The second bargaining session over changes in wages and work rules of the national rail carriers concluded prematurely on March 10 when the National Carriers Conference Committee (NCCC), representing the Class One carriers, refused to enter into or even discuss ground rules for negotiations proposed by the Rail Labor Bargaining Coalition (HLBC), representing several rail unions comprised of 85,000 rail workers. The HLBC proposed the ground rules after questions regarding the bargaining process were raised at the first negotiating session, held January 24. At the March 10 meeting, the rail carriers’ chief negotiator, Robert Allen, said, “There will be no ground rules for these negotiations.”

“By refusing to even discuss the Rail Labor Coalition’s proposed ground rules, the rail carriers have gotten these negotiations off on the wrong track,” said George Francisco, coordinator of the Coalition and President of the National Conference of Firemen & Oilers (SEIU). “These ground rules are an attempt to clarify the process in which seven rail unions are bargaining in concert.”

The proposed Ground Rules simply covered the following eight issues:

• Who each side represented;
• Who would participate in negotiations;
• The advance notification of presentations by experts;
• The scheduling of negotiations;
• The alignment of common and craft-specific issues so the suitable representatives would be available;
• Mutually agreeing upon negotiation locations and provisions for bargaining and caucus rooms and the sharing of expenses;
• Provisions for information sharing and confidentiality agreements; and
• The finalization of contract language and the process for the finalization of the contract by the members of the coalition.

“Since the 1960s, the NCCC has assumed master contract bargaining on behalf of the majority of the carriers. For the first time in decades, rail unions are joining together in a coalition to make sure our members get a fair contract,” said Francisco. “For that reason, we felt a clear set of ground rules would help streamline the process. It is outrageous that the Rail Carriers dismissed our proposal out of hand.”

Robert Allen, chief negotiator for the National Carriers Conference Committee (NCCC), representing the Class One carriers, refused to discuss the issues and refused carte blanche to point out what objections the NCCC had to the proposed ground rules.

For the first time in two decades, seven major railroad unions joined together in the creation of the “Rail Labor Bargaining Coalition” to coordinate contract negotiations with the rail carriers. The seven unions of the coalition represent nearly 85,000 railroad workers from American railroad corporations. The coalition has developed a coordinated contract negotiating strategy and each individual union will not sign off on any tentative agreements with the rail carriers until all the coalition members concur.

The Coalition is comprised of the following railroads: Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWE-BFT); Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET-BFT); National Conference of Firemen and Oilers (SEIU); Brotherhood of Railroad Signallers (BRS), Sheet Metal Workers International Association (SMWIA); International Brotherhood of Boilermakers (IBB); and American Train Dispatchers Association (ATDA).

At a time of increased terrorist threats to the United States, the TTD is calling for improved transportation security. Currently, the Federal government has failed to adequately address gaps in the nation’s transportation security network, the TTD charged, placing rail employees and the general public at risk. The TTD is asking for a significant increase in federal security aid for rail and transit systems, as well as for greater security training for workers. The TTD is also seeking expanded security for freight trains and rail yards, particularly those that transport hazardous chemicals.

In other business, the TTD recognized Sonny Hall, the recently retired president of the Transport Workers Union (TWU). The TTD passed a separate resolution honoring Brother Hall and naming him President Emeritus of the TTD.

“Nothing is more important than unity and solidarity, but never forget where you came from,” President Emeritus Hall told the union presidents in attendance. “Think about your first day on the job and always remember it. The people holding those jobs today are the people you represent. They are the people you should never forget.”

National President Don Halls First Vice-President Ed Rodziewicz, National Secretary-Treasurer Bill Walpert, Vice-President & National Legislative Representative Raymond Holmes and Chief of Staff/Political & Legislative Director John Toomin represented the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen at the meetings.
Corbin, Ky., passes remote control safety resolution

Becomes 62nd U.S. community to ask FRA for enforceable RCO safety regulations

The city council of Corbin, Ky., passed a remote control safety resolution on May 22, 2005, that urges the U.S. Congress to force the Federal Railroad Administration to implement enforceable safety regulations to govern the operation of remote control locomotives.

Corbin is the 62nd community in the United States to pass such a resolution (43 cities and 19 counties).

