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Trains[®]

THE magazine of railroading

Fixing BNSF's bottleneck

The Idaho Funnel
is no more p. 12

Gotthard:
Tunnel wreck
revives
legendary
Swiss line p. 22

**Short line
success**
p. 32

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From the Editor



Carl Swanson
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The 1880s rail line over Gotthard Pass in central Switzerland is one of the legendary places in railroading. A work of engineering genius, the serpentine line over the Swiss Alps immediately became one of Europe's key rail corridors.

Relegated to secondary status in 2016 following completion of the 35.5-mile-long Gotthard Base Tunnel (the world's longest and deepest railway tunnel), the old line is back in the spotlight following a freight train derailment that heavily damaged the base tunnel and forced its year-long closure.

While in Switzerland to host a *Trains* tour, Senior Editor David Lassen visited the pass and reports on the line's dramatic comeback in an article starting on page 22.

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Subscription rate: single copy: \$7.99 (U.S.). Print + digital subscription rate: U.S.: 1 year \$58.95. Canadian: Add \$12.00 postage. Canadian price includes GST, payable in U.S. funds. All other international: Add \$22.00 postage, payable in U.S. funds, drawn on a U.S. bank. ©2022 Kalmbach Media Co. Any publication, reproduction, or use without express permission in writing of any text, illustration, or photographic content in any manner is prohibited except for inclusion of brief quotations when credit is given. Title registered as trademark. TRAINS assumes no responsibility for the safe return of unsolicited photos, artwork, or manuscripts. Acceptable photos are paid for upon publication. Photos to be returned must include return postage. Feature articles are paid for upon acceptance. For information about submitting photos or articles, see Contributor Guidelines at www.Trains.com. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Member, Alliance for Audited Media.

Trains Magazine (issn 0041-0934, usps 529-850) is published monthly by Kalmbach Media Co., 21027 Crossroads Circle, P.O. Box 1612, Waukesha, WI, 53187-1612. Periodicals postage paid at Waukesha, Wis., and at additional offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to *Trains*, P.O. Box 8520, Big Sandy, TX 75755. Canada Publication Mail Agreement #40010760.

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WYOMING



Railroad Museum

The **Douglas Railroad Museum & Visitor Center** in **Douglas, Wyoming** is housed in the historic FE & MV Railroad Passenger Depot. It is surrounded by seven historic railcars, including the Chicago Burlington and Quincy Railroad 4-8-4 Steam Locomotive #5633.

Visitors are invited to go inside many of the rail cars, including a day coach, a dining car and a sleeper, as well as a little red caboose!



1911 Train Bridge

A **1911 bridge**, built by the American Bridge Company, is reminiscent of the railroad that once ran through **Glenrock**. Today the rail ballast, including the bridge, serve as a walking path through the community.



Coal Trains

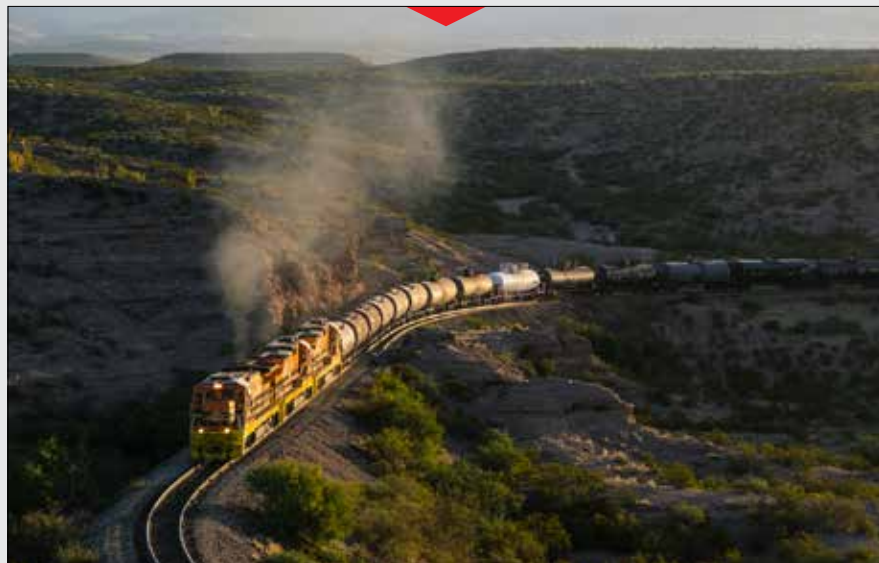
From Highway 59, **mile-long coal trains** can be seen crossing a bridge above the highway. As travelers make their way toward Bill, 35 miles north, trains frequent the north-south tracks to and from the Powder River Basin which supplies much of the nation's coal.

And venturing a little further north, off Antelope Coal Mine Road, enthusiasts will appreciate a birds eye view of Wyoming coal mining and trains at work.



Collect Douglas, Wyoming's, Jackalope stickers, including a train-themed design.

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Sunrise in the Arizona desert on the Arizona Eastern Railroad in 2023. Blair Kooistra

Beyond the byline

THE FEBRUARY 2024 ISSUE marked our 1,000th issue for *Trains* — and we couldn't be more proud! And a huge reason for our success and longevity is the people behind the scenes who go above and beyond for the magazine.

So many great writers, photographers, editors, and designers have paved the way for generations of train enthusiasts to come. Not only are they producing exquisite content for the print magazine, but they have continued providing online prose above and beyond their call of duty.

"Beyond the byline" is a short and sweet Q/A column that goes online monthly highlighting staff, correspondents, and contributors of *Trains* Magazine — experts in various fields with vast train knowledge. If you haven't noticed it yet, please check it out. You can find the column at Trains.com, under the *Trains* tab and in the "History" section. Or enter "Beyond the byline" in the search bar and the articles should populate.

If you have a suggestion (nomination) on who we should feature next, please email Nastassia Putz at nputz@kalmbach.com. We hope everyone gets a chance to be recognized for their contributions in which they are so passionate. The people featured in "Beyond the byline" are key to the continuation of a legacy. — *Nastassia Putz, production editor*

Plus

Exploring the world of train simulators

FOLLOW ALONG with *Model Railroader* Associate Editor Bryson Sleppy as he explores the world of train simulators.

Whether it's a steam locomotive from the 1800s, a high-speed train in Germany, or a massive freight train on California's Cajon Pass, Bryson is up to the task. Simulators covered so far include *Train Life: A Railway Simulator*, *Train Sim World 3* and *4*, and *Transport Fever 2*.



Bryson demonstrates using strategy and logistics to switch cars as efficiently as possible, making money through a virtual economy,

and progressing through time as a tycoon.

This series offers a bit of everything for everyone. It's a new, exciting series exclusively on Trains.com Video. Note: You must be a Trains.com Unlimited member to access. Scan the QR code above to watch it now. — *Bryson Sleppy, associate editor*



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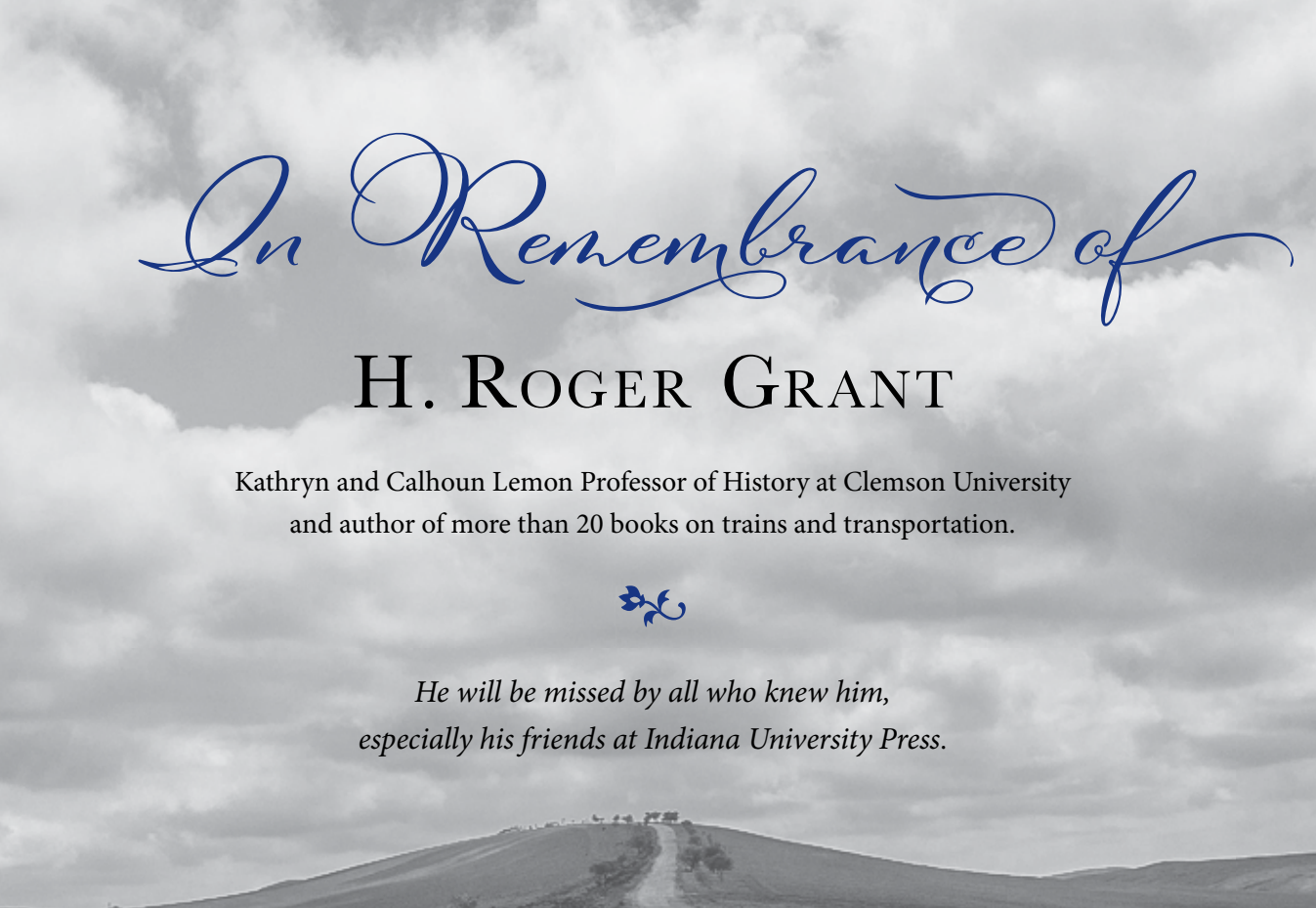
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In Remembrance of

H. ROGER GRANT

Kathryn and Calhoun Lemon Professor of History at Clemson University
and author of more than 20 books on trains and transportation.

*He will be missed by all who knew him,
especially his friends at Indiana University Press.*



Routes selected for FRA's Corridor program

New lines, extended services, expanded frequencies, high speed programs are among selections that will shape future direction of U.S. passenger service

▲ The eastbound *Sunset Limited* crosses Cienega Creek in Vail, Ariz., on March 17, 2018. Daily *Sunset* service is one of four Amtrak-backed proposals chosen for the FRA Corridor ID program.

Steve Glischinski

A SIGNIFICANT EFFORT to expand U.S. passenger service began to take shape in December with selection of routes for the Corridor Identification and Development Program. The 69 corridors chosen by the Federal Railroad Administration are a hodgepodge of potential new Amtrak routes, extensions to existing service, current routes seeking increased frequencies, and forward-looking high speed proposals.

FRA Administrator Amit Bose called the announcement “another step forward as we advance transformative projects that will carry Americans for decades to come and provide them with convenient, climate-friendly alternatives to congested roads and airports.” The step is a relatively small one, though, in a process that could, for some new routes, take seven to 10 years to bear fruit.

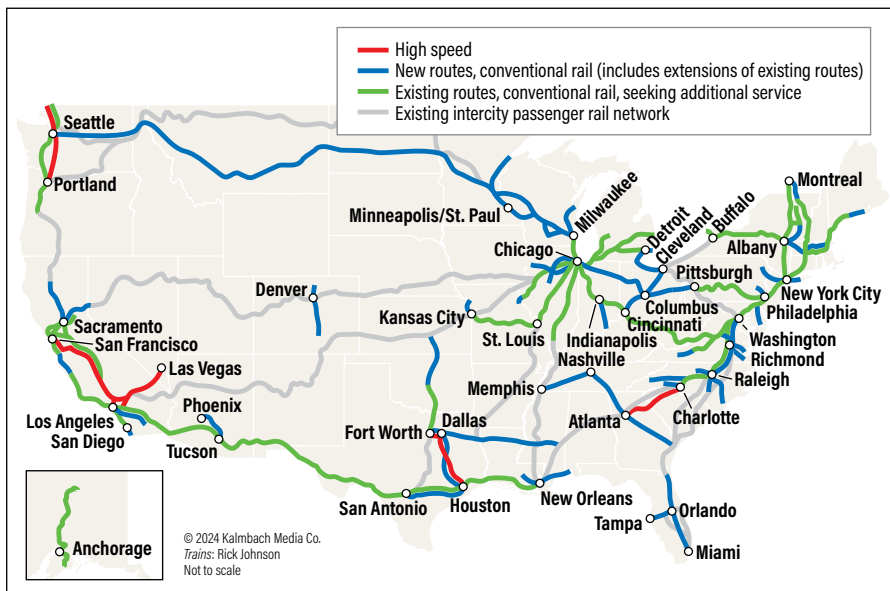
While the Corridor ID program has the potential to vastly

remake Amtrak's service map, the passenger operator itself has little financial exposure at this initial stage. Of the 69 routes selected, Amtrak was the agency behind just four applications: those to increase the *Cardinal* and *Sunset Limited* from triweekly to daily operation; to extend some *Northeast Regional* trains beyond New York's Penn Station to Ronkonkoma, N.Y., on the Long Island Rail Road; and to study the Dallas-Houston high speed route originally championed by Texas Central.

Those Amtrak projects, save for the Texas high-speed proposal, are indicative of 28 selections that represent plans to increase frequencies for existing service, or to make incremental additions to established routes. Some of these additions are quite small — so short that they barely register on the map on the opposite page. The San Luis Obispo-Los Angeles-San Diego

route of the *Pacific Surfliners* seeks a 16-mile extension south to San Ysidro, Calif., at the Mexican border, while the Missouri Department of Transportation would like to add 20 miles to the Chicago-Quincy, Ill., route of the *Illinois Zephyr/Carl Sandberg* to reach Hannibal, Mo. Bigger steps are sought by the effort to extend the *Heartland Flyer* north some 185 miles from Oklahoma City to Newton, Kan., to connect with the *Southwest Chief*, or to expand the footprint of California's Capitol Corridor service over Donner Pass to Reno and Sparks, Nev.

The 34 proposed new routes run the gamut from revival of the *North Coast Hiawatha*, between Chicago and the Pacific Northwest via southern Montana, to the 69-mile Reading, Pa.-Philadelphia corridor. They range from projects in advanced stages of development to those that appear, well, somewhat less so. Colorado's Front



The Corridor ID program could create a much different passenger map. Some routes show both new and increased service.

first step. In the third step, preliminary engineering and the environmental review process, the sponsor's commitment increases to 20%. For states like North Carolina and California, which each have five routes in the program and have proven commitments to state-supported rail passenger service, those costs are not likely to be an impediment. It may be a different story for sponsors such as Fort Wayne, Ind. — supporter of the Chicago-Fort Wayne-Columbus, Ohio-Pittsburgh proposal — or Peoria, Ill., the backer of Peoria-Chicago service.

And, since the vast majority of these routes will be state-supported services, that will only be the beginning of the financial commitments. Even if Amtrak were to revive a 2021 proposal to boost new corridors (under which it would cover all capital and operating costs for the first two years, then gradually shift the costs to states over the next four), states will still have to demonstrate the political and financial will to support these routes over the long term. Otherwise, they run the risk of joining the *Hoosier State* — which ran on the Chicago-Indianapolis route also selected for the corridor program — on another list: that of here-today, gone-tomorrow services. — *David Lassen*

Range Rail proposal already has a governing body in place, and has a taxation district defined by the state's legislature (although voters must still agree to be taxed — likely to be addressed in a 2024 ballot initiative). The Front Range organization has already begun work on the study on a timeline and infrastructure requirements for a service launch. It finds itself on the same list as Delaware's "Diamond State Line," which has yet to determine where it will start or end, although it has committed to serving the capital city of Dover.

