# REGIONALS IN REVIEW: CANADIAN NATIONAL IN THE US

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## Acting like a Class 1,

On the largest new regional, WC also means "we can"

6553 6553

ENTRAL

#### **OTTO P. DOBNICK**



LATE on a weekday afternoon, an unremarked mainline passing siding springs to life. The steady chatter of crickets in nearby wetlands succumbs to the drone of turbocharged diesels as two six-axle units ease into the siding with 110 cars. In a few minutes, with the train tucked safely in the clear, a headlight appears in the distance. Two more high-horsepower units race toward the meet and roar by on the main. A string of piggybacks, container flats, and box cars glides by on welded rail. Crews radio "your train looks O.K." messages to each other. With the meet completed, a faraway dispatcher punches up the siding location on his CTC machine, and the remotely controlled switch opens. The waiting freight accelerates away. As the rear-end telemetry devices wink at each other and distant air horns salute the next grade crossings, the siding again becomes dormant.

This generic drama typifies modern railroading, as such meets occur hundreds of times every day on the likes of



NEWLY repainted SD45 6553 and sister 6524 accelerate an extra west of Rugby Junction, Wis., May 7, 1990. Jeff Hampton photo.

### but not always thinking like one

Union Pacific, Santa Fe, Conrail, and Norfolk Southern. But this meet didn't occur on any of the Class 1's, rather on Wisconsin Central, America's largest new regional, a railroad that in many ways acts like a Class 1.

Like many other new regionals, though, Wisconsin Central also tries to act differently than Class 1's—or rather, than how Class 1's are perceived. Wisconsin Central has adopted a customer-oriented marketing and operating philosophy that is more like Procter & Gamble or United Parcel Service than a traditional railroad company. Starting anew has enabled WC to infuse a new attitude in its workforce, with flexible work-rules, operating practices, and marketing strategies to increase utilization of personnel and equipment. The goal is to offer shippers a high-quality, consistent, dependable service at competitive rates. So far, this has resulted in more traffic for WC than predecessor Soo Line had on the same lines, with high shipper satisfaction. Now, WC employment has increased, and most employees seem excited to be involved with a dynamic carrier whose business is increasing.

As its third anniversary—October 11, 1990—approaches, Wisconsin Central is showing what a regional railroad can achieve. In an arena where railroads are perceived as being unable or unwilling to change, the men and women who operate Wisconsin Central have made a habit of saying, "We Can."

#### Second time around

Wisconsin Central is aptly named, stretching like a net over the central and northern portions of the Badger State. Of the 2068 total miles of railroad WC operates, 1264 miles of the track that it owns and 167 it uses on trackage rights are in Wisconsin, making it the state's largest railroad, accounting for over 30 percent of the state's trackage. WC is made up of what is left of Soo Line's original namesake Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie line; the original Wisconsin Central from Chicago to northwestern Wisconsin; the old Duluth, South Shore & Atlantic in Michigan's Upper Peninsula; and two former Milwaukee Road lines, from Milwaukee to Green Bay, and the Wisconsin (River) Valley line in the central part of the state.

Wisconsin Central's traffic base depends largely on the paper industry. Wisconsin has been the largest paperproducing state since 1953, with paper, pulp, and converting mills scattered throughout its central and northern regions, as well as the adjacent Upper Peninsula of Michigan (locally called the "U.P."). Much traffic for these mills —inbound materials and outbound products—moves on WC's main line between Chicago and Stevens Point.

Operating WC's system on a typical weekday are 38 regularly scheduled trains drawing from a roster of 98 diesel locomotives, assisted by a fleet of 4650 freight cars with WC reporting marks, largest for any new regional. (This positions the WC's fleet between Maine Central's 3100 and Kansas City Southern's 6200). Keeping WC's operation on schedule falls on the shoulders of nearly 900 employees.

Much of Wisconsin Central's train operations are closer to those of a Class 1 than to the pattern of some smaller regionals, which might run one train daily over a single line. WC operates 50mph daily time freights (including an intermodal each way) over welded-rail, CTC-equipped main lines, as well as some service over 25-mph branches on an as-needed basis.

Wisconsin Central is the largest of the new regionals in many respects besides freight-car ownership. WC's 2068 miles easily top the MidSouth system's 1268; the only other new regionals longer than 700 miles are Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern (965), Montana Rail Link (940), newly reborn Wheeling & Lake Erie (840), and Chicago, Central & Pacific (797). In terms of annual revenues and carloads, only MidSouth, MRL, and CC&P appear to be in the same league, though W&LE might also qualify. WC is larger than existing Class 1's Kansas City Southern (1660 miles including Louisiana & Arkansas), Grand Trunk Western (935), and Florida East Coast (541), as well as such Fallen Flag "welterweight" regionals as Chicago Great Western (1800 miles), Western Pacific (1400), and Chicago & Eastern Illinois (650). Still, having taken over a largely light-density network from Soo in essentially two states, Wisconsin Central is certainly regional in character.

For the Wisconsin Central name, this is the second time around. The original WC dates to some of the earliest days of Wisconsin railroading. During the 1870's, the federal government offered land grants as enticements to railroad companies to build into unsettled regions (as well as to ensure that military troops could be moved to protect border areas should the need arise), and one such grant was for lands and adjacent timber stands on a route from central Wisconsin to Lake Superior. With this enticement, the original Wisconsin Central Railroad Company was incorporated on February 4, 1871, and on June 15, ground was broken in West Menasha (now Neenah) for a line that would ultimately reach Ashland. A 63mile line west to Stevens Point was constructed in just 120 days, and WC reached Ashland in 1877.

In the following decade, WC grew

west to Chippewa Falls in 1880 and St. Paul, Minn., in 1884; reached south to Schleisingerville (now Slinger, north of Waukesha) in 1882 and Chicago in 1886; and constructed a branch off the Ashland line east to Hurley and the Gogebic Iron Range in 1887. In 1876, a line had been built south from Stevens Point to Portage; this was abandoned in the 1940's. The Menasha-Manitowoc line was built in 1896, and the line northwest from Owen reached Ladysmith in 1906 and Superior in 1908.

The first Wisconsin Central was a relative latecomer to the big cities on its 1000-mile system, so its Chicago line, for example, followed a serpentine path through Oshkosh, bypassed Milwaukee, and gained access to the Chicago Switching District by trackage rights over terminal railroad facilities. WC was leased by Northern Pacific during 1890-1893, but, following financial difficulties precipitated by the depression of 1893, WC did enjoy better times and major capital improvements starting at the turn of the century. In 1909, the original Wisconsin Central lost its independence upon lease by MStP&SSM. (For the uninitiated, "Soo" is the pronunciation of the first word in Sault Ste. Marie, and the twin Michigan and Ontario cities are locally called "the Soo"-hence the railroad's nickname, and later its legal name.)

From 1909 through 1960, Wisconsin Central had its own bookkeeping and officers and owned its track, locomotives, and cars. Only tiny "W.C." ini-



UNLIKE some other spinoffs, WC inherited a top physical plant from Soo Line; SD45's lead train 4 up the South Range from Superior, Wis.

tials on the corners of rolling stock and engines, or their different numbering series, would tip trackside observers to WC's continued corporate existence. Soo leased WC until 1932, then operated it as agent. To Soo Line employees, Wisconsin Central was simply the Stevens Point Division. Once WC came out of receivership in 1954, it joined Soo Line in modernizing its equipment and fixed plant, operating more efficiently and gaining traffic ["Soo's Not Sleeping," pages 14-26, December 1958 TRAINS].

On January 1, 1961, the original Wisconsin Central disappeared for good as Soo Line realized an idea conceived during the Great Depression of the 1930's, amalgamating itself-the Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Mariewith WC and Duluth, South Shore & Atlantic to become the Soo Line Railroad Company, marketed as the "New Soo" ["What's Inside a Railroad Annual Report," pages 36-43, August 1962 TRAINS]. During the next quarter century, Soo Line became a feisty competitor among Midwestern railroads. Of seven Chicago-Twin Cities routes, Soo's through Stevens Point-although longer and operationally more difficult than those of its three major competitors (Milwaukee Road, North Western, and Burlington)-held its own, mainly because of welded rail, CTC, and management that emphasized regular maintenance. Ultimately, the other three routes -Chicago Great Western, Rock Island, and Illinois Central/Minneapolis & St. Louis-disappeared.

#### **Changes on the Soo**

By 1984, Soo Line was heading for some drastic changes. In the previous decade, railroading in Soo's region had changed with the deregulation of both trucking and railroads, the decline of Midwestern heavy industry, the loss of local railroad business, the growth of coal traffic, and mergers. The heretofore quiet, conservative Soo Line decided that to ensure a future, it would have to expand its traffic mix and look for new gateways. The answer was to bid against Grand Trunk Western and North Western to acquire the slimmeddown Milwaukee Road in 1985.

To its surprise, Soo—although second-high bidder to C&NW—was able to do just that, almost doubling its size overnight in February 1985. For its effort, the "new Soo" became a "newer Soo" with a larger and more diverse traffic base, new traffic patterns, and overwhelming mileage in Wisconsin. During this transition period, Soo Line marketed itself as the Soo/Milwaukee System. The former Milwaukee Road properties brought with them "Sprint" TOFC trains and a shorter Chicago-St. Paul route, but also a lot of deferred maintenance and a large debt burden from the acquisition. During the next two years, Soo Line moved most of its through traffic off its ex-WC route to the former Milwaukee Road main. And while the paper industry continued to generate thousands of carloads on Soo's traditional lines, these lines became secondary feeders on "Soo/Milwaukee."

In an effort to trim costs on these now marginally trafficked lines. Soo attempted to create an in-house subsidiary. Beginning in February 1986, most of what would later become Wisconsin Central Ltd. was given the name Lake States Transportation Division. LSTD's 2300-mile network was to operate in the style of new regionals with more flexible work-rules, which were to yield lower labor costs. But Lake States was short-lived; the work-rules changes failed to materialize, and with no substantive changes in sight, traffic levels stagnant, and a need for cash, Soo announced in January 1987 that Lake States was for sale. Funds raised would help reduce the large debt from the Milwaukee Road purchase.

Soo wanted to sell Lake States as a unit, not in sections, and when the "For Sale" sign went up, it caught the eye of several potential buyers. Among those was a group of railroad officials who had years of experience with Chicago &



PRESIDENT ED BURKHARDT



EXECUTIVE VP TOM POWER

North Western or Milwaukee Road, headed by Edward A. Burkhardt and Thomas F. Power Jr.

Ed Burkhardt, now WC's president, had spent the last 20 of his 29 rail career years with the North Western, much of it in operations and most recently as vice president-transportation. Power, now WC's executive vice president and chief financial officer, had spent the last 17 of his 24 railroad years with Milwaukee Road including vice president-reorganization and chief financial officer during the reorganization. Among the other backers was the late Richard B. Ogilvie, former Illinois governor and Milwaukee Road trustee.

Their group considered other Midwestern regional possibilities, but took great interest in the Lake States property. After considering other offers, Soo chose their group, and on April 3, 1987, announced it had reached an agreement for the sale of Lake States. The would-be owner was a brand-new company with an almost forgotten name: Wisconsin Central Ltd.

#### **Putting a railroad together**

The easiest task in starting the company may have been picking the name. And, the original WC's shield was a logical and distinctive choice for the new company's emblem, avoiding any need for an expensive image designer. The WC shield had virtually disappeared upon lease of the original WC by Soo in 1909, although sharpeyed railroaders or historians could spot the occasional yellow, shield-shaped switchstand target still in use along old WC lines (to this day, a faint shield also remains on the original WC freight house in downtown Minneapolis).

Soo Line's agreement for the sale of LSTD to WC was fairly straightforward. It included the railroad and all associated buildings, tracks, signals, and adjoining property not used for rail operations, plus specific trackage rights for both WC and Soo Line and maintenance tools, equipment, and supplies. The agreement did not include any locomotives or cars (WC did acquire some of both from Soo, but as a separate purchase). Excluded also were machinery, tools, and supplies used at the North Fond du Lac shop, if removed by Soo Line within nine months after the sale. Soo reserved the right to use the shop during that period. All bad-order cars and other scrap was excluded, unless it remained on the property after 90 days.

Wisconsin Central's backers immediately started putting together a railroad. Operations and customer service would be centered at Stevens Point, while the corporate headquarters would be in Chicagoland (ultimately in northwest suburban Rosemont). Corporate structure is relatively simple: The rail-



Otto P. Dobnick

RIDING an uncommonly weedy green (for Soo) but smooth roadbed, WC investors roll through Waukesha on inspection train behind the Lake States SD39 on April 5, 1987.

road is operated by Wisconsin Central Ltd. (WCL), the largest and most prominent subsidiary of a holding company, the Wisconsin Corporation. This firm, formed in April 1987 by five individuals including Burkhardt and Power, is privately held. Stock is owned by the lending institutions that provided capital for purchase and start-up, and by senior management, company founders, and a few outside investors. Another subsidiary, WCL Railcars, Inc., owns locomotives and cars and leases them to the railroad. WC also leases rolling stock from other sources including General Electric Leasing, Brae, and the Oxford Group. WCL Railcars remains separate as a convenience because of the way in which equipment financing was set up. Another subsidiary, Wisconsin Bridges Inc., exists to provide an American owner of stock for Sault Ste. Marie Bridge Co., a Canadian firm formerly owned half each by Soo Line and Canadian Pacific.

To assemble financing, the founders approached the small leveraged buyout market. The founders, together with Berkshire Partners, a company that arranges funds and invests in new companies, provided \$15 million in equity toward the project. About \$100 million in long-term loans and \$10 million in revolving credit for use as working capital were provided by a syndicate of seven banks. Included are Irving Trust Co. of New York, which acted as the lead bank, and First Wisconsin of Milwaukee. In addition, \$20 million in subordinated debt was borrowed from New York Life. Altogether, start-up investment came to about \$145 million. Of this, \$122 million went to Soo Line to buy Lake States; \$13 million was used as working capital; and \$10 million went for startup and financing expenses.

Following acceptance of WCL's offer by Soo Line, work commenced immediately on putting together a new company. During the ensuing spring and summer, a management team was assembled and financial backing was finalized. In August 1987, a special train -consisting of the only locomotive to have LAKE STATES emblazoned on its nose (SD39 6241) and three private cars with the rear car carrying a banner reading "Irving Trust"-toured the railroad from Chicago to Mosinee (south of Wausau) to provide investors a firsthand look at their investment. When Soo Line had turned off the spigot of through freight over the main line through Stevens Point, it understandably also throttled down much of the maintenance-of-way expenditures. Consequently, the old main line had started to turn green during summer 1987. But the track was physically sound-Soo Line's investment in steady maintenance over the years still rang true, and any fears by those aboard the inspection train that a worn-out property was being acquired were no doubt put to rest.

As equipment was being arranged and financial strategies developed by the new owners, Soo started moving out. Railroad cars and highway trucks full of Soo Line materials departed Stevens Point, North Fond du Lac, and other cities, and many areas quickly took on a sparse, uncluttered look.

For WC, the most important emphasis was on attracting qualified employees. Priority was given to Lake States people, as their experience and knowledge would be valuable. During summer 1987, hiring activities proceeded, and about 400 Soo employees working on Lakes States accepted jobs with WC. Most of these were maintenanceof-way, shop, and mechanical forces. Only a handful of Soo operating people (e.g., train dispatchers) stayed to join WC, as most elected to retain their seniority with Soo. Thus most train-service and clerical personnel were hired new, and at startup, employees and their families relocated from 42 states! In one instance, five railroaders from the same Indiana family hired on, swelling the population of Stevens Point by 22. Management and marketing people came mostly from C&NW and Milwaukee, but some from Soo (including Lake States).

Finally, a date was set: September 11, 1987. Employees, engines, equipment, and data management systems were ready to go. Management was expecting to assume operations under Interstate Commerce Commission exemption procedures. Accordingly, a petition was submitted to the ICC on September 4 to begin operations on the 11th. When that date rolled around, however, the intended startup instead became the beginning of Wisconsin Central's "baptism by fire."

#### A hectic start

On the very day WC was to take over, the ICC-prodded by labor unions and a few elected public officials-made a surprising and unprecedented decision, staying the transaction. Wisconsin Central management, employees, and shippers were flabbergasted. The ICC issued a 45-day delay so it could study the effectiveness of the sale under exemption procedures and consider the "unique issues" involved in this "unusually large and significant" transaction. Meanwhile, new employees had to be held away and locomotives had to be leased to other parties on a short-term basis. Computer systems collected dust, not data. During this time, the 400 Lake States employees who resigned from Soo to start with WC had to be reinstated.

A blitzkrieg of letters, telegrams, and phone calls from hundreds of shippers, public officials, community leaders, regulatory officials, and employees changed the ICC's mind, however, and the ICC soon dissolved the stay effective 12:01 a.m., Sunday, October 11. With three days notice, the closing process was triggered. By 4 a.m. on that Sunday morning, mountains of paperwork had been churned through, documents signed, and last-minute negotiations handled. After preparation of an estimated 80,000 pages of closing documents, Soo was \$122 million richer.

There wasn't much time for celebration. Says Ed Burkhardt, "I think somebody at the closing had a bottle of champagne, and I think I may have had a mouthful, then we went to work." As the last papers were being signed, workers at Stevens Point and North Fond du Lac began restenciling freight cars with WC reporting marks. On some ex-Soo locomotives, WC initials were stenciled on the cab and the large "SOO" on the flanks was painted over in matching white. At 8:15 a.m., the very first Wisconsin Central Ltd. freight train departed Stevens Point for Shops Yard at North Fond du Lac with engines 726, 710, and 2412 (a GP35 and GP30 acquired by WC, plus a leased Soo GP9) pulling 45 loads and 43 empties totaling 5465 tons. The new WC was finally an operating entity.

