



Transportation Division

Pennsylvania State Legislative Board

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Testimony of Paul Pokrowka Before the House Transportation Committee August 28, 2019

Good afternoon Chairman Hennessey, Chairman Carroll and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here before you today. My name is Paul Pokrowka. I am the legislative director for SMART – Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers – Transportation Division. We are the largest railroad operating union in North America. Our membership includes conductors, engineers and yardmasters. I am here today to provide you with an overview of the issues facing our membership and to talk about policies that can ensure the safety of our workers and the communities in which they live while protecting the viability of the railroad system.

My goal today is to offer you a unique perspective – that of the people who work in the rail industry every day. Rail workers are especially worried about so-called innovations that jeopardize their safety, especially precision scheduled railroading. PSR is a relatively new concept that is being embraced by the railroad companies with the goal of using departure schedules and point-to-point delivery methods to achieve low operating ratios and consolidate railroad networks to maximize profits. The practical effect of PSR is that locomotives and cars have been idled, yards have been closed, and workers have been laid off. These effects combine to create the potential for a much less safe workplace for the remaining employees in the name of short term profits.

Please don't misconstrue my opposition to PSR as a belief that railroads should not be allowed to make profits. But the fact is Class I railroads have been enjoying multi-billion-dollar profits for years. Revenues for the seven Class I carriers totaled nearly 90 billion dollars last year alone. Yet workers are being laid off, locomotives mothballed and infrastructure is crumbling.

You need look no further than just outside this building to see the practical effects of PSR. Earlier this year Norfolk Southern laid off 50 employees in Altoona, in the name of PSR, and just last month there were two derailments at the famous Horseshoe Curve. As railroads reduce the number of employees, they are also reducing inspections and other safety measures.

On May 3rd, the *Altoona Mirror* issued an editorial that stated, in part, "...the attainable company benefits [of PSR] might be dwarfed by the damage otherwise wreaked on the

employees and communities affected.” The paper cautioned that Altoona may need to create a plan to be prepared should the community face similar economic damage from closures and laid off workers.

While railroads are turning to PSR and jeopardizing the safety of rail workers, there have also been policy changes over the past few decades that resulted in gradual increases in truck weight limits. These increases threaten the safety of our communities and people on roadways. I agree with the testimony of Ms. Smith and the Genesee & Wyoming Railroad that bigger, longer trucks have a detrimental impact on short line freight railroads as well as on highway safety and public infrastructure.

One needn't look hard to find dozens of reports and legislative efforts to address the poor condition of the commonwealth's transportation infrastructure, yet simultaneously there are conversations to further stress roadways and bridges with larger trucks. These trucks will cause more damage and, due to lower costs to move freight in larger trucks, there will be even more trucks on the roadways. This would shift freight from the shortline railroads to the highways and result in more damage to highways, more congestion on highways and more costs to taxpayers.

Instead of focusing on policies that will hurt workers, communities and taxpayers, I urge the committee to explore policies that will ensure worker safety while furthering economic development.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.