



VIA Rail Bargaining Update – National Council 4000

The Unifor Council 4000 VIA Rail Bargaining Committee continued negotiations with VIA Rail the week of January 25th in Montreal.

The corporation has continued to table new proposals. They have also tabled a couple of estoppel letters in an attempt, on their part to clarify what they feel is the proper intent and application to longstanding provisions of Agreements 1 and/or 2. The union is not accepting any of these types of letters on items which have been in place in our collective agreements for a great many years. The grievance procedure is the manner by which to rectify a difference of interpretation of collective agreement provisions.

The corporation also took time last week to address their requirement to train Locomotive Engineers at VIA to backfill those who are expected to retire in the coming years. VIA would like to first offer training opportunities to their existing workforce before seeking external applicants from other railways. This is a good thing and Unifor supports this plan by VIA. But after listening to their presentation and plans for future training, the Council 4000 bargaining committee was left with concerns that we shared with VIA.

The corporation wants to use the present classification of Locomotive Attendants who are governed under Council 4000's Agreement 1 as a parking lot so to speak for employees who will be trained as Locomotive Engineers. As Locomotive Attendants operate locomotives in designated shop areas at VIA Rail, this would permit those employees with an opportunity to attain experience with the workings and operation of a locomotive, either before or during their training as a Locomotive Engineer. Employees selected for training would occupy a position of Locomotive Attendant while waiting to start Locomotive Engineer training, or after they are qualified and perhaps not immediately able to hold work as an Engineer.

But what impact would this have on existing Locomotive Attendants and their working conditions? Also of concern to Council 4000 is the integrity of our bargaining unit. The corporation appears to be favouring a select group of employees who they feel may be better suited for training at the classification of a Locomotive Engineer, which may see the greater portion of Council 4000 Agreement 1 or 2 members deprived of accessing to this training.

More discussions will be held in the weeks ahead on this initiative. It is our intent to ensure that our membership has equal opportunity at this training, and that this training initiative will not be at the detriment to the present Locomotive Attendants or the Locomotive Attendant classification.

Negotiations will continue February 22 to 26 in Montreal.

In Solidarity,
Your Unifor National Council 4000 VIA Rail Bargaining Committee

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