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From the Editor

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Oddly, boosting passenger train speeds can be an extremely slow process.

Last year, for example, Illinois officials held a ceremony at Chicago Union Station to mark the start of 110 mph running on portions of Amtrak's Chicago-St. Louis corridor.

While that's modest when compared to true high-speed trains like Germany's Intercity Express 3 trains, which cruise along at 217 mph, it is at least a higher speed than before.

Good. We're making progress. Better still, the Federal Railroad Administration is eyeing plans for faster service on a number of corridors.

On page 20, author Greg Richardson lifts the curtain on the *25-year* journey to higher speed in Illinois. We need to move faster — in a lot of ways.

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Michigan Central Station celebrates revival

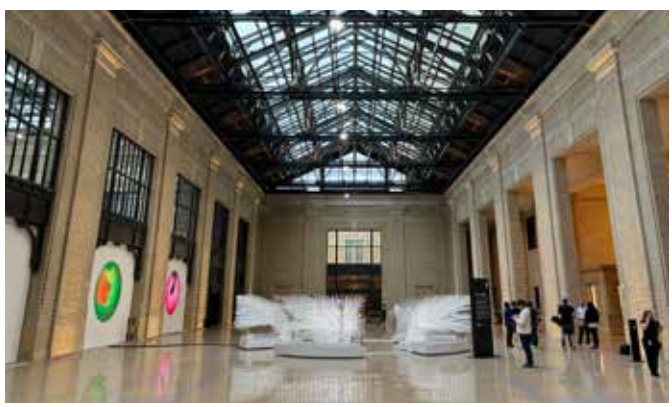
Concert, tours mark reopening of long-neglected Detroit landmark

▲ **Once emblematic of Detroit's decline, the restored Michigan Central Station is now a dramatic symbol of the city's revival.** Jason Keen/Michigan Central

THE CITY OF DETROIT has seen its share of comebacks over the past 20 years, but nothing quite like what it experienced beginning June 6 as it celebrated the grand opening of the renovated Michigan Central Station, the beneficiary of hundreds of millions of dollars in investment by its new owner, Ford Motor Co.

The massive edifice, built in 1913 by the Michigan Central Railroad and a potent symbol of that company's wealth and power, is now the cornerstone of what Ford is calling its innovation center: headquarters of the company's Ford Model e and Ford Integration Services teams, as well as other initiatives focused on transportation's future. Tens of thousands took part in 10 days of free tours, scheduled to resume this fall when commercial activity at the facility begins.

The open house was preceded by a Thursday night gala concert in front of the station, co-produced by the hip-hop icon Eminem and featuring the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Diana Ross, Jack White, the rapper Common, Melissa Etheridge, and a host of other music stars associated with the city. Free tickets for the massive concert were gobbled up within 15 minutes, and 15,000 music fans were treated to the sight of their hometown stars performing in front of the Beaux Arts façade of a 111-year-old train station.



New glass is noticeable in the station's airy south concourse, which now features art installations. Two photos, Kevin P. Keefe

The station's opening also brings fresh momentum to the re-emergence of Corktown, the working-class, originally Irish community surrounding the depot southwest of downtown.

Michigan Central's new role on the cutting edge of automotive and transportation technology is the vision of Bill (William Clay) Ford Jr., executive chair of the company that bears his name. His love of Detroit and his ties to its history — he is the great-grandson of both Henry Ford I and Harvey S. Firestone — makes the station's revival a personal quest.

"Michigan Central means a great deal to us all," Ford said in a statement. "In many ways, this building tells the story of our city. This station was our Ellis Island, a place where dreamers in search of new jobs and new opportunities first set foot in Detroit. But once the last train pulled out, it became a place where hope left. In 2018, I decided it was time to change that by reimagining this station as a place of possibility again."

That "last train" pulled out in January 1988, when Amtrak moved to smaller facilities in Detroit and terminated all its Detroit-Chicago *Wolverine* service trains at Pontiac, northwest of Detroit. A succession of unsuccessful revival plans led to the sale of Michigan Central in 1995 to the late Manuel Moroun, the mercurial trucking magnate whose company, CenTra Inc., owns the nearby Ambassador Bridge to Canada.

Ford bought the station from Moroun in 2018 after several other unsuccessful revival efforts. What Ford inherited was a veritable ruin of a building, marked by broken stone and plaster, pilfered architectural details, a bonanza of graffiti, acres of broken glass, and the detritus of several years of neglect. In a city unfortunately saddled with its status as a destination for "ruin porn," Michigan Central was exhibit A.

How things have changed. Visitors for the grand opening were treated to a stunning example of what can be accomplished with historical vision, ample financing, and advanced construction and restoration technology. The gleaming interior reflected meticulous restoration, from the waiting room's vaulted 54-foot Guastavino tile ceiling to several massive chandeliers to sparkling new glass in hundreds of windows, especially noticeable in the skylit south concourse.

In renovating Michigan Central, Ford enlisted an army of consultants, designers, community leaders, and more than 3,000 skilled tradespeople, transforming the neglected building and its grounds. It's hard to imagine another major American railroad terminal that had fallen as far into disrepair as Michigan Central, only to come back better than ever.

The station's imposing ticket lobby — now styled the Great Hall by the new owners— features a meticulous recreation of its original clock.

To replace broken and vandalized surfaces, Ford reopened the same southern Indiana quarry MCRR used in 1913 to provide hundreds of tons of limestone. In other parts of the station, artistic details such as doorway friezes and ornamental cartouches were re-created by teams of artisans. Some items were replicated from samples people "liberated" from the building during its lost years and brought back to help with the effort.

Michigan Central originally was designed by two firms whose reputations in the early 20th century were unassailable: Reed & Stem, famous for NYC's Grand Central Terminal, and Warren & Wetmore, known for its luxury hotels as well as the New York Central Building (now the Helmsley Building) on Park Avenue. That partnership is reflected in the unusual dual appearance of the building, with its flamboyant Beaux Arts main floor — the actual train station, with its huge waiting room and spacious concourse — backed up by a much more sedate 17-story office tower. When it opened, it was called the tallest railway station in the world.

The station also told the world of the importance of the Michigan Central Railroad. Driven largely by 19th-century Boston and New York investors, the MCRR consolidated in the 1860s and '70s to become one of the nation's most powerful railroads, and Detroit was its headquarters. It later came into the orbit of the Vanderbilt interests and the New York Central, which began leasing the MCRR in 1930. Decades later, even in the early Amtrak era, passenger crews often sported "MCRR" lapel pins.

The station's heyday was around 1929, when more than 90 arrivals and departures used the station's 18-track trainshed. Some of those trains were blue chip: the New York–Chicago *Wolverine*, the Detroit–Chicago and Detroit-Cleveland *Mercury*, and the nightly *Twilight Limited*, which through the 1930s boasted an extra-fare, parlor-car-only consist. Lucius Beebe said the train "was perfumed with folded money."

For the moment, Michigan Central (as the Ford entity controlling the station is called) has no plans to return passenger service to the building. The former trainshed area is destined to become an 8-acre park. There is still room for a platform and perhaps a stub track adjacent to the CPKC main line, but access would have to be from a separate building. Michigan Central representative Melissa Ditmer says, "We are working with the city of Detroit, state of Michigan, and Amtrak to study bringing passenger rail back to the station." There is nothing concrete at this point, she says, "but we are optimistic." — *Kevin P. Keefe and Bob Johnston*

National Transportation Safety Board Chair Jennifer Homendy listens during a June 25 meeting in East Palestine, Ohio, for the final report on the Norfolk Southern derailment there. Sol S. Tucker

Vent and burn at East Palestine was not needed, NTSB concludes

Agency also criticizes Norfolk Southern response

THE RELEASE AND BURNING of vinyl chloride from five derailed tank cars — which sent a towering and toxic black plume over East Palestine, Ohio, in February 2023 — was not necessary, the National Transportation Board concluded in its final report on the disastrous Norfolk Southern wreck that put a spotlight on rail safety.

The tank cars were among the 38 cars of NS train 32N that derailed on Feb. 3, 2023, after the catastrophic failure of a wheel bearing on a covered hopper. The bearing was on fire but did not trigger critical alarms at two hot-bearing detectors the train passed before reaching East Palestine, where a detector alert sounded just moments before derailment.

The wreck led to a fire that likely began with release of a flammable liquid from a punctured DOT-111 tank car. It left a 1,100-foot trail of butyl acrylates along the track, which ignited around cars in the pileup.

The NTSB identified two factors that contributed to the severity of the hazardous materials release. One was continued use of DOT-111 tank cars in hazmat service, despite decades of concern over their tendency to breach during derailments. The second was the decision to vent and burn the DOT-105 tank cars carrying vinyl chloride monomer, a key ingredient in PVC. The NTSB said NS and its contractors provided incomplete and inaccurate information to the incident commander, which created an "unwarranted sense of urgency and incorrectly represented the tank cars as at risk of failure from a polymerization reaction."

NS feared a chemical chain reaction would lead to an explosion that would send hazardous materials and shrapnel through the town on the Ohio-Pennsylvania border. But the NTSB's investigation found no evidence that a polymerization reaction was under way before the Feb. 6 vent and burn.

NS disagreed with the NTSB. "After carefully considering all alternatives, Norfolk Southern and its specialist contractors recommended a controlled vent and burn to the Unified Command as the only option to protect the community from a potential catastrophic explosion."

The board also said that NS's delay in transmitting train consist data to emergency responders, along with Ohio's insufficient training standards for volunteer firefighters, contributed to "unnecessary and increased" public and first-responder exposure to hazardous materials.

> **INCORRECT INFORMATION ERRONEOUSLY "REPRESENTED THE TANK CARS AS AT RISK OF FAILURE FROM A POLYMERIZATION REACTION."**
> — NTSB ON EAST PALESTINE DERAILMENT

The NTSB made 31 new safety recommendations. They cover improving the detection of overheated wheel bearings, providing first responders with better training and hazardous materials information, implementing tougher tank car standards and accelerating the phaseout of DOT-111 cars in hazmat service before the current 2029 deadline, as well as tightening operational restrictions on trains carrying hazmat loads.

The board asked the Federal Railroad Administration to research hot-bearing detectors and use the data to establish the first minimum requirements for hotbox temperature and alarm thresholds, the spacing of wayside detectors, and their installation and maintenance. Since the wreck, railroads have been adding detectors in order to reduce spacing to an average of 15 miles. Wheel bearing failures cause an average of 17 mainline derailments per year.

The recommendations prompted a flurry of responses from the rail industry, lawmakers, and union leaders.

NS said it has already implemented many of the recommendations. "We resolved not to wait for the NTSB's final report before taking decisive action," John Fleps, NS chief safety officer, said in a statement.

The Association of American Railroads said the industry will learn from the NTSB report. Since the NTSB released its preliminary findings last year, railroads have taken steps that bolster safety, the AAR says. Among them: A multipronged approach to enhance the effectiveness of wayside detectors, improve first responder preparedness, and address tank car standards.

Ohio's two U.S. senators — Republican J.D. Vance and Democrat Sherrod Brown — said the NTSB report demonstrated the need for Congress to pass their bipartisan Rail Safety Act. The measure has languished in committee since its introduction last year.

Rail labor leaders claimed the findings confirmed widespread safety problems workers have complained about for years.

At the conclusion of the NTSB's June 25 hearing in East Palestine, Homendy sharply criticized NS's response to the board's investigation. She said NS stonewalled board requests for information, ran its own probe on the side in violation of NTSB rules, and sought to influence the board's independent investigation. The conduct, she said, was "unprecedented and reprehensible."

NS insisted that it fully cooperated with the investigation. Still to come from NTSB: A separate assessment of Norfolk Southern's safety culture. — *Bill Stephens*

A westbound Union Pacific stack train meets an eastbound merchandise train at La Fox, Ill., on May 31, 2024. David Lassen

Study says longer trains have greater likelihood of derailment

Methodology and conclusions of report by researchers at three universities are questioned by some experts

A NEW STUDY CONCLUDES a 200-car freight train is 24% more likely to derail than one with 50 cars, but some experts question the study's methodology and conclusions.

The paper, "The relationship between freight train length and the risk of derailment," by researchers from Brigham Young University, Georgetown University, and Virginia Tech, was published in the journal *Risk Analysis*. It analyzed Federal Railroad Administration rail accident data from 2013 through 2022.

The researchers then estimated derailment risk while taking into account the reduced overall accident risk that comes from running fewer but longer trains. They concluded that, compared to a 50-car train, a 100-car train has an 11% higher risk of derailment and that the odds of a wreck rise as the number of cars in a train increases.

"Understanding derailment risk is an important component for evaluating the overall safety of the rail system and for the future development and regulation of freight rail transportation," the study's authors said. "Given the limitations of the current data on freight train length, this study provides an important step toward such an understanding."

The authors, Peter Madsen and Joseph Bradley of BYU, Robin Dillon of Georgetown, and Konstantinos Triantis of Virginia Tech, said elected officials and regulators should take into account more factors than derailment risk. The use of longer trains is a complex and multifaceted issue, they noted.

"Longer freight trains have many significant benefits for the rail system relative to shorter freight trains, including greater fuel efficiency, lower emissions per ton transported, and lower operational costs than both shorter trains and many other forms of transportation," they wrote. "The operation of longer freight trains also comes with costs such as increased wait times at railroad grade crossings for road vehicles."

The researchers noted the major challenge in examining the issue is the lack of information on the length of trains not involved in accidents. To get around this, they derived estimates using a technique that highway accident researchers rely upon. It is the first time this technique has been used to study rail accidents, they wrote.

Gary Wolf, a prominent derailment investigator, says the study lacks credibility because it does not factor out derailments that have nothing to do with train length, such as certain mechanical or track problems. Conversely, it doesn't delve into derailment risk from causes that can stem from train length, including air brake issues, poor train handling, slack action, or broken knuckles.

A definitive study, he says, would involve sorting through accident reports, finding causes related to train length, and then comparing 100-car trains to 200-car trains, for example. Derailment of a long train, he says, may have nothing to do with train length.

Christopher P.L. Barkan, professor and director of the Rail Transportation and Engineering Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, has questions about the study's methodology.

FRA derailment data measures train length by the number of cars, rather than linear feet, he notes. The study's authors attempt to overcome this by assuming an average car length. But train length can vary widely when measured by number of cars. A 50-car unit train of hoppers, Barkan says, will be roughly one-fifth the length of a 50-car train of five-unit articulated well cars. Treating these as equivalent in terms of train dynamics neglects some important factors that could affect derailment likelihood, Barkan says.

The Association of American Railroads also has concerns about the technique used to calculate derailment rates.

"Since train traffic data is not available publicly, the study used a questionable statistical method that might be acceptable for a route or corridor analysis where the distribution of trains with different lengths can be validated visually. Using the method for a network-wide analysis is stretching the validity of both the input data and conclusions of the study," spokeswoman Jessica Kahanek says.

Nashville-bound CSX Transportation freight M582 passes former Seaboard Air Line passenger and freight depots in Chester, S.C., on July 23, 2023. Travis Mackey

The study's conclusions did not surprise Greg Regan, president of the Transportation Trades Division of the AFL-CIO.

"Unfortunately, rail workers are all too familiar with the dangers posed by long, heavy trains," he says. "Currently, there is no maximum train length established by federal law. … As freight rail companies increasingly operate longer trains, we are eager to see increased federal regulation of train length, weight, and composition to improve safety for all." — *Bill Stephens*

Norfolk Southern, short lines see success with joint program

Short Line Performance Project aims to improve reliability of interchange with smaller railroads

NORFOLK SOUTHERN and 40 of its shortline connections have produced outsized growth in carload traffic this year through a program that aims to improve interchange consistency and reliability.

The Short Line Performance Project, which began as a pilot with a handful of railroads last July, saw interchange volume grow 9% from March through May. That stands out from Norfolk Southern's overall merchandise volume, which was flat for the year and up 3% in the second quarter through May. And it's well above the railroad's 5% volume growth with all shortline connections.

The program is proof that carload volume can grow when railroads provide good service and communication, says Stefan Loeb, NS vice president of business development and first and final-mile markets.

Short lines are important to NS: Roughly 40% of its carload traffic originates or terminates on a connecting short line. "If you can put visibility and data and communication around interchanges to improve their effectiveness and performance, you're going to grow with your shortline partners," says Loeb, who joined NS last year after serving as chief commercial officer at shortline holding company Watco.

