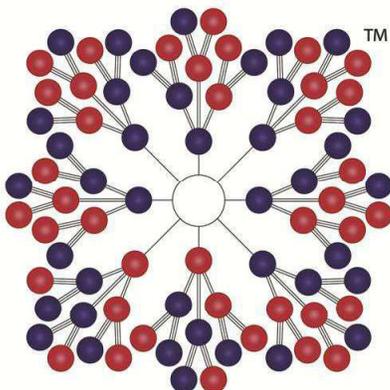


# A 12 - 2 - 60 Scouting Journey

Report #25-08

# What are the possible implications of a merger between the Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern railroads?

Joel Barker's



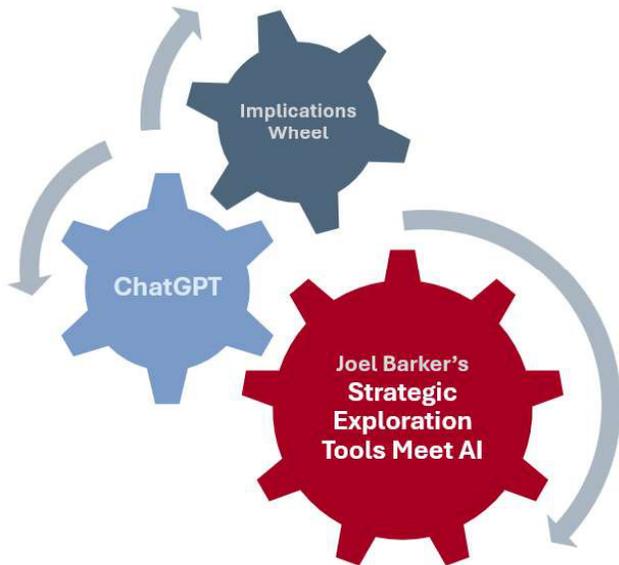
**IMPLICATIONS  
W H E E L**

*The Implications Wheel<sup>®</sup> will give you a substantial advantage in finding, recognizing, and securing your future.*

*Joel Barker*

The Scouting Journey reports are “**highly facilitated**” explorations based on futurist Joel Barker’s Strategic Exploration Tools.

The explorations are based on custom GPTs, developed and “trained” by James W. Schreier, Ph.D. He worked with Joel Barker for 25+ years, served as his Director of Training, and co-authored the “**Finding the Future Faster**” guidebook. Additional information is included at the end of each report and at [implicationswheel.org](http://implicationswheel.org)



## Introduction

When ChatGPT exploded into the world, reaching over 100 million users in January 2024, it became a focus of multiple experiments for Joel Barker's Strategic Exploration Tools. Because Joel's concepts and tools, specifically paradigms, T.I.P.S. Tracking, and the Implications Wheel, are based on diversity of input and a "Wisdom of Crowds" approach, the challenge of testing ChatGPT's "Wisdom of the World" was evident.

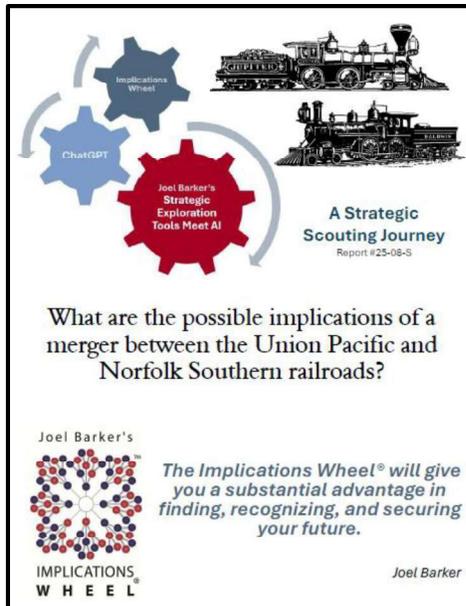
The first experiments included a strategic exploration using ChatGPT on the same "center" as one conducted by I-Wheel-trained facilitators. Joel's comment, "***That's amazing!***" summarizes the results best. Further experiments tested all the Strategic Exploration Tools. More information on these experiments is detailed at the end of this report.

An Implications Wheel exploration typically contains 12 or more "first-orders" and "arcs," resulting in over 300 specific implications. Examples on the [website](#) include five completed "arcs" with **Desirability** and **Likelihood** scoring. For these "12 - 2 - 60" Scouting Journeys, GPTs developed for the Strategic Exploration Tools are prompted to:

- Create a "center" using structured questions from a T.I.P.S. Tracking "Interrogation."
- Generate 12 "first-order" implications and, for several "12 - 2 - 60" reports, generate an additional set of "first-order" implications from a different "point-of-view."
- Based on the selection of "arcs" (at least one "positive" and one "negative" first-order implication, generate complete "arcs" containing five "second-order" implications and five "third-order" implications for each "second-order" (*An "arc" with 31 implications*).
- Suggest possible "points-of-view" for scoring and score the selected "arcs."

## A Strategic Journey Scouting Report

Based on the first-order implications generated for this exploration, an additional set of first-order implications was generated based on a second “point of view.” This resulted in a major experiment exploring additional “points of view” and additional analysis. The results are published as a separate Strategic Journey Scouting Report.



The end of this report includes more information on the custom Chat GPTs, including references to the experiments. **Responses from the custom GPTs included here are presented unedited** (Exceptions Noted).

## I. Create a “Center”

Please create a brief introduction for an exploration on the “possible implications of a merger between the Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern railroads.



The proposed merger between Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern stands to create the first true coast-to-coast freight railroad in U.S. history, a \$200 billion behemoth capable of moving goods from the Atlantic to the Pacific without a single mid-continent handoff. Proponents tout the vision as a modern equivalent of the Gilded Age’s grand rail ambitions, promising faster transit times, improved network reliability, and a potential environmental boost from shifting freight off highways and onto rails. For large shippers, ports, and investors, the appeal is clear: an integrated national system could streamline operations, cut costs, and strengthen rail’s competitive position against trucking.

But the plan would also redraw the competitive map of American freight transport, consolidating four dominant carriers into what could quickly become a duopoly. That prospect has ignited deep concern among labor unions, small shippers, and rival railroads, all of whom fear higher rates, job losses, and diminished service options. The ultimate arbiter—the Surface Transportation Board—faces a delicate balancing act, weighing the merger’s promised efficiencies and environmental gains against its risks to competition and market fairness.

The political and economic stakes are high. Supporters are mobilizing to frame the deal as a national infrastructure upgrade, while opponents are preparing antitrust arguments and labor protections as conditions for approval. With recent precedent from the Canadian Pacific–Kansas City Southern merger, this bid arrives at a moment when consolidation is reshaping North American rail—and when regulators, lawmakers, and industry players all know that what happens here could define the structure of freight transport for decades to come.

*The special “Strategic Scouting Journey” report contains a detailed compilation of information for the center of this exploration. This brief summary is an example of a version suitable for a “live” session (depending on the audience). The detailed compilation contains an in-depth analysis based on the T.I.P.S Tracking structure interrogation, examining the proposed merger based on **Trends**, **Innovations**, and **Paradigm Shifts**.*

## II. Generate “First-Order” Implications

What are the possible implications of a merger between the Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern railroads?

**ChatGPT:**



Here are 12 first-order implications of the trend of a **Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern** merger, each framed as a direct, specific consequence. These implications reflect both positive and negative possibilities across economic, social, organizational, and educational domains:

---

- 1. One possibility is** that the merged railroad eliminates interline transfers for coast-to-coast freight, accelerating delivery schedules and standardizing transit reliability across the continental network.
- 2. One possibility is** that long-haul trucking operators lose market share on transcontinental lanes as shippers shift to faster, more efficient rail alternatives.
- 3. One possibility is** that the new entity imposes volume thresholds and exclusivity agreements at key intermodal terminals, restricting access for smaller logistics providers.
- 4. One possibility is** that the Surface Transportation Board initiates extended antitrust proceedings, delaying merger finalization and suspending network integration.
- 5. One possibility is** that labor unions organize strikes or legal actions to resist job eliminations and renegotiation of seniority structures across merged operations.
- 6. One possibility is** that industrial shippers lock in multi-year contracts to preserve current rates and routing options before the merged entity asserts unified pricing control.
- 7. One possibility is** that BNSF and CSX launch parallel merger negotiations to prevent strategic disadvantage in network coverage and intermodal throughput.

**8. One possibility is** that service irregularities increase during the integration phase as dispatch systems, crew allocations, and traffic control converge under new protocols.

**9. One possibility is** that the merged firm abandons redundant secondary lines, withdrawing service from low-volume communities and concentrating resources on high-density corridors.

**10. One possibility is** that investors reduce exposure to both companies during the merger window due to uncertainty over regulatory decisions and integration costs.

**11. One possibility is** that the new entity accelerates deployment of autonomous trains and AI-driven logistics to extract cost savings and reduce labor dependency.

**12. One possibility is** that state governments enact legislative measures to ensure rate transparency and routing fairness for in-state agricultural and industrial producers.

Would you like to apply the **Points of View** framework next to assess how different stakeholders interpret or contest these implications?

**Prompt:** Please generate a new set of implications from the point of view of the unions.

**ChatGPT:** Here is a set of **12 first-order implications** from the **point of view of labor unions**, assuming the merger of **Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern** proceeds.

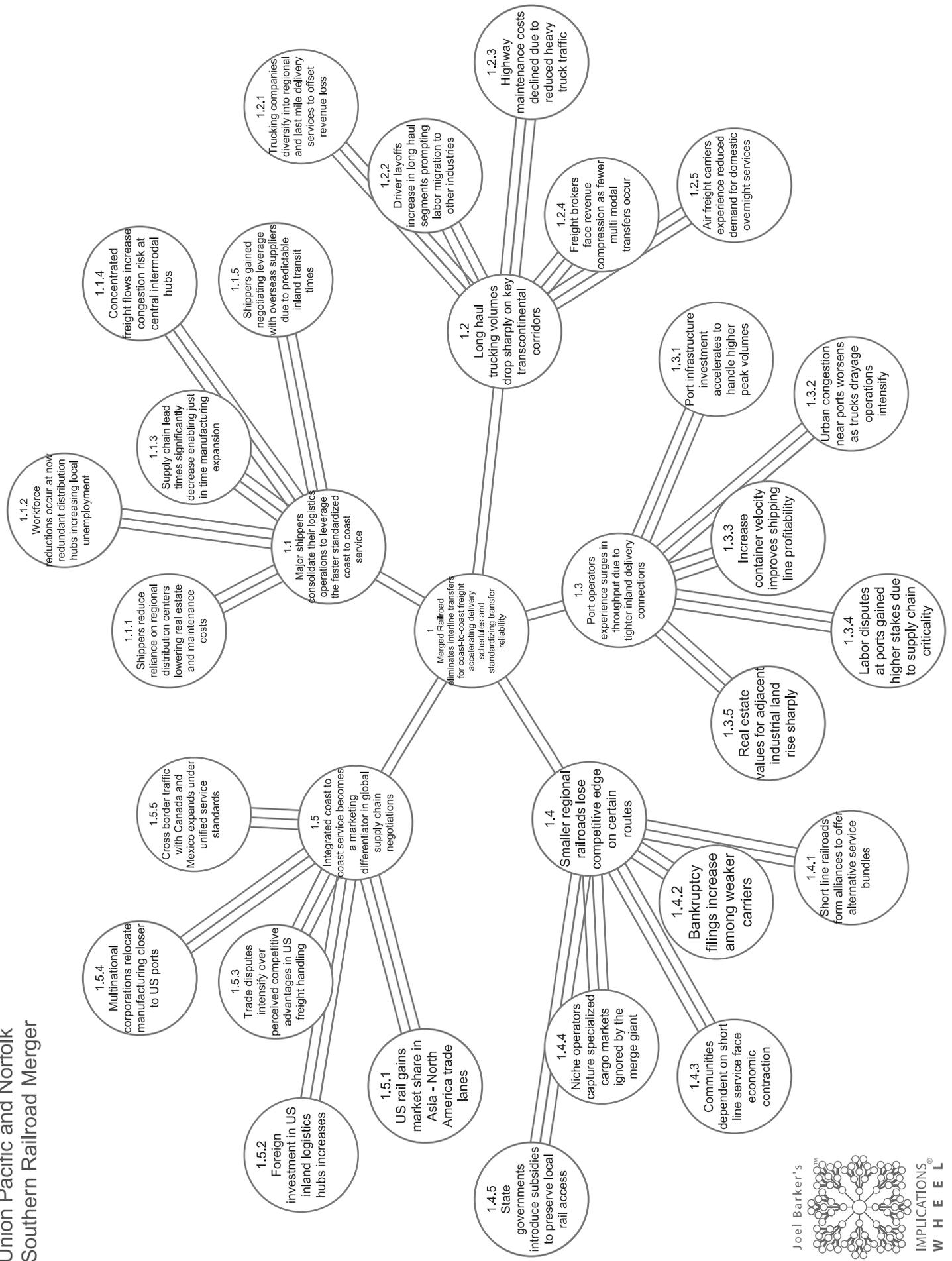
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1. **One possibility is** that union leadership mobilizes against the merger by organizing coordinated protests to oppose workforce reductions and terminal closures.
2. **One possibility is** that national rail unions increase political lobbying to pressure the Surface Transportation Board to reject the merger on labor impact grounds.
3. **One possibility is** that internal union divisions intensify as different locals compete for representation rights across the new unified operational footprint.
4. **One possibility is** that union negotiators demand guaranteed employment protections and retraining programs as preconditions for supporting merger-related operational changes.
5. **One possibility is** that the merged company centralizes crew operations, prompting the closure of regional crew bases and displacement of hundreds of workers.
6. **One possibility is** that unions use the merger to push for harmonized work rules and wage scales across both legacy companies, improving conditions for some members.
7. **One possibility is** that fears of automation and workforce streamlining increase organizing momentum among non-unionized subcontractors and short-line operators.
8. **One possibility is** that health and safety committees file formal objections to consolidation plans that lengthen work hours or increase crew-to-mile ratios.
9. **One possibility is** that rail labor coalitions align with community groups in affected towns to build broader resistance to post-merger infrastructure downsizing.
10. **One possibility is** that arbitration panels become overloaded with jurisdictional disputes as craft unions contest new job classifications and seniority mappings.
11. **One possibility is** that the merger spurs a national debate over rail labor policy, drawing attention to outdated federal protections under the Railway Labor Act.
12. **One possibility is** that unions highlight the merger's economic scale to justify expansive new demands in upcoming collective bargaining rounds.

