BLET PETITIONS FRA FOR IMMEDIATE HALT TO LEADER, TRIP OPTIMIZER TECHNOLOGY

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) has petitioned the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for an emergency order that would immediately prohibit the carrier-mandated use of Locomotive Engineer Assist/Display & Event Recorder (LEADER) and Trip Optimizer technologies.

The BLET contends that the mandated use of these electronic devices creates unsafe distractions for locomotive engineers, and that the technology overrides locomotive engineer decision-making in an unsafe manner.

BLET National President Dennis Pierce made the organization’s position known in a February 4 letter to Robert C. Lauby, the FRA’s Associate Administrator for Railroad Safety and Chief Safety Officer. LEADER and Trip Optimizer are auto-control fuel efficiency technologies. In his February 4 letter, President Pierce said the technology can create unsafe situations because it can distract engineers. The carrier-mandated use of this technology “...presses an engineer into performing clerical duties while at the controls of a moving locomotive in the name of fuel efficiency, to the detriment of safety caused by these distractions,” President Pierce wrote.

The technology was originally conceived as a way to assist engineers in obtaining greater fuel efficiency when operating locomotives. However, some carriers have mandated that this one-time guidance tool should supersede the skill-based judgment of locomotive engineers, forcing engineers to rely upon the technology as the primary method of train operation. “Trip Optimizer and LEADER essentially are becoming a virtual engineer -- making automated decisions in a manner that transforms the engineer’s duties as an operator into that of a spec-tator or monitor,” President Pierce wrote.

Use of the technology has created dangerous situations where crew members have been thrown out of their seats because of severe slack action. President Pierce also raised concerns about engineers maintaining proficient operating skills and being lured into a false sense of security while operating on “cruise control.”

President Pierce called the current situation “unsafe and unsatisfactory,” and concluded his letter by calling upon the FRA to halt the use of the technology until BLET’s concerns regarding distraction and forced-reliance have been properly addressed.

“BLET is proud of how this Union and locomotive engineers have fostered and promoted ways to safely integrate new technology, which is reflected in our formal partnering with FRA for the past two decades,” President Pierce concluded. “Moreover, locomotive engineers have faced new forms of technology since they first climbed on board a locomotive. At every stage in the history of the development of the locomotive cab there has been a story of adapting to and mastering new technology by locomotive engineers.”

- Dennis R. Pierce

BLET moves into new headquarters pg. 7

Registration for the BLET’s 2016 Regional Meetings will be available soon! Please watch the BLET National Division website and Facebook page for the latest information. The Chicago Regional Meeting will be held July 11-14, 2016, at the Drake Hotel. The Long Beach Regional Meeting will be held August 22-25, 2016, at the Hyatt Regency.

The Drake in Chicago is a beautifully restored grand hotel, and the Hyatt Regency in Long Beach is in the heart of the Long Beach Harbor entertainment area.
Dear Mr. Lauby:
The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen ("BLET") is writing to you to express our concerns about the use by certain Class I Carriers of the Locomotive Engineer Assist/Display & Event Recorder ("LEADER") and the General Electric Trip Optimizer. It is our view that the current deployment of these technologies presents unsatisfactory risks for a host of reasons. A letter from the Transportation Division of the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers ("SMART–TD") was sent to you earlier in January 2016 discussing that Organization's problems with LEADER and Trip Optimizer. We associate ourselves with their comments and have some additional concerns, which are not stated in their letter. First, SMART–TD's discussion concerning distractions to operating crews and that use of these technologies should be regulated by the Federal Railroad Administration ("FRA") is on point and we wholeheartedly concur.

The use of cell phones and interaction with Positive Train Control ("PTC") systems currently are regulated by FRA, and we believe the attention capture that is fostered by the use of the LEADER and Trip Optimizer systems has not been properly scrutinized. If the safety risks of diverting the locomotive engineer's attention away from the track ahead and, instead, toward the automatic control system, were not already clear enough, the situation becomes even more dire when you consider that railroads require — under the threat of discipline — that the engineer track all exceptions to the operation of systems like LEADER during their trip, and then record and report them at the conclusion of the trip. This presses an engineer into performing clerical duties while at the controls of a moving locomotive in the name of fuel efficiency, to the detriment of safety caused by these distractions.

