

**AUTOMATIC COUPLERS AND  
POWER BRAKES: HEARING BEFORE  
THE COMMITTEE ON INTERSTATE  
AND FOREIGN COMMERCE OF  
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Automatic Couplers and Power Brakes: Hearing Before the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce of The House of Representatives by Various

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**VARIOUS**

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**AUTOMATIC COUPLERS AND POWER BRAKES.**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

*House*  
**COMMITTEE ON INTERSTATE AND FOREIGN COMMERCE**

OF

**THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

IN RELATION TO

**THE BILL FOR THE PROTECTION OF TRAINMEN AND OTHER RAILROAD EMPLOYÉS IN HANDLING LOCOMOTIVE ENGINES, FREIGHT TRAINS, AND FREIGHT CARS ENGAGED IN INTERSTATE COMMERCE; PROVIDING FOR THE ADOPTION AND USE OF A UNIFORM STANDARD AUTOMATIC CAR COUPLER, AND REGULATING THE OPERATION AND CONTROL OF FREIGHT TRAINS USED IN INTERSTATE COMMERCE, AND PROVIDING FOR THE GREATER SAFETY OF RAILROAD EMPLOYÉS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES; AND TO PROMOTE THE SAFETY OF EMPLOYÉS AND TRAVELERS BY COMPELLING COMMON CARRIERS ENGAGED IN INTERSTATE COMMERCE TO EQUIP THEIR CARS WITH AUTOMATIC COUPLERS AND CONTINUOUS BRAKES, AND THEIR LOCOMOTIVES WITH DRIVING-WHEEL BRAKES.**

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## PROTECTION OF TRAINMEN AND OTHER RAILROAD EMPLOYÉS, ETC.

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMITTEE,  
*February 18, 1892.*

(The first part of Mr. Haines's argument was not reported.)

Mr. H. S. HAINES, president of the American Railway Association:

GENTLEMEN: It is not for me to deliver you a lecture on constitutional law. I am here to treat the question practically, and, as I hope, to throw some light on it that will aid you in your consideration of these several bills. The moral that I want to draw—I may call it a moral, for whatever sanction there is for Congressional legislation on this subject is a moral sanction—is to protect the lives and the limbs of the railroad employés. Now, the officials of the Railroad Employés' Association are here; they will address you on this subject; they will, I think, tell you, as I have heard them tell others, that all they ask in this world is that it shall be safe for them to go on in the ordinary conduct of their business. They will call your attention to statistics that have been gathered on this subject by the Interstate Commerce Commission which will show that during the last year there were three or four hundred men killed in this coupling of cars, and seven thousand, I think, more or less seriously injured in limbs and bodies. This is a thing that has been before the minds of the managers of these railroad companies in all these years, and this is the result of the solicitous consideration that they have given to this matter. That result stands before you in those two models there.

Mr. STORER. If it is not only constitutional but feasible for Congress to compel the use of a certain kind of car-coupler for the benefit and safety of the employés, would, in your judgment as a railroad man, Congress have the same power to interfere and regulate the method of heating cars, so as to prevent passengers from being burned up?

Mr. HAINES. I should think what would be a good reason in one case would be good in the other. In one case it is the protection of the lives and limbs of employés and in the other the protection of the public generally.

Now, I want to say that the test which you should apply to any proposed legislation is this: What you would be required to do in the interest of these people who are being injured? The test should be, Are you required to lay down a law distinctly as to this or that particular pattern? Are you required to lay down a law as to this or that type? Now, I say no, and I think I can show you why. The man who manipulates that coupler has no interest whatever in the type or locking device or any of the parts connected with it. He can handle it and know nothing about its internal construction, what its lines are, or anything of that kind. Why? Because all he requests is that he shall not be required to go in between the cars to do the coupling. If he can handle those cars in the performance of his duties so that he is not required to

go in between them, that is all that concerns him. That is all he needs to know about it, and he will tell you that himself. How does that affect this question? I am going to show you.

