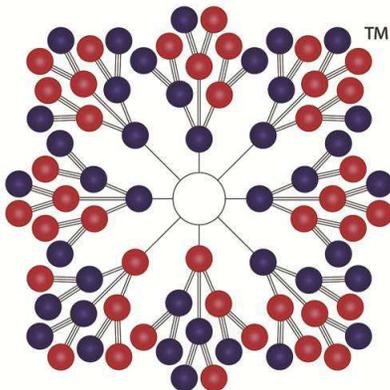


## A Strategic Scouting Journey

Report #25-08-S

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

Joel Barker's



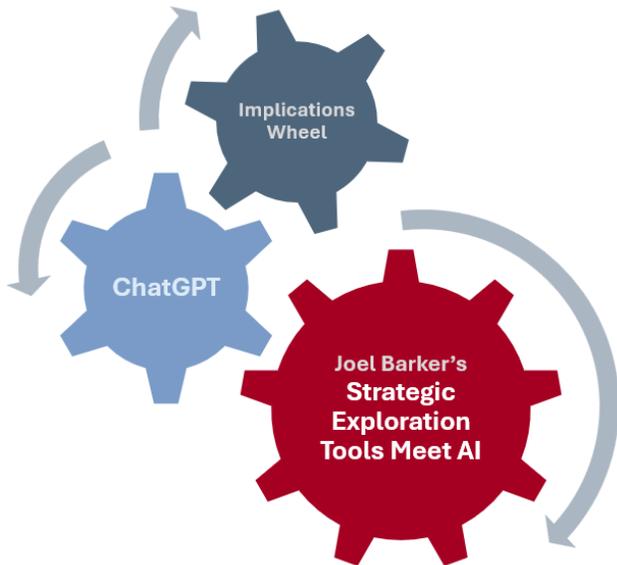
IMPLICATIONS  
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*The Implications Wheel<sup>®</sup> will give you a substantial advantage in finding, recognizing, and securing your future.*

*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 the "12- 2- 60" Scouting Journeys, Chat 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 (with some "experimental" alternatives).
- Based on the selection of one "positive" and one "negative" first-order implication, generate a complete "arc" containing five "second-order" implications and five "third-order" implications for each "second-order" (*An "arc" with 31 implications*).
- Suggest several possible "points-of-view" for scoring.

For this special "Strategic Scouting Journey," a significantly different approach is being taken. Looking at a topic with core connections to some classic explorations facilitated decades ago by Joel Barker, it was decided to shift into a different structure.

## Mergers and Acquisitions

In the history of the Implications Wheel, mergers and acquisitions stand out with two classic examples that Joel always discussed during Implications Wheel Facilitator Training Programs.

The first involved a significant expansion program in the financial industry. When the acquiring organization began merger negotiations with another organization, they completed an Implications Wheel exploration on the “**possibilities of acquiring X.**” They then required the potential acquisition to complete an exploration on the “**possibilities of being acquired.**” Upon completion of the exploration, the results were exchanged, with significant impacts: 1) the merger/acquisition process slowed significantly, but 2) the integration of organizations, for completed projects, proceeded much more smoothly.

The second example was considered a bit more dramatic by Joel. A major health care organization explored the question of the “**possibilities of acquiring X.**” The results indicated that the acquisition should not proceed. It was perceived to impact the organization’s staff negatively. However, a short time later, the acquisition took place. In consultation, Joel discovered that the original center should have been on the “**possibilities of a major national organization acquiring X.**”

In part, because of these classic examples, when it was announced that a merger was being explored between the Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern railroads, the decision to undertake a Scouting Journey was clear. The results, based on the Strategic Exploration GPTs, exceeded expectations and revealed some interesting powers of the GPTs.

### Two Key Points:

- *For the majority of the information presented in these reports, the GPT output is provided with no editing. Specific implications are edited to ensure compliance with the Implications Wheel rules for specificity. Other edits are noted.*
- *The Implications Wheel process is “highly facilitated,” whether in-person or using the online mode. Facilitators are certified via a 5-day live or online training program. The results included in these reports are “highly facilitated.”*

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

## I. Create a “Center”

Please create a brief introduction on the statistics, then interrogate the trends in the attached report on veteran suicide.



