

THE ACTIVIST



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September 2025

Message from the Gen Sec

Welcome to the September edition of The Activist. 2025 is certainly flying by – we are into Spring already.

I've attended many Branch AGM's last month and more this month. Most of these AGM's had good attendance but with some the lack of release to attend meant numbers were low.

Also, when the AGM's are held can affect attendance so a suggestion would be to survey branch members on when is the best time and day to hold their AGM's – they are important meetings.

The September Transport Worker magazine is being finalised, it's a bumper issue this time. Thanks to all those that contributed content and Branch notes.

We are very concerned that productivity is taking priority over Health & Safety by some of our members employers – the harmful dust in the Remutaka tunnel after the significant work done over Christmas is a prime example.

On the great news side, it was announced this week that Alstom will supply 18 new 5 car battery electric multiple units for the lower North Island region. These new trains will give this region the best regional passenger rail services in NZ. These trains will be called Tūhono, meaning "to connect" or "to unite"

Stay safe out there.

Todd Valster

RMTU General Secretary



KiwiRail MECA 2025 – 2027 ratification ballot result

The procedure agreed by members is that the proposed settlement will be rejected if more than 33% of RMTU Members who would be covered by the MECA, vote to reject the proposed settlement.

TOTAL BALLOTS ISSUED: 2662

TOTAL BALLOT RETURNED: 233

RETURN RATE: 8.80%

TOTAL BALLOT RATIFIED THE PROPOSED SETTLEMENT: 2429 91.20%

TOTAL BALLOT PAPERS REJECTED THE PROPOSED SETTLEMENT: 233 8.80%

91.20% OF MEMBERS VOTED TO ACCEPT THE RECOMMENDED SETTLEMENT THEREFORE THE PROPOSED MULTI EMPLOYER COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT SETTLEMENT IS DEEMED RATIFIED

An overwhelming majority of members employed within KiwiRail Holdings Limited and KiwiRail Limited indicated support for ratifying the proposed settlement for the Collective Agreement, the Union has signed on behalf of RMTU members employed by KiwiRail Holdings Limited and KiwiRail Limited.

20th September

Day of Action: Rise up for Pay Equity.

All regions

Click here to support pay equity in your area.



Crystalline silica dust – Remutaka tunnel-update

Further to last month's article on the dust issue concerning the Wairarapa trains. To recap, staff who work onboard the trains and the servicing and maintenance workers at Hyundai Rotem raised the issue of excessive dust onboard the carriages and inside the HVAC system. The dust comes from the ballast that was laid inside the tunnel during the re-railing of the tunnel at the start of this year. Analysis of the dust identified low levels of respirable crystalline silica. Due to the highly hazardous nature of silica dust, occupational hygienists recommended staff receive personal exposure monitoring to check the level of risk. The results are back from the personal exposure monitoring.

The report for the onboard staff says respirable dust levels were below 10% of the Workplace Exposure Standards. This equates to a **medium** health risk. Any presence of respirable crystalline silica is below detectable levels. The results indicate that the controls in place – i.e. daily cleaning of the trains and carriages and servicing are effectively minimising the health risk. However Air Matters notes that because of the severity of the consequences if exposed to respirable crystalline silica, the health risk category cannot be rated lower than a medium category regardless of how low exposure happens to be.

KiwiRail said controls such as the increased cleaning regime stay in place for as long as needed. The report also recommends that regular inspections are carried out, and that a further round of personal monitoring be done. The next round of personal monitoring is scheduled for October 2025.

To deal with the source of the dust KiwiRail is cleaning the tunnel walls. They predict that will be completed by end of September.

Track workers blow the whistle on unsafe work during the Remutaka tunnel re-railing work Update

Further to last month's article about Kiwirail track workers raising the alarm on unmanaged dust during the rerailing work in the Remutaka Tunnel at the start of the year. Track Workers contacted the union after hearing that respirable crystalline silica had been found in dust sampling on the Wairarapa trains in July.

