The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) recently extended by 60 days the safety waivers the agency originally granted to the rail carriers in the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic. These waivers exempt the carriers from complying with decades of safety rules and regulations, thus putting the safety and well-being of the workforce and public at an even higher level of jeopardy. The carriers had originally appealed to the FRA, claiming that inevitable manpower shortages due to the pandemic would impede their ability to move the nation’s freight, warning of a pending national emergency - pretty disingenuous considering the carriers had furloughed 40,000 workers over the previous few years. The initial waiver was due to expire towards the end of May.

The leaders of two of America’s largest rail unions, the SMART Transportation Division (SMART-TD) and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET), objected to the extending of the waiver, that they had described as “alarming” when first initiated. For a thorough analysis on this please refer to the Special Supplement in the Spring 2020 issue of The Highball.