Union Pacific (UP) and Norfolk Southern (NS) are in advanced talks to create the **first coast-to-coast freight railroad** in U.S. history. The merged entity, valued around **\$200 billion**, would link Eastern and Western rail networks, eliminating mid-continent transfers and potentially improving shipping efficiency.

### Rationale

- **Operational efficiency:** Unified scheduling, faster transit, reduced freight handling.
- **Market competitiveness:** Strengthen rail’s position against trucking and foreign logistics operators.
- **Industry trend:** Follows the 2023 Canadian Pacific–Kansas City Southern merger and may prompt a BNSF–CSX response.

### Opportunities

- Scale efficiencies could lower costs and improve service reliability.
- Potential environmental gains from shifting freight from trucks to rail.
- Strategic advantage for large shippers and ports.

### Risks & Challenges

- **Regulatory approval:** The Surface Transportation Board (STB) must approve, with a history of skepticism toward mergers that reduce competition.
- **Market concentration:** Could reduce the number of major U.S. rail operators from four to two, raising antitrust concerns.
- **Labor opposition:** Potential job losses from operational consolidation.
- **Shipper pushback:** Smaller customers fear higher rates.

# 1. Innovation Interrogation

## Where it sits in the “technology” (business model) life cycle

- This is not a new *technology* but a **business model innovation**—integrating two massive rail networks into an ocean-to-ocean system.
- It’s in the **Early Adopter** stage for modern rail consolidation: The 2023 Canadian Pacific–Kansas City Southern merger is a recent precedent, but no one has yet built a truly coast-to-coast U.S. freight network.

## Winners if it reaches the Early Majority stage

- **Railway operators** (UP + NS) from scale efficiencies and unified operations.
- **Large shippers** that benefit from reduced transfer times and possibly more predictable schedules.
- **Investors** from increased market power and potentially higher margins.
- **Infrastructure suppliers** due to increased capital investment in rail corridors.

## Losers if it reaches the Early Majority stage

- **Competing railroads** (BNSF, CSX) unless they merge in response.
- **Small shippers** if reduced competition leads to higher rates.
- **Trucking sector** if rail takes back some freight market share.

## How to speed up adoption

- Demonstrate clear public benefits—reduced congestion, greener logistics.
- Secure early regulatory concessions from the **Surface Transportation Board (STB)**.
- Offer long-term rate stability guarantees to shippers.

## How to slow it down

- Labor unions could resist over job security concerns.
- Competitors and trade associations could file antitrust objections.

## Who could alter adoption speed

- **STB** (regulatory approval power).
  - **Congress** (could intervene if market concentration is seen as excessive).
  - **Major freight customers** (public endorsements or opposition).
-

## **2. Trend Interrogation**

### **Trend identified**

- Consolidation in North American freight rail toward larger, integrated transcontinental networks.

### **Source trust level**

- Highly credible—information from Associated Press and trade sources.

### **Why this trend?**

- Career/industry relevance: Rail efficiency and logistics competition directly impact supply chains.

### **Acceleration or deceleration?**

- Accelerating—recent CPKC merger shows regulators are open to some consolidation; competitive pressure may push other players (BNSF, CSX) toward pairing up.

### **Winners if trend continues**

- Mega-rail operators with national reach.
- Ports that connect to these larger networks.
- Industries shipping heavy bulk goods (agriculture, coal, manufacturing).

### **Losers if trend continues**

- Independent regional carriers squeezed out.
- Trucking sector losing certain long-haul routes.
- Small-volume shippers facing less negotiating power.

### **How to speed up**

- Demonstrate environmental benefits of shifting freight from road to rail.
- Offer interoperability for smaller carriers.

### **How to slow down**

- Push stricter antitrust reviews.
  - Encourage public policy favoring modal diversity in freight transport.
-

### 3. Paradigm Shift Interrogation

#### Old paradigm

- Freight rail divided into Eastern and Western operators, with goods transferred between systems mid-continent.

#### New paradigm

- A single integrated, coast-to-coast rail network with unified scheduling, pricing, and infrastructure.

