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_Courting the Iron Horse: How the United States Enacted Limited Controls Over the Railroads in the Second World War_

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Honors Thesis Abstract

This thesis explores the extent of US Government control over the railroads during the Second World War. The purpose of this project is to discover how much government regulation there was regarding the railroads and how intrusive it was. This is achieved by looking over government documents between 1930 and 1950. These documents were reviewed and were assessed on how intrusive they were or were not and also the period in which they were wrote, during the war or before or after, was also taken into account. The findings of this thesis were that the US Government did increase its control over the railroads during the war but nowhere near as much as it had taken control of the railroads during World War I. The thesis also found that the government quickly handed the control it had taken back to the railroads after the war was over. This thesis is significant because the topic of government regulation and how much or how little is necessary is still very relevant today.
Courting the Iron Horse:
How the United States Enacted Limited Controls Over the Railroads in the Second World War

A Thesis Submitted to the
University Honors Program
In Partial Fulfillment of the
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Department of
History

By

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The Second World War was a time when Americans answered the call to duty and American industry stepped up to take on the gargantuan task of producing and moving the Arsenal of Democracy to where it was needed most. Trucks, tanks, cars, halftracks, planes, submarines and ships of a variety of sizes and purposes were produced in vast numbers as part of the war effort. In Europe Hitler’s armies marched against the Soviet Union and England after securing the rest of the continent. In Asia, the Japanese moved against China and a number of European colonial holdings. American weapons and war machines helped to supply the besieged Allied forces in both theaters before America’s official entry and after, easing the stress on the wartime industries of the Allied powers. In order to construct the tanks, planes, and ships needed to fight the war, vast amounts of material needed to be moved. Coal, rubber, oil, iron ore, precious and rare earth metals all needed to be moved in herculean amounts to feed the leviathan that was the munitions production industry. Then the weapons often needed to be shipped themselves to ports or airbases where they would be moved to their final destinations. The easiest way to move so much raw material and finished product was via the steel arteries of America’s railways. During the war, the US government played the vital role of coordinating the efforts of the many American railroads into one cohesive operation.

The role that the US government played with regards to railroads during World War II was not that of a supreme administrator which directly controlled all aspects of the railroads for the duration of the conflict, but instead it was that of coordinator and vigilant advisor. The US government was less interested in the details of how the railroads moved products and more interested in that the railroads moved them in a timely and efficient manner. This style of management and regulation developed out of the experience of American railroads under the uncharacteristically controlling bureaucracy that was developed for the similar task of ensuring
This paper examines the Congressional records regarding rules and regulations applied to railroads during World War II. The role that the US Government played with regards to railroads during World War II was not that of a supreme administrator which directly controlled all aspects of the railroads for the duration of the conflict but instead it was that of coordinator and vigilant advisor. The US Government was less interested in the details of how the railroads moved products and more interested in that the railroads moved them in a timely and efficient manner. This style of management and regulation developed out of the experience of American railroads under the uncharacteristically controlling bureaucracy that was developed for the similar task of ensuring the cooperation of the railroads in the First World War. This first effort to control American railroads in a time of war ended with a general consensus that the government had intruded too far into the railroads operations. From my investigation of the government documents, it appears that the government officials targeted specific categories that they believed would best help to mobilize the war economy and did not take any efforts to expand beyond these narrow categories.

The historiography available on this subject is somewhat limited, mostly due to the more casual nature of many of the works on American railroads, but what work there is can be placed into two large categories of American railroads in general and regulation of American railroads and one smaller less developed category of American railroads in times of war. While there are vast amounts of books dedicated to American railroads, the number of scholarly monographs and papers are far fewer in number. Many of the books suffer from the problem mentioned before that they are written by someone who is interested in the subject but not trained in the historical
methods necessary to make an in-depth evaluation of the subject. There are, however, a number of well written works that make critical assessments of the development of railroads in the United States, how government regulation has affected the railroads, and how the railroads preformed in the times of war. John F. Stover’s *American Railroads*, originally published in 1961 with a revised edition in 1997 extending the range of its assessment to the middle to late 1980’s, reflects the view of railroads as the engine that helped to propel the American economy, the gateway to the west and as a vital part of the American tapestry both materially and in the imagination of the country. Stover stresses that the railroads were instrumental in the development of nation and points out that changes in America could be seen reflected in changes in the nature of the railroads. Stover’s work approves of level of coordination and collaboration between the US Government and the American railroads. A counterpoint to this view is presented by authors such as Patrick O’Brian, *The New Economic History of the Railways* (1977). He stresses that railways, especially those in America, Great Britain, and Russia did not foster growth as much as they are traditionally credited with and that traditional ways of transportation such as waterways provided were more important to industrialization and modernization in these countries. These views are quite controversial because of how they directly contradict the fundamental assumptions that many prior historians took that railroads played in integral and important part in development in the industrialized world. Both of these two camps deal with the influence that railroads played on the development of America or at the very least the perceived notion thereof. Those who believe that the railroads played a vital role in the world’s development are in the majority and are widely perceived as being the more significant group.¹

The most important books that directly address the American railroads efforts in the Second World War are John Westwood's *Railways at War* (1980) and S. Kipp Farrington's *Railroads at War* (1944). Both of these works take a very positive view of the American railroads cooperation with the US government during periods of war. This body of works believes that the American railroads operated at their best efficiency when they were allowed to remain in control of their industry. This conclusion is drawn in these works based on the observations of the war immediately prior to it, World War I, where the US government seized control of the railroads for the duration of the war and the railroads were felt to have been misused, underutilized, and generally less efficient than they could have been in a time of war had they remained separate from the federal government. Most works that examine and discuss railroads in World War II appear to be in agreement that the limited government control was responsible for the overwhelmingly positive conduct of American railways during the war effort.²

With regards to railroads and regulation there are two most influential camps, those who believe that the railroads needed to be regulated and those who felt that the railroads did not need regulation. These two groups approach the same topic from different angles. Those such as Paul W. MacAvoy and James Sloss, *Regulation of Transportation Innovation* 1967, found that in some cases regulation of railroads by government organizations made it harder for railroads to make a profit, especially with regards to their studied topic of coal transportation. Their conclusion that the government's one size fits all approach was to the detriment of certain