For the reincarnated WC, it was out of the frying pan and into the fire. Burkhardt, who generally reveals an easygoing manner, recalls the adventure. "A very fine-tuned exacting plan was in place based on a September 11 startup." But during the four weeks, "our planning totally collapsed," because it was uncertain when, or even if, the stay would be lifted. Regardless, a monumental job lay ahead because of the wholesale change of employees.

Complications set in right away. First, the lessor providing the 40 ex-Burlington Northern SD45 diesels that were to be the backbone of WC's motive-power fleet had to send 20 of the units to Southern Pacific for the remainder of the year. New employees, who would be unfamiliar with the WC's operating practices, customer requirements, and waybill-management system, wound up elsewhere, at least temporarily, when the September postponement occurred. The big surprise, though, was that the record of waybill information for the 2700 cars on-line at the time of conveyance was useless. Some people suspect the car information was scrambled as a parting shot by an unknown, apparently disgruntled clerical person departing with the Soo.

Hence, Wisconsin Central began on virtually overnight notice, with insufficient motive power to move 2700 mystery cars whose particulars were unknown, employing a skeleton staff largely unfamiliar with the territory.

The result was predictable. For the first two months, train schedules were almost nonexistent, train-crew workdays were likely to end almost anywhere, and customers understandably became con-



IN WC's early days, diesels wore an array of colors and every siding became a "yard." Train 42, with a Soo GP9 and WC SDL39/GP35M/SD45, picks up cars at Vernon siding October 31, 1987; Waukesha "engine terminal" hosted WC, Conrail, and Soo units in January 1988.



cerned about delivery of raw materials and supplies. On the main line between Chicago and Fond du Lac, for example, taxicabs from cities as far away as Neenah were not uncommon visitors to Waukesha, ferrying crews to rescue stranded trains.

To alleviate the power shortage, WC retained some Lake States GP9's for several weeks and leased 22 other units until the SD45's began to be available in December. Although expensive to lease and smaller than the SD45's, the stop-gap units included 14 Conrail GP35's, two pairs of Indiana Harbor Belt switchers (affectionately known as "Bonnie and Clyde" and "Pluto and Goofy"), a Minnesota Commercial SW1500, and two Green Bay & Western Alcos.

At many locations, every usable track seemed to be filled with cars, either "lost" ones being sorted out and identified, or cars intentionally being switched there. To start expediting traffic through Shops Yard, WC relocated classification of southbound cars to specific passing sidings between there and Burlington. This "block-swapping," in which cuts of cars would be set out for pickup by following trains, was begun in early November. This allowed Shops Yard to be devoted to northbound classification. The block-swapping was halted in December after yard capacity at Shops was added. During this period, among the unsung heroes were the dispatchers, most of whom staved on from Soo Line. They may have been the only people who knew how the pieces fit together.

To get car record-keeping and waybill work under control, WC recruited additional employees. During the first five weeks, much of the corporate headquarters staff was in the field, helping to move trains and straighten out the car identification. The antidote for the spoiled waybill records turned out to be a track-by-track inspection of every car on the property.

As 1988 got under way, equipment

and personnel were in place. On October 28, the first payday had seen 531 checks cut; by November 11, there were 713. Train schedules were becoming reliable. The backlog of cars had been cleaned up, and shipper complaints were turning into compliments. Top management proudly speaks of the dedication, attitude, and perseverence of WC employees during the turbulent startup period. "The difficulty of getting started under these kinds of conditions served to very much solidify the workforce from the top to the bottom," says Burkhardt. "The problems served as a catalyst to get everybody working together. We had a lot of things that have really turned out to be great in terms of our relationship with the people who wound up working on this property." Officials estimate the four-week delay cost the company as much as \$8 million in extra expenses.

Since overcoming its startup or-

deal, Wisconsin Central has not looked back, and in its three-year existence can easily be judged successful. In 1989, it took in operating revenues of \$101.3 million, vs. \$93.7 million for 1988. The railroad has been profitable since March 1988. To bring in this money, WC handled 159,100 "revenue units" in 1989, up 9.1 percent over the 145,800 handled during 1988. A revenue unit can be a freight car, trailer, or container load. In the same year, by contrast, the



VINTAGE motive power (GP30's and GP9's), a Lake States hallmark, dominates as trains 18 and 19 meet at Shops Yard April 5, 1987. Otto P. Dobnick photo

### **The Lake States legacy**

I IN the era of new regional railroad startups, Lake States has been the least permanent. Following its creation by Soo Line in February 1986, obvious efforts were made to separate the Lake States Transportation Division into a separate business unit. Although legally remaining a part of Soo Line until its sale in October 1987, the light-density system was provided with its own management, equipment, marketing philosophy, and identity which extended all the way down to details such as stationery, promotional items, and an employee's timetable.

To trackside observers, the most obvious evidence of Lake States' independence was the dedication of specific Soo locomotives for Lake States use and the eventual transformation of operations from that of pre-Soo/Milwaukee mainline through trains to that of trains intended to handle originating and terminating traffic between central Wisconsin and Chicago. A total of 29 daily regular freights were operated on the division, mostly on a six-day-a-week schedule. Most were redesignated not with ingenious alpha codes, but with one- and two-digit numbers reminiscent of Soo Line freight and passenger trains that roamed the same routes in the 1950's and 1960's. Only the overnight "Sprint" intermodal trains between Green Bay and Chicago rated three-digit numbers, in series with Soo's mainline Sprints.

Lake States provided Soo with a repository for 73 of its oldest locomotives. The fledgling regional was assigned 37 GP9's, 19 GP30's, and 6 GP35's of Soo origin, 9 Soo and ex-Milwaukee SW1200's, and the 2 ex-Minneapolis, Northfield & Southern SD39's. Many of these units were resurrected from storage lines at Shoreham Shops in Minneapolis. The youngest were 19 years old, the oldest 33. Other Soo power, while not assigned to Lake States, frequently assisted Lake States trains; types included ex-Milwaukee GP20's and SD10's, plus GP40's and SD40-2's of both Soo and Milwaukee heritage. The Lake States fleet was also augmented by 12 leased ex-Conrail GP38's. While any combination of all these units could and did show up, solid consists of red-and-white GP9's, GP30's, and GP35's were not uncommon, allowing trainwatchers to revisit 1966, albeit with a little more rust.

Before word of this operation and the display of vintage power could escape much beyond Wisconsin, Soo Line management had made up its mind about its regional offspring. With traffic levels remaining soft and—more important—the necessary work-rule changes unsure at best, Soo concluded that the available lightdensity traffic could not support a Lake States operating under traditional work-rules and Class 1 costs.

The intent of the Lake States concept was to market and operate the light-density system as a short line or in-house regional. There would be better communication with customers and a quicker response to their needs. With greater flexibility and productivity achieved through liberalized work-rules, lower expenses, and new marketing strategies, better service could be offered. Division officials spoke of this as a new answer to the question of whether light-density lines should normally suggest abandonment. Nevertheless, there would be no chance for these theories to be tested under the Lake States name. Some, maybe even most, labor unions involved recognized the need for change, but at least one major union didn't. Soo Line decided to abandon the Lake States concept and, in October 1987, the Lakes States Transportation Division was sold to Wisconsin Central Ltd., an organization that would embrace the idea wholeheartedly.—O.P.D. U.S. railroad industry's overall carloadings decreased 1.7 percent. Over the same system, Soo's Lake States had an annual traffic base of about 138,000 carloads. Wisconsin Central's operating ratio—operating expenses divided by operating revenues—has also shown improvement, decreasing from 79.4 percent in 1988 to 77.1 in 1989. The company hopes to increase revenue units by 12 percent to 179,500 in 1990.

Employment is also up. Original plans were for about 700, and once startup problems were overcome and the operation analyzed, average employment grew to 861 persons by October 1988; this exceeded the number of people working on Lake States. By the end of 1989, average WC employment was 874, and likely will reach 900 during 1990.

Because Wisconsin Central Ltd. was a leveraged buyout, a high debt structure was necessary to begin operation. Nevertheless, in August 1989, WC's good financial position (\$15 million of debt paid off in the first year) allowed officers to refinance some of the company's higher interest bank debt with longer term money at a more favorable fixed interest rate. The new financing, arranged through Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Co. of Milwaukee and Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association, allows a better cash-flow position and a larger credit line for making property improvements and acquiring more equipment.

#### A paper railroad

Wisconsin may be known as America's Dairyland, but much of its economic muscle is provided by the paper industry. In 1988, Wisconsin mills produced over 4.5 million tons of paper, or 12 percent of the nation's output; the next closest state is Maine, 2.8 million tons. Continuing improvements are being made in the industry, and Wisconsin mills' 6 percent increase in output over 1987 was more than double the national average. Paper companies employ 49,000 people, nearly 9 percent of Wisconsin's manufacturing employment. It is no surprise, then, that Wisconsin, especially the Milwaukee area, is a national center for the printing and graphic arts industry.

Of 52 active pulp and paper mill facilities scattered throughout the Badger State, Wisconsin Central serves 25, most of them of large capacity. Two more are located on the Marinette, Tomahawk & Wisconsin, an 11-mile short line at Tomahawk whose only interchange is with WC. Wisconsin Central serves four of the seven mills in Michigan's U.P., plus one in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. WC also serves eight major paper-converting mills in Wisconsin. Many of the paper industry's big names are represented on WC sidings, including Consolidated Papers, Flambeau Paper, Georgia-Pacific (formerly Great Northern Nekoosa), James River, Kimberly-Clark, Mead, Mosinee Paper, Procter & Gamble, and Weyerhaeuser. Most of the mills are either in the Fox River valley between Neenah and Green Bay or in the Wisconsin River valley between Nekoosa and Tomahawk. Fox valley mills tend to produce "light" papers such as household products, sanitary tissues, towels, and napkins, while Wisconsin valley mills produce "heavy papers" such as writing and printing papers, reproduction and catalog papers, and boxboard and corrugated stock.

In 1989, the paper industry accounted for 60 percent of all Wisconsin Central carloads. At year's end, WC's top 15 shippers (in revenues) represented 51 percent of its traffic, with 11 being paper and pulp mills [map on page 43]. Two others, paper-related, are E.B. Eddy Forest Products, a supplier of wood pulp, and Quad/Graphics, a large printing firm headquartered in Pewaukee, Wis. (Duplainville). "Quad" is the WC's largest receiver of printing paper, with plants on WC at Duplainville, nearby Sussex, and Lomira (south of Fond du Lac) that daily receive multicar shipments for printing such titles as Newsweek, U.S. News & World Report, and other magazines, plus consumer catalogs. Two other significant WC customers are Wisconsin Public Service, which receives coal at Green Bay and Weston (Wausau), and GAF Chemicals, a major producer of roofing granules at remote Kremlin.

Several commodities make up paper industry carloadings. In the manufacturing process, pulpwood logs and wood chips are reduced to wood fibers,



Otto P. Dobnick

PULPWOOD rides short train 18 south of Mellen at Cayuga, Wis., April 1, 1988, and Waukesha switcher delivers sand empties from Foster Forbes of Burlington to Soo at Duplainville February 20, 1988, by main plant of Quad/Graphics, WC's largest recipient of printing paper.





INTRICATE trackwork at Gilbert Paper in Menasha, including Fox River trestles, is modeler's dream; SW1200 1232 works plant May 7, 1990.

which are converted to wood pulp, the material which is then used to make paper. If a facility includes both a pulp mill and a paper mill, the pulp is fed into the papermaking process as a liquified, slurry-like mixture. Otherwise, the pulp is converted to a coarse sheetlike material which is transported to other mills as bales. A large amount of this wood pulp is sold between companies as market pulp. Inbound shipments to the mills include logs, wood chips, pulp, wastepaper, clay, chemicals, and coal. The clay and chemicals are used in papermaking, and coal fuels the mills' power plants. Machinery and other supplies sometimes arrive by rail.

Outbound shipments include wood pulp, paper, paperboard, and lignin, a byproduct. This traffic keeps a steady stream of many types of freight cars moving onto and off of mill sidings: box cars, gondolas, hopper cars, tank cars, and bulkhead flats. Perhaps one-third of the paper industry traffic is chemicals and coal. In this fiercely competitive industry, minimizing inventory and maintaining round-the-clock production demands consistent, responsive transportation. Naturally, then, a lot of WC operations are geared toward mill sites. As Burkhardt says, "The paper mills run seven days a week and so should we."

The paper industry can be expected to continue filling out WC trains for a long time. Although the industry's fortunes, and profits, can be cyclical, production volumes are normally regarded as stable unless there is a dramatic change in economic conditions. Paper is considered a necessity these days, and many producers are continuing to expand their facilities.

What is the other 40 percent of WC traffic? Some examples: At Burlington, Foster Forbes get high-quality sand (delivered daily to WC from Soo Line at Duplainville) for glass bottle manufacturing, and Nestlé Foods ships out chocolate products. At Waukesha, Magnetek loads large electric transformers, some of which are oversize and ride on WC's seven ex-Soo drop-center flat cars. At Fond du Lac, Larsen Canning and Sadoff Scrap send out box cars and gondolas with loads. Stone for breakwater construction is loaded at Valders, on the Manitowoc branch, and barley arrives by rail at Manitowoc. On the Twin Cities end of Wisconsin Central, trainloads of noted gray traprock for track ballast on WC and other railroads depart Dresser, and in the U.P., seasonal gondola shipments of copper concentrate roll into White Pine Mine. At Schofield, just outside Wausau, the J.I. Case plant rolls new tractors onto flat cars, and at Sault Ste. Marie, Ont., Algoma Steel loads outbound cars with steel products.

In 1989, WC's traffic mix broke down like this (in revenue units): pulp and fibers, 22 percent; clay and minerals, 17; paper, 14; pulpboard, 12; coal, 9; intermodal, 8; chemicals, 8; food and grain, 7, and others, 2. Tallied by income, paper products and chemicals produce somewhat higher revenue than do pulpboard and coal.

#### Not an urban dweller

Like some other new regionals, Wisconsin Central must utilize trackage rights over the Class 1 whose lines it purchased to reach major gateways. This is true in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis-St. Paul) and the Twin Ports (Duluth-Superior). Unlike some regionals, though, WC's business plan relied on originating, terminating, and local traffic rather than on bridge traffic or carload guarantees from other roads. In fact, the purchase agreement with Soo Line forbids Wisconsin Central from handling bridge traffic between Ladysmith and Superior, or into the Twin Cities. Soo has retained ownership of the Ladysmith-Superior line, although WC maintains and dispatches it and hauls any local traffic on it; Soo has no operation on it. There are no restrictions on WC at Chicago or Sault Ste. Marie. With four gateways, including unrestricted access to Chicago, WC is not captive to Soo or any other Class 1.

The restriction on overhead traffic through the Twin Ports and Twin Cities is permanent in the trackage-rights agreement. This keeps WC from competing for the large volume of traffic from western Canada routed over Canadian National's Duluth, Winnipeg & Pacific to Superior, thence to other carriers in Chicago and beyond. Does the inability to compete for overhead traffic between these two gateways and Chicago bother WC? Not much, for such traffic is competitive and the profit margin can be slim. Besides, WC officials say, their company is still young and has other things to worry about.

Nevertheless, WC always seeks opportunities, and one has been overhead traffic. Heavy demand by U.S. Steel (USX) during winter, when the Great Lakes are closed to shipping, resulted in the need for all-rail moves of taconite ore during the 1988-1989 season from the MinnTac plant near Mountain Iron, Minn., to the Edgar Thompson Works in Pittsburgh. When Soo decided not to compete for this traffic, it allowed WC to handle it by special agreement on a per-car royalty basis. WC moved 1222 carloads in 12 trains of the iron-ore pellets from the Missabe Road at Ambridge, Wis., near Superior, to Conrail in Chicago. All four roads (including Soo) made money. The traffic repeated in the 1989-1990 season, with WC moving 6600 cars in 64 trains, this time from DM&IR at Steelton in Duluth again to Conrail in Chicago. The ore trains were the heaviest moves handled by WC to date, requiring the assistance of pusher engines leaving both Superior and Shops Yard. In Soo Line days, pushers on trains up the South Range out of Superior and Byron Hill out of Fond du Lac [pages 48-49] were common, but except for ore trains, WC trains have not required helpers at Superior and only occasionally have needed them for Byron.

#### **Flexible forces**

A major key to Wisconsin Central's use of resources is that its workforce can be versatile and does not have to contend with an encyclopedia of restrictive work-rules. For example, a train crew in Chicago may first take a transfer run, then relieve an inbound road crew during the same shift. A switch crew may work Stevens Point yard with an SW1200, then use the same engine to take an extra over to Wisconsin



TRAIN 11 salutes new granule hoppers at GAF Chemicals plant at Kremlin on May 14, 1990.



OUTBOUND Amtrak passes WC units off TOFC train 218 at UP's Canal Street Yard, Chicago.



MISSABE crew rides WC run-through diesels moving CR ore empties back toward Minntac.





Otto P. Dobnick

WC PEOPLE: John Thomas, conductor on L011, works at "shelf desk" in diesel cab (above); in Stevens Point customer service center (top left) are Tammi Hutchinson (left), Bobi Everson, and Bonnie Peterson (rear). Equipment is customer-oriented, too—the Waukesha switcher of October 15, 1988, GP30 700, fetches transformer loads from Magnetek, one of which rides customized ex-Soo drop-center flat car.

