

TESTIMONY OF

**JOHN RISCH
NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR
SMART – TRANSPORTATION DIVISION**

**BEFORE THE
SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD**

Public Listening Session on

CSXT Rail Service Issues

October 11, 2017



I appreciate the opportunity to appear here today. My name is John Risch and I am the National Legislative Director for the Transportation Division of the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART TD). SMART TD – formerly the United Transportation Union – our union is the largest of the rail unions in an industry that is almost 90% organized.

On the CSX railroad I represent conductors, engineers, switchmen and yardmasters. In my brief time to comment today I will talk about how CSX's move to excessively long trains has resulted in substantial service disruptions.

Freight trains in America are typically one to one-and-one-half miles long, but in recent months CSX has routinely been operating trains that are two and even three miles in length.

These excessively long trains cause all sorts of logistical problems that cause tremendous amounts of delay wherever they go.

1. A three-mile-long train simply goes slower than a one-mile long train. It takes longer to start and get to top speed which is almost never the maximum allowable speed because they are simply too heavy and hard to handle. Slowing down for speed restrictions and getting back up to speed takes far more time.
2. Most rail main lines in our nation are single-track, so when one train meets another train coming in the opposite direction one of the trains must pull into a siding to let the other train pass. There are very few sidings that are long enough to hold a 2-3-mile-long train, meaning if the long train takes the siding both trains must stop and there is what we call a "saw-by" causing significant delay. If both trains are too long we have an incredible event called a "double saw-by" which can take hours for one to pass the other.
3. Train operations require that the crew in the lead locomotive maintain constant communications with the rear locomotives or the device on the rear car of the train. When these communications fail the train is restricted to 30mph and on grades of more than 2% the train is required to stop. The longer the train the more these communications fail. This loss of communications is very common when trains go around curves or go over the tops of mountains.
4. The longer the train the higher the probability of mechanical failure. More cars mean more problems. Excessively long trains are also far more likely to break-in-two which can cause hours of delay. When there is a mechanical problem or break-in-two the trains conductor must walk back from the lead locomotive to deal with the problem. When the train is two miles long or longer and the conductors' portable radio oftentimes fails to communicate with the locomotive causing significant delay. A train

uses air for its braking system and the longer the train the harder it is to maintain adequate air in the system.

5. Many CSX engineers have little to no experience operating these excessively long trains. We have many instances of these trains breaking in two and causing significant delays, including delaying an Amtrak train for 9 hours on a siding in Florida.
6. When a train is too long to fit into a yard track the train must be separated and put on two or more tracks, adding to yard congestion and additional delay.
7. The longer the train the more crossings that are blocked and they are blocked for longer periods of time. Causing safety concerns. See letter from Indiana school.
8. Crews cannot reliably hear the report of wayside defect detectors when trains exceed 12,000 feet. When that happens, the train must stop and follow procedures to make sure their train is safe to proceed.
9. Required brake tests take longer on a long train. Some brake tests require the inspection of every car and walking a 3-mile-long train to the end and back is 6 miles. Add to that a portable radio that fails to transmit and the result is substantial train delay.
10. Trains are too long for foreign line yards: for example, the Belt Railway of Chicago only accepts 8,000 foot trains. However, CSX has sent many 9,000+ foot trains there that have been rejected requiring the crew to divert to Barr Yard and set out enough cars to get down to the 8,000-foot maximum before returning to the BRC Yard.

The question of the day is: "What can the STB do about it?"

1. We recommend that the STB immediately restrict train lengths to not exceed the length of the sidings on lines these trains operate on.
2. Or at the very least conduct an investigation on the effect train lengths have on service and safety in the industry.

Urging CSX to do better will not fix the problems that excessively long trains cause.

I wrote the FRA last April asking for action on this issue and they have so far not even responded to my letter. They have no Administrator and are reluctant to do anything until they do.

I have lots of examples of problems long trains have and are causing and I will submit this list for the record.

