Ohio Rail Safety Bill, HB 186

Testimony of Becky Schneider, wife to a locomotive engineer, and mother of two

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Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide this written testimony in support of 2-person crews. We have been debating this issue since at least 2005 and none of the arguments have changed. Even with the onset of “value added” technology to assist in train handling, the issue has actually become more complex.

At hand are central issues as to the need of a minimum of two crew members who together are vital to:

* provide an extra pair of eyes for track or train hazards ahead, to the sides, and behind trains;
* provide a back up in the event a crew member is incapacitated; and
* provide an additional crew member to assess any given situation that may occur enroute while the other crew member maintains the integrity (brakes) of the train and can relay information when needed.

These are just a few reasons for the need to require a 2-person minimum crew size. A good example of the 1st and 3rd issues stated above is a recent incident. An engineer and conductor noticed a car parked on the track right of way and, because something didn’t look right, the crew agreed that the Conductor should keep an eye on it since the engineer could not see it from his chair. After they had passed the car it suddenly backed into the train and was flipped up when it caught on a rail car pinning a pedestrian under the vehicle.

The engineer put the train into emergency and the conductor grabbed his hand set radio and ran to the accident scene to assess the situation. He relayed information to the engineer who passed it on to the dispatcher who then relayed that information to emergency response personnel. This had to occur because the handset could not directly communicate with the dispatcher. The driver had apparently had a seizure and was not aware of his actions. In part because of the thoughtful actions of the two person crew there were luckily no fatalities that day. This is just one of many incidents that occur daily involving trains and cars. It doesn’t address other situations such as rock slides or other hazards like misaligned switches or fires started by mechanical problems with the cars.

The argument that two person crew are redundant is ludicrous. In this situation the engineer could not have kept an eye on the vehicle not only because it was on the other side of the train meaning he would have had to physically get up and look out the other window, but he was already busy performing his regular duties running the train which is more complicated than it used to be. It has been shown that with the new technology and “cost saving measures” implemented by the railroads even more attention and actions are required of the locomotive engineer, and that does not include the regular duties of the conductor.

If all that was ever involved was “babysitting” the train on tracks with no grade crossings or other hazards, one person might be able to perform all of the tasks required, but the stress of doing so for 12 hours would be incredibly taxing. However, if ANYTHING happened there is absolutely no room for being able to do anything else.

As you are aware, railroads carry a lot of hazardous cargo and chemicals through the heart of our communities. I for one do not want just one person responsible for the safety of my friends and family.

Lastly, I love my husband and care about the welfare of his co-workers and want all them to come home safely after every trip. Working for the railroad is perilous enough without increasing the danger of his job by removing a crew member for the sole reason of increasing an already fat bottom line.