ATDA
American Train Dispatchers Association

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March 27, 2024

The Honorable Amit Bose
Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Via email

Re: March 26, 2024 BNSF Train Dispatcher Software Taken Out of Service Due To Safety Concerns

Dear Administrator Bose:

Please consider this letter as a formal complaint and a request for a complete investigation and audit of the BNSF's "Auto Router", "Movement Planner" and "Train Management Dispatch System (TMDS). On March 26, 2024, BNSF Manager Dispatching Practice and Rules issued BNSF Railway Control System Notice No. 75 stating, "*A TMDS defect was discovered where incorrect data is being communicated from TMDS to Movement Planner. As a result of the TMDS data defect, effective March 26, 2024, the Auto Router function is being temporarily disabled. It will be disabled at the system level on CTC territory. This will allow time for Wabtec to develop and test an enhanced TMDS version that addresses the TMDS data defect.*"

When Auto Router is on, TMDS has a defect that Auto Router triggers. Basically, TMDS pulls a past switch position from archived data and subsequently throws the switch in the field and **does not properly display the position of the switch in TMDS to the dispatcher.** This was first reported to BNSF last year. Fall of 2023 a BNSF Train Dispatcher reported a potential safety defect to BNSF Safety Hotline (the dispatcher has all supporting data). After a short investigation BNSF stated that they were unable to replicate the defect and advised the train dispatchers on that desk to take Auto Router offline at that location only. A few months later, the same defect occurred on a different desk. Now on March 26, 2024, the BNSF has taken Auto Router down on their entire system. This significant action should demonstrate the seriousness of this defect. Even more concerning, is that at least one other Class-1 Railroad uses Auto Router.

COMMITTED TO REPRESENTING ALL RAILROAD WORKERS

ATDA believes strongly that all software used by train dispatchers that affects the safe movement of trains and on-track equipment should be required to be tested and certified safe by the FRA. The current practice by railroads to implement and utilize these safety critical technologies without being thoroughly vetted is unacceptable. We cannot continue to allow the safety of our communities to be left in the hands of railroads.

The primary ATDA contact on the property is:

Kevin Porter, Vice President
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We look forward to working with you to investigate and resolve this serious safety issue.

Respectfully submitted,

L. Ed Dowell

Enclosure: BNSF Railway Control System Notice No. 75

cc: Karl Alexy, Associate Administrator & Chief Safety Officer, FRA
        Andrea Wohleber, Senior Advisor, FRA
        Kevin Porter, Vice President, ATDA
        Eddie Hall, President, BLE/T
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