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ON THE RIGHT TRACK: 2021 TRIENNIAL ELECTION MANUAL NOW ONLINE

The 2021 edition of “On the Right Track,” the Local Division nomination and election procedure manual, is now available for download from the Members’ Area of the BLET website and, for those Officers who have access, the document is also accessible in the Document Library in UnionTrack.

Triennial elections for all BLET Divisions will be held this year, beginning with nominations at each Division’s first regular meeting in September.

The “On the Right Track” election manual will assist the officers whose responsibility it is to oversee the election process, as well as the members who have an interest in running for office.

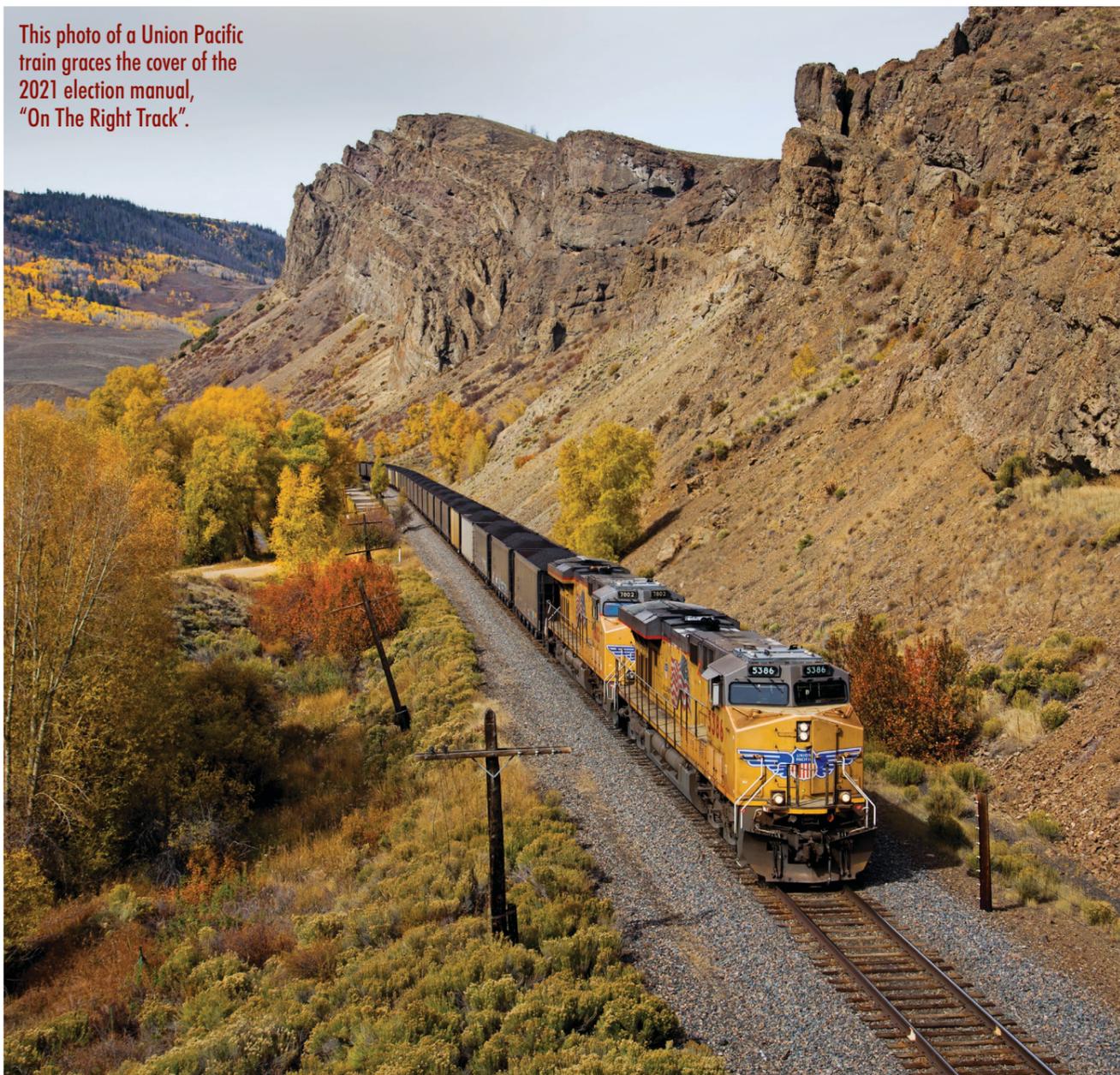
If you are a Division Secretary-Treasurer, you also serve as an election official for your Division and in the coming days will receive a package of election-related materials from the National Division. Updated copies of the Notice of Nominations and the Nominating Form are now available in the Document Library in UnionTrack.

Because determinations of eligibility to run for office may involve an interpretation of the BLET Bylaws, any eligibility questions must be submitted, in writing and via a signed letter, to National President Dennis R. Pierce.

A username and password must be used for logging into the Members’ Area of the BLET National Division website to download the 2021 edition of “On the Right Track” (PDF). It is available here: <https://www.ble-t.org/members/OnTheRightTrack.asp>

If you are a BLET member and you do not have a username and password, you can sign up for one here: www.ble-t.org/signup.asp @@

This photo of a Union Pacific train graces the cover of the 2021 election manual, “On The Right Track”.



Coronavirus relief package to benefit railroad workers

New law provides \$30 billion for transit costs as well as various improvements and additional funding for the Railroad Retirement Board

The American Rescue Plan, the sweeping COVID-19 relief package signed into law by President Joe Biden on March 11, contains several railroad-specific provisions that will benefit BLET members.

The new law allocates \$30 billion for transit costs, including \$1.7 billion for Amtrak to restore 12 long distance routes to full service and to recall and pay 1,200 Amtrak employees who were furloughed because of the pandemic. Congress made

the recall of furloughed employees and the resumption of full service a condition of funding.

“Approximately 400 BLET members will be brought back to work thanks to the American Rescue Plan,” BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce said. “Resumption of full daily service will provide a ben-



efit to the traveling public and will also provide a boost to the American economy.”

The new law provides various improvements and additional funding for the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board. The 7-day waiting period for Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act (RUIA) benefits has been waived, and enhanced

benefits under RUIA have been extended to September 6, 2021. The RRB will receive \$21.2 million for improvements to its Information Technology initiatives and \$6.8 million to hire additional staff to administer RUIA benefits.

“The Railroad Retirement Board is an important asset for all railroad workers, and the additional funding provided by the American Rescue Plan will help to strengthen the services and benefits our members receive,” President Pierce said. @@



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BLET PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE BY DENNIS R. PIERCE

WORKERS' MEMORIAL DAY 2021

Workers' Memorial Day is a time for all workers to remember and honor those who have lost their lives in the workplace, and to stand up to protect those on the job today. April 28 was chosen for Workers Memorial Day, in part, because it is the anniversary of the founding of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and is the date of a similar remembrance established by the Canadian government. Trade unionists around the world now mark April 28 as an international day of mourning. And mourning is what we must do on this day, while never forgetting to fight for safer workplaces for all workers.