Traditionally, NS and its shortline connections haven't measured interchange performance the same way. Plus, there were data gaps. No one at NS had the responsibility for monitoring shortline interchange service. And shortline service complaints went into the same hopper as everyone else's, which delayed responses.

The NS First and Final Markets team set out to change that by creating a program that aims to put out service fires — and prevent them from happening in the first place.

The first step: Establish a way to provide visibility and feedback on interchanges. NS and participating short lines use a spreadsheet to track interchange performance. On one side, NS gives its view on what service was performed the previous day. On the other, the short line lets NS know how the interchange went. If the views don't match, it gets flagged for resolution.

The second step: Establish real-time communication channels so the railroads can quickly solve service problems. NS and the participating railroads collaborate using Microsoft Teams, which permits chats between short lines and the First and Final Markets group.

"And that goes beyond 'Hey, we need you to deliver cars, we need you to pull cars,'" says Alex McNeil, director of shortline performance and marketing. If a car physically made the interchange but its electronic data did not get exchanged, for example, the short line can use Teams to request that NS resend the information.

"In the past, that was something that went into a queue sent amongst the rest of all the other requests that came into NS, specifically on the customer side, and just in many ways had the potential to die on the vine," McNeil says.

Now NS can quickly address service problems before they stack up. "In the past without anybody really watching service, one missed day could turn into two, two could turn into three," McNeil says.

The participating short lines are scattered around the NS network, across a range of carload and bulk commodities, and range in their weekly interchange volume. The common thread: They have strong growth prospects. The railroad aims to bring more short lines into the program. And some may drop out once their interchange performance is running consistently over the longer term.

Shortline executives from Genesee & Wyoming, OmniTRAX, and Watco praise the program, which they say is unique among the Class I systems. — *Bill Stephens*

NEWS BRIEFS

Supreme Court to review Uinta Basin decision

THE U.S. SUPREME COURT will review an appeals court decision blocking construction of the **UINTA BASIN RAILWAY,** the planned 88-mile line in eastern Utah to transport crude oil to a connection with Union Pacific. The **U.S. COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA** struck down **SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD** approval of the line last year, saying the STB failed to consider the larger environmental impacts of drilling for and refining the oil. But the **SEVEN COUNTY INFRASTRUCTURE COALITION**, the government agency backing the project, says courts have split on the question of considering such downstream impacts and asked the Supreme Court to determine whether regulators are required to do so.

A federal judge ordered **BNSF RAILWAY** to pay Washington state's **SWINOMISH INDIAN TRIBAL COMMUNITY** $394.5 million for violating a 1991 operating agreement by sending 100-car crude-oil trains across a strip of tribal land en route to refining in Anacortes, Wash. The figure is the amount U.S. District Judge Robert Lasnik says represented BNSF's profits from more than 266,000 railcars of crude that trespassed on Swinomish land between September 2012 and May 2021.

JAMES E. STRATES SHOWS and **CSX TRANSPORTATION** reached an agreement allowing the Strates Fair Train to mark the centennial of its relationship with the **ERIE COUNTY FAIR** in Hamburg, N.Y., the first move for the carnival train since 2019. CSX agreed to move the Strates cars to Buffalo in regular service; from there, short line **BUFFALO SOUTHERN** will handle the train to Hamburg for unloading near the fairgrounds. Straits, which had put its railcar fleet up for sale, now intends to keep some equipment for future use.

Fixes

In the August 2024 issue: On page 7, the new independent chair of the Norfolk Southern board of directors was incorrectly identified. It is Claude Mongeau, who was already a member of the NS board.

A train with no name is just not the same

Named passenger trains connect past and present

Bill Stephens
bybillstephens@gmail.com
Analysis: Trains.com

With the world changing at an accelerating pace, there's something comforting about standing on a station platform, putting your foot on the standard Amtrak-issue yellow step stool, and climbing aboard a train. Not any old train, mind you, but a passenger train with a name.

A train that carries a name has a certain cachet lacking on trains — and flights, for that matter — that are identified only by number. Today it's the Boston section of Amtrak's westbound *Lake Shore Limited*, which squeals to a stop at Union Station in Springfield, Mass., at 3:19 p.m.

Moments before you board a random thunderclap booms overhead. You're due to step off coach No. 25124 at 11:23 p.m. in Rochester, N.Y., where the next day Genesee & Wyoming will celebrate the 125th anniversary of its namesake short line.

Like G&W's original salt-hauling railroad, train names endure and even span centuries. You could have boarded Amtrak's first *Lake Shore Limited* on Halloween in 1975 — and every year since. Of course, the name itself is a revival of the original New York Central *Lake Shore Limited* that began running between Chicago and New York on May 30, 1897.

The fact that you've ridden the *Lake Shore* many times enters your mind as the train eases out of Union Station three minutes early. Those memories will have to wait because the present demands your attention: The thunder was a harbinger.

Amtrak's *Lake Shore Limited* pulls in to Union Station in Springfield, Mass., on May 8, 2024. Bill Stephens

Just past CSX's West Springfield Yard, torrential rain comes down, followed by hail bigger than marbles. Up on the point, well-worn Amtrak veteran P42s No. 115 and No. 111 shrug it off. The deluge pelts the coach windows as CSX hoists a flood warning between mileposts 115 and 126 of its Berkshire Subdivision. By the time you reach the warning area, the sun is breaking through and neither the West Branch of the Westfield River nor its tributaries pose any risk of washouts at the base of Washington Hill.

With the threat past, the only flood comes from your memories of trips on named trains. And it dawns on you that you can remember every one of them. Ask me to call up a memory from a trip on a nameless train and you'll get a blank stare. But named trains? They're different.

Some trips included firsts, like the snug Slumbercoach accommodations on the westbound *Lake Shore*, followed by the flying sensation you experience from your seat in the *Southwest Chief*'s Sightseer Lounge en route to Kansas City. That trip, which began in the wee hours of April 2, 1995, at the Buffalo-Depew, N.Y., station, was an oddity. It was the night of the spring ahead to Daylight Saving Time. So the *Lake Shore* cooled its heels for an hour in Buffalo so it could maintain its published schedule at upcoming stations.

There were humorous episodes, like the time you boarded the *Lake Shore* in Grand Central Terminal, made your way to your sleeping car, pulled back the curtain, and were surprised to find an attractive blonde woman occupying your roomette. Somehow, the roomette had been double booked. Since she's only going as far as Albany, the car attendant sends her to coach.

Later, the Hudson River blurs by while you're seated in the dining car with a couple of British blokes. They're typical Brit hilarious, but they find nothing funny about their New York strip steak. One breaks his plastic knife while trying to cut through the overcooked slab of beef.

There have been family trips, too. Taking the *Lake Shore* from Buffalo to Springfield to avoid the hassle of driving through a New England snowstorm; opening the adjoining sleeper bedrooms on the *Lake Shore* and *California Zephyr* by day on a trip to Colorado with my in-laws; and a freezing trek home for Christmas on a snow-covered *Maple Leaf*.

Even work trips have been memorable. There's no better desk than a business class seat on the *Vermonter*, where you glance out at Long Island Sound, sip wine, and snack on cheese and crackers while cranking out a the sidebar to a *Trains* feature.

Workaday numbered trains come and go rather anonymously. But named trains provide a sense of continuity, a connection to your own past, and evoke the rich history of railroading. ⊥

Jersey-style

Heritage locomotive wraps and special paint schemes abound on NJ Transit

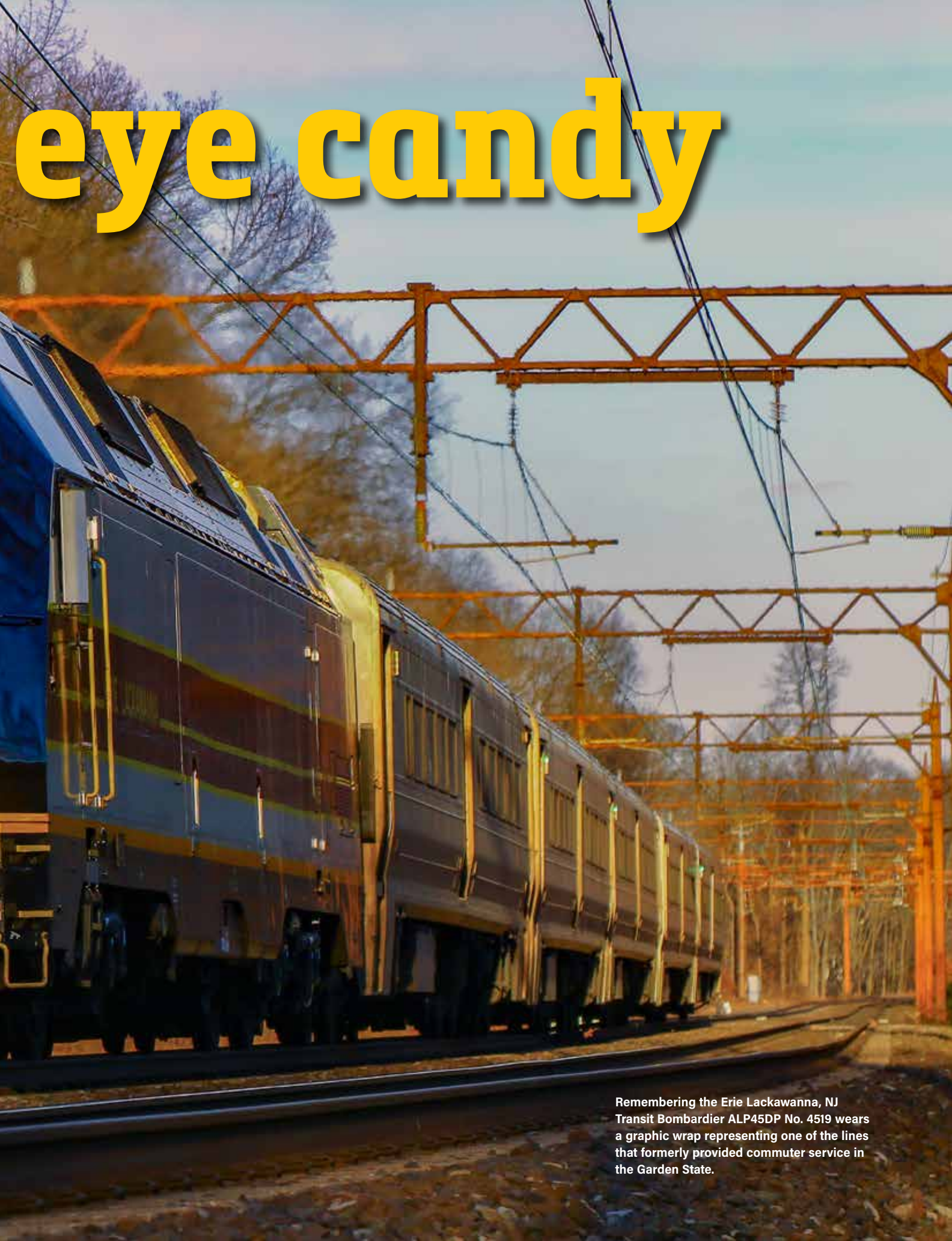
Story and photos by Bob Bahrs

Norfolk Southern created a wave of excitement in 2012 by painting 20 locomotives with fantastic heritage schemes. NS displayed the units at the North Carolina Transportation Museum in Spencer on July 3 and 4 that year, creating an amazing visual display. The NS heritage units are still roaming its system, having the desired positive effect, and being photographed nationwide.

During a conversation of what New Jersey Transit could do to celebrate the 40th anniversary of its rail operations (1983-2023), a few railfan-cognizant employees mentioned the idea of developing heritage units to Ray Kenny, then head of NJ Transit Rail Operations. Kenny, appreciative of the enthusiast community, gave the idea positive consideration. Another executive, formerly with Union Pacific and aware of the value of its heritage units, also warmed to the idea. Needless to say, when people at the top like suggestions, they have a way of happening.

Let's explore some NJ Transit's present locomotives wearing graphic wraps, or special paint schemes, and when and why they came to fruition.

eye candy



Remembering the Erie Lackawanna, NJ Transit Bombardier ALP45DP No. 4519 wears a graphic wrap representing one of the lines that formerly provided commuter service in the Garden State.

▲ Thank you for your service

With so many veterans working for NJ Transit, one of the first additions to any locomotive in recent years was the placement of a large banner saluting military service on six units. The decal, seen on Bombardier ALP46s Nos. 4635, 4641, 4645, 4659, states: "NJ Transit salutes our Military Members and Veterans." A similar banner was placed on ALP45s Nos. 4507 and 4534. One additional ALP45, No. 4518, wears a similar banner saluting all five military branches.

▶ The real model

During 2024, the Atlas Model Railroad Co. of Hillside, N.J., is celebrating its 100th anniversary. Atlas, which has models of NJ Transit equipment in its catalog, sponsored a locomotive wrap promoting the occasion. ALP45 No. 4503 is wrapped in a red, white, and black scheme with the Atlas logo and slogans. For modelers, Atlas made versions of the locomotive in HO and N scales.

The horizontal speed blur

Two units, GP40s Nos. 4205 and 4213, have worn a horizontal speed-blur decal since 2009. The design stems from a light rebuild, which included a new paint job, at American Motive Power in Dansville, N.Y. These were the only two locomotives sent to AMP at the time, and the only ones wearing this variation of the speed-blur scheme.

The big wrapper

ALL THE WRAPS AND BANNERS applied to NJ Transit locomotives come from Reidler Railroad Graphics, one of the oldest and largest producers of U.S. railroad graphics. The company is a third-generation, family-owned business. It's 60,000 square-foot headquarters is located in a new building on former Reading Co. property in St Clair, Pa.

The wrapped and specially painted locomotives are eye catchers to the public standing trackside, and a real treat for photographers striving to capture something different on the commuter line's 460 route miles. There are many additional ideas from employees and rail enthusiasts for new designs. Economics will play a big part in what is to come, but it's nice to know that the NJ Transit train arriving at any station, on any given morning, might not be pulled by a standard-looking locomotive, but rather some nice eye candy.

More of Bob Bahr's New Jersey Transit wrapped and heritage locomotive photos appear on Trains.com.

The big anniversary

In 1979 the New Jersey Transit Corp. was formed. To celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2019, three specially wrapped or painted locomotives were presented. The newer smooth-sided ALP46s and dual-mode ALP45s lend themselves nicely to a wrap, whereas the older GP units, with so many doors down both sides, do not. To showcase New Jersey's commuter roots, ALP No. 4519 received a full gray, maroon, and yellow Erie Lackawanna wrap; ALP No. 4636 received a Pennsylvania Railroad-inspired cat-whisker, pin stripe wrap in Tuscan Red and gold; and ex-Central of New Jersey GP40PH2 No. 4109 was repainted into previously worn CNJ blue. All three units debuted in fall 2019 at an employee open house at the Meadows Maintenance Complex located in Kearny, N.J.


C N J
4109

Army, Navy, et al.

In 2021, the annual Army-Navy football game was played at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey's Meadowlands. To honor the contest, ALP45 No. 4502 received a special wrap honoring the armed services. The unit features a beautiful two-tone blue paint job with lettering on both sides stating: "NJ Transit salutes our armed forces." Each side is arranged differently, but with the same elements — an artist's rendition of a waving U.S. flag, circular shields honoring all six services, and a large Bald Eagle bust. One could call this the "screaming eagle" unit considering the front-end graphics featuring a large Bald Eagle, wings spread, with talons pitched as if it were flying right off the nose. In addition to this graphic display, seven additional ALP45s received special side banners — No. 4500 honors the Space Force, No. 4501 Army, No. 4504 Marines, No. 4510 Navy, No. 4511 Coast Guard, and No. 4523 Air Force. No. 4533 received a graphic banner similar to the military units, but saluting First Responders.

Pride and more heritage

Since the 2021 Army-Navy game, several additional locomotive schemes have debuted. The Hackensack Medical Center sponsored a "Ride with Pride" wrap for ALP46 No. 4609. NJ Transit then produced their own heritage unit by painting ex-CNJ GP40PH-2 No. 4101 into a scheme it once wore under the New Jersey Department of Transportation, NJ Transit's predecessor agency. In the early 1990s, all 13 ex-CNJ GP40PH-2s went Conrail's Altoona, Pa., shops for rebuilding. Only No. 4101 retained its original number in the process; it was also one of only four units to ever wear this early NJ DOT paint. The retro look is as authentic as possible with this locomotive.

