Has potential to become BLET’s largest General Committee of Adjustment

Leaders of several short line railroads created the new BLET General Committee of Adjustment in historic meetings held in Cleveland on January 10 and 11.

The new Regional and Shortline General Committee of Adjustment is the first of its kind. It will provide a powerful voice and stronger representation to more than 300 members from 10 different shortline railroads throughout the United States. The new General Committee will focus exclusively on the representation of its shortline members.

All new shortlines organized by the Brotherhood will automatically become a member of the new Shortline General Committee. “The potential to grow is enormous,” said BLET National Secretary-Treasurer Bill Walpert, who helped facilitate the historic meeting. “There are dozens if not hundreds of non-union shortlines that could be organized throughout the United States. The potential is there for a powerful GCofA representing thousands of members.”

Delegates attending the meeting adopted General Committee Bylaws and elected officers. “The delegates did an excellent job of conducting business and electing strong, capable leaders,” said BLET Shortline Director John Mullen, who also helped facilitate the meeting. “Based on their commitment and dedication to the membership, this group of young officers are forging a bright future for the Shortline General Committee.”

Dustin Heichel was elected by acclamation as the new General Chairman of the Regional and Shortline General Committee. “Our new structure will give shortlines a tremendous boost in bargaining power,” said Heichel, who also serves as General Chairman of the Iowa, Chicago & Eastern (IC&E). “The Education and Training sponsored by the National Division will help strengthen our membership as new shortlines come on board.”

Ken Kroeger, BLET Special Representative and Coordinator of the Education & Training Dept., was in attendance to give the delegates a crash course in representing members in disciplinary hearings. The BLET National Division pledged to help the delegates and newly-elected officers of the Regional and Shortline General Committee of Adjustment post to commemorate their inaugural convention in Cleveland on January 10. Seated, from left: Dustin Heichel (IC&E), Regional & Shortline General Chairman; Dan Lorenz (Huron & Eastern), Vice General Chairman and Eastern Region Chairman, and John Sexton (IC&E), Alternate Western Region Chairman. Standing, from left: Eric Hill (Lousiville & Indiana), Alternate Eastern Region Chairman; Steve Tarlton (CF&E), delegate; Brian Price (Panhandle Northern), delegate, and Jason Baldwin (Great Western Railway of Colorado), delegate.

‘Whopping’ 91 percent ratifies new Grand Trunk Western contract

By a landslide 91 percent majority, BLET members represented by the Grand Trunk Western General Committee of Adjustment approved a new five year contract with CN on January 15. The agreement includes a 16 percent wage increase, an increase in the away from home meal allowance to $10, full retroactive pay from July 1, 2005, a $1,000 bonus claim settlement payable to all active engineers, 26 additional days off for the extra board without deduction in pay, and a “step-up bonus payment” applied directly to the Engineer’s Guaranteed Extra Board (GED) that, when coupled with the 16 percent wage increase, amounts to about a 22.1 percent wage increase for the weekly guarantee amount. The agreement covers about 250 locomotive engineers.

The new agreement amends the 2003 Engineer’s Hourly Rate Agreement. Under the new arrangement, the...
BLET launches web-based Tax Compliance program

The BLET National Division launched its new online Tax Compliance reporting system on January 9, another Internet-based innovation aimed at making the jobs of Secretary-Treasurers a little bit easier.

The new system allows Division, General Committee and State Legislative Board Secretary-Treasurers to enter their members’ payroll information online.

The system then allows the STs to produce the necessary forms they are required to file with the Internal Revenue Service. In addition, members’ Railroad Retirement information is sent electronically to the National Division, eliminating the need to mail forms OE-1 and OE-1a through the Postal Service.

Under the direction of National Secretary-Treasurer Bill Walpert, the National Division launched an Internet-based system for dues reporting and collection on January 1, 2003. That new system has drawn positive reviews from Secretary-Treasurers nationwide for reducing paperwork and making their jobs easier.

“The BLET remains at the cutting edge of technology and our Internet-based reporting systems for our Secretary-Treasurers makes us one of the most Internet savvy unions in America,” National Secretary-Treasurer Walpert said. “I want to thank Dr. Elaine Reese, our Director of Tax Compliance, and Walt Schmidt, our Director of Online Services, for the countless hours of work they put in to developing this new system.”

STs can access the new system from the link provided in their membership reporting area.

Members with tax compliance related questions should contact Dr. Reese at (216) 241-2830, ext. 243.

Members with technical questions or problems regarding the new Tax Compliance reporting system should contact Walt Schmidt at (216) 241-2930, ext. 258.

