05 September 2019

To whom it may concern:

I am not a resident of Ohio or it’s nearby locations. I am however a constant visitor both to and through your state. It is quite beautiful and probably my favorite portion of my long drive to Chicago. I’ve been to Newark, Cleveland’s rock ‘n’ roll Hall of Fame, and I’ve even met Jack Hannah at the Columbus zoo for the AmeriFlora.

I also have family Who are lifelong residence of Solon Ohio. My in-laws who have trouble getting through a busy airport. Travel through your state on Amtrak 29 and 30 The Capital Limited. And I just got back from Gallipolis on a weekend trip to the first Bob Evans restaurant. So I have as much dog in this fight as anybody else.

Regarding bill HB 186 on two man crew. This is absolutely a safety measure not a labor issue. This is literally like the seatbelts for a car. Fought hard against by auto manufacturers saying. It’s not a safety issue and our cars are safe. To showing statistics from the manufacturer proving their point. Which when countered by independent statistics. Showed the Fox was guarding the hen house just like in the tobacco industry.

Positive train control (PTC) which is long past it’s mandatory implementation date. Is not even close to perfected nor is it fail safe. The statistics on safety and no longer a need for a two person crew. Provided by the railroads are by definition suspect.

 It is only recently that the actual working crews. Have been able to give real field feedback. To other than their employers who are trying to shut down this bill. These employees have to do it by pen and paper and memory. Because of current regulations do not allow for any electronic devices to be used on duty unless provided by the company. The railroads are able to download real time events from offsite locations. While the actual crew has hand enter in the multiple daily instances of PTC failure. To a central website where one person has to put this data in a Excel spreadsheet. While these crews are supposed to be resting for the next train.

It’s a uphill battle where it’s not only the right thing to do. But is also the duty of the professional railroader to make sure these failures are documented. It is a thankless task but it shows the real data. That in every instance the offsite monitoring systems. Are unable to capture without human eyes. How do I know this? I have been a train conductor now for going on 16 years. Working across several miles on the eastern seaboard. Both with Amtrak and CSX in passenger and freight.

Airlines have a pilot and a copilot to monitor the multiple gauges on the flight deck. Along with operating communication systems for both the crew and air traffic controller‘s. It is very similar in a locomotive. Where the engineer has several gauges to monitor. Operating communication systems speaking to crews, and dispatchers. Along with paying attention to the speed limits of the territory. The grades and track conditions. And constantly changing orders and situations. Behind a multi ton train carrying everything from baby diapers to hazardous materials that could wipe out a town.

But the railroads would seem to have you believe. That with technology this is easily accomplished by one human being. Currently with the massive technological upgrades on new airplanes. We see that this is not true and is still controlled by human hands. Even if those hands created a program to remove actual humans from operation. The slightest mistake in calculations for removing the actual human control. Can have catastrophic consequences because the computer can only do what the computer has been programmed to do. And that’s to say if it has been properly maintained. As we saw in the WAMTA crash in 2009. Where eight people were killed and eighty were injured here in the nations capital. This accident was also in a modified version of positive train control. Where there was actually no need for operators other than to open the doors. And all metro trains were remotely controlled at the time.

My time with using positive train control. Is filled with several instances of failure. Or unsafe operations to make it work efficiently and effectively. This defeats the purpose of having positive train control at all. Also proving the railroads statistics are not The end all be all on one person crews.

I have personally had instances where PTC completely went dead. Or we had positive signals that were listed on our PTC as restrictions or stop signals. Mandatory directives were not actually entered in to PTC. Where an actual human being has to adjust operations. For safety and complying with the rules. Work authorities where on my honor I just have to acknowledge the permission through. Which literally puts the railway worker in charge at risk. I have left the terminal where not all the correct information was entered in to PTC. Then 30 miles later. The information was corrected and an emergency application stopped our train. With 30 miles of PTC not realizing the error. Or the ability to stop my train.

All this to call the dispatcher to receive help from a help desk. Where they ask you what was going on at the time, what did PTC say? My engineer responded with “I’m busy operating the train I have multiple other things to look at, I didn’t get that split second to check the damn PTC screen before it put me into suppression”.

I was able to catch the screen before hand to reply to the help desk. But with out another set of eyes. This failure would not have been properly documented to this offsite location. Who can not always download this data. Which at times claims to be the end all be all of statistics, and why there is no need for a two person crew.

This along with the reminders to my crew of slow orders coming up. The extra set of eyes to spot trespassers on the track for miles ahead. The extra hands to actually perform the work at industries and yards. Along with enroute failures where hazardous materials trains need to be walked per FRA rules. Before going by the elementary school in the next town.

I would ask long and hard why a industry. Would remove the safety of an extra crewman. And fight so vigorously to show that it’s unnecessary. When the actual people on the ground who keep your town safe, prove otherwise

I Thank you for your time and please vote yes on HB 186

Respectfully

John R Walker

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