Rapids. At Shops Yard, another switch crew may work the yard, then go into Fond du Lac proper with the switcher to pick up a car, return to the yard, and then hop on an SD45 to push an ore train up Byron Hill. Next to a yard crew putting together a train at Shops might be a road crew assembling its own train. Most train crews are two people, but the switch crews that work major yards, and on a few local freights (e.g., the Stevens Point-Medford turn) warrant three because of the large amount of ground work. The average crew size on WC is 2.2 persons compared with 4.8 on Lake States. Burkhardt: "The difference is entirely in the number of people we use to accomplish a task." This means that the labor ratio (percentage of revenue that is labor expense) for WC is 30 percent, compared with an industrywide average of 45 (and 50 on some Midwestern Class 1's). This is important to a light-density system such as WC whose annual revenue per mile in 1988 was only \$50,000, compared with \$201,000 for Class 1's.

This flexibility also adds a dimension to manpower requirements in the

TRAINS: J. David Ingles.

cross-training of employees. If more people are needed in a specific area, or if someone wants to do a different job, that opportunity is available. Burkhardt and Power are as concerned about WC's long-term future as they are about next month's bottom line, so they aim for a stable quantity in the workforce, minimizing the layoffs/call-backs which can be demoralizing. Burkhart: "Having the ability to move people around helps a great deal. We want to have a high degree of mobility of our workforce. People can bid for any job in the whole company for which they're qualified . . . or we'll help them get qualified." An example: Some track laborers have been trained to operate locomotives on work trains. Also, many engineers and conductors can perform either job, allowing for flexibility in train-crew assignments. Some maintenance-of-way employees have worked in the shops during the winter. One industrial representative, who had been with Soo for 10 years as a section foreman, started on WC in the same capacity. Since then, he has had training to use the Transportation Control System

computer in operations, does local measuring and inspection of high-wide loads, and has qualified as a train conductor. And, of course, with his experience he can work on track-related projects.

In this environment, employees are perhaps more ready to help each other than they might be otherwise. At Junction City, crossing of the Valley and Marshfield Subs ("sub" is CP, Soo, and WC lingo for subdivision), often more than one train will be lined up at once to use the connecting tracks, and conductors often help each other's trains get through. Trainmasters help train crews, engineering department forces, and customers. During the first oretrain season, WC car inspectors discovered that the hopper cars to be used arrived with frozen coal in them. Rather than return the cars and risk starting off the relationship with USX badly because of delayed cars, 58 WC people from several departments climbed into the cars with picks to clean them out.

How does this look from the employee perspective? There are no unions on Wisconsin Central, although employees have the legal right, of course,



to elect a collective-bargaining representative if they so choose. WC employees are all salaried, based on the average time required for a specific job. WC salaries are about 15 percent below the rail industry average, but they average well above the \$17,400 mean annual wage earned by Wisconsin workers in 1987. WC engineers earn as much as \$40,000 a year for a five-day week. WC has an employee health, dental, and welfare plan paid by the company, a 401(k) retirement investment plan, and a profit-sharing program. In spite of WC's shaky startup, employees received a \$100 Christmas bonus at the end of 1987 and \$200 at the end of 1988. In January 1989 and 1990, they received salary raises of about 4 percent each year; the profit-sharing plan kicked in at the end of 1989. Profit-sharing payouts are based on the operating ratio and each employee's salary. The first distribution totaled almost \$1.2 million.

Company policy stresses good com-

munication among everyone. Four times a year, Burkhardt and other top officials hold meetings with employees at several locations. Employees are encouraged to (and do) ask all types of questions. Any employee can talk directly to Burkhardt or any other official or manager. Says Power, "We want to create a family relationship with our employees, make them a part of the company, not just hired hands."

It is easy to find a genuinely high level of dedication and enthusiasm among WC people. Get them talking and you'll hear that it's nice to be working for a railroad that's expanding, not contracting, that's heavily reinvesting in the plant and equipment, and whose managers listen to your suggestions. Some say the whole atmosphere is more relaxed than on other railroads. Trainservice employees note that extra-board assignments are made up a week in advance, allowing personal and family lives to be planned. (On most other roads, the telephone can ring at any time, day or night.) Many of WC's train-crew members talk of the frustration in watching their former railroad employers let traffic disappear, reduce service, and abandon lines. Others remember five-man crews with only two actually doing the work. Wisconsin Central, they say, is doing things right. This is in spite of the fact that many WC jobs have the same hardships as on any other railroad: third-shift hours, a potentially dangerous work environment, and being away from home at odd hours.

Without the 108-mile workdays for train crews and arbitraries dictating what work they can perform, Wisconsin Central "runs a lot more trains and a much more fluid operation than Soo Line could afford [on the same lines]," says Burkhardt. Indeed, WC's marketing strategy is to increase train frequency on most lines and emphasize connections—with other WC trains as well as other railroads—to keep the cars moving, and to go out and talk with potential shippers, large and small, who have never used the railroad or who stopped using it years ago.

WC's trains are reliable. As Bill Schauer, WC vice president-marketing, says, "Whether there are 10 cars or 110 cars, our trains move on schedule." They run at the same time every day and aren't held until a certain number of cars are collected. All of the time freights and many of the locals run seven days a week. Much of the service has been increased from Soo Line levels. For example, Ashland Sub frequency went from triweekly to six days, and service to Wausau from two trains a day to four. Business between Shops Yard and Gladstone, Mich., has increased to the point where WC is considering adding a second pair of trains.

#### Marketing the WC

Tom Power believes railroads have to be aggressive and market their service, not just cost-cut their operation to a lower income level by pruning off viable branches. Burkhardt argues that Class 1's need the secondary and branch lines with any potential to feed their main routes. "I think the great thing that regional railroads can do is to keep these lines intact while allowing the Class 1's to concentrate on the high-density network." WC's average line haul per loaded car is 250 miles.

"You build your base with one or two cars from this guy and one or two from that guy," says Power. "We're out looking for business and knocking on doors. If our tracks go through a community, we want to know what's in every town, whom we can serve from a team track or a transload or pull up to their dock. Too many old sidings out there haven't been used in a long time, and we're breaking the rust off them."

Marketing and sales on WC also differ from the time-honored railroad mold. The marketing department, located in Rosemont, is organized by industry: paper, manufactured products, chemicals, foods, grain, and bulk. Within the groups, each marketing person has responsibility for specific key accounts. Major customers then only have one person to call regardless of commodity, territory, or car type. That representative can set prices and order cars. In many cases, WC people have been able to get rate quotations back to customers in hours, not days.

Wisconsin Central has no sales department as such, for customer contact is largely a function of operations. Online customer contact work is handled by operations managers and local train crews, who talk with shipping people on the customer's dock as well as traffic people in the offices. WC employees are given substantial responsibility to make



Jeff Hampton

"POINT" is a major WC hub. On May 3, 1990, SD45 6531 rolls by the old passenger depot, now WC's operations headquarters, as the engineer eases a long train T001 to a stop. A year before, March 12, 1989, a shorter T001 cruised through a cut west of Neenah (below).



Otto P. Dobnick



JUNCTION CITY, a former Soo-Milwaukee crossing, has two connections with hand-throw switches where crews help each other. Point-Wausau local L017 heads north May 13, 1990.



**NEIGHBORS:** As WC train 20 readies to leave North Fond du Lac May 6, 1990, a northbound on newer regional Fox River Valley enters ex-C&NW yard behind SD24/RSD15/SD35 trio.



Three photos this page, Otto P. Dobnick

ON paper mill-rich (Wisconsin) Valley Subdivision, local L018 crosses Lake duBay, between Mosinee and Junction City, at Knowlton May 5, 1990, behind two unrepainted ex-Soo GP30's. service adjustments. Wisconsin Central does not maintain off-line sales offices, instead relying on tips from train crews, trainmasters, and other employees in the field who see traffic move on other carriers or spot unused spur tracks. Existing shippers also provide information. Train crews carry addressed, stamped postcards to alert marketing personnel in Rosemont to potential customers.

This employee involvement has been responsible for many new WC customers. Among them are Valders Stone and the Fremont Company. Valders, located on the Manitowoc branch, is a major supplier of large breakwater stone for Great Lakes harbors. In 1989, the quarry loaded 100,000 tons onto an 18-car train of flats that shuttled the 10 miles into Manitowoc, where the stone was transloaded to barges. Flat cars make three round trips a week; the stone no longer rides over local highways; WC says the service is profitable. Management is proud that employees discovered a situation where the railroad can make money on a 10-mile haul. Schauer elaborates: "One of the fun things about working for this railroad is that people aren't afraid to be flexible and can do things at a profit that Class 1's wouldn't consider.'

Fremont, on the other hand, represents a more typical shipment wherein box cars of canned sauerkraut are moving from Black Creek, Wis., to Illinois and Ohio by rail for the first time in nearly 20 years. To go with that sauerkraut, as it were, two carloads of fresh potatoes per week started moving out of central Wisconsin to northeastern U.S. markets during fall 1989. Potatoes are another commodity that had left the rails, even though Wisconsin is a large spud-growing state.

"Pulpwood is probably our biggest success story insofar as directing traffic off the highways is concerned," says Schauer. During the 1970's, railroads surrendered most northern Wisconsin pulpwood traffic to trucks, claiming it was unprofitable since the raw material was worth less than the cost of moving it. As the pulpwood disappeared off the rails, so did the rails themselves. WC has begun reclaiming this traffic, moving 13,000 carloads of wood fiber in 1989, 2000 of the them wood chips and the remainder pulpwood. Most of the logs moved in gondolas, but recently, bulkhead flats have been tried and seem to work well. Major consignees of pulpwood are the Consolidated and Nekoosa mills, the wood coming from the Ashland and Superior lines, Michigan's U.P., and in interchange from the Missabe Road and Nicolet Badger Northern, a short line east of Argonne. In October 1989, Mosinee Paper resumed receiving pulpwood by rail for the first time in 15 years. In 1990, WC expected



AT Marguette on old DSS&A, all-maroon consist of GP30, SDL39's heads out on September 29, 1989. Half of WC's 98 diesels are maroon.

to move more than 15,000 carloads of pulpwood and chips, double what Soo Line handled prior to the sale. That's more than 36,000 truckloads of pulpwood not on Wisconsin roads.

Short-haul aggregate movements are another anticipated growth area and already include some customers new to rail. For example, during 1990, a large Redi-Mix dealer on the Valley Sub started receiving carloads of sand. Schauer says the key to handling lowmargin freight such as pulpwood and sand is to increase car utilization—keep the cars rolling. Pulpwood gons that used to make three or four round trips a month now make eight on WC. This avoids having to secure more equipment. Before, shippers became used to three- and four-day transit times across Wisconsin; now, many cars make the same trip in 24 hours.

WC also hauls grain. It receives blocks of 25 100-ton covered hoppers from Wisconsin & Southern at Rugby Junction (near Slinger) and from Wisconsin & Calumet at Waukesha, and assembles them into 50-car trains for Chicago. Other cuts of 100-ton hoppers are transferred by WC the 20 miles between the two short lines. Wisconsin Central is able to make money on such a short move partially because the transfer is done as part of a normal workday by the Waukesha switch crew. A service goal for all cars, achieved regularly, is that they don't remain in WC accounts for more than 36 hours.

#### **Prospects**

Even with all these positive things happening, Wisconsin Central cannot become sedate, because markets and traffic patterns keep changing. For example, a good share of WC's new carloads and revenues in 1989 were from the ore trains, and some rail industry observers predict a softening of the demand which has iron-ore shipping at its highest in a decade. Not all of WC's market expansion efforts have met with success, either. A scheme to develop a coal-handling port in Manitowoc has been shelved for now because of local concerns. And, WC and North Western were unsuccessful in snaring away from Soo and Burlington Northern a million-ton western coal contract for Wisconsin Public Service's Weston generating station.

Highway competition in Wisconsin Central's territory is fierce, and while the railroad handles a lot of inbound raw materials, supplies, fuel, and chemicals for the paper industry, outbound products are another story. WC does carry substantial volumes of outbound heavy paper-usually in giant rollsbut trucks handle more. And, most sheet paper and light paper productsconsumer and sanitary products-roll out of the mills on trucks. WC is working toward capturing more of this traffic, but it is usually shipped directly to loading docks at local warehouses or, in the case of light papers, warehouses and retail stores. A large trucking firm, Schneider National Carriers, is based in Green Bay and gives WC stiff competition. Its orange rigs are a common sight throughout the state. Wisconsin Central officials speak of Schneider with respect and describe the motor carrier as well managed and efficiently run. In fact, WC and Schneider are testing the waters on some joint projects, and in what must have made an unusual sight for local truckers, Schneider recently took delivery of a couple hundred new trailers at Chicago



Mark Simonson

and had them piggybacked to Green Bay on guess-who.

The presence of other railroads does not necessarily mean head-to-head competition. Most paper mills are on just one railroad, although some at Green Bay and Wisconsin Rapids are exceptions. WC seems to be the major interchange partner for Escanaba & Lake Superior at Green Bay, a city now served exclusively by regional railroads if you discount C&NW's line to the north, which is physically separated from the rest of the system. WC does not consider the recently formed Fox River Valley a major competitor because they have few common customers. The two have cooperated on car supply and, because they run side-byside in several areas, may coordinate joint trackage agreements.

Do customers appreciate WC's style of service? By most accounts, yes. Many shippers say the personalized service, speedy response to inquiries, and fast transit times are much appreciated. In 1989, WC was selected as a "quality carrier" by *Distribution* Magazine in its annual "Quest for Quality" survey of transportation companies in the U.S. The award is based on service, convenience, price, and sales ratings provided by customers. Wisconsin Central was one of only two railroads named, along with Union Pacific.

Says a Vulcan Chemicals representative at Port Edwards, "When you contact the Wisconsin Central, it's like hitting the gas pedal on a car. They move. They respond." Echoes the general manager of Thiensville Lumber: "When they say a car is going to arrive on Tuesday, it arrives on Tuesday. They're very good—what they say is going to happen, happens."

Another key to WC's success is its operations management system, known as the Transportation Control System (TCS), which employs integrated computer programs to provide a management plan for the railroad. TCS creates trip schedules for each carload and container; provides instant information on shipments by location, commodity, and type of equipment; maintains a perpetual inventory on all shipments from origin to destination; generates waybills and other documentation for each shipment; and generates work orders for each employee who will be involved with handling each shipment. TCS also handles data interchange with other railroads; many operations management functions; equipment and locomotive maintenance records; marketing data; and equipment scheduling and distribution. The system, which was developed by Missouri Pacific and adapted by Union Pacific after their 1982 merger (Wisconsin Central was the first outside sale of the system by Union Pacific Technologies), has its mainframe computer, an IBM-370 series, in St. Louis. On WC, it is used by operations, marketing, financial, and administrative employees. WC has a separate computer (an IBM AS/400 model B50) in Rosemont for financial and materials management files.

Largest users of WC's TCS are its Customer Service Center (CSC) and Operations Control Center (OCC), both located in the remodeled former Soo passenger station/division headquarters building in Stevens Point. The CSC is a centralized service bureau staffed seven days a week where customers can order equipment, trace cars, and obtain answers to service inquiries. The staff handles all the railroad's origin billing and agency functions. CSC employees frequently talk with the dispatchers upstairs to expedite car movements.

The Stevens Point OCC, located next to the CSC, functions like a general yard office for the entire railroad. This center—largest and busiest of seven on WC—is responsible for producing and tracking car-movement documentation including work orders, waybills, and train manifests. On the latter, cars are listed in the order they are blocked in the train.

The Transportation Control System is capable of producing other information. For example, tonnage charts can be produced for each train showing by graph where loads and empties are positioned and what each car's gross tonnage is. Cars requiring special handling or which contain hazardous materials are identified. At 5:30 every morning, the TCS automatically produces a morning report for operating and management personnel summarizing the previous 24 hours' train performance.

Because of precise car scheduling that estimates transit times right into a shipper's siding, an exact data base has been developed for the entire railroad, identifying all main tracks, sidings, yards, team tracks, and even locations on sidings for spotting cars.

The sophistication of WC's service management doesn't stop with this, as the company is expanding its electronic data interchange capabilities, a direct computer link between the railroad and the customer. This allows the customer to do his/her own billing and car-tracing. Some large customers have already performed a paperless exchange of waybill information. These capabilities and service characteristics are not unique among large railroads, but they help elevate WC beyond some other regionals.

The high level of enthusiasm within Wisconsin Central is evident. When speaking to groups, President Burkhardt has said, "We want to be everyone's favorite railroad." Wisconsin Central has enjoyed coverage in local press with its increased service and train crews who make sales calls. Employees are involved in the Operation Lifesaver grade-crossing safety program.

WC wants people to know it's part of the communities it serves, which has meant open houses and operation of special passenger trains, sponsored either by WC itself or by responsible outside groups. (Examples include the appearance in 1988 of Frisco 4-8-2 1522 from St. Louis on 20th Century Railroad Club-sponsored excursions from suburban Chicago to Shops Yard, plus occasional trips by High Iron Corp., North Star Chapter NRHS, and selected shippers, including Quad/Graphics.) This attitude is found on other roads elsewhere, to be sure, but it has helped solidify a good reputation for the threeyear-old regional. I

NEXT MONTH: In "A Hub and Spoke System for Trains," Otto P. Dobnick concludes the Wisconsin Central story with an examination of its operations. Included are a train-status map, and a review of WC motive power, with roster. Join him in October 1990 TRAINS. THE WISCONSIN CENTRAL STORY

# A hub-and-spoke

Watch for those rush hours at Point and Shops Yard!

