

AUTOMATION CONTINUES TO ADVANCE



Photo by Dale Smith
 Parked CSX locomotives with traditional brake control.

CSX's zero-to-zero trip optimizer

WASHINGTON, D.C. – CSX has petitioned the Federal Railroad Administration to approve a new Trip Optimizer (TO) Air Brake Control system. This technology promises to automate freight train operations from start to stop.

While CSX claims the system will reduce fuel consumption and emissions, SMART-TD believes CSX's true intention is to move one step closer to removing crews from their trains.

Trip Optimizer has been in use for nearly 20 years, and it often struggles with throttle control, making erratic adjustments that violate CSX's own operating rules.

The new "zero to zero" system is an expansion of this technology. The system will be given direct control over operation of the train's air and independent brakes. Widespread adoption represents a national safety issue.

Wabtec, the company behind the system, engineered Trip Optimizer to rely on Positive Train Control (PTC), yet PTC is based on the train's lineup, not signal speed. This means that a train could blow through a crossover at 45 mph, even if a signal indicates

a 30-mph speed limit. If the crew doesn't catch the mistake in time, this glitch becomes a de-certifiable 15mph over-speed event. This is one of many examples of how today's crews keep the core technology from making critical mistakes. The technology already abandons the train to human control too frequently to be trusted.

The FRA is responsible for ensuring that any waiver for new equipment meets basic standards of maintaining or improving safety, not jeopardizing our crews.

CSX and Wabtec must demonstrate that this system will not put workers or the public at risk. Given the system's flaws, it's difficult to see how they could make such a case without skewing their data.

Every SMART-TD member should diligently file a technology event report each time PTC or TO malfunctions. Our data illustrates how unreliable these systems can be.

These reports power our public comments and testimony, which provide insight for the regulators and legislators who review these tests.



Photo by Parallel Systems
 A self-driving freight container moves along a test track in a Parallel Systems promotional video.

G&W to test self-driving freight

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has granted 22 waivers to Genesee and Wyoming Railroad subsidiaries, including the Heart Of Georgia Railroad and Georgia Central Railway, to begin testing autonomous freight rail cars.

These waivers will allow the companies to move forward with seven stages of testing on prototypes developed by Parallel Systems.

Waivers include exceptions for essential safety features such as grab irons (since there will be no crew aboard), the ability to skip brake tests and the absence of hand brakes. These are basic components necessary to ensure safe rail operations and the protection of workers.

Don Roach, SMART-TD's state safety and legislative director in Michigan was present for a Parallel Systems test/demonstration in Pueblo, Colo., on March 6, 2024. "After reading the FRA's letter allowing this to go forward, I'm still stuck on FRA saying it is 'in the public interest and consistent with railroad safety.' How can they claim it's consistent with safety when they're allowing the testing

of something with so many unknown risks?"

After observing the cars' long stopping distances, tendency to overshoot switches and learning of the hazardous quantities of lithium in their power sources, Brother Roach emphasized his belief that the FRA should focus on safety rather than "effectiveness" of the new and untested technology.

"I thought the FRA's mission was about safety, not testing the limits of the capabilities of a self-propelled, zero-emission rail vehicle with known flaws, that put every man and woman near the ballast in danger," Roach commented.

While supporters of this technology hail it as the future of rail transportation, SMART-TD has made our stance clear that crew members should always be in direct control.

SMART-TD will continue to fight to protect its members, uphold safety standards, and ensure that the railroads of tomorrow remain safe, reliable and are operated by skilled professionals committed to putting safety first.

SWAT snipers test new transit barriers



A new type of glare-resistant, bulletproof barrier has been installed in eight SEPTA buses. Senior Bus Vice President **Alvy Hughes** was present for the second round of testing, shown above. The test included live fire drills conducted by SWAT snipers using both 9mm and .357 magnum rounds.

While the barriers withstood the majority of the impacts, one round

managed to penetrate the glass after multiple shots in the same location.

Hughes noted that "this is a major step forward. The barriers have the potential to protect our operators, which ultimately ensures the safety of the passengers as well."

The barriers, developed by Custom Glass Solutions, were introduced to SEPTA by SMART-TD's Bus and Transit Assault Prevention Committee.

If the barriers prove to be viable, SEPTA plans to install them throughout their entire fleet, while SMART-TD will campaign to make them a nationwide standard.

TAKE ACTION

Among many enhancements, you can now submit a Technology Event Report, Safety Condition Report, Hours of Service Violation Report, or Workplace Assault Report directly from the SMART App.

Update or install it today!



BTAPS Committee prepares new laws in all 50 states using new software

According to Bus and Transit Assault Prevention and Safety Committee (BTAPS) member **Cole Czub**, approximately 30 states have laws in place that deal with assaults against transit workers.

The goal is to expand that to every state in the union. BTAPS is now using a state bill tracker to make that happen.

The tracker monitors legislation across the country.

Members can see what's already in existing law in other states, then use templates to draft a custom bill to best address the needs of their specific state.

Instead of a tedious drafting process, members can search through, then "cut and paste" the strongest

aspects of successful transit assault legislation from across the country.

The new tool will accelerate the process across the union.

States are divided into territories, where BTAPS members examine bills that are already on the books.

They then meet with SMART-TD's safety and legislative directors to introduce new legislation that protect workers or strengthen existing law.

Strong legislation is the most durable way to protect transit workers nationwide.

Thanks to the new bill tracker, the BTAPS Committee can quickly draft new laws that keep our transit brothers and sisters safe from violent attacks and assaults.

Two more Genesee and Wyoming locals organized in January 2025

Following a nearly unanimous vote, Connecticut Southern Railroad is the newest addition to the SMART-TD union family.

They join Wilmington Terminal Railroad as the second Genesee and Wyoming property to choose SMART-TD representation in January.

With only 15 members in their train and engine service, this local often felt like they were left in the dark and didn't have their needs fully addressed by their old Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) umbrella agreement.

"Looking at our own situation, we had to say 'Hey, are we getting our bang for our buck?'" said **Garrett Desjardins**, the former local chairperson under their old BLET contract.

GCA-687 Associate Chairperson **Nick Greficz** assisted with the organizing efforts and explained how the decision was made after a lot of thought.

"It wasn't a knee-jerk reaction," Greficz emphasized. "There was some apprehensiveness about the contracts in place, the longevity of the contracts and there was some misinformation that was being spread about our union."

Discussions with Local Chairperson **Matt Pietrzak** from Local 352 (West Springfield, MA) eased their worries.

He knew most of our new members before the switch. "We worked side-by-side with [SMART-TD] guys," Pietrzak said.

Desjardins added that "we just met each other through doing the job, and you meet good people along the way."

OSHA informed about heat-related hazards faced by rail workers

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has proposed a new rule to prevent heat-related injuries and illnesses. Published in the Federal Register under Docket No. OSHA-2021-0009, the proposal is well-intentioned, but overlooks the often dangerous realities of working on the railroad.

Railroaders are required to work in sweltering conditions for hours on end, sometimes without access to water, shade, or any kind of relief the rule would require. That's the reality of walking miles of tracks in remote locations, or riding 12 or more hours in

a locomotive that doesn't have functional air conditioning.

Workers should not be forced to choose between their health and their job. The safety and well-being of rail workers cannot be an afterthought.

It's time for our employers to take responsibility and for OSHA to realize that rail workers receive the same protections found in other industries.

SMART-TD has asked for suitable protections for rail workers, including automated heat monitoring.

We can't allow ourselves to be the exception to every pro-worker policies and regulations.

DOGE EYES AMTRAK PRIVATIZATION

Recent public comments from officials within the Presidential Administration and the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) have reignited discussions that could lead to the catastrophic decision to fully privatize Amtrak.

As it stands today, Amtrak operates as a federally subsidized, for-profit corporation. The organization has never shown a profit. Funding from both federal and state sources allows it to operate as a public transportation provider with reasonable ticket prices and operational stability. They receive federal dollars to ensure the public's transportation needs are met.

Profit-driven companies are unable and unwilling to guarantee reliability and affordability in the face of fluctuating markets. The trains still need to run, even if there is a run on the banks.

Employees: Prepare to Do More With Less

If Amtrak's new goal is to increase profitability in a low-margin market, their first move will be to cut costs. This is the fastest way to boost their bottom line. The easiest target? Eliminate staff, who are already stretched thin.

SMART-TD is concerned about this threat. Aside from our responsibility to protect our member's livelihoods, staff shortages lead to fatigue and an overall decline in service quality. **We have learned this lesson multiple times; fatigue causes mistakes, mistakes accumulate into accidents, accidents can claim lives.** Should our nation's leaders choose to make this mistake again our members are the ones who will experience the trauma and struggle to clean up the mess. Why make this same mistake again?

Passengers: Prepare to Pay More for Less

The other place to boost profits for a private passenger rail company are with ticket prices and new fees. The airline industry is infamous for extracting every penny from their passengers with "junk fees" for baggage, seat reservations and other necessities.

The trend always moves in the direction of higher prices, fewer services and less reliable transportation. Supply and demand is a simple law. A private company is obliged to raise prices on popular routes while abandoning the unprofitable ones. This means higher prices for urban areas while parts of the country with low ridership are left stranded.

Maintaining is Cheaper than Rebuilding

Long-term, if the plan goes into effect, Amtrak's investments in things like tracks, stations and maintenance facilities are expected to be gutted. Restarting passenger rail service once it's been dismantled is incredibly costly, with the time and funding it takes to rebuild abandoned infrastructure and regain public trust stretching for decades.