#### Problem solved

- Eliminates costly and time-consuming mid-continent transfers.
- Creates operational consistency and potentially more reliable delivery windows.

#### Who gets “put back to zero”

- Competing railroads forced to rethink strategies.
- Some regional carriers and interline service providers lose their role.

#### Winners

- UP + NS from scale efficiencies and market dominance.
- Large shippers with coast-to-coast lanes.
- Ports on both coasts with faster inland connections.

#### Losers

- Competitors losing share unless they merge.
- Smaller shippers if pricing power shifts too far toward the merged entity.
- Labor groups if consolidation leads to workforce cuts.

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#### Bottom Line

This merger could **reshape U.S. freight logistics** into a two-giant standoff—UP+NS vs. BNSF+CSX—restoring rail’s competitiveness against trucking but raising serious antitrust and labor concerns. The key battle will be in the STB’s approval process, where the companies must convincingly prove that competition will be preserved or enhanced.

## II. Generate “First-Order” Implications

**Prompt:** (to the “Implications Explorer” GPT) What are the possible implications of a merger between the Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern railroads?



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:

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- 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.

**ChatGPT:** 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.

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. The ChatGPT Takeover

The “Implications Explorer” GPT is programmed to ask if additional sets of first-order implications should be generated from an alternative point of view.

In evaluating the two sets of first-orders, one that stood out was #11 from the Union perspective.

**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.

This is related to a very significant and frequent occurrence facilitating Implications Wheel exploration live, or when leadership is reviewing results. **“We need to do a Wheel on this one,”** referring to a specific implication. So...

**Prompt:** Is the Railway Labor Act considered outdated in terms of federal protections?

**ChatGPT:** Many labor and policy experts **do consider parts of the Railway Labor Act (RLA)** outdated in terms of federal protections, especially when evaluated against the modern freight rail environment.

Here’s why:

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#### 1. Origin and Age

- The RLA was enacted in **1926** (extended to airlines in 1936) and reflects the industrial and labor conditions of the early 20th century.
- Its original intent was to **prevent strikes from disrupting interstate commerce**, not necessarily to modernize worker protections.

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#### 2. Limited Strike Leverage

- The RLA imposes a **long, multi-step dispute resolution process**—negotiation, mediation, possible arbitration, cooling-off periods—before workers can legally strike.
  - The President and Congress can intervene to **block or delay strikes**, which critics say tips the balance toward employers.
-

### 3. Narrow Focus on Job Security

- The RLA focuses on maintaining service continuity, but it **lacks strong provisions for protecting jobs** during mergers, automation, or large-scale operational changes.
  - Layoff protections and retraining requirements are largely determined by **collective bargaining agreements**, not federal law.
- 

### 4. Inflexibility with Modern Rail Economics

- The Act was written for a time when **railroads were highly fragmented**, not dominated by a handful of mega-carriers.
  - Its structure doesn't directly address **merger-induced workforce consolidation**, modern safety risks, or the impacts of AI and autonomous train technology.
- 

### 5. Comparative Weakness to Other Labor Laws

- Compared to the **National Labor Relations Act (NLRA)**, which governs most industries, the RLA is more restrictive in strike rights and **less adaptable** to changing labor market conditions.
  - RLA-covered workers also face **tighter procedural hurdles** to organize or win new workplace protections.
- 

If you'd like, I can prepare an **implications set** specifically exploring *what happens to rail labor relations if the RLA remains unchanged during a mega-merger like Union Pacific–Norfolk Southern*. That would connect directly to your stakeholder analysis.

Here is a set of **12 first-order implications** from the **point of view of labor unions**, focused on a Union Pacific–Norfolk Southern merger **if the Railway Labor Act (RLA) remains unchanged**.