On the BLET website, you will find our Memorial Page (www.ble-t.org/memorial.asp). There we recognize our BLET Brothers and Sisters who have lost their



President Pierce with participants in a Local Chairman class held at the National Division in late-2019.

lives in the line of duty. On this somber day, I ask you to join me in taking a moment to remember these Brothers and Sisters, as well as all railroaders and other workers who have been killed or injured on the job in the past year.

This is the second Workers' Memorial Day that has come to

pass during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our nation's essential workers have been on the front lines battling this virus and putting their lives at risk to keep our nation safe, often without the personal protective equipment necessary to insure their own safety. Our locomotive engineers

and trainmen are among these essential workers, moving the freight and the passengers necessary to keep the lifeblood of America flowing. Tragically, we have lost a dozen member to the virus over the past 12 months.

I am proud to salute our freight railroad members, who move the

products that stock the shelves at our nation's grocery stores and haul the heavy bulk commodities that keep the lights on. In many large cities, our passenger/commuter railroaders operate the trains that are the primary means of transportation for key medical personnel who are leading the charge against the coronavirus in our nation's hospitals.

In recognition of Workers' Memorial Day, I urge you to take a moment to remember those who have been killed or injured on the job in the past year. I would also ask that you get involved with your union and become active and aware. Educate yourself about the issues in Washington D.C. that impact your job and your safety and join us in our fight to improve workplace safety for all American workers.

DENNIS R. PIERCE
BLET NATIONAL PRESIDENT

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BLET, NEW JERSEY TRANSIT CONTRACT TALKS IN FEDERAL MEDIATION

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET), a Division of the Teamsters Rail Conference, is being assisted by a federal mediator from the National Mediation Board (NMB) in contract negotiations with New Jersey Transit (NJT), pursuant to Section 5, First, of the Railway Labor Act.

The current round of contract negotiations began when the BLET filed its Section 6 notice on October 1, 2019. In spite of its good faith efforts to

secure a satisfactory voluntary settlement, the BLET negotiating team has deemed the Carrier's position to be unacceptable.

Negotiations on behalf of BLET are under the direction of Jim Brown, General Chairman of the BLET's NJT General Committee of Adjustment. The union represents approximately 475 NJT locomotive engineers.

"I am disappointed to have to go down this

road again," General Chairman Brown said. "After the last round of negotiations, which took over five years and was finally settled in 2016 after two Presidential Emergency Boards and just hours before a strike, I had hoped that the carrier would join us in working towards a voluntary settlement that would fairly address the needs of both sides, but that has not happened. While the membership has worked the front lines during this ongoing glob-

al pandemic, dutifully fulfilling their essential worker responsibilities, the carrier representatives have refused to start any meaningful contact talks. We hope that involvement of the NMB will cause the NJT to refocus on addressing the legitimate needs of the professional men and women who safely move the public daily across three states."

Updates will be provided as developments warrant. @@

NEVADA GOVERNOR HONORS AMERICA'S RAILROADERS

Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak has issued a proclamation praising America's railroaders, declaring Wednesday, April 28, 2021, as "A Day In Honor of Railroad Workers."

A portion of the proclamation reads: "The safe and efficient movement of the trains transporting... freight and... passengers through Nevada is due foremost to the dedication and professionalism of those employees who are directly involved in train movements, including Train and Crew Dispatchers, Maintenance of Way personnel, Signal Maintainers, Mechanical personnel, and train crews."

The BLET Nevada State Legislative Board and the SMART Transportation Division Nevada Legislative Board worked jointly to lobby Governor Sisolak regarding the proclamation. The two Boards

issued a joint statement, which reads in part:

"Every day, front-line railroad workers report for duty as required and perform the tasks of their jobs in a manner which ensures that the movement of freight and passengers by rail which is needed to keep this nation's economy functioning is accomplished. In spite of various objectives and circumstances which create hurdles to be crossed in providing this vital service, the work which you do continues to deliver for those counting on it... On this special day, we salute and thank you for the work that you do, while encouraging you to stay focused on safety in the course of your work. We also ask that you join us in remembering those workers who have passed on before us, some in the line of duty, while committing to continue fighting for all

still among us with whom we share struggles."

BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce and SMART-TD President Jeremy R. Ferguson said, "Our unions thank Governor Sisolak for honoring railroaders with this proclamation and for recognizing the important role BLET and SMART-TD members play in keeping our economy strong. We also thank Matt Parker, BLET Nevada State Legislative Board Chairman, and Jason Doering, SMART-TD Nevada State Legislative Director, for their efforts in helping to secure this proclamation and for their dedication to railroad safety."

A copy of Governor Sisolak's proclamation can be found here (PDF): www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/Nevada_Proclamation.pdf



BLET NATIONAL DIVISION ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Official communications between BLET members and the National Division require a hard copy of the correspondence, bearing a signature, being received by the National President to be considered an "official communication." This is to provide that the actual question(s) are addressed, and ensures that when official interpretations are made they have

reference to a specific request and can be used in future correspondence.

The volume of e-mails received makes it impossible for the National President to answer all unofficial communications. Therefore, it is the policy of the BLET that e-mails addressed to the National President will be reviewed and forwarded to the appropriate officer or staff for a timely

response; however, an e-mail message is not considered an official communication.

Moreover, anonymous e-mails and e-mails that do not provide sufficient information concerning the sender to enable National Division staff to confirm the sender's membership status will not receive any reply or acknowledgement. This policy is intended to allow the National

President to be aware of the opinions and suggestions of the membership, while at the same time providing a timely response to the member's unofficial communication, if a response is necessary, without needlessly expending limited BLET resources.

ADOPTED AT CLEVELAND, OHIO ON JULY 22, 2010. @@



GENERAL PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE BY JAMES P. HOFFA

AMERICAN JOBS PLAN WILL GROW THE MIDDLE CLASS

The Teamsters are a strong supporter of President Biden's newly-unveiled American Jobs Plan (AJP) that offers a broad vision for putting the nation's economy on a 21st century path towards better paying jobs that lift up U.S. workers. Now what it needs is bipartisan support to move it through Congress quickly.

The proposal introduced in late March will promote job creation and enact worker protections. The administration's commitment to modernizing the nation's aging infrastructure will create good-paying jobs that will revitalize the middle class for working Americans. It's a goal that lawmakers across parties



have previously supported.

While the U.S. is the wealthiest country in the world, it ranks 13th when it comes to the overall quality of infrastructure. After decades of disinvestment, the nation's transportation network

is crumbling.

