TRAVEL: CANADIAN PRAIRIE RAILROADING

Col

December 2024 Control of the contro

Genesee & Wyoming marks 125 years

Shortline operator celebrates, makes major investments for growth

PLUS

- Reading & Northern steam goes to Tunkhannock
- A yardmaster befriends traveling soldiers on Christmas
- Grade crossing safety lies behind the blue signs

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From the Editor



Carl Swanson



he new year ahead marks the first of a series of railroad

anniversaries, starting with the bicentennial of England's Stockton & Darlington, the first locomotive-powered public railway, followed, in a couple of years, by the bicentennial of railways in the United States.

It's a good time to reflect on the development of the industry. We've asked John Hankey to share his perspectives in a new monthly column, "History with Hankey."

John, former chief curator of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum, has also worked as a locomotive fireman and engineer. He is the author of more than 100 articles on railroad history, preservation, and interpretation.

Check out John's introductory column on page 10.

Editor Carl Swanson TRAI

Design Director Thomas G. Danneman Production Editor Nastassia Putz Senior Editor David Lassen Associate Editor Bob Lettenberger Editorial Associate Monica Freitag Assistant Design Director Scott M. Krall Illustrators Roen Kelly, Kellie Jaeger Production Director Kelly Kramer Weekley Operations Specialist Melissa Valuch Production Specialist Sue Hollinger-Klahn Librarian Thomas Hoffmann

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ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

Martha Stanczak Email: martha.stanczak@firecrown.com Phone: 888-558-1544, ex. 643

EDITORIAI

Email: carl.swanson@firecrown.com Address: 18650 W. Corporate Dr., Suite 103 Brookfield WI 53045

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Locomotives, passenger rail highlight biennial event in Berlin

▲ The display tracks at the Messe Berlin exhibit grounds are crowded with new rail equipment during the InnoTrans trade fair Sept. 24-27, 2024. Two photos, Keith Fender

THE MAMMOTH EVENT that is InnoTrans — the largest rail trade fair in the world — was held for the 14th time in Berlin from Sept. 24-27, setting new records for the number of exhibitors as well as attendees.

The four-day event drew some 2,940 exhibitors from 59 countries, and by its close, organizers said it had drawn at least 170,000 visitors from 166 countries. The exhibition included some 133 pieces of

equipment on the 2.2 miles of display tracks at the Messe Berlin exhibition center, as well as filling 42 exhibit halls.

It is impossible for one person to see everything at InnoTrans — to visit every exhibitor during the event's 34 hours would allow less than a minute at each, and that does not account for time moving from one exhibit to the next. But here are a few highlights:

- Siemens displayed one of the 41 Velaro trains it is building for a new high-speed network under construction in Egypt, while Hitachi showed its new "Frecciarossa" (Red Arrow) 225-mph train being built for Italy's Trenitalia.
- China's CRRC exhibited a prototype hydrogen-powered Cinova high-speed train, a four-car trainset designed to reach 125 mph.
- Spain's Talgo displayed one of the Travca electric locomotives that will power new 17-car Intercity Express Low Level (ICE-L) trains for Germany's Deutsche Bahn. The trains —

79 are on order — will be capable of 145 mph; they were to begin service this year but have been delayed by production and testing issues.

- Alternative power sources were featured, as has been the case at recent InnoTrans shows. Germany's Vossloh Locomotives, a subsidiary of CRRC, showed its "Modula" switchers, which offer diesel, battery, and hydrogen energy sources in various configurations. Italy's IPE Railway Vehicles showed a small three-axle switcher powered entirely by battery; while it has a pantograph, it is to be used only for recharging, not to power the locomotive in motion.
- Freight equipment on display included intermodal cars from Slovak manufacturer Tatravagónka Poprad designed to handle truck trailers normally too light to be handled by cranes; the trailers are placed in specially designed trays that can be handled by cranes.

InnoTrans is held every two years. The next edition is Sept.



Talgo's new 145-mph Travca locomotive (left), which will pull 17-car trains for Germany's Deutsche Bahn, shares display space with a new Traxx locomotive from Alstom.

Railroads, shippers differ sharply on growth

STB hearing depicts declining volume, but opinions vary as to cause

ON THE SECOND DAY of the Surface Transportation Board's September hearing on the lack of rail freight volume growth, Vice Chair Karen Hedlund said she was still struck by what she heard the day before from analysts, shippers, and Class I railroad executives.

"What we heard yesterday was a tale of two cities. And I'm still trying to get my head around it," she says. "From our economists and consultants, we heard a pretty grim story. From our Class I railroads, 'Hey! Look at all the investments we're making! We're just doing great!' And somewhere in between we have to figure out what's really going on."

On the first day of the unprecedented hearing, an analyst panel walked the board through the ugly trends. Combined volume of the big four U.S. railroads declined 7% between 2000 and 2023, while the economy grew 50%, industrial production was up 13%, and truck tonnage grew 43%.

Rail traffic has been sinking because Class I railroads have been exploiting their pricing power, provide unreliable service that doesn't fit modern supply chains, and are captive to a Wall Street that has a shortterm focus and does not believe railroads can grow, the analysts said.

The decline also has been due to a complicated stew of economic forces. Among them: Dramatic changes including the shift of manufacturing overseas, a housing market that has yet to recover from the building slump that began during the Great Recession, and the precipitous drop in the use of coal to generate electricity. "It is important to recognize that broader economic challenges ... have had and will continue to have a significant impact on freight rail volumes," says Rand Ghayad, chief economist and senior vice president of policy and economics at the Association of American Railroads.

STB Chairman Robert E. Primus was having none of it. "There's a lot of red herrings in your testimony, in a sense of saying that it's external forces that are causing the lack of growth," he said, pointing to the industry's self-inflicted service problems, many of them related to the implementation of the low-cost Precision Scheduled



Union Pacific crews handle hump work at Houston's Englewood Yard. Jim Allen/Firecrown Media

Railroading operating model.

AAR CEO Ian Jefferies said it's not mutually exclusive to say that both broad economic factors and railroad service problems have played a role. "One hundred percent there's a lot within the industry's power ... to harness and grow and get jump-ball traffic," he says.

Railroads have improved service since the pandemic, are now launching new services, and making major investments for growth. "It's incumbent upon us to walk that walk now," Jefferies says.

Customers told regulators they want to put more freight on the railroads. But unreliable service, inflexible rates, and a lack of rail competition mean they instead send more of their business to trucks. "If you're not reliable and you can't provide service and you're not competitive, you're not going to have growth," says Mike Seyfert, CEO of the National Feed and Grain Association.

Labor leaders told the STB that railroad staffing levels are a barrier to growth. Freight rail is of vital importance to the U.S. economy. Unfortunately, safety, service, and staffing deficiencies continue to plague the industry and contribute to its lack of growth," says Greg Regan, president of the Transportation Trades Division of the AFL-CIO.

Rail executives told regulators they're focused on volume growth, which will be required if they're to keep producing the double-digit earnings growth that investors expect. Each railroad touted growth-related investments in capacity and technology, as well as new services they've rolled out over the past year or two. And they said they're working more closely with short lines and each other for interline moves.

CSX CEO Joe Hinrichs — the only Class I chief executive to testify - said he knows about railroad service problems from his three decades of experience as a rail customer while working at General Motors and Ford. "Without more and better service to our customers we're not going to see growth in this industry," he says.

Railroads need to take a different approach to service, Hinrichs says. At CSX, that means creating a workplace where employees feel valued, respected, and listened to, he says. In turn, a more engaged workforce will deliver better service. The formula is working, he says, noting that CSX has led the U.S. railroads in merchandise traffic growth for the past

Hinrichs says CSX's investor base has changed over the past couple of years, with short-term stockholders being replaced by investors whose views are more in line with the long-term growth foundation the railroad is building now. — Bill Stephens

Report says risks of long trains require action

Study finds increased possibility of derailment as train length grows

LONG MANIFEST TRAINS are more likely to derail than their shorter counterparts due to excessive in-train forces — and the number of wrecks related to train makeup and handling issues has increased sharply since U.S. railroads adopted Precision Scheduled Railroading operating models that rely on ever-longer trains, according to a National Academies of Sciences report released in September.

The 105-page report on the impacts of freight trains longer than 7,500 feet recommends that the Federal Railroad Administration take steps to ensure that railroads are fully mitigating the risks associated with the operation of long manifest trains.

"Railroad operations have changed a great deal over the past few decades, as have the technologies used and our understanding of the best safety management practices," says Debra Miller, a former member of the Surface Transportation Board and chair of the committee that wrote the report. "So, the time is right for Congress, regulatory bodies, and the industry itself to take a closer look at railroad practices and regulations to ensure the safest operations going forward."

The report noted there is no threshold at which a train becomes a "long train" that should be subject to greater safety concerns. As manifest train length increases, however, the number and mix of freight car types and tonnage contributes to increased forces that can stress equipment, create handling challenges for engineers, and increase the potential for derailments if



Long manifest trains are more likely to derail than shorter ones, according to a report released in September. But BNSF was found to have a lower rate of such issues. David Lassen

in-train forces are not properly managed.

"The operational demands of long manifest trains, therefore, require a combination of responses by railroads that includes well-designed and consistently applied train makeup rules, the deployment of appropriate technology (e.g., distributed power units, brakes, engineer-assist programs), and assurance of crew readiness and competency," the report says.

Derailments related to train handling and in-train forces began increasing during 2019 in line with increases in train length, the report found. It also uncovered differences in the long-train derailment rates of the big four U.S. systems. Derailments re-

lated to excessive in-train forces were significantly higher on Norfolk Southern and significantly lower on BNSF Railway.

After derailments related to in-train forces in February and March 2023, then-NS CEO Alan Shaw ordered train lengths curtailed until the railroad could develop and implement strict rules on the safe building and handling of long manifest trains. NS says changes to train makeup, train marshaling, and new software used in terminals produced safety improvements. The other Class I systems already had complex rules governing the building of long trains, including placement of distributed power locomotives. — *Bill Stephens*

NS names George to replace ousted CEO Shaw

Relationship with another executive leads to top officer's downfall

NORFOLK SOUTHERN IN SEPTEMBER moved quickly to replace CEO Alan Shaw and Chief Legal Officer Nabanita Nag after a brief investigation found they were having a consensual relationship in violation of company policy.

The NS board unanimously named Chief Financial Officer Mark George as president and CEO on Sept. 11, just three days after confirming an independent probe of allegations that Shaw had violated the railroad's ethics policy. NS said Shaw's departure was unrelated to the railroad's performance, financial reporting, or operations.

"The Board has full confidence in Mark and his ability to continue delivering on our commitments to shareholders and other stakeholders," NS Chairman Claude Mongeau said in a statement. "Mark has played an integral role in our recent progress and brings decades of financial experience and strong operational expertise. . . .

In close partnership with our accomplished COO, John Orr, they will continue to improve NS' operating performance and close the margin gap with peers."

George joined NS in 2019 from conglomerate United Technologies Corp., where he had served as global chief financial officer for its Otis Elevator Co. and Carrier Corp. subsidiaries. NS on Sept. 24



Mark George



Alan Shaw

also promoted Jason Zampi to chief financial officer and treasurer and Jason Morris to chief legal officer and corporate secretary.

Norfolk Southern remains committed to

the service and resilience strategy introduced in December 2022, Chief Marketing Officer Ed Elkins says: "I want to be clear that the NS strategy is a company strategy developed by the entire leadership team, not one individual. ... the core tenets of our strategy remain unchanged: Service, productivity and growth with safety as the foundation." — *Bill Stephens*

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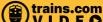












SCAN ME

Amtrak flexes muscles vs. its host railroads



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

The strategy won't help trains run on time but has damaged relationships with Class I roads

ou can't blame Amtrak for being disappointed with the on-time performance of its long-distance trains, which roll off the vast majority of their mileage on host railroads. In the 12 months ending June 30, 2024, just 57% of long-distance passengers arrived on the advertised.

Amtrak's No. 1 culprit for late trains: Freight train interference.

So now a frustrated Amtrak is flexing its legal muscles. In May it asked the Justice Department to enforce the right of preference that passenger trains are supposed to enjoy over freights. Justice in July filed suit against Norfolk Southern for putting its trains in the way of the Crescent between Alexandria, Va., and New Orleans.

