The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) is taking a stand against a rail industry effort to nearly double the distance freight trains can travel between mandatory air brake inspections.

Reducing the frequency of safety-sensitive air brake inspections would degrade safety and would place the lives of our members and the public at risk,” BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce said.

The Association of American Railroads (AAR) petitioned the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for a waiver that would allow freight trains to travel up to 2,600 miles between mandatory air brake inspections.

Brother Vincent G. Verna, the BLET’s Directory of Regulations, testified on behalf of the BLET at a FRA public hearing to examine safety regulations instead of the current industry standard of 1,500 miles. Brother Verna testified.

The AAR intends to use a technology known as wayside Wheel Temperature Detectors (WTDs) to monitor braking effectiveness, based on the logic that properly working brakes impart heat to the wheels. Finding cold wheels would indicate a potential problem with the train’s air brakes. BLET is not opposed to the technology — just the way the industry intends to use it. During the hearing and in its written submission, BLET took the position that the technology could be deployed as a way to provide early warnings to train crews that may help prevent accidents, but that it should not be used to supplant existing safety inspections performed by qualified railroad employees.

BLET believes WTDs should be deployed in the field and utilized for their intended use of examining wheel temperature in between terminals. WTDs should not, however, be used as a pretext for dodging regulatory safety standards,” Verna testified.

The AAR is seeking a waiver from the FRA to allow a pilot project consisting of revenue service unit coal trains running on the Union Pacific (UP) system between Wyoming’s Powder River Basin and an unloading facility in White Bluff, Ark., a round trip of approximately 2,600 miles. The WTD that monitors the system is located at Sheep Creek, Wyo. Under current UP operating practices, the coal trains running in this service are classified as extended haul trains and operate intact up to 1,500 miles between brake tests required under 49 CFR part 232.

"One irony of the requested waiver is that it seeks to use WTDs in lieu of inspections on the very types of trains (coal) that frequently carry the greatest tonnage and rely on effective brakes to ensure a train remains under control,” Verna testified. “We reject the premise that detecting temperature ranges that are out of the norm, on the one hand, and performing inspections and tests required by federal regulations and positive law, on the other, are interchangeable. We also take issue with waiving safety regulations in favor of a wholly unregulated product. This while permitting trains with extreme amounts of tonnage to travel 2,600 miles through inspection points avoiding inspection.”

Just over two years ago, in a ruling dated June 20, 2014, the FRA denied rail car consignment to travel 2,600 miles through inspection points avoiding inspection.

BLET fights industry effort to reduce air brake inspections

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Register for News Flash email alerts at: www.ble-t.org/newsflash

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Vince Verna

With its rear end still spanning the New River, a high priority westbound CSX Q135 hugs the river bank at the height of West Virginia's gorgeous fall foliage season in October of 2015. The Portsmouth, Va. to North Baltimore, Ohio intermodal will soon ease its way out of the New River Gorge after completing a slow journey through one of the state's most remote regions. Photo taken at Hawks Nest, W.Va., on October 20, 2015. Photo: courtesy Chase Gunnoe
I am writing this month’s message to you in the week leading up to the national election on November 8, 2016. Between now and then, the BLET will be inundated with campaign rhetoric, much of it focused on issues other than those that are most important to the economic security of working class Americans. Many promises will have been made, in some cases by politicians whose track records show no concern for the working middle class of our great country. Even so, by the time you read this message, the election will be over, and our Brotherhood’s efforts will adjust to that outcome.

