

*Policymaking*<sup>1</sup> (2021 Presidential Memorandum), as well as the National Science and Technology Council reports, *Protecting the Integrity of Government Science*<sup>2</sup> (January 2022) and *A Framework for Federal Scientific Integrity Policy and Practice*<sup>3</sup> (January 2023).

## Background

For nearly 90 years, we have administered programs and provided services that make a difference in millions of people's lives. In fiscal year (FY) 2023, our programs provided a combined total of about \$1.4 trillion in benefit payments to an average of over 70 million beneficiaries. The major programs we administer—the Old-Age Survivors and Disability Insurance program and the Supplemental Security Income program—provide an important source of economic security for millions of Americans. Our fundamental mission is to deliver quality Social Security services that ensure equity and accessibility, improve the customer experience, and address systemic barriers to participation in our programs.

The 2021 Presidential Memorandum states the Administration's goal is to make evidence-based decisions guided by the best available science and data, recognizing that scientific and technological information, data, and evidence are central to the development and iterative improvement of sound policies and to the equitable delivery of programs across every area of the Federal Government. The 2021 Presidential Memorandum emphasizes that political interference in the work of Federal scientists and other scientists who support the work of the Federal Government (e.g., government contractors, volunteers) and in the communication of scientific facts undermines the welfare of the Nation, contributes to systemic inequities and injustices, and violates the trust that the public places in our government to best serve its collective interests.

We conduct scientific activities that include evaluations of pilot projects, evaluations of demonstration projects, quantitative studies, qualitative studies, and mixed methods studies that inform important priorities, such as delivering services effectively, improving the way we conduct business, updating policies and regulations, and ensuring effective

stewardship. For example, we conducted evidence-building activities relevant to our Equity Action Plan,<sup>4</sup> which was created in accordance with Executive Order (E.O.) 13985 on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government,<sup>5</sup> as well as E.O. 14058 on Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government.<sup>6</sup> This aligns with our *Agency Strategic Plan, Fiscal Years 2022–2026*,<sup>7</sup> which includes a strategy for deepening our understanding of our customers and what drives their evolving service preferences.

We also conduct extramural research, demonstration projects, and outreach under sections 1110, 1115, and 1144 of the Social Security Act (Act). Sections 1110 and 1115 of the Act provide the waiver authority we need to conduct extramural research and demonstration projects, while section 1144 of the Act addresses outreach activities to inform and assist Medicare beneficiaries with low income who may be eligible for Medicare cost sharing or subsidized prescription drug coverage. A previous authority, under section 234 of the Act, allowed us to waive Disability Insurance program rules to enhance labor force participation; that authority sunset in 2022. We currently fund a range of scientific projects designed to:

- Help us keep pace with advancements in medicine and technology;
- Modernize our vocational rules;
- Test work support models;
- Analyze program trends, gaps, and inconsistencies; and
- Measure the public's understanding of our programs, as well as the impact of program changes.

## Request for Information (RFI)

Through this RFI, we are asking interested persons, including stakeholders across public and private sectors who may be familiar with or interested in the work of our agency, for input on the DRAFT SSA Scientific Integrity Policy.

We invite suggestions that will help strengthen and promote scientific integrity throughout the agency. The responses to this RFI that interested persons submit to us will be considered as we develop a final SSA Scientific Integrity Policy. This RFI is for information and planning purposes only and should not be construed as a solicitation or as an obligation on our part. We will not respond to the comments we receive in response to this RFI. However, we will use the input to develop our Scientific Integrity Policy.

The Commissioner of the Social Security Administration, Martin O'Malley, having reviewed and approved this document, is delegating the authority to electronically sign this document to Faye I. Lipsky, who is the primary Federal Register Liaison for SSA, for purposes of publication in the **Federal Register**.

**Faye I. Lipsky,**

*Federal Register Liaison, Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs, Social Security Administration.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

### Federal Railroad Administration

[Docket No. FRA–2024–0002]

### Proposed Agency Information Collection Activities; Comment Request

**AGENCY:** Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), Department of Transportation (DOT).

**ACTION:** Notice of information collection; request for comment.

**SUMMARY:** Under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA) and its implementing regulations, FRA seeks approval of the Information Collection Request (ICR) summarized below. Before submitting this ICR to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for approval, FRA is soliciting public comment on specific aspects of the activities identified in the ICR.

