

# Policing America's Railroads

A push is underway to allow rail officers to access public-safety interoperability frequencies.

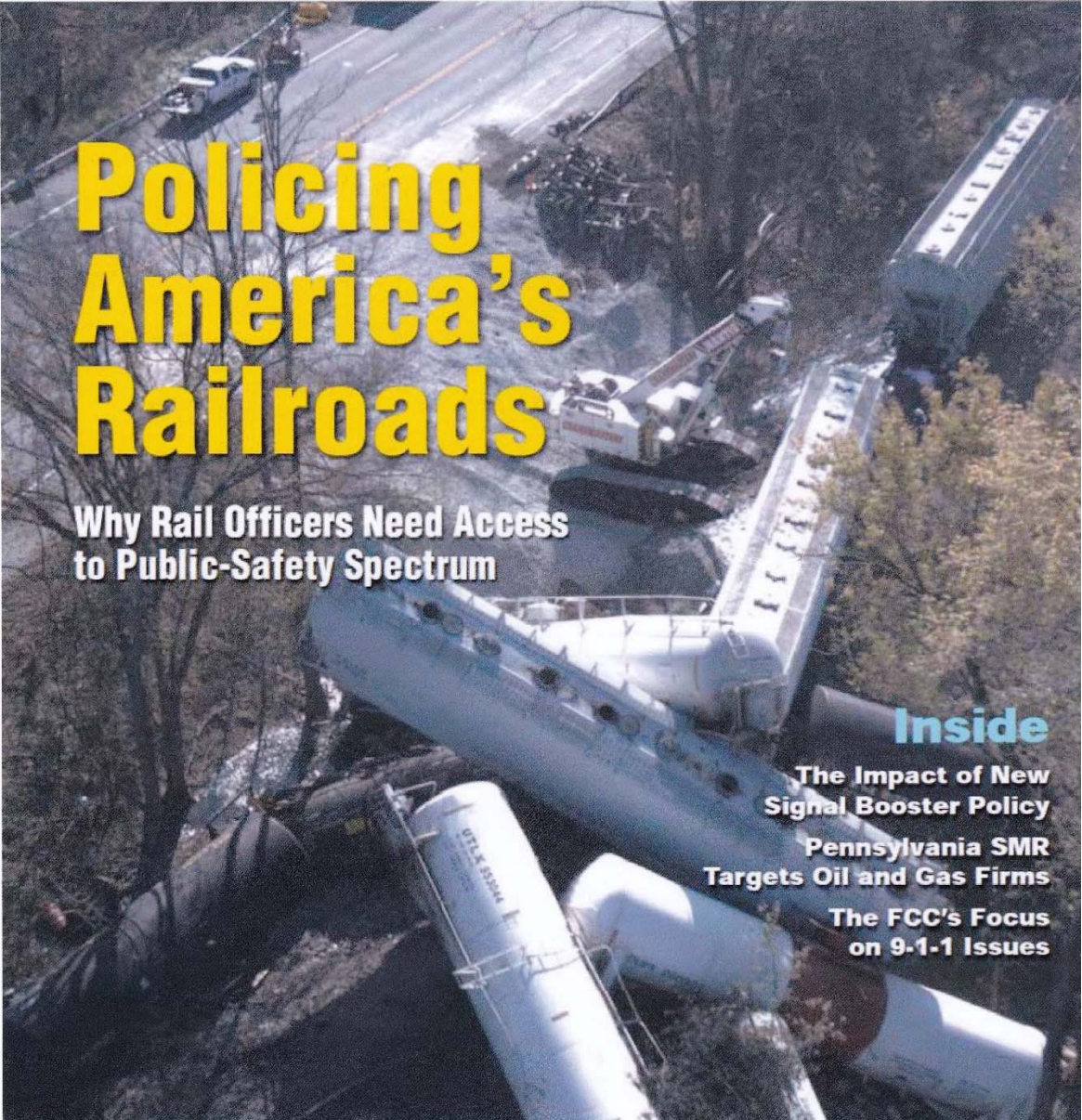
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## MissionCritical<sup>TM</sup>

COMMUNICATIONS

An aerial photograph showing a train accident. Several white and blue rail cars are derailed and overturned on a grassy embankment. A yellow crane is positioned near the wreckage. In the background, a multi-lane highway with traffic is visible.

### Policing America's Railroads

Why Rail Officers Need Access to Public-Safety Spectrum

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For more than 150 years, railroads operating in the United States have employed police officers to protect employees, passengers, property and the freight being transported by railroads. Most states have enacted legislation that authorizes the designation, appointment and commissioning of law enforcement officers to act as police officers for railroads.

Railroad police officers, often called special agents, are commissioned under state law and, in most cases, have attended a police academy in the state in which they work. Railroad police officers meet the same training requirements as local and state law enforcement officers. The legal authority of railroad law enforcement officers encompasses the police powers to arrest persons and process them into the criminal justice system for violations of state, and in some cases, federal law. Railroad police officers' geographical jurisdictions may vary by state, but in most cases, is circumscribed in some way to the railroad's employees, passengers, freight and equipment; on or about the railroad's property; or in pursuit of the railroad's business. Most states recognize railroad police authority.

Amtrak, the nation's passenger rail system, employs railroad police. Amtrak officers are also commissioned under state law and attend mandated training at state levels to meet the commission and certification requirements similar to their freight rail counterparts.



Photo courtesy Norfolk Southern Police

The Norfolk Southern Railroad Police have field special agents assigned in 22 states to protect employees, the public, property and cargo.





Photo courtesy Canadian National

Railroad police generally work with local jurisdictions when crimes are in progress or major incidents are occurring.

