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Mr. Milton H. Siegle, Jr.
Asst. Vice-President Labor Relations
The BNSF Railway Company
Post Office Box 961030
Fort Worth, Texas 76161-0030

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File: Missed Calls

This letter is written in response to the Carrier's intent to reduce the grace period for missed calls from twenty (20) minutes to ten (10) minutes. While we understand that BNSF retains some managerial discretion in this matter, we feel this change is misguided.

While the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) does not specifically address a grace period, there is a significant amount of past practice that indicates that twenty (20) minutes is a reasonable amount of time. When the CBA was written the only type of communication in use were land-line telephones. As technology improved employees were able to use answering machines that would alert them when they had missed an incoming call. Finally, with the invention of pagers and cellular phones, employees were able to "cut the cord" and tend to routine business and family affairs while still remaining available for call. The problem is, and has always been, technology is not perfect.

Many of us have been on call since long before cell phones. We have even been on call since long before pagers, and in all these years, many of us have never missed a call. With only ten minutes to accept a call, that would not be the case. Many of our members live in rural areas, perhaps an hour away from work. Now, they can be driving to work in anticipation of being there early to take care of business and miss a call. This will happen because they are in an area with no cell service for at least ten minutes while en-route. Or, they could make a trip to the bathroom to shower and prepare for an anticipated call. By the time they are done they may have already missed a call. At the away from home terminal, in anticipation of an impending call, say they walked over to Wal-Mart to buy some lunch for the trip. In the 15 or 20 minutes spent inside that building, where cell service is sketchy at best, they could find themselves looking for a way to get home because guess what, they just missed a call. In the past, if we knew our ability to communicate would be interrupted, we would contact the Crew Caller and advise him/her of the situation. It was a system that worked for both parties. Is the Carrier prepared to staff the Crew Office with enough Crew Callers to handle the increase in calls if employees return to that old practice?

Unfortunately, this personal interaction has been lost as BNSF moves toward an automated process. There is little or no communication between employees and Crew Callers. Line-ups do not accurately forecast the on-duty time. And employees still must balance the needs of their families with the complexity of being on 24/7 call. We recognize that this company is trying to go completely automated, but the people living this life on call are not automatons. They are

flesh and blood humans and they live in a world where technology is not as reliable as we all would like. Even the Carrier's own systems are far from infallible. We continue to hear numerous complaints about problems with the VRU. Employees tell us that the system routinely malfunctions. Often the employee's voice is not recognized or they are misinterpreted. This causes delays in receiving and returning calls that are wholly outside the employee's control. A ten minute grace period is absolutely unreasonable.

Undoubtedly, this change will result in lost earnings and increased discipline for employees. The Carrier will see reduced productivity while the employee is held off his job/board for extended periods of time. There are simply too many ways to accidentally miss a call under the reduced threshold. It simply takes longer than ten (10) minutes to do many routine tasks that, invariably, take us away from our phones. We are certain that some of the missed calls that occur as a result of this change will be due to factors over which the employee has no control. For example, many states prohibit the use of a cell phone while driving and it could easily take more than 10 minutes to find a freeway exit and safely park to return a call. The phone must be turned off in hospitals. Cellular phones cannot be used in theaters. There are numerous "dead spots" in rural (and urban for that matter) areas. We certainly hope, in these situations, the Carrier will consider the individual circumstances before issuing a charge letter. Unfortunately, our past experience would indicate otherwise.

In short, we believe the ten (10) minute threshold is unreasonable. We believe it will prove unproductive for the Carrier and will diminish the quality of life for the employee. There may even be a backlash, though we certainly do not advocate it. Many employees who receive short calls in the future may no longer be willing to report as soon as possible when a hot train is called on short time. These employees may instead take their entire 1-2 hours of contractual time to report for duty. We also caution the Carrier against miss calling an engineer within 10 minutes of the calling if the call is more than 10 minutes longer the contractual calling period.


The fact that the Carrier made this change with no input from this Organization is disheartening. At the very least, we would have welcomed an opportunity to discuss the concerns with the twenty (20) minute grace period before BNSF took unilateral action that changes fifty (50) years of past practice.

Fraternally,


BLET General Chairman


BLET General Chairman


BLET General Chairman


BLET General Chairman

Cc: Mike Priester, VP BLET