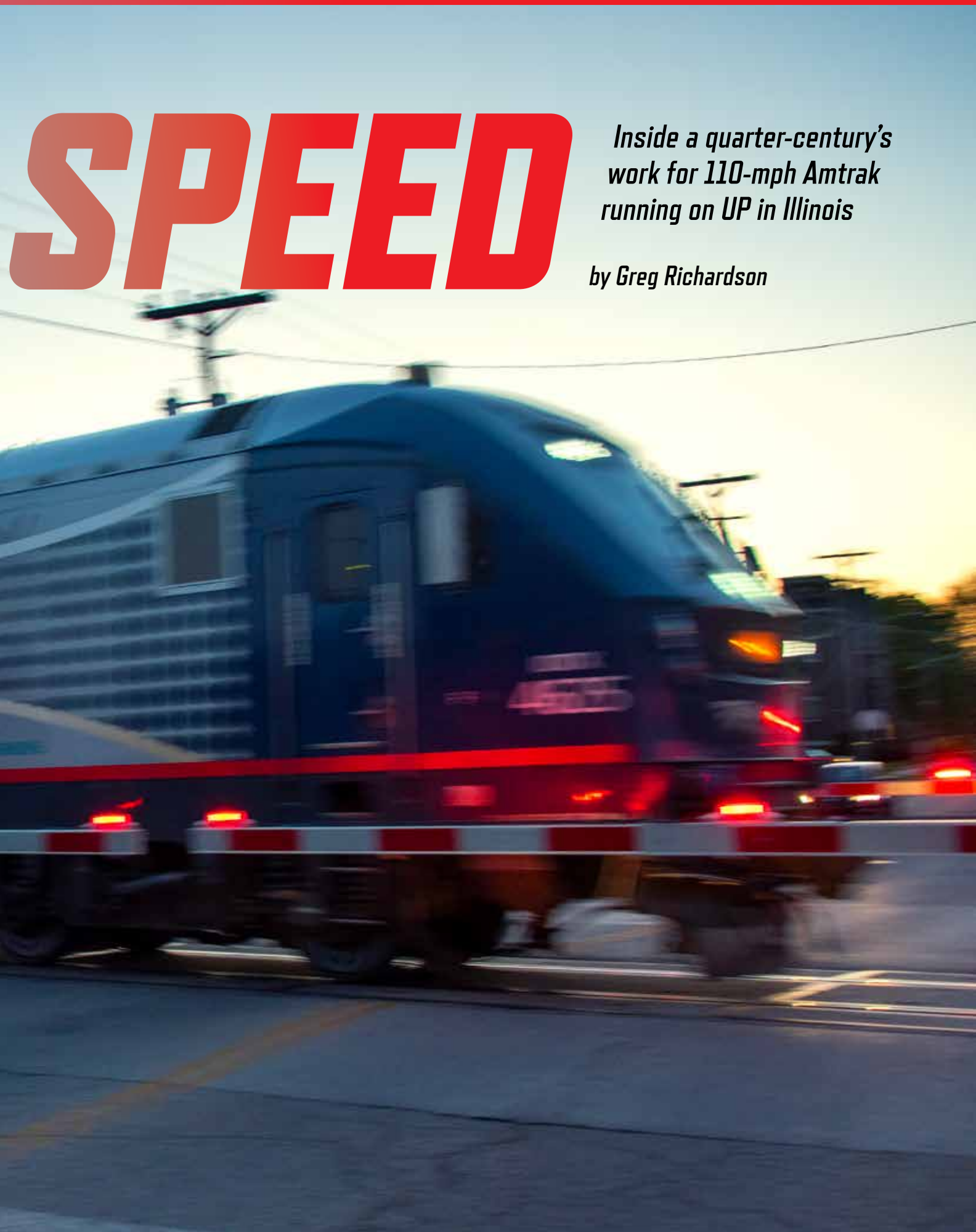
A SLOW PATH TO HIGHER

Siemens SC44 Charger No. 4625 powers Amtrak *Lincoln Service* train No. 304 across Race Street in Atlanta, Ill., on April 30, 2023, three days before the May 3 start of 110-mph operation. Steve Smedley

SPEED

Inside a quarter-century's work for 110-mph Amtrak running on UP in Illinois

by Greg Richardson



small ceremony at Chicago Union Station on June 26, 2023, marked Amtrak's change to schedules incorporating 110-mph speed limits on portions of its Chicago-St. Louis route. The ceremony, led by Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, included current and former politicians, and representatives from Amtrak, the Federal Railroad Administration, Illinois Department of Transportation, and Union Pacific.

Those on hand were likely unaware of the long journey to the event, but for me, it was the culmination of 25 years of professional involvement in the effort to bring the line 110-mph operations, primarily related to signal and train control implementation.

PHASE 1 THE NORTH AMERICAN JOINT POSITIVE TRAIN CONTROL PROJECT

In April 1998, I joined Arinc, Inc., as a member of an engineering team consulting with railroads on communications, dispatching systems, and train control. In fall 1998, my boss said what turned out to be the most significant words of my career: *"I see positive train control in your future!"*

I was assigned to two projects. One was sponsored by Norfolk Southern, CSX, and Conrail to evaluate how different positive train control systems developed by each railroad could be utilized on the others' lines — an initial foray into "interoperability."

Then there was the "North American Joint Positive Train Control" project. This ambitiously named effort of the Association of American Railroads, FRA, and Illinois DOT sought to develop and implement PTC technology on a portion of UP's newly acquired Chicago-St. Louis route via Springfield, Ill. Each stakeholder contributed to a total budget of $60 million. A committee with representatives from each of the Class I railroads, Amtrak, FRA, and IDOT was formed to guide program policy. The engineering team to which I was assigned was to develop system specifications and oversee all technical aspects.

Several safety objectives traditionally associated with PTC were in the scope of the project: prevention of train-to-train collisions; prevention of overspeed derailments by enforcement of speed restrictions, including civil speed limits and temporary slow orders; and protection for roadway workers and their equipment within the limits of specific authorities. Additionally, the system was to provide for communications-based advance activation of highway crossing warning systems, and to demonstrate a "flexible" or "moving-block" operation. This allows train movement without the constraint of traditional fixed signal blocks, theoretically increasing line capacity.

The system was to be designed around a "PTC Office Server" which served as its centralized "brain." This processed inputs from UP's dispatching system, wayside signals, and PTC-equipped locomotives, tracking the location and operational state of each train. It then was supposed to compute and communicate non-overlapping authority and speed limits back to the PTC-equipped locomotives. The test territory for the system was between Mazonia and Ridgely tower, just north of Springfield.

Another objective was to achieve FRA approval for the new PTC system through a regulatory protocol then under development. Signal and train control regulations, largely codified in Title 49 Part 236 of the Code of Federal Regulations, subparts A through G, were generally prescriptive and written around legacy relay and electromechanical systems. They did not apply well to "new and novel" processor-based train control technology, and it would have been difficult or even impossible to certify such technology. This system was to be the first through this new wringer, performance-based regulations ultimately published in 2005 as subpart H.

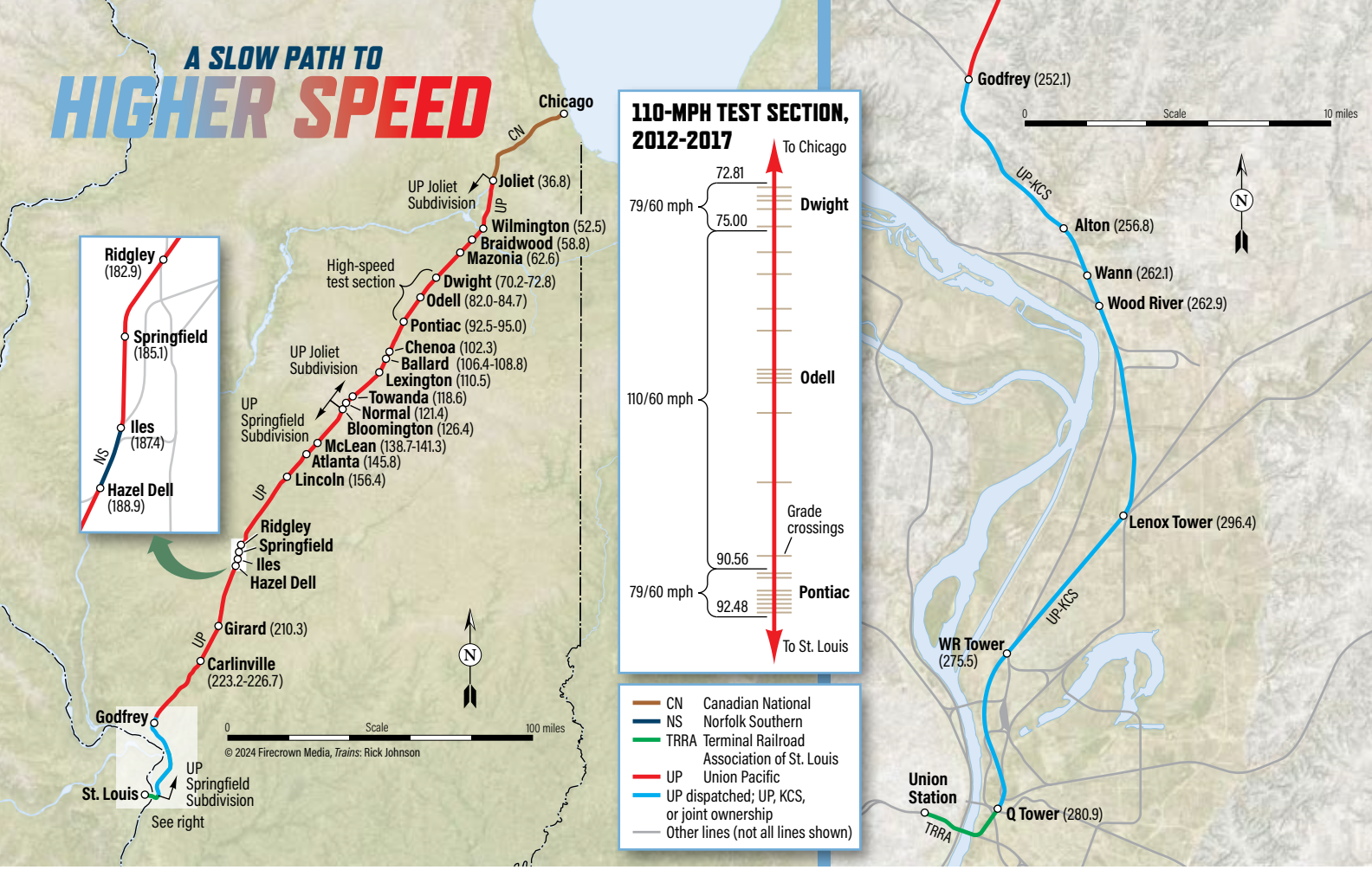
Amtrak and Union Pacific personnel look over a switch at Ballard, Ill., during test runs of equipment involved in the 110-mph program in July 2002. Steve Smedley

In early 2000, the program issued its Request for Proposals. Submissions came from several traditional railroad signal suppliers, as well as defense industry supplier Lockheed-Martin. The traditional suppliers focused on what they perceived as the technical and regulatory challenges and uncertainties, while Lockheed-Martin confidently described how these challenges would be overcome by the will and capability of its team, and its defense-industry credentials.

During the selection process, management committee members were split between the "devils we know" (the traditional suppliers) and the "one we don't." In the end, Lockheed — which enlisted two experienced rail industry suppliers, Wabtec Railway Electronics and Union Switch & Signal, as part of its team — was selected by virtue of its superior technical and financial proposals (i.e., lower price), which overcame most of the concerns about its lack of railroad-industry experience.

Development and testing, and the attendant management and technical meetings, began immediately. This division of

Illinois Secretary of Transportation Kirk Brown (left), FRA Administrator Jolene Molitoris, and U.S. Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater hold a $6.5 million check representing federal funding to Illinois for the North American Joint Positive Train Control project on June 21, 2000. Bob Johnston



Lockheed had specialized in submarine fire suppression systems, so the engineers were generally unfamiliar with railroad operations. Members of the systems engineering and UP teams spent significant time at Lockheed's Mitchel Field (Long Island), N.Y., location, trying to bring as much understanding as possible.

During early design and engineering, the UP signal team pointed out that interfacing PTC with the 1968-vintage General Railway Signal relay-based signal system would be difficult, expensive, and likely unreliable. Their case was compelling. As a result, a new Union Switch & Signal Microlok II processor-based signal system was installed between Mazonia and Ridgely. The B&O-style color position-light signals and pole-line circuits were replaced by color-light signals, coded track circuits, and radio-based CTC communications.

After approximately two years of development, the system was ready for field tests in late October 2002. Amtrak supplied a test train, including P42 locomotives Nos. 51 and 52. A battery of tests, primarily designed to exercise the system's navigation and communications capabilities, were conducted over a 2-week period. Most results were favorable, but at times the office server was not able to track train locations in an accurate, timely manner. In one example, the server inexplicably believed an Amtrak train from the previous day was still on the running track at Bloomington because of a phantom track occupancy indication. Unfortunately, this proved to be one of the most significant technical hurdles and was never safely overcome [see "What is a flashing green?" at right].

At the culmination of this first test session, a small demonstration of 110-mph operation was held for stakeholders and other invited guests. A series of short, speedy runs was made between Normal, Ill., and the passing track at Ballard, Ill., over two days. Law enforcement officers and flaggers were stationed at each crossing as the test train shot back and forth several times. A highway radar speed trailer was positioned at Towanda, Ill., and we train riders delighted in observing the speed readout as the train passed. I was aboard to brief officials and the press on how the system worked — or was supposed to.

System development, as well as the cycle of testing, problem identification, and resolution, continued for three years. Extensive field tests of 10 to 14 days occurred about once per year [see "A unique 'dampening device,'" page 24]. Each morning, the train would leave Bloomington and tests would be conducted until it needed to clear for the passage of an Amtrak or UP local train. (The Global 4 intermodal facility in Joliet had not yet been constructed, so

WHAT IS A "FLASHING GREEN?"

THE DESIGN OF the Lockheed PTC system included use of a high flashing green signal aspect (dubbed the "PTC aspect"), indicating that the train's movement was governed by its in-cab PTC display. This was to be utilized for future demonstration of "moving block" operations and was displayed upon receipt of a request from the office server to do so. The office server would send this request to a signal when it was to be displayed to a PTC-equipped train in a moving block operation, based upon its tracking of the train's location. On the first day of testing, though, the PTC aspect was mistakenly displayed to a UP local that happened to be operating near the test train. Its crew was not familiar with this aspect; it was to them, by rule, an improperly displayed aspect. Much confusion and consternation resulted. Testing was paused immediately and, since FRA test monitors were on board the train, an impromptu inquiry was held. The outcome was that this feature was immediately disabled and, in fact, never utilized again. — *Greg Richardson*

A UNIQUE "DAMPENING DEVICE"

DURING ONE FIELD TESTING session utilizing Union Pacific No. 1399, one of two GP40-2 locomotives equipped for testing, its location determination system was performing poorly. This was a component of the overall system that pinpoints the locomotive's location, speed, and direction of movement by processing Global Positioning Satellite signals, wheel tachometer signals, and other measurements of speed and acceleration. The Lockheed engineers analyzed data and speculated that the accelerometers in the subsystem hardware enclosure were malfunctioning.

A short time later, the test train was routed into the Odell, Ill., siding for an Amtrak passenger train. The UP project manager headed to the offending locomotive. A short time later, he returned and announced he had inspected the equipment, observed that it might be subjected to excessive vibration, and procured two "Union Pacific Standard Vibration Dampeners" trackside and applied them, possibly remediating the situation. The Lockheed engineers were intrigued and began asking questions about the design, schematics, and availability of such "standard dampening devices." The UP manager then escorted them to the locomotive so that they could inspect the "field modification."