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- 1. One possibility is** that unions experience prolonged delays in contract renegotiations due to the RLA's multi-step dispute resolution process.
  - 2. One possibility is** that the merged company proceeds with large-scale crew base closures before unions can legally initiate strike action.
  - 3. One possibility is** that the RLA's procedural hurdles weaken unions' ability to block automation-driven job cuts during integration.
  - 4. One possibility is** that management uses federal cooling-off periods to finalize operational consolidation while avoiding service disruptions.
  - 5. One possibility is** that union members lose bargaining leverage in wage negotiations because the RLA limits their capacity for immediate work stoppages.
  - 6. One possibility is** that the merged entity exploits the RLA's provisions to extend bargaining timelines and defer costly labor concessions.
  - 7. One possibility is** that the inability to strike quickly pushes unions to invest heavily in public pressure campaigns and congressional lobbying.
  - 8. One possibility is** that smaller craft unions face diminished influence as national-level bargaining dominates under the RLA framework.
  - 9. One possibility is** that seniority disputes escalate into lengthy arbitration cases, slowing the harmonization of work rules.
  - 10. One possibility is** that unions intensify organizing among subcontracted and non-union rail service providers as an indirect growth strategy.
  - 11. One possibility is** that the merged firm completes network rationalization plans without offering federal job protection guarantees.
  - 12. One possibility is** that union frustration with the RLA fuels a coordinated push for legislative reform targeting rail labor law modernization.
-

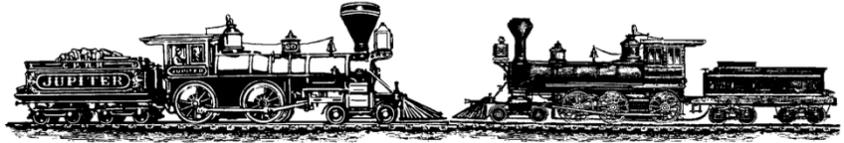
ChatGPT: I can now generate a **parallel implications set from the perspective of management** under the same condition—**RLA unchanged during the merger**—to reveal the opposing strategic posture. That would show the union–management tension points more clearly.

Here is a set of **12 first-order implications** from the **point of view of management** in a Union Pacific–Norfolk Southern merger **if the Railway Labor Act (RLA) remains unchanged**.

---

- 1. One possibility is** that management accelerates crew base consolidations while unions progress through the RLA’s lengthy dispute resolution stages.
- 2. One possibility is** that executives schedule key operational changes to coincide with RLA cooling-off periods, minimizing the risk of service disruption.
- 3. One possibility is** that the merged company implements automation pilots without immediate strike threats, using the RLA’s procedural safeguards.
- 4. One possibility is** that leadership extends wage negotiations to preserve cash flow during the integration phase.
- 5. One possibility is** that the company uses federal mediation timelines to delay granting costly job security provisions.
- 6. One possibility is** that management finalizes network rationalization and line abandonment before unions achieve arbitration outcomes.
- 7. One possibility is** that executives consolidate overlapping workforces under harmonized work rules favorable to operational efficiency.
- 8. One possibility is** that the merged entity shifts more work to non-union contractors during RLA-mandated negotiation delays.
- 9. One possibility is** that senior management leverages the RLA framework to phase in staffing reductions gradually, avoiding immediate backlash.
- 10. One possibility is** that leaders use RLA provisions to manage labor relations centrally, reducing the influence of local bargaining units.
- 11. One possibility is** that executives advance infrastructure upgrades and AI-driven dispatch systems while labor is legally restrained from striking.
- 12. One possibility is** that management frames compliance with the RLA as proof of “good faith bargaining” in public communications, strengthening regulatory positioning.

## A Collision Map



ChatGPT: I can now **map the direct conflict zones** between the union and management implication sets, showing where their first-order goals align or clash most immediately during the merger process. That would create a clear “collision map” of interests.

**Observation:** *A “direct conflict zones” map is not a feature directed by the GPT. And it is not an option offered in previous projects, with earlier versions of ChatGPT. More importantly, it is essential to note that a foundation concept of the Implications Wheel is that it provides “**decision-enhancing information for leaders.**” Note that the GPT is providing insights and possible actions but is not prescriptively making decisions.*

ChatGPT: Here is a **collision map** showing where **union** and **management** first-order implications directly align or clash under the condition that the **Railway Labor Act remains unchanged** during the Union Pacific–Norfolk Southern merger.

