



# CSX ENDS OPERATION REDBLOCK

## A Shameful Retreat From 41 Years of Leadership, Compassion, and Proven Safety

Jan. 7, 2026 — CSX Transportation has announced its decision to dismantle Operation RedBlock. This program has stood as the gold standard for substance abuse prevention, peer help, and safety in railroading for more than four decades.

“This is a sad day — not just for our members, but for management as well,” said SMART-TD **President Jeremy Ferguson**. “RedBlock worked because it saved lives, it saved careers, and it prevented countless incidents that would have cost the railroad far more than the program ever did.”

### TRUST AND PROVEN RESULTS

Operation RedBlock was a confidential, non-punitive program railroaders could rely on if they were unexpectedly called to work while impaired.

This safety valve protected employees who were under the influence, under extreme distress, or under levels of distraction that could result in a derailment, collision, injury or fatality.

RedBlock also did something in-house corporate programs rarely

achieve: it created trust.

For 41 years that trust enabled railroaders to seek long-term solutions to the underlying issues creating instability in their lives.

Operation RedBlock benefited train crews, supervisors, communities along the right-of-way, along with CSX’s bottom line.

“FRA has been impressed by the CSX Operation RedBlock programs, the EAP program, and the synergy and cooperation between the two programs,” said Jerry Powers, Staff Director of the FRA’s Part 219 Drug and Alcohol Program. “FRA considers an effective mark-off program and voluntary self-referral and co-worker reporting policies as key force-multipliers. The level of referrals is approximately three times greater year-to-year as compared to random and reasonable cause/suspicion positives, a figure that truly speaks to the outstanding efforts of CSX Drug & Alcohol, EAP, and Operation RedBlock Program personnel.

“The mark-offs and referrals demonstrate that the ORB Programs have been successful in promoting and creating ongoing cultural change and employee engagement to reduce and eliminate unsafe behavior,” Powers continued.

### FOLLOWING A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT

Amtrak and Union Pacific once had similar union-run RedBlock programs. Both were folded into carrier-controlled Employee Assistance Programs. Amtrak’s program disappeared entirely. Union Pacific lost nearly all participation after the trusted union coordinators were removed.

“CSX is following the same path,” said **Mike Jackson** of Local 1374 (New Castle, PA), who coordinated Operation RedBlock at CSX. “Once management took control at those properties, the trust disappeared. When trust disappears, people stop coming forward — and safety suffers.”

### OUTSOURCED PROGRAMS LACK ACCOUNTABILITY

“Federal law requires railroads to have EAPs, but nothing requires them to make those programs effective,” Jackson said. “What we’ve lost across this industry is real commitment. The health and mental condition of our coworkers has to matter. It can’t be reduced to compliance on paper.”

In the 1980s and 1990s, railroads invested in robust mental health and substance abuse programs. Professional

counselors, embedded within divisions, met railroaders face-to-face. They followed through. They cared whether people lived or died.

Today, most rail carriers outsource their programs to checkbox-driven EAP vendors who operate with little accountability and no connection to the railroad lifestyle.

### RECOGNITION FOR THOSE WHO BUILT AND SUSTAINED REDBLOCK

Operation RedBlock at CSX was the last program of its kind. The members and local teams who dedicated themselves to make Operation RedBlock effective across generations deserve our thanks.

Also remember the “pioneers of peer prevention” who carried this mission across the industry. Among these are Bobby Bonds, who led the Operation RedBlock program at Amtrak and Matt Schumaker, who ran the program at Union Pacific. Brother Jackson’s life’s work has been dedicated to protecting railroaders when they were at their most vulnerable.

“Mike, Bobby, and Matt were often our members’ best friend on their worst day,” President Ferguson said. “They brought credibility, compassion, and accountability to this program every single day. We thank all of them for their years of service, expertise, and unwavering commitment to our brothers and sisters. The rail industry is safer because of them.”

Their work saved lives, strengthened families, and set standards that should not be forgotten.

### FIGHT CONTINUES DESPITE CSX’S ABDICATION OF LEADERSHIP

“I’m deeply disappointed that this mission is being dismantled,” Jackson said. “What makes it worse is knowing our members will no longer have someone standing in their corner, making sure our industry doesn’t fail the people who are struggling.”

CSX claims that nothing will change under their Employee Assistance Program. We all know better.

When discipline, attendance, and job security all flow from the same entity, voluntary self-reporting disappears. Fear replaces trust. Problems go underground until they surface as accidents, injuries, or fatalities.

SMART-TD will continue to honor Operation RedBlock, and we will continue to support our members no matter what structure the carriers choose to tear down.

“No matter what the carriers do, our members need to know this: we have their backs,” Jackson said. “We will keep fighting for them — even when the road forward isn’t clear.”

## CROSS-BORDER RAIL SAFETY PROTECTIONS STRENGTHENED

Dec. 19, 2025 — The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) under the leadership of Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, took decisive action to strengthen the safety of our cross-border freight rail operations.

Only FRA-certified locomotive engineers and conductors may operate trains in the United States.

Foreign-domiciled crews who are FRA-certified and proficient in English may operate freight trains no more

than 10 miles into the United States from the point of entry solely to reach an established recrew point.

Any foreign crew that does not meet FRA certification requirements, English proficiency requirements, or both, must be stopped and recrewed immediately at the first available location, as determined by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the U.S. Border Patrol.

If a foreign crew requires the assistance of a translator or interpreter, that individual is performing a safety-critical function and must also be certified by the FRA in accordance with 49 CFR Parts 240 and 242 (Conductor and Engineer Qualified).

These actions follow FRA inspections that identified serious safety concerns, including difficulties interpreting general track bulletins, communicating with dispatchers and emergency responders and inconsistencies in hazardous materials documentation.

“These actions reaffirm a fundamental principle of rail safety in this country: Trains operating in the United States must be operated by crews who are fully qualified under U.S. law and able to communicate clearly in safety-critical situations,” said SMART-TD President **Jeremy Ferguson**. “We thank Secretary Duffy, the FRA and Administrator David Fink for

listening to working railroaders and taking meaningful steps to protect our members, our communities and the American public.”

### A Win for Rail Safety and Accountability

“Our members operate under rigorous certification standards because lives depend on it,” National Safety & Legislative Director **Jared Cassity** stated. “The FRA’s actions make clear that safety is not optional and that language barriers, insufficient training, or uncertified personnel have no place in U.S. rail operations.”

Deputy National Safety & Legislative Director **Don Roach** specifically acknowledged Secretary Duffy, Administrator David Fink and FRA safety professionals for their continued engagement with labor and their commitment to proactive oversight.

We look forward to continued collaboration with the DOT and FRA as they evaluate cross-border operations and ensure that rail safety remains a top priority.

These decisions send a clear message: protecting railroad workers and the public will always come first.

## TRANSPORTATION DIVISION PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

## 2025 layoffs break records for non-union workers

Brothers and Sisters,

It's a simple fact: Unions provide stability in an economy where predictability is rare.

Non-union workers suffer in many industries, but conditions are especially harsh in the technology sector. Workers are seen as expendable and with a continuous supply of hungry computer science graduates, burnout (both physical and mental) is a normal operating procedure. We're no strangers to this kind of grind, but **we have something they don't: Solidarity**.

