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STATE OF ALASKA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
JUNEAU

February 1, 1983

The Honorable Joe L. Hayes  
Speaker of the House  
Alaska State Legislature  
Pouch V  
Juneau, Alaska 99811


Dear Mr. Speaker:

Under the authority of art. III, sec. 18, of the Alaska Constitution, I am transmitting a bill repealing the existing law requiring train crews of certain minimum sizes. The existing law requires that passenger and freight trains have crews of no less than five persons, that a light engine without cars have a crew of at least three persons, and that a switch engine have a crew of at least three persons.

The repeal may allow railroads within the state to determine crew size based on economic and operational concerns. However, this repeal does not relieve a railroad of its existing obligation to operate with customary due care and high regard for the safety of its passengers, freight, and employees. The repeal is not intended to make any pronouncement on what is or is not an appropriate subject for collective bargaining.

I urge you to approve this bill.

Sincerely,

  
Bill Sheffield  
Governor

LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

TWELFTH LEGISLATURE

FISCAL NOTE

I. REQUEST

Bill/Resolution No. HOUSE BILL NO. 154  
 Title "An Act relating to train crew size."  
 Requested by Rules - Committee Date 1/27/83

II. FISCAL DETAIL

Agency Affected Labor  
 Program Category Affected Social Services  
 BRU, Program, or Subprogram(s) Affected Commissioner's Office

(Note: If more than one budget component is affected, separate line-item amounts and funding for each component in the analysis section.)

EXPENDITURES (Thousands of Dollars)

	FY 82	FY 83	FY 84	FY 85	FY 86	FY 87
100 PERSONAL SERVICES						
200 TRAVEL						
300 CONTRACTUAL						
400 COMMODITIES						
500 EQUIPMENT						
600 LAND & STRUCTURES						
700 GRANTS, CLAIMS, ETC.						
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>			

FUNDING (Thousands of Dollars)

	FY 82	FY 83	FY 84	FY 85	FY 86	FY 87
GENERAL FUND	0	0	0			
FEDERAL FUNDS						
OTHER (Specify Fund Source)						

POSITIONS

	FY 82	FY 83	FY 84	FY 85	FY 86	FY 87
FULL TIME						
PART TIME						
TEMPORARY						

III. ANALYSIS (See Fiscal Note Preparation Instructions, Section III)

A. Fiscal Impact.

IV. DATE January 27, 1983 PREPARED BY <sup>163</sup> Judy Knight

AGENCY Labor  
 PHONE 465-2700

Original: Legislative Finance  
 cc: Budget and Management  
 Prime Sponsor (First Legislator Named)



*united transportation union*

March 15, 1982

To:

This letter should provide you with some information on Senate Bill Number 849, "an act relating to train crews", a bill to which our membership is definitely opposed. I have put this brief together to explain how this bill affects us here in Skagway.

This is a critical issue to us in Skagway, and we would certainly appreciate any assistance which you could give us in the matter. We are at your disposal for further information and dialogue at any time.

Thank you very much.

I remain,

Corrigan L. Gates  
Legislative Representative  
United Transportation Union  
Local 1787



## *united transportation union*

March 15, 1982

U.T.U. Brief on Senate Bill Number AS 23.10.420(a)

### Background Information

The White Pass & Yukon Route Railroad, a Canadian-owned corporation with home offices in White Horse, Yukon Territory, is the last operating common carrier three-foot wide narrow gauge railroad in North America. Built at the height of the Klondike Gold Rush in 1898, it runs 110 miles from tidewater at Skagway, Alaska, to Whitehorse in the Yukon Territory. Since 1970, American crews (who used to operate all trains on the railroad) run the 41 miles to Lake Bennett, B.C., the division point, and Canadian crews take the trains the balance of the distance to Whitehorse.

Though "modern" in some respects, such as diesel locomotives and a containerized freight handling system, the WP&YR contends with some of the worst terrain and climate conditions in the world. The Canadian side from Bennett to Whitehorse is flat with only a few grades; the U.S. division is the "trickiest part of the road".

Alaskan crews must drag their trains up 21 miles of 3.9% grade to reach the summit, and then contend with another pass and two short (but equally steep) grades before reaching Bennett. The return to Skagway presents the problem of controlling 60-car trains of lead-zinc ore concentrates on the steepest railroad grade in America.

The railroad is interspaced with high wooden trestles and cliff-like retaining walls which perch the track a thousand feet above the canyon floor for miles. Blizzards have dumped over four hundred inches on the summit of White Pass, and though there are "good" years, the railroad has been blockaded sometimes for weeks on end. The worst storm shut down the road for 21 days.

The geography and weather create more than just management problems; they compound the dangers of railroading to the highest extent. Even on a well-maintained railroad, pursuing safe operational standards is critical. Here it is very literally a matter of life and death. Avalanches and rock slides periodically wipe cars over the side, and derailments (which occur very frequently) could mean disaster at many locations. Such a disaster would even be environmental in its scope, since the prospect of tons of lead and zinc dumped into the Skagway River would certainly affect life in the water, and down to the sea.

