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Rail Labor Says No Carrier Proposals 'Worthy of Consideration'

Written by William C. Vantuono, Editor-in-Chief

The rail unions comprising the Coordinated Bargaining Coalition (CBC) involved in the current round of national negotiations on Jan. 22 issued a statement that the carriers "have not made any proposals worthy of consideration by [our] membership" as COVID-19-impacted meetings continue.

The unions comprising the Coordinated Bargaining Coalition are the American Train Dispatchers Association (ATDA); the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen/Teamsters Rail Conference (BLET); the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS); the International Association of Machinists (IAM); the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers (IBB); the National Conference of Firemen & Oilers/SEIU (NCFO); the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW); the Transport Workers Union of America (TWU); the Transportation Communications

Union/IAM (TCU), including TCU's Brotherhood of Railway Carmen Division (BRC); and the Transportation Division of the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail, and Transportation Workers (SMART–TD).

"Collectively, the CBC unions represent more than 105,000 railroad workers covered by the various organizations' national agreements, and comprise more than 80% of the workforce who will be impacted by this round of negotiations," the coalition noted. "The CBC and the nation's rail carriers first met concerning the Nov. 1, 2019 Section 6 Notices in January 2020. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has made meetings for groups of this size challenging, the parties continued to meet virtually to make presentations concerning their proposals throughout 2020. Additional meetings have now been scheduled for early 2021.

"While CBC and the carriers continue to share and discuss all aspects of what would be necessary to reach a voluntary agreement, the carriers have not made any proposals worthy of consideration by the membership of the CBC unions. The parties will continue to meet in good faith as we move into 2021, fully cognizant that it is our members who must ratify any voluntary agreement."

"Since rail labor contracts remain in force until revised through collective bargaining or third-party determination, there is no time-clock deadline to reach settlement," *Railway Age* Capitol Hill Contributing Editor Frank N. Wilner noted. "The previous round began in January 2015 and concluded peacefully in late 2018, with retroactive revisions. The most recent national railroad work stoppage occurred in 1992."

Wilner, author of *Understanding the Railway Labor Act*, available from Simmons-Boardman Books, provided the following additional information on national bargaining:

• Unions representing some 90% of the workforce will bargain with the multi-employer National Carriers' Conference Committee (NCCC), which represents most Class I freight railroads and many smaller ones. The NCCC, consisting of carrier labor relations officers, is part of the NRLC (National Railway Labor Conference).

• Joining BNSF, CSX, Kansas City Southern, Norfolk Southern and Union Pacific at the bargaining table will be CN (U.S. rail operations). CN's previously different

contract-reopening dates have been realigned to those of other Class I railroads at the table, and while CN stands alone with hourly wage rates for U.S. train and engine service (T&ES) employees, the NCCC says "nothing prohibits" CN from bargaining collectively with carriers having trip rates.

• Canadian Pacific, with U.S. operations, is not an NCCC member and bargains separately.

• Many smaller railroads limit NCCC participation to benefits issues.

• While CSX will participate in national handling for wages, benefits and work rules for all non-operating crafts, and has stated it is aligned with the other Class I's in its bargaining goals, CSX will limit its participation in national handling to benefits for operating crafts (BLET and SMART-TD), meaning it will not participate in national handling for wages and work rules with BLET and SMART-TD.