A railroad police officer is focused on the protection of company employees, public, company property and the freight being transported by rail. Trespassers are a major focus of railroad police. The elimination of trespassers potentially reduces the opportunity for crimes to be committed on railroad property and against railroad employees. Gangs target railroads, often focusing on high-value freight being transported by rail across the country and across borders. Electronics shipments are prime targets.

Shippers and the railroads have teamed up to better protect the high-value rail shipments using technology. Tracking devices, alarms, closed-circuit cameras and the use of satellites to track shipments are a few countermeasures used. Railroad police partner with federal, state and local law enforcement counterparts to combat the theft of cargo moving on rail. Railroad police support various cargo theft task forces around the country, aggressively pursuing criminals targeting the railroads. Railroad police also deploy Special Operations Response Teams (SORT) to combat cargo theft. The teams are also referred to as special investigative units or burglary apprehension teams.

In most cases, railroad police are hired from local and state law enforcement agencies. This is beneficial because they have already completed a basic police academy. Each railroad police department has a centralized police communications center supported by 24/7 staff answering calls for police service from employees, the public and other municipalities. Each center has the means to communicate by radio with railroad police in the field in every state in which the railroad operates. Railroad police officers often work as a single unit, and backup may be the local or state officer working in a nearby jurisdiction. In many jurisdictions, railroad police can communicate by radio with their state and local law enforcement partners through agreements with that law enforcement agency.

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### **Norfolk Southern Railroad Police**

Norfolk Southern Police Department is headquartered in Atlanta with field special agents assigned in 22 states. The police communications center is also located in Atlanta and is staffed 24/7. Special agent responsibilities include the protection of company employees, the public, company property, and the freight and cargo being transported by the railroad. Norfolk Southern

police attend state-mandated training to remain commissioned and certified for Police (or Peace) Officer Standards and Training (POST) requirements. The Norfolk Southern Police Department also provides annual training in addition to the state-mandated training. Officers routinely attend other law enforcement training sessions offered in many jurisdictions. The Norfolk Southern Police operate on a 160 MHz system with base radios distributed across its 22-state operation, which allows field special agents to communicate with the police communications center in Atlanta. These base radios are controlled via microwave and leased circuits for dispatch and communications purposes. The NXDN digital radios include encryption, and all railroads are progressing toward using the NXDN protocol on a national basis.

## **Associations and Security**

There is a network of more than 140,000 miles of U.S. railroad tracks. All Class 1 railroads employ police officers. The seven Class 1 railroads are Burlington Northern Santa Fe, CSX Transportation, Kansas City Southern, Norfolk Southern, Union Pacific, Canadian National and Canadian Pacific. These seven railroads are members of the Association of American Railroads (AAR) and operate a network of more than 95,000 miles of track.

There are a number of smaller railroads in operation as well. These railroads are referred to as Class II and III, and known as short line and regional railroads. There are about 550 of these railroads operating across 50,000 miles of track. A small number of the short line and regional railroads employ railroad police. Most of these railroads are members of the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA).

The AAR Rail Security Committee consists of AAR members representing the seven Class 1 railroads and a small number of Short Line railroads along with Amtrak and other commuter rail operations. This committee addresses rail security matters facing rail operations in North America. The committee also takes the lead in working with federal partners such as the Department of Transportation (DOT), Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

Railroad police are also supported by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the National Sheriff Association (NSA), both recognizing railroad police as accredited law enforcement.

## **Interoperability**

In some cases railroad police have working agreements or memoranda of understanding (MOUs) for radio interoperability with local and state jurisdictions. In some states, railroad police vehicles are equipped to operate on a state's statewide radio system. In some jurisdictions, police and sheriff's departments provide car or portable radios to be used by railroad police within their city, town or county.

When responding to crimes in progress, railroad police may request backup from local jurisdictions or an officer on either side might need help. Other incidents requiring interoperability include derailments, grade crossing accidents, trespassing, injuries/fatalities, hazardous material incidents, bomb threats and general police service calls. Most railroad police departments have canine teams that not only augment daily railroad police duties, but often the canine teams are called to assist state and local law enforcement agencies requiring assistance on various calls for service.

Radio communications between railroad police and their state and local law enforcement partners and emergency response is critical for all involved. A petition filed by the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC) requested modification of Part 90 of the FCC's rules to enable railroad police to access frequencies reserved for public-safety interoperability. This is another step toward strengthening the working relationships between railroad police and public-safety agencies across the country. Comments filed by the June 30 deadline were all supportive to this modification.

**40% Percentage of intercity freight volume accounted for by freight railroads 33% Percentage of U.S. exports accounted for by freight railroads**

Updating the rules to allow railroad police use of public-safety frequencies would drastically improve communications at all levels between railroad police and their local and state counterparts because both work together on various types of calls. The most important reason for having interoperability access would be officer safety.

Curtis N. Stanley is a special agent in charge with Norfolk Southern Railroad Police and has more than 34 years of law enforcement service. He has been assigned to the FBI Counterterrorism Division and the National Joint Terrorism Task Force (NJTTF) since August 2003. He acts as a liaison between the FBI and railroad police, rail industry executives and the Association of American Railroads (AAR). He supports the FBI's Rail Security Program and works other FBI sections, and members of the intelligence community addressing rail security matters. Stanley also supports other NJTTF programs working closely with the other 42 agencies represented on the task force. He sits on the AAR Rail Industry Security Committee. Stanley is a member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and serves as secretary-treasurer on the IACP Railroad Police Section committee. Email comments to [editor@RRMediaGroup.com](mailto:editor@RRMediaGroup.com).

7 Class 1 Railroads

Burlington Northern Santa Fe ■ CSX Transportation ■ Kansas City Southern ■ Norfolk Southern  
Union Pacific ■ Canadian National ■ Canadian Pacific