



FROM THE DESK OF

**WALTER A. BARROWS
LABOR MEMBER**



U.S. RAILROAD RETIREMENT BOARD

Walter A. Barrows

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Applying for a Railroad Retirement Annuity

Railroad employees who are planning to retire should be aware of what steps to take and what documents are required when applying for an annuity from the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB). Being prepared can prevent needless delays and ensure that payments from the RRB begin as soon as possible after retirement. The following questions and answers describe the application process and other related items that retiring employees, as well as their spouses or survivors, should be aware of.

1. How are railroad retirement annuity applications filed?

Applications are filed through the RRB's field offices. Applicants may file in person or by telephone and mail. Those filing in person may do so at any RRB office or at one of the office's customer outreach program service locations. Applicants filing by telephone receive the same information and instructions that are provided to those filing in person; forms requiring signatures and other documents are then handled by mail.

The addresses of all the RRB's field offices are available on the agency's website at www.rrb.gov, or by calling the RRB's toll-free number at 1-877-772-5772. This number, which provides access to the agency's field office representatives, also provides automated menus 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. RRB field offices are open to the public from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on Federal holidays.

2. Can an application be filed prior to a person's actual retirement date?

The RRB accepts annuity applications up to 3 months in advance of an annuity beginning date, which allows the RRB to complete the processing of most new claims by a person's retirement date. An employee can be in compensated service while filing a disability application provided that the compensated service is not active service and terminates within 90 days from the date of filing. When an employee files a disability application while still in compensated service, it will be necessary to provide a specific ending date of the compensation. Compensated service includes not only compensation with respect to active service performed by an employee for an employer, but also includes pay for time lost, wage continuation payments, certain employee protection payments and any other payment for which the employee will receive additional creditable service.

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To expedite the filing process, applicants should contact their local RRB field office to schedule time for a pre-retirement consultation and also to confirm their eligibility and be advised as to the required documents. The consultation can be conducted in person, or by telephone, with an RRB representative who will provide an annuity estimate, explain a retiree's benefit rights and responsibilities, and answer related questions.

Railroad employees can also get estimates of their future annuities over the Internet by visiting the RRB's website. To do so, employees must first establish an RRB online account at www.rrb.gov. For security purposes, first-time users must apply for a Password Request Code (PRC), which they will receive by regular mail in about 10 business days. To do this, they should click on "Request Password Request Code (PRC) be mailed to your home address" in the "Benefit Online Services Login" section on the home page. Once they establish their online accounts, they will be able to get an estimate of their annuities, as well as conduct other business with the RRB, over the Internet. Railroad workers are encouraged to establish online accounts while still employed so the accounts are ready when needed. Employees who have already established online accounts do not need to do so again.

3. What are some of the documents required with an application?

- All applicants have to furnish proof of their age.
- All applicants should be prepared to furnish the notice of any social security benefit award or other social security claim determination.
- An employee may be required to submit information regarding any other Federal, State or local government pension for which he or she also qualifies, as well as certain other payments not covered by railroad retirement or social security, such as from a non-profit organization or from a foreign government or a foreign employer.
- An employee or survivor filing for a disability annuity is required to submit supporting medical information from his or her treating physician, as well as any reports or records from recent hospitalizations. He or she may also be asked to go for one or more specialized medical examinations given by a doctor named by the RRB. If an employee disability applicant is receiving workers' compensation or public disability benefits, notice of the amount and beginning date of such payments must be submitted.
- An employee will have to furnish proof of any military service claimed.
- A spouse, divorced spouse or widow(er) applying for a railroad retirement annuity must furnish proof of marriage to the employee. A divorced spouse must furnish proof of a final divorce from the employee, as well as proof that any subsequent marriages have terminated.
- A spouse, divorced spouse or survivor also qualified to receive a pension from a Federal, state or local government must submit information regarding that pension.
- All applicants have to provide banking information necessary for their enrollment in Direct Deposit.

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A booklet, "Furnishing Evidence to Support Your Claim" (Form RB-3), gives detailed information as to the types of proofs that are required when filing for an annuity, as well as sources from which these documents can be obtained. The booklet is available free of charge at any RRB office or at www.rrb.gov.

4. Can proofs be filed in advance of retirement?

Railroad employees are encouraged to file proofs of their correct birth date and their military service well in advance of retirement. The information will be recorded and stored electronically until they actually retire. This will expedite the annuity application process and avoid any delays resulting from inadequate proofs.

If employees do not have an official record of their birth or military service, their local RRB office will explain how to get acceptable evidence. All evidence brought or mailed to an RRB office will be handled carefully and returned promptly.

