

Class I roads make official their desire for one-man crews

Opening move in labor negotiations likely to meet stiff resistance

By [Justin Franz](#) | November 5, 2019

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A crew member returns to the locomotive after lining a switch at Canadian Pacific's yard in Bensenville, Ill. Class I railroads have formally introduced a proposal for one-man crews on road trains.

TRAINS: David Lassen

WASHINGTON — After hinting at it for months, Class I railroads have officially asked that single-person crews be part of a new national contract with a coalition of a dozen labor unions.

The request — formally outlined in the Section 6 notice issued last Friday [see ["Freight railroads issue bargaining notice to unions to launch new rounds of labor talks,"](#) *Trains News Wire*, Nov. 1, 2019] — will undoubtedly be met with stiff resistance from union officials who say single-person crews are a non-starter.

In the [seven-page Section 6 notice](#), railroads call for conductors to be taken out of the locomotive cab to become a “ground-based” position. The plan is similar to one that BNSF Railway negotiated with SMART-TD General Committee GO-001 back in 2014 that called for having a single-person aboard each train and a conductor in an automobile working with multiple trains on a specific territory. That proposal was later rejected by a 5-to-1 margin in a committee-wide vote.

In the new notice, the railroads argue that single-person crews are necessary for the industry to remain competitive.

“Perhaps the most glaring example of our need for modernization concerns the size and makeup of train crews,” the notice reads. “In order to take full advantage of new investments in modern technology, reduce human error and better align operational costs with other industries, railroads propose to redeploy conductors from the cab of the locomotive to ground-based positions on territories where PTC or equivalent technologies are enabled. Redeploying employees to ground-based positions in these territories will safely and more efficiently meet the industry’s operational and service requirements while providing those employees with higher quality-of-life jobs that allow more employees to spend their nights at home after shifts rather than at hotels.”

Unions counter that the push toward single-person crews is instead a way to eliminate jobs while increasing the dangers facing the employees that remain.

Earlier this fall, a coalition of railroads sued SMART-TD in federal court alleging that the union was refusing to negotiate on crew size at the national level. The union argues that crew size should be dealt with at the local level with individual union branches.