MEMBERS OF CONGRESS SHOCKED AT LAX SAFETY IN TEX-MEX JOB GIVEAWAY

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) is continuing its fight to preserve members’ jobs and to protect public safety at the Texas Mexican Railway (Tex Mex) border crossing in Laredo, Texas.

On July 9, Tex Mex unilaterally replaced U.S. citizen crewmembers with Mexican train crews between Laredo, Texas, and the International Bridge, more than 9 miles away. BLET declared the action unilaterally violated the Railway Labor Act and had threatened to strike, but a Federal judge issued a preliminary injunction on July 6 that prohibited a BLET job action over the issue.

BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce then asked President Donald J. Trump to personally intervene to help protect American jobs, but the Union has yet to hear from the Administration.

In mid-July, a delegation of BLET representatives visited 150 Congressional offices in Washington, D.C., to apprise them of the situation. President Pierce advised that many Members of Congress were shocked and surprised to learn that the train crews from Mexico would be operating trains on U.S. soil under relaxed federal railroad safety standards.

“Members of Congress expressed grave concern that the Federal Railroad Administration would allow the railroad to apply a lower safety standard to Mexican train crews than to U.S. train crews,” President Pierce said. “Our members are held to the highest standard while crews coming in from Mexico are essentially given a break in terms of certification, testing, and operating experience.”

During the federal court hearing on July 3, the railroad submitted an internal memorandum from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), which appears to give the railroad permission to proceed with its job replacement plan. According to the document, the rail safety agency told the railroad it needed to make no changes to its conductor certification program to certify Mexican conductors to replace U.S. crews.

Additionally, a review of the railroad’s revised Part 240 Locomotive Engineer Certification Program disclosed several glaring deficiencies in the requirements for foreign national locomotive engineers as compared to the requirement in place for American locomotive engineers.

“There is no requirement whatsoever that foreign national locomotive engineers must take the 200-question test required of KCS TSEs, and to pass that test by achieving at least a 90% grade.”

President Pierce questioned the FRA’s priorities in this situation. “The memorandum makes us wonder whether some at FRA are less interested in railroad safety, which is the agency’s statutory mandate, than they are in the railroad’s bottom line,” he said. “This degradation in safety is unacceptable, and we will not give up in our fight to protect good American jobs, and for the safety of those Americans living in communities where these trains operate.”

BLET asks President Trump to protect American jobs

BLET lobbies Congress about Tex Mex jobs issue

ADDITIONAL COVERAGE INSIDE:

BLET President’s Message

Spreading the word about Union Solidarity

On The Right Track

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good morning ... my name is Dennis Pierce, and I am honored to serve as National President of the Brother- 
hood of Locomotive Engi- 
ners and Trainmen, and as President of the larger Team- 
sters Rail Conference.

I thank my friend and Broth- 
er — President Dan Pickett — for the invitation to address you to- 
day at the 52nd Regular Conven- 
tion of the Brotherhood of Rail-
road Signalmen. Our two unions, BLET and TRS, work side by side, day in and day out, and I am tru- 
ly honored to be here.

I would like to take a few min-
utes this morning to share with you why I am so proud to be a Union member, and even more importantly, why I believe in, and support, the Union move- 
ment. I didn’t grow up in a Union household like many of my union brothers and sisters did. I have 
worked with second, third and 
fourth generation railroaders over the years, and they have 
shared the lessons they learned at the supper table of a union 
household. I did not have that growing up, and when I entered the workplace as a young adult, my 
first jobs were not Union jobs.

I mentioned were all won by past 
union membership. And the five 
union contracts I mentioned were all won by past 
Union, now SMART TD ... 
Conference ... 
by four Unions: 
• the BMWE, which is now a 
Division of the Teamsters Rail 
Conference ... 
• the Brotherhood of Rail- 
way and Airline Clerks — BRAC — 
which is now TCU ... 
• the United Transportation 
Union, now SMART TD ... 
• and the Brotherhood of Lo-
comotive Engineers.