Their intrigue turned to surprise and skepticism when they observed two rusty spikes, installed with an air hose wrench, wedged between a bulkhead and the floating end of a cantilevered shelf on which the location determination system enclosure was mounted. That surprise turned to satisfaction as No. 1399 performed well in subsequent tests. A more elegant "engineering change" to the shelf installation ultimately followed. So the low-tech forged railroad spike was able to save the day, if only temporarily, in an age of fiber-optic ring gyroscopes. — *Greg Richardson*

Two spikes inserted below Lockheed Martin's Location Determination System reduced vibration. Daniel L. Steinhoff

there was little freight traffic to dodge.) The test train would often pause midday at Braidwood, Ill., for the crew to descend upon the Polk-A-Dot Drive In, a trackside Route 66-themed diner.

By late 2005, progress slowed on technical matters such as the problems with accurate train tracking by the office server. Lockheed contract change orders and project scope reductions, presumably typical of the defense and aerospace industries, began to exhaust stakeholder patience and the program budget. No material progress on flexible block operation or advance activation of crossing warning systems was made, and no field tests of either were ever conducted.

Concurrently, little progress was made in exercising the new FRA regulatory approval protocol. In late 2006, these headwinds resulted in a "stop work" order, effectively shutting down the program's technical portion.

Why did the project fail? From my perspective, there were three primary reasons. The first was the centralized "brain" office server architecture; operation of the signal and communications system and the logic to handle all the inputs for safety-critical train tracking proved to be more complicated than expected and just wasn't improving. The second was budget: $60 million was nowhere near the real cost of initial development, testing, and certification of a PTC system, whether for 100 or 10,000 miles of railroad. The last was the lack of significant railroad operating expertise in the development process; too much of that burden was placed on the Lockheed team, new to the railroad industry. A silver lining is that these became significant lessons learned and were fresh in the minds of many when the industry embarked on mandated PTC development just over two years later.

Union Pacific itself remained committed to research and development of PTC, and for the next 2½ years at Arinc, I worked with UP on its PTC research. The September 2008 collision between a Metrolink passenger train and UP freight at Chatsworth, Calif., prompted the passage of the Railway Safety Improvement Act in October 2008, which mandated industry-wide interoperable PTC. This profoundly altered the industry's PTC research and development trajectory — and my own.

PHASE 2 THE DEMONSTRATION SEGMENT

On Feb. 1, 2009, I reported to Union Pacific headquarters at 1400 Douglas St., Omaha, Neb., transitioning from consultant to UP employee: general director, train control systems. My charge was to be a leader of UP's technical effort to meet the PTC mandate (a story unto itself).

Shortly after starting, I was informed

An Amtrak test train, seen from the Hudson Stuckey Road overpass near Towanda, Ill., hit a reported 109 mph on its second test run on Oct. 31, 2002. Steve Smedley

we were inking new agreements with IDOT to implement 110-mph operations on UP's portion of the Chicago-St. Louis line. Just over two years after the NAJPTC project concluded, its train control and crossing aspects were back on my plate and within the PTC statutory mandate. Long-term 110-mph operation ceased to be a stand-alone effort and became fully entangled with overall PTC development.

Uncertainty about the PTC timeline was discouraging for stakeholders in Illinois; UP was asked if some sort of interim demonstration was possible. This would build and maintain enthusiasm for high-speed operation while PTC development plodded on.

I proposed the use of UP's four-aspect automatic cab signals to meet regulatory train control requirements for operation above 79 mph, and a variant of the Incremental Train Control System (ITCS) to meet "guidelines" from the Illinois Commerce Commission for operation of highway crossing warning systems at higher speeds. Amtrak had achieved success with ITCS crossing operation as part of overall

Four-quadrant gates, closed-corridor fencing, and additional signage warning of "longer gate times" protect a grade crossing in downtown Odell as *Lincoln Service* train No. 302 passes on Nov. 16, 2016. Two photos, Bob Johnston

Author Greg Richardson displays a box containing the Lockheed Martin Location Determination System for the benefit of TV news crews during the Oct. 31, 2002, 110-mph demonstration run. The media also viewed a live video image from the locomotive cab.

PTC function on its Michigan line; since some Amtrak locomotives were already equipped, logistics could be minimized.

A significant difference: only the crossing-related functions of ITCS would be utilized in Illinois; this was dubbed "XITCS". Functions include the ability for a train to activate the crossing warning system by radio communication independent of the conventional track circuits, which remain arranged for operation at 79 mph or less. Additionally, XITCS provides a mechanism to communicate the presence of certain hazards at the crossing, so an approaching train can be slowed or stopped. These hazards include:

- Failure of the warning system to activate;
- A highway vehicle occupying the crossing during the warning system activation cycle;
- Failure of the highway vehicle detection system;
- Failure of the crossing gates to lower or raise properly;
- Extended activation of the warning system;
- Insufficient backup battery voltage.

The proposed use of automatic cab signals and XITCS was not compliant with PTC regulations, so the demonstration operation would eventually sunset as PTC implementation occurred. The demonstration section was between Dwight and Pontiac, Ill., with a 110-mph speed limit for 15 miles between approximately MP 75.0 and MP 90.5. There was one 100-mph curve speed restriction within those limits; a total of 14 highway crossings were equipped with four-quadrant gates and XITCS equipment.

The crew on a demonstration-segment test run in 2012. From left: Greg Richardson; Butch Hayes, Amtrak conductor; Steve Fleming, Amtrak engineer; and David Blackmore, FRA test monitor.
Greg Richardson collection

The Illinois Commerce Commission proposed that XITCS crossing warning time be sufficient for engineer reaction and deceleration in the event of a detected crossing hazard. This resulted in warning times of approximately 85 seconds, compared to 30-35 seconds for freight trains and at conventional crossings in the area.

Furthermore, the Commission proposed

FIGHTING WITH FLIPS

ONE LAST ATTEMPT was made to diagnose and resolve the cab-signal problem just south of Odell prior to the start of revenue 110-mph operations in the demonstration segment. A prominent theory was that high-voltage power lines paralleling the right-of-way were causing the induction of stray electrical currents into the rails, which then interfered with the cab signal operation. Arrangements were made with the local power utility and a large grain facility north of Pontiac to de-energize the power lines during their lunch break for the operation of a test train. The test train was positioned at Dwight, Ill., and at the stroke of noon, the power switch was thrown. The train highballed south to Pontiac and returned northward to Dwight. Alas, the cab-signal flips remained, and a 90-mph speed restriction was placed just south of Odell to avoid problems.

Although the restriction was a minor operational nuisance, it stuck in my craw as a matter of principle. In late spring 2014, I retained the services of a railroad signal engineering consultant to further investigate. An Amtrak test train was assembled in Chicago and outfitted with various instruments to monitor the onboard cab-signal systems, and UP facilitated the instrumentation of wayside signal components in the problem area. The test train operated back and forth for a couple of days and, as predicted, electrical signal anomalies received on board the locomotive were observed, although their cause was not clear. Adjustments to the onboard and wayside signal systems were made, but to no avail.

During one afternoon debrief, an engineering consultant presented graphs that indicated that the electrical anomalies appeared to occur at evenly-spaced intervals of 78 to 80 feet on each rail. The number "78" immediately rang a bell — that is the length of rails welded together at the factory to form quarter-mile sections of continuously welded rail. The cause of the signal anomalies was thought to be residual magnetism induced by the factory welding process. At speeds above 90 mph, the cab signal pickup bars encountered the magnetized areas at a rate which interfered with the 180 pulses per minute of the CLEAR cab signal indication. Further tests supported this theory. However, identified solutions were costly and/or impractical. No action was taken, and the problem went away when the demonstration segment's cab signals were retired in 2017. — *Greg Richardson*

During the period when cab signals allowed 110-mph operation through the area on a demonstration segment, southbound Lincoln Service train No. 301 flies through Odell, Ill., leaving traffic on Interstate 55 in its dust, on May 22, 2014. Bruce Bird

novel operation for warning systems at private "field-to-field" crossings: the gates would normally be in the lowered position, and would raise only when a button was pushed at the crossing, if no train was approaching. Both UP and FRA expressed concern about this proposal, and the FRA ultimately denied a waiver petition, but the 85-second warning time for passenger trains remained, albeit with the condition that a motorist behavioral study be conducted after operations commenced. An informational filing describing in detail the proposed technical and operational approaches was submitted to FRA in June 2012, and in late August, FRA gave conditional approval. Union Pacific then completed track upgrades in the segment to the Class 6 standard allowing 110-mph maximum speed, as well as installing cab signals and XITCS crossing and communications equipment.

Beginning in summer 2012, extensive tests were conducted at each of the 14 XITCS crossings utilizing a hi-rail truck equipped with the XITCS onboard apparatus, checking communications with each crossing and the ability to detect the various hazards. It was then time to bring in the test train. On days it operated, contract flaggers would camp out at each of the 14 crossings while protecting the test train's passage in case of some failure. The test train made passes through the demonstration territory at ever-increasing speeds; proper operation and warning times were verified after each pass. Testing went well, and speed was quickly increased to 110 mph.

However, one recurring problem emerged just south of the Odell siding. At more than 90 mph, the cab signal would repeatedly "flip" between "CLEAR" and "RESTRICTING" aspects. Because the cab signal speed control was engaged on the Amtrak locomotives (thus providing Automatic Train Control functionality), this induced an overspeed penalty brake application each time the cab signal dropped to RESTRICTING. Little progress was made in resolving the issue before the start of revenue service operations, so the decision was made to impose a 90-mph speed restriction in the problem area [see "Fighting with flips" at left].

A special train on Oct. 19, 2012, allowed dignitaries and their entourages to sample and take credit for 110-mph operation. There were nervous moments among signal technicians and the operating crew as the train raced through the Dwight-Pontiac segment. But the train achieved its intended goal, with some difficulty [see "VIP Run Drama," page 28], proceeding southward through the demonstration section and on to ceremonies at the new Bloomington station in Normal, Ill.

Revenue operations commenced as planned on Nov. 12, 2012, and continued for almost five years. [See "How Illinois ramped up to 110 mph," "Passenger," June 2013]. Most passengers probably did not notice the short burst of high-speed running, which did not materially impact schedules or on-time performance. However, motorists on parallel Interstate 55 near Odell often raised their eyebrows when they were unable to keep up with a train.

Overall, the combination of cab signals and XITCS technology proved extremely reliable. Ultimately, on Oct. 30, 2017 — shortly after the implementation of PTC on the Joliet Subdivision for UP freight trains and on the eve of Amtrak's ability to operate PTC on UP lines — passenger train speeds reverted to a 79-mph maximum, the cab signals were retired, and XITCS operation ceased, at least temporarily.

PHASE 3 THE FINAL PTC PUSH

In late 2008, UP and other Class I freight railroads formed the Interoperable Train Control committee to collaborate on fast-track development of interoperable PTC. The aim to was to meet the tight statutory deadline for full PTC implementation — at that time, Dec. 31, 2015. (This was later extended to 2018 or, conditionally, to 2020).

Two Union Pacific business cars trail *Lincoln Service* train No. 302 near Odell, Ill., on Sept. 15, 2012, as executives view a presentation on the cab signal/XITCS project by the author. Two photos, Bob Johnston

The XITCS display, at left, and UP cab signal display as they were installed in the cab of Amtrak P42 No. 66 during the Dwight-Pontiac 110-mph demonstration. Compare this with the current system shown at right.

A Siemens Charger shows IETMS positive train control and XITCS displays during current 110-mph operation. XITCS status information is in the gray block at the left center of the PTC screen. Greg Richardson

One major regulatory hurdle was the requirement that each railroad obtain a PTC System Certification, achieved by FRA's approval of its PTC Safety Plan submission. The FRA could provide certification at several different levels, based on what was requested in and supported by technical material in the railroad's safety plan.

The lowest level of certification allowed for a maximum train speed of 90 mph; other levels specified higher speed limits or none at all. No Class I railroad other than UP had any higher-speed project in the works, and all were generally apathetic toward the need to seek a PTC certification which allowed operation above 90 mph. I lobbied the other Class I railroads to pursue a higher certification level that would permit 110-mph operation specifically because that was UP's Illinois high-speed corridor objective. Eventually, I prevailed, and it was agreed to set our mutual sights on a certification level that would allow (at least) 110-mph operations.

In late 2015, the first safety plan submission — by BNSF — describing the industry's consensus PTC technology was approved by the FRA, but at only the lowest certification level. Similar approvals followed for the other Class I railroads. While the balance of the industry was excited about receipt of their respective certifications, my enthusiasm was tempered by the fact that it fell short. On several occasions, I met with IDOT, its consultants, FRA program managers, and other disappointed stakeholders to explain the technicalities of safety and certification levels, what our next steps were, and what the delay to the program might be.

On the crossing front, UP and Amtrak decided XITCS would remain the technical solution. Crossing-related functions were not mandated by the PTC statute, and it was not feasible to develop them anew as a direct part of the PTC system with the given deadline. The XITCS would operate independent of PTC (although it is able to place some textual status information on the PTC display). Union Pacific installed a new underground fiber-optic cable along the route to support XITCS communications between trains and crossings, as well as elaborate messaging systems in its Omaha data centers, which allowed XITCS to utilize the interoperable PTC communications network.

In 2017, there were discussions between the Illinois Commerce Commission and project stakeholders to modify the XITCS capabilities to detect crossing hazards. Each modification required a new cycle of safety-critical design review and development, followed by installation of modified software and testing at all affected crossings. This added many months and some complexity to the project.

Fortunately, the other Class I railroads' interest in seeking upgraded PTC certification was steadily increasing, albeit due to

VIP RUN DRAMA

AS THE OCT. 19, 2012, demonstration run approached, I discussed with Amtrak's mechanical department staff the possibility of cutting out the speed-control feature of the cab signals on the P42 locomotive to prevent the penalty brake application resulting from the intermittent cab signal flip south of Odell. The cab signals would be otherwise operative. Amtrak was agreeable; so was the FRA supervisor on the run. The appropriate steps were taken and we departed for Joliet, where the VIPs boarded, and then proceeded south. As we passed Dwight and entered 110-mph territory, the Amtrak engineer notched out on the throttle: 80 ... 81 ... 82 mph.

Suddenly, the cab was filled with the sound of escaping air. Bewildered looks filled the cab; a penalty brake application had occurred. We shrugged, the engineer recovered the air, and notched out again. But at 82 mph, the sequence of events repeated. After a quick debate, we concluded (and later confirmed) that the cut-out of the cab-signal speed control had the unintended side effect of reducing the locomotive overspeed feature from 112 to 82 mph.

Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn points to the speed of 111 mph as the test train runs between Dwight and Pontiac, Ill., on Oct. 19, 2012. U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, Senator Dick Durbin and Joseph C. Szabo of the FRA beam in approval. Steve Smedley

I jumped up and made my way back through the body of the P42 locomotive, opening and slamming bulkhead doors as I went, to the air compressor room at the rear, where Amtrak mechanical employees were riding. They asked why we hadn't yet accelerated; I explained the problem, our theory, and beckoned them forward immediately. We returned to the cab and saw we were almost to Odell, having exhausted half of the demonstration territory and still operating at 79 mph. One of the Amtrak technicians reached into the nose of the locomotive, manipulated something with a screwdriver, and reported the cab signal speed control was now restored.

By this time, the train was on the approach to the crossings at Odell, and a feature of XITCS, which limits train acceleration when approaching crossings to ensure constant warning time, prevented us from immediately attempting to accelerate. Finally, we cleared the crossings and the engineer notched out again past 83 mph and no penalty! Success was declared as we accelerated to 111 mph before passing the south siding switch at Odell. We highballed along for another mile until, right on cue, the cab signal flips and resultant cab signal overspeed penalty started. The engineer made a valiant effort to power the train through the penalty application until the cab signal stabilized, but, alas, we were quickly approaching Pontiac and the end of 110-mph territory. We decelerated and then cruised along at 79 mph to Normal, where the VIPs disembarked for another ceremony.

I remained in the locomotive cab for a while catching my breath, until I was summoned to meet the UP delegation on the platform to discuss what had happened. I provided a quick explanation; there seemed to be no significant heartburn and I gathered my career at UP was probably not impaired significantly. On the deadhead move north after the ceremonies, the Amtrak engineer and I pondered our fates had the train never surpassed 79 mph.

