

ILCAD Denver June 8, 2022 Transcript:

I am going to talk to you today as an individual and not as a representative of the Iowa Interstate Railroad or even Railroad Development Corporation. I don't do this very often, but I think under the circumstances it's appropriate.

Let me start by saying, and many of you have had this experience, that I love talking about our industry. While I am ashamed to admit that I got here by airplane, (though technically, I did get here by train, at least from the airport), at the Pittsburgh Airport I was talking to a few people about my job. Everybody thinks trains are cool, without exception; but the problem is that one-on-one stories are not particularly efficient, because you're not reaching a lot of people and at best you may convert only one person on the spot.

But there is something out there which is telling quite a different story about our industry, and that is graffiti. We heard from Dr. Walsh earlier today that graffiti is a problem, but what I'd like to talk about today is not only why it's a problem but also offer some solutions. In doing so I would like to confront the culture of hopelessness and indifference that has brought us to the point where, on the train coming in from the airport, you see freight car after freight car covered with graffiti. And in some cases railroads ignore tagging and only re-stencil the car just to put the mandatory markings on the side of the car, but don't do anything else.

As background on our company, we've been involved in a lot of interesting railroads around the world ranging from Guatemala to Estonia. I'm proud my colleague Tamo Vahemets from Estonia is here: we started an Operation Lifesaver chapter in Estonia and created materials in a language is only spoken by 600,000 people. Some of the cool stuff that was done in Estonia including crashing a train into a Volvo for the press pretty early in the game. That was under Tamo's watch so it's great for us to be back together, and to see how Operation Lifesaver, which started in the USA with the Union Pacific, has morphed into something which is becoming a global force.



## Background

- Railroad Development Corporation
  - ❖ Interests in railways worldwide
  - ❖ Unique safety challenges ranging from culture to operating circumstances

Country	Entity	Business	Length Km (Miles)	Employees	Annual Stats
USA	Iowa Interstate	Freight	855 (536)	225 ±	36.1 million tons
	Pop-Up Metro	Transit	As Needed	5 ±	TBD
Peru	Ferrocarril Central Andino	Freight	535 (332)	588 ±	2.5 million tons
RDC AutoLog Syst	AutoLog Syst	Auto Shuttle	40 (25)	85 ±	250,000 vehicles
	RDC Asset GmbH	Passenger rolling stock leasing	N/A	20 ±	80 cars, sleepers, & couchettes
Germany	DB	AutofahrerZug Overnight Auto Train Charter Trains "Thunderbird" Services	900 (560)	40 ±	128 trains
	DB	Freight	As Needed	As Needed	As Needed
France	RegioRail	Freight	Various rail	60 ±	1.0 million tons
Belgium	EuroRail	Freight	6 warehouses and other services	60 ±	1.2 million tons
England	Viverail	Passenger rolling stock manufacturing	N/A	234 ±	N/A



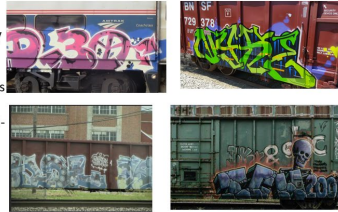
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There are a bunch of different countries and railroads up here but most important is that we focus on safety, and that drives everything; safety means quality, which means growth, which means profit, which means you're allowed to stay in business. Also, interesting is that in Germany I believe that we have become one of the most respected railway operators because of how we have handled all the challenges we encountered along the way.

## Graffiti; More serious of a problem than our industry acknowledges

- ❖ **Trespassing** violates railroad's rights of way
- ❖ **Quality** image of rail transportation compromised – loss of market share
- ❖ **Psychological Burden** on railway employees of injuries, etc. – not a victimless crime
- ❖ **Defined financially** human life valued at \$2-9 million in USA & Europe
  - ❖ Trespasser fatalities
  - ❖ Market share (Truck) fatalities



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But let's look at why Graffiti is more of a serious problem than our industry acknowledges, and let's start from the point that the industry does not acknowledge that it's a problem. Let's face it - this is not something that the industry talks about. It's background; its wallpaper; we're used to it; nothing can be done about it..... and I was even at a Class 1 railroad conference where their Chief Mechanical Officer said it looks kind of cool and the extra layers of paint prevent the cars from rusting. Yeah, he still has a job.

