

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

RE: EP 770 Rail Service Hearing

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Dear Chairman Oberman;

I am writing you today regarding the service problems the nation is experiencing from the class one railroads and their implementation of a business model called Precision Scheduled Railroading or PSR. Since implementing this business model, I have witnessed the service the class one rail carriers are providing their customers deteriorate. This service is not precision, it is not scheduled and it is not railroading under any definition.

I am a second-generation railroader, starting my career as a conductor in 1995 then following in my father's footsteps, becoming a locomotive engineer in 1997. I have worked for two different railroads over my 27-year career, and currently work for the Union Pacific Railroad. I also serve the members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) as a Local Chairman for my local division, representing them in grievance and disciplinary issues. In addition, I represent the members of the BLET on safety, regulatory and legislative issues in the state of Minnesota, serving as the State Chairman for our Legislative Board.

After railroads started implementing PSR we have seen the railroads put locomotives and freight cars in storage. Next the carriers began to close down locomotive shop across their systems. Furloughing the highly skilled employees that worked in those shops and maintained the locomotives. As a result of the shop closures, locomotive reliability dropped and failures became common across the system. Trains were delayed due to locomotive shortages while railroads refused to take locomotives out of storage to alleviate the problem.

We witnessed the railroads cut service to their customers by refusing to provide service to them on a daily basis. I was personally assigned to a local job that serviced up to ten customers a day, handling over 150 cars in a shift. One day the railroad decided to cut that assignment leaving those customers with no daily service. On many occasions the customers that once received daily reliable service from the railroad went several days with no service at all. Delaying the delivery of those goods and forcing the customers to use trucks to ship their products and increasing the shipping costs. Those costs ultimately get passed on to the consumer.

This is just one example of many where railroads reduced service to their customers from daily to much reduced, unscheduled service. No doubt this board has received thousands of examples similar to this from railroad customers across the country. Railroaders often interact with the customers that we service and take pride in providing reliable dependable service to the customers along our routes. It is very frustrating for employees to see the railroads they work for treat their customers in this manner. We understand that reduced unreliable service from the rail carriers will result in increased costs to the shippers and lost business to the railroads that we work for.

Under PSR we have witnessed the rail carriers reduce the frequency of thru freight service along rail corridors by combining trains. Prior to the implementation many terminals that had multiple trains per day departing to various destinations. Under PSR, rail carriers combined these trains into just one

train. These trains can reach up to 3 miles long. As a result, rail yards fill up with freight cars waiting for trains to reach the desired length to depart causing congestion in freight yards across the country, further delaying shipments. These very long trains also cause congestion along the line as there is no infrastructure in place to meet opposing trains that are the same length.

Due to the combining of trains, cuts in service and jobs across the systems, and the closing of repair facilities railroads furloughed highly skilled and highly trained employees. These employees remained unemployed for many months, some as long as two years. When the pandemic ended and traffic started to pick up many of the employees that were furloughed, did not return to the railroad. Frustrated with stagnant wages, unreliable employment, unpredictable schedules, and harsher working conditions than when they began their careers. Many employees with more than fifteen to twenty years of valuable experience decided that a railroad career was longer for them. As a result of their inability to retain and attract employees, railroads started to implement attendance policies that require up to 95% availability. It is important to note that most railroad employees that staff freight trains for class one railroads do not have days off. Most are required to be on call 24 hours a day seven days a week 365 days a year. The only time off we can have under these policies is what is required under the hours-of-service law making it very difficult to schedule doctor appointments, attend family events and take care of anything outside of work. Often times forcing employees to come to work sick or fatigued under the threat of discipline. This has only made the rail carrier's ability to attract and retain employees much worse. Many are realizing that it is very difficult to maintain a family life when the railroads are demanding of so much of your time and choose to find employment outside the rail industry. Since the skills required for railroad employment are very specialized, it can take up to a year to train new employees. At the current rate many rail carriers are losing employees faster than they can hire new employees. The effects of these job cuts due to PSR, will be felt across the industry for many months.

Despite all this most employees that work for the railroad are proud of what we do. We are proud of our profession and the history associated with it. We are dedicated to the customers we serve. We possess skills that are essential to the safe and reliable movement of freight that may not be available outside the industry. I feel confident in saying that most railroaders I have worked with in my career are highly skilled, highly trained, and dedicated to our profession. We have continued to work through the darkest days of the COVID 19 pandemic, putting out lives on the line while delivering essential services to this nation. To thank us for our sacrifices the railroads have implemented harsh policies upon their employees, refused to give their employees a fair pay raise, and refused to negotiate with the unions in good faith during contract negotiations. All while reaping record profits.

It's time for the railroads focus on serving their customers. It's time for the railroads to start treating their employees with respect. It's time the railroads focus on railroading again.

Sincerely

Joel Mueller

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Joel Mueller', written in a cursive style.