General Committee established for Shortline members

Shortline

Continued from Page 1

From left: BLET National Secretary-Treasurer Bill Walpert and BLET Director of Shortlines John Mullen represented the National Division during the two-day convention and assisted the Shortline delegates with the formation of the General Committee.

John Mullen represented the National Division during the two-day convention and assisted the Shortline delegates with the formation of the General Committee.

Members approve GTW contract by landslide

Grand Trunk

Continued from Page 1

BLET National Vice President Paul Sorrow played a key leadership role in negotiating the new contract. In addition to General Chairman Karakian, Vice President Sorrow thanked Marty Tyler, Local Chairman of BLET Division 650 (Durand, Mich.), and Tom Greenman, Local Chairman of BLET Division 33 (Battle Creek, Mich.), for their contributions during the negotiating process.

In any worthwhile endeavor, we must be totally prepared and willing to do whatever it takes to achieve victory, as was the case in reaching this agreement, Vice President Sorrow said. “Words cannot express the high regard I hold for General Chairman Karakian for his unyielding commitment to gain the very best agreement possible for his membership.”

“Our success is directly attributed to the GTW Membership for their patience and support over the long period of time that preceded the agreement. Suffice it to say that I am extremely proud to have played a small part in this great union effort.”

BLET National Vice President Paul Sorrow played a key leadership role in negotiating the new contract. In addition to General Chairman Karakian, Vice President Sorrow thanked Marty Tyler, Local Chairman of BLET Division 650 (Durand, Mich.), and Tom Greenman, Local Chairman of BLET Division 33 (Battle Creek, Mich.), for their contributions during the negotiating process.

BLET International President Don Hahn applauded the efforts of the negotiating team and praised Brothers Sorrow, Karakian, Tyler and Greenman for bringing the negotiating process to a successful conclusion.

Hourly Rate will increase to $18.63 on July 1, 2008, while the weekly guarantee for Engineers will increase to $1,738.24, providing GEI Engineers with a minimum annual income of over $90,000.00 per year.

The Teamsters Rail Conference believes that the solution to these excessive fatigue-inducing conditions is to reinstate some reasonable limits on the size of territory these workers have to cover,” Rodzwicz said.

As part of the re-authorization of the Federal Rail Safety Program, the Teamsters Rail Conference believes the ongoing program concerning main track switches in “dark territory”—routes that have no signal system—should be addressed. Mislabeled switches have been involved in several fatal rail accidents in recent years, while off-the-shelf switch position detection technology has been available for some time.

The Teamsters Rail Conference represents more than 70,000 locomotive engineers, trainmen and maintenance of way employees on freight, passenger and commuter rail lines across the United States. The Rail Conference is a division of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.
BLET Auxiliary Update

To join or not to join, that is the question

By Anita J. Caruso
National Secretary
BLET Auxiliary

I hope this time of year finds every one in good spirits, as it is with many good friends and not so good memories that I write this article.

I’m going to take you all back in time, to 1976, when I married my husband (Sam), who was working for the railroad as a switcher at the Royal Hotel in Kansas City, Mo. He had been working there for six years and I had no reason to believe that this wouldn’t be the place he would work until he retired. Boy, was I wrong!

One day, he came home and says, “I hear they are hiring at the railroad. I’m thinking of applying. Do you mind?” Well, who am I to tell someone that they can’t try a new profession, so I said, “Sure, as long as you don’t get a job that involves traveling or being gone overnight.” Many of you are in families that grew up working for the railroad for many generations, but, no one in any of our families or any of our friends had ever worked for a railroad, so we had no idea of what to come. In 1980, our first move came when our daughter was two years old. We left Kansas City and moved to Lawrence, Kan., to be closer to his home terminal in Oswatotim, which was about 30 miles farther than I cared to move. Although Kansas City was only 30 miles from Olathe, my family felt I was “out of town” already.

It wasn’t that I got an invitation to join GIA Helen Gould Division 235 of Oswatotim, Kan. I had no idea that there was such an organization and I was very happy to be able to join. It was very comforting to know there were other people out there who could relate to what I was learning to accept as “normal” and give me tips on how to run a household without a husband to count on. They even let me bring my daughter to the meetings because I didn’t have a sitter or know anyone in Olathe. That was very nice, too!

