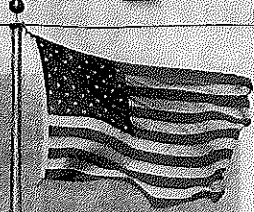


Or

Visit:
redding.com/news/opinion**Editorial**

Crude-carrying rail cars need to be reined in

Bring up names like "ForestEthics" or "Sierra Club" in the North State, and you may hear a string of epithets, moans about the spotted owl and stories about how our economy was doing just fine, thank you, before they came along and ruined the logging industry.

We tend to be sympathetic to the local point of view on this matter, though the idea of a re-surgent forest industry here is a fantasy we can't afford.

That said, the aforementioned groups and their partners, the Waterkeeper Alliance, the Center for Biological Diversity and a trio of groups from Washington state deserve credit for their battle with federal officials to force stricter regulations of thousands of unsafe tank cars hauling millions of barrels of crude oil along the rails that bisect the centers of our communities.

On Thursday the groups announced that they are suing the U.S. Department of Transportation in the 9th Circuit Court, challenging the final tank car safety rule released May 1.

Interestingly, the rule was released less than a week before another train carrying oil from the rich Bakken Shale oil fields in North Dakota exploded outside the 27-soul town of Heimdahl. No one was injured when six of the train's 107 cars left the tracks and exploded.

But that wasn't the case two years ago in the lakeside village of Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, when a 72-car train carrying North Dakota crude went off the tracks, sparking an inferno that killed 47 people and obliterated the center of town.

Five of those people were vaporized, their bodies never found.

Deraillments, fires and explosions of that highly volatile Bakken crude have continued from Canada to New Orleans, from New York to as far west as Denver.

In the North State we still remember the 1991 derailed tanker that all but killed the Sacramento River when it spilled 20,000 gallons of a toxic herbicide.

Last year when firefighters and other emergency responders from six North State counties held their emergency training in that very spot, they had Bakken crude on their minds.

Traditionally most oil shipped to California has come by ship.

Not any more.

While only about a million barrels of crude entered the state by rail in 2012, the figure jumped to 3.6 million barrels in 2013 and is projected to go to 150 million barrels by next year. Each barrel contains 42 gallons of crude.

Those same Union Pacific tracks that hug the Cantara Loop flow on down through Redding and to the Bay Area and Southern California refineries.

The DOT has been under pressure for several years now to replace two models of oil cars among those carrying the crude. The old cars are thin-skinned, not built for carrying crude and easily ruptured.

Though the new rule released by the DOT addresses those cars, it only calls for a 10-year phase-out. New tanker cars will need thicker shells, but the standards are lower for retrofitted cars.

The rule accepts the voluntary railroad industry speed limit of 50 mph and 40 mph in high-threat urban areas. Only a few dozen cities in the nation fit the latter category, according to the environmental groups.

There are other shortcomings, but among the most serious is the large step back from disclosure.

An emergency order issued a year ago required the railroads to inform state emergency centers when long trains carrying a million gallons or more of the crude moved through each county. That requirement was eliminated.

The federal rule that should have protected us from potential disaster is fraught with loopholes catering to the railroads. Those carriers no doubt are making big money hauling those traveling time bombs.

Any concessions those environmentalists can win from the court will help protect all of us.

Record Searchlight

EDITORIAL BOARD

STEVE SMITH
PRESIDENT AND PUBLISHER

SILAS LYONS
EDITOR

MALINE HAZLE
EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR



CONTRIBUTIONS

Letters should be less than 200 words and are subject to editing. Letters must include the author's full name, daytime phone number and home address; only name and hometown will be published.



10 North American Oil Trains Have Now Exploded in 2 Years

DOT has released new regulations to control the disturbing trend.

