



# Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

*A Division of the Rail Conference — International Brotherhood of Teamsters*

## Washington State Legislative Board

*Workplace Safety, Health, and Education*

Shahraim Allen, Chairman

Port of Seattle Commission  
PO Box 1209  
Seattle, WA 98111

September 27, 2013

RE: Rail Safety; Proposed SoDo Arena Project

Dear Port of Seattle Commission:

The purpose of the letter is to provide additional input and concerns regarding the proposed third arena in the SoDo Industrial District. Brief comments on behalf of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET), and United Transportation Union (UTU), were entered into the record at the beginning of the commission meeting on September 24, 2013 (Item 7a, Proposed SoDo Sports Arena Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)). We would like to submit these additional comments for The Commission to consider on this issue.

*Workplace safety, health, and education* are three primary functions associated with the work performed by both Washington State Legislative Boards (WSLB) of the BLET and the UTU. Our membership's primary craft positions, Locomotive Engineer and Conductor (and other ground operating crafts), are governed by federal and state regulation, as well as an industry standard General Code of Operating Rules (GCOR). While our membership is committed to abiding by these regulations and operating rules, most of the general public does not even realize they exist. Thus, there is an obligation on the part of public officials to take prudent steps to protect the public from the dangers inherent in rail operations they may or may not fully understand or be aware of.

Neither the BLET nor UTU WSLB's can speak to specific legalities regarding railroad right-of-way issues. That is a question best answered by the legal departments of the railroad carriers themselves. However, suffice it to say, "The railroads were here first and everything else came afterwards."



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With this basic premise in mind, our comments regarding mitigation of potential conflicts between SoDo railroad operations and the proposed third arena project in the SoDo Industrial District can proceed. This much is crystal clear: The human body is no match for the massive equipment associated with railroad operations. Most of the nomenclature used to describe rail equipment weight units is in tons, not pounds. For example, a single empty box car weighs approximately 33 tons, a single loaded C-6 grain hopper weighs approximately 140 tons, and a single locomotive can weigh over 200 tons. Carry these numbers over to a fully loaded, powered up grain train bound for Louie Dreyfus on Elliott Bay, and the totals are upwards of 13,000 tons of machinery. The forces generated can be very unforgiving and, in the case of collisions, deadly.

To gain some idea of what types of future safety issues might be associated with a third arena project in the SoDo District, one need only look to the north and the site of the two existing stadiums constructed to replace the multi-purpose Kingdome. Originally, South Royal Brougham Way was an "at-grade" crossing and during events, the flood of pedestrian and vehicle traffic created horrendous crossing safety issues. Feedback from our membership operating trains (passenger, commuter, freight) through this single location in operations had reported countless "close calls" and "near misses" involving both pedestrians and vehicles attempting to "beat the train" before, during, and after an event.

In discussions this past week with Bob Boston, State Coordinator Operation Lifesaver, it was noted that documents on file at his office indicate between 2003 and 2007 there were one (1) death and six (6) injuries involving train verses cars/pedestrians at the then at-grade South Royal Brougham Way crossing (where warning lights and gates were in place). Considering Safeco Field opened on July 15, 1999, there are likely additional documented injuries/fatalities for this single location alone. While today the South Royal Brougham Way at-grade crossing safety is no longer an issue (total grade



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separation), any future SoDo developments should require a comprehensive study of all potential rail crossing issues for all major thoroughfares (Holgate, Lander, etc.) and take steps to ensure the public is protected from hazards associated with railroad operations.

When considering event traffic generated by the existing SoDo stadiums, increased volumes of passenger, commuter and freight rail traffic on the BNSF Seattle Subdivision, and the Port of Seattle Century Agenda objectives for creating more port-related jobs in and around the port, a comprehensive EIS is absolutely warranted. What's troubling is there seems to be a political undercurrent afoot to rush what should be a very thoughtful, deliberate, public process in order to satisfy the demands of the current project investors and, possibly, to advance some hidden agenda by other groups desiring further gentrification of the SoDo Industrial District/port terminals.

As The Commission knows better than anyone, the Port of Seattle is a regional economic asset; not some local parcel to be partitioned off and sold to the highest bidder. Its natural deep waters and access to the I-5 and I-90 transportation corridors are unique and an integral part in providing vital cargo services to Seattle, Western Washington industries, Eastern Washington farmlands, to the Pacific Northwest, and to the Midwestern Industrial Corridor. The same can be said about the railroad right-of-way and rail yards located in and around the SoDo Industrial District. **Railroads and the family-wage jobs associated with railroads have existed as long, or in some cases, longer than the port or any other development in the SoDo Industrial District.** This is an important fact that must not be overlooked or underemphasized while deliberating this issue.

While our members look forward to the return of an NBA team to Seattle, they do not support a haphazard approach which potentially compromises safety, thoughtful planning, or their job interests. We respectfully request the Port of Seattle Commission take prudent steps to ensure the regional asset that the Port of Seattle is remains



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unchanged and any developments in and around the SoDo Industrial District are rigorously vetted to ensure public safety and that existing railroad job interests are best served. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mike Elliott