Other well-publicized or long-discussed routes included are the "I-20 Corridor" project for a Dallas-Meridian, Miss., train to connect with the New York-New Orleans *Crescent*; the Twin Cities-Duluth *Northern Lights Express*; Ohio's Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati service; and the still-waiting-to-launch New Orleans-Mobile, Ala., Gulf Coast service, stalled by issues in Mobile. [For the complete list, see "Full list of passenger routes in FRA program released," *Trains.com News Wire*, Dec. 8, 2023.]

The organization sponsoring the Corridor ID program application matters because, as the process of developing the routes continues, the financial commitments for that agency increases. There is no financial outlay in initial selection; agencies receive \$500,000 grants from the FRA to thoroughly explain and determine the scope of their project. For that they most likely will have to hire a consultant, which could pose its own challenges. Compared to the highway industry, which has a history of

ample funding and has developed an industry to process it, U.S. passenger rail has no track record of large-scale project funding and no such supporting industry. As a result, applicants may find themselves facing a shortage of consultants with the expertise necessary to help them advance through the FRA process.

The sponsoring organization is responsible for 10% of the funding in the second step, creation of a Service Development Plan based upon the definitions from the



A Chicago-bound *Illinois Zephyr* heads through Western Springs, Ill., on July 1, 2023. A proposal to extend the train's route to Hannibal, Mo., also made the FRA's Corridor ID list. David Lassen



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Funding for two high speed projects leads \$8.2 billion in Federal-State Partnership grants

North Carolina, Virginia also land major awards for passenger projects

SELECTION OF CORRIDOR ID ROUTES (see page 6) wasn't the only major Federal Railroad Administration announcement in December. The Agency also handed out more than \$8.2 billion in Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail grants, awards led by more than \$6 billion in funding for two high speed rail projects in the Southwest.

Other rail projects also received funding through the U.S. Department of Transportation's Mega Grants program, awarded later in the month.

The slightly smaller high-speed award may have been more significant: a \$3 billion grant for the Brightline West project to connect Las Vegas, Nev., to Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., via a route mostly along the Interstate 15 right-of-way. That funding was expected to allow the \$12 billion Brightline West project to hold a long-awaited groundbreaking early in 2024; private activity bonds and private funding is likely to provide the remainder of the money.

California's problem-plagued high speed project also received almost \$3.1 billion, slated to allow continued construction of the initial segment in the San Joaquin Valley, including a station in Fresno; design, right-of-way acquisition, and other pre-construction work for extensions at either end of that

initial 119-mile route; and purchase of the first six trainsets, as well as construction of maintenance facilities.

Other grants were \$1.1 billion for the Raleigh-to-Richmond rail project, to revive a partially abandoned CSX freight line for a more direct route between those cities; \$729 million for a group of Virginia projects led by the construction of a second Long Bridge over the Potomac River; \$143 million for infrastructure improvements on the NS route between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg used by Amtrak's *Pennsylvanian*; \$93.6 million for platform projects and ventilation improvements at Chicago Union Station; \$27.4 million for track improvements on the route of the *Dowdneaster* in Maine; \$14.9 million for work on BNSF's mainline in the Malta, Mont., area, to benefit the *Empire Builder*; and \$8.2 million for replacement of a bridge on the Alaska Railroad at Willow, Alaska.

All the grants went to relatively shovel-ready projects; those that sought funds for large-scale planning were bypassed.

The DOT's Mega Grant program went mostly to highway projects, but three rail-related applicants did receive funding. The Port of Long Beach, Calif., received \$283 million for its Pier B On-Dock Rail Support Facility, a \$1.6 billion rail yard expansion. Stuart, Fla., was awarded \$130.5 million



A rendering of Brightline West's station in Victor Valley, Calif. The Las Vegas-to-Southern California high-speed project received a \$3 billion federal grant. Brightline West

toward replacement of the Florida East Coast drawbridge over the St. Lucie River, a bottleneck for FEC and Brightline operations, as well as a problem for local marine traffic. And the Port of New Orleans received \$73.8 million for its Louisiana International Terminal, a planned \$1.8 billion container port that will offer direct rail connection to all six Class I railroads.

Also, replacement of the aging Interstate 5 bridge between Portland, Ore., and Vancouver, Wash., received \$600 million. That bridge will include a new light rail line. — David Lassen

NEWS PHOTOS



NEW LIFE? Amtrak's long-stored, problem-plagued Bombardier-Alstom HHP8 electric locomotives, which had a relatively short service life, could see revival as cab cars. Shorn of its pantographs, the renumbered 9750 tests at Leaman Place, Pa., on Dec. 1, 2023. Gary Pancavage



Iowa Northern GP38-2 No. 3800 leads a train south of Rock Falls, Iowa. Canadian National will purchase the 253-mile short line. Chris Guss

Canadian National to purchase short line Iowa Northern

Deal is the latest in a series of Class I acquisitions of smaller railroads over the last five years

CANADIAN NATIONAL WILL ACQUIRE the 253-mile Iowa Northern Railway, the companies announced on Dec. 6.

The Iowa Northern, founded in 1984 to operate former Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific trackage, is a short line rags-to-riches story. The current ownership group, headed by second-generation railroader Dan Sabin, took over in 1994, when the Iowa Northern handled 15,000 cars per year on rickety 10-mph track. Today it handles more than 60,000 cars a year and the railroad has invested millions of dollars to bring the track into a state of good repair.

The railroad has 110 employees and a fleet of 24 locomotives, plus six slugs.

"We are confident that, as part of CN, IANR will be able to continue to provide reliable first- and last-mile service to our local customers while providing them access to a much broader network and market," Sabin said in a statement. Terms

of the transaction were not disclosed. The deal will require Surface Transportation Board approval.

CN says the short line's customers will benefit from single-line service to points on its 19,200-mile network, as well as retain their options to connect with Union Pacific, Canadian Pacific Kansas City, and Iowa Interstate.

CN's Iowa Northern deal is the sixth time since 2020 that a Class I has acquired a short line or regional railroad. There's not necessarily a common thread among transactions that include: Canadian Pacific acquiring Central Maine & Quebec, 2020; CSX adding Pan Am Railways, 2022; BNSF Railway buying out the lease for Montana Rail Link, 2024; Canadian Pacific Kansas City and CSX acquiring Meridian & Bigbee, expected in 2024; CN taking a stake in the Cape Breton & Central Nova Scotia Railway, 2023; and now CN and Iowa Northern. — *Bill Stephens*

Fixes

January

Page 25: The Elgin, Joliet & Eastern map shows unbuilt features planned by Canadian National, and omits one completed feature. CN has yet to build connections at Munger, Ill., to go west to Iowa, or at Joliet to the former IC to

reach Glenn Yard. The map omitted a connection in the northwest quadrant of the diamond at Griffith, Ind., that allows trains to run directly from Belt Railway of Chicago's Clearing Yard to Kirk Yard. Also, CN never built a planned connection to Norfolk Southern at Gary, Ind.

NEWS BRIEFS

Bill would give VIA trains right of preference over freights

A member of Parliament from British Columbia has introduced a bill that would give passenger trains statutory right of preference over freight traffic in Canada, addressing an issue that has plagued **VIA RAIL CANADA** since its inception. The legislation by Taylor Bachrach, an MP from Smithers, B.C., and member of the New Democratic Party, would set a maximum penalty of C\$250,000 for each violation.



The first segment of Mexico's controversial **MAYA TRAIN** project was inaugurated with a trip by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the project's primary proponent, and other officials on Dec. 15, 2023. Limited regular service began the next day, with significant issues including trains departing up to five hours late. López Obrador also opened a second section on Dec. 31. Service began with significant amounts of infrastructure still unfinished. In between, service began on another route, the 188-mile **INTEROCEANIC RAILWAY** across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The route linking the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico is intended to compete with the Panama Canal. First Maya Train departure, Government of Mexico

BNSF RAILWAY was sued by conservation groups in federal court in Montana over the deaths of grizzly bears hit by trains. The suit claimed the railroad had failed to complete a Habitat Conservation Plan in which it would commit to moves to decrease bear strikes. Such moves, the suit argued, could include systems with flashing lights and bells to scare off bears as trains approach; reduced operating speeds; and motion-sensor alarms or electrified mats to keep bears off bridges.

Railroads: Service is key to volume growth

Also railroads: We can't possibly provide reliable service to every customer all the time



Bill Stephens

bybillstephens@gmail.com

Analysis: Trains.com

The Class I railroad CEOs say that providing more reliable service is the key to volume growth. So did they applaud when regulators proposed minimum service standards? Not exactly. In a nutshell, the Association of American Railroads says there are so many factors outside of railroads' control that it is impossible to prevent service problems. And the AAR adds that measuring on-time performance, variations in transit times, and local service quality are poor ways to judge service.

As they say in passenger stations, mind the gap.

Railroads can't have it both ways. They can't make reliable, consistent service the cornerstone of the volume growth plans they're selling to shippers and investors while at the same time telling regulators that being an outdoor factory and part of an interdependent network means that service will always be highly variable.

At issue: The Surface Transportation Board in September proposed a rule that would allow shippers located in terminal areas to seek access to a second railroad via reciprocal switch if the serving carrier failed to meet one of three performance standards over a 12-week period. Railroads risk a reciprocal switch case if: They don't deliver at least 60% of cars within 24 hours of the original estimate; average transit time increases by 20% to 25% compared to the prior year; their success rate for spotting and pulling cars within a given service window falls below 80%.

The standards aren't a high hurdle, particularly when trucks-

provide 95% on-time performance. Plus, the proposed rule includes a loophole for service failures beyond a railroad's control, such as harsh weather or the actions of third parties.

The AAR says railroads have every incentive to provide excellent service. And AAR agrees that shippers should be able to access a second railroad if the serving carrier can't fix a service problem; the reciprocal switch is safe and would improve service; and the customer has a good reason for alternative service.

But the AAR argues that the performance standards should only apply to the 5% of traffic that moves under tariffs or is subject to regulation by the STB. This tells you railroads don't want to be held accountable for the service they provide.

Among AAR's more absurd arguments: "An observed decline may be the product of comparing a prior year's new or exceptional service produced through enhanced investment, to a current year's solid (but less stellar) performance when the carrier's resources were spread to other shipments. Ordering a switch in this circumstance could disincentivize the carrier from making future investments in service improvements...."

"Despite the Board's assurances that it does not wish to discourage increased local service levels that set a higher baseline against which a future reduction in service levels might be measured, adoption of this metric would ... make railroads more cautious to experiment with increased local service levels."

In other words, setting minimum standards would actually hinder service improvements that could lead to the growth that would produce higher revenue and profits. Uh-huh.

The most disappointing response came from CSX. It claimed there's no one measure of good service and that the metrics would be a disincentive for faster transit times or more frequent local service "because the railroad would just be setting a higher performance bar."

Oh, the irony. Just 10 days after those comments were submitted, CSX CEO Joe Hinrichs delivered a spot-on speech arguing that railroads must do better. Hinrichs told the RailTrends conference that he wasn't satisfied with his railroad's 88% trip plan compliance figure in 2023. "It's good for an industry like ours. It's not great. It's better but it's not great," he says. "We have to set ourselves to higher standards. If we don't do it, the only one left to do it is the regulators."

Hinrichs is right. And give credit to BNSF, too. Despite arguing that the metrics shouldn't apply to contract shipments or exempt commodities, BNSF otherwise supported the STB proposal.

While railroads quibble over how low the service bar should be set, shippers have been judging rail service all along — and they don't like what they see. They've been voting with their feet by shifting their business to trucks. **I**



A CSX local led by SD60M No. 8763 runs light engines through Hudson, N.Y., on a 2.5-mile spur from the CSX Hudson Line. It's returning from the ADM mill at Claverack, N.Y., on April 14, 2012. Al Baker



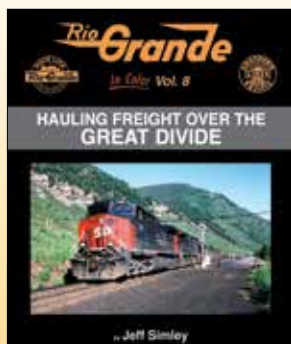
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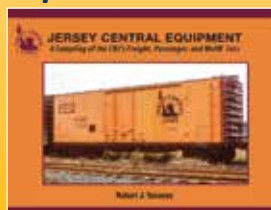
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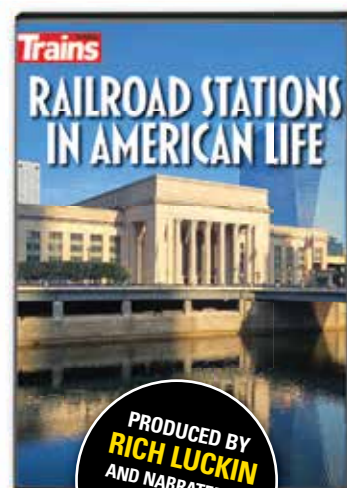
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A lone distributed power unit (DPU) brings up the rear of east-bound stack train S-SEFLPC on Sept. 9, 2023, as it crosses BNSF's ex-Northern Pacific bridge over Lake Pend Oreille in the northern Idaho Panhandle.

FIXING



THE FUNNEL

BNSF has widened its busy
traffic lane to the Northwest

Story and photos by Bruce Kelly



▲ Train H-ALTPAS crosses the new bridge over Lake Pend Oreille, Idaho, on April 29, 2023, while the old bridge undergoes extensive renovation.

Two railway bridges standing side by side across a nearly mile-wide expanse of water seems worthy of note in the annals of civil engineering. BNSF Railway bridges 3.9A and 3.9B on northern Idaho's Lake Pend Oreille represent the culmination of more than a half-century of mergers, route consolidations, and capacity improvements. These events made the nearly 68-mile stretch of former Northern

Pacific main line between Sandpoint Junction, Idaho, and Sunset Junction in Spokane, Wash., one of the busiest and most vital pieces of railroad in the nation.

BNSF predecessor Burlington Northern managed reasonably well during the 1970s with its Spokane-Sandpoint route being mostly single-tracked. But things got more congested by the 1980s, when a growing number of unit grain trains were traveling toward export docks in the Pacific Northwest. Then came the 1990s, which saw BN's intermodal business to and from the region increase nearly twofold, to the tune of roughly two dozen trains per day carrying trailers or double-

stacked containers. That was on top of all the manifests, vehicle trains, and coal trains using the same route.

At that time, BN had only one single-tracked bridge in place across Lake Pend Oreille, and it was bearing a burden of traffic NP likely did not foresee when it completed the structure in 1904, replacing the original 1881 timber trestle. In the early 1900s, NP's line through Spokane featured 20 miles of double track, half of which got whittled to single track before BN took over. The past quarter century has seen BNSF investing billions of dollars to restore lost trackage in the Spokane area and beyond.

In 2020, BNSF began grad-

ing the shores of Lake Pend Oreille for one of the final stages in making its Spokane-Sandpoint "Funnel" double tracked from end to end. A half-century after predecessor BN created The Funnel, the long-awaited opening of BNSF's second bridge over Lake Pend Oreille on Nov. 20, 2022, seemed anticlimactic. The first trains crossed the new 4,873-foot-long steel and concrete structure in the dead of night, with no corporate officials, news reporters, or train enthusiasts standing in the bitter cold to witness it.

After the new bridge entered service, BNSF turned its attention to renovating the midsection of the adjacent ex-NP bridge. (Under earlier projects,



the NP bridge received new piers and deck sections at its outer ends during 2008-09.) Previously identified as bridge 3.9, the old bridge is now 3.9A, while the new bridge is 3.9B. With a speed limit of only 25 mph for most trains (35 mph for empty trains and Amtrak), bridge 3.9, along with the 2.2 miles of single track between Sandpoint Junction and East Algoma, had been one of the last chokepoints on The Funnel.

Final work on the old bridge — involving replacement of several deck spans and reinforcement of existing concrete piers — was completed in time for a second main track to enter service at Sandpoint on Aug. 6, 2023. The physical con-



nection between BNSF and Montana Rail Link at Sandpoint Junction is now gone, replaced by new dual crossovers — named CP35 — located northwest (railroad east) of both bridges.