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² John Westwood, *Railways at War*, (San Diego: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 1980); S. Kipp Farrington *Railroads at War*, (New York: Coward-McCann, 1944)
railroads while others were not effected as much or at all shows that government regulation does not always take into consideration all of the operators and all of their different unique circumstances. The other group’s approach is split into two smaller groups, one that felt that railroads needed to be regulated in order to prevent dire consequences in the form of unfair or even non-competition and another group that felt that the railroads actually benefited from the government efforts to regulate them. Authors such as Jack High, Regulation: Economic Theory and History (1991), argue that certain railroads benefited greatly from government attempts to regulate the industry. The two ways of looking at the topic of regulation seem to be equally split with some supporting the approach that regulation hurt the railroads and some supporting the idea that regulation was necessary even maybe beneficial to the railroads.3

The last category of writings regarding American railroads during the Second World War has a very limited amount of academic level quality work. Most notable are John Westwood’s Railways at War (1980) and S. Kipp Farrington’s Railroads at War (1944). Both of these works take a very positive view of the American railroads during periods of war. In both works the efforts of American railroads are seen as paramount to the success of the war efforts, particularly with regards to the efforts of the Union during the Civil War which is regarded as one of the reasons that the Northern war effort was more successful than the Southern one, Union railways were better equipped and standardized.4

In order to make an assessment of the extent of the government involvement in railroad affairs in World War II this paper makes use of the available transcripts of government meetings

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4 John Westwood, Railways at War, (San Diego: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 1980); S. Kipp Farrington Railroads at War, (New York: Coward-McCann, 1944)
convened regarding the railroads from the period 1920 to 1950. A focus is placed on documents that directly regard how much and in what ways the government should attempt to regulate the railroads. These documents are the records of government meetings concerning legislation passed that affect the railroads and demonstrate how the government went about determining the validity of claims of unfairness by the various parties affected by the passage of the laws and regulations. These documents provided a wealth of information on how the government enacted controls during the war and before the war and how the process of review of these laws was carried out. The level of insight that the documents provide is vital to the understanding of what were the limits of the government involvement and the documents also illustrate how the congress went about determining if a particular area of government control needed to be expanded upon or if it needed to be tapered.

*Railroads in the First World War*

The US became involved in the First World War in 1917. With this entry into war the US mobilized for a truly modern industrial war for the first time. While America had prior experience with operating railroads during a war in the American Civil War, the war effort in the First World War required a far larger coordination of railroads across the whole nation moving resources from all parts of the US to the important ports of embarkation towards Europe as well as moving vital war material to all points. It was an experience that was new to America and prior precedents were not so easily applied to the situation that faced the country in the First World War.
The organization of the railroad at this time was both highly competitive and incredibly diverse. Most major cities were serviced by multiple railroads and major hubs, such as Chicago, could have dozens of railroads operating within its limits. These railroads more often or not provided both passenger and freight service to the areas that they serviced which resulted in a number of redundant trains moving between the same towns simply because one railroad was attempting to compete with another. This intense competition not only created a number of redundancies in America's rail network but also meant that there was very little cooperation between rival railroads beyond simple transfer procedures moving freight from one location to another.\(^5\)

The US government was largely apprehensive about allowing the railroads to operate independently of each other during a time of national emergency. America was pitted against a foreign power in a truly industrial war against an opponent who was equally industrialized and fully mobilized for the war effort for the first time. The railroads were still independent of each other as America entered the war properly in 1917. The railroad infrastructure had suffered from the effects of decreased investment and decreased revenues due to the shipping rate caps that had been imposed on the railroads. The railroads were trying their best to handle the war effort but because of the lack of coordination and preparation they were unable to swiftly shift to a wartime footing.

Fears of rivalries or fights over the movement of goods and of peace time activities such as multiple trains scheduled to move between the same towns during a similar period of time

prompted the US Government to seize full control over the major operations end of the railroads for the duration of the war effort under the control of the United States Railroad Administration (USRA). This institution was not created or planned before the war effort but was instead created by President Woodrow Wilson in December of 1917 to address the issues of inter-railroad cooperation and also to ensure that the railroads simultaneously modernized their fleets of locomotives and facilities while also not taking advantage of the wartime situation to rise prices. The distribution of facilities necessary for the operation of a transcontinental supply system, mostly concentrated on lines owned by the larger railroads, also was grounds for the US Government to seize control of the railroads in the national interest to insure that goods could be effectively moved and locomotives and equipment properly maintained regardless of the owning railroads capability to do so. The USRA essentially nationalized the American railroads for the duration of the war. The railroads still managed day to day operations and still maintained their executives but the scheduling, purchasing, and routing was largely placed into the hands of government appointed overseers.⁶

The USRA officials placed in charge of the operations of the railroads put an end to a number of practices that were part of the nature of the competition between railroads in peace time. Aspects of competition such as trains running the same route across different railroads were changed in favor of a smaller number of trains that were better filled to capacity without taking any regards to the owner of the train that was making the run under the control of the government officials. The railroads had, for the most part, any form of formal competition between them ended for the duration of the war and the post war demobilization process. On

paper they were still separate entities, yet they were managed by the USRA as one. The nature of the railroads as profit seeking entities was likewise put on hold for the length of government control. The railroads were required to use their existing wealth and the wealth earned during the war to make the purchases outlined by the government officials.\(^7\)

One of the biggest problems that the USRA management of railroads during World War I created was the lack of keeping in mind that each of the railroads were still fundamentally a business in their own right. The USRA lacked the incentive to maximize each individual railroads profit in favor of running the system as one large network. This approach towards running the railroads resulted in the USRA taking steps such as moving freight over the shortest distances. While this may seem to be logical when taking the larger war effort into consideration, it can cause situations were a particular railroads right-of-way is used far more than it was originally intended to because of all of the additional traffic sent over it.\(^8\)