The resolution, passed unanimously by the Corbin City Council, charges that the FRA, with the support of rail carriers, has circumvented established safety practices by issuing non-binding guidelines for the operation of unmanned remote control locomotives. The guidelines were originally intended only for use in pilot projects, rail companies have seized the opportunity to use the non-binding guidelines for full-implementation of remote control systems, thereby creating an unregulated and dangerous segment of the rail industry.

Kentucky State Legislative Board Chairman Tommy Mayne thanked the members for their contributions in helping to pass the resolution. In addition, Brother Mayne especially thanked Commissions Onskt, Gregory, Farris and Shelton for supporting the resolution.

The annual business meeting is always useful and provides the exchange of important information among the constituent member groups. In addition to the various state legislative boards and teamsters' education department, the Teamsters Unity Conference was on record seeking the safest way to implement the new technology. BLET National President Don Hahs said, “We did not seek to stop the implementation of remote control, as the UTU spin doctors would like you to believe. We petitioned the FRA for a rulemaking that would allow for the implementation of remote control in a safe, regulated environment.”

However, the carriers, the FRA and the UTU teamed up to allow remote control to be implemented with simple guidelines and unenforceable regulations.

“IT is astounding to allow this technology to be used without a rulemaking procedure and without enforceable federal regulations,” said President Hahs. “We need a regulation that provides for the safety of the public and all railroad workers. We don’t need the FRA to lobby for pro-working family legislation — from educating laypeople to lobbying for pro-working family legislation — from educating laypeople to lobbying for pro-working family legislation — from educating laypeople to lobbying for pro-working family legislation — from educating laypeople to lobbying for pro-working family legislation — from educating laypeople to lobbying for pro-working family legislation — from educating laypeople to lobbying for pro-working family legislation — from educating laypeople to lobbying for pro-working family legislation — from educating laypeople to lobbying for pro-working family legislation.”

The following is a list of the communities in the United States that have passed remote control safety resolutions. They are: Douglas County, Wise; West Baton Rouge Parish (County), La.; Paint Creek (County), Pa.; Contra Costa County, Calif.; Knox County, Tenn.; Clinton County, Iowa; Roanoke County, Va.; Harris County, Texas; Greenup, Ky.; San Antonio, Cal.; Champaign County, Ill.; Beaver County, Utah; Erie County, N.Y.; and El Paso County, Texas.


A copy of Corbin’s resolution is available on the BLET website: http://www.blet.org/pr/pdf/corbin.pdf

More information regarding remote control trains is available on the BLET website at: http://www.blet.org/remotecontrol

Bill Hahs
EUMA 2005 Registration Form
67th annual Eastern Union Meeting Association
Saratoga Springs, N.Y. • June 26-30, 2005

HOTEL RESERVATIONS
Contact the Prime Hotel Saratoga Springs, 534 Broadway, by calling (888) 999-4741, and ask for the BLET-EUMA room rate of $129 per night. Parking is free. Hotel registration deadline is May 26, 2005.

EUMA REGISTRATION INFORMATION
Registration fee is $115 per person and includes buffet breakfast Monday-Thursday, Monday’s lunch, Wednesday’s banquet and a Sunday picnic. Kids under 16 are $65 each. Golf tournament fee is $80 (see separate entry from).

Name: __________________________
Address: _________________________
City: ____________________________ State: ____________ Zip: ____________
Division: ________________________ BLET Officer/Title: ________________
E-mail Address: ___________________ Home Phone: ____________________
Cell Phone: ______________________
Spouse’s Name: ___________________
GIA Title & Auxiliary No.: __________
Number of children attending: ________ Ages: _____________________
Babysitting Required? ____________

I AM INTERESTED IN THE FOLLOWING WORKSHOPS:
Local Chairman ____________ Division President ____________
Secretary-Treas. ____________ Legislative Rep. ____________

Please mail this form, along with check or money order payable to “EUMA ’05” to:
Bill Kearsing, 2005 EUMA Arrangements Chairman
107 Vaughn Drive, Albany, NY 12203

For additional info: Call Brother Kearsing at (518) 281-0783, or email BKearsing@aol.com; or on the web at: www.blet046.org

Please print your name and division as clearly as possible on this form so your name tag will be correct.

