Freight railroads reach accord with unions

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

WASHINGTON - The nation's major freight railroads and a coalition of seven rail unions reached tentative agreement Wednesday on a new contract covering wages, benefits and other issues. The agreement with the Rail Labor Bargaining Coalition is the first to have been reached in the current round of bargaining.

The Coalition represents more than 66,000 unionized workers or about 46 percent of rail employees covered in negotiations that began in November of 2004. Coalition members include two of the nation's largest rail unions, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET), and the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employes (BMWE), both members of the Teamsters' Rail Conference and together representing about 54,000 workers in the negotiations.

The other Coalition unions are the American Train Dispatchers Association, the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen, the National Conference of Firemen & Oilers, the Sheet Metal Workers International Association and the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers and Helpers.

Details of the agreement were not released pending ratification votes by members of the seven unions.

"The agreement with the Coalition demonstrates that voluntary bargaining continues to work in the rail industry," said Robert F. Allen, chairman of the National Carriers' Conference Committee, the railroads' bargaining agent. "While this agreement is the first in the current bargaining round, we are confident that it will set the pattern for successful resolution of negotiations with the other rail unions."

Allen thanked the National Mediation Board's Terri Brown, whose work and steadfast commitment over the last two years helped the parties reach agreement.

More than 30 railroads, including BNSF, CSX, Kansas City Southern, Norfolk Southern and Union Pacific, are currently in national bargaining with 13 rail unions.