https://talkbusiness.net/2021/10/wynne-receives-2-million-for-rail-spur-facility/

[10] https://railfan.com/alc-42s-taking-charge/

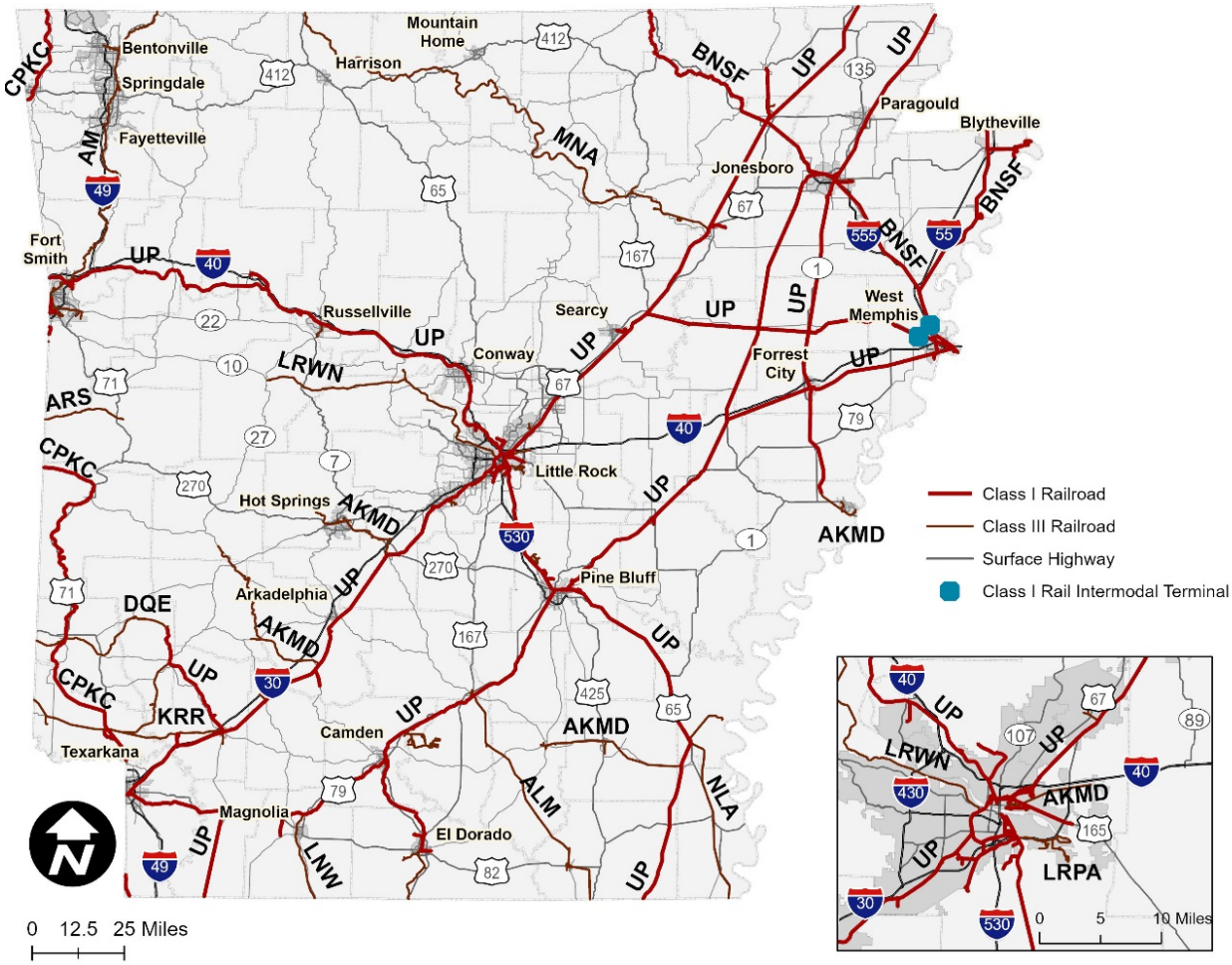
2.0 Arkansas' Existing Rail System

This chapter provides an overview of existing Arkansas' rail system. This includes a geographic and physical overview of the state's freight and passenger rail systems, including supporting facilities, infrastructure, and corresponding updates. Further background on the existing railroad system is supplemented by insight on corresponding funding mechanisms, safety programs, as well as trends, forecasts, and needs. Overall, Chapter 2 sets the foundation for identifying an effective program for investments and improvements.

2.1 Existing Freight Rail System

This section introduces the freight railroads and intermodal facilities that comprise the Arkansas freight railroad system. The Arkansas freight rail inventory is comprised of 25 freight railroads. This includes three Class I railroads and 22 Class III railroads. The Class III railroads are further broken out into 16 local railroads and 6 switching & terminal railroads. These railroads are visualized in Figure 2.1 and summarized in Table 2.1. In total, the Arkansas freight rail network consists of 2,591 miles.

Figure 2.1 Arkansas Freight Rail Network



Source: FRA North American Rail Network supplemented with information from freight railroad websites and surveys.

Table 2.1 Arkansas Freight Railroads

Class I Railroad	Alpha Code*	Mileage	% of Total
BNSF Railway	BNSF	198	12%
Canadian Pacific Kansas City Limited	CPKC	158	9%
Union Pacific	UP	1,324	79%
	Total Class I Mileage	**1,680**	
Class III Local Railroad	**Alpha Code**	**Mileage**	**% of Total**
Arkansas & Missouri Railroad	AM	111	14%
Arkansas, Louisiana & Mississippi Railroad	ALM	73	9%
Arkansas Midland Railroad	AKMD	148	18%
Arkansas Southern Railroad	ARS	53	7%
Bauxite & Northern Railroad	BXN	6	<1%
Dardanelle & Russellville Railroad	DR	5	<1%
DeQueen & Eastern Railroad	DQE	45	6%
El Dorado & Wesson Railway	EDW	6	<1%
Kiamichi Railroad	KRR	36	4%
Little Rock & Western Railway	LRWN	87	11%
Louisiana & Northwest Railroad	LNW	25	3%
Missouri & Northern Arkansas Railroad	MNA	126	16%
Northern Louisiana & Arkansas Railroad	NLA	46	6%
Ouachita Railroad	OUCH	26	3%
Prescott & Northwestern Railroad	PNW	9	1%
Warren & Saline River Railroad	WSR	3	<1%
	Total Class III Local Mileage	**805**	
Class III Switching & Terminal Railroad	**Alpha Code**	**Mileage**	**% of Total**
Camden & Southern Railroad	CSR	3	3%
Delta Valley & Southern Railway	DVS	2	2%
East Camden & Highland Railroad	EACH	54	51%
Fort Smith Railroad	FSR	24	23%
Little Rock Port Authority Railroad	LRPA	20	19%
West Memphis Base Railroad	WMBR	3	3%
	Total Class III Switching & Terminal Railroad Mileage	**106**	

Source: Freight railroad websites; surveys of Arkansas freight rail carriers; Arkansas 2015 State Rail Plan.
*Note that Alpha Code refers to the unique two-to-four-letter code used to identify transportation companies, as identified through the National Motor Freight Traffic Association Inc. (NMFTA). Some percentage totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

2.1.1 Existing Freight Rail System Inventory

The Arkansas freight rail inventory is comprised of 25 freight railroads. This includes three Class I railroads, 16 local Class III railroads, and 6 switching & terminal Class III railroads. The state's rail inventory does not include any Class II railroads.

Class I Railroads

Freight railroads with a Class I designation are those with an operating revenue of greater than $1.032 billion per year[11]. In the United States, there are six Class I railroads which cover expansive geographic areas of the United States and specialize in the hauling of regional and long-distance cargo. Three Class I railroads currently operate within Arkansas: BNSF, CPKC, and UP.

BNSF Railway

With a rail network spanning 32,500 miles, BNSF is the largest railroad in the U.S. The BNSF network covers 28 states, primarily in the western U.S. BNSF commenced operations in 1996, following the merger of the Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe Railway and the Burlington Northern Railroad. The railroad is currently owned by Berkshire Hathaway. Within Arkansas, BNSF operates approximately 198 miles of track across two corridors in northeast Arkansas:

- **River Subdivision:** Operates between Turrell (north of West Memphis) and St. Louis, Missouri.
- **Thayer South Subdivision:** Operates between Thayer, Missouri and Memphis, Tennessee, through northeast Arkansas.

The entire BNSF network with Arkansas has a weight standard of 286,000 pounds. As a key indicator of track quality, 286,000 pounds is the North American standard for maximum allowable gross rail weight of railcars. In addition to the two subdivisions, BNSF has trackage rights across most of the UP Arkansas network. These trackage rights include the Hoxie, Little Rock and Jonesboro subdivisions, as well as the Brinkley, Memphis, and Shreveport subdivisions. Lastly, BNSF has trackage rights along the Pine Bluff Subdivision between Pine Bluff and the start of the Shreveport Subdivision in Lewisville. The top commodities moved by BNSF in Arkansas include metals, farm products, chemicals, forestry products, non-metallic minerals, food, and coal. Top inbound commodities to Arkansas include coal, industrial products, and agricultural products. Top outbound commodities from Arkansas include industrial products and agricultural products.

Table 2.2 BNSF Railway Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
198	198	Unavailable	840	Unavailable

Source: BNSF Railway

[11] https://www.stb.gov/reports-data/economic-data/

Canadian Pacific Kansas City Limited (Formerly Kansas City Southern)

CPKC is the new Class I railroad resulting from the merger of Canadian Pacific (CP) and Kansas City Southern (KCS). In September 2021, CP won the bid to acquire KCS and announced a merger agreement subject to regulatory approval by the Surface Transportation Board (STB). The STB formally approved the merger agreement in March 2023, resulting in the creation of the new railroad.

CPKC remains the smallest of the national Class I operators as measured by track milage at only 20,000 miles. However, the new Class I railroad is also the most expansive in that it spans across the U.S., Mexico, and Canada, the first to connect the three major countries of North America. The new railroad includes coverage across most of southern Canada's urban centers, as well as Mexico's urban centers located in the central portion of the country. Within the U.S., the CPKC corridor stretches through the central portion of the country from Texas through the Upper Midwest. The new railroad additionally includes existing trackage rights providing access to northeastern portions of the U.S.

Within Arkansas, CPKC primarily serves the far western portion of the state, spanning 158 miles. The railroad's primary north-south corridor between Shreveport and Kansas City weaves into and out of Arkansas from Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, and Missouri. With the exception of the Fort Smith Branch, which connects Fort Smith to the primary north-south corridor in Poteau, Oklahoma, the CPKC network within Arkansas has a weight standard of 286,000 pounds. CPKC also has trackage rights along the Kiamichi Railroad within Arkansas, and the Nashville Subdivision of the Arkansas Southern Railroad. The top commodities for CPKC in Arkansas include stone, pulp board, scrap paper, iron, metals, wood pulp, coal, chemicals, and crops.

Table 2.3 Canadian Pacific Kansas City Limited Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
158	158	59	12	Unavailable

Source: Canadian Pacific Kansas City Limited and Arkansas 2015 State Rail Plan

Union Pacific Railroad

Union Pacific Railroad (UP) is the second-largest railroad in the U.S., with a network of 32,000 miles serving 23 states in the western two-thirds of the country. It is the largest railroad in Arkansas with an expansive network of 1,324 miles. The railroad was originally incorporated in 1862 through the Pacific Railway Act. The modern-day network of UP was formed through various mergers including the Missouri Pacific, Chicago and Northwestern, Western Pacific, Missouri-Kansas-Texas, and Southern Pacific rail networks.

Within Arkansas, the UP rail network serves a broad corridor stretching from the southwest to the northeast portions of the state, as well as connectivity to the Fort Smith area. The network consists of the following major subdivisions:

- **Hoxie Subdivision:** The busiest subdivision of UP, which operates between Little Rock and points northeast, including St. Louis and Chicago. Access is also available to UP's Memphis subdivision.

- **Little Rock Subdivision:** The second busiest UP subdivision in Arkansas operates between Little Rock and points southwest to Texarkana, and ultimately Dallas.
- **Jonesboro Subdivision:** Operates between Jonesboro and Pine Bluff, along a corridor parallel to the Hoxie Subdivision.

Additional subdivisions include the following:

- **Brinkley Subdivision:** Operates between Brinkley and West Memphis/Memphis.
- **El Dorado Subdivision:** Operates between Camden and El Dorado.
- **Helena Subdivision:** Operates between Helena and Wynne.
- **McGehee Subdivision:** Operates between Pine Bluff and McGehee and points south.
- **Memphis Subdivision:** Operates between Searcy and West Memphis/Memphis.
- **Nashville Subdivision:** Operates between Hope, along the Little Rock Subdivision, and Nashville.
- **Pine Bluff Subdivision:** Operates between Pine Bluff and Texarkana.
- **Shreveport Subdivision:** Operates between Lewisville and Shreveport, Louisiana.
- **White Bluff Subdivision:** Operates between Little Rock and White Hall/Pine Bluff.
- **Wynne Subdivision:** Operates between Wynne and Jonesboro.
- **Van Buren Subdivision:** Operates between Little Rock and Fort Smith.

With the exception of the Helena Subdivision and scattered railroad spurs, the entire UP network in Arkansas has weight standard of 286,000 pounds. The top commodities for UP in Arkansas include auto parts, intermodal wholesale, grain, food, sugar, steel, aggregates, coal, chemicals, and oils.

Table 2.4 Union Pacific Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
1,324	1,324	286	191	Unavailable

Source: Union Pacific and Arkansas 2015 State Rail Plan

Local Railroads

Local Class III railroads, also known as short lines, are those railroads with an annual operating revenue of less than $46.3 million. Local railroads typically provide line haul services and provide connections to the larger Class I network as well as “last-mile” connectivity to freight generating facilities, particularly in rural areas. In Arkansas, there are currently 16 local railroads, which are profiled in the following subsections.

Arkansas & Missouri Railroad

The Arkansas and Missouri Railroad (AM) is a 286,000-pound standard, double-stack cleared Class III railroad operating 10 miles between Fort Smith and Monet, Missouri. Of the total mileage, 111 miles are operated within Arkansas. The railroad, founded in 1986, also provides rail-to-water intermodal services at Fort Smith and Van Buren along the Arkansas River, in addition to transloading services across its geography. Key commodities transferred include grain and feed supplements, paper products, sand, plastic, food products, scrap steel, lumber, aluminum, and bauxite. The AM interchanges with BNSF at Monette, and KCS, UP, and Fort Smith Railroad at Fort Smith/Van Buren.

Table 2.5 Arkansas & Missouri Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
111	108	3	0	Class 1: 5 Class 3: 103

Source: Arkansas & Missouri Railroad and Arkansas 2015 State Rail Plan

Arkansas, Louisiana & Mississippi Railroad

The Arkansas, Louisiana & Mississippi Railroad (ALM) is a 286,000-pound standard Class III railroad operating 128 miles between Fordyce in southeast Arkansas, and Monroe, Louisiana. Of the total mileage, 73 miles are operated in Arkansas, while the remaining 55 miles are operated in Louisiana. Founded in 1908, the railroad has had multiple corporate owners in the timber industry until its acquisition by Genesee & Wyoming in 2004. In 2023, the former Fordyce and Princeton Railroad, also owned by Genesee & Wyoming, was fully merged into the ALM. Key commodities transported include lumber, paper, forest products, and chemicals. The ALM interchanges with UP at Monroe and Fordyce.

Table 2.6 Arkansas, Louisiana & Mississippi Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
73	73	0	0	Unavailable

Source: Genesee & Wyoming

Arkansas Midland Railroad

The Arkansas Midland Railroad (AKMD) is a Class III railroad operating approximately 148 miles. The railroad consists of seven branches across Arkansas:

- **Cypress Bend Branch:** Operates 19.5 miles along UP-owned tracks between the UP McGehee Yard and Cypress Bend.
- **Gurdon Branch:** Operates 2.9 miles in Gurdon with connections to UP.
- **Helena Branch:** Operates 16 miles between the Lexa and Helena Harbor, with connections to UP.

- **Hot Springs Branch:** Operates 43 miles between Malvern and Mountain Pine, with connections to UP. The branch has a weight standard of 286,000 pounds.
- **Jacksonville Branch:** Operates 4.2 miles in Jacksonville with connections to UP.
- **North Little Rock/Carlisle Branch:** Operates 19 miles, in two sections, between North Little Rock and Galloway, and North Little Rock and the Carlisle Industrial Lead. Connections are available to UP and BNSF, as well as the Little Rock & Western Railway.
- **Warren Branch:** Operates 44 miles between Dermott and Warren with connections to UP and the North Louisiana and Arkansas Railroad.

The railroad was originally established in 1992 by the Pinsky Railroad Company and was subsequently sold to Genesee & Wyoming in 2015. Key commodities transported include forestry products, grain products, aggregates, building materials, cottonseeds, and chemicals.

Table 2.7 Arkansas Midland Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
148	72.4	76.6	0	Class 1: 31.7 Class 2: 31.2 Expected: 67.1 Unidentified: 19

Source: Genesee & Wyoming and Arkansas 2015 State Rail Plan

Arkansas Southern Railroad

The Arkansas Southern Railroad (ARS) is a Class III railroad operating a total of 63 miles. Of this total, 53 miles are operated in Arkansas. The railroad consists of two branches:

- **Nashville Subdivision:** Operates 32 miles between Nashville and Ashdown with connections to KCS and the Kiamichi Railroad (KKR). This subdivision has a 286,000-pound standard track capacity.
- **Waldron Subdivision:** Operates 29 miles between Waldron and Heavener, Oklahoma with connections to KCS and UP.

The railroad began operations in 2005 when KCS leased the two branch lines to Watco Transportation Services. Key commodities transported include animal feed and chemicals.

Table 2.8 Arkansas Southern Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
53	0	53	0	Class 1: 32 Expected: 21

Source: Arkansas Southern Railroad and Arkansas 2015 State Rail Plan

Bauxite & Northern Railroad

The Bauxite & Northern Railroad (BXN) is a Class III railroad operating over 3 miles of mainline track, with an additional 3.5 miles of sidings and spurs in Bauxite. The railroad began operations in 1906 as a subsidiary of the Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa). The railroad was purchased by RailAmerica in 2005, which was acquired by Genesee & Wyoming in 2012. Key commodities transported include alumina, bauxite, clay, and cement. Railcar storage is available for up to 44 cars. The BXN interchanges with UP.

Table 2.9 Bauxite & Northern Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
6.5	6.5	0	0	Class 1: 6.0 Expected: 0.5

Source: Genesee & Wyoming and Arkansas 2015 State Rail Plan

Dardanelle & Russellville Railroad

The Dardanelle & Russellville Railroad (DR) is a Class III railroad operating 5 miles in Russellville, up to the Arkansas River across from Russellville. The railroad commenced operations in 1883 and is currently owned by Arkansas Shortline Railroads, Inc. Key commodities transported include forest products, plastic, petroleum and drilling commodities. The DR interchanges with UP.

Table 2.10 Dardanelle & Russellville Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
5	5	0	0	Expected: 5

Source: Dardanelle & Russellville Railroad and Arkansas 2015 State Rail Plan

DeQueen & Eastern Railroad

The DeQueen & Eastern Railroad (DQE) is a 286,000-pound standard Class III railroad operating 91 miles between Perkins and Valliant, Oklahoma. Of the total mileage, 45 miles are operated in Arkansas, with the remaining 46 miles operated in Oklahoma. Through Oklahoma, the railroad also operates as the Texas, Oklahoma, & Eastern Railroad (TOE), an affiliated railroad to the DQE.

The DQE was incorporated in 1900 as a subsidiary of Weyerhaeuser Company, a timber producer and wood manufacturer. In 2010, Weyerhaeuser Company sold all of its railroads, including the DQE and TOE to Patriot Rail Corporation. Key commodities transported include pulpboard, plywood chips, corn, stone, paper, soybeans and chemicals. The DQE interchanges with UP at Perkins, KCS and TOE at DeQueen, and the Kiamichi Railroad at Valliant, Oklahoma. Railcar storage is available for up to 150 cars.

Table 2.11 DeQueen & Eastern Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
45	45	0	0	Class 3: 45

Source: DeQueen & Eastern Railroad and Arkansas 2015 State Rail Plan

El Dorado & Wesson Railway

The El Dorado & Wesson Railway (EDW) is a Class III railroad operating 5.5 miles between El Dorado and Newell. The railroad also includes yard trackage and additional leased trackage for total operations spanning 18 miles. The EDW was founded in 1905 to serve an area lumber mill. Key commodities transported include petroleum products, chemicals and medium density fiberboard. The EDW interchanges with UP and the Ouachita Railroad Company. Railcar storage is available for up to 100 cars.

Table 2.12 El Dorado & Wesson Railway Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
6	6	6	0	Class 3: 6

Source: El Dorado & Wesson Railway and Arkansas 2015 State Rail Plan

Kiamichi Railroad

The Kiamichi Railroad (KRR) is a Class III railroad operating 264 miles between Hope in southwest Arkansas and Madill, Oklahoma. Of the total mileage, 36 miles are operated in Arkansas, with the remaining mileage operated in Oklahoma, as well as along a branch between Antlers, Oklahoma; Hugo, Oklahoma; and Paris, Texas. Besides the Paris Branch between Oklahoma and Texas, the railroad has a 286,000-pound standard track capacity. The railroad, formerly a main line of the former St. Louis – San Francisco Railway, began independent operations in 1987. It was purchased by RailAmerica in 2002, which was acquired by Genesee & Wyoming in 2012. Key commodities transported include scrap metal, non-metallic minerals, animal feed, coal, lumber, paper, glass, cement, pulpwood, stone and food products. The KRR interchanges with UP at Hope and Durant, Oklahoma, CPKC at Ashdown, and BNSF at Madill, Oklahoma. Railcar storage is available for up to 980 cars.

Table 2.13 Kiamichi Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
36	36	0	0	Unavailable

Source: Genesee & Wyoming

Little Rock & Western Railway

The Little Rock & Western Railway (LRWN) is a 286,000-pound standard Class III railroad operating 87 miles between Little Rock and Danville to the west. The railroad was founded in 1900 by the Choctaw, Oklahoma and Gulf Railroad, which became part of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad main line between Memphis and Tucumcari, New Mexico. When the railroad ceased operations, Green Bay Packaging acquired the railroad in 1980 and subsequently sold it to Rail Management Corporation in 1983. Genesee & Wyoming, the current owner, acquired Rail Management Corporation in 2015. Key commodities transferred include wood and paper products, grain, limestone slurry, cornstarch, salt, liquified petroleum gas, and pulp mill liquid. The LRWN interchanges with BNSF and UP at North Little Rock. Additionally, the LRWN acts as an intermediate switcher between BNSF and UP at North Little Rock since there is no direct connection between the two Class I railroads at this location. Railcar storage is available for up to 300 cars.

Table 2.14 Little Rock & Western Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
87	0	0	5	Unavailable

Source: Genesee & Wyoming

Louisiana & Northwest Railroad

The Louisiana & Northwest Railroad (LNW) is a 286,000-pound standard Class III railroad operating 68 miles between McNeil in southwest Arkansas and Gibsland, Louisiana. Of the total mileage, 25 miles are operated in Arkansas, with the remaining mileage operated through Louisiana. The railroad was incorporated in 1889 and purchased by Patriot Rail in 2008. Key commodities transported include chemicals, steel, and plastics. The LNW interchanges with UP in McNeil, and KCS in Gibsland. Railcar storage is available for up to 60 cars.

Table 2.15 Louisiana & Northwest Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
25	19	6	0	Class 1: 25

Source: Louisiana & Northwest Railroad and Arkansas 2015 State Rail Plan

Missouri & Northern Arkansas Railroad

The Missouri & Northern Arkansas Railroad (MNA) is a 286,000-pound standard Class III railroad operating 490 miles between Diaz in northern Arkansas and Kansas City, Missouri. Of the total mileage, 126 are operated in Arkansas, with the remaining mileage operated through Missouri. The railroad is part of the former Missouri Pacific. As a separate railroad, the MNA commenced operations in 1992, and was acquired by Genesee & Wyoming in 2012. Key commodities transferred include coal, grain, frozen foods, minerals, steel, chemicals, asphalt, and forest products. The MNA interchanges with UP in Newport, as well as in Kansas City, Missouri. In Missouri, the MNA also interchanges with BNSF and KCS. Railcar storage is available for up to 2,000 cars.

Table 2.16 Missouri & Northwest Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
126	124	2	34	Class 2 or Above

Source: Genesee & Wyoming and Arkansas 2015 State Rail Plan

Northern Louisiana & Arkansas Railroad

The Northern Louisiana & Arkansas Railroad (NLA) is a Class III railroad operating 62 miles between McGehee in southeast Arkansas and Lake Providence, Louisiana. Of this mileage, 46 miles is operated within Arkansas. The railroad was formed in 2011 following abandonment filings by its previous owners, and subsequent acquisitions of several segments via Offers of Financial Assistance from the STB. Key commodities transferred include agricultural and industrial commodities. The NLA interchanges with UP through the Arkansas Midland Railroad.

Table 2.17 Northern Louisiana & Arkansas Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
46	24	22	0	Expected: 46

Source: Northern Louisiana & Arkansas Railroad and Arkansas 2015 State Rail Plan

Ouachita Railroad

The Ouachita Railroad (OUCH) is a Class III railroad operating 26 miles in and around El Dorado. The railroad, currently owned by Arkansas Short Line Railroad since 1990, was previously owned by the East Camden & Highland Railroad. Key commodities transported include chemicals and forest products. Connections are available to UP.

Table 2.18 Ouachita Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
26	26	0	0	Expected: 13

Source: Ouachita Railroad and Arkansas 2015 State Rail Plan

Prescott & Northwestern Railroad

The Prescott & Northwestern Railroad (PNW) is a 286,000-pound standard Class III railroad operating 9 miles in and around Prescott in southwest Arkansas. The railroad was previously owned by Potlach Corporation, a forestry products company, until 2010 when it was acquired by the Pinsly Railroad Company. Subsequently, Genesee & Wyoming acquired the railroad in 2015. Roofing products are the primary commodities transported along the railroad. The PNW interchanges with UP.

Table 2.19 Prescott & Northwestern Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
9	9	0	0	Expected: 9

Source: Genesee & Wyoming

Warren & Saline River Railroad

The Warren & Saline River Railroad (WSR) is a Class III railroad operating 3 miles in Warren in south-central Arkansas. The railroad has a similar history to the Prescott & Northwestern Railroad (PNW), involving acquisition by Genesee & Wyoming from the Potlach Corporation in 2015. Key commodities transferred include outbound lumber and forest products. The WSR interchanges with the Arkansas Midland Railroad (AKMD).

Table 2.20 Warren & Saline Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
3	3	0	0	Expected: 3

Source: Genesee & Wyoming

Switching & Terminal Railroads

Switching & terminal Class III railroads are generally defined as those railroads performing switching and terminal services for larger railroads. Unlike local Class III railroads, switching & terminal railroads do not provide freight services between two distinct geographic locations. Instead, these railroads primarily support shunting operations such as combining railcars to form a consist, breaking down train consists, and railcar storage. These railroads, often previously abandoned by the larger railroads over time, perform an important role in serving businesses and customers not directly located along the larger railroads. In

Arkansas, there are currently six switching & terminal railroads, which are profiled in the following subsections.

Camden & Southern Railroad

The Camden & Southern Railroad (CSR) is a Class III railroad operating 3.2 miles in Camden in south-central Arkansas. The railroad, which commenced operations in 2011, is currently leased and operated by Arkansas Short Line Railroads Inc. from the Camden Area Industrial Development Corporation (CAIDC). Prior to 2011, the CAIDC acquired trackage from multiple private facilities that had shuttered before 2005. Today, the railroad primarily serves customers at the new industrial park developed by the CAIDC. Key commodities transported include forest products, plastic, petroleum, and drilling components. The CSR interchanges with UP.

Table 2.21 Camden & Southern Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
3.2	0	3.2	0	Expected: 3.2

Source: Camden & Southern Railroad and Arkansas 2015 State Rail Plan

Delta Valley & Southern Railway

The Delta Valley and Southern Railway (DVS) is a Class III railroad operating two miles in Wilson in northeast Arkansas. The railroad was formerly part of a larger section of track along the San Francisco – St. Louis Railway, although all but the current two miles was abandoned in 1947. Outbound cottonseed is the primary commodity transferred along the railroad. The DVS interchanges with BNSF.

Table 2.22 Delta Valley & Southern Railway Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
2	2	0	0	Expected: 2

Source: Delta Valley & Southern Railway and Arkansas 2015 State Rail Plan

East Camden & Highland Railroad

The East Camden & Highland Railroad (EACH) is a Class III railroad operating 54 miles between East Camden and Eagle Mills in south-central Arkansas. The railroad primarily consists of a loop in and around the Highland Industrial Park. The railroad primarily provides storage services, with a capacity for up to 3,000 cars, although switching services are also available. EACH interchanges with UP.

Table 2.23 East Camden & Highland Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
54	54	0	0	Class 1: 54

Source: East Camden & Highland Railroad and Arkansas 2015 State Rail Plan

Fort Smith Railroad

The Fort Smith Railroad (FSR) is a 286,000-pound standard Class III railroad operating 23.5 miles in and around Fort Smith. The railroad, currently operated by Pioneer Lines, was constructed in the 1890s by the Arkansas Central Railroad and later became part of the Missouri Pacific Railroad, which merged with Union Pacific in 1982. Key commodities transported include grain (rice), food products, industrial and agricultural chemicals, electoral products, fabricated metal, machinery, plastics and rubbers. The FSR interchanges with CPKC and UP.

Table 2.24 Fort Smith Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
23.5	0	23.5	0	Class 1: 23 Expected: 0.5

Source: Pioneer Lines

Little Rock Port Authority Railroad

The Little Rock Port Authority Railroad (LRPA) is a Class III railroad operating 20 miles within the Little Rock Port Industrial Park in Little Rock. The railroad is owned and operated by the Little Rock Port Authority. Key commodities transported include steel, peanuts, plastic pellets, gas piping, as well as any commodities shipped through customers located within the industrial park, or with access to on-site docks along the Arkansas River. The LRPA interchanges with UP and BNSF within the port.

Table 2.25 Little Rock Port Authority Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
20	20	0	0	Class 1: 20

Source: Little Rock Port Authority

West Memphis Base Railroad

The West Memphis Base Railroad (WMBR) is a Class III railroad operating 2.2 miles in West Memphis. The railroad, originally built from abandoned UP spur segments, was previously owned by the City of West Memphis until 2018 when it was leased and eventually purchased by West Memphis Base Railroad, L.L.C. It is now owned by Jaguar Transport Holdings. The railroad primarily serves the Port of West Memphis and

also provides trackage rights to UP. Key commodities transported include steel, propane, and chemicals. The WMBR interchanges with UP.

Table 2.26 West Memphis Base Railroad Mileage in Arkansas

Miles Operated	Miles Owned	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
3	3	0	0	Class 1: 3

Source: West Memphis Base Railroad

2.1.2 Intermodal Facilities

Intermodal facilities are designed for the loading and unloading of containerized freight and trailers to and from flatcars, as well as to and from trucks. These facilities allow for transferring intermodal freight between different modes, as well as between different rail lines and subs. In the U.S., major intermodal terminals are operated by each of the Class I railroads. Typically, these facilities are located within close proximity to major urban and freight centers. In Arkansas, this includes two facilities within close proximity to Memphis in the city of Marion. Overall, publicly available information on detailed operations of each intermodal terminal, including total throughput and capacities, is limited. However, information on facility layouts, capabilities, compatibility with user interface technology, and schedules are provided through the websites of each Class I railroad.

Marion Intermodal Terminal

The Marion Intermodal Terminal is the primary intermodal facility for Union Pacific serving the Memphis region. The facility supports rail-to-rail and rail-to-truck operations, as well both trailer on flat car (TOFC) and container on flat car (COFC) capabilities. TOFC refers to the placement of wheeled trailers on railcars. COFC, a more efficient means of rail transport, refers to the placement of containers directly on railcars, without wheels or trailers. This allows for double-stacking capabilities, which saves space and allows for greater efficiency in operations.

Harvard Intermodal Facility

The Harvard Intermodal Terminal, located in Marion, is the second hub for BNSF serving the Memphis region. After suspending intermodal service in 2009[12] the facility continued to function as a rail yard until August 2021 when BNSF restarted intermodal operations at the facility in response to strong demand for intermodal shipping during the COVID-19 global pandemic.[13] The Harvard Intermodal Facility handled all Memphis-bound freight originating from the Port of Long Beach's Pier T Terminal through November of 2021 when intermodal service was once again suspended.