One worker described the dust (during the re-railing work in the tunnel) as "horrendous to say the least". Staff report the dust levels were so thick you couldn't see. They said the respiratory protection was not fit for purpose. Issues include a lack of fit testing and only receiving one filter for the mask per shift. Staff resorted to wearing P2 masks underneath the full-face respirators but found the dust was still getting into their masks. Staff said they felt 'unheard' when they raised the issue at team briefings. Workers said the dust was especially thick in the middle of the tunnel where it was very dry.

Loco Engineers said there was no process to ensure they'd done their tunnel induction training before working in the tunnel. This resulted in some LE's working in the tunnel without respiratory protection or knowledge of the tunnel risks including silica dust.

The RMTU notified both Worksafe and Waka Kotahi of the incident. Worksafe met with track workers last week to discuss what happened. We are waiting to hear what action they will take.

KiwiRail has contracted engineering firm BECA to investigate the incident. The Union and KR are working on the terms of reference.



Crystalline Silica Dust – Remutaka Tunnel: Health Monitoring Recommendations

The RMTU has asked KiwiRail to provide ongoing health monitoring for track workers who were exposed to high levels of dust during the re-railing work in the Remutaka Tunnel over the Christmas block of line – including after they leave KiwiRail employment.

The Chief Medical Officer has referred to WorkSafe Australia guidance on health monitoring for exposure to respirable crystalline silica in industries such as tunnelling, quarrying, and mining.

Key recommendations include:

- Annual health monitoring to detect silicosis and related conditions early
- Initial health assessment followed by yearly check-ups.
- Workers leaving the industry should receive health monitoring.

The WorkSafe Australia guidance supports the RMTU's request for KiwiRail to fund regular health monitoring for workers even after they leave the company – potentially for the rest of their lives.

The Union urges workers to keep copies of all health monitoring results and share them with their GP. Health issues can appear years after exposure so it is important to have results of health monitoring to help with getting ACC cover for injury. Employers are only required to retain health records for ten years. Having a permanent record ensures workers can access the information if needed in the future.

Worksafe prosecuting KiwiRail following electric shock incident

Following the severe electric shock accident involving KiwiRail and Martinus employees on 3–4 September 2024, WorkSafe NZ confirmed that it had laid formal charges against KiwiRail Holdings Limited under the Health and Safety at Work Act.



Changes to Waka Kotahi investigation powers following rail incidents

Changes to strengthen NZTA/Waka Kotahi's ability to investigate rail incidents and accidents are part of the Regulatory Standards Transport Amendment Bill which has recently had its first reading in Parliament and is currently at select committee stage. The RMTU has written to Labour Transport spokesperson Tangi Utikere to express support for the changes to the Railways Act particularly the change to give Waka Kotahi the power to issue rail company's with improvement notices to address poor safety management. The changes should help Waka Kotahi to be a more effective Regulator. However, it is important to know the changes to the Bill **do not affect workers right to silence** when being interviewed by a regulator. The right to silence especially if "being interviewed under caution" is an important right. The RMTU has made a submission to the select committee endorsing the changes.



Check out your new
RMTU website
www.rmtunion.org.nz

Auckland Branch AGM

On 28 August 2025 at 7pm, Auckland held our AGM at Onehunga. We recognized our members who celebrated long service. Thank you our new chair Jordan Mana who presented the long service certificate.



Port Nelson

Another day dawns in sunny Nelson but The work on rosters does not let up, with disappointment the RMTU has requested that PNL desist from undermining the roster with creative interpretations of standing CEA clauses.

The RMTU takes issue with the hijacking of what was a great process to change the organisation of labour in this port which was the biggest change in over 100 years with the organisation of labour. This has been lost due to the needs of the business and the pressure felt in a slow economy. This is the time when we most need to protect the conditions we have and remain strong, working to improve fatigue risk management and make our conditions safe.



Nelson Branch members supporting pay equity

Traction Room Controllers

KiwiRail recently met with the working group on pay and progression for this group as part of ongoing actions for MECA bargaining.

Good progress was made and this group will meet again in early October

Structures Inspectors

One of the Transformation Initiatives being undertaken in KNIC is Future Workforce Planning. The first group to be discussed were the Structures Inspectors. We worked with KR to understand all the tasks an Inspector is required to complete and found the current FTE is under resourced by 2 Inspectors which KR has agreed to employ.