5. What is the retroactivity of a railroad retirement application?

The retroactivity of a railroad retirement annuity application is limited to 1 year for disability annuities and 6 months for full age annuities. There is generally no retroactivity for reduced age annuities.

Retroactivity of a survivor annuity application is 1 year for disabled widow(er)s and 6 months for full retirement age widow(er)s, mothers (fathers), children and parents. Retroactivity for widow(er)s ages 60-61 is 6 months if it does not increase the age reduction (this does not apply to surviving divorced spouses or remarried widow(er)s). Otherwise, there is generally no retroactivity for reduced age widow(er)s' annuities.

6. Are retiring railroad employees required to relinquish their rights to their railroad jobs?

An employee annuity **based on age** cannot be paid until the employee stops railroad employment **and** gives up any rights to return to work for a railroad employer. While an annuity **based on disability** is not paid until an employee has stopped working for a railroad, employment rights need not be relinquished until the employee attains full retirement age. However, in order for a supplemental annuity to be paid by the RRB, or for an eligible spouse to begin receiving annuity payments, a disabled annuitant under full retirement age must relinquish employment rights. And, regardless of age and/or earnings, no railroad retirement annuity is payable for any month in which a retired or disabled employee annuitant, a spouse annuitant or a survivor annuitant works for an employer covered under the Railroad Retirement Act, including labor organizations. Such work includes service for **more than \$24.99 in a calendar month** to a local lodge or division of a railway labor organization. Also, work by a local lodge or division secretary collecting insurance premiums, **regardless of the amount of salary**, is railroad work which must be stopped.

Railroad retirement annuitants may work in nonrailroad employment, but benefits may be reduced if a beneficiary under full retirement age works after retirement and earnings exceed annual exempt amounts. Additional earnings deductions are assessed if a retired or disabled employee annuitant, or a

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spouse annuitant, works for his or her last pre-retirement nonrailroad employer, regardless of age or the level of earnings.

Special restrictions also apply to any earnings by disabled employees.

7. How soon after filing can an applicant expect payment?

Under the RRB's Customer Service Plan, if an applicant filed for a railroad retirement employee or spouse annuity in advance of the beginning date of the annuity, the RRB is expected to make a decision within 35 days of the beginning date of the annuity. If an applicant did not file in advance, the RRB is expected to make a decision within 60 days of the date the application was filed.

If an applicant filed for a railroad retirement survivor annuity and was not already receiving benefits as a spouse, the RRB will make a decision to pay, deny, or transfer the application to the Social Security Administration within 60 days of the beginning date of the annuity or the date the application was filed (whichever is later). If an applicant is already receiving a spouse annuity, the RRB will make a decision to pay, deny, or transfer the application for a survivor annuity to the Social Security Administration within 30 days of the first notice of the employee's death. If an applicant filed for a lump-sum death benefit, the RRB will make a decision to pay or deny the application within 60 days of the date the application was filed.

After the RRB has made its decision, applicants should receive a notice of award or denial within 2 weeks. If entitled to benefits, it is generally expected that the payment will be deposited in an individual's bank account within 1 week of the RRB's decision.

For disability annuities, processing applications is more complex than for other benefits because of the need to develop medical evidence. Under the Customer Service Plan, if an applicant filed for a railroad retirement disability annuity, the RRB is expected to make a decision within 100 days of the date the application was filed.

If it is determined that an applicant is entitled to disability benefits, the individual's first payment will be received within 25 days of the date of the RRB's decision, or the earliest payment date, whichever is later.

Of course, claims for some benefits may take longer to handle than others if they are more complex, or if information from other people or organizations is needed. If this happens, the RRB will provide an explanation and an estimate of the additional time required to make a decision.

8. How are railroad retirement payments made?

The Department of the Treasury has eliminated the vast majority of paper checks for Federal benefit payments. New recipients of Federal benefits now receive their payments by electronic means. The most common form of electronic payment for railroad retirement, social security and veterans benefits is through Direct Deposit, in which the amount is automatically transferred to an individual's bank account. Those without bank accounts can enroll in Treasury's Direct Express® program, which electronically transfers Federal payments to an individual's Direct Express®-issued debit card. The

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card can then be used like an ordinary debit card. While agencies can still grant waivers from electronic payment, they can do so only in very limited cases.

9. How can individuals find more information about filing for railroad retirement annuities?

More information is available by visiting the RRB's website, www.rrb.gov, or by calling an RRB office toll-free at 1-877-772-5772. Persons can find the address of the RRB office servicing their area by calling the agency's toll-free number or at www.rrb.gov.

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