ERIC JAFFE | [@e_jaffe](#) | May 11, 2015 | [4 Comments](#)



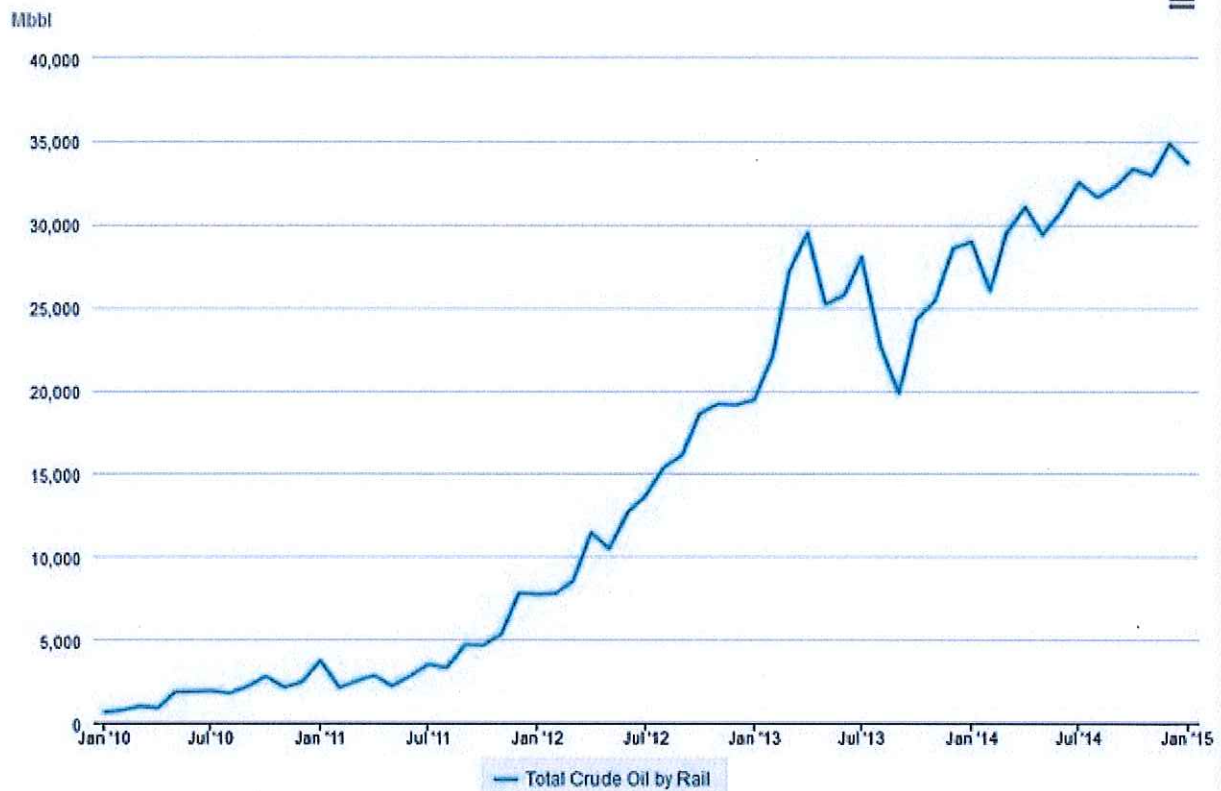
Curt Benson / AP

The crude oil train that derailed and burst into flames [last week](#) near tiny Heimdahl, North Dakota (population: 27), was the latest explosion in a disturbing series across North America. Over at *Sightline*, Eric de Place and

Keiko Budech [now count](#) at least 10 oil train accidents over just the past two years—dating back to the [July 2013 crash](#) in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec. Others during that span have occurred in the likes of Illinois, West Virginia, and Alabama.