So there are multiple problems - and we've talked about this earlier - graffiti trespassing violates our rights of way; graffiti projects an image of bad quality and insecurity which is not accurate; and it places a psychological burden on our people because graffiti is not a victimless crime when perpetrators are injured or killed. A train driver's life is permanently altered when there are fatalities involved; this is not a victimless crime.

As an aside, one thing we also don't talk about is the value of a human life. But the US government itself does value human lives. The value last time I heard is roughly \$7 million, not be confused with France where the value of a human life about \$2 million. I got this from a fabulous book, which could only have come from France, the most definitive work I've ever seen on the subject; it's called High Speed Rail by Lebouef. It's in French so you can't get the English version unless you know somebody with the keys to the closet. But there are English language versions available if you have a library. It makes the case that a life is worth about \$2 million unless you're driving a car, in which case you are discounted because you've engaged in risky behavior.

So what does this say about people who commit vandalism on railroad tracks; is the value of somebody putting up graffiti lower than that of a train driver? Well, this is just me speaking individually, and I'm just saying how the French might look at it, but I believe if you follow the logic of the Lebouef book, yes, the life of somebody who's vandalizing railroad property is worth less than a train driver. So, why don't we talk about this more? Well, if you are in a public figure position this will come back to haunt you and it could be career ending. So, I'm guessing that's one of the reasons that this is not often discussed. Which is why it's so convenient for me as an American, using French analogies; "I've got it from book that came from France". Let your conscience be your guide.

So where do we go from here? I'm assuming at this point this is an audience of the converted. I don't think there's anybody here who is a fan of trespassing or violating grade crossings, or even graffiti. So where do we go from here?

## Our Culture of Hopelessness

- ❖ No obvious practical Solutions (*chemicals & hazmat suits don't count*)



- ❖ Dortmund Graffiti Supply Store-Really???



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From a culture of hopelessness, there are no obvious solutions, right? Here are some scenes from Europe. What do you do about graffiti? No problem! You just paint the trains with graffiti resistant paint and then, wearing hazmat suits, you coat the train with paint remover, let the residue pool into environmentally safe troughs and then you take it off to a disposal location. No Problem, because after all the government is paying for it. Except, that as you go around Europe, it's even worse in some cases than in the USA, because unlike the USA, most people in Europe travel by train. And when you come into iconic locations around the world, especially in major stations, like coming into Gare du Nord in Paris, your first vision of Paris is retaining walls with graffiti on them, I'm sorry to say. So, this is not just an American problem, its not a European problem; it's a world problem.

In Germany, I was walking around Dortmund about three months ago and came across a graffiti supply store! And so, what you see are the photos that I took in my random walk around Dortmund that night. You may walk into a station, and while there may be signs telling you, “please report graffiti” and “cooperate,” the fact is, there is a store that is operating with impunity in Dortmund. How is it possible that this could happen? Everybody knows “in America, it's a free for all”, right? We're a bunch of cowboys, but in Europe everybody obeys. Well, take a walk around Dortmund see what's going on.

And my favorite; it's also illegal for train passengers to wash windows! This even applies on Amtrak, where I believe a passenger got arrested for a cleaning a window. One of my colleagues in Germany told me, “It's illegal for railroad employees to wash windows.” So, again the culture of hopelessness - what do we do about it?

## How graffiti can be contained and ultimately defeated

### Community Level

- ❖ NYCTA – David Gunn  
“We do not permit graffiti.”



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Well, there is a historic precedent, and that was when David Gunn was president of the New York City Transit Authority in the 1970s when New York City was going down the toilet. Graffiti was out of control. And when I was working in New York City freight operations for Conrail, the movie, "Fort Apache - the Bronx" was being filmed a couple blocks away from Oak Point Yard, where I worked. It was absolutely hopeless and yet, one person beat graffiti; David Gunn. How did he do it? He did not tolerate it! Where there was graffiti, it was either painted over or the train went out of service and for whoever put the graffiti up, nobody saw their work.

But what happened next was that they then went out and started painting freight trains. There's a recent film "Rolling like Thunder," which documents the whole thing; how the New York City subway system, by being cleaned up, basically, displaced the graffiti people out into the freight world, and laid upon the rail freight industry a curse which we have not been able to shake off. But if it is a contained system with one person simply saying, "it's not going to be tolerated," No Problem! And I think New York City under Dave Gunn is a classic example of how it can be done.



