BLET testifies for two person crews at Congressional hearing

BLET also tells House: Don’t extend deadline for positive train control

BLET Vice President & National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman made a strong case for the timely implementation of Positive Train Control (PTC) and other measures to boost rail safety and improve the quality of life for BLET members during testimony delivered at a House subcommittee hearing on February 26.

The House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee’s Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials called the hearing. Vice President Tolman’s testimony touched on four main topics: Positive Train Control (PTC), two-person train crews, fatigue reduction, and inward-facing cameras.

“Our perspective — and that of rail labor — differs significantly from that of the railroads on many, if not all, of these issues,” Vice President Tolman testified. “Our vision doesn’t come down from the board room or a business plan; rather, it comes up from the ranks of our hard working members who work every day and every night on our nation’s railroads. They are on the front lines of these operations and serve as the first responders to accidents. And for this reason we are uniquely positioned to provide good ideas regarding the types of changes that would make our industry safer.”

POSITIVE TRAIN CONTROL (PTC)

Vice President Tolman spoke out against a blanket extension that would delay implementation of Positive Train Control, which is supposed to be installed on certain mainline tracks by the end of 2015. Rail carriers have lobbied for an extension of that deadline.

“PTC was mandated by the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008,” he testified. “The railroads will have had over seven years from the time the legislation was passed until it is supposed to be fully implemented at the end of next year. The carriers have had ample time to prepare for the implementation of PTC.”

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**BLET FIGHTING TO PROTECT WORKER, PUBLIC SAFETY IN RULEMAKING**

Since the FRA’s announcement on April 9 of plans to issue a proposed regulation regarding crew size on America’s freight and passenger trains, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen has received numerous requests for comments. While it is not our practice to publicly comment on a pending rulemaking — and although no substantive comment can be made on FRA’s proposal, which has yet to be published — recent attempts by the industry’s lobbying arm to change the debate compel me to respond.

It is undeniable that last year’s catastrophic runaway, derailment and explosion that devastated the Quebec town of Lac-Mégantic was facilitated, if not directly caused, by operational adjustments that had to be made by the Montreal, Maine and Atlantic Railway’s decision to operate the runaway train with a single-person crew. The outrage over that tragedy led to numerous regulatory changes in Canada and here in the United States to enhance railroad safety.

The Congress has taken notice of this crisis, as well, and the Safe Freight Act (H.R. 3040) — which would require a two-person crew on virtually all freight trains, is pending before the House of Representatives. We applaud the legislators who introduced that bill, and we are working toward its passage.

FRA also has made its position clear. We agree with Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph Szabo that ‘safety is enhanced at every level, the public safety as well as the public’s confidence, bearing a signature, being received by the National President to be considered an official communication.’ Safety is our goal, and FRA’s goal, in supporting a minimum crew size of two employees. Each and every day when our members go to work, their goal is to perform their jobs in the safest and most professional manner possible. BLET members are honest and dedicated working class Americans, and working as part of a two-person train crew will give them a better chance of returning home to their families and loved ones at the end of the day.

Unfortunately, however, the rail industry seems hell-bent on hijacking this issue and converting it into a process to further pad its already historic profit levels. From the day FRA placed crew size before its Railroad Safety Advisory Committee, the railroads have attempted to hold the issue hostage to the implementation of Positive Train Control (PTC) technology, a stance that was publicly confirmed by the Association of American Railroads earlier this week. PTC is a necessity as it will save lives, but it should never be the basis for a waiver of the two-person train crew requirement, which — sadly — is what rail management is hoping to achieve.

To be clear, PTC is a significant upgrade and overlay on existing signal and train control technology. It will save lives and reduce accidents and property damage. For these reasons it can and must be installed by the December 31, 2015 deadline Congress has set, and we will continue to oppose the industry’s request for a blanket 5-year extension of the deadline.

However, at the end of the day — and while significant — PTC is only an upgrade and overlay on existing signal technology. It is not designed or required to prevent every accident. As just one example, the April 17, 2011 collision near Red Oak, Iowa, that led to a derailment and fire, and which claimed the lives of two crew members, would not have been prevented had PTC been installed on the line where the accident occurred.

Nor is PTC designed or intended to perform all of the varied duties currently performed by the second operating crew member. In addition to in-cab safety redundancy at numerous levels, the public safety aspect of these duties include, among others, monitoring the ‘left’ side of the train for defects, observing the ‘left’ side of highway-rail grade crossings for drivers who fail to stop for the approaching train, and separating stopped trains blocking crossings to facilitate the movement of motor vehicles operated by first responders and other emergency personnel who must cross the tracks.

