The Teamsters Rail Conference has added its voice to the dozens of elected officials, shippers and labor unions that strongly oppose an apparent attempt at a hostile takeover of Norfolk Southern (NS) by the Canadian Pacific Railway (CP).

The Rail Conference is comprised of constituent unions the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) and the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWED). The group stated its opposition to the forced takeover attempt in a letter from Rail Conference President Dennis R. Pierce to the Surface Transportation Board (STB) dated January 18, 2016.

Instead of the “substantial value creation” identified by CP in its December 16, 2015 presentation to investors, the Rail Conference predicts the opposite. CP’s hostile takeover of NS would trigger a round of additional Class I rail mergers, eventually reducing the industry to just two transcontinental railroads, “which is not in the best interests of our members, U.S. shippers or the public.” It could lead to a “death spiral” of job cuts and deferred plant and equipment maintenance industry wide, resulting in the crisis that crippled rail service in the Northwest and Midwest between the 1960s and late 1970s.

Pierce, who also is National President of the BLET, raised questions about CP’s reliance upon a voting trust to move ahead with the forced takeover outside of the STB’s standard rail merger approval process. “At the very least, the Board should immediately make clear to CP that it will not tolerate any attempt to short-circuit the process set forth in the law and accompanying STB regulations.”

President Pierce concluded: “CP’s proposal — while it may be good for Wall Street, hedge funds and certain investors — is bad for the public. I urge the Board to reject any and all attempts at this hostile takeover, and thank you in advance for your most serious consideration of our position.”

The Teamsters Rail Conference represents more than 70,000 rail workers employed as locomotive engineers, trainmen and maintenance of way workers across the United States as members of the BLET and BMWED. International Brotherhood of Teamsters Vice President John Murphy serves as Director of the Rail Conference. Teamsters Vice President at Large Freddie N. Simpson is National President of the BMWED.

A PDF copy of the Rail Conference letter is available from the BLET National Division website: www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/Rail_Conf_STB_CP_NS_Letter.pdf

Registration for the BLET’s Regional Meetings will be available soon! Please watch the BLET National Division website and Facebook page for the latest information. The 2016 Eastern Regional Meeting will be July 11-14 at the Drake Hotel in Chicago, Illinois; and the 2016 Western Regional Meeting will be August 22-25 at the Hyatt Regency in Long Beach, California. The Drake in Chicago is a beautifully restored grand hotel, and the Hyatt Regency is in the heart of the Long Beach Harbor entertainment area.

Join Us This Summer!

Mark your calendars and plan to attend one or both of the BLET’s regional meetings.

Eastern JULY 11-14, 2016 • CHICAGO

Western AUGUST 22-25, 2016 • LONG BEACH
Dennis R. Pierce  
BLET National President

GIVING 180 PERCENT
GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND IN THE YEAR AHEAD

The New Year 2016 is beginning with a flurry of activity for myself, my fellow members of the BLET Advisory Board, and our National Division staff in Cleveland. The past few months — and the next few months — will fly by in a whirlwind of activity that will keep us busy, to say the least.

As I write my monthly message to you, I am working with architects and contractors on the final phases of renovation at the BLET’s new National Division headquarters building in Independence, Ohio. The building we purchased in March of 2015 is a former office and warehouse for AT&T. The building itself is structurally sound, but some significant improvements were required to modernize it for your National Division officers and staff. These renovations have moved along at a quick pace, and we will begin moving into the new building in early March. Watch the BLET website and Facebook page for details regarding our ribbon cutting ceremony.

Another time consuming endeavor involves interviewing and researching moving companies. We have been in our current offices at the Standard Building in downtown Cleveland since 1989, and over the past 26 years, we have accumulated many important files, computer equipment, and other necessities that have to be moved. We are going to great lengths to find a moving company that will safely move our offices without breaking the bank. It is with mixed emotions that we leave the beloved Standard Building. Erected by the Brotherhood in 1924, the building is an important piece of our union’s proud history. But as I have said before, what matters most is not the building, but the people inside. The building may change, but our people won’t.