The American Jobs Plan will modernize our roads, bridges, ports, airports, rail and transit systems — all critical parts of America's supply chain. Teamsters work each day in every part

of this supply chain and know firsthand that our transportation infrastructure has been neglected for too long.

But that's not all the legislation aims to reform. The White House's push for Congress to enact the Protecting the Right to Organize Act as a key piece of the AJP is another sign that President Biden is fulfilling his promise to reform labor law and empower millions of workers looking for a voice on the job.

It also focuses on innovation in a new economy that will create hundreds of thousands of quality jobs now. American workers will build and make things in every part of this country, and they will be trained for well-paying, middle-class, union jobs.

The Biden administration has spent time since the unveiling of the AJP trying to drum up bipartisan support. But too many Republicans are thinking ahead to the 2022 election instead of doing what's right for working people. Lawmakers were elected to improve the lives of hardworking Americans. It's time to drop the political games and do what's right for those just trying to earn an honest living.

Congress, it's time to back the AJP!

Fraternally,

JAMES P. HOFFA
TEAMSTERS GENERAL
PRESIDENT

“Teamsters work each day in every part of this supply chain and know firsthand that our transportation infrastructure has been neglected for too long.”

Update from Railroad Retirement Board's Labor Member regarding American Rescue Plan Act of 2021

(BLET Editor's Note: The following is a message to Rail Labor from John Bragg, Labor Member of the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board, dated March 30, 2021.)

As you may have heard, Congress recently enacted legislation to provide some financial relief to railroaders. In the legislation entitled the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), Congress essentially extended the benefits originally created by the CARES Act. This legislation provides for the following benefits:

- A recovery benefit of \$600 per 2-week unemployment registration period. This extends the benefit that was established through legislation at the end of December and was due to expire March 14, 2021. As a result, employees receiving unemployment benefits will continue to receive an additional \$600 per registration period. This benefit ends with registration pe-

riods that begin after September 6, 2021.

- Extended unemployment benefits for employees who have otherwise exhausted benefits. Now, in combination with previous legislation, an additional 200 days within 20 additional consecutive 2-week registration periods are payable. These extended benefits are available for days of unemployment on or after December 28, 2020. No additional days are available for registration periods beginning after September 6, 2021.

- Waiver of the 7-day waiting period for unemployment and sickness benefits. This was also extended to September 6, 2021.

In addition, ARPA provides that up to \$10,200 in unemployment benefits may be exempt from income tax. This provision is administered by the IRS and they have more information here: New exclusion of up to \$10,200 for unemployment benefits (<https://www.irs.gov/forms->

[pubs/new-exclusion-of-up-to-10200-of-unemployment-compensation](https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/new-exclusion-of-up-to-10200-of-unemployment-compensation)).

Finally, as you know, the Railroad Retirement Board's (RRB)'s budget has remained flat for several years now and as a result, agency resources have been limited. ARPA provided a much needed supplemental appropriation for the agency's administrative budget. ARPA appropriated the remaining amount needed for the RRB's multi-year IT modernization plan which will eventually provide more online services to railroaders and their families. In addition, it appropriated \$6.8M for agency hiring related to the pandemic for the next 2 years. The RRB intends to hire staff in Field Service as well as in the unit at headquarters that handles sickness and unemployment applications. We hope that these additional hires will improve customer service.

As with previous legislation, the RRB has updated the information on its web-

site with the details regarding these benefits. You can find the FAQs here: Coronavirus FAQs (<https://rrb.gov/Benefits/Coronavirus>). Also, with most RRB field offices still closed to the public because of the pandemic, the agency is again reminding customers of the self-service options available to them to help avoid lengthy wait times. I encourage all railroaders to set up a myRRB.gov account on the RRB.gov website to help avoid any possible delays. To establish an account, employees should go to [RRB.gov/myRRB](https://rrb.gov/myRRB) (<http://www.rrb.gov/myrrb>) and click on the button labeled "Sign in with Login.gov" at the top of the page. This directs them to login.gov where they will be guided through the process of creating an account and verifying their identity — which takes about 20 minutes to complete. Once an employee's identity is verified, they will be prompted to sign in to their account and then return to myRRB. @@

SOFA REPORT FOR NOV. 2020: THREE SWITCHING FATALITIES IN 90 DAYS

The Switching Operations Fatality Analysis (SOFA) Working Group has published its most recent Safety Alert, reminding workers to remain vigilant in light of three switching fatalities in the 90 day period from August to November.

As a cross-industry collaboration for over 20 years, the SOFA Working Group has identified the Possible Contributing Factors for more than 210 switching operations fatalities since 1992. The SOFA Working Group reports its findings and emerging data trends with the goal of zero fatalities in the railroad industry.

The three fatalities occurred in Crossett, AR (August 13), Richmond, VA (October 11) and Tus-

cola, IL (November 11). According to SOFA's November 2020 Safety Alert: "While these recent cases have not yet been analyzed, the SOFA Working Group is concerned by the 159 injuries that occurred this year through August 31, 2020 and reminds all employees to remain vigilant during switching operations by not only protecting the shove movement, but also protecting themselves by avoiding close or no clearances hazards. Last, but not least, remember to always hold a job briefing whenever the job or situation changes."

The SOFA Group issues regular Safety Alerts to help achieve its goal of eliminating switching

injuries and fatalities. The group was formed in February of 1998 at the request of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to review switching operations accident reports and to develop recommendations for reducing fatalities and injuries.

The BLET is a part of the SOFA Working Group, along with representatives from the FRA, Association of American Railroads (AAR), American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRRA), SMART-Transportation Division, and the U.S. Department of Transportation's Volpe Center. The BLET's representatives are Vice President & National Legislative Representative Vince Verna, Washington State Legislative Board

Chairman Shahraim Allen, Arkansas State Legislative Board Chairman Wayne Denson, and New Mexico State Legislative Board Chairman Eric Gabaldon.

SOFA also noted in its November 2020 Safety Alert that 1 in 4 switching operations fatalities is due to a close or no clearance. The report provides instructions on how to avoid such potentially deadly situations. @@

To download a PDF of SOFA's November 2020 Safety Alert, visit: www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/SOFA_Safety_Alert_2020-11.pdf

Cadogan reelected Chairman of Massachusetts SLB

Daniel M. Cadogan was reelected by acclamation to his second term as Chairman of the Massachusetts State Legislative Board (MASLB) at its 7th quadrennial meeting on October 31, 2020.

Brother Cadogan hired out on December 17, 1997, as a trainman with Amtrak in Boston. He became a locomotive engineer with the Massachusetts Bay Commuter Railroad (MBCR) and a proud member of the BLET in February of 2005. Through competitive bidding for this privatized service, Brother Cadogan is currently employed by Keolis Commuter Services. Prior to that, the service was operated by MBCR and Amtrak, respectively.