This, of course, came as the Surface Transportation Board was 18 months into its first probe of an Amtrak on-time performance complaint, which was brought in December 2022 against Union Pacific for the consistently tardy Sunset Limited.

Amtrak also hauled CSX and NS before the STB in 2021 to settle its long-running dispute over resuming Gulf Coast service between Mobile, Ala., and New Orleans.

The common thread? Amtrak, under CEO Stephen Gardner, is pursuing a scorched-earth policy against host railroads. You could argue that begging the freight railroads to run passenger trains on time got Amtrak precisely nowhere. And you'd be right.

But it's just as clear that a lawyered-up Amtrak will not win any friends at Class I railroad headquarters. In fact, Amtrak's

legal guns blazing approach has damaged its already strained relationship with the railroads it must depend upon. An inconvenient fact for Amtrak: Nearly four years after new

federal on-time performance standards went into effect, the schedules for nine of the 15 long-distance trains are not certified. So when Amtrak says that no long distance train met the 80% customer OTP threshold, in the majority of cases it's measuring against schedules that haven't been designed to meet the new standards.

Freight railroad executives say that Amtrak's criticism of host railroad on-time performance is a case of the pot calling the kettle black. They have a point. Customer OTP on Amtrak's own Northeast Corridor was just 79.1% in the 12 months ending June 30.

The lesson here is that you can create new on-time performance standards — as the Federal Railroad Administration did in 2020 — but that does not mean trains will magically run to schedule. It's a sad state of affairs, especially if you've plunked down your money for a ticket and arrive hours late.

How can this persistent OTP problem be fixed? I posed this question to freight railroad executives, regulators, train dispatchers, and current and former Amtrak officials. Their suggestions:

For freight railroads:

- CEOs must make a commitment to running Amtrak trains on time — and then hold operating officials accountable.
- Don't run so many trains over siding length on Amtrak routes. Following a lumbering 15,000-foot, no-fitter merchandise train for miles is the very definition of freight train interference.
- Run the railroad to plan and stick to the operating plan rather than making daily tactical decisions that introduce variability. For Amtrak:
- Get your house in order: 22% of delays are caused by Amtrak itself. Strive to eliminate mechanical problems, depart on time from origin, and hand your trains to host railroads as scheduled.
- Realize 2024 is not 1974: Thanks to the Staggers Act of 1980, the Class I railroads by 1993 were handling 21% more revenue ton-miles on a network with 31% fewer miles of track. This concentration of tonnage on core routes means dispatchers can't part the seas for every Amtrak train.
- Understand that performance incentive payments are chump change that won't move the OTP needle. Today's Class I railroads earn more revenue before lunch than they haul in from Amtrak incentives for a year.

For Amtrak and host railroads:

- Stop finger-pointing and work together to solve problems, rather than asking courts and the STB to do it for you.
- Analyze where persistent delays occur, fix operational causes, and then address whether capacity projects are required. If so, secure funding through public-private partnerships. I



Amtrak train No. 21, the Texas Eagle, threads through trackage controlled by Tower 55 in Fort Worth, Texas, on Sept. 28, 2008. Steve Schmollinger

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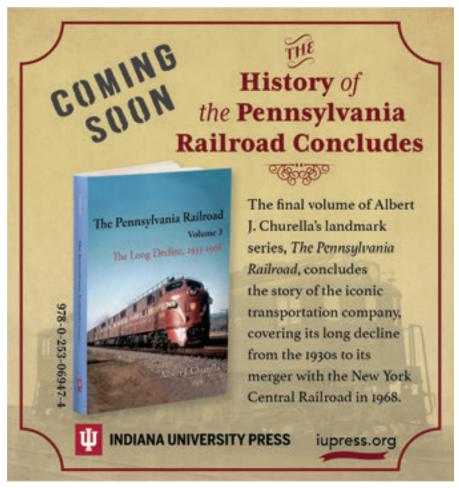
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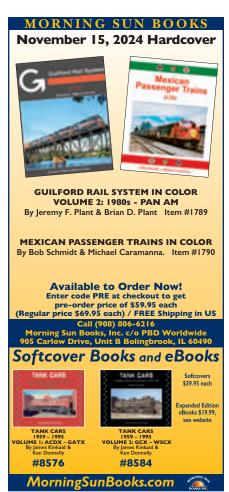
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You never know how things might turn out

▲ Baltimore & Ohio SW1 No. 8406, new on the railroad in 1942, was almost 40 years old when John Hankey climbed aboard to start his first day in engine service. By coincidence, his great-grandfather had operated the same engine in the same yard. Hankey would spend many hours in an SW1 and describes the 600-hp switch engines as agile, gutsy, uncomplaining, simple to maintain, reasonably quiet, and decently comfortable in winter. Years later, when he returned to the B&O Railroad Museum, an SW1 was the first locomotive he put back in service. Dwight Jones

INTRODUCTIONS CAN BE AWK-**WARD.** But then, you never really know how things might

I vividly remember "making my first day" in engine service on the old Baltimore & Ohio RR in 1975. The chief clerk in the road foreman of engines office put me down for the 2B job at Baltimore's Mt. Clare A Yard. It was not a warm welcome.

The dingy metal yard office building reeked of burnt coffee and stale cigarette smoke. I found the engineer I was to work with. His name was Mike Blevins, and he seemed the crusty sort of hogger you read about in old railroad fiction.

He brusquely told me to go out and sit on the yard engine — an old SW1. "Don't touch anything," he said. As I went out, he repeated the warning.

My job that day was simply to stay out of the way, and I managed to do that. We probably exchanged a dozen words.

The next day I reported to Brunswick Terminal to begin my two-week hostler apprenticeship. The next six years as a fireman and engineer were an eye-opening chapter in what has been a long career in railroading. Each time one door

closed, another opened. As a kid from Southwest Baltimore who just wanted to be around trains, I could not have imagined the challenges and experiences that always seemed around the corner.

I have only two kinds of formal training: As a historian, and as a railroader. They are two very different crafts, but entirely compatible. The work of a historian is to look into the past with insight and skepticism, and then explain that past in ways that make sense. A railroader generally looks forward — past the next curve, to the end of the run, the next paycheck, or what the industry might look like in the next year, or five, or ten.

A good historian is humble. He or she understands that we can never know what happened at any particular moment in time. There is always more to the story than meets the eye. And everyone will understand the past according to their own experiences and interests.

Life as a railroader teaches lessons of a different sort. It unfolds in unpredictable ways and can veer from the tedious to the terrifying in short order. It can be physically taxing. I've spent

my share of time squatting in the mud, changing brake shoes in "railroad weather" - by definition, 32 degrees and raining. My longest day on the clock was 22½ hours.

Railroad work can also be incredibly rewarding. Getting an overloaded coal train over the road, or handling a trailer train with a "kicker" (malfunctioning brake valve) in the consist offered real challenges. But when you handed the train off at the terminal or division point, your work was done. Every two weeks, "when the ghost walked" (and I have no idea why that meant payday), the reward was tangible.

Being a historian made me a better railroader. Doing real railroad work made me a vastly more effective historian and curator. That is what I hope to bring to this column. In the nearly six decades I've been out on the railroad in one way or another, I have had the privilege to see and do many things in many places. I've had my share of close calls, broken bones, and unfortunate outcomes. That is merely a consequence of a full and busy life.

I've been fortunate to be involved with museums and preservation projects all around North America, and to sample railroading on several continents. Most of all, I've met and worked with amazing colleagues and made many good friends.

By their nature, both historians and railroaders like to tell stories. They have a compulsion to share their experiences in the hope that someone, somewhere, will find the knowledge useful.

A year or so after encountering that gruff fellow on my first day, I spent a few months as his fireman as part of my apprenticeship. Apparently, word had gotten around that I wasn't an immediate threat to the railroad. I showed up on time where I was supposed to be, didn't do stupid things, and knew how to keep quiet. I quickly learned when to bring coffee, donuts, or freshly roasted peanuts for the head-end crew. The old B&O had its rituals.

Mike Blevins was a fine railroader and astute teacher — if you wanted to learn. Some engineers accepted students only for the few dollars extra for each day they were afflicted with a trainee. Others, like Mike, took their responsibility to pass on the craft seriously. I got to know him as a friend, and someone who I could ask the kinds of questions you didn't dare raise in the biweekly road foreman's conferences.

Some years later, after I was back at the B&O Railroad Museum, we had rented the museum's ex-Pennsy GG1 out for a movie shoot. I was on the big motor when the "Dive Bomber" — the transfer job in Baltimore Terminal — showed up on the Conrail interchange track at Bayview Yard to take us back to the museum at Mt. Clare. The engineer that night was Mike Blevins.

We checked everything out, caught up a bit, and headed west onto the B&O's old Baltimore Belt Line. He stood up and told me to take the seat. It was "my" engine, he said, and I might as well bring it home. I had kept my operating credentials up-todate, and I certainly knew the territory.

One admittedly heavy locomotive was not a difficult train to handle. The night was quiet as we drifted downgrade through the Howard Street Tunnel and picked our way over the last couple of miles to the museum. It felt like old times, and that was the last time I saw Mike. A few years later, he died of cancer. On the railroad, life can turn on a dime and give you change.

If I bring anything to this column, it is a sense of how richly complex, sometimes difficult, and often rewarding railroading can be.

The past is always with us, and the future is already here if we are wise enough to notice it. I hope whatever ideas and stories we explore, you will find them useful, and perhaps entertaining. That's the best an old head can wish for. — John Hankey

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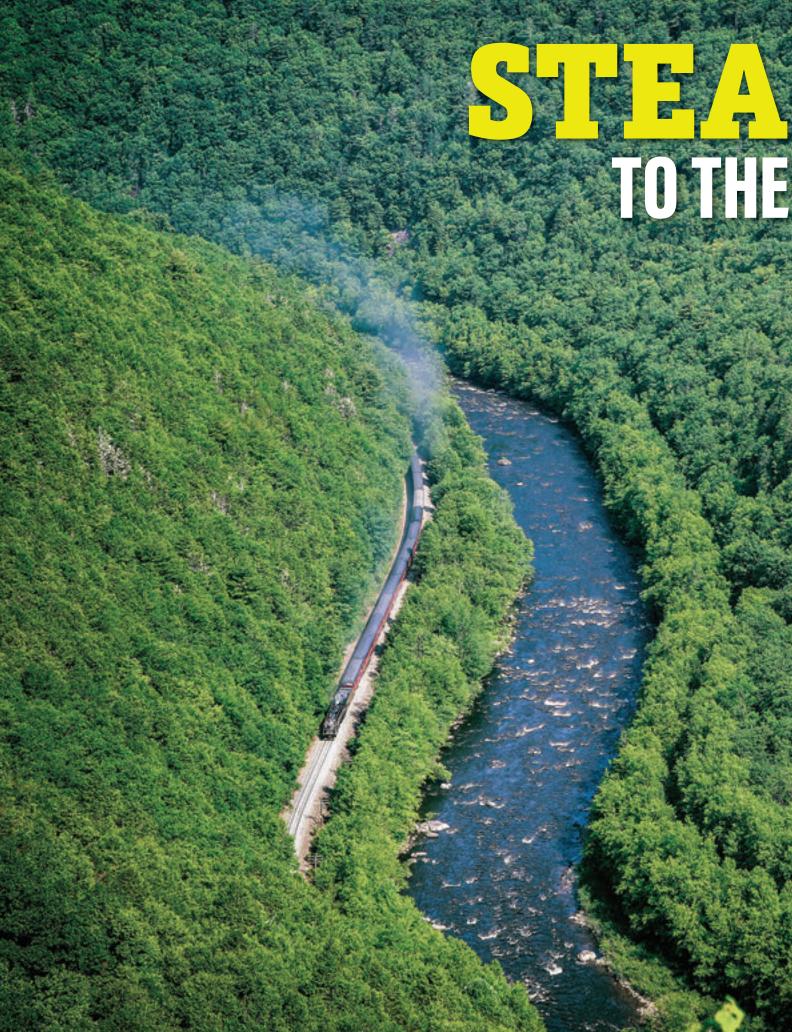
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Reading & Northern brings a 4-8-4 back to Tunkhannock after seven decades

Story and photos by Michael Wilson

IT IS APPROXIMATELY 5 P.M.

on a hot June day outside of the city of Wilkes-Barre, Pa. Milepost 164 marks the location, an unassuming place, lined by dual track, once of the Lehigh Valley Railroad (LVRR, or "the Valley"), surrounded by the Pocono Mountains. Birds chirping and a slight breeze from the southeast fills the air, a quiet rustle from the forest's trackside edge and out walks a

black bear with, thankfully, no cubs in tow. While some might confuse this for a scene out of Snow White, faintly in the distance a resonant, machine-gun-paced thunderous roar builds. A few minutes later, the roar comes to a crescendo, filling each surrounding valley like the world's largest surround sound system. Its source is a Reading T-1 4-8-4 locomotive, a 1945 product of the



▲ Mildly gray stack exhaust indicates that even with a 17-car train in tow, Reading & Northern T-1 No. 2102 is dialed in. Here, the train heads south over Penobscot Mountain en route to Mountain Top, White Haven, and all points south.

