



# Rail Jobs Report

The Value and Opportunities  
in Railroading



ASSOCIATION OF  
AMERICAN RAILROADS

# Freight Rail: Careers that Deliver

Freight railroads are an integral part of the national transportation network of trains, trucks, pipelines and barges that moves 59 tons of goods per American every year — everything from the food we eat to the cars we drive. They support nearly every sector of the economy and operate 24/7 to keep business — and American life — moving, which could not be done without the diligent work of rail employees.

In this report, you will find key data and personal stories from railroad employees illustrating the benefits and opportunities of a career in freight railroading. Railroads offer opportunities to build stable and lifelong careers that keep businesses and communities moving forward. From leading compensation, a secure retirement and quality benefits to opportunities for career development and advancement for all types of graduates, America's freight railroads provide what our employees need to build fulfilling and rewarding careers.

This report highlights more than just numbers; it spotlights the people who make us who we are. From a father and son with a combined 85 years of service on the rails to military veterans and former law enforcement officers who have built a career keeping the railroads and our customers' products safe, our employees' stories showcase the rewarding careers that railroading offers.

## Working Collaboratively with Unions

- More than 80% of Class I rail employees are unionized, **making freight rail one of the most highly organized of all American industries.** Class I railroads are the largest U.S. freight railroads and include BNSF, CN, CPKC, CSX, Norfolk Southern and Union Pacific.
- Through its **National Carriers' Conference Committee (NCCC)**, the National Railway Labor Conference (NRLC) represents many U.S. freight railroads in national (multi-employer) negotiations with the 12 major rail labor organizations.
- The most recent **national collective bargaining agreement**, covering 2020–2024, ushered in a series of substantial compensation increases, including a historic 24% wage increase. More than 30 railroads and 12 major rail unions participated.

## The Railroad is this Nation's Backbone

### Joshua Bednarz



Joshua Bednarz saw how his father's job at the railroad provided his family with a great career. As a BNSF engineer, Joshua likes the ability to travel to different places and experience new things. He values the contributions he makes to the country: "We are an integral part of bringing so many different items to where they need to go."

# Building a Lifelong Career in Railroads

Freight rail offers more than just a job; it provides a pathway to a fulfilling career that supports a good life for employees and their families. With competitive pay, comprehensive benefits and significant paid time off, rail employees can achieve long-term job stability while taking advantage of professional growth opportunities. The industry is known for its long employee tenures — often far exceeding those in other sectors — reflecting the satisfaction and commitment that come with a career in railroading.

Employees have access to professional development opportunities across various fields, from operations and engineering to technology to enable growth and advancement opportunities within the industry.

Additionally, the rail industry actively supports military veterans transitioning to civilian roles, offering on-the-job training and career advancement that supports employees with a variety of different educational and professional backgrounds.

## 13 years:

Median tenure of railroad employees (compared to 3.9 years for private sector workers).

## \$135,000 to nearly \$190,000:

The total average value of Class I craft railroad employee annual pay and benefit package.

## 120,399:

Total Class I rail employment in September 2024.

## About 1 in 6

rail employees are veterans.

## Railroading Runs in the Family



**Amanda Pequin**

According to Amanda Pequin, CPKC dispatcher, "You will never know the camaraderie, satisfaction or pride that comes with being a part of this community if you don't just jump in with both feet."

She followed her father into a career in railroads, and she's never looked back. Her passion for her work is contagious, because she finds it so rewarding. "I think being a railroader means being committed at a higher level than most jobs."

## From Apprentice to Trainmaster



**Daniel Ryland**

CPKC Trainmaster Daniel Ryland has been railroading for 17 years. He started his career as an apprentice railcar repairman and now serves as a terminal trainmaster where he oversees a host of activities at a railroad yard. They include planning how to handle the inbound and outbound traffic, assigning crews and providing safety briefings, coordinating work with the motive power and mechanical departments and being an all-around troubleshooter to make sure the yard forces have everything they need for a successful journey.