But this is the real world, so let's go to my city of Pittsburgh where recently, in my neighborhood somebody's been out, not painting over the graffiti entirely but just defacing it. This person seems to be doing two things at once! First, disrespecting the person who did the graffiti - and if you watch the film "Rolling Like Thunder" the worst thing you can do as a graffiti person is paint over somebody's work. In this film, by the way, you'll see people who have been dismembered. One guy is in a wheelchair and he's still out painting trains, but the worst thing you can do - the worst disrespect you can do - is to paint over somebody's work.

So, somebody in Pittsburgh is actually going out and defacing the graffiti, which does two things – again, it sends a signal of disrespect to the person who put it up there, but it also does not create a blank canvas for the next person to come along. Because if you're going to paint on something like this you really need to repaint the whole wall by yourself before you put your own stuff up. So, taking that as a model - and by the way this is slowly being replicated around the city, other people seem to be doing this in different neighborhoods - it's a model that seems to be taking off. Call it copycat, or call it leadership by example, somebody has shown the way, in terms of how to do this as the community level.

So, remember at the beginning of the talk, I talked about community solutions as opposed to an industry problem? One of the great things about the US rail industry is that it's 600 privately owned local

railways, each coming up with different solutions; quite different by the way than the UK where with all due respect to Network Rail you've got one entity and there is only one way to do things, which is the Network Rail way. When you talk about infrastructure, imagine a country with 600 different railway companies, all trying different things. Rail freight marketing? That's a short line success story! Well, suppose we prioritize graffiti?



So, here are some recent photos of what somebody has done to freight cars. What you see here is graffiti that has been partially defaced, but otherwise left up so as not to create a canvas for the next person. My understanding is that this is being done without hazmat suits, without chemicals; it's basically using leftover latex paint from house projects, which cleans up with water, and just going out individually and defacing graffiti on freight cars. And because it's water based you just - this is my understanding - deface the graffiti and then wash your brush off on the spot with water. All it takes is a few minutes.

So the question is, how could this happen at the industry level? Suppose the US rail industry decided that we wanted to do something about graffiti. You really don't want a bunch of people who don't know the railroad environment to be on their railroad property, therefore it falls on us as a railroad community to decide if we want to do something like this.

I see a room full of people who are Operation Lifesaver volunteers and many who even work for railroad companies or have gone through some sort of protocol that allows them to work around railroads. And suppose you use the same methodology to empower individual railroad people who might be doing something like volunteering for Operation Lifesaver and asking some of them to take on graffiti and on a railroad by railroad basis see how it works out. Try it as a bottoms - up experiment, in parallel, in a bunch of different locations; that could be interesting. But here's the point - basic latex paint cleans up with water. Don't cover it all up, just show enough disrespect to the person who put it up; and don't create a canvas for the next person..... just like I see working in my city of Pittsburgh.

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Here's another example where somebody has actually gone to the extent of finding matching paint so that if you look at this car it almost looks like the car's painted that way, and who did this was kind enough to share that these are the basic tools: you've got some latex paint; you've got a brush; you've got a little jug of water to clean up; and off you go. And by the way this apparently was done in broad daylight so if you're out doing this in broad daylight safely under railroad protocols, what's the reaction from people walking by? My understanding is that this is well supported. And again, I think that railroad people are really the only people who are capable of pulling this off, because we don't want people who are not familiar with the railroad environment to be out on our properties.

So, in conclusion, there are a couple things to think about. What would railroad police departments think about this? They would not be trespassers – they are railroad people. What would the car owners think about that? Well, somebody already painted their cars - there's just a different color and an extra layer of paint has been added. Social justice impacts? What happens if a railroad police person inadvertently arrests a railroad employee of color: that's a problem! We're going to have to think about this very, very closely as there are all kinds of Unintended Consequences.

But here is the most important thing; we are the good guys; we are in the front lines; there are many more of them than they are of us. So that makes us the partisans, and the people who put up the graffiti are the invaders. So let me just close with a phrase which I learned in Guatemala; "It is easier to ask forgiveness than permission."

So, with that I hope I've made some points that you want to think about, and I would hope especially given the capacities of this audience that there might be some movement on the graffiti front as a result of what I have put forth here. Thank you very much!