

THE ACTIVIST



Published Regularly - ISSN 1178-7392 (Print & Online) 9 July 2009

KIWI RAIL LTD AND VEOLIA CONFIRM MID-TERM INCREASES

Veolia Transport's Arthur Bruce and KiwiRail's Jim Quinn both confirmed to the RMTU, after being written to, that the midterm negotiated increase for the 2 year MECA will be honoured by their companies.

SMITH ADMITS CUTS COMING TO ACC ENTITLEMENTS

ACC Minister Nick Smith has confirmed to the Transport and Industrial Relations Select Committee that a bill he intends to introduce by the end of this year will cut ACC entitlements to workers, says Labour MP Darien Fenton.

Associate labour spokesperson Darien Fenton said she asked the Minister what changes he proposed in a bill that he said would "review unfunded scheme extensions.

"In his reply, the Minister indicated that some 18 entitlements enacted last year by Labour could be on the chopping block.

"This is very bad news for the 400,000 seasonal and casual workers whose long-term weekly compensation was changed last year so it is based on their seasonal earnings, rather than only on their recent earnings," Darien Fenton said.

"This will be a return to the unjust situation where around a quarter of the New Zealand workforce are at risk of receiving inadequate or no weekly compensation for injury simply because their working arrangements differ to those of other workers."

Another change enacted by Labour last year added mental trauma to the definition of injury arising out of a workplace

accident, such as a train driver witnessing a person being killed by the train they are driving, or a bank worker being involved in an armed robbery, Darien Fenton said.

"I'm appalled that this important advance may be rolled back, and that once again workers who find themselves in these awful situations will not be entitled to counselling or weekly earnings compensation while off work.

"Once again they will have to suffer without help the on-going mental injury caused by witnessing the death or maiming of another person."

RESULT OF NOMINATIONS CALL (NMC)

In accordance with Rule 24.6 of the Rules & Standing Orders of the Rail & Maritime Transport Union the Union called for nominations for the position(s) of:

- North Island Ports (A member of a North Island Port Branch of the Union)
- South Island Ports (A member of a South Island Port Branch of the Union)
- Northern North Island Rail (A member employed within KiwiRail Group - e.g. Freight, Network (Ontrack), Passenger, Tranz Metro, CT Sites and Mechanical (Incl Westfield AAM and Loco/Wagon depots). The Northern Rep covers all KiwiRail Group worksites north of a straight horizontal line drawn across the North Island at a point of the Porotarau Tunnel,
- Central NZ Rail (A member employed within KiwiRail Group - e.g. Freight, Network (Ontrack), Passenger, Tranz Metro, CT Sites and Mechanical (incl

This is for the information and guidance of RMTU members only!

EMU Depot, Hutt Shops and Loco/Wagon depots). The Central NZ Rep covers all KiwiRail Group worksites south of a straight horizontal line drawn across the North Island at the Porotarau Tunnel and north of a horizontal line drawn across the South Island at Seddon.

- South Island Rail (A member employed within KiwiRail Group - e.g. Freight, Network (Ontrack), Passenger, Tranz Metro, CT Sites and Mechanical (incl Hillside and Loco/Wagon depots). The Southern South Island Rep covers all KiwiRail Group worksites south of a straight horizontal line drawn across the south Island at Seddon.
- General (A member not employed within KiwiRail Group or a Port branch member. The General Rep is a member of the Union employed within NZ in any area not covered by the Rail or Port representative position (employed by Veolia Transport, Toll Networks (Tranz Link), NZ Bus – Go Wellington, Cityline Hutt Valley, Taieri Gorge Rail, Mt Maunganui Cosmopolitan Club, Orica NZ Ltd, Pinnacle Corporation, CRL Energy Ltd, Farmers Industries Ltd, Goodman Fielder, Gough Forklifts, Halls Refrigerated Transport).

The Following is the outcome of the nominations call;

North Island Ports – Aubrey Wilkinson

Declared Elected Unopposed.

South Island Ports – Ruth Blakely

Declared Elected Unopposed.

Northern Rail – Alby Barr, Hopa Bell and Bernie Snook nominated.

A ballot to be conducted.

