

RESOLUTION SUPPORTING LEGISLATION REQUIRING A MINIMUM OF TWO PERSONS ON RAILROAD TRAIN CREWS

*Resolution #42 – Submitted by SMART-TD/UTU Local 1348 –Approved Unanimously by the
Washington State Labor Council Convention on July 24, 2014.*

WHEREAS over the past 50 years, US railroads have continuously pursued a reduction in the size of crews operating trains, from six persons down to the current negotiated minimum of two crew members on through freight services; and

WHEREAS in 1967 Washington State repealed a long-standing law requiring a minimum of six persons on all trains operating within our state, and since that time no standard minimum train crew size requirements have been enacted; and

WHEREAS the elimination of crew members down to the current negotiated minimum of only two has created a situation that significantly reduces the years of on-the-job experience formerly available on larger crews, which had allowed crew members to develop their skills, knowledge, and territorial familiarity; this has resulted in a scenario where new and inexperienced train crews are now operating trains without seasoned, well-qualified persons, to the detriment of the safety of the public and the employees alike; and

WHEREAS railroad operational requirements require that train crews perform numerous tasks while concurrently operating moving trains, which the National Transportation Safety Board has labeled “task saturation,” which can result in crews overlooking specific actions related to safe train operation; and

WHEREAS technology, while improving the safe movement of trains, cannot replace the safety and security of train crews consisting of a minimum of two qualified persons, the presence of which provides additional safeguards, including the ability of crew members to cross-check and verify each other’s actions and activities while operating trains, to adequately respond to accidents and critical incidents, as well as the capability to separate rail cars at crossings to allow emergency responders to cross tracks which is a function which cannot be performed by one person; and

WHEREAS, on July 6, 2013, a Montreal, Maine and Atlantic freight train, staffed by only one crew member, was left unattended and inadequately secured and therefore rolled away, resulting in a major derailment of hazardous oil that caught fire, killing 47 people and causing catastrophic destruction to the town of Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, Canada; and

WHEREAS, on July 24, 2013, in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, a train traveling from Madrid to Ferrol, operated by one crew member, derailed at a high speed on a curve, resulting the deaths of 79 persons and 140 injuries; and

WHEREAS, on December 1, 2013, a Metro-North commuter train, operating with a one-person crew, derailed in the Bronx while rounding a curve at 82 mph, resulting in the deaths of four persons and injuring more than 70 passengers; and

WHEREAS crude oil shipments by rail have increased exponentially in recent years, outpacing rail capacity; first-responder training and state spill response planning are inadequate; and railroad crew fatigue abatement programs are nonexistent, creating public safety and environmental concerns; and

WHEREAS chronic fatigue is epidemic on US railroads, due to operational requirements that include no regular working schedule for crew members, as well as intentional underemployment policies by the carriers, through which they maximize profits at the expense of public and employee safety, requiring crew members to return to work immediately after the minimum required federal rest has expired; and

WHEREAS rail carriers have recently imposed draconian attendance policies that punish railroad employees who attempt to take additional time off for rest or family matters, resulting in train crew members reporting for work even when they know they are not rested and ready for duty, creating a serious employee and public safety risk; and

WHEREAS the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad has proposed that freight train crew sizes be reduced to just one person: the locomotive engineer, who will be alone in the locomotive cab and working frequently for time periods as long as 12 hours; and

WHEREAS Transport Canada, the equivalent of the US Department of Transportation, now requires all trains moving hazardous materials to have a crew of no fewer than two persons, it being recognized that train crews should consist of at least two qualified employees, due to the large number of tasks required of such employees in order to operate a train safely; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED that the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO (WSLC), at its 2014 convention, in the interest of public safety and employee safety, hereby steadfastly opposes any actions to permit one-person train crew operations on Class I railroads operating in our state and elsewhere; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the WSLC supports and fervently urges the Washington State Legislature to enact proposed legislation prohibiting one-person train crew operations (HB 2718/SB 6473), which are already operating in our state on short-line railroads to the detriment of public safety; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the WSLC supports and advocates that members of our congressional delegation cosponsor and work to pass HR 3040, which would require all trains operating in the United States to be staffed with a crew of no fewer than two persons; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the WSLC hereby determines that the enactment of legislation to prohibit one-person train crews shall be a priority in its 2015 legislative agenda.