Later, I found a *Chicago Tribune* article which stated, "There was a momentary glitch in the data communications link between the trackside signaling system and the Amtrak train that slightly delayed the acceleration from 79 mph toward 110 mph, according to railroad officials monitoring the test run." That explanation, while not accurate, best protected the dignity of all involved, so it worked for me. — *Greg Richardson*

A northbound test train approaches the Airport Road grade crossing north of Springfield, Ill., at 90 mph on June 25, 2020. Technicians in the bungalow are monitoring track circuit and IETMS/XITCS data; flaggers (not visible) protect the crossing. Bob Johnston

reasons other than high-speed passenger train operation. An upgraded certification level not including the specific 90-mph limit was targeted. Technical changes to the system, each improving its reliability, performance, and safety, had been accruing since the railroads first placed it into operation (UP began revenue service operation of PTC in December 2015). Railroads were also able to supplement the safety plan analysis with several years of data accumulated through hundreds of millions of train-miles of operation. A new safety plan was developed, which primarily included a re-work of the system safety analysis.

Union Pacific and Amtrak then made the decision to move forward with an interim speed increase from 79 to 90 mph under the existing certification. While not particularly impactful to schedules and operations, it was to be a significant technical milestone, since XITCS would be placed in daily revenue service operation at all crossings and for the first time since the demonstration operation ceased in 2017. Tests were ran at each of the 180-plus equipped crossings, followed by a small number of test-train runs in 2021, all of which were successful. A "soft launch" of 90-mph operation for *Lincoln Service* and *Texas Eagle* trains began July 7, 2021. Public schedules were not immediately updated, so trains arriving early at intermediate stations simply dwelled until the existing scheduled departure time. Run-time data was collected and used to develop the new schedules, implemented some weeks later.

On Sept. 17, 2021, the FRA approved the revised safety plan submission by UP, Amtrak, and several other railroads, which provided the upgraded PTC certification necessary to remove the 90-mph limit. Union Pacific and Amtrak also began to collect data and perform analysis to demonstrate that the combined PTC/XITCS operation could safely support 110-mph operations. In October 2022, UP submitted

yet another safety plan petitioning for 110-mph operation, followed by a revision in February 2023. On March 20, FRA provided its approval — the first to utilize a freight railroad's PTC system for operation above 90 mph. All regulatory and technical hurdles had now been cleared!

Since the move from 90-mph to 110-mph operations did not involve any technical changes to the PTC system or XITCS, there was little to do other than establish new timetable speed limits and make a couple of test runs. On May 3, 2023, the UP Joliet and Springfield Subdivision timetables were updated to reflect 110-mph maximum authorized speed for Amtrak passenger trains (100 mph for trains with Superliner equipment), constituting (again) a silent launch of operations at that speed. During subsequent weeks, operations were monitored closely and train performance data was gathered, which served as input for the revised public schedule changes and celebration of June 26, 2023.

Author Greg Richardson, on the eve of his retirement from Union Pacific, prepares to board the head end of *Lincoln Service* train No. 304 at St. Louis for what proved to be a routine display of PTC and XITCS performance. Greg Richardson

EPILOGUE

In September 2023, on the eve of my retirement from Union Pacific, I rode the head end of Amtrak trains Nos. 301 and 304 on a Chicago-St. Louis round trip. The trip felt routine and the PTC and XITCS systems performed without exception, as they regularly do. These systems' reliability is impressive given all that goes on "under the covers".

Many outside observers have opined that the benefit of the new schedules do not justify the time and costs to achieve them, and that they compare unfavorably with those maintained by GM&O or even Chicago & Alton. In those "good old days," such passenger operations largely required only the will of the operating railroad; the entire operation was under a single managerial umbrella. It is a different world today with the mesh of funding, regulatory, operating, and local governmental organizations who all have a stake and say, and not a relevant comparison given contemporary realities. That the entire project got caught up in the industry PTC upheaval was a twist of fate rather than a case of mismanagement or incompetence.

I witnessed first-hand the waves of technological, regulatory, and financial fatigue experienced by various stakeholders (including me and my employers) during such a long endeavor. I consider the delivery of a reliable operation and the perseverance in the face of these obstacles to be career-level accomplishments by the people in each of the organizations involved. T

New life on a (very) old branch

Ex-SP route to Placerville mixes urban and rural with light rail, freight, and two heritage lines

Story and photos by Bill Buchanan

If history had played out differently, our ride this summer day in the wooded foothills of the Sierra Nevada would be aboard Amtrak's *California Zephyr*, instead of on Fairmont motorcars. The track would belong to Union Pacific, not a joint-powers authority. It'd be home to stack trains and AC engines.

That's because this route that eventually became Southern Pacific's Placerville branch — or a segment of this route, at least — would have been part of the first transcontinental railroad.

Before Theodore Judah was chief engineer of the Central Pacific Railroad, he helped build the Sacramento Valley Railroad from Sacramento to what became the city of Folsom. The 22-mile line opened in 1856 as one of the first railroads west of the Mississippi River, and Judah believed it could be the start of a route over the mountains.

That didn't happen, of course. Instead, Judah chose a more direct route from Sacramento to Donner Pass for the CP, creating one of the enduring main lines of the West. The Sacramento Valley lived on as a local operation that eventually became the western end of SP's 60-mile line to Placerville, completed in 1888.

Although Southern Pacific stopped regular operations east of Folsom in 1986 and sold the entire line a decade later, the story continues. Except for the last few miles into Placerville, the tracks are mostly intact and partly active. Today's route offers variety — freight, electric transit, recreational rides, diesel, steam, motorcars, and handcars, in settings urban, suburban and different kinds of rural.

Come along for a visit. Many more visitors might follow you someday. A railroad museum park is in the works, and longer rides offering scenic views of the Sacramento Valley are a goal. This area of California continues to grow, the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento already draws visitors to the region, and there are several ideas for how to use this track.

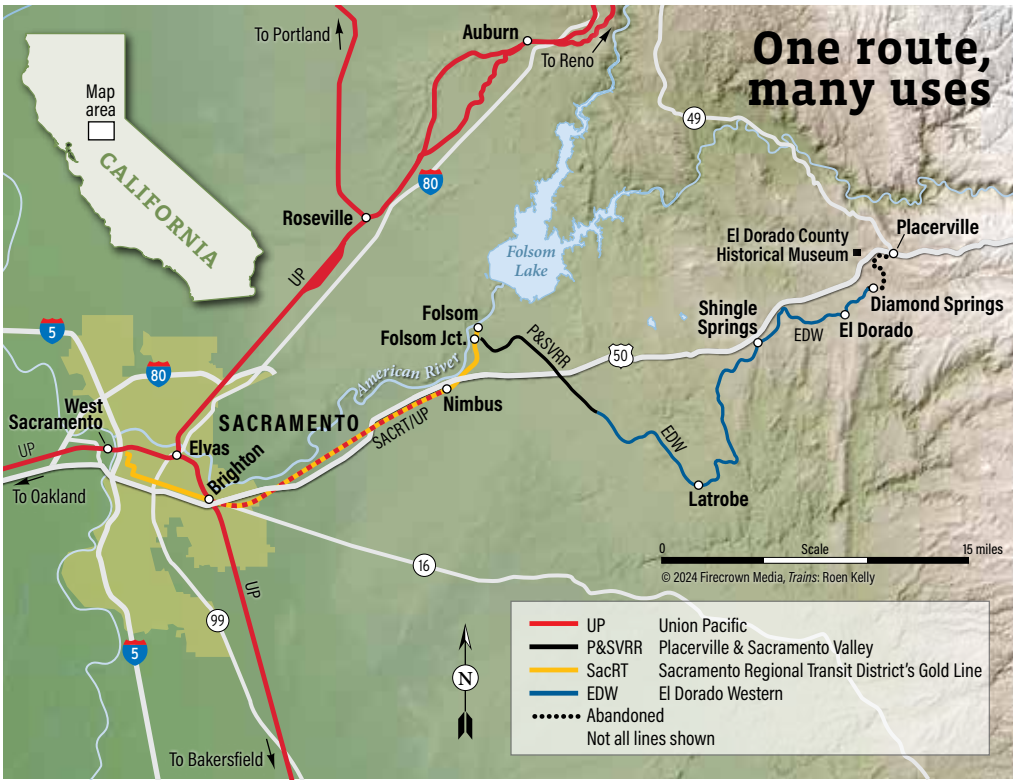
Although this line never crossed the Sierra Nevada, it still has possibilities.

The Route of the ... well, of lots of things

We'll begin with a list of current operations, starting in Sacramento.

- Union Pacific, which acquired the SP in 1996, still operates the segment from Sacramento to the end of track in Rancho Cordova at a place called Nimbus, west of Folsom. The railroad calls it the Placerville Industrial Lead. A weekly freight served four customers as of early 2024.
- The Sacramento Regional Transit District's Gold Line from Sacramento to Folsom shares the UP right of way for much of its distance. Light-rail electric trains run frequently.
- In Folsom, the Placerville & Sacramento Valley Railroad takes over. This volunteer non-

Placerville & Sacramento Valley's No. 4028, an ex-Army Baldwin-Lima-Hamilton Davenport RS4TC, acquired from Heber Valley, rests at Willow Creek in Folsom on Dec. 9, 2023. P&SVRR used it to pull motorcars and other equipment from its storage yard.



profit has a storage yard in old Folsom and has operated motorcars and/or trains on parts of its route since 2010. In December 2023 the P&SVRR was running motorcar consists on a woodsy part of the line inside Folsom, taking kids and families to visit Santa and Mrs. Claus encamped in former Cotton Belt caboose No. 48.

• Uphill, once the line crosses from Sacramento County into El Dorado County, the track becomes the territory of the El Dorado Western Railroad, also run by volunteers and overseen by the El Dorado County Historical Museum. They ran motorcar consists on most Sundays during 2023.

The Sacramento-Placerville Transportation Corridor Joint Powers Authority bought the route from Brighton (a point in Sacramento on UP's Fresno Subdivision) to Placerville from the SP in 1996, to preserve the branch and to support compatible transportation. The authority comprises Folsom, the two counties, and the transit district. The SP kept a freight easement to Nimbus.

The EDW and P&SVRR connect physically, although the connecting track is inactive. The P&SVRR and the light-rail line in Folsom do not connect, which means the two heritage railroads are isolated from the national rail network. Bike paths and trails provide another reason to keep the corridor intact.

Motorcars in the foothills

The El Dorado Western currently has permission to operate on 8 miles of track from Shingle Springs east to Diamond Springs, where the rails end at Missouri Flat Road near Placerville. It began offering rides in 2011. During 2023 it carried passengers on motorcars out and back from two locations — El Dorado and Shingle Springs. Storm damage affecting the Slate Creek bridge between the two towns prevented the speeders from running on all 8 miles.

The El Dorado segment was operating on the Sunday when we visited in August 2023. Passengers boarded at the scaled-down replica of an SP station, then rode out on a 3.8-mile round trip. We hit a top speed of 10 mph on rails that pass through woods, along a bike path, and behind rural homes. Volunteers flagged the few crossings.

Near the eastern end of the line, the consist simply paused and reversed direction, aided by the grade. The ride is easy, pleasant, and lasts about 35 minutes.

Jan Breitigan, an EDW volunteer since 2018, was operator for the outbound leg. He enjoys chatting with visitors. "I've been a land surveyor, and I've enjoyed seeing where the trains used to go," he added. "Anything to do with trains, I'm interested."

The ride from Shingle Springs is similar and passes through a deep cut that was once a tunnel. People board next to a restaurant whose building includes the surviving freight side of an SP depot built in 1896.

The speeders we rode from El Dorado had room for about two dozen passengers total, plus crew. By late morning, the day's runs were selling out.

"We have a couple of thousand visitors a year, mostly from the region, Sacramento, and San Francisco area," said Mary Cory, administrator of the El Dorado museum and general manager of the railroad. "We do get quite a few return visitors, family outings on Sunday, and multi-generational groups."

A museum with a narrow-gauge Shay

The EDW plans to attract more visits. One goal is to build the El Dorado County Railroad History Center and Park in El Dorado, to display the museum's equipment and artifacts. These include a Shay that volunteers are restoring, No. 4 of the Diamond & Caldor Lumber Co., a vanished narrow-gauge logging road that connected to the branch in Diamond Springs.

The EDW intends to run full-sized trains from its El Dorado station this fall (2024), powered by its Plymouth JDT No. 1 (1952, Certainteed Products). It also owns 45-tonner No. 5104 (GE, 1943, Pacific Coast Aggregates) and 65-tonner No. 881-002 (GE, 1941, Kaiser Cement). Both GE engines can be operated and just

On Aug. 20, 2023, El Dorado Western's Ken Asmus provides flag protection for a motorcar excursion crossing Formi Road. The volunteer-run railroad's stewardship of the Placerville branch begins where the line leaves Sacramento County and enters El Dorado County.

need some restoration, Cory said. The tracks from Shingle Springs east also need to be restored or repaired before the railroad can run locomotives east of the Shingle Springs yard.

"EDW volunteers work with me to maintain all 25 miles of track within El Dorado County," Cory said.

"The priorities and amount of work achieved depends on volunteers and money," she said. "We have this wonderful group of volunteers. They're very dedicated and committed. Every year [at a meeting] I meet with as many as can come, and we talk about goals for the next year. We've worked out that projects need to be approved by the group, by consensus.

"It's very rewarding for me when I can have everyone talking about what they'd like to see done, and to be able to organize that, on things that'll get us moving ahead on full-size train operations," Cory said.

"You want to respond to their effort, time, and skill. I also don't want many projects we can't accomplish."

The two heritage railroads evolved separately. They grew from two different visions, Cory said, but share an overarching interest in preserving and using the rails.

"Our group up here has

El Dorado Western volunteers Jan Breitigan (in front) and Claire Stover, after returning to El Dorado station at the conclusion of another motorcar excursion on a Sunday in August 2023. The railroad is planning to add locomotive-hauled trains.

El Dorado Western No. 5104 rests in the Shingle Springs yard alongside ex-Camino, Placerville & Lake Tahoe caboose No. 2. The railway foundation owns the building at right, which includes the freight section of an 1896 SP station, and leases it to a restaurant.

Milo Slack, brakeman on Placerville & Sacramento Valley's "Santa" motorcar excursion, keeps a watchful eye on the consist in Folsom on Dec. 9, 2023. The trip through a wooded area of the community took kids and families on a ride to meet Santa and Mrs. Claus.

been very focused on El Dorado and Shingle Springs. That middle stretch from Shingle Springs to the county line or Latrobe has multiple issues [that need to be addressed] to make it usable," she said. The issues have included opposition from property owners who don't want trains nearby, plus paved-over crossings, storm damage, and the condition of the track.

Handling growth in Folsom

The Placerville & Sacramento Valley has three basic operations: motorcar rides within Folsom; short trains uphill from Folsom to the El Dorado County line; and motorcars farther on to Latrobe, a former railroad town of about 200 people in El Dorado County (EDW grants track warrants for use of the rails). The in-city motorcars leave from P&SVRR's Oak Station, and the uphill runs depart from the railroad's Hampton Station, near Highway 50.

Storm damage and construction of new grade crossings made the uphill runs to Latrobe impossible in 2023, but the P&SVRR plans to resume limited operations through that section late this year. The tracks also host the annual Folsom Handcar Derby, run by the El Dorado & Sacramento Historical Railroad Association.

The roster includes:

Placerville & Sacramento Valley's "Santa" motorcar consist arrives at Willow Creek in Folsom on Dec. 9, 2023. The P&SVRR operates motorcar trips within Folsom, short trains to the El Dorado County line, and motorcars to the former railroad town of Latrobe.

• No. 4028, a working, former U.S. Army RS-4-TC Baldwin switcher built in 1954, later owned by Utah's Heber Valley Railroad.

• Ex-Santa Cruz Portland Cement No. 2, aka the Chiggen, an 0-4-0T built by H.K. Porter in 1909 and on long-term lease from Efstathios Pappas. In 2022, after completing the engine's annual inspection, P&SVRR crews ran it on short test runs, marking the first time a steam engine had operated on the former Placerville branch since 1957. They plan to use it to pull public rides late this year.

• Howard Terminal No. 8, a 44-ton diesel-electric built in 1943 for the U.S. Army by the Whitcomb Locomotive Co. when it was part of Baldwin Locomotive Works. It's currently out of service.

• A Skagit motorcar (undergoing repairs in 2024) that can hold 25, plus a trailer, speeders, open-air car, and the caboose.

Folsom, with about 85,000 residents (up from 52,000 in 2000), keeps growing. More people could mean more riders and volunteers. Eric Olds, vice president and chief of railroad operations for the P&SVRR, suggested the city could even consider using the tracks for a trolley to carry local traffic among the city's new neighborhoods and retail centers.