*I've paired related implications to make the friction points visible.* [Emphasis Added]

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### 1. Timing of Operational Changes

- **Management:** Accelerates crew base consolidations during RLA dispute stages.
  - **Union:** Faces base closures before legal ability to strike.  
**Collision:** Management exploits procedural lag; unions lose immediate defensive leverage.
- 

### 2. Automation Rollout

- **Management:** Implements automation pilots without strike threats.
  - **Union:** Loses ability to block automation-driven job cuts.  
**Collision:** Technology adoption advances under legal protection; job preservation efforts stall.
-

### 3. Negotiation Pace

- **Management:** Extends wage talks to preserve cash flow.
  - **Union:** Experiences prolonged contract delays due to RLA process.  
**Collision:** Both sides remain in drawn-out negotiations; management benefits from holding status quo.
- 

### 4. Job Security Provisions

- **Management:** Uses mediation timelines to avoid granting costly guarantees.
  - **Union:** Pushes for employment protections and retraining before operational changes.  
**Collision:** Union demand for binding commitments runs into procedural stalling tactics.
- 

### 5. Network Rationalization

- **Management:** Completes line abandonment before arbitration outcomes.
  - **Union:** Confronts service and job losses before dispute resolution concludes.  
**Collision:** Irreversible operational changes occur before labor rulings finalize.
- 

### 6. Work Rule Harmonization

- **Management:** Consolidates workforces under efficiency-oriented rules.
  - **Union:** Sees harmonization as risk to seniority and craft autonomy.  
**Collision:** Efficiency goals directly undermine existing union structures.
- 

### 7. Contracting Strategy

- **Management:** Shifts work to non-union contractors during RLA delays.
  - **Union:** Responds with organizing drives in subcontracted operations.  
**Collision:** Outsourcing reduces union footprint; organizing becomes defensive maneuver.
-

## 8. Staffing Reductions

- **Management:** Phases in cuts gradually to avoid backlash.
  - **Union:** Lacks rapid strike capacity to halt downsizing.  
**Collision:** Staff reductions advance in small, irreversible steps.
- 

## 9. Centralized Bargaining

- **Management:** Concentrates labor relations control at corporate level.
  - **Union:** Local units lose influence under national-level bargaining dominance.  
**Collision:** Strategic consolidation of power erodes localized labor leverage.
- 

## 10. Infrastructure & Technology

- **Management:** Advances AI-driven dispatch and infrastructure upgrades during legal strike limits.
  - **Union:** Files objections to plans that increase crew-to-mile ratios.  
**Collision:** Modernization projects proceed despite unresolved safety and workload disputes.
- 

This collision map shows **10 immediate friction zones**, all first-order and actionable, where the RLA's unchanged structure favors **management timing and sequencing** over **union defensive action**.

ChatGPT: I can next produce a **union counter-strategy implications set**—first-order, active voice—designed to exploit whatever limited leverage the RLA still offers in this scenario. That would make the analysis operational from the labor perspective.

Here is a set of **12 first-order implications** describing **union counter-strategies** if the Union Pacific–Norfolk Southern merger proceeds under an **unchanged Railway Labor Act**.

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- 1. One possibility is** that unions initiate early-stage grievances to trigger formal mediation before management finalizes operational changes.
  - 2. One possibility is** that labor leaders coordinate nationwide informational picketing to influence public opinion while RLA strike limits apply.
  - 3. One possibility is** that unions accelerate legislative outreach to secure congressional support for protective merger conditions.
  - 4. One possibility is** that locals fast-track seniority integration proposals to preserve worker ranking before corporate plans override them.
  - 5. One possibility is** that unions use public safety hearings to delay automation rollouts and frame them as regulatory compliance risks.
  - 6. One possibility is** that bargaining teams insert preemptive side agreements into existing contracts to lock in staffing levels.
  - 7. One possibility is** that unions leverage cooling-off periods to organize mass membership actions short of a strike, such as rulebook slowdowns.
  - 8. One possibility is** that national rail unions coordinate joint filings with shipper associations to amplify opposition to network rationalization.
  - 9. One possibility is** that unions escalate arbitration requests over work rule changes to tie up management in procedural disputes.
  - 10. One possibility is** that labor representatives intensify recruitment in contractor and short-line operations to offset anticipated headcount losses.
  - 11. One possibility is** that unions document and publicize post-merger service disruptions to weaken management’s public narrative of efficiency.
  - 12. One possibility is** that labor coalitions expand alliances with environmental and infrastructure advocacy groups to add pressure against operational downsizing.
-