2005 EUMA Golf Tournament
Tuesday, June 28, 2005
Eagle Crest Golf Club

FEES AND DETAILS
$80 per golfer includes: Green fees, cart, lunch buffet (including mixed greens salad, warm rolls, macaroni salad, baked lasagna and penne pasta with vodka cream sauce and dinner buffet including sausage & peppers, baby back ribs), coffee and tea service, beer, soda, and water served during play.

SHOTGUN START — FOUR-MAN SCRAMBLE
Tee off time at 9:00 a.m. Proper golf attire only (collared shirts, no cutoffs, gym shorts or sweats)!

TEAM CAPTAIN
Name: __________________________
Address: _________________________
Home Phone: ____________________
Cell Phone: ______________________
Check #: _________________________

Unless there is a large demand, transportation will be self-provided.

TEAM MEMBERS

Name __________________________
Division Number ________ E-mail: __________________________

1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________
3. ____________________________
4. ____________________________

Spouses Attending: 1. __________ 2. __________ 3. __________ 4. __________

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO “EUMA ’05”
Mail this form and check to:
Sonny Kertesz, EUMA Golf Chairman • 2 Debbie Drive • Brick, NJ 08724 • (732) 458-7642

Judge blocks BLET strike threat at LIRR

A federal magistrate sided with the Long Island Rail Road on March 8 in its dispute with locomotive engineers who had threatened to strike over the railroad’s use of nonunion labor to move trains in a maintenance yard. Magistrate Robert M. Levy recommended that U.S. District Judge Allyn Ross grant an injunction that would prevent the railroad from violating the status quo.

“Sadly, what the court has allowed them to do is whatever they want to do whenever they want to do it,” BLET General Chairman Bob Evers said. He added that the issue will likely go to arbitration.

The union has contended the railroad violated its contract by allowing employees of Bombardier, the Canadian M7 train manufacturer, to move trains for the warranty work at the Arch Street shop in Long Island City, which is under lease to Bombardier.

The attorney for the engineers had argued in court that it was a major dispute, which would not allow the railroad to alter its practices. As such, the attorney said, the railroad should immediately return to the “status quo,” meaning union engineers should be the ones to move trains and the act does not permit the LIRR to violate the status quo.

(Published in New York’s Newsday) •

EUMA set for Saratoga, NY

Arrangements Chairman Bill Kearsing and the members of BLET Division 46 host the 67th annual Eastern Union Meeting Association in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., from June 26-30.

The meeting will be held at the Prime Hotel Saratoga Springs, and the deadline for registrations is May 26. Reservations can be made by calling (518) 584-4000 or (888) 999-4711.

Saratoga is an outstanding destination for meetings and conventions because of the relaxing atmosphere and the many diversions it offers. Those visiting Saratoga will be pleased with the variety of family-oriented establishments. In addition, one will find over 60 restaurants and pubs all located within walking distance of the Prime Hotel.

Tentative EUMA activities include a welcome reception/barbecue at the hotel, the annual golf outing, a family day at Six Flags Great Escape in Lake George, and a Ben & Jerry’s ice cream social.

EUMA organizers are also planning various educational opportunities for BLET and GIA members, including a Division President’s workshop.

Published in Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen News • March 2005
65th annual International Western Convention

An experience of a lifetime is what you will be missing if you do not attend the 65th annual International Western Convention in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. That’s according to Brother Mike Linkletter, Chairman of the upcoming IWC, which will take place from July 3-8, 2005.

Brother Linkletter says that once the hard work is done, a party begins in Calgary. That will definitely be the case in July when not only the IWC will be in town, but also the greatest outdoor show on earth — The Calgary Stampede. The Stampede begins on July 9, and members are encouraged to extend their stay in Calgary to witness this must-see rodeo.

Hosted by Brother Linkletter and the members of Teamsters Canada Rail Conference (TCRC) Division 355, the IWC will be held at the Fairmont Palliser Hotel, which is sure to impress. The historic hotel was formerly owned by CP Limited, giving it a rich background in railroading. A room rate of $144 per night (Canadian dollars) has been secured (using code GRBRRL1) for reservations by the June 3 deadline.