Freight Railroads Hate Sharing their Tracks

Mark our words on this one: sharing tracks with the Class I freight lines is going to be an expensive proposition, as they want to price themselves out of the market. Amtrak's right to operate on freight tracks is guaranteed by federal law. This right evaporates if Amtrak becomes a fully private entity, further complicating any privatization efforts.

Thanks to Precision Scheduled Railroading, freight trains do not operate on a predictable schedule. Passenger trains, by their nature, must rely on predictable trips.

With freight-owned tracks, passengers will lose their time, money or both.

A Recipe for Bankruptcy and Collapse

While proponents of privatization claim that it will make Amtrak more efficient, history shows otherwise. The failure of privatized rail services in other countries, like the United Kingdom, should serve as a warning. The privatization of British Rail led to soaring costs for passengers, safety concerns and the loss of a vital public service. This is not a model we want to replicate.

Privatization is a shortsighted attempt to cut costs at the expense of workers, riders and communities. The current administration's emphasis on "efficiency" overlooks the real costs like safety risks, higher prices and lost services for those who need it most. We cannot afford to throw away Amtrak's value as a public service.

Our workers, passengers, and rural communities deserve better and the SMART-TD union will continue fighting to make sure they get it.

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ORGANIZERS TURN TALK INTO ACTION

In 1954, union membership among American workers reached a high of 35%. That same number plummeted to just 10% in 2023.

Higher union representation creates a smaller wealth gap as workers reclaim their dignity and receive their due share of the profits.

Unfortunately, the wealth gap has only widened as union representation has waned. SMART-TD's organizers are determined to change the narrative, grow our union and help protect as many Americans as possible.

Our organizers are actively pursuing campaigns on 12 (10 rail and two bus) properties, after securing five new properties during the Fourth Quarter of 2024. Applications for new membership grew by more than 8,000 in 2024.

Broken labor laws that favor corporate interests tilted the balance of power in the 1980s.

Employers now have a wide range of union-busting tactics to disrupt organizing efforts or to swing a vote.

This doesn't prevent them from often crossing the line into illegal suppression.

Our organizers know every play in their book. Captive audience meetings force anti-union propaganda on their employees. Selective firings remove organizers before their coworkers can learn how to defend themselves.

Managers illegally interfere with union elections in 41% of organizing efforts, while 20% of the workers attempting to unionize are unlawfully terminated for their pro-union activity.

These numbers are striking, and the heroism of our brothers and sisters who successfully form a new local is unquestioned.

Every corporate misdeed is proof that our work is important. Their abuses are our motivation to increase our efforts, expand our team, and sharpen our skill set.

We fight. We hold management accountable. We protect our organizers.

When we have solidarity with one another, we win.



Farewell Amit Bose



Federal Railroad Administrator Amit Bose stands with labor representatives at the 2023 announcement of two U.S. high-speed rail projects in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Amit Bose stepped down from his role as Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration after exhibiting transformative, labor-friendly leadership. Bose understood that the government's true role is to serve the public, especially those who work tirelessly behind the scenes to keep the wheels of America turning.

He recognized rail workers as experts and sought our input on a range of policies that impact the future of the American rail industry.

"Under Amit's leadership, the FRA became a true partner to railroaders," said SMART-TD President **Jeremy Ferguson**. "He didn't just hear us; he understood us. From advocating for the two-person crew rule becoming a federal mandate, to ensuring the majority of our members now have paid sick leave, his legacy is one of listening, learning and taking action. His respect for our members as professionals has truly been revolutionary."

Under his watch, the C3RS (Confidential Close Call Reporting System) was expanded to include major railroads like Norfolk Southern and BNSF, marking a significant shift in the approach to safety within the industry.

Bose oversaw the transfer of control over the Pueblo, Colo., rail research center — often called the "Area 51 of railroading" — away from the AAR to an independent third party. He ensured its research had a clear focus on safety for both rail workers

and the public at large.

"Amit has been a voice for the voiceless," said **Greg Hynes**, national director of SMART-TD's Safety and Legislative Department. "He didn't just push through initiatives, he took the time to understand the concerns of those of us who work the tracks every day. His leadership created a better, safer environment for railroad workers and, in turn, improved the quality of rail service for the American public."

He made a genuine effort to understand the day-to-day realities that frontline workers face.

"Amit's approach was unique in that he always made sure to meet our members exactly where they were, not just in Washington, but in the rail yards, too," said **Jared Cassity**, deputy national safety and legislative director. **"He was a leader who knew that the best way to improve the system was by lacing up his boots, hitting the ballast and listening to those who work in it every day."**

Cassity went on to say, "In an era of political figures who focus on headlines and photo ops, Bose's leadership was a reminder that true public service is about humility, dedication and a commitment to serving the people. Amit Bose never lost sight of who he was working for, the workers who make the American economy run."

"Under his leadership, the FRA didn't just serve the railroads," President Ferguson added. "It served railroaders. And for that, we will always be grateful."

NEGOTIATIONS CONTINUE

The first meeting with the NRLC was held January 23, 2025.

As national agreement negotiations move forward, the union will provide updates and guidance throughout the process. We urge all freight rail members to stay informed, participate in union meetings and remain united as we push for the changes we deserve.

To review our section 6 notices or to view other important updates related to these negotiations please visit the "Member Portal" section of our website at smart-union.org.

Proposed changes address current needs of freight rail workers:

- Stronger safety measures and protections.
- Furloughed conductors get first consideration when filling jobs on another railroad while retaining years of service for vacation and personal leave.
- Wage increases that reflect the rising cost of living and the increasing demands of the job.
- Better healthcare options, reduced out-of-pocket costs and an enhanced pension plan.
- Increase the number of vacation weeks earned and improve the rate at which vacation time is increased early in a railroad career.
- Adjustments to work rules and schedules with a focus on improved quality of life both on and off the job.

This round of national negotiations is unique in that it affects only three of the Class I railroads. Canadian National, BNSF and Norfolk Southern, along with multiple smaller railroads, are participating in the national negotiations. The other three Class Is (CSX, UP and CPKC) are negotiating individually with the general chairpersons on their respective properties.

Stay engaged and stand united as we move our negotiations forward.

DC reboots as 2nd anniversary of East Palestine disaster passes

Two years have passed since the Norfolk Southern train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio. Despite overwhelming support for stronger safety measures, little has been done. Two acts designed to protect the lives and livelihoods of rail workers have been left out to dry as the railroads continue to profit. The United States deserves better.

The bipartisan Railroad Safety Act of 2023 (RSA) is a bill containing common-sense rail safety regulations that will prevent disasters like the one in East Palestine from happening again.

Co-authored by then-freshman Senator and current Vice President **J.D. Vance** and former Ohio Senator **Sherrod Brown**, the bill received widespread backing from labor unions, including SMART-TD, and the public at large. The bill has been stalled in the U.S. Senate, a victim of Washington's dysfunction and partisan gridlock.

A similar bill called the Railroad Safety Enhancement Act of 2024 (RSEA) addresses the same critical safety issues exposed by the East Palestine derailment.

Developed by Congressman Troy Nehls (R-Texas) and Rep. Seth Moulton (D-Mass.), the bill represents an even stronger approach to addressing the current challenges facing rail safety than the RSA. It wasn't even considered for a vote in the 2024's House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

Both bills, in their respective chambers, shared a bipartisan spirit. While these bills had the necessary support to pass, they never made it out of the starting gate.

"East Palestine and every rail worker continue to get 'railroaded,'" said one SMART-TD union member who asked to remain anonymous. **"It's been two years, and we're still in the same dangerous position as before the derailment. Our lives, and the lives of those who live along these tracks, are still at risk. We can't afford to wait any longer for politicians to do the right thing."**

This year's Congress features many new faces, and our National Legislative Department is working to meet with them as quickly as possible.

Several key issues were presented to the U.S. House of Representatives Rail, Pipeline, and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee.

Jared Cassity, SMART-TD's deputy national safety and legislative director, reintroduced the union to the committee. "Our mission is simple, and it does not waver—safety will always lead the way. We stand ready to work with you and your offices to get us there."

The committee was briefed on the dangers of long trains, the importance of training and the responsible evaluation of new technologies.

"It's vitally important that [the union] play a role in these technologies and innovations, because we are the ones that are most impacted by it, and we are also the ones best suited to protect the public and understand how it can impact them," Cassity said.

SMART GENERAL PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Solidarity from Sea to Shining Sea

Brothers and sisters,

If you've been around me at all in the last few months, there's a good chance I've talked about the importance of solidarity.



By Michael Coleman

Solidarity is our Foundation

Solidarity is our core value and the source of our strength. It's the principle that has carried us through generations of challenges, whether we're fighting to maintain our crew consist agreements or bargaining for increased safety on public transit.

Our union solidarity isn't tied to any one individual trade, craft or industry.

SMART members stand with our fellow workers across North America, from sheet metal shops to short line railroads, semiconductor plants to Class I rail carriers, from buses and passenger rail cars to union halls in every state in our union.

We've demonstrated that plenty of times. In 2022, sheet metal members showed up for our brothers and sisters

on the railroad to echo their demand for a fair contract.

In 2019, SMART transportation workers joined sheet metal workers to protect union apprenticeships from industry recognized apprenticeship programs. Just last year, sheet metal and TD members rallied together at Boston's South Station to call for a fair contract for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority workforce.

Solidarity Strikes Fear in the Hearts of the Powerful

These examples of solidarity strike fear into the heart of the corporate class — the CEOs and anti-worker elites who want us to be divided.

They want us to fight each other instead of fighting the rich and powerful. They want to pit Canadians

versus Americans, railroaders versus sheet metal workers; they want workers against workers.

But we, the hard-working people who build and move America, have far more in common than we have differences.