Most white-collar workers have come to expect mergers and mass layoffs, with little thought given by their leaders to the actual humans who make these companies run. They work with an understanding that they could find the door slammed in their face faster than they can pack up their desk.

One of the most well-known mass layoffs in the technology industry (and, in fact, record-breaking at the time) happened in 2002. Hewlett-Packard Co. (HP) announced that it would cut thousands of jobs as part of its acquisition of Compaq Computer Corp, a merger that promised to "boost efficiencies" AKA Precision Scheduled Manufacturing.

In total, more than 17,000 workers lost their livelihoods in the blink of an eye.

It was a lose-lose situation: Employees, seen as disposable, were put on the chopping block while the merger failed to meet its lofty, promised goals.



By Jeremy Ferguson

Without local representation or the protections provided by a union contract to safeguard their interests, these workers were ultimately lost to the footnotes of history.

More than 20 years later, this kind of move has become a standard procedure for many firms who need to clean up their financial forecasts, whether in finance, advertising or manufacturing, from Meta to Boeing to Verizon and beyond.

The unmentioned but common denominator? These are almost always non-union workers who lack the benefits and job protections that are a well-known hallmark of union membership.

Jobs that from the outside might be seen as flashy, cushy, or status-bearing usually carry little-to-no insulation from things like mass layoffs and at-will employment, where you can be fired without notice for any (or no) reason. As a result more than 1 million workers lost their jobs without cause in 2025.

A union and a union contract are game changers.

In September, SMART-TD announced a landmark agreement with Union Pacific that puts a promise in writing: Our members working in train

and yardmaster service will have job protection for the length of their careers following the carrier's merger with Norfolk Southern, subject to the usual requirements for continued employment.

This is an unprecedented guarantee in the history of American railroading that underscores the importance of belonging to a union and why having a voice in the workplace is critical.

When the agreement was announced, we didn't mince words: The biggest railroad and biggest rail union in America were breaking new ground that protects jobs, families and the future of the U.S. supply chain.

Or take our brothers and sisters at the Port Terminal Railroad Association.

A disturbing pattern emerged over the past several years indicating ongoing disregard for union agreements, safety obligations and basic respect for the workforce at that railroad.

We fought for our yardmasters and PTRRA management got our message: This behavior will not be tolerated and will stop now.

What's been most notable, however, is the solidarity between crafts on the property.

Although represented by several different unions, yardmasters, engineers, conductors and maintenance workers have proven that unity and solidarity are the best protections against intimidation.

That's the union difference at work.

We aren't disposable: As a member of a union, your brothers and sisters are there to protect and fight for one another, to lend a hand when one is needed and to show our strength when management decides to overlook that we are human beings. We are not line-items in a financial report and they owe us their respect.

Like all families, unions are far from perfect. No organization is without flaws. But when the going gets tough, we get tougher. This determination is what ensures we don't become another statistic in an article about the latest 10,000-head layoff.

Instead we have a voice at work and have legal protections from mistreatment. We've got each other's backs, from the day you receive your union card until it's time to retire.

That's the value of being in a union and why we fight to protect our SMART-TD family.

In solidarity,

Jeremy Ferguson

President  
SMART Transportation Division



## A MESSAGE FROM BUS DEPARTMENT LEADERSHIP

## SEPTA negotiations show what is possible when we stand together

Brothers and Sisters,

As we head into a new year, I want to take a moment to reflect on a powerful example of what solidarity, determination and active membership can achieve. Over the past several months, our brothers and sisters at SEPTA showed the entire bus department and the entire American labor movement what strength looks like when working people stand shoulder to shoulder.

Negotiations with SEPTA were tough. There were real differences at the table, real pressure and real stakes. At times, our members were closer to strike action than they have been in years. But through it all, SEPTA Local 1594 members stayed united, informed and engaged. That unity made all the difference.

I was proud to serve on the negotiating team alongside General Chairperson **Anthony Petty**, and I can say without hesitation that this



By James Sandoval

tentative agreement was earned by the membership. Their resolve gave us the leverage to push back, to hold the line and to secure meaningful gains. The result is a fair agreement that delivers improvements in pay, benefits, work rules, safety and quality of life, while also guaranteeing that our members will not be replaced by automated vehicles. That protection isn't just about jobs; it's about public safety and respect for the skilled professionals who keep Philadelphia moving.

This agreement also brings our members to parity with other unions on the property and establishes ongoing conversations around quality-of-life issues like meal layovers. These wins

happened because members spoke up, stood firm and trusted in the power of collective action. This victory belongs to YOU.

The SEPTA agreement is more than a single success. It's a blueprint for what's possible. As we look toward 2026, SMART-TD's Bus Department's vision is clear: We will continue to raise the bar when it comes to representation. That means holding management accountable, refusing to accept concessions as the cost of doing business and negotiating strong contracts that reflect the value our members bring to their employers and communities.

It also means growing our union. More and more bus operators across the country are watching what SMART-TD members are achieving and they want to be part of it. Organizing new properties strengthens all of us and we will continue to support those efforts while empowering, educating and engaging our current membership.

An informed, active membership is our greatest asset.

None of this happens without you. Your participation, your solidarity and your willingness to stand together are what make it possible for us to win at the bargaining table and beyond. As we move into the new year, I encourage every member to stay involved, stay informed and stay united.

The strength shown by our SEPTA brothers and sisters is a reminder of who we are and what we can accomplish together. The future of our bus department is bright! Together, we will keep moving forward.

In unity and strength,

James Sandoval

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## A LETTER FROM THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE OFFICE

## FRA doubles risk to railroaders



By Jared Cassity

The Federal Railroad Administration checked another box off the Association of American Railroads' long-desired wish list – the ability to increase the use of automated track inspection technologies (ATI). The irony, however, is that nothing was preventing America's Class I railroads from expanding the use of ATI in the first place, meaning the reality is that prioritizing the safest course is not the ultimate goal. Instead, it is to reduce the number of visual inspections (or manpower) to improve the operating ratio in their never-ending pursuit to appear attractive to their shareholders on Wall Street.

Simply put, this waiver does nothing to improve safety. It is a business decision that could have devastating consequences to the infrastructure, the environment, the track-side communities and the men and women we represent. It is a solution in search of a problem and it is an unnecessary relief from regulatory restrictions that don't exist.

As a result, this ruling reduces by half the assurance our members have that the rail underneath them is intact and equipped to handle the weight of the car or engine they are riding. This ruling makes it twice as likely that a defect will be discovered the hard way by our members rolling over it.

As a union, SMART-TD is more than disappointed by this drastic reduction in our people's safety.

ATI, in conjunction with visual inspections, is a sensible and pragmatic approach to safe railroad operations. The current safety records are a testament to this fact, but because of this waiver, additional, unneeded risk is now being introduced into the equation and the impacts could be severe.

Make no mistake: Labor supports technology that advances safety and supplements our work. This effort misses that mark.

Jared Cassity

National Safety  
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## What YOUR UNION is doing for YOU

## Arbitration victories as reported to SMART Transportation Division leadership

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. Of the many cases that the organization received sustaining decisions on from the first division, the case referenced below is of significant interest:

In NRAB First Division Award No. 32134 (Gaskins, 2025), Union Pacific terminated the employment of a conductor based on its allegation that he violated the terms of its Attendance Policy. Although the claimant exceeded the threshold number of points permitted by the carrier's attendance policy, the board found mitigating factors that persuaded it to reduce the quantum of discipline imposed on the claimant. Specifically, a number of the claimant's layoffs during the review period were taken pursuant to FMLA. However, subsequent to the claimant's

FMLA layoffs, the carrier revoked his FMLA privileges and converted those absences to unexcused time off because it concluded that he failed to submit adequate documentation in a timely fashion to qualify for FMLA status.