One of the results of the government being put in control of the railroads during World War I was the creation of a government board with in the USRA to create a standardized set of locomotives and railcars to be built for the railroads, what has come to be known as the USRA standard. This USRA standard sought to provide locomotives in the numbers necessary to support the increase in the demand of shipping by the war effort. Most railroads lacked the shops and construction knowhow to build their own locomotives, they could maintain them, but lacked the capabilities to outright build them. The railroads instead relied on placing orders with the major manufactures (the big three being Baldwin Locomotive Works, American Locomotive Company, and Lima Locomotive Works) either based on specifications that they placed or

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\(^7\) Westwood. 78-83.

picking from a variety of locomotives that they builder had previously commissioned for other railroads. The US Government seized creative control of the new locomotive construction process and commissioned a series of standard locomotives, known as the USRA standard locomotives, that would be universally produced by all of the large manufacturers. These locomotives primary goal was to provide railroads with desperately needed modern locomotives that were necessary to move the huge volumes of material that was tied to the war effort. The locomotives, being conveniently standardized, were to also be easy to repair because of universally uniform parts from one railroad to another. These requirements may have been in the best interest of the country, but often left railroads with locomotives that may have been ill-suited to the tasks that they were needed for or to the terrain that they were destined to operate on. The government may have been able to meet its immediate needs but the railroads were ultimately left with the bill for the locomotives and a good many executives were unhappy with the resulting locomotives. The specifications that were deemed to be sufficient for the government purposes may have suited some railroads just fine. However, the same locomotive could be vastly more powerful than a small operator may have required or not powerful enough or incapable of making it over the large distances between refueling stations for another. The one size fits all approach made it easy for the government to design and coordinate the maintenance of these war locomotives at the cost of potentially being inconvenient to the railroad that was stuck purchasing the resulting locomotive whether they actually wanted it or not.9

Another aspect of establishing control of the railroads and the production of locomotives was the USRA immediately distributed any locomotives that the major builders had awaiting sale in order to streamline the entrance into the war. The major builders did have a stockpile of locomotives that they had on hand for any railroad looking to purchase them. With the dawn of the USRA control of the railroads, these locomotives were requisitioned by the USRA for the purpose of placing it in the service of a railroad that needed the extra motive power due to the increased demand of the war effort. This redistribution demonstrates how the USRA operated under the presumption of meeting the increased demand for rail traffic.

The focus on the transportation of war material rather than the profit in the end had a negative impact on the railroads that had to foot the bill in most cases ultimately and many had complaints of mismanagement or neglect in particular areas. The railroads successfully managed to win $204,000,000 on top of the $900,000,000 paid by the government to cover the lost

*Image 1:* Photograph of a 2-10-2 steam locomotive designed by the USRA and put into mass production by the USRA to meet the increased demand for traffic in World War I.

revenue that occurred during the period of USRA control, January 1, 1918 to March 1, 1920. The $900,000,000 was the amount short that the railroads were after subtracting the revenue that they took in during the period of USRA control from the total costs for maintenance, fuel, wages, and other expenses. The railroads also had to pay for the new equipment that had been purchased for the war effort. The new locomotives and rolling stock, freight cars and passenger cars, that were purchased to handle the vast increases in traffic due to the war effort were all eventually paid for by the railroads, even when the additional equipment proved to be far more than was necessary to move goods during peace time. This extra equipment became unnecessary when the total demand for rail traffic decreased and much of it was underused or placed into a pool of backup locomotives that the railroads kept rather than active service. These additional costs to the railroads were the result of the USRA prioritizing the movement of war material over the sustainability of the railroads over time as an industry.\textsuperscript{10}

One major criticism that is leveled against the handling of the war effort during the First World War by the United States Railroad Administration was that it moved far less material while consuming similar amounts of fuel and slightly less man-hours than the American railroads handled during the Second World War. This startling lack of efficiency for the organization did not reveal itself until after the Second World War was underway. Both economists, such as Thor Hultgren whose review of the railroads in World War II will be reviewed latter, and historians, such as John Stover in his book \textit{American Railroads}, remark on this discrepancy. The amount of tons moved per mile rose dramatically in the Second World War while the amount of fuel consumed to move this material only increased by a small percentage over that in World War I. While there was a significant increase in the number of

\textsuperscript{10} Stover, 167-191.
man-hours used in the Second World War and technology had progressed creating larger more
efficient locomotives, these two factors do not account for the markedly smaller movement of
material in World War I. The way that the government managed the railroads under the USRA
is believed to be one of the major contributing factors of the discrepancy. The interest that the
USRA held in moving the material was over the shortest routes and in the fastest manner
possible. Efficiency in categories beyond this, such as fuel efficiency, were not immediate
priorities of the USRA and were therefore neglected.¹¹

Post World War I Pre World War II Government Involvement in Railroad Affairs

The immediate reaction to the government intervention to the railroads was mostly
positive. The US Government had stepped in and seized control of a rail network that had
difficulties overcoming the competitive nature of the individual railroads and needed guidance.
The US government had stepped in and taken complete control of the nations rail network under
the aegis of the USRA. With the successful conclusion of the war in the favor of Allied forces
that the United States had joined, the war effort was regarded as a success. This positive attitude
that surrounded the USRA is demonstrated in the congressional documents relating to the
assessment of its performance after the war and demobilization process were both complete. The
general attitude of those recording the efforts of the USRA was that of success and triumph. The
agency had managed to coordinate the various American railroads together to successfully
carryout the war effort. The USRA had taken many steps to help improve the level of

¹¹ Thor Hultgren, *Railway Traffic Expansion and the use of Resources in World War II*. (New
cooperation between the railroads during the duration of the war effort. However, these improvements came at great cost to the railroads and often had little effect on the performance of the railroads after the war.\textsuperscript{12}

