

CSX advances major restructuring of operations, eliminating dozens of train crew jobs

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On February 6, CSX, a Class I freight rail company that operates across the Eastern, Southeastern and Midwestern United States, issued a proposal to completely restructure its workforce operations. The plan would apply to thousands of employees, primarily trainmen, who are under the authority of the Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers Transportation Division (SMART-TD).

The “Section 4” briefing is also known as an Article I, Section 4 notice of the New York Dock procedural framework. The latter was adopted by the now-defunct Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) in 1979 and is currently upheld by the Surface Transportation Board (STB). A notice of this type represents the company’s official intent to implement operational changes outside of routine contract negotiations, typically associated with mergers, acquisitions and consolidation. It opens the beginning of the negotiation period between the unions and the company on said changes.

The document calls for the consolidation of all its operational territories, which are referred to as “seniority districts” among employees. These districts are geographical regions wherein routes and schedules are determined and assigned to workers, and important day-to-day procedures and rules are laid out with respect to corresponding bargaining agreements. Under the current system, workers may not take on assignments outside of their district unless under emergency provisions, and not without losing benefits accrued by their seniority, or years with the company.

Under the new system, CSX railmen would undergo a “rearrangement of forces,” with the seniority system being determined system-wide rather than by region. This means that railmen will have to work in a wider geographic area, doubtlessly meaning longer shifts, increased workloads and fewer crew changes. Many workers will be forced to upend their current routes, schedules and assignments and dramatic changes to their lives and daily routines.

The three major CSX districts are the Northern Mid Atlantic

District (NMAD), containing roughly all of the terrain between Chicago, Albany, New York and Richmond Virginia, the Baltimore & Ohio Chicago Terminal (B&OCT) district, which covers a narrow corridor of land between Chicago and Baltimore, and the Consolidated Southern Region Agreement (CSRA) district, which roughly covers all of the southern terrain of the country which lies west of Chicago.

The proposal outlines how the merging of the districts will “improve efficiency,” specifically in relation to several key locales and passages that currently exist on the borders of operational territories. These include Evansville, IL, Chicago Terminal, Cincinnati, Columbus, Indianapolis, Richmond, VA and Huntington, WV, which are all points that currently necessitate crew change due to the difference in regional agreements.

Through these changes, CSX claims it will “abolish” a total of 67 trainmen positions, with Richmond and Cincinnati bearing the brunt of the cuts. Despite the significant reduction in jobs, the briefing repeatedly insists—no fewer than five times—that “CSX expects no employees will be furloughed, as positions that are currently unfilled and vacancies created through natural attrition would also be available for bid.”

The mood of workers toward the proposed deal is overwhelmingly hostile. A CSX conductor told the WWS, “I’ve been working for the company for twenty years and I’m not that far away from retirement. It’s upsetting that after all I’ve put in, they’re all of a now making all of these changes, and I’m just expected to deal with it. Everybody in my yard is in a really somber mood about this.”

One worker on a Reddit thread covering the tentative agreement declared, “[s]ystem wide seniority would be nice [for younger workers] but my overall opinion is [screw] that. The ulterior motive is obviously furloughs in the long run.” Another user stated, “I’m having a hard time understanding why anyone would vote for this? This only benefits the Company.” Another worker commented, “[s]urprised it took this long. Eventually they will have system forced assignments...”

The Section 4 notice comes within context of a major battle

that has unfolded in the rail industry nationwide in the past several years. In mid-2022, after a protracted struggle by roughly 100,000 rank and file railroaders in which they overwhelmingly voted to strike against a sellout deal advanced by the unions, the Biden administration and Congress intervened to force the acceptance of the agreement against the will of the rank and file, blocking a nationwide job action.

The 2022 contract struggle saw the emergence of the Railroad Workers Rank and File Committee (RWRFC) as the spearhead of the opposition to the sellout deal, in defiance of the union bureaucrats which were carrying the negotiations. These included SMART president Jeremy Ferguson, Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWED) head Tony Cardwell and Dennis Pierce of Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET).

During the negotiations, the RWRFC held large-scale online meetings of rank and file railroaders, organized informational pickets at major yards, mobilized broader support, and wrote and published regular statements that covered developments, advanced demands, and answered the lies, slander and manipulation promoted by the bureaucracy. The committee based itself on the principle that workers have the right to prepare any and all actions necessary to defend and improve their living and working conditions, and that they must do so in solidarity with their class brothers and sisters around the world.

The RWRFC played a major role in the rejection of the agreement brokered by the Biden administration, dealing a major blow to the rail companies, the union bureaucracy, as well as the entire political establishment. Roughly 30,000 SMART workers, primarily conductors and yardmen, voted against the White House-sponsored deal, which ultimately led to the intervention of Congress to block a national strike in December of 2022.

Drawing lessons from the 2022 experience, the rail carriers, in collaboration with union leaders and the Biden administration, were determined to prevent a similar surge of opposition during the 2025 contract negotiations.

The anti-worker Railway Labor Act (1926) stipulates that railroad contracts do not technically “expire”; instead, they become “amendable,” with existing conditions remaining in effect until a new agreement is reached. Anticipating that the 2022 contract would become amendable on December 31 of last year, the rail companies and the rail union bureaucracy, in unprecedented fashion, strategically bypassed national agreements. Instead, they issued numerous nearly-identical tentative contracts, divided by trade, company and region.

Already, many of these agreements, with General Wage Increases (GWI) of around 17.5 per cent over five years — less than what was already rejected and forcibly passed in 2022 — have been voted down by workers. In October, CSX maintenance-of-way workers voted down their tentative agreement by a margin of two to one. Conductors at Norfolk Southern (NS) also recently rejected a 2025 contract by a

margin of 81 percent.

At the same time, the union apparatus is fighting tooth and nail to ensure the passage of the deals being demanded by the companies, which they understand will be incredibly profitable at the expense of workers livelihoods.

SMART-TD contracts for Burlington North Santa Fe (BNSF) rail line have already appeared which sanction one-man train crews, as well the creation of the new, Road Utility Position (RUP), which is an obvious move toward eliminating the conductor position entirely.

Cardwell has attempted to falsely convince workers that the passage of these rotten agreements is already a fait accompli. Ferguson, who in 2022 lyingly claimed that a national rail strike would be unconstitutional, denounced opposition to the 2025 contracts as the result of actions outside agitators, or “bad faith actors.”

Rail workers should have no doubt about the Trump administration’s stance towards them: it is one of vicious hostility. This is clearly demonstrated by the actions of Trump’s appointee, Elon Musk, the world’s richest man, infamous for imposing savage austerity attacks on his own employees.

Musk has already orchestrated a massive purge, eliminating tens of thousands of government jobs. Trumps fascistic declaration of war on immigrants in the US is part and parcel of his efforts to eviscerate the constitution and destroy every major gain that has been won by the working class over the past century and a half.

It is urgently necessary for rail workers to fight to build the RWRFC, not only to mobilize opposition the sellout contract, but to build the power of rank and file workers everywhere. The committee has proven crucial in mobilizing opposition to sellout contracts and unfavorable working conditions, as demonstrated in the 2022 struggle and the recent rejections of tentative agreements.

It must continue to play a pivotal role in organizing against attacks on wages, living standards, and working conditions for all rail workers, including the fight against the CSX restructuring at the expense of employees. Moreover, it must aim to coordinate with other similar workplace committees across various industries, both nationally and internationally, not only to fight for better conditions, but also for the defense democratic and social rights as a whole.



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