[12] https://www.adeq.state.ar.us/downloads/webdatabases/permitsonline/npdes/permitinformation/arr00c026_notice%20of%20termination_20091201.pdf

[13] https://www.bnsf.com/news-media/customer-notifications/notification.page?notId=bnsf-responds-to-growing-intermodal-demand-in-memphis-region

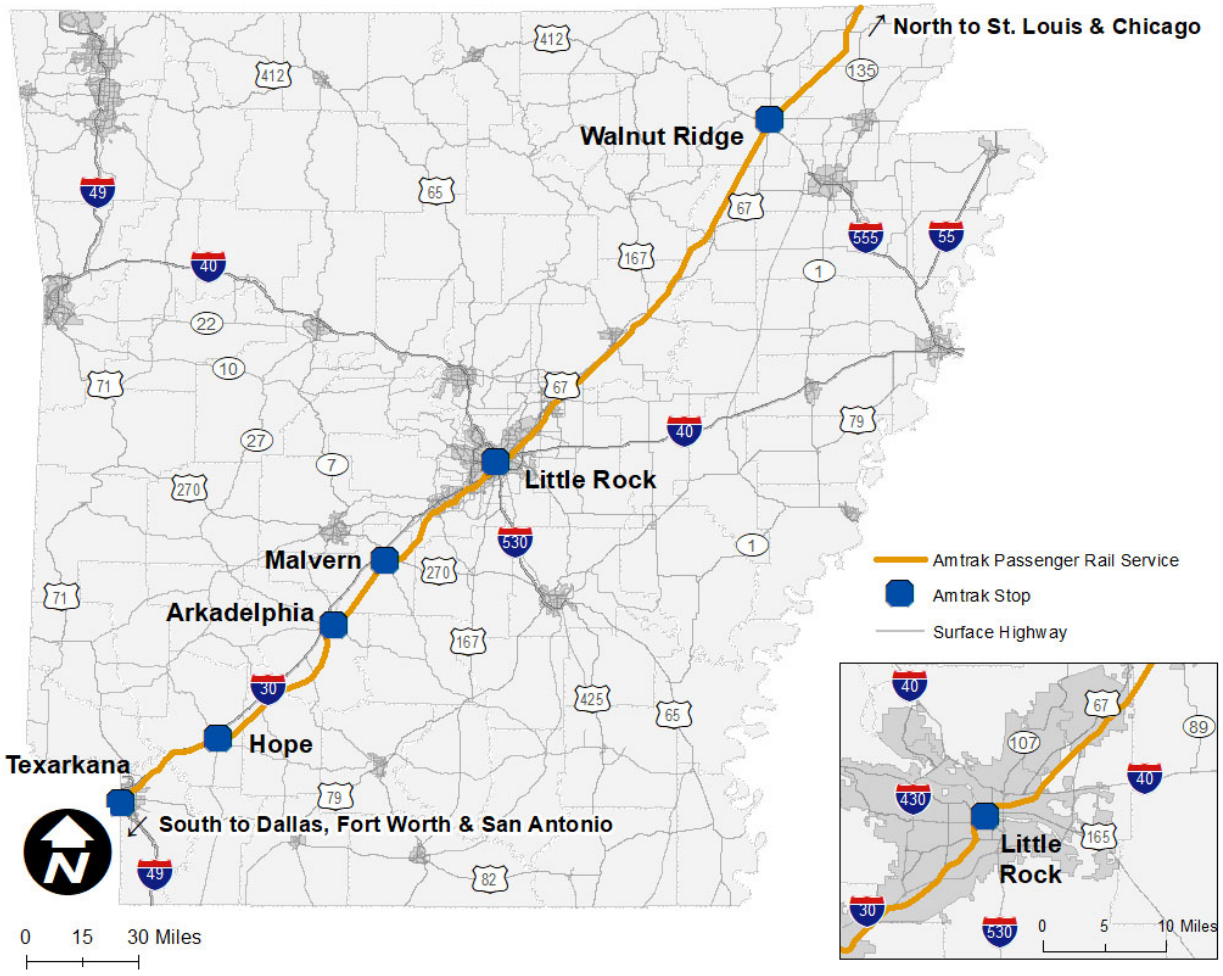
2.2 Existing Passenger Rail Service

Passenger rail service in Arkansas is provided by the long-distance Amtrak Texas Eagle. Daily service is operated from Chicago, through St. Louis and Little Rock, continuing southwest to Dallas/Fort Worth and San Antonio. In total, the Texas Eagle service consists of over 1,300 miles, with a total one-way travel time of approximately 32 hours. Passenger accommodations on the Texas Eagle include coach seating, sleeping cars, a dining car, and a sightseeing lounge car.

2.2.1 Description of Passenger Rail Service in Arkansas

Amtrak does not own any rail lines in Arkansas. Instead, Texas Eagle rail service is operated along Union Pacific Railroad's Hoxie and Little Rock Subdivisions, which form a northeast-to-southwest corridor diagonally through the state. A map of the service through Arkansas is shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Amtrak Texas Eagle Service in Arkansas



Source: Amtrak

Passenger Rail Stations

Amtrak's Texas Eagle route includes the following stations in Arkansas: Walnut Ridge, Little Rock, Malvern, Arkadelphia, Hope, and Texarkana. These passenger rail stations differ in the amenities provided. The Malvern and Arkadelphia stations have sheltered platforms but no station buildings, while the remaining stations have enclosed structures. The Malvern and Arkadelphia stations are flag stop stations, which means that trains only stop when there are passengers who have purchased tickets to board or depart at those stations. The Hope station is the latest addition and was re-opened in 2013. Table 2.27 describes the amenities and features of each in-service Amtrak station in Arkansas.

Table 2.27 Amtrak Stations in Arkansas

Feature	Walnut Ridge (WNR)	Little Rock (LRK)	Malvern (MVN)	Arkadelphia (ARK)	Hope (HOP)	Texarkana (TXA)
Address	109 SW Front Street, Walnut Ridge, Arkansas 72476	1400 West Markham Street, Little Rock, Arkansas 72201	200 East First Street, Malvern, Arkansas 72104	798 South Fifth Street, Arkadelphia, Arkansas 71923	100 East Division Street, Hope, Arkansas 71801	100 East Front Street, Texarkana, Arkansas 71854
Shelter	Station building with waiting room, enclosed waiting area	Station building with waiting room, enclosed waiting area	Platform with shelter, no enclosed waiting area	Platform with shelter, no enclosed waiting area	Station building with waiting room, enclosed waiting area	Station building with waiting room, enclosed waiting area
ADA Accessibility	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Partially
Parking	Short/long term available	Short/long term available	Short/long term available	Short/long term available	Not available	Short/long term available
Depot Hours	Midnight to 3:30 a.m.	10:30 p.m. to 8:00 a.m.	Unstaffed	3:50 a.m. to 4:45 a.m; 9:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.	4:30 a.m. to 5:30 a.m; 8:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.	5:15 a.m. to 6:30 a.m; 8:00 p.m. to 9:15 p.m.
Baggage Service	None	Checked baggage, storage, assistance, carts available	None	None	None	Checked baggage, assistance, carts available
Ticket Office	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Restrooms	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Telephone	None	Payphone	Payphone	Payphone	None	None
Flag Stop	No	No	No	No	No	No
Potential Transit Connection*	Black River Area Development (paratransit)	Central Arkansas Transit bus and trolley	South Central Arkansas Transit (paratransit)	South Central Arkansas Transit (paratransit)	N/A	Texarkana Urban Transit (bus)

*Note, due to the late hours at which each Arkansas rail station is served, connecting transit services may not be in operation at the time of Texas Eagle arrivals and departures.

Source: Amtrak, Local Transit Authorities

Passenger Rail Schedule

Texas Eagle trains provide service in Arkansas every day of the week, with stations served primarily during the nighttime hours. This is attributed to the structuring of the long-distance service to serve the major cities along the route (Chicago, St. Louis, Dallas/Fort Worth, and San Antonio) during the daytime and evening hours. The southbound Texas Eagle, departing from Chicago at 1:52 p.m. and St. Louis at 7:42 p.m., serves Walnut Ridge at 12:24 a.m. and Little Rock at 3:04 a.m. Other nighttime stops through Arkansas are detailed in Table 2.28, with the eventual arrival in Texarkana on the Texas state line at 5:52 a.m. The northbound Texas Eagle, departing San Antonio at 6:48 a.m. and Dallas at 3:38 p.m., arrives at Texarkana at 8:36 p.m. and makes nighttime stops in Arkansas, reaching Little Rock at 11:39 p.m. before continuing north to St. Louis and Chicago.

Table 2.28 Scheduled Amtrak Departures for Stations

Station	Station Code	Southbound Train 21/421 ↓	Northbound Train 22/422 ↑
Chicago, IL	*CHI*	*1:52 p.m.*	*1:44 p.m.*
St. Louis, MO	*STL*	*7:42 p.m.*	*8:10 a.m.*
Arkansas / Missouri Border	-	-	-
Walnut Ridge	CSR	12:24 a.m.	1:41 a.m.
Little Rock	LRK	3:04 a.m.	11:39 p.m.
Malvern	MVN	3:49 a.m.	10:21 p.m.
Arkadelphia	ARK	4:14 a.m.	9:57 p.m.
Hope	HOP	5:03 a.m.	9:11 p.m.
Texarkana	TXA	5:52 a.m.	8:36 p.m.
Arkansas / Texas Border	-	-	-
Dallas, TX	*DAL*	*12:00: p.m.*	*3:38 p.m.*
Fort Worth, TX	*FTW*	*2:32 p.m.*	*2:18 p.m.*
Austin, TX	*AUS*	*7:20 p.m.*	*9:24 a.m.*
San Antonio, TX	*SAS*	*2:45 a.m.*	*6:48 a.m.*

Source: Amtrak, 2024

2.2.2 High-Speed Rail

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) identifies nationally significant rail corridors for targeted rail investments and infrastructure upgrades, as a means of developing a national high-speed rail network. While service in Arkansas was included as part of the South Central High-Speed Rail Corridor (SCHSRC), which was designated in 2001, the state and most of the SCHRSRC, with the exception of the Dallas–Oklahoma City corridor, were not included in a subsequent designation in 2011. Under current conditions, high speed rail infrastructure upgrades and service is not likely for the state of Arkansas.

As shown in Figure 2.3, the SCHSRC consists of a hub in Dallas/Fort Worth and three branches linking to Austin/San Antonio, Oklahoma City/Tulsa, and Texarkana/Little Rock. The corridor includes Amtrak's

Texas Eagle service in Arkansas, from Little Rock to points south. The *Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008* also called for a study to examine the feasibility of further extending the SCHSRC to additional geographies, including from Little Rock to Memphis.

Figure 2.3 South Central High-Speed Rail Corridor

Source: Texas A&M Transportation Institute

A subsequent designation of high-speed rail corridors across the United States occurred in 2011. This designation however omitted Arkansas and most of the SCHRSRC with the exception of the Dallas – Oklahoma City corridor. Although this omission does not disqualify Arkansas from receiving high-speed rail funding, it does affect the state's competitiveness in the ability to compete for such potential funding and grants. Instead, the High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) Program focuses on a network of core express (top speeds of over 150 mph), regional (top speeds of between 110 mph and 150 mph), and feeder (top speeds of between 90 mph and 110 mph) upgrades for routes primarily along the West Coast, Midwest, and the Northeast Corridor, as well as the corridor between Dallas and Oklahoma City.

In 2020, ARDOT, in cooperation with the FRA and FHWA, completed the *Arkansas High-Speed Passenger Rail Study*.[14] The study reported the financial challenges of establishing high-speed passenger rail in the state given high capital and operating costs and forecasted ticket revenues. However, interest in this route continues. It is noted that Amtrak's long-distance services generally recover less than half of operating expenses through ticket revenues. However, it should also be noted that most transportation infrastructure projects do not finance themselves in that way, but instead are justified based on other user benefits such as improvements to mobility and safety. Further, recent transportation bills introduced additional funding streams that could increase the feasibility of new services. See Section 2.4 for additional information on these funding opportunities.

Based on each of these factors, including cost competitiveness, a lack of dedicated funding, and a national focus on targeted high-speed rail infrastructure upgrades for other corridors in the United States, no high-speed rail infrastructure upgrades are expected in the short-term for Arkansas. Long-term, ongoing studies and additional funding sources may provide opportunities for high-speed rail infrastructure upgrades in Arkansas. See Chapter 3 for more information on the passenger rail investment program which includes an ongoing study and initiatives spearheaded at the federal scope to identify high-speed rail infrastructure investment opportunities. Additionally, ongoing funding opportunities available for high-speed rail infrastructure investment are identified in Section 2.4.

2.2.3 Objectives for Passenger Service in Arkansas

The objectives for passenger rail service in Arkansas are identified as follows:

- Advance viable opportunities to link Arkansas' population centers with intercity passenger rail service;

  As described in Chapters 3 and 6, ARDOT's outreach to multiple stakeholders, including the general public, identified the desire for expanded intercity services, including between Little Rock and Northwest Arkansas, between Northwest Arkansas and major cities in surrounding states, between Little Rock and Memphis, and through Northeast Arkansas (Missouri-Jonesboro-Memphis). This SRP forms the basis for potentially advancing these efforts through the help of future federal initiatives and grant funding.

- Advance viable opportunities for commuter rail service in Arkansas' urban areas;

  Identifying opportunities to implement commuter rail service across the state's urban centers. As identified through outreach, there may be desire for increased transit options in and around the urban centers of Central Arkansas and Northwest Arkansas, including commuter rail services.

- Support improvements to the existing Texas Eagle service for Arkansas to grow ridership across the state;

  Operating as a long-distance service along freight tracks through improvements related to expanded service levels, frequencies, and overall ridership growth. Chapter 3 identifies station and service improvements spearheaded by Amtrak, as well as interest in new service opportunities, such as Bald Knob. Coordination should continue in order to facilitate construction and infrastructure upgrades, and related improvements to the Texas Eagle service.

[14] https://www.ARDOT.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/FINAL-High-Speed-Passenger-Rail-Study-Executive-Summary.pdf

2.2.4 Arkansas Passenger Rail Performance Evaluation

This section includes a performance evaluation of intercity passenger rail services in Arkansas, including ridership, on-time performance, and delays.

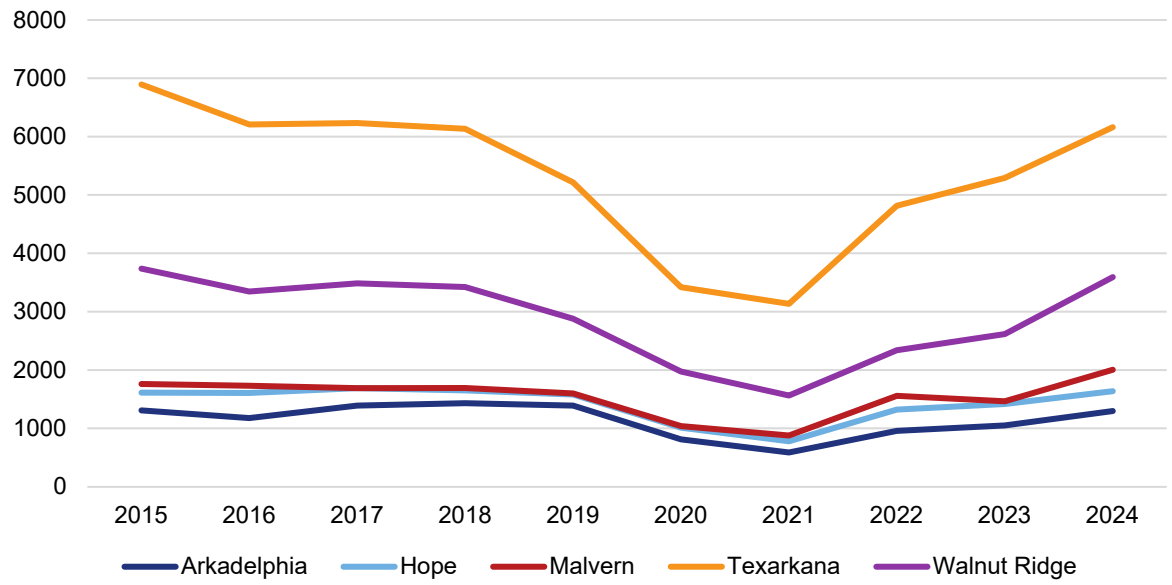
Ridership

Amtrak ridership as measured by boardings and alightings on the entire Texas Eagle in Federal Fiscal Year (FY)[15] 2024 was 325,709, which was an increase of 10.6 percent over FY 2023. This growth reflects a recovery in rail travel following the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this trailed the ridership growth (14.8 percent) across all Amtrak services during the same period.

Figure 2.4 and Figure 2.5 show the total ridership trends for all Arkansas stations between 2015 and 2024. Ridership in Arkansas fell steadily from 2015 and into the COVID-19 pandemic . However, in recent years, ridership in the state has bounced back and surpassed pre-pandemic levels and is now approach 2015 levels. Annual boardings and alightings in the state totaled 37,061 in FY 2024.

As shown in Table 2.29, Little Rock remained the busiest station in the state, with 22,369 boardings and alightings in FY 2024. In 2013, the Hope station opened in Southwest Arkansas; by FY 2024, the station had seen 1,637 boardings and alightings – levels comparable to that of Malvern and Arkadelphia.

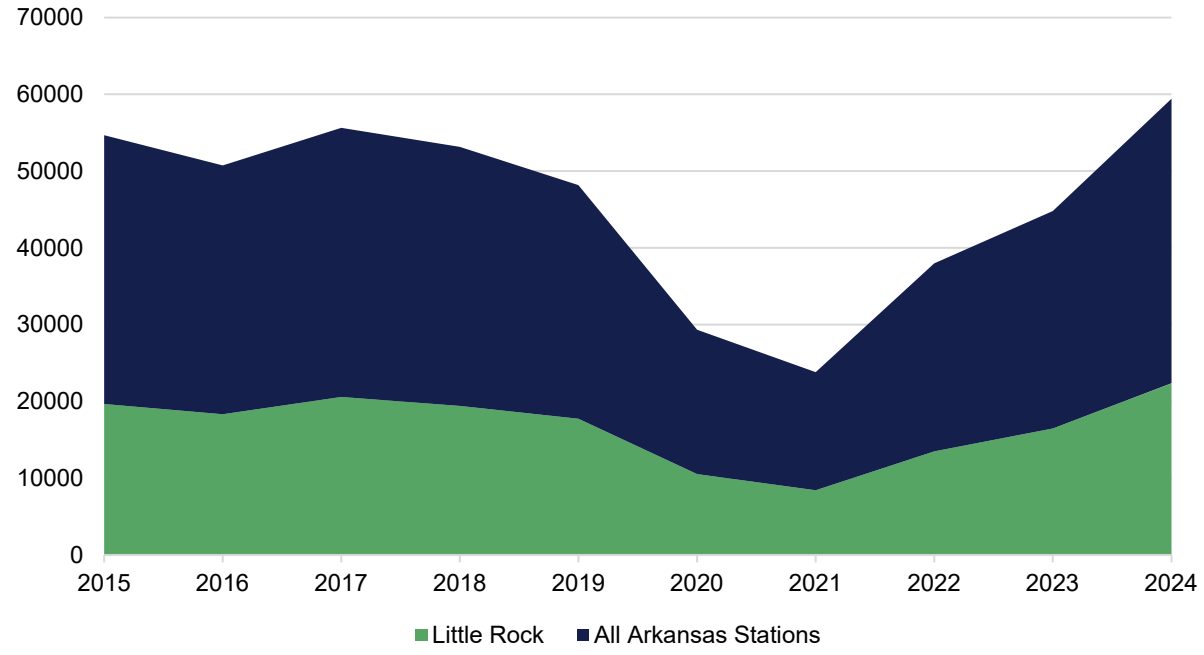
Figure 2.4 Total Ridership by Station, except Little Rock, 2015–2024



Source: Amtrak State of Arkansas Fact Sheets (2015–2024) and Arkansas 2015 SRP

[15] It is noted that the Federal fiscal year differs from the Arkansas fiscal year. The Federal fiscal year runs from October 1 of one calendar year through September 30 of the next. The Arkansas fiscal year runs from July 1 of one calendar year through June 30 of the next.

Figure 2.5 Total Ridership by Station, Little Rock and Total, 2015–2024



Source: Amtrak State of Arkansas Fact Sheets (2015–2024) and Arkansas 2015 SRP

Table 2.29 Ridership by Station

Station	2013	2019 (Pre-Pandemic)	2022	2023	2024
Little Rock	22,351	17,755	13,492	16,474	22,369
Texarkana	8,903	5,214	4,814	5,293	6,160
Walnut Ridge	4,766	2,878	2,340	2,617	3,593
Malvern	2,101	1,598	1,558	1,464	2,006
Hope	1,310	1,579	1,322	1,417	1,637
Arkadelphia	1,787	1,389	956	1,050	1,296

Source: Amtrak State of Arkansas Fact Sheets (2015–2023) and Arkansas 2015 SRP

Origin/Destination Pairs

Table 2.30 demonstrates the top five origin-destination pairs by station in Arkansas (based on 2022 ridership information). Most riders in Arkansas use the service to travel out-of-state. Chicago was the most traveled destination for riders who either started or ended their trip in Arkansas, followed by St. Louis, then Dallas. It is noted that some riders who travel to or from Longview, TX are continuing onto or coming from buses that link Longview to Houston, TX, Shreveport, LA, and Jackson, MS, among other connections.

Table 2.30 Ridership on Top 5 Origin-Destination Pairs for Arkansas Stations (FY 2022)

Station	From Arkansas	To Arkansas
Walnut Ridge (WNR)		
Chicago (Union Station), Illinois	367	367
St. Louis, Missouri	193	180
Dallas (Eddie Bernice Johnson Union Station), Texas	75	83
Longview, Texas	82	82
Fort Worth, Texas	61	57
Little Rock (LRK)		
Chicago (Union Station), Illinois	2,209	2,447
St. Louis, Missouri	1,333	1,409
Dallas (Eddie Bernice Johnson Union Station), Texas	552	550
Longview, Texas	508	450
Los Angeles, California	397	409
Malvern (MVN)		
Chicago (Union Station), Illinois	165	169
Dallas (Eddie Bernice Johnson Union Station), Texas	126	105
St. Louis, Missouri	120	103
Longview, Texas	76	62
Fort Worth, Texas	52	46
Arkadelphia (ARK)		
Chicago (Union Station), Illinois	133	122
St. Louis, Missouri	74	74
Dallas (Eddie Bernice Johnson Union Station), Texas	54	58
Little Rock, Arkansas	24	38
Fort Worth, Texas	35	32
Texarkana (TXA)		
Dallas (Eddie Bernice Johnson Union Station), Texas	493	464
Chicago (Union Station), Illinois	438	426
St. Louis, Missouri	330	323
Longview, Texas	244	250
Fort Worth, Texas	239	212

Source: Amtrak

On-Time Performance and Delays

On-time performance (OTP) is measured by Amtrak as the percentage of stations at which the train arrives within 15 minutes of the scheduled arrival time. In FY 2024, the customers that alighted in Arkansas

experienced an OTP of 62.5 percent.[16] By comparison, OTP for the entire Amtrak system was much higher, ranging between 75 percent and 80 percent between 2020 and 2024,[17] as shown in Table 2.31

Table 2.31 On-Time Performance by Fiscal Year for Arkansas Stations Compared to Systemwide Totals

	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Arkansas	42%	52%	49%	60%	62.5%
Amtrak Systemwide	80%	78%	74%	74%	75%

Source: Amtrak

Between April 2022 and March 2023, the average minutes late per late rider, excluding on-time customers, along the entire Texas Eagle corridor was 104 minutes. These figures can be interpreted in multiple ways. On the one hand, these figures are calculated across the entire Texas Eagle corridor and may not necessarily be representative of trends for riders in Arkansas. In actuality, these figures may be higher within the state given that many passengers use the service to travel to other states. However, given that the end-to-end travel time is approximately 32 hours, there is a possibility that any delays could be made up through increased travel speeds further along the corridor, especially for longer-distance passengers.

Host railroads have the unique challenge of balancing their freight needs with the passenger rail needs that operate on their railroads. Amtrak states that it continues to fine-tune operating schedules with host railroads via a schedule certification system that has been in place since FY 2021.

2.3 Abandonments

The process for a railroad to formally abandon trackage is documented by the STB.[18] It requires rail owners to apply for permission to discontinue rail service along a corridor and may or may not involve the sale of the line. Approximately 100 miles of track have been abandoned since 2000. This represents a declining trend since the 1990s of abandonment since the passing of the Stagger's Rail Act in 1980 which allowed railroads to more easily eliminate economically unprofitable rail lines by either selling or abandoning them.

Through the process of abandonment, railroad rights-of-way (ROW) can be "railbanked", a process included in the National Trails System Act of 1983. Rail-banking is a method by which lines proposed for abandonment can be preserved for future rail use through interim conversion to trail use. Railbanking can be requested by either a public agency or certain private organizations, which file a Statement of Willingness to Assume Financial Responsibility and a Public Use Condition request with the STB during an abandonment proceeding. Under the terms of rail-banking agreements, tracks and ties of a line can be

[16] https://www.amtrak.com/state-fact-sheets

[17] https://www.bts.gov/content/amtrak-time-performance-trends-and-hours-delay-cause. Note that a systemwide OTP for Amtrak has not yet been made publicly available.

[18] https://www.stb.gov/proceedings-actions/search-stb-records/

removed, but the bridges and trestles must be kept in place. This arrangement was implemented in Arkansas in the past to establish the Delta Heritage Trail State Park.[19]

2.4 Public Financing for Rail Projects and Services in Arkansas

Financing for rail projects and services varies notably based on the type of service. Historically, freight railroads have been operated and financed under private ownership. However, public rail funding for freight rail operations has been made in multiple instances, including during the 1970s and 1980s when a shrinking industry threatened to significantly reduce rail access to shippers who were not located on high-density rail lines. In recent decades, public sector freight rail investments have typically focused on preservation, safety, economic development, mobility, safety, and even sustainability, funded primarily through federal and state sources, as well as some local sources where applicable. This is especially the case given the contents of the most recent transportation funding bills which included significant funding for rail projects. Those examples aside, freight rail remains a largely private enterprise.

Most modern-day passenger rail services tend to be funded primarily through public sector subsidies, including from federal and state sources, given that passenger revenues alone are not sufficient for covering operating and capital costs. Amtrak's Texas Eagle service, for example, is funded primarily through federal subsidies, and to a lesser extent, passenger revenues. Although Arkansas has participated in federal rail funding programs, if Arkansas were to request additional Amtrak service, state or local entities would typically be expected to pay for associated capital and operating subsidies.

2.4.1 Federal Rail Funding

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), enacted in November 2021, provided substantial planning, development, and funding opportunities for freight and intercity passenger rail. In total, the new investments and reauthorization provided $102 billion in total rail funding, including $66 billion from advanced appropriations, and $36 billion in authorized funding.

Federal funding sources comprise a large portion of public funding for rail projects. Administered by the FRA and FHWA of the USDOT, and authorized through the IIJA, there are multiple funding programs which can be leveraged to support future freight and passenger rail investments in Arkansas. These grant programs are shown in Table 2.32.

[19] https://www.ARDOT.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/AR_StateRailPlan_Final_with_Summary.pdf

Table 2.32 Federal Rail Funding Grant Opportunities

Program	2024 Funding Authorization	Description
Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD)	$1.5 Billion	Supports a wide range of surface transportation projects of local and/or regional significance.
Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA)	$2.7 Billion	Provides funding to state and local governments for projects of regional or national significance, with a focus on freight needs. IIJA also raises the cap on multimodal projects to 30% of program funds.
Mega Projects	$1.7 Billion	Similar to RAISE and INFRA grants, Mega grants support a wide range of transportation projects. However, an emphasis is placed on particularly large and complex projects.
Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Savings Transportation (PROTECT)	$876 Million*	Provides grants for resilience improvements to protect surface transportation assets, including intercity passenger rail facilities and highway-rail crossings.
Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Program (CRISI)	$1.4 Billion	Provides funding for projects that improve safety, efficiency, and reliability of intercity passenger and freight rail.
Port Infrastructure Development Program	$500 Million	Authorizes funding to upgrade nationwide ports with an emphasis on addressing resiliency and reducing pollution.
Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant Program	$1.48 Billion	Provides funding for the elimination or improvement of highway-rail grade crossings.
Rural Surface Transportation Grant Program	$780 Million	Aims to improve and expand surface transportation infrastructure in rural areas to increase connectivity, improve safety, and support the movement of people and freight, in order to generate regional economic growth.
Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program – Planning Grants and Capital Construction Grants	$200 Million	Supports planning grants and capital construction grants, as well as technical assistance, to restore community connectivity through the removal, retrofit, mitigation, or replacement of eligible transportation infrastructure facilities, including rail infrastructure.
Reducing Truck Emissions at Ports Program	$160 Million*	Funds efforts at ports to look at electrification and emerging technology can reduce emissions from idling trucks.
Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Program	$5 Billion	Provides funding for capital projects that reduce the state of good repair backlog, improve performance, or expand or establish new intercity passenger rail service.
Interstate Rail Compacts Grant Program	$5.8 Million*	Provides support for improving, developing and marketing intercity passenger rail service.
Formula Funding Programs, including: • National Highway Freight Program • Railway-Highway Crossings Program	Varying Amounts	Formula funding programs apportioned across each state.

*2024 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) has not yet been released for certain grants. For these grants, 2023 or the most recent available program funding totals are listed. Funding totals for 2024 are assumed to be identical or similar to 2023 figures.

Source: U.S. DOT

Historically, freight rail infrastructure and operations have been funded almost entirely by private-sector companies. Few dedicated programs for passenger rail capital assistance to states existed at the federal level until 2008, however. The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA) and related appropriation bills provided funds for intercity passenger-rail investments directly to states in 2008 and amounted to $13 billion in total investment between 2009 and 2013. As described above, the IIJA includes multiple funding programs for passenger rail.

2.4.2 State Rail Funding

Arkansas does not have dedicated funding programs for freight or passenger rail. However, some state funding mechanisms can be used to fund rail projects within the state on a case-by-case basis.

Quick Action Closing Fund

Established in 2007, the Governor's Quick Action Closing Fund is a targeted discretionary fund aimed at supporting statewide economic development. The program provides funds for firms to attract, grow, or retain jobs within the state. Funding for the program is approved by the Governor and subsequently reviewed by the legislative council which provides oversight of the executive branch of the Arkansas state government. Appropriated annual funding for the program has varied widely since its inception from approximately $3 million to over $75 million in 2025.[20] [21]

The Quick Action Closing Fund is a general fund which at times has been used to fund rail-related projects. This has included the restoration of the North Louisiana and Arkansas Railroad in 2011 when the Delta Southern Railroad proposed it for abandonment.[22] Most recently in 2021, Trex, a manufacturer of outdoor decking and railing, secured funding from the program to develop a third U.S. manufacturing site to be located within the Port of Little Rock. The state has also committed funding to construct a new rail spur to the site which will be served by the Little Rock Port Authority Railroad. In exchange, Trex has agreed to generate a minimum number of annual rail cars to support Port of Little Rock operations.[23] As a result, the new Trex facility, which is expected to commence operations in 2024, is expected to generate 2,000 annual rail cars worth of traffic.[24]

2.4.3 Local Rail Funding

In some instances, local communities in Arkansas have funded rail projects. In most cases, these are economic development initiatives with a rail component. As an example, a rail spur to support local manufacturers was funded in part by the City of Wynne in 2021.[25] It is important to note, however, that local communities, particularly small towns and villages, are limited in the size of investments that can be afforded.

[20] https://uca.edu/acre/files/2018/11/QACF_Policy_Review-new.pdf

[21] Arkansas Act 608 of 2025

[22] https://www.up.com/customers/shortline/profiles_l-p/nla/index.htm

[23] https://armoneyandpolitics.com/trex-400m-expansion-arkansas/

[24] https://www.globallocationstrategies.com/c0/trex-installing-itself-at-little-rock/

[25] https://katv.com/news/local/wynne-receives-2-million-for-rail-spur-facility-10-20-2021

2.5 Ongoing Programs to Improve Safety and Security of the Arkansas Rail System

Maintaining a safe and secure multimodal transportation system is a key goal for ARDOT. This goal is shared by rail operators and other rail stakeholders in the state. Rail safety requirements are provided through a combination of federal and state laws and operating procedures specific to each railroad. The majority of rail safety-related rules and regulations fall under the jurisdiction of the FRA, as outlined in the Rail Safety Act of 1970 and other legislation, including the most recent Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008.[26]

Federal, state, and local investments, policies, and programs work across the state to prevent incidents such as derailments, discharges of hazardous materials, and incursions with roadway traffic at highway-rail grade crossings. Additionally, railroads carry vital materials and transport users across the state and country, and so security of people and goods is vital. Addressing critical aspects of the statewide rail network, this section identifies ongoing programs to improve rail transportation safety and security, including based on recent trends and developments.