BLET joins SMART–TD in requesting that you issue an emergency order prohibiting the use of these technologies until they are further examined, to ensure that they do not pose risks to the safety operations of freight railroads. At a minimum FRA should examine to what extent new regulatory requirements are necessary to ensure safety operations, testing and maintenance and actual performance of these systems in the field.

An Example of Proposed Use: Union Pacific Railroad's Product Development Plan Submission Regarding Trip Optimizer and LEADER

As just one example of our concern, the 49 C.F.R. Section 236.913(d)(1) Notice of Product Development for Phase I and Phase II Development of its Communications-Based Train Control ("CBTC") System filed by Union Pacific Railroad ("UPRR") describes Trip Optimizer in the following way:

Trip Optimizer provides the locomotive engineer with guidance or automated control for fuel efficient operation of the train based on terrain, train dynamics, permanent and temporary speed restrictions, and the train's current authority. The Trip Optimizer software suite resides on a separate non-vital hardware platform on V-TMS equipped locomotives, and is designed and implemented in such a manner as to preclude interference with V-TMS's train control functions.

See FRA-2007-27322-0013. UPRR also makes a distinction regarding which CBTC control components perform safety-critical train control functions and that those perform merely a non-vital business function. UPRR places Trip Optimizer in the category of non-vital business functions, which it defines as follows:

- Non-vital business functions are those unrelated to train control, but which provide business benefit, such as location reporting, integration with NYAB's LEADER or GE's Trip Optimizer. These functions may leverage operational data provided by CBTC/V-TMS, such as location, speed, etc., but do not impact the operation of CBTC/V-TMS.

Id. at 25 (emphasis added). UPRR then explains: General Electric's (GE) Trip Optimizer software suite will be integrated into V-TMS equipped locomotives. Trip Optimizer provides the locomotive engineer with guidance for throttle, dynamic brake and air brake settings for fuel efficient operation of the train based on terrain, train dynamics, permanent and temporary speed restrictions, signal indications and the train's current authority limits. Trip Optimizer provides the capability for automated throttle, dynamic brake and air brake control under the guidance of the locomotive engineer. When automated control is selected by the locomotive engineer, Trip Optimizer will manage locomotive throttle, dynamic brake and air brake settings to operate the train in conformance with the recommended operating profile.

Id. at 33 (footnotes omitted).

In its November 13, 2007 letter to UPRR, FRA placed many conditions on the testing of this equipment, but enough has changed in new requirements for PTC and some very unsettling reports from the field that we firmly believe additional action is warranted by FRA. Some of the conditions actually required a FRA field monitor to be present during the tests. See FRA-2007-27322-0012.

The above example is not intended to single out UPRR regarding its use of LEADER or Trip Optimizer. Rather, what matters is that use of Trip Optimizer and LEADER is represented to be for “guidance” and “business purposes.” Any railroad could make this same statement regarding its use of

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 time-ly 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.
the technology, as Trip Optimizer and LEADER is vendor software available to any railroads who desire the product on their locomotives.

Use with PTC

Furthermore, we believe that monitoring auto control systems like LEADER is at least as intrusive and distracting as requiring the locomotive engineer to interact with PTC systems. To be clear, BLET desires at the earliest opportunity to take advantage of a PTC system that saves our members’ lives in the event of a PTC-preventable accident. The interaction between PTC systems and LEADER or Trip Optimizer remains a critical question.

The fact of the matter is that PTC operational screens could compete with Trip Optimizer’s. There are only two ways to address presentation of the additional information. One would be to incorporate the non-vital business function data with the vital PTC data, but this could result in shrinking information down to a font that is very hard to read, even by persons having perfect eyesight.