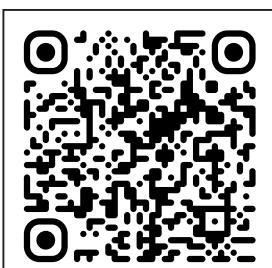
At the formal investigation, the claimant produced evidence of the FMLA documentation that he submitted to the carrier. Finding that this evidentiary documentation constituted a mitigating factor, the board ruled to reinstate the claimant to service with lost earnings for the twelve (12) months preceding his reinstatement to service.

GO-953 General Chairperson **Luke Edington**, GO-953 Senior Vice General Chairperson **Kurt Christensen**, GO-953 Senior Vice General Chairperson **Ian Reynolds**, GO-953 Senior Vice General Chairperson **Mike Moore** and GO-953 Senior Vice General Chairperson **Zach Nagy** progressed this case to the NRAB First Division.

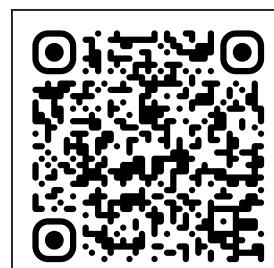
General chairpersons who wish to report a victory should contact:  
Bus Department Vice President Alvy Hughes ([ahughes@smart-union.org](mailto:ahughes@smart-union.org))  
Rail Vice President David B. Wier Jr. ([dwierjr@smart-union.org](mailto:dwierjr@smart-union.org))

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## SMART members go back to school

Announced in June 2025, the Union College Benefit provides discounted tuition at accredited colleges and universities across the country for more than 150 programs. Since its official launch over the summer, over 130 of our brothers and sisters have signed up for the benefit, including nearly 90 union members, 43 family members and 14 members who are military veterans.

Associate and bachelor's degrees are the most popular choices. Master's and doctorate programs are also available for those with an undergraduate degree.

The Union College Benefit provides a flexible option to study without a fixed schedule. Students can achieve their educational goals on their own terms, at a pace that fits within their valuable and often limited free time.

## How to Get Started

Visit the Union College Benefit website at:  
<https://ebsunioncollegebenefit.org/smart/>

There are three steps to get started:

- Find the right program by completing an online interest form detailing your educational and career goals. This will be used to find a list of schools that fit your objectives.
- Select from the matching colleges and universities that align with your experience, goals and interests.
- An admissions counselor will then contact you with detailed information about your selection, including your out-of-pocket costs, transfer credits and instructions on completing the admissions process.

The Union College Benefit program is a service provided by Employee Benefit Systems, Inc., who provide similar benefits to several other unions. Participation in the scholarship program is entirely voluntary.

While SMART-TD is pleased to offer this opportunity to our membership, this article is for informational purposes only and does not imply a formal endorsement of Employee Benefit Systems, Inc. (EBS) or of any particular college or program offered through this benefit. As with any major decision, once selecting a school of interest, members are encouraged to conduct their own research and due diligence to determine whether a particular institution or program truly aligns with their individual educational and professional goals.

## Better Short-Term Disability Benefits Coming in 2026

If you're enrolled in SMART-TD's Voluntary Short-Term Disability (VSTD) plan, an important change to your benefits is coming in the new year that means greater coverage for you and more money in your pocket.

If you become disabled on or after January 1, 2026, the maximum weekly benefit payable by the plan will increase for both rail and bus members.

Rail members will see an increase of \$78 (19%) and bus members will see an increase of \$60 (28%) per week.

Monthly premium payments will not change and the cost for coverage continues at the current rate.

The benefit improvement constitutes a change to the schedule of benefits outlined on page 1 of your plan booklet and summary plan description.

The VSTD plan is self-funded by SMART and provides a basic "safety net" of coverage for members that's designed to work in combination with either Railroad Retirement Sickness Benefits or state-mandated disability programs.

New SMART-TD members are automatically enrolled unless they choose to opt-out via a waiver that must be returned to headquarters. The monthly cost of coverage is collected through payroll deduction.

Questions can be addressed to the plan office toll-free at 844-880-1071.

## AJFL Recruiting Northeast Regional Account Associate

American Journey Financial Life (AJFL), formerly the UTUIA, is seeking an insurance representative to handle their Northeastern region.

The territory includes Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island.

Any members who are interested would be able to positively impact union families, while continuing to promote our shared values of solidarity and mutual support.

AJFL has dedicated itself to serving union members and their families for over 150 years. They offer a range of insurance solutions, as well as college and trade scholarships for union families.

If interested, contact AJFL President Ken Laugel at [klaugel@ajlife.org](mailto:klaugel@ajlife.org), or via the website at [www.ajlife.org](http://www.ajlife.org).

## 2026 Office Holidays

The SMART-TD administrative offices will be closed for the following holidays in 2026:

- January 1-2
- February 16
- April 3
- May 25
- July 4 (observed July 3)
- September 7
- November 26-27
- December 24-25, 31

## VSTD/VILP

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## SEPTA Strike Averted, Agreement Reached

**Hard-fought negotiations remove self-driving transit from the table. Pay, benefits and quality-of-life improvements arrive for members of Local 1594.**

After months of difficult negotiations, the members of SMART-TD Local 1594 (Upper Darby, Pa.) have ratified a new tentative agreement with SEPTA. General Chairpersons **Anthony Petty** and **Ray Boyer**, along with Bus Department Vice President **James Sandoval**, successfully negotiated advances in safety, pay, benefits, work rules and quality of life.

Notably, SMART-TD members are guaranteed that they will not be replaced by automated vehicles. As driverless taxis continue to cause safety problems in cities where they have been deployed, we believe this is not only a job-security issue, but it is also a public safety emergency. This guarantee extends one year beyond the life of the contract.

Quarterly meetings will also be held focusing on improving members' quality of work life, as the parties work towards a specific agreement focused on meal layovers.

This contract did not come easily. SMART-TD and SEPTA had very different ideas about what a fair agreement should look like. Talks grew tense and our SEPTA brothers and sisters came closer to taking strike action than we've seen in years. Our negotiating

team was guided by one simple truth: SMART-TD members are the skilled professionals who keep Philadelphia moving and we deserve equal respect and protection.

We also want to recognize the leadership team from SEPTA for staying at the table. Despite our differences, SEPTA ultimately showed professionalism and recognized the value our members bring to their system and their city.

In the end, that respect made this hard-fought deal possible.

To our members: this victory is yours. Your skill, your dedication and your daily work on the streets and trolley lines of Philadelphia made the difference. Your professionalism kept the riding public safe and the system running smoothly even as the talks dragged on. Your solidarity gave our negotiating team the strength to keep pushing. Your unmatched work ethic reminded SEPTA that our members are the most valuable resource in Philadelphia's transit network.

The new agreement brings SMART-TD members to parity with the other unions on the property and sets the stage for a future built on respect, fairness and shared purpose.

When SMART-TD members stand together, we move forward—with strength, unity and respect from our employers.

Congratulations to every member of SMART-TD Local 1594. You've earned this victory.