**ChatGPT:** I can now produce a mirrored “management counter-counter strategy” set— showing the direct tactical responses management can deploy against each union move

Here is a **management counter-counter strategy set** — showing **direct tactical responses** management deploys against the union counter-strategies, assuming the **Railway Labor Act remains unchanged** during the Union Pacific–Norfolk Southern merger.

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- 1. One possibility is** that management accelerates operational change announcements before unions can file formal grievances to start mediation.
- 2. One possibility is** that executives counter informational picketing with targeted PR campaigns emphasizing job creation in other parts of the network.
- 3. One possibility is** that corporate government affairs teams intensify lobbying to present the merger as essential to national supply chain resilience.
- 4. One possibility is** that integration managers implement seniority merges through company policy updates before union proposals reach ratification.
- 5. One possibility is** that technology teams fast-track automation pilots under safety waivers to bypass extended public hearing challenges.
- 6. One possibility is** that negotiators tie staffing guarantees to concessions in other contract areas, making them costly for unions to accept.
- 7. One possibility is** that legal counsel uses the RLA’s restrictions on “concerted activity” to challenge slowdowns as illegal strikes.
- 8. One possibility is** that management forms shipper advisory boards to present a unified industry front against union opposition to rationalization.
- 9. One possibility is** that executives consolidate disputed work rules under existing agreements to avoid triggering new arbitration cases.
- 10. One possibility is** that the merged entity locks in long-term contracts with contractors and short-line partners before union organizing drives gain traction.
- 11. One possibility is** that corporate communications reframes service disruptions as temporary integration effects and highlights recovery metrics.
- 12. One possibility is** that leadership sponsors infrastructure and green investment initiatives to offset criticism from environmental and infrastructure groups aligned with unions.

ChatGPT: Here's the **color-coded Strategic Conflict Matrix** for the Union Pacific–Norfolk Southern merger under an **unchanged Railway Labor Act**, showing **advantage zones** based on the inherent leverage each side holds in first-order exchanges.

## Legend

■ **Management Advantage Zone** – RLA structure or timing strongly favors management initiative.

■ **Union Advantage Zone** – Union action has higher likelihood of immediate effect under RLA.

■ **Contested Zone** – Advantage depends on speed, sequencing, and public perception.

Management Move	Union Counter-Strategy	Management Counter-Counter	Advantage Zone
Accelerate crew base closures	File early grievances to trigger mediation	Announce closures before grievances are filed	<span style="color: blue;">■</span> Management
Launch automation rollout	Use public safety hearings to delay deployment	Obtain safety waivers to bypass delays	<span style="color: blue;">■</span> Management
Extend wage negotiations	Insert staffing guarantees into existing agreements	Tie guarantees to expensive concessions	<span style="color: orange;">■</span> Contested
Consolidate seniority lists under efficiency rules	Fast-track union seniority integration proposals	Merge lists via policy before ratification	<span style="color: blue;">■</span> Management
Shift work to non-union contractors	Organize subcontractor labor drives	Lock in long-term contractor deals before organizing	<span style="color: blue;">■</span> Management
Implement line abandonment	Partner with shippers to oppose closures	Form shipper advisory boards to counter opposition	<span style="color: blue;">■</span> Management
Harmonize work rules to favor operations	Escalate arbitration over work rule changes	Consolidate rules under existing agreements to avoid new arbitration	<span style="color: blue;">■</span> Management
Advance AI-driven dispatch systems	File safety objections based on crew workload	Reframe upgrades as efficiency improvements with oversight compliance	<span style="color: orange;">■</span> Contested
Centralize labor relations control	Mobilize local units for public campaigns	Use central bargaining to limit local influence	<span style="color: blue;">■</span> Management
Delay job security concessions	Lobby Congress for protective conditions	Intensify corporate lobbying to present merger as national benefit	<span style="color: orange;">■</span> Contested