Brother Cadogan has spent most of his career as a union officer, beginning as a Vice Local Chairman and then Local Chairman of his Local with

BLET ELECTION NEWS

"I congratulate Brother Cadogan and all officers of the Massachusetts State Legislative Board," President Pierce said. "I know they will continue to uphold their Board's legacy of strong political representation, and will continue to play a key role in our Brotherhood's legislative endeavors throughout the Northeast."

— PRESIDENT DENNIS PIERCE

SMART-TD (the former UTU). He has also served as Vice Local Chairman and then Local Chairman of BLET Division 57, and currently is also the Legislative Representative for Division 57 in Boston.

Also elected by acclamation were: Vice-Chairman William S. Keay Sr., Division 57 (Boston) and Secretary-Treasurer Mathew Cartier, Division 57 (Boston). Elected to serve as Trustees were: Joseph G. Eaton, Division 439 (Allston,

Mass.); Bryan Cadogan, Division 57 (Boston); and Christopher Roy, Division 57 (Boston).

National Officers and staff in attendance were: National President Dennis R. Pierce; now-retired Vice President and National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman; former Director of Regulatory Affairs (and current Vice President and National Legislative Representative) Vince Verna; and Director of Political and Legislative Affairs Bob Hagan.

This meeting served as the last speaking platform for Vice President Tolman prior to his retirement. Fittingly, the Massachusetts State Legislative Board was founded and originally chaired by Brother Tolman in 1992.

"I congratulate Brother Cadogan and all officers of the Massachusetts State Legislative Board," President Pierce said. "I know they will continue to uphold their Board's legacy of strong political representation, and will continue to play a key role in our Brotherhood's legislative endeavors throughout the Northeast."

Additional attendees included: United States Senator Ed Markey; U.S. Representatives Bill Keating and Stephen Lynch; and Chairman of the Massachusetts Democratic Party Gus Bickford.

The Massachusetts State Legislative Board represents approximately 350 members from six Divisions representing various railroads around the state. ©©

The importance of a current connection for Railroad Retirement benefits

Under the Railroad Retirement Act (RRA), a "current connection with the railroad industry" is one of the eligibility requirements for both the occupational disability and supplemental annuities payable by the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB). It is also a factor in determining whether the RRB or the Social Security Administration pays monthly benefits to survivors of a railroad employee.

1 How is a current connection determined under the Railroad Retirement Act?

To meet the current connection requirement, an employee must generally have been credited with railroad service in at least 12 months of the 30 months immediately preceding the month his or her railroad retirement annuity begins. If the employee died before retirement, railroad service in at least 12 months in the 30 months before the month of death will meet the current connection requirement for the purpose of paying survivor benefits.

However, if an employee does not qualify on this basis, but has 12 months of railroad service in an earlier 30-month period, he or she may still meet the current connection requirement. This alternative generally applies if the employee did not have any regular employment outside the railroad industry after the end of the last 30-month period which included 12 months of railroad service, and before the month the annuity begins or the month of death if earlier.

Once a current connection is established at the time the railroad retirement annuity begins, an employee never loses it, no matter what kind of work is performed thereafter.

2 Can nonrailroad work before retirement break a former railroad employee's current connection?

Yes. Full or part-time work for a non-

railroad employer in the interval between the end of the last 30-month period including 12 months of railroad service and the month an employee's annuity begins, or the month of death if earlier, can break a current connection, even with minimal earnings.

Self-employment in an unincorporated business will not break a current connection. However, if the business is incorporated the individual is considered to be an employee of the corporation, and such self-employment can break a current connection. All self-employment will be reviewed to determine if it meets the RRA's standards for maintaining a current connection.

Federal employment with the Department of Transportation, National Transportation Safety Board, Surface Transportation Board, National Mediation Board, Railroad Retirement Board, or Transportation Security Administration will **not** break a current connection. State employment with the Alaska Railroad, as long as that railroad remains an entity of the State of Alaska, will not break a current connection. Also, railroad service in Canada for a Canadian railroad will neither break nor preserve a current connection.

3 Is there an exception to these normal procedures for determining a current connection?

Yes. A current connection can also be "deemed" for purposes of a survivor or supplemental annuity if the employee completed 25 years of railroad service, was involuntarily terminated without fault from his or her last job in the railroad industry, and did not thereafter decline an offer of employment in the same class or craft in the railroad industry regardless of the distance to the new position. (A "deemed" current connection does not satisfy the current connection requirement for an occupational disability.)

If all of these requirements are met, an employee may be considered to have a

"deemed" current connection, even if the employee works in regular nonrailroad employment after the 30-month period and before retirement or death. This exception to the normal current connection requirement was established by amendments to the RRA and became effective October 1, 1981. It only covers employees still living on that date who left the rail industry on or after October 1, 1975, or who were on leave of absence, on furlough, or absent due to injury on October 1, 1975.

4 Would accepting a buy-out affect whether an employee could maintain a current connection under this exception?

Generally, in cases where an employee has no option to remain in the service of his or her railroad employer, the termination of the employment is considered involuntary, regardless of whether or not the employee receives a buy-out.

However, if an employee has the choice of either accepting a position in the same class or craft in the railroad industry or termination with a buy-out, accepting the buy-out is a part of his or her voluntary termination, and the employee would not maintain a current connection under the exception.

5 An employee with 25 years of service is offered a buy-out with the option of either taking payment in a lump sum or of receiving monthly payments until retirement age. Could the method of payment affect the employee's current connection under the exception?

No. The determining factor for whether the exception applies when a buy-out is paid is whether or not the employee stopped working involuntarily - not the payment option. The employee must always relinquish job rights to accept the buy-out, regardless of whether it is paid in a lump sum or in monthly payments. Neither payment option extends the 30-month period.

An employee considering accepting a buy-out should also be aware that if he or she relinquishes job rights to accept the buy-out, the compensation cannot be used to credit additional service months beyond the month in which the employee severed his or her employment relation, regardless of whether payment is made in a lump sum or on a periodic basis.

6 What if the buy-out agreement allows the employee to retain job rights and receive monthly payments until retirement age?

The RRB considers this type of buy-out to be a dismissal allowance. When a monthly dismissal allowance is paid, the employee retains job rights, at least until the end of the period covered by the dismissal allowance. If the period covered by the dismissal allowance continues up to the beginning date of the railroad retirement annuity, railroad service months would be credited to those months. These railroad service months would provide at least 12 railroad service months in the 30 months immediately before the annuity beginning date and maintain a regular current connection. They will also increase the number of railroad service months used to calculate the railroad retirement annuity.

7 Could the exception apply in cases where an employee has 25 years of railroad retirement coverage and a company reorganization results in the employee's job being placed under social security coverage?