Train crews have learned to take safety as more than just the title page in the rule book. After all, we're the ones out there in the middle of it. Five-man crews on the WP&YR exist primarily for safety, in spite of management's stand on this bill. Here are a few examples:

1. Ice building up between the wheels and the brake shoes can cause winter brake failures. The Company has refused to upgrade their equipment, and this leaves the crew to deal with problems out on the road.
2. Bridges and trestles on the road are not equipped with walkways. A train which is stretched across a bridge leaves no walking (or climbing) room at the edge. Therefore, a brakeman cannot walk from one end of the train to the other, and a second brakeman is needed to walk the other end in emergencies. This can be critical.
3. In winter months it often takes the combined strength of two men to set a good safe handbrake on a car, and the same force of two men to "knock-down" or remove the brake. On older cars with faulty handbrakes this applies all year, even with brake clubs.
4. The "sophisticated communications systems" (two-way radios) in use are continually in for repair and are prone to failure. The crews do not rely on them because of this safety hazard, and hand signals are regularly used in switching moves.
5. The primary job of the crew while underway is to watch for any hint of trouble on or around the train. The railroad is twisted like a piece of spaghetti with 16 to 24<sup>o</sup> curves, and there are documented cases of the fireman, riding on the left-hand side of the locomotive, spotting danger which was out of the engineer's line of sight and stopping the train. Similarly, brakemen ride at both ends and watch over the train for hotboxes, loads shifting or breaking loose, broken axles or wheels, downed brake rigging, derailed cars, broken rails, fires, washouts, etc. Thus, the manning positions at the head-end with the engineer and fireman watching the track from the lead unit, a brakeman riding the "rear" or trailing unit watching over the train behind, and a conductor and rear-brakeman overseeing the train ahead of the caboose (and the track behind for signs of dragging brake rigging or derailed equipment) have been established for the safe opera-

tion of the train while underway. Dozens of documented cases exist of crew men at their positions spotting trouble which would have gone unseen by other crew members, and thus saving the Company thousands of dollars in repairs and wreck clean-up operations.

6. Most important to the crew members in the light of safety on the road is the grim fact that besides dealing with faulty locomotives, antiquated equipment, and track and bridge maintenance which barely meets the job at hand, employees have to deal with snowslides and cliffs over which a train's plunge would mean certain injury or death. The specter of a passenger train loaded with 400 tourists going through a rotten trestle, or derailling high above "Dead Horse Gulch", or being hit by a rock slide (on top of the 1900-era wood-roofed parlor cars with their old oil stoves) brings shudders to the men who actually are on board as well as to management. Crew members to deal with such accidents are essential. Even more frightening in the winter season are the snowslides. There has been an increase in winter passenger traffic over the last few years, and thus the crew is faced with the added burden of protecting travelers as well as themselves.

1. White Pass and Yukon Ltd. of Vancouver is owned by Federal Industries, Ltd. of Winnipeg. The Canadian management is on an over-all cost-cutting spree at this time, and are trying to tighten up their operation. Part of this has included the postponement of track repairs--a major rail replacement program was knocked out to save money--and an attitude of "beat it 'til it dies" toward their locomotives, some of which are now 28 years old and in critical need of replacement or complete long-term overhaul. Because traffic is so heavy at this time, the Company can't take their engines out of service much more than stop-gap, repairs on the worst problems. Engine failures or malfunctions are a common occurrence on the railroad. It is also worth noting that the average train length in 1969 was 30 cars, operated by five men. Today the same five men have to run trains that can be 100 cars long out of White Pass. This is actually more work for each man involved, with more weight to contend with, more cars to watch (and to talk when checking the train, or in emergencies), and definitely more hazardous.

2. Remarkable but true in light of the terrain and operational hazards on the WP&YR is the fact that White Pass does not legally have to comply with Federal laws concerning safety and operation. The reason: White Pass is "narrow gauge" instead of "standard gauge" (4' 8½" wide track), and as such the Company can usually sneak by under requirements and regulations which would close down a standard gauge road "outside". This appears to be an oversight by the Federal Railroad Administration, but is understandable since the little known and obscure White Pass is the last narrow gauge common carrier left in the U.S. Also, it is generally viewed as a Canadian company. The 21 miles within Alaska under jurisdiction of American law, usually slide by unnoticed.
3. Much of the freight equipment, passenger equipment and airbrake equipment is antiquated and of museum vintage. Crews must deal with this as well as other problems, adding to operational hazards.
4. Because of all the previous factors, it is little wonder that the White Pass accident and safety record is atrocious. Summer travel has increased each year, and with it the number of accident reports. Employees must be extra alert at all times to prevent injury or death from faulty equipment, dangerous operational procedures, or management decisions affecting train movement. White Pass enjoys saying that they have "never lost a passenger's life" in their 80-year history. The men who ride the trains can only count the number of dead employees over the years, and knock on wood. The Company is playing Russian Roulette with human lives, and their own odds get worse by reducing the number of men on board a train who are available to deal with the expected--and unexpected--hazards of mountain railroad-ing under the most extreme conditions.

#### Statement of Position by the United Transportation Union

We of the United Transportation Union, Local 1787 in Skagway, are adamantly opposed to Senate Bill 949, a bill which will aid a non-resident Canadian corporation by eliminating Alaskan jobs on U.S. soil. This is by itself a dangerous international precedent, worthy of close attention--particularly in light of the proposed Alcan gasoline project.

Few people even know that there is a railroad in Southeast Alaska. Instead of repealing the present law, we propose a rider should be added that would exempt state owned Railroads.

March 15, 1982

Lastly, very few individuals are aware of the delicate balance that exists in Skagway between labor and management. We feel that the introduction of this bill is an attempt by the Company to further drain our union treasury attending a battery of hearings in Juneau. The last time we had to testify it involved long hours and much expense-- something which the Company can easily afford.

Given this situation, our membership has nothing except the present State law to protect us from the whims of a foreign corporation. Our only defense at present lies in "An Act relating to train crews" as set forth in State law. It would thus seem beyond comprehension for our own lawmakers-- our own elected representatives--to vote to repeal the only security which we in Skagway have in these difficult days.

Corrigan L. Gates  
Legislative Representative  
United Transportation Union  
Local 1787  
Skagway, Alaska 99840