

Dec 6 2004

Members of the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission

My name is Ken Richards, I am 35 years old and have been a switchman for the BNSF Railroad for 9 years. I live in Lake Stevens and work in Everett. I along with many other railroad workers am asking for you to improve working conditions by changing the size of switching lead balast to 3/4 or smaller. We have asked the company on many occasions to fix the leads and are repeatedly told that it will not be done. Smaller gravel is the only way to ensure a smoother walking surface free from tripping hazards. This will also save on the wear and tear on our bodies. The smaller the gravel, as you well know, will compact into a much firmer surface and it will also allow any water to run off. If I had my way I'd like to see 3/8 minus on all leads, but the 3/4 is better than nothing.

In Everett there are three leads in the yards, two at Delta and one at Bayside. The company resurfaced the east lead at Delta a couple of years ago and within the past few weeks has redone the lead at Bayside. On the east Delta lead they used some very nice 5/8 (I'm guessing) gravel that after a bit of use and rain compacted into a very nice walking surface. The lead at bayside is also not too bad. It is a mix of 5/8 and 3/4 that has packed relatively well, but some larger rocks and other tripping hazards remain. The west lead at Delta however is in horrible shape. If you need to visit an example of an unsafe lead come and check it out. Very large balast 1 to 2 inch with some 3/4 mixed in. This surface will not pack and is constantly moving under your feet. The large rocks are tripping hazards to say the least, but it is the abuse on the body that is the worst. I am in better than average physical condition, I work our 4 or more times every week and am by no means overweight. We have to carry a seven pound remote control belt pack that is mounted at belly button level and it is not a lot of weight, but just enough to be a killer on the low back when you combine that with poor footing. After one shift on the west Delta lead I suffer from sore feet, ankles, knees, hips and low back.

I urge you to change the rule about balast size, without the rule change we may never get a good walking surface on the west lead at Delta yard. I am sure that there are other leads in this state as bad or worse than the one that I have described. Without your help we have no way to get the railroads of this state to give us what we need, a safe walking surface that will pack, drain off water and not contain any tripping hazards. WE WORK ON THESE LEADS DAY AND NIGHT, EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR. Please help us. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely Ken Richards