Your National Division officers and staff will continue to offer the best representation and service available. In terms of our National Division staff, I have asked everyone to give not just 100 percent but 180 percent over the weeks and months ahead. In addition to the major move of our headquarters, we have to tackle many other items that demand the best that everyone has to offer. I have challenged everyone to go above and beyond the call of duty. I have challenged them to maintain the same level of day-to-day service required by your membership while also rising to meet the daunting challenges presented by our headquarters move. We have our work cut out for us, but I have every confidence we can meet these challenges if everyone gives 180 percent.

Last year, we began our Triennial Election cycle. Our staff is in the midst of recording and inputting election results as they are packing boxes and preparing to move. I would like to thank them for their efforts. I would also like to thank our Brothers and Sisters who ran for office, voted, or otherwise participated in our Triennial Election process. To those who ran for office, rest assured that your dedication to our Brotherhood is truly appreciated. You are the rock upon which our union is built. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for taking the time from your busy work schedules and from your all too busy family life to serve our Brotherhood.

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to meet some of our newly-elected Brothers in Iowa during the week of January 18. The ink was not even dry on the election results as our BLET Education and Training Department took their program on the road to conduct a Local Chairman workshop for the Union Pacific-Northern Region General Committee of Adjustment (GCA). Under the dedicated leadership of General Chairman Dick Crow, the GCA has eight new Local Chairmen and eight new Vice Local Chairmen. These 16 brand new officers were among the 23 Brothers and Sisters who took part of the nearly week-long Local Chairman workshop. It was my pleasure to attend this workshop and thank these members in person. Their enthusiasm and dedication was inspiring. I cannot stress enough how important it is to complete our training classes, and I am proud to salute those who attended our Local Chairman class in Iowa. Our Education and Training Department will have a new and improved Training Center at our new Independence headquarters, and I encourage all of our officers — especially those who just elected in the 2015 Triennial Election cycle — to make the time to attend a workshop in 2016.

In the midst of packing to move to our new headquarters, we are also hard at work planning conventions for our 2016 Regional Meeting Associations. Our Eastern Regional Meeting will take place in Chicago, Illinois, July 11-14, and our Western Regional Meeting will be held in Long Beach, California, August 22-25. Preparations for the underwriting and registration information should be available soon. Please monitor the National Division website and Facebook page for the latest information. These are just a few of the items on our plate at the National Division. We are heavily involved in negotiations as a part of the Coordinated Bargaining Group (CPG). Our National Legislative Office in Washington, D.C., remains focused on important legislative and regulatory issues that impact the lives and working conditions of all locomotive engineers and trainmen. And we are also gearing up for the national elections coming up in November, when we will elect a new President of the United States and over 460 members of Congress. Updates on these and other issues will be available over the weeks and months ahead.

The year 2016 is shaping up to be one of the busiest years in recent memory, but I have confidence that our Advisory Board and our National Division staff will see us through.

Dennis R. Pierce  
BLET National President

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. BLET is not responsible if a response is necessary, without needlessly expending limited BLET resources.

Adopted at Cleveland, Ohio on July 22, 2010.

Denise R. Pierce  
BLET National President
Teamsters Take First Steps in Getting America Working

L ast September, the Teamsters unveiled its “Let’s Get America Working” (LGAW) platform that stressed the need for Congress to approve infrastructure investment and defend worker-friendly policies. And members and everyday Americans are already seeing positive results.

The biggest victory came in December when after more than a decade, Congress approved a five-year, $305 billion long-term transportation plan that sets a path forward to pay for road, rail and mass transit upgrades. Its passage was somewhat miraculous, given that Capitol Hill is still mired in the mud and unable to come together on much of anything.

But the victories didn’t end there. The Teamsters supported a $1.1 trillion omnibus appropriations bill, signed into law just before Christmas, that ensured workers retained their rights to organize on the job and continued to receive comprehensive health insurance from their employers without being financially penalized.

