

TTD NEWS RELEASE

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Transportation Unions Call on FRA to Strengthen and Finalize Rule Barring One-Person Crew Freight Train Operations

WASHINGTON DC — Transportation unions appeared at a public hearing today to urge the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to complete a new federal rule this year barring one-person freight train crew operations. Edward Wytkind, president of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO, joined John Risch, national legislative director of the SMART Transportation Division (SMART-TD), at the hearing to make the case for a two-person crew mandate and a final rule that closes loopholes permitting freight railroads to deploy single crew operations.

“It’s time to [put to rest](#) the absurd notion that operating a 19,000-ton freight train with a single crewmember is safe,” Wytkind said. “The American public understands that having massive freight trains travel through their communities operated by one-person crews is a safety menace that should be barred by our government. We need a strong rule from the FRA mandating a certified conductor and certified engineer on all freight trains, and we need it this year.”

Risch, who worked as a freight engineer for 30 years, made a compelling [argument](#) for a two-person crew mandate.

“Operating a freight train isn’t a walk in the park. It’s a complex task that requires at least two skilled, qualified individuals,” Risch said. “Conductors and engineers rely on each other to make sure operating procedures are completed correctly, and safely. Their teamwork is vital not only to their safety, but the public’s safety.”

The FRA’s proposed rule represents a strong step forward, but it provides too much leeway for the railroads to evade the two-person mandate. And because the proposal does not specify that crew members be a certified engineer and conductor, the final rule should be [strengthened](#).

Wytkind and Risch were joined by SMART-TD member and BNSF conductor Mike Rankin, who shared a personal story about how he and an engineer were able to work together to help save a life after their locomotive collided with a vehicle.

“Ensuring that all freight trains are operated by two qualified crewmembers is about public safety,” Rankin told the FRA. “Conductors and engineers don’t just operate trains. In emergency situations, we’re first on the scene. Our presence and teamwork can mean the difference between life and death.”

Transportation labor has [long advocated for](#) a strong federal minimum requiring two crew members on freight trains – a policy that the [vast majority of Americans](#) agree with.

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The Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO, (TTD) provides a bold voice for workers in every mode of transportation and is devoted to protecting middle-class jobs, expanding collective bargaining, and ensuring modern, safe, and secure transportation operations and infrastructure. For more information, visit us at www.ttd.org

The [SMART Transportation Division](#) is comprised of approximately 125,000 active and retired members of the former United Transportation Union, who work in a variety of crafts in the transportation industry.