■ Former Reading Co. T-1 No. 2102 thunders north to Tunkhannock, Pa., on former Lehigh Valley Railroad trackage, as seen from the Tank Hollow Overlook, north of Jim Thorpe, Pa., on June 22, 2024. With code line and telegraph poles still in place, not much has changed for these tracks in over 50 years. The rapids of the Lehigh River serve as excellent fodder for avid whitewater rafters.



Lehigh Valley Railroad along the Susquehanna River at Falls, Pa., on June 22, 2024 en route to Tunkhannock. This piece of track, originally part of the North Branch Canal, was surveyed and sold to the LVRR in 1865. The route gave the Lehigh Valley an important interchange with the Erie Railroad at Waverly, N.Y.

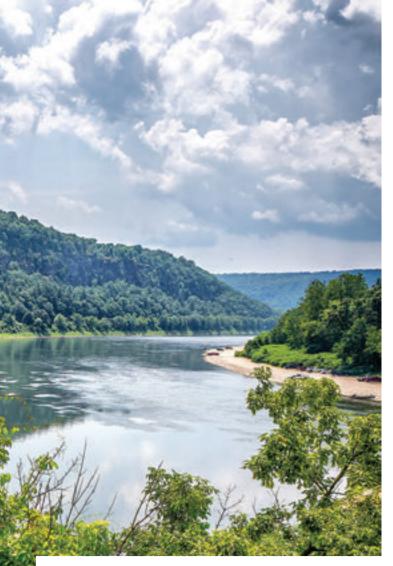
Reading Co.'s own shops, speeding past with its throttle wide open in full stride, pulling a string of freshly painted maroon passenger cars.

On June 22, 2024, Reading & Northern No. 2102 conquered Penobscot Mountain, the first trip of its kind in well over five decades. For the first time since the late 1940s, a Northern steam locomotive cruised the former Lehigh Valley water-level route along the Susquehanna River to

Tunkhannock. Marked by 1.8% grades, the mainline through the heart of the Pocono Mountains served an important route to and through the anthracite coal fields of northeastern Pennsylvania. With the original goal of being a railroad to connect the "Ocean to Lakes" and the home of the luxurious Black Diamond Express, the Valley meant business, grossing \$80 million in stock in 1926. From the late 1890s through the

post-World War II years, the LVRR continued to upgrade, with widened rights-of-way featuring multiple tracks, upgraded bridges, alignments and signaling, some of which still remains to this day.

R&N No. 2102, which was returned to operating condition in 2022, ran again on this route in August. It operated from Nesquehoning to Pittston for the destination's annual Tomato Festival, which even features a spaghetti-eating



FOR THE FIRST TIME

SINCE THE LATE 1940S, A NORTHERN STEAM LOCOMOTIVE CRUISED THE FORMER LEHIGH VALLEY ALONG THE SUSQUEHANNA RIVER TO TUNKHANNOCK.

contest. No. 2102 is similar in many ways to the former LVRR 4-8-4s, known as Wyomings, which roamed the same rails. Designed like the Reading T-1s for fast freight service, the Valley's T class, particularly the T2b 4-8-4s, were capable of 66,982 pounds of tractive effort, also expandable thanks to a booster producing an additional 12,300 pounds.

Unlike the ground-up design of the Valley's Wyomings, No. 2102 was built as I-10a 2-8-0 No. 2044. No. 2102's birth is a product of World War II production limitations

only permitting the Reading Co. to build locomotives with the designs they had available. Following its time in regular service, No. 2102 was assigned to Reading's famous Rambles from 1960 to 1964. The locomotive then worked for several owners, running on numerous excursions throughout the East and Midwest, before it was sold to R&N owner Andy Muller in 1985.

It has remained with the railroad ever since, running on some of the same track for which it was designed and built almost 80 years ago. I

▼ No. 2102, a 1945 product of Reading's shops in conjunction with Baldwin Locomotive Works, heads south over Penobscot Mountain at Milepost 164 outside Wilkes-Barre, Pa. The former Lehigh Valley rightof-way features double track, sweeping curves, and rock cuts.





he PCC electric streetcar was a design born of desperation. By the late 1920s, the electric streetcar, long a staple of urban transit, was steadily losing market share to the automobile. In response, North American operators and manufacturers banded together

to form the Electric Railway Presidents Conference Committee. After five years of painstaking effort, a radically new streetcar design took to the rails in New York City on Oct. 1, 1936. Fast, smooth-riding, and comfortable, the PCC car (the initials stand for "Presidents Conference Committee") was an

immediate hit. More than 5,000 were made for United States and Canada service, but that impressive number was dwarfed by the 15,000 PCC and PCC-design cars built for international service — the first of which was delivered 75 years ago.

European transit operators were interested in PCC cars as

early as the 1930s but it wasn't until 1949 that the first PCC finally crossed the Atlantic to Europe — a demonstration model sent to Belgium.

The streetcar proved difficult in operation. The American vehicle's width didn't fit well with tighter European road and rail standards. How-



An iconic American streetcar design found a home overseas Story and photos by Quintus Vosman

The Hague Public Transport Museum is celebrating 75 years of PCC streetcars in 2024. It's the start of a three-year celebration of the popular American-design street car planned for the Netherlands and Belgium. A PCC lineup on June 8, 2024, at the Zichtenburg depot featured PCC Nos. 1022, 1165, 1210, 1304, 2101, along with party tram 1302, HTM articulated GTL No. 3045, Regio Citadis No. 4021, and Avenio No. 5029.

ever, an additional two PCCs were included in the same 1949 order in the form of kits. These two cars were assembled by Belgium based La Brugeoise et Nicaise & Delcuve (BND;

later BN for La Brugeoise et Nivelles), which had purchased the PCC production license for the Benelux countries. These PCC prototypes featured a row of small, American-style standee windows above the main windows, but the carbodies were shortened and narrowed by BND before delivery to the Dutch city of The Hague.

The modified prototypes proved an immediate success: The Hague's transport operator ordered 22 more BND-built cars, delivered in 1952.

PCCs were soon introduced



PRESERVATION

TWENTY OF THE HAGUE'S PCCS, representing various series, have been preserved, most within the Netherlands but some abroad. One made it across the Atlantic to the birthplace of PCCs: tram No. 3129 is enjoying its retirement at the National Capital Trolley Museum in Colesville, Md., near Washington, D.C.

in Belgium. Almost identical to The Hague's cars, 24 narrow gauge, standee window models were delivered to the Belgian National Society for Regional Transport (NMVB in Dutch and SNCV in French) and operated mostly south and east of Brussels.

Brussels' transit operator also ordered 50 standard gauge PCCs, which entered service

starting in 1951. These cars introduced a new appearance. The standee windows of the American design were removed to make room for taller main windows and the end of the car was redesigned. Europe was starting to develop its own version of the PCC.

Brussels operated a large fleet of PCCs, including both single and double articulated

cars. Of the latter, many are still in service in the Belgian capital. The Belgian cities Ghent and Antwerp also received narrow gauge PCC cars. Antwerp still has a few in service, but their days are likely numbered.

In the early 1950s, two American-design PCC lookalikes were constructed by ASEA for Stockholm. There were no follow-up orders. One has been preserved.

THE HAGUE: PCC PARADISE

The two prototypes delivered in 1949 to The Hague in the Netherlands were the start of a success story. The Hague was the only system to operate

PCCs in the Netherlands and its fleet grew to 234 PCCs, all with a distinctly American appearance. However, as was the case in Belgium, the small standee windows were not appreciated. After the first 24 cars, the remaining cars received larger main windows instead. BN at Bruges, Belgium, delivered the last car in 1975.

The PCCs, popular with both staff and passengers for their reliability and comfort, dominated The Hague's transit scene for four decades. Their withdrawal from regular service was completed in 1993. (Although in 1999, preserved PCCs helped out in regular operations when there was a



OPPOSITE: The Hague transit operator converted PCC car No. 1302 into 'Partytram P1'. The PCC participated in June 2024's heritage operations on line 11 with a carload of invited guests. The Partytram just has left the tram terminus Scheveningen Haven.

The first PCC cars ordered by The Hague had small main windows capped with a row of standee windows. Following cars in the series received large windows without standee windows. No. 1022 is a preserved example from the first series.

With the North Sea in the background, Scheveningen Haven is the terminus stop where The Hague's streetcars turn back to the city. During special runs commemorating 75 years of PCCs in Europe, preserved PCC No. 1304 is waiting for departure on line 11 while PCC No. 1022, with its early design standee windows, has just arrived from Station Hollands Spoor.



5 CENTS

WHEN THE FIRST PRODUCTION PCC entered service on the Brooklyn & Queens Transit Corp. on Oct. 1, 1936, New York City Mayor Fiorella LaGuardia took part in a ribbon-cutting, then stepped aboard. Waving away a coin offered by the railroad's president, the mayor produced his own nickel, dropped it in the farebox, and became the first paying customer to ride a PCC.

shortage of available trams.)

PCC cars can still be seen in The Hague, where they operate in tourist service. Four PCC cars are available for these well-used services: Nos. 1101, 1193, 1321, and 1180, the latter currently under repair after a collision with a road vehicle.

PCCs and PCC-based cars

also appeared in various other European systems. The Belgian rail industry, in particular, played a major role in supplying PCC cars to the market in Western Europe, including the French cities of Marseille and Saint-Étienne.

Based on a pre-World War II license agreement, the Czech-Slovak manufacturer Tatra

developed PCC derivatives, including the tram types T1, T2, T3, and T4. The T3, in particular, was produced in massive numbers. Over 14,000 were built and served in Czechoslovakia as well as most communist Eastern Bloc countries. Many are still in service.

CELEBRATION

As The Hague was the first European transit system to operate PCCs, it was the obvious place to celebrate 75 years of the PCC in Europe. The Hague public transport museum (www.hovm.nl), located in the former Frans Halsstraat tram depot, organized an exposition and events, attracting

both railfans and the general public. With the support of city transport operator HTM, the museum fielded several PCC heritage operations in June 2024. Rides were free and the venerable cars accommodated huge numbers of passengers.

The celebration of 75 years PCC cars in Europe is just the start. PCCs will operate in 2025 on a 41.6-mile line along the Belgian coast, followed by events in Brussels in 2026.

The exchange of historic cars between the various heritage operators is both a nice celebration and a tribute to the streetcars that served so many transit systems so well after World War II. 1







ook closely anywhere a road or pedestrian walkway crosses railroad tracks in the United States. You'll see a small rectangular blue-and-white sign at-

tached to the nearest warning device. Officially dubbed an Emergency Notification System, or ENS, sign, it has at least two vital pieces of information: a U.S. Department of Transportation "National Inventory Number" unique to that crossing, and a phone number that goes directly to the dispatching desk of the railroad responsible for movements at that location.

Lack of widespread knowledge about the existence of these signs has, unfortunately, led to needless tragic accidents resulting in loss of life, derailed trains, and millions of dollars in property damage.

At about 10 p.m. on Nov. 16, 2023, a 911 operator in Southwest Michigan, informed of a disabled vehicle stuck on tracks, called an emergency number for what the operator believed to be the railroad associated with the crossing. The CSX dispatcher fielding the call would have stopped trains on that portion of the Chicago-Grand Rapids route while attempting to identify the exact location.