One thing is for sure, when the election is behind us, it will be time for us all as BLET members to join in solidarity for our focus back to the workplace issues that matter most. First and foremost, the BLET is currently engaged in national negotiations for a new contract. Our organization is a member of a coordinated bargaining group with five of our unions: the Transportation Division of the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART-TD); the American Train Dispatchers Association (ATDA); the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS); the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers, and Helpers (IBBF); and the National Brotherhood of Firemen and Oilers / SEIU (NCFO). Togeth-
Elect officials, both Democrats and Republicans, increasingly view infrastructure investment as an essential step to creating jobs and bolstering the U.S. economy. That’s a good thing. Yes, the plans may differ in size and scope, but the realization that money needs to be spent on roads, rail, mass transit, energy networks and water systems is one that will hopefully move beyond campaign promises after November. The Teamsters have been pushing such a message for more than a year. It needs to become a reality if this nation is to become the absolute best it can be. To do that, however, will cost money. So how does the country come up with the funds? Easy, make corporations who have been stashing their profits offshore pay their fair share. Currently, it is estimated that U.S. corporations have effectively shielded some $2.4 trillion in profits overseas. That means they are cheating America out of about $126 billion a year in tax revenue. There is nothing fair about engaging in such activity. A new report by the Economic Policy Institute and Americans for Tax Fairness found that about 55 percent of American corporate offshore profits are held in tax-haven countries. As a result, corporations only contribute $1 out of every $9 in federal revenue, down from $1 out of every $3 at its peak. “While the statutory tax rate on corporate income is 35 percent, estimates of the rate corporations actually pay put the effective rate at about half the statutory rate,” the study finds. “Driving this divergence between what corporations are supposed to pay and what they actually pay is a combination of offshore profit shifting and tax avoidance. Multinational corporations pay taxes on between just 3.0 and 6.6 percent of the profits they book in tax havens.” It is time for corporate America and Congress to do the right thing. Politicians and big business shouldn’t drape themselves in the flag while doing nothing to end this fleecing of the nation. Corporate fat cats making record profits don’t need these dollars — the U.S. does. Fraternally, James P. Hoffa Teamsters General President

Lost Corporate Taxes Could Fund Needed Infrastructure

The Rail Workers Hazardous Materials Training Program is hosting four training sessions in the coming months. The dates are as follows: November 13-18, 2016; January 15-20, 2017; February 19-24, 2017; and March 19-24, 2017. Each class will run on a Sunday through Friday basis, with an orientation session at 5:30 p.m. on Sunday and departure on Friday. All training will be conducted at the Houston Fire Department’s Val Jahnke Training Facility, 8030 Braniff St., Houston, Texas, 77061. This training addresses OSHA and DOT required training in addition to procedures, different levels of response and worker protection in a hazardous materials emergency or release, weapons of mass destruction awareness, and the incident command system. The training also provides completion of the OSHA 10-Hour General Industry Outreach requirements. The programs are delivered using interactive classroom instruction, small group activities, hands-on drills and a simulated hazmat response in full safety gear. The Rail Workers Hazardous Materials Training Program is funded to provide this training by a federal grant from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). These five-day hazmat training courses will provide rail workers the essential knowledge, skills, and response actions in the case of an unintentional release. These tools will allow rail workers to protect themselves, their co-workers and their communities. The funding provides the following student expenses: travel, lodging and meals. In addition, an incentive of $175.00 per day is available to all training participants of these programs, except those who are able to secure regular pay through their employer, or are paid union officers.

Please use the following website for more information or to register:
railworkertrainingprogram.org

Four rail hazmat training classes available
The BLE National Division is pleased to announce the dates and locations of its 2017 regional meetings: June 5-9 in San Antonio, Texas; and August 14-18 in Myrtle Beach, S.C.

The San Antonio regional meeting will be held at the Hyatt Regency-San Antonio Riverwalk in Texas and the Myrtle Beach regional meeting will be held at the Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort in South Carolina.

As with the 2016 regional meetings, the 2017 meetings will be arranged on a Monday through Friday schedule. Travel to the meeting, registration and a welcome reception for each of the two meetings will be on Monday (June 5 for San Antonio and August 14 for Myrtle Beach). Meetings, training classes and other events will be scheduled throughout the remainder of the week and will include a closing banquet on Thursday night. Travel home is on Friday for each meeting (June 9 for San Antonio and August 18 for Myrtle Beach).

Per the BLE Bylaws, regional meetings are held “for the purposes of membership training, education and discussion of matters of importance to the membership.” Additionally, the meetings are structured to include options for fellowship with other members and their families, entertainment, fun and relaxation.