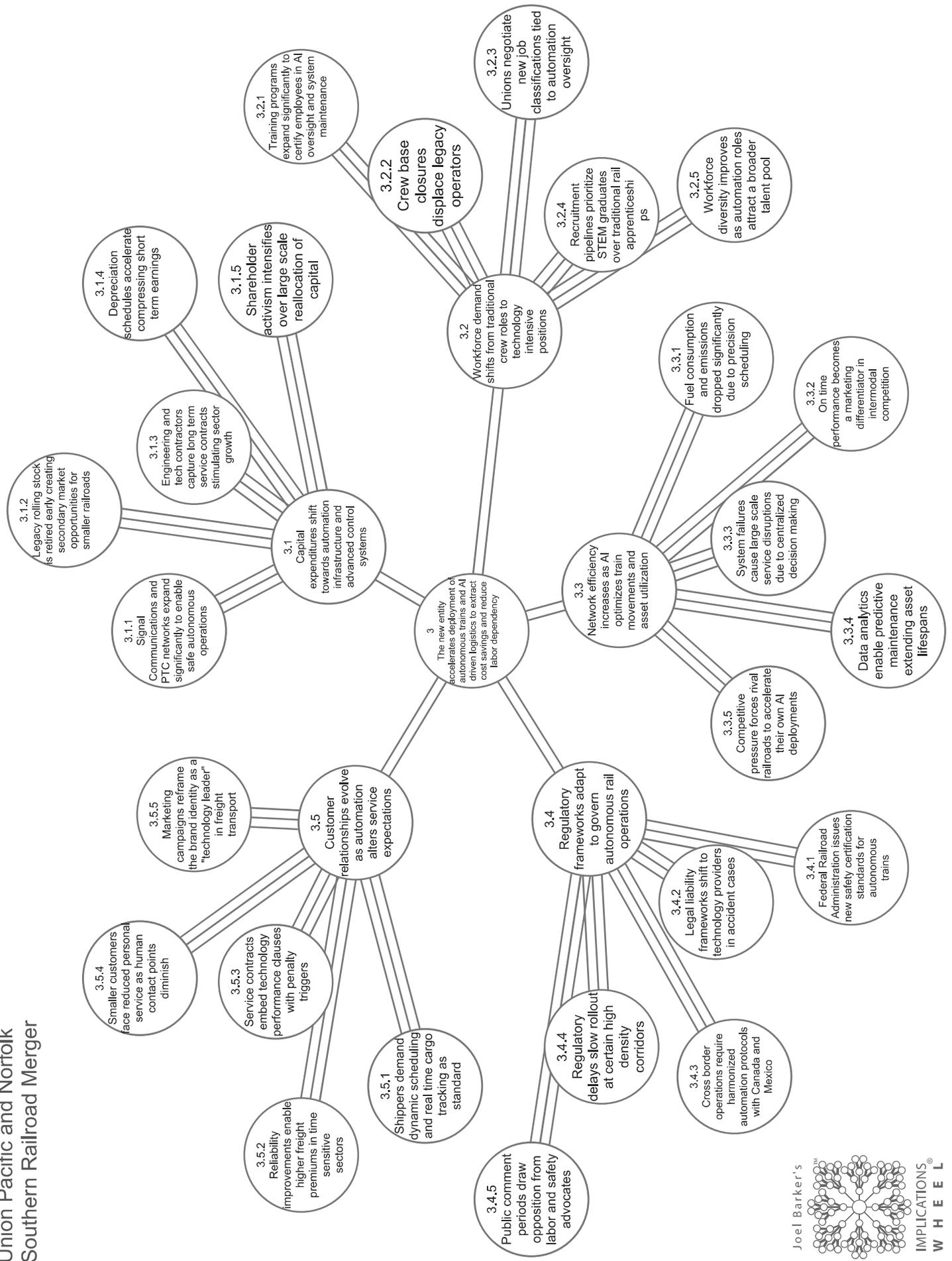
### **III. Generate “Second- and Third-order” Implications**

The “arcs” presented here are generated by the **Implications Wheel “Arc” Explorer** GPT. They were then entered into the **Implications Wheel** software to generate the “arc” graphic presentation. Minor editing was done for these implications to increase clarity and compliance with **Implications Wheel** rules for specificity.

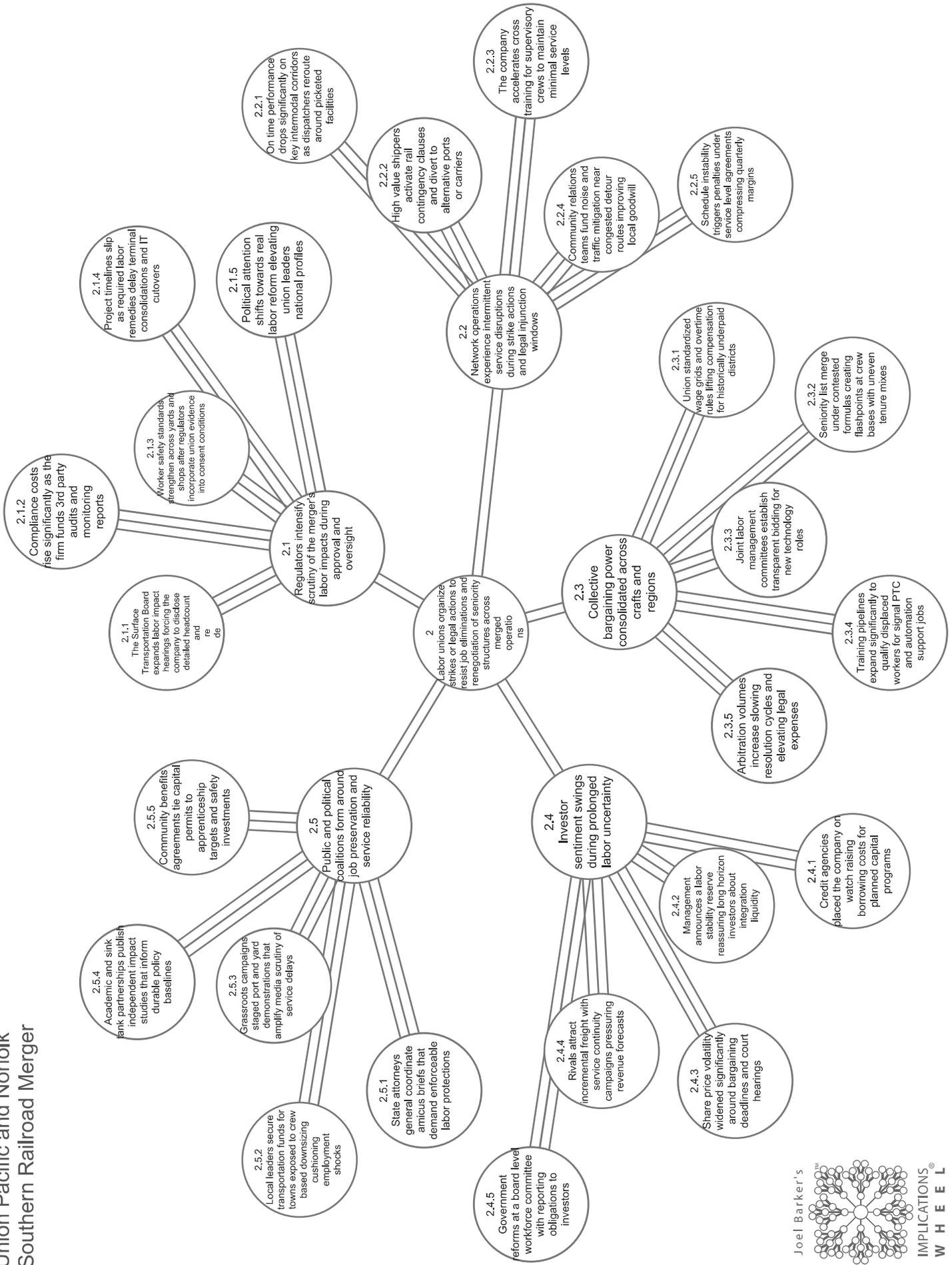
# Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern Railroad Merger



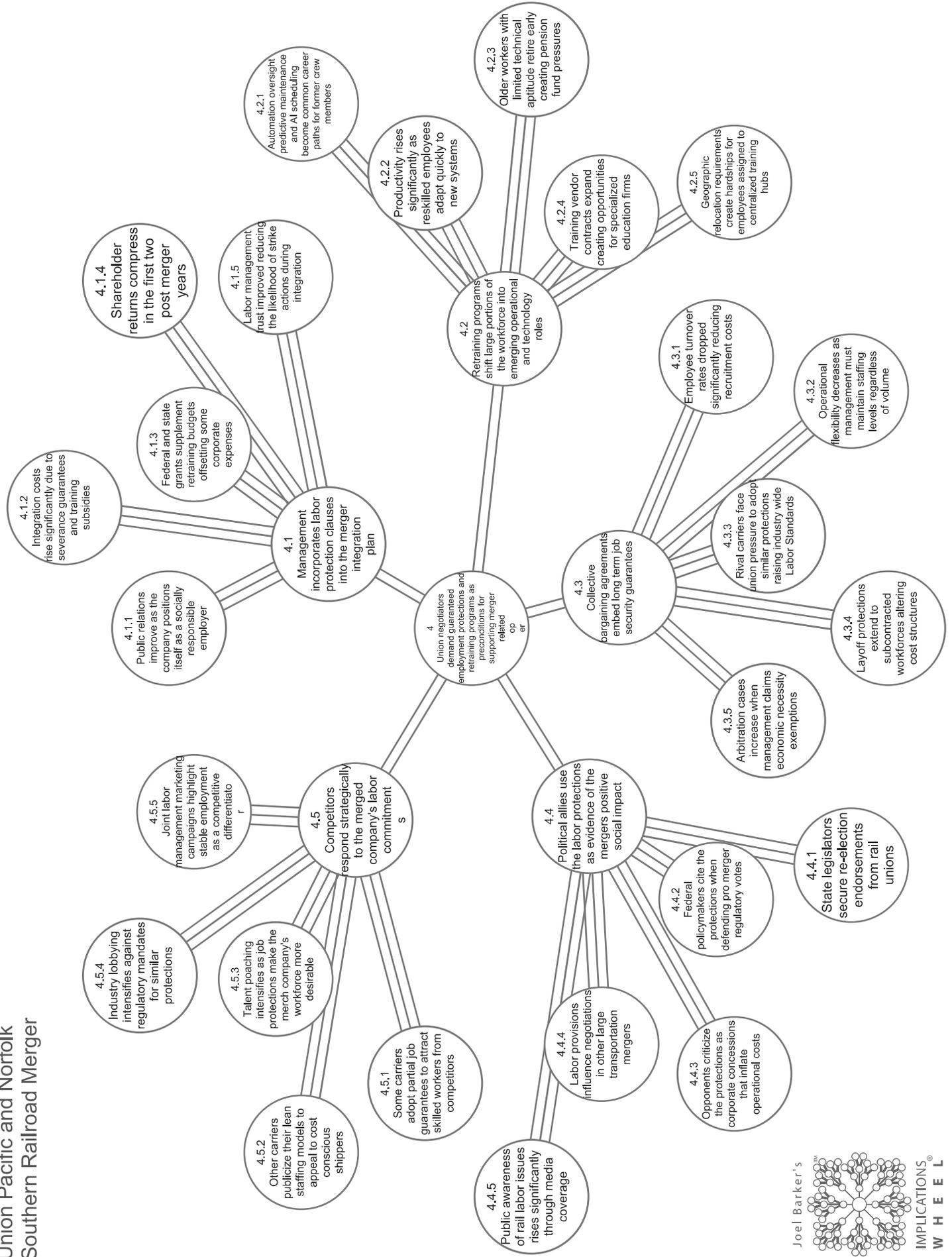
# Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern Railroad Merger