2.5.1 Safety

Safety is the highest priority of the Arkansas Department of Transportation. This priority is shared by rail operators and other rail stakeholders in the state. As a key component of this SRP, safety is discussed in relation to general rail incidents, highway-rail grade crossing, PTC technology, and the safe transport of hazardous materials.

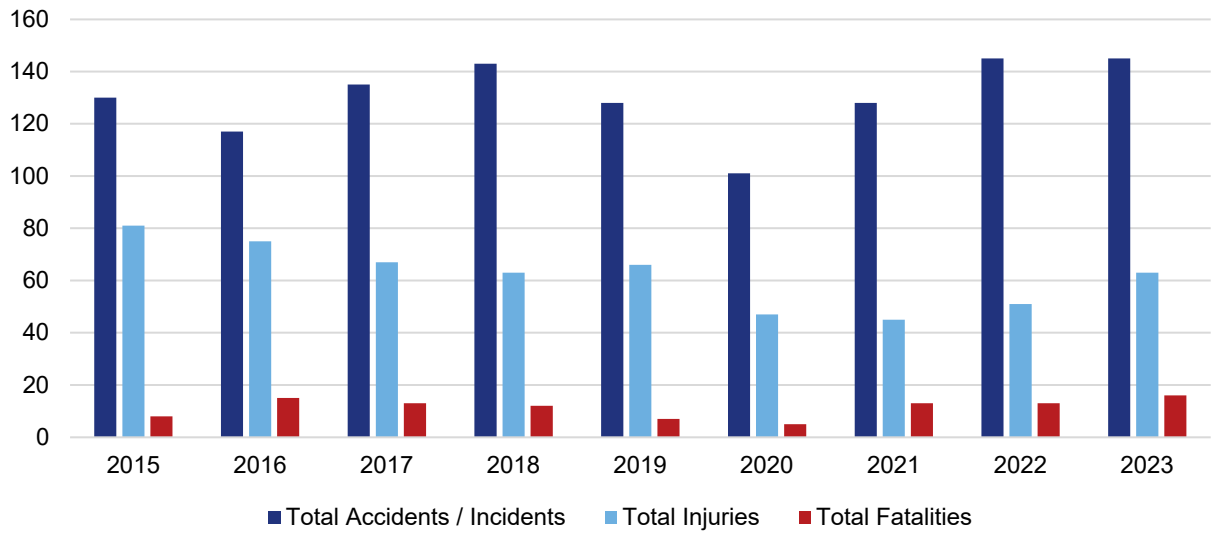
Rail Incidents

Figure 2.6 illustrates rail incidents and related metrics[27] between 2015 and 2023. Since the previous SRP total incidents have fluctuated. Between 2015 and 2018, incidents rose to over 140, before dropping to a low of 101 in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the following years, total incidents rose again to pre-pandemic totals of over 140. Despite the increase in incidents, total injuries have followed a downward trend since 2015 from 81 injuries to 63 in 2023. Fatalities, while less frequent when compared to injuries, have fluctuated and reached a nine-year high of 16 in 2023.

[26] It is noted that the Railway Safety Act of 2023 is currently being considered in Congress. The bill would require rail carriers and shippers to (1) provide state emergency response commissioners with advanced notice and information about the hazardous materials; (2) reduce blocked rail crossings; and (3) comply with certain requirements regarding train length and weight specifications, track standards, speed restrictions, and response plans. It also includes updated legislation on fines, rail car inspection regulations, rail crew minimums, the phasing out of certain tank cars, local first responder training, and research funding for rail safety. As of 2024, the bill remains stalled in Congress.

[27] The FRA does not differentiate between an accident and an incident. “Accident/Incident” is the term used to describe the entire list of reportable events. These include collisions, derailments, and other events involving the operation of on-track equipment and causing reportable damage above an established threshold; impacts between railroad on-track equipment and highway users at crossings; and all other incidents or exposures that cause a fatality or injury to any person, or an occupational illness to a railroad employee.

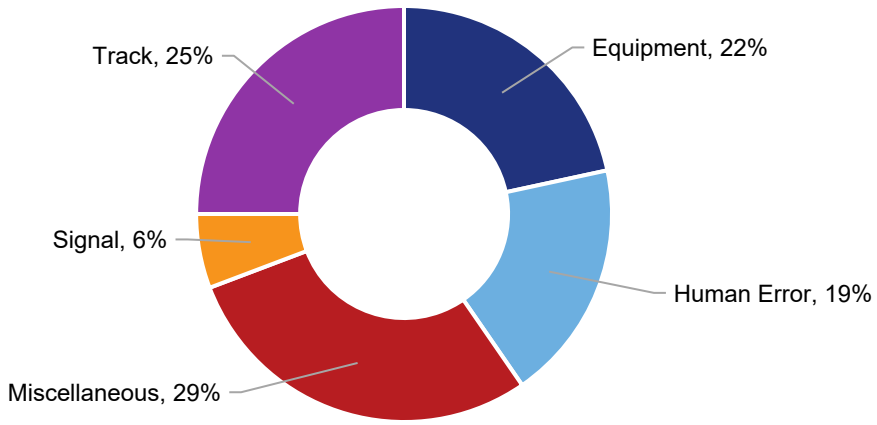
Figure 2.6 Arkansas Rail Accidents/Incidents & Safety Metrics, 2015–2023



Source: FRA 2024 Accident/Incident Overview Dashboard

Train incidents occurring between 2015 and 2023 are broken out by cause in Figure 2.7. Overall, the causes of train accidents vary relatively evenly across most of the five categories. Miscellaneous causes and track issues accounted for just over half of all incidents. This was followed by equipment malfunction and human error, which each accounted for approximately 20 percent of all incidents. Signal issues comprised an additional six percent of all incidents.

Figure 2.7 Train Accident by Cause, 2015–2023

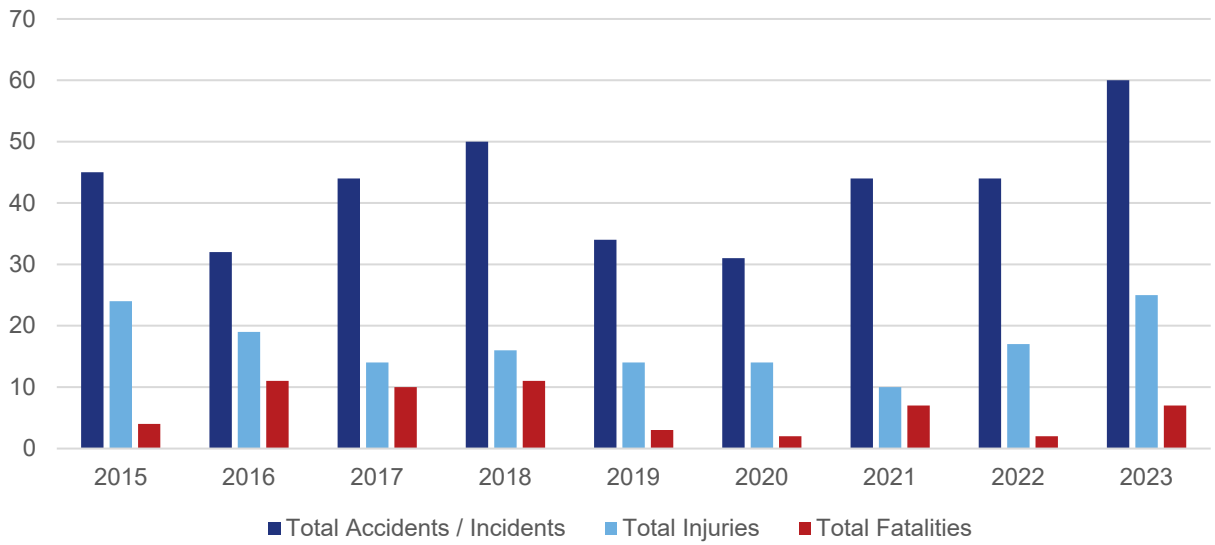


Source: FRA 2021 Accident/Incident Overview Dashboard

Grade Crossing Incidents

Those safety incidents specifically involving grade crossings are shown in Figure 2.8. Between 2015 and 2023, grade crossing incidents followed a similar trend to that of all rail incidents. This includes a gradual rise in total incidents through 2018, followed by a drop into the COVID-19 pandemic, and subsequent rise in incidents in the most recent years. Prior to the pandemic, total incidents reached a high of 50 in 2018, although a new high of 60 was reached in 2023. Injuries resulting from these incidents followed a slightly different trend of declining slightly between 2015 and 2021 but also rising again to a high of 25 occurrences in 2023. Given much lower totals, there was more variance in relation to fatalities, which reached a high of 11 in 2016 and 2018, before dropping in the following years. A total of seven fatalities were recorded in 2023. During this nine-year period, grade crossing incidents as a proportion of all incidents ranged from 27 percent in 2016 and 2019 to a high of 41 percent in 2023.

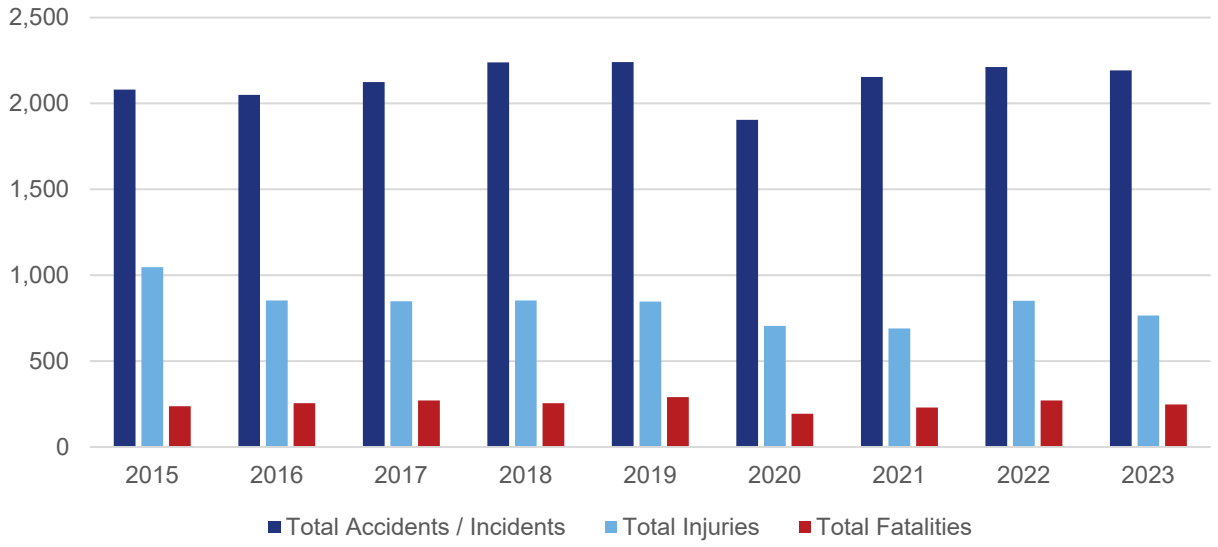
Figure 2.8 Arkansas Grade Crossing Incidents by Year, 2015–2023



Source: FRA 2024 Rail Grade Crossing Incident Dashboard

By comparison, grade crossing incident metrics for the entire U.S. are shown Figure 2.9 for the same time period. By measure of overall incidents, national metrics also followed a similar pattern of increasing before the pandemic before increasing again in the following years. On the other hand, total incidents have remained steady since 2021 at just above 2,150. By comparison, in Arkansas, total incidents rose noticeably into 2023, although a larger degree of variance is expected for the individual state given the much lower totals. At the national level, total injuries largely followed a declining trend from nearly 1,050 in 2015 to 765 in 2023. Fatalities at the national level remained relatively steady, despite a drop in 2020 during the pandemic.

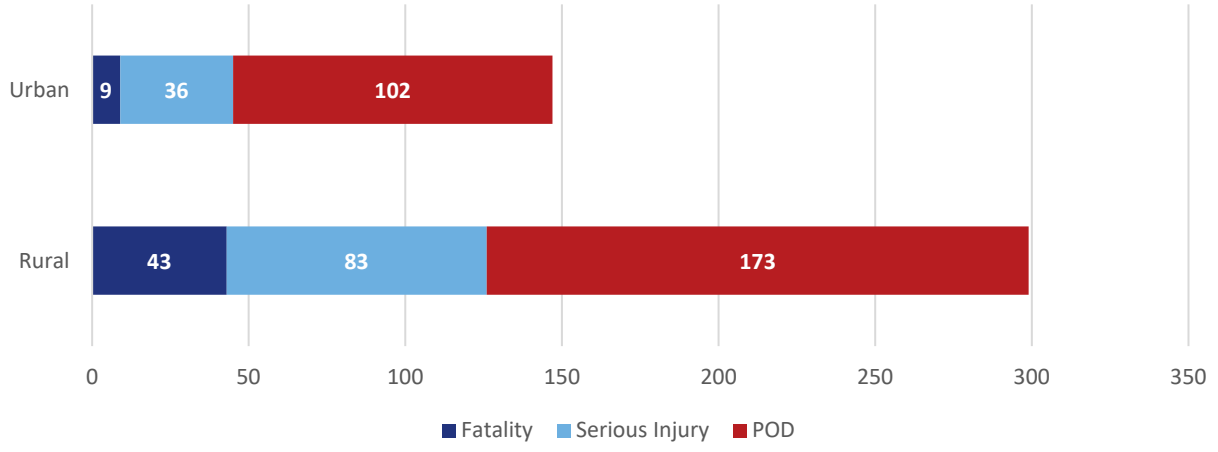
Figure 2.9 National Grade Crossing Incidents by Year, 2015–2023



Source: FRA 2024 Rail Grade Crossing Incident Dashboard

A comparison of grade crossing incidents in urban vs. rural areas is provided through 2023, as shown in Figure 2.10. Although urban crossings accounted for approximately 50 percent of incidents, rural crossings comprised two-thirds of fatalities from related incidents. This geographic disparity is likely attributed to speed. Motor vehicles are likely forced to travel at slower speeds in urban locations due to lower speed limits, denser street networks, higher traffic levels, and the presence of pedestrians. These factors are less present in rural areas where motor vehicle speeds are less restricted and may account for the corresponding larger proportion of more fatal crashes. As a result, while rural crashes are less common, their severity can be greater.

Figure 2.10 Total Incidents in Urban vs. Rural Areas, 2014 – 2023



Source: FRA GCIS Database, FRA Form 57

Most incidents occurred at individual, unique crossings, indicating that at least some of these may be isolated incidents, and not necessarily due to a particular shortcoming of the crossing design.

Safety Improvements at Highway-Rail Grade Crossings in Arkansas

The above statistics indicate a continuous need for grade crossing safety improvements in Arkansas. ARDOT's Project Coordination Section administers Section 130 federal formula funding with assistance from the Traffic Safety Section. The purpose of this program is to provide funds for the elimination of hazards at railway-highway crossings

ARDOT receives approximately $4 million of Section 130 funding annually. These funds are applied for a wide range of improvements depending on the crossing and safety needs. Improvements can include the installation of signage and warning devices at passive and active crossings, roadway geometry changes, pavement markings, channelization, signal timing improvements, use of camera technology, and other intelligent transportation system (ITS) infrastructure. Crossing closures are also considered when feasible. Grade separations may also be pursued but typically require large capital outlays that exceed the funding available under the Section 130 program. Current allocations of Section 130 funding translate to the funding of between around five to eight projects per year, depending on the size and magnitude of funded projects.

Positive Train Control

PTC systems are designed to prevent train-to-train collisions, over-speed derailments, incursions into established work zones, and movements of trains through switches left in the wrong position. PTC consists of a system of communication between operating locomotives and a rail track operations center. This system is able to identify any operational issues within the track network or locomotive, including speeding. If needed, the PTC system can remotely stop the locomotive from moving. The term *positive* refers to the requirement that the track operations center provides positive movement allowance in order for a locomotive to proceed on PTC-implemented trackage.

Through the Rail Safety Act of 2008, PTC implementation was mandated for the Class I rail network for any track sections with 5 million or more gross tons of annual rail traffic, trackage where certain hazardous materials are transported, and on any main lines over which intercity or commuter rail passenger service is regularly provided. In Arkansas, this includes BNSF and KCS (now CPKC) trackage, as well as most UP trackage. On December 29, 2020, the FRA announced that PTC had been successfully implemented across all 57,536 miles of United States trackage where it was required. PTC technology includes a communication system linking locomotives and rail operations centers to communicate information on train speed in relation to speed limits along rail lines. It also provides the ability to send a warning alert to a locomotive in advance of a violation or potential derailment, and can also take control of, and stop the locomotive.

Hazardous Materials

Given their physical and chemical properties, a sizable proportion of freight commodities are considered hazardous. In fact, nearly 20 percent of total transported freight in the U.S. is deemed to be hazardous to some degree and severity.[28] USDOT defines hazardous materials as materials posing an unreasonable threat to the public and environment. This includes hazardous substances, hazardous wastes, marine pollutants, elevated temperature material, identified materials in 49 CFR 172.101, and identified materials meeting the

[28] https://www.bts.gov/archive/publications/special_reports_and_issue_briefs/special_report/2011_01_26/entire

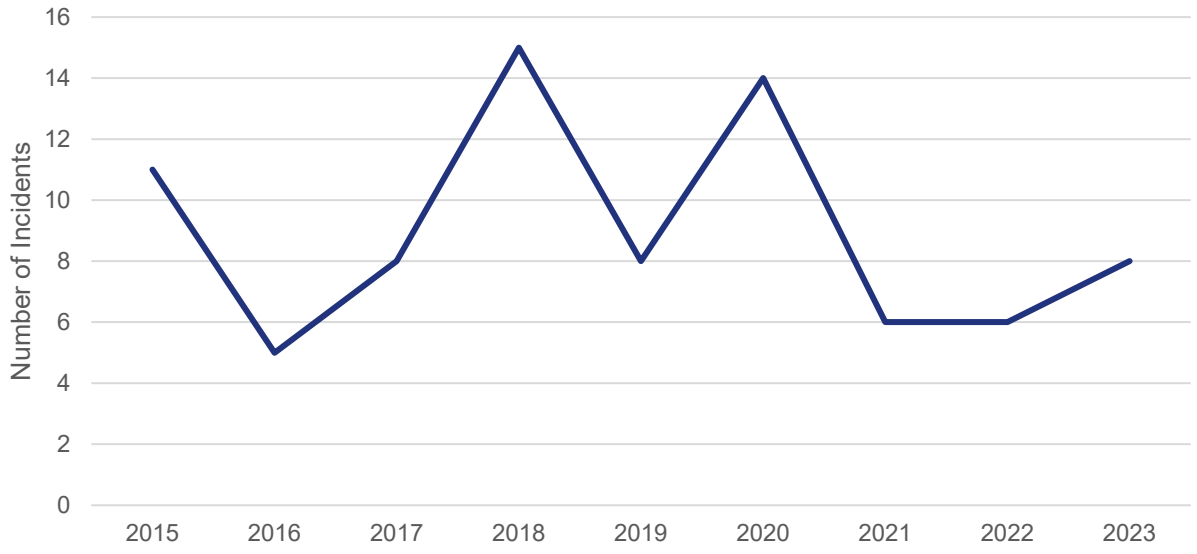
definitions set forth in 49 CFR Part 173. U.S. DOT classifies hazardous materials into 9 categories: Explosives, Gases, Flammable Liquid, Flammable Solids, Oxidizing Substances/Organic Peroxides, Poisonous & Infectious Substances, Radioactive Material, Corrosives, and Miscellaneous Dangerous Goods.

Rail is a key mode choice for the transport of many hazardous commodities. Although the nation's freight railroads are private sector entities, they are bounded by a common carrier obligation which legally requires them to transport hazardous materials for shippers, in part because rail is statistically the safest mode for transporting these materials. More than 99.9 percent of all hazardous material moved by rail reaches its destination without a release caused by a train incident. Railroads use the Rail Corridor Risk Management System (RCRMS) a mapping-enabled software and joint initiative between railroads and USDOT, to analyze and identify the safest and most secure routes.[29]

While rare, rail incidents resulting in discharges of hazardous materials do have the potential to cause significant damage to surrounding populations and ecosystems. Recent derailments in North America including in East Palestine, Ohio, Lac-Mégantic, Quebec garnered significant attention due to the sizeable impacts that the release of hazardous materials had on surrounding communities.[30]

In Arkansas, incidents involving hazardous materials transported by rail have been both rare and minor. Between 2015 and 2023, annual incidents fluctuated between 5 and 15 (Figure 2.11). Only two of these incidents involved a hospitalization, and none resulted in fatalities. When considering the overall annual tonnage and traffic transported by rail during this time period, more than 99.9 of all hazardous materials moved in Arkansas without incident, similar to the national success rate.

Figure 2.11 Arkansas Hazardous Material Incidents Occurring Along Railways by Year, 2015–2023



Source: Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration Incident Statistics

[29] https://www.aar.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/AAR-Hazmat-Common-Carrier-Obligiation-Fact-Sheet.pdf

[30] https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/a-year-after-a-train-derailment-in-ohio-spilled-hazardous-chemicals-health-fears-persist-for-east-palestine

2.5.2 Security

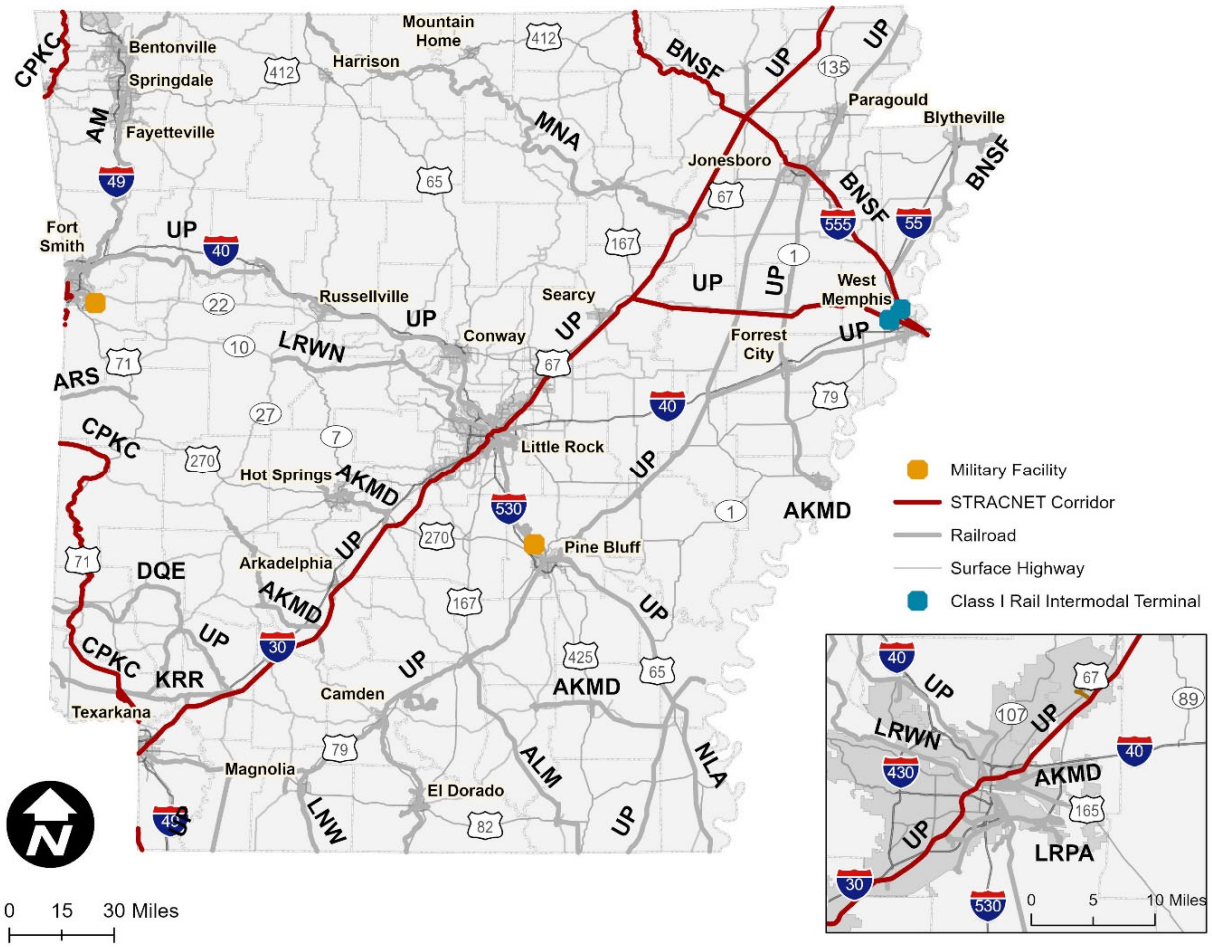
The Transportation Security Administration (TSA), under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, has primary federal jurisdiction over rail security. The Arkansas Department of Emergency Management is tasked with coordinating emergency responses to vulnerabilities within the state. ARDOT's Public Transportation Section with the Local Programs Division is responsible for safety oversight of the streetcar operated by Rock Region Metro in Little Rock.

Nationally, the TSA's Surface Transportation Security Inspection Program deploys inspectors across the U.S. to verify implementation of voluntary freight rail security measures, conduct vulnerability assessments, and conduct regulatory compliance inspections. The TSA published rules aimed at protecting the nation's freight and passenger rail systems on November 26, 2008. These include a requirement by railroads shipping TIH, certain explosive materials, and certain radioactive materials (collectively referred to as "security-sensitive material") shipments to follow prescribed chain of custody procedures. Rail carriers, rail transit systems, and certain rail facilities are required to designate rail security coordinators to act as liaisons with the TSA. Railroads are required to report security concerns to the TSA. Upon request by TSA, railroads must be able to report the location of a single car with security-sensitive materials within five minutes, and within 30 minutes the location of multiple security-sensitive material cars in multiple locations.

Strategic Rail Corridor Network

The U.S. Transportation Command developed the Strategic Rail Corridor Network (STRACNET), which is a system of commercial railroads that serves U.S. Department of Defense's domestic operations, connecting bases, military installations, and maritime ports when rail service is needed. In Arkansas, this includes the Little Rock Air Force Base, Camp Robinson, Ebbing Air National Guard Base, Fort Chaffee Joint Maneuver Training Center, and the Pine Bluff Arsenal. STRACNET is designated along with the Strategic Highway Network (STRAHNET), strategic seaports, military airports, and other infrastructure facilities that support essential freight activity and goods movement for the U.S. military. Figure 2.12 shows the STRACNET routes within Arkansas. This includes the entire CPKC network through western Arkansas, BNSF's Thayer South Subdivision, and Union Pacific's Hoxie and Memphis Subdivisions.

Figure 2.12 Arkansas STRACNET Corridors



Source: U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics; U.S Transportation Command.

2.6 Rail Transportation's Impacts

This section discusses the impacts of rail transportation in Arkansas in terms of economic, environmental, safety, and community impacts. Freight and passenger rail may offer competitive advantages in these areas as compared to other modes. Identified related performance metrics for freight and passenger rail in Arkansas, forming the basis for these various impacts, include 19.6 billion ton-miles of freight transported in 2022[31] and 34.3 million passenger miles traveled (PMT) in 2022 according to one industry estimate.[32] With one daily service through Arkansas in each direction, 305 route miles in the state, and an average vehicle occupancy (AVO) of 154 for the entire route, the annual estate for PMT equates to approximately 34.3 million PMT. Although AVO values could be lower for this specific segment, three of the top ten busiest origin-destination pairs by ridership and seven of the top ten routes that generate the highest revenues along the line run through Arkansas. While these potential benefits of freight and passenger rail must be considered in context (for

[31] *Freight Analysis Framework 5 (FAF-5)* data, including inbound, outbound and within freight traffic by rail, Federal Highway Administration.

[32] https://www.railpassengers.org/site/assets/files/3444/32.pdf

instance, availability, cost-effectiveness, timeliness, and potential adverse effects compared to other modes), they do speak to potential advantages of rail service.

2.6.1 Economic Impacts

Having supported economic development in the U.S. for nearly 200 years, freight railroads are crucial to business core activities of numerous industries. Compared to trucks, freight rail service can be more cost-effective and emit fewer transportation-related emissions.[33] In terms of jobs, Class I freight railroads employees are in the 94th percentile with regard to their average compensation. Freight rail also has an important role in globalization and American competitiveness worldwide, accounting for one third of U.S. exports by volume. Rail has also been continuing under long-term betterment trends, having become 44 percent more affordable in recent years, compared to 1981.[34]

Freight railroads in Arkansas employed more than 2,400 workers in 2022.[35] The average salary for this sector, including associated benefits, was above $135,000 a year in 2022 values, leading to an estimated payroll of $324 million per year. Summary statistics for 2022 are shown in Table 2.33. The only currently existing passenger service in Arkansas, Amtrak's Texas Eagle, employed 31 Arkansans in 2024, who had a total work compensation of almost $3 million,[36] as shown in Table 2.34.

Table 2.33 Direct Impact of Freight Railroads in Arkansas, 2022

Impact	Value (2021)	Unit
Employment (a)	2,401	Employees
Average Wage (b, including Benefits)	$135,000	2022$
Estimated Payroll = (a) * (b)	$324,135,000	2022$

Source: Association of American Railroads, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Table 2.34 Direct Impact of Passenger Rail in Arkansas, 2024

Operator	Line	Impact	Value	Unit
Amtrak	Texas Eagle	Employment (a)	31	Employees
		Total Income (b)	$2,900,141	2024$
		Average Income, including benefits = (b) / (a)	$93,553	2024$

Source: Amtrak State Fact Sheets, FY2024 – State of Arkansas.

[33] https://www.aar.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/AAR-Economic-Impact-Fact-Sheet.pdf

[34] https://www.aar.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/AAR-Railroad-Short-History-Fact-Sheet.pdf

[35] *State Rankings 2022*, Association of American Railroads. Note that more up-to-date statistics have not yet been released.

[36] https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/statefactsheets/ARKANSAS24.pdf

2.6.2 Environmental Impacts

Freight rail is a more energy-efficient mode of transport than trucks, which carry most of the freight in Arkansas. The Department of Energy annually publishes energy consumption per ton-mile of different freight modes. Table 2.35 shows energy consumption per ton-mile of both freight rail and trucks in British Thermal Units (BTU) and Ton-Mile Diesel Equivalent Gallon (DEG). On average, freight rail can run 346.75 ton-miles using a single DEG, more than three times further than trucks. The 19.6 billion ton-miles of freight rail in Arkansas in 2022 would have required 116.6 million additional DEGs of fuel if it had been trucked instead of shipped via rail, leading to increased costs and emissions.

Table 2.35 Energy Efficiency by Freight Mode

Mode	BTU per Ton-Mi	Ton-Mi per Diesel Equivalent Gallon (DEG)
Rail	400.00	346.75
Truck	1224.24	113.30

Source: Table 2.16 of Transportation Energy Data Book, Department of Energy. 40th edition, 2022. One Diesel Equivalent Gallon (DEG) is equal to 138,000 BTU.

Passenger rail is more fuel efficient than other modes of travel. Table 2.36 illustrates the efficiency of rail, which is almost three times as efficient as buses and more than three times as efficient as single occupancy vehicles (SOVs) on a per-passenger-mile basis (PMT).

Table 2.36 Energy Efficiency by Passenger Mode

Mode	Passenger Miles Traveled per Diesel Equivalent Gallon (PMT / DEG)
Single-Occupancy Vehicle (SOV)	28.90
Transit Bus	33.70
Commuter Rail	87.18
Intercity Rail	91.63

Source: American Bus Association Foundation. Updated Comparison of Energy Use & Emissions from Different Transportation Modes (2019), and Table 2.13 of Transportation Energy Data Book, Department of Energy. 40th edition, 2022.

2.6.3 Safety Impacts

Rail transportation is a comparatively safe mode of transportation. While analyzing crashes involving large trucks across the U.S. between 2016 and 2020[37] and Rail Equipment Accident/Incident Data (Form 54) from the FRA between 2017 and 2022[38], freight rail is indicated to be safer in terms of avoiding deaths and injuries.