We want the same thing, regardless of where we live, work or play: good, family-sustaining jobs, stellar pay, a retirement with dignity.

And our union fights for those exact goals — recently winning organizing campaigns on short-line rail properties, ballistic barriers on SEPTA buses, a transformative new contract for Amtrak's dining car stewards and more.

Achievement Comes from Standing Together

That's what we can achieve when we stand together.

Because make no mistake: Our solidarity and our collective power do not just come into existence when we pay our dues. We, the members, are the union.

When we are engaged, involved and active — both in our local unions and when it comes to supporting one another — we win real victories for working Americans.

So let's stay in this fight together.

In solidarity,

Michael Coleman
General President
SMART



A MESSAGE FROM BUS DEPARTMENT LEADERSHIP

Success begins by showing up

As we embark on this new year, we also confront new challenges.

Our path is clear, as an organization founded in solidarity. From every stretch, locally and internationally, we are fighting to ensure that our members are provided the best in terms of safety and prosperity.

The power lies within us, and we will face the work and challenges together through solidarity. This is our strength. This is why attending union meetings is essential.

Union meetings are the backbone of our organization. It provides an open forum for members. Members come together to hear about grievances, workplace issues, safety concerns and to ensure members' voices are heard. It is the place to handle our business and cast our votes.

Many feel that officers can handle everything on their behalf, from representation to union-related issues. Our representatives work tirelessly for the members; however, the most effective membership body actively participates in decision-making. We are stronger together.

Misinformation spreads when members rely on rumors instead of facts. Attending union meetings ensures that you receive information straight from the source, giving everyone a clearer understanding of what's happening and an opportunity to ask



By Alvy Hughes

questions. Meetings provide knowledge to navigate issues and avoid pitfalls that may jeopardize employment.

Union meetings are an opportunity to meet new members, share experiences and build solidarity. Strong relationships foster unity, which benefits all. Attending meetings is not about sitting and listening; it's also about being present and engaged.

Solidarity is only as strong as our commitment to each other. Attending meetings will protect not only your own rights but the rights of your fellow members and future generations. Success starts with showing up.

If we care about a stronger future for all, make it a priority to attend meetings. Let's stand together, fight for what's right and ensure we rise in solidarity.

In solidarity,

Alvy Hughes
Vice President
SMART-TD Bus Department

A LETTER FROM THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE OFFICE

Your comments make a difference

To my brothers and sisters,

I am writing today with immense gratitude for your efforts in standing up against CSX's recent attempt to strip operational control of a train from the crew and entrust it to a fallible technology.

CSX petitioned the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for the installation of a new and advanced Trip Optimizer (TO) software in their locomotives. We reached out to you for help in determining the reality of so-called energy management systems and their effects in the cab of the locomotive.

We know that we cannot trust the railroads to be honest with their own data, so we asked you, our brothers and sisters, to share your real-world experiences with TO. We needed your stories to speak truth about the dangers and inconsistencies of this technology, and, in doing so, you helped us craft a compelling objection.

In the days that followed our request, I was flooded with emails and messages. You shared detailed, thoughtful accounts of how the current Trip Optimizer has failed to properly manage your trains, outlining the flaws that not only jeopardize your safety but also the efficiency of America's supply chain.



By Jared Cassity

Your response was remarkable.

Together we made it crystal clear to CSX, Wabtec and the FRA that the Zero-to-Zero concept is unacceptable. The fantasy that CSX painted about what they hoped to achieve with their TO was exposed.

SMART-TD cannot promise that the FRA will accept our concerns or that this fight is over, but we can promise that your voices were heard.

To everyone who took the time to share their experiences with us and to those who completed the survey, I thank you. Your commitment to preserving the integrity of our profession and securing a future for generations of railroaders is something I will never forget.

In solidarity,

Jared Cassity
Deputy National Safety and
Legislative Director
SMART-TD

Michael Coleman
SMART General President
mcoleman@smart-union.org

John Daniel
SMART General Secretary-Treasurer
jdaniel@smart-union.org

Jeremy R. Ferguson
Transportation Division President
president_td@smart-union.org

Gregory K. Hynes
Transportation Division
National Legislative Director
ghynes@smart-union.org

SHEET METAL | AIR | RAIL | TRANSPORTATION

news_td@smart-union.org • Phone: 216-228-9400 • Fax: 216-228-5755

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TRANSPORTATION DIVISION PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Advancing Safety and Strengthening Unity

As we move forward in these changing times, one thing is clear: Standing together is our greatest strength.

A hallmark of our union is that our members have always faced challenges head-on. While we continue to address evolving issues in our industry, we are also seeing progress, particularly when it comes to improving safety for our members.

A Step Forward in Bus Safety

A shining example of what we can accomplish through collaboration is unfolding in Philadelphia. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of SMART and BTAPS, a pilot project is underway that equips SEPTA bus operators with bulletproof, glare-resistant full enclosures.

These enclosures are designed to enhance the safety of our operators, protecting them from potential threats while maintaining clear visibility for safe driving. This success underscores what we can achieve when our local leaders and SMART-TD leadership work in unison to protect our members.

Our goal is to expand this life-saving initiative to all SEPTA buses and beyond, ensuring that bus operators across the country benefit from this



By Jeremy Ferguson

enhanced safety. This project is not just a win for Philadelphia: it's a model of what's possible when we prioritize safety and work together to bring about real change.

Staying Strong Through Education and Unity

Our ability to advance and protect our members' interests lies in knowledge and preparation. That's why we are urging all local officers to take full advantage of the regional training seminars being offered this year.

These seminars provide valuable tools and information that empower our local officers to navigate the complexities of our industry while staying informed about our members' rights and how to effectively fight for them.

The first seminar in Dallas was a resounding success, with over 180 brothers and sisters in attendance.

Three more opportunities remain this year. They are in Denver; Anaheim, Calif; and Atlanta.

These events are more than just

training sessions; they are platforms for building stronger lines of communication and fostering the solidarity that makes our union so effective.

Challenges Remain, but So Does Our Resolve

While we celebrate our wins, we remain aware of the challenges that persist. Discussions about privatizing Amtrak and the push for autonomous freight trains are ongoing concerns that we are closely monitoring.

We also continue to address the impacts of decisions like the closure of critical Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) offices, which affect the services our members and retirees rely on.

However, instead of dwelling on these obstacles, we are focused on solutions. Through strategic planning and a unified approach, we can protect the future of our industry and safeguard the dignity and livelihoods of our members.

A Call to Action: Build on Our Momentum

We stand at a crossroads where we have a choice—to allow challenges to divide us or to come together and shape a stronger future.

The victories we have achieved,

like the SEPTA bus operator enclosures, show that collective action works.

By building on this momentum, we can continue to secure meaningful wins for our members.

From the local level all the way to SMART General President Mike Coleman, our leadership is committed to this mission.

In a world that continues to change, we know where we stand.

When we are united in knowledge, strength and purpose, there's nothing we can't accomplish.

In solidarity, we move forward.

Together, we win.

In solidarity,

Jeremy Ferguson
President, SMART-TD

B.T.A.P.S.
BUS TRANSIT ASSAULT PREVENTION SAFETY



What YOUR UNION is doing for YOU

Arbitration victories as reported to SMART Transportation Division leadership.

General chairpersons who wish to report a victory should contact:
Bus Department Vice President Alvy Hughes (ahughes@smart-union.org) • Rail Vice President David B. Weir Jr. (dwierjr@smart-union.org)

NRAB First Division Report

SMART-TD Vice Presidents David B. Wier, Jr. and Jamie C. Modesitt report that the organization has received numerous favorable decisions from cases arbitrated at the First Division of the National Railroad Adjustment Board (NRAB). Of the many cases that the organization received sustaining decisions on from the First Division, the cases referenced below are of significant interest:

In NRAB First Division Award No. 31892 (Vonhof, 2024), Union Pacific dismissed a Conductor from service for purportedly violating the carrier's attendance policy. Based on its studied review of the instant case, the Board determined that the carrier failed to introduce substantial evidence into the record of the formal investigation to bolster its allegation that the claimant violated the attendance policy.

In particular, the Board concluded that the claimant cited documentation to justify two (2) of his absences that were used as a basis for his dismissal from service. Having reached that conclusion, the Board maintained that the discipline assessed to the claimant was not appropriate. Therefore, the Board ruled to reinstate the claimant

to service with backpay and benefits. GO-887 General Chairperson Todd Campbell and GO-887 Vice General Chairperson Kurt C. Berg progressed this case to the NRAB First Division.

In NRAB First Division Award No. 31913 (Tener, 2024), Union Pacific terminated the employment of a conductor for alleged dishonest and unethical conduct when he laid off under the conditions of the Oregon Sick Child Family Leave Act between October 16, 2022, and May 1, 2023.

After reviewing the record of the instant case, the Board determined that the carrier failed to satisfy its burden of proof to corroborate its allegation that the claimant improperly laid off using the Oregon Sick Child Family Leave Act. In light of that finding, the Board ordered the carrier to reinstate the claimant to his former position with backpay for his lost earnings during the time period of his unjust discharge from service. GO 953 General Chairperson Luke Edington and GO 953 Senior Vice General Chairpersons Kurt Christensen, Ian Reynolds, Mike Moore and Zach Nagy progressed this case to the NRAB First Division.

