Railroad Workers United (RWU) supports the public ownership of the rail infrastructure of North America and believes the rail industry should be operated in the public interest. RWU urges all labor unions, environmental and community groups, social justice organizations, rail advocacy groups and others to push for a modern publicly owned rail system, one that serves the nation’s passengers, shippers, communities, economy, and citizens.

Rail infrastructure the world over is held publicly, as are the roads, bridges, canals, harbors, airports, and other transportation infrastructure. There are numerous examples of publicly held rail infrastructure which have operated successfully across North America for decades, usually in the form of local/regional commuter operations and state-owned freight trackage.

In the face of today’s crumbling infrastructure, crowded and clogged highways and city streets, poor air quality, lack of transportation alternatives and deepening climate crisis, expanded rail transportation – for both freight and passenger - presents a solution to these social ills and problems. However, the privately held rail industry is contracting – rather than expanding – at a time when we need more trains, trackage, rail workers, and carloads, not fewer. In fact, the private rail industry is moving 5 to 10% less freight than it did 17 years ago. The carriers have shuttered diesel shops and classification yards and have drastically reduced the number of employees.

In addition, the private rail freight industry is generally hostile to proposals to run any additional passenger trains on their tracks – despite having legal common carrier obligations to do so - making it difficult if not impossible to expand the nation’s passenger rail network.

The rail industry has come to focus solely on the “Operating Ratio” as a measure of their success, and in doing so have engaged in massive stock buybacks and other measures that deliver short-term gains for stockholders but at the expense of the long-term health, safety, and vitality of the industry. Their failures to move freight effectively have contributed greatly to the ongoing supply chain crisis, resulting in some of the highest inflation rates in many years.

These mega-corporations have raked in record profits for a generation, right through the “Great Recession,” the pandemic, and otherwise, right up to the most recent Quarterly financial announcements. They serve primarily as a “cash cow” for the wealthy few, while they have:  
- Failed to solicit or accept new but “less profitable” freight traffic, forwarded less freight than 17 years ago.  
- Stonewalled practically every attempt by Amtrak and other agencies to add passenger service, and have failed to run Amtrak passenger trains on time, despite regulation and law to do so.  
- Downsize the infrastructure, physical plant, and capacity of the rail network  
- Eliminated nearly a third of the Class One railroad workforce.  
- Outraged shippers and their associations by jacking up prices, providing poor service, and assessing steep demurrage charges.  
- Thumbed their nose at state and federal governments.  
- Blocked road crossing and increased derailments by the implementation of extremely long trains.  
- Threatened and attempted at every turn to run trains with a single crew member.  
- Opposed proposed safety measures, from Positive Train Control (PTC) to switch point indicators; the End-of-Train Device (EOT) to Electronically Controlled Pneumatic Brakes (ECP) and more, spending millions on lobbying efforts to avoid safety regulations.  
- Taken a hostile stance towards the workforce, refusing to bargain in good faith, and bringing the nation to the verge of a national rail shut-down.  

The railroad workers and the people of North America need a modern, efficient, safe, and green rail transportation system that works for them, not a handful of billionaires and Wall Street hedge funds. It is time the railroads be operated in the public interest.