Yes. The RRB has considered the exception applicable in cases where a 25-year employee's last job in the railroad industry changed from railroad retirement coverage to social security coverage and the employee had, in effect, no choice available to remain in railroad-retirement-covered service. Such 25-year employees have been "deemed" to have a current connection for purposes of receiving supplemental and survivor annuities. ©©

RRB plans improved access to toll-free service

The U.S. Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) has developed two changes to the agency's nationwide toll-free telephone system aimed at improving customers' access to agency staff and services. The changes took effect on February 15, 2021.

To address lengthy wait times for callers on our toll free number ((877) 772-5772), the RRB is adding a virtual hold function and increasing our total hours of availability beginning with the week of February 15, 2021.

Starting February 15, rather than staying on the phone until a representative becomes available, callers will be able to request a callback when their place in line comes up. When choosing this op-

tion, callers will be asked to confirm their phone number and record their name. The system will then tell them approximately how long it will take for them to receive a callback.

At the time the return call is placed, the person answering the phone will be able to accept the call, request a brief delay while the original caller comes to the phone, or reschedule the call for a later time. This approach will result in more efficient service by RRB representatives, and will allow customers to avoid long hold times.

In conjunction with implementing the virtual hold feature, the RRB will also be increasing the number of hours per week during which claims representatives will be available to answer calls.

Going forward, the hours during which the toll-free number will accept calls will change to 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. each business day, including Wednesdays.

Customers also have other options that are available 24 hours a day to obtain select services without the need to talk to an agency representative. By calling 877-772-5772 and using the automated menus or visiting myRRB, the following information and services are available:

- Letters verifying income and monthly benefit rates;
- Service and compensation statement;
- Replacement Medicare card;
- Duplicate tax statement (1099, 1099-R);
- General benefit information; and
- RRB field office addresses.

In addition, railroad employees who have established myRRB accounts can login and complete the following actions:

- Apply for and claim unemployment benefits;
- Claim sickness benefits;
- Check the status of their unemployment or sickness benefit claims;
- View their railroad service and compensation history; and
- Get an estimate of retirement benefits.

Customers also have the option of sending a secure message to their local office by accessing the Field Office Locator (<https://rrb.gov/Field-Office-Locator>) and clicking on the link at the bottom of their servicing office's page. ©©

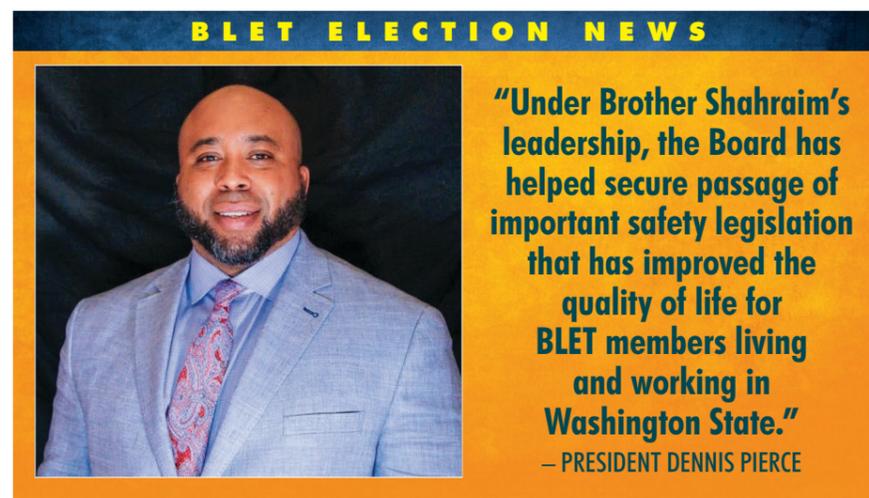
Allen reelected to third term as Washington SLB Chairman

Brother Shahraim C. Allen was reelected by acclamation to his third term as Chairman of the Washington State Legislative Board at the Board's quadrennial meeting on December 10, 2020.

Brother Allen is a third-generation railroader and a member of BLET Division 238 (Tacoma, Wash.). In 1994, he hired out as a switchman for the Burlington Northern, earning promotion to locomotive engineer on December 20, 1995. Brother Allen joined the Brotherhood on June 1, 2001. He was first elected Chairman of the Washington State Legislative Board at its quadrennial meeting in 2012, and then reelected by acclamation at its 2016 quadrennial meeting.

Also elected were: 1st Vice Chairman Dylan D. Elkins, Division 443 (Spokane, Wash.); 2nd Vice Chairman Dave M. Beech, Division 518 (Seattle, Wash.); Secretary-Treasurer Tristin DeYoung, Division 238 (Tacoma, Wash.); and Alternate Secretary-Treasurer Dylan D. Elkins, Division 443 (Spokane, Wash.). Elected to serve as Trustees were: Allan D. Manson, Division 892 (Seattle, Wash.); Dakota L. Poole, Division 58 (Wishram, Wash.); and Dave M. Beech, Division 518 (Seattle, Wash.).

Representing the BLET National Division at the meeting were: BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce; Vice President and National Legislative Representative Vincent G. Verna; Director of Political and Legislative Affairs Robert F. Hagan; and Administrative Assis-



tant to the National Legislative Office Carlos Barrett Sr.

Additional BLET guests included: Retired BLET Vice President and National Legislative Representative John Tolman; General Chairman Steve Leysion, UP-Western Region GCA; Arkansas State Legislative Board Chairman (SLBC) Wayne Denson; California SLBC Ryan Snow; Colorado SLBC Paul Pearson; Florida SLBC Brendan Sullivan; Georgia SLBC Dwayne Massengale; Indiana SLBC Shane Hubbard; Iowa SLBC Michael Walker; Louisiana SLBC Richard Barnett; Maryland SLBC Dave Dinges; Missouri SLBC Calvin Groose; Montana SLBC D.B. Kenner; Nebraska SLBC Pat Pfeifer; New Mexico SLBC Eric Gabaldon; Texas SLBC Gary Pedigo; Utah SLBC Scott Weeks; Virginia SLBC Tim Craver; and Wisconsin SLBC Chuck Schulz. Brother Hubbard, who also chairs

the National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen, served as Parliamentarian during the meeting.

Additional guests included: Washington State Senator Patty Kuderer (48th District); Washington State Representative Bruce Chandler (15th District); Washington State Treasurer Mike Pellicciotti (former Representative, 30th District); former Washington State Representative Art Want (27th District); Washington State Representative Mari Leavitt (28th District); and Drumfire Public Affairs Vice President Sam Jefferies.

"I congratulate Brother Shahraim and all officers of the Washington State Legislative Board, and I thank them for their willingness to serve our Brotherhood," BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce said. "Under Brother Shahraim's leadership, the Board has helped secure

passage of important safety legislation that has improved the quality of life for BLET members living and working in Washington State. I have every confidence they will continue their excellent work and will continue to raise the bar when it comes to the safety of our Brothers and Sisters in Washington State."