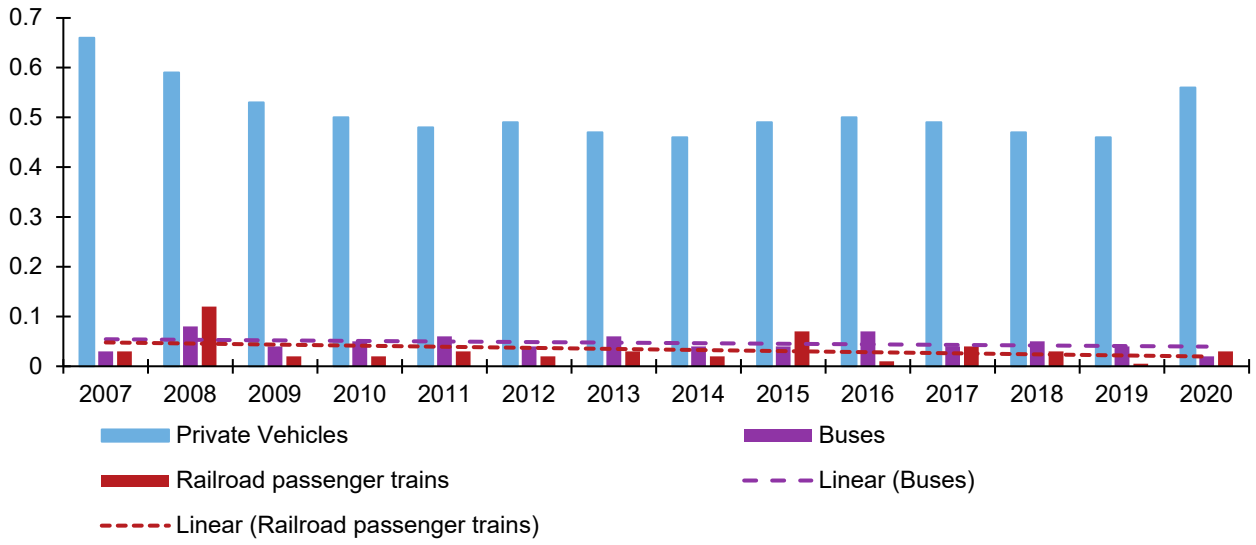
[37] https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/safety/data-and-statistics/large-truck-and-bus-crash-facts-2020

[38] https://data.transportation.gov/Railroads/Rail-Equipment-Accident-Incident-Data/85tf-25kj

According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), one truck ton-mile is 52 times more likely to contribute to a fatality and 131 times more likely to contribute to an injury than a freight rail ton-mile. However, one truck ton-mile is only 64 percent as likely to contribute to a property damage only crash. In 2022, 19.6 billion ton-miles of freight moved by rail in Arkansas instead of by truck, meaning that an estimated 19 fatalities and 566 injuries were avoided by use of rail instead of truck.

A National Safety Council analysis of different passenger transportation modes found that passenger rail is 15 times safer on a per-PMT basis (Figure 2.13) than travel by private vehicles. Applying this data to the 34.3 million PMT estimated for the Texas Eagle in Arkansas in 2022, a fatality would be avoided about every five years compared to if these passengers traveled by SOV.

Figure 2.13 Passenger Death Rates per 100 million Passenger Miles Traveled (PMT) in the United States, 2007–2020



Source: Highway passenger deaths – Fatality Analysis Reporting System data. Railroad passenger deaths and miles – Federal Railroad Administration. Airline passenger deaths – National Transportation Safety Board. Airline passenger miles – Bureau of Transportation Statistics. Passenger miles for transit buses – Federal Transit Administration. All other figures are National Safety Council estimates.

The Victoria Transport Policy Institute conducted a study to determine the costs of a crash by passenger mode, comparing an average car, bus, and rail. As shown in Table 2.37, while passenger rail is safer than a bus or car in terms of external costs per PMT, bus has a lower internal cost per PMT. Added together, the external cost competitive advantage of passenger rail compensates its relative weakness in comparison to buses for internal costs. Both rail and bus are substantially less expensive than travelling by car. Using this method, the 34.3 million PMT estimated for the Texas Eagle in 2022 means that just below 6 million dollars were saved annually from avoided crashes.

Table 2.37 Internal and External Crash Costs by Passenger Mode

Vehicle Class	Average Internal Crash Cost / PMT	Average External Crash Cost / PMT	Average Total Crash Cost / PMT
Car	$0.10847	$0.07188	$0.18035
Bus	$0.00523	$0.00936	$0.01459
Rail	$0.00758	$0.00163	$0.00921

Source: *Transportation Cost and Benefit Analysis II – Safety and Health Costs*, Victoria Transport Policy Institute, 2007; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI-U; INFRAS Zurich / IWW U. Karlsruhe; and Swiss Federal Office of Spatial Development. The last two sources implied the conversion of external crash costs per 1,000 passenger kilometers data in 1995 euros to per vehicle mile data in 2021 dollars, and the estimation of internal crash costs following a ratio of internal crash costs to total crash costs, respectively.

2.6.4 Community Impacts

Railroads benefit Arkansas' communities by reducing truckloads, and thus reducing truck VMT, highway congestion, average travel speeds, and fewer hours of travel delay for highway users. Railroad transport helps to slow infrastructure deterioration on Arkansas' highway network. Highway Economic Requirements System (HERS) modeling for the eastern U.S. highway network, conducted by Cambridge Systematics, estimated that on average, 0.0045 vehicle-hours are saved for highway users if a single mile traveled by a truck is avoided. Applied to the state of Arkansas, this means that for 19.6 billion ton-miles transported by freight rail in 2022, 3.3 million person-hours were saved[39]. When the mode choice is available, passenger rail may also provide additional benefits as compared to travel by car. Passenger rail travel requires less concentration than driving, and allows a passenger to engage in social, recreational, and other therapeutic activities. Passengers who regularly ride the same route may build social connections.[40]

2.7 Trends & Forecasts

Drawing in part from the 2022 SFP, this section identifies and expands on key demographic, macroeconomic, and transportation operations trends that can inform present and future strategies for the deployment of freight and passenger rail, including infrastructure needs. Other trends discussed include trade policy changes, the COVID-19 pandemic, related supply chain implications, and federal transportation policy, among other events. Insight into each of these sections is drawn from a variety of sources including recently published reports, news articles, and publications.

[39] This estimate assumes that one truck carries 17 tons of freight, 90 percent of vehicles are cars with an average occupancy of 1.67, and 10 percent of vehicles are trucks with an average occupancy of 1.

[40] Arnold, M. (2018, March 19). *Commentary: Health, economic and environmental advantages of using public transportation.* Naples Daily News. https://www.naplesnews.com/story/opinion/2018/03/19/ commentary-health-economic-and-environmental-advantages-using-public-transportation/437497002/

2.7.1 Economic Growth Factors

Arkansas' rail network is influenced by a broad range of factors that informs demand for both freight and passenger rail service. This section, developed for the 2022 SFP and applied to this SRP, discusses economic activity trends and outlook for key industries in Arkansas.

Industrial Outlook by Sector

This subsection discusses three critical industries in Arkansas: rice production and processing; poultry production and processing; and iron and steel production and processing. These industries have had performances ranking at the highest levels nationally and with visible impact overseas. Additionally, this section discusses these industries' upcoming challenges and opportunities in the context of the role of rail. The original content for each sector was originally developed as part of the 2022 SFP.

Rice Production & Processing

Rice production is an important contributor to the U.S. economy and the food supply both domestically and abroad. Arkansas contributes nearly half of all rice produced in the U.S., including the majority of rice produced in the eastern half of the country.

In 2024, U.S. rice export was valued at $2.46 billion. The top three export markets are Mexico ($442 million), Japan ($295 million), and Haiti ($266 million).[41] Exports include rough (unmilled) rice, parboiled rice, brown rice, and fully milled (white) rice. Although the U.S. exports a significant amount of rice, over the past five years, the U.S. has imported, on average, more that 14 percent of its total supply of rice.[42]

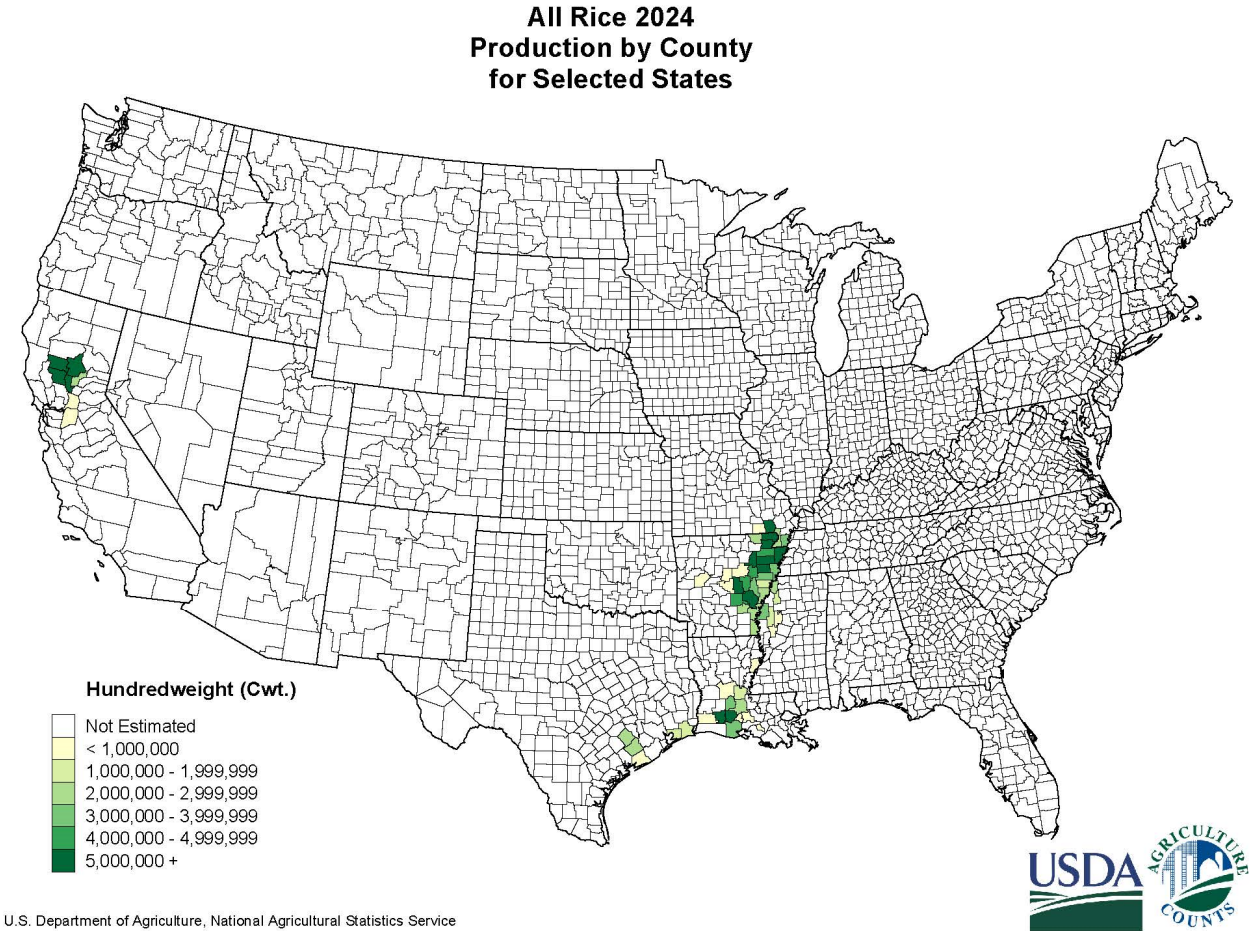
Two of the four top rice producing regions in the U.S. are partially or completed located within Arkansas: the Mississippi Delta (which also includes parts of Mississippi, Missouri, and Louisiana) and the Arkansas Grand Prairie. The rice industry is concentrated in the eastern part of the Arkansas, with Poinsett, Jackson, and Arkansas counties producing the greatest amount, and totaling above one fifth of the state production. The concentration of rice production by county is shown in Figure 2.14. Rice growers in the state produced more than 10.9 billion pounds of rice in 2024. Output varies from year to year based on rice yields per harvested acre, which may be influenced by factors such as weather, drought, and crop rotation.

The following inputs are required to grow rice: rice seed, fertilizers, and pesticides for the crop itself along with heavy farming equipment to work the land. In Arkansas, rice is usually planted in April and harvested in August. Rice plants are submerged in between two and four inches of water for weed control and to improve the absorption of nutrients that allow the crop to flourish. With access to an abundant supply of water, the lowland areas of eastern Arkansas and the Mississippi River Delta provide an effective location for rice production. Once the plants grow to a height of approximately four feet, they are harvested and brought to onsite or offsite storage and distribution facilities.

[41] https://www.fas.usda.gov/commodities/rice

[42] https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/crops/rice/rice-sector-at-a-glance/

Figure 2.14 U.S. Rice Production by County, 2024



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture.[43]

Opportunities and challenges for the production of rice were identified through industry research and one-on-one interviews with industry stakeholders in Arkansas. A key challenge in relation to rice farming is flooding. Farmed in water-rich land, rice is particularly vulnerable to extreme flash-flood events.[44] In 2021 for example, severe floods caused the near-total loss of over 300,000 acres of rice in the southeast portion of the state.[45] Furthermore, nearly every Arkansas county is expected to see an increased flood risk in the future, especially those in the eastern portion of the state where rice is grown. In relation to the statewide transportation network, the challenges are twofold. Flooding can increase infrastructure degradation and

[43] Note that production is expressed as hundredweight or cwt. A hundredweight is equivalent to 100 pounds.

[44] https://soilcrop.tamu.edu/rice-researcher-addresses-plant-survival-during-extended-flooding/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CSince%20rice%20naturally%20grows%20in,the%20crop%2C%E2%80%9D%20she%20said.

[45] https://www.ricefarming.com/departments/breaking-news/floods-cause-200-million-plus-in-crop-damage-in-se-arkansas/

require detours and rerouting away from vulnerable links. Additionally, flooding has the potential to impact and alter agricultural output, and corresponding freight traffic.

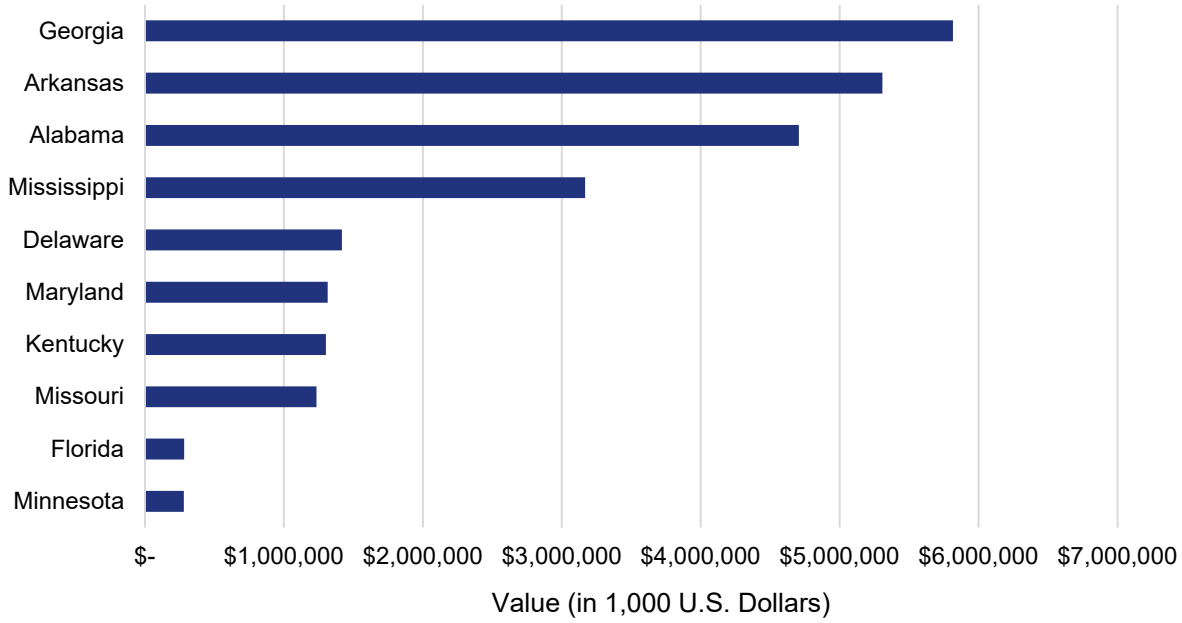
Role of Rail and other Freight Modes

Rail, along with truck and barge support the rice industry. Rail or barge is used to transport heavy inputs and outputs to and from broader markets while trucks are used for first- and last-mile connections on farm-to-market roads. Multiple opportunities and challenges exist with respect to freight transportation access and service. In direct relation to agriculture, a recent STB hearing identified significant impacts to the industry as a result of railroad delays impacting the ability to acquire necessary fertilizer and chemicals. These delays are driven by factors such as reductions in rail service and labor challenges.[46] This is concerning to many Arkansas shippers, who prefer shipping bulk rice via rail as it is more cost effective than by truck.

Poultry Production & Processing

The U.S. has a large and growing poultry industry, with an inventory of over 520 million chickens and 218 million turkeys. It is a major consumer and significant exporter of poultry products. For the last decade, the U.S. has exported about 7 billion pounds of broiler, chicken that is bred and raised specifically for meat production, annually. Additionally, the U.S. exported about 515 million pounds of turkey, with 68 percent, bound for Mexico in 2023.[47] At the state level, Arkansas is the second top state based on total value of broilers (Figure 2.15).

Figure 2.15 Top 10 U.S. States Based on Total Value of Broilers, 2023



Source: Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/196084/top-us-states-based-on-total-value-of-chickens/

[46] https://www.dtnpf.com/agriculture/web/ag/news/article/2022/05/02/stb-rail-service-hearing-exposes-2

[47] https://www.statista.com/topics/6263/poultry-industry-in-the-united-states/#topicHeader__wrapper

Poultry is one of the largest agriculture industries in Arkansas. According to the Poultry Federation, the sector provides nearly 175,000 jobs in the state, with over 6,500 farms in Arkansas producing some type of poultry. In 2024, poultry generated $6.7 billion (53 percent) of the total agriculture cash receipts; broilers alone contributed 44 percent .[48] Statewide totals for 2021 included 7.5 billion pounds of broiler chicken (from more than 1.05 billion broilers), 540 million pounds of turkey (from 31 million turkeys), and 4.2 billion eggs.[49] The poultry industry in Arkansas is concentrated in the western portion of the State.

The poultry business model consists of five major elements: hatcheries, feed mills, growing farms, processing plants, and distribution for final consumption. Hatcheries input breeding poultry, food, and medical products; and output young chicks and waste that can be reconverted into livestock food. Feed mills input corn, while its outputs include finished feed. Growing farms receive the outputs from hatcheries (one-week-old chicks) and feed mills as an input and are ideally located near the latter to reduce transportation costs, which usually involve trucking. Other inputs include pharmaceuticals, water, physical space, utilities, and labor. After six weeks at the growing farms, processing plants receive chickens and harvest them, at a pace of approximately 21 million per week in Arkansas.[50] Processing plants also input packaging materials and represent the largest supply by dollar value to each poultry company. As for the distribution phase, either fresh or frozen, the output is generally transported directly to the market by the poultry companies themselves.

Opportunities and challenges were identified through interviews with industry stakeholders. The industry is currently facing a labor shortage and automation of difficult repetitive tasks in challenging work environments presents an opportunity. According to industry personnel, the process of automation is expected to accelerate through the next two years. In relation to transportation, assuming demand for poultry products remains strong and automation processes will become more efficient in the upcoming years, automation has the potential to increase freight traffic into and out of poultry processing centers. A key challenge and risks exist in relation to Avian Influenza, which carries a 100 percent mortality rate for birds.

Role of Rail and other Freight Modes

While trucks are the dominant mode used by the poultry industry, rail and barges also support the industry. There is high reliability on roadway infrastructure to move heavy, bulky goods over short distances. Trucks transport inputs for each element of the poultry business model from initial inputs at hatcheries to distribution, after processing, to the market. The one exception is feed, which is generally brought by train or barge, although it is increasingly locally supplied and trucked. A share of the final distribution is also shipped by rail; overseas exports are shipped by vessel. For those components of the supply chain utilizing rail, especially for inputs and distribution, key rail carriers may include CPKC and UP, and additional short line railroads located in the western portion of Arkansas.

Strategies employed to increase the share of poultry-related goods moved by rail should consider corridors in the west side of the state, where the industry is concentrated. The roadway network serving east-west travel is dominated by I-30 and I-40. Travel north of I-40 is served by I-49, which runs north to Kansas City. This is in addition to the use of local and feeder/collector roadways to access the key thoroughfares. It is

[48] https://www.thepoultryfederation.com/resources/facts-figures

[49] Interview with Poultry Federation, May 2022.

[50] Interview with Poultry Federation, May 2022.

less likely that the industry would be able to successfully compete with barges on the Arkansas River which transport raw agricultural material, or with the barges on the Mississippi River that carry goods bound for export through Louisiana ports which would then be transferred to containers.

The heavy reliance on trucks also poses a challenge to this industry, given the observed and expected driver shortages across the U.S.[51], caused by a high turnover rate and an aging workforce.[52] Industry personnel also identified issues related to backlogs at out-of-state ports causing delays that can slow, stop, or alter regional freight traffic flows, including in and through the state.

Iron & Steel Production & Processing

Iron and steel are widely used across multiple sectors of the global economy, ranging from consumer products such as cutlery and tools to industrial equipment, construction materials, and major infrastructure systems. In 2023, the U.S. produced approximately 82 million tons of steel, making it the fourth-largest producer globally, behind China, India, and Japan.[53] Steel production in the U.S. is widely distributed across the country, with high concentrations of manufacturing in the Midwest and South. Due to an extensive infrastructure network, massive consumer base, and large urbanized population, the U.S. is the largest importer of steel in the world. In 2024, the U.S. imported 26.2 million tons of steel and exported 8.0 million tons. Canada, Brazil, and Mexico accounted for half of all imports, while Canada and Mexico accounted for nearly 90 percent of all exports.[54]

In Arkansas, the metals industry employs over 22,000 people and accounts for nearly 14 percent of total manufacturing. Located in the Northeast corner of Arkansas, Mississippi County boasts the second-largest capacity for steel production in the nation. Arkansas' major steel companies include Nucor Corporation, Big River Steel, Majestic Steel, and U.S. Steel. These companies have expanded or constructed state-of-the-art, next-generation facilities that are highly sustainable and technologically advanced. They produce many of the most advanced and sustainable steels in North America.[55, 56]

Steelmaking is an energy-intensive but efficient process. At the most basic level, steel consists primarily of iron, along with varying amounts of carbon. Depending on the specific product, nickel, molybdenum, manganese, titanium, cobalt, and other metals are also added. Raw material is heated to extremely high temperatures (upwards of 2,600°F) through the use of natural gas (transported by pipeline) or coke (coal). This process is known as primary steelmaking, which creates the base steel product. Through secondary steelmaking, the base steel product is molded and ladled into useful products, ranging from household goods to large pipes. Following any sanding, finishing, painting, and other value-added processes, products are shipped to distribution and consumer endpoints, typically using varying combinations of rail, truck, and

[51] https://www.trucking.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/ATA%20Driver%20Shortage%20Report%202021%20Executive%20Summary.FINAL_.pdf

[52] http://cerasis.com/2016/05/03/driver-shortage/

[53] https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/steel-production-by-country

[54] https://legacy.trade.gov/steel/countries/pdfs/imports-us.pdf and https://legacy.trade.gov/steel/countries/pdfs/exports-us.pdf

[55] https://www.majesticsteel.com/majestic-steel-announces-new-service-center-on-nucor-hickman-campus/

[56] https://www.arkansasedc.com/news-events/newsroom/detail/2022/01/11/u.-s.-steel-selects-osceola-arkansas-as-location-for-most-advanced-steelmaking-facility-in-north-america

barge as well as vessel if exported overseas. Approximately 98 percent of steel can be recycled, meaning scraps can be remolded and refigured into new products.[57]

Role of Rail and other Freight Modes

Rail plays a major role in supporting the steel industry. Many shippers rely on and prefer freight rail service to move large volumes of heavy raw material and products, such as pipe or coils. However, despite its overall efficiency, the turnaround time it takes to move cars from one location to another is a shortcoming. Combined with the lack of ability to track railcars in real-time, industry personnel see a need for increased efficiency and improved transparency.

As for truck and barge, stakeholders noted that changing expectations of customers have led them to ship more outbound products by truck directly to where it is needed, rather than relying on multimodal transfers. However, participants commented on a scarcity of truck drivers, which stems from challenges with driver recruitment and retention. Also, additional barge services are needed in the southbound direction. Oftentimes, there is demand for outbound transport of intermediate and finished products in this direction, but no services are available. As such, industry personnel suggested that a partnership could be helpful to establish increased service along this route. The lack of certain barge services could be an opportunity for targeting future rail endeavors. To expand the share of the market supported by rail, key improvements include infrastructure to reduce the amount of time these movements take, and technology improvements to increase transparency, including offering monitoring abilities to shippers and receivers.

2.7.2 Freight Demand & Growth

This section evaluates freight rail demand and projected growth using FAF Version 5.2 data (FAF5) and the STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample for Arkansas. Tonnage and value were analyzed for a base year of 2019, with projections through 2050. This analysis includes an assessment of total tonnage and value, directional breakdown, top commodities, top state trade partners, supplemented by an assessment of intermodal and carload service types. More detail on these data sources is as follows:

- **Freight Analysis Framework version 5.2 Database**: The FAF, produced through a partnership between Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) and FHWA, integrates data from a variety of sources to create a comprehensive picture of freight movement among states and major metropolitan areas by all modes of transportation. Starting with data from the 2017 Commodity Flow Survey (CFS) and international trade data from the Census Bureau, FAF incorporates data from agriculture, extraction, utility, construction, service, and other sectors. FAF version 5.2 provides estimates for tonnage and value by regions (multi-county or state FAF zones) of origin and destination, a 2-digit Standard Classification of Transported Goods (SCTG) commodity type, and mode. Data is available for the base year of 2017 and forecasts from 2020 through 2050 in 5-year intervals. FAF 2017–2050 data was disaggregated to obtain truck, water, air, pipeline, and other flows at the county level for the state of Arkansas. Growth factors for 2017–2050 data were used to estimate 2019 disaggregated FAF flows. Additionally, growth factors estimated from FAF for rail (carload equivalent) mode and multiple modes

[57] https://www.reliance-foundry.com/blog/how-is-steel-made#:~:text=At%20the%20most%20basic%2C%20steel,than%20is%20correct%20for%20steel.

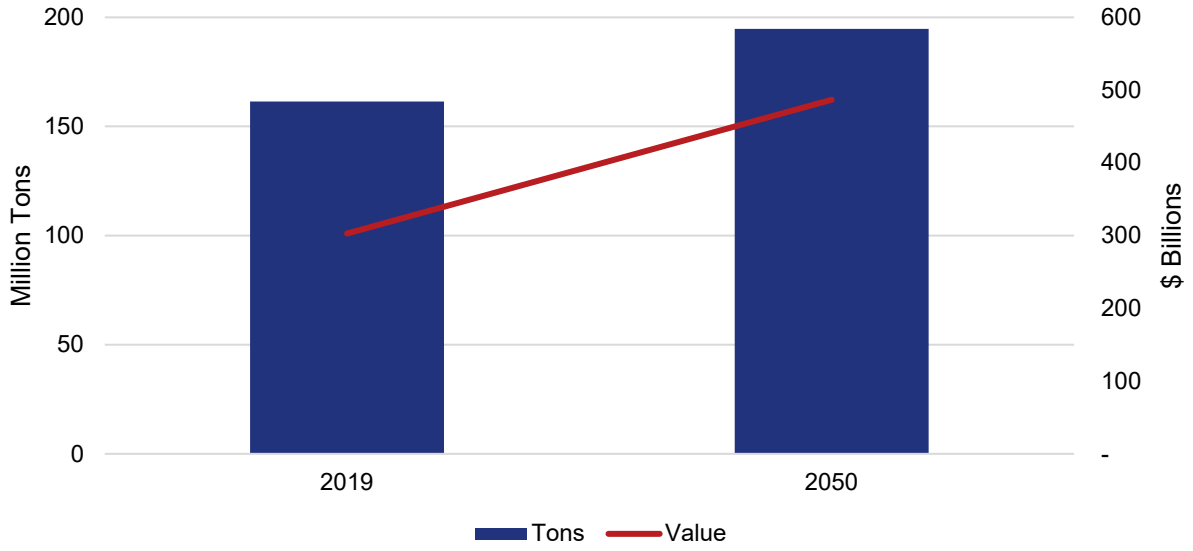
and mail mode (which includes rail intermodal) were applied to 2019 Carload Waybill Sample data to forecast the future year (2050) freight rail traffic.

- **2019 Carload Waybill Sample for Arkansas**: The Association of American Railroads (AAR) collects a stratified sample of carload waybills annually for the Surface Transportation Board (STB) from railroads that terminated at least 4,500 carloads each year for each of the previous three years, or which move five percent or more of any state's total rail traffic. ARDOT obtained the confidential version of the Waybill Sample, which includes detailed shipment data including origin county, destination county, 7-digit level Standard Transportation Commodity Code (STCC) commodity type, equipment type, and tonnage. This data informed the base year freight rail traffic. In this analysis, the rail traffic flows in the 2019 Carload Waybill Sample data were converted to a 2-digit Standard Classification of Transported Goods (SCTC) equivalent commodity flows database using a lookup table.

Statewide Freight Rail Activity

In 2019, more than 160 million tons of freight valued at more than $300 billion moved throughout the Arkansas freight rail network (Figure 2.16). By 2050, tonnage is expected to grow by 20 percent to nearly 200 million tons by 2050, valued at nearly $500 billion.

Figure 2.16 Total Freight Rail Tons and Value in Arkansas, 2019–2050



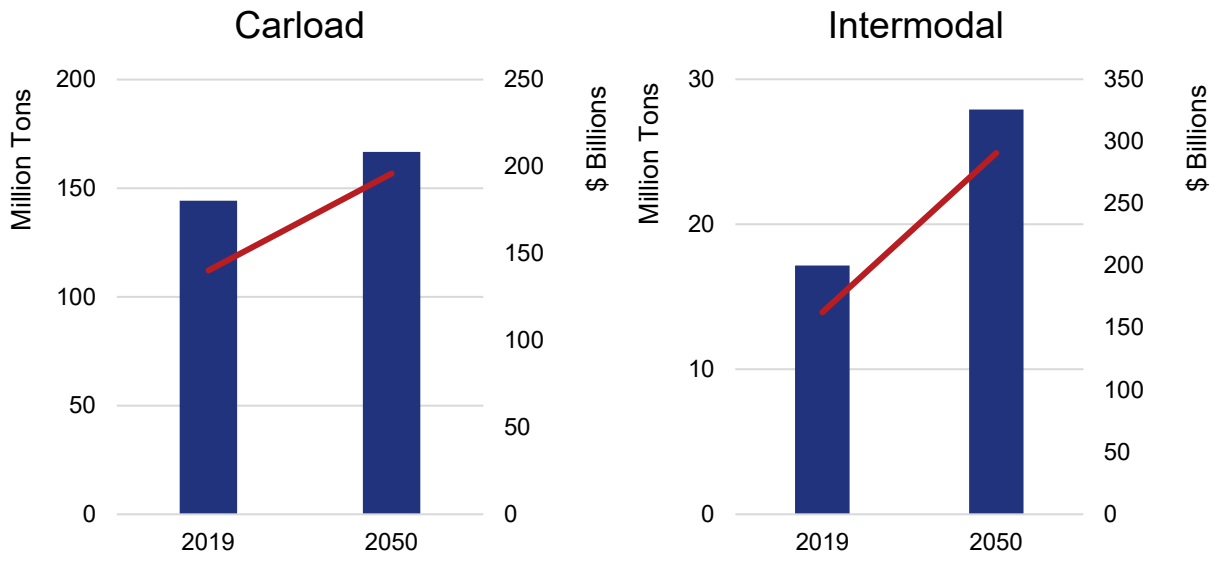
Source: 2022 Disaggregated FAF5.2 and confidential STB Carload Waybill Sample

Freight rail tonnage and value are further broken out by carload and intermodal totals in Figure 2.17. The distinguishing of carload and intermodal traffic refers to the type of railcar and corresponding commodities transported. Carload traffic refers to various types of railcars used primarily, but not exclusively, to transport bulk commodities such as aggregates, grain, or coal. This includes hopper cars, tank cars, flat cars, box cars, and gondolas. Intermodal traffic refers to containerized units able to be double stacked for rail transport, and directly transferred to other modes, including truck and vessel. Intermodal traffic consists of a wide range of commodities, primarily in finished or intermediate stages of production, including automobile parts, equipment, packaged food, toys, and various household and everyday items.

