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Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street Southwest
Washington DC 20423

RE: EP 770 Rail Service Hearing

April 23, 2022

Dear Chairman Oberman,

I am currently working as a Locomotive Engineer for one of the Class I railroads. I was hired on in May of 2006. I worked as a Conductor until May of 2009. When I applied for this job it was a highly sought after job, and highly competitive. At my hiring event in Edgemont, SD there were over 350 men and women who were taking their tests and interviewing for 20 jobs that were available. When I was offered a position, I felt very fortunate. This was an opportunity of a lifetime for my family and me. This was going to make it to where I could financially support my family, and be able to keep my wife at home to raise our kids. For the first few years, things were great. The pay was great. The time off for family was adequate, and I felt like I was treated as a valued employee. Fast-forward to 2022. Things have changed drastically. Although we have seen raises throughout the years, the company raising our cost of insurance as well as normal cost of living offset them. My time off for family has been under attack over the last 10 years and recently was taken away from us with a new Hi-Viz policy. It all started somewhere around 2011 with the 24 hr. mark up, where they put you back on the board at the end of a layoff event. This sounds great, however, it not only took time from my family, but it also cost the company more manpower. In a lot of cases, it would take two employees to cover my turn instead of just one. Then in 2015, they implemented their new grand pools. They basically eliminated the extra boards and put every employee on one pool to work multiple directions. Not only is this not safe but it has proven to be inefficient. At first, the Unions were saying this would cut 30% of the manpower at my terminal. However, it backfired. It took almost 30% more people to man the same terminal. Traffic wasn't up; we weren't seeing more trains throughout our trip than usual. It was caused from people taking time off to spend with family. Why? Well, because along with the Grand Pool scheme came fuel conservation. They started giving us less locomotives to use to get trains over the road, and then started giving us throttle limitations where on most empty grain trains and coal trains I am only allowed to run 5 of my 8 throttle positions. As if that wasn't enough, they also enforced a 0/40 rule, which means you cannot be in throttle if you are over 40 MPH. During the winter of 2016 and into the fall of 2017, my on duty times and total time away from my family sky-rocketed. Prior to the implementation of fuel conservation, my average on-duty time was around 8-9 hours, and total time away from my family was 32-36 hrs. Then after the implementation, it went to 48 hours plus. My on duty times were way longer as

well. 90% of my trips during this time were at least 14 hours on-duty, with a handful that were over 16 hours. Then, I would head back to work with only around 16 hours off at home. Not a big deal right? You would think I was getting paid overtime. Not so. Overtime does not begin until 16 hours on-duty. So, no wonder people were laying off, wanting time off with their families, and quite honestly needing a break. This is when this job began to be depressing. When I took my call I didn't know where I might end up going, when I might end up getting off, how long I would be at the hotel, and how long I might be stuck on a train. It was at this point I began to notice guys looking for other places of employment. The job was demanding too much time away from home, and we were being punished for taking time off to spend with family or to try to see your Dr. to keep up with your health. The fall of 2017 finally came and things began to slow down. I saw my on-duty times fall under 12 hrs. What was causing this? I can't say for sure, but there was definitely less train traffic. We were still running trains very slowly due to fuel conservation...a lot of our trains running at well under 20 miles an hour. There has been a lot of sitting in locations just waiting for no reasons...no other trains coming our way - just waiting. To this day, my on-duty hours are still higher than pre-2016. I spend almost 11 hours on-duty. In the last 2 years they started making moves again to be able to cut manpower and do more with less. Sound like PSR? While they never admitted to it, it looks exactly like it. They started running 14,000 ft. trains, with up to 34,000 tons. There have been plenty of service interruptions due to these long trains being operated over territory where they lack the infrastructure to run them. Out of the three directions we run, they only have five places where you can meet two opposing 14,000 ft. trains. So when they run them, you end up sitting for longer periods of time, causing delays to every other train...even significant delays to Amtrak.