The Brothers and Sisters of the Washington State Legislative Board successfully lobbied for passage of a two-person crew bill, which was signed by Governor Jay Inslee on March 27, 2020, and helped to secure passage of one of the nation's most comprehensive train crew transportation laws, which was signed into law by Governor Inslee on May 16, 2017.

During his opening remarks to the delegates assembled for the 2020 quadrennial meeting, Brother Allen encouraged all members to remain politically active and to continue fighting for what is right in spite of heightened anti-union actions by the carriers and certain government agencies.

"It is imperative that we do more now — than ever before — to inform our State and Congressional leaders of what is taking place in our industry, and how they can further assist in the protection of railroad workers and public safety through established legislation," Brother Allen said. "There is no time like the present to take full advantage of the potential opportunities that lay ahead."

The Washington State Legislative Board represents more than 1,000 active and retired members from 9 different BLET Local Divisions. ©©

BLET MEMBERS RATIFY NEW CONTRACT WITH PAN AM RAILWAYS

Members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) have ratified a new collective bargaining agreement with Pan Am Railways.

The three-year agreement contains no work rule or health & welfare changes. Members will receive general wage increases of 2 percent at ratification, on September 17, 2022, and on September 17, 2023. It governs 81 members.

The Pan Am Railways members belong to BLET

Divisions 72, 112 and 191, and they are represented by the CP Rail-D&H/PanAm (ST)/SL&A General Committee of Adjustment. The negotiating team consisted on General Chairman Kevin Moore, Vice General Chairman Matt Lafrenier and National Vice President Mike Twombly.

In November 2020, CSX announced it had signed a formal agreement to purchase Pan Am Railways, but details were not disclosed. Brother Moore said the newly ratified agreement is only

an increase in wages due to the pending sale.

"I thank General Chairman Moore, Vice General Chairman Lafrenier and Vice President Twombly for their efforts in bringing this contract to a successful conclusion," BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce said. "I also thank our Pan Am Railways membership for their involvement throughout the process."

Pan Am Railways is a holding company that owns and operates Class II regional railroads

covering northern New England. Its primary subsidiaries include the Springfield Terminal Railway, Boston and Maine Corporation, Maine Central Railroad Company, and Portland Terminal Company. The combined system includes approximately 1,700 route miles, and connects with four eastern Class I railroads (CN, CP, CSX and NS) and more than 20 regional and short line railroads. It is headquartered in North Billerica, Mass. ©©

Comparison of benefits under Railroad Retirement and Social Security

Employers and employees covered by the Railroad Retirement Act pay higher retirement taxes than those covered by the Social Security Act. As a result, railroad retirement benefits are higher than social security benefits, especially for “career” employees (those employees who have 30 or more years of service).

The following questions and answers show the differences in railroad retirement and social security benefits payable at the close of the fiscal year ending September 30, 2020. They also show the differences in age requirements and payroll taxes under the two systems.

1 How do the average monthly railroad retirement and social security benefits paid to retired employees and spouses compare?

The average age annuity being paid by the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) at the end of fiscal year 2020 to career rail employees was \$3,735 a month, and for all retired rail employees the average was \$2,985. The average age retirement benefit being paid under social security was approximately \$1,505 a month. Spouse benefits averaged \$1,090 a month under railroad retirement compared to \$765 under social security.

The Railroad Retirement Act also provides supplemental railroad retirement annuities of between \$23 and \$43 a month, which are payable to employees with railroad service prior to October 1981 who retire directly from the rail industry with 25 or more years of service.

2 Are the benefits awarded to recent retirees generally greater than the benefits payable to those who retired years ago?

Yes, because recent awards are based on higher average earnings. Age annuities awarded to career railroad employees retiring in fiscal year 2020 averaged about \$4,370 a month while monthly benefits awarded to workers retiring at full retirement age under social security averaged nearly \$2,070. If spouse benefits are added, the combined benefits for the employee and spouse would total \$6,115 under railroad retirement coverage, compared to \$3,105 under social security. Adding a supplemental annuity to the railroad family’s benefit increases average total benefits for current career rail retirees to about \$6,135 a month.

3 How much are the disability benefits currently awarded?

Disabled railroad workers retiring directly from the railroad industry in fiscal year 2020 were awarded \$3,160 a month on average while awards for disabled workers under social security averaged \$1,415.

While both the Railroad Retirement and Social Security Acts provide benefits to workers who are totally disabled for any regular work, the Railroad Retirement Act also provides disability benefits specifically for employees who are disabled for work in their regular railroad occupation. Employees may be eligible for such an occupational disability annuity at age 60 with 10 years of service, or at any age with 20 years of service.



4 Can railroaders receive benefits at earlier ages than workers under social security?

Railroad employees with 30 or more years of creditable service are eligible for regular annuities based on age and service the first full month they are age 60, and rail employees with less than 30 years of creditable service are eligible for regular annuities based on age and service the first full month they are age 62.

No early retirement reduction applies if a rail employee retires at age 60 or older with 30 years of service and his or her retirement is after 2001, or if the employee retired before 2002 at age 62 or older with 30 years of service.

Early retirement reductions are otherwise applied to annuities awarded before full retirement age (the age at which an employee can receive full benefits with no reduction for early retirement). Full retirement age is age 66 for those born 1943 through 1954 and is gradually rising to age 67 for those born in 1960 or later, the same as under social security.

Under social security, a worker cannot begin receiving retirement benefits based on age until age 62, regardless of how long he or she worked, and social security retirement benefits are reduced for retirement prior to full retirement age regardless of years of coverage.

5 Can the spouse of a railroader receive a benefit at an earlier age than the spouse of a worker under social security?

If a retired railroad employee with 30 or more years of service is age 60, the employee’s spouse is also eligible for an annuity the first full month the spouse is age 60. The spouse of a worker under social security is not eligible for a spouse benefit based on age until both the worker and the spouse are at least age 62. Regardless of age, the spouses of workers under both retirement systems are eligible if the worker is retired and the spouse is caring for a qualifying child.

6 Does social security offer any benefits that are not available under railroad retirement?

Social security does pay certain types of benefits that are not available under railroad retirement. For example, social security provides children’s benefits when an employee is disabled, retired or deceased, whereas the RRB only pays children’s benefits if the employee is deceased.

However, the Railroad Retirement Act includes a special minimum guaranty provision which ensures that railroad families will not receive less in monthly benefits than they would have if railroad earnings were covered by social security rather than railroad retirement laws. This guaranty is intended to cover situations in which one or more members of a family would otherwise be eligible for a type of social security benefit that is not provided under the Railroad Retirement Act. Therefore, if a retired rail employee has children who would otherwise be eligible for a benefit under social security, the employee’s annuity can be increased to reflect what social security would pay the family.

7 How much are monthly benefits for survivors under railroad retirement and social security?

Survivor benefits are generally higher if payable by the RRB rather than social security. At the end of fiscal year 2020, the average annuity being paid to all aged and disabled widow(er)s was \$1,825 a month, compared to \$1,380 under social security.

