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### Feds propose railroad brake rule

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WASHINGTON (AP) - Federal rail regulators are formally supporting a technological change already under way that enables trains to stop more quickly while also permitting them to travel longer distances between required brake tests.

The new braking technology, which could cost the industry roughly \$1.5 billion to install, is designed to improve engineers' ability to control trains by applying uniform pressure on all wheels simultaneously, instead of from one car to the next, as is done with conventional air brake systems.

Electronically controlled pneumatic brakes also are designed to reduce train derailments, improve fuel efficiency and reduce emissions through better handling, Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph H. Boardman said Tuesday.

Railroad operators Burlington Northern Santa Fe Corp. and Norfolk Southern Corp. in March received waivers to start outfitting trains with the new brakes and the first one equipped with them is scheduled to make its initial run later this month, federal officials said.

On Tuesday, the government proposed rules designed to hasten adoption of the new brakes by permitting a train to travel up to 3,500 miles between routine tests -- more than double the current maximum distance. That distance would enable container cars emanating from West Coast ports to reach Chicago without stopping and coal trains also could make quicker deliveries to eastern and southern power plants, according to federal regulators.

But the new brakes will not come cheap. The government estimates it would cost the railroad industry about \$1.46 billion over 20 years to convert to the technology. But the total benefits of the proposed rule are about \$3.16 billion, including \$1.22 billion in fuel savings.

Written comments on the proposed rule are due by Nov. 5, but the Association of American Railroads already is 'have ry supportive' of electronic brakes due to the safety and operating advantages, said spokesman Tom White.

The federal proposal is not a mandate, but is designed to 'expedite adoption of the technology,' said Transportation Department spokesman Warren Flatau.

Wabtec Corp. and New York Air Brake, which is owned by Germany's Knorr-Bremse Group, currently make the new brakes and other manufacturers have plans in development, Flatau said.

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