In the months that I soon found to attending, hearing about what was going on at the railroad from everyone’s husbands perceives, trying to learn the “special lingo” that railroaders use, hearing ways to cope with holiday time when your husband was always going to functions by yourself because the railroad again has held your husband hostage. It gave me the feeling like I had another family to look to. In the past, my own families didn’t understand why we couldn’t commit to Sunday dinner in advance. These are things that needed to be endured or understand as it’s a totally different way of life, for sure. After seven and a half years in Olathe, my husband decided that a “beter” job awaited him in Omaha, Neb. I thought I was going to die, right on the spot! He applied and in true railroad form, had to leave immediately upon being contacted, to be in Omaha so he could establish a new seniority date. That left me in Kansas with two small children and a husband who was back and forth from Omaha to Olathe for eight months. When the school year ended and the house sold, we headed west. Never in my dreams did I think I would end up living in Nebraska. I thought the only thing there would be the race track and college football, which were the only reasons we’d ever visited the state.

We arrived in Nebraska in May of 1988 from Kansas. I told my husband we would “bug” me to start an auxiliary here and I just kept putting it off. Finally, he wore me down and in early 1995, I started sending letters out to all the wives of BLET members asking if they would like to join a new auxiliary in the Omaha/Council Bluffs, Iowa, area. We had a wonderful response and were initiated in September of 1995 as River City Auxiliary 12 with 15 charter members.

Now, 11 years later, it was one of the best things I could have ever done. I have made so many wonderful friends and have my own “extended family” here to look forward to seeing once a month. We have shared many ups and downs through the years and I can tell you, having a group of friends with a common interest is a wonderful way to “let go of some stress!” In recent years we feel we are doing even more to help our spouses on issues that directly affect our families, and we feel we are still so much more we can do to help.

So, why join an auxiliary or start one, why on earth not? •

New law gives boost to retirees income

President George W. Bush signed H.R. 5483, the Railways and Retirement Disability Earnings Act, into law on Friday, January 12.

“The bill will allow our retirees to earn money to supplement their Rail- road Retirement income,” said BLET National President Perry Renfro. “This bill represents a victory for our Legislative Department, Rail Labor, but most importantly, our retired members.”

The U.S. Senate passed the bill by voice vote in December and it was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives on September 28. “Congratulations to all of those retired railroad employees who gave us the victory on this legislation,” BLET Vice President and National Legislative Representative John Boland said. “I would especially like to thank those BLET members who wrote letters, called, faxed and emailed their Senators and Representatives on this legislation.”

The signing of this legislation provides much needed relief for our Brothers and Sisters on disability.

The new law will raise the outside earnings limits of retired railroad workers from $400 to $700 per month.

The measure becomes effective immediately, and will also allow all indexing based on the growth of the consumer price index. The signing of this legislation was only 10 years ago. •

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NASLBC to hold annual meeting April 26-28

The annual meeting of the National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen (NASLBC) will take place April 26-28 at Bally’s in Las Vegas.

The meeting immediately precedes the Teamsters Unity Conference, which is also at Bally’s from April 29-30.

“We scheduled our business meeting to take place just before the Teamsters Unity Conference so that our members who wanted to attend both meetings will only need to purchase one airline ticket, helping to decrease their travel costs,” said Perry Renfro, Secretary-Treasurer for the NASLBC.

The NASLBC’s annual meetings give Legislative Chairmen from across the U.S. the opportunity to network, inform and update legislative efforts on both the state and national level. They will also hear reports from BLET and IFT officers during the meeting.

The chairman will discuss rail security issues, Amtrak funding, the BLET PAC fund, the 2008 Presidential elections, and numerous other issues of importance to BLET members.

Any questions concerning the meeting should email Brother Perry Renfro at perenfo@cebridge.net.
New ECP braking technology would benefit safety

When new technology is introduced in the railroad industry, there’s always a game of “give and take” played between management and labor. But in a recent public safety hearing before the Federal Railroad Administration regarding the implementation of a new braking technology, it’s clear that railroads are willing to give a little — but only if they can take away a lot.

A panel of locomotive engineers and trainmen testified before the FRA on January 16 regarding electronically controlled pneumatic (ECP) braking systems. The ECP technology reduces stopping distances of trains by allowing the lead car in a shoving movement, something the BLET strongly supports. Delivering the testimony in Washington, D.C., on behalf of the BLET was Thomas A. Pontolillo, the BLET’s Director of Regulatory Affairs.

“The BLET has a long and proud history of promoting and working to advance the implementation of technologies that enhance railroad industry safety,” he testified. “We recognize the potential benefits of the new ECP technology — both for our members and for the industry, as a whole.”