However, the effort to implement LGAW isn’t over yet. In 2016, the union will keep up the fight to defeat the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership and keep American jobs at home. It will also continue its efforts to defeat a proposal by the Central States Pension Plan that would dramatically cut the pensions of tens of thousands of Teamsters.

Going forward, this nation needs to invest in rebuilding its energy and water systems, as well as making sure union members retain their ability to collectively bargain so they can earn a fair wage. Workers need proper training and access to educational opportunities. And retirement should be made secure by bolstering both pension plans and Social Security.

Teamsters need to join together to make this happen. That way everyone wins.

Fraternally,

James P. Hoffa
Teamsters General President

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Final workshop held at BLET Training Center in Cleveland prior to move to new headquarters

A bout two dozen Local Division officers completed the BLET Education and Training Department’s Secretary-Treasurer Workshop in Cleveland the week of December 14, 2015. These Brothers now have the distinction of participating in the final workshop at the BLET’s Training Center in the Standard Building prior to the National Division’s move to a new headquarters facility in Independence, Ohio, during the spring of 2016.

During the afternoon session on December 16, the students heard presentations from BLET National President Dennis Pierce and National Secretary-Treasurer Steve Bruno. During the almost four day training workshop, students received training in a number of areas, including how to use the BLET National Division’s web-based system for membership reporting, OLMS tax compliance tips, Division Trustee reporting, and computer skills. Members also learned proper record keeping techniques, minute-taking, and methods for filing various Department of Labor and Railroad Retirement reports including Internal Revenue Service Federal tax reports such as CT-1, 941, W-2, W-3, and W-4. The workshop also focused on essential items such as 990 authorizations, bonding, check registers, banking, and other related items.

The final workshop held at the Standard Building Training Center was a General Chairman workshop that began on July 21, 2014. It is expected that the first workshop at the new Independence Training Center will be held in the Spring of 2016.

The National Division thanks these Brothers for their dedication to the Brotherhood and for their hard work in completing this complex training.
The 2016 BLET Scholarship Directory is as follows:

Like Us on Facebook

Members and their families are encouraged to contact the BLET Public Relations Department at: Bentley@ble-t.org.

E-provides members and their families with contact information for each scholarship program. The BLET National Division does not maintain its own scholarship program. The following comprehensive list of scholarship opportunities varies widely. The following list provides members and their families with contact information for each scholarship.

Note: The 1960-only scholarship program, formerly administered by the BLET Auxiliary, is no longer in existence.

{company}

Teamster Scholarships
The President, J. Hoffa Memorial Scholarship Fund is now accepting applications for scholarship awards. The deadline for receipt of completed materials is March 31, 2016. Applications must be a son, daughter, or financially dependent grandchild of a BLET member in good standing in order to be eligible to apply. Please see the Teamsters website for full eligibility requirements and to download the application along with other supporting materials.

Scholarship applicants compete in one of the five geographic regions. One category of awards totals $10,000 each. These four-year scholarships are disbursed at the rate of $2,500 per year and are renewable annually. Other awards are one-time $1,000 grants. These scholarships are disbursed to the college or university at the beginning of the recipient’s freshman year.

Eligibility requirements and application procedures are the same for all awards. Recipients are selected by an impartial committee of university admissions and financial aid directors based on academic achievement, SAT/ACT scores, character, potential and financial need. The J. Hoffa Memorial Scholarship Fund considers all applicants without regard to race, religion, gender, disability, or any other legally protected status.

A full list of specific eligibility requirements and scholarship applications can be found on the Teamster website: www.teamster.org/benefits/jrh-scholarship.