There's no mystery why these incidents are occurring now: the practice of moving crude oil by rail in North America is climbing at a startling rate. In a separate *Sightline* post, de Place and Deric Gruen [chart the trend](#) via new material from the U.S. Energy Information Administration. This one just about says it all—oil train shipments either to, from, or within the U.S. have gone from 20 million barrels in 2010 to 373 million in 2014, largely on the back of new production from the [Bakken region](#):

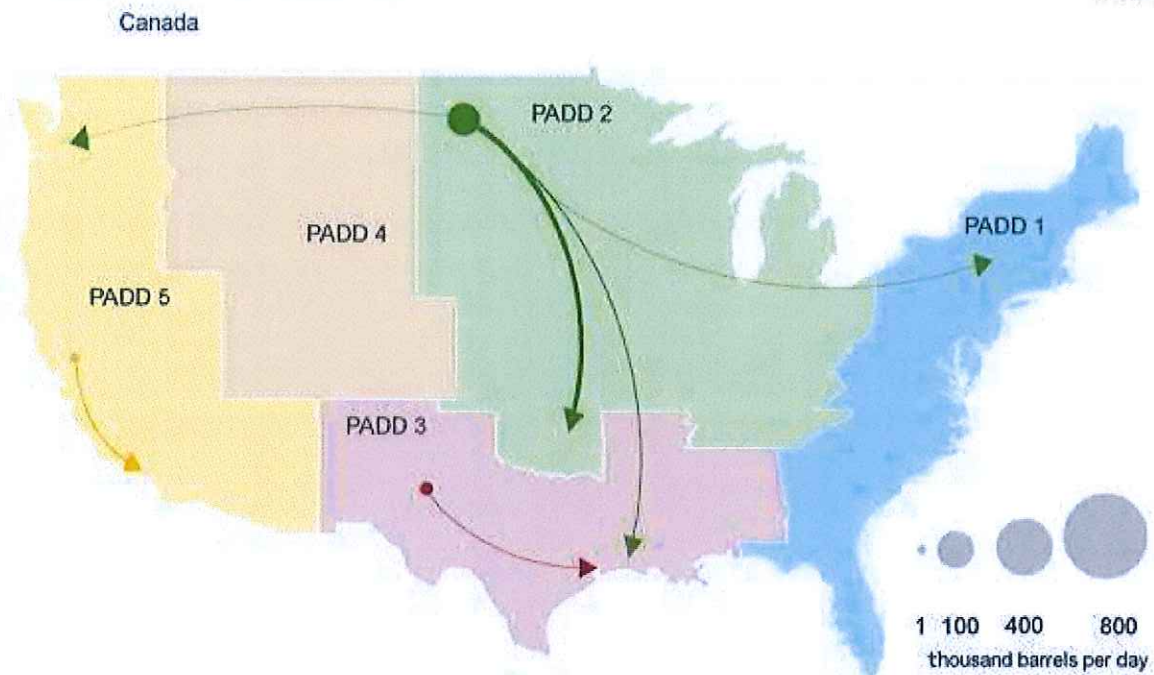
Movements of Crude Oil by Rail



[Sightline](#)

The [EIA offers](#) a more visual look via time-based maps. Here's the skinny-arrowed look at how things were in 2010:

