

Surface Transportation Board
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Washington DC 20423

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RE: EP 770 Rail Service Hearing

April 25th, 2022

Dear Chairman Oberman and Board Members,

My name is Christopher Sheble. I am a locomotive engineer with BNSF Railway. I operate out of Kansas City, Missouri. I've been with the company for nearly nine years and I believe my time and experience allows me to share some of my insight regarding the upcoming hearing. Firstly, let me thank you for being open to comments from myself and other hard working, blue collar Americans. My experiences, opinions and anecdotes will all involve the Kansas City area.

Let me start my comment off by saying that I truly enjoy my job, my issue lies with those of whom I am employed by. I cannot stress to the board enough, how every issue that I will lay out in the letter, can be laid at the feet of the carrier. In 2020, we were heroes who showed up, did the work, all through the pandemic. We were labeled heroes, including by BNSF. Currently, as it stands, we do not feel as though we're being treated as such. Nor am I asking for us to be treated that way. I would prefer my employer simply treat me as a human being. Someone who is simply asking to be treated fairly.

The most recent and glaring show of the carriers opinion of us is Hi Viz. An attendance policy that is the most restrictive and most draconian of any railroad in the country. Currently we've lost about 1000 coworkers because of this policy. The carrier has failed to employ any new hires in numbers to combat this loss. That is because the word is out. No one wants to be required by an employer to be ready to work 90% of the month. Nor should they. It's akin to feudalism indentured servitude. When the carrier released its Hi Viz proposal, labor relations told the unions that the company needed to "make good employees out of these guys." The pandemics heroes were now held in the highest of contempt by those that made zero of the sacrifices during the pandemic. While all TY&E showed up, most everyone above first line supervisors worked from home, avoiding any risk that the rest of us faced. I'm Judge Pittman ruling on Hi Viz, it reads as though the company wrote his decision for him, which may not be surprising since he worked for the law firm that represented the carrier and the lawyer for that law firm clerked for him. We were essentially told, we must take one for the team because of the consequences that would be faced by an already strained supply chain, and the American people. We have done that and more.

In 2020, BNSF made drastic cuts over and over because of the pandemic and shutdown. They saw this as an opportunity to do more, with less. They decimated their crew base for the next two years after that as well. Even with the eventual need for crews after the economy opened back up, the jobs were not added back. Many, remained furloughed. In June of 2021, BNSF, along with other carriers were brought before the STB to answer whether or not they had the crew base to handle the volume of backed up cargo containers at ports. Strangely, by the end of April all the way through to this meeting, jobs were added back, people coming back to work, crews were there to move freight. Shortly after this meeting took place, all of this jobs added, were cut again. We were again required to do more with less. Including the company violating many of our collective bargaining agreements. As I write this letter now, we lost hundreds of people in Kansas City over the last two years. Most of whom, did not return after

being recalled from furlough after finding new jobs. Most did not come back because of the uncertainty of how long they would be able to work this time. After the last recall in Kansas City, we did not have enough people to return to fill the open jobs. Which led to many egregious hours of service violations. Crews being forced to operate their trains past their 12 hour mark because the carrier did not plan accordingly and didn't want trains blocking mainlines halting all traffic. I have personally been called to relieve trains that are 16 miles outside of Kansas City, and we go dead before we are relieved by a crew or van. I've been called to deadhead, take a van from one terminal to another and no transportation was called. Recently, I had a 16 hour deadhead because the Manager of Crew Operations for BNSF stated that it "wasn't her job to order vans," on a recorded line. In fact, that is their job, it's what they do, they move crews and transportation. We are regularly run until we have no time left because there isn't a crew or a van to help us. We are told this by dispatchers. We cannot continue this way.

I'd just like to make an overall point about what BNSF has done over the last few years. In an effort to cut costs and improve share holder value, every aspect that makes a working railroad has suffered. We have throttle restrictions, limiting our ability to use increased fuel efficiency and maximum horse power. We have blanket speed restrictions over entire territories. We have what's called a 0/40, which means that once you reach 40 mph, you cannot use any throttle. Bnsf has intermodal cars, and power in storage that could alleviate congestion at the coast. But they refused to take them out because it would increase the operating ratio. And now, they wouldn't have the crews to move it because of the job cuts they've made. They run every train with the bare minimum horsepower. Which means if something goes wrong, you've got a service interruption. They have deferred track maintenance in a way that's unprecedented. We've seen more derailments in the last few years than in years previous to that. And their big push of longer trains is a detriment to the public at large. They do not have, nor plan to invest in the infrastructure to run 2-3 mile long trains. Again, if something goes wrong, you've got a bit interruption. These trains take multiple crews to move and kill any opposing traffic. They also needlessly block roadways that force emergency workers to divert. This is because they aren't even worried about cutting crossings anymore. In fact, I was told by a road foreman of engines that, "they'll move freight whenever they have someone to move it." These cost cutting measures are a detriment to crews, customers, and the public at large.

Finally, I'd like to speak about myself and my brothers and sisters. We are the backbone of BNSF. We are the ones sacrificing our physical, mental, and emotional health everyday. BNSF had record profits in 2021, 6 billion. And the previous years, 2020 not withstanding, we're record as well. 2020 being 5.2 billion after 2019 was 5.4 billion. We have been without a contract for nearly 3 years. We have had contract and work rules violated. We have had good penalty claims denied for frivolous reasons. And yet, we, as a union, are fighting this battle through the legal processes laid out in the RLA. BNSF wants to cut the pay of its workforce, get rid of conductors, and build longer trains, with fuel saving initiatives that will delay customers cars. All while making record profits. We are not asking for much, we wish to be fairly compensated for the work that we have done to pad the bonuses of BNSF officials. I also urge you to realize, that the carriers will use a "workforce shortage," as an excuse to petition for one man crews. Any shortage is a direct result of the carriers actions over the last few years. I hope the board will hear our pleas. As tired and burnt out as we are, we must and will continue to fight for what we believe is right. And right now we believe they the carriers should be held accountable for their actions that have done irreparable damage to us, customers, consumers, and the economy at large because of corporate greed. We cannot, and will not have our voices ignored any longer.

Thank you,
Christopher Sheble