## NTSB Issues Two Rail Safety Alerts



The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) issued two important safety alerts that stem from recent incidents where rail workers were either seriously injured or killed on the job.

In its first safety alert, rail workers are warned to recognize the risks when equipment is fouling the track.

Anything within four feet of the nearest rail increases the likelihood of a conductor being hit by a train or moving equipment. Between July 2024 and July 2025, the agency investigated five accidents where rail workers were seriously hurt or killed because they fouled the track or encountered a fouled track and were crushed.

The NTSB urges rail workers to only foul the track when necessary and confirm that it is safe to do so, inspect unattached rail-cars to verify that they are secure and always expect equipment to move at any time.

The second alert highlights

shoving movements, especially through close clearances that can pinch conductors against rail equipment, buildings and other objects.

Five recent investigations identified shoving movements where conductors were killed after colliding with highway motor vehicles at a grade crossing, falling into the path of a train, riding through a close clearance or being caught between colliding trains.

Out of the 20 conductor deaths reported to the Federal Railroad Administration between January 2020 and July 2025, 70% of them involved riding trains during shoving movements.

Among other suggestions, the alert encourages conductors to face the direction of travel and watch for unexpected obstacles, such as trains or other equipment on nearby tracks to reduce the risk of serious injury or death.

The alerts encourage railroads to prohibit riding equipment through ungated highway-railroad grade crossings and in other high-risk locations.

More detailed information on both safety alerts can be accessed by visiting the NTSB website.

<https://www.ntsb.gov/Advocacy/safety-alerts>

**DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL?**  
**news\_td@smart-union.org**

## Mass. Law Protects Private Transit Workers



Mass. Governor Maura Healey signs H. 4645 into law after an extended lobbying effort by a coalition coordinated by SMART's BTAPS Committee.

Dec. 3, 2025 — After years of tireless work led by SMART-TD, private transit workers in Massachusetts were granted the same protection from violent assaults as their public counterparts when Governor Maura Healey signed the MBTA Employee Assault Bill (H. 4645) into law.

Keolis, a private contractor within the state, employs over 500 SMART-TD members as conductors, engineers and onboard crews. The new law imposes a penalty of up to 120 days in jail and a maximum \$5,000 fine for an assault on any transit employee. The law also adds "bodily fluids" to the definition of an assault, which imposes a strong disincentive for passengers assaulting operators with their spit or urine.

"I'm grateful for all of our brothers and sisters who never stopped showing up and sent a message to our lawmakers that it's time to get this done," said SMART-TD's New England Safety & Legislative Director **Dave Stevenson**. "This victory belongs to the men and women who keep Boston and the Commonwealth moving!"

### Mass. Joins Growing Effort to Protect Workers Everywhere

As transit workers nationwide continue to face the daily threat of violent assaults, this legislation represents an important step forward in the fight to ensure that the punishment for attacking these front-line employees literally fits the crime.

Mass. is the fourth state where SMART-TD helped pass transit safety legislation in 2025. Members in Maryland, Colorado and California successfully guided transit safety bills to passage in their respective statehouses.

"Safety on the job is and will always be our union's top priority," explained **Cole Czub**, chairperson of Local 898 (Boston) and interim chairperson of SMART-TD's Bus and Transit Assault Prevention and Safety (BTAPS) Committee. "As I've said before, we want to put together one bill that we can push forward to all the states as we're going along, trying to get more states to pass and hopefully a federal bill that will protect our members."



## Texas Shortline Issued Final Warning

HOUSTON — SMART-TD Alternate Vice President and highest-ranking officer representing the craft of yardmaster **Chris Bartz** issued a direct and unequivocal warning to management of the Port Terminal Railroad Association (PTR): The ongoing disregard for union agreements, safety obligations and basic respect for the workforce will not be tolerated.

Union documentation and first-hand accounts describe repeated incidents of misconduct by property management.

One PTR general manager emailed a "loyalty pledge" to his yardmasters, requiring them to acknowledge and agree to retain their positions. An employer cannot legally offer individual contracts unless the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) explicitly allows it, which the PTR agreement did not.

Acts of retaliation against union activity included mandatory overtime, sometimes extending yardmaster shifts to 24 hours. A yardmaster reported an unsafe condition due to lack of rest resulting in a threat of disciplinary action — a violation of federal law. SMART-TD forced the carrier to rescind the action.

Another PTR manager remains employed after allegedly violating the railroad's sexual harassment policy. The very same manager terminated another employee just days earlier, after that worker faced a similar charge.

"These are not isolated incidents,"

Bartz said. "This is a systemic culture problem that starts at the top."

Management has stonewalled or simply ignored repeated requests from SMART-TD to reinstate structured safety meetings and joint observations.

Equipment maintenance has deteriorated, with FRA defects recurring on the same tracks and radio communication failures frequently harming yard and road operations.

Members have reported serious safety violations (including chemical exposure), with management focusing on union involvement rather than resolving the hazards.

"This is the kind of nonsense that gets people hurt or killed," Bartz said.

This union will pursue every available avenue through formal grievances, federal oversight and public accountability to ensure the Port Terminal Railroad Association operates in accordance with the law, that their labor agreements are honored and that basic respect for human decency is upheld.

"This carrier needs to understand something," Bartz concluded. "We expect professionalism from our members, more to the point, we demand it, because it's the only way to stay safe in this line of work. But that same standard applies to management. If they want to run this place like a bush-league, unorganized outfit, they'll find themselves in a fight they can't win. This ends now."

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Learn about our life insurance products at [ajlife.org](http://ajlife.org)

## Union Pacific Tentative Agreement Ratified

Nov. 28, 2025 — Members of SMART-TD working on Union Pacific (UP) properties decisively voted to ratify the 2025 Tentative Agreement (TA), with over 80% of ballots cast in favor.

After nearly a year of determined negotiations, SMART-TD and UP reached a TA that mirrors the recently ratified national pattern agreement while securing additional, critical protections tailored for our UP members.

### What the Agreement Delivers

- Substantial wage increases — The contract provides a compounded wage increase of 18.77% over the five-year life of the agreement, as detailed in the national SMART-TD agreement ratified on October 30, 2025.
- Enhanced benefits & quality-of-life improvements — Members will see strengthened health benefits (medical, dental, vision), improved vacation accrual and other quality-of-life enhancements reflected in the national agreement.
- An end to the rail carrier's two-decade-long practice of deducting "outside earnings" from back pay awards in wrongful termination cases. This is a major win for fairness and financial security.
- Fully reinstated members are made whole, with reimbursed medical premiums and expenses incurred while awaiting arbitration decisions.
- Expanded meal allowances in recognition of the changing costs rail workers bear while on duty.

### A Strong Vote of Confidence

The decisive "yes" vote demonstrates members' trust in SMART-TD's bargaining team and the value placed on the protections and improvements secured under the TA. The overwhelming results affirm that the membership believes this contract moves the union and its members forward, materially improving wages, benefits and job security.