What was quite possibly the most damaging part of the way the USRA handled the railroads during the First World War was the manner in which it addressed the railroads business side. The USRA had allowed for multiple increases in pay to the various employee unions inside of the railroads that when coupled with the rising cost of fuel and the low shipping rates that the USRA enforced devastated the potential profits that the railroads could have made. The railroads had suffered from a period of stagnation prior to World War I due to a downturn in investment and increase in fuel and labor costs. The increased demand for higher paying jobs in the defense industry caused unrest in those unions within the railroads that carried out similar skill level jobs to those in the defense industry. The vast increase in traffic due to the war effort could have provided the additional income that the railroads needed to reinvest in themselves. The actions of the USRA limited the amount of money available to the railroads due to the uptick in traffic during the war which cut the railroads out of additional funds which could have further modernized the railroads by replacing obsolete locomotives and rolling stock, passenger cars and freight cars, as well as updating other infrastructure such as communications and signaling equipment as well as right-of-way and bridges.\textsuperscript{13}


\textsuperscript{13} Stover, 167-191.
The process of dismantling the USRA was the focus of the most strenuous involvement of the US Government into the affairs of the railroads between the two wars. The majority of the other legislation written during this period deals with various aspects of labor contracts, safety standards. This type of legislation is not specific to the railroads industry. Many industries, the steel industry for example, had very similar if not identical legislation passed in reference to them. These types of laws exist as part of the nature workings of the economic system that is practiced by the United States. These laws predominantly seek to prevent the railroads from taking advantage of employees. These laws are only specific to the railroad industry because it happens to be railroad employees who are concerned rather than employees of another industry, this paper will not go too far in-depth to these regulations. These laws generally deal with increasing the hourly wage of employees across the industry and providing industry wide cost of living raises that the railroads were reluctant to provide. As such, the railroads are here regulated not because of the service they provided but instead they are regulated because they are a large employer.  

Another focus of the legislation of this period of time is anti-trust and fair competition legislation. This is legislation that is designed to prevent either the railroads from working together in an illegal fashion to artificially raise prices or to ensure the fair treatment of all railroads so that no railroad takes dominance over the others by unfair business practices or government aid. Again these laws are no different than those that concern other industries. These laws only affect the railroads because these laws deal specifically with applying broader practices of anti-trust legislation to the specific case of the railroads. These laws are part of the normal legislative cycle and do not represent the government taking any steps beyond the slandered legislative and regulatory practices of peace time. Both of these groups of laws are overlooked by this work in favor of those that directly relate to steps that the government took to effect changes in policy on the railroads as part of a conflict or similar event that required the government to step into railroad affairs above and beyond the standard level of regulation during peace time.15

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It was not until the threat of imminent war that the US began to take measures to ensure the cooperation of the railroads by the establishment of a Transportation Commission as part of the Advisory Commission to the Council of National Defense. President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Ralph Budd as the Transportation Commissioner in charge of the new created commission and went about actions to ensure the cooperation and consultation of the railroads in matters of government control and regulation of railroads. Budd was a former president of the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad who was famous for revitalizing the railroad so it could compete with bus and air transportation by introducing the all streamlined diesel “Zephyr” as well as ensuring the company was still a viable provider of freight transportation against the growing trucking and pipeline companies as well as other railroads. This position would be shifted to a new agency and Budd became the Director of the Transportation Division in the Office of Emergency Management. Through groups such as this the US prepared of the possibility of conflict by establishing the grounds to which the government would control or not control particular aspects of the war economy. These advisory positions helped the US government to come up with acceptable ways to handle the massive increase in freight and passenger traffic without seizing direct control of the railroads.
As America began to seriously step up its programs for rearmament and modernizing its arsenal, laws regarding American railroads became more substantial and authoritative in nature. This in itself is a not illogical progression, as America moved closer to becoming involved in the conflict in Europe it necessitated actions to be taken that would allow for a smooth transition into a wartime footing. As the threat of war loomed on the horizon, America took steps to ensure such a smooth transition from peacetime operations to a wartime footing. A smooth transition which allowed the country to enter the war without having to pause while the transportation industry caught up with the demands of the war time increase in shipping was the desired outcome. The opposite result, a period where the strategic resources necessary to wage war being tied up across the country with no way to ship them, could have possibly set the war effort and as a result dramatically weaken Americas ability to defend itself and its territories.

The US Government worked quickly to establish the various agencies required for the management of the multiple aspects of the war effort. Committees were created for the purpose of requisitioning the necessary property and material needed to set up the additional required marshaling yards and laying the tracks needed to connect newly established or vastly expanded arsenals. The Office of Emergency Management which had been established by President Roosevelt in the lead up to the war had its Transportation Division placed into a position where it could both make sound suggestions to the railroads and be receptive to the response that the railroads had to the proposed and enacted policies that the government officials put in charge of regulating the railroads for the duration of the Second World War created. The Transportation
Division was headed by Ralph Budd, a former president of the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy railroad.\textsuperscript{16}

One of the pressing aspects of the US in the opening acts of the war was the establishment rail networks in locations vital to the war effort. In locations such as munitions plants and the larger arsenals that were established to link multiple plants that are used in the same line of production there was an insufficient amount of rail. These areas either lacked a rail network prior to the war entirely, such as the munitions plants, or had a system of tracks and yards that were not up to the task of the massive increase in shipping due to the war effort, such as the ports. These areas often required many miles of track to be laid in order to connect the distant parts of the munitions plants or establish proper rail yards for shipping purposes. The need for vast amounts of tracks to meet the requirements to connect the areas that were newly vital was complicated by the wartime scarcity of metal. The vital role that iron played in the war effort required it to be rationed so as to ensure those directly involved in the creation of weapons of war had the resource in amounts necessary to fulfill their quotas. The result was that while the effort to connect these crucial war time industries and shipping facilities was a priority, it was subordinate to the greater war effort. Thus the US Government sought alternatives to requisitioning new rails for these purposes. This is where the government sought the cooperation of the railroads.\textsuperscript{17}

The US Government established a commission to locate unused track to be repurposed for these newly important operations. The commission was tasked to locate track that could be

\textsuperscript{16} Stover, 167-191.

