



**TRAINING,
SAFETY, JOB
SECURITY AND
A SURPRISING
ARRAY OF
TASKS MAKE UP
IBEW MEMBERS'
WORK ON THE
RAILROADS**

Powering the Railroads




One hundred years ago, railroads were the uncontested kings of transportation in North America. Rail lines linked the vast continent and were the only reliable, safe way to ship all manner of goods and transport passengers from New York to California, from Halifax to Vancouver.

Today, jet travel has supplanted railroads as the passenger mode of choice, and the highway system is the principal venue for product transportation. But railroads still have a very definite place in the economic life of North America. In the United States, approximately 40 percent of all freight is shipped by rail, while in Canada, the figure is 71 percent. IBEW members, working in one of the most important crafts on the railroads, play a major role in keeping this vital mode of transportation rolling.


IBEW members in the Railroad Branch work in nearly every state and province. They perform a wide variety of tasks that keep the highly technical rail system and the older and newer generations of locomotives operating at peak efficiency (see "Railroading, IBEW Style" on the adjoining page).

When it comes to issues affecting their working lives, the IBEW's railroad members have much in common with their brothers and sisters in other industries. Technology, especially telecommunications technology, plays an increasingly important role on the modern railroad (An engine hauling a million tons of freight had better have excellent communications with the dispatching center and other trains.). Such changes


Local 134 members (front to back) Joyce Cole, Ron Oclon, Mike Stevenson and Eric Carter remove cable from trunking as part of a project to renew all signal equipment and rail switches at Chicago's Union Station.



**Electrician
E.L. Mercer of
Local 1923,
Hamlet, North
Carolina, plugs
m.u. jumper
between
locomotives.**



**Maintenance
Electrician Jim
Peterson of
Local 452,
Burlington,
Iowa, working
on a Mig wire
feed welder.**



**CP Signal and
communications
wireman Robert
Leduc of Local 2017,
Montreal, lays
down plastic pipes
for the passing of
fiber optic cables
in Ste-Anne de
Bellevue, Quebec.**

have created the need and the opportunity for increased training and skill upgrading among the Brotherhood's railroad members, just as similar factors have been at work in other IBEW-represented industries. The IBEW is also involved in efforts to study and develop recommendations on the use of new technology to chart the movement of trains in order to increase the safety of those working on the rails and in the yards.

Another safety issue lies in the fact that railroads also haul more and more hazardous materials than ever before. Potential exposure to such materials represents a new damage against which railroad employees must protect themselves. National legislation and increased training are two methods by which the IBEW Railroad Branch is dealing with this issue.

The rail industry has not been immune from the wave of mergers and buyouts that has swept across North American industry. As with other branches, such activity among the big carriers has created pressure for the downsizing of the work force, while not eliminating the work itself. Mergers have also taken place across borders, as the recent purchase of the Illinois Central Railroad by Canadian National illustrates. The merged carrier now offers rail service from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico.

All of these issues will affect IBEW members and all railroad workers as the industry enters a new century. In upcoming issues, the *IBEW Journal* will explore these and other issues in greater depth and report on the recent IBEW Railroad Conference. ☐

RAILROADING, IBEW STYLE

(Ed. Note—The following piece was submitted by Brother L.W. Kurrasch, Jr., Recording Secretary of IBEW Local 1984, Waycross, Georgia)

It is really amazing, when people ask me what I do for a living, to see the blank looks I get when I tell them I am an electrician for the railroad. This same response even comes from brother electricians, who work in construction or for power companies.

The next time the crossing arms come down, warning you of an approaching train, and you get stuck in traffic waiting for that train to go by, just think of the people who keep that train moving, the members of the IBEW.

While you sit there in your car or truck, the first things you see are the crossing arms and the warning lights blinking at you. In many cases, these are built, installed, maintained, and repaired by IBEW members. You might also notice that the old phone lines that used to follow the tracks are missing. These are being replaced by microwave dishes that provide instantaneous communications between the locomotive engineer and the railroad dispatcher, who may be hundreds of miles away.

As the locomotive horn blares in your ears, you see the headlights glaring at you and even an extra pair of headlights blinking at you, do you ever think about the people who work on the locomotives? Well they are union brothers and sisters, working on a union job, on union made locomotives.

The locomotive electricians are proud, highly skilled electricians who must mas-

ter many different difficult fields of electricity. When a locomotive comes to the shops, the electricians must perform all necessary maintenance and repairs in a timely and efficient manner. This might include checking all the lights and safety equipment, testing radios or global positioning links with satellites, and troubleshooting and repairing miles of wiring running through the locomotive.

The locomotive electrician uses calculators, laptop computers, and prints, as well as screwdrivers and wrenches. We work on the humblest of the yard switch-engines to the most powerful 6,000 horsepower AC locomotives. We work on DC circuits, AC circuits, fiber optics, radio equipment, microwave systems, and computers that control everything the locomotive does.

Twenty-four hours a day, 7 days a week, including holidays, we are at work to keep this nation's freight moving to market, and passengers going to work or home.

Finally, when the train is clearing the crossing, you may notice on the rear knuckle of the last car, a red flashing light. This is not only a warning light, but also a radio transmitter that lets the engineer know what the air pressure on the train is, direction of travel, and distance traveled and that everything is OK with the rest of the train.

When the crossing arms raise up, the lights quit blinking, and traffic starts to move, think of the railroad electrician in passing, and remember that these men and women of the IBEW are your brothers and sisters in the union and proud of it. ☐