Central Rail – Phil Bosworth, Howard Phillips and Wally Wallbutton nominated.

A ballot to be conducted.

Southern Rail – Doug Blakie, Kevin Gubb and Tim Spence nominated.

A ballot to be conducted.

General – Jacqueline Poole (Tranz Link) and Randolph Sladen (Veolia) nominated.

A ballot to be conducted.

Congratulations to both Aubrey and Ruth on being re-elected onto the NMC for a new 2 year term and may the best person win in the balloted/contested positions remaining.

Ballot papers have been issued out of National Office this week and MUST be returned by 31 July 2009. Please ensure that you vote as instructed on the ballot paper to ensure that your vote counts and above all – PLEASE ENSURE YOU VOTE!

RAIL SAFETY AWARENESS WEEK

The annual Rail Safety Awareness Week is 26-31 July 2009. The main focus of the week is to remind and raise awareness amongst the public of the dangers of level crossings and trespassing on the rail corridor. TV ads will run through the week. Chris Cairns will be in NZ for that week and will do media events to assist the campaign.

Let's all commit to spread the word and to do our bit to make rail safer for us and for the public.

AUSTRALIA'S VERY FAST TRAIN INCHES CLOSER

Identifying the viability of introducing Very Fast Train (VFT) technology to Australia is the main objective of the latest project approved by the CRC for Rail Innovation. The project responds to the recent increase in interest surrounding the introduction of VFT technology to the Australian rail landscape. "Changes in factors such as environmental and transport policy, airport capacity issues, price of fossil fuels and transport demand make the opportunity for a VFT more attractive than ever before, particularly as an alternative to carbon-intensive air transport." said David George, CEO of the CRC for Rail Innovation. "The research study aims to provide an informed opinion on the VFT concept, which if viable could take the form of a VFT line between Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney and Brisbane or some sections of it." continued Mr George.



According to data from the International Union of Railways, there are 1,737 high-speed train sets in operation in the world, with Europe leading the way and followed by Japan and China. It is expected that the final report will be released in December 2009

CONFERENCE 2009 REMITS

A reminder that Remits for conference close on 31 July 2009 but late remits are frequently accepted and conference delegates also have an opportunity to table "notices of motion" at conference to be debated on the floor as well.

It is essential that early advice is given and received for remits which seek to achieve major change within the Union or the way it conducts itself as the delegates need to be able to obtain a mandate on how to vote at conference.

All remits to conference MUST have been passed by a majority vote at a duly constituted Union branch meeting.

LOCO FUND INVITES NEW MEMBERS

The Chairman and Trustees continue to invite enquiries and applications from prospective members to apply for membership of The New Zealand Locomotive Engineers' Sickness, Accident & Death Benefit Fund, 'the Fund'.

Benefits payable include a range of Loss of Certificate Medical Retirement benefits payable based on age of joining and age at date of loss, as well as a Death Benefit.

Applicants must:

- Hold a Locomotive Engineers Certificate,
- Be a full time Employee of KiwiRail Ltd, United Transport Ltd (previously Alstom Transport NZ Ltd), or Veolia Transport (previously Connex Auckland Limited), and Taieri Gorge Railway Ltd, and
- Have completed medical examination within four (4) months of application.

There are no changes for Existing Fund Members who will continue with their current arrangements and receive benefits

as detailed in the First Schedule of the Trust Deed.

For further information and an application form contact the Secretary Julia Harrison on (04) 499-2066 or email jharrison@rmtunion.org.nz

KIWI RAIL NETWORK INDUSTRIAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS

The Council will have 5 elected infrastructure representational RMTU positions and 3 Operations elected representational RMTU positions on it. All 8 positions have now been filled. They are;

- Ganger – Foreperson – Hopa Bell
- Infrastructure – Trackworker – Albert Barr
- Infrastructure – Signals, Comms, Traction – Phil Kearns
- Infrastructure – Bridges and Structures – Buzz Terrey
- Infrastructure – Mechanical Group – Jerry Hohepa
- Operations – Train Controller – Geoffrey Young
- Operations – Signalpersons – Paul Bryden
- Operations – Clerical Admin – Kevin Jones

Thank you to all those who stood for election and who voted. This group will be responsible for the industrial leadership of this part of KiwiRail Group for a period of 2 years once the current wagheround and related working parties are finished their work.