More specific details will be announced at a later date. Registration information will be available online at the BLE National Division’s regional meeting website (www.bleregionals.org). All members are encouraged to attend one or both of these regional meetings in 2017.
Nick Johnson reelected Arizona State Legislative Board Chairman

Brother G.N. "Nick" Johnson was reelected by acclamation to his third term as Chairman of the Arizona State Legislative Board at the Board’s quadrennial meeting in Long Beach, Calif., on August 22, 2016.

A member of BLET Division 28 (Tacoma, Ariz.), Brother Johnson is a Union Pacific locomotive engineer who first joined the Brotherhood on April 1, 1999. Most recently, he was elected by acclamation to the chairman’s office at the Board’s meeting on October 23, 2012. He was first elevated to the office of chairman on August 1, 2011, after former chairman Vincent G. Verna was appointed to serve as the BLET’s Director of Regulatory Affairs out of Washington, D.C.

Also elected by acclamation were: 1st Vice Chairman Manny Perez III, Division 647 (Phoenix, Ariz.); 2nd Vice Chairman Richard Kolomitz, Division 134 (Winslow, Ariz.); Secretary-Treasurer Stephen Whittman, Division 28 (Tacoma); and Alternate Secretary-Treasurer Jake Howard, Division 383 (Fort Mohave, Ariz.). Elected by acclamation to serve as Trustees were: Kevin Onnenbo, Division 123 (Phoenix, Ariz.); Manny Perez III, Division 647 (Phoenix, Ariz.); and Richard Kolomitz, Division 134 (Window, Ariz.).

Guest speakers included: BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce; Vice President & National Legislative Representative John P. Tólan; National Vice President Mike Twombly; Union Pacific-Western Lines General Chairman Bill Hannah; and Director of Regulatory Affairs Vince Verna.

"I am proud to offer my congratulations and thanks to Brother Nick and all officers of the Arizona State Legislative Board," President Pierce said. "I thank them for their dedication to serving our Brotherhood. They will have much work to accomplish over the next several weeks in advance of the November elections, but I have every confidence that they will rise to the task."

Additional special guests included: Brian P. Carr, UP-Western Lines 1st Vice General Chairman; Cory Runion, Wyoming State Legislative Board Chairman; and Bob Hagan, BLET Director of Political and Legislative Affairs.

Brother Johnson coordinated the date and location of the Board’s 2016 quadrennial meeting to coincide with the beginning of the BLET’s Regional Meeting in Long Beach, Calif. The location gave members and delegates of the Arizona State Legislative Board the opportunity to meet with as many National Division officers and Staff as possible.

The BLET’s Arizona State Legislative Board represents approximately 600 active members throughout the state.
BLET establishes Maryland State Legislative Board

On June 2, 2016, the newly established BLET Maryland State Legislative Board held its inaugural meeting in Frederick, Md., and Brother David M. Dinges of BLET Division 181 (Brunswick, Md.) was elected as the Board’s first Chairman. Also elected to four-year terms were: 1st Vice Chairman Christopher T. Brown, Division 52 (Baltimore, Md.); 2nd Vice Chairman Frank L. Shillingburg, Division 934 (Cumberland, Md.); and Secretary-Treasurer Daniel B. Swartz, Division 181 (Brunswick, Md.).

In addition to the elected officers mentioned above, Maryland-based BLET members present at the inaugural State Legislative Board meeting were: R.W. (Wes) Boyer Sr., Division 97 (Baltimore, Md.); and Fred M. Cox, Division 52 (Baltimore, Md.).

Brother Cox also serves as 2nd Vice Chairman of the Norfolk Southern-Southern Lines General Committee of Adjustment.

Representing the National Division at the meeting were: Vice President and National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman and Director of Political and Legislative Affairs Robert F. Hagan.

“I congratulate Brother Dingels and all officers of the Maryland State Legislative Board,” BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce said. “I also thank our Brothers and Sisters in Maryland for taking the initiative to establish a State Legislative Board.”

In April, a majority of active members belonging to Divisions chartered in Maryland overwhelmingly voted to establish the Maryland State Legislative Board. It is comprised of approximately 320 members from BLET Division 52 in Baltimore (Norfolk Southern), Division 97 in Baltimore (CSX), Division 181 in Brunswick (CSX) and Division 934 in Cumberland (CSX).