And I didn’t have to track of any 
those unions down to become 
a member. In fact, it was incred-
ibly easy for me to be part of a 
labor 
union.

Each time I entered a new 
craft, someone from the union 
contacted me to fill out my ap-
lication to become a member. I didn’t 
have to fight for the right to belong to a union, and I didn’t pay 
my dues to those four rail 
unions out of any obligation .... I paid them because I personally knew the value of a union job. 
Yes there were furloughs, and I was forced to work away from 
my family for months at a time, but I also knew I was accumulat-
ing seniority because of my union 
contract, and that I had insur-
ance benefits that allowed me to 
start a family I could take care of 
in times of sickness.

We are fortunate to work in 
an industry that is virtually 
completely organized, and for 
that reason, our members have 
benefits that come not only from 
collectively bargained contracts, but also from legislation craft-
ed and promoted by our Unions. 
Think for a minute about these 
combined benefits that come 
from over a century and a half of 
trade unionism in the rail-
road industry; 
• A Railroad Retirement sys-
tem that allows you to retire with 
30 years of service at age 60, and that pays retirement annuities 
double those paid under Social 
Security. 
• An Occupational Disability 
system for railroaders with 20 
years of service that pays double 
the annuity paid to SSI recipients who are totally disabled. 
• A Medicare system that pro-
vides you with health care in your 
retirement years. 
• Health and welfare cover-
age for working, that — de-
spite some flaws — pays about 
90% of all medical costs, and 
provides bridge coverage for 
those who take early retirement 
and are not old enough to qual-
ify for Medicare.

The FELA System that pro-
tects you in the event that you get injured on the job. We all know 
that railroading is a dangerous occupation, and FELA is there to 
only protect you if injured, but it also protects the families of 
railroad workers whose lives are lost on the job.

These benefits and protections 
are only part of the benefits of 
union membership. And the five 
union contracts mentioned were 
won by past generations of Union 
Brothers and Sisters.

It may be that, in some ways, 
baseball unionization in this in-
dustry has led some to take for 
granted that rail union will al-
ways be there to provide repre-
sentation and other services, 
without any action required on 
their part. Such thinking could be fatal for our movement, for 
our economic security, and for 
our standard of living.

Front and center in today’s 
legislative halls is the corporate-
backed push called “right to 
work”. As I’ve often said, any-
time corporate-backed politi-
cians give something a catchy 
nickname, you need to do your home-
work on the details. What this 
type of legislation does is relieve 
nonmembers of the obligation 
to pay for the representation they 
receive while retaining the 
union’s duty of fair representa-
tion. The biggest con ever pushed 
on the American worker by the 
corporate bosses is the notion 
that he or she is better off with-
out a Union contract. Those cor-
porate interests invent employ-
ees like Mark Janus, who are 
nothing more than shills for a 
aging agenda intended to de-
stroy the union movement.

To accomplish that, they 
speak lies and make false prom-
ises, and they promote division 
within the house of labor ... all 
to create a class of freeloaders 
that will drive union insolv-
ency and out of existence be-
cause the costs of representation 
far outweigh the unions’ income. 
Furthermore, we should all rea-
think this type of legislation “right-to-freeload”. 
Ultimately, it is the right to make the Union weaker, and the boss-
es richer.

If these corporate-backed pol-
ticians succeed in eliminating 
union labor unions from the American 
workplace, your Union contracts 
go away with them. Many of our 
members do not realize that with-
out a Union contract, there is no seniority roster or se-
niority district.

Much like my first factory 
job, pay rates will be decided by 
the boss, without regard to 
anything but personal favorit-
ism and nepotism.

There are no work rules that 
limit what you can be forced to 
do for a day’s pay.

Insurance is no longer provided to 
the extent required by govern-
ment, and if you complain about 
any of this, you are terminated 
without the hearing and arbitra-
tion process that your contract 
currently provides you.