Adding a second main all the way to Sandpoint Junction required construction of two smaller bridges within city limits, as well as rearrangement of the platform and other amenities at the Sandpoint depot. Built in 1916 to replace NP's original 1880s wooden station, Sandpoint's brick-walled depot underwent significant renovation during 2014-15. It is Amtrak's only station in Idaho, with the *Empire Builder* in both directions scheduled to stop during the night.

FORMING THE FUNNEL

Northern Pacific laid track through the Spokane area and northern Idaho in 1881 for its route connecting St. Paul, Minn., with Tacoma, Wash.

► **A hot train at a Funnel hotspot: Z-CHCPTL-9 passes the ex-NP Sandpoint depot on Oct. 17, 2015. The asphalt platform at left, where the photographer is standing, is today occupied by a second main track.**

▲ **GP39-2 No. 2716 leads Burlington Northern's hot Chicago-Portland train No. 1 down the single-track main at East Ramsey, Idaho, on July 24, 1986, while GP30 No. 2203 waits in the clear with Train 100YA, a Pasco-Chicago manifest that was reclassified at Yardley.**

Great Northern entered the scene in 1892 while building between St. Paul and Seattle. In the years that followed, Union Pacific reached northward from Oregon into Spokane, and eventually to the Canadian border through acquisition of the Spokane International. The

Milwaukee Road passed some 20 miles south of Spokane but added a side route tapping directly into the city. And, the superbly engineered Spokane, Portland & Seattle provided GN and NP with a connection between Spokane and Portland, Ore., while not actually going anywhere close to Seattle.

For decades, the NP and GN intertwined their operations and stock holdings in what seemed like one veiled merger after another. Then came 1957, when consulting firm Wyer, Dick & Co. submitted its feasibility study on a true merging





▲ Union Pacific train QETHK uses BNSF's Latah Creek Bridge on its way out of Spokane, Wash., on May 4, 2013, while a BNSF train (left) waits its turn to cross. At far right, a BNSF manifest holds at East Empire.

► Fall rush finds Z-CHCPTL (left) curving into Sandpoint Junction off the Hi Line on Oct. 22, 2016, while B-DENSEA, which is coming off Montana Rail Link with empty containers for Seattle, waits its turn.

of the two railroads, along with the SP&S and the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy. The so-called Wyer Report recommended changes that were considered beneficial to the layout and operation of these railroads, should they become one.

The creation of Burlington Northern in 1970 brought much of the Wyer Report to fruition. It set into motion a chain of events whose impacts resonate to this day: upgrading of select routes; selling, leasing, or abandonment of routes deemed surplus or too costly to operate; downsizing the number of yards



or facilities serving each region.

In 1972, two years after the BN merger, new bridges and new track were placed in service in Spokane and Sandpoint to channel through traffic between those cities onto one route: the former NP. The changes made in Spokane were also part of an extensive removal of GN, SP&S,

MILW, and UP properties from the city's core to create a site for the 1974 World's Fair. Half a century later, virtually all that remains of the vacated rail terminals is the GN clock tower standing in Riverfront Park.

Central to Spokane's rail consolidation was the 3,872-foot long, 212-foot-high Latah

Creek Bridge. From above, it looks like a giant Y, with its top aiming toward the southwest, one prong curving northwest to follow a BN-built connection to the former GN toward Seattle, and one prong curving south to tie in with the former SP&S toward Pasco, Wash., and Portland.

UP trains began using Latah Creek Bridge as well. Having given up its route through downtown Spokane to the World's Fair development, UP obtained 14 miles of trackage rights over BN between Napa Street (east of downtown) and Fish Lake, located southwest of Spokane. There, a new connection was built between BN's former SP&S line and the UP line heading to Hinkle, Ore.

Just east of downtown, BN built a 601-foot-long bridge over the Spokane River and acquired a roughly half-mile segment of UP track to connect the ex-GN main from Sandpoint with the ex-NP. However, this connection angled east toward the ex-NP Yardley terminal rather than west toward Seattle, thus making the ex-GN between Spokane and Sandpoint an unlikely candidate for east-west through traffic.

In Sandpoint, post-merger alterations included a mile-long, S-shaped piece of new main line linking BN's ex-GN and NP routes. This new track crossed UP's Spokane International line at grade and crossed Sand Creek on a 997-foot-long curved bridge. Sandpoint on the former GN became North Sandpoint on BN, more of a local freight office and maintenance base, while the Sandpoint depot on the former NP went on to serve Amtrak's *Empire Builder*.

The importance of the former GN main line between



Montana Rail Link's Kootenai siding ends at Sandpoint Junction. The manifest and grain train (middle and right) are waiting to enter The Funnel while a grain train off BNSF's Hi Line rolls by on July 15, 2018.

Spokane and Sandpoint dwindled during the 1970s. Eventually, 30 miles of track was removed from its midsection. What survived west of the breach was a mix of ex-GN main line and branch segments north of Spokane that carries a respectable amount of lumber, sand, and mineral traffic to this day. West of Sandpoint, BN retained 30 miles of the GN main line to Newport, Wash., as a branch serving timber product industries and providing outside connection for Milwaukee Road's Newport-Metaline Falls Branch. (Short line Pend Oreille Valley Railroad took charge of this MILW branch in 1979, and would ultimately acquire most of the Sandpoint-Newport track from BNSF in 1998.)

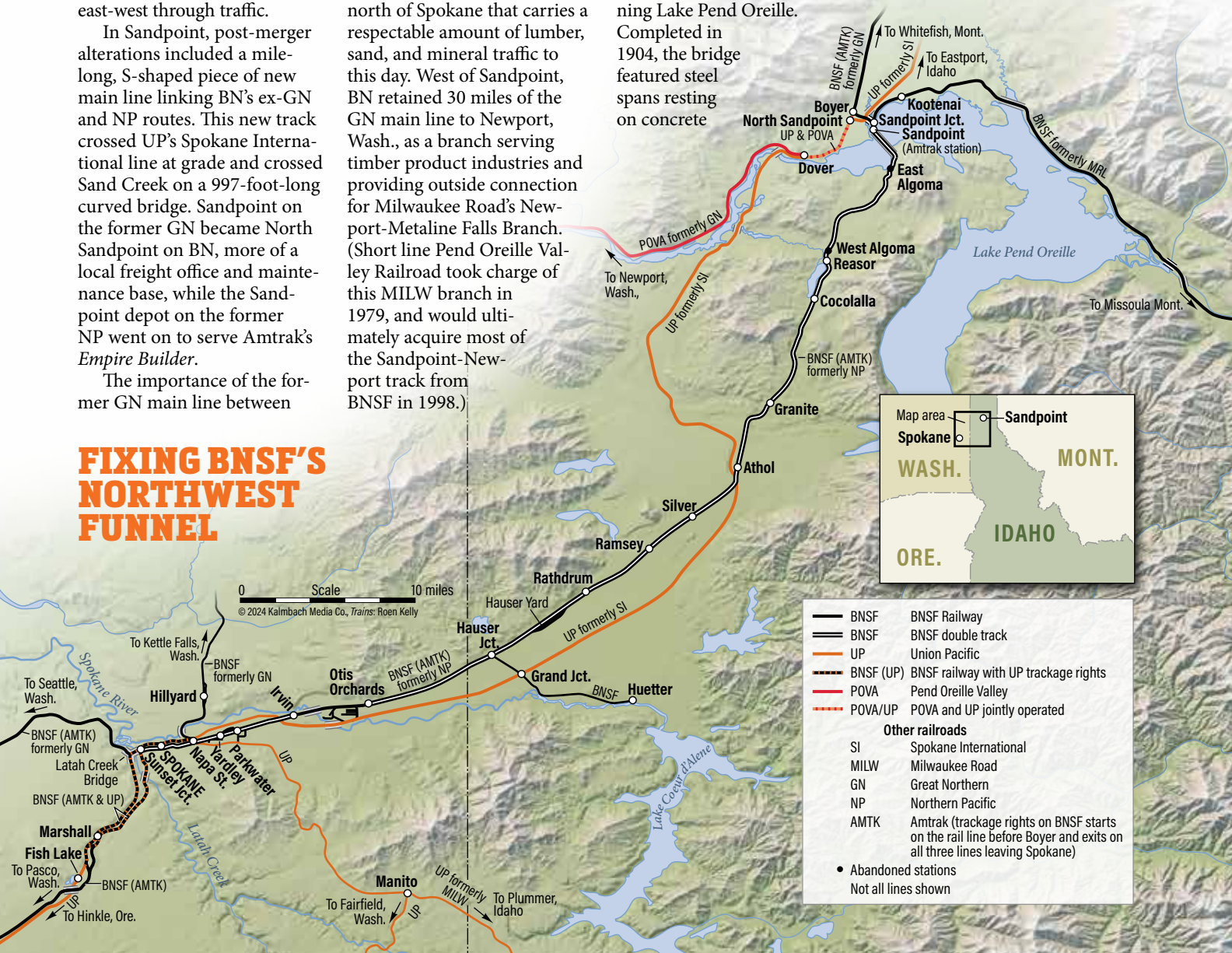
All of this left BN's former NP route between Spokane and Sandpoint carrying the sum of two railroads' worth of business. Nowhere was this more acutely felt than on the 4,769-foot-long bridge spanning Lake Pend Oreille. Completed in 1904, the bridge featured steel spans resting on concrete

and mortar piers. It replaced the original timber/pile trestle that NP had opened there in 1881. Lake Pend Oreille's main body reaches depths of more than 1,100 feet, but NP crossed the lake where the water is typically less than 20 feet deep.

Handling virtually all of Burlington Northern's east-west traffic to and from the Pacific Northwest is why the ex-NP between Spokane and Sandpoint earned its nickname "The Funnel." During most of the BN and BNSF years, it's been said that The Funnel carries an average of 60 trains per day. That figure has gone up or down depending on the season and prevailing economic conditions.

BN's merger with the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway (Frisco) in 1980 spawned further reductions in BN's route

FIXING BNSF'S NORTHWEST FUNNEL





▲ Z-PTLCHC accelerates east on Main 6 out of BNSF's refueling facility at Hauser, Idaho, on the evening of June 28, 2013.

► An empty coal train pulls east on Main 6 to spot its rear DPU on the Hauser, Idaho, fuel pad on March 10, 2018. Grain and oil trains are being serviced on Mains 4 and 5, and two vehicle trains are among the occupants of Hauser's yard tracks.





structure. Hundreds of main line and branch miles were cast off from the Midwest and Mid-south to the Northwest. In 1987 alone, BN closed its ex-SP&S route from Fish Lake down to the outskirts of Pasco and handed over its NP main line between Sandpoint Junction, Idaho, and Huntley, Mont., to Montana Rail Link. Even though most traffic on MRL had been BN and BNSF trains handled by MRL crews, they faced the brunt of the delays at Sandpoint when it came to pass-sage over the Sandpoint bridge.

YARDS AND FUEL

Just west of the midway point between Spokane and Sandpoint lies Hauser Yard, a somewhat obscure but logisti-



cally significant facility that's played a pivotal role in shaping operations and capacity expansions on The Funnel. Hauser was an empty patch of land next to the NP, east of the Washington-Idaho border, when pre-BN merger planners were looking for a bigger place to sort railcars moving into and out of the Northwest.

The Wyer Report of 1957 recommended closing GN's yard and shops at Hillyard — on Spokane's north side — and consolidating switching and locomotive servicing to NP's yard at Yardley, Wash., and its adjacent shops at Parkwater, Wash. It was also suggested that Yardley-Parkwater be rebuilt into a larger classification yard. In 1967, blueprints were drawn for a proposed classification yard on the GN at Dean, Wash., 10 miles north of Hillyard. Neither yard was ever built. However, a \$5-million upgrade to NP's existing hump yard in Pasco was begun in 1969.

Meanwhile, GN and NP officials had their eyes on Hauser, figuring that all traffic between Spokane and Sandpoint would likely get "funneled" onto the NP following the BN merger. Hauser became the favored

▲ **Demonstrating the need for a second bridge and main track, V-DILPTS (left) waits to come off MRL at Sandpoint Junction, on July 27, 2019, while Z-PTLCHC rolls through and enters the BN-built connection to the ex-Great Northern Hi Line.**

choice for the region's next new switching yard.

In 1972, BN went public with its plan to build a 76-track, \$30 million classification yard at Hauser. Within months, there were six tracks laid there. But post-merger investments elsewhere began taking priority, and by 1975 the price tag to complete Hauser had nearly doubled.

Hauser entered the 1980s as a nine-track holding yard, complete with a weigh-in-motion scale, where grain trains could be staged for optimal delivery time to Northwest ports, and empty grain trains could be held awaiting their next call east. By the 1990s, trains handling intermodal or automobiles were being reshuffled at Hauser for destinations in either direction.

BN's merger with Santa Fe Railway in 1995 triggered billions of dollars in capital investment across the combined system. The reopening of

Stampede Pass, a pre-BN route in western Washington, in 1996 was a bold first step. Years of steady improvements elsewhere were about to begin, including on The Funnel.

Between Spokane and Sandpoint, several sidings were extended or connected during 1997-98, resulting in three sections of double-tracked main line totaling 38.5 miles: Otis Orchards, Wash., to Rathdrum, Idaho; Athol to Cocolalla, Idaho; and West Algoma to the shore of Lake Pend Oreille at East Algoma. (The Algoma segment was an add-on to 6.6 miles of double track BN had forged in 1982.) Another 11 miles of second main was laid between Rathdrum and Athol in 2017, followed by 2.5 miles between Cocolalla and West Algoma in 2019. At that point, the only single track remaining on The Funnel was just over 4 miles between Irvin and Otis Orchards, Wash., and roughly 2 miles between East Algoma and Sandpoint Junction — the 2 miles that would become doubled in August 2023.

Back at Hauser, three more tracks were added and existing tracks were lengthened during 1997-98. Hauser now has 12

yard tracks. There's also a 3-mile long track that once housed the weigh-in motion scale — Track 0, often referred to as "Scale Track" or "Aught Track" — that can hold two average-sized trains end-to-end.

Hauser never developed into the sprawling classification yard originally intended, but it ultimately took on a role of equal importance. In 2004, Hauser became home to a \$30-million main line refueling facility that revolutionized how

BNSF moves most of its trains into and out of the Northwest. Its first two years had only two run-through refueling tracks in service, but Hauser now has four run-through tracks — Mains 3 through 6 — that guide trains to the fueling pad. Roughly half of The Funnel's trains are refueled at Hauser, while others simply change crews or swap cars there. BNSF says that Hauser can fuel 40 or more trains per day during the busy autumn shipping season. The facility will mark its 20th anniversary in September 2024.

BRIDGING THE GAP

The Funnel's last segment of single track to be widened is the 4 miles between Irvin and

► **One year before The Funnel's east end was widened, a west-bound stack train crosses Lake Pend Oreille on Oct. 3, 2021, passing an empty grain train waiting at East Algoma for its turn over the bridge.**

Otis Orchards, Wash., just east of Spokane. Helping to carry a second main track through this gap will be a new bridge over the Spokane River, parallel to BNSF's existing 534-foot-long bridge completed by NP in 1911. Stone piers from an earlier bridge still stand a short distance downriver.

Preliminary grading for BNSF's second main on the east side of the Spokane River was

▼ **Montana Rail Link SD40-2s lead H-LAUPAS over the Spokane River near Irvin, Wash., on Aug. 6, 2016. BNSF is building a second bridge on the far side of this one, built by Northern Pacific in 1911.**





done in 2020. Full-fledged work on the bridge and its approaches has been underway since April 2023.

BNSF says mid-2025 is the current target for completing this final stage in the decades-long process of doubletracking The Funnel.

Dual main lines from Spokane to Sandpoint will not make things completely fluid on The Funnel at all times. Trains occasionally queue up on one main track on either

▲ Two years after BNSF laid a second main along Cocolalla Lake, the fall traffic rush is in full swing on Oct. 16, 2021, with a grain train rolling west past the rear DPU of a Seattle to Logistics Park Chicago stack train.

side of Hauser, waiting their turn for the fuel pad, while other trains scoot by on the adjacent main. At Parkwater's intermodal ramp, a Z or Q train making a pickup or set-out can still tie up one or both mains for more than a few

minutes. And at Sandpoint, westbounds off BNSF's former Montana Rail Link may still wait their turn if other BNSF trains are lined up to pass each other on the bridges.