UPDATE ON KIWI RAIL GROUP DRUG & ALCOHOL TESTING PROGRAMME

The KiwiRail Drug & Alcohol Testing Programme has undergone a review process to accommodate the changed Australian and New Zealand Standard 4308:2008 'Procedures for specimen collection and the detection and quantitation of drugs of abuse in urine.'



KiwiRail in consultation with the Rail and Maritime Transport Union have agreed to release this update on the KiwiRail Group Drug & Alcohol Testing programme setting out the key changes.

NZDDA (New Zealand Drug Detection Agency) is the provider contracted to provide a 24-hour seven days a week on-site drug and alcohol testing – this will mean the test will be undertaken at the actual worksite in an approved mobile testing facility.

Written consent and photographic proof of identity will be required from all employees being tested.

The general rules of urine sample collection procedure remains unchanged but the testing device used will now be the ProScreen Cup.

The breath alcohol test will be conducted using an approved testing device which meets the Australian Standard: AS 3547-1997 "Breath Alcohol Testing Devices for Personal Use".

The drug screening device provided by NZDDA and used for the drug screening has been verified under Appendix 'B' of AS/NZS4308:2008

- NZDDA will ensure that the on-site device is within its used by date and record the test date, the batch number and expiry date of the device in the permanent record system
- If the on-site screening device indicates the possible presence of a drug class (non-negative), the NZDDA shall ensure chain of custody documentation is correctly completed and shall split and dispatch the specimens to ESR in the donor's presence in accordance with section 2 of the AS/NZS4308:2008.
- Following completion of the on-site drug and or alcohol test the original signed consent form is to be faxed or scanned by NZDDA to KiwiRail HSE Corporate on the same day as the test was conducted and a copy given to the donor, a copy will also be retained by the NZDDA for requirements under the AS/NZS 4308:2008 and legislative requirements.

- For KiwiRail employees in the approved rehabilitation programme, NZDDA will undertake on-site random drug and or alcohol testing as required to undergo the stipulated 6 tests within the 12 month period.
- NZDDA response times are expected to be as follows:
 - 2 hours if within a 40km radius of a major city
 - Maximum of 4 hours for all other locations

KIWI RAIL GROUP EAP

KR Group has appointed EAP services as their EAP services provider. This means a change from SEED for most but no change for the ex United Rail members. The RMTU's George Laird attended the tender's presentations and his report was that EAP services were head and shoulders above the rest in their presentation and approach.

All current EAP counseling that is occurring with SEED will continue until completion so that no disruption is experienced by members during their current counseling arrangements.

FAIRFAX WAGE FREEZE CLAIMS INCORRECT

Claims by management at the Fairfax-owned Nelson Mail that a wage freeze has been imposed on staff at the paper are incorrect, says the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union.

The wage freeze claims were made in the Nelson Mail by the newspaper's management, and follow similar claims by management at the Timaru Herald, also owned by Fairfax.

EPMU senior national industrial officer Paul Tolich says pay rises for union members will be decided across the negotiating table.

"Under New Zealand law, wages and conditions are set by good faith bargaining, not by management decree.

"While Fairfax has indicated its desire for a wage freeze, any decision on wage increases is subject to collective negotiations between the company and its unionised staff and

cannot be unilaterally imposed by management.

"As a union we're seeing an increasing number of companies claiming in the media that they've put in a wage freeze before bargaining has even begun. These statements are both factually incorrect and are potentially in breach of good faith obligations.

"The EPMU has no plans to agree to a wage freeze in this year's wage round. Our members in the newspaper industry have had to cope with the same cost of living increases as everyone else and Fairfax is still a profitable company.

"If Fairfax wants to make an argument for wage restraint they should bring it to the bargaining table rather than trying to issue edicts through the media."

MONSTER TRUCK SCHEME PUTS US ON ROAD TO NOWHERE

The Alliance Party says that the National Government appears to be in the pocket of the Road Transport Forum, with its recent proposals to allow heavier trucks on New Zealand roads.