However, he told the FRA panel that the BLET is not in favor of requests by the BNSF Railway and the Norfolk Southern Railroad to waive highly important Federal railroad safety inspections as part of the pilot project. Those waiver requests are nothing more than a way for the railroads to cut costs and will degrade overall safety in the industry if granted, Pontolillo said.

BNSF and NS are seeking to implement a pilot project to test the new brakes on certain portions of their territories.

“We fully support pilot projects of this type, and would view with an open mind petitions for waiver from compliance with FRA regulations that interfere with this effort,” Pontolillo said. “However, our reading of the petition has convinced us that the pilot — as initially presented — falls far short of what is required, because a number of necessary conditions were omitted from the petition and relief is being sought from a number of regulations that do not re- strict use of the pilot.”

In exchange for implementing the new braking system, the railroads are seeking waivers of highly important safety checks that aren’t necessarily related to the technology. For example, the railroads are seeking to waive the Federal requirement for a daily locomotive inspection.

“The purpose of the daily locomotive inspection is to ensure — at least once each calendar day — that there are no new technical defects in any of the various locomotive subsystems at the time of the inspection,” Pontolillo testified. “Waiving this requirement will expose locomotives in ECP service to an unacceptably high standard of inspection, while denying the request will not impair in any way the ECP pilot. FRA should deny this request.”

In addition, railroads are seeking relief from the requirement that 100 percent of the brakes must be effective and operative prior to departure of a train from the initial terminal. The railroads also asked for numerous other waivers, including the right to waive various brake test and inspection requirements, and other important safety systems currently mandated by Federal law, such as standards for end-of-train devices.

Another safety degradation is the fact that railroads seek to establish new inspection standards for trains equipped with ECP brakes — inspection standards that are different than standards for trains equipped with conventional brakes.

Establishing different standards for different equipment sets that will be operated side-by-side, when they are not operationally required, is a recipe for confusion and injects an unnecessary risk,” Pontolillo said.

In the end, the BLET applauded the railroads for taking the first step in the eventual broad implementation of this safety-improving technology. However, their request as currently written would have the potential to degrade safety and is nothing more than a way to cut costs.

“FRA must consider the safety case for ECP in reaching its determination concerning this petition,” Pontolillo said. “Instead, Petitioners have largely sought relief from those regulations necessary to create what can only be called a ‘labor cost savings’ case for ECP.”

New FRA Safety Advisory asks railroads to strengthen yard safety

Following a preliminary investigation into the December 14, 2006 death of a CSX carman in DeWitt Yard outside of Syracuse, New York, when his truck was struck by a remote controlled shoving yard movement, the Federal Railroad Administration has issued a series of recommendations to the railroad industry intended to prevent another such tragedy.

The recommendations were included in Safety Advisory 2007-01, which was published in the January 19 Federal Register.

FRA stressed that the accident is still under investigation and contributing factors have not yet been established, and that the Safety Advisory should not be construed as placing blame or casting any aspersions on the accident on the acts or omissions of any person or entity.

FRA also noted that the subject of “point protection” for shoving movements was included in a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking concerning railroad operating rules that currently is under consideration.

By issuing the Safety Advisory, FRA is asking the industry not to wait until the lengthy rulemaking process is concluded, but to act now to prevent another unnecessary injury or death.

FRA’s most significant recommendation is that railroads “review, or amend as necessary, their point protection rules to clarify that the person protecting the point visually determine, for the duration of the shoving or pushing movement, that the track is clear either within the person’s range of vision or for the complete distance the equipment is to be shoved or pushed, or that other safeguards are observed to prevent critical incidents involving shoving movements.”

In making this recommendation, FRA acknowledged that “continuous observation cannot be accomplished if the person is also accomplishing other tasks that cause the person to divert attention from providing point protection.”

The Safety Advisory also recommended that railroads:

• assess their current rules addressing safety at yard crossings, including rules governing shoving and pushing movements and backing motor vehicles;
• review their point protection rules and their importance with all relevant employees;
• review their current rules pertaining to employee behavior on or about tracks with particular emphasis in yards with all relevant employees;
• address the ability of employees to call for assistance in emergency situations through the use of common emergency radio frequencies, or by other means; and
• assess the conspicuity of flat cars and other equipment with low profiles and consider measures available to increase their visibility when they are the lead car in a shoving movement, especially at yard crossings.

John Tolman, BLET’s Vice President and National Legislative Representative, praised FRA’s action. “The industry is long overdue for a mandatory point protection requirement for shoving movements and crews should have the absolute right to refuse to make a blind move,” he said. “We strongly urge the FRA to closely monitor the industry’s response to these recommendations, and to take further action, if necessary, to ensure that another tragedy like the DeWitt accident never happens again.”