But as a whole, The Funnel has far greater capacity to move trains today than ever before. If only the folks who built the NP and GN through here in the late 1800s, and those who crafted the BN merger nearly a century later, could see it now. **I**



Freight traffic has returned to Switzerland's Gotthard Pass in a big way, as illustrated by this northbound train between the spiral tunnels at Wassen on Sept. 9, 2023.

A high-angle photograph of a Swiss village nestled in a valley. In the foreground, a red high-speed train is traveling along a track that runs diagonally across the frame. The village is composed of numerous houses with red-tiled roofs and white walls, some with dark wood accents. A prominent white church with a red roof and a small tower is visible on the right side of the village. The background features steep, forested mountains under a clear blue sky. The overall scene is bright and sunny, with lush green grass and trees.

Tunnel accident brings new life to legendary Swiss rail line

GOTTHARD PASS REVIVAL

Story and photos by David Lassen

On a cloudless afternoon in the Swiss Alps, four photographers have gathered on a hillside above the small town of Wassen (population 412, elevation 3,050 feet). They are documenting the sudden and unexpected revival of the Swiss Federal Railways' Gotthard Pass line. An engineering marvel completed in 1882 that once hosted more than 120 trains a day, the route had been downgraded in recent years to a single passenger train per hour in each direction.

That is definitely not the case on this warm September day. Instead, the double-track electrified main line hosts a steady stream of regional, intercity, and — in the form of the occasional Alstom-built Cisalpino trainset from Italy's Trenitalia — trans-national passenger trains. A few freight trains are mixed in.

There was no reason to expect Gotthard Pass would ever see this kind of activity again. The 2016 opening of the world's longest rail tunnel, the Gotthard Base Tunnel, created a route that shaved an hour off passenger schedules, eliminated a steep, curving route for freight traffic, and largely made the 1882 line redundant.

That all changed in August 2023, when a derailment in the base tunnel sent a flood of traffic onto the pass — a state of affairs now expected to last until September 2024. This return to prominence — temporary though it may be — has again made the spectacularly scenic passage through the Alps an international attraction. The four photographers on that hill? Only one is from Switzerland; with him is a man from Germany, another from Japan, and a rather winded visitor from Wisconsin, who has just finished climbing a few hundred feet from a bus stop in the town below.

The derailment

The revival of Gotthard Pass was not only unplanned, but painful and disruptive for Swiss Federal Railways, the country's generally superefficient national rail operator. (Hereafter, we'll refer to it by its German initials, SBB, for Schweizerische Bundesbahnen).

It came about because of an Aug. 10, 2023, derailment of a northbound freight train in the west bore of the 57.1-kilometer (35.5-mile), two-track base tunnel. A preliminary report from the Swiss Transportation Safety Investigation Board determined a wheel fractured on the 11th car of the 32-car train. The first fragment broke off about 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) into the tunnel, but the train continued for more than 7 additional kilometers, or 4.3 miles, before the last piece broke away and the car hit a switch at a crossover between the tunnel's two bores, derailing the next 16 cars.

The movement with the damaged wheel and the derailment wreaked havoc within the west bore. Initially, the most crucial damage was to an airtight door at the crossover. That door separates the two tubes to prevent fire or other issues from spreading from one side to the other, a key element of the tunnel's safety plan. Without it, no trains could operate through the tunnel, even through the undamaged east tube.

For a dozen days, the tunnel was closed to all rail movement. This led to a huge logjam of freight traffic on what is normally the primary cargo route between Northern Europe and Italy. Many trains that normally use the base tunnel could not detour over Gotthard Pass, which SBB refers to as the "panoramic route," because of clearance restrictions. Alternate routes were quickly at capacity, and Switzerland



An Alstom ETR610 trainset from Italy's Trenitalia handles EuroCity service from Zurich to Milan at Wassen on Sept. 5, 2023.

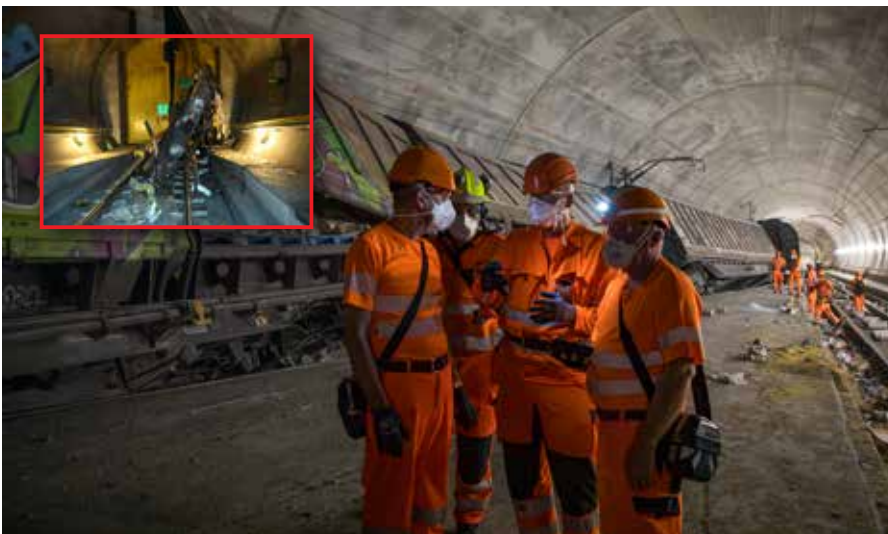
rapidly ran out of space to park waiting trains. Traffic was soon being held in neighboring countries.

"The fact that such an accident could still happen hits us hard," SBB CEO Vincent Ducrot told an Aug. 14 press conference. He said damage was worse than originally believed, and that repairs would continue into early 2024, but even that proved to be optimistic. In November, SBB announced it did not expect both bores to be fully available until September 2024, more than a year after the derailment — insuring an extended run for the increased traffic on the panoramic line.

A number of factors play a part in the lengthy repair timeline. First, most of the derailed cars were so badly damaged they had to be dismantled on the spot. That work took more than a month to complete before tunnel repairs could begin.

Those repairs were extensive. More than 7 kilometers of concrete floor slabs had to be repoured, cured, and placed. About 20,000 specialized concrete ties required replacement; just one company can produce and install those ties. Track had to be rebuilt. Signal systems and tunnel walls also sustained damage. And a new door for the crossover point had to be manufactured.

Working conditions complicated the effort. In that portion of the tunnel, the



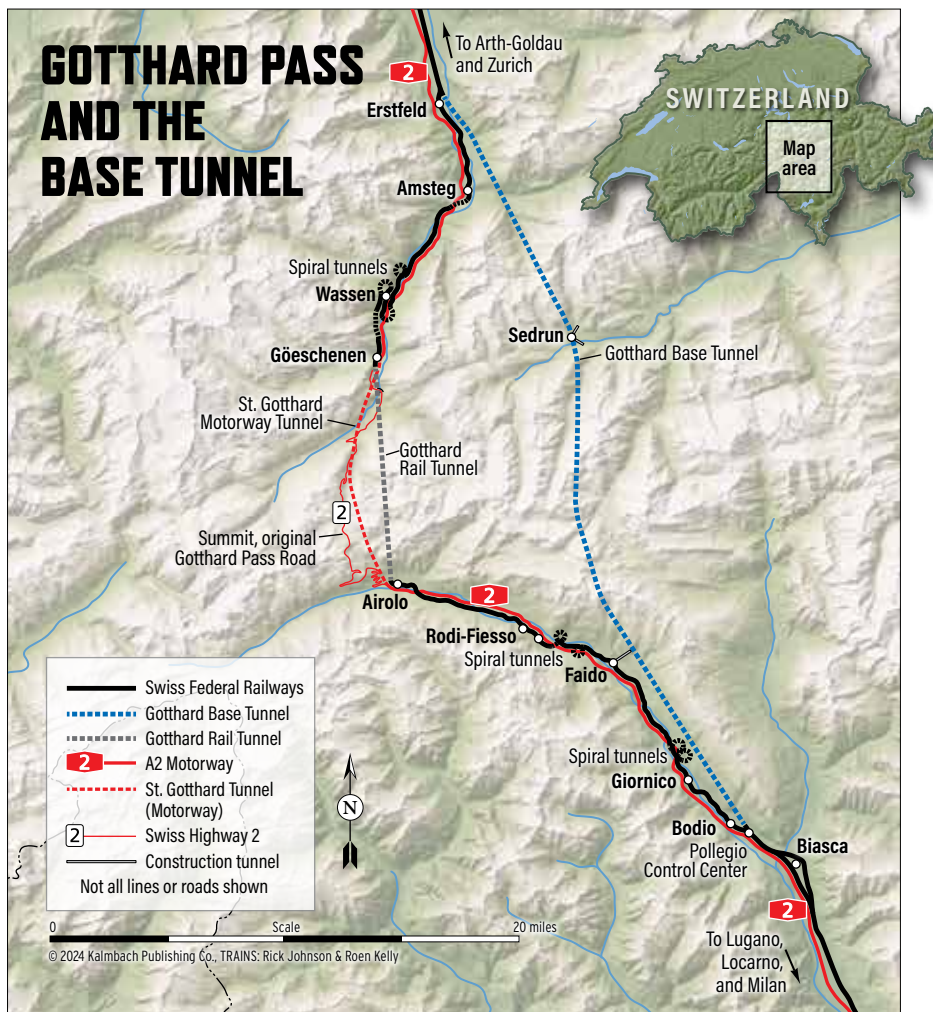
Workers discuss damage inside the Gotthard Base Tunnel following a derailment on Aug. 10, 2023, that has closed one of the tunnel's two tubes until September 2024. Inset: Damage to an airtight door separating the two tubes was a major issue. Two photos, Swiss Federal Railways



A train with a track geometry car (yellow coach) makes its way through Wassen.

ambient temperature is about 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit); workers wear devices alerting them when they become overheated, and when that occurs, they must go to a special cooling room to recover. It all means repairs proceed at a pace of about 300 meters per week.

Freight trains finally began moving through the tunnel on Aug. 23, with a temporary door, used during maintenance work, sealing the crossover track. That restored the ability to use the undamaged east tube. Through a plan in which four trains operated in one direction, after which four travel in the opposite direction, SBB was able to move about 100 freights a day on the single available track.



Tunnel vision

Gotthard Tunnel Experience offers a look inside world's longest rail tunnel

MORE THAN JUST a large hole in the ground, the Gotthard Base Tunnel — the world's longest rail tunnel— is also a tourist attraction.

The Swiss Federal Railways understood this. For four months in 2016, after the 57.1-kilometer (35.5-mile) tunnel was completed, but before regular operations began, SBB operated special *Gottardino* excursions. These trips between the towns of Flüelen and Biasca, many of which sold out, stopped in the tunnel at the Sedrun "multi-function station" including emergency evacuation facilities. At one time, Sedrun was to be the site of a station to be connected by elevator to mountain resort towns more than 2,400 feet above. That plan was scrubbed, in part because passenger-train stops would have decreased tunnel capacity.

For the *Gottardino* visits, the Sedrun facility featured displays on tunnel construction, including a movie shown in a cavern that would have been the station waiting room. Those excursions ended Nov. 27, 2016; regular operations through the tunnel began on Dec. 11.

A worthy successor to that venture has been offered since 2017 by the tourism office for the canton of Uri: the four-day-a-week "Gotthard Tunnel Experience." The tour begins at the station in Erstfeld, at the junction of the tunnel route and the historic Gotthard Pass line, and takes participants into a construction tunnel in nearby Amsteg. A highlight of the two-hour-plus tour is a viewing window that allows tour members to watch trains race by in the tunnel's west bore.

More than 10,000 people have taken the tour — no small feat considering regular tours have a capacity of 24 people (larger groups can be accommodated by prior arrangement). Its popularity is such that it was sold out every day I asked about in September. (The tourism office's Jasmin Schuler said in an email that they could have booked all of September at least twice.)

However, Uri Tourism was kind enough to organize a private tour for me with Charly Simmen, who had been a base tunnel construction supervisor, and now is working on a project to build a second bore of the Gotthard road tunnel. (In Switzerland, you can have a nice career moving from one massive tunnel project to the next.) Essentially, I had a concentrated 1-hour version of the tour, and it was outstanding. Even though I had taken a *Gottardino* trip in 2016 and have written about the tunnel before ["The Hole Truth," February 2017], I learned an immense amount in a short period about the tunnel and its construction — as well as more about why the damage from the August derailment that closed the tunnel was so extensive.

The construction tunnels were built so work on the main tunnel could proceed on multiple fronts; Simmen told me the Swiss government's mandate was to complete the project in 10 years, and working simply from each end would have taken 25 years. I had pictured the tunnel at Amsteg as a long, single shaft, but near the base tunnel, a



The view into the base tunnel at Amsteg. Since the viewing area looks into the west bore — the one damaged by the August derailment — no trains were running. Normally, they would be frequent.



Among displays at Amsteg were these photos of the airtight door damaged by the derailment (at right) and the temporary door, normally for maintenance, that allowed some operation to resume.

cross tunnel accommodates access, power systems, and other uses.

One of these cross shafts would not have been needed when construction was complete, and it would have been filled in if not for Uri Tourism and its idea for the Tunnel Experience. That shaft is now filled with displays about tunnel construction, comparisons of the Gotthard Base Tunnel with other long tunnels worldwide, videos, and other background information. It reminded me quite a bit of the material at Sedrun back in 2016. And I did get to look into the tunnel — although the viewing window is into the west bore, the one closed by the derailment, so there were no trains. Still, the people in charge were nice enough to turn on the lights so I could get the photo you see.

Based on my experience, the tour is worthwhile for anyone interested in engineering and technology, as well as trains. Tours are generally in German but English-language tours are available by advance arrangement — and as my experience shows, booking well ahead is a must. For details, see "If you visit" on page 30. — David Lassen

Relief valve

Still, that left all passenger traffic, as well as about 30 freight trains a day, to travel the historic Gotthard Pass line. (Most freight moves between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m., when passenger service pauses.) Along with the additional hour of travel time, passengers faced capacity problems. The clearance issues that affect freight trains also mean SBB's newest bilevel passenger equipment, used through the base tunnel, cannot cross

the older route. For a time, many passenger trains were standing room only until SBB could reshuffle its equipment and offer expanded consists of single-level trains.

In October, SBB received regulatory permission to begin running some passenger trains through the base tunnel's single bore, and began running five passenger trains per weekend. In December, it expanded that passenger schedule to a total of 31 trains between Friday and Sunday,

when repair work pauses, while increasing freight traffic the rest of the week. That plan was to be effective through March and revised thereafter.

Undoubtedly, most passengers are dismayed that travel time between, say, Zurich and Bellinzona had swelled from 1 hour, 37 minutes to 2 hours, 28 minutes or more because of the slower, more circuitous route cresting at the 9.3-mile Gotthard tunnel. But perhaps some were able to appreciate



Top: Passengers on the pass see Wassen and its famous church from three levels. This view is roughly from the location of the lead locomotive in the photo on pages 22-23.

Above: A monument in Airolo remembers those who died building the Gotthard tunnel.

the scenery and remarkable engineering of the older line. It features three sets of spiral tunnels to limit the maximum grade to 2.7% on the climb from its starting points — Erstfeld, elevation 1,558 feet, in the north, and Biasca, 988 feet, in the south — to the summit in the tunnel at 3,776 feet. The best known of the spirals is probably on the northern approach — which has a loop at Pfaffensprung and two at Wassen — because the train's corkscrewing path



Spiral tunnels between Rodi-Fiesco and Giornico allow trains to descend from this location, viewed from onboard the *Gotthard Panorama Express*, to the two levels of track below as they make their way down the southern side of Gotthard Pass.

Treno Gottardo, the Voralpen Express, and SOB

Distinctive copper-colored trains are symbolic of regional company's larger role

THE COPPER-COLORED Stadler FLIRT Traverso trainsets that provide the only year-round passenger rail service on Gotthard Pass belong to Südostbahn, better known by the initials SOB, and are part of a somewhat groundbreaking agreement between that company and SBB, the Swiss Federal Railways.

