

VIEWPOINT

Riding the Rail Industry to Work

by Edward R. Hamberger

(NAPSA)—The railroad industry is on track to help drive economic recovery. Over the next six years, it will hire more than 80,000 workers—and by 2020, freight demand is expected to jump 67 percent.

These numbers will be added to some already impressive economic indicators: carload freight was up more than 3 percent in 2003, with grain rising 10 percent and coal—the bedrock of the rail industry—up 3 percent. In addition, the industry employed 221,000 people at the end of 2003.

So why work on the railroad?

Salary

Class I railroad employees earned an average salary of \$61,895 in 2003. Personnel who maintain locomotives and freight cars typically earn \$48,853. Conductors—who are particularly in demand—earn more than \$67,000. Locomotive engineers earn an average of \$75,162 and their salaries peak at about \$110,000. In addition to their salaries, rail employees receive benefit packages averaging just under \$23,000 annually.

Stability

The railroads have been around for more than one hundred fifty years and they will be around for many more. Independent Wall Street Analyst Anthony B. Hatch said, “Railroads are moving increased volumes of automobiles, building materials, plastics, chemicals and coal. We expect railroads to continue to play an even larger role in American industry and worldwide distribution.”

Opportunity

It is common for people to work their way up through the rail industry, starting as laborers and eventually reaching management positions. Jobs at many levels are becoming available as more rail workers retire. The railroad indus-



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try has a significantly older workforce than the rest of the U.S. Almost 40 percent of all rail employees are eligible to retire within the next decade.

Technology

Highly skilled workers are needed for today's technologically advanced freight railroad industry. (The cab of a modern locomotive, for instance, looks much like that of a jet airliner, equipped with computer-display terminals and microprocessor-controlled engines.) Nearly all of today's railroad jobs require significant technical expertise, which necessitates training. Training programs have traditionally been conducted in-house, although some railroads have worked with community colleges to develop a railroad curriculum that prepares students for careers in railroading.

To learn more about jobs in the railroad industry, visit America's Job Bank at www.ajb.dni.us or link to railroad Web sites through www.aar.org.

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