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Urgent issues in Freight Rail Service

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My name is Monica Brown. I am 59 years old and I work for a class I railroad on the south west corridor. I have 27 years and 4 months of continuous service with the same railroad. I have been a locomotive engineer for all but 4 months.

It is my intention to impart my experience and perspective on the topics of concern in this hearing regarding the safety and logistics of the supply chain issues from the “man on the scene” point of view.

PSR

PSR has been a topic or theory of service for almost 30 years. In 1993 this theory of service delivery and exercise best practice model for the company to deliver service and have a profit margin acceptable to the stock holders. It has never worked. Precision Scheduled Railroading boasted a precise schedule and the ability to deliver more efficiently. This has never been a continuous process. Best laid plans... It is best described as smoke and mirrors. All the executives find ways to cook the books to make sure their departments have followed the process and it looks good on paper, yet the only success achieved was a talking point. In recent years approximately 2017 or 2018 there has been a new drive to push this PSR service theory by a new stock holder base. Very reminiscent of the Hostess Corporate Raiders who gutted Hostess, sold all the assets. Pump and dump.

The company started selling the new equipment, cutting employees, closing repair facilities, and failing to maintain equipment and track. Squeezing the safety right out of the process. They have raised all the stock value on the backs of employees and the public by cutting out safety, throwing out the baby with the bath water.

EXCESSIVELY LONG TRAINS

Doubling and tripling the length of the trains to cut the number of crews used to move the trains across the country on paper saved costs. These trains are 3 to 4 miles long 15,000 to 18,000 feet. The ability for a conductor to walk his train which would be 6 to 8 miles as he would have to walk back to the end and then from the end to the front. The trains are so long that many times those trains do not fit in the terminal, they are not being inspected properly as they are literally a moving wall. In some cases, they are inspected in large segments in order to fit in the terminal. The problem is that there are more chances that one trainman may have to work both sides and ensure that all the valves have been properly opened. Because of the length of the train and having mid train power and rear power the engineer can not identify a problem with

propagation of air until the train is moving. While the train is stopped it will not indicate any issues so long as the inline power successfully passes the air test. While the train is in motion it will display propagation issues when the braking systems fail to release or set the brakes properly. During the recent Covid 19, the company received special permits and allowances from the FRA to forgo the air brake testing from 4 hours off air to an extended time of 24 hours. The question is why? Cars don't get covid. Cut safety to save man power. Man power that they cut off in 2018 and 2019.

CREW CONSIST

The company chose to cut crew consist and boards so much that when the pandemic hit, they chose not to recall those crew members. When they finally needed those crew members, those members would not come back. These members had given up good jobs to come work for the railroad and were released. Why would they come back? Some of these people lost their homes or cars, sustained financial losses to work for the railroad and then they were unceremoniously release from duty. Greed. There are levers in place to assist the railroad in times of high volume and low volume. They made executive decisions to forgo the protections for both the railroad and the crew members

PUBLIC SAFTEY

It has been my experience that since the movement of these long trains the safety of the public has been sacrificed. Wishful dispatching. When these trains fail and have to stop, outside the terminal, one train can easily block three or more road crossings. Blocking emergency crews. ambulances, police, fire, and public road assistance are left to find a way around these stalled trains. The company has limited the power to move the trains as well and making them so long one person cannot work fast enough to identify, repair, and get the train moving again in a timely matter. Most of the infrastructure is built to accommodate the train lengths of 6,000 to 8,000 feet. Not 15,000 to 18,000 feet. Recently there have been some changes made to extend some sidings to accommodate these long trains. They extended the sidings to be 15,000 feet to accommodate the longer trains. So now they build the trains longer, 16,000 to 18,000 feet. What is long enough. Our country is now dealing with acts of theft, and sabotage. The company chose to let go of 70 or more special agents 2017 or 2018 so the perfect storm is formed. The company has elected to use local police to act as security, placing the financial burden on localities, in lieu of hiring back the special agents that would inspect and provide security for the trains. If a terrorist decided to attack a big city, they could use a long train to cut off emergency police forces, military, etc to detain or delay action. Very unsafe.