I have just described is the non-union workplace in 
America, the one I left 41 years 
ago. And the non-union work-
place actually hasn’t changed much in that time.

I don’t think anyone in this 
room wants to go backwards to a 
non-union workplace at your 
railroad. I don’t think anyone 
who wants to go back to a workplace 
where corporately negotiated wages, work place rules and ben-
fits are gone.

But if we are complacent, it 
could happen in our lifetimes. 
Over a century and a half of 
trade unionism in the railroad indus-
try could be wiped out if these 
anti-union politicians, largely 
bought and paid for by Corpo-
rate America, get their way.

Here is what we must remem-
ber: strong unions are what build 
the American Middle Class, and the 
non-union workplace over the past 
40 years is what made it possible to 
hold out that Middle Class.

Anyone who believes for one
Teamsters from across the nation descended on Capitol Hill in mid-July to lobby lawmakers and learn about the union’s plans to get involved and activate membership in advance of the 2018 election.

About 125 political coordinators from locals all over the U.S. spent time going from office to office meeting with elected officials and talking about pension reform, specifically the Butch Lewis Act. The bill would boost financially troubled multiemployer pensions so they don’t fail. It would create a new agency under the U.S. Treasury Department that would sell bonds in the open market to large investors such as financial firms.

Pensions were a top issue during the first day of the Teamsters Political & Legislative Coordinators Conference, when several lawmakers spoke to attendees about the need for reform. Lawmakers like Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), Rep. Richard Neal (D-Mass.) and Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.) said it was time for a bipartisan collection of lawmakers to stand together for retirement security. They noted that working people had done their part by foregoing some wage increases so they could pay into their pensions. “Working people kept their part of the deal on this,” Rep. King said. “To lose [their pensions] now … is completely unfair.”

Of course, the concerns of Teamsters go beyond pensions. Focusing on the upcoming election season, Teamsters officials told attendees they must be ready to seize upon the momentum building to elect officials who will stand up for hardworking Americans. This union recognizes that workers are longing for change. The Teamsters need to get people out to the polls. We have to be at the forefront to turn the political landscape around so that the concerns of workers will be matched with results from our elected officials in Washington.

Democratic Party officials on hand agreed that the climate is building that could flip control of Congress. But it starts with those on the ground. The Teamsters are ready to return power to the people.

Fraternally,
James P. Hoffa
Teamsters General President

This union recognizes that workers are longing for change. The Teamsters need to get people out to the polls. We have to be at the forefront to turn the political landscape around so that the concerns of workers will be matched with results from our elected officials in Washington.

On the Right Track:

2018 Triennial Election manual now online

The 2018 edition of “On the Right Track,” the Local Division nomination and election procedure manual, is now available for download from the BLET website and for those Officers who have access, the document is also accessible in Document Library in UnionTrack.

Triennial elections for BLET Divisions are being held this year, and nominations will be held at each Division’s first regular meeting in September of 2018.

The “On the Right Track” election manual will assist the officers whose job 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 will also serve as an election official for your Division and will be receiving a hard-copy of “On the Right Track” in the mail in the coming days. An additional package of election materials will be mailed to you from the National Division office shortly, and copies of the Notice of Nominations and the Nominating Form are also currently available 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 2018 edition of “On the Right Track” (PDF). It is available at: 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 at: www.ble-t.org/signup.asp

• For 21st Century Service

BLET Local Division Nomination and Election Procedure
Revised June 2018

2018 RIGHT TRACK
ON THE
Photo: Chase Gunnoe
National Division launches 2018 convention website

BLET Convention 2018

T he BLET National Division has launched a new website — https://bletconvention.org — to provide key information to delegates, vendors and officers attending the union’s Fourth National Convention, which will be held October 1-4, 2018. The BLET’s Fourth National Convention will convene at the Rio All-Suite Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada, from Monday, October 1, 2018, through Thursday, October 4, 2018. Delegate registration begins on Sunday, September 30. Approximately 500 delegates will represent nearly 37,000 active and retired engineers employed throughout the United States.