Alliance Economic Development Spokesperson Quentin Findlay says the plans show National is on a "road to nowhere" with backward-looking ideas. Mr Findlay says that the Road Transport Forum, headed by former Muldoon-era Cabinet Minister, Tony Friedlander, was getting preferential treatment from the Government.

The promotion of heavy trucking at the expense of other road users had resulted in the Government proposing to allow 50 tonne trucks on specific routes – and up to 65 tonnes in special cases. The statutory limit is currently 44 tonnes. Mr Findlay says the Minister of Transport Steven Joyce had ignored the negative effects of "monster trucks on the roads." "The real cost of having heavier trucks on the road will be carried by the taxpayer in terms of road maintenance. This is estimated to be between \$85 million to \$100 million."

The taxpayer and other users are already paying for increased road usage through

increased road levies and road maintenance, effectively subsidizing heavy trucks.

Mr Findlay says that Mr Friedlander's comments about trucks not being a danger on New Zealand roads did not square with the reality.

He says that long haul road transport using heavy trucks was not a good or sustainable option for New Zealand. He says the Alliance would regulate the road industry and reimpose a limit on the type of trucks on New Zealand roads and the distance that they could transport goods before they had to be transferred onto rail or coastal shipping.

Mr Findlay says that the transferring of heavy goods onto rail and coastal shipping would mean fewer trucks on the road, lower road maintenance costs, a more sustainable means of transportation and more employment for New Zealanders.

"The proposed changes to road transport simply suit the self interest of the Road Transport Lobby. Is National looking after all New Zealanders or just their well-connected mates?"

PROPOSED LAND TRANSPORT RULE: VEHICLE DIMENSIONS AND MASS AMENDMENT [(No 2) 2009]

This proposed amendment Rule will amend Land Transport Rule: Vehicle Dimensions and Mass 2002 (the Vehicle Dimensions and Mass Rule), which specifies requirements for dimension and mass limits for vehicles operating on New Zealand roads. The Rule sets in place a regulatory regime so that vehicles, in particular, heavy truck and trailer combinations, are operated safely.

Three changes to the Vehicle Dimensions and Mass Rule are proposed;

- Proposal 1: To increase the maximum mass and certain dimension limits for vehicles operating up to 44 tonnes without the need for a permit.
- Proposal 2: To allow road controlling authorities (RCAs) to issue permits (ie, 'high-productivity motor vehicle' permits) for standard size vehicles to operate above 44 tonnes and up to 53 tonnes on specified routes that have been assessed

by the RCAs, with conditions of operation specified in the permits.

- Proposal 3: To allow the NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) to issue high-productivity motor vehicle permits for increased overall vehicle length and associated dimensions for vehicles to operate above or below 53 tonnes gross mass on specified routes assessed by the NZTA, with conditions of operation specified in the permits.

The yellow draft is also available, with supporting information, on the NZ Transport Agency website at www.nzta.govt.nz/consultation/vehicle-dimensions-and-mass-amendment/index.html.

NZTA look forward to receiving your comments and, to help you, details on making a submission are included in the overview to the draft Rule. It would be appreciated if you could send your submission by email or using the on-line submission form provided, but postal submissions are also acceptable. Your interest and involvement in the Rule-making process is appreciated. Please note the closing date for submissions, which is 24 July 2009.

INQUIRY REJECTION SHOWS GOVERNMENT EITHER IMPOTENT OR ON THE SIDE OF AUSSIE BANKS - CALL FOR DISCLOSURE ON BANKS LOBBYING

Bank workers' union Finsec says the decision of the government majority on the Finance and Expenditure Select Committee not to proceed with an inquiry into banks' interest rates shows the government is either impotent or on the side of Australian owned banks.

"The decision of the government majority on the select committee is disgraceful and is a significant let down for all bank customers," said Finsec Campaigns Director Andrew Campbell.

"The government has abandoned the people who elected them and has sided with the Australian bank CEO's and shareholders," said Campbell.

"This government is once again walking away from doing anything to help Kiwi workers pay the bills," said Campbell.

"The New Zealand public deserves to know what lobbying the banks undertook to ensure this inquiry did not happen. As such we are calling on the government, and its agencies, to disclose the number and nature of the discussions they had with the banks about this," said Campbell.