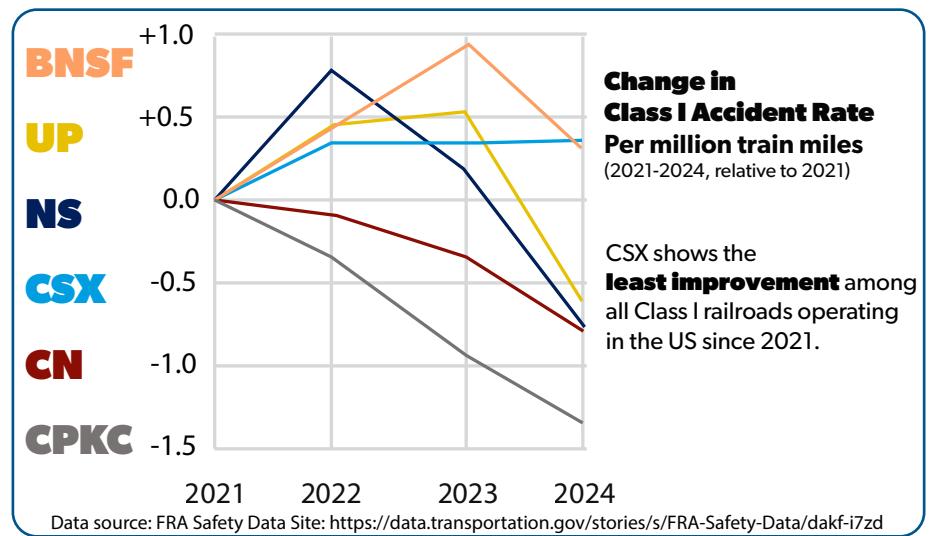
"This ratification reflects our members' unified voice and confidence in what was negotiated," said SMART-TD President **Jeremy Ferguson**. "The decisive support underscores a shared commitment to preserving good jobs, strong benefits and fairness for all members working on the Union Pacific. I want to thank all of the general chairpersons and their general committees from our Union Pacific properties for their hard work negotiating this agreement. Their leadership in this process will protect our people and their families' interests over the next five years."

### What Comes Next

With ratification confirmed, the TA becomes binding. UP-employed SMART-TD members will begin receiving the agreed wage increases, benefit enhancements and the new protections outlined in the agreement. Union leadership encourages all members to review the full text of the agreement. This includes the wage schedule, benefit provisions and protections. SMART-TD wants to ensure our UP members have a full understanding of what was won.

Our union remains committed to representing the interests of all its members. Though this agreement covers those on UP properties, the union continues its work across all railroads to ensure every member benefits from strong contracts now and into the future.

## CSX Hides From Poor Safety Performance



Data source: FRA Safety Data Site: <https://data.transportation.gov/stories/s/FRA-Safety-Data/dakf-i7zd>

Injuries are up, fatalities continue and transparency is down, yet CSX Transportation has requested that the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) allow it to continue hiding behind a five-year waiver that relieved it of the requirement to physically post workplace injury and illness reports in crew rooms.

This waiver was granted in 2020 on the condition that CSX would ensure equal access to this information. **They didn't. They haven't. And they had five years to get it right.**

Instead, they want to keep injury reports buried in an electronic system that, as every railroader already knows, most crewmembers cannot easily access while on duty. SMART-TD told the FRA the real story.

### Visible, Posted Safety Reports are Important

Before CSX won their 2020 waiver, injury and illness postings hung alongside job briefings, safety alerts and the rest of the information crews rely on as part of their daily rhythm. Bulletin board postings serve a significant purpose:

- They spark conversations.
- They create impromptu safety huddles.
- Crews share best practices to avoid repeating the same mistakes.
- They serve as real-time reminders of what was happening on the rails.

**Jared Cassity**, SMART-TD's national safety and legislative director, spent 14 years as both a conductor and locomotive engineer with CSX. He has seen firsthand how CSX corporate culture views safety.

"I hired out on CSX. I know the difference between a safety tool and a corporate smokescreen. Removing those postings didn't 'modernize' a thing. It silenced conversations, buried accountability and put every railroader at greater risk. CSX didn't fail to meet the waiver conditions by accident. They failed because transparency was never their goal to begin with."

And now they want another five years? That is not how this works.

Since CSX forced workers into this "electronic-only" shell game, the FRA's own safety data shows an increase in CSX's accidents and injuries while the rest of the Class I railroads trended down. If CSX thought hiding injury information would hide their safety problem, they were wrong.

### SMART-TD's Message to the FRA: Do the Right Thing

If the FRA allows CSX to continue down this road after five years of broken promises, then the message to every Class I railroad is clear: waiver conditions don't matter. Safety transparency doesn't matter. Workers' access to critical information doesn't matter. Promise the government regulators whatever they need to hear, then do whatever you want!

**We refuse to accept that and we trust the FRA won't either.**

"If the FRA rubber-stamps this extension, they're telling every railroad in America that safety rules are optional and honesty is negotiable," Cassity warned. "CSX is daring the FRA to prove that it actually prioritizes safety. For the sake of every railroader in this country, the FRA better not blink."

## 2026 COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS FROM AJFL

In its ongoing commitment to support the children and grandchildren of SMART-TD members, American Journey Financial Life (AJFL) is offering 50 four-year college scholarships and 50 two-year trade school scholarships at \$2,000 per student, per year.

The application period is open between January 15 and March 31, 2026.

The scholarships are awarded by chance and are renewable for up to four years after verifying enrollment for the fall term. Winners' names will be drawn after the application deadline. Students are required to maintain at least a 2.5 GPA to keep the scholarship.

### Eligibility Requirements

- Students age 25 or younger and a U.S. citizen.
- High school senior (or equivalent).
- Acceptance offered or already enrolled for at least 12 credit hours at an accredited institution of higher learning (university, college or junior college, nursing or technical school offering college credit).
- Child, grandchild of, or AJFL policyholder as of December 31, 2025.

Only one application per student will be accepted.

Learn more at: <https://ajlife.org/scholarships/>

Questions may also be directed to Nancy Dailey at 216-227-5290.

### REPORT ALL TRANSIT ASSAULTS VIA NEW FORM

If you've been threatened, harassed, or assaulted on the job, it is crucial to report the incident to SMART-TD.

Our Workplace Assault Reporting Form guarantees that every assault or attack is documented and treated with the seriousness and urgency it deserves.

These reports help BTAPS and SMART-TD lobby for stronger barriers, security personnel to prevent assaults, tougher penalties for attackers and greater support for victims.

The form is on the SMART-TD website. To find it, navigate to **Get Involved>Report a Worksite Issue** then look for the red "Workplace Assault Report" button.

In the words of the committee, "No one should have to start a shift wondering if they'll make it home safe. Violent incidents aren't 'part of the job.' They're part of a systemic failure to protect the men and women who keep our communities moving every single day."

A failure both SMART-TD and our BTAPS Committee are committed to correcting, but we need your help.

### Don't Stay Silent: Report It

### BROTHER SMITH ELECTED TO IOWA CITY COUNCIL

TAMA, Iowa — Brother **Chris Smith**, SMART-TD's Iowa safety & legislative director, is taking his trademark fight for working people from the rail yards to city hall. Smith was elected to an at-large seat on the Tama City Council in his first-ever campaign for public office.

His father served the city of Tama in the same role for 18 years. Watching his dad work to make Tama a better place through the 1990s left a lasting impression. "Seeing my dad serve taught me just how many people one person could help in that position."

Responsibility rooted in honesty, hard work and accountability is what drives Smith. "I look at the city's budget just like I do our members' dues money," he said. "I take pride in being a good steward of their contributions. Local governments owe taxpayers that same respect."