The new website has numerous sections containing news and other information for delegates, visitors and vendors. The goal is to expedite the registration process by providing as much information as possible in advance of the convention, and to serve as a one-stop information source for convention-related news, photographs and videos.

The delegate section includes a video from BLET National Division President Dennis R. Pierce explaining the convention process. There is a special link directly to the Rio Hotel website that allows delegates to make their room reservations, and another to reserve transportation between the airport and the hotel.

The visitors section provides an online pre-registration form for non-delegates who plan to attend the Fourth National Convention and observe the proceedings. Advance registration for visitors is encouraged as visitors will be required to display a name badge when they are in the convention visitor seating area. The visitors section also contains links for hotel room and airport ground transportation reservations.

Vendors are required to register in advance. A vendor application is available online, and the website provides information regarding vendor booth set up, loading and unloading, security, and other specifics, as well as access to links for hotel room and airport ground transportation reservations.

Additional key elements of the website include a tentative agenda for both the BLET Convention and the BLET Auxiliary Convention, as well as maps of the hotel and the convention area. In addition to the link allowing delegates, visitors and guest to make hotel and airport ground transportation reservations, the new website also contains weather information for the Las Vegas area.

Lastly, the BLET Auxiliary will hold its Third National Auxiliary Convention at the Rio from October 1-3, 2018. Auxiliary delegates will elect National Officers and consider important resolutions. A separate section of the BLET convention website focuses on the Auxiliary’s Convention, and similarly includes links for hotel room and airport ground transportation reservations.

BLET members lobby Congress over safety, Tex Mex jobs issue

B LET Legislative Representatives visited 150 Congressional offices in Washington, D.C. on July 13 as part of a major railroad safety lobby day effort and to make members of Congress aware of the union’s struggle to preserve the jobs of BLET members who work for the Texas Mexican Railway (Tex Mex). On July 9, Tex Mex unilaterally replaced U.S. citizen crewmembers with Mexican train crews — who work under relaxed federal safety standards — between Laredo Yard and the International Bridge, more than 9 miles away.

Twenty-seven BLET Division Legislative Representatives (LRs) and State Legislative Board Chairmen (this number does not include additional BLET officers and staff in attendance) participated. The most pressing issue the group tackled was educating members of Congress about the pending issue of the Federal Railroad Administration certifying Mexican nationals as locomotive engineers and trainmen in the United States. The group had 150 House and Senate offices and provided legislators and their staff with a copy of President Pierce’s letter to President Trump (https://www.blet.org/pr/pdf/Trump_TexMex_Letter.pdf), which details the BLET’s safety concerns regarding the certification of engineers who live and work in Mexico to also work in the United States under relaxed federal safety standards.

The BLET representatives also educated legislators regarding the BLET’s two-person crew bills (S. 2360 and H.R. 233), which would mandate a minimum crew size for freight trains in the United States. Other subjects included in meetings with elected officials included Positive Train Control (PTC), Amtrak funding, right-to-work issues, rail worker fatigue, and other topics of importance to BLET members.

Prior to the lobby day, the BLET members participated in a two-day classroom training session on July 11 and 12 conducted by the BLET Education & Training Department. Following the classroom training, those involved in the classroom training and lobby day events. “There is no possibility we could have visited 150 offices in a single day to deliver our message of safety without the class’s help,” he said. "Washington D.C. politicians heard our voice today loud and clear."
On June 27, the U.S. Supreme Court sided with anti-union advocates attempting to undercut the rights of millions of public employees to negotiate with their employers for a fair return on the value of their work. By backing the plaintiffs in Janus v. AFSCME, the high court’s decision is an attempt to limit the collective voices of not only government workers, but the country’s private-sector workforce as well.

“By overturning 40 years of judicial precedent, conservative justices endorsed on agenda supported by corporations and the wealthier in our society,” said King County Councilmember Joe dictate if a contract settlement is the work day in and day out. “I can’t think of a better workers’ right to negotiate an agreement that is best for the crafts that it represents, and in doing so, its members.

