

To California Assembly Member Dario Frommer, Chairman of the
Passenger Rail Safety Committee and to members present at Glendale, CA
July 20, 2005

Presented by Kerri Ormiston Davis, Bakersfield, CA

Thank you for asking me to be here today.

My dad, Conductor Tom Ormiston, worked on trains for as long as I can remember. I have spent time on them, and trains have just always been a part of my life.

My dad lived and worked on trains almost every day, and, in spite of the dangers he knew existed, it was his job. And he loved it.

I have heard a lot of train stories both good and bad, but in the last few years while he was working for Metrolink, my Dad loved his job less and less. And his stress level increased.

He said that Metrolink management thought more of whether your tie was straight and your shoes were shined than if the railroad was safe. He would often speak of going to work on the "coffin car" which is what he called the cab car.

And he expressed concern over the dangers of running the trains "backwards" with the cab car forward, and the train being pushed from the rear. . He felt this was a dangerous practice and "an accident waiting to happen"

Working on the trains for 30 years allowed him a thorough understanding of operations and safety issues.

Very few people have an understanding of these issues like someone who is on the rail everyday. It seems as though someone with "hands-on" experience on a day-to-day basis has the best place for an understanding of the workings of the trains and their safety issues.

And it does not seem like it would take a safety committee or a FRA statistical "analysis" to realize that hitting a vehicle on the tracks in front of you with a 140 ton locomotive that has a V-shaped "cowcatcher" on its front end is a whole lot safer than hitting a vehicle on the tracks with a modified passenger car that weighs only 56 tons and has little or no "cow catcher" in front

Statistics can "prove" anything they say---even for example that shark infested waters are safe.....

It also seems like common sense that a train is safer being pulled by a locomotive than being pushed by one. In an accident you don't want the heaviest weight in the back.

If a train hits a vehicle with the locomotive in the back, it's going to push the cars in front of it into a jackknife. That's exactly what happened in Glendale last January.

If it hits the vehicle with the locomotive in front it's just going to pull the cars along with it, and knock the obstruction out of the way. Picture trying to push a rope as opposed to pulling it.

I personally love trains and am not asking people to stop riding them. But my family and I believe there is a much safer way of running them.

People get on these Metrolink trains every day just assuming they are safe, because they have put their trust in the safety regulations, and Metrolink management, just like getting on an airliner, we trust that whoever is in charge of maintenance and safety has done everything in their power to ensure it is done the safest way possible.

But now every single day, Metrolink still runs their trains the same way they did that day last January when countless lives were changed forever. My family and mine certainly were.

To not do everything possible to ensure the safety of the passengers is to have a disregard for the lives of those people who get on Metrolink trains every day.

My family and I believe that Metrolink has an obligation to do whatever it takes to make those trains as safe as possible.

In my dad's long career in running trains, he experienced numerous collisions with cars and even a semi truck. All of these collisions occurred with the locomotive in front and resulted in no derailment or injury to crew or passengers. He stated that hitting a car with a locomotive was similar to hitting a bug with the windshield of a car. He barely even felt it.

There are almost 800 grade crossings on the Metrolink route. So another collision with a car or truck is inevitable. It may not happen today or tomorrow. But it WILL happen.

If you happen to be on the train that is going to collide with a vehicle, do you want the 140 ton locomotive in front of you with its big V-shaped "cowcatcher" ---- or do you want to be riding in the 56 ton modified passenger cab car in front with little or no "cowcatcher"?

Growing up in a railroading family, we learned there are lots of ways to turn trains around very easily and very cheaply.

You can use a "balloon" track, or a turntable, or more expensive things like equipping the entire fleet with a locomotive on both ends of the train.

But the easiest, cheapest, and safest way to turn Metrolink trains around is to have what is called a railroad WYE (spelled “W”-“Y” “E”) at each end of the 7 Metrolink runs.

My sister, Christie, Tom’s wife, Ann, and I realized this, from what we learned from my Dad. And we know what a very small amount of funds and extra time it would take to ALWAYS have the locomotive in front.

We also know that Metrolink has had at least 3 major derailments since 2002 that cost 16 lives and many hundreds of serious, life changing injuries. Those train wrecks have ruined so many lives forever because of Metrolink’s cab car push operations.

Yet Metrolink has done absolutely nothing (except to rope off a little of the front of its cab cars) to protect its passengers.

That is why we started a “WHY NOT WYE” petition campaign. We want to educate the public to put pressure on Metrolink management to explain why they won’t WYE THE TRAINS.

Please look at the one page hand out while I go over it with you.

It is so simple. This is how a WYE works: It is a lot like turning your auto in the street by pulling into a driveway and backing out and up the street so you can head back down the street where you came from.

My illustration is taken from an aerial photo about a mile from the Moorpark Metrolink Station. If Metrolink had had a WYE there and had turned Metro #100, it would have knocked the Jeep off the tracks like an empty tin can, and would not have jackknifed into the train my Dad was working that January morning.

Step one in wyeing a train is to pull the train forward past the (in this example west) switch. That switch is then thrown. This can be done by hand or by the dispatcher at Pomona. Then the train is backed down the (in this case west) leg of the wye past the next switch. That switch is thrown. Then the train is operated forward --- and it goes onto the same main line track, but with the locomotive at the front end!!

It’s really very, very simple. Railroads had wyes a long, long time before my Dad was born.

The Metrolink train is always kept together. So Metrolink management saying it will take time and money to uncouple the locomotive engine and put it on the other end is wrong. No uncoupling is required to wye a train

Metrolink management says it will take \$3 million times 40 locomotives to put another locomotive on the other end of all its trains. That is not needed, either, because you use the exact same locomotives Metrolink already owns and operates. And no more.

Metrolink says it will take all sorts of increased labor costs. Well I don't know what Metrolink management is talking about, but any experienced conductor like my Dad was could WYE the train in less than 15 minutes.

And cost? There is already a WYE around the Mission Tower by the LA Union Depot. So that one is free.

The handout shows that the TOTAL COST to add 7 wyes to the existing routes will be a LOT less than \$ 2 million dollars. TWO MILLION DOLLARS, TOTAL.

I ask you. Is \$ 2 million dollars too much to spend to stop the fatalities and horrible injuries of Metrolink passengers?

More vehicles WILL get onto the tracks in front of Metrolink trains. How many millions will those deaths and injuries cost if the trains are not wyed?

My sister, Christie, and my Dad's wife, Ann, asked me to tell you they wish they could be here today to speak to you. But they are still back in Oklahoma where the whole family went this past weekend to place Dad's gravestone.

I came back early for the family in order to express my Dad's hope to get coffin cab cars off the front of Metrolink trains.

Metrolink thought enough of my Dad to name a turnout or siding after him where it will be for all freight and passenger railroaders to see forever. We thank them for that.

But they will not W Y E the trains to make them safe.

Will you please sign our WHY NOT WYE petition so we can turn them into Metrolink Management??

Thank you.