Examples of CSX Operating Excessive Train Lengths

L&N property on CSX:

- CSX had been running trains more than 18,000 feet in length across L&N property from New Orleans, LA to Tallahassee, FL. The crews have experienced many issues with broken knuckles simply due to the buff and draft forces involved that the engineer cannot control due to the various terrain and track conditions. As a result, local news media filmed traffic congestion at a blocked crossing, which lasted approximately 4 hours. While CSX told news stations that the blocked crossing was due to a mechanical failure or that the train is “stalled”, they failed to mention that the blocked crossing was due to the trains excessive length and that the yard did not have tracks long enough to hold these trains.

Long Trains between Louisville and Cincinnati, and Nashville and Memphis:

- We have received numerous reports highlighting concerns about the length of trains being run between Louisville and Cincinnati, and Nashville and Memphis. For example, not one train handling rule exists dealing with distributed power or the excessively long trains exceeding 13,000 feet. We also don't know how many tons can go either behind or in front of the DP locomotive(s). Crews are supposed to use Trip Optimizer (TO) when it's available, but the broad consensus among engineers is that TO has too erratic of throttle/braking inputs to be used with very long trains.
- It's nearly impossible for the crews to reliably hear the defect detectors in a clear transmission on long trains that exceed 13,000 feet due to the distance traveled from the detectors.
- We have told CSX management many times that they needed a radio repeater system in place for the terminals that handle these long trains because the conductor or foreman cannot communicate with the trains lead locomotive because of the distance. Instead we are forced to relay radio communications through a third party which is a safety concern due to miscommunications between parties.

Long Trains between North Carolina and South Carolina

Since July 24, 2017, CSX has operated a number of freight train lengths resulting in numerous broken knuckles and blocked crossings. Switching moves and brake applications with these trains are also very dangerous due to the time it takes for train brakes to set up. Please see the list below:

- **July 24, 2017:** 181 cars, 14,475 tons, 11,717 ft – the train went into emergency twice with air hose separations. The first incident blocked three road crossings at Parkton, NC

for an hour and lost radio communication with Conductor while he inspected the entire train due to lost communications with the end of train device. The second incident caused a knuckle failure on the 40th car in Fayetteville, NC and the train blocked both main tracks and six road crossings in downtown for 1 hr and 40 minutes.

- **July 26, 2017:** 173 cars, 13,003 tons, 10,827 ft. Blocked road crossing in Sharpsburg, NC for 40+ minutes making an air brake test.
- **July 27, 2017:** 155 cars, 11,673 tons, 10,569ft. Blocked road crossing at Florence, SC for 25 minutes making air brake test.
- **July 31, 2017:** 217 cars, 14,390 tons, 12,857 ft. Blocked a crossing in Sharpsburg, NC for one hour making an air brake test.
- **August 5, 2017:** 221 cars, 16,457 tons, 14,095 ft. Train had multiple failures including air hose separation at Wilson, NC where it blocked crossings for several hours, stalling at Wilson after repairs were made only to have the train break in two again after additional locomotives were added. The train then sat at Kenly, NC blocking Highway 581 for several hours waiting for a relief crew to arrive.
- **August 9, 2017:** 201 cars, 14,574 tons, and 12,100ft. Blocked crossing at Sharpsburg, NC for an hour performing an air brake test.
- **August 9, 2017:** 187 cars, 16,021 tons and 11,209 ft. The train went into emergency at Fayetteville, NC because of an air hose separation and blocked four road crossings downtown for 1 hour and 15 minutes.
- **August 12, 2017:** 189 cars, 17,369 tons and 11,367 ft. Train blocked a road crossing at Florence for 45 minutes while and brake test was performed.
- **August 17, 2017:** 209 cars, 16,617 tons and 13,430 ft. The train blocked a crossing at Florence for 50 minutes making an air brake test. There was also an air hose gasket rupture on the rear car at Sellers, SC blocking both mains and three road crossings for an hour. The engineer lost radio communication with Conductor because he was too far away and the crew used cell phones due to long distance.
- **August 19, 2017:** 191 cars, 11,294 tons and 11,801 ft. Instructed by Yardmaster to block both crossings at Sharpsburg, NC to hang and end of train device.
- **August 20, 2017:** 229 cars, 21,628 tons and 14,208 ft. The train blocked a crossing at Florence for an hour and ten minutes while making an air brake test.
- **August 26, 2017:** 214 cars, 16,304 tons and 12,580 ft. The train blocked a crossing at Florence for 50 minutes making an air brake test.