For true solidarity to exist, this must occur all must be toughened up by their own efforts. One union attacking another as they work to protect the interests of those who share this view of Union solidarity. For that reason, I deduce that we are not in the age of the railroad. We face a fight like none of us have ever experienced. And it won’t happen in a single, winner-take-all battle. Instead, years of attacks on labor, some hidden in seemingly harmless legislation, is already underway. We need our hands on deck, and we need to educate our membership exactly how stark are the risks we face. If we don’t maintain an historic struggle. We must also redouble our efforts to strengthen the solidarity between rail unions that we saw last round of national negotiations.

Kowalewski’s lawsuit alleged that the company had engaged in a “staggering” pattern of misconduct in violation of the Federal Employers’ Liability Act. The judge also agreed that the rail company misled federal investigators.

In 2009, Washington County Judge Ellen Maas said BNSF had engaged in a “staggering” pattern of misconduct by lying and concealing evidence in the 2003 deaths of four young people in a collision with a train at a malfunctioning crossing in Anoka. Maas slapped the railway with a $4 million penalty — on top of a $21.6 million jury award for the families of the victims. When BNSF appealed, the state Supreme Court upheld the penalties.

In Kowalewski’s case, he was working four years ago at a Fridley rail yard when he started a burning in his nose that later collapsed in a break room and was taken to a hospital. Lawyer Paula Jossart said her client was unwar- aref of leakage from one of the cars carrying “wellhead casing oil” from fracking sites in Texas. Later testing determined that he’d been exposed to a highly toxic cocktail of “various hydrocarbons, including benzene, hydrogen sulfide, and toluene.” The lawsuit said BNSF didn’t tell doctors at the hospital about his possible exposure to the toxins and brushed off the incident.

Sherry Weather, 53, was in charge, losing motor function and the ability to write. He was diagnosed with a progressive neuro- muscular disorder and filed the lawsuit in Janu- ary 2017, saying he had not been warned about the danger of exposure to crude oil.

Dawg’s order said BNSF “likely exacer- bated” Kowalewski’s condition by failing to comply with court orders requiring the company to pro- duce 11 hydrocarbon cars that had been at the rail yard on the day he became ill. The company appealed the $21.6 million jury verdict that detailed the contents of the cars.

The Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Co. has been smacked with a $4.6 million mislead jury penalty by a Minnesota judge for de- straying evidence — and it’s not the first time.

As 2018’s Class I railroads employed 147,282 workers, up 0.19 percent from mid-May 2017, according to Surface Transportation Board (STB) data. The number of transportation employees (train and engine) increased 0.31 per- cent on a month-over-month basis from mid-May 2017 to mid-June 2018, according to the STB. Class I rail employment levels for mid-June 2017.

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Unemployment and sickness benefits for railroad employers

What is the daily benefit rate?

Almost all employees will qualify for the maximum daily benefit rate of $77. This rate is generally payable for the number of days of unemployment or sickness benefits over 10 days in any one claim period, which yields $770 for each two full weeks of unemployment or sickness benefits. However, only one seven-day waiting period is allowed per benefit year. Normal unemployment or sickness benefits are also payable for up to 130 days (26 weeks) in a benefit year. The total amount of each kind of benefit which may be paid in the new benefit year cannot exceed the employee's railroad earnings of at least $3,862.50 in calendar year 2017, counting no more than $1,545 for any month. Those who were first employed in the rail industry in 2017 must also have at least five months of creditable railroad service in 2017.

Under certain conditions, employees who do not qualify on the basis of their 2017 earnings may still be able to receive benefits in the new benefit year. Employees with at least 10 years of service (120 or more months of service) might qualify for accelerated benefits, and employees with at least 10 years of service (120 or more months of service) might qualify for accelerated benefits if they have rail earnings of at least $3,862.50 in 2018, not counting earnings of more than $1,545 a month.