"New Zealand taxpayers are currently underwriting the banks' business through the government guarantee schemes whilst the banks continue to make billions. Yet the mere thought of the taxpayer having a look at how they set interest rates is seen as too much. That is a blow to transparency," said Campbell.

"We can't help but wonder that the banks or the government might have something to hide by making sure this inquiry doesn't go ahead," said Campbell.

CONNEX AND YARRA TRAMS LOSE MELBOURNE CONTRACTS

Victorian Premier John Brumby announced on June 25th that Metro Trains Melbourne (MTM) will run Melbourne's metropolitan rail network and Keolis Downer EDI (KDR) will run the tram network, stripping Connex and Yarra Trams of the contracts. Brumby said KDR represented the best value for Victorian taxpayers, with KDR's bid for Melbourne's trams "making it clear" that it was committed to customer service, including an increased focus on staff training and providing timely and accurate information to passengers.

KDR is a consortium between Keolis, a subsidiary of the French public enterprise railway company SNCF, and Australian maintenance provider Downer EDI. KDR will initially be offered an eight year term with an option for a further seven years. Final discussions will now take place, leading to the signing of the new operating contract in August.

DEADLINE APPROACHING FOR TRANZ RAIL SHAREHOLDERS TO CLAIM COMPENSATION

Shareholders still eligible for compensation from settlement of the Tranz Rail insider trading case have three weeks to register their claim.

In April the Securities Commission issued a statement that some 535 shareholders had yet to come forward to claim compensation. The names of those shareholders are listed on the Commission's website at www.seccom.govt.nz.

Since then 147 of those have contacted the Commission about how to claim their compensation. Shareholders on the list who haven't contacted the Commission and wish to claim their compensation must do so by 24 July 2009.

Entitled shareholders will need to verify their identity and shareholding details.

Only shareholders who have already been contacted by the Commission or whose names are on the list are entitled to compensation.

The Commission is keen to hear from the remaining shareholders so that compensation can be paid.

Shareholders should contact Geoff Brown on (04) 471 8295 or email geoff.brown@seccom.govt.nz for any further discussions or clarifications.

TRANSMISSION GULLY A LEMON

Transmission Gully would likely take longer to clear than the coastal highway after a major earthquake, the Minister of Transport, Stephen Joyce, admitted in Parliament today.

Mr Joyce who was answering questions from Green Party MP Sue Kedgley confirmed that it would likely take three weeks to clear Transmission Gully in the event of an earthquake.

"This admission undermines the main justification for building Transmission Gully—namely that it would provide an alternative out of Wellington in the event of an earthquake," Ms Kedgley said. "It is

madness to build a new motorway on an active earthquake fault."

A Ministry of Transport report also notes that the steepest section of Transmission Gully is a 3.3 kilometre climb that is roughly twice as long, and half again as steep as the Ngauranga Gorge, and as a result truck operators may prefer the coastal highway.

Ms Kedgley said the report obtained under the Official Information Act confirmed that roading engineers proposed escape routes and 'arrestor beds' for out-of control vehicles travelling on the extremely steep section of the proposed motorway.

Meanwhile Transmission Gully was expected to increase commuter traffic, reduce rail use and that there was 'a substantial potential for increased congestion' around Porirua.

"Why on earth would the Government build a motorway that is predicted to increase congestion and reduce public transport?" Ms Kedgley asked.

"Transmission Gully is a lemon. Most roads require a positive cost benefit ratio of 4 or 5 to be built, and it would be absurd to build a new motorway on an active earthquake fault that only has a cost benefit of only 0.36 to 0.50."

(Transmission Gully is a gully just north of Wellington which currently has electricity lines running thru it and lies inland from the currently congested and delay ridden coastal northern route out of the city.)

UK TRANSPORT UNIONS WELCOME RENATIONALISATION OF EAST COAST RAILWAY NETWORK

UK unions have given the British government's plans to renationalise the country's east coast mainline railway service the thumbs up; the service runs from London in the south up to Scotland.

The government announced on 1 July that it would bring the east coast service, which has been franchised out to transport firm National Express, back into public ownership for a short-term period. The ITF has set up a union network with affiliates in all those countries. A recent network meeting made

the company's financial difficulties one of its focal points.