In 2017, SBB and SOB agreed to cooperative operation of two routes, the *Treno Gottardo* route and one between Chur, capital of the Swiss canton of Graubünden, and the national capital, Bern, via Zurich. The latter operates as the *Aare Linth*, named for two rivers along the route. Under the agreement, SOB provides the equipment for, operates, and markets the routes; SBB provides a flat-rate compensation. *Treno Gottardo* operation began in December 2020; the *Aare Linth* began in December 2021.

SOB had previously operated in a relatively small portion of northeastern and central Switzerland, operating over 440 route-kilometers (about 273 miles). Adding the two long-distance routes expanded its service to some 1,006 route-kilometers, or 625 miles.

"The small SOB had to expand in the long term to have an independent future," spokesman Conradin Knabenhans explains in an email. "The Südostbahn can offer regional passenger services more cost efficiently thanks to the income from long-distance services. Savings are possible because SOB can make better use of its own service centers for maintenance, for example."

The copper-colored FLIRT (short for Fast Light Intercity and Regional Train) Traverso is also standard on another SOB train, the *Voralpen Express*. Likely little known to North Americans, although it is one of the eight trains that make up Switzerland Tourism's "Grand Train Tour of Switzerland," the *Voralpen Express* runs between the tourist hub of Lucerne and St. Gallen, SOB's headquarters city. It's a fairly short trip — 2 hours, 15 minutes — and, as Switzerland Tourism's website puts it, shows "a different kind of Switzerland — undulating hills, picturesque villages, and lovely orchards."

I followed a trip across Gotthard Pass with a ride on this route thanks to a comment from Martin Oester, North America sales and marketing manager of the Swiss Travel System. When one of the feature ideas for my trip fell through and I was casting about for a new plan, he mentioned the *Voralpen Express* and said simply, "My favorite. No crowds ever."

That was enough of a recommendation for me, particularly since

it took me to a corner of Switzerland I had not previously visited. It was indeed a scenic trip, although in a more low-key way than the usual towering-Alp images that define the view most have of Switzerland. For me, this was an opportunity to recharge. This is not to say it should top your Switzerland-by-rail bucket list, but it is certainly worthwhile if you want a trip off the usual tourist path.

Unlike the *Treno Gottardo* and *Aare Linth*, the *Voralpen Express* in its current form — which dates to 2013 — has always been an SOB operation. Traverso trainsets took over for locomotive-hauled equipment in 2019; SOB now has 24 of those eight-car trains, with six more on order. There are also 33 four-car FLIRTs, including 10 of the same generation as the Traverso equipment. These are used elsewhere or added to the long-distance trains to increase capacity.

The eight-car trains seat 359, including 68 in a two-plus-one seating first-class section. I rode them on a half-dozen occasions on various routes and found them to be quiet and comfortable. Onboard video displays make it easy to track your location and be prepared for your stop; baggage is mostly accommodated on overhead racks, although there is some other storage space.

The addition of the two long-distance trains appears to be paying dividends. SOB's annual report for fiscal 2022 said *Treno Gottardo* ridership increased over the previous year, the *Aare Linth* exceeded expectations, and the services showed a profit, after two years of losses resulting from startup costs. Overall, the move into long-distance service helped the company boost ridership from 13.66 million passengers in pre-COVID 2019, as a regional operation, to 27.19 million in fiscal 2022.

SOB does not release route-specific ridership data, but Knabenhans says *Treno Gottardo* "is once again successfully operating [in 2023] and has recorded even more passengers so far." From about 600 people per day passing through the Gotthard summit tunnel in 2017, when SBB operated the service, daily ridership with *Treno Gottardo* is now about 1,200 on the section through the tunnel.

Like the *Voralpen Express*, SOB may not be well-known in North America, but the *Treno Gottardo* may help to change that. As company chairman Thomas Kuchler notes in that annual report, "The Gotthard route and its tourist attractions attract domestic and, increasingly, international guests. That's why we continue to work with tourism partners to offer attractive travel experiences." — David Lassen



▲ The *Voralpen Express* parallels a highway as it climbs from Arth-Goldau toward Rothernthurm on its way to St. Gallen.

◀ One of the copper-colored FLIRT Traverso trainsets used on SOB's long-distance trains departs Arth-Goldau.



Passengers on the *Gotthard Panorama Express* take advantage of the coach for photographers with windows that open.



The all-first-class *Panorama Express* features these coaches with oversized windows.

means trains pass Wassen's church three times, at three different altitudes. The baroque Catholic church, which dates to 1733, is often said to be Switzerland's most famous house of worship.

But there are also two sets of spirals on the southern side of the pass, the Piottino and Biaschina loops, making it possible for the line to gain or drop some 1,808 feet in 22 kilometers (13.7 miles) between Rodi-Fiesso and Giornico. In all, the line — with some 36 tunnels — took a decade to build. It was completed with opening of the Gotthard Tunnel on June 1, 1882. Digging the tunnel itself took almost 10 years, and cost an unknown number of lives. The official death toll is 170; this is now considered wildly low, as it only includes those who died at the tunnel site itself, not those who became ill in the horrible working conditions, left, and died elsewhere.

In 2007, when the route was celebrating its 125th anniversary, there were real fears that the panoramic line would be closed when the base tunnel opened. As historian Orazio Martinetti told the website Swissinfo at the time, "Maintenance of this line costs the Swiss Federal Railways about 50 million Swiss francs [then, \$41.6 million] a year. Why should such a sum be invested in the future after the completion of the Gotthard base tunnel?"



A carved wooden sculpture of Alfred Escher, who led construction of the Gotthard Pass line but never traveled over it, rides the *Panorama Express*.



The *Panorama Express* passes the station at Wassen, where trains no longer stop. With the complex, looping trackage, the northbound train is heading south as it passes the station.

But by the time the base tunnel opened, authorities had committed to keep the line open, with a promise to reassess its future in 2025. Given the significant role the panoramic route has played as a relief valve in the wake of the derailment, it is hard to imagine its future is not now secure.

The *Panorama Express*

For those content to experience Gotthard from a passenger's point of view — an experience that will remain available even after the base tunnel reopens — there are two scheduled passenger services across the pass. Each has its advantages.

The first-class way to go, literally, is SBB's *Gotthard Panorama Express*. It operates Tuesday through Sunday seasonally (in 2024, April 20 through Oct. 20). This all-first-class train features four panorama coaches with curving glass tops and — a big attraction for railfans — a coach with windows that open, meaning you can enjoy the wind in your hair and get photos free of the reflections that come from shooting through glass. No seats are sold in the open-window coach, so you can come and go as you please. Passengers seem to be good about sharing window space, although it can get a bit crowded at key locations.

This is a scenic trip done

very well. Between onboard narration and information from car attendants, you'll learn a tremendous amount. Backing that up is a pamphlet at each seat with a route map calling out points of interest; numbers on that map correspond to more detailed information in a book provided for each set of seats. Snacks, beverages, and souvenirs are available, and are delivered to your seat.

I rode the train twice in a week (once solo, once with our *Trains/Special Interest Tours* group) and had the same car attendant, Jacqueline, both times. Personable, informative, and — like most Swiss — multilingual, she was terrific about pointing out sights of interest and providing advance notice about photo opportunities.

While no seats are assigned in the photo coach, it does always have one rider, in a manner of speaking. Seated at one end is a life-size wooden sculpture of Swiss politician and businessman Alfred Escher, who played a key role in construction of the Gotthard railway. Escher was forced to resign as chairman of the Gotthard Railway Co. while it was still under construction because of cost overruns (of a relatively modest 3%). Not invited to the Gotthard Tunnel breakthrough ceremonies in 1880 and too ill to attend those marking its completion two years later, he died in December 1882. He is not believed to have ever ridden the Gotthard Pass route, so the sculpture was created by artist Inigo Gheyselinck in 2019 and placed aboard the train to give him a chance to finally do so.

The *Gotthard Panorama Express* travels north from Lugano to Arth-Goldau in the morning and makes a return trip in the

If you visit

Tips for a trip to Gotthard Pass

■ It takes just 1 hour, 45 minutes to get from Zurich Hauptbahnhof, the city's main station, to Göschenen, at the top of the pass, via Südostbahn's *Treno Gottardo*. Trains leave from Zurich every other hour; on the alternate hour, take a train to Arth-Goldau and change there. SBB Mobile, the smartphone app for the Swiss National Railways, will give you all the schedule information you need and much more — it's an essential tool for Swiss rail travel.

■ Göschenen is the ideal place to stay as a base for photo expeditions because it's served by train — both standard and narrow gauge — and is a short bus ride to Wassen. (It's 8 minutes to the Wassen-Post stop on the B401 bus; with a Swiss Travel Pass, the bus is included.) I spent two non-consecutive nights in Göschenen, at two hotels: the Hotel Weisses Rössli, \$148 for a one-person room, and the Hotel Krone, which was \$144 (including dinner; I think the room itself was \$120). Obviously, rates will vary. I would stay at either again, but would lean toward the Krone because Alexandra, who I communicated with in several emails beforehand, was helpful and delightful in person. A small disclaimer: Both are three-star hotels, absolutely spotless, and — like many European hotels — are not air-conditioned. This likely is not often an issue; it was unseasonably warm when I visited, but wide-open windows and rapid cooling at night made things comfortable enough. If you'd prefer something more high-end (and priced accordingly), Andermatt — a larger community on the route of the *Glacier Express* — is 15 minutes away by narrow-gauge train; there are two round trips hourly.

■ In tourist season, SBB's *Gotthard Panorama Express* runs between Arth-Goldau and Lugano, with a steamship option between Lucerne and a rail connection at Flüelen. A seat reservation is required, although SBB's website says passengers may travel without a reservation if seats are available. Don't risk it. The train runs Tuesdays through Sundays in season; for 2024, that's April 20 to October 20. A booking tip: I rode the train in each direction during my September 2023 visit, and Jacqueline, my car attendant on both trips, said the northbound trains are generally less crowded. My northbound, midweek train was almost empty. A quick plug: The *Panorama Express*, including the boat trip from Lucerne, is part of the "Majestic Switzerland Tour" offered again this year by *Trains* and Special Interest Tours (www.specialinteresttours.com).

■ While sellouts prevented me from joining the "Gotthard Tunnel Experience," I have no doubt it would be worthwhile. The tour departs from the Erstfeld station — a stop on the *Treno Gottardo* route, and well served by SBB. In 2024, the tour will cost 31 Swiss francs for adults, 15 francs for ages 12 to 15. (12 is the minimum age). Tours are offered Wednesday through Friday at 1:30 p.m. and



A train of the narrow-gauge Matterhorn Gotthard Bahn arrives in Göschenen. It's a 15-minute trip to Andermatt, a stop on the *Glacier Express* route; trains make two round trips hourly.

Saturdays at 9:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. The tours are in German, but English-language tours are available by advance arrangement.
— David Lassen

ON THE WEB

TRAIN INFORMATION:

- ▶ www.myswitzerland.com/en-us/experiences/treno-gottardo/
- ▶ www.sbb.ch/en/leisure-holidays/trains-trips/rail-travel-special-trains/panorama-trips/gotthard-panorama-express.html

GÖSCHENEN HOTELS:

- ▶ www.weisses-roessli.com/
- ▶ hotel-krone-goschenen.hotelescuatroestrellas.website/

TUNNEL TOUR INFORMATION, IN ENGLISH:

- ▶ www.myswitzerland.com/en-us/experiences/gotthard-tunnel-experience/

IN GERMAN, INCLUDING A LINK TO BOOKING:

- ▶ www.uri.swiss/de/erleben/seilbahn-eldorado-uri/eisenbahn/gotthard-tunnel-erlebnis/

afternoon. Most passengers ride as part of a package including travel by steamboat to or from Lucerne, boarding or departing the train at Flüelen. The train-only trip takes about 3½ hours; the boat-and-train combination between Lucerne and Lugano is about 5½ hours. You can also board at a couple of intermediate locations. Reservations are required; see "If you visit" above for details.

Treno Gottardo

The other train serving Gotthard Pass — and the one available year round — is the regular *Treno Gottardo* service. It runs hourly between Arth-Goldau and Locarno; beyond Arth-Goldau, trains continue to or from Basil or Zurich on an every-other-hour basis. These trains offer both first and second class, and no reservation is necessary. They can get quite crowded, especially

on weekends, when it seems every single person in Switzerland goes hiking.

The *Treno Gottardo* service is operated by Südostbahn, or SOB, and uses copper-colored, eight-car Stadler FLIRT Traverso electric multiple-unit trainsets. These are also the signature equipment for SOB's *Voralpen Express* (see page 28) and *Aare Linth* services. There's no full food service; a "bistro" car has a vending machine and



A Treno Gottardo crosses the bridge at Wassen shown in the photo on pages 22-23. This is the only train serving the communities on the pass.

offers beverages. (If you want more to eat, buy before you board: virtually every station in Switzerland has a store with good, modestly priced takeaway food.) *Treno Gottardo* stops include Erstfeld, home of the “Gotthard Tunnel Experience” (see page 26), as well as Göschenen and Airolo, the towns bracketing the Gotthard Tunnel.

If you have a Swiss Travel Pass (which is really the only way to go), the hourly service allows you to jump on and off the train as you wish, if you want to explore towns along the route.

And the southern terminus, Locarno, is worth a visit, although — since I was there, jet-lagged, on the second night of my trip — I didn’t do much more than stroll along Lake Maggiore, enjoy an exceptional pizza (it’s the Italian part of Switzerland, after all), take a funicular ride to the Madonna del Sasso convent (you can read about that on [Trains.com](https://www.trains.com)), and sleep.

A *Treno Gottardo* trip, incidentally, provides a reminder of Switzerland’s multilingual nature. The boundary between the German-speaking canton of Uri and Italian-speaking Ticino is in the middle of the



A Treno Gottardo emerges from a tunnel below the station at Wassen. Once it rounds this curve, the northbound train will again be heading north.

Gotthard Tunnel; onboard announcements for the stop at Göschenen are in German, but on the other side of the tunnel, at Airolo, they’re in Italian. (At terminal stops like Locarno, announcements are in German, French, Italian, and English. This takes a while.)

No matter your language, and whether on train or off, Gotthard Pass is worth a visit. This will never be more true than during its current traffic revival, as those photographers on the hillside could attest. But it will still be the case even when, eventually, traffic returns to its far more modest levels. **I**

THE FAMILY BECOMES A

The Indiana Northeastern: A Midwest short line success



DREAM RAILROAD

Story and photos by Steve Smedley



Straddling the state line between Michigan and Indiana, a southbound Indiana Northeastern Railroad train is framed by an abandoned gas station that sits in Michigan. EMD GP9 No. 1601 and GP30 No. 2185 — both former Reading Co. locomotives — power the train through Ray, Ind., on Aug. 10, 2010. Ray is divided by the state line.



Under a full moon (and the photographer's Alien Bee strobe lights), GP30 No. 2185 rests outside the Indiana Northeastern Railroad headquarters building in Hillsdale, Mich., on Feb. 2, 2012.



RAY, INDIANA, MICHIGAN

"Indiana Northeastern 3125 at station sign Ray," crackles the radio as engineer Jimmy Van Heerde announces the location of his train ambling through a town whose residents live half in Michigan and half in Indiana.

Dust is ripped out of the Stateline Road crossing as twin six-axle locomotives slog northward with a 64-car mixed freight train headed for Hillsdale, Mich.

A concrete marker wounded by more than one vehicle accident stands alongside the track like a silent sentinel in Ray, Ind.

The marker, with IND on one side and MICH on the other, indicates the state boundary line and sits within sight of an abandoned gas station. Its gravity-feed fuel pumps, as well as the building's windows, are devoid of any glass they once held, the result of unskilled work by local juvenile delinquents.

In 3 minutes, quiet returns to Ray as the sound of hard-working twin EMD 645 diesel engines fades in the leaden air, mixing with thunder, as storms approach from the west. By the time Van Heerde and his charges roll into Reading, Mich., the thunderstorms are filling Michigan State Route 49 with standing water, as once-dusty

grade crossings now pitch mud onto the trucks of No. 3125 North. (*Reading* is pronounced like you are reading a book.)

