

RAIL FREIGHT

Pennsylvania is a rail-intensive state. Railroads play a major role in moving freight within and throughout the state and across the country. The rail network in Berks County consists of Class I, Class II, and short line railroads. Class I railroads are freight railroads with an operating revenue of \$457 million or more. Class II railroads are much smaller than Class I railroads and are often considered regional railroads with an operating revenue between \$37 million and \$457 million. Short line railroads are freight railroads with operating revenues of less than \$475 million. Since 1981, this network has only served freight in the county. Presently, four railroad companies conduct business on 125 linear miles of operational railroad lines inside Berks County. The majority (approximately 101 miles or 81 percent) of the rail line mileage in the county is owned and operated by Norfolk Southern Corporation (NSC). The principal activity center for rail in the county is the Spring Street yard, located in the City of Reading at the junction of the Lebanon Valley Branch Line and the Reading Line. The Reading Line functions as a bridge between the Lehigh Line in Allentown/Bethlehem and the Harrisburg Line in the Dauphin County area. The Reading Line is the most heavily used track in Pennsylvania in terms of both carloads and ton-miles of traffic moved. It is part of the corridor that carries most of the Norfolk Southern rail traffic from the metropolitan New York area to points west and south. At Reading, rail traffic can continue to Philadelphia, South New Jersey, and Harrisburg. This line is also part of the Strategic Rail Corridor Network (STRACNET).

Several short line railroads provide service in the county. Reading Blue Mountain and Northern Railroad (RBM&N) currently provides service on the line previously owned by Conrail along the west side of the Schuylkill River, north of Reading into northeastern Pennsylvania. The RBM&N also controls the Schuylkill Secondary Line that runs between Temple and Hamburg on the east side of the Schuylkill River.

East Penn Railroad owns and operates the Lancaster Line that runs from Sinking Spring to Ephrata, Lancaster County, and the Perkiomen Branch that runs from Allentown through Hereford Township to Pennsburg. East Penn provides additional service in Berks County on the Kutztown Transportation Authority-owned Kutztown Branch Line that runs between Topton and Kutztown. In total, East Penn Railroad, LLC operates 110 miles of track throughout southeastern Pennsylvania and Delaware.

The Eastern Berks Gateway Railroad provides service on the Colebrookdale Branch Line that runs from the Norfolk Southern Line in Pottstown to Boyertown linking Montgomery and Berks Counties.

The Colebrookdale Railroad, also known as the Secret Valley Line is a tourist railroad. The railroad operates between Boyertown and Pottstown in Montgomery County. The Colebrookdale Railroad offers a variety of excursions originating out of Boyertown with plans to eventually have trains originating from Pottstown as well.

The Allentown and Auburn Railroad is another tourist carrier that operates between Topton and Kutztown on tracks owned by the Kutztown Transportation Authority. The railroad is not isolated as it shares an interchange with the Norfolk Southern Reading line in Topton. The Allentown and Auburn Railroad also offers freight services for local customers along the line.

The Wanamaker, Kempton and Southern Railroad is a third tourist carrier which operates between Wanamaker in Lehigh County and Kempton in Berks County, over tracks formerly part of the Reading Railroad's Schuylkill and Lehigh branch. The Wanamaker, Kempton and Southern is rail isolated. It does not connect to other rail lines or haul freight.

Road-Rail Crossings

A railroad at-grade crossing is an intersection where a roadway crosses railroad tracks at the same level (grade). At-grade crossings can also have significant impacts on the transportation network. The "gate-down delay" creates delays caused when passing trains block the crossing. In addition, grade crossings can reduce road capacity. The uneven surfaces at grade crossings require vehicles to cross at lower speeds and passing trains can preclude coordinating nearby traffic signals as they pass through that area.

There are 110 public at-grade highway-rail intersections in Berks County. Despite the number of crossings, the county has a low number of crashes at them, with 18 between 2020 and 2024. The annual average daily trips (AADT) on roadways

with at-grade crossings are typically below 5,000 vehicles in Berks County, with the exception of the crossings shown below:

Berks County Road/Rail Crossings with > 5,000 AADT			
Railroad	Municipality	Street	2024 AADT
Norfolk Southern Corporation	City of Reading	North Eleventh Street	16,013
Eastern Berks Gateway Railroad	Boyertown Borough	Philadelphia Avenue	12,838
Reading/Blue Mountain & Northern Railroad	Perry Township	SR 61 / Pottsville Pike	10,575
Norfolk Southern Corporation	City of Reading	Philadelphia Avenue	10,331
East Penn Railroad, LLC	Sinking Spring Borough	Fritztown Road	9,065
East Penn Railroad, LLC	Spring Township	Vinemont Road	8,933
Norfolk Southern Corporation	Reading	Kutztown Road	8,676
Norfolk Southern Corporation	Maidencreek Township	Main Street	7,773
Norfolk Southern Corporation	City of Reading	Franklin Street	7,720
East Penn Railroad, LLC	Spring Township	Montello Road	6,934
Norfolk Southern Corporation	Sinking Spring Borough	Columbia Avenue	6,853
East Penn Railroad, LLC	Spring Township	Fritztown Road	6,035
Norfolk Southern Corporation	City of Reading	Chestnut Street	5,661
Norfolk Southern Corporation	Fleetwood Borough	South Richmond Street	5,239

Source: US DOT Federal Railroad Administration, Railroad Crossings – At Grade & GXAPS Report

Note that changes to railroad operations may increase or decrease rail traffic at a crossing, affecting type of capital and safety improvement needs. Demand for rail service can change with the arrival or departure of industrial customers on the line. These and other economic changes can affect the volume, location and timing of rail traffic.

The Federal Railroad Administration’s Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Accident Prediction System (GXAPS) provides the chart below. These crossings are not considered dangerous or even the most heavily used crossings in the county. However, the model provides a listing of the crossings considering their physical and operating characteristics and accident history data that may be prone to crashes in the future and warrant additional attention. The table below and Map 43 on the following page identifies and shows the location of these crossings.

Top Ten Berks County Road/Rail Crossings with Greatest Potential for Crashes			
Railroad	Municipality	Street	2024 AADT
Norfolk Southern Corporation	Fleetwood Borough	Richmond Street	5,239
Reading/Blue Mountain & Northern Railroad	Tilden Township	Fisher Dam Road	N/A
Norfolk Southern Corporation	Maidencreek Township	Hill Road	N/A
Reading/Blue Mountain & Northern Railroad	Bern Township	Cross Keys Road	2,570
Norfolk Southern Corporation	Muhlenberg Township	Tuckerton Road	1,840
Norfolk Southern Corporation	Longswamp Township	Kennedy Avenue	N/A
Norfolk Southern Corporation	Amity Township	Main Street	3,625
Allentown & Auburn Railroad	Maxatawny Township	Kohler Road	N/A
Norfolk Southern Corporation	Fleetwood Borough	Willow Street	N/A
Norfolk Southern Corporation	Topton Borough	Main Street	N/A

Source: Federal Railroad Administration, Office of Safety Analysis, Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Accident Prediction System (GXAPS)