Management Move	Union Counter-Strategy	Management Counter-Counter	Advantage Zone
Publicize efficiency gains	Document and publicize service disruptions	Reframe disruptions as temporary and show recovery metrics	■ Contested
Advance infrastructure investment	Align with environmental allies to pressure against downsizing	Launch green investment programs to neutralize criticism	■ Contested

### Pattern Insight

- **Management holds clear advantage in 7 of 12 zones**, especially where timing and irreversibility of operational changes dominate.
- **Union advantage zones** do not appear without significant procedural or public pressure leverage—RLA structure inherently limits them in first-order engagements.
- **Contested zones** (5 of 12) are primarily **narrative-driven**—media, political, or public framing can shift control.

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

For the “12-2-60 Scouting Journey” reports, asking the GPT “**Arc Explorer**” would be the third part of the report. This would be followed by identifying possible scoring “points of view,” sample scoring of selected arcs, and a scoring exercise for readers. Because of the “ChatGPT” takeover, these parts are being produced as a separate “12-2-60” report.

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  
WHEEL

The Implications Wheel® will give you a substantial advantage in finding, recognizing, and securing your future.

Joel Barker

#### IV. Decision-Enhancing Information for Leadership

***A core principle of the Strategic Exploration Tools is that they do not provide decisions. Everything is driven by creating “possibilities” for a future – a future to be decided by the leadership of an organization.***

***The amount of “possible” strategic information generated by the “ChatGPT Takeover” is significant and relevant for any organization to consider. In multiple “live” explorations that I’ve facilitated with Joel Barker, this information would be solid fodder for extensive discussions we’ve labeled “Campfire Meetings” or “When the Scouts Return.”***

***I decided to put the GPT “Implication Explorer” to one more test, asking it to suggest an agenda for a leadership meeting.***

**Prompt:** I am organizing a diverse team of leaders from the railroads, labor leaders, and business stakeholders. I would create diverse teams of 5-6 participants to discuss the findings of this analysis. Please suggest an agenda for a one-day meeting with multiple different 1.5 to 2-hour discussion sessions.

**ChatGPT:**

Here’s a **full-day agenda** designed to bring together leaders from railroads, labor, and business to explore the Union Pacific–Norfolk Southern merger analysis in depth. It balances **information sharing, structured small-group discussion, and cross-group synthesis**—while ensuring that different perspectives mix throughout the day.

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#### **One-Day Stakeholder Summit Agenda**

**Theme:** *“Crossing the Continent Together – Evaluating the Future of U.S. Rail”*

**Participants:** Railroad executives, labor leaders, shippers, port representatives, regulators, and industry analysts.

**Format:** Diverse mixed-role teams of 5–6 participants, rotated for each discussion block.

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#### **8:30 – 9:00 AM – Welcome & Framing**

- Opening remarks by convener
- Purpose: Understand opportunities, challenges, and trade-offs of the merger

- Overview of process and discussion norms
  - Short review of key facts from the analysis (Innovation, Trend, Paradigm Shift frameworks, stakeholder map)
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### **9:00 – 10:30 AM – Session 1: Opportunities & Risks**

**Focus:** Identify and deepen understanding of the potential benefits and downsides.

- **Prompt 1:** What are the strongest arguments *for* the merger? Who benefits most?
  - **Prompt 2:** What are the strongest arguments *against* the merger? Who stands to lose?
  - **Deliverable:** Each group creates a “Top 3 Opportunities” and “Top 3 Risks” list.
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### **10:30 – 10:45 AM – Break**

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### **10:45 AM – 12:15 PM – Session 2: Stakeholder Perspectives & Power**

**Focus:** Examine positions, motivations, and influence.

- **Prompt 1:** From the stakeholder map, which groups will have the most sway over the merger’s outcome?
  - **Prompt 2:** Where could alliances form across traditional divides?
  - **Prompt 3:** Which voices are missing from the conversation but could shape public opinion or policy?
  - **Deliverable:** A visual “power-interest” map for the merger.
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### **12:15 – 1:15 PM – Lunch (Networking)**