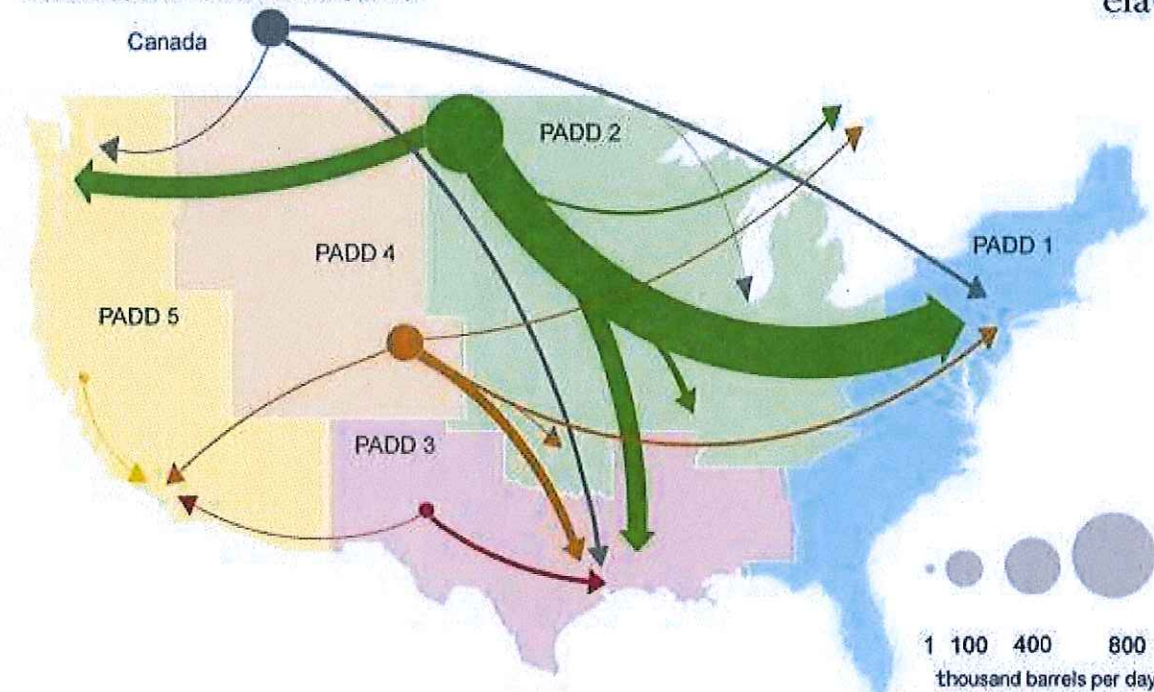
Crude-by-rail movements (2010)



U.S. EIA

And here's the fuller and fattened landscape today:

Crude-by-rail movements (2014)



U.S. EIA

Even before the Heimdal explosion, federal officials did recognize the problem. On May 1, the U.S. Department of Transportation announced a [four-part plan](#) to improve oil train safety: enhanced tank cars with thicker shells, better braking systems less likely to "pile up," reduced speeds and other operating requirements, and improved classification—building on new rules that included a [40-mph speed limit](#) through urban areas. Canada released similar standards.

The DOT regulations are a good start, though as usual there's a little something for everyone to dislike. Some officials worry the changes will actually make it harder for the public [to get information](#) about oil train routes and schedules. Railroads question whether the brake requirements will truly upgrade safety. None of the rules address what [one senator told](#) the *New York Times* is at the core of the problem: Bakken crude is just way more volatile than typical oil.

Taking the wider view, the safety hazard of moving crude by rail is yet another [hidden social cost of car reliance](#). The longer these go unpaid, the higher the cost to all.

About the Author



Eric Jaffe is a senior associate editor at CityLab. He writes about transportation as well as behavior, crime, and history, and has a general interest in the science of city life. He's the author of *A Curious Madness* (2014) and *The King's Best Highway* (2010), and lives in New York.

ALL POSTS | [@e_jaffe](#)

California Has Little Say Over Oil Train Safety

Molly Samuel

Listen:

Audio Player

00:00

05:16

Use Up/Down Arrow keys to increase or decrease volume.



A BNSF train with tank cars crosses a trestle in the Feather River Canyon in Northern California. (Jake Miille/Jake Miille Photography)

Update, Friday, July 25: On Wednesday, the federal Department of Transportation [proposed new regulations](#) aimed at improving the safety of trains carrying oil.

Original story (Monday, July 21):

The number of trains carrying crude oil across California is increasing rapidly, and two official reports say the state is not ready. Regulators are preparing, with funds for disaster response and more track inspectors, but they're limited in how much they can do to make rail transport safer.

"My view is it's pretty undeniably bringing in extra risks to the state," said Paul King, deputy director for rail safety at the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC).