Early-bird IWC registration — before April 30, 2005 — is $86 per person ($75 Canadian). Registration after April 30, 2005, is $85 per person ($89 Canadian). A special “early early-bird” registration is being offered to those who register with the TAW before March 31, 2005. Those who take advantage of the “early early-bird” registration will have their names entered into a special prize draw to have their banquet fees waived, a $25 value ($30 Canadian).

While in Calgary for the convention, members will find that there are many things to do and see around the city. Heritage Park, Spruce Meadows and the Rocky Mountains are only a few. Activities will include a tour of Banff, a bar stool rodeo dinner, and the annual golf tournament. Educational opportunities and workshops will be offered for Legislative Representatives, Secretary-Treasurers, and possibly Local Chairmen. In addition, the theme of the 65th annual IWC is effective communication. Brother Linkletter is planning a number of guest speakers including two professional arbitrators. Other educational sessions will focus on effectively communicating with managers (dealing with difficult people), effectively communicating with arbitrators, effective communicating with our union Brothers and Sisters, and preparing and communicating with the media.

A tentative agenda calls for a July 4 golf tournament and sight-seeing in Calgary. July 5 is the opening ceremony. July 6 is scheduled for workshops and training. July 7 is more workshops and a gala ball, and July 8 is checkout and the beginning of the Stampede, highlighted by the Calgary Stampede Parade.

IWC 2005 Registration Form

65th International Western Convention
Calgary, Alberta, Canada • July 3-8, 2005
Chairman: Mike Linkletter & Division 355

HOTEL RESERVATIONS
Contact the Fairmont Palliser, 133 9th Ave. SW, Calgary, by calling (800) 866-5377, or online at: www.fairmont.com/palliser (use booking code GRBRRL1) • Rooms are $144 per night (Canadian) and the reservation deadline is June 3

REGISTRATION INFORMATION
Early Bird Registration (post marked on or before April 30, 2005) is $60 per person ($75 Canadian). Regular registration (after April 30, 2005) is $75 per person ($99 Canadian). See below for details on drawing for “early early bird” registration.

Name: ...............................................................................................................................................
Address: ...........................................................................................................................................
City: ..................................................................................................................................................
State/Province: .........................................................................................................................
Zip/Postal Code: .......................................................................................................................
Division: .................................. TCRC/BLET Title: ................................................ E-mail Address: .................................................................
Home Phone: ..................................................................................................................................
Cell Phone: ......................................................................................................................................

I plan on attending the following workshops: Locally Chairman Secretary-Treas. Legislative Rep.

U.S. Residents: Calculation of fees in U.S. Funds (please include payment with this form):

| U.S. Funds: Early-bird registration at $60 per person (prior to 4/30/05) | $60.00/person | X. No. of People | = |
| U.S. Funds: Regular registration at $75 per person (after 4/30/05) | $75.00/person | X. No. of People | = |
| U.S. Funds: Golf tournament registration at $100 per person | $100.00/person | X. No. of People | = |
| U.S. Funds: Tour of Banff at $25 per person | $25.00/person | X. No. of People | = |
| U.S. Funds: Bar Stool Rodeo Dinner registration at $20 per person | $20.00/person | X. No. of People | = |

Total Amount Enclosed (in U.S. Funds): $ .................................................................

Canadian Residents: Calculation of fees in Canadian Funds (please include payment with this form):

| Canadian: Early-bird registration at $75 per person (prior to 4/30/05) | $75.00/person | X. No. of People | = |
| Canadian: Regular registration at $99 per person (after 4/30/05) | $99.00/person | X. No. of People | = |
| Canadian: Golf tournament registration at $125 per person | $125.00/person | X. No. of People | = |
| Canadian: Tour of Banff at $30 per person | $30.00/person | X. No. of People | = |
| Canadian: Bar Stool Rodeo Dinner registration at $25 per person | $25.00/person | X. No. of People | = |

Total Amount Enclosed (in Canadian Funds): $ .................................................................

Please mail this form, along with check or money order payable to “TCRC Provincial Legislative Board Alberta,” to: Mike Linkletter • #3 1207 45 Street SE • Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2A 5E5

“Early early registration” on or before March 31, 2005, will be eligible for a special prize draw to have their banquet fees waived.

For additional information: Contact IWC Chairman Mike Linkletter at: mlinkletter@teamstersrail.ca

Stunning mountain views (above) and Rocky Mountain wildlife are just two of the natural attractions available to members who attend the upcoming International Western Convention in Calgary, Alberta.