Public Law Boards Report

In Public Law Board 7832, Award No. 134 (Vonhof, 2024), BNSF terminated the employment of a switchman for allegedly reporting an on-duty injury to management late and making immoral comments to a BNSF manager. According to the carrier, the claimant requested a manager to remove another trainman from his assignment and replace the individual with a different employee due to the other employee driving over a speed bump in a company vehicle while he (the claimant) was a passenger in the automobile. The claimant was off work for the next three (3) days while observing rest days and a personal leave day. Following his return to work, the claimant asked the manager whether the other employee on his assignment had been replaced. After the manager told the claimant that his request to replace the other employee had not been fulfilled, the claimant notified the manager that the incident involving driving over the speedbump from the previous week was potentially causing him back pain. A few days later, the claimant submitted a hand-written letter to the manager, requesting the removal and replacement of the

other employee from his assignment. Further, the letter described a timeline of events from the date the claimant's crew drove over the speed bump in the company vehicle and it stipulated that he sustained injuries to his left hip and back as a result of being a passenger in the vehicle when it traversed over the speed bump. The carrier opined that the claimant acted immorally by requesting the other employee to be removed from his job and attempting to bargain to have the employee replaced with another employee in exchange for not filing an injury report. Because the claimant submitted the hand-written note to the manager detailing his on-duty injuries at the onset of the meeting, the Board determined that there was no merit to the carrier's contention that he sought to coerce the manager to remove the employee from his job by offering to not report the injuries in exchange for the carrier's compliance with his requested removal of the other employee from his job. Moreover, the Board deduced that the claimant's comments were inappropriate; however, as the Board noted, the comments did not constitute immoral commentaries. Based on its review of the record of this case, the

Continues on Page 8

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The Women of the White Pass Railroad

Zowe Gardner is used to seeing tourists take lots of pictures on the White Pass & Yukon Route Railway in Skagway, Alaska. One day, she noticed that a man was taking pictures of her every time the train stopped. "He was super excited because his granddaughter loved trains and he'd never seen a young female as an engineer before," Gardener remembered. "That really just made me feel validated and happy."

Gardner is one of the few women to work in train and engine service over White Pass' 125-year history. Today, the railroad can field an all-female crew.

Lindsay Breen, their first female engineer, is a 25-year resident who joined the railroad in 2012. Tired of her desk job, she put in an application and got hired. "That took a very long time for that to happen," Breen noted. "It's really just been an awesome path for me...and being part of that first female crew ever last October was awesome."

She was joined by conductor **Eliza Myers** and brakeman **Eileen O'Keefe**. A Skagway native, Myers worked at an ice cream shop as a teenager, then decided to move over to White Pass. She was promoted to conductor last year.

"It's very inspiring...it opens the door of 'Okay, what else can I do? Could I do something else that's a male-dominated field?'" Myers said.

O'Keefe spent her first year with White Pass as a tour guide, which happened to be Gardner's first year as a brakeman.

"When I saw her being a brakeman, I was pretty inspired and I kind of wanted to follow in her footsteps," O'Keefe said.

Before joining in 2022, brakeman **Stephanie Zubel** had never moved away from home, but after visiting Skagway fell in love with the community. She spent two years as a tour guide before becoming a brakeman in 2024.

"Zowe and Lindsay were both in the train and engine service and I looked at it and I was like 'I want to do that. There's nothing that's gonna stop me from doing that.'" Zubel said.

"The brotherhood is also a sisterhood," O'Keefe observed. "Being part of a collective that supports you in the workplace is a really amazing thing, and I think that can be very beneficial for women across many different sectors."

"Seeing women in our roles kind of just encourages people and kids in general to just go after whatever they want, regardless of what society tells people...it just takes hard work," Gardner agreed.

Local 1626 General Chairperson **Jason Guiler** is quick to describe what these five women mean to Skagway's roughly 3,000 year-round residents. "These women are setting an example to this community in ways that they don't even understand," Guiler said. The railroad anchors the town's tourism-based economy.

It took 125 years to make history, but for these women, it's only the beginning. "It's finally happening," Breen concluded. "We're making some breakthroughs, and it's just really cool to be a part of."



NEBRASKA'S Manda Snide

In 2014, **Manda Snide** was burnt out and underpaid at her previous job. "I'd asked the director of [the nursing home] for a raise for a quarter an hour, and she said 'no.' The brand-new people were coming in making exactly what I was, and I had 10 years experience and a college degree."

Sister Snide, also a volunteer firefighter and EMT, met a railroader at a first responder meeting. That conversation changed her life.

"If I can run a fire truck," Snide realized, "there's no way that I couldn't handle trains." That was a decade ago. Today, as Nebraska's assistant safety and legislative director, Snide works to help others. "It's terrible if you're going through something and you don't know who to reach out to, so I wanted to be that person to help in those moments."

"We take [new hires] out to supper with our Designated Legal Counsel so that we can be truthful about what railroad life really is, because in the hiring process they don't really talk about the hours and how grueling that can be."

Sister Snide serves as a voice for other women who work on the rails. "I think I'm given a pretty unique opportunity of being a female in a leadership role, that those females might feel comfortable talking about issues," she said.

Some of those issues may be talking; take the issue of locomotive remote-control boxes. After learning the transmitter in a remote-control box can trip an outlet, she reached out to other state directors and learned that not every box emitted as much radiation. But she also met other women with larger concerns about the remotes.

"One conductor had issues with her pregnancy. The doctor removed several tumors, and he told her that they were likely due to some radio or cell phone-type radiation," she explained. "She brought up the concern about the remote-control box, and he said, 'It's possible, but I can't prove it.'"

"One of the [other] things I've been working on with Union Pacific is trying to provide childcare," she explained. "If we could provide childcare, I think it would be a huge access for single parents. This job changed my life financially, and I'm sure it could change a single parent's life as well."

She is also quick to praise her union brothers.

"Most of my guys are really great," she explains. "I did have a hard time with some of the managers accepting me at first," she remembers, "so that took a couple of months, for people to understand that I had the same title, and I deserve the same respect."

In September, she helped her father celebrate 45 years of service with the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE). "It's really cool to come from a union family and to have been taken care of and had the insurance and the benefits from that my whole life," she reflected. "To become a member and have those benefits bestowed upon me has been great." As a leader from a union family herself, Snide is focused on paying it forward.



TEXAS' Jessica Martin

Jessica Martin (Local 594) knew that she wanted to be more involved with her union but she didn't know where to start. Her answer came as a nomination to become the legislative representative for her local. Sister Martin got the job.

To help her start learning the ropes, Safety and Legislative Director **Kamron Saunders** directed Sister Martin to a SMART-TD regional training seminar. "I think it's incredible, we're coming here and all of the things we're going over in class, like how to talk to people and be respectful of their body language and things like that," she emphasized. "I think it's very important, because a lot of the concerns, a lot of the issues...[members aren't] gonna just come directly to you. It just comes naturally with relationships you build with people."

After three years as a legislative representative, Sister Martin has a good grasp of her role and the responsibilities that come along with it. "You catch more flies with honey," she explained. "It helps to be patient and nice. You can't go in there slamming your hand on the table and expect to get a lot of things done."

Some of that includes handling members' safety concerns and issues.

Lighting issues have been big in the past year, for example, so she got new lights installed in a yard in Mineola.

After that, she had a moment where the lights literally clicked on, and she realized that lights were needed in other places, too.

"It makes it a lot better if you can see what you're doing at night," she said. "It's important."

"I feel like it's very important to have somebody on the local level that's gonna do the job well," she emphasized. "I would be very frustrated if somebody took my position and didn't do the job at all. You're looking out for your brothers and your sisters. You're keeping people safe at the end of the day, and that's my favorite part about it."

In addition to her safety and legislative duties, Sister Martin is a conductor for Union Pacific. While she says that working on the railroad makes it feel like she has a hundred little brothers, Sister Martin admits it's nice change of pace when she gets the opportunity to work with other women.

"[Men and women are] wired differently, and it's so nice to catch a trip with someone who's naturally irritated by the same things," Martin reflected. "I think it'd be wonderful to have more sisters and more solidarity."

Martin grew up in a rail union family where her father and her grandfather were leaders. "There was so much pride," she remembers. "You didn't mess with them. They banded together. That's not a thing anymore."

She cites the fact that it's the same handful of people at union meetings and the frustration of getting members involved or responding to calls to action as reasons why we need to find new ways to increase participation.

"If you have a campfire and you don't ever put wood on it, it's gonna die out. Our fire is getting real low. We have to stick together."



WYOMING'S April Ford

Even as a child, **April Ford** knew that she wanted to be a union member. Her grandfather was a carman, and she still has memories of her dad walking the picket line and carrying signs when he worked for Mountain Bell.

Fast forward to today and Sister Ford has held almost every position in Local 951 and is the first female safety and legislative director (SLD) in Wyoming. "It's kind of fitting, because Wyoming was the first state to allow women to vote," Ford noted during a recent interview with SMART-TD.

Back in 1998, Sister Ford and her husband (who worked on the railroad) were busy raising three teenagers while she went to junior college for a second associate's degree.

With a semester left, she found out that the railroad was hiring. "At that time, I had four brothers-in-law that were working for the railroad, and I knew that the railroads paid pretty well," Ford said. "So, I decided to apply. Essentially an opportunity knocked and I jumped."

She worked as a conductor for five years before being promoted to locomotive engineer. "Eventually, I was able to stay and work in my hometown, and I've got two boys that work out on the railroad. If [my grandfather] was still around, he'd be pretty proud of the legacy."

Sister Ford doesn't shy away from speaking about the reality of her state's political landscape.

"Politics in Wyoming is tough," Ford explained. "When you're trying to talk to lawmakers about workers' rights and safety conditions, not only for their constituents, but also for the workers of Wyoming, it's a pretty cold reception."

Still, she hasn't let that stop her from speaking out about her passion for safety.

"My belief is that every member and every employee should return home in the same condition that they left it," Ford said. "Company officials can't be everywhere, and they don't see the same things we see. They're not exposed to the same hazards that we are day in and day out, and I just believe that it's our duty to report safety hazards and to let them be known, and to protect our brothers and sisters as well as ourselves out here."

