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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Yesterday, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) checked another box off the Association of American Railroads' (AAR) long-desired wish list – the ability to increase the use of automated track inspection technologies (ATI). The irony, however, is that nothing was preventing America's Class I railroads from expanding the use of ATI in the first place, meaning the reality is that prioritizing the safest course is not the ultimate goal. Instead, it is to reduce the number of visual inspections (or manpower) to improve the operating ratio in their never-ending pursuit to appear attractive to their shareholders on Wall Street.

Simply put, this waiver does nothing to improve safety. It is a business decision that could have devastating consequences to the infrastructure, the environment, the track-side communities, and the men and women we represent. It is a solution in search of a problem, and it is an unnecessary relief from regulatory restrictions that don't exist.

As a result, this ruling reduces by half the assurance our members have that the rail underneath them is intact and equipped to handle the weight of the car or engine they are riding. This ruling makes it twice as likely that a defect will be discovered the hard way by our members rolling over it. As a union, SMART-TD is more than disappointed by this drastic reduction in our people's safety.

ATI, in conjunction with visual inspections, is a sensible and pragmatic approach to safe railroad operations. The current safety records are a testament to this fact, but because of this waiver, additional, unneeded risk is now being introduced into the equation, and the impacts could be severe.

Make no mistake: Labor supports technology that advances safety and supplements our work. This effort misses that mark.

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