The industry’s response is nothing more than a red herring, and it is unfortunate — if not reprehensible — that railroads are preying upon the legitimate safety concerns of railroad workers and the general public to further stuff their coffers. We also view the railroads’ response as a thinly-veiled threat against collective bargaining agreement provisions that address crew size, which would be unaffect by the proposed regulation, and which will we vigorously defend. We will continue to put the safety of BLET members, all of railroad workers, and of the American public first and foremost, and we will work with all our energy to ensure FRA develops a regulation that does just that.”

**DENNIS R. PIERCE**
BLET NATIONAL PRESIDENT

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**OFFICIAL 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.**
Voices Against Fast Track Are Growing Louder

Thousands of Teamsters have contacted their congressional members in recent weeks to let them know that “fast track” trade authority is the wrong track for America. And the message is getting through. Lawmakers are increasingly realizing that giving the administration free rein to push through trade deals like the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) without input from Congress is bad for workers.

Recently, new Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) announced he has no intention of rushing forward with fast-track legislation authored by former Chairman Max Baucus and GOP committee leaders in the House and Senate. He too realizes that the old-style fast track model doesn’t work in today’s economy. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) has also made it clear he has no desire to proceed with fast-track legislation. Add that to the bipartisan collection of upwards of 200 members of Congress who previously came out against fast track and that’s a strong base of opposition. But the light is far from finished.

The United Auto Workers, led by my good friend Bob King, has taken a lead role in explaining how the TPP as currently written fails to stop currency manipulation. That in turn would cause fewer U.S. vehicles and other goods to be sold abroad. Fast track would ensure nothing would be done to change it. That’s not the way to help workers.

The growing numbers of lawmakers and leaders coming out against fast track are listening to the will of the people. Hundreds of thousands of Americans have let Congress know as part of a coordinated campaign between unions and fair-trade advocates that fast track will lead to job loss, unsafe food and a dirtier environment. That’s not something anyone wants.

Now it’s time for the administration to get the message. Although the administration has made it clear it wants to move forward with fast track, the writing is on the wall. Congressional leaders and the American people are putting their foot down. It would be wise to listen.

Fraternally,

JAMES P. HOFFA
Teamsters General President

Savannah to host BLET for 87th annual SMA

Registrants are proud to host the 2014 Southeastern Meeting Association (SMA) annual convention at the Westin Savannah Harbor Golf Resort & Spa in Savannah, Ga.

The 87th annual SMA will run from June 15-19, 2014, and will offer numerous educational workshops for members as well as ample time to relax with family and friends. BLET Advisory Board members in attendance will give officer reports during a closed meeting for members only, and there will also be meetings for the BLET Auxiliary.

Registration will begin on Sunday, June 15, followed by a welcome reception. The opening ceremony will be held on June 16 followed by a closed meeting for BLET members only that afternoon. Also that afternoon, the BLET Auxiliary will host an open meeting for all spouses and family members.

The annual SMA golf tournament and family day. Non-golfers will enjoy Savannah-area attractions such as Daffufuske Island, River Street and City Market. Workshops will be held throughout the day on June 18 and 19, and the 2014 SMA will conclude with a banquet the evening of June 19.

“We are very excited about the banquet we have planned for Thursday night, as we have secured a very unique entertainment experience we are sure you will enjoy,” Brother Dickey said.

Guests will stay at the Westin Savannah Harbor Golf Resort & Spa, and room reservations can be made online through www.blet.org/sma or by calling (912) 201-2000. Room rates are $175 per night plus a $21 per night resort charge and Georgia state tax. The deadline for reservations is May 8, 2014. The resort fee includes: self-parking, in-room high speed internet access, on-site shuttle transportation, free water taxi service across the Savannah River; fitness club access (including workout room, steam room, and sauna at the Heavenly Spa by Westin); use of tennis courts and racquets, golf club storage, use of chipping and putting greens and driving range (including the use of complimentary clubs); and access to the private beach located at the Westin Savannah’s sister resort, The Westin Resort on Hilton Head Island.

“During the week you can take the free water taxi across the Savannah River to the famous River Street, which is full of unique shops, restaurants, pubs and bars,” Brother Dickey said. “City Market is another favorite for visitors as it offers live music, restaurants, shops, carriage rides and more. We will have discount tickets for ghost tours, trolley tours, and the Bonaventure. All of this is within walking distance of the hotel… no vehicle needed for your entire stay!”

Workshops will focus on specialized training for Local Chairmen, Secretary Treasurers, Legislative Representatives and Division Trustees. A Representing Trainmen workshop is also on the agenda. The National Division will once again conduct a class on its mobilization network. Additional classes will be offered regarding insurance benefits, Railroad Retirement and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

“BLET Division 646 is excited to be your host this year for the 87th Annual SMA,” Brother Dickey said. “We look forward to seeing you in Savannah in June.”

