

Submitter: William Wallace

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB723

My name is William Wallace, and I am writing to express my strong support for Oregon Senate Bill 723 (SB 723), which mandates that freight trains operating within the state be staffed by no fewer than two crew members. This is a common sense, life-saving measure that will help protect not only railroad workers but also the environment and every Oregonian who lives near the tracks.

Freight trains carry heavy loads, travel through urban neighborhoods, farmlands, and alongside rivers, and often transport hazardous materials such as crude oil and toxic chemicals. These are high-stakes operations that require constant vigilance, technical skill, and most importantly redundancy. A single human being should not be solely responsible for operating a machine that weighs thousands of tons and travels through populated areas.

No one would board a commercial airplane for a 12-hour flight if there were only one pilot in the cockpit. Yet, freight trains, with just as much potential for catastrophic failure, are increasingly being looked at to operate with only a single crew member, as railroads push for cost-cutting measures at the expense of safety. SB 723 rightly rejects that dangerous model and affirms what professionals in the field already know: two-person crews are essential for safe, effective train operations

We've already seen what happens when things go wrong. In June 2016, a Union Pacific train carrying crude oil derailed in Mosier, Oregon, igniting a fire, spilling 42,000 gallons of oil, and forcing evacuations in a small community along the Columbia River. The consequences could have been far more devastating, but two crew members were onboard and responded swiftly.

Even more recently, the 2023 Norfolk Southern derailment in East Palestine, Ohio brought national attention to the dangers of lax rail safety standards. That derailment released hazardous chemicals, forced thousands of evacuations, and left lasting environmental damage. Residents are still grappling with the health effects and contamination more than a year later. Investigations revealed a pattern of cost-cutting and reduced oversight, exactly the kind of dangerous thinking that one-person crew operations represent.

SB 723 is not anti-business. It is pro-safety. It ensures that when railroads operate through our towns and sensitive ecosystems, they do so with the staffing and safeguards necessary to prevent catastrophe. A second crew member is not a luxury, it is a fundamental safety requirement.

I urge lawmakers to pass SB 723 without delay. Let's not wait for Oregon to become the next headline. Let's lead with responsibility and foresight.

Thank you.