With the addition of Maryland, the BLET now has 40 State Legislative Boards throughout the United States.

IMPORTANT OPEN ENROLLMENT ANNOUNCEMENT FOR MEDICARE-ELIGIBLE BLET MEMBERS AND RETIREES

If you are a BLET member, retiree, spouse or dependent, and entitled to Medicare Part A and/or enrolled in Medicare Part B, you are eligible for the TEAMStar Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Program (PDP). You are eligible for this program regardless of your health status or the drugs you are currently taking.

The enrollment period for TEAMStar Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Program runs from October 15, 2016 to December 7, 2016. We hope you will take advantage of this affordable prescription drug plan, which enables BLET members to save as much money as possible.

The TEAMStar Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Program is a voluntary Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Program that meets the federal government requirements for creditable coverage. It is not available to the general public and is designed to help Medicare-eligible BLET members, retirees and their spouses or dependents reduce their prescription drug costs and insures them against high prescription drug expenses in the future.

This program was introduced in 2006 and thousands of Teamster retirees have chosen to enroll since the program’s inception. Enrollment packets will be arriving in the mail soon. If you didn’t receive an enrollment packet or need another one, please call the number listed below and you will be sent a packet. Don’t wait! The open enrollment period is for a limited time.

ENJOY THE FOLLOWING TEAMSTAR PART D PROGRAM BENEFITS:

• Competitive Union Group Rates — TEAMStar Medicare Part D is not available to the general public. The rates and benefits are set by your union.

• Union Preferred Pricing — certain Preferred Generics are available for as low as $2 at a Union Preferred Pharmacy.

• Coverage Options — three unique plans that offer different levels of security to Teamsters.

• Coverage through the Donut Hole — if you select the Platinum Plan you can get coverage for most generics at a low copay after you get to the Coverage Gap.

You can get more detailed information and also register for the program, at www.teamstarpartd.com or call 1-866-524-4173.

Open Enrollment Period begins October 15, 2016!

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters is proud to announce the open enrollment period for the TEAMStar Medicare Part D Program. This annual open enrollment period will begin on October 15, 2016 and end on December 7, 2016. Teamster retirees and spouses who are currently enrolled in Medicare Parts A and/or B qualify for TEAMStar Medicare Part D coverage.

Enrollment packets will be arriving in the mail soon. If you didn’t receive an enrollment packet or need another one, please call us and we will send you one. Don’t wait! The open enrollment period is for a limited time.

Enjoy the following TEAMStar Part D Program benefits:

• Competitive union group rates — TEAMStar Medicare Part D is not available to the general public. The rates and benefits are set by your union.

• Union Preferred Pricing — certain Preferred Generics are available for as low as $2 at a Union Preferred Pharmacy.

• Coverage Options — three unique plans that offer different levels of security to Teamsters.

• Coverage through the donut hole — if you select the Platinum Plan you can get coverage for most generics at a low copay after you get to the Coverage Gap.

To get additional information or an enrollment packet, visit our website at www.teamstarpartd.com or call 1-877-577-3880.
RRA financial reports

The Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) is required by law to submit annual financial reports to Congress on the financial condition of the railroad retirement system and the railroad unemployment insurance system. These reports must also include recommendations for any financing changes which may be advisable in order to ensure the solvency of the systems. In June, the RRB submitted its 2016 report on the railroad retirement and railroad unemployment insurance systems.

The following questions and answers summarize the findings of these reports.

1. **What were the assets of the railroad retirement and railroad unemployment insurance systems last year?**

As of September 30, 2015, total railroad retirement system assets, comprising assets managed by the National Railroad Retirement Investment Trust and the railroad retirement system accounts at the Treasury, equaled $2.6 billion. The Trust was established by the Railroad Retirement and Survivors’ Improvement Act of 2001 to manage and invest railroad retirement assets. The cash balance of the railroad unemployment insurance system was $108.9 million at the end of fiscal year 2015.

