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Trains of All Lengths Keep Economies on Track

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Union Pacific Chief Operating Officer responds to recent news with facts and stats regarding train length and crossings

OMAHA, Neb.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Sep. 19, 2024-- Union Pacific's Executive Vice President of Operations Eric Gehringer responded to recent news coverage about train length in a narrative essay included below.

Trains of all lengths keep economies on track

By Eric Gehringer,
Executive Vice President – Operations, Union Pacific Railroad

I'm writing to reflect on recent stories and reports about train length—and to share some facts about railroading, stats about length and safety, and the specific actions Union Pacific has taken to work with community partners.

As a child I loved train sets, arranging the cars by size, color and type, connecting straight tracks with loops, and managing the flow of traffic with my friends. Trains bring people together. Indeed, one of Union Pacific's most popular "monster" trains is the Big Boy No. 4014, the world's largest operating steam locomotive. When the Big Boy comes to town, tens of thousands travel to small communities across the country helping local economies flourish, celebrating the promise of our past and potential of our future.

Facts about Railroading

Trains were essential in the building of our nation and continue to be a vital part of the global economy. Freight trains carry the materials to build our homes and fuel to warm them. They carry the vehicles we use to commute to work, so we can take care of our families. They carry the food, water and appliances that we need. Trains of all lengths carry these things and more.

I've been a railroader for nearly 20 years, and we take great pride in our role moving the supply chain. Railroaders work all hours of the day and night, in all kinds of weather—rain, snow, wind and wildfire—to serve our customers and care for our families.

- Freight railroads invest for growth and are not funded by taxpayers. We invest billions each year and approximately \$10 million dollars a day back into the railroad to grow and protect our infrastructure.
- A Union Pacific train travels around the earth approximately 49 times before a derailment occurs on the main line or in a siding.
- While average maximum train length grew, serious derailments on Union Pacific's network declined 26% in 2023 compared with 2019.

Driving can be frustrating—and made more so by trucks or trains. Perhaps you've been on a highway sandwiched by monster trucks, hoping to safely move away from them. Maybe you've been in bumper-to-bumper traffic because of the volume of trucks on a highway—or because of an accident involving a massive truck that flipped over. And maybe you've also experienced waiting at a rail crossing, as a long train goes by.

These situations are frustrating. Yet waiting for a light at a train crossing is less common and more controlled than the truck scenarios described above.

- According to data from the Federal Railroad Administration and U.S. Department of Transportation, freight rail is 17 times safer than trucks per gross ton miles.
- The average rail car can hold three to four truckloads worth of freight and reduces greenhouse gas emissions by up to 75% compared to trucks.
- A single train keeps roughly 300 trucks off our nation's already congested roads.

Train Length is About Fluidity

On my first day at the railroad, I saw train crews in the yard rely on printed paperwork to do their jobs. Today, that information is at their fingertips on mobile devices. Technology has changed the way we railroad, from how we assemble a train to its length, and, yet **trains are still the safest and most cost-efficient freight system in the world.**

At Union Pacific, we leverage a tool called Train Builder to simulate and replicate the forces trains experience based on the terrain they travel. We use the data to determine how a train will handle while en route, where cars should be placed in the lineup, the number of locomotives needed and the best routes. It's also a valuable training tool for employees.

Armed with this knowledge, Union Pacific trains are built to support the natural ebb and flow of our customers' needs and keep our 23-state network fluid. Imagine placing your online grocery order. If you place separate orders for a few things at a time (rather than your entire list at once), it takes longer for the store to get your order ready, and other customers are impacted with longer wait times, too. The same is true of trains, short trains congest the network.

But, there is a balance.

- Less than 3% of Union Pacific trains are over 15,000-feet, and when we operate them, we do so in specific areas designed to handle them. In fact, we haven't operated a 20,000-foot train in 2024.

- Roughly 73% of Union Pacific trains are 9,000-feet or less—that’s about 5 laps around a football field.
- A 9,000-foot train takes about 4 minutes to go through a crossing at 25 miles per hour – that’s about the time it takes to listen to your favorite song.

Taking Action: Addressing Safety, the Environment and Local Economies

Caring for the environment, listening to communities and serving customers to keep the economy moving isn’t simple. As a father of three, I know that there isn’t a one-size-fits all approach to parenting, and there isn’t one for a complex issue like addressing blocked crossings either. We are working with local communities across our network to identify critical crossings that might impact emergency response and safety needs.

- Over the last 10 years, Union Pacific invested more than \$34 billion to strengthen our infrastructure and build sidings, tracks that act as a passing lane, to support our customers and plan for future growth. These sidings allow shorter trains to pull off and let longer trains, or those with priority like Amtrak pass.
- We’ve collaborated with public partners to construct 114 overpasses and underpasses (grade separations) over the last five years to eliminate grade crossings, and have numerous other projects planned and under construction.
- We also have formal and effective escalation processes, beyond the phone number found on the blue signs located at each crossing, to mitigate blocked crossing risks and help local first responders.

Limiting train length will result in more trains passing through crossings. This will increase opportunities for train-vehicle accidents, often due to distracted driving and drivers who ignore warning signs and go around gates. In fact, nearly 40% of Union Pacific crossing incidents last year involved motorists stopped on tracks

Our relationships with local communities, where our employees live and work, are a vital part of providing safe and efficient rail services. At the end of the day, we all share the same goals: to be the safest mode of transportation in the U.S. that protects our communities, while ensuring every railroader returns home safe to their family after the workday is done. I’m proud of the work we’ve done and energized by the collaboration as we work together to identify ways to safely ship more goods by rail, help alleviate road congestion and incidents while reducing harmful emissions and building a brighter tomorrow for everyone.

ABOUT UNION PACIFIC

Union Pacific (NYSE: UNP) delivers the goods families and businesses use every day with safe, reliable and efficient service. Operating in 23 western states, the company connects its customers and communities to the global economy. Trains are the most environmentally responsible way to move freight, helping Union Pacific protect future generations. More information about Union Pacific is available at www.up.com.

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