"Instead of being the noisy guy in the back with ideas on how other people could do the job better, I decided to do the job myself. I'm bringing the SMART-TD mentality to city hall," Smith said. "If one of us doesn't count, then none of us count. I'll fight for my community the same way I fight for our members."

### SUMMARY ANNUAL REPORT

#### OF THE SMART DISCIPLINE INCOME PROTECTION PROGRAM

This is a summary of the annual report for the SMART DISCIPLINE INCOME PROTECTION PROGRAM, EIN: 34-1031303, for the period January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024. The annual report has been filed with the Employee Benefits Security Administration, as required under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA).

#### BASIC FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The value of plan assets, after subtracting liabilities of the plan, was \$22,459,478 as of December 31, 2024 compared to \$21,183,948 as of January 1, 2024. During the plan year, the plan experienced an increase in its net assets of \$1,275,530. This increase includes unrealized appreciation and depreciation in the value of plan assets at the beginning of the year of the cost of assets acquired during the year. During the plan year, the plan had total income of \$6,773,333, including participant contributions of \$4,955,516 and gain on investments of \$1,817,817. Plan expenses were \$5,497,803. These expenses included \$389,393 in administrative expenses and \$5,108,410 in benefits paid to participants and beneficiaries.

#### YOUR RIGHTS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

You have the right to receive a copy of the full annual report, or any part thereof, on request. The items listed below are included in that report:

1. An accountant's report.
2. Financial information and information on payments to service providers.
3. Assets held for investment.

To obtain a copy of the full annual report, or any part thereof, write or call the Discipline Income Protection Program, SMART Transportation Division, 6060 Rockside Woods Blvd N, Suite 325, Independence, OH 44131; telephone 216-228-9400. The charge to cover copying costs will be \$13.00 for the full annual report or \$0.50 per page for any part thereof.

You also have the right to receive, on request and at no charge, a statement of the assets and liabilities of the plan and accompanying notes, or a statement of income and expenses of the plan and accompanying notes, or both. If you request a copy of the full annual report, these two statements and accompanying notes will be included as part of that report. These charges to cover the copying costs shown above does not include a charge for the copying of these portions of the report because these portions are furnished without charge.

You also have the legally protected right to examine the annual report at the main office of the plan, SMART Transportation Division, 6060 Rockside Woods Blvd N, Suite 325, Independence, OH 44131, and at the U.S. Department of Labor in Washington, D.C., or to obtain a copy from the U.S. Department of Labor upon payment of copying costs. Requests to the Department should be addressed to: U.S. Department of Labor, Employee Benefits Security Administration, Public Disclosure Room, 200 Constitution Avenue, NW, Suite N-1513, Washington, D.C. 20210.

### SUMMARY ANNUAL REPORT

#### OF THE SMART TD STAFF RETIREE HEALTH FUND

This is a summary of the annual report for the SMART TD STAFF RETIREE HEALTH FUND, EIN: 34-1031303, for the period January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024. The annual report has been filed with the Employee Benefits Security Administration, as required under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA).

#### BASIC FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The value of plan assets, after subtracting liabilities of the plan, was \$6,261,651 as of December 31, 2024, compared to \$5,462,325 as of January 1, 2024. During the plan year, the plan experienced an increase in its net assets of \$799,326. This increase includes unrealized appreciation and depreciation in the value of plan assets at the beginning of the year of the cost of assets acquired during the year. During the plan year, the plan had a total income of \$2,961,397 including contributions of \$2,648,588 and gain on investments of \$312,809. Plan expenses were \$2,162,071. These expenses included \$25,958 in administrative expenses and \$2,136,113 in benefits paid.

#### YOUR RIGHTS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

You have the right to receive a copy of the full annual report, or any part thereof, on request. The items listed below are included in that report:

1. Governing documents including insurance contracts and collective bargaining agreements
2. Annual report and Financials
3. Summary Plan Description

To obtain a copy of the full annual report, or any part thereof, write or call the office of the Plan Sponsor:

SMART

Plan Sponsor

1750 New York Avenue, 6th Floor

Washington, DC 20006

34-1031303 (Employer Identification Number) 216-228-9400

The fund office may make a reasonable charge for copies of the annual report.

You also have the legally protected right to examine the annual report at the main office of the plan:

SMART

1750 New York Avenue, 6th Floor

Washington, DC 20006

or the U.S. Department of Labor in Washington, D.C., or to obtain a copy from the U.S. Department of Labor upon payment of copying costs. Requests to the Department should be addressed to: U.S. Department of Labor, Employee Benefits Security Administration, Public Disclosure Room, 200 Constitution Avenue, NW, Suite N-1513, Washington, D.C. 20210.

## Railroader Healthcare Stable Amid Market Increases

At \$308.49 per month, railroaders' 2026 monthly healthcare contributions remain slightly below the \$309.21 that went into effect in 2023.

What is the rest of America paying? In March 2025, Forbes Magazine published data showing the steep cost of healthcare for Americans under unsubsidized private marketplace plans.

#### Monthly Premiums by Year\*

Year	Private	SMART-TD
2023	\$788	\$309.21
2024	\$870	\$309.21
2025	\$919	\$277.54
2026	\$1130	\$308.49

Rail members will pay a flat rate of \$308.49 per month in 2026. Our youngest members, who benefit from lower private insurance rates, would pay nearly 40% more for private insurance than our healthcare plan.

Est. 2025 Premiums by Age Group*		
Age	Private*	SMART-TD
21	\$810	\$277.54
27	\$848	\$277.54
30	\$919	\$277.54
40	\$1,035	\$277.54
50	\$1,446	\$277.54
60	\$2,197	\$277.54

\*Year-over-year ACA averages are based on Forbes published 2025 average for a 30-year-old with a platinum plan, modified by year-over-year premium changes as published by the state of Colorado for their healthcare marketplace.

"Statewide increases were 5.6% in 2025, 9.7% in 2024, 10.4% in 2023 and 1.1% in 2022." Actual rates for your state may vary.

# SMART TD Alumni

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

#### RAILROAD RETIREMENT BENEFITS

##### SET TO INCREASE IN JANUARY

Members who receive railroad retirement benefits will notice an increase that's set to take effective in January 2026. The change is due to a rise in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) from Q3 of 2024 and 2025.

Increases are factored into the Tier I and Tier II portions of a railroad retirement annuity.

The Tier 1 portion will go up by 2.8%, which is the same percentage as the CPI increase. The Tier II portion is set to increase by 0.9%.

Starting in January 2026, the average railroad retirement employee annuity will increase \$80 a month (\$3,636) and combined annuities for an employee and spouse will increase \$112 a month (\$5,249). The last increase took place in January 2025.

Widowed spouses who are eligible will see an increase of \$50 a month (\$2,109). However, if annuities are paid under the Railroad Retirement and Survivors' Improvement Act of 2001, annual cost-of-living adjustments will not go into effect until the annuity amount is surpassed by the amount that would have been paid under prior law.

#### 2026 RAILROAD RETIREMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE TAX CHANGES

The amounts of compensation subject to Railroad Retirement Tier I and Tier II payroll taxes will increase in 2026, while the tax rates on employers and employees will remain unchanged. In addition, unemployment insurance contribution rates paid by railroad employers will not include a surcharge, as continued improvement in the rail economy has kept the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Account at a healthy balance, according to the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB).