[Photo courtesy: Tourism Calgary.]
78th annual Southeastern Meeting Association

BLET members are in for a dose of southern hospitality at the 78th annual Southeastern Meeting Association in Montgomery, Ala., June 12-17, 2005.

Brother David Bowen and the members of BLET Division 332 will host this year’s SMA, which will be held at the Embassy Suites Hotel in downtown Montgomery. A room rate of $114 per night has been secured for the convention, and reservations can be made by calling 1-800-EMBASSY or (334) 269-5055. Be sure to use discount code SLE when making your reservations. The deadline for room reservations is May 13.

A number of entertaining activities are planned for BLET members to complement the various educational opportunities also on the agenda. Tentative plans include a trip to the Victory Land Dog Racing Track (includes a buffet dinner), a trip to the Montgomery Zoo, a historical tour of Old Alabama Town, and a formal banquet. Members will also have the opportunity to attend a bluegrass music show featuring Brother Rod Sanders, a member of BLET Division 332 (Montgomery). This year’s golf tournament will take place at the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail in Prattville, Ala.

In addition to these activities, educational workshops will be held for Local Chairmen, Secretary-Treasurers, Legislative Representatives, and Division Presidents (pending membership interest levels).

Early-bird registration for the SMA is $80 per person for those who register (and pay-in-full) before April 15, 2005. After that date, regular registration is $70 per person.

The 78th annual SMA offers something for everyone and is a convention you will not want to miss.

Tentative Agenda
78th annual SMA
(This tentative agenda is subject to change.)

Sunday, June 12
• 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.: Check-in and registration Special rate at Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail (tee time only $53.00)
• 3:30 p.m.-6:00 p.m.: Bluegrass music featuring BLET Division 332 member Rod Sanders and his band.
• Open night, dinner on your own

Monday, June 13
(Railroad Retirement Board representatives on hand today through Wednesday)
• 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.: Registration
• 7:00 a.m.-9:00 a.m.: Breakfast in hotel restaurant
• 8:30 a.m.-10:00 a.m.: Opening ceremonies
• 12:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m.: BLET closed meeting
• 10:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.: GIA shopping trip with lunch sponsored by Designated Legal Counsel (DLC)
• 5:00 p.m.: Buses load for a night of dining and dog racing at Victory Land Race Track

Tuesday, June 14
• 7:00 a.m.-9:00 a.m.: Breakfast
• 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.: Workshops for Local Chairmen and Secretary-Treasurers. Working lunch provided by BRCF.
• 9:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m.: DLC Legal Fair
• 6:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.: Casino Night

Wednesday, June 15
• 7:00 a.m.-8:30 a.m.: Breakfast
• 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.: Golf tournament
• 8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.: Historical tour of Montgomery and visit to Montgomery Zoo (lunch and transportation furnished)
• Open night, dinner on your own

Thursday, June 16
• 7:00 a.m.-9:00 a.m.: Breakfast
• 9:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m.: BLET closed meeting
• 1:00 p.m.-2:45 p.m.: BLET closed meeting GIA luncheon, sponsored by DLC
• 6:00 p.m.-10:00 p.m.: Banquet

Friday, June 17
• 7:00 a.m.-9:00 a.m.: Breakfast

For more details: Contact Brother Bowen at: (334) 361-4181 (home); or (334) 201-2200 (cell); or email: <dab332@aol.com>

MONDAY’S DÉJÀ VU

• 7:00 a.m.-9:00 a.m.: Breakfast in hotel restaurant
• 8:30 a.m.-10:00 a.m.: Opening ceremonies
• 12:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m.: BLET closed meeting
• 10:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.: GIA shopping trip with lunch sponsored by Designated Legal Counsel (DLC)
• 5:00 p.m.: Buses load for a night of dining and dog racing at Victory Land Race Track

SMA 2005 Registration Form
78th annual Southeastern Meeting Association
Montgomery, Ala. • June 12-17, 2005

HOTEL RESERVATIONS
Embassy Suites Hotel, 300 Tallapoosa St., Montgomery, Ala., 1-800-EMBASSY or (334) 269-5055.
Be sure to ask for the BLET room rate of $114 per night (Code SLE). Registration deadline for the BLET rate is May 13, 2005.