The other would be to cycle screens displaying the non-vital business function data with those displaying the vital PTC data. However, this would require a locomotive engineer to devote much more attention to the screen, thereby engendering attention lapses from vigilant observance of conditions ahead and out the window to ensure proper whistling at grade crossings, and visualization of track defects, trespassers, unannounced yellow boards, red boards, red/yellow boards, diverging route signals, etc.

If systems such as LEADER and Trip Optimizer were advisory programs only, we might be able to excuse their intrusive effect; however, railroads such as UPRR and BNSF mandate that locomotive engineers obey these non-vital business function data prompts under the threat of discipline.

Normal course of events. It has not been made clear how a non-vital business fuel-saving system that uses throttle and braking to save fuel will react with a vital PTC system designed to prevent the worst kinds of train accidents by intervening to prevent a potential violation. Nor is it clear whether event recorders can distinguish between PTC actions taken to override a locomotive engineer’s command, and PTC actions taken to override a command that was responsive to the demands of a non-vital business system like LEADER and Trip Optimizer.

Human Factors and lessons from Aviation

The aviation industry has gone through a long period of automation from the late 1970’s to the present. The logic of this transition to automated operations is that humans are prone to error and properly designed and maintained machines should not be. Machines do not have the fatigue problems or inattention of humans. And in the aviation industry, a manufacturer typically cannot install new equipment without first having the device or system fully tested, vetted and type certified. Oftentimes it is the simplest of components that require this vetting, such as a new style of oil pressure gauge fitting. However, in the railroad industry there is severe lack of oversight with respect to new components or systems installed on cars and locomotives. It is our belief that equipment as complex and distracting as automated communication-based control systems should be properly vetted before they are forced upon operating employees. FRA has correctly chosen to do so regarding vital operational systems. Regrettably, FRA has not yet acted upon non-vital business systems such as LEADER and Trip Optimizer, even though locomotive engineers are required to operate their trains pursuant to the data those systems produce.

Flight operations have become very safe and statistics bear out this fact. That being said, as safety gains have been realigned with automation, the rate of human error has not decreased. The rail industry has many lessons to learn from...
aviriation with regard to the great many advances in safety. However, we should also attempt to learn from the new human factors issues that arise when one moves from being a primary operator to a passive monitor of automation. We believe that oversight of the adoption of technology in the rail industry is not keeping pace with the implementation of certain significant technologies. Train crews are being faced with using technology that they are unfamiliar with, and are expected to maintain their vigilance on those systems all while maintaining their responsibility for the success or failure of the transportation. The stories of airline pilots attempting to cope with differing and new forms of automation are legion and too numerous to enumerate.

At every stage in the history of the development of the locomotive cab there has been a story of adapting to and mastering new technology by locomotive engineers. Such mastery can only come about when there is standardization of safety, planning for human error to take place and providing a way to manage failure when it inevitably occurs; that is the end we seek here.

We respectfully request that FRA issue an emergency order to prohibit the mandated use of and reliance upon LEADER, Trip Optimizer and other similar auto control or advisory control locomotive operating systems until railroads can prove that the relevant safety implications of reliance upon these systems have been properly identified and addressed. Communication-based train control systems that interact with throttle positions, train handling, air brakes and dynamic brakes place them in a category where an engineer is left only in reactive mode, and the current reality is unsafe and unsatisfactory.

Respectfully,

Dennis R. Pierce
BLET National President
Powerful bipartisan voices aired concerns about the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) recently, leaving passage of the lousy trade deal that would ship thousands of jobs overseas and permit unsafe food and products to flood U.S. stores in limbo.

The loudest came when House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) noted he “is not the dictator of the House” and cannot force members to pass the 12-nation Pacific Rim trade agreement. He conceded that as it stands, the pact does not have the votes required for passage.

That was followed up by Rep. Sander Levin (D-Mich.), ranking member of the House Ways & Means Committee, who announced he would not be supporting the TPP. He took aim at its failure to address currency manipulation as well as its weak worker rights and country-of-origin rules as his reasons for opposing it.