torn up and then re-laid at points where it was required for a successful war effort. Abandoned mining and logging operations were cataloged and investigated for the possibilities of acquiring track to be moved to new locations. Similarly, the commission sought out unused or redundant mainline right-of-ways for the purpose of harvesting track for the factories and ports. The commission targeted the abandoned sources such as the mines and logging camps first for sources of track because they were sources of material that were not going to be missed by their owners because, for any of a variety of reasons such as the mine dried up or the Great Depression caused the operation to become no longer viable. The government simply purchased the unused rail segments from the owners at scrap price.\textsuperscript{18}

This particular technique represents a very unobtrusive form of government intervention into the affairs of railroads. Here the individuals in charge of deciding the US Government’s policy towards railroads decided that, rather than seize control over all railroads and then decide what track they wanted, the government officials surveyed the tracks that were least used and then did an assessment of the line to be torn up to see if its loss would affect anyone. This level of government involvement reflects a certain amount of restraint on the part of the regulators and a higher level of respect to the individual railroads independence.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{18} Requisitioning of Railroad Property, 1-215.

\textsuperscript{19} Requisitioning of Railroad Property, 1-215.
While this allowed the government to reallocate a reasonable amount of material via the outright unused track segments, it fell significantly short of the amount required to meet the levels necessary to complete even a reasonable amount of projects. So the government officials in charge of procurement decided to call on the railroads to help make up the deficit. The government required the railroads to give up (statistic) of the track that they tore out and replaced.
as part of normal maintenance in order to provide rails for the various projects. As part of the deal the railroads still received fresh rails for the track that they were replacing and the railroads were able to decide which rails they sent to the government operation to lay track in vital areas. This requirement and the caveat that the railroads could choose the track that they sent to the government reflects the nature of the government official's desire to guide the railroad industry down the right path regarding the war effort without directly seizing control of it.\textsuperscript{20}

The amount of track from tearing up abandoned industrial track and acquiring the track torn out as it was being replaced still was short of what the government deemed necessary for the war effort and the government officials put in charge of procurement decided that they should seek additional sources of rail. With the need for rail in those sectors most crucial to the war effort continuing, the board in charge of requisition took one further step to try and acquire the rail necessary with the cooperation of railroads. The government board began to investigate cases of redundant mainline track, such as two railroads building right-of-ways near to each other and neither being used to their full potential, and cases where railroads had abandoned a spur and had failed to reclaim the rails, such as to a town that no longer had demand for rail services or a section of track that lead to a factory or other industry that went under. In these cases the rail was not actively being used or being used in a manner that was redundant, such as in the cases of the parallel rail lines that serviced the same communities, so the government officials saw themselves less as forcibly requisitioning material that was vital.\textsuperscript{21}

Another case where the government showed an interest in allowing the railroads autonomy in operation while trying to enact controls to help the war effort is in the case of a

\textsuperscript{20} Requisitioning of Railroad Property, 1-215.

\textsuperscript{21} Requisitioning of Railroad Property, 1-215.
shortage of freight cars. The railroads entered the war effort with the resources they had on hand at the beginning of the conflict. As a result, the railroads were using mostly outdated equipment that had not always been maintained more than was necessary to safely move products. The Great Depression signaled a decline in demand for shipping, and so the railroads did not invest in new freight cars while they still had operational cars. With no real incentive to invest in their fleet of cars, the railroads maintained what they had and only built new cars to replace those which had become damaged beyond repair. These two factors combined to result in a shortage of freight cars when the war created a massive demand for them.22

The massive increase in the demand for shipping goods by rail caused the railroads to be caught in a paradox. They needed to provide additional cars for the purpose of shipping yet had problems requisitioning the material needed to construct such cars because of the vital nature of steel in the production of war goods. The increase in demand also put additional strain on the existing cars, wearing out in short order cars that had been only given the most basic of maintenance to keep them running. These two factors resulted in a dire set of circumstances when the railroads had to manage the existing resources to their greatest extent.23


23 Shortage of Railroad Equipment for Transportation Purposes [Part 1], and Shortage of Railroad Equipment for Transportation Purposes. [Part 2], 1-521.
The system that guided the use of railcars was largely left to the railroads for non-war critical uses. The government allowed the railroads to continue with pre-war practices regarding the distribution of cars beyond those industries that were central to the war effort. American railroads appeared to have kept to a system of allocating cars to locations on a basis of availability of cars, the priority nature of a shipment and the past use of freight cars by the customer. The railroads also took actions to stockpile cars in response to seasonal demand such as the movement of grain at harvest time. However, the strain on the system proved to be too much and the railroads fell short of moving the required loads of grain in the fall of 1943. The lack of the cars necessary to empty grain silos that in many cases still held the remainders of the previous two years crops in parts of the northern Midwest resulted in a crisis, as there was no room to store freshly harvested grain. The process was further complicated by the decisions of several railroads to provide cars for the transport of grain intended for use as animal feed while perfectly good grain was in danger of spoiling due to a lack of storage capacity coupled with an abnormally large harvest. This issue of harvested grain on the ground potentially being ruined because of a lack of cars available to transport it brought the issue to a head and to the attention of the Senate Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee. The committee considered the many different reasons for the crisis and also reviewed and critiqued the railroads on their policies regarding the distribution of freight cars across the country and even on a local level.\textsuperscript{24}

While the government had little that they could do to solve the problem in the short run with regards to the shortage of freight cars beyond launching an investigation into how the railroads managed their supply freight cars, it did solve the larger problem by commissioning several companies to produce war emergency box cars to meet the demand. This approach does

\textsuperscript{24} Shortage of Railroad Equipment, 1-521.
have echoes of the USRA control of the First World War but it was handled differently in a different set of circumstances. Instead of producing a set of freight cars and forcing the railroads to purchase them to meet demand the government officials elected to contract a group of companies to produce the cars and then let the railroads buy up the freight cars on their own volition. This resulted in those railroads that needed the cars to make purchases that benefited their company not only in the short run but also thinking ahead to replace cars that had been

