In June, the Trump administration unveiled a plan to move unit trains of Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) by rail through densely populated communities for export overseas. The proposal was forwarded to the Pipelines & Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), allowing just a few weeks for public comment. Due to public outcry— which included Congressmen, citizens groups and Railroad Workers United (RWU) - PHMSA was forced to extend the comment period until early August.

For years the rail industry has wished to ship LNG, but historically, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has not allowed its shipment by rail due to its highly volatile nature and the fact that a derailment and tank car rupture could result in cataclysmic explosions. There is no way to effectively fight an LNG fire.

Thousands of comments were received, most vehemently opposing LNG by rail. In its official comment RWU insisted that a number of safety recommendations be put in place before LNG is allowed on trains including:

- Electrically Controlled Pneumatic (ECP) braking should be employed on all unit trains of LNG as a means of possibly preventing a disaster and/or mitigating the extent of the disaster in the event of a derailment/crash.
- Only tank cars that have been crash tested to withstand puncture be employed in LNG service.
- Like oil trains, the maximum speed of unit trains of LNG should not exceed 40 mph.
- All such trains must be staffed by a minimum of two persons
- Prior to movement onto the mainline, trains should have an advance “high-rail” escort service to ensure that the track ahead is clear of obstruction and in proper condition.
- Unit trains of LNG should be limited to no more than 50 cars.
- Each train must receive a thorough and proper inspection by host railroad employees who are properly trained/certified.

Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-Oregon) and Congressman Tom Malinowski (D-New Jersey) introduced a bill on September 12th that would require extensive reviews on the safety of using tank cars carrying LNG before any approval is granted from the DOT and FRA. "The administration's absurd plan to allow trains of up to 100 cars filled with LNG to move by rail is extremely reckless," DeFazio said in a statement. "Putting LNG into rail cars and moving it through highly populated communities presents a significant risk to the safety of the public and the environment, with the possibility of catastrophic consequences."

Published in mid-September, the bill - H.R. 4306 - calls for PHMSA and the FRA to conduct safety tests to see if tank cars are suitable for transporting LNG, while also factoring in the operating conditions and what public and environmental benefits would result. The goal is to ensure that if such a hazardous commodity is shipped by rail, that the safety of workers and trackside communities is a priority.