“Some will say that TPP is an improvement over the status quo,” Levin said. “Trade touches all aspects of our lives, and we are setting an economic framework for generations. We cannot afford to lock in weak standards, uncompetitive practices, and a system that does not broadly spread the benefits of trade, affecting the paychecks of American families.”

Taken together, big business has a problem on its hands. Lawmakers across the political spectrum are seeing what the Teamsters and many pro-worker allies have known all along — TPP won’t help anybody but the corporate class.

Congress is in no rush to move forward with the trade deal because elected officials see their constituents rising up and saying no to even more corporate handouts at the expense of everyday Americans. The TPP is just the latest example of crooked capitalism run amok.

Fraternally,

James P. Hoffa
Teamsters General President

Lawmakers across the political spectrum are seeing what the Teamsters and many pro-worker allies have known all along — TPP won’t help anybody but the corporate class.

Tentative agreement announced at NJ Transit

The 11 unions of the NJ Transit Labor Coalition and negotiators from New Jersey Transit (NJT) announced a tentative contract agreement on March 11, hours before a March 13 deadline for a possible strike or lockout.

Details of the agreement were not being released in order to give the unions a chance to present the information directly to the membership. The situation was continuing to unfold as this issue of The News went to press.

The unions have been without an agreement for five years. Throughout negotiations, they adopted the impartial recommendations of President Emergency Board (PEB) 248 as their final offer. The PEB recommendations called for a contract averaging 2.5% a year coupled with significant increases in employee health care contributions.

NJT’s offer was for 0.6% net wage increases per year.

The two Presidential Boards consisted of six experienced and impartial panels. Congress changed the Federal Emergency Board that does not broadly spread the benefits of trade, affecting the paychecks of American families.”

The situation was continuing to unfold as this issue of The News went to press.

The NJT Rail Labor Coalition held a massive rally in Woodbridge, N.J., on March 5. Thousands of union members were in attendance. NJ Transit is the nation’s third-biggest mass-transit provider. A strike would have left an estimated 65,000 people in the New York/New Jersey area without a way to work each day. An influential business group, Partnership for New York City, estimated the strike would have cost the city’s businesses $5.9 million per hour.

The Coalition includes every rail union on NJT, representing more than 4,000 commuter workers.

The NJT Rail Labor Coalition is comprised of: American Train Dispatchers Association (Power Directors, Train Dispatchers); Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, IBT; Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division, IBT; Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen; International Association of Machinists & Aerospace Workers; International Brotherhood of Boilermakers; International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1573 and System Council No. 7, IBEW; National Conference Firemen & Oilers/SEIU; SMART-Mechanical, SMART-Transportation Trainmen and SMART-Transportation Yardmasters; Transport Workers Union; and Transportation Communications Union/IAM (ARA SA Division, BRC Division and Clerical Division).

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Brother Dave Decker, General Chairman of the BLET’s New Jersey Transit General Committee of Adjustment, speaks at a rally for NJ Transit workers on March 5, 2016, in Woodbridge, N.J. Several thousand rail workers attended the rally, where union members urged the management of NJ Transit to accept the recommendations of Presidential Emergency Board 248.
RRB announces dates of Spring 2016 Pre-Retirement Seminars

DATES AND LOCATIONS OF THE AGENCY’S SPRING 2016 PRE-RETIREMENT SEMINARS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

APRIL 26 – Jerome Hill Theater (1st floor), 180 E. 5th Street, St. Paul, Minnesota.
APRIL 28 – Gus Solomon Federal Courthouse, 620 SW Main Street, Room 101, Portland, Oregon.
MAY 6 – Leo O’Brien Federal Building, 11A Clinton Avenue, Room 823, Albany, New York.
MAY 13 – Con-Do Building, Community Room 2nd Floor, 1 South Church Street, Hazelton, Pennsylvania.

 RR B announces dates for March-June 2016 informational conferences

RRB’s Office of the Labor Member, the conference offices of CP Rail’s headquarters in Calgary in 2015 to investigate why 57 rail cars — some containing hazardous cargo — were left parked on a mountain slope without proper handbrakes above Revelstoke, B.C., in February of 2015. While Transport Canada hasn’t given an official statement, a CBC News analysis of search warrants raises allegations that three CP Rail supervisors — not the train crew — are responsible for the unsafe act, which violates Canada’s federal rail safety laws.