"I think there's a lot of burnout with the local union leadership roles that we play out here," Ford reflected. "There's a huge amount of the armchair quarterback that are quick to criticize and who don't show up for regular meetings."

"As far as women getting involved...just do it. Get involved. It's hard, but it's even harder to stay involved. That's a struggle."

"I've gone to a lot of conferences and conventions, and I look at that head table. We need women in those spots. We come up with some amazing ideas."

"Promoting those other women, getting them involved, pushing them a little bit, putting my arm around their shoulder and dragging them to things. That for me is the biggest takeaway that I will grab a hold of when I [retire]."

TO THE POWERFUL WOMEN OF SMART TRANSPORTATION DIVISION: THANK YOU FOR YOUR COMPASSION, SOLIDARITY AND STRENGTH



ALASKA'S Martha Claugus

Many high schoolers spend their summers working as a lifeguard or at a local restaurant. As a senior in high school, **Martha Claugus** worked as a tour guide for Alaska Railroad.

"It's a pretty cool program because the tourists get a real Alaskan kid who is also very knowledgeable in the history of the railroad. You know what you're seeing outside your window, that sort of thing," she explained.

She planned to go to college and work as a brakeman over the summer, because it would help pay for her room and board at school.

That summer job led to a career that's lasted almost 30 years.

"Within two years, I was fully promoted to an engineer, and there was just really no turning back at that point. It was time to stay and make this my career."

After becoming a member of Local 1626 in September of 1997, Sister Claugus quickly realized that she had a built-in second family.

"[The union] is there to support you in every way, not just getting you better benefits but also supporting you when you have incidents and even outside personal and family issues," she explained. For example, a member's home burned down several years ago, and the local rallied together to get her furniture and started a GoFundMe so that she could start rebuilding her life.

"I think one of the best things about being a member of the union is just

the support that you get and the kind of constant knowing that someone always has your back around here." That's an idea that she believes is starting to reach non-members, too.

Over the past 28 years, Sister Claugus has seen her fair share of changes. One of the most noticeable is the atmosphere and attitude towards women.

"When I hired out 28 years ago, women weren't necessarily welcome in a lot of ways," she remembered. "You had to really prove yourself, and it could be demeaning at times. I think a lot of attitudes have changed. Women are a lot more accepted."

That wasn't the case when she hired on.

"I was told that I was taking a man's job...that I was basically taking food out of some other family's mouth, because I was taking up a space that a man could take to support his family," she said. "No recognition of my own family, just their family. I can't possibly imagine, at least on my railroad, someone saying that to one of the women who work here now."

Ultimately, her choice to work was the best decision for her family, and she wants her union sisters to know the power to make that decision belongs to them, regardless of the outside noise.

"I'm absolutely a better parent, because I went to work every day and gave myself a feeling of accomplishment for coming to work every day and earning for my family and doing good things at work."

"It's a difficult industry to see yourself breaking into, right?" she asked. "Especially for engineers on freight trains because we're very nameless and faceless. People don't really see us; they just see the engine go by."

"Put women more towards the forefront so that other women can look at that or little girls," she suggests. "When other women can look at that woman and say 'Well, she could do that. I'm certain I could, too.' To show people that we're here and that it can be done, because in a lot of cases, until you see someone else doing it, you don't understand that you can, too."



NEW JERSEY'S Rashonda Brown and Shakyia Ward

Rashonda Brown and **Shakyia Ward** are both conductors for New Jersey Transit. They're not just co-workers. They're also mother and daughter.

But even though the two women are related and work for the same agency, they've made it a priority to forge their own paths.

"[My mom's] the chairman of the North Division," Sister Ward explained. "The first thing I did was go to the Hoboken division and qualified there. That was kind of a shocker, because everybody assumed I would just go to the Northside and be under my mom. But it was kind of a thing where it was like I wanted to create my own identity."

"I didn't want to just be Rashonda Brown's daughter, and I wanted people to see that. Not only am I Rashonda Brown's daughter, but I'm actually good at the job, too."

Back in 2000, Brown was a single mom working as a hairdresser at a beauty parlor. Her sister, also a conductor for New Jersey Transit, encouraged her to fill out an application, but she wasn't interested in being a conductor.

Several years later, Brown was managing a shoe store at the mall. Her sister stopped by with the new general chairperson for New Jersey Transit. He was looking for an assistant to help him figure things out.

She gave it a shot. Three years later and the General Chairperson, facing an

election, asked Sister Brown if she had ever thought about working in transit. He wanted to guarantee that she'd still have a job if he lost the election. While still uncertain, she made the switch and became a conductor.

Ward took a similar, but independent path to the job. She was in nursing school, but went to work at a bank after realizing it wasn't the career path she thought it would be. Her mom suggested that she come and work for the railroad.

"I kept saying to her, 'You know, we didn't pay for college for you to be making \$17 an hour,'" Sister Brown said. "I know you don't want to work [on the railroad], but let's just try it out and see what happens and when you find something better than the railroad, then you can leave. It's been six years now."

"As a parent, you just want to also make sure your kids if, God forbid, anything happens to me today, I know that she has something that will be able to support her and my granddaughter. It's not an easy job, but it's a career that I have not regretted since I started."

The two women have seen lots of changes.

"We have more women than we've ever had on this property," Sister Brown pointed out. "I remember I was in a class of 18, and there were only about four women in that class. The boys' club is kind of just dispersing."

"I had a child while I was working on the railroad, and I feel like I was taken care of as far as maternity leave," Sister Ward said. "I was able to actually spend time with my child, but it's just small things that men don't think about."

"I think the difference between people working for transit and other jobs is you don't get grandfathered into it," Brown explained. "You actually have to put in to work for yourself, because your mom can't pass the test for you, right?"

Even with her mom working for New Jersey Transit before she did, Ward was still unsure about joining her on the rails.

"I was a little apprehensive with my mom working here and coming home and telling me crazy stories," she said. "I'm like 'This can't be real life, she has to be making this stuff up.' But I enjoy what she does, I enjoy seeing her grow."

STEWARDS RATIFY NEW AGREEMENT

General Chairperson **Rick Pauli** of GO 769 is pleased to announce the unanimous ratification of his dining car stewards' tentative agreement. The vote concluded January 13, 2025.

The seven-year agreement secures a general wage increase (GWI) of 34.5%, compounding to 40.21% over the course of the contract. This is consistent with gains secured by Amtrak conductors and assistant conductors, further strengthening SMART-TD's position across the workforce.

The Agreement also includes several quality of life improvements:

- Full retroactive pay dating back to July 1, 2022.
- 10 weeks of paid parental leave.
- The addition of Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a paid holiday.
- Increased meal allowances.
- A modest increase to other health and welfare benefits.

SMART-TD is committed to securing fair treatment for all of our members, in every craft and in locals of every size.

CHICAGO LOVES METRA WORKERS, REJECTS SELF-DRIVING TECH.

The results of a recent survey conducted in the Greater Chicago area by an independent third party found that 83% of people have a favorable opinion of Metra (44% "excellent" and 39% "good").

The survey also found only 26% of people rated Metra overall as an "excellent" organization.

Our members scored significantly higher with the community than Metra did overall, due in large part to the work that's done by our conductors, ticket collectors and other frontline workers.

"It's no surprise to me that our Brothers and Sisters at Metra are held in such high regard," SMART-TD's Illinois State Safety and Legislative Director **Bob Guy** had to say about the members in his city.

"As the face of Metra, passengers

Victories from Page 5

Board concluded that although the claimant's comments warranted some degree of discipline, the remarks were not egregious enough to corroborate the carrier's imposition of termination from service. In determining the appropriate quantum of discipline that should have been administered to the claimant, the Board reduced his termination to a suspension of ten (10) days from service. For that reason, the claimant was reinstated to service and awarded backpay for time lost, minus the initial ten (10) days he was withheld from service. GO 001 Associate General Chairperson **Nathan MacDonald** handled this case before Public Law Board 7832.

In Public Law Board 7942, Award No. 41 (Bass, 2024), Norfolk Southern terminated a conductor for allegedly possessing a firearm while occupying a company-provided facility and making false and conflicting statements concerning a matter under investigation. After completing a trip to his away from home terminal, the

PORTERS' BROTHERHOOD TURNS 100

In 1925, the Pullman Palace Car Company was the largest employer of African-Americans in America. Pullman found them easy to exploit.

They were paid much less than conductors and other employees. Preparing and serving meals, making beds and shining shoes for passengers who would never know their names was as far as their careers would go.

Pullman's porters decided it was time to stand up for themselves, led by their first president, Philip Randolph.

By 1937, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters had its first agreement. They won shorter runs, lower work-related expenses, a living wage and the right to introduce themselves by name.

These determined men and women forged a path into the middle class for African Americans across the country, then went on to help shape the civil rights movement in the United States.

Every SMART-TD member is indebted to their perseverance and strength. As we celebrate and remember Black History in America, we salute the legacy of the BSCP.

Heists intensify in Arizona

Thieves are becoming more brazen when it comes to how and what they're stealing from Arizona freight trains. Prime targets are trains parked until they can fit into a yard. Incidents have gone from petty theft to organized raids on containers stocked with specific items.

SMART-TD's Arizona Safety & Legislative Director **Scott Jones** is surprised by how much theft in and around rail yards has grown.

"Many years ago, you might notice a person walking through a rail yard or near some storage tracks out of town," Jones explained. "They were mainly looking for a box car or something to break into possibly and steal some cases of beer or alcohol. It's just really escalated in the last few years.

