

Senator Mike Peterson

Committee on Transportation

Kansas State Legislature,

3/4/23

Hello, my name is Steven Titus. I am a full-time Maintenance of Way Employee of Union Pacific Railroad, with nearly 26 years of seniority. I am a Member of the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division/IBT, and have the honor and privilege to serve as the BMWED Kansas State Legislative Director.

The BMWED represents employees working in the craft or class of Maintenance of Way Employee employed by most of the freight railroads in the United States, including all of the Class I railroads, including Union Pacific Railroad, Amtrak, and the major commuter railroads, and some regional and short line railroads. We are the workers who build, repair, and maintain the tracks. I speak in support of proposed SB271.

For approximately 7 years, the Class I railroads, including Union Pacific, adopted and implemented their cost-cutting value extraction business model that they call Precision Scheduled Railroading or "PSR". The freight railroads' cost-cutting crusade started with the dramatic reduction of railroad workers. In general, the industry has seen a nearly 30% reduction in employee headcounts, and specific to Maintenance of Way workers on my home road, Union Pacific, we watched as much as 25% of my fellow UP track workers get sent home.

I have seen many Maintenance of Way Employees retire early or quit mid-career because of the increased stress of the job caused by having to do more work. It was almost unheard of for Maintenance of Way Employees to quit the railroad because the jobs were always considered good jobs with good pay and good benefits. But the jobs have been degraded by the railroads with respect to working conditions and by pressure to work faster, more hours, with less coworkers and resources often over larger service territories, cut corners and ignore or defer maintenance and repairs. It is also nearly impossible to carry out this work because PSR has made it more difficult to get track time.

You see, PSR also involves cutting engineers and conductors from running what I would call “regular sized trains”, or trains that are not in excess of 8,500 feet, which is still a very long train. Instead, PSR involves running much longer trains, more than 3 miles long. Trains this long routinely have problems, which often results in crews running out of hours and the trains end up dying on the tracks that need to be maintained, because the sidings are often too short to capacitate these mega trains when needed. These dead mega trains attributes to the inability for Maintenance of Way crews to get track time to maintain the tracks.

Train velocity and car dwell time are major metrics used by the railroads to determine their performance under their cost-cutting business model, which basically means how fast trains are going on average and how long are trains sitting still. So, to put this more finely, when a train dies on the tracks it reduces their velocity and increases their dwell time and it is not viewed well for performance measures. And keep in mind that when one train dies on the tracks, other trains are still trying to move down the tracks, and train traffic starts to back up. So, the railroads’ natural tendency is to get the stopped or dead trains recrewed and moving again, which means there is no time for Maintenance of Way workers to get track time. The result is that the track maintenance continues to get deferred.

It was always a challenge to get track time to perform maintenance work during my career. But the challenge to get track time has only gotten worse since the railroads have implemented their cost-cutting business model and started using these mega trains. I believe these longer and heavier trains wear harder and put much more exertion on the track structure than “regular sized trains” did. I also believe that these longer trains potentially subject engineers and conductors to more risks in their operations. We need to limit the length of trains so that the crews can operate them more safely, so that there will be less service disruptions, and so that Maintenance of Way workers can have a better opportunity to get track time and do their best work.

Please pass SB271 to limit train length to 8,500 feet. Thank you for the opportunity to address all of you today.

Steven Titus