Benefits awarded by the RRB in fiscal year 2020 to aged and disabled widow(er)s of railroaders averaged about \$2,340 a month, compared to approximately \$1,355 under social security.

The annuities being paid at the end of fiscal year 2020 to widowed mothers/fathers averaged \$1,990 a month and children’s annuities averaged \$1,195, compared to \$1,030 and \$900 a month for widowed mothers/fathers and children, respectively, under social security.

Those awarded in fiscal year 2020 averaged \$1,780 a month for widowed mothers/fathers and \$1,545 a month for children under railroad retirement, compared to \$1,015 and \$905 for widowed

mothers/fathers and children, respectively, under social security.

8 How do railroad retirement and social security lump-sum death benefit provisions differ?

Both the railroad retirement and social security systems provide a lump-sum death benefit. The railroad retirement lump-sum benefit is generally payable only if survivor annuities are not immediately due upon an employee’s death. The social security lump-sum benefit may be payable regardless of whether monthly benefits are also due. Both railroad retirement and social security provide a lump-sum benefit of \$255. However, if a railroad employee completed 10 years of creditable railroad service before 1975, the average railroad retirement lump-sum benefit payable is \$1,030. Also, if an employee had less than 10 years of service, but had at least 5 years of such service after 1995, he or she would have to have had an insured status under social security law (counting both railroad retirement and social security credits) in order for the \$255 lump-sum benefit to be payable.

The social security lump sum is generally only payable to the widow(er) living with the employee at the time of death. Under railroad retirement, if the employee had 10 years of service before 1975, and was not survived by a living-with widow(er), the lump sum may be paid to the funeral home or the payer of the funeral expenses.

9 How do railroad retirement and social security payroll taxes compare?

Railroad retirement payroll taxes, like railroad retirement benefits, are calculated on a two-tier basis. Rail employees and employers pay tier I taxes at the same rate as social security taxes, 7.65 percent, consisting of 6.20 percent for retirement on earnings up to \$142,800 in 2021, and 1.45 percent for Medicare hospital insurance on all earnings. An additional 0.9 percent in Medicare taxes (2.35 percent in total) will be withheld from employees on earnings above \$200,000.

In addition, rail employees and employers both pay tier II taxes which are used to finance railroad retirement benefit payments over and above social security levels. In 2021, the tier II tax rate on earnings up to \$106,200 is 4.9 percent for employees and 13.1 percent for employers.

10 How much are regular railroad retirement taxes for an employee earning \$142,800 in 2021 compared to social security taxes?

The maximum amount of regular railroad retirement taxes that an employee earning \$142,800 can pay in 2021 is \$16,128, compared to \$10,924.20 under social security. For railroad employers, the maximum annual regular retirement taxes on an employee earning \$142,800 are \$24,836.40, compared to \$10,924.20 under social security. Employees earning over \$142,800, and their employers, will pay more in retirement taxes than the above amounts because the Medicare hospital insurance tax is applied to all earnings. ©



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Brotherhood Of Locomotive Engineers And Trainmen

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Photo of the Month: March-May 2021



WILDLIFE ON THE RIGHT-OF-WAY: Brother Jon Boehl (nickname "Jonny Bail-Off") of BLET Division 60 (Seattle, Washington) taps the whistle in a succession of short blasts to clear the track of birds while running westbound Amtrak train 513 as it approaches the station stop in Edmonds, Washington, on July 16, 2011. Throughout his career, Brother Boehl has been able to save the lives of people and animals alike by taking quick action to slow or stop his train. He first joined the BLET in January of 2004 as a Union Pacific engineer out of Chicago (BLET Division 404), and hired out as a conductor with the NS in the Conrail territories of Detroit in 2000. *Photo:* by Tom Murray



Are you a photographer? The National Division's Public Relations Department, which produces the Newsletter each month, has received numerous inquiries lately from BLET members volunteering to contribute their

images to the "Photo of the Month" section of the Newsletter. If you'd like to submit a photo for consideration, you may call Editor John Bentley at (216) 241-2630, ext. 248, or you can email: Bentley@ble-t.org.

Please note only high resolution images can be used. Members are also encouraged to review their employer's policies regarding the use of cameras and other electronic devices while on duty.

Advisory Board January/February 2021 Activity

In accordance with the BLET Bylaws, summaries of BLET Advisory Board members' activities are published monthly:

NATIONAL PRESIDENT DENNIS R. PIERCE: National Division Office, Independence, Ohio; General supervision of BLET activities; General office duties; Correspondence and telephone communications; Supervision of Office Administration; General Supervision of Special Representatives; President, Teamsters Rail Conference; Policy Committee, Teamsters Rail Conference; Chairman, CRLO; Missouri SLB mtg.; CRLO rate renewal mtg.; Virtual mtg., all BLET State Legislative Board Chairmen; TTD mtg.; BLET National General Chairmen's Assoc. mtg.; Bargaining session; BLET State Legislative Chairmen mtg.

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT E.L. (LEE) PRUITT: National Duties include but not limited to: Trainmen's Dept.; National Publications Committee; National Legislative Board; Teamsters Rail Conference Policy Committee; and PRAC; General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications, etc.; Holiday, vacation.

NATIONAL SECRETARY-TREASURER STEPHEN J. BRUNO: General supervision of Accounting Dept., Record Dept., Online Services Dept., Tax Compliance Dept.; Safety Task Force; PAC and FEC reports and filings; Implementation and training for BLET membership database/Union Track; Pension, STD, 457 plan Trustee; Mtgs. with vendors and financial institutions; Union Track issues, development, testing, status updates; Merrill Lynch, BLET finance committee.

VICE PRESIDENT & NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE VINCENT G. VERNA: Assigned to BLET Washington, DC office; General office duties, telephone and correspondence communications, Washington, D.C.; Advisory Board mtg.; SOFA mtg.; OneRail mtg.; FRA/Rail Labor mtg., Washington, D.C.; BLET/DC State Chairmen monthly mtg.; Daily conference call mtgs. w/ D.C. staff; Various receptions and fund raising events with members of Congress and the leadership of both the GOP and Democratic parties.

VICE PRESIDENT MARCUS J. RUEF: Chairman, National Railroad Adjustment Board (NRAB); National Mediation Board (NMB) Advisory Forum-Labor Member; Department Head, BLET Arbitration Department; Assigned to CN-Wisconsin Central, CN-Illinois Central, Indiana Harbor Belt, Metra (Chicago), CP Rail System/US (Soo); Holiday, vacation; Awards for PLB 7667; Annotate awards for CIR 1-93; Assist IHB GC Burns, VGC Wells w/ rules issues; Prep awards for PLB 7666, CP; Assist GC Hau w/ discipline appeals, WC; Assist GC Balonek w/ disc appeals, Metra; NMB subject codes working group; Assist GC Burns, Division 682 w/ security issue, IHB; NMB Arb. Dir T. Brown, Section 3 funding; Assist GC Burns w/ discipline submissions, IHB; GCs Balonek, Evans and Semenek Section 6 discussions w/ DRP, Metra; Assist GC Semenek w/ discipline appeals; National General Chairmen Assoc. mtg.; NMB 3rd Division awards, and assist BRS w/ due process issues; Proposed awards, PLB 7154, IC; Section 6 talks, CP.

