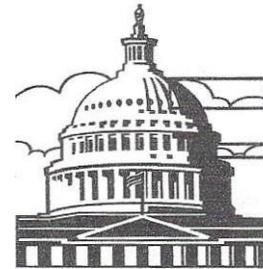


CAPITOL TO CAPITOL

For

JULY/AUGUST 2005



Less Than \$99 Per Car

("The Stirrup Staple")

By: Robert "R.B." Frank—Legislative Representative BLET Div 839

Fellow R.R. folks have thought it odd why I, a 29 year locomotive engineer veteran, would involve myself with the issue of user-friendly railcars? Believe it or not, it was multiple members of the U.T.U. who simply asked me. Yep, at a time when the U.T.U. wants to charge dual dues for our BLET trainmen, our BLET Union has officially responded by not doing the same to their U. T.U. engineers. The push for user-friendly railcars is another example of how the co-operatively minded BLET is trying to make things better for Labor, our Carriers and our customers.

Even though win-win opportunities such as user-friendly railcars seldom come better, the push for it has been ill-greeted by an even greater amount of push-back from our Regulators and Carriers alike. This is to be expected with human nature. It's like the child who savagely resists a medication shot no matter how great the health benefit. For less than \$99 per car, the railcar retrofit will be even cheaper than the childhood shot(s). This push-back is actually an encouraging sign. It means we have caught their attention. It means they are taking it seriously enough to cry out against it like the child in the doctor's office. Therefore, with "coaching and counseling", we will hopefully convert their resistance into acceptance, and then, into mutual promotion.

At this juncture, allow me to share the following examples of push-back, and how we have responded. First, was the FRA official who said how difficult it would be to retrofit "millions and millions" of tank cars. Our response: There is an approximate 1,400,000 total freight cars in North American circulation and approximately 20% of those are tank cars. To say there are "millions and millions" is to exaggerate the push-back resistance by upwards of 10 times or 1,000%, because in fact, there are approximately 280,000 tank cars, period!

Secondly, was the FRA official who claims the need to uphold the "standard" for railcar stirrups and grab irons. Our response: The only thing standard about the so-called "standard" is that there is no standard. We would challenge anyone with a tape measure to record how railcar stirrups are of different widths, different slope angles inward toward the rail, different slope angles outward toward the field, and most mis-feasant of all - different heights off the rail! Unfortunately, there is a standard track gauge of 56 1/2". Fortunately, there is a standard coupler height off the rail. Unfortunately, there is no user-friendly standard for stirrup height off the rail. For the FRA to hide behind the so-called "standards", is to justify their stubbornness in this matter. The FRA has an absolute and overdue duty to revise a true and consistent user-friendly standard for stirrups. Ideally, stirrup height for railcars should be consistent with the bottom step height on locomotives, which is 15 inches.

Thirdly, was the FRA official who refused to get involved with tank car riding issues, claiming that trainmen are empowered to walk if they don't want to ride. Our response: Please refer to the previous paragraph. Please note I did not mention the standard for freight car weight limits. As you can see, standards are plentiful for the protection of freight cars, but are sadly lacking for the protection of freight car trainmen.

If the FRA is serious about R.R. employee safety, Please live up to your overdue duty to revise a true and consistent user-friendly standard of 15 inches for all R.R. rolling stock steps and stirrups.

Fourth, was the Carrier mechanical officer who said, "This dog will never hunt because the FRA won't allow the welding of new things to railcars." Our response: When our Carriers advanced from riveted bridges to welded, or advanced from bolted rail to welded, or advanced from riveted boilers to welded, toward the end of the steam locomotive era, the weld or not to weld question(s) was a much harder decision. In the intervenCMünued •n page 3

ing 60 plus years, however, the welding technology has only improved. Further, the 1/2" thick flat bar used in the construction of stirrups is only 1/8" thinner than the 5/8" web thickness of 136 pound rail. If welded 5/8" will support a 35 ton axle load at speed, welded 1/2" will support a 200 pound human at rest. This should be an inarguable no-brainer.

Fifth, almost like the Amendment, was the "Safety Bell" award ceremony held at BNSF's Stockton Terminal, at which, the group of R.R. Vice Presidents in attendance were introduced to our Safety Stirrup hardware. At first impression, these gentlemen were all smiles and enthusiasms until they found out who made the hardware. Suddenly, their smiles became frowns. Suddenly, the new paint "stunk" and the hardware suffered from "not invented here syndrome". However, one forward thinking Vice President said, "Good idea, but most railcars are owned by our customers or leasing companies, so, who's going to pay for it?" Our response: Please remember, non-R.R. car owners don't pay FELA awards. Otherwise, it's said that the main job of Vice Presidents is to say, no. If they continue to say, no, then railcars will remain user unfriendly for the next 94 years as they have been for the past 94 years, ill-thanks to the FRA. Regardless of who pays for it, for less than \$99 per car, the rate of return would approach, if not exceed 100% per year to our Carriers. This is based on a mere savings of \$8 per month, average per car, by way of saved terminal taxi fares, walking related injuries, 2 M.P.H. walking vs. 10 M.P.H. riding, overtime, railcar per diem, customer delay and freed yard capacity. Another way to look at this, if 1,000,000 of our industry's 1,400,000 railcars were made user-friendly, the less than one time \$99 million investment would be less than the annual bonuses (for just one year) of all our R.R. industry Vice Presidents, who are paid to say, no! Seriously, if all railcars were retrofitted gradually as they came in for maintenance and/or repair, the financial "shot" would feel utterly painless!

In conclusion, safety awareness and situational awareness will improve more and more if trainmen are able to shift some of their focus away from the user unfriendliness of awkward to board, isometrically awkward to ride and awkward to dismount railcars. The improved velocity gives us an accelerated way to pay for it. This is a very decent example of improving safety, hand in hand, with velocity. Since one idea improves another, please review the following photos for any improvement ideas you might have. Oh, in case you hadn't guessed, I'm the designer-fabricator of this cube root invention I've named the "Stirrup Staple". I write (weld) a little with an electric stick-rod, too. Thanks Again.

From left: With coffee cup in hand, Stirrup Staples are so user-friendly, "even Belt-Pack amputees can return to work." Stirrup Staples are wide enough so grab pole comes up through center of chest. Trainmen can stand perfectly upright, so all yard tracks should be rideable. Stirrup Staples fit within the "dimensional envelope" of the car(s). At 15" off the rail, Stirrup Staples are low enough so trainmen can use lower grab iron points for varied 3 or 4 point contact.