The Railroad Retirement Tier I payroll tax rate on covered rail employers and employees for 2026 remains 7.65%, identical to the Social Security tax rate. For withholding and reporting purposes, Tier I is divided into:

6.20% for retirement

1.45% for Medicare hospital insurance

**The maximum amount of an employee's earnings subject to the 6.20% Tier I retirement portion will increase from \$176,100 in 2025 to \$184,500 in 2026. As in previous years, there is no maximum on earnings subject to the 1.45% Medicare portion.**

An additional 0.9% Medicare payroll tax applies to individuals earning more than \$200,000, or \$250,000 for married couples filing jointly. Employers begin withholding the additional Medicare tax when an employee's wages exceed \$200,000. The final amount owed or refunded is calculated with the individual's federal income tax return.

Tier II tax rates are based on an average account benefits ratio reflecting the balance

of the Railroad Retirement system. By law, employee Tier II rates may range from 0% to 4.9%, while employer rates may vary between 8.2% and 22.1%, depending on funding levels.

**The maximum amount of earnings subject to Tier II taxes will increase from \$130,800 in 2025 to \$137,100 in 2026, while Railroad Retirement Tier II tax rates will remain unchanged for 2026:**

4.9% for employees

13.1% for employers

Employers (not employees) pay railroad unemployment insurance contributions, which are experience-rated by the employer. Under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act (RUIA), a surcharge is applied when the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Account balance falls to or below certain indexed thresholds.

The account balance was approximately \$405.3 million as of June 30, 2025, down from \$454.8 million the prior year. Surcharges are triggered when the balance is at or below \$100 million, indexed to \$173.0 million as of June 30, 2025. Because the account remains well above that threshold, no surcharge will apply in 2026, continuing the surcharge-free years of 2024 and 2025.

Unemployment insurance contribution rates for railroad employers in 2026 will range from 0.65% (minimum) to 12.0% (maximum, applied to monthly compensation up to \$2,150). This is an increase from \$2,065 in 2025.

In 2026, 91% of covered employers will pay the minimum 0.65% rate, 3% will pay the maximum 12.0% rate and new employers will pay 5.58%, reflecting the average contribution rate paid during 2022–2024.

#### 2026 Railroad Retirement & Unemployment Insurance Tax

Tax Type	Employee	Employer	Employee Max	Employer Max
Tier 1 – Medicare	1.45%	1.45%	No Maximum	No Maximum
Tier 1 – Railroad Retirement	6.20%	6.20%	\$184,500.00	\$11,439.00
Tier 2 – Railroad Retirement	4.90%	13.10%	\$137,100.00	\$17,948.10
Total	12.55%	20.75%	—	\$29,387.10

\* Additional Medicare Tax: Employees pay an extra 0.9% Medicare tax on earnings above \$200,000 (individual) or \$250,000 (joint filers). This additional tax is not reflected in the percentage rates above.

Tier I Medicare and Tier I Railroad Retirement tax rates are equivalent to the 2026 Social Security tax rates. Tier II Railroad Retirement tax rates do not apply to employees covered under Social Security

#### 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](mailto:arayner@smart-union.org) or visit [smart-union.org/resources/transportation-alumni/](http://smart-union.org/resources/transportation-alumni/)

## THE FINAL CALL

The 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	Member	City
2	Nero, Patrick S.	Genoa, Ohio
2	Wagner, Joseph E.	Columbia City, Ind.
195	Olson, Edmund B.	Palmyra, Mo.
202	Joslin, Glen J.	Montrose, Colo.
440	Staley, Donald C.	Loveland, Ohio
453	Lichtenwalter, Galen D.	Clinton, Ill.
645	Wolff, Lawrence E.	Mooers, N.Y.
656	Chesshir, Wendell P.	Sherwood, Ark.
744	Stephens, Dennis D.	Ft. Pierce, Fla.
792	Priebe, Thomas E.	Medina, Ohio
867	Peterson, Harlan W.	Des Moines, Iowa
934	McLennan, Ken P.	Las Cruces, N.M.
974	Mann, John A.	Hollow Rock, Tenn.
1011	Napier, Donald L.	Polkton, N.C.
1378	Myers, Donald F.	Dillsburg, Pa.
1445	O'Brien, Edward	Linden, N.J.
1447	Donovan, James P.	Waynesville, N.C.
1574	Booker, Frank J.	Buckeye, Ariz.
1598	Shirley, James N.	Douglasville, Ga.
1780	Nelson, Harold K.	Holden, Mo.

## IN MEMORIAM



**Tanya Perry**  
**Local 1565**  
**Hollywood, Calif.**

Sister Tanya Perry was killed on duty on Nov. 2, 2025 in Los Angeles.

A Metro bus operator, sister Perry was struck by a hit-and-run driver while on her layover between routes in the Eagle Rock neighborhood of Los Angeles. She was crossing the street in a marked crosswalk when the collision occurred.

This senseless tragedy has devastated her family, friends and fellow workers. Perry was only 50 years old and left behind her three children, who are now faced with unimaginable grief and loss.



**Steven Crowe II**  
**Local 1422**  
**Los Angeles, Calif.**

SMART-TD is mourning the tragic loss of Brother **Steven "Baby Crowe" Crowe II**, who was killed on the job on Dec. 3. Because his accident is an active federal investigation, our ability to comment on the circumstances of his passing is restricted.

We can share that Crowe was a beloved member of Local 1422 (Los Angeles) who hired on with Union Pacific in 2014. He was proud to follow in the railroading footsteps of his father, Steven Crowe Sr. (Local 1846, West Colton, Calif.).

Whether you knew him as "Baby Crowe," "Birdie," or "Brother Steve," Steven touched many lives and embodied what it means to be a true union brother.

"Steven was a wonderful union brother and friend to many in the crew rooms of Southern California, Yermo, California and Yuma, Arizona,"

"Tanya had a beautiful smile," said SMART-TD Local 1565 President **William Luckey**. "She was the kind of warm person who always had a hug for everyone; that made your day better. She was a sweetheart who made baked goods for the whole division and her positivity will be missed at Metro and especially in our local."

SMART-TD extends its deepest condolences to Sister Perry's family, friends and fellow members at Metro and Local 1565. We stand in solidarity and sorrow with all who knew and loved her.

reflected LCA-887B Local Chairperson **Anthony Ray**. "He will be missed dearly."

A warm and magnetic soul with a gift for storytelling (even if some of those stories went on a little too long), Crowe also loved punk music, spending time in nature and fellowship with those who were most important to him.

He was especially proud to be a "Clamper" with the Honorable Order of E Clampus Vitus (ECV), a historic fraternity whose unique blend of absurdist fun and deep commitment to brotherhood spoke to Crowe on a deeper level.

Crowe is survived by his wife, Theresa, three children (Dylan, Braden and Makensie), his father, Steve Crow Sr., his stepmother, Elizabeth "Beth" Crowe, his mother Joni, his sisters and extended family.



SMART-TD Local 1190 (Ludlow, Ky.) has a longstanding tradition of presenting a gold retirement bell to its members at the end of their careers.

Brother **Thomas D. Hein** (Local 1190) was set to receive his retirement bell in September of 2025 but sadly passed away nearly a year earlier in October of 2024.