Quick thinking KiwiRail worker saves life-Timaru

In Timaru on Monday 8th September an incident occurred on a railway bridge. Due to the quick thinking and bravery of our RMTU Timaru Rail Branch members, further harm was prevented and lives saved. Other branch members at the time are still giving wrap around support to those involved.

Way to go Timaru, Kia Kaha.

KiwiRail LE's trial new rostering rules

The trial to improve KiwiRail Loco Engineer (LE) rosters has now been rolled out to all depots from 31 August. The changes apply only to relief links.

At the end of each relief link fortnight, LEs on relief links will receive a short RMTU survey. The Union wants to hear from LE's about whether the new rules are helping to reduce fatigue and improve work-life balance.

The trial will run for six months. If the feedback from LEs is positive, and KiwiRail also agrees, the changes will go to a vote of LEs early next year.

Key changes being trialed include:

- A mandatory **two-night rest break** after one or more night (A) shifts, starting back after 0900.
- After three consecutive A shifts, LEs will get **three nights off** before returning to work, starting back after 0700.
- Rostered days off (RDOs) will be grouped into blocks of two or more, to give better rest and family time and minimising single days off.
- A minimum of four RDOs every fortnight.

KiwiRail - improves privacy around medical information

The RMTU has asked KiwiRail to do better

when it comes to handling members' personal medical information, including both prescription and over-the-counter medicines. The problem started after a KiwiRail toolbox told staff they had to tell their manager about every medication they were taking including all over the counter medicines. KiwiRail said this was so they could check whether medications were compatible with safety critical work. But one member told us that after they shared their prescription information, it wasn't kept private by the manager. Before long, their medical details were common knowledge around the depot. Following discussion with the Union KiwiRail has now agreed to make changes to their system for collecting members medical information. Workers can choose to speak directly with the Rail Medical Officer (RMO) to disclose medical information or email the KR Health and Wellbeing team instead of disclosing the details to their manager. They are still required to let their manager know they are taking medication but do not have to provide any details to them. If they choose to speak with the RMO they may have to be stood down whilst they wait. Sometimes this can take weeks to get an appointment. If a worker is stood down while waiting to see the RMO, KiwiRail confirmed to the union staff will stay on full pay, with no deductions to their leave.



Wellington Rail

A great turnout for the AGM last month was great to see, with plenty of members from all across the region and from all our different employers, just to prove you can't beat Wellington on a good day. A lot of interest from the members in regard to the new master rosters for Metro, we are making slow progress but with interest from the MD to complete this project this year we have to keep the pressure on.

The Remutaka tunnel dust issue continues to burn.

Even an evangelical preacher climbing a light tower over the Wellington concourse added to the colour of the city as we watched the police chase him down.

Marlborough

Interesting times ahead for Picton based members as things start to change in this part of the world.

All our members whether they are Rail, Port or Interislander will soon be working in a construction zone as demolition of the old Aratere infrastructure soon commences. It will be a struggle for our members to cope with this changing workplace for the next few years we just hope that it is all worth it in the long run when we have our shiny new ferries.

Taranaki Rail

Had a good turnout for their AGM but unfortunately their organiser was not amongst them as a misunderstanding over whether the meeting was proceeding resulted in him not being there. Not to worry a couple of phone calls and a video call later all were united, shame Rob's device ran out of power before the end.

KiwiRail Industrial Council

We met on the 3rd & 4th September in Christchurch which put on a fine sunny display. The meeting was productive, with some issues now moving to working groups and risk assessments to get action. Taupiri Urupa level crossing is now going to get a risk assessment to decide what is the next best action. There was updates on some ongoing projects, the Wabtec RCL project is now at the stage where we have a loco fitted and will be testing in the Mount in September. The LE Training School project is coming along with another meeting to look at the content scheduled for end of September. We have 2 members leaving the team, so a big thanks for all your work Ollie, and Steve. And a welcome to the new members I am sure you will continue on the hardwork the others were doing, as there are some projects quite far advanced those departing will likely continue on in those. There will be some testing done for the DL locos on passenger service under high speed running. The DLs are capable of 100kmh running but the track condition was the issue, so this will be tested to see if the track work that has been done is now at spec for 100kmh running. Overall was good productive time.