"These trains explode," King said. "If that were to happen in a town, there's no telling the damage. And of course we know what happened in little Lac-Mégantic." That's the town in Quebec where a train carrying crude from North Dakota's Bakken formation derailed last July. The explosion killed 47 people.

'These trains explode.'— *Paul King, California Public Utilities Commission*

Bakken crude is volatile. In the past year, trains transporting crude from the Bakken have also exploded in North Dakota, Virginia and Alabama.

Trains carrying Bakken crude traverse California, too, bringing the oil to refineries here. And while the CPUC regulates rail in California, the state can't actually do much when it comes telling the railroads how they can operate. Almost all of those rules are up to the federal government.

'Our Hands in California Are Tied'

The state can't set speed limits on crude oil trains. It can't tell railroads to choose less hazardous routes. It can't tell oil companies not to bring trains carrying the volatile crude through cities. It can't tell oil companies to ship that crude in stronger tank cars. It can't require upgraded braking systems.

Neither can local governments, though the cities of Davis, Richmond and Berkeley have all passed resolutions expressing their opposition to the transport of crude oil by rail.

"I almost feel like our hands in California are tied, yet all these trains are going through our communities," State Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson, a democrat from Santa Barbara, said at a hearing last month.

Trains carried nearly 6.3 million barrels of oil into California in 2013. That's more than five times more than in 2012. According to the California Energy Commission, by 2016 that number could balloon to more than 100 million barrels.

That's because there's an oil boom in the middle part of the continent, and to get that crude from Alberta and North Dakota to California, oil companies have to use trains.



Firefighters douse blazes in Lac-Mégantic on July 6, 2013. (François Laplante-Delagrave/AFP/Getty Images)

Steps Towards Safer Shipping

There are ways to make the trains safer.

Most of the tank cars used to transport crude oil, including the volatile Bakken crude, are old, and can't protect against explosions. After the disaster in Lac-Mégantic, [Canada required](#) that the most dangerous of the cars — the same tank cars that carry as much as 82 percent of crude oil in the U.S. — be removed from service, and that the rest be retrofitted.

The U.S. is considering stricter tank car standards. Last week, the advocacy group Earthjustice sent a [letter to the U.S. Department of Transportation](#), urging the agency to move faster by issuing an emergency order immediately banning the use of the unsafe cars.

But California can't require any of this. The CPUC intends to urge the DOT to "move expeditiously" to update its tank car regulations. That, and other recommendations, are laid out in a [recent report on crude-by-rail](#) safety in the state. The state wants the feds to require that there be newer braking technology on oil trains and a GPS-based system that prevents accidents on oil train routes. According to King, the CPUC will submit those recommendations to the Federal Railroad Administration soon.

The railroads have already adopted some [voluntary safety measures](#), including lower speed limits and increased track inspections. And Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, the company that is currently transporting large amounts of Bakken crude in California, is asking railcar manufacturers to submit bids to build 5,000 safer cars. (The railroads typically don't own the cars used to ship material; the oil companies themselves either own or lease them.)

The CPUC has done one of the main things it can: hire more railroad safety inspectors. The CPUC keeps a list of the most hazardous sections of track, and according to [a recent report](#), the most frequent cause of derailments at those sites are track problems. The new state budget adds seven positions, bringing the CPUC's inspection staff to 38. CPUC staff checks all the tracks in California once a year and, going forward, will check the tracks on Bakken oil train routes twice a year.

[Revealed: Routes for Trains Hauling Volatile Crude Oil in California](#)

[Bay Area Cities and Environmentalists Respond to Crude-By-Rail Boom](#)

[California's Not Ready for Influx of Oil Trains, Says Report](#)



A Past Disaster

California once tried to introduce stricter railroad regulations.

In July, 1991, a train derailed in Northern California at a bend in the track where it crosses the Upper Sacramento River, near the town of Dunsmuir. It spilled 19,000 gallons of a pesticide called metam sodium into the river.

"It killed everything down to the bacteria," said Mark Stopher, who was hired by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to assess the damage to the river.

