

Testimony to Senate Committee: Crew size on Freight Trains SB164

Good morning Chairman Peterson and Members of the Committee

My name is Vince Wetta. I support passage of SB164. I worked for 41 years as a Brakeman, Conductor, and Engineer for the BNSF Ry. I spent 6 years in the Kansas House and am now on the Wellington City Council.

There is a movement to reduce Crews on Freight Trains from an Engineer and Conductor to running with just an Engineer. With technology called Positive Train Control (PTC) the railroads feel there is no longer a need for the Conductor on the train. In a climate controlled situation where everything works to perfection that may be the case. However, in real life railroading, with huge swings in weather and constantly changing situations on a 300 plus mile run from Wellington to Amarillo, Texas, plans that were in place at the start of a trip are usually a distant memory by the end of the trip. Trains in the railroad industry have gone from under a mile long to well over 1 ½ miles long. Crew size has gone from 5 man crews when I started to two man crews now. We have adjusted and can move the nation's freight with two man crews. However, going to one man crews will be a safety hazard to the public and cities and towns along the route. New technology is great and should be used in all industries, but when you get to bare bones crew sizes, you are going beyond safe movement of freight and moving to an unsafe situation. One man cannot perform all the jobs that are required in the ordinary trip much less when engines or train cars or signals or switches or tracks are not working properly.

Freight trains today carry hazardous materials through our cities and towns at high speed. Citizens along the tracks have no idea what is moving past them. It is your duty, as Legislators, to protect the public and help move freight through our state safely. I am proud of the BNSF railroad and feel lucky to have had the job all those years. I bought stock in the company all the years that I worked and hope they continue to prosper. But, financial returns are not a reason to cut corners on safe operations.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I would be happy to answer any questions at the proper time.