

Railroads increase employment in July

(The following story by John D. Boyd appeared on The Journal of Commerce website on August 20, 2009.)

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The nation's top railroads increased employment slightly from mid-June to mid-July. Their first increase this year came mostly in train and engine crews, according to reports they filed with the Surface Transportation Board.

The STB said the seven Class I carriers employed 150,400 workers in their U.S. operations at mid-July, up 0.5 percent from 149,614 a month earlier.

That would be in line with signs early this summer that the long plunge in freight traffic was bottoming out, with some cargoes even showing a pickup in demand. The STB figures are also in line with the Labor Department's report for all of July, which showed a small increase in the number of railroad workers from June.

The STB report, using a format that began in the 1960s, asks carriers for a snapshot of employment as of the first mid-month payroll. They then have until the end of that month to submit the data, and the agency compiles it and issues a report the following month.

The job category of train crews – locomotive engineers and conductors – make up the largest single group of rail workers, and in the latest month accounted for most of the increase after many months of sharp decline.

The Class I's listed 56,814 workers in the T&E category in July, up 1,380 from mid-June.

That was a 1.7 percent increase in a month, but still left train crew levels down 16.6 percent from mid-July 2008.

The big railroads added 565 professional and administrative workers, to 13,841 at mid-July for a 4.26 percent gain from June and a 0.6 percent rise from the same point last year. And Class I railroads reported 35,432 maintenance of way workers last month, up 50 from June.

Among the carriers, most of the crew additions came from BNSF Railway and CSX Transportation. Others that added jobs from June to July were Union Pacific Railroad, Kansas City Southern and Canadian Pacific Railway's U.S. operations. Norfolk Southern Railway and Canadian Pacific further trimmed their payrolls.

Before the latest month, railroad employment tracked by the STB had fallen in June to the lowest level in at least the past decade, and was down about by about 10,000 rail jobs of all types just since January.