The poison killed more than a million fish, and every insect and plant in the river for 40 miles. "Nobody's ever seen anything like that before," he said. In [video](#) from the time, you can see fish struggling to escape the river and get into tributaries. Stopher said they all died.

"It was kind of a blow to the heart to lose the river," said Phil Dietrich, executive director of a conservation group called River Exchange.

The Upper Sacramento had been a popular fishing destination. So when the fish were gone, the tourists, and their money, disappeared too.

But it was a pulse of poison; metam sodium doesn't linger. A few years later, the fish were back. The tourists are back, too. It could have been worse, if what spilled had been a substance that lasts in the environment for a longer time. Oil, for instance.

After the accident, the CPUC tried to require stronger track at Cantara Loop, to keep it from happening again.

"We were trying to adopt regulations where there were none," said King. But they couldn't. The railroad sued the CPUC, and eventually the court sided with the railroad, reinforcing the Federal Railroad Administration's jurisdiction. There is a large rail in place on the bridge now, to help keep trains from derailing into the river. According to the CPUC, there have been four derailments in the area since 2009.

"Our role is limited," King said. "Our role is to ensure that the regulations that the federal government has in place are followed."

Beefing Up Clean-Up

Even if the the state can't do all it wants to keep an accident from happening, it can prepare to respond to one.

In June, dozens of fire fighters, public health experts and Red Cross volunteers gathered near Cantara Loop to run a drill. The scenario was that an oil train had collided with an illegal marijuana grower's truck at the site of the '91 spill. The truck wrecked, and the train derailed and spilled oil into the river.

Firefighters pulled the casualties (volunteers marked with paint) away from the scene, a helicopter brought tools to treat people who'd been doused in dangerous chemicals and a team deployed a drone to get a view of the (largely imaginary) disaster scene from above.

"We want to make sure California's prepared to respond," said Alexia Rettalack of California's Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR). "Spills happen. When product moves, things happen."

OSPR got more money in this year's budget, so that it can prepare for inland oil spills. Until now, the agency focused only on marine accidents. The state Office of Emergency Services is also looking for ways to better prepare emergency responders, many of whom are volunteers, for an oil train explosion. And state lawmakers are considering a couple of crude-by-rail bills that would improve emergency responses.

Dietrich emphasizes that what happened in Dunsmuir in 1991 was a rare event, and yet, the memory lingers.

"It comes down to we care about our river and about our towns," he said. "And we hope that the agencies and the railroad are on top of it."

Explore: [Audio](#), [Energy](#), [Environment](#), [News](#), [Radio](#), [bakken](#), [bnsf](#), [cantara loop](#), [CPUC](#), [crude-by-rail](#), [oil](#), [trains](#)
[Show Comments \(4\)](#)

Related

[Bay Area Residents Resist Crude-by-Rail as Accidents Rise](#)

[Revealed: Routes for Trains Hauling Volatile Crude Oil in California](#)

[Benicia Extends Public Comment Period on Bay Area Crude-by-Rail](#)

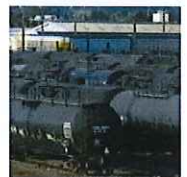
[California's Not Ready for Influx of Oil Trains, Says Report](#)

[Crude-by-Rail: More Information Coming to California](#)

[Oil Transport by Train Continues to Climb](#)



Powered by



Barbed Wire - July 25, 2014

July 25, 2014

Solar Permitting Bill Moves to Senate Appropriations Committee –
RCRC Urges Members to Take Action



Crude Oil by Rail

Public Comment Period Extended on Tribal Acknowledgment
Rule

Rural Areas Targeted for Investment

Highway Trust Fund Update

President Signs Reauthorization of Workforce Investment Act into
Law

Unpredictable Track for Wildfire Funding

Supervisors Testify on Capitol Hill in Support of PILT, SRS, and
Partnership

House Transportation and Infrastructure Hearing on EPA's
Integrated Planning Approach

