

Good Morning Board Members and RETAC Committee,

Today, I will address a few key topics, including employment levels, the challenges our members are facing, and the collaborative partnership between the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen, HUM Industrial, and The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Employment levels have improved slightly compared to the previous report, with most of the gains seen at CSX and NS. NS has returned to its 2020 employment levels, while CSX is nearing those numbers. Meanwhile, CPKC, CN, and BNSF have remained stagnant in terms of workforce growth. UP continues to see a decline in employment, a trend that has persisted since 2016. Frankly, aside from the modest growth at NS and CSX, the overall workforce situation has become frustrating. Without regulatory action to establish minimum staffing standards, those interested in addressing concerns have responded with increases. However, without a comprehensive study—similar to what has been done with the Carmen—it remains impossible to determine appropriate staffing levels. A thorough examination of the signal craft is essential, particularly with a focus on setting reasonable standards for mandated testing, and it should be a priority to better understand the workforce needs. I acknowledge that sometimes my craft can be its own worst enemy by pushing to meet railroad demands, often at the expense of proper staffing. Signal Workers, like other crafts in the industry, take pride in their accomplishments and define success by how much they can get done. However, to establish a minimum standard for these regulated tasks would require intervention from a regulatory body to set staffing standards.

As we approach national negotiations, some unprecedented developments have occurred with a few of the Class I railroads engaging in local bargaining. Notably, CSX, NS, and BNSF have already reached tentative agreements ahead of the national bargaining round. While we are actively engaged in discussions with these carriers, we do have some craft-specific requests that could potentially slow the overall process.

While I will not reiterate all the points from the recent hearing on industry growth, I want to express my gratitude to the Board for hosting such an important discussion. I would also like to commend our Labor Representative, Rich Edelman, for his excellent testimony. A critical issue for labor—

setting a defined standard for employment levels is essential if we want to achieve sustainable growth in this industry.

The BRS is creating a workforce development initiative to implement newly emerging technology that will reduce the potential for train derailment from wheel-axle bearing failures. To do so, the BRS is partnering HUM and UTRGV with currently available sensor technology to research the workforce needs, implementation process, and overall impact on the industry. The primary activity of the BRS in this initiative is to develop labor protocols and procedures to adopt this technology.

The current use of wayside hot box detectors in the railroad industry is the standard for detecting catastrophic failures of wheel-axle bearings as they are happening reactively. While the BRS encourages the continued use and adoption of such technology, it is the goal of our Organization to identify additional technologies as well as develop workforce implementation and deployment strategies that can detect earlier forms of failure to provide preventative and time-based information to produce more accurate safety decisions.