#### **OTTO P. DOBNICK**

FOR \$122 million. Wisconsin Central Ltd. in October 1987 purchased a lot of railroad from Soo Line in terms of fixed plant and property. The centerpiece: the 421 miles of Soo's former main line between the Chicago and Twin Cities areas (Forest Park, Ill., to Withrow, Minn.). In excellent physical condition, much of it with welded rail, the line supported Soo freights operating at or over the official 40-mph limit. Within a year after startup, in fact, Wisconsin Central raised maximum freight-train speeds to 50 on the line south of Neenah. Except within yard limits at Shops Yard (North Fond du Lac) and Stevens Point, centralized traffic control is in operation over the 285 miles between Schiller Park, Ill., and Owen, Wis. WC disconnected the CTC between Owen and Chippewa Falls, 42 miles, because it runs only two time freights and one local there each day. Another crucial line for WC is its

Valley Subdivision connecting New Lisbon, Junction City, and Tomahawk, Wis. This former Milwaukee Road line penetrates into the heart of central Wisconsin papermaking territory. The line, which also boasts welded rail, was rebuilt by Milwaukee Road in 1981-1982 in part with Four R Act funds. Wisconsin Central officials give Soo credit for strongly emphasizing proper track maintenance on its main lines.

Most of WC's other lines were already in good shape for the traffic WC anticipates, and very few sections in use force trains to operate slower than 25 mph. About half of WC's track is 100-lb. or heavier rail, two-thirds of that welded. When WC assumed operations, track and roadway maintenance programs were begun right away. During the first few months, work was concentrated on eliminating slow orders, adding yard capacity at Shops Yard, improving the interchange with the

Minnesota Commercial at New Brighton, Minn., and reopening the 15-mile Menasha-Hilbert (Wis.) section to better serve the Manitowoc and the Plymouth Subs. By the end of 1988, 140,000 tons of crushed rock had been applied, 400 miles of track tamped and aligned, and 65,000 ties replaced, mostly on the Ashland, Manitowoc, and Shawano lines plus sections of the former St. Paul-Sault Ste. Marie line. By comparison, Soo's Lake States Transportation Division in its last year had installed only 18,000 ties. Most of WC's ballast is quarried on-line at Dresser, Wis., with some at Mosinee and Wisconsin Rapids. In 1989, engineering department forces surfaced 440 miles of track, dumped 147,000 tons of ballast, and replaced 96.000 ties.

For 1990, track programs were just as ambitious. The \$12.5-million budget included replacement of 133,000 ties, surfacing of 450 track-miles, and instal-





# system for trains

lation of welded rail on 5 miles of track between Neenah and Appleton. WC anticipates this project to be the first of many. The railroad is also participating in partially state-funded track rehabilitation projects with the states of Wisconsin and Michigan for the Manitowoc (44 miles) and Munising (5 miles) branches, plus the Pembine-Gladstone line (53 miles). Trackwork is especially important in Michigan's Upper Peninsula ("the U.P."), where railroad lines punch through swampy areas that undermine any upgrading these lines received from Soo Line prior to the sale.

The sale to Wisconsin Central also included all associated property, structures, and buildings. Because of the topography-testimony to the carving effects of long-ago glaciers-wood and steel trestles and bridges abound. By far the largest is the half-mile-long, 185-foot-high, five-arch bridge spanning the St. Croix River valley from Somerset, Wis., into Minnesota. Other massive structures also span northwoods waterways. On the previous Duluth, South Shore & Atlantic line to White Pine Mine, two steel viaducts-products of the American Bridge Co. of Gary, Ind.—span valleys created by the Bad River and Vaughn Creek, locations

far removed from any highway or other civilization (and graffiti). Between the two Sault Ste. Maries, an international border crossing is accomplished across the St. Mary's River and lock system by three movable bridges, of swing, bascule, and vertical lift style (in succession). The bascule bridge is a rare double-leaf Strauss heel trunnion design of 1914 vintage and is supposedly the longest bascule in the world, with a 336-foot span. Wisconsin Central has acquired Canadian Pacific's half ownership of this international crossing and has been working toward strengthening the bridges to permit handling of 100ton-capacity cars.

Besides bridges, the sale included the shops at North Fond du Lac and Stevens Point, numerous classification yards large and small, 11 roundhouses and 11 turntables, a variety of depots, freight houses and other buildings, and two iron-ore docks. To be sure, the new owners are either finding a use for and remodeling such structures or planning for their disposition. Many of the roundhouses, turntables, and stations were still in use and will continue to be. Some stone and cinder-block depots of original-WC heritage still survive. To its credit, the new WC appears to be continuing the frugal ways of Soo Line and not disposing of any property prematurely.

Surprisingly, a bit of namesake heritage went along with the deal. The original Wisconsin Central shop facility, completed in 1887 next to the yard in Waukesha, was phased out as a railroad shop by 1900 and thereafter leased out for use as a foundry. When the foundry ceased operation in the late 1980's, the property reverted back to the railroad which was by then the new WC Ltd. . . . complete with the name WISCONSIN CENTRAL spelled out on raised stone high in the building's brickwork. Alas, before action to preserve the artifact could be taken, the old wall bearing the name collapsed in a windstorm. The new WC has considered using this property as a transloading facility.

Did someone say ore docks? Yes, speaking of transloading facilities, WC does own two. At 1800 feet and 970 feet in length, respectively, these monstrous concrete-and-steel facilities in Ashland, Wis., and Marquette, Mich., have long since lost their utility, the last ore having flowed down their chutes in 1965 (Ashland) and 1971 (Marquette). Their trestle approaches each extend another half-mile, and their continued existence





BRIDGE across St. Croix River is WC landmark. On October 12, 1988, as the railroad enters its second year, train 6 enters the Badger State.

now is just a result of the large cost that would be incurred in dismantling. Nevertheless, WC is seeking a conclusion to their story, possibly as part of real estate swaps with the cities who desire the lakefront property. Local Marquette interests envision eventual removal for area redevelopment. In Ashland, once a great lumber and ore shipping port on Lake Superior, local interest is accruing to the dock's historic significance.

Like most large railroads with a long history, Soo Line had acquired a tremendous amount of property along its lines. Thus, with the sale went a lot of auxiliary land, much of it in cities. Because railroad real estate needs in many areas aren't what they once were, WC has been evaluating the parcels which may not be required for future rail use or industrial development. A few have turned out to be valuable and, in 1989, such sales recovered \$3.1 million. Proceeds have been used to help reduce WC's debt.

The sale of Lake States provided Soo with a convenient means of disposing of several branch lines that were still intact but which Soo had permission to abandon. Since the sale, WC has proceeded with dismantling several of these: St. Croix Junction to Danbury, Wis., 51 miles on the old St. Paul-Duluth route; Bergland to Sidnaw, Mich., 45 miles; and Trout Lake to St. Ignace, 27 miles. Sidnaw to Nestoria, 23 miles, was also legally abandoned by Soo, but for now is being retained by WC, along with two other segments: Baraga to Arnheim, Mich., 10 miles, and Mellen, Wis., to Bessemer, Mich., 34 miles. During 1989 and 1990, WC has requested permission from the ICC to abandon four additional unused sections of track, all in Wisconsin: 26 miles between Medford and Prentice; 16 miles between Amery and Almena; 7 miles between Wisconsin Rapids and Vesper; and 1 mile in Menasha.

Wisconsin Central's network has also expanded, albeit negligibly. To effect direct connections with more railroads in Chicago (Burlington Northern, Chicago Central, Chicago Rail Link, Illinois Central, and Manufacturers Junction), some additional trackage rights have been procured. In August 1989, WC purchased Lake Superior & Ishpeming's 5½-mile branch into Munising, Mich., to provide direct service to a Kimberly-Clark mill. The branch had been isolated from the remainder of LS&I since 1979; a single diesel, usually LS&I's last active Alco RS3, was kept there and a (full) crew drove over two or three days a week to service the mill and the Soo (later WC) interchange.

#### The trains

Wisconsin Central train operations are as diverse as the traffic and territory served. As last month's tonnage map shows, WC can be likened to a tree planted in Chicago. The trunk extends through Fond du Lac, Neenah, and Stevens Point to Owen. One secondary trunk diverges at Neenah north through Appleton, splitting at Black Creek for Green Bay and continuing on to Gladstone, Mich. At Owen, secondary trunks go on northwest to Superior and split west to the Twin Cities. The greatest traffic volume, obviously, is on the trunk between Chicago and Neenah, with specifically the heaviest tonnage on WC between Duplainville and North Fond du Lac.

These trunks are the stomping ground for Wisconsin Central's time freights, the backbone of its operations, designated by T-numbers. Like basic service patterns, train designations tend to be a refinement and expansion of Lake States operating practices. The time freights are T002/T041 and T020/- T043, Shops Yard-Chicago; T012/T047. Shops Yard-Milwaukee; T001/T002 and T007/T008, Shops-Stevens Point; T019/-T020, Shops-Green Bay; T011/(another) T012, Shops-Gladstone; T003/T004, Stevens Point-Superior (DW&P Pokegama Yard); and T005/T006, Stevens Point-St. Paul. All normally run seven days a week and will have anywhere from 50 to 100 cars behind usually two or three SD45's. An exception is T019/T020, where Green Bay & Western-over whose trackage WC has rights from Black Creek into Green Bay-limits locomotives to 263,000 pounds. T003/-T004 also employ four-axle units as often as not. The other two time freights are T218/T219, the Green Bay-Chicago intermodals (page 47). They are weekdays-only and utilize SD45's south of Shops and four-axle units north; size is normally 20-40 flats plus 20-40 nonintermodals. Note: The T-numbers appear on WC paperwork, but on the road you'll usually hear just numerical references ("41," not "T41" or "T-oh-41").

Weekday local turns, or road-switchers, designated by L-numbers, each rate a single unit and supplement the time freights on the trunks. Monday through Friday, these turns are authorized to work from C.F. Yard in Chippewa Falls east to Owen and west to New Richmond (L4748); Stevens Point west to Spencer and Medford (L7170); Neenah north to Shawano (L3233); Shops Yard to Sussex (L5859); and Waukesha south to Burlington and Lake Villa (L5455). Two others work Monday through Saturday, from Stevens Point east to Neenah (L022); and from Schiller Park north to Lake Villa (L5150). The Neenah train can be fairly substantial, led by two or three units.

The other lines are served by local assignments coming in a variety of train sizes, the heaviest concentrated on the Valley Sub, where they resemble time freights in size. Trains L013/L014 move traffic between Stevens Point and Wisconsin Rapids; L011/L012 primarily forward traffic to Wausau and to the Marinette, Tomahawk & Western at Tomahawk, where an early evening train swap is coordinated with the short line; and trains L017/L018 do the local work between Stevens Point and Wausau. These trains run daily with two or three Geeps for their 40 to 60 cars, although trains of almost 100 cars are not unheard of on the Rapids job and the SD45's make frequent appearances.

At Wausau, the Stevens Point trains relay cars to and from trains L015/-L016, which patrol from Wausau north to Mellen six days a week. Heavy on pulpwood and wood chips, these trains collect traffic from the Rhinelander local (L0910) at Bradley and the Ashland local (L1516) at Mellen. The Wausau-Mellen route is unique in that it makes



Otto P. Dobnick

SIGN on west wall of a building in Waukesha shops of the original Wisconsin Central survived to welcome the new WC—look above 4005's cab in this April 20, 1988, photo.



Otto P. Dobnick

JOBS based in Hilbert work ex-Soo Manitowoc branch and ex-Milwaukee Superior Division. Chevron-style switchstand at Chilton marks line as ex-MILW as GP30 switches May 7, 1990.



UNTIL international spans at Sault Ste. Marie are strengthened, new owner WC likes to assign SDL39's. No. 585 returns to Michigan with CP-Algoma Central transfer on May 30, 1988.



gan's U.P. stem from Gladstone. Trains L034/L035 work daily from there east to Trout Lake and Sault Ste. Marie and back, usually with SD45's pulling long trains. Trout Lake is the junction with what remains of the DSS&A (known as the South Shore) west to Marquette and Baraga on the Keweenaw Peninsula. Trains on this line are based out of Marquette, WC's most remote terminal. They are L041/L040 to and from Baraga, and L042/L043 to and from Trout Lake. They are of modest size but normally require two small units to battle the hills west of Marquette. Frequency averages twice a week west of Marquette and triweekly to the east. This line has lengthy distances between customers and annual snowfalls measured

in hundreds of inches (almost 300 at some stations). Until track conditions on the recently acquired Munising spur can be improved, a switcher has been stationed there.

Other local services exist on the east and west ends of WC's system. From Neenah, a weekday local (L2425) works east to Hilbert and Manitowoc, and at Hilbert, another local (L2627) works south along the former Milwaukee Road's Superior Division as far as Cedarburg and sometimes almost into North Milwaukee, and north to Green Leaf. A crew based in Ladysmith (L65-66) does local switching on weekdays, running west to Almena, and up the Rice Lake spur as necessary. Service on the west end of the original Sault Ste. Marie main line, from Withrow to Dresser and Amery, is also provided

as necessary; that frequency increases when ballast is being loaded at Dresser.

**T219:** 6507, 6504 (31-0-2100) (to depart at 9:05 p.m.)

CHICAGO

#### The terminals

Wheeling

Des Plaines

Schiller Par

L5150: 710 (2-4-480)

ILLINOIS

Forest Par

Like the deregulated airlines, WC has an operating scheme resembling a hub-and-spoke system. All trains are scheduled to provide service consistently and allow the Transportation Control System to construct schedules for indi-

Wisconsin Central radio channels Ch. 1, road: 160.785 North Fond du Lac-Neenah-Argonne; Stevens Point-Neenah-Hilbert-Manitowoc; Green Bay-Hilbert-Milwaukee Ch. 2, yard: 160.260 Shops Yard, Neenah-Menasha, Stevens Point, Gladstone

LISTENING III.



vidual carloads. The main hubs are Stevens Point and Shops Yard, where all traffic is assembled by blocks. At Shops. southbound cars are blocked for Chicago connections, northbound cars for Neenah, Stevens Point, Green Bay, and Gladstone. At "Point," westbound blocks are built for St. PaulMinneapolis and Superior; northbound blocks are built for Wausau (including the Ashland Sub); and eastbound blocks are built for Neenah and Shops Yard. Point also sorts for mill traffic along the Wisconsin River. Two smaller hubs are also crucial. At Neenah, much car sorting is done for the large number of industries in the lower Fox River valley; also, traffic from Stevens Point is set out for Green Bay and Gladstone trains. At Gladstone, cars for the remainder of the U.P. are sorted.

The spokes are the time freights and locals, whose schedules are designed to connect with each other in addition to other railroads' trains, allowing WC to speed service. For example, schedules adjusted in August 1989 now allow second-day service from connecting roads at Superior to Green Bay, a routing that had required two to four days. This hub-and-spoke philosophy even replicates airline operations out on the railroad itself, as evidenced by the daily rush hour at Stevens Point. Between 2:30 and 4:30 p.m., trains 17 (Wausau), 11 (Tomahawk), 5 (Twin Cities), and 3 (Superior) regularly depart in quick succession. Similarly, each afternoon and evening Shops dispatches south (timetable east) trains 12 (Milwaukee) and 2, 20, and 218 (Chicago).

The hub yards are busy enough to keep several dedicated switch jobs at work. At Shops Yard, 17 scheduled trains each weekday bring in more than 500 cars to be sorted; this, plus carshop moves, rates four switching assignments. With liberal work-rules, crews may handle other chores. Stevens Point yard crews, for example, have worked to Wisconsin Rapids and regularly venture down the remnant of the old Portage branch to serve customers at Whiting and Plover. Neenah yard crews also serve customers in the twin town of Menasha. In small terminals such as Chippewa Falls, Ladysmith, Rhinelander, and Waukesha, one crew with a single road unit will do all local switching and wayfreight service to nearby towns. During ballast-loading season, a switcher is kept at Dresser.

WC President Ed Burkhardt likes to summarize Wisconsin Central's gateway terminal situation succinctly: "We have no yards." That is, WC maintains its own facility at only one of the five

major gateways that anchor the corners of the system-Sault Ste. Marie, the smallest. At Superior and the Twin Cities, locally based WC crews perform what is essentially transfer work to and from other roads using WC road power while the incoming crew rests; preblocking at Stevens Point allows WC to not sort at the gateways. In the same manner, Shops blocks cars for Chicago, and WC freights operate directly to connecting roads' yards (e.g., IC's Markham and BRC's Clearing). Because of Chicago's complexity, WC does base crews and power at suburban Schiller Park. The crews handle some transfer work, operate the local north to Lake Villa, and assist road crews in handling scheduled freights and extra trains through this often congested and timeconsuming terminal. The fifth gateway is Milwaukee, where most Soo Line interchange is handled by turnaround freights T012/T047 from Shops. To help facilitate car scheduling with the TCS, transfer jobs and switching jobs that wander outside yards are designated with a Y-number.

Extra movements are not uncommon, especially south of Shops Yard. These might operate to handle intermediate mainline work on heavier days, allowing an already filled T002 or T020 to keep moving. In some cases, enough cars will be on hand to make an entire train for one connection, such as Indiana Harbor Belt. All extras also receive a specific number for TCS purposes; for example, CR054 means the 54th loaded ore train of the season for Conrail.

To manage train operations, WC is separated into three divisions. The Eastern Division, headquartered in



Steve Glischinski

REPAINTED diesels on eastbound train trumpet WC's attractive corporate image as they cross the river at Chippewa Falls on March 3, 1990.



Otto P. Dobnick

RUN-THROUGH BN diesels power Soo empty unit coal train from Weston south through Wisconsin Rapids April 29, 1990, past Consolidated Paper's mill, WC's largest shipper.

North Fond du Lac, includes all lines south and east of Neenah and the Shawano Sub north of Neenah to Argonne. The Western Division, headquartered at Stevens Point, includes all lines west of Neenah and Argonne. The Michigan Division, headquartered in Gladstone, has all lines east of Argonne. Two dispatchers each shift manage the trains from the second floor of the operations center in the Stevens Point depot. The east dispatcher handles all lines east of Point and south of Lily (between Shawano and Argonne); the west dispatcher handles the remainder, including the U.P.