Registration information is available online at: www.sma2014.net or through the National Division website, www.ble-t.org/sma.
BLET Tests

However, since it was mandated, the railroad has used a seemingly never-ending series of excuses for delaying the implementation of this life-saving technology, and while there are challenges to its implementation, we believe that this could have been averted by more forward thinking by the railroads.

TWO-PERSON TRAIN CREWS

Vice President Tolman also rejected the reasoning that PTC provides a justification for reducing crew size, as the railroads contend.

"To implement PTC as a pretext to reduce crew size would be taking one step forward and two steps backwards," he said. "PTC is simply another safety overlay of operating systems in which trains will be kept apart in the majority of circumstances, but not in every circumstance."

He urged the committee members to consider co-sponsoring the Safe Freight Act, H.R. 3040, a BLET-backed bill that would require a two-person train crew on all freight trains in the United States.

"The BLET has spent significant time and resources countering industry efforts to under staff train crews," he testified. "The industry has even enshrined in its lexicon the oxymoronic term ‘one person crew.’ This issue—specifically, the proposed requirement that there be, at minimum, two individuals in the cab of all freight locomotives—is before your Subcommittee in the form of H.R. 3040."

FATIGUE REDUCTION

Vice President Tolman also testified regarding the importance of fatigue mitigation to improving rail safety. Fatigue reduction would also go a long way toward improving the lives of BLET members and their families.

"I have testified before both this Subcommittee and the full Committee on several previous occasions, and discussed the problem of fatigue and its effect on risk in general and our members’ safety and the public’s safety in particular," he said. "It remains clear to me that the intent of the 2008 Rail Safety Improvement Act was to reduce fatigue in the industry. This should have been done by providing railroad operating employees with predictable schedules, calling windows and train line ups they can rely on so that they can plan their sleep accordingly. I continue to believe these and similar ideas will help to alleviate fatigue in the industry.

“Our members are professionals who want to go to work rested and ready to ensure their safety and the safety of the communities through which they operate. But in the current operating environment—because they do not know when they will be called to go to work—they simply cannot accomplish this goal."

INWARD-FACING CAMERAS

Lastly, Vice President Tolman testified against requiring the installation of inward-facing cameras to monitor train crews. It is the BLET’s contention that the cameras are not a safety improvement; they would not prevent accidents and likely have the opposite effect—providing a distraction that would make an engineer’s work environment less safe.

The proponents of these cameras suggest that video surveillance of locomotive engineers and conductors in the workplace would somehow abate fatigue and foster rule compliance," he said. "However, it is absurd to suggest that inward-facing cameras are a tool to reduce fatigue. In the absence of operational changes to reduce the likelihood that a locomotive engineer or conductor will be fatigued while operating a train, these cameras will do nothing but document the crewmember falling asleep. In fact, these cameras cannot and will not prevent a single accident, and will only create yet another source of distraction from the train crew’s work tasks. More than a century of research establishes that monitoring workers actually reduces the ability to perform complex tasks, such as operating a train, because of the distracting effect of surveillance."
Amtrak’s new locomotives

BLET A DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE SCENES, IN FIRST REVENUE SERVICE TRIP

On February 7, Amtrak launched the first of 70 new locomotives designed specifically for service along the Northeast Corridor, and two members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) played key roles in the historic day.

Arthur Fontes, a member of BLET Division 312 (Boston, Mass.), worked as the first locomotive engineer in revenue service on the new ACS-64 out of Boston’s South Station on the morning of February 7. Brother Fontes has been a BLET member since February 1, 1983.

R.F. (Rick) Stolnis, Vice President of BLET Division 483 (Philadelphia, Pa.), spent countless hours behind the scenes prior to the launch of the new locomotive. Brother Stolnis worked with Amtrak and Siemens on the design of the interior of the new locomotive’s cab.

A staunch supporter of Amtrak, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden headlined a press conference to introduce the new locomotives to the public. Prior to the press conference, Brother Stolnis gave VP Biden and DOT Secretary Anthony Foxx a behind the scenes tour inside the cab of a new locomotive. He showed Biden and Foxx the safety and operating features that are important to operating along the Northeast Corridor, including cab signals and ACSES safety systems.

The Siemens-built electric locomotives, known as the Amtrak Cities Sprinter, should provide more reliable and efficient service for passengers. The locomotives are being assembled at Siemens’ rail manufacturing plant in Sacramento, Calif. The equipment includes parts built from Siemens plants in Norwood, Ohio, Alpharetta, Ga., and Richland, Miss., and nearly 70 other suppliers, representing more than 60 cities and 23 states.