As shown in Figure 2.17, carload tonnage is expected to increase by 15 percent through 2050 to approximately 167 million tons. During this time, total carload value is expected to increase by 40 percent to approximately $196 billion. Intermodal tonnage is expected to increase from 17 million to 28 million by 2050. Total intermodal value is expected to rise significantly from $163 billion to $291 billion. Based on these figures, carload represents the majority of transported tonnage, although intermodal tonnage is expected to increase at a faster rate through 2050. On the other hand, the smaller amount of intermodal tonnage is much more valuable. Furthermore, intermodal value is also expected to increase at a much higher rate through 2050. These differences in carload and intermodal patterns are expected given the composition of commodities transported.

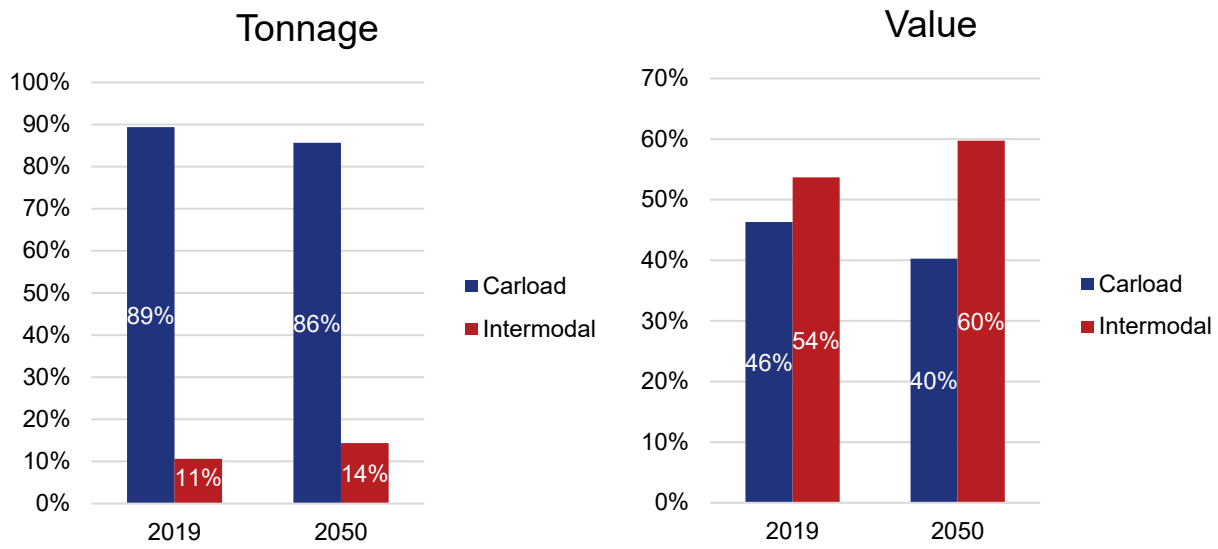
The breakdown of carload and intermodal figures is further illustrated in Figure 2.18. Total tonnage is comprised primarily of carload traffic, a trend that is largely expected to remain in place through 2050, despite a small increase in intermodal percentage. Despite the small proportion of total tonnage, intermodal traffic comprised over half of total 2019 freight rail traffic value. Through 2050, intermodal traffic is expected to comprise 60 percent of freight rail traffic value, despite smaller increases in tonnage percentage. This indicates that intermodal traffic will be increasingly comprised of higher value and finished products, in comparison to carload bulk commodities.

Figure 2.17 Freight Rail Tons and Value by Service Type, 2019–2050



Source: 2022 Disaggregated FAF5.2 and confidential STB Carload Waybill Sample

Figure 2.18 Proportion of Carload vs. Intermodal Traffic in Arkansas, 2019–2050



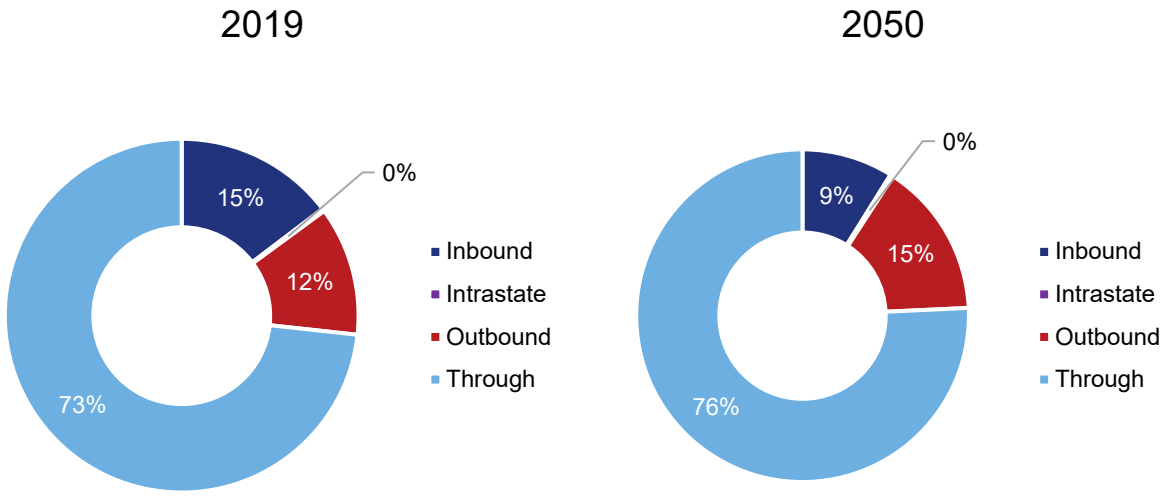
Source: 2022 Disaggregated FAF5.2 and confidential STB Carload Waybill Sample

Directional Split

The directional breakdown of Arkansas freight rail traffic is shown in Figure 2.19 for tonnage and in Figure 2.20 for value. The vast majority of traffic, both in terms of tonnage and value, is comprised of through traffic. This can be attributed to multiple factors, including the state's geography, position within the national freight rail network, and proximity to major industrial markets. Arkansas, located in a constrained position, ranks in the bottom half of states in both physical area and population. At the same time, a large portion of the state's freight rail network is comprised of Class I trackage along major corridors and within close or immediate proximity to national freight generators and hubs such as Dallas, Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, and Memphis. As a result, a significant amount of traffic into and out of these freight hubs passes through Arkansas on the way to intermediate and final destinations.

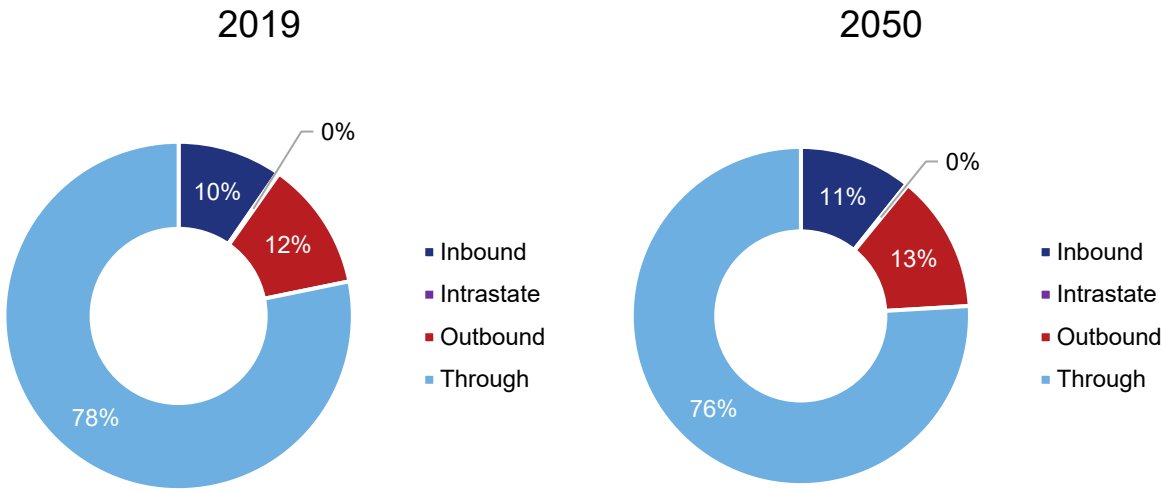
Similarly, intrastate traffic comprises only a negligible amount of both totals, given the relatively small size of the state. These trends are expected through 2050. In terms of tonnage, inbound tonnage comprised a slightly higher proportion in comparison to outbound. Through 2050, outbound tonnage is expected to comprise a higher proportion, given a proportion of 15 percent outbound tonnage and just 9 percent inbound tonnage. In terms of value, both inbound and outbound proportions are expected to rise slightly. This is as a result of a slight decrease in the total share of through traffic in 2050.

Figure 2.19 Rail Direction Split by Tonnage, 2019–2050



Source: 2022 Disaggregated FAF5.2 and confidential STB Carload Waybill Sample

Figure 2.20 Rail Direction Split by Value, 2019–2050



Source: 2022 Disaggregated FAF5.2 and confidential STB Carload Waybill Sample

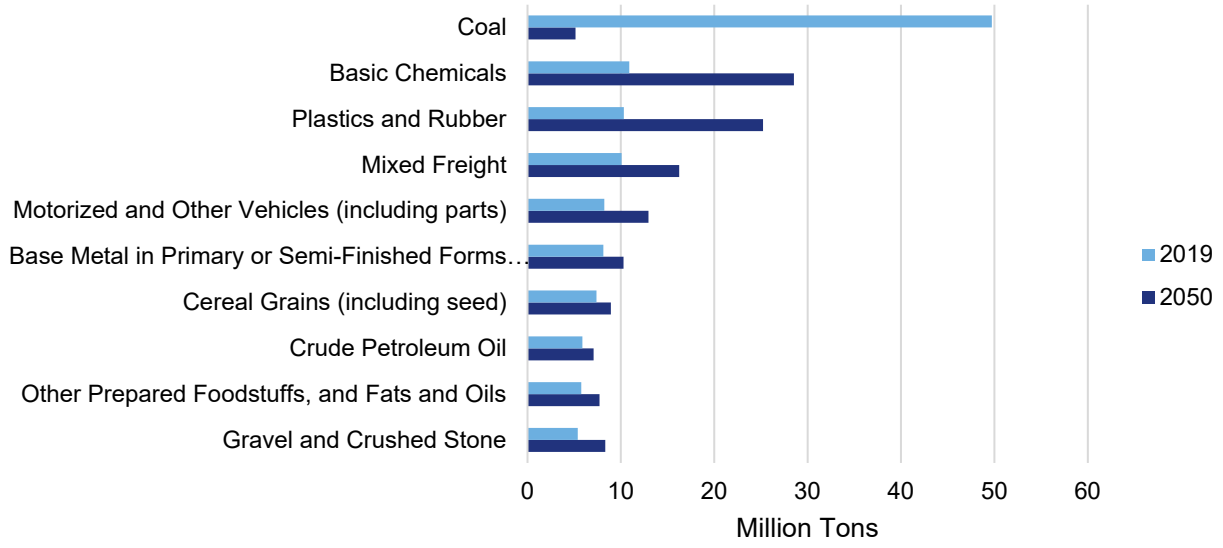
Top Commodities

Top commodities by tonnage across both carload and intermodal traffic are shown in Figure 2.21. In 2019, coal was by far the most dominant commodity by tonnage at nearly 50 million tons. The dominance of coal can be attributed to its broad and widespread use as a source for electricity production. Given its physical characteristics as a bulk commodity, coal has primarily been transported by rail. In 2020, 67 percent of all

coal shipments reached their final destination by rail. However, due to the rise of other cost competitive fuels (such as natural gas), and environmental concerns, the use of coal for power generation has declined significantly from its peak in 2008. Correspondingly, between 2008 and 2020, originated coal carloads across the U.S. dropped by 61 percent. The decline of coal is expected to continue, given the cost effectiveness and availability of natural gas.[58] Through 2050, coal is expected to decline by 90 percent to just 5 million tons, placing it well outside of the top ten statewide commodities.

In contrast, significant increases in other commodities such as basic chemicals and plastic/rubber are expected.[59] Other top commodities expected to increase include vehicles and vehicle parts, metal, and aggregates (gravel and crushed stone), which further support a wide range of industries from manufacturing and construction. As a result, increases in the top rail commodities, across all directions, are largely expected to offset coal declines through 2050, as indicated by projected increases in total tonnage (Figure 2.16).

Figure 2.21 Top 10 Rail Commodities by Tonnage, All Directions, 2019–2050



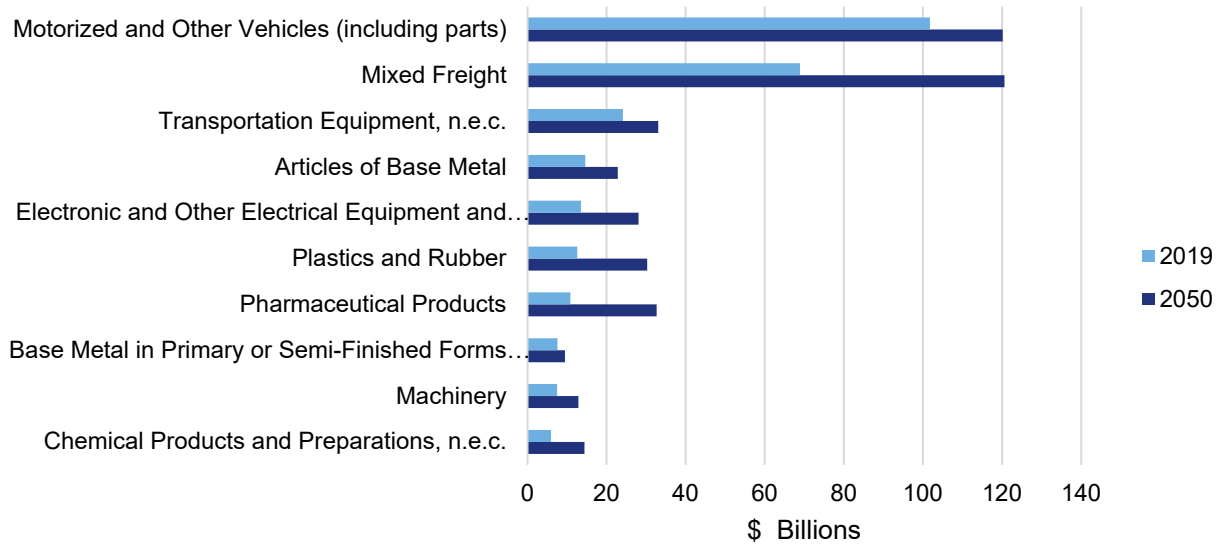
Source: 2022 Disaggregated FAF5.2 and confidential STB Carload Waybill Sample

As shown in Figure 2.22, the composition of top commodities by value largely differs from those based on tonnage. The difference in composition of commodities is attributed to the characteristics of the commodities themselves. Bulk commodities such as coal and aggregates that are typically quite heavy in nature tend to have a much lower value on a per-unit basis. This is in comparison to commodities such as pharmaceuticals and electronics, which have a value largely derived from their versatility as finished, accessible consumer products. Through 2050, vehicles and mixed freight are expected to remain the top commodities. As the term suggests, mixed freight refers to a wide range of commodities, goods, and finished products transported together. Additional increases in total value are expected for pharmaceuticals, plastic/rubber, and electronics.

[58] Association of American Railroads 'What Railroads Haul: Coal' Available at https://www.aar.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/AAR-Coal-Fact-Sheet.pdf

[59] Association of American Railroads 'What Railroads Haul: Chemicals' Available at https://www.aar.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/AAR-Chemicals-Fact-Sheet.pdf

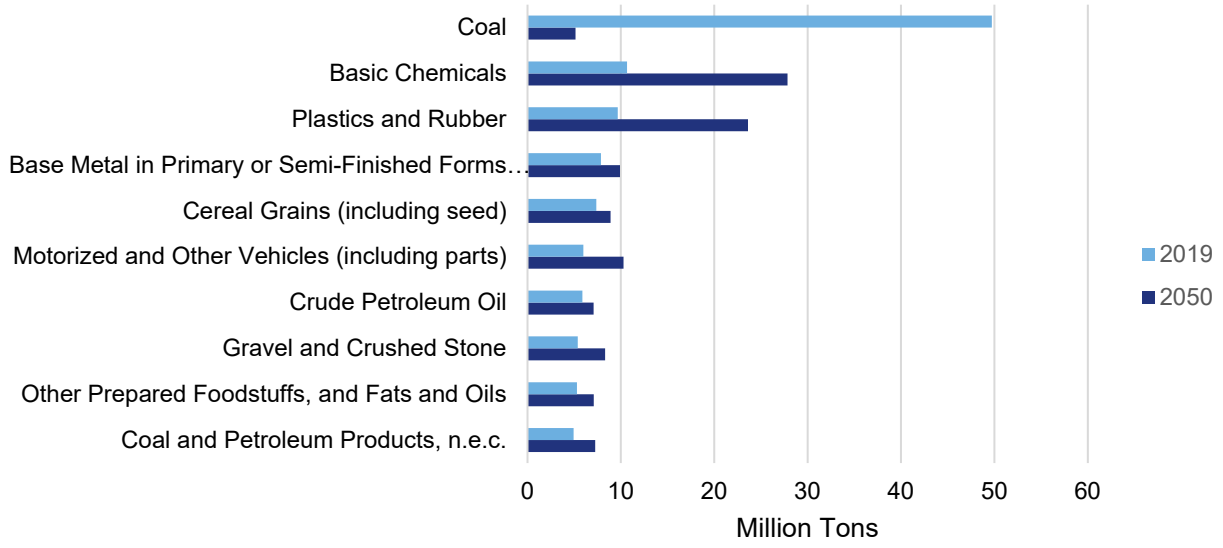
Figure 2.22 Top 10 Rail Commodities by Value, All Directions, 2019–2050



Source: 2022 Disaggregated FAF5.2 and confidential STB Carload Waybill Sample

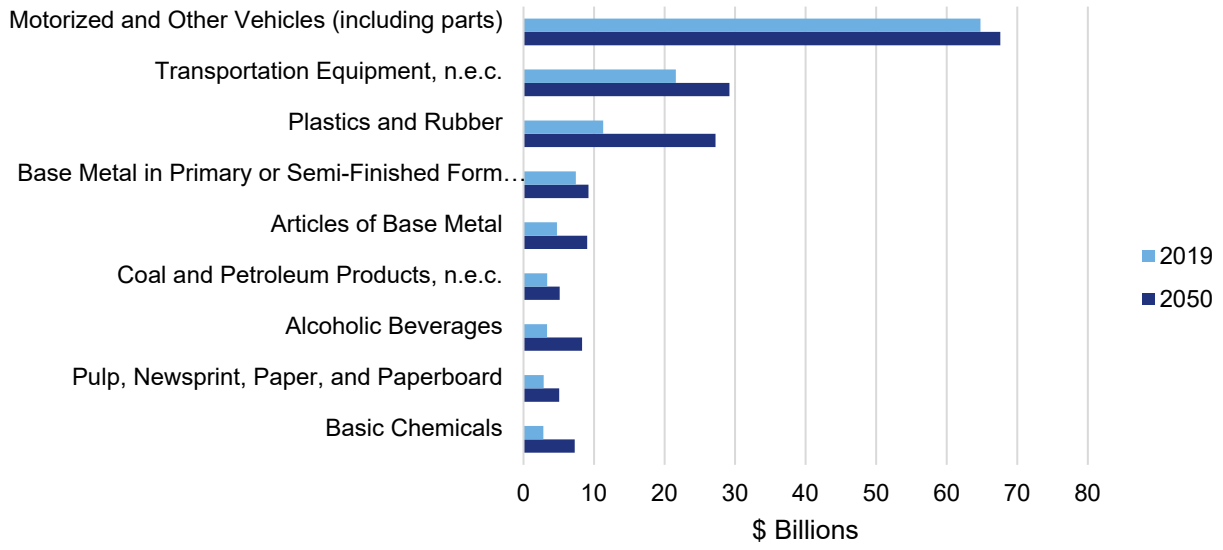
Top commodity tonnage and value are further broken out by carload and intermodal traffic in the following figures. Top carload commodity tonnage largely mirrors total tonnage for both types of traffic (Figure 2.23). This includes the top commodities of coal, plastics/rubber, and basic chemicals which are almost exclusively transported by carload. By value, top commodities include vehicles, transportation equipment, and plastic/rubber (Figure 2.24).

Figure 2.23 Top 10 Carload Rail Commodities by Tonnage, 2019–2050



Source: 2022 Disaggregated FAF5.2 and confidential STB Carload Waybill Sample

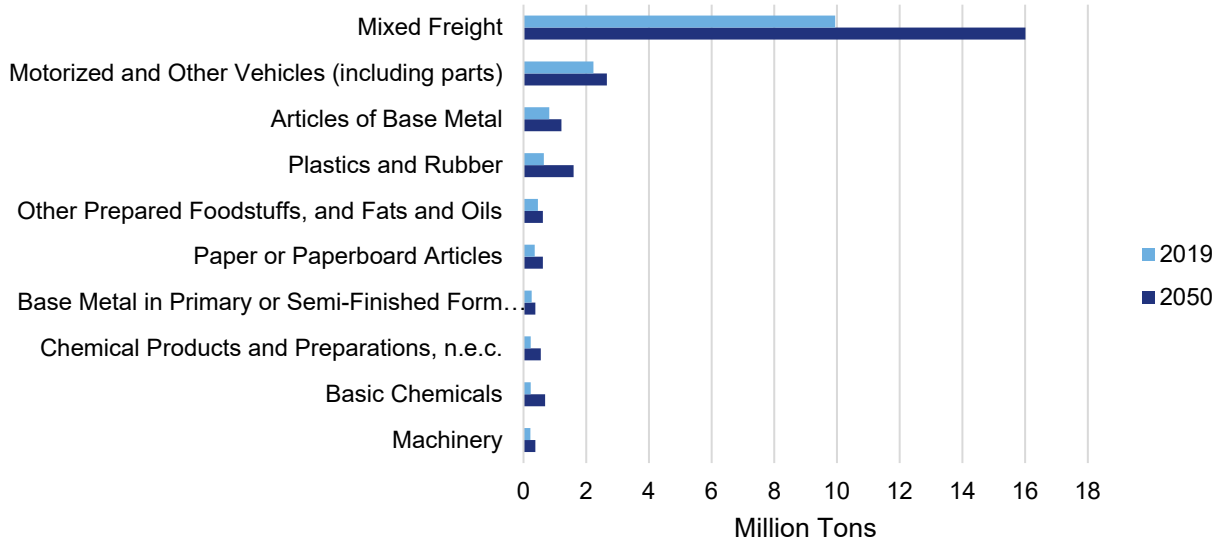
Figure 2.24 Top 10 Carload Rail Commodities by Value, 2019–2050



Source: 2022 Disaggregated FAF5.2 and confidential STB Carload Waybill Sample

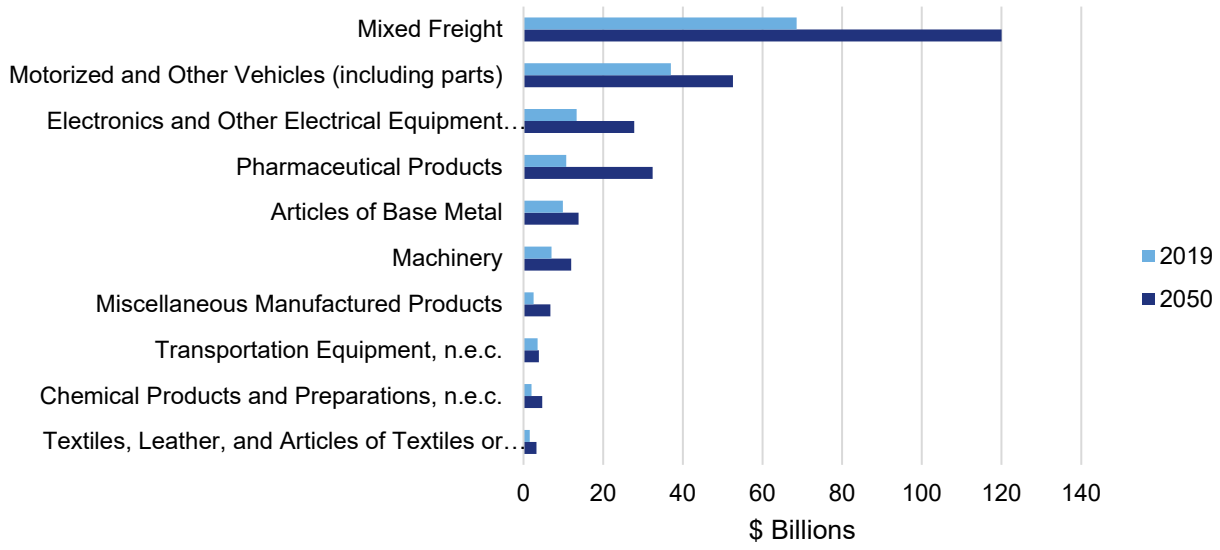
Top intermodal commodities by tonnage are shown in Figure 2.25 and by value in Figure 2.26. By tonnage, intermodal traffic is largely comprised of mixed freight. With a large increase from 10 to 16 million tons expected through 2050, this trend is expected to remain in place. By value, mixed freight is also the top commodity, followed by vehicles. Through 2050, large increases in value are also expected for electronics and pharmaceuticals as well.

Figure 2.25 Top 10 Intermodal Rail Commodities by Tonnage, 2019–2050



Source: 2022 Disaggregated FAF5.2 and confidential STB Carload Waybill Sample

Figure 2.26 Top 10 Intermodal Rail Commodities by Value, 2019–2050



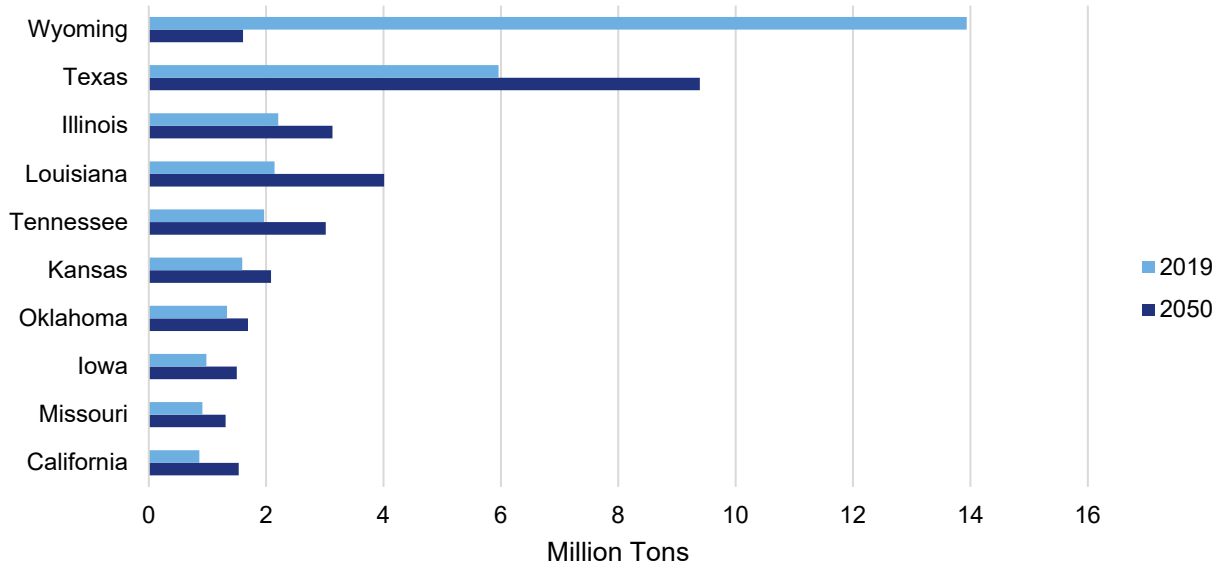
Source: 2022 Disaggregated FAF5.2 and confidential STB Carload Waybill Sample

Top Trading Partners

Top geographic trading partners by carload and intermodal haulage are provided in the following figures, beginning with carload tonnage (Figure 2.27). In 2019, carload tonnage was largely dominated by inbound traffic in the form of coal from Wyoming. Correspondingly, Wyoming inbound tonnage is expected to drop significantly through 2050. Outside of Wyoming, most carload tonnage, including through 2050, is expected from nearby states, with the most sizable increases expected from those states directly bordering Arkansas, including Texas, Louisiana, and Tennessee.

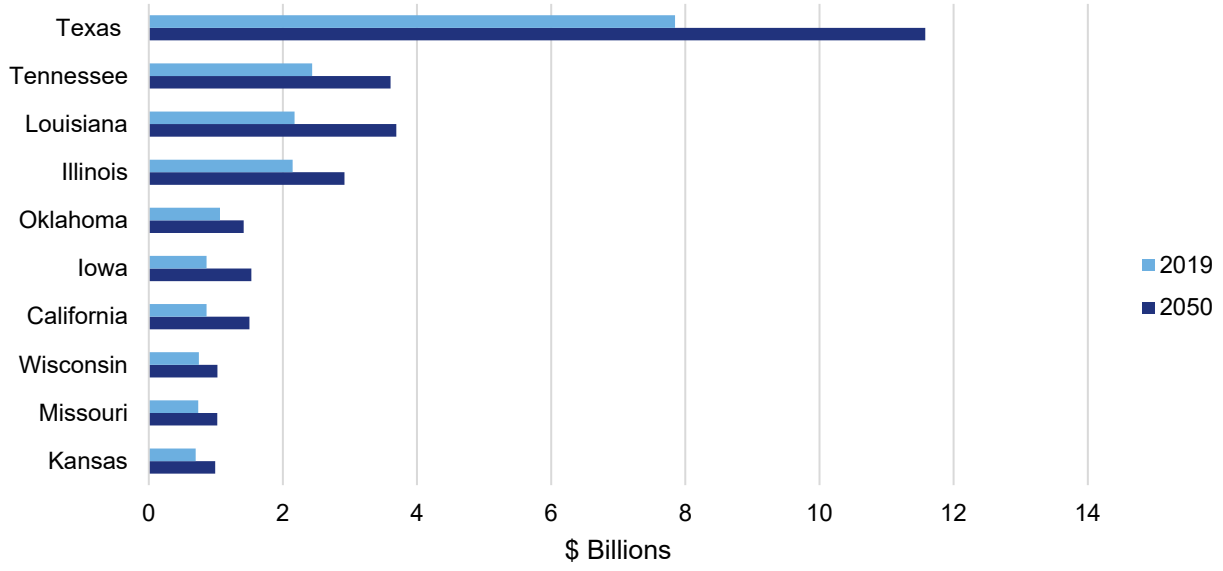
As shown in Figure 2.28, the top trading partners by carload value largely mirror those by carload tonnage. The exception to this is Wyoming, and its corresponding coal tonnage. This is expected given the characteristics of coal as a heavy, but lower value commodity. As a result, the majority of top trading partner value stems from trade with neighboring and nearby states, including Texas, Tennessee, and Louisiana. Through 2050, sizable increases in total value are expected for each of the top trading partners.

