

Kansas City prime

RSSI's new formula for a C&S trade show proved popular with railroaders, and no bum steer for suppliers.

By Tom Judge, Engineering Editor

Railway Systems Suppliers, Inc., working closely with the railroads, pulled off a success far beyond the most optimistic projections with the Western C&S Exhibition at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Kansas City, Mo., May 16 and 17. The exhibition was conceived by Railway Equipment Co. President Dave Fox and ERICO, Inc., Sales Manager Jim Huntley, both RSSI directors. It was co-hosted by Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Assistant Vice President-Signal Dennis Boll, Union Pacific Chief Engineer-Signals Phil Abaray, and RSSI Chairman and President and Union Switch & Signal Director-Railroad Sales and Customer Service George Rudge.

To encourage attendance, railroaders were not charged a registration fee. Since meals were included, the only expenses railroad companies had to pick up for employees were travel and lodging. Both BNSF and UP have large numbers of employees nearby, so

transportation costs were low and lodging costs were eliminated in many cases. Low costs also encouraged attendance from other Class I railroads as well as regionals, short lines, and transit agencies. Outside activities were discouraged. Suppliers were strongly urged not to entertain customers. There were no hospitality suites, no outside supplier events, and no spouse program.

"The very best advance turnout forecast was about 800," said RSSI Executive Director Donald F. "Bucky" Remaley. "The final attendance total was about 1,400 people, of whom about 600 were from railroads, transit agencies, and government agencies. That's a ratio of almost one supplier to one user, which is fantastic."

The Western C&S Exhibition was just that, an exhibition. Suppliers from more than 100 companies took booth space in the hall. There were no technical papers presented. The only event scheduled outside of the exhibit hall in the Crown Plaza Hotel was the welcoming dinner on Tuesday, May 15. Kansas City Southern Chairman, President, and CEO Michael Haverty delivered the keynote address and congratulated the group on the excellent turnout.

On Wednesday, May 16, the exhibit hall was open from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. The next day, the exhibits were open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Buffet lunch and dinner were served in the exhibit hall Monday and buffet breakfast, lunch, and dinner were served there Thursday. Some railroads did take advantage of available meeting rooms to hold monthly safety meetings or other gatherings.

Many suppliers said they were happy not only with the number of railroaders, but also with the variety. "At this meeting we saw not only top and middle level supervisors, but also the people who are responsible for day-to-day maintenance, the ones who use our products every day," said Western-Cullen-Hayes, Inc. President Ron McDaniel. One supplier was told by a railroader that he learned there were four suppliers for products in his area that, prior to the exhibit, he did not know existed.

RSSI plans to repeat the no-frills exhibit format in May 2002 in Louisville, Ky., with CSX Transportation and Norfolk Southern. In the interim, the RSSI board and staff will review comment sheets to consider what improvements might be made to the format. EN

