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TWO-MAN CREW BILL ON LIFE SUPPORT BECAUSE OF REPUBLICAN OPPOSITION

McConnell stands in way of Brown, Vance victory on Rail Safety Act



Story by Alexander Bolton

According to an article posted online from the Hill©, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) has promised he will schedule a vote on a long-delayed rail safety bill sponsored by Sen. Sherrod Brown

But the legislation is opposed by Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), who may block it outright or drag out its time on the Senate floor.

Brown, spoke with Schumer twice earlier this year about getting a vote on the bill and said the Democratic leader promised he would schedule it soon. "Schumer absolutely wants to help and we're working it. I talked to Schumer twice about it in the last 72 hours," the Ohio Democrat told The Hill.

The legislation also has the backing of conservative Sen. J.D. Vance (R-Ohio), They teamed up last year on the legislation after a 150-car freight train carrying toxic chemicals derailed in eastern Ohio nearly a year ago, creating an environmental disaster.

Sources in both parties say, however, believe it won't get the 9 Republican votes needed to advance on the floor, even though Vance, the lead GOP sponsor, insists there will be enough bipartisan support to get it done.

The legislation faces stiff opposition from the freight rail industry, a wealthy interest group that has given generously to Republicans and Democrats, alike.

The legislation would enhance safety procedures for trains carrying hazardous materials, requiring emergency response plans and stricter regulations to prevent wheel bearing failures.

The failure of a sensor to alert the crew to an overheating wheel bearing was blamed for the disaster.

The legislation would require two-person crews for freight trains and would substantially increase fines for safety violations. It would require the Federal Railroad Administration to oversee infrastructure improvements to

railside defect detectors and prohibit caps on inspection times to give inspectors for time to review

The Association of American Railroads, a trade group representing the freight rail industry, identified what it called “challenges” in the Rail Safety Act when it passed the Commerce Committee in May. It cited provisions mandating crew staffing models, expanding hazmat transportation requirements, “micromanaging” of the defect detector network and an expansion of manual inspection standards as problems.

The railroad industry spent \$69.47 million on lobbying in 2021, 2022 and 2023, according to Open Secrets, a group that tracks money in politics.

Union Pacific Corp., BNSF Railway, CSX Corp, and Norfolk Southern, which operated the train that derailed in Ohio, have donated \$1.44 million to Republican and Democratic candidates so far this election cycle, according to Open Secrets. Republican candidates have collected \$923,000 of that amount, or about 64 percent.

Democrats have a 51-seat majority and every member of their caucus is expected to support the measure. That means Vance would need to muster at least eight other Republicans to overcome a filibuster if all Democrats vote to proceed to the bill.

The Republican cosponsors include Sens. Marco Rubio (Fla.), Josh Hawley (Mo.), Mike Braun (Ind.), Mitt Romney (Utah) and Roger Marshall (Kan.).

Sen. Eric Schmitt (R-Mo.) voted for the bill in committee and is expected to do so again if it reaches the floor. Vance says that two other Republican senators have promised him they’ll vote for the legislation though they’re staying anonymous for now.

“We’ve had commitments from the majority leader for a while that we would get a vote on it. I think we’re now talking about floor time and what might actually happen,” Vance told The Hill, adding “we’re at least progressing.” “I think we’ll get our vote,” he added.

The freshman Ohio senator said there are a “few provisions” he’d be willing to change in the bill but acknowledged, “I don’t think we can move enough” to win over McConnell’s support for the legislation. Nevertheless, Vance says he’s confident he can still deliver the GOP votes needed to advance the bill. “I am. I think we’re going to be good,” he said.

“I don’t think we’re going to do an omnibus. I think we’re actually going to bring it standalone for a floor vote,” he said.

Brown, the lead Democratic sponsor, insisted “we think we do” have the 9 Republican votes to advance the bill.

“The hold-up is floor time,” he said. “We have seven Republicans publicly.... We need two more but Vance says there are Republicans who will vote for it who are not public.”

Link to full article: [McConnell stands in way of Brown, Vance victory on Rail Safety Act \(msn.com\)](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/story/mcconnell-stands-in-way-of-brown-vance-victory-on-rail-safety-act)