The growth also threatens to crowd the railroad. Its current operations in the city are limited by unprotected grade crossings dating from the line's inactive period, and new housing has created four more crossings. The housing plan includes an obligation to install gates on the new crossings, but the work is delayed until the state Public Utilities Commission addresses plans to expand two-lane White Rock Road at the edge of Folsom into a four-lane expressway. Automatic gates guard the railroad's White Rock crossing now, but the state might require a grade-separated crossing once the road is busier.

The railroad is working with the city and commission on an interim operating plan through the new crossings until the White Rock question is settled.

P&SVRR President Jim Harville hopes limited train operations can resume in late 2024. "We have tremendous support from both the community and our elected officials," he said, "it's now just a question of cutting through the red tape."

'Everywhere we imagined we wanted to be'

The Placerville branch mostly carried fruit, finished lumber, and lime. Its demise followed the 1986 shutdown of the Camino, Placerville & Lake Tahoe Railroad, a connecting 8-mile short line owned by Michigan-California Lumber Co. and source of most of the branch's traffic.

Once that railroad quit, wrote Placerville writer and historian Doug Noble in his blog, SP filed to abandon the branch from Folsom to Placerville. After regulators refused permission, the railroad imposed a $750 surcharge per carload ($2,100 in 2024 dollars). Most remaining shippers reluctantly shifted to trucks.

The old right of way into Placerville now hosts a bike trail beyond Missouri Flat Road in Diamond Springs.

The route was built under different names and owners before coalescing as the SP's Placerville branch in 1888. The segment from Folsom to Shingle Springs was built during 1863 to 1865.

Davey "Doc" Wiser, a volunteer with EDW, worked for SP and UP for 50 years, retiring as a conductor. In videos for the museum, he recalls his short tenure working on the branch.

"The first day I ran on this track was 1986," he said. "I hauled the last commercial load out of Diamond Springs down to Sacramento yard."

He also helped bring SP No. 1771, a 2-6-0 Mogul formerly displayed in downtown Placer-

A Gold Line train is ready to depart Sacramento Valley Station bound for Folsom, on Jan. 15, 2024. The light rail line is operated by the Sacramento Regional Transit District (SacRT) and connects the state's capital with Folsom.

A rider aboard the Gold Line light rail at Brighton. The transit cars run on their own tracks but use parts of the original 1850s right-of-way. A ride all the way to Folsom takes about an hour, split between urban street running and a dedicated right-of-way.

ville, to the California State Railroad Museum in May 1985. "I had the privilege and honor of taking the 1771 to the Sacramento yard and the rail museum," Wiser said in the video. The SP had given the engine to Placerville in 1958 after service in and around Indio, Calif.

Pat Kinkade and his late brother Thomas, the well-known painter, grew up in Placerville. Pat remembers playing on the engine. "Kids would climb all over it, using our imaginations to stage World War II military operations and Old West hold-ups," he said. "Thom and I would be there at least once a week, riding our Stingray bikes to climb aboard and begin our adventures.

"That train never moved," he said, "but it transported my brother and me everywhere we imagined we wanted to be."

The engine doesn't appear in Kinkade's paintings. "Thom painted downtown Placerville several times," Pat Kinkade said, "but always looking up the street and away from the train."

Videos of UP's current operations on the Placerville Industrial Lead can be found on YouTube from posters like Aerial Trains and Railroads, and MobileRailSpotterRxR.

Once the UP's tracks end, the light-rail line uses essentially the rest of the 1850s right of way into Folsom. A ride on the en-

The end of track at Missouri Flat Road, near Placerville. The right-of-way continues into Placerville as part of the El Dorado Trail, and crosses the Weber Creek Trestle, a former SP bridge. The span dates to the early 1900s and is more than 100 feet tall.

tire Gold Line to Folsom takes just under an hour and varies from urban street running in Sacramento to sprints of up to 55 mph on a separate right of way toward Folsom. Light-rail reached the city in 2005.

Sacramento Regional Transit District uses equipment built by Siemens and CAF. In 2024 the district is adding Siemens S700 low-floor vehicles. The district has bought 36 of the cars and has up to 76 on its contract.

The light-rail line passes within several yards of the P&SVRR's end of track in Folsom at the former Folsom Wye, before terminating another half-mile up the track in Historic Folsom. In Sacramento the Gold Line ends at the ex-SP Sacramento Valley station, where Amtrak stops, and within walking distance of the California State Railroad Museum.

How about trains all the way?

The big question is if trains could run again over the 34 miles from Folsom to Diamond Springs.

"Our goal is to run passenger service all the way to Shingle Springs," said Chris Van Thull, development director for the P&SVRR.

"Our normal trip from our Hampton station to the county line is 45 to 50 minutes. If you go to Latrobe, it will take 2 hours round trip. Shingle Springs could be a 4-hour round trip."

Niles Canyon Railway, operated by The Pacific Locomotive Association in the San Francisco Bay Area, "is really our model, our goal," Van Thull said.

"It could take us 40 years [to get where they are now]. We've gotten a lot of help from them and the California State Railroad Museum. We want to try to get past the short-sightedness of thinking it's too much work. We want to keep a foothold in the city, and push our vision of what the railroad could be to the city of Folsom. It could benefit everyone," he said.

"We want to keep the railroad part of the urban area so everyone sees it," Van Thull continued, "but get it out to the rural areas where it looks like it did a hundred years ago."

"A train from Folsom to end of track would be a great thing to see," said EDW General Manager Cory. "I don't know if it'll happen anytime soon. In the interim we have plans for the railroad museum park, where we can put the Shay locomotive as it's undergoing restoration, and logging equipment."

The grade crossing questions in Folsom would need to be resolved, inactive segments of track would need to be repaired, and there would need to be enough volunteers to do the work and money to pay for it all.

Most volunteer organizations face problems of labor, money, and endurance. There's one additional quality that the builders of the Sacramento Valley Railroad might recognize among their 21st century successors. The P&SVRR's Eric Olds named it.

"Potential," he said. 1

WEST SIDE

A final Conrail passenger move on New York's West Side Freight Line

Story and photos by Kent Patterson

NEW YORK CENTRAL'S West Side Freight Line, more formally named the 30th Street Branch, was the only direct freight railroad line into Manhattan. It was just 10 miles long, but maintained to mainline standards, and was even electrified for three decades. Vital for freight, mail, and express into the 1960s, it afterward saw a protracted decline. By 1982, under Conrail ownership, only one customer was left: The *New York Times*, which received rail shipments of newsprint from Canada.

That March began "30th Street's" final days. Briefly, the *New York Times*' newsprint was actually trucked to a just-built New Jersey plant. It was a convoluted shipping move on the eve of ending. Subsequent cars would be more directly routed to the Jersey plant.

The other rail customers on Manhattan's West Side had evaporated over three decades. Lesser known, and rarely referenced in employee timetables, was an extension of the line to lower Manhattan's St. John's Park in the meat-packing district. This part of Manhattan's once very blue-collar West Side was dubbed Hell's Kitchen.

Today, a more gentrified lower West Side hosts the lower elevated portion as Manhattan's High Line Park, an area with restaurants, galleries, condos, and museums near the Hudson River waterfront.

The railroad's West Side plan involved closing for a lengthy service hiatus and conversion from a downgraded freight secondary into Amtrak's Empire Corridor link from Spuyten Duyvil to Pennsylvania Station. A tube was bored about 1990 from the old freight line above 30th Street, curving down to Penn Station.

Conrail had one oddball task before ceding the trackage to Amtrak for the multi-year rebuild — the removal of two privately owned passenger cars at the now-unused yard at West 30th Street. The cars belonged to rail enthusiast and Metropolitan Transportation Authority real estate staffer Peter Obletz.

STORY

Obletz's cars were New York Central No. 404, a dining section from a twin-unit diner, and an ex-Santa Fe lunch-counter-dormitory car (since converted to privately owned diner *Epicurious*). The cars were stored in a fenced-off area of the West 30th Street Yard, near a closed New York Central brick yard office. Today the West 30th Street Yard is an MTA/Long Island Rail Road day-storage yard for Penn Station, but originally this yard was the New York & Hudson River Railroad's southern terminus, then simply named the Hudson River Railroad, completed in 1849.

Big changes began in the late 1860s when 'The Commodore', Cornelius Vanderbilt, acquired the New York & Harlem Railroad and built the 7-mile Spuyten Duyvil & Port Morris Railroad to access the Harlem Line, permitting Hudson trains to reach the first Grand Central Station in central Manhattan in 1871. Grand Central Station then was the eastern end of a developing greater New York Central System that Vanderbilt was assembling to reach Chicago.

With virtually all passenger traffic diverted to Grand Central, the West Side line's importance grew, as only NYC had direct freight access to Manhattan Island (the New Haven did reach the Bronx). Other railroads reached Manhattan Island

TOP LEFT: The crew poses at West 72nd Street after the car pull. From left: Brakeman Morgan Davis, Engineer Frank Sorci, Conductor John Walpole, and Brakeman Richard Vallieu. Fireman Dave Riley, not shown, was getting coffee. This area has since been redeveloped. At right, the figure walking may be the cars' owner, Peter Obletz.

ABOVE: In addition to Manhattan-bound newsprint loads, road-switcher OP-11's consist generally included a few empty plastic resin and flour loads for the former NYC Putnam Division. Sugar empties came from Yonkers, plus some lumber, food items, etc. The disused signal bridge and unused Track 2 reflect the line's decline, much of which took place during Penn Central's years.

ABOVE: A yard once packed with freight now shows its rusty rails. In making up the return block of 15 or so cars for the Oak Point Yard, the crew used some vacant tracks for easier switching, giving the illusion of a full yard. About 1980, West 72nd Street ceased operating as a service yard with its remaining road freight consolidated to Conrail's ex-New Haven Bronx yard at Oak Point.

via their marine fleets of tugs and barges and river piers. Some of these operated small service yards adjacent to their marine access. NYC also maintained a robust marine operation, interchanging with roughly eight New Jersey railroads. This once-vibrant cross-harbor trade dried up by the early 1970s.

Local passenger trains operating from the Bronx to 30th Street were discontinued by the early 1930s. Other passenger moves on the West Side were unscheduled and included some rail-enthusiast excursions. The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus also used the 30th Street Yard for its circus train into the 1970s.

And then there were the rumors.

My favorite involved comedian Jackie Gleason storing a private passenger train at 30th Street, but research quickly disproved that. Gleason indeed traveled aboard private cars, but he simply chartered available rolling stock.

All things come to an end, and I received advance word of the Conrail run to collect Mr. Obletz's passenger cars when working as an extra-list operator assigned third trick — the midnight shift — at Spuyten Duyvil's DV Tower.

Naturally, I told a couple of close friends of the special move. One of them, Walter, a Grand Central yardmaster, came along. He arrived at 30th Street by bicycling from lower Manhattan.

The move was simple. An Oak Point road-switcher, I believe it was OP-11, crept down from 72nd Street Yard to 30th Street to haul away the two cars. Mr. Obletz was there with a friend as car attendants. These cars were to be set out on track 77, a short siding behind DV tower. OP-11 then would continue to Oak Point Yard, finishing up. Later that night, Conrail's Oak Point-to-Selkirk freight would take the cars north.

A pair of Electro-Motive Division SW1500s of early-1970s Penn Central vintage did the honors. At the 72nd Street Yard, we dropped four newsprint loads at the *New York Times* track and also left a handful of cars there from other work, mostly at Yonkers.

Frank Sorci was the engineer. Having our group tagging along clearly annoyed him but he went along with everything and even posed for a photo. Going south (timetable eastbound), Frank parked his train for a spell to play cards with conductor Morgan Davis and the brakeman, possibly just to make me nervous about missing the afternoon light.

The car pick-up at 30th Street was uneventful. A few fans showed upon reaching 72nd Street, and some daylight remained. Here, after stopping briefly for pictures, the crew grabbed six empty newsprint (and other) cars, and headed back towards Oak Point. A quick stop at DV was made for the passenger car drop. Mr. Obletz asked if I could run him to a supermarket so he could ice-up. He bought food and 10 bags of ice to fill the lunch counter's ice storage to serve as a temporary icebox. There was no lighting or heat on the cars, just flashlights.

And that was that for passenger moves on the old 30th Street Branch. Soon it was out of service. Amtrak's rebuilding project (including Spuyten Duyvil's swing bridge) began a couple years later; it reopened for Amtrak use in 1992. 1

ABOVE: We ran as light-engines to the 30th Street Yard, opened a padlock to a gate accessing the equipment, made an inspection, and left in minutes. The overhead bridgework was the once elevated West Side Highway. Just steps away is the High Line Park — a re-usage of the St. Johns Park trackage. Short line executive Howard Pincus credits Peter Obletz as a leader among those advocating the High Line's regeneration as an innovative urban park.

ABOVE: Spring 1992 revealed a newly reopened two-track West Side *Empire Service* access Spuyten Duyvil to Amtrak's Penn Station. An inbound mid-morning Rohr Turbo train from Albany-Rensselaer passes at Riverside Park (part of the mentioned city urban renewal project, this was once a more industrial area). There have been numerous discussions about bringing Metropolitan Transit Authority/Metro-North commuter service to this line as well.

BELOW: Looking northward to 72nd Street where the yard's throat and approach tracks converged beneath new parks and roads: part of a Robert Moses-inspired 1920s and '30s urban renewal project to better cloak the West Side Line from street running in an effort to curb the railroad's loud, smoky foot print. A staircase once descended from 72nd Street to the yard office and tracks. A brief clip in the 1964 film *The Pawnbroker* shows the area in busier days.

Lesson(s) learned

Confronting the elephant in the room

by Geoffrey H. Doughty

WHILE READING A RECENT LOCAL NEWSPAPER OBITUARY PAGE, I recognized the name of a person I knew from my work on the Maine Central. I had served in several positions before being promoted to the company safety department, so I got to know a good number of people. The gentleman was 89, had lived a good life, retiring in 1990 from the engineering department's bridge and building section. Seeing his name brought to mind my first dilemma as a supervisor and a valuable management lesson.

The incident involved the company's — and the whole industry's — Rule G. First things first: any employee who accepts employment at a railroad commits to obeying the rules, and there are many of them, including subsets for each department. This commitment was, and still is, non-negotiable. Maine Central's Rule G in the 1980s was based on the industry's Uniform Code of Operating Rules and stated: "The use of intoxicants or narcotics by employees subject to duty, or their possession or use while on duty, is prohibited."

Violation of rules could result in serious injury, or worse. Any employee caught in violation was subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal. Getting caught in violation of Rule G meant hearings and often appeals, but in either case, it was a messy affair,

The Maine Central, under Guilford ownership, needed a safety tuneup in the early 1980s. Our author was to help change the safety culture. *Trains* collection

and often difficult to prove. Too many times an employee was simply told to go home and, unless it was egregious, the incident was overlooked.

After the safety department promotion, part of my job was to bring more visibility to safety and change the current culture, which was best described as "business as usual." The company's safety record was deemed needing improvement by Maine Central's new Guilford management. Periodic "safety pushes" had been unsuccessful, short of telling people not to get hurt. Each department handled its safety enforcement differently. When the previous management decided that safety improvement was necessary, departments followed a similar course: redesign their accident report form.

Adherence to the Operating Rules meant whenever an employee was on duty or subject to duty, they were accountable. Like anyone in train service or connected to operations in some manner, e.g., mechanical and engineering, I had to take a rules exam and demonstrate my knowledge and familiarity. As a supervisor, I was entrusted with the authority to enforce the rules, and being relatively new in my position, I came up against a number of situations requiring decisions impacting employee safety and the company. At times, as I was about to learn, this responsibility was a significant burden.

My first encounter with a Rule G violation actually occurred well before I was hired. I was teaching school in Pittsfield, Maine, and had gotten to know the local agent and train crew. Occasionally, on weekends, I would go to the station, where the on-duty agent could often be found sipping a beer and repairing TV sets on the side. Supervisors were scarce on weekends, so some believed they wouldn't be caught. Back then, even I knew what he was doing was prohibited. Another Saturday, the train crew invited me to ride with them back to Waterville, Maine. Riding on the rear platform of the "buggy" — caboose — leaving Pittsfield, the brakeman was running to catch up as the train began moving … toting a couple six packs of beer, which he handed to me so he could safely get aboard.