As part of the Lake States package, WC has a few lines that, while not

abandoned by Soo, have seen few if any WC trains. These include spurs from Chippewa Falls to Eau Claire and Wisconsin Rapids to Vesper; the Valley main from Nekoosa to New Lisbon; the north and south ends of the old Milwaukee Superior Division, from Green Leaf (north of Hilbert) to Green Bay and Cedarburg into Milwaukee: and two sections of the original MStP&SSM line, from Prentice to Tony (east of Ladysmith) and Rhinelander to Argonne. Two lines in the Twin Cities retained by Soo on which WC has rights, but has rarely operated, are Cardigan Junction to St. Paul and and Shoreham Yard to Crystal in Minneapolis. WC activity has been restricted to temporary rout-



ON Division Street in Oshkosh, WC has "a fascinating stretch of main line. From the cab, you seem close enough to touch the porches." Train 219 is Green Bay-bound July 10, 1989.

ings during startup, detours, and special loads.

Other railroads do visit Wisconsin Central tracks on a regular basis. The Valley Sub sees regular Soo Line unit coal trains to the Wisconsin Public Service generating plant at Weston; Soo crews and diesels (sometimes including BN units) run through. Soo also kept trackage rights from Withrow to Dresser for its own ballast trains. As part of the WC sale agreement, Soo had kept rights between Duplainville and Franklin Park, Ill., in case it needed an alternate route to its own ex-Milwaukee Road main line, but Soo has let the option expire. In track-sharing that dates to Milwaukee Road days, Chicago & North Western uses WC's Valley Sub from South Necedah to Wisconsin Rapids. At Waukesha, short line Wisconsin & Calumet goes to WC's yard to interchange cars. And is it homesickness? Trackwork and derailments on Soo have caused Soo freights to return to their former main line-now WC-several times since the regional's startup. These incidents have also forced Amtrak's Empire Builder to detour on Wisconsin Central at least four times, variously between Duplainville and Schiller Park or Duplainville and New Lisbon.

#### The diesels

Wisconsin Central, like most regionals, shopped the used locomotive market for its motive power. After some shuffling of units with lessors, the railroad has settled on a fleet of 98 diesels including 40 SD45's, 42 road-switchers, and 16 switch engines (roster on page 49). The SD45's, all ex-BN, are the basic power for the time freights. As with most WC units, the 20-cylinder, 20-year-old EMD's were chosen largely because of their availability at the time of startup. Jim Fisk, WC mechanical superintendent for locomotives who came from Milwaukee Road and Soo Line by way of Indiana Hi-Rail, says the SD45's have been good units, performing better than had been anticipated. One reason is that WC has rated them at 3200 h.p. each vs. their original 3600. Fisk claims they are "as good as any non-Dash-2 power" and should work for another four or five years before needing either rebuilding or replacement.

Why yard switchers? They were available; the railroad has a lot of work well suited to them; and economy. Says Fisk, "It doesn't cost as much to run 1200 horsepower as it does to run 2000 horsepower." WC uses about 1 million gallons of diesel fuel a month, making it the largest expense item after labor and car-hire. Locations that *require* the particular services of a switcher are few; WC employs them regularly at Shops Yard, Neenah, Point, and Glad-

### Intermodal service, regional style

WE'RE at the foot of Oakland Avenue in Green Bay; it is 3:45 Ĩ p.m., April 6, 1990. The sky is a brilliant blue with only a few clouds, but it's still April in Wisconsin, and the temperature is only 35 degrees. Just because we're on Daylight Saving Time is no reason to think it's spring yet, for earlier this afternoon, snow squalls were dusting the area. In this former Milwaukee Road yard, Gary Lockstein, trainmaster on Wisconsin Central's Eastern Division, surveys the activity. The "Piggyback Strip," two tracks on the south side of the yard that can hold 26 89-foot flat cars, commands his attention. For now, the activity represents the heart of train T218, soon to be dispatched for Chicago. It and northbound counterpart T219 are WC's Monday-Friday intermodal trains, a service inherited from Milwaukee Road's "Sprint" service. (Sprints began on the Chicago-St. Paul route in 1978 ["The Train They Call Sprint," April 1981 TRAINS] and expanded to Chicago-Green Bay; Soo still runs the former as well as a Chicago-Kansas City Sprint.)

On the Milwaukee, Sprints helped inaugurate three-person crews, but on WC, the only real factor differentiating 218/219 from other WC trains is 218/219's volume of intermodal traffic. Wisconsin Central is one of the few regionals on which such traffic is significant; others include lowa Interstate and Susquehanna. In 1989, trailers and containers accounted for 1200 to 1300 revenue units a month, 8 percent of all WC loads, up from 5 percent in WC's first full calendar year. WC people are intent on having the overnight service grow, and during first quarter 1990, intermodal loadings were 75 percent ahead of 1989.

The two loading tracks flank a wide driveway area for trucks and a Piggy-Packer loader to maneuver. Dick Gagnon is the main "Packer" operator who loads the flats and ties down the trailers. In the intermodal office at the end of the strip is John Sauer, who oversees the operation and helps position trailers on the ground with the Trailer-Jockey tractor. He's a 23-year veteran of Milwaukee Road's truck subsidiary, most of those years at Green Bay, and recalls the Piggy-Packer replacing circus ramp loading in 1980. While the Milwaukee was perhaps the lowest-profile railroad in Green Bay—C&NW had the most lines and trains, GB&W the name—it built a good base of intermodal traffic which Soo Line kept up in 1985 and transferred to WC with the October 1987 sale. Today, the other railroads serving Green Bay have negligible intermodal business at best.

Activity picks up approaching 4:30 p.m., the cutoff time for trailer delivery, as one of two local crews, aboard GP30 709 still in Soo white and red, switches flats variously carrying KTTX, RTTX, and WC reporting marks. As usual, a few drivers roll in at the last minute in a cloud of dust, positioning their trailers right under the waiting arms of the Piggy-Packer. A few minutes later, the trailers are on the flats. In the background, the other local crew has arrived with a transfer from east-side industries behind GP35M 4006; at the west end of the yard, Escanaba & Lake Superior GP38 402 trundles in with the daily train from Channing, Mich., 28 box cars and 1 tank car. Later this evening, 709 and 4006, in M.U., will depart with train T020 for Shops Yard in North Fond du Lac, leaving WC's Green Bay terminal without WC locomotives until trains T019 and T219 arrive tomorrow morning.

Tonight's 218 will have Warren Gerard as engineer and Tim Keenan as conductor. At 6:05 p.m., Gerard is aboard the lead unit, GP35M 4010; in the cab, its Missouri Pacific ancestry is obvious from the raised screaming eagle insignia on the conductor's seat cushion. Trailing 4010 is GP30 704, still in Soo colors. After the train is doubled together, 4010's shield-bedecked nose pokes into 12th Avenue as one of the switch crews tacks on the rear portion of the train. With the train assembled, the required air brake test is completed and conductor Keenan swings aboard. A chirping sound in 4010's cab indicates the crew has affixed an end-of-train box onto the last car's coupler and that "FRED" is functioning properly.

At 6:35, 218 rolls out of the yard and across Mason Street, immediately thereafter taking a left onto the GB&W. Coming off the transfer track, the train—to the GB&W, Extra WC 4010 West—



OFFICIALLY, it's Conrail's Ashland Avenue Yard, but railroaders still call it "CJ" for a predecessor. Wisconsin Central's T218 will drop 44 cars here before proceeding to UP's Canal Street facility.

slices through Green Bay's remaining evening rush-hour traffic on Military Avenue. Trailing the two units are 21 loads and 45 empties. The train length is a clue that 218 and 219, in good regional performance, are more than just intermodals, exhibiting maximum utilization of resources. Accordingly, on any given night 218 will depart Green Bay with 20 to 30 flats plus any through traffic that doesn't require local switching. Tonight, joining the intermodal flats are a string of empty coal hoppers to be dropped at Shops Yard for forwarding to Milwaukee and a cut of cars for direct interchange with Conrail in Chicago.

West of Green Bay, the crew faces directly into the sun as the 4111-foot train winds up a 5-mile grade at a steady 30 mph. GB&W mileposts on the north side stand guard over 90-lb. jointed rail that provides a good ride. At 6:58, the GB&W dispatcher at Norwood Yard in Green Bay requests our location. Within the next hour or two, WC train T020 and GB&W train 1 will follow the same path out of Green Bay. The barns and silos mark the territory as the heart of "America's Dairyland." Up on a crest are silhouetted two youngsters watching the train go by. West of Seymour, deer scamper across the track and join a herd as the sun sets in a clear but cold sky.

It's dusk in Black Creek and Miller Time at the Copper Kettle, one of dozens of neon-lit taverns that dot small-town Wisconsin serving up fish frys and cold beer, two Friday evening staples in the Badger State. At 7:33, our 2384 gross tons of train roll past the Copper Kettle and enter the connection track from GB&W onto WC rails. Looking back from 4010, it's hard to tell we're an intermodal train, the flats being queued in back. Entering track warrant No. 29, T218 proceeds southward over WC's Shawano Sub. At 8:05, we're rolling at restricted speed through the west side of Appleton, the deep-throated roar of the ex-MoPac unit, with its customized four-stack exhaust manifold (the Harley-Davidsons of the railroad?) echoing off industrial buildings, many with freight cars on their sidings.

At 8:30, T218 is at Milepost 361 on the Shawano Sub, also Milepost 188 on the Neenah Sub, as the former Soo Chicago-Twin Cities main line now gains another train. From here south, WC trains enjoy welded rail and CTC operation. From Appleton to Fond du Lac, the Fox River Valley main line parallels on the left. In Neenah, 218 makes the first of only five brief regular stops to work. Neenah has a new intermodal facility, opened in May 1989. David Wilson, WC manager of intermodal marketing, says the ramp was put in to extend the market, not to pull shipments from carloads but rather for traffic that can't move in carloads. The 3.2-acre facility, located to tap the Fox River valley markets between Kaukauna and Oshkosh, boasts a brand-new \$600,000 Letro-Porter trailer loader. At Neenah yard, local cars and those from the even newer Stevens Point ramp are added to T218. WC had planned to open a piggyback ramp in Point in 1990, but North Western's closing of its ramp in nearby Wausau advanced WC's plans to July 1989

Our train passes under the new Winneconne Avenue viaduct and alongside the Neenah foundry, maker of sewer covers among other things. The radio crackles "One car to a stop, 218" at 8:43, and just 3 minutes later, after having four cars tacked onto the rear by the 2 p.m. switch crew on SW1500 1555, engineer Gerard has 218 rolling out of Neenah. A restored Soo Line wood caboose across the street watches. Conductor Keenan notes that the amount of intermodal business on 218 and 219 can vary from day to day. Wilson agrees, but says an average night in 1989 saw 40 to 50 loads originated on the railroad.

In Oshkosh, WC contends with an anachronistic, yet fascinating, stretch of main line. At 9:13, 218 begins a 10-mph trek down Division Street, a residential street where the track lays between street and sidewalk; from the cab, you seem close enough to touch the front porches alongside the train. In back of downtown stores, the train negotiates a sharp reverse curve, a drawbridge, then more backyards. Even the grade-crossing signals—old-style Griswolds with revolving stop signs that snap to attention for approaching trains—date this stretch of track, which WC would like to exit onto the parallel Fox River Valley Railroad.

At 9:50, the lights of North Fond du Lac and Shops Yard appear, foretelling 218's usual crew and engine change. The Green Bay crew, with 4010/704 cut away from the flats, doubles the empty hoppers for Milwaukee into another yard track and starts its wait to return north as tonight's T019. Meanwhile, the North Fond du Lac crew, with a big SD45 that isn't permitted up north on the GB&W, is ready to move in with cars to be spliced into 218's blocks. The intermodals are unusual trains at Shops Yard since they do much of their own work and are the only trains that go through and do not originate or terminate here.

WITH yard work and an air test completed, engineer Quay Smith moves the reassembled 218 south out of the yard to the Scott Street crossing at the north end of Fond du Lac proper, where conductor John Ziegler will board. The engineer requests "main line east" from the dispatcher in Stevens Point ("Coming right up, sir"), and SD45 6499, tonight with smaller GP35 728 behind it, begins towing 48 loads and 26 empties through town at 10:46. Also occupying the Scott Street crossing is an FRVR switcher, GP9 4330, with two hoppers and a caboose. This area is familiar to Quay, since he ran trains out of North Fond du Lac on neighboring C&NW for 27 years.

A few minutes later, 218 is south of the U.S. 41 overpass on the outskirts of the city, sitting in Valley Siding awaiting a meet with T047 out of Milwaukee; it has 132 cars behind 6551, 6554, 4006, and 6538 (three SD45's and a GP35M) and a crew whose 12 hours is ready to expire. As the long train traverses a small dip in the grade coming off Byron Hill, one of its coal hoppers decides to give a lesson on the unpredictability of train dynamics on grades, snapping a coupler knuckle and bringing the train to a grinding halt. Our crew on 218 is closer to the culprit car than is 47's crew, so they assist the disabled train. After 47 is on its way again, our 218 marches up Byron Hill at 17 mph, cresting it at tiny Byron at 12:38 a.m., Saturday. In Byron siding atop the grade, T043, with a colorful engine mix of 706, 6507, 4005, 710, and 6559 and 125 cars, awaits our passage.

After we leave Valley Siding, it's nonstop to Burlington. In gen-

eral, most WC intermodal loads are southbound and include both light and heavy paper products destined for points throughout the East and South in trailers, or for the Port of Montreal in containers. Among the destinations for tonight's loads are Springfield, Mass.; Atlanta; Dallas; Fort Smith, Ark.; and Fresno, Calif. Northbound WC intermodal traffic includes machinery parts and department store merchandise, but 218 and 219 have moved seemingly almost anything—vacuum cleaners, motorcycle helmets, wooden crutches. Loads are split about evenly between trailers and containers. About 10 to 15 percent of WC's intermodal business goes west of Neenah to Stevens Point.

The train motors through southeastern Wisconsin at a steady 40 to 50 mph. We pass the Allenton lineside talking defect detector at 1:17 a.m., then scoot down the main line raised on fill across the surrounding marshes by the original WC at the turn of the century. The train, now 4870 feet in length with 4218 tons, curves through Slinger and rattles the Wisconsin & Southern diamond and the old Storck brewery at 1:26 a.m. After clearing the Soo Line diamonds (ex-Milwaukee Road) at Duplainville (WC's dispatcher customarily calls Soo's D.S. in Milwaukee for clearance in advance of WC trains hitting Soo's bell), 218 slows to the requisite 15 mph crawl through the center of Waukesha, passing at 2:05 a.m. the apartment building on Hartwell Avenue from which I was privileged to watch this line's transition from Soo Line's main to an almost-unused Lake States route to today's WC.

The detector at Honey Creek does not stop us, and we glide into the passing siding just north of Burlington. On many mornings—this one included—Burlington is where the crews on 218 and 219 swap trains; this allows them to return to home the same night. Tonight, Smith and Ziegler board a 219 with SD45's 6511 and 6572 on 61 cars. Joining us on 218 are engineer Tim Foster and conductor Joe Bernal, both Chicago-based; their first work with the eastbound is to pick up three cars in Burlington before departing at 3:07 a.m.

We've cleared the Antioch detector just inside Illinois and traversed the growing Lake County suburbs of Chicago, and it's still a clear, crisp, almost full-moonlit morning as we clatter across the C&NW/Metra diamonds at Deval Tower in Des Plaines and enter Schiller Park at 4:30. The yard here was Soo Line's former Chicago terminal. Soo still owns it, using it mostly as an intermodal facility.

At Schiller Park, the crew steps off and into the yard office to contact B&OCT and Conrail. After dropping 12 cars in the Soo yard, our train, now 65 cars, leaves Schiller at 5 a.m. to begin its weekday expedition into the Chicago Switching District. At 5:37, 218 leaves WC trackage at Forest Park, a former Soo-B&OCT junction (Chicago Great Western trains used B&OCT to the west on trackage now gone) and enters the wholly owned CSX subsidiary. (Baltimore & Ohio Chicago Terminal earns more in trackage rights and other property rental that it does from its own work; other carriers using B&OCT include C&NW, Soo, Indiana Harbor Belt, and of course WC). With dawn just breaking over Chicago, Saturday early morning traffic on the paralleling Eisenhower Expressway is still light. At a junction on the west side of C&NW's Global One terminal, WC 218 turns south and heads for Brighton Park, meeting a Conrail double-stack train on the double-track line.

Just beyond the Ash Street crossing of Santa Fe and Illinois Central's former lowa Division and almost underneath a giant Campbell's Soup can marking a production plant, the crew negotiates hand-throw switches to get from B&OCT into Conrail's Ashland Avenue yard, yet referred to as "CJ" for the Chicago Junction Railway, a predecessor in this area. Once in the yard, conductor Burnal is on the ground more often than not, and the engineer leaves the cab on several occasions to line turnouts. Alongside is a C&NW double-stack transfer.

By 6:50, 218 is 44 cars shorter, and the power and remaining 21 flats head east on Conrail and then north for its final destination, Union Pacific's Canal Street yard, arriving at 7:45. This facility, visible from Amtrak eastern trains on Conrail, is a former Chicago & Eastern Illinois property; UP subcontracts unloading and switching to a short line, Chicago Rail Link.