2. **What was the conclusion of the 2016 report of the financial condition of the railroad retirement system?**

The conclusion was that, barring a sudden, unanticipated, large decrease in railroad employment or substantial investment losses, the railroad retirement system will experience no cash-flow problems during the next 25 years. The long-term stability of the system, however, is still uncertain. Under the current financing structure, actual levels of railroad employment and investment return over the coming years will largely determine whether corrective action is necessary.

3. **What methods were used in forecasting the financial condition of the railroad retirement system?**

The 2016 report projected the various components of income and outgo of the railroad retirement system under three employment assumptions intended to provide an optimistic, intermediate and pessimistic outlook, for the 25 calendar years 2016–2040. The projections of these components were combined and the investment income calculated to produce the projected balances in the railroad retirement accounts at the end of each projection year.

Projecting income and outgo under optimistic, intermediate and pessimistic employment assumptions, the report indicated no cash-flow problems occur throughout the 25-year projection period under any of the three employment assumptions.

4. **How do the results of the 2016 report compare with the 2015 report?**

The projected tier II tax rates for each calendar year are either the same or higher than in last year’s report. (Railroad retirement payroll taxes, like railroad retirement benefits, are calculated on a two-tier basis.)

5. **Did the 2016 report of the railroad retirement system recommend any railroad retirement payroll tax rate changes?**

The report did not recommend any change in the rate of tax imposed by current law on employers and employees.

6. **What were the findings of the 2016 report on the financial condition of the railroad unemployment insurance system?**

The RRB’s 2016 railroad unemployment insurance financial report was also generally favorable. Even as maximum benefit rates increase 36 percent (from $572 to $980) from 2015 to 2026, experience-based contribution rates maintain solvency. No new loans are anticipated even under the pessimistic assumption. Unemployment levels are the single most significant factor affecting the financial status of the railroad unemployment insurance system. However, the system’s experience-rating provisions, which adjust contribution rates for changing benefit levels, and its surcharge trigger for maintaining a minimum balance help to ensure financial stability in the advent of adverse economic conditions.

Under experience-rating provisions, each employer’s contribution rate is determined by the RRB on the basis of benefit payments made to the railroad’s employees. Even under the pessimistic assumption, the report predicted that the average employer contribution rate remains well below the maximum throughout the projection period.

A 1.5 percent surcharge is in effect in calendar year 2016. Under all three employment assumptions, the report projects a surcharge of 1.5 percent in 2017 and 2018, with a surcharge of 1.5 percent predicted for 2019 under the pessimistic assumption and likely under the intermediate and optimistic assumptions.

7. **What methods were used to evaluate the financial condition of the railroad unemployment insurance system?**

The economic and employment assumptions used in the unemployment insurance report corresponded to those used in the 2016 report of the retirement system. Projections were made for various components of income and outgo under each of the three employment assumptions, but for the period 2016-2026, rather than a 25-year period.

8. **Did the 2016 report on the railroad unemployment insurance system recommend any financing changes to the system?**

No financing changes were recommended at this time by the report.

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The BR&CF is the least expensive protection when disciplined for eligible occurrences. We are affordable. You could save up to $1,032 each year on a $200 benefit level. A BR&CF membership offers you the best price, value and service. To apply for membership, act today... ask a BR&CF member where you work or for an application or visit our web site at www.brcf.org or call us toll free at 800-233-7080.
advoc C. Decker was reelected by acclamation to his third term as General Chairman of the New Jersey Transit General Committee of Adjustment at the GCA’s quadrennial meeting in Karrtan, N.J., on September 8, 2016. Brother Decker is a New Jersey Transit locomotive engineer and member of BLT Division 272 (Dover, N.J.). He hired out in 1988 as a trainman, earned promotion to locomotive engineer in 1990, and joined the Brotherhood on March 1, 1990. In 2008, Brother Decker was elected 1st Vice Chairman of the GCA, then served two years as an officer of the General Chairman beginning in 2010 following the retirement of Rich Darcy. He was reelected by acclamation to continue service as General Chairman of the GCA’s quadrennial meeting in 2012. Also reelected by acclamation to their second consecutiv...