



# Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen Minnesota Legislative Board

*A Division of the Rail Conference-International Brotherhood of Teamsters*



## **SF 4161 Maximum Train Length**

### **Background**

Recent high profile derailments, including the BNSF derailment in Raymond MN in March of last year underscores the urgent necessity for the state to act on railroad safety in the face of Federal sluggishness and industry self-regulation. Since 2015 train lengths have increased to up to 15,000 feet in many cases. Trains of this size can exceed 30,000 tons. These long trains not only cause congestion in Minnesota's rail network, they will often cut communities in half by blocking crossings for long periods of time, putting citizens at risk by preventing first responder to reach those in need.

### **Why is SF 4161 Needed**

- Longer trains are more difficult to operate due to complexities relating to weight and power distribution in the train that cause excessive forces within the train.
- The Federal Railroad Administration has issued Safety Advisory 2023-03 highlighting these issues.
- Due to their extreme length and weight, long trains increase potential for track and equipment failure such as broken couplers, kinked or broken air lines that can disable the trains brakes, due to their extreme length and weight.
- Long trains often experience loss of communication with locomotives and in the middle and rear of the train due to limits on this technology. When making switching moves crews also experience the inability to communicate with other over railroad radios, putting the workers and public at risk.
- Current railroad infrastructure in Minnesota's rail network does not lend itself to the operation of trains of this size. Other trains are not able to pass when a long train needs to stop for repairs. Terminals and freight yards are not equipped to receive and process trains of this size. This causes congestion in the network, leading to supply chain issues.
- Long trains lead to more blocked crossings.

## **Why 8,500 Feet Train Length Maximum**

- Does not impose radical restrictions on the industry and limits trains to the best operating practices in place today.
- Avoids congestion within Minnesota's rail network due to capacity and infrastructure limitations. Keeps Minnesota's rail network fluid avoiding supply chain issues.
- Reduces blocked crossings.

## **Can Minnesota Act?**

**Yes!** Neither Congress or the Federal Railroad Administration has regulated train length. Courts have ruled numerous times that subject matter is not preempted when federal regulations merely touch upon that subject matter. The proposed requirements in this bill are not preempted by federal law, because neither Congress nor the Federal Railroad Administration have taken action on these items. Absent the potential for federal preemption or demonstrably harming interstate commerce, states are authorized to enact laws that protect their residents and environment from potential harm by entities including railroads. This is a common-sense solution that protects workers and the public. Minnesota can and should legislate on this rail safety issues.

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