This marks the end of WC's work. A Rail Link switcher is standing ready to spot the flats for unloading. Most of the traffic on 218 is interchanged to other roads, but unlike the cars it left at Schiller Park, for rail interchange to Soo Line, most trailers and containers arriving at 26th and Canal will be "rubbered" to other railroads. Normally, 218 arrives here between 6 and 7 a.m., with trailers available at 9:30. The crew signs out and heads to their homes in northwestern Indiana.—O.P.D. stone, and occasionally elsewhere (e.g., Dresser or Waukesha). Why the lone SW1? The diminutive unit (not yet repainted WC, alas) shunts equipment around the shop at North Fond du Lac, being the perfect shop goat since it and an SD45 just fit on the turntable.

Other roster pets are the nine SDL-39's. Custom-built by EMD for Milwaukee Road branch lines with light rail or bridge loadings, they are the only such units in the world (the 10th SDL39 was wrecked and scrapped by MILW). Soo acquired them with MILW but didn't want them (even leasing some out to Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern). Burkhardt liked the 2300 h.p., six-motor units and figured WC had use for them, and so far, their only disadvantage is the specialized export-style truck whose replacement parts are difficult to get. They roam systemwide on WC but frequent the Manitowoc Sub and jobs at Marquette and Sault Ste. Marie; once the international bridge at the Soo is rebuilt, the SDL's won't really be advantageous anywhere on WC.

Four-motor road-switchers fill most WC local jobs and help the SD45's on time freights. First on the property in WC colors were 11 modified GP35's, repainted by dealer Wilson Corp. before delivery. They are ex-Missouri Pacific and are WC's only road units to not retain their old numbers, being renumbered as WC 4001-4011. Some of their paint has worn thin, and at least four have been given a more current paint job. MoPac had rebuilt them beginning in 1975, removing the turbochargers and installing 645 prime movers. Both MoPac and WC have rated them at 2000 h.p., consider them a GP38 equivalent, and designate them GP35M's. They are augmented on WC by 22 ex-Soo Line units, 17 GP30's (all still riding on Alco trucks from Soo FA tradeins) and 5 GP35's.

In an age where contemporary corporate paint schemes often range from unembellished to uninspired, WC's colorful diesels turn heads. After some variations, WC has settled on schemes for road units and switchers consisting of a maroon ("WC Maroon" on the paint cans) and yellow arrangement inspired by the wine-red WC color at the turn of the century as well as the maroon-andgold layout applied to Soo Line diesels in the 1950's. Road units have sufficient space on their hoods to spell out

WISCONSIN CENTRAL in one line, while some switchers have a profile of a pine tree on the hood with the name stacked, and safety stripes on the ends. On the occasion of WC's first birthday, SD45 6655 was given a commemorative paint job. On the sides above the name was stenciled in yellow OCTOBER 11, 1988— OUR FIRST ANNIVERSARY, and on the nose a new design which framed the

#### **WISCONSIN CENTRAL LOCOMOTIVES**

Road Nos.	Qty.	Model	Year built	Heritage, remarks
1	1	SW1	1941	PC 8480, NYC 8480, NYC 683, nee NYC 633; North Fond du Lac shop goat, nainted IHB black and orange
582-585	4	SDL39	1969	Soo 582-585, nee MILW 582-585
586-590	5	SDL39	1972	Soo 586-590, nee MILW 586-590
700-721	17	GP30	1963	Soo same Nos.; units 700, 703-704, 706-713, 715-719, 721 only; all have Alco trucks
723-724	2	GP35	1964	Soo 723-724
726-731	3	GP35	1965	Soo same Nos.; units 726, 728, 731 only
1230	1	SW1200	1963	MP 1107
1231	1	SW9	1951	HB&T 31
1232-1234	3	SW1200	1966	MP 1278, HB&T 33, HB&T 34
1235-1237	3	SW1200	1965	SSW 2260, SP 2287-2288
1550-1551	2	SW1500	1968	SSW 2487, SP 2505
1552	0	SW1500	1969	SP 2529; never renumbered, no longer on roster
1553-1554	2	SW1500	1970, 71	SP 2578, 2594
1555-1557	3	SW1500	1972	SP 2640, 2652, 2665
4002	1	GP35M	1963	MP 2603; MP 2505; nee T&P 605
4004-4006	3	GP35M	1964	MP 2608-2610; MP 2516, 2519, 2521; nee MP 618, 621, 623
4007-4010	4	GP35M	1965	MP 2611-2614; MP 2523, 2530, 2541, 2543; nee MP 625, 633, T&P 644, 646
4011	1	GP35M	1964	MP 2616; MP 2560; nee C&EI 663
4012-4013	2	GP35M	1963, 64	WC 4001, 4003, renumbered 1989; MP 2602, 2605; MP 2503, 2507; nee T&P 603, 607
6417	1	SD45	1967	BN 6417; nee NP 3617
6494	1	SD45	1970	BN 6494; ordered by CB&Q, delivered to BN
6498-6572	34	SD45	1971	BN same Nos.: 6498-6499, 6501-6502, 6504-6508, 6510-6511, 6517, 6522- 6524, 6526-6527, 6530-6535, 6537-6539, 6541, 6543, 6548, 6553-6554, 6559-6560, 6572
6655, 6660	2	SD45	1967	BN 6655, 6660; nee SLSF 905, 911
6677, 6690	2	SD45	1969	BN 6677, 6690; nee SLSF 929, 943
Oxford Gro	up:			
1701-1724	3	SD45	1966	N&W same Nos.: 1701, 1718, 1724; all chop-nosed by WC, 1988
1737-1746	4	SD45	1967	N&W same Nos.: 1737, 1744-1746; 1737 cannibalized for parts; 1744-1746 chop-nosed by WC, 1988
8939	1	SD45	1968	SP 8939
8993, 9093	2	SD45	1969	SP 8993, 9093

Notes: All units built by Electro-Motive Division, General Motors; all SD series are C-C (6-motor), remainder are B-B (4-motor); GP35M's are GP35's rebuilt by Missouri Pacific to GP38-2 standards.

Key to initials: BN, Burlington Northern; C&EI, Chicago & Eastern Illinois; CB&Q, Chicago, Burlington & Quincy; HB&T, Houston Belt & Terminal; MILW, Milwaukee Road; MP, Missouri Pacific; NYC, New York Central; PC, Penn Central; SLSF, St. Louis-San Francisco (Frisco); SP, Southern Pacific; SSW, St. Louis Southwestern (Cotton Belt); T&P, Texas & Pacific Units painted in WC colors; 582-584, 566-590; 711, 713, 715, 723-724, 728; 1230-1237, 1550-1551, 1553-1557; 4002-4013, 6522-6523, 6526, 6531, 6534, 6538, 6548, 6553, 6657 (50 units as of June 1, 1990); Oxfords 1701-1746, 8939, 8993,

9093 (9 units); other units are in immediate predecessor colors except for SW1 No. 1, painted Indiana Harbor Belt black and orange, and SDL39, in Milwaukee orange and black. SD45 6523 lettered "Richard B. Ogilvie"; SD45 6655 lettered "October 11, 1988, Our First Anniversary"

Sources: Wisconsin Central Ltd.; EMD Locomotive Reference Data; "The Mixed Train"; "Burlington Northern 1977-1980 Annual"; Nick Modders. Accurate as of June 1, 1990—J.D.I.



Otto P. Dobnick

NOT what it seems, WC caboose 17—with a FRED in place—deadheads west at Van Dyne after trip to Shops Yard with damaged cars.



WC'S SW1500's have "pine tree" emblem on hoods to honor the paper industry; 1550 works at Stevens Point on May 13, 1990.





Otto F. Dob

ONLY rarely, such as with ore trains, does WC need pushers for Byron Hill out of Fond du Lac. Train 2 of March 6, 1988, is amply powered by a GP35M and two SD45's as it crests the grade under County Trunk F at Byron (above). WC uses Soo trackage rights from Duplainville to reach Milwaukee. On May 6, 1990 (right), T047 out of Milwaukee waits short of the connection switch as T043's extra slaps the diamonds.

ageless WC shield. Veteran trainwatchers thought the design to be an upside-down version of the wings on Soo Line maroon F unit and Geep noses, but some WC Stevens Point shop personnel like to describe the design as a sunrise between two pine trees. In fact, the scheme was suggested by a Point shop employee to Ed Burkhardt. The "pines" nose treatment, together with the pine tree shape on switchers, can be construed as a tribute to WC's paper product shippers. The nose treatment on 6655 was well received and now is applied to all road diesels as they're repainted. The repainting of a locomotive requires an average of 35 gallons, and half of WC's 98 units are in the maroon color, including the 11 GP35M's, 13 switchers, 6 of the 22 ex-Soo GP30's and GP35's, and 8 of the 9 SDL39's.

Leased power has appeared on WC on two occasions. After startup, when only 46 of the planned 85 locomotives were available, as many as 53 different units were leased. The last of these to be turned back was a Minnesota Commercial SW1500, which worked at Stevens Point, in March 1988 when WC had its full fleet for the first time. Since then, WC has turned to the Oxford Group for additional horsepower.

The Oxford Group is a separate company formed by some WC principals, and others, to take advantage of the active locomotive leasing market and to provide another source for WC when credit was at its limit owing to startup expenses. The Oxford units initially included 8 SW1500's, 5 SDL39's, and 9 SD45's, most worked on under contract at North Fond du Lac and repainted into WC colors. Nine of the Oxford SD45's, painted WC maroon, spent six months in 1988 leased to Union Pacific. Oxford has since swapped 6 of the switchers and the 5 SDL39's to WC for 6 more SD45's. Recently Oxford has acquired GP38-2's, SD40's, and more SD45's and continues to lease its units to other roads; some are painted in a MoPac-like blue scheme with a circular "WC-Oxford" emblem. Leasing of Oxford units by WC has tapered off and is expected to cease. By March 1990, active Oxford power working on WC was down to a single unit.

Missabe Road engines have also appeared on WC, to work off horsepower-hours gained by DM&IR in operating WC SD45's through in ore-train service. During the first ore season, Missabe units made as far south as Shops Yard; in early 1990, four Missabe Road SD9's were working out of Marquette.

With the WC locomotive fleet of a maturing age, the railroad's mechanical and operating personnel try to take good care of their charges. The locomotive availability ratio has been averaging about 88 percent, far better than the low of 72 percent experienced six months into the operation. Fisk notes that motive power is kept "user friendly." That is, power is assigned by dispatchers and operating personnel to best fit their needs, which helps keep the service customer-oriented. The only restriction: SD45's are not permitted on the Green Bay & Western or the Marinette, Tomahawk & Western; or on WC's Manitowoc Sub, Medford branch, and some spur and industrial tracks. Otherwise, the big units go almost everywhere. WC has not yet developed a long-term plan for the replacement of locomotives due for retirement.

#### The freight-car fleet

In February 1990), Wisconsin Central reported a total of 4650 freight cars



either owned or leased. (Don't rely on the "Official Railway Equipment Register," which erroneously has shown WC with as many as 6727 cars.) About half are box cars, with 900 covered hoppers and the remainder divided fairly evenly among gondolas, flat cars, and open hoppers, plus a handful of tank and other cars. The fleet has been gradually refurbished and expanded since startup, when WC had approximately 3200 cars (vs. 2600 assigned to Lake States by Soo Line). The mechanical department started car-repair programs immediately; as much as possible, cars that go through the repair shop are repainted. Gondolas and hopper cars are painted black with white lettering, covered hoppers gray with maroon lettering, and box cars maroon with yellow lettering. Shields are applied on many classes of box cars; hoppers and gons receive billboard lettering. About two-thirds of WC's inherited cars came from Soo Line, including Milwaukee Road and MN&S; hence many cars, especially box cars, have WC reporting marks but still advertise Soo in large letters. By mid-1989, about 10 percent of WC's car fleet had been shopped.

Wisconsin Central does not use ca-

booses. It owns 100 end-of-train boxes. or "smart FREDs," at \$2500 each, but did acquire five ex-Milwaukee Road bay-window cars from Lake States for use on a handful of jobs involving backup moves or switch-throwing. (White Soo cupola cabooses were seen on, but not assigned to, Lake States.) Two of the five had been repainted maroon by WC, and one, No. 17, was often used during the first year until WC was notified that a bank-not Soo-owned it and wanted it returned upon expiration of a lease. The other repainted caboose has been retired for display on a track section alongside U.S. 41 at North Fond du Lac about a mile from the WC yard.

New locomotives may be in WC's future, but new freight cars are already here. In mid-1989, WC placed an \$11 million order with Bethlehem Steel for 250 100-ton "shorty" covered hoppers, to haul roofing granules out of Kremlin and Wausau. In early 1990, WC added 150 more, for almost \$7 million. This was the largest car order yet placed by a regional railroad. The new covered hoppers, along with other equipment and roadway upgrading, give WC an ambitious capital outlay program, totaling \$20.4 million for 1990, up from TRAINS: J. David Ingles.

\$17.7 million in 1989 and \$9.6 million in 1988.

In Soo Line days, the North Fond du Lac shops were busy and even massproduced new box cars on occasion. During its last Soo years, the shop's activity and employment dwindled, but the coming of the new regional essentially reopened the shop, which now provides employment for 110. Major activity is churning through the backlog of bad-order cars, many acquired from Soo. Cars that require up to 400 manhours of work are repaired, but those beyond that level are traded to scrap dealers for cash. Car work is also done at Stevens Point and Gladstone, while North Fond du Lac does much of the work on WC's maintenance-of-way equipment. Locomotive repair is completed at Stevens Point and North Fond du Lac, more of it at the latter (including the heavier work). The mechanical forces are flexible, with many of the same people working on engines as well as rolling stock.

WC achieves high utilization at the shops with the help of contract work, an area the mechanical department would like to see expanded. Examples have included repairs and modifications









Zephyr Graphics: T.J. Florian.

SHOPS in the village of North Fond du Lac, along the shore of Lake Winnebago, see renewed activity under Wisconsin Central ownership. May 1989 aerial view above looks east. Diesel shop (also below) is at top left, car shop with electrically powered transfer table to right. The portion of the roundhouse nearest the camera has since been razed, although other stalls are still in use. Damaged SD45 6553 (left) received hood from cannibalized N&W 1737 (and sister 6548 a short hood from UP 3639). In carshop (bottom left), construction style of an E9 is evident on BN 9919, in for WC-contracted cosmetic body work for Chicago-area owner West Suburban Mass Transit Authority. Fond du Lac facility, which built many Soo freight cars, employs 110 for WC, who are busy repairing and repainting both cars and engines.



Zephyr Graphics: Stanton Hunter.

to box cars for short lines, repairs for Union Tank Car Co., locomotive repair for Metra, the Chicago commuter authority (body work on two BN E9's), private passenger car refurbishing for Charter Manufacturing Co., repair and painting of wood chip gons owned by a Consolidated Papers affiliate, and repair work on 22 Oxford locomotives.

#### The future

Wisconsin Central's goals include continuing to increase carloads and revenues, improve car utilization and transit times, pay off debt, upgrade equipment and facilities, and also increase contribution to employee profit sharing. Sure, this sounds like corporate standards everywhere, but so far WC boasts the track record to achieve them. Says Burkhardt, "I have no concern about this company's ability to compete and prosper." WC expects aggregates and pulpwood traffic, especially, to expand.

WC's future to a large degree will depend on the region's paper industry. And as long as the nation's population keeps increasing, the demand for the paper product "necessities" produced in Wisconsin and Michigan's U.P. should also increase. Between 1988-1990, the paper industry in Wisconsin reinvested a record \$900 million. To WC, this means that several on-line mills can be expected to expand production capacity. In February 1990, ground was broken by Consolidated Papers, WC's largest shipper, in Wisconsin Rapids for a \$495 million mill expansion. When completed in late 1991, the project could double WC's traffic from Wisconsin Rapids. Also, the state of Wisconsin recently completed a study which identified 21 areas suitable for new or expanded pulp mills, several of which are near WC lines. But the mix of traffic on WC may also change as it meets the competition from truckers. The shipment of minerals may see a boost if proposed mining operations at Ladysmith and Crandon come on line in the 1990's.

Wisconsin Central also will continue to be affected by events outside its control. Says Power, "Basically it (the railroad) will look the same. We're not interested in getting ourselves to Kansas City, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, or any exotic places." He and other WC officials feel that the railroad has found a good niche. "Do what you do best and you become more efficient over time as you do it."

Are any additions to Wisconsin Central's map within its region on the ready track? WC officials understandably won't comment, but it's easy to look at a map and speculate. The most obvious candidate is Soo's 105-mile Ladysmith-Superior line, on which WC is prohibited from soliciting bridge traffic. But Soo Line's overall position has been changing. Soo is now a wholly owned CP subsidiary, and Soo's share of Twin Ports traffic has decreased dramatically in the past five years—Soo's only route into Duluth-Superior is over BN trackage rights. CP could very well decide to make the Ladysmith line available.

Another question mark is the future of Chicago & North Western in much of Wisconsin. Having shorn itself of many branch lines, C&NW in WC territory is down to basically Chicago-St. Paul and Chicago-Superior routes, plus the isolated Green Bay-Ishpeming route, which includes ore-hauling north of Escanaba. C&NW, being in a highly leveraged position because of the Blackstone management buyout last year, could be easily affected by soft traffic conditions and might well have to put some lines on the sale block.

Then there's the Green Bay & Western, which competes directly with WC for mill traffic at Rapids and Green Bay. Unfortunately for the Green Bay Route, it doesn't reach the Twin Cities, and its new Itel sister railroad, Fox River Valley, doesn't reach Chicago, two important gateways accessed by WC. GB&W's long-established base of bridge traffic between the carferry docks at Kewaunee and the Burlington (Northern) at East Winona has shrivelled to almost nothing in the past 10 years, and the 254-mile Alco-powered road now relies largely on paper-related traffic, where its lack of strategic gateways and higher labor costs place it in stiff competition with WC.