The actual crossing, however, was at Lakeside Road on Amtrak-owned tracks hosting 110-mph passenger trains. Dispatchers monitoring train movements at a Chicago Union Station console were unaware of the stalled vehicle before west-bound *Wolverine* No. 355 slammed into a tow truck that was trying to move it. The crash derailed the locomotive and first coach, ripped up track, and injured the engineer plus at least 10 of more than 220 passengers and crew on board.

In the aftermath, all eight departures on the Chicago-Michigan corridor were canceled for 24 hours, affecting thousands of passengers. Had the stalled vehicle's owner or the tow truck driver known to look for the blue sign mounted on both crossing gates, direct communication to Amtrak's dispatcher could have stopped the train

before the crash occurred.



Most railroads had long found various ways to identify specific crossing locations — mainly for the benefit of their own operating and maintenance personnel. Typically, the name of the intersecting highway and railroad's milepost location were stenciled on the nearest equipment bungalow. There may or may not have been a phone number to reach the dispatcher in case of an emergency. Certainly, unsignaled crossings protected only with crossbucks, and pedestrian walks with or without gates, bells, or flashing lights, seldom had any identification. With 211,000 public and







In January 2011, before the legislation standardizing signage, a Norfolk Southern sign displays information on a signal mast at a crossing east of Ypsilanti, Mich. Such signs did not necessarily include a toll-free number or DOT identification information.

private highway and pathway crossings in the U.S., speedily pinpointing locations in emergencies was a hit-or-miss proposition.

That changed with Section 205 of the Railway Safety and Improvement Act of 2008. It mandated a 2012 Federal Railroad Administration rule that led to the adoption of Emergency Notification System requirements. The same legislation that required railroads to install positive train control technology also attempted to provide information on who to call to stop a train. Too many hapless truck drivers had watched helplessly when their lowboy trailer were destroyed after being inadvertently grounded on a raised crossing. Coincidentally, the requirement arrived along with widespread deployment of cell phones and better wireless reception in rural areas.

The regulation gave railroads until 2017 to install uniform blue signs at both sides of every grade crossing. Each sign displays:

- A unique National Inventory Number to be listed in a USDOT database. Many carriers also choose to put the rail milepost and a brief location description on the sign, so a railroad dispatcher might quickly verify a crossing while confirming the DOT number with the citizen caller.
- A direct, toll-free phone number that can immediately reach someone at the railroad capable of communicating with train crews, controlling signals, notifying maintenance personnel, and connecting with local law enforcement.

The signs themselves must:

- Be 12 inches wide by 9 inches high or larger. Some of the early signs and most more recent signs are larger — a move applauded by safety experts.
- Have white text at least 1 inch high on a blue background. The National Inventory Number may be black text set on a white rectangular background.
 - · Reflect light at night.

Those requirements are included in more than 75 instructions covering "Emergency Notification Systems for Telephonic Reporting of Unsafe Conditions at High-

WHEN YOU CALL

Tips for dealing with a grade-crossing situation

OPERATION LIFESAVER, the national nonprofit organization sponsored by the railroad industry that works to prevent grade-crossing collisions and trespasser deaths, and Trains have several tips for anyone who observes an unsafe situation and places a Emergency Notification System blue-sign call:

- If a vehicle is stalled on tracks, ensure all occupants exit the vehicle and move away from the crossing as far as possible along the intersecting roadway.
- Quickly observe any nearby street signs before calling the phone number on the sign and relaying the DOT ID number. Any additional crossing identifying indicators, such as a nearby street, can help local authorities the dispatcher will contact.
- Make the call in front of the sign to accurately dial the number and report the crossing ID. All toll-free numbers vary by railroad and possibly by division.
- If other vehicles can't proceed around a vehicle stalled on the tracks, urge their drivers to find an alternate route rather than wait for the crossing to clear. Any trains nearing the crossing when notified by the dispatcher won't be able to stop.
- If a train horn is heard while the vehicle is stalled and warning devices activate, move diagonally away from the crossing in the direction the horn is coming from to minimize exposure to flying debris.

For 2024, the Operation Lifesaver's annual concentrated week of rail safety education focusing attention on the importance of making safe choices while driving or walking near railroad tracks and trains was renamed "See Tracks? Think Train Week." Safety events were held Sept. 23-29. — Bob Johnston



A Canadian National crossing in Trevor, Wis., near the Illinois state line, features the requisite blue sign and repeats most information on a nearby signal bungalow, although the bungalow lacks part of the toll-free phone number because of structural damage. Two photos, David Lassen

way-Rail and Pathway Grade Crossings." They spell out procedures to be applied in varying circumstances for train dispatchers, train crews, and maintenance workers that must be followed when a call is received about any "unsafe condition" at a highway or walkway crossing. These might include a stalled vehicle, obstructed view of a train's approach, or a warning device either not activating for a passing train, or continuing to operate without a train present.

After handling immediate operating considerations, the dispatcher must notify police whose jurisdiction includes the crossing, "to direct traffic or carry out other activities to maintain safety at the crossing." Also contacted: track and signal maintainers capable of correcting malfunctioning or damaged equipment, such as a broken gate or grounded track circuit.

The train dispatcher has to be instantly

reachable, except at crossings on light-traffic or intermittently operated routes where train speeds are limited to 20 mph or less. In those cases, the railroad could utilize an answering machine or a third-party answering service, as long as messages are retrieved and acted upon at the start of the next business day. Additionally, if more than one railroad dispatches trains at or maintains the crossing, one company must be designated as the "primary dispatching railroad" and is required to immediately notify the other carriers when an unsafe condition is reported.

WHEN A CALL COMES

Trains wanted to see exactly what transpires after a blue sign call comes in. While Class I railroads generally handle emergency calls in centralized, high-security dispatching centers, visits to Northern Indiana



It's 10:03 a.m. on March 27, 2024, as a South Shore dispatcher talks on the phone while watching train movements at his desk in the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District's Michigan City operations center. A dedicated phone line rings with blue-sign calls.

Commuter Transit District's operating headquarters in Michigan City, Ind., and Metra's Chicago dispatching facility revealed how potentially dangerous situations are promptly rectified.

"The South Shore has 161 highway crossings," NICTD Chief Dispatcher Sara Krga notes on a tour of the darkened dispatcher's enclave. A dedicated "blue sign line" sounds directly at the console. "They know its distinctive ring, and are ready with a list that cross-references DOT numbers with crossing locations," she adds.

Train crews are notified by radio. Based on information from the caller and other circumstances, "the dispatcher will determine if a train must stop and flag the crossing or slow down to restricted speed," Krga says. "Law enforcement and first responder information is keyed to each location; one of three signal maintainer districts will then be contacted."

Calls are relatively infrequent and might involve a misbehaving gate or blocked crossing. But protocols are a part of NICTD's safety program administered by Chief Safety Officer Kristen Coslet. "We touch base with emergency responders in our various territories three times per year, including staged mock disaster drills, and work with Operation Lifesaver to come up with outreach programs," she says. These include familiarizing area 911 dispatchers with how bluesign communication is railroad-specific in a region with numerous intersecting lines.

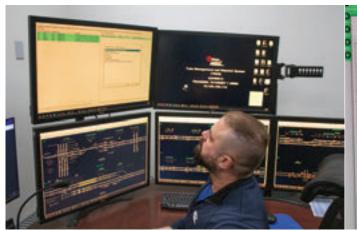
For Metra, handling ENS calls gets a bit more complicated, especially on routes where dispatching and crossing-maintenance responsibility is split among host railroads. SouthWest Service trains come out of Union Station on Amtrak (one highway crossing), roll on Metra to Forest Hill (one crossing), and then Norfolk Southern to the end of the line at Manhattan, Ill. (38 highway and pedestrian crossings with DOT numbers, plus about a dozen walkways at commuter stations within the immediate vicinity of a protected crossing). The NS dispatcher who gets the call in Atlanta quickly relays it to NS' Landers Yard office on Chicago's southwest side. There, personnel advise their own maintenance staff and

forward the information on to Metra operating crews. Similarly, Union Pacific and BNSF dispatchers handle all communication and summon maintenance regarding crossings on lines hosting commuter trains.

At Metra's Consolidated Control Facility, separate dispatching desks are maintained for each of the Metra Electric. Milwaukee, and Rock Island districts. Facility Director Greg Godfrey explains that blue-sign calls from any of 237 crossings for which Metra is responsible go directly to the correct dispatcher. "Each district has its own specific number to help sort it out quicker in our office, and they 'ring' on both phones, for example, in the Rock Island, where there are two dispatching desks," he says. Any resulting restriction imposed by the dispatcher instantly impacts the positive train control system for that route and triggers an incident report.

Suppose someone calls the number on the sign after observing gates remaining in the lowered position on the Rock Island District's Prospect Avenue crossing in Chicago's Beverly neighborhood, a situation that tempts motorists to assume a train isn't coming and drive around the gates. At an off-line console, Godfrey demonstrates what happens.

"If the dispatcher is handling another matter, they will put that call on hold to take the blue-sign call. While the caller is on the phone, the dispatcher will load a bulletin that initiates an FRA incident report and ask the person to again verify the DOT number to ensure the crossing is correctly identified," explains Godfrey. A handy database he manages cross-references every DOT crossing number with street names, city locations, and nearby intersections; there are many "Main Street" entries. A look at the Beverly Branch train display shows how many highway crossings are crammed into just a few miles of right-ofway, so misidentification is a real possibility without these ancillary references. Once



PREVIEW BULLETIN - THURSDAY - MARCH 28

AUTOMATIC WARNING DEVICE MALFUNCTION **BEVERLY Sub DISTRICT** AT PROSPECT AVE CROSSING MP 13.69 On ALL TRACKS

DOT# 608834P

FROM 03-28-2024 16:28

ASSOCIATED INCIDENT REPORT ITEM 1 - DEVICES HAVE ACTIVATION FAILURE OR ARE DISABLED

At an off-line work station, Metra Consolidated Control Facility Director Greg Godfrey demonstrates how a dispatcher creates an ITEM 1 incident report if a call comes in. At right: what the report looks like on screen.

the location is validated, that rail segment gets flagged for an automatic warning device malfunction.

"When I hit 'activate' it immediately floats into the PTC world to impede any movement at that crossing," says Godfrey. "An 'ITEM 1' restriction requires the train crew to stop and protect, because when the call comes in, we don't know whether there is a track disturbance potentially caused by a vehicle or problems with circuits. Most of the time we put the restriction on all tracks; we don't know what is broken, so we assume the safest course."

The center's chief dispatcher usually jumps in at this point, calling the appropriate maintainer to advise of a possible broken gate. Metra and/or local police are also alerted to deal with auto traffic, while the dispatcher who received the call is relaying instructions to train crews. "Our philosophy: divide and conquer," Godfrey says.

As the episode is investigated, the incident report is modified. An ITEM 1 may revert to a "stop, look, and proceed" ITEM 2 restriction if there are an adequate number of flaggers to stop traffic. The resulting log pinpoints when the incident started, actions taken, and how it was resolved. "A huge database is created from these reports that may suggest deficiencies to be addressed," Godfrey says. This could be traffic bollard installation at a particular location to keep autos off the tracks, or identifying crossings that are especially prone to blocked freight trains.

In 2023, Metra, CPKC, and NS dispatchers registered 2,212 automatic warning device malfunctions that required an ITEM 1 restriction. Very few were the result of ENS calls from the public, since Metra operating and maintenance personnel have constant eyes on the property and are usually in a better position to observe equipment anomalies. Godfrey says that through mid-2024, blue-sign calls are trending about six per month. But checking September 2023 crossing malfunction data, he found that 11 people called the police first to report a problem versus one person utilizing the number on the sign. "Had they called directly, any issue would have been addressed much faster," he notes.

The widespread deployment of ENS signs and the calls they prompt have made it easier for railroads, and the FRA, to accurately tabulate instances where crossings are blocked for an extended time by stalled freight trains. Far from just an inconvenience to motorists, any time a crossing is blocked creates a potential temptation for pedestrians to crawl on or under the stalled train. Not only is this perhaps the most dangerous act a trespasser can take — trains can move at anytime — but an unseen train on an adjacent track may lurk on the other side.