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### **1:15 – 3:00 PM – Session 3: Future Scenarios & Strategic Responses**

**Focus:** Explore the three possible outcomes—Best Case, Base Case, Worst Case—and plan for each.

- **Prompt 1:** If the merger is approved with few conditions, what should each stakeholder do to maximize benefits?
  - **Prompt 2:** If the merger is approved with heavy conditions, what compromises might be necessary?
  - **Prompt 3:** If the merger is blocked, how should the industry adapt?
  - **Deliverable:** “Action recommendations” for each scenario.
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### **3:00 – 3:15 PM – Break**

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### **3:15 – 4:45 PM – Session 4: Building a Shared Path Forward**

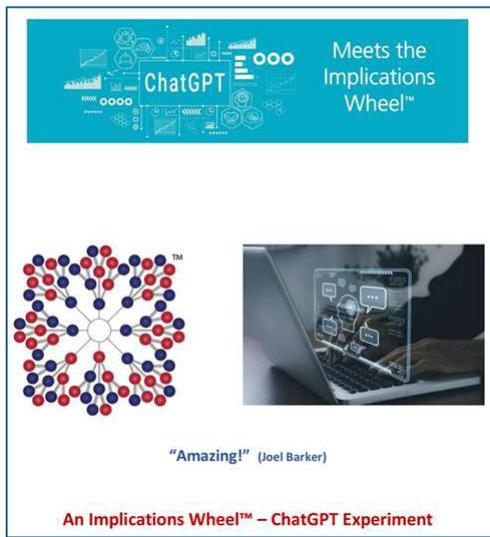
**Focus:** Develop cross-sector strategies for a resilient, competitive rail system regardless of merger outcome.

- **Prompt 1:** What shared priorities can railroad operators, labor, and shippers agree on now?
  - **Prompt 2:** How can environmental, efficiency, and competitive goals be balanced?
  - **Prompt 3:** What commitments can stakeholders make today to improve trust and cooperation?
  - **Deliverable:** Draft “Joint Principles” document to guide public statements and advocacy.
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### **4:45 – 5:15 PM – Closing Plenary**

- Groups share key takeaways and joint principles.
  - Outline of next steps: continued dialogue, follow-up sessions, preparation for regulatory hearings.
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Meets the Implications Wheel™

ChatGPT

“Amazing!” (Joel Barker)

An Implications Wheel™ – ChatGPT Experiment

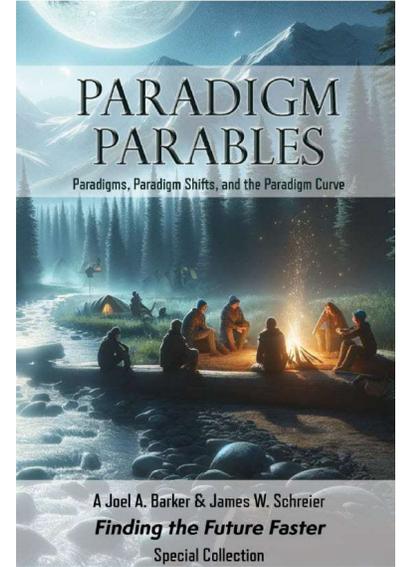


This report compares an exploration developed by I-Wheel facilitators to the same topic explored by ChatGPT.

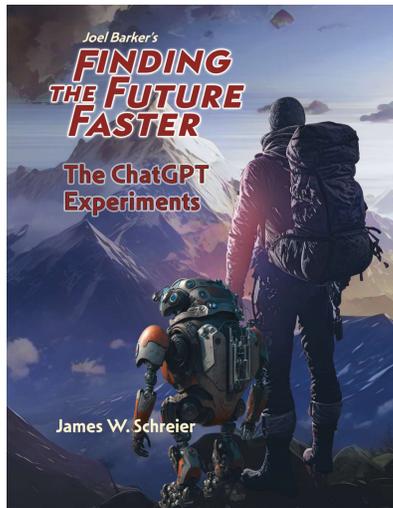
Key observations include the identification of identical and similar implications plus the need to actively “facilitate” the work of ChatGPT.



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*