ASIA PACIFIC WOMEN GET STRONGER VOICE

Women trade unionists in the Asia Pacific region will have a stronger voice, thanks to the creation of new positions on ITF regional and section committees. The seats were created at last week's Asia Pacific regional conference, as a result of recommendations from the women's meeting held just before. The meeting urged unions to organise more women, especially in light of the global economic crisis. The crisis is badly affecting women workers, who suffer disproportionately from job losses. Unions need to include women organisers and negotiators so that organising and collective bargaining work takes account of gender issues, the meeting found.

PIKE RIVER

KiwiRail Freight is in negotiations with Greymouth Rail Branch for a local variation to the collective agreement after the company negotiated with Pike River Coal for rail Operators to take on the significant responsibility of loading the coal into the wagons.

Concerns raised by members so far include the use of customer equipment, protocols and procedures if something was to go wrong and the isolation of the loading facility in the event of equipment failure.

We will negotiate with the company for a fair and reasonable recompense to undertake this value added role as it is only fair that our members share in the returns that the loading agreement will make for the company.

GANZ MAVAG REFURBISHMENT – WGTN

On 1 July 2009 Todd Valster (National Office), Howard Phillips (Wgtn Branch), Hayden Smith (Metro LE's), Harvey Paterson (Metro Train Mgrs) and Burt Millman (Metro EMU Depot) met with Tony Pepperell (KR PSG). Tony has recently

being assigned as Project Manager for the next Ganz Mavag EMU refurbishment and the session was to introduce this project and outline the planned approach and scope.

The last refurbishment program on the Ganz's started in 1995 and ultimately stretched out to 2001 before being completed. So we've had between 8 and 14 years of service out of the fleet in the meantime.

KiwiRail & GWRC are working towards a formalised contract that will cover the detail design of the refurbishment and doing a pilot set over the next 12 to 15 months. The process of designing and building the prototype will be used to confirm the design and establish the supply lines, processes and procedures that go into such a build and also importantly to firm up the cost. We will then be able to apply for funding to execute a production run on the fleet.

The priority and focus for the project is very much on the things that will improve the Ganz fleets reliability for the next 10 years of service as the shoulder and peak support fleet (ie English Electric fleet gets retired) when the new Matangi fleet is commissioned.

A small team to get the project started has begun to come together. KR PSG are being assisted on this project by the Metro EMU Depot, the Tranz Scenic light repair shop, KR Mechanical (ex UG), and KR Hutt. The approach so far has been to look first at the areas that might help the Metro EMU Depot with the fleets reliability today (eg what to do with the MA sets), then to build on that knowledge and improve the overhaul specification and finally to look at what new technology is out there that we can apply. We'll also be looking at some of the Matangi project details to see what solutions can be applied from this onto the Ganz.

The scope covers investigations into all of the currently known troublesome items. The final refurb design will be a mix of repair, refurbish, replace and upgrade to try to strike that elusive "best bang for bucks" balance. Copies of the current scope were distributed to the names in the first paragraph if you'd like to read more detail.

CHANGES AT THE HELM OF NATIONAL DISTRIBUTION UNION

The 20,000 strong National Distribution Union has National Secretary-designate. Robert Reid, currently the Union's President, will take over the role from Laila Harré from August. Laila Harré gave notice last year that she would not be seeking a further term as National Secretary in this year's union elections. Robert Reid was the sole candidate for the role.

"In my four years with the NDU we have organised more workers in more workplaces into collective agreements. The result has been higher wages and better working conditions. I know the NDU will maintain that momentum because we see daily what a difference a union can make to the lives of workers on low and moderate incomes and to people facing uncertainty at work," said Laila Harré.

Robert currently leads the redundancy response work inside the NDU. "I look forward to building on the successes achieved by Laila Harré in her four years as NDU National Secretary," said Robert Reid. "Although hit by major redundancies over the last year, membership in the union is still growing. This is a tribute to Laila, the leadership team, the organisers and administration staff and the hundreds of enthusiastic NDU delegates up and down the country."

Laila Harré will take up a position with the Auckland Transition Agency.