An outbound Metra train moves at reduced speed across Myrtle Avenue in Elmhurst, Ill., while workers address a grade crossing malfunction on July 15, 2023. David Lassen

One caller's experience with an ENS report

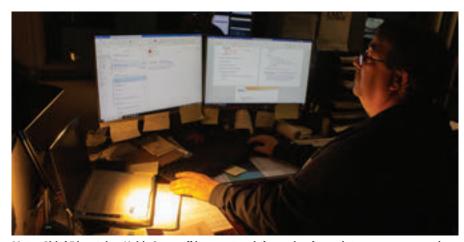
WITH LUCK, you will never have reason to call the 1-800 number on an Emergency Notification System sign. But having done so once, I can tell you the response is impressive.

My reason for calling was, on the list of potential issues, fairly benign: after a train cleared the Myrtle Avenue grade crossing on the Union Pacific in Elmhurst, Ill., the crossing gates stayed down. Once cars started slaloming around the gates on the fairly busy main line, I felt I'd better report the problem.

The person on the other end of the line was polite and efficient, getting the crossing number, a description of the issue, and my name and a callback number. Seemingly as soon as I was off the phone, an Elmhurst police car was on the scene to direct traffic, and the next train that approached — an outbound Metra UP West move — did so at significantly reduced speed.

As it turned out, once that train passed, the gates operated properly. But the officer stayed on scene until signal maintainers arrived a few minutes later; after talking with them, the policeman left, and they went to work in the signal bungalow. They were there quite a while, but there were no further issues.

Everything about it was absolutely routine, and ensured safety. Which is exactly the point of having the ENS signs. - David Lassen



Metra Chief Dispatcher Keith Georgeff has contact information for maintenance crews and law enforcement to assist a segment dispatcher when a blue-sign call comes in.

For all of 2023, the FRA reports there were 2,192 U.S. crossing collisions that caused 245 fatalities and injuries to 763 people. It isn't possible to know what role, if any, the presence of a blue sign played in each incident; the decision to drive around gates or dispense with simple precautionary measures to stop-look-listen and "always expect a train" couldn't save drivers who failed to take them. But if an additional life could be saved or damage avoided by expanding the public's knowledge of what to do when an unsafe condition is detected, then progress will be served. I



Hot times for Georgia Central among short lines seeing

marks its 125th anniversary by Bill Stephens eorgia Central Engineer Andrew

investments amid carload growth as G&W

Proman has his work cut out for him. Instead of the usual 50 or more cars tied behind his trio of B32-8s, there are just 10 empties and two loads on this July morning's version of Savannah-bound train L781. The lack of tonnage stretched over the undulating terrain east of the railroad's headquarters at Lyons, Ga., means Proman has to almost constantly work the throttle to keep No. 567's speedometer pegged at 25 mph.

The train rolls through the Georgia pine woods as well as small towns with Railroad Streets and Railroad Avenues, a multitude of grade crossings, and historic Savannah & Western depots. And all the way the Savannah Subdivision's single track, it seems, is either going uphill or downhill.

There's no question about the trajectory of the Georgia Central itself. It's up — way up. Traffic surged 28% between 2019 and 2023, with most of the growth tied to the burgeoning Port of Savannah. The railroad's new Savannah-area customers include a \$172

million plastics export facility, a million-squarefoot warehouse, and an export operation that transloads animal feed from hoppers into containers. Rock tonnage, which supports an array of Savannah-area construction projects and normally fills out Proman's train with 30 or more hopper loads, has grown, too.

An hour and 51 minutes after leaving Lyons, Proman brings the L781 to a stop just short of a grade crossing east of the 4,224-foot Groveland siding. Up ahead a track gang is doing tie work as part of an effort to raise Georgia Central track speed to 40 mph by the end of the year.

"It was 10 mph when I got here," says General Manager Bernard Cooper, who joined the GC in 2018.

The major impetus for the latest round of track upgrades is the Hyundai Motor Group's massive \$5.5 billion electric vehicle and battery manufacturing facility that's scheduled to open in early 2025 on the GC 30 miles west of Savannah. Today it's not unusual to see 100-car trains on the GC, but a lot of those cars are 44foot rock hoppers — not 90-foot auto racks.



Georgia Central Engineer Andrew Proman's hand is on the throttle as train L781 rolls through Pembroke, Ga., on July 11, 2024. Three photos, Bill Stephens

So GC is building a pair of 10,000-foot sidings — just over double the current average siding length — in order to handle longer trains on its former Seaboard Coast Line main line that runs from the Norfolk Southern interchange in Macon to the CSX interchange in Savannah.

The 211-mile Georgia Central also is preparing to haul a variety of other commodities, from frozen food to forest products, to and from transload and warehouse sites in the Savannah area. And by 2032, owner Genesee & Wyoming expects GC's traffic to double to more than 50,000 carloads per year.

The railroad has become one of G&W's fastest-growing short lines. It's an astonishing feat when you consider that Georgia Central had been treading water since G&W acquired it in 2005. "Ten years ago it was doing nothing," says Jack Hellmann, G&W's executive chairman.

You could have made an argument that G&W should have sold the railroad. But G&W takes a long-term view. And it's patient as long as a railroad isn't bleeding cash. "We just said we're going to take a calculated bet here," Hellmann says. "We're not going to go crazy, but every nickel we make we're going to put into the track, and we'll get grants where we can. And we're going to hold this rail line until something happens. And now this something has happened."

These days there's a lot happening at many of G&W's short lines in the U.S. and Canada. With G&W's go-go acquisition days behind it, the company's focus has shifted to attracting new customers and making the most of its existing railroads amid a North American manufacturing renaissance.

G&W CEO Michael Miller says there's a trifecta of forces accelerating industrial development, which will in turn drive growth in carload traffic on the holding company's short lines. "Post-COVID, there's been a tremendous focus on reshoring, and then you have deglobalization on top of that, and then



Georgia Central B32-8 No. 555 leads a westbound Norfolk Southern manifest, rerouted because of a derailment, out of Collins under Lynntown Road heading towards Vidalia, Ga., on Aug. 30, 2022. Zane Williams

decarbonization on top of that," Miller says.

As a result, G&W's industrial development pipeline is twice as big as it has historically been, with potential new or expanded customer facilities popping up along its railroads. "It's across the board, which is really nice to see, and it's geographically very dispersed as well," Miller says. G&W figures it can grow its 1.5 million annual carloads by 3% a year for the next few years, even if all of the potential projects don't materialize.

Going strong at 125

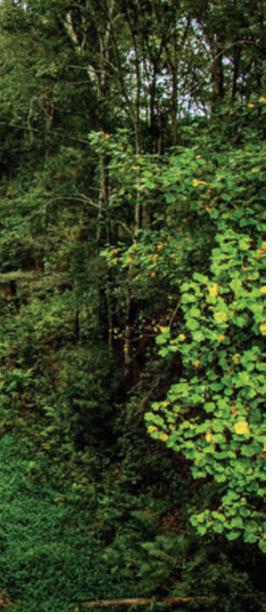
The growth comes as Genesee & Wyoming celebrates the 125th anniversary of its namesake original short line, western New York salt-hauler Genesee & Wyoming Railroad. G&W marked the anniversary with a May 9 excursion and the unveiling

of two heritage locomotives at Rochester & Southern's Brooks Avenue Yard. The R&S absorbed the GNWR in 1986.

The gleaming units, C44-9 No. 1899 and GP38-2 No. 125, sport the same orange livery that the G&W's Alcos wore. GENESEE & WYOMING is spelled out on the long hood and four black whisker stripes wrap around each end of the locomotives. The 1899 bears the name E.L. Fuller, who purchased the Genesee & Wyoming Valley Railroad out of bankruptcy and renamed it the Genesee & Wyoming Railroad on March 24, 1899.

E.L.'s great-grandson, retired G&W Chairman Mortimer B. Fuller III, was on hand for the trackside 125th ceremony. Fuller and his wife, Sue, christened the 1899 by smashing a bottle of champagne on the locomotive's pilot. The bubbly was still dripping when steam-whistle blasts echoed across the yard from a whistle once used on GNWR 2-6-0 No. 17.

'There are some railroads that are older than us, like the Union Pacific Railroad





G&W's two heritage diesels - C44-9 No. 1899 and GP38-2 No. 125 - power the six-car excursion train from Rochester, N.Y., as it visits the American Rock Salt mining track in Mt. Morris, N.Y., on May 9, 2024.



Retired Genesee & Wyoming Industries Chairman Mortimer B. Fuller III and Sue Fuller christen G&W C44-9 heritage unit No. 1899 in Rochester, N.Y., on May 9, 2024.

from 1862. And there are some railroads that are younger than us, like Canadian National in 1919. Yes, we are older than Canadian National," Hellmann said during the ceremony. "But we're privileged to be among the select few that have the longevity to celebrate our 125th anniversary."

Today G&W operates 114 railroads, with 110 of them in North America. Overall, the holding company has more than 3,000 customers on its 13,000 miles of track, including its European operations. "We have come a long way from that single short line," Hellmann says.

Indeed. Mort Fuller bought out other investors to gain a controlling interest in the 14-mile G&W in 1977. It was a big bet on railroading at a time when there were questions about the industry's survival in the Northeast. The short line was surrounded by Conrail, which a year earlier had been formed from seven bankrupt Class I systems, including G&W connections Penn Central, Lehigh Valley, and Erie Lackawanna. G&W also was dependent on its lone customer, International Salt Co. and its rock salt mine at Retsof, N.Y.

To diversify, Fuller created the Genesee & Wyoming Industries holding company that could acquire or enter any type of business, not just railroads. "You had a good little business on a standalone basis regardless of what was happening in connecting roads," Hellmann says of the G&W short line that became a GWI subsidiary. "And the future wasn't necessarily going to be in rail ... it was the era of the conglomerates ... So it's really a story of entrepreneur first, rail second."

Yet GWI's first three businesses happened to all be rail-related: Railcar leasing, fleet management, and freight-car repair. After the passage of the Staggers Act that partially deregulated the industry in 1980 and enabled Class I railroads to spin off marginal lines, opportunity came knocking. And Mort Fuller became one of the pioneers in leasing or acquiring Class I castoffs.

He didn't have to look far for his first acquisitions. In 1983 he expanded the G&W by buying 13.5 miles of the former Delaware, Lackawanna & Western main line from Conrail. That gave G&W a connection to neighboring short line Dansville & Mount Morris, which in 1985 became GWI's first new railroad. Within a decade GWI acquired seven railroads, including short lines and regionals operating in western New York, Pennsylvania, Louisiana, Washington, and Oregon.

Fuller never imagined G&W becoming a global enterprise. A key turning point, he says, was G&W's initial public offering in 1996. After that, money started flowing and fueled acquisition after acquisition — including railroads in Canada, Mexico, Bolivia, and Australia between 1997 and 2000.

The IPO was not a sure thing. It had been postponed in the aftermath of a 1994 cave-in that flooded the Retsof salt mine and forced it to halt production. In 1995, a decision was made to abandon the mine that had been the G&W's lifeblood for nearly a century. (Today's American Rock Salt mine, a few miles away in Mt. Morris, opened in 1998 and can produce 18,000 tons of salt per day.)

Amid this drama, G&W acquired the coal-hauling Chicago & Illinois Midland, which it renamed Illinois & Midland. The deal impressed Wall Street by underscoring the company's disciplined growth strategy. "The team did a really good deal at that moment, and then that underpinned the IPO by showing what G&W could do," says Hellmann, who joined the company as its chief financial officer in 2000, became CEO in 2007, and executive chairman in 2023.

From 2001 to 2012, G&W's acquisition spree included 46 railroads from a variety of owners. Then came the big one: G&W bought rival shortline holding company

RailAmerica in a 2012 deal worth \$1.39 billion. The acquisition added 45 railroads and 7,000 miles of track, and doubled G&W's revenue to \$1.1 billion.

G&W's dealmaking slowed in the years that followed, partly because it had to digest RailAmerica. Between 2014 and 2023 it added 11 railroads, including operations in the Netherlands, U.K., Poland, and Germany. G&W became a private company once again in 2019, when it was acquired by Brookfield Infrastructure Partners and GIC in a transaction valued at \$8.4 billion.