ABSENTEE POLICY

The current absentee polity is causing a real risk to the public and to the health and safety of the crews. Having crews that are so fatigued that they are forced to work extended hours. Mandatory overtime, 12 to 16 hours including limbo time. Not allowing employees time to recover and enforce this ridiculous absentee policy. A policy that is more a work release program. This type of over working of crews has seen a rise in employees dying at the away from home terminal. Some employees dying after taking their call at home. Exhaustion and fatigue

plain and simple. Abuse of our hours of service and then having to wait for a subcontract driver to pick us up and take us to the terminal. Subcontract drivers are exhausted, having accidents. In all my tenure I have never been offered van insurance until now. Van insurance to protect me in the event that the subcontract van company causes my injuries or worse, my death.

PTC/EMS/ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS

PTC, EMS, DPU, HED, EOT (Positive train control, Energy Management System, Distributed Power Unit, Head End Device, End of Train) are supposed to be integrated. Each of these systems are layered on to the locomotive system. Each system has its own idiosyncrasies. Each system is separate and have been, over the years, layered on top of each other. It is a patchwork of electronics. They do not work together. Integrated is just a term they use. It is not. They are 5 systems that report to each other, not always correctly. PTC screens have been added to the locomotives. In some cases, the screens are outside of the forward view making it uncomfortable and not ergonomic to provide constant monitoring. The length of the trains longer than 8,000 feet does not appear complete on the screen. If your train is longer than 8,000 feet it is hard to determine where your train will fit further up the track. I was trained to be conscience of my location and out six miles to know where your train can fit or where the track changes to run the train correctly. With the trains that are greater lengths the view is not available and the monitor is out of view.

The PTC signal indication was updated to indicate only signal indications that are more restricting than an Approach Signal, while the screen indicates a green indication and the signal in the field is not, it is Advance Approach (Flashing yellow.) It is now a contradiction. If it displays a green track, the signal in the field could be green or flashing yellow. It was updated. It is now a contradiction. Before the update a green track was only a green signal.

EMS has several systems in this category. One is SMART, another is Trip Optimizer, lastly Leader. Each system operates similarly. SMART was scrapped early on. It was a safety problem and I was so glad they scrapped it. Someone was surely going to get hurt. It would drop the lead power and run from trailing units or DPU units causing pushing and lurching from trailing power. Trip Optimizer and Leader are currently the systems being used. Both operate similarly. The problem is that the command center is trying to limit locomotive usage and maximize the units based on power only. Problem is the locomotive consist is more than power. It is Dynamic braking and air compression for the brake pipe pressure maintenance. EMS will not operate properly if the other systems are not sufficient. If Dynamic Braking is too low the system will drop out. If the system can not advise on air braking, it will drop out. If the system decides that it can not control the consist, it will drop out. If it can not control the DPU, it will drop out. If you build a train that can not move over the track in 12 hours because you are saving fuel and instead move over one leg in 8 or 10 hours, and not have an engine blow up because it is being overwhelmed, you are saving more fuel and man power. But each executive is defending their part of PSR. Thirty years and PSR does not work! The king wears no clothes. So, they cook the books.

In closing, when I first hired onto the railroad, we would run train list of the trains that were coming against us. We ran on single track and met 27 to 30 trains that were 6,000 to 8,000 feet long in one shift. Now we can not meet 10 trains and cannot make it to the next terminal in

a 12-hour shift. Choosing to not hire, abusing current employees with a bad absentee policy, forced overtime and job allocation, cutting maintenance on equipment and track will continue to endanger the public and the environment. If we continue to proceed looking through a blind eye we will experience more shipping delays, supply chain delays, track catastrophes, and damage to the environment. One can just look at the financial records and see that they have been reporting record quarterly revenues while others companies have suffered great losses. These gains on the backs of the public, localities (police security), employees, and shippers. These issues are all byproducts of greed, manipulation, and corporate extortion