

Congressman Burlison:

On behalf of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO (TTD), representing hundreds of thousands of rail workers across the passenger and freight rail industries, I write to strongly oppose your Freights First Act, H.R. 3893.

This legislation would eliminate a federal provision that gives Amtrak trains the “right of preference” over freight trains on freight-owned tracks if an Amtrak train is within 50 miles of a port or rail yard. In doing so, this bill would greatly harm intercity and commuter passenger rail service while doing nothing to improve ongoing freight rail service delays. The right of preference dates back to the Rail Passenger Service Act that created Amtrak in 1970, and freight railroads actively supported this right for Amtrak at the time. Amtrak runs just a handful of trains on most freight rail lines in this country and is not at fault for the widespread service issues experienced by nearly every industry, from agriculture to manufacturing, that ships goods by rail. Simply allowing the freight railroads to ignore passenger trains is not going to improve freight service.

This legislation would permanently harm Amtrak’s passenger rail operations for your constituents while ignoring the root cause of the issue. The real obstacle to reliable freight rail service is the industry’s use of the Precision Scheduled Railroading operating model that prioritizes profits over rail service and safety. Rail workers have sounded the alarm for years about Precision Scheduled Railroading, which has led to 45,000 job cuts, decreased track and equipment maintenance, and reductions in essential equipment like locomotives and rail cars. These actions have led to the existing freight rail service and safety crises, including nearly 1,000 derailments a year.

Unfortunately, this legislation will not actually improve freight rail service or safety. Unless Congress acts, these challenges will persist and worsen. We strongly oppose the Freights First Act and instead urge Congress to act on two fronts: pass robust rail safety legislation and require better rail service by strengthening the common carrier obligation for freight railroads.

If you have any questions, please contact TTD Legislative Representative Alex Beckmann at alexb@ttd.org

Sincerely,



Greg Regan

President, Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO

CC: Representative Troy Nehls
Representative Scott Perry
Representative Andy Ogles
Representative Harriet Hageman