Lakeland to Hialeah, Florida

- A junior engineer was required to take a 177-car mixed freight train from Lakeland to Hialeah, FL where the train did not fit into any siding on the route. A combination of improper train build & inexperience led to 3 knuckle failures and a 9-hour delay to one Amtrak train, which was held in a siding in the middle of nowhere with the CSX train strung out at both ends of the siding. Shortly after CSX advised that no train would be run that exceeded the maximum length of sidings on that subdivision (approximately

7,500 feet), they continue to routinely run trains in excess of that ignoring their own instructions.

Danville to Chicago, Illinois

In the state of Illinois, the average length of the train has grown from 6,000-7,000 feet to 10,000-12,000 feet in length. This has created a variety of safety and operational issues for our crews as well as numerous service delays for CSX customers. By restricting train lengths, CSX would significantly reduce delays in service for its customers for the reasons below:

- **Trains are too long for our sidings:** this creates problems when meeting other trains, which are required to wait for trains that do not fit into sidings. This results in a recrew situation causing further delays in service for CSX customers.
- **Trains are too long for foreign line yards:** for example, the Belt Railway of Chicago only accepts 8,000 foot trains. However, CSX will send 9,000 foot trains daily that get rejected by BRC requiring the crew to divert to Barr Yard and set out 1,000 feet before going to the BRC Clearing Yard. This adds to the time it takes to get to designation (more reworks and/or waiting on a crew to be rested in hotel because they have cut Chicago Terminal jobs) to then get to said customer.
- **Train lengths and problems with end of train (EOT) device and speed restrictions:** Most EOT's have issues at some point during our trip to and from Chicago with train lengths over 10,000 feet. CSX rules state that we must reduce speed to 30 mph until communication is restored (if at all). So if you have a intermodal train that can run at 60 mph, and is now reduced to 30 mph, you have essentially doubled the time it would take to get from Chicago to Danville and vice versa. Ultimately, when train lengths are so excessive and we have to deal with speed restrictions, it can double the time it takes to slow down and then resume track speed.
- **Excessive train lengths contribute to communication delays when a conductor has to handle any issues or hazards with his train:** the average hand-held radio a conductor carries only transmits from the conductor to the head end at the most around 8,000 feet. If the engineer cannot hear the conductor because he is too far away, the conductor then must walk back towards the head end until he can communicate or try and get a hold of the dispatcher (if available) to relay to the engineer. This is one of the leading causes of train delays.



Mintonye Elementary School
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www.mes.tsc.k12.in.us
Rob Skaggs, Principal



Dear Mr. Edwards,

10-2-17

I am writing today to inform you that trains of excessive length, and trains that have been stopped on the railroad tracks have become commonplace in southwestern Tippecanoe County, Indiana. The past four to five months, very lengthy trains and stopped trains keep two or three roads closed in excess of ten minutes almost every day. This violates Indiana Code 8-6-7.5-1.

As principal of a rural elementary school in Tippecanoe County, I can tell you the frustration among student, parents, bus drivers, teachers, and support staff members continues to negatively impact our school community. Since school started in August, we have experienced the following problems when a train blocks the railroad tracks for excessive amounts of time:

1. Teacher arrives late due to stopped train, so someone must be pulled off regular duties to supervise the students.
2. Bus drivers arrive late to pick-up the students due to stopped train, and children must be supervised until they arrive. Who will do it? Staff members are off duty after dismissal.
3. Children arrive late to school due to a very long train. They have missed the morning routine of school breakfast, unpacking materials, listen to announcements, listening to the teacher's instructions, completing the morning assignment, etc. Many kids do not get caught up and do not recover from this break in routine and it sets them up to have a bad day at school.
4. Bus drivers are late getting to school, so they are late getting to their second jobs
5. Parents are late arriving at school to drop-off their kids due to trains of enormous length, so they are late getting to work.