Hellmann credits the company's longevity to three things: The efficiency of steel wheels rolling on steel rails, the impact of the Fuller family, and G&W's employees.

Short line evolution

The history of the G&W as a shortline holding company mirrors changes in the railroad industry over the past four decades.

Initially, Fuller sought out railroads similar to the G&W: Short railroads that were in good condition, enjoyed high traffic density based on the number of customers per mile, and generated strong cash flow. At the time, it didn't make sense to buy a 100-mile, broken down railroad that a Class I had neglected for decades. "You would spend your entire life investing everything in that track with no certainty of a payoff," Hellmann explains.

But the math changed around 2004, when railroads gained pricing power for the first time and began earning their cost of capital. Suddenly the economics of owning longer regional railroads made sense. Plus, they had more volume upside than a smaller railroad. A longer main line meant more developable property adjacent to the tracks, and therefore more opportunity to attract new customers. "And so stuff that we weren't interested in during one decade could become very interesting to us in another decade because the economics of the



Buffalo & Pittsburgh train RISI is northbound at Wilcox, Pa., on Oct. 4, 2023, behind SD60M No. 3887. The B&P was one of seven railroads whose acquisition in the late 1980s and early 1990s launched Genesee & Wyoming's path toward its current widespread empire. Damien Calvo

industry had shifted ... I don't think that's well understood," Hellmann says.

The fundamentals of buying a short line have not changed over the decades. "When you're buying a railroad, there are two parts of the due diligence," Hellmann explains. "One's the railroading due diligence, and that's the condition of the physical plants and how much more efficiently you can run the operations or not. But the other equally important part is the quality of your customers and how much longer they're going to last."

Would a major customer facility be around for another 50 years? Is the facility competitive globally? Is it among the company's top plants? They're questions G&W would attempt to answer as part of every potential acquisition.

Hellmann recalls being G&W's 29-yearold chief financial officer and getting advice from a seasoned portfolio manager at a major institutional investment company. The words of wisdom from the G&W investor? "My job was to beat the fade," Hellmann says. By that, the investor meant G&W had to squeeze as much cash out of short lines as possible before their customers' industrial plants moved out of the country or succumbed to global competition — and put the railroad out of business, too.

What a dismal view, Hellmann thought. And it didn't jibe with what Hellmann saw as G&W's "forever" customers, who produced agricultural products or shipped raw materials and were necessary businesses that simply couldn't move overseas.

Now he looks back at that conversation

A Sept. 17, 1977, directors' special on the original Genesee & Wyoming gathered two RS1s, two cabooses, and business car GNWR No. 1, the *Edward I*, for a trip to Caledonia, N.Y., and back. Richard W. Story



and marvels at how much has changed. "We're not even talking about survival anymore," Hellmann says. "You're talking about growth and sidings and new plants and expansions and the industrial backbone of the U.S. for the next 40 years ... You've gone from beat the fade to there is no fade."

A full growth pipeline

You don't have to tell that to Georgia Central GM Cooper. He's in the thick of it all, scrambling to hire enough people to keep up with growth on the Savannah Sub. It's not easy hiring in a hot job market. So GC has raised its entry-level wages in each of the past two years and added benefits like extra paid time off.

GC customers — who on surveys rate the short line an 8.8 out of 10 — say the railroad has been able to maintain service levels while growing.

"Georgia Central has been an exceptional partner for us," says Dave Peschong, rail portfolio manager for POET, which operates the animal feed export transload facility in Savannah. "Their reliable and professional service has allowed us to grow business alongside them. They take on opportunities with a growth mindset and find creative solutions for us to provide feed ingredients to the world."

One of GC's rock customers, McLendon Enterprises, receives aggregates at its transload facility in Ellabell, on the outskirts of Savannah. "At a time when infrastructure and construction materials are in high demand, Georgia Central's like-minded approach to customer service and ability to tailor their services to our needs is most appreciated," says Sean Scott, McLendon's chief engineer.

The railroad has spent \$31 million over the past five years to improve its track and equipment. GC is building a six-track support yard for the Hyundai plant, and a second phase will double the size of the yard.

Operational changes are coming, too. Its fleet of 35-year-old, ex-Norfolk Southern GE B32-8s — which replaced GP38-2s in the second half of 2021 — will rise to 20 units when three more Dash 8s arrive this year. Compared to the EMDs, they burn 23% less fuel than and emit 2,000 fewer metric tons of carbon dioxide. "They're fantastic for what we do now," Cooper says, noting they've eliminated the need to leave tonnage behind on heavy traffic days. "Eventually, if the traffic keeps building the way it's building, we're probably going to have to go over to six axles for our road power. And our operating plan is going to change where we'll have locals doing the work instead of road trains."

It's still unclear how CSX and NS will split the Hyundai finished-vehicle traffic, or if one of the railroads will win all of the



jump-ball business. GC's operations will hinge on the outcome. Will it haul the lion's share of traffic all the way across the railroad to the NS interchange at Macon? Or will it short-haul auto racks to CSX in Savannah?

As railroad problems go, this is a good dilemma to have. The general managers at some of G&W's other short lines have had to wrestle with growing pains, too.

The Kiamichi Railroad, a 264-mile former Frisco line that operates in Oklahoma, Texas, and Arkansas, has landed four major new or expanded customer facilities over the past few years.

"When we took it over from RailAmerica, it was a railroad that really needed some capital infusion, and we spent a good bit of money trying to upgrade that line to make it where it was actually operational 24/7/365," Miller says. "They basically didn't run the railroad in summer months unless it was nighttime because it was too prone to rail kinks and derailment risk."



On the excursion, from left; CEO Michael Miller, **Executive Chairman Jack Hellmann, retired** communications director Sue Fuller, retired chairman Mortimer B. Fuller III. Bill Stephens

After the line was upgraded, International Paper expanded its containerboard mill in Valliant, Okla. Ash Grove Cement expanded its plant in Forman, Ark. And in 2017, Commercial Metals Co. opened a



steel micro mill in Durant, Okla., that receives carloads of scrap metal and ships out loads of rebar.

Then Tyson Foods came looking for a place to build a \$65 million poultry feed mill that would receive inbound unit trains of corn, as well as soybean meal in manifest service. G&W offered a 145-acre site along the Kiamichi in McNab, Ark., with nearby interchanges with BNSF Railway, Union Pacific, and Kansas City Southern. While Tyson began construction in 2020, Kiamichi started work on \$9 million in upgrades that included bringing a 180-mile stretch of the railroad from Madill, Okla., to Hope, Ark., up to the industry-standard 286,000-pound axle load capacity. The project involved rail replacement and strengthening more than 80 bridges. Kiamichi delivered the first cars to Tyson in May 2022.

G&W's longest railroad, the Rapid City, Pierre & Eastern, has attracted new business, as well. Among the new sources of traffic on the 670-mile railroad, which operates in Minnesota and South Dakota with branches that extend into Wyoming and Nebraska: An ethanol plant, a dried distilled grains facility that makes high-protein animal feed, and an expanded cement plant.

With support from South Dakota and the U.S. Department of Transportation, RCP&E has invested more than \$100 million in upgrades since being acquired by G&W in 2014. The railroad has replaced 100-year-old rail for the line east of Wall, S.D.; beefed up hundreds of bridges and trestles; and doubled capacity by building three sidings on the main line. It also introduced scheduled service, which gives crews and customers more predictability.

The most surprising growth story, Miller says, is the 158-mile Puget Sound & Pacific, which interchanges with BNSF and UP in Centralia, Wash. Soybean processor AGP is doubling the size of its soybean meal export terminal at the Port of Grays Harbor in Aberdeen, Wash., which will be able to handle unit trains that originate in the Midwest. The port also landed more automobile import business. Expectations are for PSAP's overall volume to increase by 50%, which has required the construction of several sidings. Passing sidings at Montesano, Wash., and at the Centralia interchange are both under construction. A new siding in Elma, Wash., opened last year. "That railroad within the next couple years will probably be the highest-volume railroad at G&W from a carload standpoint," Miller says.

Railroads do not haul computer chips. Yet Intel's \$20 billion "Ohio One" semiconductor plant project outside of Columbus has been a boon to G&W's Ohio Central Railroad. The railroad has delivered materials to support construction of the two chip plants, which are set to begin production next year. They will employ 3,000 people, which is spurring development of the housing, roads, and utilities that are leading to new carloads. "We've never really thought about how a chip manufacturing facility being located close to our railroad would be a good thing, but it has really turned out to be a really nice magnet for bringing new industry and new opportunities to the Ohio Central Railroad," Miller says.

Led by B32-8 No. 555, Georgia Central train L782 shines in early-morning light as it rolls through Lyons, Ga., en route to Savannah on Sept. 26, 2022. The railroad is now one of G&W's fastest growing. Zane Williams

After going through two years of widespread service problems due to crew shortages, service improvements at the big four U.S. Class I railroads have had a big impact on shortline volumes. "At the end of the day for us, the single biggest driver is good service ... and fortunately right now Class I service is actually as good as it's been for a while," Miller says. "And I think that really helps us capture those incremental carloads with existing customers because the service product is good and it's reliable."

It helps, too, that the Class I railroads are also seeking more carload business. "They're all pivoting to growth right now," Miller says. "Obviously they manage to an operating ratio, but they all have said, 'Look, we've got to grow these franchises.' So being close to the Class Is, working with them to drive growth, that definitely helps to capture more business with our existing customers."

Tech: key part of the future

Any company that wants to survive 125 years has to innovate, Miller says, and today that means investing in technology.

G&W is a founding member of the Rail-Pulse joint venture, which is adding GPS equipment and sensors to freight cars to monitor their location and health in real time. This should lead to volume growth from existing customers, who will be able to see the location of inbound empty cars and



The Rapid City, Pierre & Eastern's southbound Belle Fourche Turn passes through downtown Rapid City, S.D., with 33 cars on Oct. 1, 2021. The railroad has seen more than \$100 million in improvements since becoming a G&W property in 2014. Blair Kooistra

have confidence that they'll arrive in time. Currently some customers divert freight to trucks if they're unsure inbound cars have made it through interchange with a Class I.

G&W also is seeking Federal Railroad Administration permission to conduct the first operational testing of Parallel Systems' autonomous, battery-electric container cars on the Georgia Central and the connecting Heart of Georgia Railroad. The railroads

are viewed as ideal test beds due to their proximity to the Port of Savannah and their isolated sections of track with no grade crossings, says Gary Fillingame, vice president of G&W's Coastal Division.

Ultimately, the plan would be to use platoons of autonomous cars to deliver containers to the HOG's small intermodal terminal in Cordele, Ga., dormant since 2017. "We're excited about it. I know some people may think it's going to replace jobs. That's not the intent," Fillingame says.

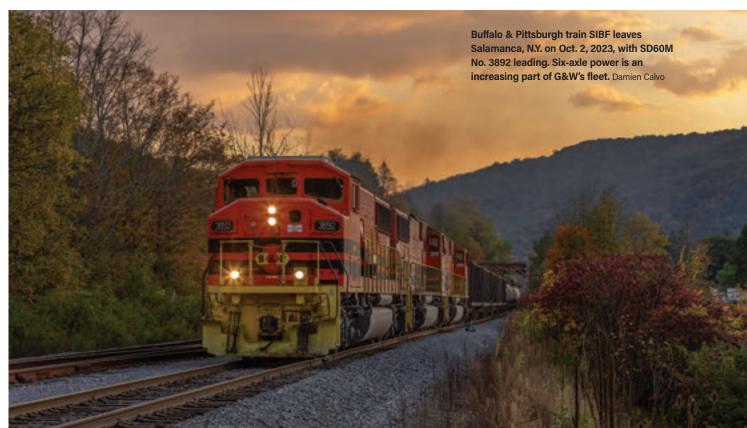
The goal, as East Coast ports grow, is taking trucks off the road in short-haul markets where the railroad has proven it can't now compete. "Any day you go to the Port of Savannah, there's 10,000 trucks getting in and out draying containers," Miller says.

