Since the national round of bargaining concluded in December 2022, each of the largest Class I railroads have been at the table with their local unions to move the ball forward on several issues, including paid sick leave and scheduling predictability. While work continues, good faith negotiations have yielded benefits, delivered wins, and improved quality of life for rail employees and their families while positioning railroads to continue in their role as the backbone of the economy.

Beyond reaching new agreements, the latest employment data demonstrates railroads have continued hiring the workforce necessary to support the supply chain and our employees. Class I employment in April 2023 reached 121,391, marking an impressive 8.2% increase since January 2022 and the highest level since April 2020.

These developments at the bargaining table and elsewhere reinforce what folks in the industry have always known. Railroading is important, skilled work that powers the economy while also helping employees support a family with great pay, first-class benefits, and a secure retirement.

**Sick Leave**

As of June 6th, 2023, most unionized employees at the nation’s largest railroads are now covered by agreements providing individual paid sick leave days. Through the bargaining process, unions and railroads have reached more than 40 new agreements to provide this benefit to employees represented by the ten major rail unions that did not previously have them. The individual paid sick leave benefits added by these agreements supplement the pre-existing short- and long-term paid sickness benefits already in effect across the industry.

While the agreements are not all the same, they have been reached through the collective bargaining process in partnership with rail labor. Negotiations continue between those carriers and unions that have not yet reached agreements.
Scheduling Predictability

While many operating craft employees already have highly predictable schedules that include designated work and rest days, the recent national agreements with BLET and SMART-TD also provide an opportunity for the parties to enhance the quality of life for those conductors and engineers who do not enjoy the same level of predictability through local negotiations regarding job assignment and work schedule rules.

Railroads and these unions have made significant progress in these discussions – and several comprehensive agreements to modernize scheduling practices and provide employees with more predictable schedules have already been reached.

High Compensation

The most recent historic deal solidified railroading as one of the most lucrative professions in the U.S. economy, marking a significant milestone. The national agreement ushered in a series of substantial benefits, including a remarkable 24% wage increase spanning the five-year period from 2020 to 2024.

Additionally, employees received $1,000 annually in service recognition bonuses, along with an immediate lump sum payout averaging $16,000 per individual. The comprehensive compensation package, inclusive of pay and benefits, is projected to reach an impressive annual value of $160,000 by the conclusion of the contract period. Furthermore, the agreement introduced enhanced features to an already exemplary healthcare plan, featuring low-cost sharing for workers. Employees also now enjoy an extra paid personal leave day each year.

Improved Best-in-Class Healthcare

The industry’s benefits plan has achieved the highest level of recognition, attaining Platinum status as defined by the Affordable Care Act. This translates to employees continuing to receive top-tier healthcare, consistently ranked among the nation’s best plans, and featuring some additional enhanced benefits.

Notably, employee contributions are fixed at a reasonable 15% per month. In 2023, the nationally bargained health and welfare plans for the unionized railroad workforce are provided substantial advantages, with significantly lower member cost-sharing compared to benchmark data, reaffirming the commitment to prioritizing the well-being of the workforce.