This train issue in our area is creating stress for everyone. I do not recall trains ever being a big problem for the eighteen years I have been the principal of Mintonye Elementary in Tippecanoe County. But, in the past five months, that's about all people talk about. If you could please help us by figuring out a way to fix this train problem, we would certainly appreciate your help!

Thank you,

Rob Skaggs

Rob Skaggs, Principal
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Southwestern Middle School

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Dr. Scott Hanback, Superintendent
Kyle Spray, Principal



Kimberly Weston, Guidance Counselor
Clint Williams, Athletic Director

9/22/2017

To Whom It May Concern:

The purpose of this statement is to inform you of the substantial disruption that CSX trains have caused to our school day at Southwestern Middle School. We have had to make adjustments for abnormally long train delays.

Most recently on Thursday, September 15th, a CSX train was stopped across the tracks on 800 South (CSX rail crossing 341360N) at a time when we had buses and parents commuting to school. Four buses carrying our students were stopped by a train for over 20 minutes while the train was blocking the road, and the train was fully stopped for much of that time. One of our staff members, who was also stuck, had to get out of his vehicle to help buses turn around and seek an alternate route to school. Not only was this disruptive to our school day by having over 100 students and some instructional staff arrive late, it was a major safety concern for our buses to turn around on a county road.

While there have been other delays, this was the most recent and significant.

Kyle Spray
Principal
Southwestern Middle School
(765) 538-3025



CR 800S & CR 625S Blocked Train Crossing

Report

Name (Optional): DAVID UNGARO

Date: 9/28/17

Which Crossing (625S or 800S):

Time your delay began: 8:35

Time your delay ended: 9:00

Approximately how long were you stopped?: 25 mins.

Were there other vehicles stopped at crossing?: YES

If so, approximately how many?: 50

Were there any school buses stopped due to train?: 3

If you are a bus driver, what is your bus number?: NO

Were there students, school staff or teachers involved?: YES

If so, was school/work time missed and how long:

25 mins LATE TO WORK.

Train crashes into Atlanta house, destroying it

USA TODAY NETWORK Catherine Park, WXIA-TV, Atlanta Published 8:23 a.m. ET Oct. 5, 2017 | Updated 10:31 a.m. ET Oct. 5, 2017



(Photo: WXIA-TV, Atlanta)

ATLANTA — One of nine cars on a train that derailed in northwest Atlanta early Thursday destroyed a (<http://on.11alive.com/2fMjgiK>), trapping its occupant inside, rescue workers said.

The man sleeping in its bedroom when the accident happened at around 3 a.m. ET was taken to local hospital. He had minor injuries and his name was not released, said Sgt. Cortez Stafford of the Atlanta Fire Department.

The train car stopped 5 to 10 feet inside the house, knocking it off its foundation, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (<http://www.ajc.com/news/local/breaking-injured-train-derails-and-crashes-into-house/u3RAxHeLdAVjyaB3z7CnoL/>) reported.

"You're sleeping in your bed, and you hear a large rumble and then you hear a large crash," Stafford said. "So he's very fortunate that he's alive now."

The damage to the house has rendered it unlivable, he said.

A neighbor told the *Journal Constitution* that the house had about six bedrooms, three bathrooms and a porch.

Fourteen cars on the northbound train, which was traveling from Waycross, Ga., to Cincinnati, were affected, CSX spokesman Rob Doolittle said. Five cars were totally off the tracks and another five were partially derailed, and CSX investigators are on the scene to determine what led to the derailment.

The train was transporting sand, rocks and dirt and had no hazardous material, Stafford said.

Of its 191 railcars and three locomotives, about a third — 68 — were loaded, Doolittle said.

Follow Catherine Park on Twitter: [@Catherine11news](https://twitter.com/Catherine11news) (<https://twitter.com/Catherine11news>)

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