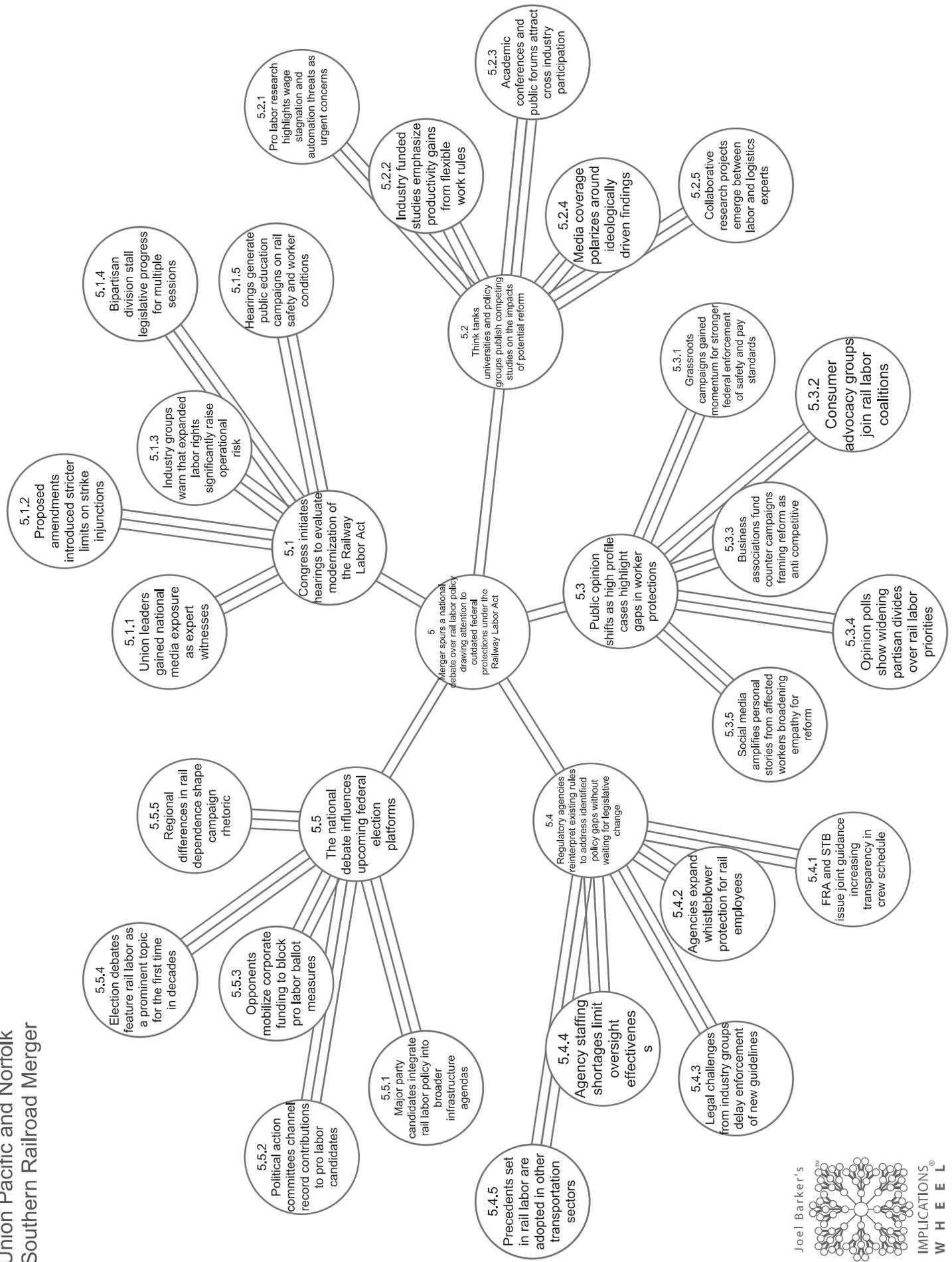
# Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern Railroad Merger



# Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern Railroad Merger



# Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern Railroad Merger



## IV. Identify Scoring Possibilities

The Implications Wheel features scoring for desirability and likelihood from a specified "point of view." What are some possible "points of view" for scoring this exploration?

**ChatGPT:**



Given the topic of possible **merger between the Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern railroads**, here are several possible **scoring points-of-view** you could use for your Implications Wheel analysis. Each offers a unique lens through which to evaluate the **desirability** and **likelihood** of consequences:

---

### Stakeholder Points of View for Scoring

1. **Management**
  - Focus: Operational efficiency, profitability, shareholder value, merger synergies.
2. **Labor Unions**
  - Focus: Job security, work rules, wage and benefit preservation, crew base retention.
3. **Shippers / Freight Customers**
  - Focus: Service reliability, shipping rates, routing flexibility, access to capacity.
4. **Regulators** (Surface Transportation Board, Federal Railroad Administration)
  - Focus: Competition, safety, service continuity, compliance with merger law.
5. **Investors / Shareholders**
  - Focus: Return on investment, stock price appreciation, dividend stability.
6. **Competitors** (BNSF, CSX, regional Class II & III railroads)
  - Focus: Market share protection, competitive parity, strategic positioning.
7. **Port Authorities** (East & West Coast)
  - Focus: Throughput efficiency, infrastructure funding, long-term service contracts.

## 8. State and Local Governments

- Focus: Economic development, tax base stability, job retention, infrastructure impacts.

## 9. Community Advocacy Groups

- Focus: Local service continuity, environmental impact, rail safety in neighborhoods.

## 10. Environmental and Climate Organizations

- Focus: Carbon reduction, green infrastructure, land use, ecological safeguards.

## 11. Short-Line and Regional Rail Operators

- Focus: Interchange agreements, access to mainline capacity, contract stability.

## 12. International Trade Stakeholders

- Focus: Port connectivity, supply chain resilience, customs and cross-border logistics.

## V. Scoring Results

For this **12 – 2 – 60 Scouting Journey** report, the GPT, **Implications Scoring**, was prompted to score the selected “arcs” from the point of view of the merged Union Pacific – Norfolk Southern railroad and then from the Labor Unions’ point of view.

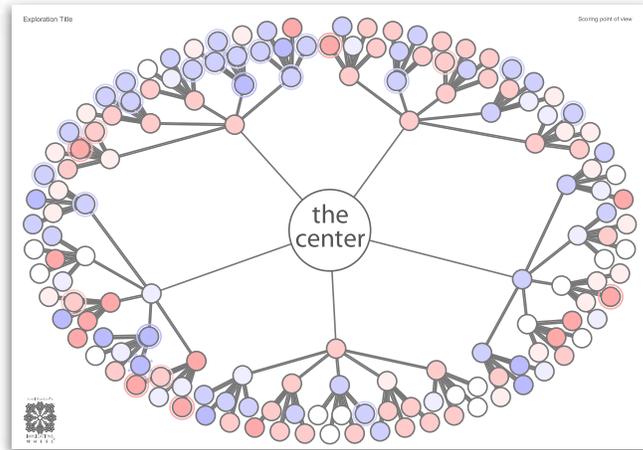
The results included here show the scoring of selected arcs and a “comparison” arc presentation for the two points of view.

A “Reading an Exploration” guide is included.



# The Implications Wheel®

## Reading an Exploration



Start by assuming that **the center** happens. The circles connected to the center are possible consequences of the center. These are called **1st order implications**.

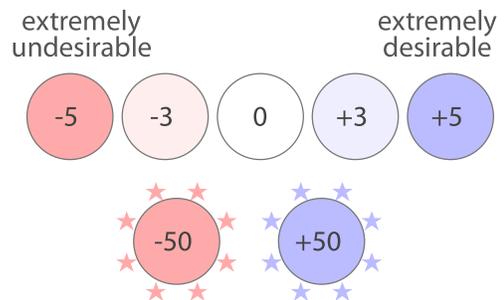
Then assume that the 1st order implications happen. The **2nd order implications** are possible implications of the 1st orders.

Finally, the **3rd order implications** are possible implications of the 2nd orders.

## Scoring for Desirability

The desirability or undesirability of an implication **depends on one's point of view**. The point of view from which these implications were scored is printed in the upper-right corner of the exploration.

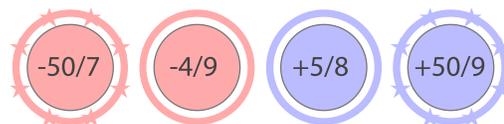
The desirability scale goes from -5 to +5, with two special scores (+/-50) for extraordinary situations.



## Scoring for Likelihood

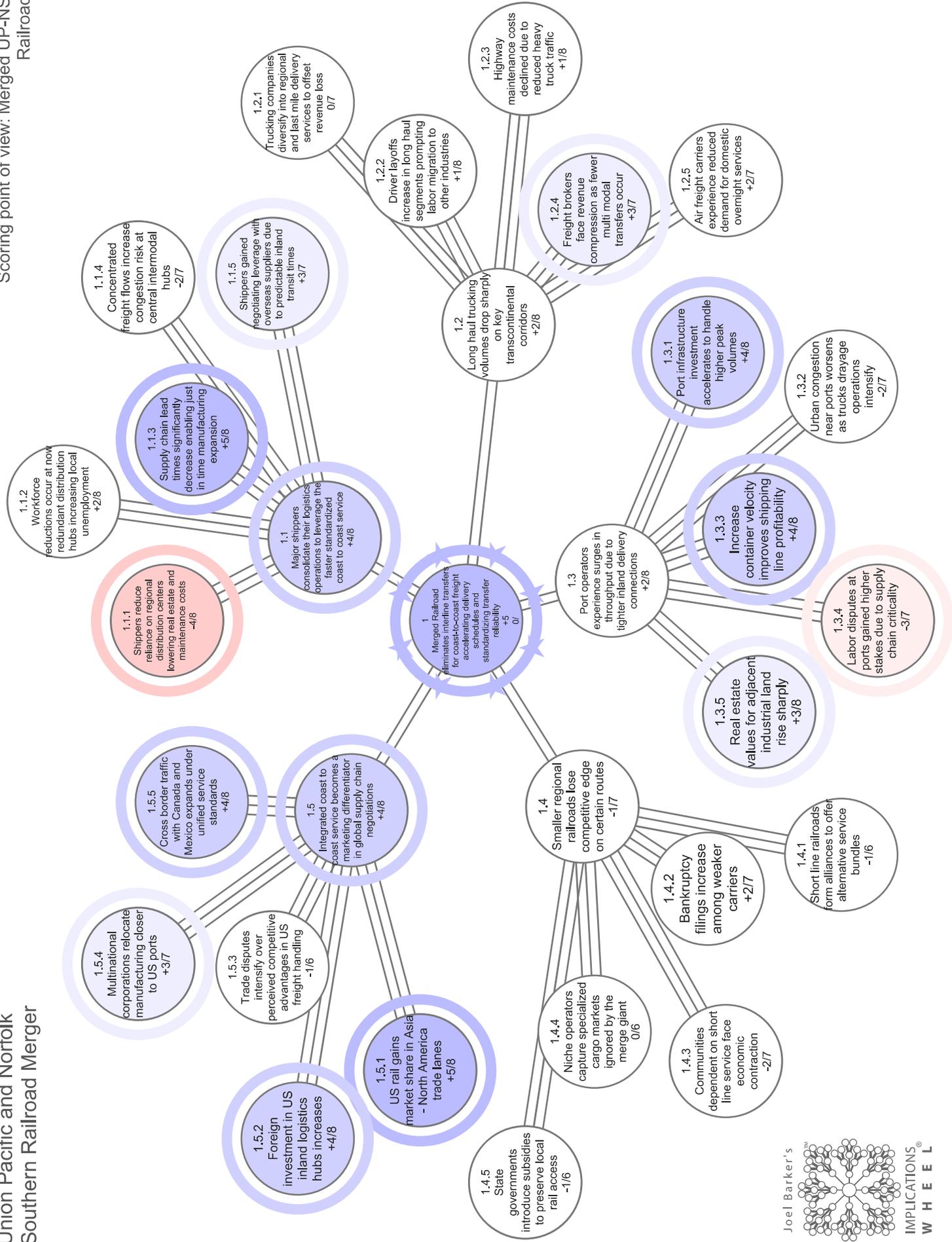
Each likelihood score **assumes the occurrence of the preceding implication**. The likelihood scale is from 1 to 9.