In order to qualify for extended unemployment benefits, a claimant must not have voluntarily quit work without good cause and not have voluntarily retired or, if claiming sickness benefits, be under age 65. To be eligible for accelerated benefits, a claimant must have 14 or more consecutive days of unemployment or sickness; not have voluntarily retired or, if claiming unemployment benefits, quit work without good cause; and, when claiming sickness benefits, be under age 65.

How long are these benefits payable?

Normal unemployment or sickness benefits are each payable for up to 130 days (26 weeks) in a benefit year. The total amount of each kind of benefit which may be paid in the new benefit year cannot exceed the employee's railroad earnings of at least $3,862.50 in calendar year 2017, counting no more than $1,545 for any month. Those who were first employed in the rail industry in 2017 must also have at least five months of creditable railroad service in 2017.

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What is the waiting period requirement for unemployment and sickness benefits?

Benefits are normally paid for the number of days of unemployment or sickness over four in 14-day registration periods. Initial sickness claims must also begin with four consecutive days of sickness. However, during the first 14-day claim period in a benefit year, benefits are only payable for each day of unemployment or sickness in excess of seven which, in effect, provides a one-week waiting period. (If an employee has at least five days of unemployment or five days of sickness in a 14-day period, he or she should still file for benefits.) Separate waiting periods are required for unemployment and sickness benefits. However, only one seven-day waiting period is generally required during any period of continuing unemployment or sickness, even if that period continues into a subsequent benefit year.

Are there special waiting period requirements if unemployment is due to a strike?

If a worker is unemployed because of a strike conducted in accordance with the Railway Labor Act, benefits are not payable for days of unemployment during the first 14 days of the strike, but benefits are payable during subsequent 14-day periods. If a strike is in violation of the Railway Labor Act, unemployment benefits are not payable to employees participating in the strike. However, employees not among those participating in an illegal strike, but who are unemployed on account of the strike, may receive benefits after the first two weeks of the strike. While a benefit year waiting period cannot count toward a strike waiting period, the 14-day strike waiting period may count as the benefit year waiting period if a worker subsequently becomes unemployed for reasons other than a strike later in the benefit year.

Can employees in train and engine service receive unemployment benefits for days when they are standing by or laying over between scheduled runs?

No, if they are standing by or laying over between regularly assigned trips or they missed a turn in pool service.

Can extra-board employees receive unemployment benefits between jobs?

Yes, but only if the miles and hours they actually worked were less than the equivalent of normal full-time work in their class of service during the 14-day claim period. Entitlement to benefits would also depend on the employee's earnings.

How would an employee's earnings in a claim period affect his or her eligibility for unemployment benefits?

If a claimant's earnings for days worked, and/or days of vacation, paid leave, or other leave in a 14-day registration period are more than a certain indexed amount, no benefits are payable for any days of unemployment in that period. That registration period, however, can be used to satisfy the waiting period. It does not have to be in the same work and nonrailroad work, as well as part-time work and self-employment. Earnings also include pay that an employee would have earned except for failure to mark up or report for duty on time, or because he or she missed a turn in pool service or was otherwise not ready or willing to work. For the benefit year that begins July 2018, the amount is $5,545, which corresponds to the base year monthly compensation amount used in determining eligibility for benefits in each year. Also, even if an earnings test applies on the first claim in a benefit year, this will not prevent the first claim from satisfying the waiting period in a benefit year. On the other hand, earnings of no more than $15 a day from work which is substantially less than full-time are not consistent with the holding of normal full-time employment may be considered subsidiary remuneration and may not prevent payment of any days in a claim. However, a claimant must be sure to report all full and part-time work on each claim, regardless of the amount of earnings. call the BR&CF at (717) 657-1890 if you have any questions!
How does a person apply for and claim unemployment benefits?