Perhaps the greatest potential for railroad line consolidation in WC territory is in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, where WC tallies 20 percent of its route mileage. C&NW's ore line stretches only 72 miles from Escanaba to the Marquette area, but Wisconsin Central requires 235 miles via Trout Lake. West of Marguette, at the end of WCowned track on the L'Anse Sub at Arnheim is a site where plans for a \$500 million paper mill are presently on hold. Beyond Arnheim, along the former route of the Copper Country Limited, are 26 more miles of state-owned track extending through Houghton-Hancock to Lake Linden on the Keweenaw Peninsula. Locals like to think that prospects are good for reopening the route, unused by freight trains since 1982, across the double-deck Portage Lift Bridge at Houghton.

In the western U.P., WC reinstated service to White Pine Mine, operated by the Copper Range Co. and located 14 miles north of Bergland, the junction with the former South Shore main. During 1988, pyrite, which is copper concentrate used in smelting, arrived in gondolas via Marquette and Nestoria. In May 1989, WC reopened the route by way of the Ashland Sub and Marengo Junction for 600 carloads from Quebec and Utah, but it took bridge work, surfacing, and 30 cars of ballast. WC would like to increase traffic here, and one way to do it would be to haul coal into White Pine. That coal arrives by barge at Ontonagon, from where it is trucked to the mine. Burkhardt notes, with frustration, that on a per-ton basis, the public subsidy for dredging the Ontonagon harbor for this traffic is costlier than the entire all-rail rate from Chicago.

If more traffic can be developed in the area, WC could consolidate the Marengo Junction-White Pine line with the Mellen-Bessemer line, which under WC has seen only one shipment of pipe and is presently not in service. WC could link them by building a 4-mile connection at North Ironwood. Wisconsin Central and both the Wisconsin and Michigan DOT's are co-sponsoring a study of this possibility.

WC officials are eager to consider other consolidation proposals. Examples include Slinger, where WC and Wisconsin & Southern operate side-by-side for 5 miles from Rugby Junction, and Oshkosh, where WC and Fox River Valley amble through the city only blocks apart and maintain two drawbridges over the Fox River as it flows into Lake Winnebago.

Wisconsin Central is doing what a railroad does best: moving carloads fast and in a way that best suits customers needs. By doing this with a traditional name and appearance but with nontraditional tactics. Wisconsin Central has proved that a railroad can thrive in the upper Midwest. Likening WC to the local favorite football team. Tom Power says, "We want to be like the Green Bay Packers in the old days-stay on a basic game plan and don't get fancy." With that basic game plan, the men and women who are Wisconsin Central have embraced the "We Can" attitude. Says one of those people, echoing the thoughts of probably dozens more, "I see Wisconsin Central as being here for many, many years . . . long enough for me to retire." I

OTTO P. DOBNICK, 37, a Milwaukee native, acquired a fondness for the lines that have become Wisconsin Central Ltd. by riding Soo Line's Laker between Waukesha and Superior as a child. He now has ridden 85 percent of WC's active mileage. A transportation planner for a southeastern Wisconsin government agency, he resides in TRAINS' new hometown within air-horn distance of WC's main line. This is his third TRAINS byline. He gratefully acknowledges the help of the many WC employees who took time to assist him; Peter A. Briggs of Briggs Business Communication; and manuscript typist Nancy Ciancimino.

### Seared, burned, but now cooking

After a flashy start and tumult, Chicago Central is quietly successful

#### **STEVE GLISCHINSKI**

I AT LAST there's peace and stability at the general offices of the Chicago, Central & Pacific. The turmoil brought about by an ownership dispute of the late 1980's is over. As a result, the railroad that blazed the trail for the recent regional movement in the U.S. can finally be counted among the growing number of successful regionals.

Credit for the Chicago Central's (CC) success belongs, in no small part, to a group of methodical, professional railroaders at its headquarters in Waterloo, Iowa. How have they done it? "We try to improve the railroad day by day, little by little," says Lyle Reed, CC's president. "We do this by trying to extend the life of our assets, such as our locomotives and track, and by being responsive to our customers. We aren't flashy like some other railroads. We just work hard."

Chicago Central was the brainchild of Jack E. Haley, an entrepreneur full of enthusiasm and promise. Haley got his first taste of railroading in 1984 when he purchased a 108-mile branchline of Illinois Central Gulf (ICG) from Cedar Falls, Iowa, to Albert Lea, Minn., and renamed it Cedar Valley (CVAR). Haley quickly instituted more frequent service on the Cedar Valley and pioneered dinner-train operation with the "Star Clipper." In December 1985 he bought the Illinois Central's former Iowa Division, 681 miles, for \$75 million [pages 20-24, August 1986 TRAINS].

#### Flashy start, then problems

Observers were excited by Haley's nontraditional approach to railroading. One tool was dedicated intermodal trains. He also brought in marketing people with backgrounds in the grain business, one of the biggest commodities handled by Chicago Central.

Included in the sale were the rights to the Illinois Central's old green diamond logo, and soon CC splashed it on just about every building and piece of equipment it owned. The old Waterloo backshop was reopened, and office



space was leased in downtown Waterloo for CC headquarters. Huge Chicago Central signs, visible from all over the city, were installed on top of the building. New station signposts, each nameboard with the diamond logo, appeared the length of the line. The CC's future looked bright.

But then, in 1987 things began unraveling. General Electric Credit Corporation (GECC), which had financed the acquisition from ICG, became concerned when loan payments were not being made. Worried about its large investment, GECC brought in Don Wood, formerly an executive with Burlington Northern, to assess the situation and the property. According to Kevin Trout, Chicago Central's chief financial officer, the situation Wood walked into was simple: expenses were exceeding revenues. Wood's report indicated the railroad was viable, but only if changes were made.

Haley recognized a threat to his control of the company and attempted to take Chicago Central into bankruptcy on September 1, 1987. Soon after, Haley and GECC reached an agreement, and Haley left the company.

GE Credit then had to make a crucial decision. It could spend more money on an unsettled situation or it could sell off CC's assets. It chose to stay in the railroad business, loaning more



TRAIN 50's six units pull 109 cars across undulating Iowa landscape nearing Manchester on July 27, 1991. TRAINS: J. David Ingles.

money to pay suppliers and to keep the company running. According to Trout, "The loan was restructured so Chicago Central could live with the payments and continue in operation. This was a critical decision that allowed the railroad to keep going."

The lender then asked Wood to serve as Chicago Central's president, and the company was released from bankruptcy protection in October 1987, following restructuring of the debt. In January 1988 Wood brought in Lyle Reed as vice president and chief marketing officer. A former BN officer off the Frisco, Reed was promoted to president and chief operating officer in 1989. At the same time, Wood was promoted to chairman and chief executive officer. Today Chicago Central is owned by its senior management.

#### Implementing change to survive

Chicago Central didn't waste time getting its house in order. Greg Amys, now chief transportation officer, came aboard in September 1988. A 22-year veteran of the Great Northern and BN, Amys spent many years as superintendent of ore and taconite operations for BN in his native Superior, Wis. He quickly recognized what the CC was up against. "We were running too many train-miles and crew starts, plus we had locomotives and cars plugging up sidings and yards. It was necessary to improve connections between industries, locals, and through trains. Our task was to reduce expenses while continuing to operate and provide good service for our customers."

Amys instituted basic changes to reduce train-miles, resulting in lower costs. "The train-miles were not a match for our business, so we reduced the number of trains, but increased the work that those we kept would perform."

Among the casualties were the two dedicated intermodal trains, which were costing more to operate than the revenue they generated. Chicago Central has not given up on intermodal traffic, though. It continues to enjoy a healthy business handling trailers, but does so on regular trains.

Another move that saved money was limiting all trains to 40 mph; some intermodal trains previously had a 60mph limit. Loaded coal trains are permitted 30 mph. The changes save fuel as well as wear on the tracks and equipment.

Reed examined CC's overall business and rates and made some adjustments. Carloadings had dropped off in late 1987 and early 1988, but Amys says the railroad's "quality" of carloading went up—Chicago Central was attracting more profitable business.

The changes reduced the number of

cars needed, so the surplus was disposed of. The January 1990 "Official Railway Equipment Register" lists 1835 cars with CC reporting marks, virtually all of them covered hoppers for grain. The number of employees was also reduced, from 700 in 1986 to about 500 today.

As another cost-saving measure, CC moved out of its expensive downtown Waterloo offices and into its own facility, the remodeled IC division headquarters building adjacent to the Waterloo roundhouse and backshop. The building has the look of a railroad headquarters, with historical and contemporary railroad photos adorning practically every wall.

As part of the Chicago Central's "hands-on" approach, supervisors of the transportation and mechanical departments in Waterloo gather for a daily conference call at 8:15 a.m. The call includes employees across the railroad. Its purpose is to review the previous day's operation and to plan the upcoming 24-hour period. Amys says the call helps break down territorial boundaries and increases communication. "It helps everyone feel they're part of one team," he says.

#### Grain and coal

Chicago Central's primary business is hauling agricultural products, not



surprising since the railroad serves some of the top corn and soybean producing areas of Iowa. Another big commodity is low-sulfur coal, which comes off the Union Pacific at Council Bluffs. One of two weekly trains originates at Black Butte, Wyo., and is destined for the Commonwealth Edison (Com Ed) plant at Plaines, Ill. The other one is interchanged to Conrail in Chicago. Conrail moves the train to the Northern Indiana Public Service Commission (NIPSCO) power plant at Wheatfield, Ind. A third coal train, operating once or twice a month, is interchanged to the Chicago SouthShore & South Bend for NIPSCO's Michigan City (Ind.) plant. On average, the Chicago Central operates about 20 to 25 unit coal trains a month

A new addition to coal service in 1991 was 220 cars (two 110-car sets) leased from Utility Fuels of Texas and built by Trinity Industries to Chicago Central's specifications. Painted in CC red, they carry the familiar green diamond logo.

All Chicago Central train crews are unionized. Engineers are represented by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, trainmen by the United Transportation Union. Through trains use two-person crews, and locals and switchers three. Crew safety and ensuring of rules compliance is the bailiwick of Rik Anderson, superintendent of rules, safety and training. He came to Waterloo in 1988 from the BN and quickly began converting Chicago Central from Illinois Central Gulf's old rules to the General Code of Operating Rules, used by most of the major Western railroads. Anderson also wrote a new safety book and a dispatchers and



AT Fort Dodge, agent hoops up message to an eastbound on December 21, 1988.

operators manual, and he designed Chicago Central's timetable.

#### Simplicity in operations

For a railroad its size, Chicago Central's operations are deceptively simple. It runs one road train, Nos. 50 and 51, daily each way the length of the railroad. These are the only trains, other than coal, that travel the entire 500-mile mainline.

Nos. 50-51 terminate/originate at IC's Markham Yard south of Chicago. Usually, 51 departs either just before or after the evening commuter rush of Metra, Chicago's commuter authority. Departure of No. 51 is also dependent on Chicago Central's own Chicago facility, the former IC Hawthorne Yard on the border of west-suburban Cicero, where it picks up cars before heading west. During 51's day-and-a-half trek across two states, its crew is changed and its consist classified at Freeport and Waterloo before arriving in Council Bluffs around 2 to 4 a.m. the second day.

No. 50 departs Council Bluffs in the late afternoon or early evening, and, after crew changes and work at Waterloo and Freeport, arrives at Markham Yard in the early-morning hours the second day. Both 50 and 51 stop for interchange work at the Indiana Harbor Belt connection at the Chicago suburb of Broadview, and they'll do work as necessary along the line. The stretch between Dubuque and Waterloo is the best for seeing 50 and 51 in action, as they both pass through the area in daylight hours.

Chicago Central has a light-car-repair facility at Hawthorne. Two regular switch jobs work the yard and interchange with other railroads, one five days a week, the other six. Usually an



extra crew works on the seventh day.

Wallace Yard, at the west end of Freeport, is also a hub. In addition to a switch crew which classifies 50 and 51 each day, Wallace originates a six-day local. This job switches Kelly Springfield, an automobile tire manufacturer east of town and CC's biggest customer in the area. It can also work east to Rockford and west to Dubuque.

The country west of Freeport is some of CC's most scenic. The line swings through curve after curve up to Scales Mound and then down through historic Galena into the Mississippi valley at Portage, where double-track operation along the river begins.

#### **Delays at Dubuque**

For 12.6 miles to East Cabin in East Dubuque, Ill., Burlington Northern has trackage rights over CC. Those rights have been a thorny issue since CC began operation. This is BN's busy mainline between the Twin Cities (Minneapolis-St. Paul) and Savanna, Ill. CC's trains use the route too, of course, and CC has customers in East Dubuque that require switching. This section, dispatched by CC, can become quite congested, which results in delays. BN would like to buy one or both tracks, and dispatch the section. CC's Amys says only that both railroads are having discussions, with the goal of lessening or eliminating train delays.

Access to CC's track at Portage and East Cabin is controlled by an operator at ground-level East Cabin, an old-fashioned interlocking plant complete with levers to operate switches manually. Just west of here, CC's track swings east and plunges into a curved tunnel. The tracks emerge westbound across the BN diamond and immediately head onto the swing-span Mississippi River bridge. Barge traffic frequently keeps the bridge open, further delaying trains ["Hot Spots," March 1992 TRAINS].

On the other side of the river lies Dubuque, an important point for Chicago Central. Elevators along the Mississippi are served by the railroad, and during warm-weather months CC assigns extra switch jobs to serve them in addition to the regular six-day local.

The city was the site of a major track relocation project in 1990 when U.S. Highway 61 was rebuilt. The Iowa Department of Transportation paid \$7.5 million to move and reconstruct the tracks for  $1^{3/4}$  miles through the city; the reconstruction also included installing Central Traffic Control (CTC). Soo Line now uses Chicago Central track through town, gaining its own rails at Wood interlocking, south of downtown.

During the project, CC's yard was removed, so Iowa DOT financed construction of a new yard. With it and a new yard office, Dubuque has some of Chicago Central's most modern facilities.

#### Improving the track

Chicago Central west out of Dubuque is also laden with curves as it struggles to escape the Mississippi valley. The area was a headache for John Adair, CC chief engineer, when he came over from BN in January 1988. He discovered a problem many regionals face—deferred maintenance by the Class 1 road that owned the track. "On my first day I walked into the dispatcher's office to find out how things were going," Adair recalls. "There were 100 track pull-aparts, with about 70 or 80 slow orders. And the dispatcher didn't think things were too bad that day!"



Rik Anderso

OLD TIES are picked up by work train crew November 5, 1990, at Alta on Sioux City branch.



TRAIN 51 threads Dubuque in January 1990, where highway work shifted track alignment.

The track around Dubuque, though laid with welded rail, was severely worn, and the ties had deteriorated. "We had some of the worst rail wear in the Dubuque area that I've seen in my railroading career," Adair says. The problems were compounded by an almost complete lack of rail anchors to hold the track in place. To solve the problem, Adair's crews used rail grinders to smooth the worst spots and have since replaced ties and about eight miles of rail.

Another trouble spot was the Tara-Sioux City branch. Although only 127 miles long, the line generates about 40 percent of CC's grain loadings; it became a priority for Adair. Under Iowa's Rail Assistance Program, a three-year project was undertaken to upgrade the line from Tara to Le Mars. The program began in 1988 and cost in excess of \$8 million, 80 percent of which came from CC. About 1300 ties and 1500 tons of ballast were installed per mile. All grade crossings were renewed and new rail anchors installed. The rehabilitation permitted train speeds to be raised from 10 mph to 30.

Other rehabilitation projects have included the 42-mile Manchester-Cedar Rapids branch, where half of all curves are now laid with welded rail, and the entire line has been surfaced.

The railroad has two yards in the Cedar Rapids area, one ex-Illinois Central and the other former Milwaukee Road. A switch job is on duty seven days a week, working industries as well as servicing the line into Marion, Iowa, once a part of Milwaukee's mainline.