Figure 2.27 Top 10 Carload Trading Partners by Tonnage, 2019–2050



Source: 2022 Disaggregated FAF5.2 and confidential STB Carload Waybill Sample

Figure 2.28 Top 10 Carload Trading Partners by Value, 2019–2050



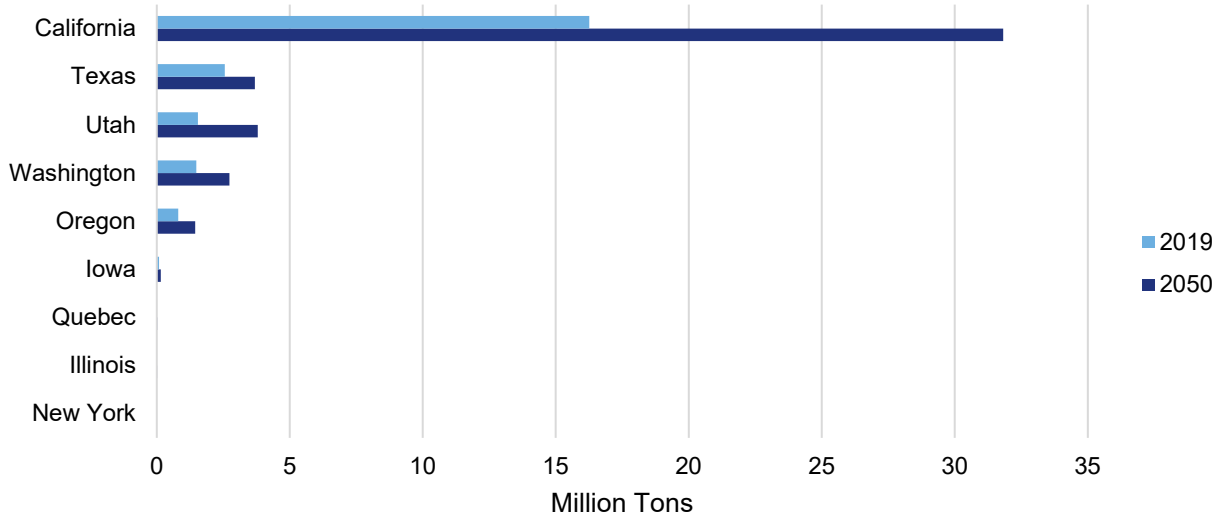
Source: 2022 Disaggregated FAF5.2 and confidential STB Carload Waybill Sample

The geographic composition of intermodal trading partners by tonnage (Figure 2.29) differs noticeably from carload. For intermodal tonnage, outbound tonnage to California comprised the large majority of traffic in 2019 at just over 15 billion tons. Such traffic is expected to increase significantly to over 30 billion tons through 2050. Given the presence of the other West Coast states within the limited range of intermodal trading partners, the majority of this tonnage is likely bound for West Coast ports such as Long Beach and

Seattle. Traffic into and out of Texas, the second largest intermodal tonnage trading partner, may be a mix of domestic and port-bound (Houston, Brownsville, and land border crossings with Mexico) freight.

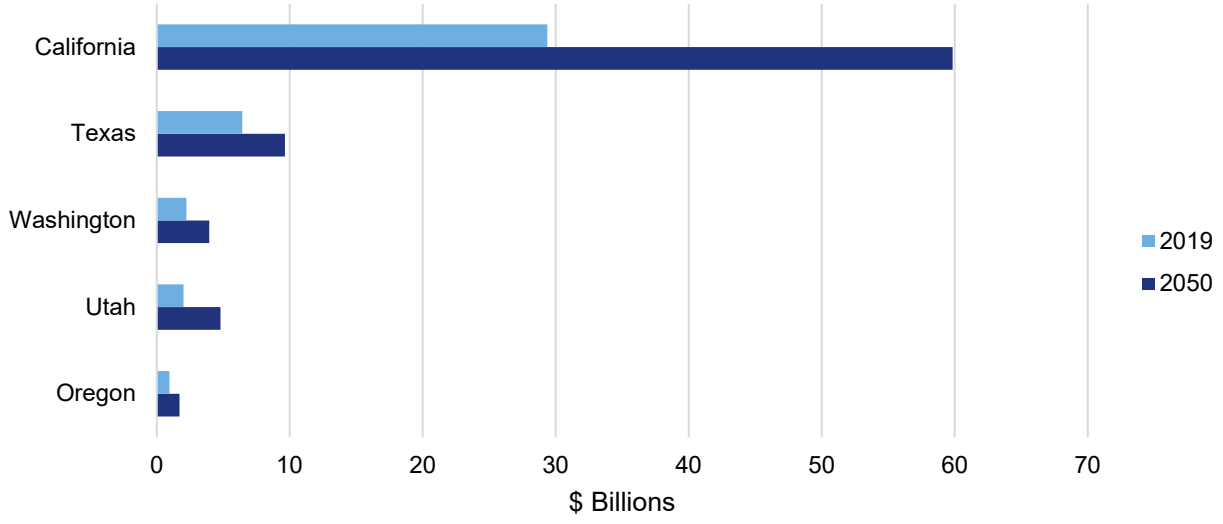
Similarly, the top intermodal trading partners by value (Figure 2.30) mirrors those by tonnage, a limited group of states overall. The composition of these partners includes California, followed by Texas, Washington, Oregon, and Utah, with sizable increases expected for each of these locations through 2050.

Figure 2.29 Top 10 Intermodal Trading Partners by Tonnage, 2019–2050



Source: 2022 Disaggregated FAF5.2 and confidential STB Carload Waybill Sample

Figure 2.30 Top Intermodal Trading Partners by Value, 2019–2050



Source: 2022 Disaggregated FAF5.2 and confidential STB Carload Waybill Sample

2.7.3 Passenger Rail Demand & Growth

Of the $66 billion the IIJA appropriated for rail, at least $12 billion was designated for network expansion outside of the Northeast Corridor. The law also authorized $7.5 billion for the Federal-State Partnership for the Intercity Passenger Rail program, contingent on future appropriations. As well as additional funding for capital projects, federal support for passenger rail has manifested in rule changes that allow Amtrak to use 10 percent of National Network appropriations for the purposes of "corridor development," including the payment of operating expenses.[60]

It remains to be seen how exactly Amtrak may spend the funds from IIJA, but it released a network map in 2021 detailing its vision for new and enhanced service.[61] Amtrak's network expansions may impact ridership in Arkansas by giving riders more destinations, while network improvements may lead to a decrease in travel time to existing destinations. Recent – as well as planned – improvements on a large section of track in Illinois will allow for shorter travel times on the Texas Eagle between Arkansas and Chicago.[62] In the long-term, network expansion on the Dallas-College Station-Houston corridor could also boost ridership numbers for travelers starting or ending their trips in Arkansas. Additional information on potential service improvements and expansions being considered by Amtrak is provided in Chapter 3.

In the near-term, accurately forecasting ridership is a difficult task. On the one hand, as previously discussed, ridership has declined since the early 2010s and has continued to remain on a downward trend. However, from a low in 2021, ridership has continued to increase significantly, with ridership leveling off to near pre-pandemic 2019 levels. As of 2024, post-pandemic ridership levels have continued to increase. This is despite the fact the slow growth along the Texas Eagle relative to the growth rate across the entire Amtrak system. Current Amtrak ridership has surpassed estimates by one measure developed and assumed by Amtrak. [63]

2.7.4 Fuel Cost Trends

Figure 2.31 shows retail diesel fuel prices in the Gulf Coast Petroleum Administration for Defense District 3 (PADD 3), which includes New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Alabama. Since 2014, prices have fluctuated noticeably. This includes lows in 2016 and 2020 of just over $2.00 per gallon. Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, prices fluctuated considerably. While prices have

[60] https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/if/if11920

[61] https://www.amtrakconnectsus.com/

[62] https://media.amtrak.com/2023/05/110-mph-schedules-coming-for-amtrak-chicago-st-louis-corridor/#:~:text=CHICAGO%20%E2%80%93%20Amtrak%20and%20the%20Illinois%20Department%20of,Amtrak%20Lincoln%20Service%20round-trips%20and%20the%20Texas%20Eagle.

[63] https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/businessplanning/Amtrak-Service-Asset-Line-Plans-FY22-27.pdf

Amtrak's ridership assumptions are based on the following:

-A return to pre-COVID ridership levels by 2024, based on a continuation of 2020–2021 growth rates.

-A return to pre-COVID capacity levels by 2023.

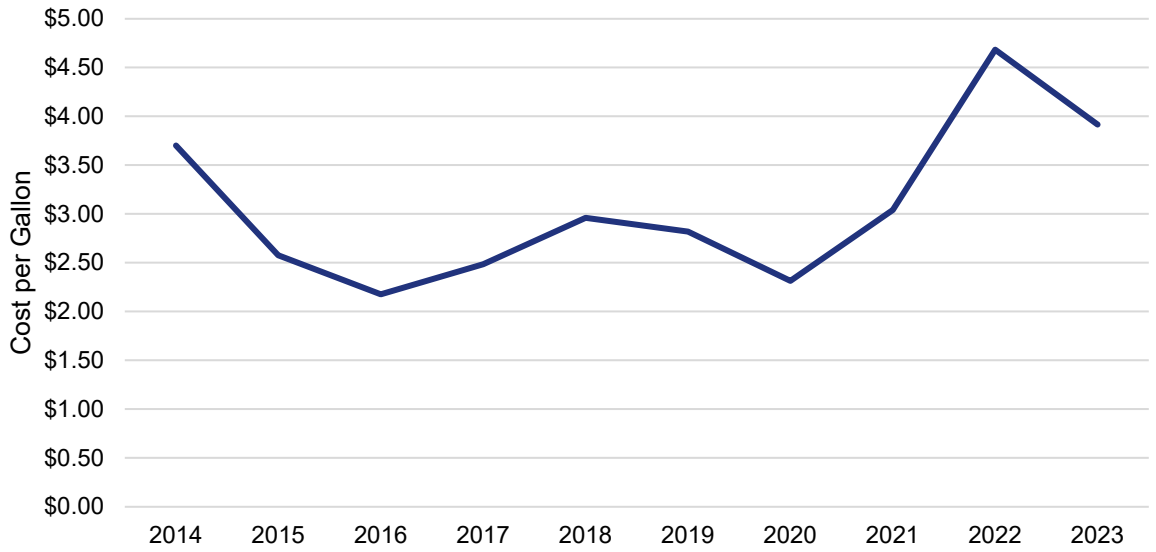
-Continuation of most major capital priorities, and prioritization of the most pressing capital and maintenance needs across the system.

-Significant increases in capital spending and upgrades across the network.

come down through 2023 from a high of over $4.50 in 2022, they still remain above pre-pandemic levels. As of the date of this writing (August 2025), retail diesel prices have further come down from their 2022 highs to approximately $3.40 per gallon.

While looking at longer term trends, current values are not historical maximums in real terms, and fuel is somewhat more affordable than in previous years. There have been several recent events that have kept fuel prices elevated, including the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its associated sanctions, as well as ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. Similarly, there also have been a few events lowering oil derivatives prices in the past, most recently the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic with its associated slowdown in activity.

Figure 2.31 Cost of Diesel Gallon in the Gulf Coast Region, 2014–2023



Source: Energy Information Administration; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI-U.

Regionally speaking, fuel price varies to some degree within the U.S. Arkansas' proximity to Texas and its refineries may contribute to significantly lower prices compared with other regions. Despite this proximity to refineries, prices in the region rose significantly following the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. This rise in prices can be attributed to global supply chain shortages and corresponding inflation.

Some endeavors, which may impact fuel costs and diesel fuel dependency in the future, include lithium-battery-powered locomotives, hydrogen fuel cells for hybrid trains, and compressed natural gas. These alternatives, although still experimental to a degree, make freight transportation more independent from oil prices.[64]

2.7.5 Rail Congestion Trends

Rail congestion can stem from multiple shortcomings of the multimodal infrastructure system. This can result in the need for upgrades, such as double tracking certain rail segments, extending trackage and

[64] Luvishis, A. (2021, February 12). *Zero-Emission Locomotives on U.S. Railways?* Railway Age. https://www.railwayage.com/news/zero-emission-locomotives-on-u-s-railways/

siding to reach new locations, or improving weight or logistical restrictions along certain bridges. The need to address bottlenecks is important to prevent backlogs and traffic jams along not just freight railroads, but also the entire multimodal freight network. Freight railroads and other stakeholders identified the following bottleneck locations across the Arkansas freight rail network:

- **Sedgwick, between Hoxie and Jonesboro:** BNSF indicated that extending siding would help alleviate some rail congestion.
- **Fort Smith:** Pioneer Lines indicated that FSR trains must traverse a bridge controlled by another short line (Arkansas & Missouri Railroad) to access the interchange with UP. According to Pioneer Lines, this requires significant coordination of schedules, which can be impacted by various factors, including weather. Additionally, FSR will soon reach full capacity and will require the construction of additional trackage. The railroad is experiencing an annual growth rate of 5 percent.
- **Little Rock:** The Little Rock Port Authority indicated a bottleneck related to an at-grade crossing with Fourche Dam Pike, which has a close proximity interchange with I-440.
- **West Memphis:** WMBR indicated the desire for additional trackage at the Port of West Memphis to accommodate increased carloads. The railroad stated that there are plans to build this additional trackage.

It is noted that Genesee & Wyoming reported no bottlenecks or congestion issues along the track that it owns and operates.

2.7.6 Highway Congestion Trends

Rail transportation can relieve congestion by diverting freight and passengers from other modes to train services. In 2023, ARDOT identified the most important truck freight bottlenecks in the state 2018 FHWA guidance[65] and NCHRP Report 854[66] released in 2017. ARDOT also took the following into consideration when selecting the priority truck freight bottleneck areas:

- Road segments with high daily truck volumes;
- Level of service (LOS) information for all roadway routes;
- Areas of steep uphill or downhill vertical grades;
- Segments with relatively high truck-involved crashes per mile;
- Construction zones; and
- National Performance Management Research Data Set (NPMRDS) data to calculate daily total delay per mile of truck travel.

[65] https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/tpm/guidance/hop18070.pdf

[66] https://www.trb.org/Main/Blurbs/176115.aspx

After using this data to screen locations, ARDOT arrived at this list of fifteen truck freight bottleneck locations, as shown in Table 2.38.

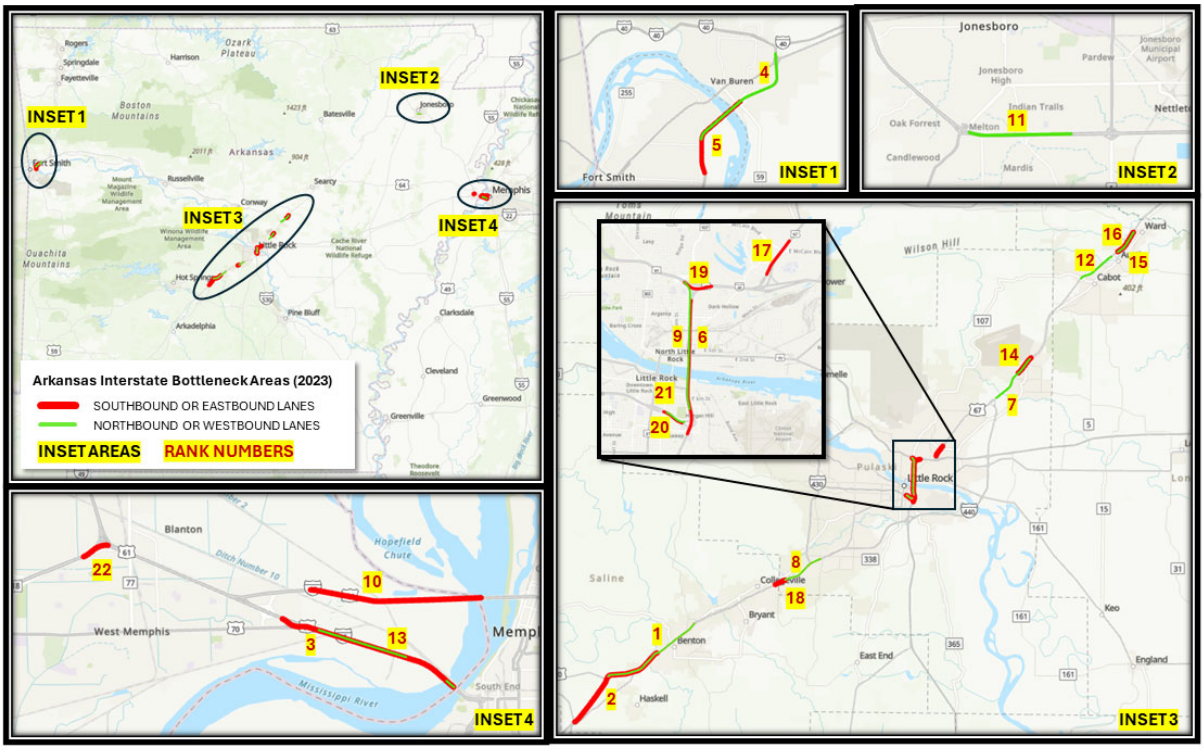
Table 2.38 Truck Freight Bottlenecks in Arkansas, 2023

ID	Segment	Description	Cause
1	I-30 WB	Exit 111 – Thomas Rd	Construction (CA0601)
2	I-30 EB	Exits 111–116	Construction (CA0601)
3	I-55 SB	Exits 1-3B to Tennessee State Line	Construction (110813)
4	I-540 WB	Exist 2–5	Construction
5	I-540 EB	Exits 3–5	Construction
6	I-30 EB	Exits 139–143	Excess Demand/Construction (CA0602)
7	US-167 NB	Exits 8–11	Construction (CA0604)
8	I-30 WB	Exits 126–129	Excess Demand
9	I-30 WB	Exits 139–144	Excess Demand/Construction (CA0602)
10	I-40 EB	Hernando DeSoto Bridge	Incidents/Maintenance
11	US-63 WB	US-49B–Hwy 1B	Excess Demand
12	US-167 NB	Hwy 321/Exit 22	Construction (AX0002 & 061642)
13	I-55 NB	Exits 1–3A to Tennessee State Line	Excess Demand
14	US-167 SB	Exits 10–11	Construction (CA0604)
15	US-167 SB	Hwy 312/Exit 22	Construction (AX0002)
16	US-167 NB	Hwy 319/Exit 25	Construction (AX0002)
17	US-167 SB	I-40–Exit 1	Excess Demand /Construction (CA0602)
18	I-30 EB	Alexander Rd/Exit 126	Excess Demand
19	I-40 EB	I-30/US-67/US-167/Exit 153	Weaving Area
20	I-630 EB	Exit 1	Weaving Area
21	I-630 WB	Exit 1	Weaving Area
22	I-40 EB	I-55/Exit 277	Weaving Area

Source: ARDOT Mid-Year Report on Truck Freight Bottlenecks, 2023.

Figure 2.32 displays the locations of these truck freight bottlenecks in yellow, overlaid with Interstate-only peak average truck speeds relative to free-flow. Generally, the identified bottlenecks reflected locations with lower average speeds (though some locations with lower average speeds were not classified as truck freight bottlenecks due to low truck volumes). The suspected cause of each bottleneck (such construction or excess demand) was also identified as shown in Table 2.38. In many cases, the cause of a bottleneck was a transient condition (such as a construction zone), not a permanent condition (such as excess demand).

Figure 2.32 Identified Truck Freight Bottlenecks in Arkansas, 2023



Source: ARDOT Mid-Year Report on Truck Freight Bottlenecks, 2023; National Performance Management Research Data Set.

In addition, the American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI) releases a list of the Top 100 Truck Bottlenecks in America each year. In recent years, no locations have been identified in Arkansas or in cities near the border of Arkansas. The closest bottlenecks identified by ATRI are in Dallas, Nashville, Tennessee, and St. Louis.[67]

ARDOT uses a multiple-objective decision analysis (MODA) tool[68] for selection of capacity projects. Project selection is driven by several factors that are relevant to highway freight mobility including travel time reliability (LOTTR), volume/capacity ratio (a measure of peak-hour recurring congestion), truck percent, and safety history (a source of travel time unreliability). Other measures that are included in the project selection process (including bridge and pavement condition) are also meaningful towards freight mobility and reliability.

ARDOT continues to make significant investments that are expected to relieve truck freight bottlenecks, such as Job CA0601 on I-30 in Central Arkansas. In addition, while I-40 from Little Rock to West Memphis does not generally have reliability issues, it experiences the highest truck volumes of any highway in Arkansas and can experience significant disruptions in freight movement due to crashes and other events.

[67] https://truckingresearch.org/2024/02/top-100-truck-bottlenecks-2024/

[68] Decision Lens

In response, ARDOT has two major ITS projects let (one on I-40 and another on U.S. Highway 70 which runs parallel to I-40) to improve reliability and resiliency of the corridor.

2.7.7 Land Use Trends

Land use and transportation depend on and affect one another in significant ways. Higher population densities potentially increase the cost-effectiveness of transit and the ability to walk and bike. Conversely, transportation costs are higher in places with low-density, rural-residential and strip commercial development patterns. It is often more affordable to build new facilities or housing on unused parcels and open land than it is to rebuild or infill in already developed areas. In addition, for areas losing population, less tax revenue may impact the ability to provide services or support transportation infrastructure. In Arkansas, there are several initiatives to explore and advance high quality, compact development that supports transit. For example, in Little Rock, Region Rock Metro has proposed redeveloping the River Cities Travel Center, the main transfer hub, as a mix of commercial, residential, office, and entertainment[69]. In Northwest Arkansas, Springdale has made urban design and public space improvements, alongside a zoning code that is flexible enough to allow for mixed-use and has managed to remove historical obstacles to it.[70] Nevertheless, these examples could be applied to the catchment area of the Texas Eagle and other planned and potential rail transit systems.

Freight-oriented land and property with favorable attributes for freight (including freight rail access) should be preserved to maximize the benefits of multimodal freight service options. When a rail is abandoned and track is removed, it is extremely hard to restore. Having public or private efforts that survey and inventory properties that are or could be served by rail is key to this goal. Although freight activities can result in noise, vibration, odor, light pollution, and air quality issues, appropriate buffering from residential areas can help to maximize the benefits of consolidated logistics activities while minimizing impacts to communities. Strategies focusing on land use compatibility are less likely to raise concerns in communities. Working with freight and industry stakeholders to act as “good neighbors” can help alleviate some of these concerns and reduce tensions while respecting rail exemptions from some local control.

Based on the characteristics of the e-commerce sector, there are challenges associated with the need for effective land use planning in relation to the siting of warehousing facilities for freight. In particular, opportunities for growth, especially in and around West Memphis, may exist given the availability of affordable land and proximity to freight generators and facilities in and around Memphis, TN. Although this growth has the potential to increase economic output and generate job growth, negative externalities from increased truck traffic will also need to be considered. A key opportunity relates to the potential for expedited e-commerce delivery to rural areas, characteristic of many portions of Arkansas. In an effort to maximize profit, e-commerce platforms have traditionally focused their resources on service to urban and economic centers. However, since at least 2021, Amazon has been developing a strategy to improve rural delivery service.[72] This strategy involves utilizing “mom and pop” shops in rural areas and small towns to deliver

[69] Rock Region exploring development options for downtown Little Rock bus terminal | The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette - Arkansas' Best News Source (arkansasonline.com)

[70] Bergstrom, M. (2022, August 3). *To Address Regional Housing Challenges, Northwest Arkansas Cities Collaborate on Lasting Solutions*. Walton Family Foundation. https://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/stories/home-region/to-address-regional-housing-challenges-northwest-arkansas-cities-collaborate-on-lasting-solutions

[71] https://www.aboutamazon.com/news/transportation/rural-small-town-america-us-prime-same-next-day-delivery

[72] https://www.vox.com/recode/2022/5/9/23063528/amazon-rural-small-business-delivery-program-hub-partners-usps

orders to Amazon customers within a set radius. In exchange, these businesses are paid a fee by Amazon. The strategy, known as the Amazon Hub Delivery Program, has been tested in ten states, including Arkansas. Citing shortcomings of partner package delivery services, Amazon's strategy is part of a larger goal to have greater control over its entire shipping process. At the local level, the strategy can potentially provide an effective and necessary financial boost for local small businesses, which may be particularly impacted by ongoing supply chain issues in the post-COVID-19 era.

Passenger rail both benefits from and can help promote symbiotic land uses. Stops are typically located in the heart of small villages or towns where passenger rail can provide transportation alternatives to a higher number of people living in a dense area. Most jurisdictions with passenger rail service are supportive of the service and include provisions for the service and for growth opportunities in their local land use plans. Passenger rail can contribute to healthier communities by locating stations in mixed-use environments that promote walking, biking, and transit, as well as contribute to economic vitality by providing destinations for visitors to the area. It can also help meet key land use goals of maintaining historical settlement patterns with compact centers surrounded by rural countryside by providing additional transportation options, thereby keeping VMT per capita down.

2.8 Rail Service Opportunities

This section highlights general opportunities for freight and passenger rail in Arkansas. These opportunities were identified based on existing conditions, future trends, stakeholder outreach efforts, and best practices in rail planning.

2.8.1 Freight Rail Issues & Opportunities

Additional Capacity & Enhancement

Increasing capacity is a means of allowing for the operation of additional (or heavier) trains along the statewide network. This capacity can be achieved through various means, including the construction of additional main line tracks, replacement of substandard track, yard and terminal capacity, sidings for trains to pass, or spurs for access to industrial sites. Even for those sites already served by rail and have available space and railroad capacity, there is a desire for increased incentives and initiatives to attract new customers to rail-served sites. Potential access improvement projects are identified in Chapter 5. Examples provided for illustrative purposes include:

- Western Arkansas Intermodal Authority (WAIA) Intermodal Facility Access Improvements – The WAIA is promoting the development and expansion of an intermodal facility along the Arkansas River south of Van Buren. To advance this vision, freight rail access alternatives are being explored, including the potential for new trackage.

- The land surrounding Northwest Arkansas National Airport (XNA) has great potential for future industrial development, which would benefit from proximity to XNA and Interstate 49. Extending rail service to this location would provide a third mode for freight cargo, which would be attractive to some potential industrial users.

Improvement and Elimination of At-Grade Crossings

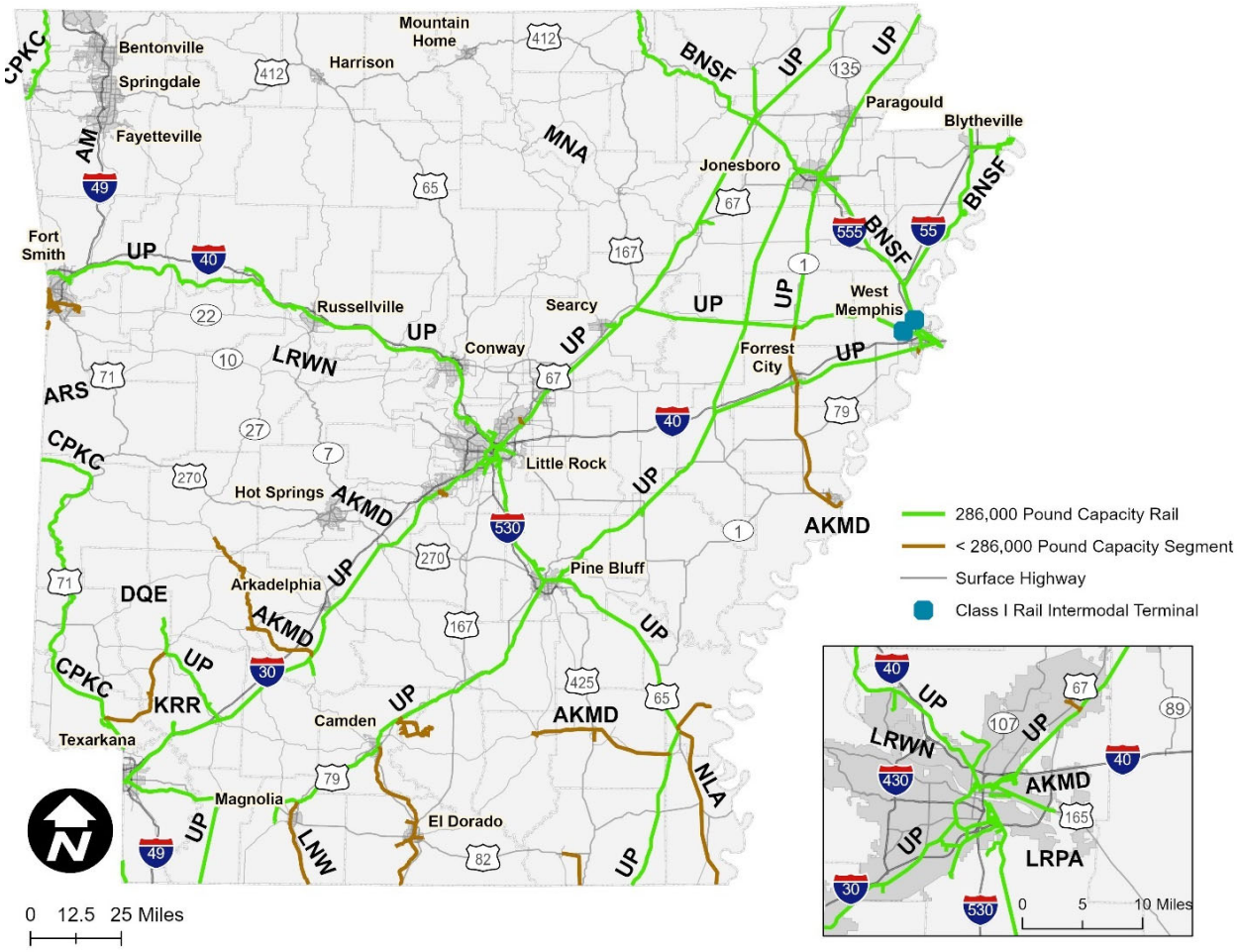
Highway-rail grade crossings present unique safety implications, risks, and design characteristics, and improving grade crossing safety requires a sustained focus by, and collaboration between, roadway authorities and rail owners/operators. Reducing the number of at-grade crossings is the most effective way to improve the safety of highway-rail interactions, but it is recognized that crossing closures can be challenging and that grade separation can be cost prohibitive.

Track Quality & Weight Restrictions

For the most part, Arkansas freight rail trackage has a weight standard of at least 286,000 pounds. This includes all BNSF and UP Class I rail trackage, and most CPKC trackage. These Class I rail networks comprise the majority of statewide trackage. However, as shown in Figure 2.33, there are multiple portions of the statewide rail network that do not meet the 286K weight standard. Most of this trackage is concentrated in southern, and especially southeastern, portions of Arkansas. There are additional concentrations of such trackage in and around Fort Smith. Nationally, a weight standard of at least 286K is considered to be the general track quality standard for freight railroads. For those railroads or rail segments with weight standards below the 286K standard, weight constraints can decrease efficiency and reduce the overall competitiveness of rail in comparison to other modes.

Upgrades to freight rail trackage can be implemented as part of a larger statewide economic development strategy. For example, based on the insight from the stakeholder outreach portion of the SFP development process, the timber industry was identified as a key industry requiring 286K rail accessibility. As such, in coordination with statewide railroads and key industries, and given funding constraints, there is a desire to identify those track segments where infrastructure upgrades would provide the best return on investment, although this is beyond the scope of the SRP and would require a more detailed cost-benefit analysis to determine.

Figure 2.33 Arkansas Rail Network Weight Restrictions



Source: Arkansas Freight Railroads

Funding

Securing funding for priority projects is an on-going issue for freight rail owners, but it can be particularly challenging for Class III carriers. In addition, some freight railroads expressed the need for dedicated funding support. As discussed in Section 2.4, through the passing of the IIJA, there are opportunities to secure funding through a large variety of grant programs to help address these funding needs.

General Rail Safety

General rail safety improvements and monitoring emerged as a key freight rail need. General rail safety refers to the need for a broad and comprehensive strategy to address related statewide issues across the freight rail network. Despite dropping into the COVID-19 pandemic, safety incidents have risen in the following years and remain elevated. This indicates a continuous need for effective and innovative strategies.

Since the release of the 2015 SRP, PTC technology, designed to prevent collisions, derailments, and other incidents, has been implemented across all 57,536 miles of nationwide freight and passenger trackage where it was originally required. Since PTC implementation was only completed at the end of 2020, it is too early to fully assess the full effects on general safety needs. Additionally, the implementation of PTC is not applicable to the entire statewide rail network. This is because implementation was required only for the Class I rail network on any track sections with 5 million or more gross tons of annual rail traffic, trackage where certain hazardous materials are transported, and on any main lines over which intercity or commuter rail passenger service is regularly provided. As a result, there may be a need for the allocation of resources to safety needs on statewide track segments where PTC has not been implemented.

In addition, trespassing continues to remain an issue, as reported by rail owners and operators. As such, there is a need for coordinated efforts, to effectively address and deter trespassing. This should include a robust education component, as well as coordination with local law enforcement personnel.

As noted in Section 2.5, the Railway Safety Act of 2023 is currently being considered in Congress, following the major derailment and discharge of hazardous materials by a Norfolk Southern train in East Palestine, Ohio. The bill would require rail carriers and shippers to (1) provide state emergency response commissioners with advanced notice and information about the hazardous materials; (2) reduce blocked rail crossings; and (3) comply with certain requirements regarding train length and weight specifications, track standards, speed restrictions, and response plans. It also includes updated legislation on fines, rail car inspection regulations, rail crew minimums, the phasing out of certain tank cars, local first responder training, and research funding for rail safety. However, the bill remains stalled in Congress, and there is uncertainty as to whether it will move forward. Although the bill remains stalled, there has been renewed push and need for increased training related to hazardous materials discharges. There is also a need for mitigation equipment and materials present along rail corridors which carry large quantities of hazardous materials.

