

Disrupting Rail Cargo Theft

In recent years, organized criminal groups have increasingly targeted the nation's railroads using sophisticated tactics and technology to commit cargo theft. While these attacks occur across every freight provider and in every region, collectively the result is rippling supply chain disruptions and costly delays that impact American families.

In 2024, total costs to the nation's largest railroads (Class Is) exceeded \$100 million.

Beyond the costs of insurance claims for stolen goods, railroads are also faced with the need to repair or replace damaged infrastructure, manage operational delays that disrupt the network, invest in new anti-theft technologies and allocate additional resources to combat these crimes. All these factors contribute to rising operational costs and inflationary pressures for businesses and consumers.

Industry estimates suggest that over 65,000 thefts occurred in 2024 representing a roughly 40% increase over the prior year. Additionally, railroads are also reporting an escalation in tactics with suspects being armed increasing the potential for apprehending these individuals to result in violence.

More effective apprehension and prosecution are necessary.

Railroads estimate that, at most, one in ten cargo theft attempts results in an arrest. Even when they do, many of these crimes are committed by repeat offenders. For example, one railroad apprehended the same individual five times in a single day and another has reported arresting the same individual seventeen times for repeated cargo theft attempts.

Railroads have invested millions in preventing these crimes across the 140,000-mile U.S. rail network. However, the industry cannot disrupt these highly organized – and often transnational – criminal groups alone.

Breaking this cycle will require sustained attention, dedicated federal resources, and increased penalties. Given the interstate and transnational nature of this issue, and the ties many criminals have to larger criminal organizations, a federal response is necessary to improve coordination of data collection and facilitate the apprehension, effective prosecution, and detention of those responsible. Railroads are working in coalition with other supply chain partners to:

1. Advance Reps. David Valadao and Brad Schneider's [Safeguarding our Supply Chains Act](#), which creates a data sharing repository from industry and enhances coordination between the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, and local law enforcement to address cargo theft.
2. Increase penalties for those who commit cargo theft.
3. Encourage efficient and effective prosecution for cargo theft crimes when an arrest occurs.
4. [Secure funding for dedicated federal prosecutors to tackle cargo theft.](#)

Key Takeaway: Freight railroads and other supply chain partners are being targeted for cargo theft by highly organized criminal operations costing the nation's largest railroads more than \$100 million in 2024. Multi-layered federal action that enhances law enforcement coordination and increases prosecutions is vital to disrupt these criminal operations and protect consumers and businesses from supply chain disruptions and increased costs.