REGISTRATION INFORMATION
Early Bird Registration costs/activity fee is $60.00 per person registering and paying-in-full by April 15, 2005 (registration after April 15 is $70.00 per person). All BLET members must also pay $20 SMA dues. There is a $53.00 per person golf tournament fee.

NAME:__________________________________________________________
Address:________________________________________________________
City:________________State:________Zip:_________________________
Home Phone:_____________________Cell Phone:___________________

Spouse’s Name:__________________GIA Title & Auxiliary No.:________

If you are interested in any of the following activities, please indicate the number attending so we know how many plan to participate:
1. Victory Land Dog Racing Track w/ buffet dinner
2. Family Day at Montgomery Zoo
4. Historical tours of Old Alabama Town
5. Banquet on Thursday evening

Please indicate which of the following workshops you would like to attend:
1. Local Chairman Workshop
2. Secretary-Treasurer Workshop
3. Legislative Representative Workshop
4. Division President Workshop

Number of children attending:_________Ages:________________________

Will you be using the baby sitting service that will be available at a minimal fee? Yes________No________

REGISTRATION FEES
• Early Bird Registration fee (before April 15, 2004): $60.00 (All attendees 13 or older must pay the activity fee)
• Regular Registration fee (after April 15, 2004): $70.00 (All attendees 13 or older must pay the activity fee)
• SMA Dues: $20.00 (All BLET members must pay SMA dues)
• Golf Tournament: $53.00 per person (Includes green fees, lunch, transportation and prizes)

Please mail this form, along with check or money order payable to “David Bowen, SMA Chairman” to: David Bowen, SMA Chairman
2835 County Road 59 • Deatsville, AL 36022

For more details: Contact Brother Bowen at: (334) 361-4181 (home); or (334) 201-2200 (cell); or email: <dab332@aol.com>.

Arrival Date: Sunday, June 12, 2005. Check out: Friday, June 17, 2005
Please print your name and division number as clearly as possible on this form so that your name tag will be correct.
Benefits under Railroad Retirement, Social Security

Railroad Retirement benefits remain substantially better than Social Security benefits.

Employees and employers covered by the Railroad Retirement Act pay higher retirement taxes than those covered by the Social Security Act, so that railroad retirement benefits remain substantially higher than Social Security benefits.

The following questions and answers show the differences in railroad retirement and Social Security benefits payable at the close of the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004. It also shows the differences in contributions and payroll taxes under the two systems.

1. How do the average monthly railroad retirement and Social Security benefits paid to retired employees and spouses compare?

The average annuity being paid by the Railroad Retirement Board at the end of fiscal year 2004 was $2,075 a month, and for all retired railroad employees the average was $1,865 a month. Spouse benefits averaged $950 a month under railroad retirement compared to $665 and $615 respectively under Social Security.

So early retirement reductions apply if a railroad employee retires at age 62, and railroad employees with less than 30 years of service are eligible for regular annuities based on age and service the first full month they are 60, and railroad employees with 30 years of service are eligible for regular annuities based on age and service the first full month they are 62.

Social security retirement benefits are payable to workers who are totally disabled for work caused by a medical condition that is expected to last at least 12 months or result in death. Social Security does pay certain lump-sum death benefits.

The Railroad Retirement Act also provides supplemental railroad retirement annuities of between $23 and $43 to workers with 25 or more years of service. The lump-sum benefit is generally payable at the close of the fiscal year in which death occurs.

2. Are the benefits awarded to retired railroad workers greater than the benefits payable to those who retired years ago?

Yes, because recent awards are based on higher average earnings. For career railroad employees retiring at the end of fiscal year 2004, regular annuity awards averaged over $2,710 a month while monthly benefits awarded to workers retiring at full retirement age under Social Security averaged about $1,245. If spouse benefits are added, the combined benefits for the railroad industry with 25 or more years of service was just over $925 a month.

3. How much are the disability benefits currently awarded?

Disability payments are made to railroad workers who are totally disabled for work, medical condition which is expected to last at least 12 months, or result in death. Railroad retirement benefits are payable to surviving spouses of railroad employees.