EPMU MEMBERS TO CAMPAIGN AGAINST DEPENDENT CONTRACTING

Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union delegates from the telecommunication sector will meet in Auckland next Wednesday to plan the details of their campaign to stop Visionstream's dependent contractor model.

Visionstream has announced plans to force hundreds of telecommunications technicians who maintain Chorus' Auckland and Northland networks to subcontract if they want to retain the work – a move that

could cost individual workers up to \$60,000 in equipment.

EPMU national secretary Andrew Little says members have roundly rejected the move.

"Unsurprisingly our members don't want to fork out tens of thousands of dollars, lose their job security and take on all the risks associated with the industry just to keep doing the work they do now but with no bargaining power.

"They've told us they want to negotiate with Visionstream as a group through the union and instructed us that the dependent contractor model is unacceptable. We'll be meeting with Visionstream in the near future to discuss this.

"Chorus themselves have stated they need these workers because of the skills shortage and yet they are backing a contractor that seems to be doing its best to drive them out of the industry.

"Given we are talking about all of Auckland and Northland's telecommunications infrastructure we would hope that Visionstream recognises the implications if it continues with this course of action."

SLEEPOVERS ARE WORK

The Employment Court has ruled that sleepover shifts are classed as work and employees should be paid the Statutory minimum wage for night shifts. IHC says it can't afford to pay this amount. The court ruling means workers will get at least \$12.50 per hour for sleepover shifts, compared to a total of \$34 they currently get for a 10 hour shift. The Court has asked Business New Zealand and the Council of Trade Unions for submissions on how the wages should be paid. The IHC says it needs additional Government funding to pay its employees more. They say that their workers do 250,000 sleepover shifts per year and the extra costs will be "millions".

The Service & Food Workers Union (SFwu) says the ruling brings New Zealand into line with other countries.

Bits & Bobs

- Printing company Wickliffe has asked its 290 employees in Dunedin and Auckland

to take a 5% pay cut. The across-the-board wage reduction proposal is aimed at saving \$500,000 as the company grapples with a severe downturn in work. Neither the Council of Trade Unions nor the Engineering Printing and Manufacturing Union were aware of such a large pay cut being suggested elsewhere in the country. Dunedin EPMU organiser Mike Kirwood said the proposed 5% cut had been rejected by union members - almost 100 in number - but negotiations were continuing.

- The 125-year-old Kingston Flyer is likely to be shut down indefinitely, with the director blaming financiers for blocking the sale of the train to a United States company. Kingston Acquisitions put the 125-year-old train up for sale in November in an attempt to repay about \$4.7 million in overdue loans to Prudential Mortgage Nominees. Director Robbie Caldwell said the Flyer operation was likely to be shut down after Prudential Mortgage blocked two offers by US-based company Railmark to buy the train. With mounting debt, there was no money to open for the tourist season in October and if the operation shut down the Flyer would probably never run again, he said.
- Prime Minister John Key is expected to launch his national cycleway project in a matter of weeks, with possible confirmation of funding for a rail trail between Queenstown and Kingston. The proposed track would involve crossing Lake Wakatipu from Queenstown to Walter Peak and cycling through Mossburn, Athol, Five Rivers and Kingston taking up to four days of travel. Apparently Southland district council has received assurance from the prime minister's office that the track would receive funding, pending the approval of feasibility studies and talks with landowners. The flat, scenic terrain and the enthusiasm of local authorities to see the project go ahead had probably may see the region as being "first cab off the rank" for funding. The full economic impact of the cycleway is still to be determined but estimates say it would bring an extra 2000 to 3000 people into the region in its first year.

- The passenger rail service to Helensville is up for debate again with the year-long trial ending this month. The trial started on July 14 last year to see if there are enough passengers to sustain the service. The Auckland Regional Transport Authority (ARTA) will evaluate the service to decide if it will continue.
- The RMTU is preparing a submission on the MOT's proposal to allow 50 tonne trucks onto our roads. We urge all members to visit the MOT website and to also submit on this proposal. It appears to us that the proposal was authored by the Road Transport Forum.

Let's Be Safe Out There & Remember.....

"WE'RE STRONGER TOGETHER"!

