

City votes to ask for real-time data on hazardous train cargo

By Samantha Craggs, [CBC News](#) Updated: Mar 31, 2014 3:03 PM

City councillors will ask the federal government to release real-time information on what dangerous cargo trains carry as they speed through Hamilton.

The general issues committee is expected to pass a motion Wednesday asking Transport Canada to look into making the data mandatory for rail companies.

That means local firefighters and emergency personnel will immediately know exactly what they're dealing with should a train derail, said Coun. Sam Merulla of Ward 4.

Currently, Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railway say emergency personnel can contact them right away if there's a problem. But that's the step Merulla wants to avoid.

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Real-time data would "eliminate one layer of steps necessary to obtain the information," he said.

"I'm confident (the motion) will be unanimously supported" by councillors, he said.

At least seven of every 100 rail cars that pass through Hamilton have hazardous material, including gasoline, chlorine and sulphuric acid, shows new data obtained by the fire department.

Canada's rail lines will release historic data quarterly. The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs is still pushing for real-time data.

CN and CP both say real-time data would jeopardize client confidentiality, and be a safety hazard if it lands in the wrong hands.

Railway safety has been in the spotlight since last July, when a freight train carrying crude oil derailed in the small town of Lac Mégantic, Que., killing 47 people and destroying much of the downtown.

CN and CP both have about nine trains that go through Hamilton each day. That doesn't include CN trains that operate within city limits, or trains operated by the Hamilton-based Southern Ontario Railway.

The general issues committee meetings at 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday.