

October 9, 2014

M14-017

To: SPEEA Council Delegates

From: SPEEA Legislative and Public Affairs Committee

Subject: **PRE-SUBMITTED NEW BUSINESS:** SUPPORT FOR LEGISLATION
REQUIRING A MINIMUM OF TWO PERSONS ON RAILROAD ENGINE TRAIN
CREWS AND SUPPORT FOR US RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE MAINTENANCE
AND SAFETY.

Background

Over the past 50 years, US railroads have continuously pursued a reduction in the size of crews operating trains, from six persons down to the current negotiated minimum of two crew members on through freight services.

In 1967 Washington State repealed a long-standing law requiring a minimum of six crew on all trains operating within our state, and since that time no standard minimum train crew size requirements have been enacted.

The elimination of crew members down to the current negotiated minimum of only two has created a situation that significantly reduces the years of on-the-job experience formerly available on larger crews, which had allowed crew members to develop their skills, knowledge, and territorial familiarity; this has resulted in a scenario where new and inexperienced train crews are now operating trains without seasoned, well-qualified persons, to the detriment of the safety of the public and the employees alike.

Railroad operational requirements require that train crews perform numerous tasks while concurrently operating moving trains, which the National Transportation Safety Board has labeled "task saturation," which can result in crews overlooking specific actions related to safe train operation.

Technology, while improving the safe movement of trains, cannot replace the safety and security of train crews consisting of a minimum of two qualified persons, the presence of which provides additional safeguards, including the ability of crew members to cross-check and verify each other's actions and activities while operating trains, to adequately respond to accidents and critical incidents, as well as the capability to separate rail cars at crossings to allow emergency responders to cross tracks which is a function which cannot be performed by one person.

Crude oil shipments by rail have increased exponentially in recent years, outpacing rail capacity; first-responder training and state spill response planning are inadequate.

Railroad crew fatigue abatement programs are nonexistent, creating public safety and environmental concerns.

Chronic fatigue is epidemic on US railroads, due to operational requirements that include no regular working schedule for crew members, as well as intentional underemployment policies by the carriers, through which they maximize profits at the expense of public and employee safety, requiring crew members to return to work immediately after the minimum required federal rest has expired.

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Rail carriers have recently imposed draconian attendance policies that punish railroad employees who attempt to take additional time off for rest or family matters, resulting in train crew members reporting for work even when they know they are not rested and ready for duty, creating a serious employee and public safety risk.

Having only a single engine crew person has been a contributing factor to numerous railroad accidents in the past 2 years.

Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad has proposed that freight train crew sizes be reduced to just one person: the locomotive engineer, who will be alone in the locomotive cab and working frequently for time periods as long as 12 hours.

Transport Canada, the equivalent of the US Department of Transportation, now requires all trains moving hazardous materials to have a crew of no fewer than two persons, it being recognized that train crews should consist of at least two qualified employees, due to the large number of tasks required of such employees in order to operate a train safely.

As we have seen from the recent accident in Montana, still under NTSB investigation, impacts to the rail link that allows 737 bodies manufactured at the SPIRIT plant in Wichita, Kansas to be transported to the Boeing Renton plant. This is a key link in the production and supply chain for SPEEA members working at both sites. Infrastructure support for our rail system is vital to transport items safely and on time. The 737 bodies can only be transported on qualified tracks and if those tracks lost a key bridge or other stretch of track for a week or more it would harm SPEEA member's ability to work and meet scheduled rates of production. This could lead to a short term lay off until tracks were available to be used for transport of 737 bodies.

Motion

It is moved that the SPEEA Council opposes actions to permit one-person engine train crew operations on Class I railroads operating in the US; and be it

RESOLVED, that the SPEEA Council will support and advocate that members of our congressional delegations cosponsor and/or work to pass HR 3040, which would require all trains operating in the United States to be staffed with an engine train crew of no fewer than two persons.

and be it further

RESOLVED, that the SPEEA Council supports and urges national investment in US railroad infrastructure, maintenance and safety.

Pro

- If the legislation is passed it will help to preserve a safe rail transportation system.

Con

- Increased rail infrastructure could be used to compete with short haul aircraft routes between close cities.

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