If you need additional assistance, please contact: James R. Hoffa Memorial Scholarship Fund 25 Loeishana Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20001 Phone: (202) 634-9735 Email: scholarship@teamster.org

BLET Auxiliary Scholarship Program
The BLET Auxiliary Scholarship Program provides $1,000 scholarships to qualifying students who wish to pursue higher education. To apply for an Auxiliary Scholarship, the applicant must be a son, daughter, stepson, or stepdaughter of a BLET Auxiliary member and a BLET member (living or deceased), with each being a member at least one year. In addition, applicants must be accepted for admission by an accredited university, college, or institute of higher learning. Children of an unmarried BLET member who has been an Associate Member of the BLET Auxiliary for at least one year are also eligible. Recipients are chosen on the basis of academic record, leadership, character, and personal achievement.

Important: For high school seniors entering an institute of higher learning for the first time, a copy of ACT or SAT scores and a current copy of cumulative grade point average (GPA) must accompany the application. For graduate students or students returning to an institute of higher learning, a copy of last term’s (or most current) GPA must accompany the application. A cumulative GPA of 3.0 or better is required for eligibility. Applications submitted without these documents will not be considered.

Completed applications must be received by BLET Auxiliary Secretary Lavanya Popp no later than April 1, 2016. Applications received after that date will not be considered.

Applications, instructions for scholarships, and mailing address for submission may be found on the Auxiliary website at www.bletauxiliary.net.

California State Legislative Board
The BLET’s CSLB will award a $1,000 scholarship to a graduating high school senior attending a college/trade/vocational school in 2016. The applicant’s parent or guardian must be a member in good standing in a BLET division represented by CSLB.

Rules, applications and deadline information are available on the Board’s website, www.cslb.ca.gov. The deadline is May 1, 2016.

All applications should be mailed to the CSLB home office address:
California State Legislative Board
610 Auburn Ravine Rd., Suite C, Auburn, CA 95603.

Illinois State Legislative Board
The BLET’s Illinois State Legislative Board is currently accepting applications for its Don Little Memorial Scholarship Fund, which was established in 2013.

The BLET’s Illinois State Legislative Board is currently accepting applications for its Don Little Memorial Scholarship Fund, which was established in 2013.

One $1,000 and two $500 scholarships will be awarded to applicants whose parent or guardian is a BLET member in good standing in a BLET Local Division represented by the Illinois State Legislative Board. Applicants must be 26 years of age or younger.

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Brother Little was a locomotive engineer with Metra commuter rail in Chicago and a proud member of BLET Local Division 294 (Bensenville, Ill.) for 35 years. Brother Little served for more than 10 years on the Executive Committee of the Illinois State Legislative Board and always had a dream of establishing a scholarship program for the family mem-
bers of fellow Brothers and Sisters who belonged to divisions chartered in Illi- nos. Unfortunately, Brother Little passed away before his dream was realized.

In 2013, Paul Pickard (Chairman of the Illinois State Legislative Board), Timothy Dunn (former Secretary-Treasurer of the Board), and several others helped make Brother Little’s dream a reality.

Scholarship applications and all accompanying documentation must be received by May 1, 2016. Specific eligibility require- ments, detailed instructions and application forms are available for download from the BLET National Division website (PDF): www.blet-t-622.org/pr/pdf/Il- linois_SLB_Scholarship_2016.pdf

For questions or assistance in completing the application, call Joyce A. Piekarski, Administrative Secretary, at (630) 963-6099 or email Joyce.Piekarski@gmail.com.

Wyoming State Legislative Board

The BLET’s Wyoming State Legislative Board (WYSLB) is again offering a schol- arship program for the upcoming school year. First offered for the 2014 academic year, the scholarship deadline for 2016 is June 1, 2016.

Wyoming State Legislative Board Chair Cory Runion said the Board will award either two $1,000 scholar- ships, or, in the event of a single appli-cant, one $1,000 scholarship each year to an immediate family member of a BLET member in good standing and holding membership in a Division char-tered within the state of Wyoming. The scholarships will be awarded based on the application, along with the request- ed documentation, by the WYSLB scholar- ship committee.

