

Operating Craft Unions to Head up New Rail Labor Bargaining Coalition

In December, rail union officials announced a new bargaining coalition of six rail unions. The Transportation Division of the Sheet Metal, Air, Rail & Transportation union (SMART) and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen (BLET) will head up the coalition which also includes the American Train Dispatchers Association (ATDA), the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS), the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers, & Helpers (IBB), and the National Conference of Firemen & Oilers (NCFO). The unions will participate together in coordinated bargaining in the upcoming round of national negotiations. Jointly, the participating unions represent more than 85,000 railroad workers covered by the various organizations' national agreements, and comprise over 58% of the workforce who will be impacted by the negotiations.

On December 8, 2014, both the BLET as well as the SMART-TD General Chairpersons each served bargaining notices on their respective railroads, including identical notices related to health & welfare and related benefits. BLET National President Dennis Pierce stated, "Now more than ever before it is imperative that the unions representing railroad

operating crafts sit side-by-side at the national table, and I am pleased that we have been able to accomplish that." Not to be outdone, SMART-TD President John Previsich commented, "This is a landmark occasion for BLET members and SMART-TD members alike."

Railroad Workers United (RWU) has advocated for a universal bargaining coalition of *all* railroad craft unions since our Founding Convention in 2008. According to RWU Organizer Mark Burrows, "This latest action is a step in the right direction. Significantly, the unions of the operating crafts now find themselves in the same coalition." However, Burrows notes that nearly half of rail labor — including the major unions from the shop crafts (IAM and IBEW), the TCU, and the BLET's traditional partner union in such an effort — the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWED) — are not party to the new coalition. "Failure to include all rail unions, including some of the largest unions that represent rail workers in the U.S., means we will once again be limited in what we are able to achieve at the bargaining table." Burrows urges all unions concerned to take the necessary steps to build "One Big Bargaining Coalition"

All rank & file railroaders are encouraged to work within their respective unions to push for a universal coalition. If your union is not a part of it, demand that the leadership take the necessary measures to ensure that it is. For more information about Coordinated Bargaining, see the RWU website link "Campaigns — Coordinated Bargaining".