A decade later, I was employed as a supervisor. One day, while driving to Rumford, Maine, for a meeting, I stopped off in Leeds to grab lunch. In the diner parking lot was a Maine Central pickup truck. I went inside and sat down at the counter next to its driver, somebody I knew. We exchanged greetings and then I noticed the full glass of beer and a bottle sitting in front of him as he ate his sandwich. I didn't say anything other than to ask what project he was on. As we chatted, I went over in my mind how I should deal with the situation. I had an obligation; do I leave it alone, or do I call him out? That glass became the proverbial pachyderm in the room — and I was the one who was uncomfortable.

Ultimately, the Maine Central, like other railroads, was forced to establish a drug testing program. Rule G violations were shifting from alcohol to include marijuana and hard drugs as well. *Trains* collection

It was obvious he had ordered the beer, but had not taken a drink — the glass was full to the brim, and some remained in the bottle. As long as he didn't touch the glass or take a sip, so far as I knew, somebody else could have poured it and placed it in front of him. All I could prove — maybe — would be intent. I left it at that and said nothing; neither did he.

I ordered my lunch and we continued to talk about work in a superficially relaxed manner until he finished his lunch, got up, never once touching the glass. We departed amicably. I knew that he knew that I knew — I breathed a sigh of relief. Still, it was a learning experience for me; what would I do next time? It was no longer business as usual. We would see each other again; neither of us spoke of the incident.

Not long after the beer situation, I was tasked with creating the railroad's drug and alcohol testing program. Times had changed. Alcohol — once the most abused drug in the workplace — was being joined by marijuana and hard drugs. The time had come to step up to confront the problem and not stay silent anymore — an important lesson learned.

Rest in peace, my friend. Rest in peace. T

Museum closed by flood waters

Big Sioux River inundates Sioux City Railroad Museum

▲ **The Big Sioux River deposited flood waters across the grounds of the Sioux City Railroad Museum. Depths ranged from 2 to 10 feet.** Larry Obermeyer

Middle left is the roundhouse turntable — this structure was fully submerged at the height of the flooding. Jen Taylor

DURING THE NIGHT OF JUNE 23-24, the Big Sioux River, flowing through Sioux City, Iowa, crested its banks, submerging the buildings and grounds of the Sioux City Railroad Museum in water ranging from 2 to 10 feet deep. Of the museum's structures, five were inundated with flood waters, causing damage to the buildings, objects, and exhibits, and ruining gift-shop inventory. The museum announced via its Facebook page that it will be closed for the foreseeable future to survey and repair the flood damage.

The museum is based around the former Milwaukee Road Sioux City Engine Terminal and Car Repair Shops. Exhibits and rolling stock are displayed in a number of original buildings throughout the 31-acre site. Key structures include the remaining portion of the roundhouse, turntable and car shop. At the high-water mark, the turntable pit was filled, with only the roof of the turntable's control shack and electrical bridge visible above the flood waters. Flood stage on the Big Sioux River is 31 feet, according to National Weather Service data. On Monday, June 24, the river crested at 45 feet — 14 feet over flood stage and 8 feet higher than forecasts.

On Sunday, June 23, the museum closed to the public as staff and volunteers began filling sandbags to protect the facility. More than 100 volunteers worked to seal buildings, move artifacts to higher storage locations, and relocate rolling stock to safe areas. Sunday morning, the river had started to overflow its banks and encroach on the museum grounds.

By 10 p.m. on Sunday the museum grounds were fully inundated. As flood waters covered the museum, not only was the water's presence a problem, but the strong current put unusual pressure on the historic buildings.

The museum sustained "extensive damage to all its buildings from the pressure of the flood waters," said Larry Obermeyer, board president and CEO of the museum's governing body, the Siouxland Historical Railroad Association. "[There is] extensive damage to the interiors of the Car Shops Learning & Event Center and the Roundhouse Building. You can see the pressure of the flood waters caused the wood floor in the Car Shops building to buckle."

The water hit the museum with the same force that knocked out a railway bridge upstream on Sunday night. Ironically, says Obermeyer, the strong current may have helped the museum situation.

"We were lucky the pressure blew in doors," he said, "which allowed the water to enter the building interiors. While we have significant damage inside the buildings, the fact we still have the buildings standing is something to be grateful for. After all, these buildings are 106 to 107 years old."

The Milwaukee Road built the Sioux City complex between 1916 and 1918. The facility consisted of nearly 25 workshops and support structures. At its

peak, the site employed more than 565 workers.

River flooding was anticipated as the original complex was designed and the grounds are still structured to mitigate flooding. C.F. Loweth, a self-taught civil engineer, placed the major buildings so that if flooded, the water would rapidly drain into retention areas strategically located between the buildings. From these ponds, the design led water to additional holding areas along the river.

The system worked, Obermeyer says: "Once the crest of the river took place, and water levels began to lower, the flood waters quickly flowed to the large retention areas next to the river." In the early hours of Tuesday, June 25, it took about 6 to 8 hours for the water to recede into the retention areas. By 6:30 a.m. on Tuesday, flood waters had filtered out of the buildings.

When the water had receded, a debris field including trash, timber, and other waste transported from upstream covered the museum grounds. Hydrostatic pressure knocked ties from under the track and floated them across the facility. Tie plates and spikes were also carried along by the current. The turntable sustained significant damage to its wood bridge deck and gear system. The wood rim around the pit was destroyed.

The museum has begun damage assessments. However, Obermeyer notes that at this time the museum does not qualify for federal or state recovery resources, and that Woodbury County, Iowa, the museum's home, is not listed in the Presidential Emergency Declaration for this flooding event.

If you would like to assist the Sioux City Railroad Museum in its recovery, please visit: linktr.ee/siouxcityrailroadmuseum. — *Bob Lettenberger*

The Nebraska Central, a 75-foot-by-15-foot HO scale model railroad, is a major feature of the Civil Engineering Exhibit Hall. The flood left the layout sitting in 2 feet of muddy water. Adam Campbell

Traveling the Main Line today

Riding Amtrak's *Keystone* and *Pennsylvanian*

▲ **Amtrak P42 No. 131 powers the *Pennsylvanian*, train No. 43, on Norfolk Southern's Pittsburgh Line near Mexico, Pa.** Two photos, Brian Solomon

ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS passenger routes in the East is the former Pennsylvania Railroad trunk between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, known for hosting the New York-Chicago *Broadway Limited*.

I'm a big fan of this route, known as the Main Line. The name stems from the original transportation corridor, the Main Line of Public Works — a multimodal system completed in the mid-1830s and consisting of canals, inclined-plane "portage railways," and primitive railroad lines.

Amtrak's *Keystone Service* and *Pennsylvanian* trains travel this historic route, offering an excellent way to traverse Pennsylvania. Amtrak owns the route as far west as Harrisburg, whereas Norfolk Southern owns the trackage to the west. You can experience Amfleet cars in regular revenue service [see "Travel," May 2024] and ride behind Amtrak's powerful Siemens ACS64 Cities Sprinter electrics.

There are many ways to enjoy this route. You could board train No. 43, the westward *Pennsylvanian*, in the morning at its eastern terminus below ground at New York City's Pennsylvania Station and spend the day traveling the length of the route, including a swift trip on the electrified Northeast Corridor to Philadelphia and then via Harrisburg to Pittsburgh. From there you could continue west overnight on Amtrak's *Capitol Limited* to Chicago or opt to return the following day on the eastward counterpart, train No. 42.

PRR's 30th Street Station in Philadelphia (renamed William H. Gray-30th Street in 2014) is by far the grandest station on the route. It's among my favorites, and the most appropriate place to begin or end a journey on the Main Line.

Keystone trains can reach 110 mph on sections of the Main Line. The perspective you get racing along under wire, stopping momentarily at intermediate stations, then accelerating away is very different than watching trains pass at speed. Locomotives are typically assigned to five-car, push-pull Amfleet sets.

Amtrak has been upgrading its trackage, including installation of concrete ties, with the aim of raising the speed limits and shortening travel times.

The *Pennsylvanians* are hauled by an ACS64 between New York and Philadelphia. Since the trains reverse direction at 30th Street, it suits operations to make the change to diesel power (typically a GE P42) here, rather than at the end of electrification at Harrisburg.

West from Philadelphia's Zoo Junction, the PRR route is now Amtrak's Harrisburg Line. It is shared with suburban operator SEPTA as far as Thorndale.

To accommodate the frequent stops of SEPTA trains, the route retains four tracks to a point just east of the Paoli station. Beyond to Harrisburg the line is largely two bi-directionally signaled main tracks. A few *Keystone*s share the Ardmore stop with SEPTA, and most *Keystone*s also serve SEPTA's Paoli and Exton platforms.

Beyond SEPTA territory, the scenery becomes rural. *Keystone*s stop at Downingtown (where Amish often board to take their agricultural wares to sell in Philadelphia), Coatesville (the location of a large PRR stone viaduct), and Parkesburg. The latter is where the PRR Atgen-Susquehanna Branch joined the Main Line. Built in the early 20th century, this low-grade freight route was electrified in the 1930s and had

been a preferred route for through freight until the Conrail era.

Today, evidence of the once-important junction remains as a wide spot between eastward and westward platforms. A short stub of the freight route remains for Norfolk Southern to serve its local customers.

Keystone trains accelerate quickly from Parkesburg. A few miles west, the route passes Christiana, location of a preserved PRR station on the south side of the tracks and, on the north side, an old freight house and a Conrail caboose, preserved by the Lancaster Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society.

Trains slow for the curves at Gap and then accelerate across Pennsylvania Dutch country, where the rolling hills are home to many Amish and Mennonite farms.

Leaman Place in Paradise is the junction with Strasburg Rail Road. In season, eastward *Keystone* No. 656 regularly passes Strasburg's evening steam excursion as the locomotive is running around its train.

Next stop is Lancaster, then Mount Joy and Elizabethtown. The latter is on an 1899 line relocation on a high fill, featuring a limestone-faced Tudor Gothic-style station built in 1915 (on the north side of the line, the third PRR depot in that town) that shares its architectural design with the 1,400-acre Masonic Village south of the railroad. The large modern station at Middletown opened in January 2022.

***Keystone* No. 666, led by Siemens ACS64 No. 640, sweeps through Gap, Pa. *Keystone*s are usually push-pull sets with a cab control car at one end. This set has ACS64s at both ends.**

Harrisburg is the terminus for the *Keystone*s while travelers on the *Pennsylvanian* continue over the NS Pittsburgh Line, one of the busiest freight routes in the East. Highlights include crossing the Susquehanna River on the 48-arch Rockville Bridge completed in 1902, the segment through the scenic Juniata Valley, the shop complex at Altoona, and rounding world famous Horseshoe Curve on the ascent of the Eastern Continental Divide. — *Brian Solomon*

Thanks to Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Railroad Collections Archivist Kurt Bell for his assistance.

GREAT RAILFAN ROADS

CHICAGO'S CICERO AVENUE

Eighteen rail lines hosting 650 daily trains along 42 miles of road

By John Friedmann

ROOSEVELT ROAD USED TO BE THE Chicago railfan road. On less than a mile of viaducts just south of downtown, fans could catch passenger trains to and from many of the great Chicago passenger stations and associated coach yards. But intercity trains now only call at Union Station, and while commuters still roll, several iconic terminals and longtime coach yards are long gone.

Today, Cicero Avenue (nobody calls it Illinois Route 50) is Chicago's best railfan road — farther out, running north-south, and focused on freights and commuters more than intercity passenger trains. The scenery may not be world class, but the rail action is dense — 18 rail lines hosting about 650 trains per day along 42 road miles.

Don't decry "look-alike" commuter trains — six locomotive types lead Metra commuter trains in different paint, including several heritage schemes

Start in Skokie near the intersection of Skokie Boulevard (which becomes Cicero Avenue) and Dempster Street at the Chicago Transit Authority's Skokie Swift terminal. The Skokie Swift is the most prominent operating remnant of the Chicago, North Shore & Milwaukee system and retains its interurban feel. Heading south, Skokie Boulevard parallels and then crosses under the Swift.

Enter Chicago proper on what is now Cicero Avenue. In quick succession, cross over the CTA's Blue Line in the Kennedy Expressway median, then underneath the six-diamond (!) crossing of CPKC's C&M Sub to Milwaukee and Union Pacific's Harvard Sub. Both lines host Metra trains (128 total), and the CPKC line also has Amtrak. Mayfair tower used to govern this busy crossing, but was torn down in 1997. Train watching is difficult at this hot spot because both lines are elevated. If train schedules show something due on the CPKC, duck into Metra's Mayfair station a few blocks down.

Three miles south, you'll encounter Metra's Milwaukee District-West line, also used by CPKC. While the Metra station is Grand/Cicero, most railfans know this as Cragin for the nearby CPKC/Belt Railway of Chicago connection. The Metra station (accessible

▲ **Cicero Avenue is unquestionably Chicago's best railfan road. Crowded into just 42 road miles are 18 railroad lines, including Blue Island's eight-track crossing.**

from the underpass) sits in the middle of the interlocking and makes a convenient train-watching perch. Starting here, BRC's main line runs parallel to, but out of sight of, Cicero Avenue until past Midway Airport.

Cicero next crosses UP's ex-Chicago & North Western Omaha main line. UP's M-19A diesel shop, which primarily services Metra power, is a few blocks east, but you can't really see it — Kinzie Avenue runs along the UP opposite the shop, but the track is on an embankment that blocks the view. Metra trains are frequent (58 daily), and you can see UP freights, mostly interchange with NS and CSX via the Western Avenue corridor.

Just beyond the Eisenhower Expressway (I-290) is CSX's lightly-used Altenheim Sub. Bridge problems on the east end limit

The Skokie Swift is a throwback to the interurban lines of old, it's a remnant of the once-expansive Chicago, North Shore & Milwaukee. It's not exactly scenic. Two photos, David Lassen

the line to local service, primarily to Ferrara Candy (famous for Lemonheads and Atomic Fireballs). Farther south, there's an unusual at-grade crossing with CTA's Pink Line, formerly the Douglas Park Branch. CTA's Cicero station is at the crossing.

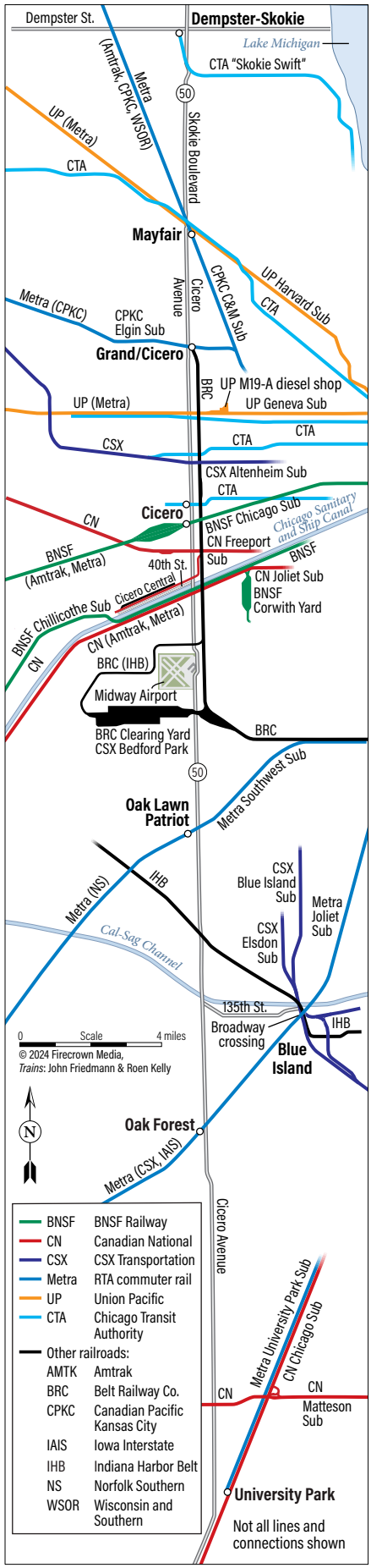
Before the next railroad bridge, turn right on 25th Street, then left on 49th Place to get to Metra's BNSF Line (former CB&Q) Cicero station. The location at the east end of BNSF's Cicero Yard provides views of through trains (Amtrak, Metra, and BNSF) and yard action. Be warned: Most of the 100-plus passenger trains don't stop and come through at track speed!