**DATES:** Interested persons are invited to submit comments on or before March 25, 2024.

**ADDRESSES:** Written comments and recommendations for the proposed ICR should be submitted on *regulations.gov* to the docket, Docket No. FRA–2024 0002. All comments received will be posted without change to the docket, including any personal information provided. Please refer to the assigned OMB control number (2130–0589) in

<sup>1</sup> See 86 FR 8845 (January 27, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/01-22-Protecting\\_the\\_Integrity\\_of\\_Government\\_Science.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/01-22-Protecting_the_Integrity_of_Government_Science.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/01-23-Framework-for-Federal-Scientific-Integrity-Policy-and-Practice.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ssa.gov/open/materials/SSA-E.O.-13985-Equity-Action-Plan.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/12/13/executive-order-transforming-federal-customer-experience-and-service-delivery-to-rebuild-trust-in-government/>.

<sup>7</sup> Social Security Administration, Agency Strategic Plan *Fiscal Years 2022–2026*, available at [https://www.ssa.gov/agency/asp/materials/pdfs/SSA\\_Agency\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_Fiscal\\_Years\\_2022-2026.pdf](https://www.ssa.gov/agency/asp/materials/pdfs/SSA_Agency_Strategic_Plan_Fiscal_Years_2022-2026.pdf).

any correspondence submitted. FRA will summarize comments received in a subsequent 30-day notice and include them in its information collection submission to OMB.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Ms. Arlette Mussington, Information Collection Clearance Officer, at email: [arlette.mussington@dot.gov](mailto:arlette.mussington@dot.gov) or telephone: (571) 609-1285 or Ms. Joanne Swafford, Information Collection Clearance Officer, at email: [joanne.swafford@dot.gov](mailto:joanne.swafford@dot.gov) or telephone: (757) 897-9908.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The PRA, 44 U.S.C. 3501-3520, and its implementing regulations, 5 CFR part 1320, require Federal agencies to provide 60 days' notice to the public to allow comment on information collection activities before seeking OMB approval of the activities. See 44 U.S.C. 3506, 3507; 5 CFR 1320.8 through 1320.12. Specifically, FRA invites interested parties to comment on the following ICR regarding: (1) whether the information collection activities are necessary for FRA to properly execute its functions, including whether the activities will have practical utility; (2) the accuracy of FRA's estimates of the burden of the information collection activities, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used to determine the estimates; (3) ways for FRA to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information being collected; and (4) ways for FRA to minimize the burden of information collection activities on the public, including the use of automated collection techniques or other forms of information technology. See 44 U.S.C. 3506(c)(2)(A); 5 CFR 1320.8(d)(1).

FRA believes that soliciting public comment may reduce the administrative and paperwork burdens associated with the collection of information that Federal statutes and regulations mandate. In summary, comments received will advance three objectives: (1) reduce reporting burdens; (2) organize information collection requirements in a "user-friendly" format to improve the use of such information; and (3) accurately assess the resources expended to retrieve and produce information requested. See 44 U.S.C. 3501.

The summary below describes the ICR that FRA will submit for OMB clearance as the PRA requires.

*Title:* State Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plans.

*OMB Control Number:* 2130-0589.

*Abstract:* Section 202 of the Rail Safety Improvement Act (RSIA)<sup>1</sup> of 2008 required the Secretary of Transportation to identify the 10 States that had the most highway-rail grade crossing collisions, on average, over the previous three years and to require those States to develop State highway-rail grade crossing action plans within a reasonable period of time, as determined by the Secretary. Section 202 of the RSIA further provided that these plans must identify specific solutions for improving safety at crossings, including highway-rail grade crossing closures or grade separations, and must focus on crossings that have experienced multiple accidents or are at high risk for such accidents.

In 2020, FRA issued a final rule titled, State Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plans,<sup>2</sup> to implement section 11401(b) of the Fixing America's

Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) which required 40 States and the District of Columbia to develop and implement highway-rail grade crossing action plans. The final rule also required ten States that developed highway-rail grade crossing action plans, as required by RSIA and FRA's implementing regulation, to update their plans and submit reports to FRA describing actions they have taken to implement their plans.

