

To: Oregon State Legislature Joint Committee on Transportation
Re: Support of SB 723

Dear Chairman Gorsek, Chairwoman McLain, and Committee Members,

I am Natalie Miller, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) National Auxiliary 2nd Vice President and National Legislative Representative. I represent the families of our BLET members across the country, all railroad families, and the people living in the communities we run through. The debate over whether trains should be operated by a single person or a two-person crew has been ongoing in railway operations. I know the companies will give you a mountain of numbers and try to confuse you with jargon spouting redundancy or federal precedence, but I am asking you to please ignore them and not let them make fools of you. I am writing to ask you to vote to support SB 723. A two-person crew is paramount for ensuring train operations' safety, efficiency, and reliability. There are key reasons why a train should have a two-person crew instead of relying on a single operator.

Enhanced Safety

Immediate Response to Emergencies

Having two crew members on board allows for a quicker and more coordinated response to emergencies. In situations like sudden medical issues, mechanical failures, unexpected obstacles on the tracks, collisions at crossings, or derailments, one crew member can handle the immediate problem, and act as an emergency responder if needed. At the same time, the other communicates with dispatch and coordinates any necessary response vehicles, or emergency vehicles to ensure public, crew and cargo safety.

Redundancy and Error Mitigation

Human error is an inevitable part of any operation. A two-person crew provides a crucial layer of redundancy. One person's mistake can be caught and corrected by the other, reducing the likelihood of accidents. This is especially important in high-stress situations where a single operator might become overwhelmed.

Fatigue Management

Fatigue is a significant factor in railway accidents. A two-person crew can share duties and take turns resting, which helps to mitigate the risk associated with operator fatigue. An alert crew is better able to respond to any irregularities and maintain safe train operation.

Operational Efficiency

Division of Responsibilities

A two-person crew can divide responsibilities, allowing for more efficient operations. While one person focuses on driving and monitoring the controls, the other can handle navigation, communication with dispatch, and ensuring adherence to schedules. This division of labor enhances overall operational efficiency.

Handling Complex Situations

Railway operations often involve complex situations such as navigating through towns with multiple crossings or dense traffic or pedestrian crossings, rural crossings prone to heavy truck or farm implement traffic, dealing with adverse weather conditions, or managing delays. A two-person crew can work together to solve these issues more effectively than a single operator, ensuring that the train remains on schedule and passengers are kept informed.

Improved Communication

Internal Communication

Effective communication between crew members is critical for safe and efficient train operations. A two-person crew can quickly exchange information, discuss potential issues, and make informed decisions. This internal communication is vital for adapting to changing conditions and ensuring the smooth running of the train.

External Communication

Communicating with dispatch, other trains, and railway personnel is a key aspect of train operations. With a two-person crew, one member can focus on driving while the other handles communication, ensuring that all necessary information is relayed accurately and promptly.

Customer Confidence and Service

Enhanced Cargo Safety

Customers feel more secure knowing that there is more than one trained professional on board to handle any situation. This enhanced sense of security can improve overall customer satisfaction and confidence in the railway service.

Better Customer Service

A two-person crew can provide better customer service by addressing public inquiries at blocked crossings, managing unexpected situations, and ensuring that their shipment arrives at its intended destination as quickly and efficiently as possible. This level of service is difficult to achieve with a single operator who must focus primarily on driving.

Regulatory and Compliance Considerations

Adherence to Current Safety Regulations

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has mandated the presence of a two-person crew to ensure safe operations. However, the Class 1 railroads are suing the FRA to repeal this rule. Federal legislation with a 2-person crew rule is stalled in committee, with committee chairs refusing to bring the legislation forth for a hearing. And the current administration has appointed a life-long railroad executive as the new FRA Director. We need to stand up for our communities, our railroad crews, and their families who don't want their railroaders to operate trains alone. We are asking you to help us. We are asking for your support. We are asking you to stand for safety over profits and corporate greed. Under the current litigation and the newly appointed FRA Director, the recently implemented FRA 2-person Crew Rule could be repealed. We need more states like Oregon to step up and enact legislation to make it a state law. Currently, 12 states have passed similar legislation, but we need 26 states to pass 2-person crew laws to force a federal law. We ask for your help and that you vote to move SB 723 forward for a full vote.

Sincerely,

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