The CP Rail offices were raided in May, followed by a subsequent raid on Nov. 2, 2015. Railway safety investigators in Canada are the responsibility of Transport Canada, making it the equivalent of the Federal Railroad Administration in the United States.

In the search warrant for the raid, Transport Canada alleges that the company and three supervisors violated emergency rules intended to prevent runaway trains and derailments made into law after the Lac-Mégantic oil train tragedy in July 2013.

The B.C. incident involves allegations that CP Rail ignored those emergency rules during the night of February 14–15, 2015, as it faced a nationwide strike by locomotive engineers and conductors. CP workers were set to walk off the job at midnight in a strike and company managers were directing crews to park their trains and tie down their cargo.

Train 401 was descending CP Rail’s Mountain Subdivision approaching Revelstoke when the conductor said she was ordered to leave the rail cars on a grade above the town of Revelstoke and not to take extra time to apply hand brakes. CP’s rail charts describe the portion of track in question, at the Greely side road roughly 6.2 miles uphill from Revelstoke, as a “heavy grade” with a slope of 1.2 per cent.

During the first raid, investigators seized audio recordings of radio and telephone calls from the night in question between the train crew and the rail traffic control center in Calgary. After listening to those calls, rail safety investigators expanded their investigation. On November 2, Transport Canada obtained a second warrant and searched CP’s headquarters again.

According to the warrant papers filed in court, investigators listened to the audio recordings and now believe the crew was ordered to ignore the rules by three CP Rail supervisors. Transport Canada won’t discuss their investigation, and the regulator has not laid any charges. Penalties for violating an emergency directive under Canada’s Railway Safety Act include fines of up to $1 million against a company and up to six months in jail for individuals.

In the search warrant for the raid, Transport Canada alleges that the company and three supervisors violated emergency rules intended to prevent runaway trains and derailments made into law after the Lac-Mégantic oil train tragedy in July 2013.
BLET settling into new headquarters

Brother Charles D. Weick was reelected to his second term as Chairman of North Dakota State Legislative Board during its quadrennial meeting in Bismarck, N.D., January 11-13, 2016.

Brother Weick is a CP Rail locomotive engineer and Legislative Representative of Division 160 (Harvey, N.D.). He hired out with the CP Rail in January of 1994, earning promotion to locomotive engineer in 1998. He has held continuous membership in the BLET since April 1, 1998. Brother Weick began serving his Division as Legislative Representative in 2004 and was elected to serve as Secretary-Treasurer in 2008. He was elected unanimously to serve as Chairman of the North Dakota State Legislative Board on January 24, 2012, following the retirement of outgoing chairman Michael R. Muscha.

Also elected during the quadrennial meeting were: 1st Vice Chairman Sean M. Forschen, Division 746 (Mandan, N.D.); and 2nd Vice Chairman Mark A. Schneider, Division 695 (Minot, N.D.). Secretary-Treasurer Darin L. Hamre, Division 671 (Enderlin, N.D.) was reelected by acclamation. Elected to serve as Trustees of the Board were: Terry L. Pauli, Division 69 (Grand Forks, N.D.), Mark A. Schneider, Division 695 (Minot, N.D.), and Sean M. Forschen, Division 746 (Mandan, N.D.).

BLET Vice President and National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman represented the National Division at the meeting, along with Special Representative Richard A. Olson. Brother Olson is a member of Division 746 (Mandan, N.D.).

“I am proud to thank Brother Weick and all members living in North Dakota. They embrace unity and solidarity.”

Weick reelected to 2nd term as Chairman of North Dakota State Legislative Board

The address of the new headquarters is: 7061 East Pleasant Valley Road Independence, Ohio 44131

All correspondence should be directed to the new address in Independence as of March 1, 2016. The National Division’s telephone number, (216) 241-2630, and fax number, (216) 241-6536, will remain the same.

