



# Railroad Workers United

*Solidarity • Unity • Democracy*

*The Rank & File in Action!*

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## **RWU Resolution in Support of Public Ownership of the Railroads**

**Whereas**, rail infrastructure the world over is held publicly, as are the roads, bridges, canals, harbors, airports, and other transportation infrastructure; and

**Whereas**, numerous examples of rail infrastructure held publicly have operated successfully across North America for decades, usually in the form of local/regional commuter operations and state-owned freight trackage; and

**Whereas**, due to their inability to effectively move the nation's freight and passengers during WWI, the U.S. government effectively nationalized the private rail infrastructure in the U.S. for 26 months; and

**Whereas**, at that time it was agreed by shippers, passengers, and rail workers that the railroads were operated far more effectively and efficiently during that time span; and

**Whereas**, every rail union at that time (16 unions) supported continued public ownership (the "Plumb Plan") once the war had ended; and

**Whereas**, specifically, when the rank & file rail workers were polled by their unions in December 1918, the combined totals were 306,720 in favor of continued nationalization with just 1,466 in favor of a return to private ownership; and

**Whereas**, the entire labor movement at that time was in favor of basic industry being removed from private hands, with the delegates to the 1920 AFL Convention voting 29,159 to 8,349 in favor, overruling the officialdom of the AFL and its conservative position; and

**Whereas**, 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, the expansion, not contraction of rail transportation – for both freight and passenger – presents a solution to these social ills and problems; and

**Whereas**, the rail industry today however is contracting – rather than expanding – at a time when we need more trains, trackage, rail workers, and carloads, not fewer; and

**Whereas**, the private Class One rail industry is moving 24% less freight than it did 17 years ago (32.1 million carloads in 2006 vs. 24.4 million carloads in 2023)\* and in recent years has shuttered diesel shops and classification yards, drastically reducing the number of employees; and

**Whereas**, national plans are afoot for a dramatic restoration of passenger train frequencies and routes, yet 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 create such an expanded passenger rail network; and

**Whereas**, 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 and vitality of the industry; and

**Whereas**, the Class One carriers’ 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; and

**Whereas**, these “Fortune 500” corporations have raked in record profits, in both “good” years and “bad”, right through the “Great Recession,” the pandemic, and otherwise, right up to the most recent Quarterly financial announcements; and

**Whereas**, during these years of record profits, these same Class One carries have:

- Failed to solicit nor accept new but “less profitable” freight traffic.
- Forwarded 24% less freight than 17 years ago.
- Stonewalled practically every attempt by Amtrak and other agencies to add passenger service.
- Failed to run Amtrak passenger trains on time, despite regulation and law to do so.
- Downsized the infrastructure, physical plant, and capacity.
- Eliminated nearly a third of the workforce.
- Outraged shippers and their associations by jacking up prices, providing poor service, and assessing new outrageous 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 the proposed safety measures, from Positive Train Control (PTC) to switch point indicators; the End-of-Train Device (EOT) to Electronically Controlled Pneumatic Brakes (ECP).
- Taken a hostile stance towards the myriad unions, refused to bargain in good faith, consistently demanding concessions, all the while expecting these “essential workers” to labor through the pandemic without a wage increase.

**Therefore, be it Resolved** that RWU supports the public ownership of the rail infrastructure of the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, to be operated henceforth in the public interest, placed at the service of the people and railroad workers of all three nations; and

**Be it Further resolved** that RWU urge all rail workers to voice their support for this proposal; and

**Be it Further Resolved** that RWU urges the rail union leadership of North America to take a similar stand - like they did in 1919 in support of the Plumb Plan - thereby providing the leadership necessary to see such a proposal through to fruition; and

**Be it finally Resolved** that 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, and citizens.

\* Statistics as reported by both the AAR and Statista

**Adopted by the RWU Steering Committee 10/5/2022**

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