

# Railroad Jobs: A Highly Skilled & Compensated Workforce

The industry attracts employees from a wide range of backgrounds — from high school graduates to those holding graduate degrees — to help safely transport the raw materials, products and finished goods that sustain the nation's economy and people.

Railroads provide the opportunity to build lifelong careers in fields such as engineering and dispatching, law enforcement, information technology and industrial development. And with a strong track record of hiring America's veterans, rail companies are military-friendly employers.

Because of high wages and benefits, technical training and professional growth opportunities, freight rail employees often stay in the industry for their entire careers. In fact, many have family railroad legacies that stretch back generations.

**Safe and well-paid:** Freight rail is one of the safest industries in the U.S., with employee injury rates lower than trucking, airlines, agriculture, mining, manufacturing, construction and grocery stores. Per Class I railroad employee, the injury rate has dropped 63% since 2000 and is at an [all-time low](#).

In 2020, Class I freight rail employee compensation, including benefits, averaged about \$135,700 per year. Railroad retirees are covered by the Railroad Retirement System, which is separate from social security and is funded by railroads and their employees. In 2021, nearly 500,000 beneficiaries received \$13.4 billion in benefits from Railroad Retirement.

**Supported by technology:** Advanced [training centers](#) with simulators and virtual reality enable employees to practice real-life skills in a safe, rigorous and controlled environment, while [innovations](#) like remote control locomotives and high-definition cameras allow employees to perform their jobs effectively from a distance where possible, keeping them out of harm's way.

**Military-friendly:** Railroads have been a vital partner in [U.S. military operations](#) for nearly 200 years. They have transported troops and supplies, hauled the raw materials for weapons and planes, and continue to actively hire veterans.

**Union representation:** Approximately 85% of Class I rail employees are unionized, and rail employees are represented by one or more of a dozen different labor unions. The Railway Labor Act governs collective bargaining between freight railroads and their employees. The gains in the [most recent labor agreements](#) are significant, including historic wage increases, best-in-class healthcare, and meaningful progress in creating more predictable, scheduled work shifts.

**Actively hiring:** Class I train and engine (T&E) employment in April 2023 was 51,556, which is up 504 (1.0%) over March 2023 and up 5,789 (12.6%) over January 2022. As of April 2023, freight railroads are close to a pre-pandemic T&E employment number, which was 51,801.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Freight rail employees are highly skilled professionals who are among the best-compensated workers in the nation. In 2020, Class I freight rail employee compensation, including benefits, averaged about \$135,700 per year.
- Freight railroads are committed to safeguarding their workforce and invest in training and new technologies to help make sure railroaders go home safely. The freight rail employee injury rate is lower than in most other industries and is at an all-time low.
- Freight rail is actively hiring, and the Class I train and engine (T&E) employment in April 2023 was 51,556, which is up 12.6% over January 2022.

[Find Jobs](#)

# The Average Freight Rail Employee Earns 64% More Than the Average U.S. Employee



Average Rail Employee  
**\$135,700**  
 2020 Wages & Benefits



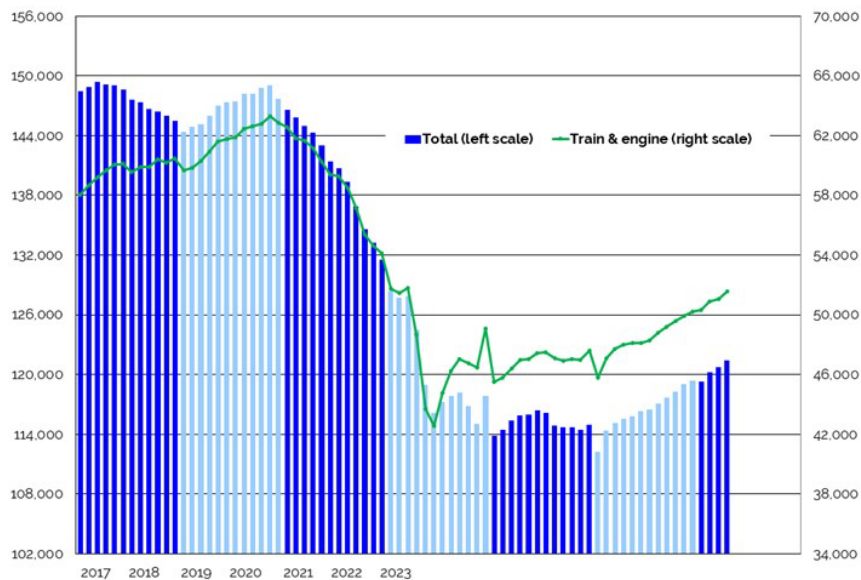
Average U.S. Employee  
**\$87,000**  
 2020 Wages & Benefits

Freight rail employees are among the highest-paid in the nation. Employee compensation for U.S. Class I freight railroad employees, including benefits, averaged \$135,700 in 2020. Railroad jobs range from locomotive engineers, train dispatchers, and maintenance professionals to law enforcement, IT and industrial development experts.

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, AAR

## Railroads Are Hiring

Class I Railroad Employment: January 2017-April 2023



Class I train and engine (T&E) employment in April 2023 was 51,556, which is up 504 (1.0%) over March 2023 and up 5,789 (12.6%) over January 2022. As of April 2023, freight railroads are close to a pre-pandemic T&E employment number, which was 51,801.

Data are not seasonally adjusted. Source: Surface Transportation Board