FRA uses the collection of information to ensure that States meet the Congressional mandate and devise and implement suitable plans to reduce/eliminate highway-rail grade collisions. FRA reviews these crossing action plans and crossing action plan revisions to ensure that these plans include the following: (1) identify specific strategies for improving safety at highway-rail grade crossings, including highway-rail grade crossing closures or grade separations; (2) focus on crossings that have experienced multiple accidents or are at high risk for such accidents; and (3) cover a five-year period.

In this 60-day notice, FRA makes no adjustments to the previously approved burden hours and responses in the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) inventory.<sup>3</sup>

*Type of Request:* Extension without change of a currently approved collection.

*Affected Public:* Businesses.

*Form(s):* N/A.

*Respondent Universe:* 50 States + District of Columbia.

*Frequency of Submission:* On occasion.

*Reporting Burden:*

CFR section	Respondent universe	Total annual responses (A)	Average time per response (B)	Total annual burden hours (C = A * B)	Total cost equivalent in U.S. dollar (D = C * wage rates) <sup>4</sup>
234.11(b)—State highway-rail grade crossing action plans—Development and submission of new action plans—Grouped into high, medium, and low plans.	40 States + District of Columbia.	13.60 burden plans (1.3 high burden + 2.3 medium burden + 4 low burden + 6 minimal burden).	1,510.00 hours (700 hours + 550 hours + 200 hours + 60 hours).	3,376.67	\$290,157.25
—(c)(1) Updated action plans (10 listed states in § 234.11(e))—Grouped into high, medium, and low plans.	10 States .....	3.30 burden plans (1 high burden + 1 medium burden + 1.3 low burden).	1,965.00 hours (1,100 hours + 640 hours + 225 hours).	2,040.00	175,297.20
—(c)(2) Implementation reports (10 listed states in § 234.11(e))—Grouped into high, medium, and low implementation reports.	10 States .....	3.30 burden reports (1 high burden + 1 medium burden + 1.3 low burden).	320.00 hours (160 hours + 120 hours + 40 hours).	333.33	28,643.05

<sup>1</sup> Public Law 110-432, sec. 202 (Oct. 16, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> 85 FR 80648 (Dec. 14, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Changes to the total cost equivalent in U.S. dollars, a category not included in the OIRA inventory, are due to updated statistics from the

<sup>4</sup> 2022 Surface Transportation Board (STB) Full Year Wage A&B data series.

CFR section	Respondent universe	Total annual responses (A)	Average time per response (B)	Total annual burden hours (C = A * B)	Total cost equivalent in U.S. dollar (D = C * wage rates) <sup>4</sup>
—(f)(2) Notification to FRA by State or District of Columbia (DC) of another official to assume responsibilities described under § 234.11(e)(6).	50 States + District of Columbia.	2.70 notifications ....	5.00 minutes .....	0.22	18.90
—(g) FRA review and approval of State highway-rail grade crossing action plans: Disapproved plans needing revision—Grouped into high, medium, and low revised plans.	40 States + District of Columbia.	2.70 revised plans (0.7 high burden + 0.7 medium burden + 1.3 low burden).	189.00 hours (105 hours + 60 hours + 24 hours).	142.00	12,202.06
—(g) FRA review and approval of State highway-rail grade crossing action plans: Disapproved plans needing revision (10 listed States in § 234.11(e))—Grouped into high, medium, and low revised plans.	10 States .....	0.90 revised plans (0.7 high burden + 0.7 medium burden + 1.3 low burden).	295.00 hours (165 hours + 96 hours + 34 hours).	98.33	8,449.50
<b>Total</b> <sup>5</sup> .....	N/A .....	27 responses .....	N/A .....	5,991	514,768.00

*Total Estimated Annual Responses:* 27.

<sup>4</sup> The dollar equivalent cost is derived from the 2022 (STB) Full Year Wage A&B data series using employee group 200 (Professional & Administrative) hourly wage rate of \$49.10. The total burden wage rate (straight time plus 75%) used in the table is \$85.93 (\$49.10 × 1.75 = \$85.93).

<sup>5</sup> Totals may not add up due to rounding.

*Total Estimated Annual Burden:* 5,991 hours.

*Total Estimated Annual Burden Hour Dollar Cost Equivalent:* \$514,768.

FRA informs all interested parties that it may not conduct or sponsor, and a respondent is not required to respond to, a collection of information that does

not display a currently valid OMB control number.

*Authority:* 44 U.S.C. 3501–3520.

**Christopher S. Van Nostrand,**  
*Acting Deputy Chief Counsel.*

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