Service and Labor Challenges

Labor and workforce challenges continue to impact nearly every industry sector, which has put pressure on many industries, particularly manufacturing and transportation/logistics. At times, this pressure has forced both shippers and carriers to pivot their operators in order to move essential freight. In the freight rail industry, this has led to operational challenges for both shippers and carriers, and, for some businesses, moving less freight on the freight rail network and more on the freight highway network.

2.8.2 Passenger Rail Issues & Opportunities

Service Parameters & Modal Competitiveness

Amtrak's Texas Eagle consists of one run per day in each direction, running between Chicago and San Antonio. Spanning over 1,300 miles, this trip takes approximately 32 hours. However, the Texas Eagle only serves Arkansas during the evening and early morning hours. Traveling southbound, the Texas Eagle reaches Walnut Ridge, the first station in Arkansas, at 12:24 a.m. Texarkana, the final station in Arkansas, is served just over five hours later at 5:52 a.m. In the northbound direction, Texarkana is served at 8:36 p.m., while Walnut Ridge is eventually served at 1:41 a.m. Although the intercity passenger rail service is structured around serving the largest population centers (Chicago, St. Louis, Dallas/Fort Worth, and San Antonio) at the most reasonable and accommodating hours, the current service format most adversely

impacts the Arkansas portion of the corridor. As a result, the effectiveness of intercity passenger rail in Arkansas, especially for intrastate travel, is significantly impacted.

Overall, these current operating conditions for intercity passenger rail service in Arkansas make it difficult to capture meaningful mode share from automobiles. Based on current Texas Eagle timetables, Amtrak's rail service travels at a speed of approximately 50 miles per hour between Texarkana in southwest Arkansas, to Walnut Ridge in northeast Arkansas. The entire trip takes approximately 5 hours depending on the direction of travel. Conversely, by automobile, the same trip can be made in under 4 hours, with allowable driving speeds of up to 75 miles per hour. When expanding this comparison to include air mode from Little Rock to the larger population centers along the Texas Eagle corridor, the same issues of modal competitiveness are still evident.

Service Expansion

As identified through extensive stakeholder engagement, there is a desire for service expansions. In addition to increased service frequencies and hours as described above, there is a desire for service to new stations, as well as to new geographies. Bald Knob has been identified as a location with strong interest in implementing rail service, including through multiple stakeholder outreach channels as discussed in Chapter 6. In addition, there is strong interest in implementing passenger rail service in Northwest Arkansas, especially as the region continues to grow rapidly. Likewise, communities in Northeast Arkansas have expressed interest in passenger rail, recognizing the strong rail presence in the region. Lastly, there is interest in passenger rail service connecting Little Rock and Northwest Arkansas, as well as service between these two urban centers and other major cities such as Memphis, Tulsa, and Kansas City.

Inconsistent High-Speed Rail Corridor Designations & Lack of Funding

Efforts to develop true high-speed rail corridors across the U.S. and within Arkansas have produced limited results outside of the nation's Northeast Corridor and a few other corridors across the U.S. This is largely attributed to a lack of dedicated funding to support infrastructure improvements and upgrades. In Arkansas these efforts have largely stalled. In 2000, U.S. DOT designated the South Central High-Speed Rail Corridor (SCHSRC) between Little Rock and San Antonio, making these corridors eligible for dedicated Federal funding for infrastructure upgrades.

A subsequent designation of high-speed rail corridors across the U.S. occurred in 2011. However, this designation omits Arkansas. Instead, the High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) Program focuses on a network of core express (top speeds of over 150 mph), regional (top speeds of between 110 mph and 150 mph), and feeder (top speeds of between 90 mph and 110 mph) upgrades for routes primarily along the West Coast, Midwest, and the Northeast Corridor, as well as the corridor between Dallas and Oklahoma City. In 2020, ARDOT completed the *Arkansas High-Speed Passenger Rail Study*[73] with the objective of examining passenger rail service needs with an emphasis on high-speed rail upgrades. This study found that upgrades of existing statewide passenger rail infrastructure for high speed operation would be cost prohibitive without a dedicated funding source. In addition to increased funding, the state's Texas Eagle intercity passenger rail service requires consistent designation as a high-speed rail corridor.

[73] https://www.ARDOT.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/FULL-Arkansas-Passenger-Rail-Study-2020-02.pdf

3.0 Proposed Passenger Rail Investments and Improvements

In Arkansas, Amtrak operates passenger rail service along trackage owned and maintained by UP. The Arkansas passenger rail program primarily takes the form of participation in ongoing national passenger rail efforts, as well as passenger station improvements. This section provides an overview of activities impacting passenger rail investments in Arkansas, including participation in ongoing FRA studies, Amtrak station improvements and service enhancements, and investments in other states that may impact Arkansas' future passenger rail system.

3.1 Passenger Rail Capital Investment Overview

As discussed in Section 2.2 and Section 6.1, passenger rail service in Arkansas is provided by Amtrak through its long-distance Texas Eagle service.[74] While there continues to be demand for passenger rail and the need for investment, robust passenger rail service in Arkansas is challenged by numerous factors. This includes:

- Inconvenient and infrequent hours of operation almost exclusively in the evening and early morning hours due to the scheduling requirements of out-of-state hubs such as Chicago and Dallas;
- A lack of competitiveness in schedule, route, and destination choice in comparison to automobile and air travel;
- Historically insufficient and unreliable passenger transportation funding sources, both at the state and federal levels; and
- Inconsistencies in Federal rail corridor designations applied to Arkansas railroads, such as designation and then removal of the Arkansas Texas Eagle corridor as a high-speed rail corridor (see Section 2.8).

The challenges to passenger rail service are not unique to Arkansas, and are in fact common across the U.S. The IIJA appropriated $66 billion for rail initiatives to directly address many of these shortcomings and challenges. This includes at least $12 billion for network expansion outside of the Northeast Corridor, and an additional $7.5 billion for the Federal-State Partnership for the Intercity Passenger Rail program. Additional funding was allocated for rail studies, as discussed in Sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2.

Based on these current trends, existing needs, and ongoing studies, passenger rail funding opportunities should be evaluated. See Section 2.4 for additional information on funding mechanisms.

3.1.1 Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study

The Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study[76] represented a broad, yet comprehensive examination of the nation's rail network. As a component of increased rail investment, IIJA tasked the FRA with conducting

[74] https://www.amtrak.com/texas-eagle-train

(Footnote continued on next page...)

this study to evaluate the restoration of daily intercity passenger rail service and the potential for new Amtrak long-distance routes. This includes the evaluation of service across the following areas:

- Corridors where any Amtrak long-distance routes were discontinued;
- Locations where long-distance service is provided on a non-daily basis; and
- General evaluation of new services that would link and serve large and small communities as part of a regional rail network, advance the economic and social well-being of rural areas of the U.S., provide enhanced connectivity for the national long-distance passenger rail system, and/or reflect public engagement and local and regional support for restored passenger rail service.

Key stakeholders in the study include state DOTs – including ARDOT – Amtrak, Class I railroads, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), regional passenger rail authorities, local officials, federally recognized tribes, and other local groups and organizations. Throughout 2023, the FRA has conducted multiple working group meetings with related stakeholders across the country. These meetings have been conducted at the regional level, with the identification of six regions across the U.S.: Northeast, Southeast, Central, Midwest, Southwest, and Northwest. The first series of meetings was held in January and February 2023, the second series of meetings was held in summer 2023, the third was held in February 2024, and the last was held in June 2024. ARDOT participated in several of these meetings to provide a voice to stakeholder interest for enhanced passenger rail service in Arkansas. However, the completed report to Congress does not recommend any service improvements in Arkansas.[77]

3.1.2 Corridor Identification and Development Program

The FRA Corridor ID Program is another rail-related initiative established through the IIJA. The Corridor ID Program is an initiative to establish a comprehensive intercity passenger rail program through the identification of select projects and funding opportunities. Eligible applicants include Amtrak, state DOTs, groups of states, MPOs, and other entities. The program awards selected grantees $500,000 for a study to determine the engineering, cost and other requirements needed to establish service. The original NOFO soliciting applications for corridor designation opened in December 2022, and a number of corridors have been successfully designated. While no applications for this program have been submitted in Arkansas, FRA does anticipate issuing future notices soliciting Corridor ID Program proposals.

3.2 Amtrak Passenger Service Opportunities

3.2.1 Amtrak Station Improvements

There are currently six Amtrak stations in Arkansas. Amtrak's current station investment program places a strong emphasis on Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance. In December 2020, Amtrak entered into agreement with the Department of Justice to upgrade inaccessible stations and additionally pay $2.25

[75] https://railroads.dot.gov/IIJA

[76] https://fralongdistancerailstudy.org/

[77] https://fralongdistancerailstudy.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Amtrak-Daily-Long-Distance-Service-Study-%E2%80%93-Final-Report-2025.pdf

million to victims impacted by inaccessibility at one or more of 78 identified stations across its network.[78] The list of 78 inaccessible stations did not include any in Arkansas. However, Amtrak has identified a number of capital improvement projects for stations in Arkansas to further improve and enhance ADA accessibility in the State. This includes the following station projects, which Amtrak is fully funding without any local match requirements[79]:

- **Arkadelphia:** Amtrak completed modifications to the existing restrooms at the station, bringing them into ADA compliance.
- **Little Rock:** Amtrak completed modifications to the station to including providing an accessible route from the public right of way to the platform, station, and parking area; providing ADA-compliant parking spaces with painted striping, signage, and bollards; constructing a new platform with associated ramps, stairs, railings, and signage; modifying station entrances and restrooms to meet ADA requirements; and providing platform city identifier signs and ADA-required signage for the station and parking area.
- **Malvern:** Amtrak is currently in the design stage to modify the station to improve ADA compliance. This will include providing an accessible route from the public right of way to the platform, station, and parking area, providing ADA-compliant parking spaces with painted striping, signage, and bollards, constructing a new platform with associated ramps, stairs, railings, and signage, modifying station entrances and restrooms to meet ADA requirements, and providing platform city identifier signs and ADA-required signage for the station and parking area. Construction is set to commence in 2026.
- **Walnut Ridge:** In 2024, Amtrak completed modifications the station to ensure ADA compliance.

3.2.2 Amtrak Service Enhancements

As discussed in Section 2.8, there is a strong desire for Amtrak service enhancements in the form of new geographic coverage, as well as additional stations. This includes demand for service to Bald Knob in the northeast portion of the state, which generated a significant amount of stakeholder interest. In comparison to other service enhancements, implementation of service at Bald Knob would be the most straightforward given that there is an existing station facility at Bald Knob. In addition to a growing retiree population with limited access to other transit options, there is currently an approximately 130-mile gap in service between Little Rock and Walnut Ridge in Northeast Arkansas. As highlighted in public engagement, it is recommended to assess the feasibility of implementing new service at Bald Knob.

Comparatively, expanding passenger rail service to serve Northwest Arkansas, Northeast Arkansas, or connect Little Rock to additional portions of the state would require additional significant capital investments. This would include the use of federal funding from one or more of the programs discussed in Section 2.4, and would likely require extensive collaboration and compromising with freight rail owners and operators to allow for passenger rail service along active freight lines (since the alternative is new location trackage). Also highlighted through public engagement, there is desire to assess the demand for and

[78] https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/225-million-fund-available-justice-department-settlement-amtrak

[79] https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/statefactsheets/ARKANSAS23.pdf

feasibility of implementing these services, and to monitor key opportunities to spearhead these initiatives, including participation in the FRA's CID Program.

3.3 Non-Arkansas Related Passenger Rail Investments & Initiatives

In May 2023, Amtrak and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) received federal approval for maximum speeds up to 110 mph for most of the Chicago-St. Louis corridor, primarily between the Amtrak stations in Joliet, IL and Alton, IL.[80] This represents an upgrade from previous maximum speeds of 90 mph as a result of infrastructure upgrades, along the corridor which is currently served by the Texas Eagle and Lincoln Service. Amtrak is currently testing the new speeds and improved track conditions and has not yet made any changes to its existing schedules. However, the quicker travel times between Chicago and St. Louis along the Texas Eagle service may impact the schedule through Arkansas.

Amtrak, in partnership with the Southern Rail Commission, commissioned a study to evaluate connecting Dallas with Atlanta. Amtrak has also submitted a grant application for initial project development and engineering to develop service along this I-20 corridor between Dallas/Fort Worth, Shreveport, Jackson, and Meridian.[81] The establishment of rail service along this corridor could spur additional demand for passenger rail, especially in the southern portion of Arkansas.

Within Arkansas, stakeholders presented a number of additional potential passenger rail initiatives during the public outreach process. Prominent among these were requests for passenger rail service between Central Arkansas and Northwest Arkansas, renewed requests for passenger rail service between Little Rock and Memphis, service through Northeast Arkansas between Missouri and Tennessee, and rail service within the northwest Arkansas region. Citing the potential establishment of rail service along the I-20 corridor through Louisiana, stakeholders identified the desire for rail service along the I-49 / future I-49 corridor between Northwest Arkansas, Texarkana, and Shreveport, as well as Kansas City in the north. Overall, the desire for rail service in Northwest Arkansas was attributed to the rapid growth of the region, and congestion issues.[82] [83]

[80] https://media.amtrak.com/2023/05/110-mph-schedules-coming-for-amtrak-chicago-st-louis-corridor/

[81] https://media.amtrak.com/2023/03/amtrak-and-southern-rail-commission-to-seek-federal-study-for-new-long-distance-service-across-mississippi-and-louisiana-to-texas/

[82] *Visioning Rail Transit in Northwest Arkansas: Lifestyles and Ecologies* https://s3.amazonaws.com/uacdc/NWA_Rail_Reduced.pdf

[83] *Fayetteville 2030: Transit City Scenario Plan* https://uacdc.uark.edu/work/fayetteville-2030-transit-city-scenario-plan

4.0 Proposed Freight Rail Investments and Improvements

This chapter provides an overview of proposed freight rail investments and improvements in Arkansas. These investments have been identified in partnership with Arkansas' freight rail carriers, and, where relevant, railroad holding companies, as Arkansas' freight rail network is entirely owned, operated, and managed by the private sector. This includes decisions relating to capacity and operations, as well as safety and maintenance decisions in accordance with FRA guidelines and regulations. The entire SRP provides an opportunity to comprehensively assess the statewide freight rail network's needs, as well as how the rail network can evolve to align with multimodal goals, visions, and objectives. The project list also provides descriptions of where investments are being made at the local and regional levels.

4.1 Freight Rail Investments

Arkansas' freight rail system consists of 25 freight railroads, as detailed in Section 2.1. In total, the state's railroads and other rail stakeholders identified more than 50 projects for inclusion in the SRP. Implementation of these projects would be led by and funded by the appropriate railroad owners or other railroad stakeholders (such intermodal terminal operators). Freight rail investments are identified for both Class I and Class III railroads across the state. Class I and Class III railroads differ significantly in terms of size and overall operations, as the classifications are based on total operating revenue.

- Class I railroads have a geographic footprint spanning large portions of the U.S., including many major markets and population centers, across thousands of miles of trackage. As components of larger national networks, Class I rail investment in the statewide rail network has historically been strong. UP, which owns the majority of trackage in Arkansas, invested over $800 million in tracks, structures, and facilities across the state between 2018 and 2022.[84]

- Class III railroads have much more localized footprints, with networks of up to a couple of hundred miles, all the way down to switching & terminal railroads measuring under 10 miles in length. As a result of these differences, freight rail investment needs can also differ by railroad class. Consisting of smaller networks and corresponding capital and technical resources, the most common Class III rail investment needs include weight and operational capacity chokepoints.

4.2 Capital Investment Themes

Projects identified for inclusion in the SRP freight rail capital investment program are grouped into five categories of investment: At-Grade Crossings, Infrastructure Upgrades, Access New or Existing Customers, Improved Utilities, and Accelerated Maintenance. These categories were identified based on the types of projects included in the freight rail capital investment program and broadly based on overall freight rail system needs. These categories are also aimed at distinguishing public benefits associated with identified capital investments, and cover the necessary components associated with operating and

[84] https://www.up.com/cs/groups/public/@uprr/@corprel/documents/up_pdf_nativedocs/pdf_arkansas_usguide.pdf

maintaining a functional and dynamic rail system. Each category is briefly explained in the following subsections.

4.2.1 At-Grade Crossings

At-grade crossing projects specifically address the needs of Arkansas' highway-rail at-grade crossings. There are nearly 2,500 public at-grade crossings across the state. These crossings are the subject of ongoing efforts to improve transportation safety, as discussed in Section 2.5, including through the use of Section 130 federal formula funding. Grade crossing capital investments are identified as those projects specifically focusing on grade crossing safety needs. This includes studies to assess grade crossing needs, installation of active and passive protection devices and infrastructure, grade separations, and other related projects. ARDOT is currently working with Class I and Class III railroads to develop and implement 32 Section 130 projects on public road crossings across the state.

4.2.2 Infrastructure Upgrades

Infrastructure upgrades is a broad category of capital investments aimed at improving and/or expanding the current statewide rail network, including through the construction of additional mainline trackage, new right-of-way (ROW) trackage, upgrades to accommodate increased weight (286,000 pound weight standard), and general projects aimed at reducing rail traffic congestion and increasing system capacity. Infrastructure upgrades comprise the majority of identified capital investments included in the SRP.

4.2.3 Access New or Existing Customers

Freight railroads generate revenue by serving customers seeking to transport or accept shipments from across the U.S. and Arkansas. Freight railroads serve customers using a network of siding and turnouts to generate and control traffic. Sidings can be considered very small branch rail lines, designed to specifically serve one or more businesses (customers) and/or transloading/intermodal facilities. Sidings are connected to the main line rail network through a network of turnout switches, which serve the role of guiding traffic from one track to another. Combined with the railroad's network of signals, these turnout switches help regulate rail traffic as rail cars are transported onto and off sidings. Related capital investments are identified as those projects addressing these infrastructure components and also includes corresponding construction of new roadways or sites to facilitate rail access.

4.2.4 Improved Utilities

Utility projects are identified as addressing the needs of supporting infrastructure systems. This includes infrastructure systems including drainage, energy, and soil within the scope of the rail network. Utilities projects comprise a smaller proportion of identified capital investments included in the SRP.

4.2.5 Accelerated Maintenance

Accelerated maintenance projects are capital investments aimed at addressing maintenance needs associated with the system. Railroad tracks are complex infrastructure systems consisting of rails, crossties (typically made of wood), joints, and spikes which together form the actual structure. The structure is typically laid over ballast (typically consisting of crushed stone and rock) which provides support for the track. Furthermore, the point at which train wheels make contact with the rail (known as the wheel-rail

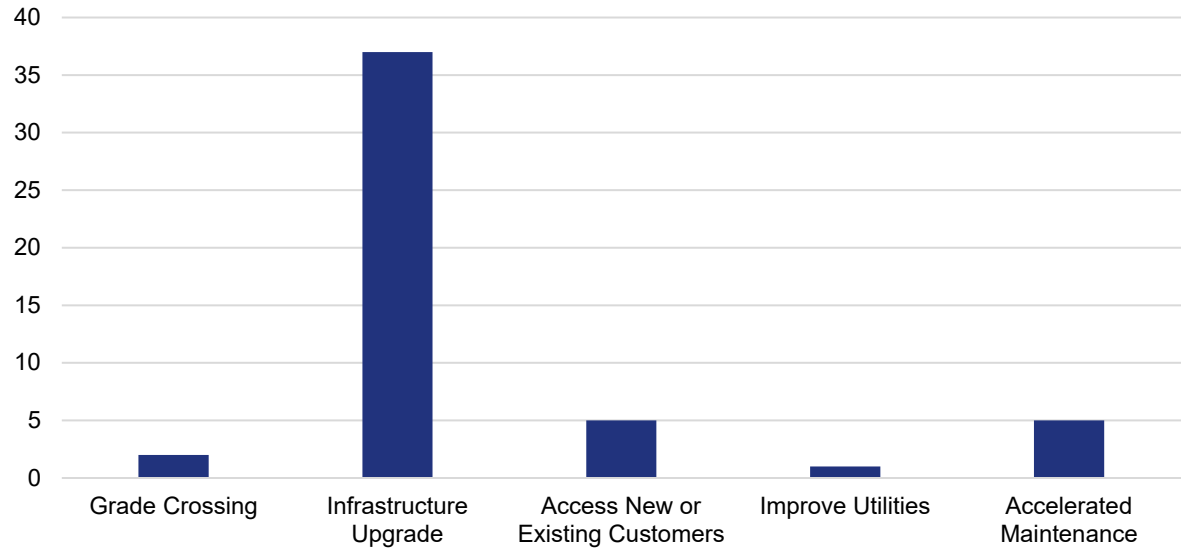
interface) is less than a square inch in size, adding to the importance of maintaining the infrastructure's state of good repair. Over time, and through wear and tear associated with rail traffic and outdoor elements, rail degradation can occur.

Rail degradation can take two forms. The first of these are physical cracks and material deterioration, especially in the rails themselves. The second of these is geometric degradation. This occurs when there is displacement of the rails from their original positioning. Both forms of degradation can be extremely small and on the magnitude of millimeters. However, the deterioration and geometric displacement can grow over time if not tended to. If left unchecked, rail degradation can lead to the need for speed and weight restrictions, resulting in potential increases in traffic congestion, as well as compromised safety. Although accelerated maintenance projects do not directly result in new system capacity, they are critical elements to ensuring a fully functional, operational, and safe system.

4.3 Investment Program Analytics

Arkansas' freight rail carriers and other rail stakeholders have proposed more than 50 projects for inclusion in the SRP.[85] A detailed list of capital investments is included in Chapter 5. Figure 4.1 breaks down these proposed investments by purpose. The majority of projects identified by rail carriers consist of infrastructure upgrades. This includes upgrades to key components including signals, mainline rails, bridges, siding, turnout rails, and capacity/weight. Five projects each were identified for accessing new or existing customers, as well as accelerated maintenance, while the remaining projects address grade crossing and utility needs.

Figure 4.1 Freight Rail Investments by Purpose

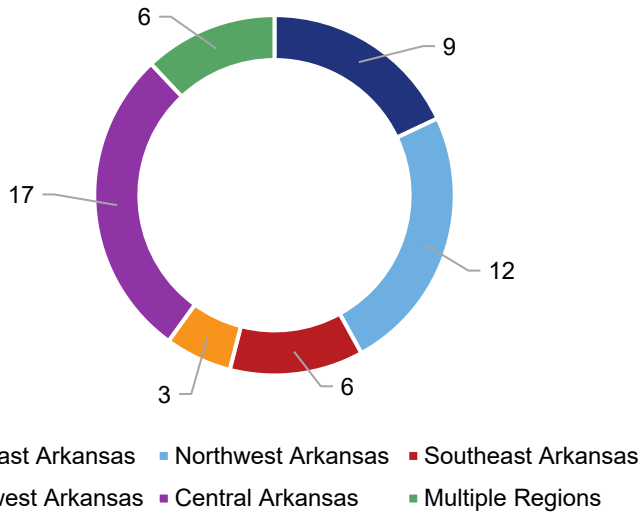


Source: Arkansas Freight Railroads and Other Rail Stakeholders

[85] Note that some railroads did not respond to requests or opted not to include projects in the SRP. This section represents the comprehensive list of projects from those railroads which provided information to ARDOT.

The projects identified for inclusion in the SRP are broadly broken out by geography[86] in Figure 4.2. Central Arkansas is the location of the most identified projects, followed by Northwest Arkansas. Both regions include the most urbanized portions of Arkansas, including the Little Rock, Pine Bluff, Fort Smith, Fayetteville, and Bentonville metropolitan areas. Correspondingly, these locations tend to include rail corridors with a higher degree of activity and greater network density, resulting in increased investment needs. Outside of these two regions, Northeast Arkansas, including trackage around West Memphis, Jonesboro, and points northeast comprised the locations with the largest number of identified projects. A map of all identified projects can be found in Chapter 5.

Figure 4.2 Freight Rail Investments by Geography

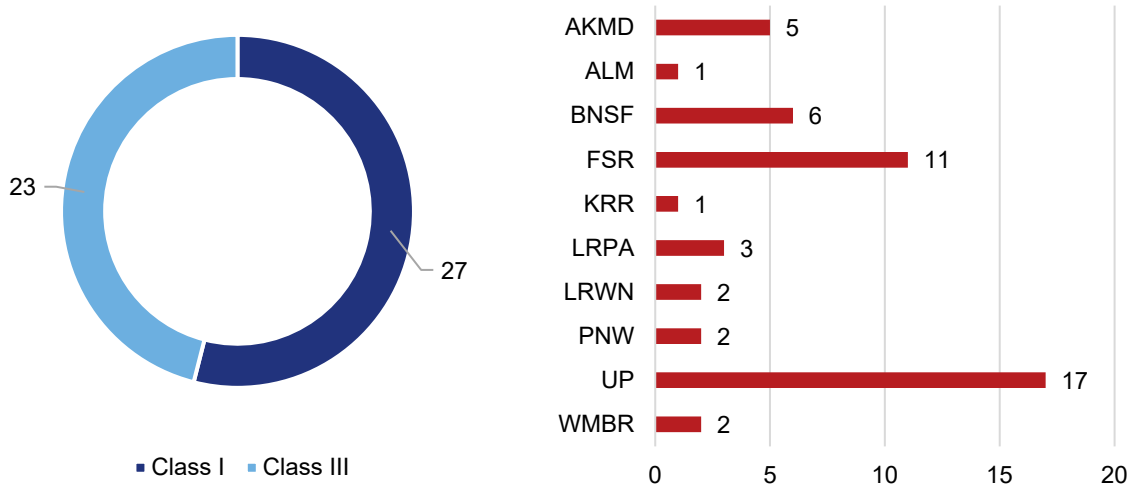


Source: Arkansas Freight Railroads and Other Rail Stakeholders

As shown in Figure 4.3, the freight rail capital investment program is comprised relatively equally of both Class I and Class III rail projects. By measure of individual rail carrier, UP has included 17 projects, the most of any freight railroad. This was followed by FSR and BNSF at 11 projects and 6 projects, respectively. However, the size and magnitude of each project can differ. Additionally, a single project can include multiple components, including across multiple geographies, as identified above. Further information on project size is shown in Figure 4.6. The freight rail capital investment program includes a relatively even distribution across all project sizes when measured by cost. The majority of projects identified are under $5 million, or between $10 million and $50 million.

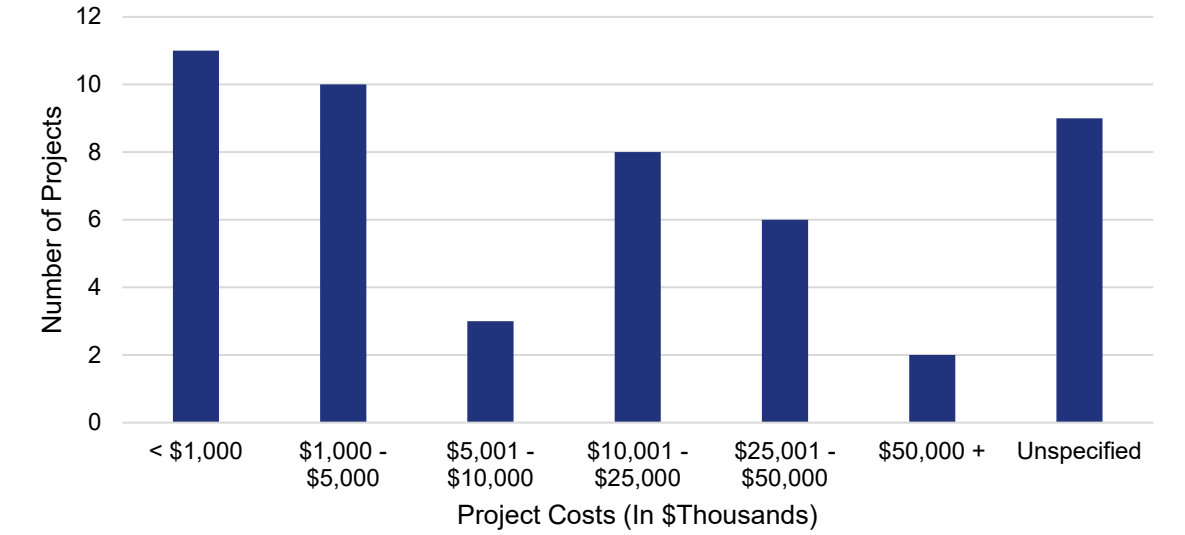
[86] The geographic boundaries comprising each region are broadly identified as follows: Northeast Arkansas includes Ash Flat, Walnut Ridge, Jonesboro, Searcy, Forrest City, and surrounding areas. Northwest Arkansas includes Bentonville, Springdale, Fayetteville, Fort Smith, and surrounding areas. Southeast Arkansas includes McGehee, Monticello, El Dorado, and surrounding areas. Southwest Arkansas includes Arkadelphia, Texarkana, Magnolia, and surrounding areas. Central Arkansas includes Little Rock, Hot Springs, Pine Bluff, Russellville, and surrounding areas. Projects which include components across more than one region are classified under 'Multiple Regions'.

Figure 4.3 Freight Rail Investments by Railroad Class & Rail Carrier



Source: Arkansas Freight Railroads and Other Rail Stakeholders. Note that this tally does not include three potential projects with the carrier to be determined.

Figure 4.4 Freight Rail Investments by Project Size



Source: Arkansas Freight Railroads and Other Rail Stakeholders. Note that this tally does not include three potential projects with cost estimates to be determined.

5.0 Rail Service Investment Program

This chapter delves further into the passenger and freight rail investment programs, including how these components fit into and further the vision for statewide rail service in Arkansas. Program coordination and related benefits to Arkansas' larger multimodal transportation network are also discussed in this section. Finally, the individual projects comprising the rail investment program are identified in Section 5.5.

5.1 Vision for Statewide Rail Service

The statewide vision for rail service is the guiding basis for policy and related investments, including at the local, statewide, and national scale. It considers statewide rail system needs and opportunities holistically, guided by best practices and stakeholder input. At the onset of the development of the SRP, a Rail Advisory Committee (RAC) was established. As a first step, the RAC evaluated the previous 2015 SRP vision:

> "*Arkansas will preserve, maintain, and improve a vibrant, safe, efficient, and environmentally sound railroad network that serves the economic development objectives and mobility needs of Arkansas communities throughout the state.*"

This vision echoes several key elements heard throughout the development of this SRP, including the themes of safety, mobility, and economic prosperity. These themes have good alignment with other ARDOT plans for the multimodal transportation system – including goals of advancing safety & resiliency, economic competitiveness, infrastructure condition, congestion reduction/mobility/system reliability[87], and environmental sustainability – and 2023-2028 Strategic Plan, which outlines ARDOT's purpose, which is to deliver a modern transportation system to enhance safety and quality of life in Arkansas.

Ultimately, the RAC agreed upon the 2025 SRP vision that incorporates these key themes and explicitly applies them to both freight and passenger rail service across the state:

> ***"Arkansas will preserve, maintain, and improve a competitive, safe, efficient, resilient, and environmentally sound freight and passenger rail network that maximizes economic competitiveness and meets the mobility needs of Arkansas communities."***

5.2 Program Coordination

Fundamentally, Arkansas' rail network is a key component of the state's multimodal transportation system (highways, ports and waterways, airports, intermodal facilities, pipelines, and railroads) and is influenced and impacted by investments across this system. The SRP integrates and expands on key multimodal goals set forth through the state's various transportation planning and investment programs. Additional information about Arkansas' multimodal freight system can found in ARDOT's State Freight Plan (2022).[88, 89]

[87] The IIJA included over $50 billion in funding for resilience-related initiatives and established multiple related programs providing additional future funding opportunities. This includes the opportunity for states to develop resilience improvement plans which can be used to reduce required local matches for PROTECT grant funding applications. These planning initiatives are meant to further establish and promote resilience in decision making across all transportation operations.

[88] https://ardot.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022-Arkansas-State-Freight-Plan.pdf

[89] https://ardot.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022-Arkansas-State-Freight-Plan-Executive-Summary.pdf

5.3 Proposed Organizational Changes

At present, there are no known additional proposed changes from state departments, legislators, or elected officials to the existing state rail agency organization, policies, or programs in the short term. The current system of state, regional, and local government support of passenger and freight rail is well adapted to assessing, planning, funding, and implementing publicly supported passenger and freight rail policies, programs, and investments.

5.4 Rail Studies and Reports

Table 5-1 lists recently-completed plans and studies with a rail component. In addition to furthering the vision of this SRP for improving statewide rail and multimodal systems, these studies and reports are aimed at maximizing the impacts of the rail investment program.

