Press Release

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For immediate release

For more information: Fritz Edler 202-494-3848; Mark Burrows 773-486-7001; Ross Grooters 515-689-3229.

Railroad Workers Demand Coronavirus Protections

While the COVID-19 pandemic spreads out across the continent, the response of the major rail carriers and the regulatory agency – the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) – is complacent at best and irresponsible and dangerous at its worst. The FRA has taken what it calls an “all-government” approach to the crisis, effectively a “hands off” attitude, issuing not a single guideline or regulation. On March 14th, FRA Administrator Ron Batory did issue a “Declaration of Emergency Situation,” but this edict does nothing but allow the rail carriers to appeal for “relief” of rules under which they must operate.

As for the carriers, all have issued a hodgepodge of confusing and contradictory guidelines and expectations for employee conduct in the face of the crisis. In most cases, their edicts appear more concerned with protection of their operating ratio, displaying a complete disregard for not only their own employees’ health and well-being, but for that of the entire nation. The big rail carriers are doing little in the way of sanitizing yard offices, locomotive cabs, and other work areas. They have issued a complex array of policies and procedures, demanding that sick workers stay home, but offering no relaxation of strict attendance policies, nor offering paid sick leave. Their attitude towards their employees is best exemplified in a statement by Bryan Tucker, Vice President of Corporate Communications at CSX, the nation’s third largest railroad: “There aren’t any changes to the attendance policy. We expect people to follow the normal protocol.”

Railroad Workers United demands that in the interest of workers’ health and safety, the travelling public, and the health and well-being of the nation, that the rail carriers undertake immediate measures that truly combat the pandemic, including but not limited to:

⚫ Temperature testing and screening of employees when arriving at work, with employees directed to stay at home as necessary.
⚫ Allowing paid time off - for a two week minimum period - granted to workers infected and/or workers who have immediate family members who are stricken with the virus.
⚫ Recalling to service some or all of the thousands of currently furloughed employees to provide adequate and proper staffing through the crisis.
⚫ Ensuring that hand washing facilities and sanitizer, together with disinfectant wipes are readily available and conveniently located throughout the workplace.
⚫ Properly cleaning and sanitizing all workspaces, including offices, crew rooms, company and contracted vehicles, locomotive cabs and toilets, and away-from-home lodging facilities.
⚫ Posting signage throughout the workplace on the importance of hand washing and cleanliness to effectively stop the spread of the disease.