Taranaki Port

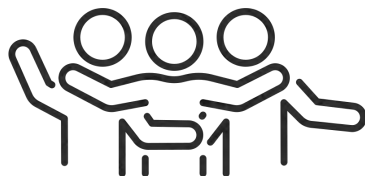
Taranaki port shortly to vote on a variation to their collective agreement as part of the recent restructure and working group. Sadly, hard times have fallen on this port with the huge reduction in gas production affecting their cargo volumes.

Palmerston North

New challenges for a branch that has already felt the winds of change with plenty of turmoil a year ago when we saw 15 locomotive engineers lose their jobs. The yard workers are going through a terminal optimisation consultation process at this time which is creating some degree of stress. KR have indicated there will be no forced or voluntary redundancies at this stage which is a relief to our members.

There is however concern in regard to the future as we see a 26% reduction in the number of services in the lower North Island.

We have to believe that KiwiRail will not be able to cut its way to a profitable future. We need to hope that there will be enough fat left in the system that when KiwiRail can grow again that it will have the ability to do so.



Napier Port

Napier seeks to do what no other port has yet done which is to introduce fully autonomous vehicles to its operation. They will begin next year bringing in Chinese built tractor units which will be introduced over two years and will eventually be used to move cargo from the yard to the hook. Using never seen in this country technology including a fully electrified fleet with automated battery swap. These units will eventually operate without a human driver, a scary proposition for the future of work in our ports

RMTU BOP Port Branch

Due to the amalgamation of the RMTU and Qube the growth of the RMTU BOP Port branch has reached 578 members with such a proportion we need a big venue for this year's AGM. We have been fortunate in securing The Mount Club on the 26th of September and this will run from 3pm to 5pm.

Growth in the RMTU brings support for the individual and strength for the group.

RMTU BOP Port Branch – Annual General Meeting

Venue: The Mount Club

Date: 26th September

Time: 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM

We encourage all members to attend. This is a great opportunity to come together, discuss our achievements, and look ahead to the future.

These are exciting times for the RMTU. With growth comes greater support for each individual and increased strength for us as a collective.

See you there!

Bay of Plenty Rail Branch AGM

The Bay of Plenty Rail Branch AGM will be held on **Friday 26th September** at the Club Mount Maunganui, 45-47 Kawaka Street, Mount Maunganui from 1pm-3pm.

Hawkes Bay Rail

This small branch continues to reel from slashes to staffing last year in freight ops and continues to struggle to cover leave.

The only positive note is that the line remains open and two trains a day run up it into Napier.

Also our HB networks people continue to maintain it to a high level



The Employment Relations Amendment Bill 2025

This bill introduces several significant changes that could have far-reaching implications, many of which are seen as reducing employee protections and shifting the balance of power toward employers.

1. Change the contractor vs employee test.

The present test of whether someone is an employee requires consideration of the reality of the arrangement. The proposed new test amends the definition of "employee" to exclude a "specified contractor".

2. Increase the impact of employee contribution in the personal grievance process by severely limiting the remedies available.

Even if an employee is able to establish unjustified dismissal there will be significant barriers to meaningful compensation.

3. Deny employees earning over \$180,000 (i) the ability to raise a personal grievance for or related to an unjustified dismissal

4. Remove the 30-day rule providing new starts the terms of a CA, making it easier for 90-day trials to be imposed, for example.

At present for the first 30 days of employment, employees working within coverage of a collective agreement receive its terms. They can then decide whether to join the union or not.

Wellington Port AGM

A reminder that the AGM for this branch will be held on September 26th at the Thistle Inn at 1400. We urge all Port members to attend and hope for a good turnout, refreshments will be served and it will be a good chance for the members to meet up.

We hope to be able to encourage some new delegates to put their hands up.

Qube Hours of Work Review

As a result of the recent ratification and signing of the new Collective, the RMTU have agreed to put together a working group of members who work on an 1,820 contract to review the consecutive hours and days of work ensuring safe fatigue management guidelines are being followed. The first meeting is set for Friday 24th October 1:30pm–3pm.