The BLET sold the historic Standard Building to Weston, a real estate development group, in mid-2014. The National Division had leased back its office space in the Standard Building for the last year or so. The BLET purchased the new space in Independence, a suburb of Cleveland, in March of 2015.

The new headquarters will provide ample room for National Division officers and staff in a more modern work environment. It will also feature an expanded and improved state-of-the-art Education and Training Center.

The AM Higley Co. of Cleveland is performing the construction services related to renovation of the new headquarters. A 100 percent union workforce is performing all renovation work on the new building.

The BLET is the oldest labor organization in the United States. Cleveland was selected in 1870 as the union’s headquarters city due to its central location for serving U.S. and Canadian members. From 1910 to 1989, the union’s national office was located in the Engineers Building, the BLET’s original headquarters building in Cleveland. That building was sold in 1988 to make way for the Marriott Tower. The Standard Building, which was originally constructed by the BLET and dedicated in 1924, has served as National Division headquarters since 1989.

A dedication ceremony for the new BLET National Division headquarters building is planned for Thursday, April 14. Active and retired BLET members, officers and members of the BLET Auxiliary are invited to attend. As the date approaches, information and other details will be posted on the BLET website (www.blet.org) and the National Division Facebook page (www.facebook.com/BLETNational). **

BMWED WAGE SUCCESSFUL STRIKE ON THE CANADIAN PACIFIC’S DELAWARE & HUDSON RAILWAY

On March 7, members of the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWED) went on strike at Canadian Pacific’s Delaware & Hudson Railway near Albany, New York.

According to the BMWED, membership of its Northeastern System Federation went on strike over CP’s refusal to pay its track workers in a fair and acceptable manner. “Our BMWED members on CP have not been fully paid for the time they worked, have not been accurately paid at their contractual hourly rates, have been paid incorrectly or not at all for holidays and vacations, and have been deprived health insurance and supplemental sick benefits while on medical leave or furlough,” the union said in a press release.

The BMWED claimed victory and called off the strike later that day, after receiving assurances from CP that employees shorted on rates-of-pay, holidays and vacations — or otherwise shortchanged in any way through errors in its payroll department — would be fully compensated and made whole.

Representatives for the BMWED and CP were slated to meet in Chicago on March 14 to hash out the details of the problems with the railroad’s payroll processes and to establish procedures to make sure that this does not happen again. Part of that plan will include a dedicated CP representative, whose task will be prompt response to payroll issues for union-represented employees.

“I am proud of our Brothers and Sisters on the D&H. We all stepped out with conviction and courage today. We stuck together and we stood up for what’s right,” BMWED Northeastern System Federation General Chairman Dale Bogart said. “And I am also very proud of the support we got from every BMWED member across our Brotherhood. We could feel the support from thousands of miles away. Good things happen to good, honest, hardworking people when they embrace unity and solidarity.” **
Secretary-Treasurers complete LM-2 training class

In February, the BLET Education and Training Department conducted a training class for all Secretary-Treasurers who file LM-2 reports for their General Committee of Adjustment (GCA), Division, or State Legislative Board (SLB). The class was held in Long Beach, California.

Each year, labor organizations must file a financial report with the U.S. Department of Labor. The filing requirements are determined by the total annual receipts of the union, and the LM-2 is required for units with $250,000 or more in total annual receipts.

The BLET conducts one such LM-2 class each year, and it is generally intended for Secretary-Treasurers from many BLET General Committees of Adjustment and larger Divisions along with some State Legislative Boards.

A special agent of the class focused on the records that must be kept to comply with the new LM-2 form, including itemization of certain expenses as well as estimates of time spent by officers and employees in five “functional activity” categories. Other segments included an overview of the BLET online dues reporting program, a QuickBooks refresher, and information on the LM-2 digital signatures titled “The Seven Deadly Sins of Union Recordkeeping.”

Thank you and congratulations to the Brothers and Sisters who successfully completed this complex training. Please monitor the BLET National Directory website and FastMail for announcements regarding upcoming training classes offered by the BLET Education and Training Department. 