As the war progressed the American government began to review the effects of its policies. The idea behind such reviews was to discern whether the approach that the US had taken towards the railroads was successful beyond simply getting the job done. With this purpose in mind American economists weighed in on the successes or failure of the US policies up to that point. One such review of the American war time policy was the review of the policy by Thor Hultgren for the National Bureau of Economic Research *Railway Traffic Expansion and Use of Resources in World War II*, published in February 1944.\(^\text{25}\)

*Railway Traffic Expansion and Use of Resources in World War II* was written by Thor Hultgren, an American economist who specialized in transportation. Hultgren (1903-1975) was a major contributor to the National Bureau of Economic Research. While his highest degree was a M.B. from the Brookings Graduate School of Economics and Government although it is likely he would have completed his doctorate had the school not folded. His colleagues noted that while he lacked a doctorate he showed a dedication and level of self discipline that indicated he was operating at that level of academic understanding. Prior to his work at the National Bureau of Economic Research, Hultgren worked with the government as an agricultural economist for eight years and as an economic analyst with the Interstate Commerce Commission for four years.

This period with the Interstate Commerce Commission had a major influence on his latter work with the National Bureau of Economic Research of which *Railway Traffic Expansion and Use of Resources in World War II* is a part of. This work accesses the American railroads performance during the period 1941 to early 1944 while taking into consideration the effects of US government policy. Hultgren compares the increase in traffic to the prewar traffic levels to demonstrate how far the railroads progressed and how well they had adapted to the tremendous increase in traffic due to the war effort. This review is unique in that it took place during the war itself as a self checking procedure to see if the policies enacted were working out. The review approaches the subject from the perspective of his training, economics.26

Hultgren observed the adaptation of the American railroads to a war time footing by looking at the statistical data gathered by the government. This collected data was then used to calculate among many things the efficiency of the American railroads during the war effort to their efficiency prior to the war, in the Great Depression. The conclusions reached by the paper included that the railroads saw a huge increase in efficiency in the war years, which was in part by targeted reforms by the government. American railroads saw vast increases in the amount of freight and passenger tonnage moved which is especially interesting when it is taken into account that the amount of fuel used to move the vast increase in traffic saw only a slight increase. The result was a quite significant increase in the efficiency of the railroads during the war. One of the reasons that this increase in tones of freight and passengers moved for the amount of fuel consumed was so significant was that the railroads had been running trains that were either not filled to their capacity or were far less than the engine leading them was designed to pull. Both

of these situations were a result of having to move time sensitive goods, such as passengers or perishable products such as milk or fish or fresh fruit, despite a decrease in the demand for all of these goods and services because of the ongoing Great Depression. Railroads still needed to move people and goods from place to place despite the decrease in demand for travel and goods due to the downturn in demand that was caused by the Great Depression because they would face bankruptcy if they did not provide services to those who still sought them. Thus, the American railroads had accepted the cost of inefficiency during the Great Depression while still managing to maintain their survival.27

Hultgren's review also demonstrates the US policy regarding the railroads. Among the policies that the US government enacted was a review of the process of loading freight cars. The US Government observed that the railroads were moving freight cars, particularly box cars, without filling them to capacity. The government officials intervened in what they felt was a wasteful practice due to the war. The war effort brought with it a vast increase in the amount of traffic moved via all means of transportation, railroads were no exception. The increase in demand for the movement of goods left the railroads to adapt to the situation, however the government officials involved in the regulation of interstate transportation felt that the railroads needed to adapt to the situation more quickly. The railroads were still operating like they had during the Great Depression, moving cars as a group when the train was ready or moving the car to a location and picking it up when the client requested it rather than seeking to maximize the amount moved by the individual cars. Due to the vital nature of the war effort and evidence that the railroads were not seeking to make the changes on their own, the government stepped in to see that the railroads made the best use of the limited supply of cars. The railroads did not

27 Hultgren, 1-30.
initiate these reforms on their own because it was not necessarily directly in the railroads' interest to maximize the amount carried by the car because of the way that the railroads billed the transit of goods. The railroads used a system to calculate the shipping cost of a freight car based around how much the cargo being moved weighed and how far it was going to be shipped. This system had no incentive to maximize the cargo shipped per car on the part of the railroads; all incentive was placed on the business being serviced. If the business was willing to ship cars less than full than the railroads were willing to move the car. The government stepped in by setting goals for how full a freight car must be before it is shipped. The result of the government's action with regards to the loading of freight cars was that cars were required to be a certain percentage filled or meet a particular number of tones in order to be allowed to be shipped with the use of mostly self-regulation and limited government observation. This use of government power to cause the railroads to take an action that they would not normally do for the greater good of the war effort is a prime example of the US policy towards railroads during World War II.  

Another contrast between the First World War and World War II was that the railroads remained independent in the category of design. The only restriction that was placed on the railroads in the area of procurement of locomotive power was the construction of new diesel electric locomotives. This one notable example was driven by the war efforts' requirement for the tools that were needed to build diesel motors for trains were the often needed elsewhere for the construction of war machines. The matter of rationing the few diesel locomotives that were allowed to be produced was addressed by the government by a system of allocating the locomotives to where they were to be needed most and thus to the railroads that were servicing those regions. Thus railroads that found themselves moving material over these expanses were

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28 Hultgren, 1-30.
awarded the ability to procure additional diesel locomotives while those who did not had to make do with purchases of traditional steam locomotives.

The freedom afforded to railroads in the field of the acquisition of new locomotives for the war effort resulted in railroads being able to better fit their engine purposes to the needs of their fleet. This independence allowed railroads such as the Santa Fe to purchase oil powered locomotives that could carry enough fuel to make the trip from Chicago to Los Angeles without refueling. The same independence allowed the Union Pacific railroad to construction more of its articulated coal powered locomotives for the regions of Wyoming and Montana where more typical non-articulated engines would have a hard time being both fast on the flat lands and still have the power to move up mountain grades. This specialization of locomotives for the purchaser that was not permitted in the First World War allowed the railroads to invest in locomotives that could still be useful to the railroad after the huge demand for shipping decrease post war. These purchases did not result in a surplus of locomotive power that did not quite suit the railroads needs and instead allowed the railroads to maintain the type of locomotives that they preferred for the jobs that they needed to carry out. Many of the locomotives purchased to meet the increased demand brought on by the war found a decade or more of mainline service after the war and preformed well at their jobs after the war because the railroad picked locomotives that they knew that they would still need after the war was over.