An Application for Sickness Benefits (Form SI-1) can be obtained from RRB.gov, any RRB field office, their local railroad labor organization, or railroad employers. An application including a doctor's statement of sickness must be filed at the beginning of each period of continuing sickness for which benefits are claimed. Claimants should make a special effort to have the doctor's statement of sickness completed promptly since no claims can be paid without it.

Once a claimant files a claim for sickness benefits, the RRB�s Bureau of Hearings and Appeals will review the claim. In most cases, the RRB�s Bureau of Hearings and Appeals will issue a decision, and the claimant will be notified of the decision. If the claim is denied, the claimant may appeal the decision to the RRB�s Bureau of Hearings and Appeals.

How are payments made?

Railroad unemployment and sickness insurance benefits are paid by Direct Deposit. With Direct Deposit, benefit payments are made electronically to an employee�s bank, savings and loan, credit union or other financial institution. New applicants for unemployment and sickness benefits will be asked to provide information needed for Direct Deposit enrollment.

How long does it take to receive payment?

Under the RRB�s Customer Service Plan, if a claimant files an application for unemployment or sickness benefits, the RRB will release a claim form or a denial letter within 10 days of receiving his or her application. If a claim for subsequent biweekly unemployment or sickness benefits is filed, the RRB will certify a payment or release a denial letter within 10 days of the date the RRB receives the claim form. If the claimant is entitled to benefits, his or her benefits will generally be paid within one week of that decision. However, some claims for benefits may take longer to handle than others if they are more complex, or if an RRB field office has to get information from other people or organizations. If a claimant does not receive a decision notice or payment within the specified time period, he or she may expect an explanation for the delay and an estimate of the time required to make a decision.

How can claimants get more information on their railroad unemployment or sickness claims?

Claimants with Benefit Online Services accounts can view their individual railroad unemployment insurance account statement. This statement displays the type and amount of the claimant�s last five benefit payments, the claim period for which the payments were made, and the dates that the payments were approved. Individuals can also confirm the RRB�s receipt of applications and claims.

In addition, claimants can call the agency toll-free at 1-877-727-5722 to access the RRB�s automated HelpLine service which provides information about the status of unemployment and sickness claims or payments 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Individuals with questions about unemployment or sickness benefits, or who need information about their specific claims and benefit payments, can also contact an RRB field office by calling the toll-free number. Persons can find the address of the RRB field office serving their area by clicking on Field Office Locator, or by calling the RRB�s HelpLine service and selecting the appropriate option from the automated menu. Most RRB offices are open to the public on weekdays from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., except on Wednesdays when offices are open from 9 a.m. to noon. All RRB offices are closed on Federal holidays.
BNSF files for PTC extension due to interoperability delays with other railroads

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You are a photographer! The National Division's Public Relations Department, which produces the News, Letter each month, has received numerous inquiries lately from BLET members volunteering to contribute their images to the "Photo of the Month" section of the News Letter. 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.

BNSF files for PTC extension due to interoperability delays with other railroads

On June 3, BNSF announced that it had submitted a request to the Department of Transportation (DOT) for a two-year extension of the PTC deadline. This extension is required due to the Federal Railroad Administration’s (FRA) current interpretation of the law that full implementation status cannot be achieved until all non-BNSF trains and/or equipment operating on its PTC-equipped lines are also PTC-compliant. BNSF previously announced in December 2017 that it had fully installed and was operating under Positive Train Control (PTC) on all mandated subdivisions in advance of the December 31, 2018 deadline.

As reported, BNSF completed the installation of all mandated PTC infrastructure at the end of 2017, including 88 required subdivisions covering more than 11,500 route miles on its network. However, to be considered fully implemented requires that all other railroads operating across any of BNSF’s PTC-equipped lines must be capable of operating with BNSF’s PTC systems between Class I, commuter and short line rail carriers remains a challenge. BNSF has successfully demonstrated interoperability with several railroads that operate on its network, including commuter railroads and Amtrak. However, not all railroads that operate on BNSF will have completed their PTC installation by the end of 2018.

(Based on a press release.)