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## Railroad Safety in Desperate Need of Reform and Oversight

*Transportation labor testifies at Congressional hearing, the first step toward updating expired federal rail safety laws*

Washington, D.C. – Congress must overcome the railroad industry’s decade-long campaign to block common sense safety legislation and make clear that profits do not trump safety.

“It is simply disgraceful that over a decade has passed since our nation’s rail safety programs have been reauthorized,” said Edward Wytkind, President of the AFL-CIO’s Transportation Trades Department. “We have met stiff resistance from the railroads and their lobbyists who have spent a decade or more derailing every attempt to reauthorize federal rail safety programs.”

As recently as January 16, a train derailed near Brooks, Kentucky with a full-scale evacuation but no serious injuries. But other derailments have not proven so lucky, with deaths in Graniteville, S.C. in 2005, Macdona, Texas in 2004, and Minot, N.D. in 2002. According to Federal Railroad Administration statistics, there were 1,744 train derailments in 2006, and 20 hazardous material spills (reporting was from January through October 2006).

“Railroad workers want more training,” Wytkind said. “They want whistleblower protections so they can identify security or safety risks without fearing retaliation from their employers. They want to address hours of service rules so an 18-hour workday and dangerous fatigue become less common. In short, workers want more government oversight because they believe that safety and security aren’t negotiable.”

Testifying before the House Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials, Wytkind presented the views and concerns of transportation workers:

**On accountability and oversight:** “We know that railroads have used their considerable political clout to limit enforcement activities and oversight, and in reality, face little consequence for safety infractions. Fines, when they are levied at all, are little more than nuisances to multi-billion dollar rail companies. Fines should be increased exponentially and penalties should more adequately reflect the level or number of infractions by a carrier.”

**On safety and security training:** “This is an industry that is making record profits, yet is unwilling to hire and adequately train the necessary workforce to handle traffic...”

“Workers are not receiving meaningful security training. More than five years after 9/11, workers still do not know what constitutes a security risk, though they are told to be ‘vigilant.’ They do not know how to respond when they see someone or something suspicious and they certainly do not know what to do if something actually happens.”

**On worker harassment and intimidation:** “Rail workers... continue to face employer harassment and intimidation when reporting accidents, injuries and other safety concerns. It is disingenuous for the railroads to ask workers to report problems and at the same time refuse to provide them basic protection needed to ensure that such reporting will not result in retribution.”

**On fatigue:** “Our nation’s railroads are demanding that workers work more hours and come to work tired or face reprisals...The National Transportation Safety Board has identified fatigue as one of the most serious safety issues affecting the railroad industry and has noted that safety sensitive rail employees can be required to work in excess of 400 hours in a 30-day period.”

The nation’s largest railroads reported 2006 net incomes of \$1.89 billion for Burlington Northern Santa Fe Corp., \$1.61 billion for Union Pacific, \$1.5 billion for Norfolk Southern Corp., and \$1.31 billion for CSX Corp.

“The railroad industry is making money hand over fist. It’s time for them to do their part to better protect their workers and the American public,” Wytkind said.

For the [full testimony](#) or more information, visit [www.ttd.org](http://www.ttd.org).

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#### **About TTD**

Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO (TTD), a Washington, D.C.-based labor organization, represents several million transportation workers in the private and public sector. The 32 member unions of TTD work in aviation, bus, mass transit, rail, trucking, highway, longshore, maritime and related industries. TTD works with Congress and the Executive Branch including the transportation related Federal Agencies to protect good jobs, increase wages, defend workers' rights, increase transportation safety plus security and ensure adequate funding for our nation’s transportation infrastructure. Under the umbrella of the AFL-CIO, which represents more than 9 million workers in the United States, TTD handles policy and legislative issues related to transportation. Visit [www.ttd.org](http://www.ttd.org) for more information.

