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## Memorandum

Date: April 12, 2021

Subject: INFORMATION: Audit Announcement | FRA's Use of Automated Track Inspections | Project No. 21S3002S000  
Federal Railroad Administration

From: David Pouliott   
Assistant Inspector General for Surface Transportation Audits

To: Federal Railroad Administrator

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Defective track conditions result in 30 percent of all reportable railroad accidents and are one of the most frequent causes of derailments, according to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). From 2011 to 2020, FRA attributed over 5,300 accidents<sup>1</sup> to track defects. Since 1974, FRA's Automated Track Inspection Program (ATIP) has conducted operational surveys of the U.S. rail transportation network to determine railroads' compliance with Federal Track Safety Standards.<sup>2</sup> Currently, FRA uses nine ATIP vehicles to collect data on the highest risk routes, including passenger and hazardous material routes. According to FRA, these data inform risk-based planning to ensure inspection resources are used effectively. ATIP also generates diagnostics to notify railroads of major safety risks and supports track safety research.

Given the continuing safety impact of track defects, as well as the technological changes since our last track-focused audit in 2009,<sup>3</sup> we are initiating an audit to evaluate FRA's use of automated inspections to aid track safety oversight.

We plan to begin the audit this month and will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance conference. We will conduct our work primarily at FRA Headquarters and will interview track inspectors and other officials, as needed. If you have any questions, please contact me at (202) 366-5630, or Wendy Harris, Program Director, at (202) 366-2794.

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<sup>1</sup> FRA Office of Safety Analysis, Accident/Incident data through December 31, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Title 49, Code of Federal Regulations, section 213, Track Safety Standards (2019).

<sup>3</sup> *Enhancing the Federal Railroad Administration's Oversight of Track Safety Inspections*, (OIG Report CR-2009-038, February 24, 2009). OIG reports are available on our website: <https://www.oig.dot.gov/>.

cc: DOT Audit Liaison, M-1  
FRA Audit Liaison, ROA-2