2007 Railroad Retirement Board Informational Conferences

The U.S. Railroad Retirement Board offers free informational conferences for elected union officers throughout 2007. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. and ends at 12:30 p.m.

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<td>March 30</td>
<td>Covina, Calif.</td>
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<td>Clarion Hotel Sports Complex</td>
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<td>Ronald V. Dellums Federal Building</td>
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<td>May 18</td>
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<td>950 22nd Street, North Meeting Room C</td>
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<td>3800 Main Ave.</td>
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Locomotive theft ignites rail security push in Ohio

Ohio’s House of Representatives will consider a railroad security bill in light of a locomotive theft in southeastern Ohio on January 18.

State Representative Bob Hagan, who is a working locomotive engineer and a member of Division 706 of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET), held a press conference on January 18 where he announced that he will reintroduce Senate Bill 363, the Rail Safety and Security Act. Also at the press conference in Youngstown were State Senator Capri Cafaro and Tim Hanely, the BLET’s State Legislative Board Chairman for the State of Ohio.

The legislation would require railroad owners and operators to secure their facilities from the threat of terror strikes and provide for proper oversight from the appropriate state agencies to ensure compliance.

Early on January 16, two boys escaped from a juvenile detention home in Nelsonville, Ohio, broke into a building that houses a Hocking Valley Scenic Railway locomotive, and took the locomotive on a 12-mile joy ride before being apprehended by police.

Chairman Hanely said the theft is proof positive that securing Ohio’s railroad system is long overdue.

“What further proof is needed?” Hanely asked. “If we can’t secure a potential weapon of mass destruction from kids, how could we ever think our rail networks are safe from terrorists?”

This industry has ignored the problem far too long and it’s high time our legislators stepped in to protect Ohio’s citizens.

Hannely said that Ohio has fallen victim to numerous rail accidents in the recent past, many of them serious. He cited a train fire in Chillicothe, a runaway train out of Toledo, a fatal train accident and train sabotage in Cincinnati, and train crews being fired upon with rifles while on route between Ohio cities as examples of security lapses in the state’s rail network.

“Enacting a rail security bill could have prevented most of these incidents,” Hanely said.


Buddy White reelected as Georgia SLBC

Buddy White was reelected at the quadrennial meeting of the Georgia State Legislative Board Chairman (SLBC) at the Board’s quadrennial meetings in Atlanta on January 22.

Also elected were: Vice Chairman James Rigby, a member of Division 706 (Ft. Lauderdale, Ga.); 2nd Vice Chairman Corey Vaught, Division 409 (Columbus, Ga.); Secretary-Treasurer Ed Way, Division 631 (Atlanta); and Alternate Secretary-Treasurer Louis Meyers, Division 316 (Atlanta).

Chair Neil, from Division 409 (Columbus, Ga.), presided over the Board meeting and added Secretary-Treasurer to the list of his titles for the meeting but he did not seek reelection because he is retiring in July. Brother Poss was elected by acclamation to fill the vacant position.

Guest speakers at the quadrennial meeting included Richard Ray, President of the Georgia State AFL-CIO, and Tasso Knight, the Political Director of the Georgia State AFL-CIO. Brother White reports that even though the AFL-CIO and the Change to Win federation are split at the national level, the BLET remains close with the Georgia AFL-CIO through a Solidarity Charter.

The following Legislative Representatives attended the meeting as delegates of their respective divisions: Culley Johnson, CSX, Division 30 (Atlanta); Scott Sutton, NS, Division 59 (Valdosta, Ga.); Leon Watkins, NS, Division 210 (Macon, Ga.); Frank Middleton, CSX, Division 323 (Augusta, Ga.); John R. Hunt III, NS, Division 328 (Atlanta); Al Belin, CSX, Division 563 (Atlanta); Chris Dekey, NS, Division 046 (Savannah, Ga.); Sammy Ganus, CSX, Division 648 (Waycross, GA.); Dwayne Massengale, CSX, Division 779 (Manchester, Ga.); Ed Robinson, NS, Division 786 (Macon, Ga.); and Preddle Doyle, CSX, Division 563 (Savannah, Ga.).

During the meeting, the delegates discussed their legislative priorities. Improved railroad safety and safer remote control train operations are top priorities for the BLET in Georgia. Also, the Georgia State Legislative Board plans to introduce and lobby for a bill that would require switch indicator lights in dark territory.