The next morning, crews go on duty at Hillsdale, Mich. There, the railroad's headquarters and base of operations is situated on the first floor of a three-story brick building that was once division headquarters and a passenger station for Lake Shore & Michigan Southern Railway.

Four hours later, after starting in Coldwater, Mich., engineer Jeff James watches for highway traffic as he operates spotless GP30 No. 2185 and sister No. 2230 southbound into Angola, Ind. The ditches hold evidence of the previous week's ice storm — trees cut by chainsaw-wielding employees staffing a work train that took two days to clear the line. On this short line, you are an engineer one day, and an axe man the next. It is a perfect example of the all-in attitude employees of the Indiana Northeastern hold close to their hearts.

EARLY HISTORY

From Hillsdale, the former NYC line — known as "The Old Road" — runs to the end of the line in Coldwater. "The Old Road" received its name because it was the first Eastern road to reach Chicago. The current Indiana Northeastern Railroad serves Southeast Michigan, Northeast Indiana, and a small section of West Central Ohio.

Its lines once belonged to the Wabash and the New York Central railroads.

President Gale Shultz, 62, leans back in his office chair at South Milford, Ind., as he talks about the early years of rail operations. Shultz came from a farming family of six children, and fondly recalls taking a ride to watch trains roll through South Milford with his father Ralph in the mid-1970s.

Ralph Shultz was the president of South Milford Grain Company, located on Norfolk & Western's former Wabash Railroad Second District.



In an interesting technological juxtaposition, an Amish farmer and his daughter guide draft horses past Indiana Northeastern Railroad GP30 No. 2230 — the second GP30 on the roster — with a load of corn silage heading for a farmstead east of Reading, Mich., on April 24, 2013. This is grassroots Midwestern farm country and grain is a significant part of the railroad's business.



As the engineer notches up Nos. 2185 and 2230, the railroad's pair of 60-plus-year-old GP30s, grouse feathers are ruffled in the adjacent field. The train is running west after leaving the Norfolk Southern yards at Montpelier, Ohio, on Feb. 8, 2012. Here the railroad is utilizing 2 miles of trackage rights on Norfolk Southern.

"Dad saw a vision of loading grain trains here; he had big ideas for the future," the younger Shultz says. "Everybody thought Dad was crazy when he talked about the future. At the time, most of the grain harvest went to the East Coast to Tidewater Grain for unloading. The country was expanding its grain business."

In 1976, the Norfolk & Western filed to abandon the Second District line through South Milford and reroute all traffic through Fort Wayne to the south. It was sink-or-swim time if the Shultz family wanted to protect Dad's dream.

The family organized local businesses and shippers, filing a federal court appeal seeking a stay of the abandonment.

"We finally beat them in January of 1983," Shultz recalls. "Dad passed away the day the family found out the Seventh U.S. Circuit Court in Chicago had ruled in favor

INDIANA NORTHEASTERN RAILROAD LOCOMOTIVES

Number	Model	Date built	Former
1601	GP7	Aug. 1952	Reading No. 606
2216	GP9	Aug. 1952	Santa Fe No. 2746
1602 (2nd)	GP9	April 1957	Great Northern No. 693
5903	GP9	April 1954	Cleveland Union Terminal No. 5903
1073	GP10	Jan. 1956	Illinois Central No. 9167
2185	GP30	July 1962	Reading No. 5517
2230	GP30	April 1963	Pennsylvania No. 2230
2000	GP40-3	Sept. 1966	Denver & Rio Grande Western No. 3065
3084	SD40-2	Dec. 1966	Canadian Pacific No. 5527
3125	SD40M-2	Sept. 1969	Southern Pacific SD45 No. 9006
4379	SD70M	May 2001	Union Pacific No. 4379
4670	SD70M	May 2001	Union Pacific No. 4670

of blocking the abandonment." The family was able to share the news with Ralph before he died at age 56.

In the early 1970s, when Conrail was formed, over 200 Penn Central route miles in Michigan were to be abandoned. Among the mileage not making it into Conrail was the lines in Hillsdale County, west to Quincy and then south to Steubenville, Ind. On April 1, 1976, with help from the State of Michigan, the Hillsdale County Railway

took over these local lines. The South Milford Grain Co. signed a haulage agreement with the HCR to preserve the N&W connection at Montpelier, Ohio.

"They were a bunch of carpetbaggers," Shultz says. "The HCR let the lines fall into disrepair and derailments were common, much of the rail was 80 pound on rotted, deteriorated ties and roadbed. They were putting zero into the railroad and owed the N&W one million dollars."



The railroad's two elderly statesmen at the time, ex-Reading Co. GP7s Nos. 1602 and 1601, clear carbon buildups as the crew goes to work on April 16, 2012. The two locomotives worked on the Hillsdale County Railway during the 1976 startup. No. 1601 was rebuilt by the Hudson (Ind.) shop. No. 1602, the first to wear this number on the INR, was retired and is now a parts source.

"In 1976 the Conrail sale had freed up a lot of federal money to run short lines. They were living high on the hog," said Shultz.

The South Milford Grain Co. acquired a 15-mile section of N&W from Wolcottville to Ashley, Ind., the family's first entry in railroad operations. The Pigeon River Railroad was the first short line created by South Milford Grain. This allowed the Pigeon River Railroad to maintain a connection with Hillsdale County.

"On Dec. 2, 1992, Hillsdale County Railway put one of our unit bean trains in the ditch. That derailment put [the] Hillsdale County [Railway] out of business," says Shultz. With eight cars derailed, emergency-service contractor Hulcher refused a call to clean up the wreck near Hamilton, Ind., since the short line owed them money for past derailment cleanups.

"They owed everybody money!" Shultz says.

Shortly after the wreck, the HCR put its assets up for sale. Several suitors lined up to make offers on the line that now connected Montpelier, Ohio, with Hillsdale and Coldwater, Mich., via Steubenville Junction, Ind.

Shultz hired a crew, vacuumed out the spilled beans, and paid for the track to be

rebuilt. South Milford Grain assumed the debt owed to the federal government and the Norfolk & Western and formed a new railroad — the Indiana Northeastern.

"No one gave us a snowball's chance in hell, but we started picking the track up out of the mud," says Shultz. "The early days were plagued with minor derailments, but we kept chipping away."

By this time the line was owned by Norfolk Southern. "They just laughed at us," says Shultz. "Jim McClellan, an NS executive, told me, 'If you want to keep this railroad you are going to have to run it yourself'"

That's exactly what Shultz and three of his siblings did.

"Things were growing — we were running coal trains to Litchfield, Mich.; grain was booming in Reading; and we had a big steel shipper in Fremont [Ind.]," he says.

The coal and steel business are gone now.

In 1996, the railroad lost a bridge at Edon, Ohio, after a 10-inch rain that disrupted service for 30 days while a new bridge was constructed over Bear Creek.

"Things were looking bleak," Shultz says. "This is why we focus so much on the track. We have seen what can happen when you let things go into disrepair."

A DIRT FLOOR TO START

Not only has Indiana Northeastern pulled trackage out of mud, but it has also spent hard-earned money on first- and second-generation diesel power.

In the railroad's early days, diesel work was done in the open air or in a one-stall, unheated shed built onto an old freight house in Hillsdale, Mich. "The old shop was something erected by the Hillsdale County Rail[way]," says Travis Bloom, mechanical foreman for the railroad. "[It's] basically a lean-to attached to the freight house."

The lean-to shop had a single track with a pit. The pit was only deep enough to allow a mechanic to duck down and crawl under a locomotive. The pit could only accommodate one end of a locomotive at a time, meaning the unit had to be turned on the wye to work on both trucks.

"It had a gravel floor, four bay lights, and Styrofoam walls for insulation," Bloom says. "It was dark, smelly, and we always had invaders of the rodent variety."

For larger repairs requiring a crane or lifting the locomotive, the unit was sent to South Milford, if possible. That facility has four 50-ton jacks and equipment that can lift heavy components.

"Of course, all these heavy repairs were done outside, and these things only needed to be fixed in the middle of winter on the coldest days of the year," says Bloom.

Plans for a locomotive shop had been in place since the inception of the Indiana Northeastern. Like all capital projects, money, land, and the time to acquire them were required before a new shop could be constructed. In the fall 2011, the pieces came together. Shop construction began in



The cab window of Indiana Northeastern GP7 No. 1601 frames GP30 No. 2230 as the units alternate loading cuts of covered hoppers in Reading, Mich., on April 24, 2013.

early spring 2012 and was completed by June with move-in shortly thereafter.

"To say that the new building is an improvement is not doing it justice at all," Bloom says. "Going from a dirty, dark, smelly, and oily building to something that is three times the size, complete with a 25-ton overhead crane, full-length pit, jacking pads built into the floor, and enough lighting that you rarely use a flashlight or work light is something that every shortline mechanic dreams about."

The new facility has allowed the Indiana Northeastern to keep its antique fleet of first-generation EMD's running efficiently and reliably.

"When I first started working for the Indiana Northeastern Railroad we had five locomotives — two GP30s, a GP7, a GP9 and on occasion, when it wanted to work, a GP10," Bloom says. "Since then, we have added another GP9, another GP7 and two SD40-2s to our roster. Without the shop, I am sure some of these old units would be parked or scrapped."

The shop not only does locomotive work, but also maintains the company vehicles and maintenance-of-way equipment, although most of the trackwork is currently done by contractors.

AN ALL-EMD ROAD

The obvious stars of the railroad are its twin former Conrail GP30s. No. 2185 is a former Reading Co. locomotive, while No. 2230 was built for the Pennsylvania Railroad. When first introduced, the GP30 had trouble holding the rail, which became its ultimate downfall.

"They are slippery, but after our Hudson shops upgraded [No.] 2185 with a new wheel adhesion system, she holds the rail much better," says engineer Jeff James.

In the last four years the shops have rebuilt or repainted three GP9s, a GP7, and GP30 No. 2185. In addition, they painted the two former CEFX six-axle units.

Recent additions to the fleet are ex-Union Pacific SD70Ms Nos. 4379 and 4670.

Mechanic and locomotive engineer Kevin Petre shared a unique electrical fault of No. 4670. "You'd turn the cab lights on, and the horn would blow." Petre finally remedied the noisy situation by correcting two wires that had been switched around in the electrical cabinet.

Petre was a computer programmer before coming to the railroad 12 years ago.

EMPLOYEE INTERVIEWS

The longest serving employee on the railroad is Van Heerde, who started working for Hillsdale County Railway in 1976. Van Heerde could be considered the railroad's class clown. He blames this writer for getting him sick the first time we met, and sticks his



Engineer Jimmy Van Heerde makes notes on the operations bulletin board in the Indiana Northeastern Railroad's headquarters building at Hillsdale, Mich., on May 3, 2011. Van Heerde is the railroad's longest-serving employee, having started with the Hillsdale County Railway in 1976.

tongue out as a greeting on every trip.

"Well, I am from the last remaining set of guys hired by the Hillsdale County Railway Co.," says Van Heerde. "I also worked for Huron & Eastern, but most of my life has been with Indiana Northeastern. It has been a night-and-day difference."

From the cab of SD45R No. 3125, engineer Jeff James is working Hudson, Ind., in August 2023. While No. 3125 and trailing unit No. 3084 are considered SD40-2s, No. 3125 retains its classic flared radiators that made the SD45 stand out.

"They comfortably pull an 85-car loaded grain train," James says. "I started here in September 2004. Most of us are cross-trained. I have never held a job this long. [They are] great people to work for and [it's] a good work environment and a good quality of life."

James notes that with the Indiana Northeastern, "We're not on the extra board and were not waiting for the phone to ring," which makes life better for his close-knit family of five children and wife Kate.



Engineer Jeffrey James spots liquid fertilizer loads at Ceres Solutions near the end of the line in Coldwater, Mich. on Sept. 19, 2019. GP9 No. 5903 was built for the Cleveland Union Terminal Railroad in April 1954. It was rebuilt by the Indiana Northeastern shop forces in Hudson, Ind., with a GP9H designation. The "H" stands for Hudson shops.

Troy Strane, the railroad's general manager, talked one fall morning after crews had left Hillsdale. "We have a good railroad because of the heavy investment by our ownership. We've enjoyed federal tax credits and state matching grant programs to improve track, crossings, and warning devices.

"The main segment of our line rebuild has been from Steubenville Junction north to Ray, Ind. It was mostly 80-pound rail, some of it dated from 1898. The old rail was breaking all the time; sometimes we would have as many as six broken rails a week."



Jimmy Van Heerde looks back to conductor Jeffrey James as the crew begins to pull grain loads from the Edon Farmers Co-Op Association elevator at Edon, Ohio, on Feb. 25, 2013. The locomotive is a year older than the photographer, having been built for the Illinois Central Railroad as its No. 9167 in 1956. The GP10 rebuild rolled out of Illinois Central's Paducah, Ky., shops in 1971 as IC No. 8167.

Strane is also cross-trained and takes a hands-on approach to his position. "I was out there changing 32-foot sections of rail every day," he says. "We sometimes cut them in half and used a 16-foot section to make repairs, but it becomes a vicious circle because you are creating more joints and more maintenance."

The old rail was replaced with new 115-pound stock rolled in 80-foot sections by Steel Dynamics, Inc. of Columbus City, Ind. With the project completed in 2012, Strane says the line "rides like welded rail."

"We know how to grow business and service customers. But it's still contingent on the performance of the Class Is," Strane says.

TODAY'S TRAFFIC

Indiana Northeastern's main traffic is grain. The largest shipper is Anderson's Grain Inc., with a large complex in Reading. Many of the unit grain trains received from Norfolk Southern at Montpelier, Ohio, are bound for Reading. Other unit trains head west to South Milford.

An added customer, served by an extension of the new track westward from South Milford, is SEE Terminal, which receives approximately 10 cars of liquid fertilizer per week. They are interchanged from NS at Montpelier.

Indiana Northeastern's customers range from the least appetizing to the most. Darling Ingredients Inc., a large rendering facility in Coldwater, Mich., which produces inedible animal tallow (fats), ships several tank car loads each week.

On the other end of the spectrum: If you eat at a McDonald's in the Midwest, there is a good chance the bun ingredients were hauled by the railroad. New Horizons Baking Co. in Fremont, Ind., receives wheat flour from North Dakota and manufactures hamburger buns for the fast-food giant.

A STEAM TRAIN COMETH

The most exciting event in the railroad's recent history is the agreement between the Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society and Indiana Northeastern. Signed in early 2022, it brought the society's Nickel Plate Berkshire No. 765 and several pieces of rolling stock to the railroad and launched a new program called the Indiana Rail Experience, which led to several excursions that first year and spurred a growing relationship.

The shop crew is working to bring the society's repainted Nickel Plate SD9 No. 358 back to serviceable condition. There are several electrical issues needing attention. The plan is to use No. 358 on the rear of steam-powered passenger trains as power for the return leg of a trip.

Recently, the historical society purchased the Pleasant Lake, Ind., freight house and passenger station and plans to restore the building, along with adding an ADA-accessible platform to accommodate excursions.

"One of my first memories is going to ride the Little River Railroad out of Pleasant Lake," says Kelly Lynch, Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society vice president. "It has come full circle for me."

For years, the Fort Wayne group looked for opportunities to run No. 765 in Indiana.

"The ... investment that the Shultz family has made in the railroad to make it better than new set the stage for this partnership," Lynch says, "we are able to celebrate our railroad history and [are] also able to shine the limelight on an important local railroad."

Being able to offer steam-diesel excursions with two Nickel Plate locomotives is a



An Indiana Northeastern Railroad job approaches a banjo-style switch stand in the company headquarters town of Hillsdale, Mich., on April 18, 2012. The crew is ready to tie up this train from Coldwater. The lead GP30, No. 2230, is of Pennsylvania Railroad heritage, having been built in April 1963.

special circumstance, according to Lynch. There are not many preservation organizations that have operating steam and diesel equipment from the same railroad.

Ironically, No. 358 was part of an order that replaced the Nickel Plate Berkshires. No. 765, however, was not the first steam to operate over the Indiana Northeastern.

The Little River Railroad relocated from White Pigeon to Coldwater, Mich., in 2005, after failing to get an operating agreement with track owner Pioneer Rail-Corp-affiliate Michigan Southern Railroad. It operated steam powered trains on weekends between Coldwater and Quincy, Mich. Travis Bloom got his start on the Little River Railroad.