Scholarship applications and all ac- companying documents must be re-ceived by June 1 of each year. Specific eligibility requirements, detailed in-structions and application forms (PDF) are available for download from the BLET National Division website, or can be requested from your Division Legislative Representative. Currently, the BLET has nine Divisions chartered in Wyoming — Division 31 (Bill); Di- vision 207 (Casper); Divisions 44, 103 and 115 (Cheyenne); Division 94 (Gil-lette); Division 869 (Greybull); Division 142 (Rawlins); and Division 624 (Sheridan).

For questions of assistance in completing the application please contact your Division Legislative Representative.

Information and application form available here (PDF): www.blet-t.org/pr/pdf/Wy_SLB_Scholarship_Appl.pdf

BLET Division 269

BLET Division 269 (Jamaica, Long Island, N.Y.) offers two $500 scholar- ships to the children of BLET members who are already enrolled in college. Participa-tion is limited to members of Division 269 only.

Winners are picked at random at the Division’s Christmas party. For details, watch your Division 269’s mobile app or contact Division President John A. Kavanaugh Jr. at (931) 813-2234.

BLET Division 622

BLET Division 622 (Alliance, Neb.) will award two $500 scholarships in 2016. Only the children of Division 622 members are eligible to apply. Scholarship winners will be chosen at random during a Division meeting in August.

Applications must be received by July 31, 2016. For more specifics, please visit the Division 622 website (www.blet622.com) and click on “Scholarship.”

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Winners are picked at random during a Division meeting in August.

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Norfolk Southern to combine Virginia and Pocahontas divisions

On January 12, Norfolk Southern announced that it is consolidating its Virginia and Pocahontas divisions to form the new Pocahontas Division, with headquarters in Roanoke, Va., effective Feb. 1.

In a related move, Norfolk Southern is changing traffic patterns and selling parts of its “West Virginia Secondary,” a 253-mile line between Columbus, Ohio, and central West Virginia that has experienced steady declines in business in recent years. This follows the idling of a 33-mile mainline between Elmore and Princeton, W.Va., in September.

The new Pocahontas Division will comprise 2,581 route miles, mainly in Virginia and West Virginia, extending from the Port of Virginia to Portsmouth, Virginia and West Virginia, extending over the territory, and its yards comprise 2,581 route miles, mainly in Virginia and West Virginia, extending from the Port of Virginia to Portsmouth.

The 121 management and union employees who currently report to the Huntington Division offices will remain employed in the area supporting the transition over the next several months. At the conclusion of the transition period, some employees will be given an opportunity to fill positions in other areas of the network.

TIER I AND MEDICARE TAX

The railroad retirement tier I payroll tax rate on covered rail employers and employees for 2016 remains at 7.65 percent. The railroad retirement tier I tax rate is the same as the social security tax, and tier withholding and reporting purposes is divided into 6.20 percent for retirement and 1.45 percent for Medicare hospital insurance. The maximum amount of an employee’s earnings subject to the 6.20 percent rate stays at $118,500 in 2016, with no maximum on earnings subject to the 1.45 percent Medicare rate.

An additional Medicare payroll tax of 0.9 percent applies to an individual’s income exceeding $200,000, or $250,000 for a married couple filing a joint tax return. While employers will begin withholding the additional Medicare tax as soon as an individual’s wages exceed the $200,000 threshold, the final amount owed or refunded will be calculated as part of the individual’s Federal income tax return.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS

Employers, but not employees, pay railroad unemployment insurance contributions, which are experience-rated by employer. The Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act also provides for a surcharge in the event the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Account balance falls below an indexed threshold amount. The accrual balance of the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Account was $120.1 million on June 30, 2015. Since the balance is less than the indexed threshold of $152.9 million, a 1.5 percent surcharge will be added to the basic contribution rates for 2016, but will not increase the maximum 12 percent rate. There was also a surcharge of 1.5 percent in 2015, with no surcharge for 2013 and 2014.

As a result, the unemployment insurance contribution rates (including the 1.5 percent surcharge) on railroad employers in 2016 will range from the minimum rate of 0.1 percent to the maximum of 4.9 percent, while the tier II rate for employers can range between 8.2 percent and 22.1 percent.