4. Can railroaders retire at earlier ages under railroad social security?

Railroad employees with 30 or more years on the job are entitled to a disability annuity if they are totally disabled. For railroad employers, the tier II tax rate for employers will be between 0 percent and 4.90 percent, while the tier II tax rate for employees is 4.40 percent and on rail employees it is 12.00 percent on employee earnings up to $6,900. More information on this topic is available at: http://www.rrb.gov/act/pdf/taxrates.pdf.

5. Does social security offer any benefits that are not available under railroad retirement?

Social security does pay certain types of benefits that are not available under railroad retirement. For example, social security provides children’s benefits when an employee is disabled, retired or deceased. Under current law, the Railroad Retirement Act only provides children’s benefits if the employee is deceased.

However, the Railroad Retirement Act includes a special minimum guaranty provision which ensures that railroad families will not receive less in monthly benefits than they would have if railroad earnings were covered by social security rather than railroad retirement laws. This guaranty is intended to cover situations in which one or more railroad employees would otherwise be eligible for a type of social security benefit that is not provided under the Railroad Retirement Act.

6. How much are monthly benefits for survivors under railroad retirement and Social Security?

Survivor benefits are generally higher if payable by the Board rather than Social Security. At the end of fiscal year 2004, the average annuity being paid to all Railroad Retirement beneficiaries was just over $855 under Social Security.

The maximum amount of regular railroad retirement taxes paid to employees earning $89,000 in 2005 compared to social security taxes?

The maximum amount of regular railroad retirement taxes that an employee earning $89,000 can pay in 2005 is $8,829.60, compared to $6,885 under Social Security. For railroad employers, the tier II tax rate for employers will be between 0 percent and 4.90 percent, while the tier II tax rate for employees is 4.40 percent and on rail employees it is 12.00 percent on employee earnings up to $6,900.

Employees earning over $90,000, and railroad employers may pay more in retirement taxes than the above amounts because the Medicare hospital insurance tax of 1.45 percent is apportioned to all earnings.
In addition to the retirement annuities payable to employees, the Railroad Retirement Act, like the Social Security Act, also provides annuities for the spouses of retired employees. Payment of a spouse’s annuity is made directly to the wife or husband of the employee. Divorced spouses may also qualify for benefits.

The following questions and answers describe the benefits payable to spouses and the eligibility requirements.

1. How are railroad retirement spouse annuities computed?

Regular railroad retirement annuities are computed under a two-tier formula. The spouse annuity formula is based on certain percentages of the employee’s tier I and tier II amounts. The tier I portion of an employee’s annuity is based on both railroad retirement credits and any social security credits that the employee also earned. The tier II benefit approximates the social security benefit that would be payable if all the employee’s work were performed under the Social Security Act.

The tier II portion of the employee’s annuity is based on railroad retirement credits only, and may be compared to the retirement benefits paid over and above social security benefits to workers in other industries.

The first tier of a spouse annuity is generally 50 percent of the railroad retirement tier I amount. The second tier amount is 45 percent of the employee’s tier II amount.

2. How does a railroad retirement spouse annuity compare to a social security spouse benefit?

The average annuity awarded to spouses in fiscal year 2004, excluding divorced spouses, was $761 a month, which is generally 50 percent of the social security benefit amount. The difference is generally due to the fact that spouse annuity credits are only applied if the employee first became age 62 or receiving an annuity, the employee’s spouse is also eligible for an annuity the first full month the spouse is age 62. Early retirement reductions are applied to the spouse annuity if the spouse retires prior to full retirement age. Full retirement age for a spouse is gradually rising to age 67, just as for an employee, depending on the year of birth. Reduced benefits are still payable at age 62, but the maximum reduction will be 25 percent instead of 20 percent by the year 2022. However, the tier II portion of a spouse annuity will not be reduced beyond 25 percent if the employee had any credited railroad retirement service before August 12, 1983.

4. What if the spouse is caring for a child?

A spouse of an employee receiving an annuity and caring for a child aged 18 or under is also eligible for a spouse’s annuity. The child is only eligible if the spouse’s annuity begins before or after August 12, 1983.

5. What if the spouse is caring for a child who is disabled?

A spouse of an employee receiving an annuity and caring for a child who is disabled is also eligible for a spouse’s annuity, provided that the child is under age 18 or the child became disabled after age 22.