A TRIBUTE TO DAD'S DREAM

As the Indiana Northeastern celebrates its 31st year in business, it's interesting to look back on the changes that brought heavier axle loadings and six-axle locomotives into the mix.

When brother Tim Shultz died in 2019,



Nickel Plate No. 765 speeds past the Michigan-Indiana state line marker at track speed into Ray, Ind. The corn is ready to harvest and the leaves are just starting to change as the Indiana Rail Experience Fall Color Train passes this October 8, 2023, afternoon. Bryson Sleppy

the family sent him off with a fine salute. Both six-axle locomotives were parked over Indiana State Road 3 in South Milford. When the funeral procession rolled beneath the bridge, both locomotive horns were sounded as a tribute.

It was a perfect sentiment to a family

member who had a part in the railroad, and a salute to Ralph's memory as well.

"Dad's name is on [No.] 3125 and Mom's is on [No.] 3084," says Gale Shultz. It is a testament to a farm family that saw Ralph Shultz's dream turn into reality — when others said it would fail. **I**



TOURING THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Former Rio Grande business car was rebuilt to the elegance of 1920s rail travel

Story and photos by Robert W. Scott

IN EARLY 2023, I had the opportunity to take a step back in time, experiencing a short ride on a privately owned railcar. Through this trip, I was able to see what it might have been like to be a railroad president inspecting his territory.

The car, the *Abraham Lincoln*, with owners in the Pacific Northwest, spent time on Tenino, Wash.-based Rainier Rail for several private-party excursions. It should not be confused with the railcar used in the Lincoln funeral train of 1865.

This *Abraham Lincoln* was built by the Pullman Co. in 1910 for the Western Pacific Railroad as coach No. 894. In 1910, President Abraham Lincoln's son, Robert Todd Lincoln, had just taken control of the Pullman Co. The younger Lincoln more than likely oversaw the car's construction.

By 1929, coach No. 894 was retired from Western Pacific service. It was purchased by the Denver & Rio Grande Western. The car was then rebuilt at D&RGW's Burnham Shops in Denver as a self-contained business

car, No. 101, used by the railroad's president and other officials. The car features office space; two staterooms, one with attached bathroom; a hallway bathroom; dining room; servants' quarters; kitchen; and the all-important observation area. The interior was complete with inlaid walnut and mahogany, period electric lamps, and bronze fixtures. It also featured ice-cooled air conditioning as well as steam heat.

The D&RGW used the *Abraham Lincoln* until 1964. It was then sold to Golden



1 Stateroom A was the railroad president's accommodations, as it provided a larger bed along with an en suite bathroom. **2** The car included space for a secretary that could both telegraph and send out messages and directives from a typewriter. **3** The *Abraham Lincoln* was built as a Western Pacific coach in 1910. The refurbished 80-foot car shows the observation platform added by D&RGW. **4** A full kitchen provided meal preparation for everyone on board. **5** The car's shared bathroom features a shower and sink, and is adorned with beautiful tilework.

West Rail Tours, which used it for the next two decades. In 1983, it entered private ownership, moving from Los Angeles to Tucson, Ariz., where an 8-month restoration brought it up to Amtrak standards, allowing its use on long-distance passenger trains. It was then moved to eastern Washington, closer to the car's owners.

Rebuilt to the elegance of the 1920s, it has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a reminder of the history of rail travel in the United States. **1**



Unstoppable

on the Santa Fe



A real-life incident 42 years before the 2010 movie

by Robert H. Leilich

THURSDAY, JUNE 20, 1968, began simply enough — clear, sunny, and warm. As a newly minted Santa Fe acting trainmaster working vacation relief out of Newton, Kan., I had been assigned by Superintendent Jimmy Fitzgerald — who later became vice president of operations — to monitor and expedite the movement of grain trains from loadouts on the Larned and 5th District (Middle Division) branch lines to the grain silos in Hutchinson, Kan.

Working the Larned Branch on what was going to turn into a fateful day, we pulled our train into Larned, Kan., at about 4 p.m. and put our train in the hole (siding) so the crew could go for beans.

Getting off the engine, the operator at the Larned depot came running out and in a highly excited voice exclaimed, “Mr.

Leilich, the Chief wants to talk to you.”

“What’s going on, George?” I asked.

“We got two runaways.”

Puzzled, I called the chief dispatcher and asked him what was happening. First, he asked if I had my train in the clear and all switches lined for the main.

Puzzled even more, I answered “yes” and asked again, what’s going on?

“We’ve got two runaways.”

“I got that,” I said, “so what does that have to do with us? Call the police.”

“Two runaway units [I thought I also heard him mumble “you idiot”] and they’re coming your way,” said the chief dispatcher.

“How fast are they going?” I asked, now that he clearly had my attention.

“The last we estimated is 40 to 45 mph.”

The train crew quickly figured out that

A pair of EMD GP30 locomotives got the better of a Hutchinson, Kan., hostler and proceeded on a wild, unmanned run along the Santa Fe’s Middle Division on June 20, 1968. At the time, the GP30s were only 5 years in service, having been delivered between January and June 1963. *Trains collection*

their plan to go for beans may have to wait awhile.

THE PLAN

I told him that my plan would be to leave our train in the hole but take our two tired GP9s out on the main and run ahead of the two loose units, letting them couple into us after which we could brake, slowing them down enough for me to go back and shut them down. Fortunately, I was once a fireman and a qualified engineer, so I felt confident about doing this.

Before I committed to this plan, I wanted another “OS” (location and operating speed) on these runaways, still some 65 miles away from Larned. With the operators at Nickerson and Sterling, Kan., on the line, I clocked the units as doing the 8

miles in less than 8 minutes. I did not need a calculator to tell me that they were going much faster than 45 mph and also more than likely were going to exceed the 72-mph maximum speed of our two geeps, which probably never saw more than 60 mph in their lives.

CHANGE OF PLANS

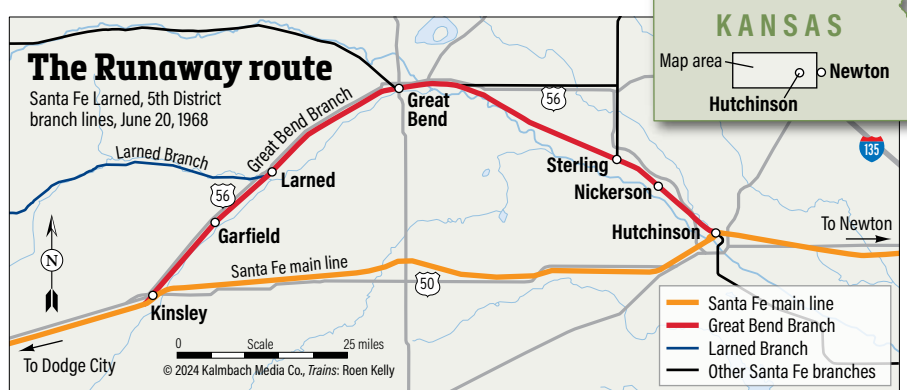
“My game plan has changed,” I told the chief. “We’re going to chase them and, if we can, couple into them and slow them down.” If successful, the second part of my plan was the same — carefully make my way up to each unit and shut them down with the emergency fuel switch. The speed limit on the Great Bend branch was limited to 40 mph, though the track was easily good for 50 mph.

I may have set two world records that day: Having the longest runaway experience — 98 miles — and operating the first two-man crew on a unionized railroad where the norm was then five. The rest of the train crew decided to stay put while allowing the engineer and me to have all the fun.

Soon, we could see a cloud of dust looming on the horizon. As the cloud got bigger, I gave the hogger the word to “go for it” in order to build up a little speed before we headed out onto the main line. The local section foreman, who happened to still be on duty, had only seconds to line the switch, or we were going to automatically line it for him! With the Geeps in run eight, our speed built up quickly. Seeing that we were going to exceed maximum locomotive speed, I asked anyone glued to the radio monitoring this unfolding drama how to nullify the overspeed trip, which would force our engines into emergency. With no one knowing how to do this, I told the engineer to “hold it on the warning whistle.” At this speed, the cloud of dust continued to disappear over the horizon. I later learned that all I had to do was break the glass on the speedometer and hold the needle below 72 mph.

After chasing the runaways for about 11 miles, the overspeed finally got us and our units went into emergency. With no hope of catching them and only a few minutes before the units hit the main line at Kinsley, Kan., I barked into the radio, telling the Kinsley operator, “Line the east wye switch (good only for 15 mph) to derail ‘em. If you can get the superintendent’s concurrence, do so, if not, they are my orders.” A booming voice quickly came back over the airwaves, “This is the superintendent. I concur.” I said to myself: Here I am, probably getting thanked for wrecking two fairly new locomotives.

I jumped off our locomotives and stood in the middle of the parallel highway and flagged down a startled farmer



and told him to take me to Kinsley — now about 13 miles away — as there was a railroad emergency. When I arrived, sure enough, the two units were lying on their sides amid wisps of smoke from hot oil. I immediately climbed into the cab on the lead locomotive to take note of the throttle, brake handle positions, and pulled the speed tape, as I knew there was going to be an investigation. Climbing out of the cab, I found a microphone stuck in front of my face wanting to know what happened. A Wichita newspaper had chartered a helicopter to get a scoop on the event.

THE REST OF THE STORY

Later, I pieced together how this all happened. A hostler, totally unfamiliar with the two fairly new — 5-year-old — EMD GP30s was attempting to move the units from the servicing track to the ready track. The controls were located differently than he was accustomed to. Also, the throttle did not “notch” out like he expected.

His first mistake was to apply instead of releasing the independent brake. The brake handle was located alongside the engineer and not in front, confusing him further. His second mistake was unknowingly moving the throttle to the third or fourth notch, and when the engine did not move — the independent brake was fully applied — he advanced the throttle further, up to run 7. With the engines revving up and still not moving — the GP30s had a much slower generator field buildup than older Geeps and F7s — he panicked, making his third mistake, jumping off the engine. When he got off and the engine began to move, he made his fourth mistake — running too late to catch and re-board the locomotives. He alerted the yardmaster, who in turn called the dispatcher and the police. No one could stop the engines from making their way to the main line, heading west.

According to the speed tape, the units sailed through Hutchinson — speed limit 15 mph — at about 45 mph, going through at least 10 grade crossings before the gates went down. It was a miracle no one was hit. The dispatcher lined the switch to di-

rect the locomotives up the 5th District branch, as no one was on the track except our grain train and a track supervisor on a motorcar. The track supervisor tried to get his motorcar off the track but managed to only clear the front wheels before the two locomotives came barreling down on him. He escaped just in time to see the motorcar turned into shards of metal and wood. After the brake shoes burned off, setting grass fires along the right-of-way, speed increased to beyond the maximum speed tape recording limit of 80 mph.

Needless to say, the hostler soon started a new career completely unrelated to railroading.

At the time of the accident, safety features that would have stopped the locomotives were disabled once the independent brake was set. As a result of the ICC’s investigation, disabling safety features on future new locomotives included the requirement that the reverser also must be set in the neutral position.

I don’t know how much of this experience went into the movie *Unstoppable*, but there were certainly several interesting parallels: Trying to hit the emergency fuel shut-off switch with a rifle fired from a police car chasing on a parallel road less than 25 feet away, and chasing the runaways with another locomotive. I was reluctant to see the movie as my wife knew I would pick it apart. After finally seeing it and putting up with unrealistic Hollywood enhancements and theatrics, it brought back strong memories of what happened to a neophyte 28-year-old kid trainmaster.

It was an experience I’ll never forget. **I**

ROBERT LEILICH worked for 45 years in railroad operating management and consulting. His career started as a locomotive fireman with the Santa Fe and continued in various operating management positions with the railroad. He studied mechanical engineering and industrial management at Purdue University. Leilich is a Navy veteran. He is now retired and living with his wife of 60-plus years in The Woodlands, Texas, close to their three grandchildren.



Restoration begins on oldest surviving EMC motorcar

Mid-Continent Railway Museum plans to run car in 2025

▲ The Winton engine and its generator are removed from Montana Western No. 31. The motorcar is the 13th built by EMC and the oldest surviving. It was constructed in 1925 for the Great Northern Railway. Mid-Continent Railway Museum hopes to have it operational by 2025. Two photos, Mid-Continent Railway Museum

MID-CONTINENT RAILWAY MUSEUM in North Freedom, Wis., has launched a project to restore its Electro-Motive Corp. motorcar, the oldest surviving piece of EMC rolling stock, to operating condition.

Montana Western No. 31, built by EMC in 1925 for Great Northern Railway as its No. 2313, is the 13th railcar built by the company that celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2022. The motorcar was featured during a *Trains LIVE* program [see “Mid-Continent Railway Museum visit with Montana Western No. 31,” *Trains.com*, Nov. 9, 2022]. The museum said in a press release that it will work with FMW Solutions, a rail engineering firm with experience in preservation projects, to restore the gas-electric car. The car was named a Historic Mechanical Engineering Landmark in 2003 by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. The

project is expected to cost \$300,000; volunteers are welcome to support the project and contributions are welcome at the museum’s website: midcontinent.org.

“Great Northern No. 2313 is already an important display piece, but we want to provide visitors with an immersive and moving experience that tells the story of railroad technology through the last century,” said Rusty Schramm, project manager. “We have recently undertaken repairs to the roof, radiator, control system, and fuel tank, but the antique Winton engine has not operated since 1987, and will be our first major undertaking.”

Restoration of the engine will be aided by a large supply of original Winton parts donated to the museum by the Sperry Rail Service when it was retiring its Winton-powered rail inspection cars. Many of these surplus parts have



The builder’s plate attached to Montana Western No. 31’s engine indicates it’s a Winton model 106 — a “straight-six” power plant.

never been installed in an engine, with some still in their original EMC packaging from the 1940s.

“A lot of places don’t have [a stock of original factory parts] and must take old parts and use them as a pattern,” explains Andy Spinelli, museum vice president. “It is hard to use a worn part as a pattern because you are guessing on tolerances.” Spinelli is optimistic that Mid-

Continent's EMC parts stock will see it through the restoration and into future maintenance needs once the motorcar is returned to operation.

Removing the in-line six-cylinder engine-generator assembly from the car was among the first major steps in the restoration. This unit was shipped to FMW's machine shop in Soddy-Daisy, Tenn., for work. Lifting the engine-generator from the car was accomplished in December 2023.

"As someone who has spent my career dedicated to the maintenance and preservation of EMD locomotives, having the chance to oversee the restoration of this historic engine is a distinct privilege," said FMW Senior Mechanical Associate and Winton Project Lead Allen Rider. "The engine-generator arrived at the FMW Tennessee machine shop earlier this month, and we will begin the initial disassembly and inspection in the coming weeks."

A formal restoration plan will be developed following that initial inspection and assessment.

"Our goal is to have her up and running in time for her centennial in 2025," Schramm said. "It's a worthwhile goal and achievable with donations and volunteer help." — *Trains staff*

T1 Trust advances to frame fabrication

New steam locomotive nearing 50% completion

THE PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD T1 STEAM LOCOMOTIVE project has begun fabricating the locomotive frame. The nonprofit group is working to build a new Pennsy 4-4-4-4 T1. The T1 Trust, in a Facebook post, announced it has selected the Dover Tank and Plate Co. of Dover, Ohio, to build the frame.

Originally, the Pennsylvania Railroad rostered 52 T1-class locomotives. They were designed for 100-mph passenger service with the plan to run them between Harrisburg, Pa., and Chicago. The T1s were built in two locations: 25 at the Penny's Altoona, Pa., shop, and 27 at the Baldwin Locomotive Works. All 52 were scrapped.

The original T1 frame was a one-piece casting with all four cylinders integral to the casting. The new frame will contain both fabricated and welded parts, says Jason Johnson, T1 Trust general manager. When completed, the frame will weigh nearly 70,000 pounds and measure more than 65 feet long.

The design and engineering phase of the frame construction has been completed at



In the April issue



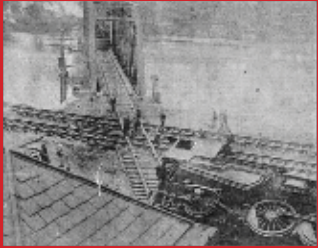
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Come for the trains, stay for the food and service

A quality railroad station restaurant is all about the details

▲ Once a Philadelphia & Reading passenger station, this beautifully restored building hosts the Tamaqua Station Restaurant. Inside are Reading photos and artifacts. Five photos, Brian Solomon

▼ Tamaqua Station Restaurant is tastefully decorated with classic railroad memorabilia, such as vintage lanterns.