# Leading Pay and Benefits

Railroads offer wages that help employees build successful lives and provide for their families. Our competitive pay is part of the reason generations of families seek out careers on the rails. The most recent round of national agreements (concluded in 2022) further strengthened railroad compensation, with a historic 24% wage increase over five years (2020-2024). Starting July 2024, most Class I railroad craft employees began earning between \$90,000 to \$140,000 in annual wages (depending on their craft), with an average of about \$111,000. The total average value of Class I railroad craft employee annual pay and benefit package (including healthcare, paid time off and retirement programs) now ranges from about \$135,000 to almost \$190,000, with an average of \$160,000.

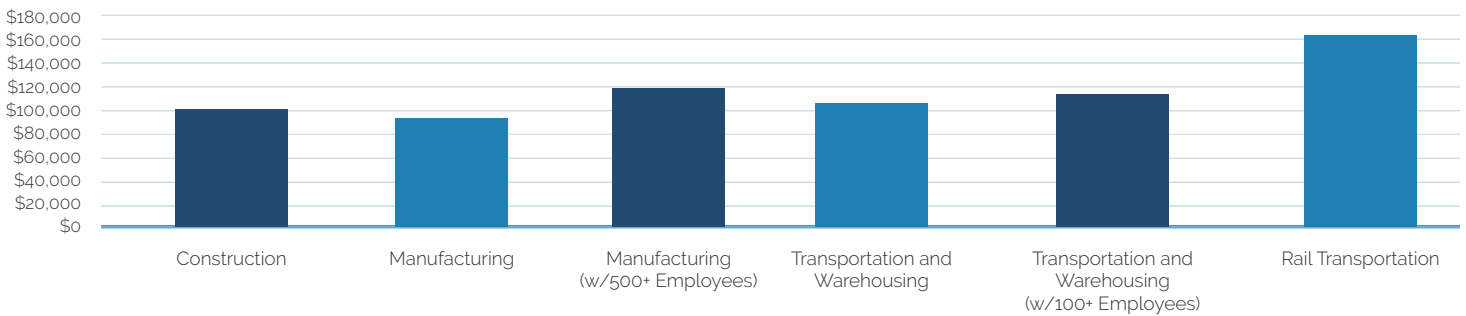
## By the Numbers

In 2023, **92% of employees worked in industries with lower average total compensation** than the rail industry. Only 8% worked in industries with higher average total compensation.

On average, Class I craft railroad employees covered by the new national agreements will receive approximately **\$111,000 in annual wages** by the end of the agreement, along with health and other benefits worth almost \$50,000 each year.

## Average Annual Wages and Salaries 2024

*Calculations based on Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Cost for Employer Compensation (June 2024); Rail Cost Adjustment Factor (Q3 2024)*



## A Career for Generations



### The Fields

Kaleb Fields prides himself on his railroading career and his family's legacy. Following on his grandfather's and uncle's footsteps, he is a third-generation railroader working at CSX's Public Safety Coordination Center. Kaleb's uncle, Mike Fields, thinks highly of his decision to continue a career in the industry: "I'm glad to see him part of it. I hope it's as good for him as it's been for me ... Next to marrying my wife, it was the best decision I ever made."

## A Family Business



### Joe and James Wilson

Joe Wilson began his career with Norfolk Southern as a conductor more than 21 years ago. Today, he works alongside his eldest son, James. "I'm glad to see that he's able to provide for his family the way that I was," Joe says of working with his son. "I think it's great to have a job with the railroad."

# Supporting Railroaders Wherever Life Takes Them

Railroad benefits packages reward rail workers' hard work and provide exceptional stability to families, including retirement benefits that surpass Social Security, as well as paid sick leave and paid time off. Railroads are committed to giving their employees the support they need for their families to thrive.

## By the Numbers

- Most Class I craft railroad employees now enjoy an average of **28-32 days of paid time off per year**, with the most senior employees receiving 42-43 paid time off days to complement existing short- and long-term paid sickness benefits. More than **93% of all craft employees now have paid sick leave**.
- Railroads pay 85% of the healthcare costs incurred by the plan. **Effective Jan. 1, 2025**, the monthly employee healthcare premium under the Railroad Employees National Health and Welfare Plan and SMART-TD Railroad Plan for unionized rail employees **will decrease more than 10% from \$309.21 to \$277.54**.
- Many railroads offer **family planning programs**, including adoption and surrogacy assistance, as part of their benefits packages.
- Railroad retirees are covered by the Railroad Retirement System, which is funded by the railroads and railroad employees, with rail carriers bearing the majority of those costs. Career railroaders (those who are 60+ years old and have served at least 30 years) receive **over two times as much retirement income as the average Social Security recipient**. In 2022, nearly 500,000 beneficiaries received \$13.5 billion in benefits from the Railroad Retirement System.