"These aren't your basic, mid-level, lower-level thieves," Jones said. "This is probably organized crime or something."

Jones believes that someone with insider knowledge might be involved. One of the high-profile thefts involved the robbery of \$500,000 worth of Nike

tennis shoes.

"I mean, you've got 400 containers out there. How do they know to go to a specific container? That's what they're doing," Jones stressed.

Unless the carriers plan on stepping up by adding more yard crews or easing congestion so that trains don't have to be left in remote areas for extended periods of time, all Jones can do is educate our members.

Our union's method of operation has always been, "If you see something, say something," but without knowing who's behind these crimes Jones wants to ensure that our brothers and sisters don't feel compelled to confront the criminals themselves and risk serious harm.

"Don't wait on guidance from the carrier," Jones said. "Protect yourself, make sure you know the lead locomotives are all supposed to be able to be secured now."

Until the heists are brought under control, Jones still has many unanswered questions about what railroads are doing to protect our crews.

CSX slashes mentor programs

For many of the mentors in CSX's peer training program, their role is a source of pride.

These old heads strive to pass along their experience and expertise to new hires, knowing they would have been better off if an official mentor had been there earlier in their own careers.

Earlier this year one of our members, who shall remain anonymous, was notified that his position was being cut due to low quarterly revenue for the Fortune 500 Railroad. He wasn't the only one.

"I proceeded to tell them that doesn't really paint a pretty picture in my eyes from a company that preaches safety," he said. "And you're basically cutting the safety department."

Local 1760 Chairperson **Andy Wirth** estimates that this is the third time in roughly three years that the railroad has cut mentors at his terminal. **CSX's strategy for short-term cost savings come with long-term consequences for their employees.**

"It's really disheartening that you can't put your money where your

mouth is as far as these guys' safety and their careers," Wirth explained.

The former mentor agreed.

"It's kind of depressing for a company that year after year preaches safety, and we just kind of put a hold on it to make up for lost revenue."

The recently cut mentor has a checklist, based on hands-on experience, to discuss in meetings with his trainees — but now managers are leading the discussion.

"Every [trainee] said it was a disaster," he recalled. "Only one or two out of the 15 key points were talked about."

There is some solace in the relationships mentors have built and the knowledge that he passed down to his trainees.

"I already had a guy call me, and he goes, 'If it wasn't for you, I probably would have quit.' That means a lot to me," our mentor emphasized. "I realize how hard and different this job is when you get hired, [an experienced mentor] is something I wish I had when I started."

with the request. After receiving the photographs of the object via text messages, the manager requested to view the object in person. However, due to personal matters, the claimant was unable to meet in person with the manager for several days. Once the claimant's personal matters resolved, he offered to meet up with the manager to let him analyze the lighter in person. Nevertheless, given the length of time that had elapsed from the initial request to inspect the lighter in person, the manager declined the offer to personally view the lighter and scheduled an investigation to probe the matter. At the formal investigation, the carrier produced written statements from the two (2) hotel maids who alleged that the object was a firearm. Nonetheless, the carrier failed to procure the presence of the hotel maids as witnesses to testify and be cross-examined at the formal investigation. No witnesses, other than the claimant, provided testimony at the formal inquiry that could be considered first-hand knowledge of

the incident. The charging manager's testimony exclusively consisted of hearsay testimony. Because the core of the carrier's case against the claimant was based on hearsay testimony, the Board concluded that the carrier failed to satisfy its burden that the disciplinary action it took against the claimant met the standards of being reasonable and appropriate. However, since the claimant waited several days to offer to make the lighter available for the carrier to inspect, the Board concluded that the claimant was not entitled to backpay from the date he was removed from service until the date the investigation took place. Accordingly, the claimant was reinstated to service and awarded backpay from the day the investigation took place until his reinstatement to service. GO 898 General Chairperson **Tommy Gholson**, GO 898 Assistant General Chairperson **Jason Roberts** and International Vice President **David B. Wier, Jr.** handled this case before Public Law Board 7942.

Denver 2025 Regional Training Registration NOW OPEN!

Location: DoubleTree by Hilton Denver Hotel

Dates: June 23-26, 2025

(S&T: June 23-27)

Room Rate: \$159/night

Registration Fee: \$75

The Dallas RTS will begin on Monday, June 23, 2025, with an evening welcome reception. The training will cover topics such as: local governance; the roles and responsibilities of local presidents, secretaries, treasurers, legislative representatives, and local chairpersons in member advocacy; an overview of the SMART Constitution and other key subjects.

For a detailed meeting agenda please visit the Meetings page via the SMART Union mobile app.

Room blocks and space in many popular training tracks is limited and will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis.

Registration closes on **June 16, 2025**, and there will be no on-site registration available.

Attendees are responsible for making their hotel reservations.

For more information, contact **Nick Torres** in the SMART-TD office at 216-227-5269 or by email at ntorres@smart-union.org.

Register for Classes



REGISTER EARLY

Hotel Reservations



We look forward to seeing you in Colorado!

Ron Sabol: A champion for transit access

Brother **Ron Sabol** has been appointed to serve as a member of the Mercer County Advisory Council on Special Transportation.

One of the Council's main priorities is to look for federal funding to help seniors, students and those who are disabled better traverse the New Jersey county.

Brother Sabol is both the president of Local 1447 and SMART-TD's New Jersey/Delaware safety & legislative director (SLD). His one-year term on the council began on November 14, and he was sworn in by County Executive Dan Benson on December 5, 2024.

Mass transit is a vital part of daily life for both passengers and workers in Mercer County, which includes the state capitol.

Princeton University is a big stop for both Amtrak and New Jersey Transit, whose riders mix with other passengers that rely on the Trenton Transit Center and the Hamilton Train Station.

SMART-TD members who live in the Garden State are no strangers to Brother Sabol's passion for ensuring that his union family is adequately protected on the job.

Nearly two years ago, New Jersey Governor **Phil Murphy** signed the Motorbus and Passenger Rail Service Employee Violence Prevention Act into law.

The first of its kind in the nation, the law addressed the rise in violent attacks against transit workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thanks to Brother Sabol's efforts, the bill increased the penalty for all assaults on a bus operator, the operator's supervisor or a passenger rail employee.

In addition to his work on the Council, Brother Sabol also serves as a Vice President of the New Jersey State AFL-CIO and is secretary to the Mercer County Central Labor Council. He was also re-elected as the president of the New Jersey Society for Environmental, Economic Development (NJ SEED) in December.

Congratulations, Brother! Your union looks forward to seeing the impact that your service on the Council has on SMART-TD members!

Rail safety battle continues in Colorado legislature

Following the 2023 East Palestine derailment and a similar derailment that same year in their home state, Colorado SMART-TD members helped pass a law that created a state office of rail safety.

SMART-TD's Colorado Safety & Legislative Director **Carl Smith** is optimistic about the impact this entity will have, if it ever becomes fully operational.

"If states can have more eyes, more people looking at what the railroads are doing, that is good for our members, good for safety and good for all of us," Smith explained.

Follow-up legislation will secure long-term funding for the office, with the first of several hearings set for March 5, but deep-pocketed lobbyists are attempting to reverse their efforts.

Smith isn't taking anything for granted, even if the legislation is somewhat of a "clean-up" bill.

"Let's get this over the finish line," he said. "I'll be clear...this is going

to be a fight, because Colorado's in a billion-dollar budget shortfall. Getting this over the finish line is going to be a big tackle, and then we'll come back for those other [items] next year."

The office is important because every argument BNSF and UP have offered against SMART-TD's past legislative actions were based on a lack of data proving there is a problem.

This office, once funded, will independently collect that data.

"The goal is to be able to push safety regulations throughout the state," Local 202 Legislative Representative **Omar Ledesma** explained. "It was covered by the Federal Railroad Administration, and that's where we ran into every bump in the road."

Now, both Ledesma and Smith are focused on passing the legislation that will officially get the Office of Rail Safety up and running.

Brother Ledesma's biggest piece of advice: Don't give up.

NEW TRAINING DEBUTS AT DALLAS SEMINAR

Dallas — Over 180 local officers and union leaders gathered to enhance their skills, knowledge and boost member representation at SMART-TD's first regional training seminar (RTS) of 2025.

"There is power in numbers, in knowledge and power in FACTS. That is why we are all here," SMART-TD President **Jeremy Ferguson** reminded attendees during his opening speech, setting the tone for a productive week of training and development.

SMART-TD Local Legislative Representatives (LR) were treated to a new curriculum, taught for the first time in Dallas. Led by Minnesota and Michigan State Safety and Legislative Directors **Nick Katich** and **Don Roach**, our LRs learned how to properly onboard and mentor new employees, a crucial aspect of ensuring the future success and safety of the railroad workforce. New content also addressed de-escalation training for our passenger rail members.

Funded by a grant from the Federal Railroad Administration, Katich and Roach used the Dallas classes to refine the content, with the intent to bring the same education directly to any interested SMART-TD member.

In other tracks, local chairs could choose to attend a beginners' or an advanced course on how to represent their members. Newly-elected chairpersons could study the foundational principles of union leadership with Indiana Harbor Belt General Chairperson **Justin Wolters**. More experienced leaders deepened their understanding of union operations and best practices with SMART-TD Vice President **Jamie Modesitt**. Secretaries and Treasurers learned how to ensure that locals are up to date on federal and state filings and how to maintain compliance with legal requirements.

"We are committed to giving our local leaders the tools they need to defend our members and protect their rights," Ferguson explained in his speech. "This training ensures our local leaders are better equipped to handle the challenges we face and fight for our members' best interests."

SMART-TD's regional training seminars have proven highly effective. Since their inception, the win rate for discipline and appeals have increased from mid-20% to nearly 65%.