The Board also discussed ways to address membership concerns regarding hours of service and limb time abuses by rail carriers CSX and Norfolk Southern, the two major railroads operating in Georgia.

Delegates enjoyed a reception on January 21 provided by Matthews & Steel, the BLET designated legal counsel in Atlanta. In addition, Brother White thanked the Brotherhood’s Relief and Compensation Fund (BRCF) for sponsoring lunch on January 22.

On November 30, the Illinois Senate gave its final, unanimous approval to the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact, a plan to create railroad jobs and to expand passenger rail service in the Midwest. It is expected that Governor Rod Blagojevich will sign the measure within the next 80 days.

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen was one of the primary supporters of the compact and worked to get the bill passed.

“This piece of legislation will help to expand passenger rail transportation in the Midwest,” BLET Illinois State Legislative Board Chairman Ed Way said. “We are happy that the Illinois state legislature has voted to join the compact.”

In the Illinois House, Representative Kathy Ryl (the chief sponsor of the bill in the House) and the House’s other chief co-sponsors — Representatives Elaine Nekritz, Paul Froehlich, Karen May and Dave Winters — spearheaded HB 4344 through the House during the first week of that state’s fall legislative veto session.

Senate Transportation Chair Tony Muñoz was the bill’s primary sponsor in the Senate, and the co-sponsors included Senators Dale Riserig, Debbie Halvorson, Larry Bomke and John Sullivan. In all, 49 House members and 24 Senate members signed on as co-sponsors of the legislation for the veto session.

“I would like to congratulate Brother Way and all of the BLET members in Illinois who worked diligently to get this legislation passed,” BLET Vice President and National Legislative Representative John P. Tolland said.

MIPUC’s current members are Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota and Ohio. The main purposes of the compact are to:

• Promote and coordinate support regional improvements to passenger rail service
• Promote both current improvements and long-range plans for increased passenger rail service in the Midwest.
• Coordinate interaction among Midwest state officials and between the public and private sector at all levels (federal, state and local).

On February 21, 2007, the Illinois State Legislative Board Office launched its website.

The BLET’s National Legislative Office in Washington, D.C., premiered its website on February 21.

The site is intended to be a resource for BLET members, as well as anyone who is interested in the BLET’s legislative and regulatory activities. Members can visit the website at http://www.bletdc.org.

The website contains a plethora of information to keep members informed, including an Action Alert section for breaking news and a testimony area that collects testimony delivered by BLET and Teamster officials on key regulatory and legislative issues.

The website also contains contact information for the National Legislative Office as well as all State Legislative Board Chairmen. Members can also sign up for the BLETPMC through the new site.

Illinois joins Midwest Interstate Passenger rail compact

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The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen was one of the primary supporters of the compact and worked to get the bill passed.

“This piece of legislation will help to expand passenger rail transportation in the Midwest,” BLET Illinois State Legislative Board Chairman Ed Way said. “We are happy that the Illinois state legislature has voted to join the compact.”

In the Illinois House, Representative Kathy Ryl (the chief sponsor of the bill in the House) and the House’s other chief co-sponsors — Representatives Elaine Nekritz, Paul Froehlich, Karen May and Dave Winters — spearheaded HB 4344 through the House during the first week of that state’s fall legislative veto session.

Senate Transportation Chair Tony Muñoz was the bill’s primary sponsor in the Senate, and the co-sponsors included Senators Dale Riserig, Debbie Halvorson, Larry Bomke and John Sullivan. In all, 49 House members and 24 Senate members signed on as co-sponsors of the legislation for the veto session.

“I would like to congratulate Brother Way and all of the BLET members in Illinois who worked diligently to get this legislation passed,” BLET Vice President and National Legislative Representative John P. Tolland said.

MIPUC’s current members are Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota and Ohio. The main purposes of the compact are to:

• Promote and coordinate support regional improvements to passenger rail service
• Promote both current improvements and long-range plans for increased passenger rail service in the Midwest.
• Coordinate interaction among Midwest state officials and between the public and private sector at all levels (federal, state and local).
In the halls of Congress...

BLET State Legislative Board Chairmen meet with members of Congress on Capitol Hill

Twenty-one BLET State Legislative Board Chairmen descended on Capitol Hill the week of January 22 in a major effort to educate their Senators and Representatives about railroad security, Amtrak funding, and many other issues of importance to the BLET and the Teamsters Rail Conference.

The 21 State Chairmen visited 140 members of Congress in two days. The BLET National Legislative Office organized the event, which was held in conjunction with the Teamsters Leadership Academy on Political Action. The IBT’s Training and Development Department and the IBT Government Affairs Department hosted the Leadership Academy.