As G&W's railroads handle more carloads, safety will continue to be critical. "To me, that's our license to operate," Miller says. "And it is one of the reasons we spend so much time and effort on our new hires."

New conductors typically don't switch cars by themselves for at least six months, and there's no limit set on the training period when they're teamed up with an experienced crew. "They're not marked up until a certified conductor or engineer says they're marked up," Miller says.

G&W's short lines will continue hiring to support volume growth. "What you're witnessing today is a rapidly accelerating industrial economy in which railroads are going to play a critical part in addition, of course, to the environmental benefits of shipping by rail, which are increasingly understood," Hellmann says.

Although coal continues to decline and overall North America carload volume has been stagnant at best, change is in the wind as customers invest in rail-served plants. "Watch the next three to five years and how much volume comes through the U.S. rail network," Hellmann says. "It's just going to be another phase of living history." I







night of mystery, elegance, and a *train ride* ... Leaving the worries of 2023 at the Hobbs Station in Forest Park (Noblesville, Ind.), 94 guests and I boarded the Nickel Plate Ex-

press train on Dec. 31, 2023. This sold-out train figuratively waved goodbye to the present landscape as we glided back in time and fearlessly entered the past in sophisticated, sprightly Bridgerton style. People traveled near and far to join the Nickel Plate crew — I myself came from Cedarburg, Wis. — for this first-time event, a 45-minute excursion on the Masquerade Express New Year's Eve train ride.

Guests detrained several hours prior to the new year, entering a gorgeously adorned, well-thought-out venue at the end of the

line. Dressed to impress, people sipped champagne, ate tantalizing hors d'oeuvres, and joyfully floated across the dance floor in cocktail and period-themed attire. It was a night to remember.

THE MASOUERADE **EXPRESS TRAIN**

The train operated on 12½ miles of former Nickel Plate Road track between Noblesville and Atlanta, Ind. Guests boarded 1956 Santa Fe El Capitan Hi-Level cars (two coaches and two dining cars). One locomotive was placed on each end of the train: Nickel Plate GP7 No. 426, built in 1953, and No. 4214, an F9 dating to 1956 originally used by the Erie Mining Co.

Nickel Plate Express Executive Director Emily Reynolds was the evening's host. She has worked for the Nickel Plate Heritage Railroad since March 2021. With 20-plus years of non-profit management experience, this is Reynolds' first job with a railroad.

New to the world of trains, Reynolds says she is fortunate to be around an amazing and knowledgeable crew that has helped her gain an understanding of how to operate a tourist railroad.

"I grew up in Noblesville and have fond memories of a train running through town. Being able to serve my community and ensure we continue operating a train in Hamilton County is a driving force for me."

PLANNING THE NIGHT

In June 2023, alongside planning the annual holiday trains, Reynolds started to map out this event. She developed a brief



Above: Nickel Plate Express hosts a masquerade party on New Year's Eve 2023. Photographed to promote the first-time event are two former employees, Jake and Jenny Garvey. Matt Doubt Right: Tables were elegantly decorated with the theme of the night. Nastassia Putz

outline of the evening which included the date, the location (Earthly Endearments owned by Shannon and Steve Plumer), the food, and the music, which was inspired by the 2020 Netflix series, Bridgerton, created by Chris Van Dusen.

"I spent weeks designing centerpieces, picking out sparkling wine, and ensuring the event went off seamlessly," says Reynolds. Having held previous events at this local venue helped streamline the process.

"The setup was the most time-consuming part. It took a team of four people over 8 hours to put out decor and set the tables in the venue. I think offering events off the train are so fun and unique, but they bring the challenge of not just prepping the train

but also an outside venue."

Was the night successful? Reynolds met and spoke with people from all over the central United States — Wisconsin, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, and Louisiana, to name a few. Her goal was to have people wowed by the end of the evening, and those smiling, laughing faces certainly indicated they were. A few can't wait to come back again for another New Year's Eve rendezvous.

GUESTS GO ALL OUT

Sherry Zaruba-Cassatt, salon owner, typically doesn't go out for New Year's Eve. However, her sister heard about this event from a good friend who works on the train





Nickel Plate guests promenaded and danced the night away at Earthly Endearments in Atlanta, Ind. This wedding venue is along the tracks providing the perfect place for guests to congregate and bring in the New Year. There was a live band playing pop-classical songs. Three photos, Nastassia Putz

and decided to go. It was around Thanksgiving time when she committed to a night of mystery and elegance.

"My sister was constantly calling me: 'Did you order your dress yet?" says Zuraba-Cassatt, who did indeed order a dress. The dress came in time, but to her dismay, was "hideous." It was too late to order another one. She decided to make her own dress and worked on it until the day of the event. It turned out perfectly, especially since she didn't know what to expect. "I didn't even get to ask my sister very many questions. To be honest, I didn't care. I was just so excited to dress up like the 1800s and go on a mini weekend vacation."

Overall, she had a fantastic time and would love to do it again. For her, the train ride was relaxing, and talking with new people alongside her husband, sister, and brother-in-law made the event worthwhile.

"The young men that sat at the table behind us on the train complimented our dresses several times and even gave me a mask from Mardi Gras. I'm such a people person. I told the young man who gave me this beautiful mask that I intend to make a dress to match it for next year."

One part she found difficult — though a huge fan of costumes and dressing up — was trying to fit between the tables at the venue wearing a period garment. Can you imagine? "Trying to squeeze between tables with a petticoat under my dress."

A CREW AFFAIR

Bobby McCoy, the evening's train conductor, has worked with the railroad since

December 2019. He is also an engineer and an instructor of conductors. McCoy has seen a variety of events happen on the train like weddings, birthdays, and anniversaries, to name a few.

The Masquerade Express was a unique endeavor for him. "Conducting on the last train of 2023 and the first train of 2024 is a neat feeling," says McCoy. He really enjoyed celebrating with all the guests and being a part of their experience. "Destination trains are something relatively new for us. We

have our *Murder Mystery Express* trains that run to Atlanta, people disembark, have dinner, do other activities, and then hop back aboard to head back to Noblesville. Then occasionally we run trains to festivals and dinner in Cicero. Most of our rides have the event occurring on the train, so this gave people the experience of taking a train to somewhere and returning."

As the conductor, McCoy feels an overwhelming responsibility to make sure everything runs smoothly from leaving the train



So many wonderful treats to choose from. This is a small section of the desserts. The table was quite big and was filled with many different small-plate appetizers and hors d'oeuvres.



Live music - "Bridgerton-style" - plays throughout the night, while guests mingle.

station on time to checking on each passenger's welfare. "What we do here at Nickel Plate Express is unique. Many people today have not only never been on a train before, but do not realize it can be this much fun! We show them that by featuring events and themed rides in a fresh and upbeat way, and they still get to enjoy the sights and sounds of a real 1950s passenger train."

A FUTURE ENDEAVOR

Reynolds learned considerably from this night and will carry it forward into planning the next event. "This was our first time ever offering a NYE ride. We learned a few things from the evening including more balloons if we do a balloon drop again, some music for the musician's breaks that we can dance to. and to be prepared for hungry passengers."

The spread was certainly exquisite. The music was perfect. The guests were happy.

"We advertised appetizers and thought that guests would eat dinner before boarding an 8 p.m. train," says Reynolds. "We were totally wrong! Luckily our catering company was amazing and had a huge spread of food to offer. They did an amazing job keeping food out and making it look gorgeous. It could have been something that went so wrong, but thanks to our amazing catering company it went totally well."

This year (2024), the Nickel Plate Express is having a 1970s disco-themed celebration called NYE Soul Train.

THIS 5-HOUR EVENT INCLUDES:

- Round trip on the Nickel Plate Express
- Dinner (buffet) at Earthly Endearments
- Best-dressed contest
- Dancing and dessert
- Champagne toast and countdown

FUN MASQUERADE EXPRESS FACTS:

- 120 bottles total of sparkling wine, champagne, and cider served
- 140 masquerade masks worn
- 400 balloons for the balloon drop
- 121 staff hours for set up and event (not including the planning) Happy New Year! I

CHEERSTOA

More trains, more toasts, more twists ...

THERE ARE SEVERAL railroads offering New Year's Eve trains. Here are a few options.

'MIDNIGHT IN PARIS' NAPA VALLEY, CALIF.

The Napa Valley Wine Train had its NYE maiden voyage in 2023. The Wine Train itself, however, has been in service since the 1980s.

The "Midnight in Paris" experience was brought to fruition by NVWT General Manager Nathan Davis. In conjunction with founder and winemaker Miljenko "Mike" Grgich from Grgich Hills Estate, the NYE experience celebrates the victory of the Judgement of Paris wine tasting and includes the following 6-hour accommodations:

- · Round trip on the Legacy Train that consists of a locomotive, two Pullman dining cars, and an open-air car
- Sparkling wine tasting and lunch
- · 2-hour party at Grgich Hills Estate
- A toast and countdown to the ball drop (Paris time, 3 p.m. Napa time)
- Dancing and dessert

The NYE crew includes two chefs, one engineer, one conductor, one maitre d', and two servers. The theme is fixed; the NVWT wants its future guests to have the opportunity to experience this and make it a tradition for years to come.

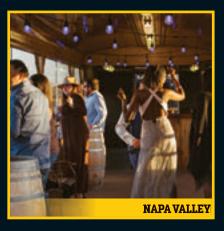
"NYE Legacy is truly an experience like no other. Along the way, memories were made that would last a lifetime, among strangers who quickly realized they were no longer strangers. Somewhere along the way they become friends, they become family and together ... they welcomed the New Year." -Nicolas Estefan, Maitre d'/Assistant Food & Beverage Manager

FUN NVWT NYE TRAIN FACTS:

- 56 desserts served
- 168 glasses poured
- 30 miles traveled
- 1 Cupid Shuffle danced

TENNESSEE VALLEY **CHATTANOOGA, TENN.**

The Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum began operating NYE trains in the early 2000s. Behind the locomotive, the train consists of two dining cars and one premium Pullman car.



There are three to four crew members and the kitchen/service staff is comprised of 12 to 15 people. This event is deemed a classic Chattanooga experience, one that sells out every year.

"I sometimes catch myself being complacent about what a unique experience TVRM offers. How many places can you eat on a moving train car from 1924?" says Zach Gilmore, road foreman of engines, operations supervisor. "This is TVRM at its best, offering an immersive trip that transports you to another era."

The event caters to 136 guests annually and includes the following 2-hour accommodations:

- · Four-course dinner
- · Ride through urban East Chattanooga

FUN TVRM NYE TRAIN FACT:

• There have been a number of marriage proposals onboard over the years!





ROYAL GORGE ROUTE **CANON CITY, COLO.**

Approximately, 250,000 people from around the world ride the Royal Gorge Route Railroad annually. The RGRR's NYE dinner train was launched in 2010 to offer a more casual first-class dining experience on one of the most romantic nights of the year. The train consist varies each year but includes several Vista Dome, deluxe, and coach cars, along with an open-air car and onboard kitchen.

As the night begins, guests arrive at the historic Santa Fe Depot. Throughout the evening, guests are encouraged to visit the openair car with a drink in hand to gaze out at a captivating Colorado night sky. The train ride includes a fully-stocked bar of microbrews, wine, and cocktails. The trip lasts roughly 21/2 to 3 hours, with the following features:

- A kick-off toast
- Three-course dinner
- A ride through Colorado's Grandest Canyon

FUN NYE TRAIN FACT:

- 500 plus bottles of champagne enjoyed
- · At least one couple gets engaged

HOCKING VALLEY SCENIC NELSONVILLE, OHIO

Hocking Valley Scenic Railway's first NYE train ran in 2008 providing a unique opportunity to passengers. It was one of several themed trains introduced at the time. The NYE ride consists of the Baltimore & Ohio combine No. 1497, B&O day coach No. 3501, a trio of Rock Island commuter cars, two Canadian Pacific day coaches, Southern Pacific/Amtrak dining car No. 8063, and former Chesapeake & Ohio caboose No. 90921. Certain cars are either designated wine and cheese or pop and pizza — this will vary from year to year. There are two diesel locomotives used, with one on each end of the consist, Similar to the railroad's Santa trains, the NYE train is adorned inside and out with colorful LED lights.

