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Surface Transportation Board
Docket EP 770 (Urgent Issues in Freight Rail
Service)

June 4, 2022

Dear Board,

I watched the April 26-27 STB hearings associated with freight rail service issues. I was shocked to see that freight rail is more problematic than when I was with Conoco and DuPont from 1981 to 2005.

During that timeframe I witnessed disruptions from rail that caused us to declare either force majeure or take extraordinary measures to continue operation. DuPont's rail fleet in Texas was twice the size you would expect to avoid production outages because of rail unreliability.

Class 1 railroads were also notorious for their inflexibility compared to other shipping partners.

Freight rail can be the only method of transportation for many product manufacturers and suppliers. A byproduct that requires rail (i.e., petroleum coke) can cause severe loss of production for the primary products (i.e., gasoline, diesel...).

The criticality of freight rail for the US economy is obvious from the hearings and to anyone who observes the freight cars that are being moved around the US. Choosing what to prioritize among the various products (fuel, chemicals, food...) is fraught with hazard for the health and welfare of the US populace. Allowing Class 1 railroads to make these decisions without oversight is likely to have catastrophic results.

I suggest the board consider managing the freight rail system like a public utility board because of their regional monopoly status. The goal would be to maintain sufficient capacity at all times to avoid production or supply limitations from freight rail. These systems should be as reliable and cost effective as electricity, water and sewer.

Warm Regards,

W. Jeff Meier

Retired Chemical Engineer