As a 36-year member who served as both a Local Chairperson for LCA-888B and the Secretary for GCA-898 under General Chairperson **Tommy Gholson**, Brother Hein's union family was determined that he still receive his retirement award after his passing.

On December 9, 2025, Local 1190

presented Brother Hein's retirement bell to his wife, Paula and his sons, Zach and Jack. Belonging to a union is more than a contract and membership card; we stand together when we're here and honor one another when we're gone.

"It was an honor to present Brother Hein's retirement bell to his beloved family and continue this tradition," said Local 1190 President **Robert Munch**. "We miss him and his service to our union every day, but we wanted to show his loved ones that they're just as much a part of our organization as he was. Whether in life or death, the bonds of our union family run deep."



## Veteran Benefits Enhancement Act Protects Railroaders Who Served

Nov. 10, 2025 — SMART Transportation Division (SMART-TD) has endorsed Rep. Melanie Stansbury's newly introduced legislation, the Veteran Benefits Enhancement Act (H.R. 10109). Her bill ensures that military retirement pay is not classified as a "social insurance payment" under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act (RUIA). This technical clarification will prevent veterans working in the railroad industry from having their unemployment benefits unfairly reduced.

For too long, veterans who worked for America's railroads have had their hard-earned military retirement benefits reduced by the amount they collect from Railroad Retirement Board unemployment benefits. The Veteran Benefits Enhancement Act closes this loophole, ensuring that no veteran's military service becomes a financial disadvantage.

"Service to our country is not something we should ever take for granted, nor should it be held against anyone," said SMART-TD President and U.S. Army veteran **Jeremy Ferguson**. "Our brothers and sisters who wore the uniform and now keep our economy moving deserve the full benefits they've earned, both as veterans and as railroaders. The DD-214 they carry is a badge of courage and selflessness, not a target. We are proud to

stand with Congresswoman Stansbury in this fight to right that wrong."

SMART-TD's National Safety and Legislative Director **Jared Cassity** emphasized the union's longstanding partnership with Congresswoman Stansbury on this issue.

"We worked side-by-side with Rep. Stansbury when she first introduced this bill last Congress," Cassity said. "Unfortunately, it didn't have the chance to become law before that session ended. When she decided to reintroduce it, her office came straight to SMART-TD to renew our partnership. This time, we're not just endorsing the bill—we're working Capitol Hill to make sure it gets across the finish line. Our veterans deserve nothing less."

The introduction of H.R. 10109 stands as a testament that the value we place on our veterans is not symbolic: it's a driving force in our union.

SMART-TD represents thousands of veterans across the rail industry. These men and women answered the call to serve and continue to sacrifice daily to keep America's supply chains running.

"This legislation is about fairness, respect and gratitude," Ferguson added. "It's about making sure no veteran has to choose between the benefits they earned defending our country and the benefits they earned keeping it running."

## NEW BOSTON RRB OFFICE LOCATION

As of October 17, SMART-TD members and retirees who are served by the Railroad Retirement Board Boston District Office can visit the new location at the following address:

John W. McCormack Post Office and Courthouse  
5 Post Office Square, Suite 170044  
Boston, MA 02109

The new office is located a few blocks away from its previous space and is more centrally situated in the downtown area. Offices are open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday and appointments, although not required, can be made by calling 877-772-5772. To send an email, visit RRB.gov, click on "Field Office Locator," then select your local office for more details.

# FEATURED PHOTO SHOWCASE



**Jacob Vogelsang** out of Local 1328 (Louisville, Ky.) took this picture of the Aurora Borealis in Lawrenceburg, Ky. while heading home after his shift.

SMART-TD is always on the lookout for great photographs of work-related scenes! Share your favorite shots and your photo may be featured in the next issue of SMART Transportation News. Send high resolution originals to [news\\_td@smart-union.org](mailto:news_td@smart-union.org) along with your name, local and what is going on in the photo. Remember to follow your employer's policies regarding use of cameras/electronics. Terms and conditions apply, visit [smart-union.org](http://smart-union.org) for all the details.

## From the Iron Rails to Carnegie Hall



ALLIANCE, NEB. — Aaron "A.J." Hamburger, Jr. will take the stage at the legendary Carnegie Hall in New York City as part of the National Honors Bands Performance Series. A.J. is the son of BNSF conductor and SMART-TD Local 934 (Alliance, Neb.) Vice Local Chairperson **Aaron Hamburger**. On February 8, 2026, out of more than 10,000 applicants worldwide, A.J. will join only 350 other students on stage.

He will perform on his clarinet with the Honors Band, a distinction that recognizes the very best young musicians worldwide. His nomination came from his middle school band director, Shannon Kinsella, whose mentorship helped spark A.J.'s passion for music.

After being nominated as an eighth grader, A.J. then recorded four audition pieces in the summer before his freshman year at Alliance High School. A.J.'s performance earned him a place among musicians who are typically high school upperclassmen.

Music runs deep in the Hamburger family. Aaron Sr. himself played

trombone in high school and college, earning a scholarship to attend Western Nebraska Community College, where he performed before beginning his railroad career.

A.J. is being recognized by the National Honors Bands Performance Series for his ability to play his primary instrument (the clarinet), but he doesn't just play one instrument. He plays eight of them! From woodwinds to brass and percussion, he's been the kind of student every band director dreams of: a musical "utility player" who can fill in wherever needed.

Even as a freshman, A.J. has stood out as the go-to musician who makes the band stronger, deeper and more dynamic.

Railroading is a profession defined by a shared goal: providing opportunity for loved ones.

We go to work every day, fully aware of the dangers. When we see our kids taking advantage of the opportunities our labor provides and when they chase their dreams, it makes the long nights and missed holidays worth it. It justifies the sacrifice.

## Leadership Visits NS Trainees



MCDONOUGH, GA. — On Tuesday, Oct. 28, SMART Transportation Division **President Jeremy Ferguson**, along with a delegation of national, general committee and local leaders, joined Norfolk Southern (NS) new hires at the company's McDonough Training Center. The impromptu town hall brought together nearly 100 fourth- and fifth-week trainees with the union that will have their backs every step of their careers.

The event was made possible thanks to brothers **Kelvin Hill** and **Greg Glenn**. Both men are longtime NS employees and fixtures in the Atlanta area. Leading by example, Hill and Glenn go above and beyond to make sure new hires understand not just their job duties, but also the lifestyle, expectations that come with a railroad career and the support that's a hallmark of their membership in SMART-TD.

When recent news of the proposed Union Pacific/Norfolk Southern merger sparked understandable anxiety among the trainees, Hill and Glenn saw an opportunity. With SMART-TD's

Regional Training Seminar (RTS) taking place in nearby Atlanta that week, they reached out to arrange a special visit.

Their goal was simple: to get answers for our new brothers and sisters straight from the top.

"A lot of these men and women have been worried about what's next for them," Hill said. "Greg and I knew that if we could get our leadership in the room, the people who are actually at the negotiating table, it could give these new brothers and sisters the clarity and confidence they deserve."

Their initiative quickly grew into a union-wide show of solidarity. Joining President Ferguson were Vice President **Brent Leonard**, NS General Chairpersons **Tommy Gholson** (GCA-898) and **Nick Greficz** (GCA-687) along with several vice general chairpersons, local chairpersons and other local officers who were in town for the regional training event.

By the time the Q&A began, the room was filled with experience, leadership and genuine care for the next generation of railroaders.