“We visited members of both parties,” said John Tolman, BLET Vice President and National Legislative Representative. “We focused on getting our message across to both Republicans and Democrats — and will work with members of both parties to get legislation passed.”

Several newly-elected State Legislative Board Chairmen and Teamsters from around the country attended the Teamsters three-day Leadership Academy. The program educated participants on how to develop a political action program at the local level, and a winning strategy for the upcoming 2008 elections.

“Educational opportunities such as this one provide our officers and members with the occasion to learn side by side with the brothers and sisters from the International Brotherhood of Teamsters,” BLET National President Don M. Habs said. “They serve to encourage greater solidarity with in the organization.”

During the Academy, Vice President Tolman gave attendees a presentation about communications.

“I really enjoyed the training and found the variety of programs very interesting,” he said. “I believe they will be especially valuable to me as a new Legislative Board Chairman,” said Brian Kelley, Missouri State Legislative Board Chairman. “I thank Brother Tolman and the members of his staff who helped put this whole event together.”

Veteran BLET State Legislative Board Chairmen joined the new Chairmen for visits to the Capitol. Railroad security and Amtrak funding were two of the key issues among the many that were discussed. The Chairmen stressed that worker training and whistleblower protections should be necessary parts of any rail security legislation passed by the Congress. In addition, the Chairmen stressed that a new collective bargaining agreement for Amtrak workers should be a part of any long term funding given to the National Railroad Passenger Corporation. BLET members at Amtrak have been without a new contract in more than six years.

“I think these visits provided an invaluable experience for both the new Chairmen and the veteran Chairmen,” Vice President Tolman said. “It gave us an opportunity to express our views to more than 140 members of Congress and also allowed these brothers to get instructions and legislation that impacts our members on a national level.”

Tolman said he received overwhelming positive feedback from the Chairmen about the Hill visits. All of the Chairmen filled out questionnaires and gave their opinions of the visit. He said the questionnaires will be used in the future to target certain members of Congress when legislation is coming up for votes.

“The opportunity to meet with our legislators in Washington during the first 30 days of the new Congress was invaluable,” said Tim Hanely, Ohio State Legislative Board Chairman. “Change is definitely in the air on Capitol Hill.”

The State Chairmen were organized into small groups for the visits to Capitol Hill. Each new Chairman was paired with one or more experienced Chairmen, often leading to diverse pairings.

“I was impressed by our representatives from Maryland,” said Terry Todd, Arkansas State Legislative Board Chairman. “They were very knowledgeable about our issues and wanted our input. I am a freight engineer in the south with Union Pacific. George Newman is a passenger engineer from Massachusetts. I think we worked well together. George doesn’t run freight and I don’t run passenger. We each had our own specialty.”

The meetings were set up over a three week period to coincide with the days that were scheduled for the efforts.

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Tolman said “On the behalf of the State Legislative Board Chairmen who participated and myself, I would like to thank Dan Sullivan of the National Legislative Office, and Kathleen Policy of the BLET Public Relations Department, for their hard work in setting up these appointments and organizing this event,” Tolman said.

The following BLET members participated in the Capitol Hill event (all are State Legislative Board Chairmen unless otherwise noted): Mike Weston, Colorado; Jim Wilmesher, Colorado State Legislative Secretary-Treasurer; Craig Gilehrist, Montana; TM “Mike” McClary, Pennsylvania State Legislative Board Chairman; A.J. Stokes, State Coordinator, International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Tim Hanely, Ohio State Legislative Board Chairman; Congressman Shuster; Stephen Martinko, Legislative Director of Shuster’s staff; and John Tolman, BLET Vice President and National Legislative Representative.

From left: Lobbying in the office of Congressman Bud Shuster (R-Pa.) is Ken Kertesz, Pennsylvania State Legislative Board Chairman, A.J. Stokes, State Coordinator, International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Tim Hanely, Ohio State Legislative Board Chairman, Congressman Shuster; Stephen Martinko, Legislative Director of Shuster’s staff, and John Tolman, BLET Vice President and National Legislative Representative.

Clockwise, from left: Todd, Arkansas State Legislative Board Chairman, Jeff Rainier, BLET Indiana State Legislative Board Chairman, and Ed Way, BLET Illinois State Legislative Board Chairman.
BLET provides training to new NMB arbitrators

Working jointly with management, BLET teaches ‘Railroading 101’ to next generation of arbitrators

Just like the rest of the railroad industry, which had to hire and train new employees to replace a generation of retirees, arbitrators who have been practicing in other railroad industries have experienced challenges. Some of the new referees have experience in arbitration, but none have had First Division, or operating craft, cases before.