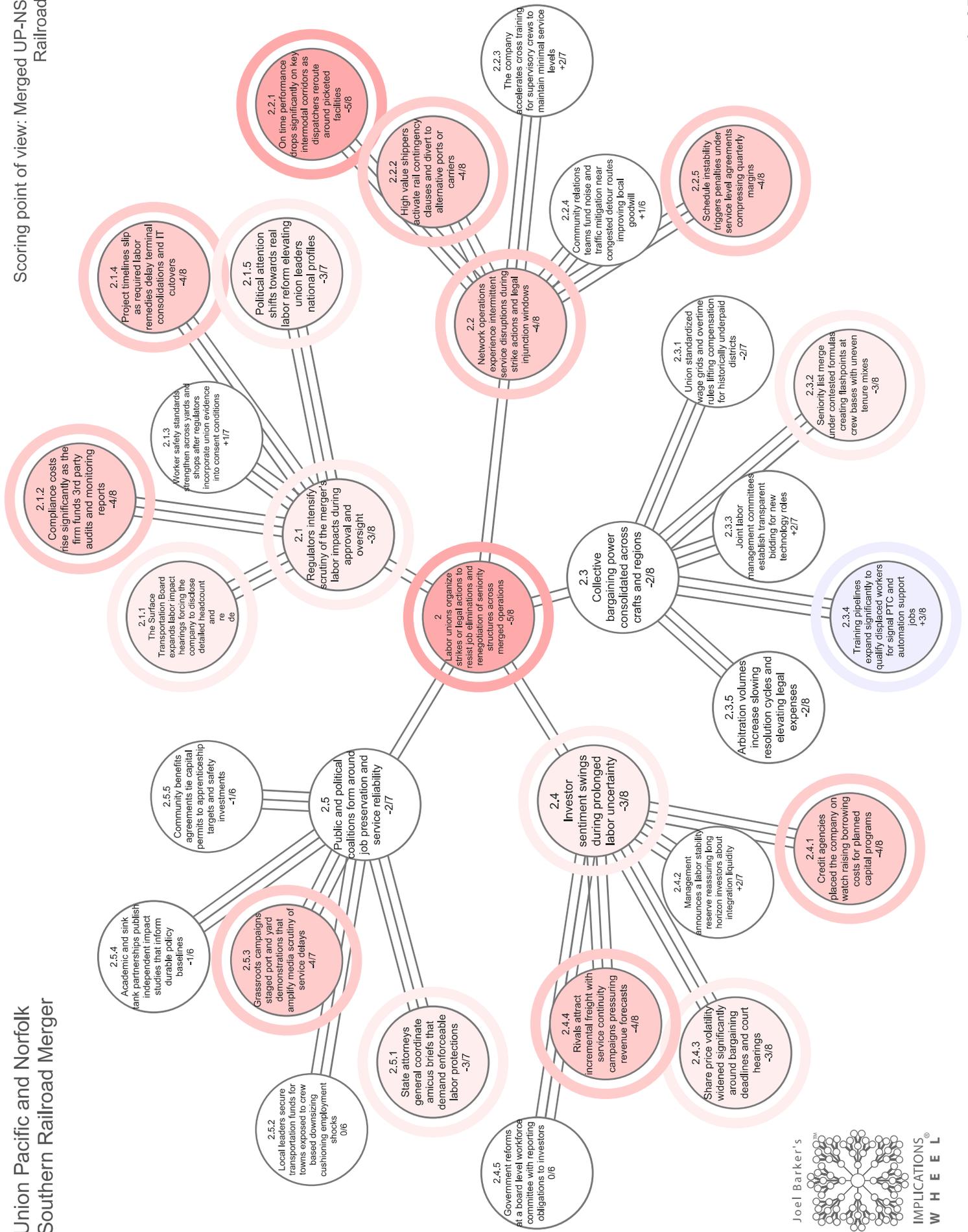
If you see a red or a blue implication that is circled, the circle indicates that the implication received a 7, 8, or 9 likelihood.

