



# Railroad Workers United

*Unity—Solidarity—Democracy: The Rank and File in Action!*

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## Press Release

**Subject:** Railroad workers' group opposes operation of excessively long and heavy trains

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### **Railroad Workers' Group Opposes Long and Heavy Trains**

Railroad Workers United (RWU) has embarked upon a campaign to limit the length and tonnage of freight trains across North America. The goal is to reverse the long running trend whereby the rail carriers assemble ever longer and heavier trains which are dangerous to railroad workers, pedestrians and motorists, trackside communities, the environment, and society in general.

RWU expects that through this effort, the public will gain a far better understanding of the dangers of long and heavy trains and the need to reduce length and tonnage. We invite citizens' advocacy organizations, environmental groups and others -- including the rail unions of Canada, the U.S. and Mexico -- to join us in this movement to oppose this dangerous practice.

The last year has witnessed a number of long and heavy train wrecks, resulting in a loss of life and property, wholesale evacuations, injured train crews and environmental devastation. Nevertheless, the rail carriers have a professed interest in continuing to operate such long and heavy trains -- and even expand upon this trend -- as a way to perceived savings on fuel, motive power and labor costs.

Such overly long and heavy trains create an unsafe situation for many reasons. It takes far more time and distance to slow or to stop such a train. And the longer and heavier the train, the more severe the "slack action", thereby increasing the potential for a train break-in-two, emergency brake applications and derailments. In addition, the longer and heavier the train, the more severe the train wreck if and when such a train does derail. Long trains are more likely to have air brake problems, especially in cold and inclement weather. And all things considered, it is more difficult for the train crew to safely run, inspect, work, test, and otherwise operate such a train. Therefore, it follows that reducing train length and tonnage would undoubtedly result in an all around "risk reduction" for the train and its crew.

The longer and heavier the train, the greater likelihood of blocked road and pedestrian crossings, creating at best an inconvenience to the public, and at worst the inability to provide emergency services when crossings are blocked. In addition, blocked crossing in effect "train" motorists to "run the gates" in order to avoid being impeded for what might be long periods, resulting in grade crossing accidents and fatalities.

Finally, such trains tend to increase the number of hours the train's crew spends getting the train in and out of the terminal and over the road, making for exhausting tours-of-duty for train crews. The result is more crew fatigue, reduced situational awareness, more time at the away-from-home terminal, and a lower quality of work and home life for trainmen and engineers.

Therefore, RWU opposes any expansion of the current length and tonnage of existing trains. Furthermore, we support a reduction in the length and tonnage of already existing trains, especially those hauling hazardous materials, traversing steep grades and /or operating in very cold temperatures. We expect that these goals can be achieved through both legislative efforts and at the bargaining table.