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Analytical Modelling of Rail Defects and Its Applications to Rail Defect Management

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This report is the third in a three-part series describing the technical contributions of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the Volpe National Transportation Systems Center (Volpe Center) to the UIC/WEC (International Union of Railways/World Executive Council) joint research project on Rail Defect Management. The first two reports presented correlations between engineering calculations and rail defect growth test data generated under laboratory and field test conditions. This report discusses some of the applications of these engineering analyses to rail defect management. These applications include: (1) determining rail inspection frequencies based on track condition and usage, (2) estimating limits for rail head wear based on fracture mechanics principles, and (3) applying risk analysis to evaluate different strategies for controlling the risk of rail failures. In the context of this report, risk is the occurrence of broken rails from undetected defects. Although a cost/benefit analysis was not included, the risk examples described in this report provide the foundation for more comprehensive risk analyses which can take into account the consequences and costs associated with broken rails.

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