



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Ritchie Wants State Review of Local Rail Safety

PATTY RITCHIE February 7, 2014

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Asks Governor for Oversight of Freight Trains Speeding Through Rural Communities

Senator Patty Ritchie wants the state to boost its oversight of freight trains coursing through Oswego, Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties in the wake of moves by national rail companies for higher speeds on the local lines, and growing concerns about transport of hazardous materials through populated communities.

The Senator has written a letter to Governor Cuomo urging him to expand a new rail safety review he's ordered into rail transport of crude oil on downstate lines to also include potentially hazardous freight being moved through other communities. The letter is [available here](#).

“Community leaders have expressed concern that these higher speed trains could be causing unnecessary risks to neighboring communities and schools, local populations and our environment, should a serious accident occur,” Senator Ritchie said in her letter to the Governor, copies of which she has sent to emergency response officials in the three local counties.

“It is imperative that, in light of recent incidents and concerns about rail cargo safety, we take every step to make sure that these carriers are complying with our laws and following the best safety practices, that our communities are fully informed, and our emergency services best equipped to deal with possible crises.

“I urge you to consider expanding your review of rail carrier safety in this state to include a broader study of the communities I represent, and the cargoes that are increasingly being transported through them.”

CSX, the region's main freight rail operator, recently completed track upgrades that allow the company nearly to double the speed of trains along its route from Syracuse to Montreal.

Since then, there have been at least one freight accident in each of the three counties Senator Ritchie represents, including a derailment in Oswego County, a collision in Jefferson County and a pedestrian fatality in St. Lawrence County.

In December, Senator Ritchie arranged a meeting between CSX and local officials to discuss the new speeds. The railroad pledged to work with communities to address safety issues, and to support First Responders in the event of accidents.

Earlier this week, Governor Cuomo ordered the commissioners of several state agencies to conduct a "top-to-bottom" review of safety and emergency response preparedness related to the oil shipments.

While these shipments occur largely outside of Senator Ritchie's district, they use a type of tanker car that also is in use here to transport other potentially hazardous cargo. The DOT-111 tanker was the type that was involved in a massive explosion last summer that leveled much of the town of Lac-Mégantic, near Montreal, killing 47.

Senator Ritchie raised the issue of the rail safety review at budget hearings this week in Albany. The state's Transportation Commissioner, Joan McDonald, said she didn't believe that the Governor's order was limited to oil shipments, and that she would review the request.