

# UNMANNED Locomotives

at

## City Hall

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In my last two articles, I referred to Belt-Pack controlled locomotives as Chicken-Pack due to R.R. industry refusal to respond to our derby challenge for any cherry-picked BeltPack crew to approach, equal or exceed 2/3 of our productivity with an engineer operated locomotive. As Chicken-Pack is boiling down more and more to an issue of safety for both R.R. workers and the public alike, its debate is being shifted more and more to the public sector within City Council chambers. In light of this shift, it will be public necessary for us to drop public confusing terms such as RCO, RCL, Black Box, Remotes, etc. Therefore and henceforth, I will stop using the term Chicken-Pack and instead use the term UNMANNED LOCOMOTIVES. During 2003, City Councils will hear unmanned locomotive issues in at least 20 cities in California alone. Perhaps you will be called upon to testify at one or more of these meetings about such issues as Grade Crossing Safety. Perhaps you will volunteer to testify on your own. You will be most welcome because we all have our own war stories, which in turn breed concern. Little doubt, you will have family, friends, neighbors and co-workers whose safety will be compromised - indeed jeopardized, due to unmanned locomotives. In the spirit of one idea enhancing another, this article is not intended to be a complete guide on how to address City Councils about our safety concerns, but rather a mere cornerstone, upon which, we can build.

Through and in my own endeavors, I've had to address City "Fathers" and County "Fathers" about every other year since 1978. After 12 or 13 such public meetings, I'm arguably still a novice in this political science art. Nonetheless, I feel it my sworn duty to share what I can, in order to leverage what city influence we may have, in comparison to the mighty carriers. Insensitive carriers, particularly Union Pacific, are unabashedly shameless in telling the public how safe unmanned locomotives are. Therefore, and in the spirit of democracy, it will be necessary for us, the railroad operating people, to tell the higher truth.

For many of you, the notion of dealing with City Councilmen may seem alien. In many respects, however, it's not too unlike dealing with your own R.R. supervisors. For example, think of city council members as if they were yardmasters. Like most yardmasters, in comparison to top ranking R.R. officials, you will discover most City Councilmen to be as capable as top ranking politicians. Like most yardmasters, most City Councilmen silently harbor ambitions for higher office, but will find advancement almost impossible for lack of political-organizational backing. Like most yardmasters, most City Councilmen rule with neither republicanism nor democracy in mind (non-partisan), but are rather socialistic instead, while operating within a capitalistic-enterprise system. Like most yardmasters,

most City Councilmen have genuine day-to-day concern for their community's living and working environment and are therefore approachable, by us, with any new ideas we may have. Unlike most yardmasters and City Councilman, most top ranking R.R. executives and politicians suffer from "not invented here syndrome." Also, unlike most yardmasters and City Councilmen, most top ranking R.R. executives and politicians put their political well being of self, ahead of all other considerations. Enough? Oh, before I forget, the top ranking City Councilman is generally the Mayor. If you think of this person as the R.R. terminal manager, you will now have the proper mindset to deal with City Council(s).

Every bit as important as what we might say about the "un"safety of unmanned locomotives, is to understand and anticipate the safety propaganda peddled by the mighty carriers. History repeating itself, unmanned locomotives don't represent the first time City Councilmen have been "snowed" and "fooled" by transportation industry salesmen. An excellent example of this occurred during the 1950's when cities across our nation were "snowed" and "fooled" into abolishing their electric railway trolley lines. As you read this, many of those same cities are investing billions of tax dollars to recapture a mere fraction of what they once had, known today as "light rail." Repeating similar history, professional unmanned locomotive spokesmen will make claims of superior safety, reliability and emciency. Be mindful that these so-called professionals won't know the difference between a "reverser" and a "reverse movement," let alone the difference between a "pneumatic control switch" and a "transition relay." We, as locomotive engineers, are the truer R.R. professionals, not only in name, but in the actual operating practice of both its machinery and its thousands of governing rules, literally. What the so-called professional spokesmen do know about unmanned locomotives is based on Canadian propaganda. The kind of self-serving propaganda stemming from a natural conflict of interest in that the primary Canadian user of unmanned locomotives, the Canadian National Railway, is also its primary manufacturer through its subsidiary, CANAC. Again, if you want the higher truth about unmanned locomotives, simply ask the Canadian R.R. workers, themselves, who have been struggling in its physical use, maintenance and problematic serviceability. This observer did. So, as City Councilmen once listened to the sales pitches of bus makers, today's Councilmen will listen to the pitches of unmanned locomotive makers and/or their miscalculating customers - the mighty carriers.

In case you didn't know, it is the goal of the airline industry to have pilot less aircraft by the year 2030. The R.R. industry is ahead of the airline industry by over 30 years in terms of unmanned locomotives. As the general public, in combination with us, becomes increasingly outraged over carrier disregard for public safety, we can further anticipate the carriers to do their best to avoid the public scrutiny of City Council meetings by invoking their rights under Interstate Commerce Law. In other words, for the carriers to avoid this growing public relations cancer, will require them to convince busy City Councils the waste of time unmanned locomotive meetings would be as Federal Law, not Municipal Ordinance, governs whether or not it can be operated over city streets. We, the people, will beg to differ!

