



SURFACE
TRANSPORTATION
BOARD

The Rail Customer and Public Assistance Program





The Board established the Rail Customer and Public Assistance Program to provide the public with informal access to agency staff and expertise, and to expand the opportunity for private-sector, voluntary resolution of rail operational and service-related issues. The office also answers questions pertaining to Board regulations and procedures.

The Program has become one of the Board's most successful forums for resolving problems experienced by consumers of railroad transportation service and others by:

- Identifying and narrowing disputes between railroads and their customers;
- Facilitating informal, private-sector dispute resolution, without litigation, wherever possible; and
- Enhancing communication among rail transportation stakeholders and promoting rail-service improvements.

Who may use the program?

Anyone who has a problem, question or concern falling within the Board's area of expertise. Because the inquiries are informal, matters addressed are not strictly limited by the Board's jurisdictional bounds. The Program's staff has handled a wide range of inquiries from a variety of small,



medium, and large shippers transporting regulated and unregulated commodities by rail. In addition to addressing problems between railroads and their customers, the Program staff also has resolved concerns arising between one railroad and another railroad, and has answered a broad array of inquiries from municipal, county, and state governments.



What types of issues do Program staff address?

The Program's staff has handled thousands of rail-customer matters of all types since the Program's inception in November 2000, including:

- Rates and other charges
- Employee concerns
- Car supply and service issues
- Demurrage claims
- Interchange issues
- Community concerns
- Claims for damages
- Informational needs

How does the process work?

The Program's complaint-handling process typically begins when the agency receives a telephone call, e-mail or fax from, for example, a rail customer. A Program staff member will respond as quickly as possible, usually within 24 hours of receiving the inquiry. If necessary, Program staff will contact the customer initially to discuss the inquiry and obtain further information. Then, Program staff will assess the information the customer has provided and advise the customer as to what services the Program might be able to offer. Rail customers seeking assistance through the Rail Customer and Public Assistance Program can choose to: (1) seek guidance from Program staff without the involved railroad being contacted; (2) have Program staff contact the railroad without identifying the customer; or (3) permit Program staff to contact the railroad and identify the customer. In most situations, the customer gives Program staff permission to contact the railroad and reveal the customer's identity. Whichever option a customer chooses to pursue, all customer communications with Board staff are kept strictly confidential unless the customer gives approval for staff to contact a railroad on the customer's behalf.

In response to a rail customer's complaint, the Program's staff typically will contact the railroad involved, outline the problem (either identifying the customer, or not, according to the customer's wishes), and discuss the matter with the railroad.



Program staff will then determine if the customer's problem can be readily resolved, or if some middle ground can be found that is mutually satisfactory to both the railroad and the customer. At this point, the staff member will communicate with all involved parties to seek to secure an informal solution to the problem. Because the Program is informal, Board staff cannot order

a specific resolution or outcome through the Program, nor does the Office of Public Assistance, Governmental Affairs, and Compliance provide opinions or rulings on rail-customer matters. If a resolution cannot be reached, the parties always retain the right to bring a formal dispute before the Board in which the Program staff will not participate.

Contacting the Rail Customer and Public Assistance Program

Customers are invited to contact the Board's Office of Public Assistance, Governmental Affairs, and Compliance and its Rail Customer and Public Assistance Program by telephoning **(202) 245-0238**, or toll-free at **(866) 254-1792**; faxing to **(202) 245-0461**; or by e-mailing **rcpa@stb.dot.gov**. Additional information is provided on the agency's home page, at **www.stb.dot.gov**.

About the Surface Transportation Board

The Surface Transportation Board is an economic regulatory agency charged by Congress with the fundamental missions of resolving freight railroad rate and service disputes, adjudicating proposed rail mergers, and reviewing other rail restructuring transactions such as rail line purchases, constructions, and abandonments. In addition to these duties, the Board has jurisdiction over certain trucking company and moving van rate matters; certain rate matters involving ocean carriers in the noncontiguous domestic trade (that is, transportation between the U.S. mainland and Alaska, Hawaii, and various U.S. territories); certain intercity bus company structure, financial, and operational matters; and rates and services of certain pipelines not regulated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

About the Office of Public Assistance, Governmental Affairs, and Compliance

This office serves as the Board's principal point of contact with the U.S. Congress, state and local governments, news media, railroads, shippers, receivers, attorneys, labor interests, trade associations, landowners, and the general public. As such, the office provides information and addresses concerns, complaints, and inquiries about all matters before the Board. The office's staff has extensive experience in rail operations, marketing, analysis, tariffs and rates. This expertise enables the staff to quickly assess and understand the nature of rail-shipper issues and operational problems. The office brings this experience to bear in the Board's Rail Customer and Public Assistance Program.





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