## Helping Railroaders Build Their Families



### Robert McLean

Norfolk Southern engineer Robert McLean and his husband took advantage of the railroad's adoption support benefit and adopted six siblings from foster care, ensuring the family could stay together. "We had room in our house and our hearts," Robert says, and "the railroad has always been supportive."

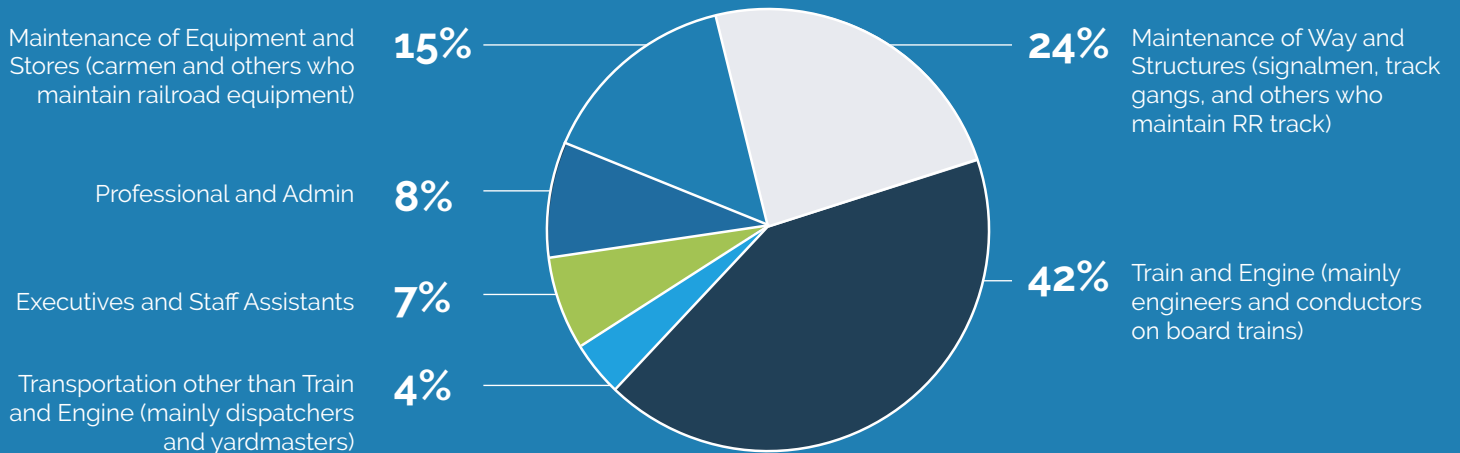


# Career Advancement and Opportunities

The industry attracts talent from diverse backgrounds, from recent high school graduates to those with graduate degrees. Rail jobs go well beyond traditional roles such as conductors, engineers and tracks and equipment maintenance crews. Railroads offer careers across a range of fields, from law enforcement to data analytics to IT. They provide robust training programs to support professional growth and empower employees to enhance their skills and advance in various fields.

The rail industry's commitment to safety and professional growth relies on a foundation of extensive training, technology investments and established programs to support employees no matter the track they choose. Cutting-edge training centers equipped with simulators and virtual reality provide a secure environment for honing real-life skills. Peer-to-peer safety initiatives also foster collaboration and enhance the industry's safety culture.

## Class I Railroad Employment by Category



Data are averages for 2023. Source STB.

Choose a job you love, and you'll never work a day in your life.

**Domingo Molina**

As a transportation training manager at BNSF, Domingo Molina led classroom training for new conductors and locomotive engineers, working closely with his team to update and design training materials and ensure new employees operate safely and efficiently. "It can be intimidating coming into the railroad and trying to learn all of our rules and operating practices. I love being able to make the classroom a fun and exciting environment to help make learning as easy and enjoyable as possible." Domingo now is a manager of operations on BNSF's Kansas division.