An important customer in Cedar Rapids is Cargill, which operates a large soybean processing plant that re-

Di	000	s of t	he Chicago Ce	ntral	1593	GP8 GP7	1952/1972	UC 7993, ICG 7993, QNSE GP7 107 MKT 95	Sold to North Share Scapia
	CJC		ic officago oc	IIIIai	1601	GP7	1952	MKT 97	Sold to North Shore Scenic
No.	Model	<b>Built/Rebuil</b>	t Heritage, earlier Nos.	Remarks	1602	GP7	1952	MKT 119	
964	GP20	1954/1972	MILW GP9 236 2423		1669	GP10	1953/1971	CC 8269 IC 8269 IC GP7 8801	Heavy had order
965	GP20	1954/1972	MILW GP9 240, 2390	Retired 11/89	1700	GP18	1960	CC 9400 IC 9400	ficavy bad order
966	GP20	1954/1972	MILW GP9 248 2398		1705	GP10	1954/1972	CC 8005 IC 8005 IC GP9 9005	
967	GP20	1954/1972	MILW GP9 247, 2397	Heavy repair	1719	GP10	1954/1971	CC 8019 IC 8019 IC GP9 9019	
968	GP20	1954/1972	MILW GP9 245, 2395		1742	GP9	1957	CC 9242, IC 9242	
969	GP20	1956/1972	MILW GP9 258, 2386	Heavy repair	1743	GP10	1956/1971	CC 8163, IC 8163, IC GP9 9163	
970	GP20	1956/1972	MILW GP9 257, 2385		1744	GP10	1954/1971	CC 8044, IC 8044, IC GP9 9044	
971	GP20	1956/1972	MILW GP9 256, 2384		1745	GP10	1954/1969	CC 8045, IC 8045, IC GP9 9045	
972	GP20	1956/1972	MILW GP9 254, 2382		1749	GP10	1956/1969	CC 8159, IC 8159, IC GP9 9159	
973	GP20	1956/1972	MILW GP9 253, 2381		1750	GP10	1956/1970	CC 8150, IC 8150, IC GP9 9150	
974	GP20	1956/1972	MILW GP9 252, 2380		1765	GP10	1954/1970	CC 8065, IC 8065, IC GP9 9065	
975	GP20	1956/1972	MILW GP9 251, 2379		1775	GP10	1956/1970	CC 8165, IC 8165, IC GP9 9165	
976	GP20	1956/1972	MILW GP9 250, 2378	Heavy repair	1777	GP10	1955/1971	CC 8077, IC 8077, IC GP9 9077	Heavy repair
977	GP20	1954/1972	MILW GP9 277, 2443		1806	GP18	1960	CC 9406, IC 9406	
979	GP20	1954/1972	MILW GP9 271, 2437	Heavy repair	1878	GP20	1954/1972	CC 978, MILW 978, MILW GP9 273,	
980	GP20	1954/1972	MILW GP9 270, 2436					2439	
981	GP20	1954/1972	MILW GP9 275, 2441		2000	GP38	1969	MGA 2000	
1200	SW7R	1950/1967	ICG 200, IC SW7 1200, 9300	CC model designation SW9	2001	GP38	1969	MGA 2001	
1300	SW1300	1940/1971	IC 1300, IC TR-A 1026A, 9203A		2002	GP38	1969	MGA 2002	
1301	SW1300	1945/1971	IC 1301, IC NW2 1009, 9159		2003	GP38	1969	MGA 2003	
1328	SW14	1950/1980	CC 1428, ICG 1428, IC SW7 427,	Sold to National Railway	2004	GP38	1969	MGA 2004	
			9427	Equipment	2005	GP38	1967	ITS 201, C&O 3853	
1504	GP8	1953/1970	CC 7904, IC 7904, IC GP7 8904		7983	GP8	1952/1972	ICG 7983, DT&I GP7 955	
1505	GP8	1953/1971	CC 7905, ICG 7905, IC GP7 8905		7984	GP8	1952/1972	ICG 7984, DT&I GP7 956	
1585	GP8	1952/1972	CC 7985, ICG 7985, DT&I GP7 957		7989	GP8	1952/1972	ICG 7989, QNSL GP7 101	
1591	GP8	1953/1972	CC 7991, ICG 7991, QNSL GP7 119		7990	GP8	1952/1972	ICG 7990, QNSL GP7 106	
1592	GP8	1953/1972	CC 7992, ICG 7992, QNSL GP7 115		8002	GP10	1954/1972	ICG 8002, IC GP9 9002	

quires regular switching. The branch is worked by trains 90-91, which originate in Cedar Rapids and make a round trip to the mainline at Manchester six evenings a week.

#### **Chicago Central's nucleus**

Waterloo is the busiest point on Chicago Central. In addition to mainline movements, there are a 24-hour switch job and a Monday-through-Friday switcher at the huge John Deere farm tractor manufacturing plant. CC also interchanges at Waterloo with the Iowa Northern, a 126-mile shortline that runs from Cedar Rapids north to Manly, Iowa.

In addition to switch crews, coal trains, and 50-51, Waterloo also originates locals east and west. Train 96 works east, usually to Manchester to connect with the Cedar Rapids train before returning to Waterloo as 95. Occasionally 96 will go all the way to Dubuque. West local 71 works to Fort Dodge, and after an overnight layover returns to Waterloo as 70. Both work six days a week, taking Sunday off.

Five miles west of Waterloo, at Mona Junction, Chicago Central connects with the former Cedar Valley Railroad, which Haley had retained after leaving Chicago Central. On May 22, 1991, though, Cedar Valley abruptly terminated its operations. In June, at the request of shippers and Chicago Central, the Interstate Commerce Commission issued an order allowing CC to serve CVAR customers. On December 31, 1992, Chicago Central bought the line through a new subsidiary, Cedar River Railroad.

Cedar River has its own employees and offices (in Osage) but leases loco-

Paral to support for	544 1	
		PARKING PARKING Mile Schafer

COAL TRAIN bound for Plaines via IC trackage rights nears Joliet Union Station in May 1989. Among CC's 21 cabooses, all ex-ICG and mostly used on locals, is 199048, originally GM&O, with switcher 1301 at CC's Chicago facility, Hawthorne Yard in suburban Cicero.



Rik Anderson.

8012	GP10	1954/1970	IC 8012, IC GP9 9012		8258 GF
8023	GP10	1954/1970	IC 8023, IC GP9 9023	Heavy repair	8260 GP
8032	GP10	1954/1971	IC 8032, IC GP9 9032		9315 GP
8033	GP10	1954/1971	IC 8033, IC GP9 9033	Heavy repair; at Silvis	9376 GP
8035	GP10	1954/1971	IC 8035, IC GP9 9035		9388 GP
8039	GP10	1954/1969	IC 8039, IC GP9 9039		9402 GP
8041	GP10	1954/1971	IC 8041, IC GP9 9041	Retired 11/89	9405 GP
8055	GP10	1954/1971	IC 8055, IC GP9 9055		9408 GP
8056	GP10	1954/1970	IC 8056, IC GP9 9056	Sold to Gulf & Ohio, 2/92	9413 GP
8058	GP10	1954/1970	IC 8058, IC GP9 9058	Retired 10/89	9414 GP
8059	GP10	1954/1970	IC 8059, IC GP9 9059		9415 GP
8063	GP10	1954/1970	IC 8063, IC GP9 9063		9416 GF
8079	GP10	1955/1970	IC 8079, IC GP9 9079	Heavy repair	9417 GP
8093	GP10	1955/1970	IC 8093, IC GP9 9093		9420 GP
8111	GP10	1955/1971	IC 8111, IC GP9 9111	Heavy repair	9426 GP
8114	GP10	1955/1971	IC 8114, IC GP9 9114		9427 GP
8121	GP10	1955/1970	IC 8121, IC GP9 9121		9428 GP
8134	GP10	1956/1969	IC 8134, IC GP9 9134		9438 GP
8169	GP10	1956/1971	IC 8169, IC GP9 9169		9439 GF
8170	GP10	1956/1971	IC 8170, IC GP9 9170	Heavy repair	9440 GF
8171	GP10	1956/1971	IC 8171, IC GP9 9171		Key to ini
8179	GP10	1956/1971	IC 8179, IC GP9 9179	Heavy reapir	Ironton; IC
8181	GP10	1956/1971	IC 8181, IC GP9 9181		(dealer); M
8188	GP10	1956/1970	IC 8188, IC GP9 9188		Note: IC/II
8190	GP10	1956/1970	IC 8190, IC GP9 9190		owned by
8194	GP10	1956/1971	IC 8194, IC GP9 9194	Retired 11/89	Notes: All
8199	GP10	1956/1970	IC 8199, IC GP9 9199		8041 819
8211	GP10	1957/1971	IC 8211, IC GP9 9211		1602 Ben
8233	GP10	1957/1968	IC 8233, IC GP9 9233	Sold to Helm Financial, 2/92	
8234	GP10	1957/1971	IC 8234, IC GP9 9234		Sources:
8254	GP10	1957/1971	IC 8254, IC GP9 9254	Sold to Helm Financial, 2/92	Club "Mix

8258	GP10	1953/1970	IC 8258, IC GP7 8975	
8260	GP10	1953/1971	IC 8260, IC GP7 8977	
9315	GP9	1958	ICG 9315, IC 9315	Retired, 1986
9376	GP9	1959	IC 9376	To be retired
9388	GP9	1959	IC 9388	Retired, 1992
9402	GP18	1960	IC 9402	
9405	GP18	1960	ICG 9405, IC 9405	Heavy repair
9408	GP18	1960	IC 9408	
9413	GP18	1960	IC 9413	
9414	GP18	1960	ICG 9414, IC 9414	
9415	GP18	1963	IC 9415	Retired, 1992
9416	GP18	1963	IC 9416	Retired, 1992
9417	GP18	1963	IC 9417	Retired, 1992
9420	GP18	1963	IC 9420	
9426	GP18	1963	IC 9426	Heavy repair
9427	GP18	1963	IC 9427	Heavy repair
9428	GP18	1963	IC 9428	
9438	GP28	1964	IC 9428	
9439	GP28	1964	ICG 9439, IC 9439	
9440	GP28	1964	IC 9440	Heavy repair
Key to Ironto	n; IC, Illin	CC, Chicago, Ce ois Central; ICG	ntral & Pacific; C&O, Chesapeake & ( , Illinois Central Gulf; ITS, Intermou	Dhio; DT&I, Detroit, Toledo & ntain Transportation Services
(deale	r); MGA, I	Monongahela; N	MILW, Milwaukee Road; QNSL, Quet	bec North Shore & Labrador.
Note:	IC/ICG dis	tinction is how	unit was actually lettered; all "IC" u	inits conveyed to CC&P were
auman	bullee			

Notes: All units B-B wheel arrangement, built by Electro-Motive Division, General Motors. CC 965, 8041, 8194 wrecked 11/1/89, retired and traded to D.A. Wilson (dealer) for ex-MKT units 1600-1602. Repair status is as of March 1, 1992.

Sources: Chicago, Central & Pacific; EMD Product Reference Data; Illinois Central Gulf, Camerail Club "Mixed Train"; Kenneth M. Ardinger.—J.D.I.

### When seeing red means progress

 WHEN Chicago, Central & Pacific was created in 1985, most of its locomotives came from Illinois Central Gulf's fleet of former IC GP7's and GP9's rebuilt by its Paducah (Ky.) shop. IC designated them GP8's and GP10's. Of the 10 GP8's and 45 GP10's CC purchased, 8 GP8's and 41 GP10's are still on the property. Almost immediately, CC supplemented these "Paducahs" with 34 former Milwaukee Road "GP20's"—what Milwaukee called its upgraded GP9's leased from GATX. Chicago Central also took unrebuilt ICG road units—4 GP9's, 14 GP18's, and 3 of the rare GP28's, plus 4 switchers. (EMD built only 26 GP28's.)

There are currently 99 locomotives in the fleet (including leased units) under the care of Jim Moschetti, chief mechanical officer. Like some other CC managers, Moschetti is a Burlington Northern veteran, having hired on with BN in 1972 in Denver as a machinist. He boomed around the system, from Montana to Iowa and Minnesota before moving into operations as a road foreman at West Quincy, Mo. Greg Amys asked Moschetti to come over to Chicago Central in November 1988. He began as superintendent of operations and was named CMO in August 1990.

Moschetti is outgoing and loves a good joke, but he gets serious when he talks about his diesels and the people who work on them. "There is nothing we can't do here in Waterloo—we can change out an engine, rewire, chop noses, and so on. The facility isn't beautiful or the most technologically advanced, but we have everything we need to do the job."

Moschetti had his hands full when he took over Chicago Central's mechanical department. "Until the middle of 1990, we really didn't have a handle on exactly what kind of condition our locomotives were in. Invariably, if we sent one in for new paint, it would be the next one that the crankshaft would fail on. So now, we're bringing them into the shop, dropping the mains, and inspecting the crankshaft. If that's shot, you might as well retire it because it's a \$100,000 job to replace.

"We know some of these locomotives are going to be with us for 10 years. It's our plan to buy five GP38's a year, so we need to keep our old locomotives in good condition and have a maintenance standard on them."

Of CC's 99 units on hand in January 1992, 7 were leased GP38's, formerly Chicago, Missouri & Western units (and earlier, Conrail). Moschetti has high hopes for them. "If the lease works out right and they turn out to be good-running locomotives, we'll purchase five of the seven in the spring." Like the six GP38's already acquired, these units are likely to get a full shopping if purchased. "If we're able to purchase them, we'll refurbish the cabs, remove the dual controls from units 2046 and 2047, and add event recorders and new high-back seats." Meantime, CC also leased 10 Conrail GP40's in March 1992 for 90 days.

There are no plans to add ATS to the CM&W GP38's, so don't look for them in the lead between Waterloo and Fort Dodge. They will also receive new strip heaters and snowplows before being moved to GE Railcar in Waterloo, where CC units are painted. CC's scheme is red with white striping and lettering reminiscent of the final livery of former Iowa denizen Minneapolis & St. Louis.

Chicago Central has embarked on a small rebuild program of its own, beginning with GP18 9400 and GP9 9242, now renumbered 1700 and 1742. Moschetti: "We chopped their noses, put in ATS, rewired them, and went through the engine. They're two of the best older locomotives we have." But CC's maintenance program on older engines isn't like what a UP or BN would do, says Moschetti. "We don't bring it in, tear the whole thing apart, and put in new components. The most important components on the engine get looked at and changed if necessary. On a 90-day basis, we look over the power assemblies, replacing components that have failed, which is rare."

There are three switch engines: SW9 1200 and SW1300 rebuilds 1300-1301. Unlike CC's other locomotives, the switchers still wear an IC-like black scheme. "The former CMO wanted it to be a little like the old Burlington—red on the road power and black on the switch engines," Rik Anderson says. Until CC can scrutinize its entire fleet, however, there will be no full-blown painting program.

The railroad continues to pursue GP38's, which someday may completely replace the Paducahs as primary road power. Crews like them.

Chicago Central briefly tried leased six-axle units for coal trains, but current transportation officials like the versatility of four-axle power. Says Amys, "We want engines that can pull a coal train one day, switch the yard the next, and be on the local the day after." This is just what Chicago Central power does, day after day.—*Steve Glischinski*.

motives and cars from CC. The first Cedar River train ran on January 4, 1992. CVAR's demise, incidentally, did not affect the operation of the "Iowa Star Clipper" dinner train, owned by Haley's Trains Unlimited. It runs east out of Waverly on six miles of former Chicago Great Western track toward Readlyn.

The Cedar River acquisition was not Chicago Central's first expansion. In 1986, CC acquired a 25-mile Chicago & North Western branch in western Iowa between Wall Lake and Ida Grove. CC works it about twice a week with the Denison Turn, a six-day mainline local based out of Fort Dodge.

Chicago Central also operates another former North Western (Minneapolis & St. Louis) line from Hampton down to Steamboat Rock. The branch is controlled by a shipper group, North Central Iowa Railway Association, with CC having a 20 percent interest. Operations began on September 15, 1989. CC trains go north only to Geneva— C&NW retains the customers at Hampton and on the south end at Steamboat Rock. The branch is worked as needed by west locals 70-71.

From Waterloo west to Cedar Falls Junction, CC trains continue under CTC. Here trains of the Iowa Northern leave the main and head north.

On the mainline, automatic train stop (ATS) begins here. ATS-Illinois Central's version of cab signals—is still in operation between Cedar Falls Junction and Fort Dodge, a holdover from the days of passenger-train operations. Because of the signaling, only ATSequipped locomotives may lead trains west of Waterloo. Although the system is a nuisance for the railroad, it will continue in use for the foreseeable future. From Fort Dodge west to Tara the line returns to CTC operation.

Dispatchers are based in Waterloo; one dispatcher works each "trick," or 8-hour shift. In 1991 Chicago Central bought a new computerized track-warrant system, based on the one developed by Canadian Pacific's CP Rail. Track warrants are issued for operation over all tracks not covered by CTC.

#### **Guide to Chicago Central renumbering**

UID CC series	Qty.	New CC series
200	1	1200
964-981	17	1864-1881, retaining last two digits
1300-1301	2	1300-1301
1428	0	1328 (unit sold to NRE)
7904-7993	10	1504-1593, retaining last two digits (exception: 7990 to 1690)
8002	1	1602
8005-8199	34	1705-1799, retaining last two digits (exceptions: 8159 to 1749, 8163 to
		1743, 8165 to 1775)
8211-8254	4	1610, 1633, 1634, 1654
8258, 8620	2	1758, 1760
8269	1	1669
9242, 9376	2	1742, 1676
9400-9440	14	1800-1840, retaining last two digits (exception: 9400 to 1700 because it
		has ATS)

1600 and 1700 series are identical, except 1700's are equipped with Automatic Train Stop system in order to be lead units between Cedar Falls Junction and Fort Dodge, Iowa.





Steve Glischinski

"RAINBOW BRIDGE" on farm road west of Ackley, Iowa, frames eastbound train in 1986. CC&P counts on the GP38 (top) as diesel of future.

Until it was closed in February 1992, Mills Tower guarding the C&NW "Spine Line" crossing in Iowa Falls was staffed 24 hours a day. It was the last manned interlocking tower in Iowa. Not to worry about the fate of the tower, however. It and the depots at Ackley, Cherokee, Iowa Falls, Storm Lake, and the Fort Dodge depot and freight house are all listed on the National Register of Historic Places, so they cannot easily be altered or torn down. CC has already sold the Cherokee depot to a local preservation group.

#### What's ahead

Chicago Central hopes to see more coal traffic. In 1991, the company operated three test trains from the BN connection in Omaha to Dubuque, where the coal was transferred to barges. The barges traveled up the Mississippi to Cassville, Wis., to Wisconsin Power & Electric's Nelson Dewey plant. This could become a regular move for CC.

An improved motive-power fleet is also in store (see opposite page, top) with more GP38's. Brand-new power, however, is probably not in the cards because of the high cost.

Whatever the future holds, Chicago Central probably can meet any new challenge. Since the company is privately held, it hasn't released financial data. According to Reed, however, it has enjoyed three consecutive years of profitability. Having survived its tumultuous early years, Chicago Central can now concentrate on an objective it shares with many of the other new regional carriers.

This objective, as summed up by President Reed, is: "We want to pay down our debt, and put our money back into the property." I

STEVE GLISCHINSKI, a freelance writer based in St. Paul, Minn., has had eight bylines in TRAINS, beginning with a history of Escanaba & Lake Superior in 1984 and also including news stories on Duluth-area railroads and features on Minneapolis-St. Paul railroading and the New Georgia Railroad.