All these interlocking devices are required to be manipulated in one and the selfsame way; that is to say, a man comes alongside of the car and there is a rod which sticks out (unfortunately this model is too small to show you this)—I can show you better on the drawing—but there is a rod that stands off from the car connected with the locking device here [illustrating], and comes to the side of the car and is turned by a crank. When he turns it it unlocks, and when he lets it loose it locks; and so long as the rod is in the same place it is a very simple thing for the switchman to couple and uncouple the cars. That is all that concerns that man; if he will stand there he is safe, and it will perform all that would be expected of him to perform and all that we expect the coupler to perform. Therefore, it seems to me that it is proper for me to impress that idea upon your mind, for in the interest of humanity you are not called on to prescribe a pattern—one pattern out of five or six thousand; you are not called on to prescribe a pattern out of four or five thousand of this type. You are simply to decide what type should be used, if you think you should do anything.

I hope that I make this subject clear. If you gentlemen will take this pattern here it will show you how this rod comes out to the edge of the car.

MR. PATTERSON. Has the Interstate Commerce Commission made any report in respect to this matter; that is, made any recommendation in respect to legislation in regard to it?

MR. HAINES. I was about to relate the history of attempted legislation up to this time, but before doing so I wanted to apply a measure, what I call a yardstick, to all these bills. Now, I say, therefore, in the interest of humanity, all that you are called on to require, if you are called on to require anything, is that the man shall not be required to go in between the cars to couple them in the ordinary performance of his duties.

THE CHAIRMAN. Mr. Haines, I do not wish to limit you at all, but I will ask you to make your points as quickly as possible, because of the large number of parties who wish to be heard.

MR. HAINES. It is a pretty broad subject and I am trying to get over it as rapidly as possible.

A MEMBER. Your association represents how many miles?

MR. HAINES. One hundred and twenty-two thousand.

A MEMBER. And how many miles are there in this country?

MR. HAINES. One hundred and seventy thousand miles in this country.

A MEMBER. Then this association does not cover the whole mileage?

MR. HAINES. No, and no other body here covers anything like that much.

MR. O'NEILL. There is a difference in cars, I believe, and do you know of any one invention to-day or number of inventions that could be applied to all cars alike—any single drawbar coupler that could be applied to all cars?

MR. HAINES. I do not see why this would not. [Referring to a model on the table.] This type would do because the coupler has nothing to do with it when fastened on the car. This is attached to another device.

MR. O'NEILL. This one opens from the side?

MR. HAINES. All of them open from the side; all out of the four or five hundred.

MR. O'NEILL. Are you aware, Mr. Haines, that more men were killed last year from falling from the tops of cars than from coupling cars?

Mr. HAINES. Undoubtedly.

Mr. O'NEILL. Have you thought of anything in connection with trying to save human life on that line?

Mr. HAINES. A great deal might be said which did not seem to be germane to this particular question of couplers, and so I did not speak in regard to it. And a great deal of what I had to say in regard to couplers you will find applicable to the question generally.

I am going to come now to the question of legislation. The Interstate Commerce Commission did take this matter up. They invited members of all the State commissions to come to a convention, and they came together and appointed a committee on safety appliances, and that committee on safety appliances was instructed to prepare and present a bill on this subject. That committee called a meeting and invited all those interested in this matter to attend. That committee meeting was held in New York, in the Chamber of Commerce rooms, and we were invited to be present. We came there and discussed this matter. The officials of the associations of railroad employes were there, and we had a very general and very pleasant discussion of this whole matter. There were no two sides to it. It was all on one side. These gentlemen were then to prepare a bill, and then they were to call us together again and show us their bill and see what we thought of it. They did not call us until day before yesterday. It seems there was a hearing before the Senate committee yesterday, and the day before that they called us hastily to appear before them. We came then. Much to my surprise they did not have a bill. They had *several* bills. It seemed to have been so many men with so many minds. After having discussed all this matter they were unable themselves to agree on any bill that they would present to Congress.

Now, the officials of the associations of railroad employes have had this subject up and their general idea seems to be that this is a matter that concerns them only in one respect, and that is that they shall be able to perform their duties with safety to themselves. That the selection of the device, the character of it, belongs to men who have to spend the money to put it on the car, and so long as they are protected in the discharge of their duties by not being required to go in between the cars to couple them it is not for them to say what should be the character of the device.

Now, the idea of some, if there is to be any legislation at all, seems to be that there shall be a commission appointed which shall pick out some one coupler; that the expense of this commission in their elaborate investigation shall be paid for by an appropriation, and that that coupler, if it is a patented device, shall be paid for by the United States and made a present to us all. Now, if that was done the commission would probably select just such a coupler as that is. It would be no better coupler. But if we are allowed to go on the line we are going on, of a type, that would leave the matter of improvement open and would simply provide a rod to extend to the edge of the car so that the man need not go in between the cars.

