

Media Release: Rail and Maritime Transport Union
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Retaining skilled rail workforce needs to be a priority for Transport Minister

An important issue for the new Transport Minister will be how to retain skilled rail workers in New Zealand, their union said today.

The Rail and Maritime Transport Union represents more than 4,500 workers in rail and ports, and looks forward to meeting with Gerry Brownlee in the near future.

RMTU General Secretary Wayne Butson said that as oil prices increased over time, rail would become even more essential to the national transport supply chain, and the retention of a skilled workforce was critical to that.

“We told the previous Minister that the government should focus on working with KiwiRail on an economic development plan for the rail network that looks to the long-term, rather than a process of ‘managing’ it into extinction by systematic mothballing,” Wayne Butson said.

“Either New Zealand has a well trained rail workforce or it doesn’t. When KiwiRail sends major rail construction jobs overseas, it risks skilled trades people leaving our shores also.”

Economics consultancy BERL estimated last year that local construction of the electric multiple units and locomotives for the \$500 million project to electrify Auckland’s train network would have added between 770 to 1270 additional jobs and \$232 to \$250 million to GDP.

“Sending this work overseas represented a lost opportunity to keep good manufacturing jobs in New Zealand while upgrading New Zealand’s train stock.”

“Instead of pumping half a billion dollars into the Dunedin and Lower Hutt economies, this benefit was lost. Shortly after, production of 300 new container flat top wagons was sent to China.”

44 workers at KiwiRail’s workshops in Dunedin lost their jobs and the plan for 22 job losses at the Lower Hutt workshop was withdrawn following the Union’s action.

Wayne Butson said there was some irony in the former Transport Minister now having overall responsibility for skills.

“Steven Joyce didn’t appear concerned about letting go of rail industry jobs and putting the wider engineering industries in Dunedin and Lower Hutt at risk.”

“We are interested in putting forward our case to Gerry Brownlee in the hope he will.”

Ends.

For further comment: RMTU General Secretary Wayne Butson on (027) 496-2461.