This is how SMART-TD develops informed and capable leaders at every level of the organization. This strengthens our ability to organize, stand up and protect our rights in the face of ever-evolving industry challenges.

Massachusetts bill to protect Keolis transit workers

The law in Massachusetts is clear: assault a public transit worker, and you go to jail — up to 120 days or a maximum \$5,000 fine. Except, in many cases, public transit is operated by private companies. Boston's Keolis, which employs 426 SMART-TD members, is one such company. This means our members are not protected by the current law. A new bill is in the works to fix that.

House Docket No. 2682 broadens the definition of "public employee" to cover transit workers employed by private companies.

The measure also adds "bodily fluids" to the definition of an assault, which imposes strong incentives for passengers to avoid getting their spit or urine on our members. It wouldn't be in the bill if this didn't happen often

enough to be a real problem.

Cole Czub, vice chairman of SMART-TD's Bus and Transit Assault Prevention and Safety (BTAPS) Committee, pointed out that other labor organizations have been trying to pass this legislation for the past several years, but it always seems to get pushed aside. He's confident that SMART-TD's involvement will be the extra momentum that's needed to get this over the finish line.

"It's just been an oversight that's been allowed to exist for far too long, and it's definitely time to put a fix to it," Czub said. "I think we have the support, and the support in the Massachusetts government to get it done."

Once committees are formed supporters will have a better sense of the legislation's path to becoming

Massachusetts law.

After that, New England Safety and Legislative Director Dave Stevenson is preparing for an all-hands-on-deck effort.

"We're going to use every tool we have to get this passed," Stevenson promised. "We'll let our members know to reach out to their legislators to support the bill. Testify in person. Testify in writing."

"We're going to get our members mobilized and hopefully push this bill in the right direction."

The message to lawmakers is simple but powerful.

"I just want to make sure that they hear us loud and clear that this has to get done now," Czub said.

SMART TD Alumni

Useful news and information for our retirees and members of the TD Alumni Association

DOGE CHANGES COURSE RRB OFFICES TO REMAIN OPEN

The now-infamous Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) published its intent to close nine Regional Offices of the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) earlier this year. At the time of publication, DOGE has rescinded its decision, which means the offices will remain open to serve our retirees and other beneficiaries.

For the time being, the following RRB offices will remain open:

- Mesa, Ariz.
- Covina, Calif.
- Jacksonville, Fla.
- Joliet, Ill.
- Wichita, Kan.
- St. Paul, Minn.
- Cincinnati, Ohio
- Altoona, Pa.
- Scranton, Pa.

The RRB is funded by direct employee contributions and not federal tax dollars, so closing these offices would cause harm without improving the federal budget. Rail labor took its case to the current administration, who reversed the decision.

The RRB also continues to publish notices and answers to common questions about benefits on its website. Recent publications answer questions about survivor benefits, Medicare and credit for military service. If you are new to the railroad or approaching retirement age, this resource should be one of the first places to look:

<https://RRB.gov/OurAgency/LaborMember/QandA>

Retirees: Sign up as a new member of the Alumni Association and receive a pair of vintage UTU cufflinks!



Offer valid while supplies last. Cufflinks available on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Are you getting close to retirement?
You can get the TD News and other benefits for \$12/year!
Call (216) 228-9400, email arayner@smart-union.org or visit smart-union.org/resources/transportation-alumni/



General Chairperson **Rick Pauli** has announced his retirement after 32 years as a railroader. As he steps away, Pauli leaves a stronger, more resilient union in his wake. His care and contributions will resonate for years to come.

Brother Pauli hired onto Amtrak in January 1993 as a passenger conductor. He became local chairperson of Harrisburg Local 816 in 2009 before becoming general committee secretary in 2013. In November of 2018, he moved up to vice general chairperson before ascending to general chairperson of GO 769 the following February.

Pauli successfully negotiated several collective bargaining agreements, bringing unprecedented wage increases to his members. This includes the 2024 Amtrak agreement that delivered

the highest wage increase in Amtrak's history.

He has arbitrated hundreds of cases, reinstating several members with full back pay while establishing precedents that protect all our members across a range of claims-related issues.

In addition, Pauli helped our members navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and other unprecedented challenges on the railroad.

His dedication, leadership, tireless advocacy and commitment to improving the lives of those he represented have made a lasting impact. He will always be our brother, and we wish him the very best in this next chapter of his life.

Brother Rick Pauli, we say thank you for your service to this union and leadership in GO 769.



GO 769 General Chairperson Rick Pauli poses with his staff. GO 769 Secretary Javier Ramirez, Vice General Chairperson John Vessels Jr., Michelle Meade, Pauli, Office Manager Kelli Hack, and Suzanne Bartley.

Disabled with RRA income protected from property tax increases in New Jersey

Thanks to the efforts of SMART-TD, railroad workers in New Jersey who receive disability payments under the Railroad Retirement Act (RRA) are protected from increases to their property tax bills.

These so-called "homesteader reimbursements" have long protected social security recipients but inadvertently missed railroaders, who are covered by different laws.

"We've had permanently disabled railroad workers on permanent railroad retirement disability benefits denied the homestead rebate program because of the way the law reads. That's not right.

"Our members and all railroad workers in New Jersey have paid their dues and deserve to be able to take advantage of a program that's utilized by many of their friends and neighbors," New Jersey Safety & Legislative Director **Ron Sabol** explained.

The bill, with SMART-TD's

backing, received unanimous support in the New Jersey legislature and was signed into law by Governor Phil Murphy on March 6, 2025.

A-1672/S-1285 adds disabled railroad workers to the pool of people eligible for New Jersey's existing Senior Freeze Program.

SMART-TD was involved in promoting the bill from the time it was conceived in January 2024.

"All railroaders that sacrificed their time on the railroad, they end up either disabled from a work-related injury or from a sickness of some kind that puts them on permanent railroad retirement benefits. They weren't entitled to the same things that other disabled persons in New Jersey were," Sabol explained. "So, we made that change happen."

Congratulations to SLD Sabol and thank you to every SLD for your hard work and vigilance. We are all better off because of your efforts!

THE FINAL CALL

Following are the names of deceased members who were active TD members or maintained annual membership in the SMART-TD Alumni Association, according to reports received at the TD office. These brothers and sisters will be missed by their many friends and by fellow Alumni Association members.

Local	Name	City/State
195	Smith, Darrel D.	Florence, Ariz.
202	Yoder, Gary W.	Denver, Colo.
204	Groves, Thomas C.	Pueblo, Colo.
256	Hobbs, George J.	Carbondale, Pa.
306	Shaner, Robert W.	Sidney, Neb.
322	Schill, Allan J.	Lindstrom, Minn.
331	Cheek, Charles	Temple, Texas
339	Cruce, James D.	Lake Saint Louis, Mo.
418	Walsh, Craig E.	Denton, Texas
469	Adamove, Leroy F.	East St. Louis, Ill.
469	Payer, John I.	Winfield, Mo.
500	Kent, Arthur B.	Clifton, Colo.
577	Tekresh, Walter	Chicago, Ill.
630	Hughes, Earl	Hi Hat, Ky.
733	Waldrep, Wesley F.	Texarkana, Texas
771	Dodson, Donald F.	Needles, Calif.
772	Olivis, Jerry W.	Tuscumbia, Ala.
783	Starkey, George F.	Spencer, N.C.
785	Rushing, Billy J.	Paducah, Ky.
792	Krichbaum, George D.	Mantua, Ohio
903	Phillips, Carl E.	Jacksonville, Fla.
941	Ginn, Forrest C.	Ellerslie, Ga.
941	Land, John W.	Fortson, Ga.
945	Kibler, Marvin E.	La Junta, Colo.
976	Woodall, Albert B.	Baton Rouge, La.
1202	Herman, Steven P.	Grabill, Ind.
1202	Kilander, John P.	Wabash, Ind.
1344	Fandrigh, David H.	Mandan, N. D.
1409	Bonawitz Jr., Dan K.	Olathe, Kan.
1418	Guy, Wayne E.	Aliquippa, Pa.
1470	Faith, John P.	Selbyville, Del.
1473	Casey, George T.	Kingston, Mass.
1557	Washington, Richard L.	Memphis, Tenn.
1563	Romero Jr., Lionel P.	West Covina, Calif.
1598	Smith, Ronald C.	Douglasville, Ga.
1614	Philipp, Robert L.	Welch, Minn.
1629	Olson, Scott T.	Phoenix, Ariz.
1770	Fetterly, John J.	San Gabriel, Calif.
1770	Gebbie, Ralph P.	West Covina, Calif.
1780	Edmonds, Howard T.	Blue Springs, Mo.
1816	Reynolds, Ronald L.	Oregon, Ohio
1978	Meliti, Virgil J.	Selkirk, N.Y.

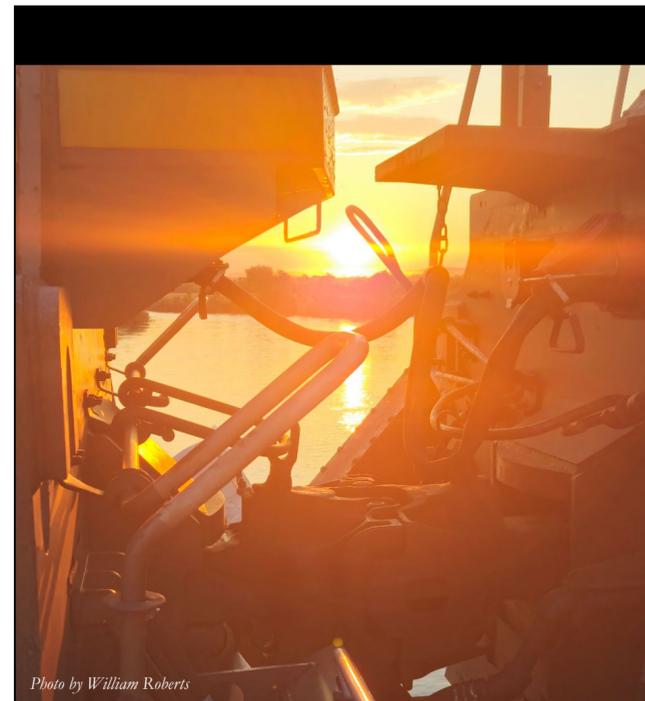


Photo by William Roberts

IN MEMORIAM



Dan Bonawitz
Local 1409
Kansas City, Kan.