The new locomotives will serve as the strong workhorses of Amtrak Northeast Corridor operations, power all Northeast Regional and long-distance trains between Washington, New York and Boston, and match existing trip-times at speeds up to 125 mph. Eventually, they also will operate on the Keystone Service between New York, Philadelphia and Harrisburg, Pa.

The new locomotives are designed for improved reliability and easier maintenance leading to faster turn-around times and increased availability for service. A state-of-the-art microprocessor system performs self-diagnosis of technical issues, takes self-corrective action and notifies the locomotive engineer. In addition, there are redundant systems to ensure power is maintained to the passenger cars to keep heating and cooling systems working, the lights on and the doors operational. The locomotives also meet the latest federal rail safety regulations, including crash energy management components.

Furthermore, the locomotives are energy efficient and use a regenerative braking system to feed energy back into the power grid. Together, the 70 locomotives could save over 3 billion-kilowatt hours of energy and could result in more than $300 million in savings over 20 years.

The new locomotives will replace older equipment that have between 25 and 35 years of service and average mileage of more than 3.5 million miles traveled with some approaching 4.5 million miles. Amtrak expects to have several more new locomotives enter revenue service in the coming weeks and then will receive monthly delivery of the remaining units through 2015.

Amtrak President and CEO Joseph Boardman, center, joins BLET engineer Arthur Fontes, left, and conductor Chris Weldon on the platform of Boston’s South Station for the first revenue trip of one of Amtrak’s 70 new electric advanced technology locomotives. Brother Fontes has held continuous members in the BLET since February 1, 1983. Fontes and Weldon were the first crew members out of Boston on the new ACS-64, which will operate on the passenger carrier’s Northeast Corridor.
The convention is scheduled for September 29-October 2, 2007 at the Rio Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada, but delegates should plan to arrive in time to register on Sunday, September 28. Reservations and travel information will be mailed to delegates in the coming weeks.

The list is published in the Locomotive Engineer & Trainman News as required by National Division Rules Section 20, Paragraph (g) of the BLET Bylaws. All BLET division men News as required by National Division Rules Section 20, Paragraph (g) of the BLET Bylaws.
Important change in eligibility for spouses under all plans under Group Policy GA-2311

The Cooperating Railway Labor Organizations (CRLOs), Policy Sponsor, has made a decision to include same-sex spouses as Eligible Dependents under all plans under Group Policy GA-23111 (the “Policy”). The Policy provides coverage for certain retired and former railroad employees as well as their dependents and is administered by UnitedHealthcare. The change in eligibility for same-sex spouses is effective retroactive to January 1, 2014.

SAME-SEX SPOUSE ELIGIBILITY

Effective January 1, 2014, a same-sex spouse can be enrolled as a dependent under the Policy based on the requirements below:

- You and your same-sex spouse must be legally married regardless of your current state of residence. “Legally married” means a marriage which is performed in a state or foreign country that legally allows same-sex marriage ceremonies and issues a marriage certificate. (Domestic partnerships or civil unions will not be recognized as legal marriages under the Policy.)
- Coverage for children as a result of a same-sex marriage will follow the current Eligible Dependent rules and definitions under the Policy.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ADDING YOUR SAME-SEX SPOUSE

In order to add your same-sex spouse as a dependent under the Policy, you should provide the following documentation to UnitedHealthcare:

- A copy of the marriage certificate from a state or foreign country that legally allows same-sex marriage ceremonies and issues a marriage certificate
- The spouse’s date of birth
- The spouse’s social security number

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ADDING A DEPENDENT CHILD OF YOUR SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

In order to add an eligible dependent child as a result of your same-sex marriage, you should provide the following documentation to UnitedHealthcare:

- A copy of the child’s birth certificate
- The child’s social security number

NOTE: The documentation for adding your same-sex spouse and/or any dependent children as a result of your same-sex marriage will, in most cases, result in an increase in your total monthly premium.

If you have a same-sex spouse affected by this change in dependent eligibility and have any questions, please contact UnitedHealthcare at 1-800-842-5252.
GET EXCLUSIVE CONTENT ON THE BLET'S FACEBOOK PAGE

The BLET National Division reached a milestone on its Facebook page in late March

— 4,000 total page Likes. Visitors to our new Facebook page enjoy exclusive content, such as daily news, “Throwback Thursday,” and photos. In March, we shared exclusive photos taken at BLET Education & Training Department, Advisory Board, and National Division Office workshops for Secretaries-Treasurers and Local Chairs. Please log on and keep up to date with the latest Brotherhood news, and help us build on our 4,000 Likes.

CHECK IT OUT! WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/BLETNATIONAL