Cost of living worries increasing, Labour seen as most capable of managing.

Inflation / cost of living worries remains the top concern for Kiwis according to the August IPSOS survey. The quarterly survey of 1,002 New Zealanders reveals significant increases in concern about inflation / cost of living and unemployment. Inflation / cost of living remains the most important, with 60% of New Zealanders identifying it as a concern increasing significantly on the previous wave. Meanwhile, concern for Unemployment is at its highest point since November 2020, with 1 in 5 (19%) New Zealanders identifying it as a key issue. Concern for Healthcare / hospitals is second and concern for the economy remains the 3rd most important issues facing New Zealand, To read the report go [here](#)



RMTU Supporting Pay equity

The Pay Equity petition was presented to Parliament in July with more than 94 000 signatures.

What's Pay Equity

Pay equity is about people in female dominated professions and people in male dominated professions receiving the same pay for doing jobs that are different, but of equal value. That is, jobs that require similar levels of skills, responsibility and effort. The Equal Pay Amendment Act (2020) established a standardised way to assess roles to see if they are undervalued. The CTU website has excellent resources on this topic <https://union.org.nz/pay-equity-explainers/> including a list of all the 33 Pay Equity Claims that have been gutted by the recent legislative changes. The CTU is calling on the Government to:

- Reverse all proposed amendments to the Equal Pay Act and restore existing pay equity claims.
- Undo Equal Pay Act changes that make it impossible for people working in female dominated professions to achieve and retain pay equity
- Deliver pay equity settlements to every worker waiting for their claim.



People's Select Committee on Pay Equity

The People's Select Committee hearings began on August 11. The first in-person session was a powerful display of the real-world impact of this Government's decision to erode pay equity, with 11 moving submissions.

👉 If you missed it, you can watch on by clicking on the links in bold font, **YouTube**.

👉 Follow the PSC on **Instagram** and **Facebook** to stay connected with upcoming hearings.

👉 Not on socials? Visit their **website**.

20th September

Day of Action: Rise up for Pay Equity

All regions

Click here to support pay equity in your area.



Please update your contact details with the RMTU by scanning the QR code.



Expressions of Interest 'WIMDOI'

11-14 May 2026

WIMDOI stands for Women in Male Dominated Occupations & Industry. The RMTU is calling for expressions of interest from women RMTU



members who would like to attend the WIMDOI Biennial Conference next year in Rotorua. The WIMDOI Conference provides women with a safe environment to share stories, enhance skills, build networks and strategies, and develop Union power. Feedback from previous RMTU attendees includes:

- "Empowering", "Inspiring"
- "I made lifelong connections"
- "paving the way for the younger generation"

of women coming into the industry"

For further information please contact Rebecca Hauck at gunkgirl7@gmail.com. To register your interest please email

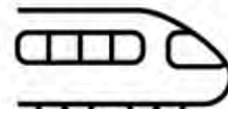
reception@rmtunion.org.nz

Note: to secure spaces for RMTU women and to keep costs to a minimum, please register your interest by **30 SEPTEMBER 2025**

UK's Rail Maritime Union (RMT) members

have voted to take strike action across the underground train network from Friday 5th September. RMT members are fighting for better pay and fatigue management due to extreme shift patterns. The workforce, voted in overwhelming numbers to take strike action.

PETITION: LET'S GET THE SOUTHERNER TRAIN BACK!



The pro-rail lobby group 'the future is rail' is asking for people to sign a petition for bringing back the **Southerner Train**, from Invercargill, via Dunedin to Christchurch, as a regular public transport service, supporting South Island towns and cities along the route.

They say a restored Southerner train route offers affordable transport for 750,000 South Island residents,



bridging gaps where air is too costly for students/low-income, coaches inaccessible for disabled/elderly, and car travel unsafe/expensive. This boosts regional economic development and tourism. Recent rail investments, like Hillside Workshops, new ferries, and Inland Ports, confirm rail's viability in the South Island. If you'd like to support, sign the petition [here](#)

Stay safe out there.