The large articulated locomotives that the Union Pacific ordered during the war, with two sets of pilot wheels followed by a first set of four driving wheels and then a second set of four driving wheels topped off with a final pair of guide wheels under the cab a 4-8-8-4 wheel arrangement, have been attributed by some within the Union Pacific railroad to having been one of the reasons why there was not a major break down in transcontinental rail service during the
war. These locomotives hauled incredible amounts of material across enormous stretches of planes and prairies across the northern continental United States with impressive speed and herculean strength and above all else, efficiency. The twenty-five purchased during the war in addition to those which had been built before the war played a major role in assuring that the Union Pacific was able to meet its transportation quota. These locomotives had originally been ordered by the Union Pacific during the tail end of the Great Depression to better suit their particular locomotive and power needs. The size and power of these locomotives was built to the Union Pacific’s specifications for a locomotive that could handle the steeper mountain grades in the Rocky Mountains without needing the help of one or more additional helper locomotives that required more time to cut into train before the grade and cut out again after the train made it over the grade. They were also built to burn coal making use of a local available, abundant, and therefore inexpensive resource in the Montana region. These locomotives went on to serve the Union Pacific railroad until late July 1959. Even if the claim by the Union Pacific executives may be exaggerated, it still conveys the importance of these engines to the success of the railroad during the war effort and therefore the importance of allowing the railroads to make their own choices in locomotives during a time of war.\(^{29}\)

Even with the intense focus of the regulations and legislation on the nature of the war effort, some of the traditional forms of government regulation of railroads and industry in general did persist. The government still sought to enforce fair wages on the railroads. Similar to the labor situation of the First World War, the armaments and steal industry both provided high wages in these areas vital to the war effort. Again, like in the First World War, the various
labor groups and unions that represented the railroads employees felt that they needed an increase in the level of pay commensurate to that of the other vital industries. Trained and untrained railroad employees were earning less than similarly trained personnel in other industries and they wanted the railroads to correct this situation. The major unions threatened to strike should the railroads not take measures to raise the wages of employees to a level comparable with the other major industries involved in the war effort. The government stepped in this time and created legislation to force the railroads to raise pay scales in order to fend off a strike.\(^{30}\)

This action was not new to the Second World War, the government had taken similar actions to raise pay to avert strikes in the First World War. This action is unique in that the government had complete control over the operation of the railroads in the First World War via the USRA. The Second World War required the government to carry out the same action via slightly different means, not by direct control but instead via regulation. This change is not incredibly important but is still significant because of the similar roll that the US Government must play in ensuring that there is no work stoppage because of strikes during a time of national emergency. The major difference between the two wars being that it World War II the US Government played the role or arbitrator between the two groups rather than siding with the workers outright as it did in the First World War to avoid a nasty labor dispute between itself, via

the USRA, and the various labor unions that represented the employees of the railroads. This example of the government maintaining its peacetime role as the protector of employees and the group responsible for resolving labor disputes between unions and industry even during the changed circumstances of the war shows that the US government did not totally shift away from the more basic role that it provides because of the war. Instead, the government and the officials that comprise it added to their existing regulatory roles, even if the existing regulatory roles were somewhat neglected if they were not of dire urgency, such as the possibility of a workers strike that could cause a nationwide transportation disaster.31

*Post World War II Railroad Regulation*

The laws and regulations passed in the immediate aftermath of the war, 1946 to 1950, were a return to the status quo. A number of laws and regulations that were put into effect for the duration of the war slowly expired or ceased to be relevant as the war effort wrapped up in 1945. As the war effort concluded with the return of the troops and the program to disarm, the railroads slowly returned to their prewar management policies and the government began to shift back to the prewar regulation standards.

Similar to the period after the First World War, the government became more concerned with the more mundane aspects of regulation after the end of the Second World War. With no all consuming war controlling the attention of the country and by extension the countries railroads, regulation shifted back to the type of regulation scene in the prewar years. This shift

31 *Substandard Wages. Part 1; Railroad Wages; and War Injury and Death Benefits for Civilians*
returned in a large part to the style and nature of legislation and regulation that dominated the post World War I to World War II period with a few new additions and changes that reflect the different nature of the two times societal norms. This return signaled the reestablishment of anti-trust, labor negotiations, and safety standards to the priority of government legislation.

The return to the prewar standards demonstrated an increase in labor and workers rights laws that had played a relatively minor roll compared to the requisition and coordination regulations and laws that dominated the Second World War. These regulations once again became a major part of the American regulatory scene. Once again, the government was looking to seek to protect workers by establishing full compensation to those who retired from the railroads after reaching a retirement age and having served a certain number of years of service, such as thirty years working on various railroads. The government also made returns to trends in pre war legislation that sought to protect the wages of workers in the rail industry in comparison to other industries. Both of these areas and the broader scope of workers’ rights reasserted itself in the wake of the war.32

The post war return to normalcy also ushered in a new round of anti-trust and oversight of railroads. While the railroads needed to work together to achieve the goal of victory during World War II, the government returned to assuring that the railroads did not engage in any sort of coercion or price collusion. The post war legislation and regulations also saw a return to the governments assurance that the railroads operated within the letter of the law and an attempt to

assure that the railroads did not raise prices unnecessarily nor attempt to penalize customers who needed to ship on multiple carriers to reach their destination. These laws similarly show that the US Government returned to its prewar role of regulator and guardian of the public in the style and content of the legislation and regulations passed in the period immediately after the Second World War.\textsuperscript{33}