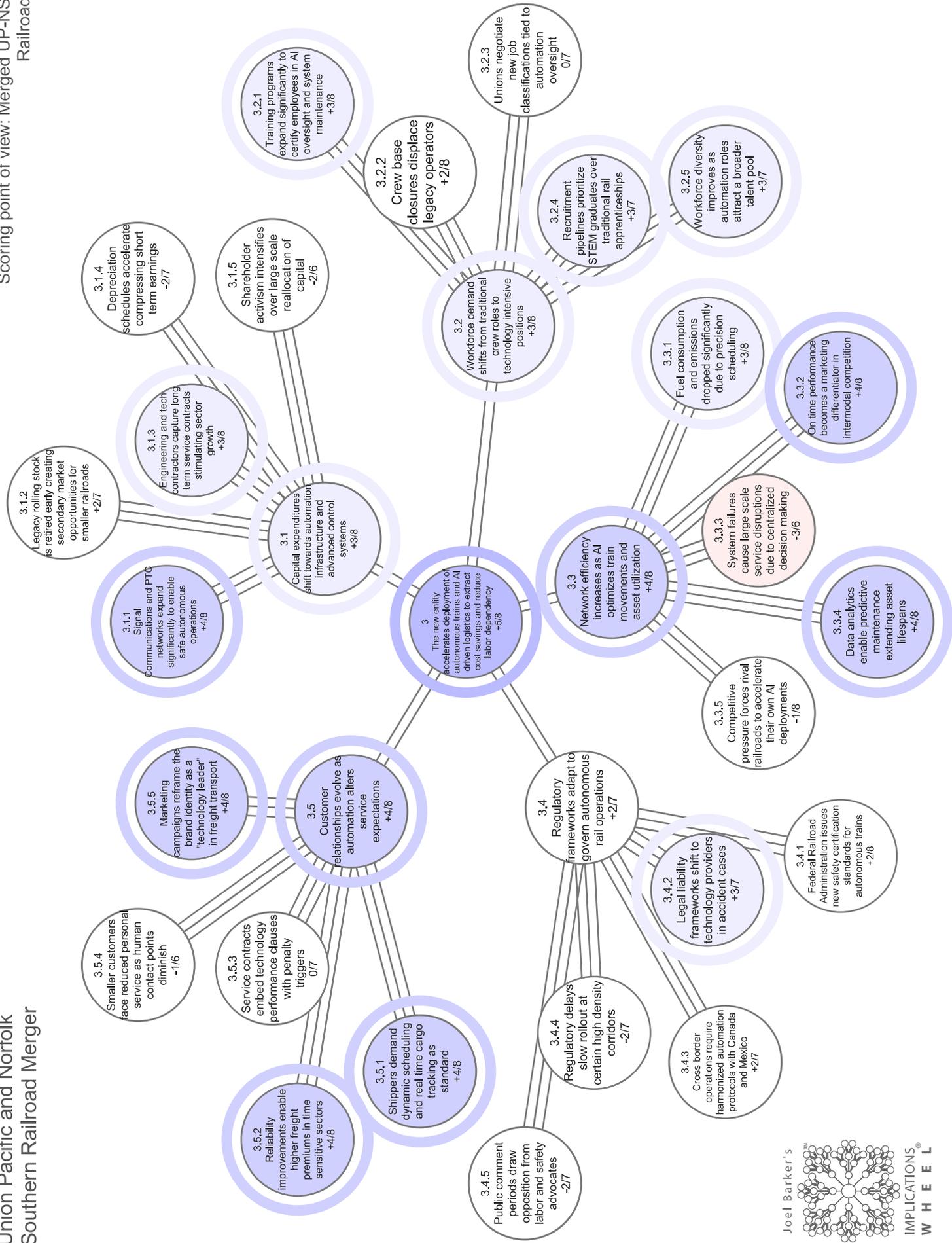


# Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern Railroad Merger

# Scoring point of view: Merged UP-NS Railroad

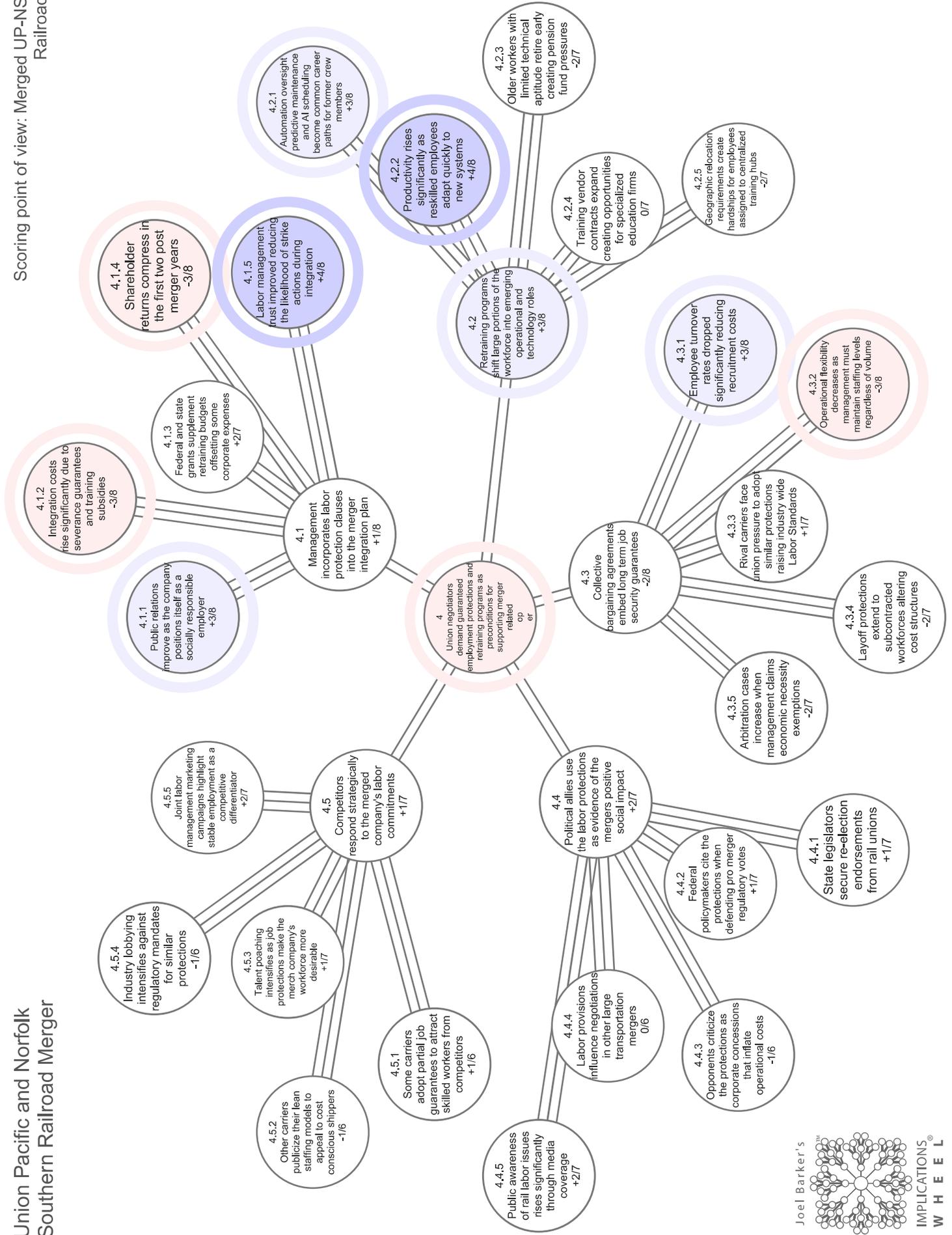


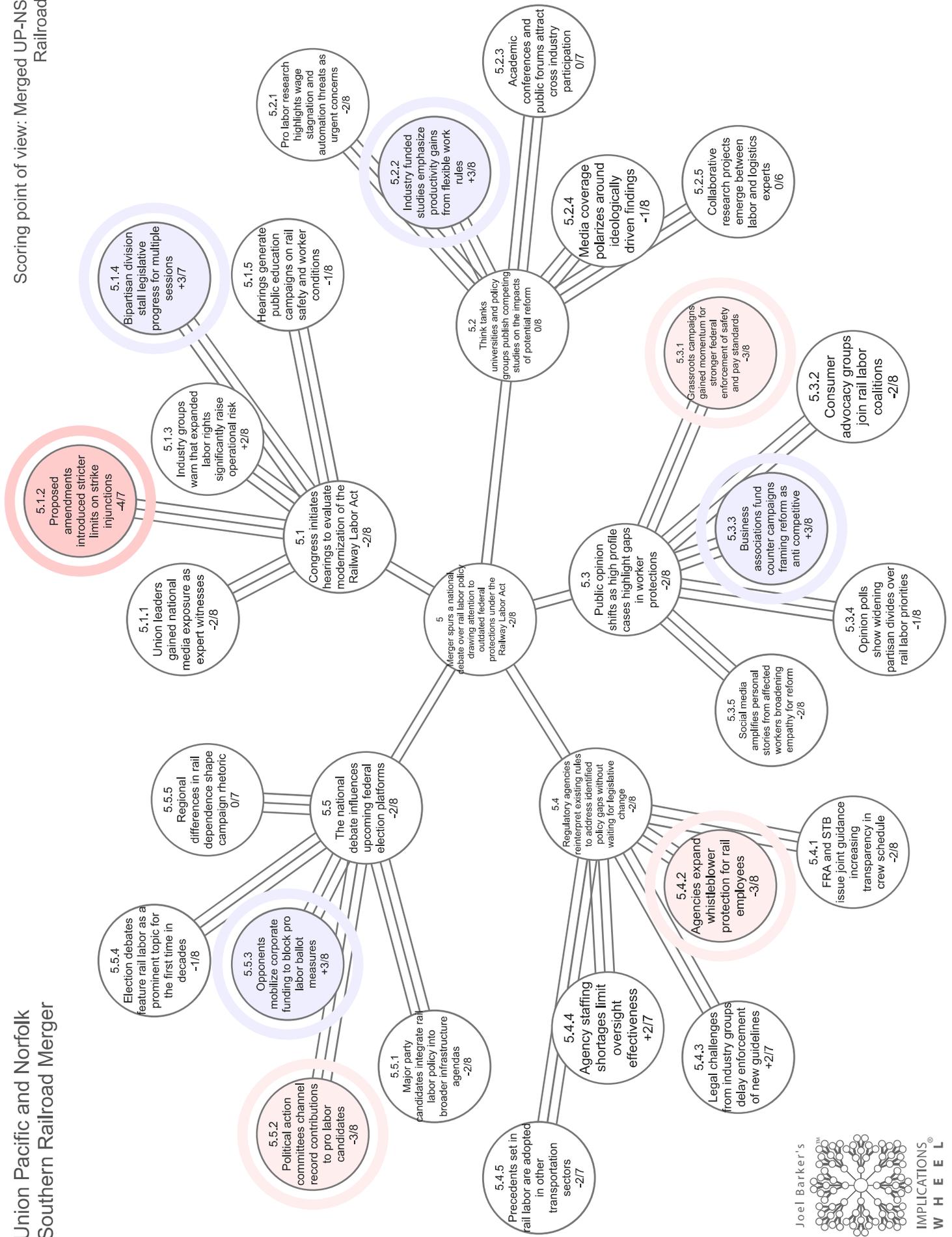




# Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern Railroad Merger

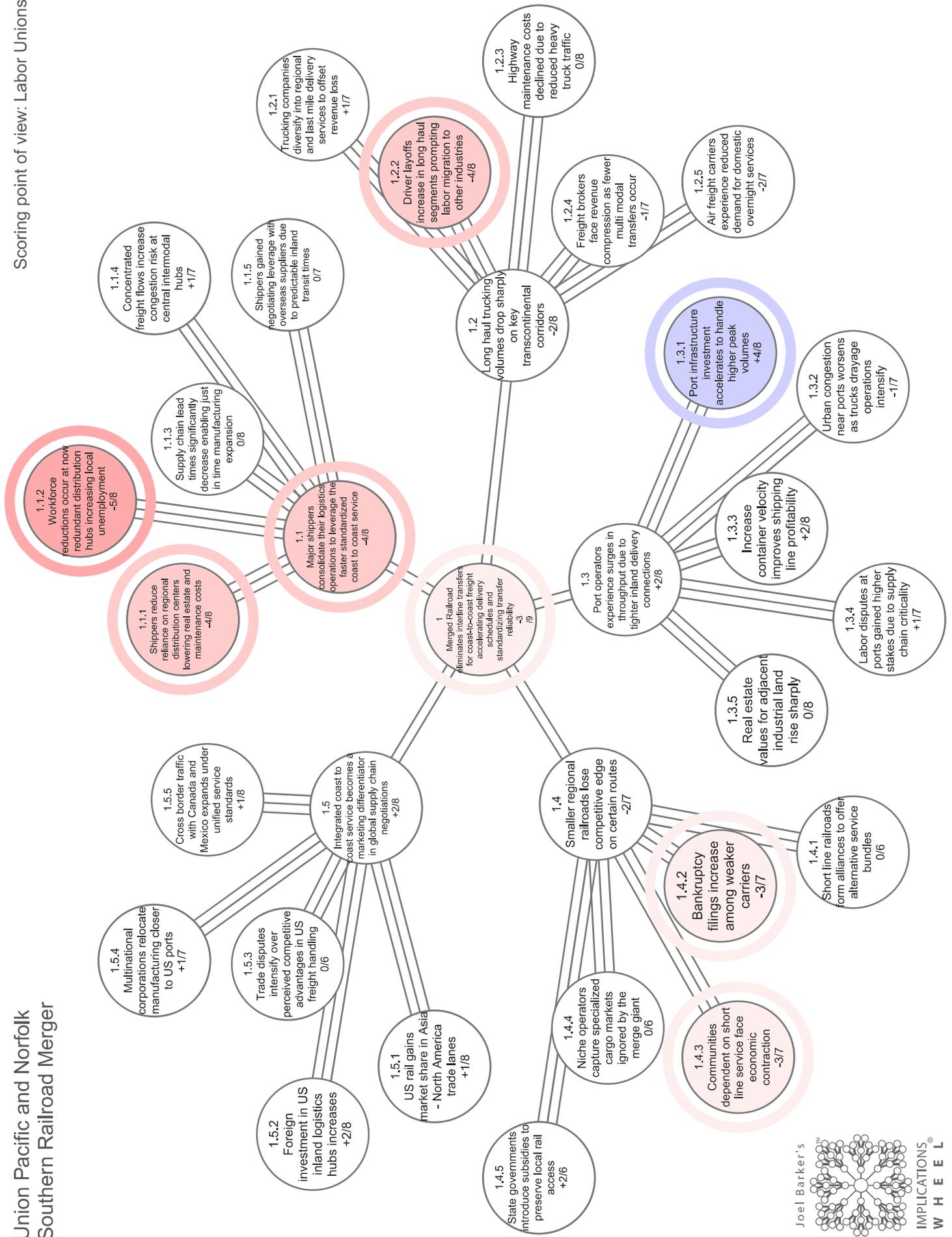
# Scoring point of view: Merged UP-NS Railroad





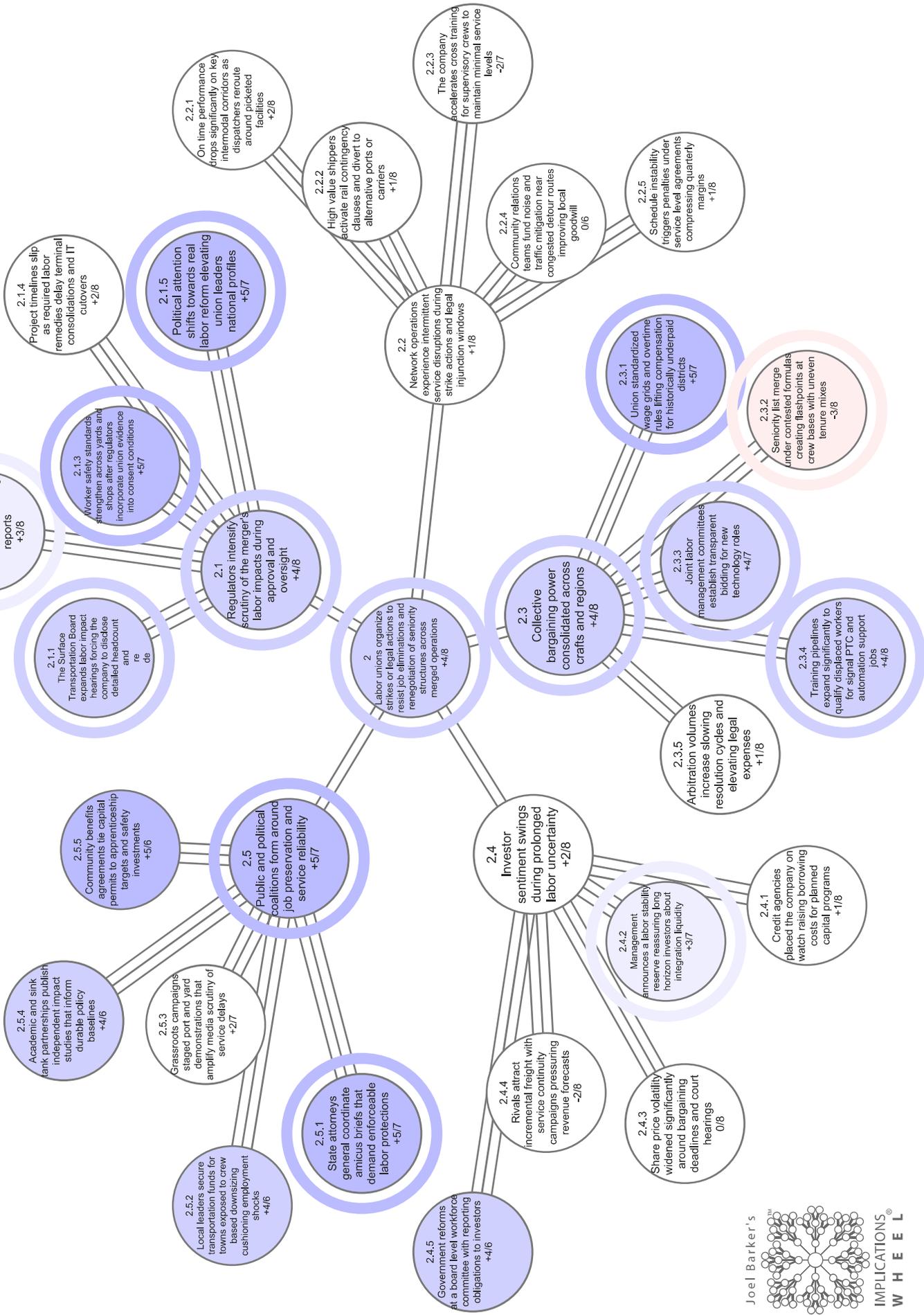
# Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern Railroad Merger

## Scoring point of view: Labor Unions



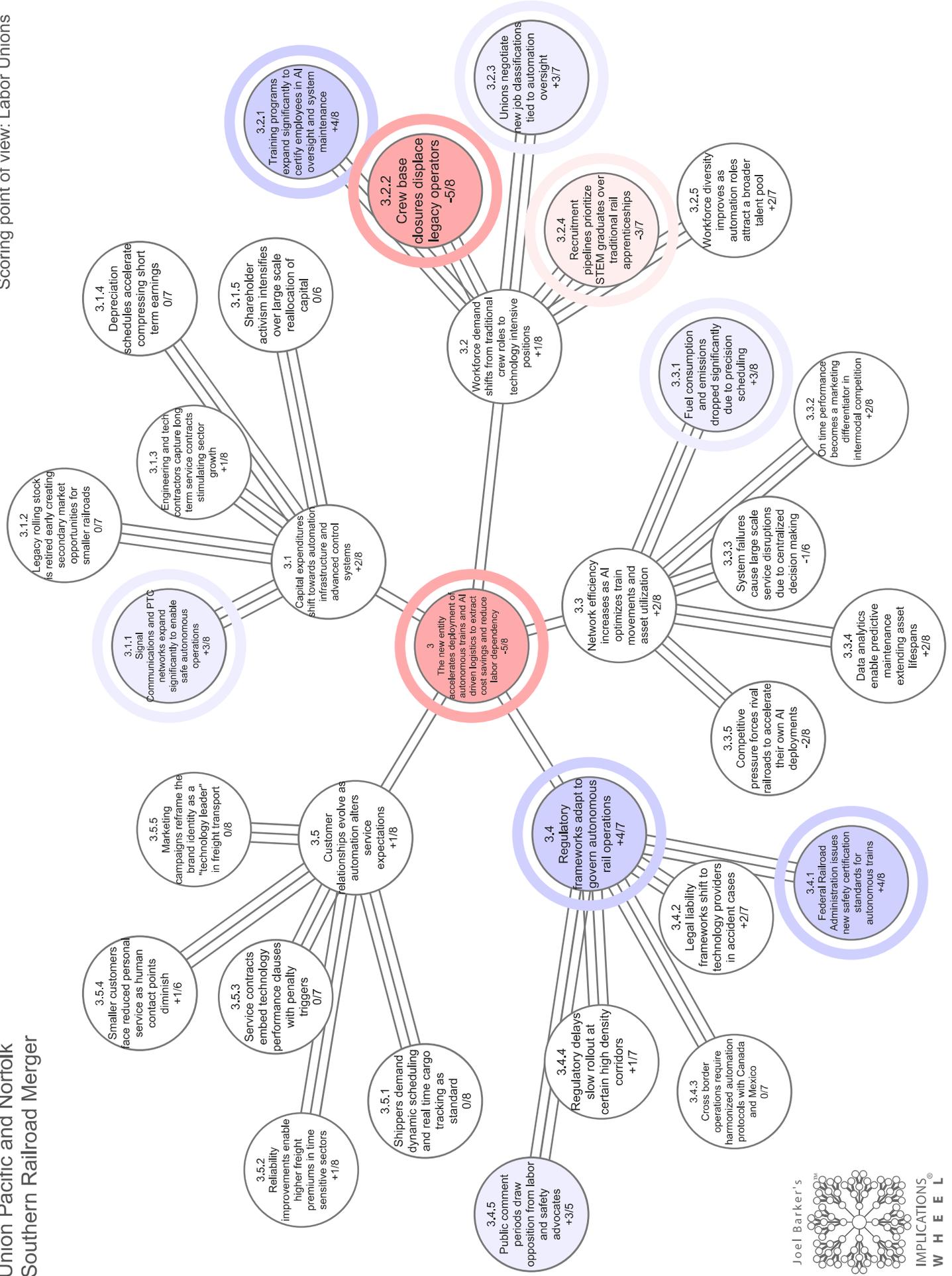
# Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern Railroad Merger