Irregardless of inconsistent, Interstate Commerce Law as it applies to cities, be mindful that cities have passed ordinances forbidding whistle use during certain hours as well as grade crossing occupation by trains during certain commute hours. It would stand to reason, then, that cities could ban unmanned locomotives as a dangerous city menace and/or public nuisance. This is where our testimony, as operating R.R. employees, will be most handy. Please allow me to explain. As you know, unmanned locomotives, depending upon the type of switching application, is up to 50% less productive than manned locomotives. The inverse proportionality of this would mean that to be half as productive, switching will take twice as long, which will result in grade crossings near rail yards to likewise be blocked twice as long. (Please be prepared to answer why it is up to 50% slower. The answer(s) will depend on factors unique to your own terminal(s).) Imagine the negative impact this will have on emergency response vehicles such as fire trucks, ambulances, police officers, etc. Imagine the negative impact on other emergency responders such as medical practitioners, parents of small children or "when nature calls." Imagine the extra public frustration in general. After all, doesn't the general public hate the railroads enough as it is. Now the carriers want to expand and intensify this public hatred through the use of unmanned locomotives.

Of the many remote-controlled locomotive accidents to date, R.R. management claims human failure of the remote-control operator as the main cause. To a somewhat lesser degree, technology failure of the remote controls also weigh in. Whether human failure or technology failure, the root cause of either is the locomotive being unmanned. In my 27 years of running manned locomotives, I've lost track of how much life and limb I've helped save, and in so doing, how much litigation (law suits) I've saved my carrier. From my elevated cab, I notice most all that is in front, behind and to the sides of me much more effectively than would the public in noticing a mere sign, warning of unmanned locomotives. With my greater field of vision, at the point of movement, I can sense brewing public danger such as automotive mal-function or possible automotive gridlock on road crossings. Upon the approach of 911 vehicles, I radio my crew, often thousands of feet away in order to clear the road crossing. On several occasions when movement of the overall train was impossible, and my crew wasn't close at hand, I've made my own train separations to allow 911 crews to pass. The railroad, as an "attractive nuisance," forces me to deal with trespassers between, over and under rail cars, tracks, tunnels and trestles. Obviously, the railroads will be that much more of an "attractive nuisance" with unmanned locomotives. I have reported fires, crimes in progress, hazardous leaks from rail cars and impending collisions among other rail movements. Someday, I might even spot a R.R. terrorist. No doubt, you could share many similar as well as different ways the public and the carriers have been helped by our alert presence. The point being, how is it even possible to put a price tag on the amount of tragedy and trauma that we, the locomotive engineers, have prevented?

Unfortunately, the carriers want to exchange public safety for the less than marginal economics of unmanned locomotives. Please allow me to explain. Railroads cost out their switch engines at \$350 per hour. Of this, the engineer's wage plus benefits is right at \$33 per hour. The engineer, then, is slightly less than 10% the cost of the switch engine

enterprise, which is little more than the sales tax rate. With unmanned locomotives, should there be a 10% drop in productivity, compared to manned locomotives, the carrier's savings of the abolished engineer's job would be a wash, zeroed-out, negated. The reality, however, is a 25% to 50% drop in productivity, depending upon the switching application. This is what is meant by the less than marginal economics of unmanned locomotives being traded for public safety.

If you participated in a rally against unmanned locomotives, you might have been discouraged when you heard the carrier's response on the evening news. Now we have the chance to be vindicated! So, remembering that same patriotic energy, consider those rallies as a dress rehearsal for the upcoming City Council meetings. Try to dress as if you were attending a funeral and participate in it as seriously. "Of course I'm not kidding." Like a funeral, it won't be necessary for you to speak unless you want to. Otherwise, your grunts, sighs and chuckles of the courteous kind will have an impact on the politics and the press. Don't forget to bring your families and coach them accordingly. Also, as our Chairman Tim Smith has said: Don't mention anything about job loss. The very ironic outcome of unmanned locomotives is that they have created as many new jobs as they have cost in old jobs, literally! This is all about public safety - and ours - period!

In conclusion, I know you're discouraged to the point of saying, "What's the use - the carriers always get their way, anyway." If this is your belief, then damn it, throw all of the history books into the fire. But remember, the essence of history is of those people who have helped to change it against overwhelming odds, particularly when the alternative was unthinkable! Otherwise, be encouraged by the tactical mistake the carriers have made in telling the public how R.R. employees are "extra careful" with unmanned locomotives. This is true! We R.R. employees are more careful with unmanned locomotives than we are with the shipments of Class I explosives or nuclear waste, by far. Its compromised operating rules and bastardized safety, causes us to treat it like an unlocked, loaded gun or a vicious dog on the end of a long leash; a very thin and delicate leash of a mere one radio watt and up to one mile in length. As R.R. workers, we have the forewarned privilege in knowing the gun is already loaded or the dog is already vicious. It will be impossible for an unwitting general public to respect unmanned locomotives with the same extra carefulness that we give it, and how or why should they whether on foot, in their cars or on Amtrak? Speaking of Amtrak, our fellow engineers there, are gravely worried when operating next to unmanned locomotives, but that's another future article.... Thankyouandhopeto see you at City Hall !