Another aspect of legislation that again returned to its prewar norms was that of safety. This was one aspect that in particular suffered during the war years. The US Government had allowed the railroads to fall below the minimum number of inspections and safety standards for the duration of the war in order to ensure the steady and timely delivery of vital war material. As a result, many railroads had let track inspections and locomotive maintenance slip as low as possible during the war effort in order to keep costs and time consumed carrying out these matters of routine maintenance to a minimum to ensure the maximum amount of material was moved. With the urgency of the war past, the government returned to the prewar standards of safety and accountability and then elaborated on it. The US Government continued the tread to step of safety standards and practices while also increasing the level of accountability that the railroads were held to in matters of employee injury. This return to making safety a priority of the government policy shows how the government adapted its policy during the war in favor of speed and volume over safety back to the prewar trend to increase safety standards. The post

The US Government reacted to the perceived overstepping of its bounds in the First World War when it seized direct control of the railroads by taking a more advisory role in the Second World War. The Second World War revealed a US policy that targeted particular essential areas and regulated the behavior of the railroads in these areas but allowed the railroads to remain independent and capable of guiding their own fate. This action helped to lead to a substantial increase in material moved while only increasing the amount of fuel used to move it in comparison to the First World War. While the US government did expand the role of the bureaucracy during the war years, this expansion was nowhere near the extent of the expansion.

of power during World War I. The nature of this expansion was also different in that it sought to leave the railroads in control of their assets and operations while still meeting the increased demand and sensitivity of war time operations.

The study of the government regulation of railroads is important because of the ever relevant controversy of how much control the government should take in the area of industrial regulation. The case of the US Government involvement in the railroad industry during World War II demonstrates a level of restraint in the invasiveness of the government into industry. This vital middle ground that is demonstrated in this example is key to finding the optimum mix of regulation and freedom. Without the government measures to regulate the industry, the railroads would have moved material at their own leisure. The railroads would have likely followed the same profit motivated operating system that the used in peace time that gave priority to shipments that paid more or were time sensitive, such as perishables. This system could have left the government waiting for equipment to be moved from one place to another, stalling vital troop and equipment movements overseas because the railroads choose to move a train of more profitable goods over those that the government needed moved for the war effort. It also could have greatly increased the cost of the war if the government tried to increase the value of is shipments by paying more to ship them faster. The opposite is too much regulation as was demonstrated by the role that the US Government took during World War I. The government seizing complete control of the industry left the railroads on the losing end of a deal. The railroads moved the government trains at the highest level of priority and charged what the government felt was fair and disregarded the independent nature of the railroads as profit seeking corporations. The result of this effort was the job was done but at great cost the railroads in lost revenue, additional unnecessary expenses, and purchases above and beyond what the railroads
needed in the long run in order to meet short term demands. This achieved the goal of moving the freight and personnel required but at the cost the railroads missing out on the extra money available during the war effort and also the surplus of equipment that needed to be dealt with.

The route in-between these two extremes was the approach that the US Government took in the Second World War. By guiding the railroads to make the most out of every freight shipment and prioritizing shipments vital to the war effort but while still operating in the same overarching environment the material necessary to the war was still delivered in a timely manner. Allowing the railroads to make purchasing decisions bounded by the constraints of the war effort, the railroads managed to make purchases during the war that benefited the railroads even after the war was over, not just during the short run. This route achieved the goals of the government while allowing the railroads to benefit from the period of intense economic growth rather than being a slave to it. It allowed the railroads to self impose co-operation on themselves rather than be forced into compulsion by the government.\cite{Stover167-191}

This level of regulation is especially important when it is viewed in the light of the New Deal program of government involvement that had been advocated by President Roosevelt before the war. The New Deal represents for a time when the US Government stepped up the level of government involvement in the lives of Americans. The New Deal ushered in revolutions in America such as Social Security and massive industrial and business reforms. It created millions of government funded jobs to provide work for unemployed men and women. All of this increased government involvement during the Great Depression can be seen as the government overstepping its bounds or as a necessary step to alleviate the crisis of the largest economic downturn in American history. When the low level of government control that is

\cite{Stover167-191}
experienced by the railroads during World War II is viewed in this light it helps to break the
stereotypical view of the Roosevelt administration being regulatory overbearing. This very same
level of antipathy directed towards the liberally minded Roosevelt administration plagues the
more liberal politicians and governments to this day. The case of the railroads shows an
extraordinary high level of flexibility on the part of the Roosevelt administration compared to the
more stringent methods used earlier in the very same administration with regards to the New
Deal. Thus this study of the regulation of railroads is significant today in both demonstrating
how industry and government can work together and both reach their goals and also showing that
the Roosevelt administration was not attempting to break down the level of autonomy that
private industry has. This work demonstrates that the forces of industry and those of government
can work together in a partnership without the government overstepping its bounds. Both the
American railroads and the US Government benefited from the war effort that was linked to
World War II. The railroads benefited from their independence and their ability to set their own
prices, within reason, and managed to modernize the railroads with new locomotives and rolling
stock after the years of the Great Depression that were void of any major investment. This
modernization effort that coincided with the increase in traffic ensured that the railroads could
still provide services to a post depression America.

The importance and lasting significance of this paper is showing that the middle route
between total government control and total freedom on the side of industry is the best option.
The government should regulate as far as it is necessary to ensure the survival and safety of the
nation. The government should expect full corporate cooperation from American industry in a
time of crisis. However, in a peacetime situation or a circumstance that does not endanger the
lives or livelihood of American citizens, the government should provide more leniencies in how
it creates legislation to regulate industry. Even today there is much discussion going on about what steps the government should and should not take in order to ensure the safety and stability of the nation. Recent events such as the US Government buying up parts of the major American auto makers or providing loans to the hurting banking industry are just some actions that reflect the continuing level of intervention that the US Government and the individuals that are employees and officials inside of it take to ensure the safety and stability of American industry. These recent government interventions had similar motivations behind them; these actions were taken to prevent harm from coming to America and its citizens. While this harm was not from an aggressor nation or military opponent, it still constituted a threat to the security and stability of America and as such necessitated a government reaction in the eyes of some. This paper address one example of how the government successfully made such interventions on the behalf of the American citizens which ended with both the government and industry benefiting from the results.
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