## Scoring point of view: Labor Unions



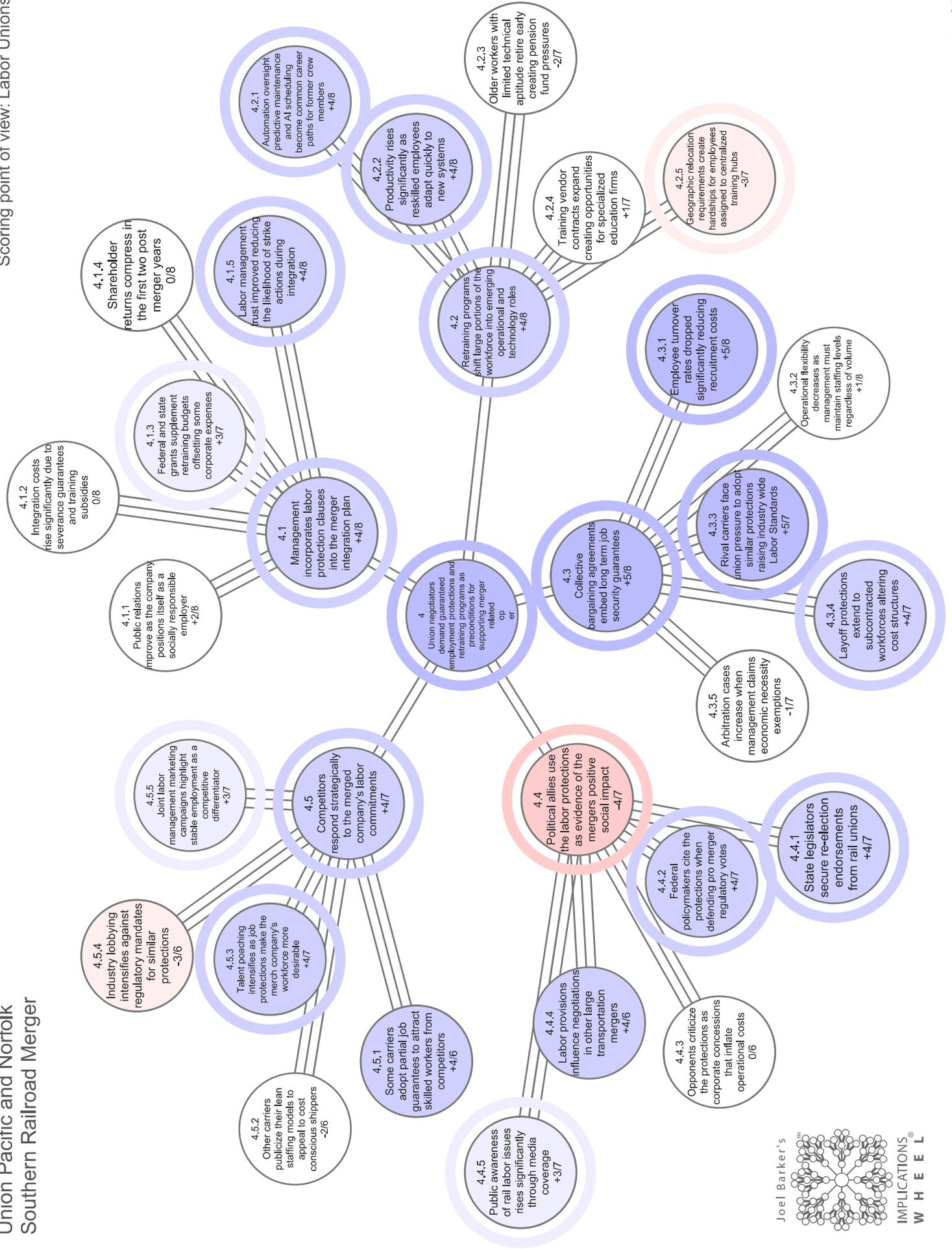
# Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern Railroad Merger

## Scoring point of view: Labor Unions



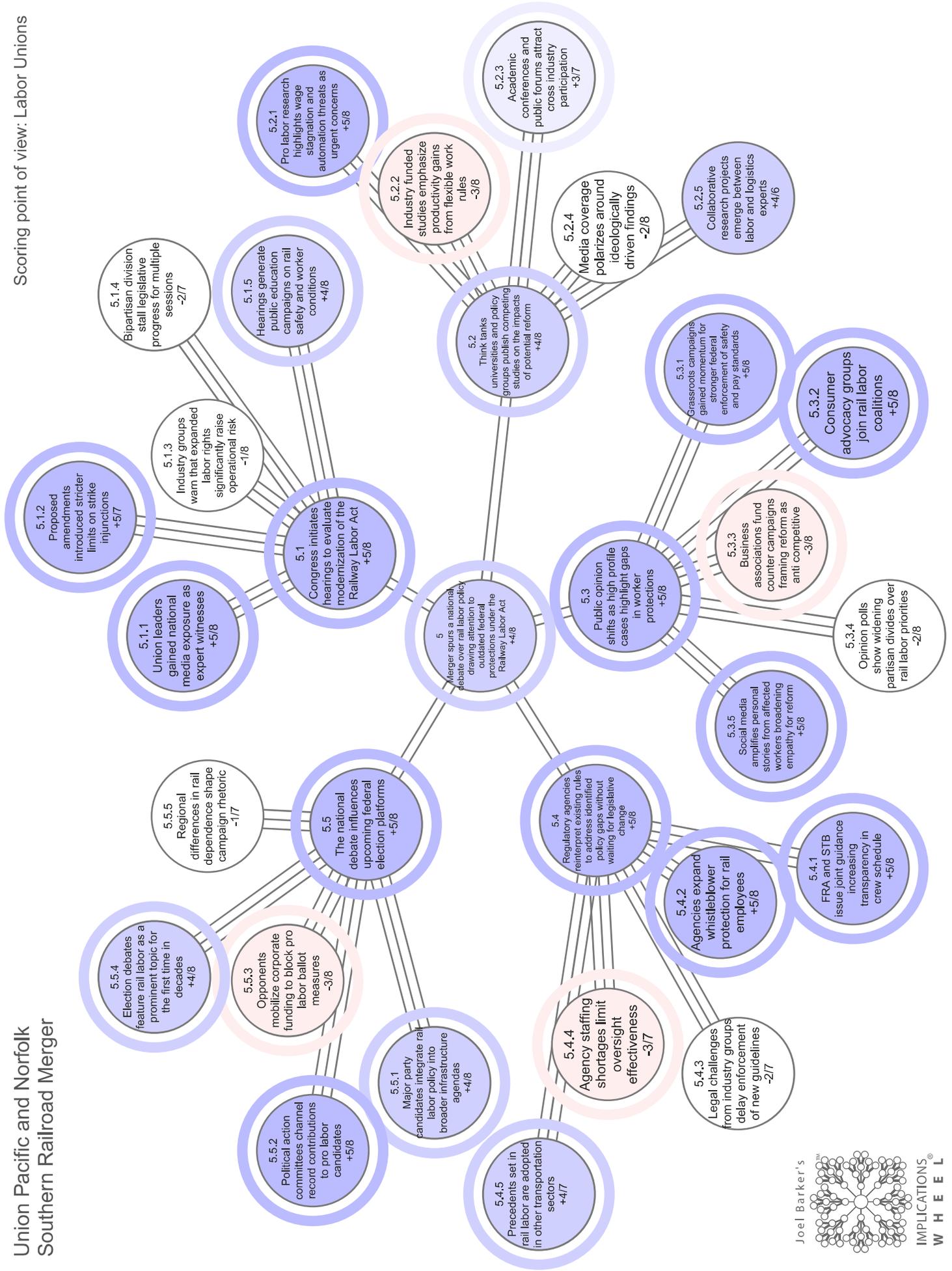
# Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern Railroad Merger

## Scoring point of view: Labor Unions



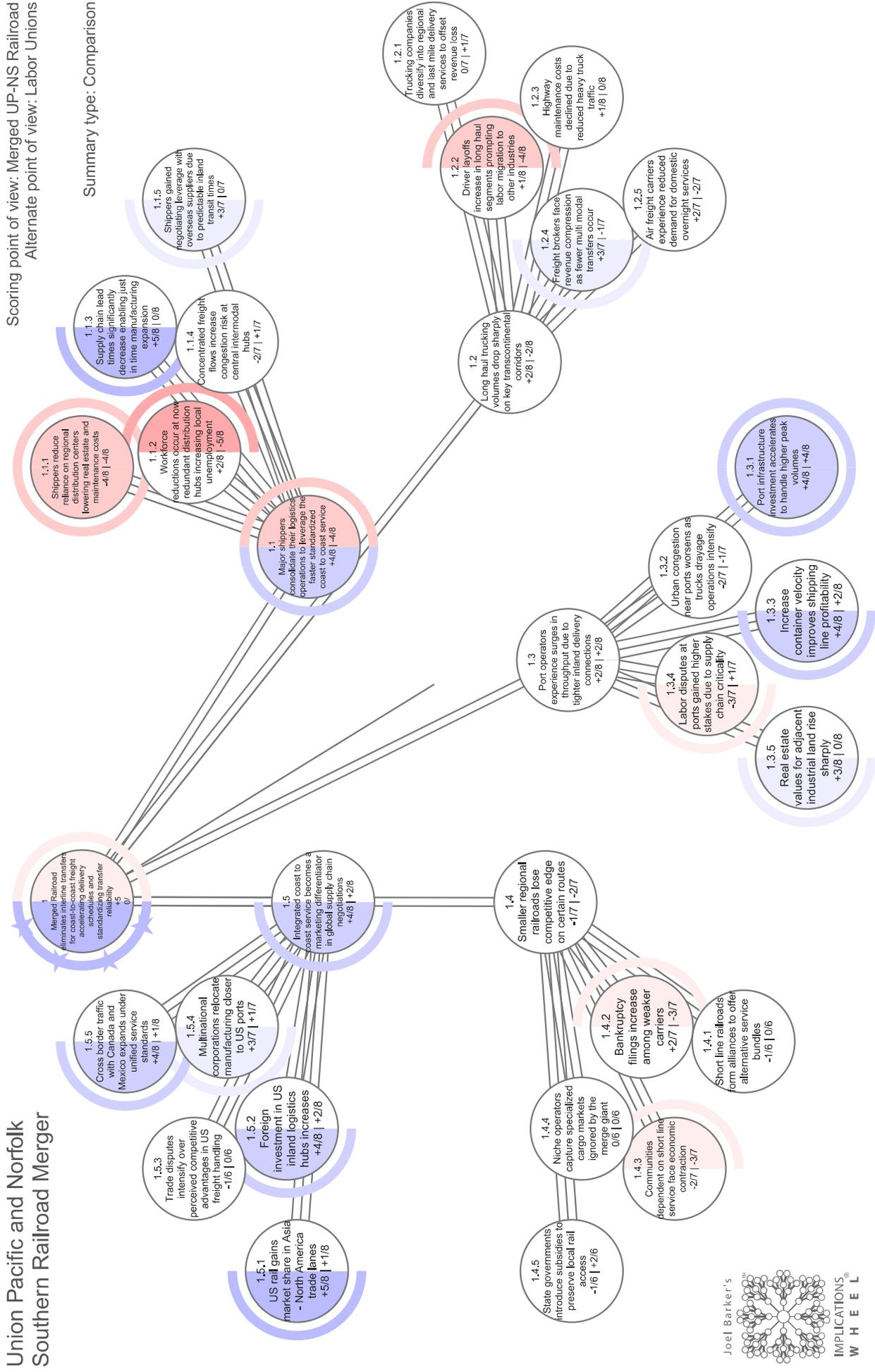
# Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern Railroad Merger