The Massachusetts legislature attempted legislation of this kind in 1884. The legislature passed a law in which they gave to their commission the right to say that certain couplers and no others should be adopted. Well, they went all over this question. I could read you pages in this book, a Massachusetts committee report, showing how they went into this thing. They finally issued an order naming four or five couplers. Do you know, those four or five would not couple together. The different couplers would not couple. Now, that was a



dead letter, and Massachusetts to-day is further behind in this question of the coupler than any other State, except, perhaps, New England generally.

In 1886 New York did the same thing. They passed a law on this subject which is just as dead as the one passed in Massachusetts.'

Now, look at the commissions we have had on this thing. We have had the very best ability that the railroads could pay for in this country. We have had them at work on it for years. Their action has been supervised by the highest managing officers of the very best railroads in this country. They have spent hundreds and thousands of dollars and that is what they have come to. Now, I say you can not go back on what we have done. You can not expect us after we have nearly two hundred thousand cars equipped this way out of a million, and we are going on with this work at a rate that, I say, inside of four or five years will sweep the link and pin out of existence. You can not ask us to go back on this thing. If you are going to do anything, you have got to legalize what we have done. You must do that if anything.

Mr. LIND. Excuse me, but I came in a little late and I would like to ask if you do not represent the railroads in this matter?

Mr. HAINES. Yes, sir.

Mr. LIND. Do you advocate a special coupler?

Mr. HAINES. I advocate five hundred different kinds. Now, I say that this is the result of the management of 122,000 miles of railroad in this country. That this type, not that pattern or this, but this type, which embraces some five hundred couplers, is the type they have selected. Now, if you legalize anything you should not legalize this one or that one or any one of the dozen I have here, but you should legalize that type of a coupler.

Mr. COOMBS. If any legislation at all is to be passed, you would recommend a law to prohibit the use of any coupler that would not work from the side of the car?

Mr. HAINES. I am going to say what I would recommend. I want to say to you that any commission you appoint can not do anything more than what we have done.

Mr. O'NEILL. Of course, we know the commission is a very fair one, but we have not the advantage of all their work before us. Do you not think that among all the patterns, thousands of which have expired, many of which are involved in different patents—in other words, that a commission could take out of the various inventions part of one and part of another, and from them get a perfect or as nearly a perfect coupler as possible, and have that recognized as the United States standard coupler?

Mr. HAINES. I think they could take part of one coupler and part of another and make a good coupler. That is just what we have done. We have taken part of one coupler and part of another and have decided that the couplers should be of this type—that is the vertical hook type. Then we have prescribed certain lines that they must have so that they will couple together.

Mr. O'NEILL. I am under the impression that three-fourths of the lives lost and injuries sustained are caused by the absence of safety rails on the tops of cars and safety rails at the ends of cars. I believe that two-thirds of those men were injured because they have nothing on earth to catch hold of when they slip or the train moves. If there was a rail along the side of the car and at each end of the car, so that a man would have a chance to catch hold of it, there would not be anything like so many accidents. If there was a rail on the top of the

car, so that when a man slips from the slanting footboard, he would have some chance to catch himself—

A MEMBER. I do not see just what that has to do with the question of coupling.

Mr. O'NEILL. It has this to do with couplers: When you are dealing with the question of couplers it is a mere matter of an invention to save human life, and if that can be accomplished by rails on the tops and sides of cars it is a matter to be considered in that connection.

Mr. HAINES. It would be no use having that if we did not want him to go between the cars. We will furnish a rod, to be operated from the side of the car, which any gentleman here could easily manipulate.

Mr. LIND. There are successful car couplers on some of the Western roads.

Mr. HAINES. There are two hundred thousand automatic couplers in use on freight cars. But there are a number of devices, and as long as they will couple together I do not think Congress ought to prescribe any particular one. As long as the man can stand at the side of the car I do not think it in the interest of humanity that you are called on to go farther than to prescribe that the man shall be able to manipulate the coupler without going in between the cars.