I LIKE RAILROAD STATION RESTAURANTS,

especially those that thoroughly grasp their heritage, offer views of the tracks, and consistently provide great service and delicious food. Over the years, I've visited a great many, including traditional establishments in active railroad stations.

As a youngster, my father brought me to Grand Central's famous Oyster Bar; in my

Dublin days, I'd meet friends at Heuston Station's Galway Hooker (named for the traditional Irish fishing boat).

Old passenger stations can make ideal restaurant venues. These are well-constructed buildings with large rooms that are often centrally located and feature ample parking. Two of my favorite station restaurants offer examples of adaptive reuse of classic station buildings and embrace the heritage of the buildings and railroads they once served.

I've known the Lemothe family for many years. In 1987, they acquired the former Palmer, Mass., Union Station. In the early 2000s, they transformed it into a popular railroad-themed eatery called the Steaming Tender Restaurant.

The building was designed in the 1880s by the renowned American architect Henry Hobson Richardson, who drafted plans for many Boston & Albany stations. In its 19th-century heyday, Palmer Union Station served B&A and Central Vermont predecessor New London

Northern. The diagonal level crossing of these two lines is immediately west of the station and resulted in its trapezoidal floor plan. I'd been visiting the station since the early 1980s, and was delighted when the Lemothes opened the restaurant and restored the interior in its classic Richardsonian style.

Outside, a classic Porter-built 0-6-0 helps entice visitors, while Steaming Tender's interior decorations will captivate any railroad enthusiast. Perhaps also encouraging an interest in railroads for casual visitors.

The walls are decorated with period photos, timetables, and an array of railroad memorabilia, much of it relating to the B&A and New York Central. Wait staff are dressed in classic bib overalls. While they look the part and contribute to the railroad theme, I wouldn't quiz them on the nuances of how to work a 6 brake or the finer points of locomotive valve gear.

The Steaming Tender has a prime location for train-watching. In addition to CSX's Boston Subdivision (former B&A



main) and New England Central's ex-CV route, traffic includes Mass Central's local freights. With any luck, during the course of your meal, at least one train will pass your window (as of this writing, Amtrak No. 448 — the eastward *Lake Shore Limited* — should pass about 20 minutes after 6 p.m.). The menu has a wide variety of choices, including classic New England seafood. (I'm partial to both the Hopper Haddock and Clam Strip Express.) They also have a good choice of burgers and a variety of up-market entrées.

Another favorite railroad-themed eatery is Pennsylvania's Tamaqua Station Restaurant, situated in the 1874-built Philadelphia & Reading passenger station in the heart of eastern Pennsylvania anthracite country. This distinctive brick station was a replacement for an earlier wooden structure. Until 1930, it included a railroad restaurant for the benefit of the traveling public. Like Palmer, and so many stations across North America, in its heyday it was surrounded by gardens and a park. Tamaqua lost its regular passenger service decades ago, and the station fell into disrepair.

Although it was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1980, the station suffered from arson and was a sad ruin by the mid-1990s. Thanks to efforts by the non-profit group Tamaqua S.O.S. (Save Our Station), the building was rescued and ultimately restored, including recreation of a railroad park. The restaurant opened in 2016 and in 2023, Tamaqua was one of five noteworthy stations honored by a special block of stamps issued by the United States Postal Service.

Visitors to Tamaqua are likely to enjoy passing freights and the occasional excursion operated by Reading & Northern. If timed right, you might enjoy one of several annual steam trips powered by the restored former Reading 4-8-4 No. 2102. Tamaqua Station Restaurant is true to period interior décor and is decorated with photos and artifacts, among them Reading Co. lanterns on tables.

The food is delicious. On one recent visit I enjoyed a Reuben sandwich (with sauerkraut) and a Yuengling lager — a beer brewed locally in Pottsville, Pa. On another occasion, I was delighted to sample their interpretation of fish & chips — a classic meal that owes its lineage to the advent of the railroads in Britain and Ireland.

Great locations, railroad themes, and good food aside, the key to both these restaurants — and what distinguishes them from other similar establishments — is their great customer service and attention to detail.

Visit www.steamingtender.com or www.tamaquastation.com for more information. — *Brian Solomon*



Guests at Tamaqua Station Restaurant are treated to classic Victorian décor and may be seated in several areas of this restored 1874-built station. Make sure to bring your appetite along with you as you dine in style.



Steaming Tender Restaurant displays a variety of historic railroad artifacts in front of the entrance, including a wooden-bodied passenger car (peeking out on the left) that has been made available for group bookings.



Home to the popular Steaming Tender Restaurant, this 1880s-built station at Palmer, Mass., is an architectural gem. Classic railroad photos decorate the walls and the trains of four operators regularly pass outside.

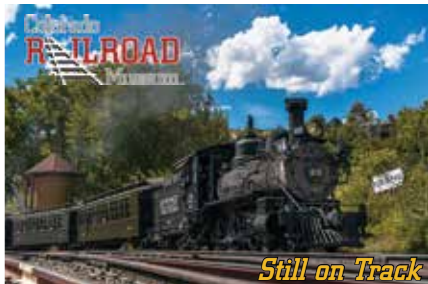
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www.facebook.com/theoldhotelothello 509-488-5936

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RAIL SHOWS AND EVENTS

MARCH 1-3, 2024: 34th Annual Hostlers Model Railroad Festival. Ogden Union Station, Historic 25th St. & Wall Ave., Ogden, UT. Friday 3:00pm-8:00pm; Saturday 9:00am-6:00pm; Sunday 9:30am-3:00pm. Admission: adults \$8, weekend pass \$12, 12 and under FREE. Layouts - all scales, many vendors, LEGO layout. Biggest train show in the Intermountain West. Information: 801-394-4952, 801-544-5749, www.hostlers.info

MARCH 2, 2024: PORTLAND, OR. Willamette Model Railroad Club Swap Meet. Kliever Armory, 10000 NE 33rd Dr., Portland, OR 97211. Sat. 9:00am-3:00pm. Admission: \$6.00 Adults, 12 & under free w/paid adult. Free Parking. Food available. Over 114 Tables, all gauges. 8-ft vendor tables: \$30/\$35. Website: wmrrc.com For Table Reservations contact: Roger Rees, wmrrcswapmeet@gmail.com, or 503-256-2248

MARCH 3, 2024: River City Modelers Spring Model Train Show. Spokane Fairgrounds, 404 N. Havana, Spokane, WA. 9:30am-3:30pm. Admission: adults \$8, 12 & under free. 200+ tables of Railroad-related items for sale, operating layouts, Free-MO, Operation Lifesaver & more. Free Parking. Table rental/general info, contact: Shirley Sample, 509-991-2317 or shirleysample13@gmail.com

MARCH 3, 2024: Jersey Central Train Show & Sale. Mother Seton Regional High School, 1 Valley Road, Clark, NJ 07066. Sunday, 9:00am-3:30pm. Admission: \$7, children under 12 free, \$14 family. Model trains, railroadiana, books, etc. Refreshments available. For information: Heinz Ricken, hricken@gmail.com, 908-272-3910, or Mitchell Dakelman, dakelmanm@aol.com, 908-208-2522

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APRIL 6-7, 2024: Lewis County Model Railroad Club, Annual Spring Train Show and Swap Meet. Southwest Washington Fair Grounds, Blue Pavilion Building, 2555 N. National Ave., Chehalis, WA. Saturday 10:00am-4:00pm, Sunday 10:00am-2:00pm. Admission \$5.00. Free parking. Information: Ted, 360-985-7788, or TedsTrains@LewisCounty.com

APRIL 6-7, 2024: Rocky Mountain Train Show. National Western Complex, 4655 Humboldt St., Denver, 80216. Saturday, 9:00am-5:00pm, Sunday 9:00am-4:00pm. 3 acres of model trains, all scales, 30 layouts, 700 sales tables, clinics and more. Admission \$14.00, under 12/scouts in uniform FREE. Free Parking. 303-364-0274

MAY 31-JUNE 1, 2024: Annual Johnson City, Tennessee, BIG TRAIN SHOW. Host: George L. Carter Railroad Museum. 64,000 sq.ft., 330+ tables. All scales, operating layouts, vendors, books, memorabilia, food. ETSU "Mini-Dome" Noon-6pm Friday, 10am-4pm Saturday. Admission: \$8/day, under 12 Free. Free covered parking. Contact Roger Teinert 423-791-4937 or www.etsu.edu/railroad

All listed events were confirmed as active at the time of press. Please contact event sponsor for current status of the event.

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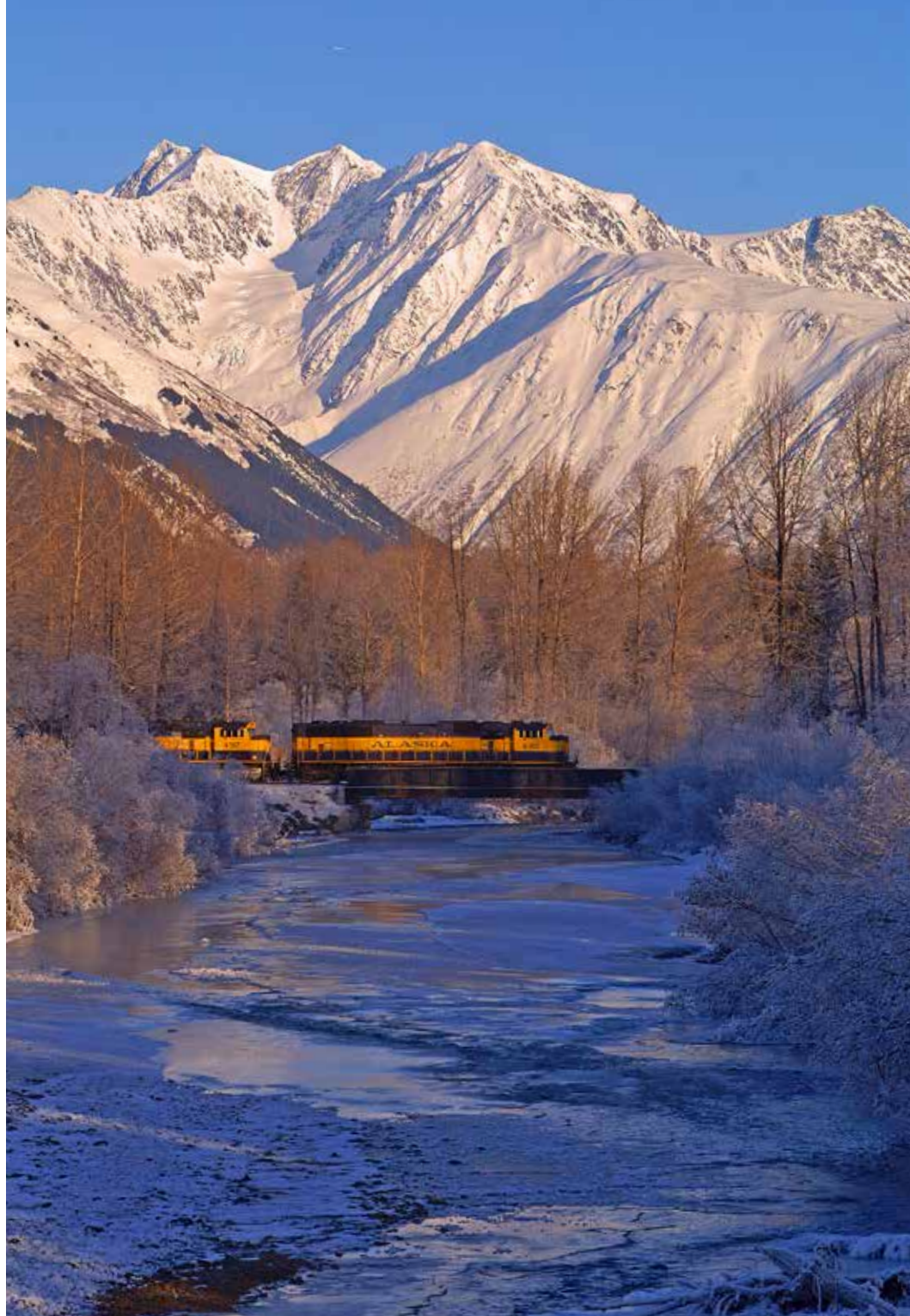
Above the mist

Norfolk Southern train No. 951 rolls above the fog on Nov. 12, 2011, over the Holston River at Strawberry Plains, Tenn., with a Lexington Group excursion. The trip began in Knoxville, Tenn., and is heading to Asheville, N.C. NS F9A No. 4270 is leading the train. Bryan Pleasant

Gold arches

The stone and concrete arches of the Rockville Bridge and the waters of the Susquehanna River reflect the sun's gold on May 31, 2012. Norfolk Southern C40-9W No. 9580, along with Union Pacific SD70M No. 5128 lead a stack train over the famous bridge 5 miles north of Harrisburg, Pa. Lewis Bogaty





Mount Alyeska

A pair of Alaska Railroad SD70MACs, with No. 4005 leading, crosses Glacier Creek below Mount Alyeska near Girdwood, Alaska. The train of coal loads rumbles below the snow-capped mountain on Jan. 14, 2011. Mount Alyeska towers 3,937 feet above the frozen creek. Frank Keller



Red, yellow, and green

The red of CPKC SD70ACUs Nos. 7056 and 7051 and the yellow of the auto rack block at the front of empty grain train No. 329-030 contrast with the green forest around the Little Pic River near Neys, Ontario, on Sept. 1, 2023. Size restrictions route the auto racks via Winnipeg, Manitoba, then south to the U.S. Chris Wilson

Over the flats

With the setting sun to the west, CSX northbound freight No. Q688 heads north across the Ohio River flood plain at Rahm, Ind. The train has just crossed over the five-span main bridge from Henderson, Ky., on Jan. 5, 2011.

Drew Mitchem





Over the bridge ...

and through the woods come a pair of Blue Ridge Southern EMD GP39-2s leading train No. T59. They'll snake their way west along Dark Ridge Road and across Dark Ridge Creek on the way into Sylvan, N.C., to work the Jackson Paper plant on Oct. 23, 2023. Travis Mackey



Mmm, grain


Although the rumble of Wisconsin & Southern SD40-2 No. 4219 might be disturbing to the Canada geese floating calmly near Lone Rock, Wis., they will tolerate the noise for some of the grain in the 40 trailing covered hoppers. It's Sept. 21, 2021, and local No. L724 is en route from Prairie Du Chien to Madison, Wis. Matt Krause

On other side

Framed by a through-truss road bridge at Cotton Hill, W.Va., in the New River Gorge, CSX Transportation AC4400CW No. 492 leads an eastbound coal train during August 2012.

Don Woods



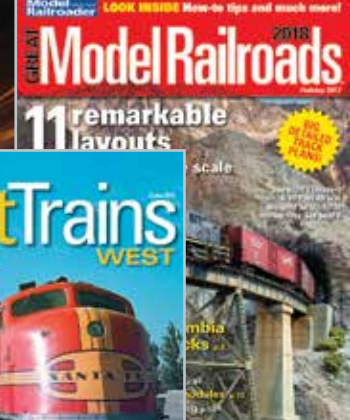
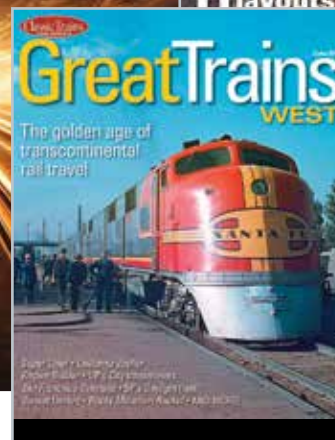


So high above

Almost soaring over Banklick Creek on Bridge 40 near Independence, Ky., CSX train No. Q217 is reflected in the still waters below. Kansas City Southern runthrough power in the form of SD70MAC No. 3968 leads the train, which is heading towards Louisville, Ky., on Aug. 23, 2017. Ryan Markham

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