## Scoring point of view: Labor Unions



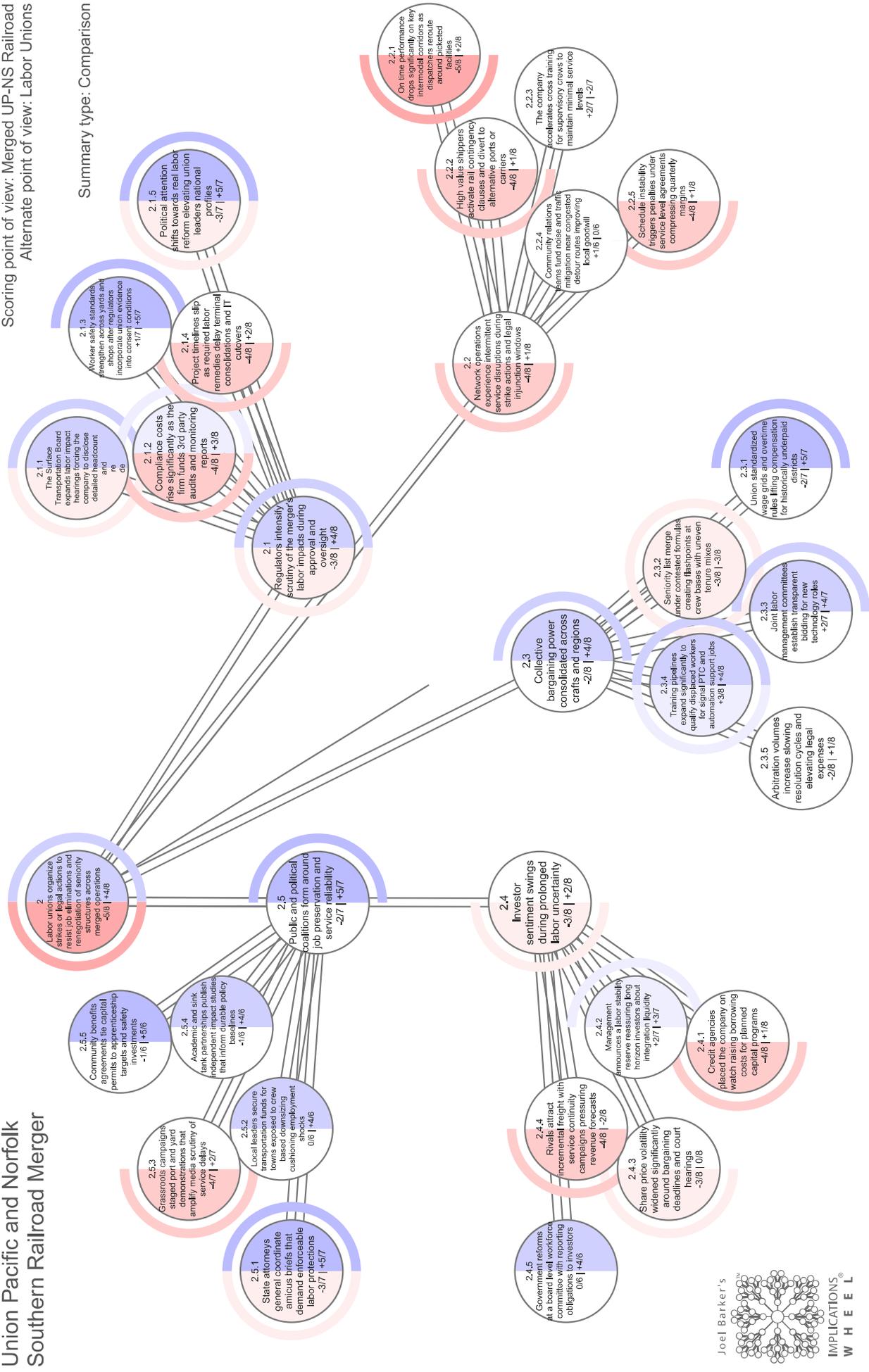
# Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern Railroad Merger

Scoring point of view: Merged UP-NS Railroad  
Alternate point of view: Labor Unions



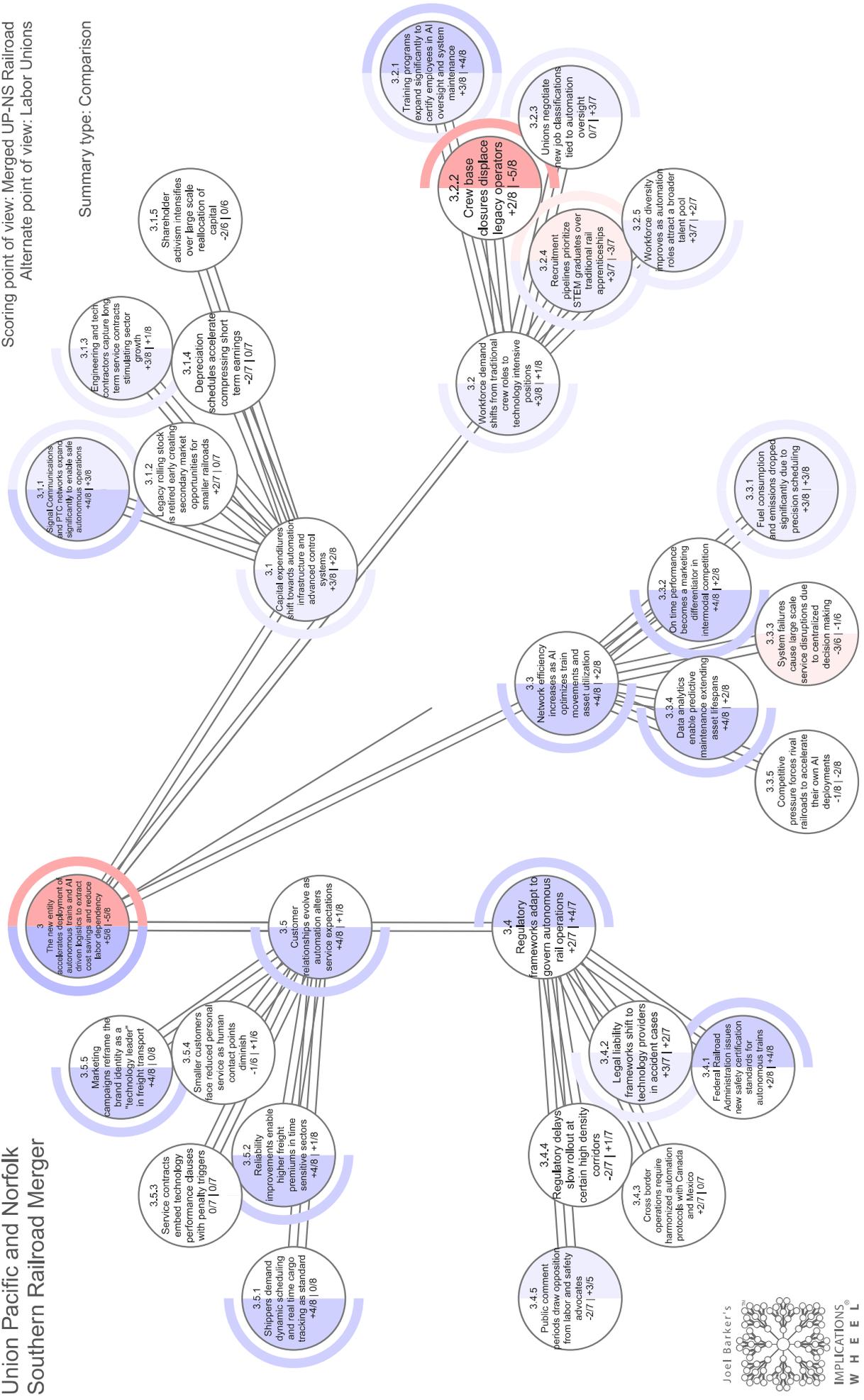
# Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern Railroad Merger

Scoring point of view: Merged UP-NS Railroad  
Alternate point of view: Labor Unions



# Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern Railroad Merger

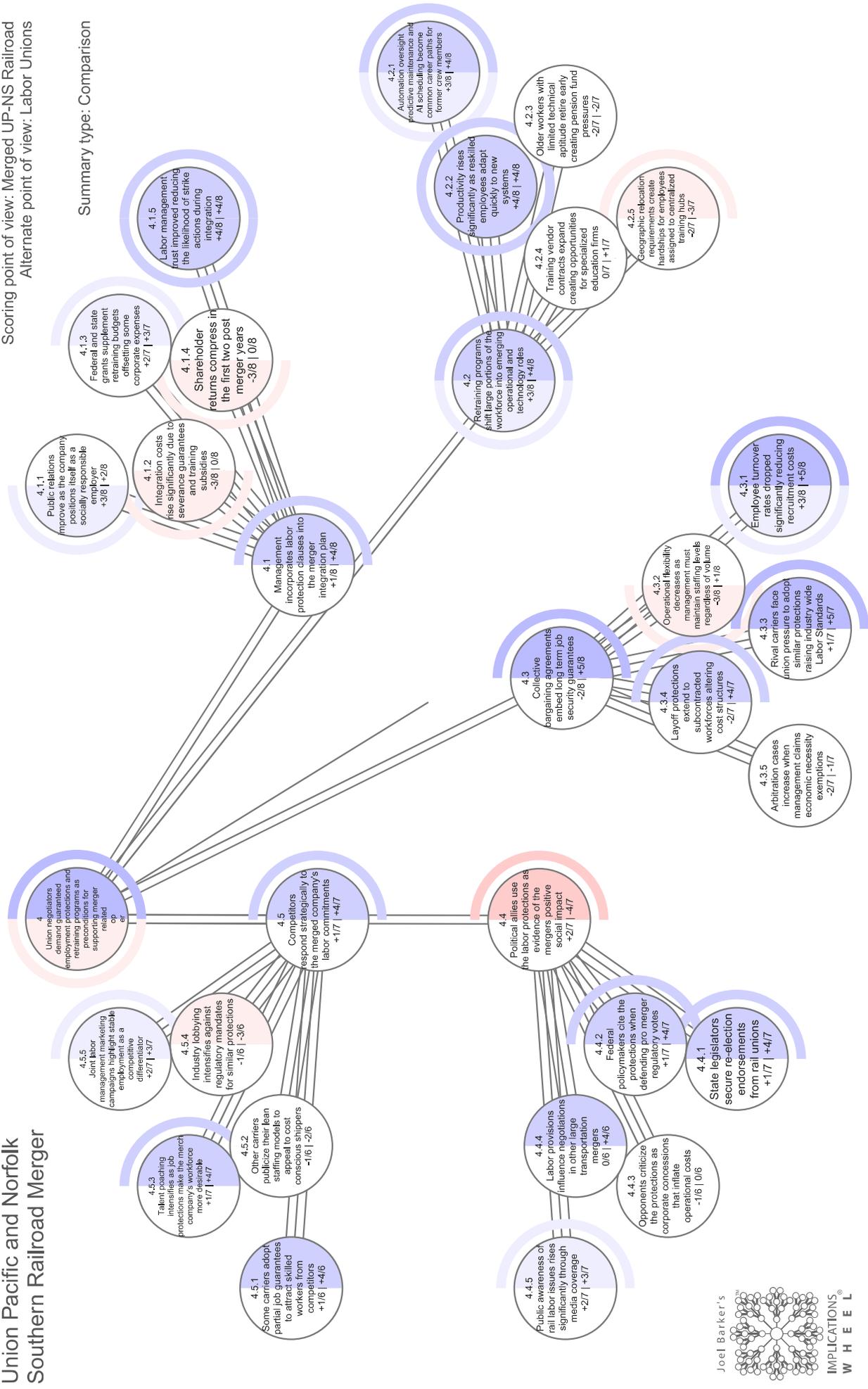
Scoring point of view: Merged UP-NS Railroad  
Alternate point of view: Labor Unions



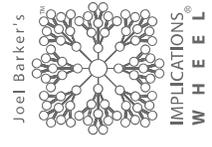
Summary type: Comparison

# Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern Railroad Merger

Scoring point of view: Merged UP-NS Railroad  
Alternate point of view: Labor Unions