Now, I have gotten to this point that I have shown you that no commission can do better than the commissions the railroads have had at work on this subject. If the air brake had been stopped by legislation at the time when Westinghouse first put it on the Pennsylvania Railroad, we would have been 'way behind the times. But we went further; and Mr. Westinghouse has got such an application of his idea, has so far perfected it, that as soon as a train parts the brakes apply themselves automatically and stop both sections of the train. It is a most valuable improvement. I would show you what the English board of trade arrived at on that subject. They said it was useless for legislation to attempt to interfere in the details of invention; that would simply stop it, and that the only effect would be to prevent improvements.

Now, I want to say that a commission, which is a favored idea of legislation, could not collect any more information or do more than we have. Ours is the very best commission that could possibly exist. It is a commission that has an area of 120,000 miles in which to operate. It is their own property, that is, the property of the stockholders; and this is their conclusion, that is, that a certain type of coupler, of which there are five hundred different patterns in existence, will meet the situations and requirements by having a rod put on them, so that they can be handled from the side of the car without injury to the switchman.

The next idea is that a time shall be fixed, admitting that all I have said is true, at which this thing shall be done. Every man who has a bill in which he has included a limit has a different limit, and the limits range from six months to ten years. Now, all I can tell you is that we think this work is going on satisfactorily. Nearly one-fifth of the cars of the United States are so equipped. Now, what time shall be fixed? Shall it be ten years? We could not wait ten years for it. I do not think we are going to wait five. I think of their own volition the railroad companies of this country are going to do this thing inside of any reasonable limit that may be made.

Mr. PATTERSON. What limit would you suggest?

Mr. HAINES. I would not care to make one. But I will give you a limit which I would suggest as proper from my own experience. As

soon as the railroads which are in line with this improvement—and I have told you that by far the largest mileage in this country is in this association—as soon as they get their own cars, a sufficient number of them, equipped with this type they will put a regulation into effect that they will not receive cars that have not couplers of a like type. They are going to say, We are not going to have our men mashed up any more. We can protect our men and we do not require them to go in between cars to couple cars, and if our neighbor comes with an old coupler we won't take the car if our man has to go in between the cars. Some one will say, How can you do that? When I hear that said I feel very much like replying as Columbus did in regard to the egg as to how he would stand it on its end. It is done. Let a man come here with a passenger car with a link and pin coupler and see if it would be hauled. The car inspectors would put a chalk mark on that car and that would be the last of it. It is being done to-day on freight cars that are not equipped with air brakes. If the car has not got air brakes that settles it. Therefore I say that the lines in line with us on this subject will finally say they can not continue to have their men hurt by the use of the old couplers, and having paid for the automatic coupler on their own cars they will put a chalk mark on the cars not provided with them. We are persuading the other lines to come in with us. If you fix this limit for them I am afraid you will make it too far ahead and they will wait until the last moment. I think we can fix it for ourselves just as soon as we get a sufficient number of our cars equipped.

Mr. LIND. It is conceded, then, that the automatic or air brakes that are now applied to freight cars are a success, are they not?

Mr. HAINES. No, sir.

A MEMBER. Have you read the bill introduced by Mr. Henderson, of Iowa, in the House? He fixes five years in that bill for this law to go into effect and also provides for the principle that you contend for. I would like to ask you if you think five years would be too long a time.

Mr. HAINES. It would not be too long a time to make it a penal offense. We are pushing the work just as fast as we can. Possibly as soon as we get these couplers applied largely to our own equipment—I would not like to say it outside of this room—but when the American Railway Association gets along to the right position they will probably say to their friends on the outside that they can not afford to have their men mashed up.

Therefore, I say that no commission you can appoint will accomplish any more than ours has already accomplished. No committee can hasten the time in which this work will have been accomplished. We are going along now from one to the other, and it is not an easy matter to couple that kind of coupler to the link and pin coupler. And so long as the link and pin couplers exist men will be hurt in manipulating the automatic coupler in connection with the link and pin, and they will complain of the automatic coupler. They will say we can handle the old link and pin coupler better. But this will not be true when there are no link and pin couplers left.

Mr. PATTERSON. If I understand you, there is no legislation needed?

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Haines, I will have to ask you to be as brief as possible.

Mr. HAINES. I am going to make my last point now.

The CHAIRMAN. I would like to inform the committee that we have authority to sit while the House is in session.