Table 5.1 Completed and Short-Term Anticipated Rail Studies and Reports

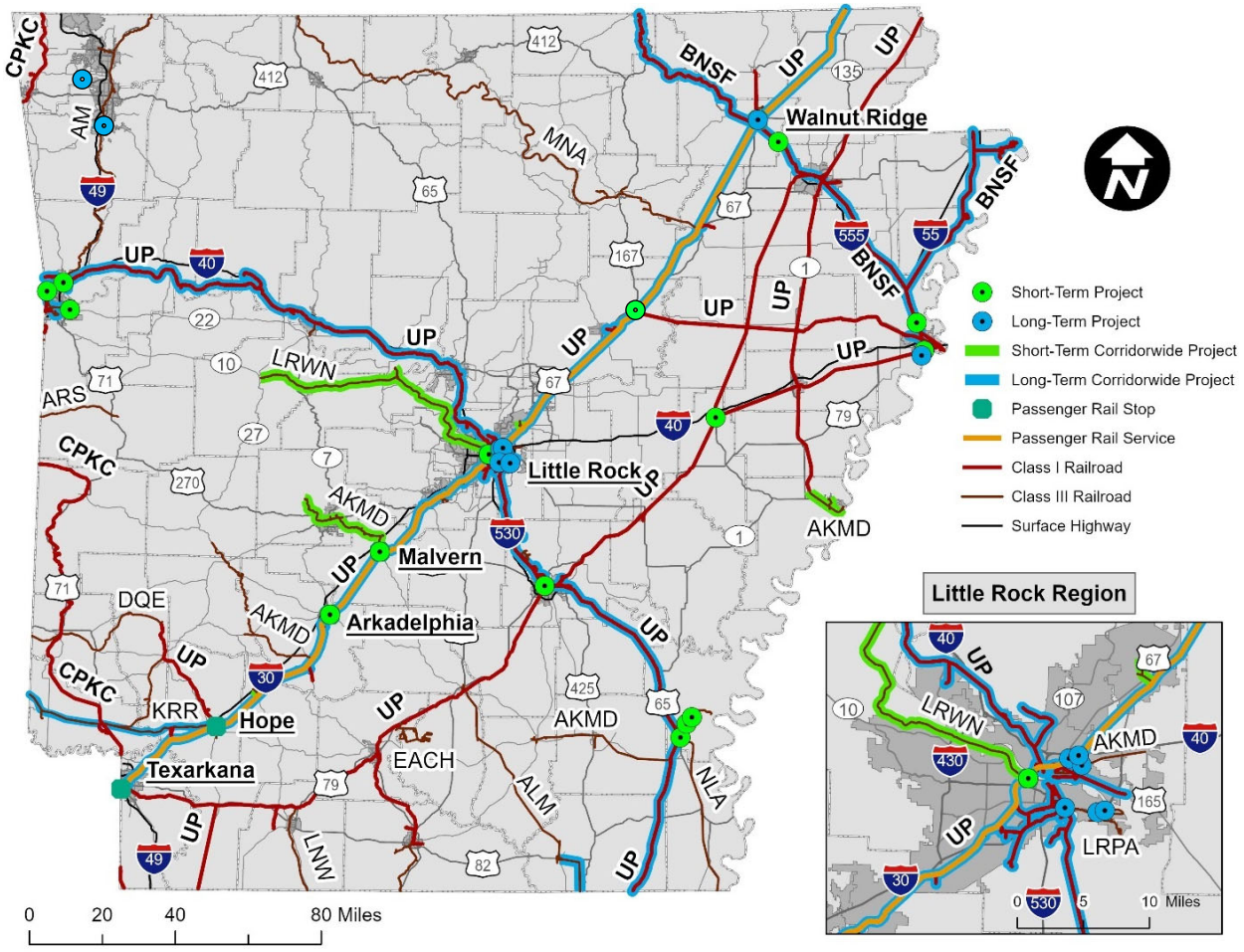
Plan / Study	Topic Area	Lead Agency	Year / Estimated Completion	Project Purpose
Statewide Long Range Intermodal Transportation Plan	Long Range Planning	ARDOT	2017	Establishes a framework for multimodal transportation investments and policies to guide decision making through 2040.
State Freight Plan	Freight Planning	ARDOT	2022	Identifies freight assets and needs, including for freight rail, and guides multimodal freight transportation investments and strategies.
Daily Long-Distance Service Study	Passenger Rail	FRA	2025	The FRA evaluated the restoration of daily intercity passenger rail service and the potential for new Amtrak long-distance routes but did not recommend any service improvements in Arkansas.
Statewide Long Range Intermodal Transportation Plan Update	Long Range Planning	ARDOT	TBD	Update to Long Range Intermodal Transportation Plan.
State Freight Plan Update	Freight Planning	ARDOT	2027	Update to State Freight Plan on four-year basis.

Source: Amtrak, ARDOT

5.5 Summary of the Passenger and Freight Rail Investment Program

The full list of proposed passenger (Tables 5.5a and 5.5b) and freight rail capital (Table 5.6) investments draw from the previous SRP, railroad responses, stakeholder engagement, and previously conducted studies. The locations of proposed projects are shown in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 Proposed Rail Investment Plan Projects[90]



Source: Arkansas Freight Railroads, Other Rail Stakeholders, Amtrak

[90] Note that Corridor wide projects include upgrades, improvements, or studies applied to a broader rail segment, as opposed to a single infrastructure site such as a bridge or culvert. Although these projects tend to be larger, this alone is not an indication of whether a project is classified as a long-term or short-term project.

Table 5.5a Funded Passenger Rail Investment Program

Project Title	Project Description	Project Purpose	Timeframe	Carrier(s)/Class
Arkadelphia Station Improvements	Accessibility improvements at Arkadelphia Station to ensure ADA compliance.	Accessibility Improvement	Complete	Amtrak
Little Rock Station Improvements	Accessibility improvements at Little Rock Station to ensure ADA compliance.	Accessibility Improvement	Complete	Amtrak
Malvern Station Improvements	Accessibility improvements at Malvern Station to ensure ADA compliance.	Accessibility Improvement	Short-Term	Amtrak
Walnut Ridge Station Improvements	Accessibility improvements at Walnut Ridge Station to ensure ADA compliance.	Accessibility Improvement	Complete	Amtrak

Source: Amtrak.

Table 5.5b Unfunded Passenger Rail Investment Program

Project Title	Project Description	Project Purpose	Timeframe	Carrier(s)/Class
Bald Knob Station Improvements	Proposed accessibility, platform, and other improvements necessary to meet requirements for an Amtrak stop in Bald Knob	Accessibility Improvement	Short-Term	Amtrak
Statewide Intercity Passenger Rail	Proposed service between Northwest Arkansas, Central Arkansas, and other major cities in surrounding States (Tulsa, Kansas City, Memphis), and through Northeast Arkansas (Missouri to Memphis)	Planning, New Service, Infrastructure	Long-Term	TBD
Intracity Passenger Rail	Proposed intracity/commuter service within Northwest Arkansas	Planning, New Service, Infrastructure	Long-Term	TBD

Source: Passenger Rail Stakeholders

Table 5.6 Proposed Freight Rail Investment Program[91]

Project Title	Project Description	Project Purpose	Timeframe	Est. Cost (1000s)	Carrier(s)/Class
Grade Crossing Study	Study potential closures, improvements, or road redesigns for grade crossings along the Thayer South Subdivision between Ravenden and Marion to pursue grant funding.	Grade Crossing	Long-Term	$400–$500 for initial study	BNSF, Class I
Signalized Crossing Upgrades	Upgrade signalized crossings with OBS equipment to latest signal circuitry across the entire statewide network as needed.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Long-Term	$75–$150 per crossing	BNSF, Class I
Signalized Crossing Upgrades	Upgrade signalized crossings with LED lights across the entire statewide network as needed.	Grade Crossing	Long-Term	$75–$150 per crossing	BNSF, Class I
Road Infrastructure Improvement	Improve road infrastructure to/from major BNSF served sites across the entire statewide network as needed.	Access Existing or New Customers	Long-Term	-	BNSF, Class I
Greenfield Site Identification	Identify greenfield sites for dual BNSF/Union Pacific access.	Access Existing or New Customers	Long-Term	-	BNSF, Class I
Sedgwick Siding Extension	Extend Sedgwick siding to reduce congestion along the Thayer South Subdivision	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	-	BNSF, Class I
Cypress Bend Branch Bridge Upgrades	Upgrade of 2 bridges along the Cypress Bend Branch	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$1,000	AKMD, Class III
McGehee Yard Drainage Improvements	Improve drainage in McGehee Yard.	Improve Civil Works	Short-Term	$100	AKMD, Class III
Helena Branch Rail Improvements	Rail improvements (3,229 tons) along the Helena Branch	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$2,400	AKMD, Class III
Hot Springs Branch Bridge Improvements	Upgrade of 7 bridges along the Hot Springs Branch	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$5,000	AKMD, Class III
Jacksonville Branch Turnout Construction	Construction/upgrade of 8 turnouts along the Jacksonville Branch	Access Existing or New Customers	Short-Term	$560	AKMD, Class III

[91] Some railroads did not respond to requests or opted not to include projects in the SRP. This section represents the comprehensive list of projects from those railroads which provided information to ARDOT.

Rail Improvements	Rail improvements (345 tons).	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$350	LRWN, Class III
Bridge Upgrades	Upgrade of 2 bridges.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$500	LRWN, Class III
Rail Improvements	Rail improvements (848 tons).	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$635	PNW, Class III
Turnout Construction	Construction/upgrade of 14 turnouts.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$980	PNW, Class III
286K Capacity Upgrade	Upgrade of ALM segments to 286K capacity.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Long-Term		ALM, Class III
Facility / Levee Relocation	Transload Facility and Levee Relocation	Infrastructure Upgrade	Long-Term	$4,700–$9,000 (varies based on scope of improvements for transload facility) plus $1.5M for levee relocation	LRPA, Class III
Second Bridge Construction	Fourche Dam Pike Trestle – Construction of a second bridge as alternative route. Since the existing bridge is the only rail access into and out of the Port of Little Rock, unforeseen infrastructure issues would halt port operations for up to 12-15 months.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Long-Term	$3,100	LRPA, Class III
Western Rail Loop	Western Rail Loop – Construction of a new rail line and rail yard to access the Port of Little Rock by land, via the Union Pacific Main Line.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Long-Term	$25,000	LRPA, Class III
Facility Improvements	Transload facility improvements and upgrades.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$2,000	FSR, Class III
Rail Replacements	Rail replacements across FSR network.	Accelerated Maintenance	Short-Term	$16,000	FSR, Class III
Crosstie Replacements	Crosstie replacements across FSR network.	Accelerated Maintenance	Short-Term	$2,500	FSR, Class III
Switch Crosstie Replacements	Switch crossties replacement across FSR network.	Accelerated Maintenance	Short-Term	$250	FSR, Class III

Ballast Renewal	Ballast renewal across FSR network.	Accelerated Maintenance	Short-Term	$500	FSR, Class III
Surfacing Renewal	Surfacing renewal across FSR network.	Accelerated Maintenance	Short-Term	$650	FSR, Class III
Yard Improvements	Marshaling yard improvements and upgrades.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$2,000	FSR, Class III
Lift Equipment Upgrade	Lift equipment upgrade.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$250	FSR, Class III
Rail Infrastructure Extension	Extend rail infrastructure 3.5 miles to serve industries within Chaffee Crossing and upgrade current infrastructure.	Access Existing or New Customers	Long-Term	$6,000	FSR, Class III
Bridge Upgrades	Bridge upgrades across FSR network.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$1,000	FSR, Class III
Capacity Upgrades	New capacity and upgrades across FSR network.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Long-Term	$5,000	FSR, Class III
Site Development	Development of 2,400 acres area adjacent to terminal for rail served industrial use.	Access Existing or New Customers	Long-Term	TBD	WMBR, Class III
Access Improvements	New Y-track to access Union Pacific Mainline from Friday—Graham Rail Spur	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	TBD	WMBR, Class III
Rail Access to Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport	Construct new track serving the Northwest Arkansas National Airport (XNA) industrial development site in Highfill, with connection to existing CPKC track to the west. Reuse of abandoned rail alignment following Highway 12 may be considered.	New Access	Short- to Long-Term	TBD	TBD (potentially CPKC)
Fayetteville South Industrial Park Rail Connection	Construct new track serving the Fayetteville South Industrial Park with connection to existing AM track to the west. Reuse of abandoned rail south of Highway 16 may be considered but would be challenging due to environmental and development constraints.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short- to Long-Term	TBD	TBD (potentially AM)
Van Buren Yard Slot Construction	Van Buren Yard Slots—Construct Slot at Van Buren	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$15,000	UP, Class I

White Bluff Sub to Pine Bluff Sub Connection Enhancement	White Bluff Sub Connection to Pine Bluff Sub—Construct connection from White Bluff Sub to Pine Bluff Sub.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$8,000	UP, Class I
Van Buren Sub Siding Construction	Van Buren Sub Sidings—Construct 4-6 sidings between Little Rock and Van Buren on the Van Buren Sub.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$50,000	UP, Class I
McGehee Sub Siding Construction	McGehee Sub Sidings—Construct 4-6 sidings south of Pine Bluff on the McGehee sub.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$50,000	UP, Class I
White Bluff Sub Upgrades & Improvements	White Bluff Sub Sidings and Double Track Construct 2-3 sidings between Little Rock and Pine Bluff, double track extensions extending 3-5 miles out of terminals of Little Rock and Pine Bluff.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Long-Term	$70,000	UP, Class I
North Little Rock Yard 3rd Main Track Construction	3rd Main Track at North Little Rock. Construct additional mainline at North Little Rock yard to facility fueling, inspection, crew change activities.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Long-Term	$17,000	UP, Class I
Double Track Development – Little Rock	Double Track Little Rock to Marche.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Long-Term	$45,000	UP, Class I
Double Track Development – Marion	Double Track Marion to Presley Jct. Construct approximately six miles of 2nd main track between Marion and Presley Jct.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Long-Term	$30,000	UP, Class I
New Transload Capabilities	Little Rock Area Transload facility—Develop new transload capability in the Little Rock/Central AR area.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Long-Term	$20,000	UP, Class I
Brinkley Connection Enhancements	Brinkley Connection—Enhance connection at Brinkley.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$5,000	UP, Class I
Double Track Development – Little Rock & Hoxie Subs	Little Rock & Hoxie Subs Double Track—Construct 150—200 miles of double track between Arkansas/ Missouri State Line and Texarkana.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Long-Term	$750,000	UP, Class I
Van Buren Sub CTC Installation	Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) Van Buren Sub—Install CTC signal system between Van Buren and North Little Rock.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Long-Term	$35,000	UP, Class I
Powering of McGehee Sub Sidings	Power McGehee Sub Sidings—Power all sidings on McGehee sub	Infrastructure Upgrade	Long-Term	$10,000	UP, Class I
Marion Intermodal Expansion	Expansion of Marion—Construct additional ramp capability (tracks, parking) to support intermodal growth	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$40,000	UP, Class I
Kiamichi Tri-State Freight Rail Improvement Project Phase 2 (2024)	Replace 100-year-old 90-lb. jointed rail with new 115-lb. rail in different areas of the lines, and replace 11 turnouts and improve at-grade rail crossings	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short-Term	$66,000	KRR, Class III

WAIA Intermodal Facility Rail Enhancements	Use of existing rail and/or new track alignments serving the WAIA Intermodal Facility south of Van Buren. Multiple service options have been explored in conceptual planning documents.	Infrastructure Upgrade	Short- to Long-term	TBD	TBD (but concepts have been proposed involving UP or AM trackage)

Source: Arkansas Freight Railroads and Other Rail Stakeholders

5.6 Expected Effects of Rail Program Implementation

Key passenger and freight rail planning initiatives and projects are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. The short- and long-term effects of the rail investment program are discussed in the following subsections.

5.6.1 Public Sector and Economic Benefits

As documented in Section 2.6, rail investments help to advance public sector goals relating to safety, mobility, and economic prosperity. In relation to the passenger rail investments, Amtrak's station improvements will make passenger rail service more accessible for Arkansans with enhanced mobility needs. These projects, identified for four stations, could result in additional ridership increases over time. Other proposed improvements to passenger rail service would further enhance regional and statewide mobility.

The freight rail investment program includes improvements and upgrades across the statewide rail network. In the short-term, these improvements are expected to help bolster the statewide transportation system by ensuring state of good repair. Over the longer term, continued freight rail investments will be crucial to supporting economic growth, both locally, regionally, and statewide.

5.6.2 Private Sector Benefits

Private sector and economic benefits are evident based on the overall impacts of both freight and rail service (see Section 2.6.1). The freight rail investment program includes multiple projects that enhance site development opportunities, including intermodal facility expansion, double-tracking, industrial site and turnout construction. The benefits of businesses clustering together around rail-accessible sites could also spur additional private sector benefits and developments. In addition to these highlights, in general, the rail investment program is expected lead to increased employment and economic investment during the planning, design, and construction phases of each project.

5.6.3 Rail Capacity & Congestion

Several bottlenecks are identified in Section 2.7.5, while weight restrictions along the rail network are shown in Figure 2.33. Both of these are limiting factors that can reduce capacity and increase congestion. Projects at these locations which would address rail capacity and congestion by constructing sidings, turnouts, new rail connections, mainline tracks, and expanded freight facilities. In the short term, these projects would lead to reductions in bottlenecks and other chokepoints in the statewide multimodal transportation system. In the long-term, these projects could produce additional benefits for rail shippers and users in the form of increased operations efficiencies and accessibility to new customers and businesses.

In relation to weight standards, projects to upgrade trackage and infrastructure are additionally expected to reduce congestion in the short-term. These congestion reductions stem from increased infrastructure system reliability, and reduced chokepoints. In the long-term, a strong capital investment program will also lead to cost savings on future capacity and congestion needs as a result of proactive planning.

5.6.4 Safety & Resiliency

Rail investments are also expected to realize safety benefits for the rail system and in the larger context of the state's multimodal transportation system. As an example, ARDOT will continue to pursue investments in grade crossing protections, which improve safety for rail operators and highway users, alike.

Resilience in the context of the rail system refers to the need to maintain a high degree of reliability, safety, and performance. Overall, investments in passenger and freight rail systems can be expected to increase resilience across both the short-term and long-term time horizons. The passenger rail investment program includes upgrades to the state's passenger stations, and long-term studies to broadly improve and expand the system. Nearly every component of the freight rail investment program promotes resilience. Some highlights include the construction of an alternative bridge into and out of the Port of Little Rock, drainage projects in and around freight facilities, and equipment/infrastructure upgrades.

6.0 Coordination and Review

ARDOT developed this SRP with input from a wide range of stakeholders representing various interests within Arkansas. Chapter 6 summarizes the methods of private and public sector input utilized for developing the SRP.

6.1 Approach to Public- and Private-Sector Stakeholder Participation

In order to better understand the opportunities and issues faced by Arkansas' rail system stakeholders and users throughout the state, stakeholder outreach was structured to receive targeted feedback from stakeholders in the public sector, industry, and the general public. This engagement consisted of four components: assembly of a Rail Advisory Committee (RAC), an online story map and survey, in-person engagement, and direct outreach.

Figure 6.1 shows the methods used to engage with each major stakeholder group to develop the SRP. Figure 6.2 shows how insight gained from coordination with each major stakeholder group helped guide the development of key sections of the SRP.

Figure 6.1 Summary of Engagement by Stakeholder

	Rail Advisory Committee	Survey	In-Person Engagement	Direct Outreach
Arkansas Public Sector Representatives		✓		
Freight Industry Representatives	✓	✓		
General Public		✓	✓	
Other Public Sector Representatives	✓	✓		✓
Passenger Rail Users		✓	✓	
Rail Carriers	✓	✓		✓
Rail Shippers	✓	✓		

Figure 6.2 Stakeholder Insight Applied to SRP Components

	Arkansas Public Sector Reps.	Freight Industry Reps.	General Public	Other Public Sector Reps.	Passenger Rail Users	Rail Carriers	Rail Shippers
Vision & Goals for Rail Service	✓						
Governance & Funding	✓						
Rail System Inventory						✓	
Rail System Trends & Forecasts	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Rail System Needs		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Rail Investment Program						✓	
Rail Investment Program Impacts		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

6.1.1 Rail Advisory Committee

To guide the SRP development process, a Rail Advisory Committee (RAC) was assembled, consisting of key industry stakeholders, representatives from the state's railroads, rail shippers, industry representatives, planning & development districts, MPOs, and other relevant groups. Throughout the SRP development process, the RAC provided input, vetted materials, and helped to guide next steps. The SRP project team and RAC convened three times throughout this process, with each meeting briefly summarized below:

- **RAC Meeting #1:** The first RAC meeting was held early in the SRP development process in December 2021, while the SFP was also ongoing. This meeting included a review of the previous SRP vision and goals, as well as existing commodity flows. The meeting also included discussion of pre- and post-COVID-19 pandemic travel and rail usage patterns, and which themes should be highlighted most in the SRP.

- **RAC Meeting #2:** The second RAC meeting was held in June 2023 following adoption of the SFP. This meeting included a comprehensive assessment of existing conditions, and discussions of prioritizing passenger and freight rail opportunities and challenges. Key freight opportunities which were discussed included system enhancement needs, funding, track quality & weight restrictions, safety, and service/labor challenges. Passenger rail opportunities which were discussed included hours of service, modal competitiveness, Federal designation of high-speed rail corridors, and spillovers from freight issues.

- **RAC Meeting #3:** The third RAC meeting was held in June 2024 during the latter stages of the SRP development. This meeting included a recap of the RAC and its role in the development process, as well as an examination of the SRP layout and structure. The meeting also included a discussion of the passenger and freight rail investment program, as well as an open-ended discussion about the future of rail in Arkansas, and suggestions for building on this SRP.

6.1.2 Story Map & Surveying Process

ARDOT developed and deployed an online Story Map and survey to share information with stakeholders and the general public throughout Arkansas and to solicit input on freight and passenger rail opportunities in the state. The Story Map consisted of a concise and visual web-based version of the plan, designed to easily disseminate the key components of the SRP, including an examination of the statewide freight and passenger rail systems, and trends & forecasts impacting rail in Arkansas.

The Story Map also included a survey focusing on passenger and freight rail issues and opportunities. The passenger rail portion of the survey asked respondents about their interactions with, and opinions of passenger rail, and how various trends (such as rising gasoline prices or increasing traffic congestion) could spur more frequent rail usage. The survey also asked respondents about where they would like to see new passenger rail services and connections. The freight rail portion of the survey asked respondents about their interactions and experience with freight rail both directly and within their communities, concerns, and suggestions for improving freight rail.

The Story Map and corresponding survey were released to the general public for a 30-day period between January 14, 2024, and February 13, 2024. RAC members and other key stakeholders were also invited to participate and help distribute the materials. Information about the Story Map and survey were also distributed through social media channels, e-Blast, newspaper advertisements, and printouts.

6.1.3 In-Person Engagement

In July 2023, ARDOT hosted a listening session as a component of outreach for the SRP at the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission (NWARPC) in Springdale. The purpose of this listening session was to gather input on what the future of rail, and especially passenger rail service should look like in Arkansas. The listening session was open to the general public, with attendance consisting of personnel from NWARPC, NWA GO, Ozark Regional Transit, the Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, the City of Fayetteville, and individuals from the region. Overall, the listening session focused on multiple topics including high-speed rail, the FRA's Corridor ID program, and regional needs related to rail and mobility. Key takeaways included the following:

- Passenger rail can be used as tool to alleviate regional congestion, especially in the form of a high-speed rail service.
- There may be merit in applying for FRA Corridor ID designation for one or more corridors in Arkansas.
- Participants expressed interest in state leaders from Arkansas starting or participating in a coalition similar to the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission.

- A passenger rail corridor connecting Kansas City to Shreveport via Northwest Arkansas could build on ongoing efforts by the Southern Rail Commission to link Dallas and Atlanta via Northern Louisiana.
- A rail connection to Northwest Arkansas National Airport (XNA) could spur economic development in the area.
- There are concerns over noise pollution from increased traffic following the Class I merger which formed CPKC, although in the short term, no increases in freight rail traffic are expected.
- There is interest in developing a multi-use trail between Little Rock and Hot Springs along formerly used rails.

6.1.4 Direct Outreach

In addition to the above methods of outreach, ARDOT engaged directly with the state's railroads to obtain information on rail networks and investments in the state. ARDOT also engaged other key industries which rely heavily on rail, including the agriculture, poultry and metals manufacturing industries, to solicit input into the plan. As explained in the next section, ARDOT also engaged representatives from the neighboring states of Missouri and Texas to identify opportunities for coordination on multi-state rail issues.

6.2 Coordination with Neighboring States

ARDOT conducted meetings with state DOT representatives from Missouri and Texas to discuss shared rail-related issues, opportunities, and needs, centered around Texas Eagle passenger rail service, as well as freight rail operations near the borders with Arkansas, or which could impact rail activity in Arkansas.

6.2.1 Missouri Rail Coordination

ARDOT met virtually with staff from the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) Multimodal Division Rail Section to discuss rail opportunities and needs. Multiple rail lines cross between the two states, and the Texas Eagle passenger service connects Arkansans to St. Louis and other destinations in Missouri, and vice versa. Key takeaways from this meeting include

- The merger of CP and KCS into CPKC has not led to a significant increase in freight rail traffic near and across the border between Missouri and Arkansas. Traffic along BNSF's River Subdivision between St. Louis and West Memphis is expected to increase as a result of new businesses along the line in Missouri.
- The city of DeSoto, MO, located approximately 45 miles south of St. Louis, has received approval for a new passenger rail stop along the Texas Eagle. The next steps in establishing service will be to undertake construction of a new station and integrate the stop into the existing schedule.
- MoDOT submitted a Corridor ID application for the Kansas City – Joplin corridor. There is also growing interest to examine the feasibility of service between Kansas City and Minneapolis, and between St. Louis and Memphis via Arkansas.

- The AM railroad received a CRISI grant to eliminate an at-grade crossing in Monet, which is located in southwest Missouri, approximately 30 miles from the border with Arkansas.

6.2.2 Texas Rail Coordination

ARDOT met virtually with staff from the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Planning & Programming Section to discuss rail opportunities and needs. The primary connection between Arkansas and Texas is the UP's Little Rock Subdivision which is a major rail connection to population centers in Texas, points west, and Mexico. The Little Rock Subdivision also carries the Texas Eagle towards Dallas and points south and west. Overall, few meaningful opportunities for coordination were identified, as TxDOT is currently focusing passenger rail development efforts outside of the Texas Eagle corridor. TxDOT did note plans for a project to construct a second rail crossing between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo, Mexico given that the existing crossing is a single track. This project, still in the planning phase, could significantly increase rail traffic, including Arkansas, given that Mexico is a major manufacturing hub.

6.3 Recommendations from Stakeholders & The Public

Through the diverse methods of coordination and stakeholder engagement, a number of key themes and recommendations were provided to help guide implementation of the SRP:

- Overall, stakeholders view rail service as vital to Arkansas' economy. This was particularly reflected through engagement with the RAC, carriers, shippers, and members of the general public who participated in the survey. As a result, there is a continued need for investment across the state's freight and passenger rail systems.

- Stakeholders recommended increased passenger rail investments in the form of additional stations along the Texas Eagle route (particularly at Bald Knob), as well as better (more frequent) service along the route. Stakeholders also expressed interest in new passenger rail services, including service within and to Northwest Arkansas (with destinations such as Little Rock, Tulsa, and/or Kansas City), service in Northeast Arkansas (with destinations such as St. Louis and Memphis), and continued interest in service between Little Rock and West Memphis.

- Safety investments are recommended broadly across the statewide rail network. This was a key topic discussed during the second RAC meeting and through the general public survey. These investments are recommended to address needs related to grade crossings, hazardous materials, and operations. In relation to grade crossings, investments are needed in the form of upgrades and grade separations. In relation to operations, there is a desire to better protect local communities from the negative externalities of freight rail traffic, including traffic, blocked crossings, and noise.

- Continued collaboration between stakeholders is recommended to achieve the goals of the SRP, particularly in relation to passenger rail service, but also to provide new and enhanced opportunities for freight rail service.

6.4 Coordination with Other Transportation Planning Programs

This SRP has been coordinated with and is structured to provide input to other statewide and metropolitan planning efforts, including 23 U.S. Code § 134, 23 U.S. Code § 135, 49 U.S. Code § 5303, and

49 U.S. Code § 5303 in relation to statewide, metropolitan, and nonmetropolitan planning. Broadly and at the statewide scope, the SRP was developed in close coordination with the SFP given the strong overlap between the two processes, with freight system trends and needs guiding the approach to assessing rail system needs. Similarly, the goals and visions for the statewide rail system were developed in close coordination with the SFP and LRITP. This statewide coordination provides Arkansas with a strong understanding of the statewide rail network and could position the state's rail network to secure innovative funding opportunities in upcoming years.

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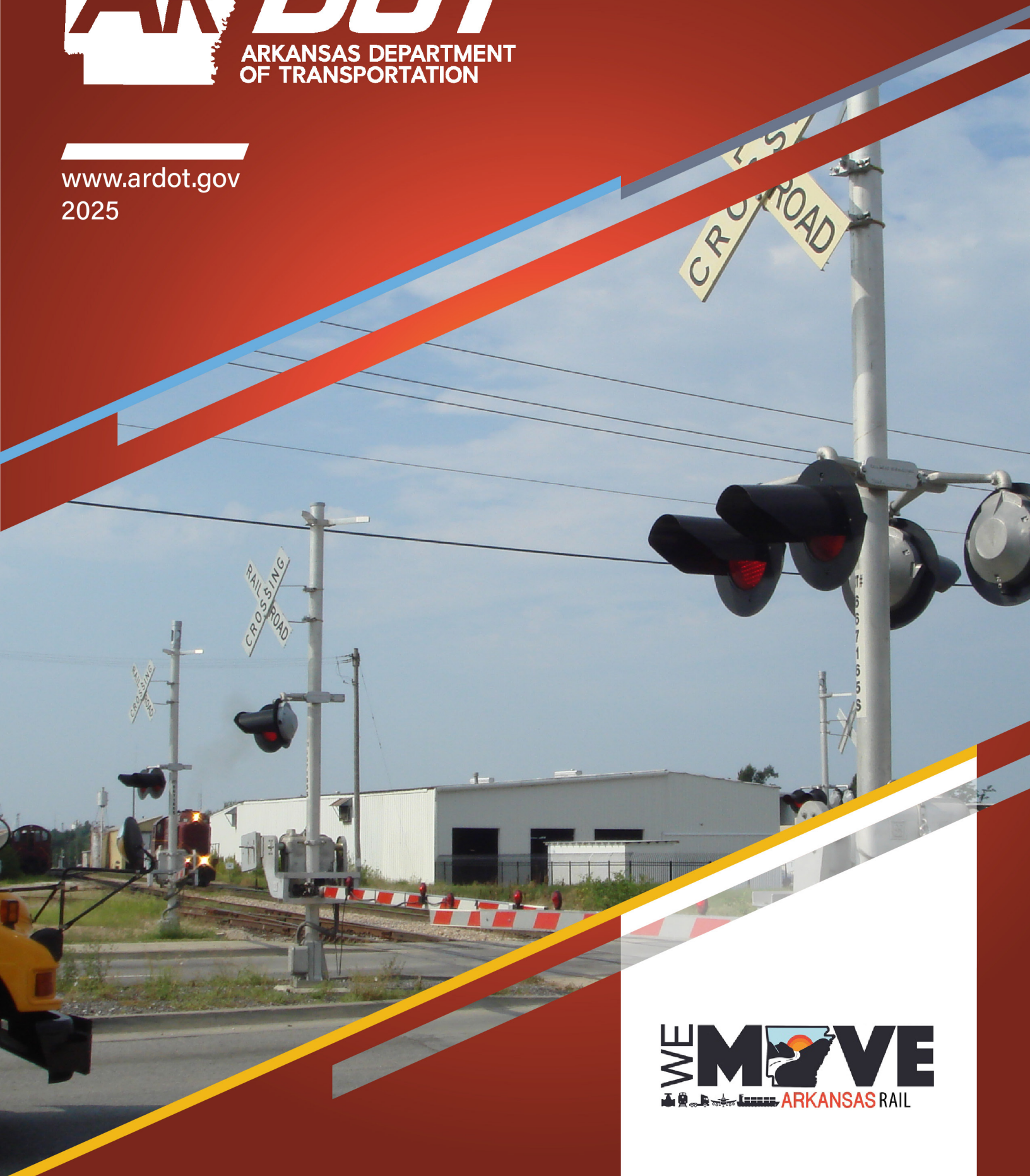

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