After exploring the area around Cicero Yard, head south to encounter CN's former Illinois Central Freeport Subdivision overhead. Never heavily used by Chicago standards, this portion of the line has been made quieter by CN's EJ&E purchase. CN's small Hawthorne Yard is just to west.

Just before Cicero crosses the Chicago Sanitary & Ship Canal, bump across an ungated CN industrial track (formerly IC subsidiary Chicago & Illinois Western). Make a quick right onto 40th Street (it looks like a driveway) and dodge trucks for about a half mile and you'll come upon Watco's Cicero Central which serves a Koppers plant using ex-Milwaukee MP15ACs.

Back on Cicero after crossing the Chicago River, BNSF's former Santa Fe main line is overhead followed by the Stevenson Expressway (I-55) and CN's Joliet Sub, the former GM&O route to St. Louis, which also hosts 10 daily Amtrak trains and six Metras. BNSF's Corwith Yard (intermodal) is about a mile and a half east. While good access points are hard to find, a driveway off of South St. Louis Avenue (north of 38th Street) will provide a clear view of CN crossing Corwith's north throat.

Car traffic now gets heavier because Cicero Avenue is the main route to Midway Airport. BRC's 59th Street Branch crosses overhead just north of the airport, but the big reward — BRC's Clearing Yard — lies on the other side of Midway. Cicero Avenue provides the best views of Clearing, one



Metra's Oak Lawn Patriot Station, just west of Cicero Avenue, is served by the weekday-only SouthWest Service. This drone-like view is from a parking garage. Three photos, David Lassen

of two double hump yards left in the United States. Variety abounds because all Class I railroads use Clearing, and trains for CSX's Bedford Park intermodal terminal on Clearing's south side add to the action. Cicero has sidewalks on both sides over the BRC, so park nearby and walk up.

The distinctive round tower of the Hilton Oak Lawn signals the crossing of Metra's Southwest Sub. This was Wabash's Chicago–Decatur, Ill., route, abandoned by Norfolk Southern south of Manhattan since 1990. Metra's 30 daily trains dominate the action, while NS has only a single local. Metra's Oak Lawn station is just west of Cicero Avenue.

Cicero next crosses over the Indiana Harbor Belt main line. But continue south across the Cal-Sag Channel and take a left on 135th Street. Bearing left again on South Claire Boulevard will take you to Blue Island's eight-track Broadway rail crossing. IHB joins CSX's Barr Sub and former Grand Trunk Western Elsdon Sub here, but you can find trains of every Class I in town while Metra, CSX, and Iowa Interstate trains fly overhead on the nearby former Rock Island, visible from the crossing.

The road goes under the Metra-owned Rock Island route to Joliet several miles south, and Metra's Oak Forest station on the west side provides convenient parking and wide-open angles.

Chicago's outskirts are signaled by a crossing of CN's former Elgin, Joliet and Eastern, "Chicago's Outer Belt." The "J" is much busier since it absorbed CN's trains through Chicago starting in 2009. Turn left off Cicero at Kildare Avenue to get to the suburb of Matteson where the CN's Illinois Central and Metra's former IC electrified commuter lines fly over EJ&E.

Linking CN's EJ&E and IC routes required constructing a tight, looping connection, but the best feature is an elevated railfan viewing platform. That platform provides good views of the connection and the Metra/IC main lines, but better angles of the EJ&E may come from the Main Street crossing nearby.

Cicero station on Metra's BNSF Line (former Chicago, Burlington & Quincy) is located at the east end of BNSF's Cicero Yard and provides views of through Amtrak, Metra, and BNSF trains.

Metra's Grand/Cicero station is more of a passenger shelter, and provides a handy photo platform with a skyline backdrop.

Appropriately, the last stop on this railfan road is University Park, the southernmost station on Metra and the end of electrified territory. Because Metra equipment lays over here, it's easy to work shots of Metra EMUs with passing CN freights.

WORTH STOPPING FOR:

• **PASSES.** Tired of driving? Try riding. Metra offers a full-system pass for $13.50 weekdays, $10 for a full weekend, or $7 Saturday or Sunday. A CTA day pass is $5.

• **CHICAGO SPECIALTIES.** What Cicero Avenue lacks in fine dining, it makes up in local fare. Two of Chicago's best Italian Beef spots are along Cicero: Roma's in Mayfair and Scatchell's in Cicero. Many Chicagoans swear by Portillo's hot dogs and Polish sausages, which you can sample at a new location on Cicero next to CN's Freeport Sub. For deep dish pizza, try Louisa's on Cicero in the south suburbs.

• **BLUE ISLAND BEVERAGES.** Only 0.3 miles west of the Broadway crossing in Blue Island is the Rock Island Public House, named for the tracks nearly in its backyard. There are plenty of pinball machines to play between trains.

IF TIME IS SHORT:

Plant yourself at a location and let the trains come to you, especially during rush hour. Two of the best are along the BNSF ex-CB&Q Chicago Sub (although the further-out suburbs offer better scenery) and the busy Broadway crossing at Blue Island.

BESIDES THE RAILROAD:

You won't find prime tourist attractions along Cicero Avenue's gritty neighborhoods. But two sporting venues are near the route: Hawthorne Race Course offers weekend horse racing and SeatGeek Stadium hosts men's and women's pro soccer. 1

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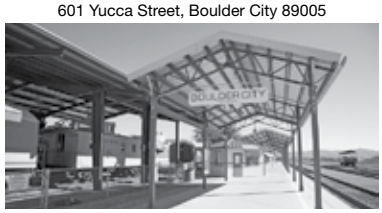

The Nevada State Railroad Museum, Boulder City, is a showcase of the regional railroad lines that built Hoover Dam and other indelible parts of Southern Nevada. Visitors can experience railroading through train rides, exhibits, and learning opportunities. For more information, visit boulderrailroadmuseum.org.

boulderrailroadmuseum.org **702-486-5933**

NEVADA — **Carson City**

NEVADA STATE RAILROAD MUSEUM

2180 South Carson Street, Carson City 89701

The Nevada State Railroad Museum, Carson City, is a cultural resource dedicated to educating the community about Nevada railroad history. The museum contains an extensive collection of significant locomotives, rolling stock, artifacts, photographs, and memorabilia. In addition to static exhibits, select pieces of equipment in the collection are restored and operated throughout the year to demonstrate steam and early gasoline technology and provide visitors with an immersive experience. For more information, visit carsonrailroadmuseum.org.

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SOUTH CAROLINA — **Greenwood**

THE RAILROAD HISTORICAL CENTER

908 South Main Street

Last Chance to See This Fabulous Historical Train this Year!

From the 1906 Baldwin Steam Engine, to the 1914 Executive 'Carolina' car, you will see some of the most beautiful train restorations in the Southeast, including 3 of the existing 4 cars from the old P&N Railway, plus Pullman Passenger and Sleeper cars and the Erie Lackawanna Dining Car #746. Open every Saturday 10-4, May 7 through October 15, or call for tours at any time but Sunday.

Call today!

www.greenwoodrrmuseum.com **864-229-7093**

TEXAS — **Rosenberg**

ROSENBERG RAILROAD MUSEUM

1921 Avenue F, Rosenberg, TX 77471

The Rosenberg Railroad Museum is dedicated to preservtion and education of railroading history and its impact on Fort Bend County. Exhibits Include 1970's Caboose, 1903 Tower 17, 1879 passenger car, Garden Railroad, model train layouts, and more! Open Wed-Fri. 10-3pm, Sat. 10-4pm, & Sunday 1-4 pm.

www.RosenbergRRMuseum.org **(281)633-2846**

WASHINGTON — **Othello**

OTHELLO'S MILWAUKEE ROAD INTERPRETIVE CABOOSE

Explore the history of the Milwaukee Road in an original caboose turned interpretive center. Photos, memorabilia, maps and more ignite your imagination. Bay window, rib side caboose is open year round, Tuesday through Saturday from 10am-5pm. Groups welcome. Various train items and artwork available for sale in adjacent historic Old Hotel Art Gallery, originally built as a train hotel.

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

WISCONSIN — **East Troy**

EAST TROY RAILROAD MUSEUM

2002 Church Street

HARVEST FEST runs Sept 7th to Oct 27th! Purchase tickets in advance for Harvest Fest trips between the East Troy depot and museum and The Elegant Farmer and from The Elegant Farmer to the East Troy Depot. Featuring a mix of trolley and interurban cars. Purchase tickets at easttroyrr.org. See full schedules at

www.easttroyrr.org **262.642.3263**

WISCONSIN — **Green Bay**

NATIONAL RAILROAD MUSEUM

2285 South Broadway

Explore dozens of historic trains and engaging exhibits at the National Railroad Museum, which is open year-round. Among our popular attractions are: the General Motors Aerotrain, Union Pacific "Big Boy" #4017, Pennsylvania Railroad GG-1 electric locomotive #4890, the Dwight D. Eisenhower A4 locomotive, and the world's largest collection of drumheads. Train rides are offered daily May-September (weekends in October).

www.nationalrrmuseum.org **920-437-7623**

WISCONSIN — **North Freedom**

MID-CONTINENT RAILWAY MUSEUM

E8948 Museum Road

MCRM is home to one of the nation's largest collections of restored wooden passenger cars. Take a 55-minute, 7-mile round-trip ride aboard 1915-era coach cars. Open weekends May-Oct, daily except Mondays mid-June-Labor Day. Join us for our Vintage Rail Car Tour (Sept. 28th-29th.)

www.midcontinent.org **800-930-1385**

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www.trainride.org **651-500-1822**

WISCONSIN — **Trego**

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N6639 Dilly Lake Road

America's Only Moving
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www.spoonertrainride.com **715-635-3200**

YOUR STATE — **Your City**

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E-mail: classads@firecrown.com

RAIL SHOWS AND EVENTS

SEPTEMBER 21, 2024: Railroad Day at the Centralia Area Historical Museum, 240 South Locust Street, Centralia IL. 9am-3pm. Train exhibit & historical photo display, vendor tables, photo stand for Amtrak, NS, CN & BNSF Mainline, food truck, and much more! Sponsored by Freight Car Locomotive Experts (FCLE). Vendor tables $30, call 618-907-4052

OCTOBER 20, 2024: 33rd Annual Chicago Railroadiana and Model Train Show. Sunday, 10:00am-3:00pm. Kane County Fairgrounds, 525 South Randall Rd., St. Charles, IL. Admission: $6.00 w/tax. Tables starting at $65.00. Information: 847-358-1185, RussFierce@aol.com or www.RRShows.com

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

LODGING

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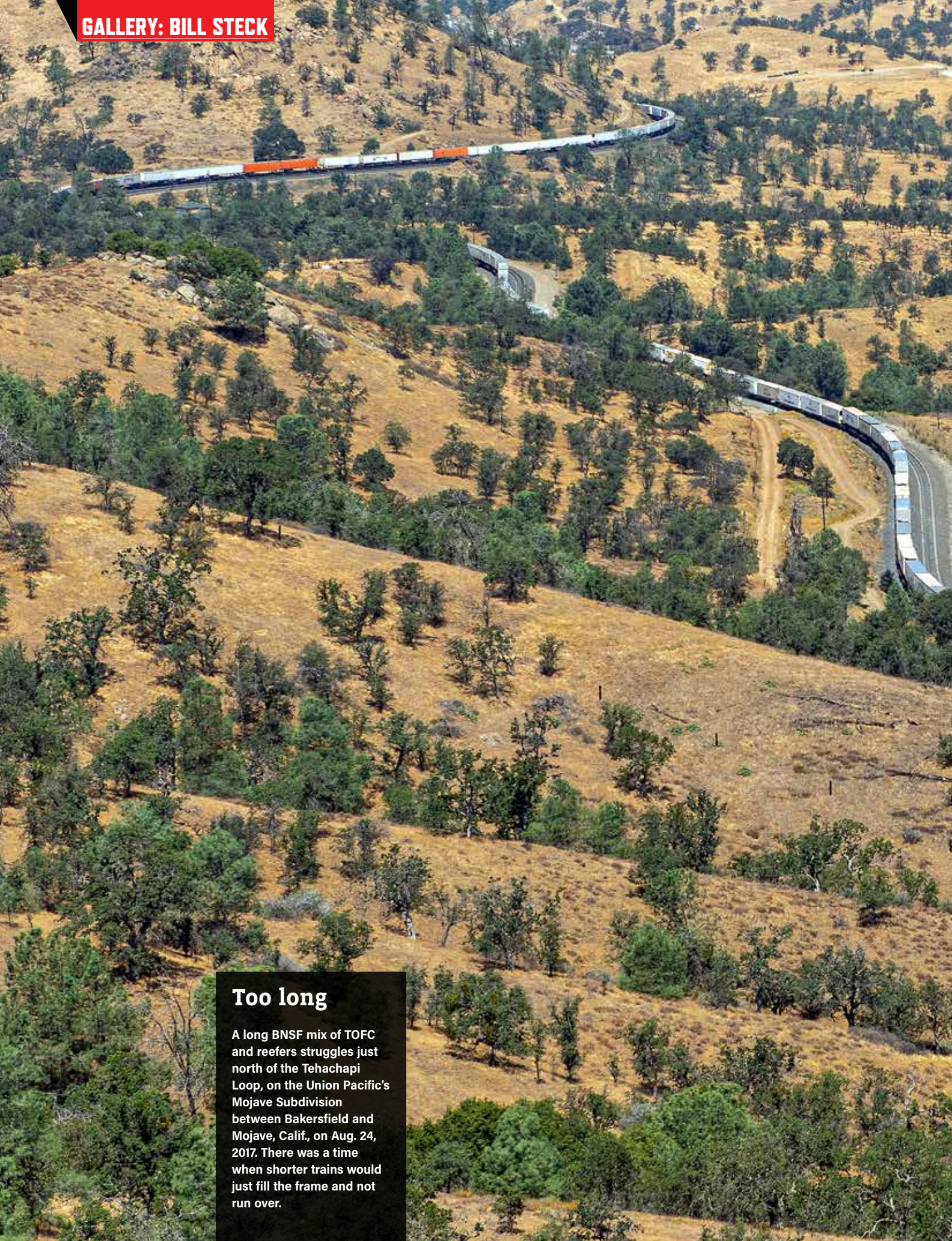

Too long

A long BNSF mix of TOFC and reefers struggles just north of the Tehachapi Loop, on the Union Pacific's Mojave Subdivision between Bakersfield and Mojave, Calif., on Aug. 24, 2017. There was a time when shorter trains would just fill the frame and not run over.

Same place, different time

Sharing the line through the Tehachapi Mountains, BNSF and Union Pacific also share the bridge over Bealville Road in Caliente, Calif. UP C44ACCTE No. 5960 rolls over the bridge on Nov. 21, 2023, at 8:01 a.m. BNSF Railway GE ET44C4 No. 3794 takes a turn on Feb. 9, 2024, at 10:19 a.m.

Central California rain

The 1973 pop song said it never rains in Southern California. It *does* rain in Central California, forcing commuters at Fresno's Tulare Street station to grab umbrellas, fending off the downpour at boarding time on Jan. 22, 2024.

Morning light

As the morning sun is about to crest the ridge east of State Route 58, a westbound BNSF TOFC train, with ES44DC No. 7471 on point, glides through Cameron, Calif. Cameron is merely a set of crossovers on the railroad and a spot where tracks and road bend around the ridge.

Switching Guadalupe

Short line Santa Maria Valley Railroad EMD GP7 No. 1322 looks like a Santa Fe locomotive as it grabs a cut of cars on Union Pacific track in Guadalupe, Calif., on Jan. 21, 2019. The truth is No. 1322 was new to the Santa Fe in 1952, became a BNSF unit through the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe merger, and was then cast off to shortline duty.

Bill Steck, from California, has been interested in trains as far back as he can remember and photography nearly as long — being able to mix them is a bonus. Steck notes the only easy thing about train photography is that, sooner or later, a train will come down the track. How soon or later is up in the air, along with everything else that will affect a shot. The best thing about doing this, Steck says, is being able to collaborate and associate with people having the same intense interest, and if we had a motto, it would be "Semper Gumby," Always Flexible.

Looking at Lompoc

As Union Pacific GP38-3 No. 1010 eases two loaded hoppers downhill through a southside residential area in Lompoc, Calif., a crewman catches a breather on the train's quiet end. Easily 50-plus years old, the ex-Southern Pacific caboose still stands its duty.