6. Under what conditions can a divorced spouse receive a spouse annuity?

A spouse annuity may also be payable to a divorced spouse of a retired employee if their marriage lasted for at least 10 years, both remarried to different individuals after 1958. If the employee’s tier I benefit is offset for a noncovered service period, the spouse tier I amount is 50 percent of the employee’s tier I amount after the offset.

7. Would the award of a spouse annuity affect the employee’s monthly annuity rate payable to a retired employee and/or the current spouse?

If a divorced spouse becomes entitled to an annuity based on the employee’s railroad service, the award of the divorced spouse’s benefit would not affect the amount of the employee’s annuity, nor would it affect the amount of the railroad retirement annuity that may be payable to the current spouse.

8. Are spouse annuities subject to offset for the receipt of other benefits?

The tier I portion of a spouse annuity is reduced for any social security entitlement, regardless of whether the social security benefit is based on the employee’s entitlement, regardless of whether the social security benefit is based on the employee’s own earnings or the earnings of another person. This reduction follows principles of social security law which, in effect, limit payments to the higher of any two or more benefits payable to an individual at one time.

The tier I portion of a spouse annuity may also be reduced if the security receipt of any Federal, State or local pension separately payable to the spouse based on the spouse’s own earnings. The reduction generally does not apply if the employment on which the public service pension is based was covered under the Social Security Act throughout the last 60 months of public employment. (This 60-month requirement is being phased in over a five-year period ending March 1, 2009, and there are some exceptions.) Most military service pensions and payments from the Department of Veterans Affairs will not cause a reduction. For spouses subject to the public service pension reduction, the tier I reduction is equal to 2/3 of the amount of the public service pension.

In addition, if the employee was first eligible for a railroad retirement annuity and a Federal, State or local government pension before 1985, there may be a reduction in the employee’s tier I amount for receipt of a public pension based, in part or in whole, on employment not covered by social security (except teacher retirement). If the employee’s tier I benefit is offset for a noncovered service period, the spouse tier I amount is 50 percent of the employee’s tier I amount after the offset.

The spouse tier I portion may also be reduced if the employee is under age 60 and has not attained age 62 for a full month, and the divorced spouse is not currently married. The amount of a divorced spouse’s annuity is, in effect, equal to what the social security benefit would pay in the same situation (tier I only) and therefore less than the amount of the spouse annuity otherwise payable. The average monthly divorced spouse annuity awarded in fiscal year 2004 was $416.

11. How can a person get more information about railroad retirement spouse annuities?

For more information and/or a benefit estimate, a person should contact the nearest office of the Railroad Retirement Board. Most Board offices are open to the public from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on Federal holidays. Persons can find the address and phone number of the Board office serving their area by calling the automated toll-free RRB Help Line at (800) 808-0772. They can also get this information from the Board’s Web site at www.rrb.gov. •

### 2005 Railroad Retirement Board Informational Conferences

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<td>East Hanover, N.J.</td>
<td>Ramada Conference Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 8</td>
<td>Covina, Calif.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 8</td>
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<td>Nashville, Tenn.</td>
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| April 5        | New York, N.Y. | Doubletree Metropolis Hotel | 369 Lexington Ave. at 31st St. |
| April 5        | Nashville, Tenn. | Prime Hotel & Suites | 1112 Airport Center Dr. |

Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen News · March 2005 Page 7
Amtrak funding priority

We are once again facing a crisis with Amtrak funding. As you know, President Bush has recommended that Congress not fund Amtrak. I want to assure you that we are fighting this ef-
fort and we are taking our fight to the hometowns of members of Congress. We represent nearly 2,000 dues-paying BLIT engineers who operate Amtrak locomotives and we are committed to preserving these jobs.

We are also participating in a coalition group for Amtrak funding that is being coordinated by the AFL’s Transportation Trades Department. Nearly a dozen rail unions have members which work on Amtrak and it is critical that this mainstay of our nation’s trans-
portation system survives and flourishes. In some small towns, it is the only form of mass transit to the larger cit-
est. Therefore, Amtrak is an important component of the economy on a com-
unity level.

Rail Signal Safety

Since the tragic accident in Granville, S.C., the elimination of dark territory has become a central topic. We need to pressure the rail car-
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A message from IBT General President James P. Hoffa

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