STATE LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

FEDERAL AND STATE REGULATORY UPDATE

Solar Permitting Bill Moves to Senate Appropriations Committee –
RCRC Urges Members to Take Action (/solar-permitting-bill-moves-
senate-appropriations-committee-%E2%80%93rcrc-urges-
members-take-action)

Assembly Bill 2188 (Muratsuchi), which calls for the expedited permitting and inspection process for small residential solar energy systems, continues to move through the legislative process. AB 2188 is scheduled to be heard in the Senate Appropriations Committee on Monday, August 4, 2014. RCRC staff strongly urges member counties to contact Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee and describe the impacts this legislation would have upon local government, and request that they vote "No" on AB 2188 when it is heard in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

As amended July 1, 2014, AB 2188 requires each city and county to create an expedited permitting and inspection process for small residential solar energy systems, among other provisions. Specifically, AB 2188:

- Gives preference to solar over all other types of permits, creating a special class of permitting and inspections for one particular industry; and,
- Requires that by September 30, 2015, every city and every county must adopt an ordinance that creates an expedited, streamlined permitting process for small residential rooftop solar energy systems, consistent with the Solar Rights Act.

The text of AB 2188 can be accessed here
(http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/13-14/bill/asm/ab_2151-2200/ab_2188_bill_20140701_amended_sen_v94.pdf).

For additional information, please contact RCRC Legislative Advocate Kathy Mannion at (916) 447-4806 or kmannion@rcrcnet.org (<mailto:kmannion@rcrcnet.org>).



Crude Oil by Rail (/crude-oil-rail)

On Wednesday, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) issued a comprehensive rulemaking proposal to improve the safe transportation of crude oil and ethanol by rail, largely in response to the Bakken Crude oil spills that have caused major disasters in both Canada and several communities across the states. DOT has proposed new rules that would mandate new safety standards for existing and new tank cars, as well as speed restrictions and new braking equipment on trains carrying these materials. The new regulations would also require railroads to notify state emergency response officials about the operation of oil trains through States. Currently, there are no provisions to require notification to local governments, which is critical to ensure that they are well-equipped to implement emergency measures in the event of a rail disaster.

Public Comment Period Extended on Tribal Acknowledgment Rule (/public-comment-period-extended-tribal-acknowledgment-rule)

The Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the Department of the Interior (Department) announced today that the public comment period for a proposed rule to acknowledge tribes has been extended to September 30, 2014. This 60-day extension is to accommodate the numerous requests that the Department has received from the public and Congress to allow more time for comments before the rule is finalized. This proposed rule revises and expedites the process for the federal government to recognize new tribes. In addition to the comment period extension, the Department also announced two new additional public meetings to discuss the proposed rule. The meetings will be held by conference call on September 3rd and 5th from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. PDT at (888) 323-4307. Participant passcode for the call is 4823348. Transcripts of all tribal consultations and public meetings will be posted on the Indian Affairs website, accessed here (<http://www.bia.gov/>).

Rural Areas Targeted for Investment (/rural-areas-targeted-investment)

Earlier this week the U.S. Rural Infrastructure Opportunity Fund was unveiled at the first-ever White House Rural Opportunity Conference. CoBank, a national bank that caters to rural America, pledged the initial \$10 billion investment. It is hoped that this "anchor" investment will trigger other investment firms to participate in the new fund.

For its part, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) will continue investing through its Rural Development grants and loans program, but sees the new investment fund as a way to leverage its own investments and expand projects into rural areas. Additionally, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack is placing the agency into the "matchmaking" role, matching available capital investments with the communities, business-owners, and projects that need resources. For projects that have greater financial risks and limited access to lending resources, the USDA can play an important role as a guarantor of financing.

According to Secretary Vilsack, the hope is for innovation both in the types of projects, and the variety of funding sources and streams. While key projects will be largely geared toward rural community