VICE PRESIDENT MIKE TWOMBLY: Department Head and designated representative of the BLET National Short Line Division (NSLD) and Organizing Department with responsibility for hearings, conferences, appeals, First Division Appeals and all other daily business involving the NSLD assigned railroads in conjunction with Carrier Officers and advancement of BLET organizing strategies and opportunities; NVP assigned to: CN-Grand Trunk Western; Springfield Terminal; Delaware & Hudson; St. Lawrence & Atlantic; New York Susquehanna & Western; Connecticut Southern; New England Central; Louisville & Indiana; Huron & Eastern; Wheeling & Lake Erie; Tacoma Municipal Belt Line Railroad; National Short Line Division (Local Division 16) railroads: Union Railroad, Belt Railway of Chicago, South Buffalo Railway, Western New York & Pennsylvania and Gary Railway; General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications, etc.; On duty at home office, NVB and

NSLB Department Head combined daily responsibilities; Local Division 16 monthly mtgs. (Jan. and Feb. 2021); National General Chairmen's Assoc. mtg.; WNYP teleconference mtgs.; Prep with Railroad Retirement Board for upcoming Division 16 open meeting; National Arbitration Dept. teleconference; Genesee & Wyoming Labor Relations mtgs.

VICE PRESIDENT MICHAEL D. PRIESTER: Assigned to all BNSF (former ATSF, former C&S, CRI&P, FWD, former STL-SF, BNSF/MRL), Panhandle Northern, Great Western Railway of Colorado; Missouri & North Arkansas, Montana Rail Link, Otter Tail; General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications, etc.; Conference call w/ GC Cunningham and Local Chairmen; National General Chairmen's Assoc. mtg.; PLB 7928 prep w/ GC Psota and VGCs Brandt and Fransen, BNSF-MRL; PLB 7928 hearing w/ GC Psota, VGS Brandt and Fransen, and Arbitrator Phillips.

VICE PRESIDENT R.C. (RICK) GIBBONS: Assigned to: All Norfolk Southern General Committees (Northern, Eastern and Southern Lines); Chicago, Ft. Wayne & Eastern; Indiana & Ohio (G&W); General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications; Vice President duties; On duty at home office; BLET staff virtual mtg.; National General Chairmen's Assoc. mtg.

VICE PRESIDENT JAMES P. LOUIS: National Division Department Head, BLET Education & Training Dept.; Department Head of the BLET Internal Organizing, Mobilizing & Strategic Planning Dept.; Department Head, BLET Passenger Dept.; Assigned Amtrak; Keolis Commuter Services; Keolis Rail Services of Virginia, LLC; TransitAmerica Services, Inc.; Long Island Rail Road; New York & Atlantic; Metro-North; New Jersey Transit; PATH; National Division technology group mtgs.; E&T issues; Regional meeting and convention hotel planning and related issues; Holiday; PLB 5210, assist PATH GC Blakey; SBA 940, assist NJT GC Brown; ND technology mtgs.; Assist LIRR GC Sexton w/ contract issues; OLMS election training; Assist NJT GC Brown w/ contract issues; Assist PATH GC Blakey w/ GCA issues; National General Chairmen's Assoc. mtg.; Assist SEPTA GC Hill w/ GCA issues; National Legislative mtg.

VICE PRESIDENT MARK L. WALLACE: Assigned to all Union Pacific GCAs (Eastern District, Northern Region (former C&NW), Western Lines (Pacific Harbor Lines), Western Region (Portland & Western RR), Central Region, and Southern Region); Utah RR; Longview Portland & Northern and Longview Switching, and Portland Terminal; General office duties, telephone, emails, correspondence, communications, etc.; On duty at home office; Assist UP GC's with various on-property issues; Mtgs. w/ UP General Chairmen specific to Attendance Policy; Weekly COVID call w/ UP; National Wage Team mtg.; Bargaining session with National Carriers Conference; National General Chairmen's Assoc. mtg.; Assist GC Leyshon w/ prep for PLB 7228.

VICE PRESIDENT J. ALAN HOLDCRAFT: Assigned to all CSX Transportation GCAs (Eastern Lines, Western Lines, Northern Lines (Bombardier Transportation Services), Conrail Shared Assets/CSX Northern District); KCS-Kansas City Southern/Louisiana & Ark. RR.; KCS-Texas Mexican Railway; KCS-Mid South Rail, South Rail, Gateway Western RR, Illinois Midland (G&W); General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications, etc.; Mtgs. w/ all CSXT GCs to prep for PLB 7265; Illinois and Midland negotiations, assisting KCS GC Billy Evans; National Division staff mtg.; National bargaining session; Conference call w/ CSX VP Labor Relations; National General Chairmen's Assoc. mtg.; Served as Board Member of PLB 7265 w/ CSXT GCs Best, Driscoll, Lyons and Kerley; Participated in national bargaining session, NCCC-CBG.

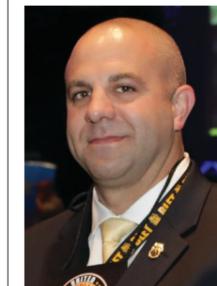
BLET seeks mediation in LIRR contract talks

On March 2, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) applied to the National Mediation Board (NMB) for the assignment of a federal mediator to assist in contract negotiations with the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR), pursuant to Section 5, First, of the Railway Labor Act.

The current round of contract negotiations began when the BLET filed its Section 6 notice on November 1, 2018. In spite of its good faith efforts to secure a satisfactory voluntary settlement, the BLET negotiating team has deemed the

Carrier's tactics to be unacceptable.

Negotiations on behalf of BLET are under the direction of Kevin Sexton, General Chairman of the BLET's LIRR General Committee of Adjustment. The union represents approximately 500 LIRR locomotive engineers.



Sexton
General Chairman Sexton said, "From the outset, our intent was to reach a volun-

tary settlement that would fairly address the needs of both sides, but that has not happened. We rightfully expect a fair settlement that recognizes the grave personal sacrifices our members have made — and continue to make — each day in the performance of our duties in spite of an ongoing global pandemic. We hope that involvement of the NMB will cause the LIRR to refocus on addressing the legitimate needs of the professional men and women who safely operate trains on the largest commuter railroad in the United States."

Updates will be provided as developments warrant. @@