Brother **Dan Bonawitz** passed in January, 2025. He was a tireless advocate for workers' rights and our union brotherhood. Dan was a charter member of SMART-TD's National Safety Team, where he ensured investigations were fair and thorough.

"Dan didn't just teach safety—he lived it," said **Jared Cassidy**, chair of the team. "His passion and love for his fellow workers was second to none."

Bonawitz made SMART-TD a more inclusive organization as a founding member of our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee.

"He's always going to fight for your rights," reflected **Chad Yokohama**, the committee chairperson. "Whether it put a target on his back or not, he's going to fight for you."



George Casey
Local 1473
Boston

SMART honors the life and legacy of Brother **George Casey**, who passed away Saturday, March 1, at 74 years of age.

He worked for Amtrak for 50 years. Brother Casey was a member of Local 1473, the former New England safety and legislative director, and the former general chairperson of GCA-081.

"George did a lot getting the UTU and SMART where we are today," said SMART-TD's current New England Safety and Legislative Director **Dave Stevenson**. "Whenever I go to meetings, the first thing I mention is George's name and everybody knows him. Having the same position has helped to open many doors for me, and I know how much he did for us over the years."

His loss will be felt by all who worked with him.



Scott Olson
Local 1629
Phoenix

Brother **Scott Olson**, who passed away Friday, December 27, 2024, at the age of 77, was the former Arizona state legislative director.

"He was a great teacher, a great friend, and I truly admire him," noted Greg Hynes, SMART-TD National Safety and Legislative Director and former Arizona SLD.

During Olson's time, Republicans held a super-majority in the state legislature and weren't considered labor-friendly. That didn't deter Olson.

Rather than accept defeat, he was able to work with the Arizona Corporation Commission to move the needle on issues that were important to SMART-TD members, including working conditions and two-person crews.

"He always found a way to make it work," Hynes emphasized.

Focused on working across the aisle whenever necessary to get things done for the betterment of our union, Olson was a respected member of the SMART-TD family.

He will be remembered by the working families he helped and his colleagues within our union.

Bonawitz was also an advocate for veterans, earning him the honor of becoming SMART-TD's Man of the Year in 2023.

His legislative leadership was unparalleled.

National Safety and Legislative Department Director **Greg Hynes** noted that "Dan was among the best at working with legislators. He got the job done no matter what the need was."

Ty Drago, director of the Kansas Legislative Board agreed, "Dan never backed down from a fight that needed fought. He was a force of nature!"

"Dan was a warrior for our brothers and sisters in every sense of the word," said SMART-TD President **Jeremy Ferguson**. "His selflessness, work ethic and commitment to doing what was right are unmatched. We are all better for having known him, and his legacy will live on in the union he helped build."



Charles Cheek
Local 331
Temple, Texas

Brother **Charles "Chuck" Cheek** passed away on Thursday, December 12, 2024, at the age of 53.

A member of Local 331, where he served as a local chairperson for LCA 393C. Cheek was sadly diagnosed with stage 4 cancer in August 2024.

He peacefully passed away after his last chemotherapy treatment.

His resilience and courage is a powerful inspiration to all who had the good fortune to know him.



Howard Edmonds
Local 1780
Kansas City, Mo.

Howard Edmonds passed on January 28, 2025. His 37-year career as a switchman and conductor began a railroading legacy.

His son Anthony, chairperson of Local 544A, explains, "I was raised up with good work ethics. You put in a hard day's work. I raised my son the same way, and I think just going into this there's a sense of pride in it." Knowing the family tradition lives on is a source of comfort.

While the family mourns, they're also celebrating as grandson Daniel graduates conductor training.

"It's been a difficult time but just thinking back to how I do the same thing [Howard] did and now my son's doing the same thing...it just kind of makes me smile."



Albert Woodall
Local 976
Shreveport, La.

With a career spanning four decades, Brother **Albert Buford "Sonny" Woodall** dedicated much of his life advocating for rail workers. He passed on Saturday, December 21, 2024, at the age of 94.

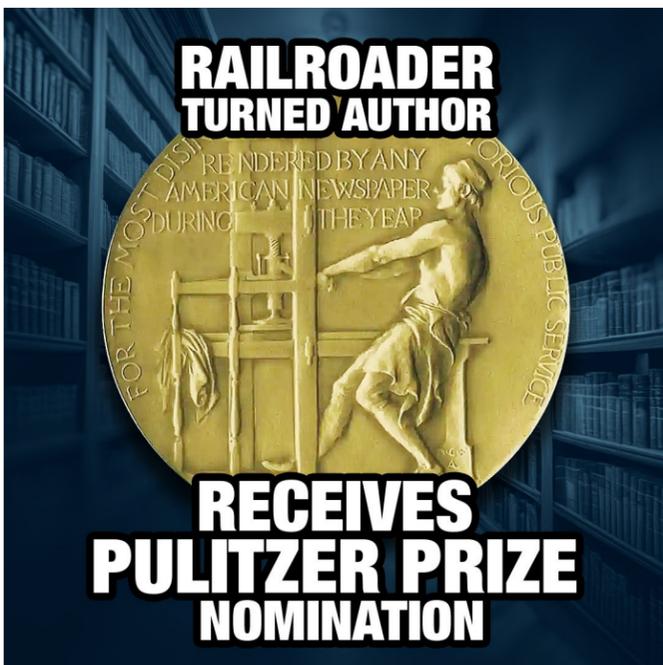
He was the Louisiana state legislative director for 22 years. His memory lives on in the policies and practices that continue to protect and benefit our members today.

Former SLD **Gary Duval** and current Director **Chris Christianson** send their condolences to Woodall's family and the brothers and sisters of Local 976.

FEATURED PHOTO SHOWCASE



UP7007 CCDSA 05: A loaded 150-car coal train on its way from Powder River Basin, Wyo. on the UPRR Powder River Subdivision. The train was waiting to get into the yard at S. Morrill, Neb. for inspection, fuel and re-crew to continue its way to San Antonio. The photo was taken on February 5, 2025, by renowned photographer and UP engineer Alan "AJ" Nash of Local 257 out of Morrill, Neb.



Not many people can say that they've written three books or have been nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

Brother **Carlos Wallace**, a fifth-generation railroader out of Local 11 in Houston has done both.

"I think the impact of the writing has me more excited than the actual accolade," Wallace said. "When I started to understand the criteria and what they look for and how it's about things that can make society better, that's when it meant something to me. In my writing, to me, that's what's most important: making the world a better place."

The Pulitzer Prize is an annual award that recognizes achievement in American journalism, letters and music. Out of an initial pool of 1,400 nominees, Brother Wallace has advanced to the top 50, who are still in the running.

He says that the winner will likely be announced sometime in June. The Pulitzer is awarded by Columbia University in New York City.

Wallace served as the local chairperson for Local 11 and

the secretary of GCA-927, while also working for Union Pacific. Traveling as an organizer for the United Transportation Union (UTU) gave him the opportunity to meet a lot of different people and experience different scenarios, which factored heavily into his writing.

Wallace's first book centers around his East Texas upbringing and the principles that his parents and grandparents instilled in him.

"I've yet to meet anybody in my life that can say that they worked in the same industry as their great-great-grandfather," Wallace reflected.

"Society works much like the operation of the railroad. All it takes is one part failing, and it can make the entire operation fail. But if it's built properly enough, we can assist and help bring it back on board. It's just making those comparisons from railroading to real life, and it's taught me so much."

Brother Wallace's third book, "Why Sell Lies When the Truth is Free", nabbed him the Pulitzer nomination. The book is his first venture into fiction.

He admits that it was a little tougher to write than his first two, which he classifies as motivational and empowering books.

"I'm very proud of [my third book]. I was able to craft a good story, and it caught the recognition of some really good people in the literary world," Wallace said. "It's all based on real facts and real things that happen, and I just kind of put them all together to make one story."

"I am a die hard. I only know union," Wallace emphasized. "I want to thank the men and women from the bottom-up because it takes everyone, and it makes me extremely proud to say that I'm a SMART member."



SHARE YOUR BEST SHOTS!

SMART-TD is always on the lookout for great photographs of work-related scenes. **If you see a beautiful moment on the rails, on the road, out the window or back at the shop, consider sharing it with your union brothers and sisters!**

Printed photographs should be mailed to SMART-TD, 6060 Rockside Woods Blvd. N, Suite 325, Independence OH 44131.

High resolution digital photos should be in JPG format at the largest, highest quality setting available to you. Email them to news_td@smart-union.org. We prefer horizontal compositions.

Tell us about your photos — each submission should include your name, SMART-TD local, when and where the photo was taken, along with the names of any people in the picture. Please list names as they appear in the photograph, left to right.

All photographs submitted become the property of SMART, which allows us to publish them in the newspaper, social media and other future projects.

Remember to review your employer's policies regarding the use of cameras and other electronics on property or during work hours.