2020 came and created a whole bunch of problems for everyone - tons of people sick with Covid, huge increases in the unemployed, and shelves going bare. However in 2020 the railroads weren't hurting at all. They received waivers from the FRA for a number of things, which cut down on needed-employees to operate the entire railroad. I was fortunate enough to have a job. I went to work all of 2020 and was deemed an "essential employee." However, when it came to how they treated us during the pandemic, it was everything but 'essential,' and quite honestly, this hasn't stopped. They still tried to force us into vans with sometimes up to 6 people at a time, despite the supposed need for social distancing. They were not providing adequate safety precautions of cleaning cabs for us to operate, and let's hope you didn't end up getting Covid or requiring quarantine for fourteen days. My local company authorities forced me to quarantine twice, at which point the company nurse told me it would be the company - not the state/local health authorities - to decide whether I could be off or not. They attempted to override any sort of precautions being taken to prevent the spread of this virus...not to mention the absence of pay it cost me. Why? The railroad paid only four of the required fourteen days off for any person on quarantine for Covid. Everyone else outside of the company that I knew who got Covid and was quarantining was paid for the full fourteen days at their companies. So yet again, the railroad boasted huge profits. All the while, it was their employees who were not only taking a risk of

getting Covid, then bringing it home to their loved ones, but on top of it all, they were being gipped financially as well.

Since the partial recovery from the pandemic in our country, we've seen the mess at the ports...ships backed up for days. The Biden administration claimed a halfhearted victory when they struck a deal with the ports to work around the clock to get our supply chain back on track. Maybe it helped. But those of us who work for the railroads knew who really were at the root of the problem...the railroads, with all of the Class 1 running their own versions of PSR. They are the reason for it all. As I have so lengthily stated earlier, they have been slowing trains down purposefully to maximize profits. It's taking us longer to get trains over the road. The number of trains running has not increased. They will manipulate the data and pad their stats as to how they need you to see them, but as a veteran employee, I am telling you they are lying. I used to see 14-16 trains on a single shift. Now, it's a busy day if I see eight. And if I see 10, it's likely I won't make my destination. With every train running underpowered and slower - even loaded grain trains - they are not letting us run with all available power. It's no wonder they can't get things to their destination in time. Do the grain customers know what is really going on? How are they charged? I don't know all the ins and outs of it, but I know in my sixteen years, I have never seen this company deliberately slow down train traffic as much as they have since the pandemic.

The railroads will also tell you that they can't run trains because they have no manpower. This also is a lie. In my terminal, they have flooded the engineers' side to purposefully create a shortage on the conductor side. They still have conductors, but they are running thin. Prior to 2020, they always ran the boards the other way. The engineers would run shorter because half of the conductors would be able to work as engineers as well. So one solution to their problem would be to cut back on engineers and add those people to conductor side. However, this doesn't play into the narrative - which I am almost certain you will hear about in your hearing. They want one-man crews. So by purposefully creating a shortage of conductors, they can seek permission to run one-man crews. This would also give them the testing they need to approach the FRA and say that one-man crews are safe. This is their end game. Magically if one-man crews were granted, you would see your supply-chain crisis disappear. No doubt they can hire more people right? Well, because word has gotten out about how badly this company treats its employees, and how the pay doesn't make it worth it any more, people are not willing to work for this company. Also, I believe they are being stricter with their hiring process. There are people willing to work, however, they can't even get an invite to an interview. I have a friend who, back in 2015 was invited to an interview, however, due to personal reasons turned it down. This person applied just last month and for some reason now the railroad rejected him. Why would that be? It's just speculation, but it seems to also play into their narrative of telling you they can't even hire enough people.

To make things worse, they've also introduced the new Hi-Viz policy. This policy is unsustainable. I get 30 points for the remainder of my career. For me, one day off costs 2-4 points depending on the day of the week. Without fully diving into the ins and outs of the policy, it allows me to retain employment if I only take one day off a month. Since the policy started we have had over 1000 employees who

have either quit or retired. So not only are they purposefully creating a shortage, they are implementing policies that are making employees with 15 years plus walk away at a very alarming rate.

This supply chain crisis is completely manufactured by the railroads. They have taken the mentality of "I will get your product there when I get it there." They have a monopoly...and they know this. They know that customers can't afford to truck things, especially with gas prices now. So, they have the customers by the throat, and now they have our country by the throat. They are choking us, and its deliberate. They are now - in an attempt to be able to tell you that they are running trains at full available power - giving us the ability to run trains with no throttle restrictions. This just happened about a week ago. Strange timing, considering next week's hearings.

Thank you for taking the time to read this lengthy email. I felt it was important to give you a full perspective of how the railroads have treated customers and employees throughout my career and how this isn't just a bad few years since the pandemic. This has been a continual habit by the railroads and the pandemic of 2020 was an easy excuse for them to really double down.

Thank you,

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