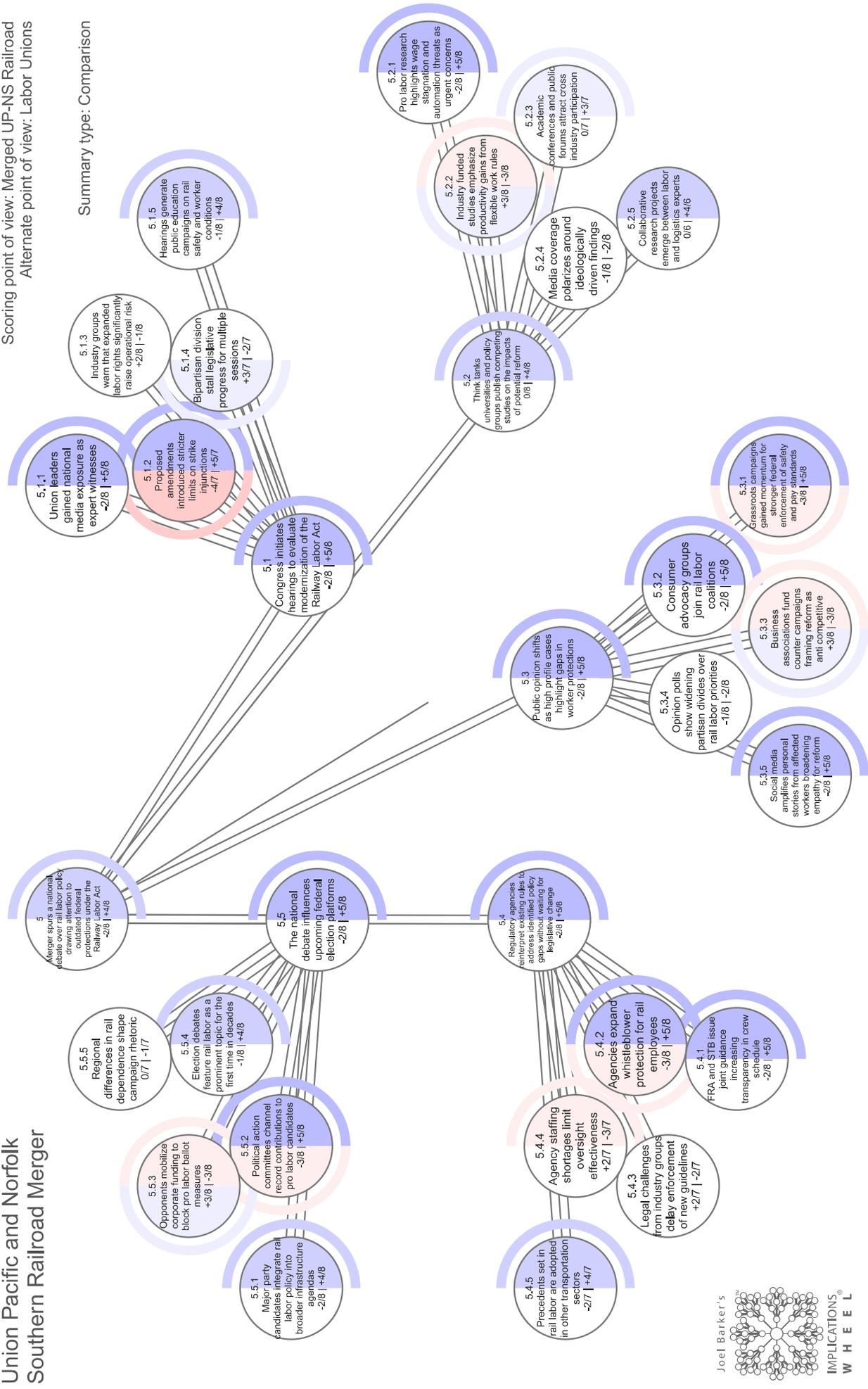


Summary type: Comparison



# Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern Railroad Merger

Scoring point of view: Merged UP-NS Railroad  
Alternate point of view: Labor Unions



Summary type: Comparison

## Scoring Summary

*Note: For this report, I prompted the Scoring GPT to summarize the key results from scoring the five arcs from the two points of view. It offered several options for a table, a graphic presentation, or a summary narrative. I asked for a summary narrative. Usually, as noted in all the “12-2-60” reports, the GPT responses are presented without editing.*

### Overall Themes

Across all five arcs, there is a clear structural divide between the priorities of UP - NS MERGED and LABOR UNIONS.

- **UP - NS MERGED** consistently values operational efficiency, cost reduction, market growth, and strategic positioning, even when these involve workforce reductions or technology displacement.
- **LABOR UNIONS** prioritize job security, fair compensation, safe working conditions, and maintaining bargaining leverage — sometimes at the expense of operational flexibility or shareholder returns.

The arcs reveal pockets of **alignment** — mainly around safety improvements, skill retraining (when funded), and public goodwill — but also **sharp flashpoints**, particularly in automation rollouts, labor protection mandates, and reforms to federal labor law.

---

### Arc-by-Arc Summary

#### Arc 1 – Coast-to-Coast No-Transfer Service

- **UP - NS MERGED:** Rated the first-order implication as a **Triumph (+50)** for eliminating inefficiencies and boosting competitiveness.
  - **LABOR UNIONS:** Saw it as **undesirable (-3)** due to potential job losses from streamlined operations.
  - **Agreement:** Both sides viewed port investment, faster container velocity, and integrated marketing advantages as positive ( ● ).
  - **Disagreement:** Workforce reductions at redundant hubs (+2 UP - NS MERGED vs -5 LABOR UNIONS) and loss of regional service highlight the deepest split.
-

## Arc 2 – Strikes & Legal Actions to Resist Cuts

- **UP - NS MERGED:** Viewed strikes and related disruptions as very undesirable (-5 to -3 across key points).
  - **LABOR UNIONS:** Saw them as necessary leverage (+4 first-order, positives for increasing scrutiny and bargaining power).
  - **Agreement:** Few — port infrastructure investment and some community benefit measures scored positively for both sides.
  - **Disagreement:** Operational disruptions and credit risks were flashpoints, with UP - NS MERGED seeing them as serious threats and LABOR UNIONS seeing them as tools for negotiation.
- 

## Arc 3 – Accelerating Autonomous Trains & AI

- **UP - NS MERGED:** Strongly positive (+5 first-order) for cost savings, efficiency gains, and market differentiation.
  - **LABOR UNIONS:** Strongly negative (-5 first-order) due to displacement of traditional crew roles.
  - **Agreement:** Mutual support for safety tech (signal/PTC upgrades), AI-related training, reduced fuel/emissions, and predictive maintenance.
  - **Disagreement:** Crew-base closures (+2 UP - NS MERGED vs -5 LABOR UNIONS) and STEM-biased hiring (+3 UP - NS MERGED vs -3 LABOR UNIONS) were major flashpoints.
- 

## Arc 4 – Guaranteed Job Protections & Retraining

- **UP - NS MERGED:** Mixed view — some positives for PR, reduced strike risk, and productivity gains, but negatives for cost, reduced flexibility, and pension strain.
  - **LABOR UNIONS:** Strongly positive (+5 first-order) as a strategic win, with high scores for job security, political backing, and industry influence.
  - **Agreement:** Retraining programs, reduced turnover, and improved trust were all win-win items.
  - **Disagreement:** Extending protections to subcontractors and lobbying battles over mandates split the sides.
-

## Arc 5 – National Debate on RLA Reform

- **UP - NS MERGED:** Slightly negative (-2 first-order), fearing expanded labor rights and operational constraints.
  - **LABOR UNIONS:** Positive (+4 first-order), viewing the debate as an opportunity to modernize protections.
  - **Agreement:** Almost none — this arc was largely adversarial.
  - **Disagreement:** Limiting strike injunctions (-4 UP - NS MERGED vs +5 LABOR UNIONS) and expanded whistleblower protections (-3 UP - NS MERGED vs +5 LABOR UNIONS) were among the biggest policy flashpoints.
- 

### Patterns of Agreement

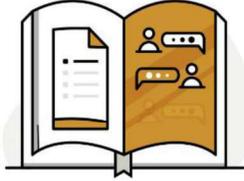
- **Safety and standards:** Both sides scored positively on infrastructure and operational safety improvements (e.g., 1.1.1 signal/PTC upgrades, FRA transparency, predictive maintenance).
  - **Skill development:** Funded retraining into higher-tech roles (especially when job security is preserved) tended to be mutually desirable.
  - **Public goodwill:** PR boosts, community benefits agreements, and political goodwill measures were often win–win.
- 

### Patterns of Disagreement

- **Job reductions:** Any implication tied to workforce displacement scored as highly positive for UP - NS MERGED (cost control) and highly negative for LABOR UNIONS (job loss).
- **Automation hiring bias:** STEM-heavy recruitment and reduced reliance on traditional apprenticeships were contentious.
- **Labor law reforms:** Changes that expanded union rights or limited strike injunctions drew starkly opposite scores.
- **Operational flexibility:** Provisions locking in staffing or extending protections to subcontractors were attractive to LABOR UNIONS but costly and undesirable to UP - NS MERGED.

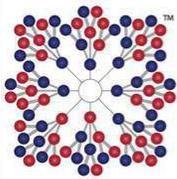
## VI. Scoring Exercise

In **12 – 2 – 60 Scouting Journey** reports, an opportunity to interact with the exploration will be included.



*This is an exercise frequently conducted with audiences during an introduction to the Implications Wheel. It also introduces participants to evaluating the implications of an exploration.*

1. Review the “arcs” included earlier in this report.
2. Select a scoring “point-of-view” from the list of suggestions generated by ChatGPT or...
3. Point-of-View:
4. Identify, based on the “point-of-view” and your assessment, the three most important **negative** implications and the three most important **positive** implications.
5. For this “12 – 2 – 60” report, you might also look at the scored arcs and assess your agreement or disagreement with the GPT scoring. You might also consider how the scores of some implications would change if you adopt a different point of view.



"Amazing!" (Joel Barker)

An Implications Wheel™ – ChatGPT Experiment

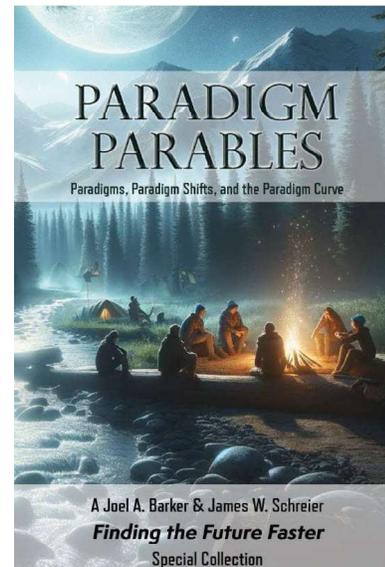


This report compares an exploration developed by I-Wheel facilitators to the same topic explored by ChatGPT.

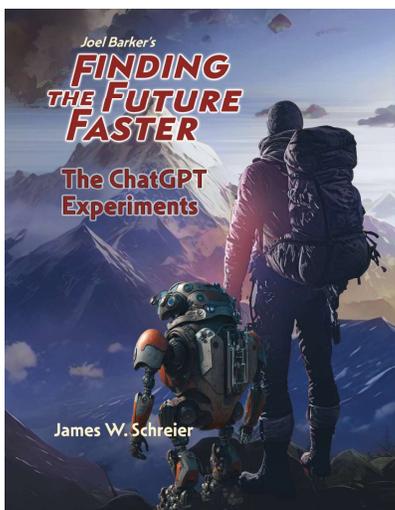
Key observations include the identification of identical and similar implications plus the need to actively “facilitate” the work of ChatGPT.



This special publication contains multiple examples of paradigms, paradigm shifts, and applications of the paradigm curve.



This special publication contains experiments and examples of how ChatGPT works with Joel’s Strategic Exploration tools.



SCAN TO REQUEST MORE INFORMATION!



There are six Chat “GPTs” developed and trained based on Joel Barker’s Strategic Exploration Tools.

Strategic Exploration

GPT Guides



**Future Insight**

*A strategic exploration GPT for interrogating trends, innovations, and paradigm shifts. It uses a formal set of questions based on the T.I.P.S Tracking Interrogation process.*



**Implications Explorer**

*Expert-level GPT for direct, specific, first-order implications.*



**Implications Wheel “Arc” Explorer**

*Generates a 5 x 5 Implications Wheel Arc.*



**Implications Scorer**

*Scores implications for an "Arc" of an Implications Wheel. A specific point-of-view is specified to begin the scoring.*



**Campfire Inquiry**

*A structured inquiry of Implications Wheel results, based on “When the Scouts Return.”*



**Barriers, Bridges, Information Needs**

*Generates possible decision strategies for specific I-Wheel Implications*