# Exciting Careers in Railroading

- **Simulations Developer:** Designs virtual training programs that teach employees to maneuver locomotives, operate switches and sort cars onto different tracks.
- **Biodiversity & Permitting Manager:** Works with engineering departments on permitting processes and associated field compliance monitoring and performance wherever railroads may impact wetlands.
- **Avalanche Control Team Member:** Uses data from weather stations and U.S. Army 105mm howitzer guns mounted on railcars to trigger controlled avalanches near the tracks to prevent larger dangers.
- **Police Officer:** Protects the rail network by investigating theft and vandalism and patrolling rail yards, depots and other railroad property.

## Law Enforcement Partners



**Danny Castaneda and Saar**

Union Pacific Senior Special Agent Danny Castaneda — accompanied by his K-9 partner, Saar — has continued his career in law enforcement at railroads. Danny's previous career as a police officer gives him the expertise to support UP's collaboration with U.S. Customs & Border Protection and other agencies. With Saar by his side, Danny inspects railcars coming into the U.S. from Mexico — on the lookout for contraband and signs of missing goods — and he takes pride in the important work he does. "Discovering cases of theft at the border helps protect both the customer and Union Pacific."

## Developing Great People



**Stacey Lyons**

Stacey Lyons has seen firsthand the developmental support a career in railroading offers. In her 12 years at CN, Stacey attributes the ability to take on new roles to her peers and support system: "I've had five different roles, all of them vastly different, but each time I've been greeted by a leader who is passionate about developing great people, and I've been supported to be successful."



# Safety Is Our Top Priority

Safety is a core value in the rail industry, with continuous improvements that make a safe work environment even safer. The commitment to workplace safety begins with creating a safety culture that permeates each railroad. It includes extensive safety training for employees from day one, daily pre-shift safety briefings for frontline employees, significant investment in safety technology and maintenance and strict adherence to safety protocols and federal regulations. Beyond the resources provided to keep employees safe, rail carriers empower them to make decisions using their own judgment and expertise to help maintain a safe working and operating environment.

Technology is central to freight rail operations, enabling optimized efficiency, enhanced safety and improved customer service. Advanced training centers with simulators and virtual reality enable employees to practice real-life skills in a safe, rigorous and controlled environment.

Year after year, railroads consistently outperform other transportation sectors (including trucking, water transport and airlines) and most other major industries, from agriculture to mining, in employee safety. With stringent safety rules and regulations in place, rail employees remain equally committed to protecting the railroads — and each other.

## By the Numbers

- Since 2000, America's Class I railroads have spent **\$522 billion (\$685 billion in today's dollars)** on network maintenance and capital expenditures to modernize tracks, bridges, tunnels, railcars and locomotives to help keep our operations safe.
- Railroads' safety efforts have made the last decade the safest ever for rail. Efforts have **driven the train accident rate down 27% since 2000** and 6% since 2022.
- The Class I railroad employee injury rate per hour worked is significantly lower **than the rate for grocery and department stores**.

## Champion of Safety

**Taylor Richard**



Taylor Richard, manager-locomotive maintenance, joined Union Pacific in September 2021 after graduating from the University of Texas at San Antonio with a degree in mechanical engineering. She started as an operations management trainee (OMT) and now works as a second shift overhaul and modification manager. Her supervisor said she stands out from the crowd by owning her business and being a "champion of safety." Her favorite part of being a railroader: being a part of the impact the rail industry has on the economy.

## Safety Culture

**Denny Mixon**



The Southern Region Safety Team at CSX travels the region, working alongside engineers and transportation members, ensuring safety measures are prioritized and met. Whether it includes ensuring rail yards are free from debris or highlighting key safety procedures, the team provides a watchful eye. Safety Team Coordinator Denny Mixon recognizes the importance of a safety culture: "Safety is the most important thing we do here at CSX ... A fresh set of eyes coming in, you can see things that maybe the people that see it every day didn't quite recognize."

# A Career with Purpose and Promise

A career in railroading offers more than just a job — it provides stability, growth and the opportunity to have a meaningful impact. With competitive compensation, robust benefits and a strong focus on safety and professional development, railroads are dedicated to supporting employees and their families.

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