

Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street Southwest
Washington D.C. 20423

RE: EP 770 Rail Service Hearing

Dear board members,

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I am a 2nd generation railroader, following my fathers footsteps who served the Burlington Northern/ BNSF Railway for 42 years, retiring a handful of years ago as a Locomotive Engineer. I have worked for the BNSF Railway for 8 years as a Conductor and Locomotive Engineer, and had the privilege to work with my father and have him teach me to become an Engineer. I have been a union representative and involved in multiple safety committees.

It is no secret that PSR has ruined the railroads and their ability service to customers, the majority of the railroads in question today have publicly praised this practice of reducing labor and making record breaking profits at the expense of the customers and employees that rely on them. We all know that the supply chain crisis has impacted everybody, but these railroads have been capitalizing off of this. BNSF intentionally runs its trains at the bare minimum horsepower per ton and also limits speeds, and throttle position, causing excess delays, and longer trips for employees, further implicating the shortage of crews, railcars, and delay of key shipments. Although BNSF has a surplus of locomotives in storage, trains will often wait for days account insufficient power to run the trains, further affecting train lineups the TYE employees rely on and delaying shipments from leaving the ports.

The railroads clearly have not been trying to bargain in good faith and offer a fair contract, and at a time where labor is short and their profits are record breaking, they are trying to cry wolf. Sam Macedonio (BNSF Railway, Labor Relations) said it himself in a November 2021 WA State virtual work session, that during contract negotiations they, "take into consideration, many of things; pay levels, sickness benefits, vacation, time off, scheduling, lots of different things and always try to balance the rights of the employee with the needs of the company to make sure employees can earn enough money to make the job attractive, as well as we can pay an amount that will attract employees as well as give us a way to efficiently serve our customers." It is basic economics that these Class 1 railroad companies fail to understand. The labor market is tight, supply is low, and demand is high. Instead of trying to offer a fair contract to maintain employees and attract new employees, they instead enforce new, stricter attendance policies which does the exact opposite, and their attrition rates will speak the truth of this issue. It is no wonder why these companies are having a hard time managing their workforce, but the ball is in their court and they refuse to play.

I am happy to report that I am no longer working for the BNSF Railway. When I hired on I thought I would never have to look for another job again, that this was it. I was proud to carry on my father's legacy. But in my 8 years I have only seen conditions worsen. Longer slower trains, longer trips, longer stays in hotels, less employees, less predictability, less allocations to take earned days off, and a horrendous company safety record. The new attendance policy was the final straw for me. I understood when I hired out that I would miss some holidays, some weekends, and some other special events to spend with family or friends, but I never signed up with to miss all of them! The expectation from the BNSF Railway is absolutely unreal and unsustainable, which is why my me and a hell of a lot of other people have called it quits. My mental and physical health have suffered severely due to their inability to offer any kind of rest schedule, predictability, or them being capable of keeping enough people employed. A few years ago, my father got diagnosed with diabetes and unfortunately lost his leg and most recently his big toe, my mother has suffered from 8 strokes and is incapable of taking care of herself. I applied for FMLA about 6 times and only had one of them approved until I got furloughed and then no longer qualified for the hours. I recently applied for a personal leave of absence to address my mental health and tend to my parents, but due to the amount of people who have quit due to the new "Hi-viz" policy, and their self-inflicted manpower issues, they denied my request. It is unfortunate that these once great jobs have become such garbage.

Thank you for hearing my testimony.

-Travis Usselman