 Railroad Retirement and unemployment insurance taxes in 2016

The amounts of compensation subject to railroad retirement tier I and tier II payroll taxes, as well as the tier I and tier II tax rates on employers and employees, will stay the same in 2016. In addition, unemployment insurance contribution rates paid by railroad employers will continue to include a 1.5 percent surcharge in 2016.

TIER II TAX

The railroad retirement tier II tax rates in 2016 will remain at 4.9 percent for employees and 13.1 percent for employers. The maximum amount of earnings subject to railroad retirement tier II taxes is still $88,200. Since 2004, tier II tax rates are based on an average account balance.

The accrual balance of the Railroad Retirement Tier II Account was $62.7 million on May 31, 2015, with 8 percent paying the maximum tier II rate. In 2016, the minimum rate of 0.25 percent will apply to 77 percent of covered employers, with 8 percent paying the maximum rate of 12 percent. New employers will pay an unemployment insurance contribution rate of 0.82 percent, which represents the average rate paid by all employers in the period 2012-2014.

IN 2016, THE BL&T MARKS THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF ITS MONTHLY NEWSLETTER. Authorized by delegates attending the Fourth Quinquennial Convention in 1986, the newsletter provides all active BLE members with important news and developments every month. Here’s to another 30 years!
BLET, SMART-TD petition FRA for speed signs

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET), in collaboration with the SMART-Transportation Division, has formally petitioned the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for a rulemaking that would mandate uniform warning signs in advance of a permanent speed restriction.

Recently, some railroads have begun removing these safety indicators, thereby creating a safety hazard for operating crews and the general public. In the joint petition, the unions asked the FRA to begin a rulemaking process that would mandate uniform warning signs to assist train crews in the safe performance of their duties. “In the interest of safety it is necessary to warn road crews of an upcoming speed restriction, which otherwise may not be readily apparent,” the joint petition reads. “Just as it is unreasonable for a motorist to know each speed restriction without a warning, the same is true for railroad crews. Unlike automobile travel, where speeds can be reduced promptly, trains and the general public. In the joint petition, the unions asked the FRA to begin a rulemaking process that would mandate uniform warning signs to assist train crews in the safe performance of their duties. “In the interest of safety it is necessary to warn road crews of an upcoming speed restriction, which otherwise may not be readily apparent,” the joint petition reads. “Just as it is unreasonable for a motorist to know each speed restriction without a warning, the same is true for railroad crews. Unlike automobile travel, where speeds can be reduced promptly, trains

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Amtrak’s Joe Boardman to retire

On December 9, 2015, Amtrak President and CEO Joe Boardman announced that he would retire in September of 2016 after nearly eight years with the railroad. Under his leadership, Boardman helped Amtrak achieve record ridership and revenues, as well as many other improvements. “When I look back at this time I see so many accomplishments and so many changes we made to make America’s railroad a stronger, safer and more important part of our nation’s transportation system,” Boardman wrote in a letter to employees announcing his retirement. “Amtrak is a remarkable story and it is so because of the people who work here — people who put their entire life’s work into this company.”

According to his letter, Boardman will work closely with Amtrak’s Board of Directors as they begin the search for a new CEO. “Having served on the Board prior to my time as CEO, I know that the selection of a President and CEO of Amtrak is perhaps the single most important decision that a Board can make,” he wrote.

Teamsters now have access to a leading brand of tax preparation software, TurboTax. Buying TurboTax through the Teamster page, you’ll receive a discount, plus a portion of what you pay goes toward the James R. Hoffa Memorial Scholarship Fund. http://ibt.io/turbotax

TurboTax products feature:

• A step-by-step interview with easy-to-understand questions;
• Forms automatically filled out using your answers; and
• 100-percent accurate calculations guarantee.
SD9043MAC. BLET members ratified a new contract with the DM&E on November 30, 2015. Illinois, to Nahant, Iowa, on November 9, 2015. The leader is an ex MILW SD40-2 (206) and is 41 years old. The second unit is CITX 119, an DM&E POWER:...