



A bold voice for transportation workers

November 18, 2013

Cosponsor H.R. 3040, the Safe Freight Act

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO (TTD), I urge you to cosponsor the Safe Freight Act (H.R. 3040). Recently our 32-member Executive Committee unanimously endorsed this legislation, which bans the use of one-person train crews on our nation's freight railroads.

Just this summer in Quebec, a runaway train carrying 72 cars of crude oil killed 47 people and leveled the town of Lac-Megantic. The accident occurred after a crew member, working alone, parked the train uphill from the town for the night. Unmanned, the train rolled down the track and destroyed the town. Although the official investigation is ongoing, this horrific accident is the most recent reminder of the need for a federal prohibition against one-person freight rail crews.

That is why Rep. Michael Michaud (D-ME) has introduced the Safe Freight Act (H.R. 3040), legislation that mandates at least one certified conductor and one certified engineer on every freight train. This is a common sense bill, especially given the scale and size of freight operations. A U.S. freight train can weigh up to 15,000 tons and averages over a mile long. It is significant that this industry transported almost 2.5 million carloads of hazardous materials last year. It is absurd to argue that such a massive piece of equipment can be safely operated by one individual, especially given the many tasks to be performed during operations and the myriad federal safety regulations and railroad operating rules that must be followed.

We are disappointed that our nation's freight railroads have dismissed the need for this legislation. The reality is that although two-person crews are the norm on U.S. freight lines, crew size is often a subject of collective bargaining. Such a basic safety measure should not be open for negotiations and it should not be something for which employees have to give something else up in order to achieve. Moreover, some rail employees do not have a union voice and smaller, non-union railroads can put one-person crews out on the tracks. This would not only jeopardize safety but also set a dangerous, competitive trend that larger railroads would seek to follow. In fact, the Class I railroads have previously tried to reduce crew sizes through collective bargaining.

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Edward Wytkind, President / Larry I. Willis, Secretary-Treasurer



Federally mandated two-person crews would also go a long way to combat fatigue – a top safety issue in the rail industry. Employer practices, including mandated long shifts and unpredictable work schedules, already lead to a fatigued workforce in a two-person crew operating environment. A second crewmember helps both employees stay alert and provides an essential backstop against the mishaps that can occur when memory or judgment is affected by chronic fatigue. Limited redundancy is also needed to maintain safe operations in the event that the other crewmember should become injured or incapacitated, a fact that is recognized by Federal Aviation Administration as it prohibits cockpit crews of less than two pilots.

More must be done to ensure the protection of hardworking rail employees and the American public from the dangers that one-person crews pose. We applaud Rep. Michaud for introducing this common sense legislation and urge you to add your name as a cosponsor to H.R. 3040.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edward Wytkind', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Edward Wytkind
President