The BLET Arbitration Department, in conjunction with the National Railway Labor Conference (NRLC), and with the cooperation of Union Pacific Railroad, sponsored three railroad-orientation classes for new arbitrators in December of 2006. The purpose of the class was to provide fundamental information concerning locomotive and train operations and to expose the new arbitrator to the locomotive engineer work environment and railroad culture. The three arbitrators attended all-day classes, which were conducted in Chicago.

Doug Davidson of the BLET National Division’s Arbitration Department taught the workshops.

“The workshop was a condensed version of a Railroading 101 class,” Davidson said. A member of BLET Division 86 in Chicago, Davidson works under the direction of National Vice-President Richard K. Badzek and serves as a labor member for the First Division of the National Railroad Adjustment Board.

“We began in a classroom with a general overview of the responsibilities and duties of the locomotive engineer,” Davidson said. “This was followed by a module on engineer certification and duties of the locomotive engineer.”

That portion of the workshop was followed by a presentation on train-track dynamics, focusing on in-train forces and on what an engineer must do to control slack and speed. A Union Pacific representative demonstrated locomotive engine record technology on a laptop computer and there was a discussion concerning event recorder data as evidence.

The class then continued in the field where the new arbitrators inspected rail cars and locomotives, looked at track structure, switches, signal systems and safety devices. Each class visited a manned interlocking tower and listened in on railroad communications. The three arbitrators gave the new arbitrators an overview of the railroad work environment, and railroad culture. The three arbitrators attended all-day classes, which were conducted in Chicago.

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BLET NEWS

A message from Teamsters General President Jim Hoffa

Legislative challenges for 2007

Priorities for Working Families

The Teamsters Union is making sure that workers are the focus of the 110th Congress. Our votes and voices changed the nation’s priorities. We rejected the past six years of failed policies and put the Bush administration on the defensive. The global supply chain relies heavily on America’s railroads to safely and securely transport goods. Yet the rail corporations have the misguided idea that remote control devices will increase efficiency, but their trials of its use show the exact opposite. Not only are the rail yards using remote control not as productive, but they incur more accidents, some fatal. All the while, the rail corporations have been pushing for a reduction in crews running a locomotive. Our Rail Conference firmly believes that rail employees are the true eyes and ears of the rail system. You can’t replace their skills, unionized rail employee with a robot.

Members on Capitol Hill

Members of both the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) and the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWED) came to BLET headquarters in January for the first Teamster Leadership Academy of 2007. Lobbying members of Congress in the House and the Senate, our members are funding the future of rail security and rail employee anti-terror training were the leads. Both the Amtrak and rail security issues are part of the Teamsters legislative agenda for 2007. Our members lobbied more than 140 Senators and Representatives. In 2005, we distributed copies of our “High Alert” report to members of Congress, so we know they are aware of the faulty state of rail security, but it never hurts to remind them. As we gear up for the 2008 presidential elections, we must re-steer Congress to work for us, and get them focusing on helping working families.

During the lobbying our members helped the general union movement by informing Congressional representatives that a minimum wage bill must pass. I thank all of you for your help with this labor-wise issue. Unfortunately the Senate rejected a bill, but it was not the clean bill we had pushed for: Now our task is to have the minimum wage bill become free of big business giveaways. I ask each of you to contribute to your political action fund. This will give us the clout we require to fight off big-business interests. Every one of our members needs to be involved in the political process — it is a part of what will insure security for our families and our livelihood.

James P. Hoffa
General President

Registration begins for 80th SMA at Walt Disney World

Registration is now underway for the 80th annual Southeastern Meeting Association (SMA) convention at the Coronado Springs Resort at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fla., from June 10-15.

Co-hosted by Earl D. Karper Sr. of Division 35 and Michael L. Tanner of Division 760, the 80th SMA promises to be an exciting, relaxing and fun event for the entire family. The Co-Chairmen and the SMA arrangements committee have put together fun events such as a Polynesian luau, a tour of the Walt Disney Railroad steam trains at the Magic Kingdom, a golf tournament on a PGA graded course, a motorcycle ride and many other existing possibilities.

Members can register and pay online through the SMA’s all-inclusive website, http://www.2007sma.com.

As usual this year, the SMA is using a “register early for less” option that will not only save members money but will help the SMA arrangements committee get a better head count in advance.

The SMA’s reduced room rates are $129 per night (for rooms that are normal-