The event is planned months in advance and supplies (like fireworks) are accounted for. The night prior, staff must ensure the train is

properly stocked. On the day of, crew and staff need to be prepared — the depot staff will sell tickets, the gift shop will assist customers, an engineer will wait in each locomotive alongside a brakeman, the conductor will be present alongside car hosts, and a dozen or so volunteers will be ready to go.

"No one is more important than the other and it is an all-hands-on-deck experience," says Isaac Miller, Hocking Valley Scenic Railway secretary. "Our New Year's Eve Train is an incredible experience that offers something for everyone."

Tickets (for wine and cheese or pop and pizza) are purchased online and picked up at the depot. On board, party favors are dispersed and at 10:30 p.m. the train departs Nelsonville, Ohio for East Logan. All guests are welcome to get off the train and watch a midnight firework show. This 2-hour event sells out annually and caters to 400 people.

FUN NYE TRAIN FACTS:

- 225 hats and tiaras distributed
- 500 napkins crumpled
- 225 wine glasses sipped from
- 225 cheese boxes sampled
- 720 beads worn

MY OLD KENTUCKY BARDSTOWN, KY.

My Old Kentucky Dinner Train has hosted NYE train excursions since the late 1980s. It's a very traditional experience according to Marketing & Events Manager Veronica Gettinger. "We just like to have a regal party where folks can have a good time. The depot and train are decorated to the nines and our customers match the atmosphere," she says. It's also the biggest event of the year and planning takes roughly six months. Each train

car has been restored to look like it did in the 1940s. And to get ready for the night's festivities, it takes staff roughly five days to flip the depot building from Santa's Winter Wonderland into a Glitzy Boogie Wonderland.

"We will have around 40 staff members running like a well-oiled machine on that train," notes Gettinger. With 232 guests, all hands are needed. The trip lasts 3 hours, and includes the following accommodations:

- "Best Dressed Contest" per train
- Champagne greeting & souvenir flute
- Special elite bourbon offerings
- · Toasting/signing with musicians
- 4-course meal and full bar
- NYE photo booth
- Four 1940s dining cars
- Mock midnight countdown and champagne toast

"We work our magic to get our hands on some exclusive bourbons throughout the year and hold on to them for this one night," says Gettinger. "On the top of each hour, we offer the sales of one particular bourbon after showcasing its title and flavor profile."

FUN NYE TRAIN FACTS:

- 9 musicians
- 320 balloons
- 464 champagne glasses
- 275 bottles of champagne
- 150 Mardi Gras beads
- 250 noise makers
- 150 party tiaras
- 100 NYE hats/crowns
- 575 festive cocktail picks

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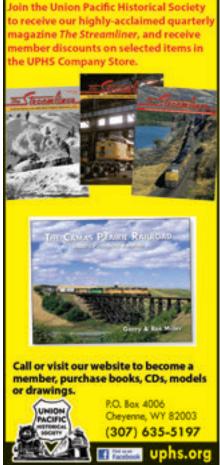


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Moving a military train up the East Coast a week before Christmas ... what could go wrong?

by Larry Ground

THE FIRST SERGEANT'S VOICE BOOMED out over the formation: "I'm looking for eight volunteers. I need eight men who are looking for an adventure to volunteer for a special assignment. Don't everybody step forward at once." Not surprisingly, no one was inclined to volunteer until they knew more about what they were getting into.

The past months had been busy for the 24th Infantry Division at Fort Stewart, Ga. A year earlier, the unit was regular infantry with jeeps and light trucks. Now the division worked feverishly exchanging light equipment for tanks and armored personnel carriers. Even the unit's name was updated — 24th Mechanized Infantry Division.

The next step for the new mechanized division was a major training exercise. Fort Drum, N.Y., was selected for a January 1980 event. Located close to Lake Placid, the site for the upcoming Winter Olympics, Fort Drum would provide a different climate. There might be snow, something many of the soldiers had not experienced.

Joining Fort Stewart soldiers would be units from the 194th Armored Brigade (Separate), Fort Knox, Ky., as well as units from Fort Bragg, N.C.; Fort Huachuca,

Although more contemporary - 2016 versus 1979 - one can understand the scope of moving a armored unit from this 70-load BNSF train heading to Fort William Henry Harrison, Mont. Bradley Fighting Vehicles ride two to a flatcar, followed by support vehicles. Chip Sherman The 24th Mechanized Infantry Division began as the 1921 Hawaiian Division. Its emblem shows the green taro leaf used to make a Polynesian dish, poi, a Hawaiian favorite.

Ariz.; and Scott Air Force Base, Ill. The equipment move was a logistical challenge. All of the division's heavy equipment would need to be transported nearly 1,100 miles from Fort Stewart to Fort Drum.

Rail transportation is often best for deploying a large, mechanized infantry or armored unit. Soldiers routinely train on all aspects of loading and unloading such rail movements. Experienced noncommissioned officers and railroad personnel provide supervision and hands-on training.

Routinely, in the early 1980s, a detachment of soldiers traveled along to provide



security and logistical support. For the rail movement between Fort Stewart and Fort Drum, eight soldiers would serve as rail guards or "supernumeraries," the military term for personnel accompanying shipments by rail or sea. Six served as guards, one would be the cook and a sergeant was in charge of the detail. A caboose was provided by the railroad, which had room to sleep four at a time — more or less comfortably — a simple kitchen setup, a toilet, and a coal-burning stove.

The supernumeraries boarded the train at Fort Stewart and stayed with it to Fort Drum. The rail movement was tentatively scheduled to begin a week before Christmas. Transit time was estimated at three or four days, putting the eight soldiers in Fort Drum a few days before Christmas and nearly two weeks before the rest of the unit was due to arrive via Air Force transports.

In the end, the first sergeant had no trouble getting volunteers. It was a chance at an adventure, operating as a small team on an important mission. It would mean being away from family over the holidays, but that was part of military service. Being a staff officer in the division logistics office, I did not volunteer, but monitored the train's progress from Fort Stewart.

The team was brought together, briefed on its duties, and began preparing the caboose. A set of portable radios

> with sufficient range to reach both ends of the train was issued, so guards could conduct a walking patrol when stopped. It was decided the team would not carry rifles but would instead be equipped with axe handles.



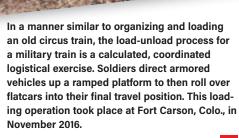
During loading and unloading, military and civilian railroad personnel work together as seen here at Fort Carson, Colo., during December 2016. The oversized dimensions of armored vehicles favor rail transport. Notice how the armored vehicle tracks lap over the side of the flatcar. Three photos, Bill Diven

The axe handles would be a sufficient symbol of authority and provide a means for basic self-defense.

The cook was given help planning menus and stocking utensils and food to cover a week, even though the trip was expected to take no more than 3 days. As a backup, several cases of MREs (meals, ready-to-eat) were loaded.

In an abundance of caution, one of the soldiers was designated as a Class A agent, authorized to make limited purchases in special situations when normal procurement processes are not practical. The Class A agent sets up a purchase, looking for fair prices and quality products. A second person, who has been entrusted with a small sum of cash, pays for the purchase, saving the receipt to turn in back at their home base in order to balance the books.

Despite this cautionary measure, no one realistically expected any trouble. A person could drive from Fort Stewart to Fort Drum



IN MY OWN WORDS



There is a method to tying a heavy armored vehicle to a flatcar for movement. The soldiers in mechanized units responsible for transportation are trained how to secure its vehicles aboard a train. Two photos, Bill Diven

in a couple of days. Surely a train could cover that distance in three to four days.

The 26-car train was loaded and cleared to depart Fort Stewart about a week before Christmas. A local TV news crew came out and captured video of the train rolling by, loaded with tanks, armored personnel carriers, and heavy trucks. The rail guards were seen waving from the caboose as it rolled by.

The news then cut to coverage of the Soviet Union's ongoing movement of military forces into Afghanistan. One network broadcast showed Soviet tanks in the snow in Afghanistan, juxtaposed with the movement of vehicles from Fort Stewart heading to Fort Drum for winter training.

Back at Fort Stewart, the division headquarters was monitoring the movement of the train as it headed up the East Coast, quickly learning that military trains do not enjoy a high priority. Over and over the Fort Stewart train would be put into a siding and the train guards would find themselves watching other trains pass.

The days dragged by. The train moved pretty fast when it moved, but that wasn't often. It seemed that the train would just get started moving at a good clip when it would slow down to take another siding.

After nearly a week, the train had traveled across South Carolina, North Carolina, and just entered southern Virginia. The guards speculated they could have walked that distance faster.

As Christmas Eve drew closer, the team found themselves low on supplies. They had gone through the better menu choices in the galley and had resorted to eating the MREs.

Worse, the coal was running low. The guards had been generously feeding the stove, thinking the supply only needed to last a few days. As days dragged on, the possibility of running out of coal became a major concern.

On Christmas Eve the guards received mixed news from the train crew. The train would not be moving on Christmas Day. It was heading into the Petersburg, Va., yard, where it would stay until Dec. 26. The crew tried to soften the blow by pointing out that Petersburg is immediately adjacent to Fort Lee, one of the largest Army bases on the East Coast. Perhaps the guards could catch a ride to the base and eat in a real

mess hall and sleep in a real bunk.

The sergeant of the guard nixed that idea. The guards would remain with the train. Even if the train was inside the rail yard, the mission was to ensure everything remained secure. However, groceries and coal would need to be restocked.

The train crew directed the sergeant to the Petersburg yardmaster — someone they were familiar with and knew he had experience working with the military thanks to nearby Fort Lee. If anyone could help, it would be the yardmaster.

The crew disconnected the power, leaving the eight supernumeraries to spend Christmas in a cold, dark rail yard.

The sergeant and cook headed out to find the yardmaster. It was getting late on Christmas Eve when they found him in his office. He quickly took charge, figuring out how to get coal and groceries delivered.

The Sergeant kept a running tally of how much this was going to cost the team. Thanks to some finagling by the yardmaster, they were able to keep the costs well within the budget. But when the Class A agent went to pay, the yardmaster held up his hand and refused to accept cash. The team was still hundreds of miles and potentially days from reaching its destination. He pointed out that the train might face more delays as it neared the nation's capital and beyond. He insisted the team keep its limited funds just in case. Besides, he pointed out, he worked with the purchasing office at Fort Lee all the time. He didn't expect to have any problem getting reimbursed.

The encounter with the yardmaster was a turning point for the team. He made sure they had plenty of food and drink, along with a full load of coal. The guards were well fed and stayed warm and dry on Christmas, even though they were miles from home and family.

On Dec. 26 the train was underway again. The remainder of the journey was uneventful, with fewer and shorter delays, so

it seemed. The train arrived at Fort Drum a couple of days after Christmas.

The training exercise at Fort Drum went well. The weather continued to be unseasonably warm with little precipitation until the next to the last day of field maneuvers. Then the skies dumped snow, snow, and more snow. Anybody who had hoped for lots of snow got their wish. And those who did not had nearly two weeks without snow, so it all balanced out.

When training was over, the process was reversed. The train was loaded, a team of rail guards assembled, and the equipment rolled home to the warmer Georgia climate.

Early that summer, the division logistics officer answered a call from the procurement office. In question was an invoice from the Petersburg yardmaster for services rendered to a transient shipment on Dec. 24. The colonel assured them the bill was legitimate and should be paid. No, sir! Sorry. The proper procedure had not been followed. The purchasers should have obtained three competitive bids and followed standard contracting protocol. That the provider turned down the Class A agent's cash payment violated the fine print of some government regulation. Much paperwork was now needed in order to pay the yardmaster.

Months later, when the logistics officer briefed his replacement on outstanding issues, the yardmaster's still-unpaid bill came up. The incoming logistics officer promised to make it a top priority.

When Christmas rolls around, we are sometimes reminded of the yardmaster who went out of his way to help eight soldiers far from home. We would like to think he was eventually made whole for his services and for the way he went above and beyond the call of duty. Maybe he did get paid; then again, maybe not. If nothing else, his efforts were then and still are appreciated by the eight soldiers and those of us who know the yardmaster's story — a gentleman who helped some cold and lonely soldiers at Christmas. I

When the unit goes, everything needs to go with it. The equipment here is all part of an armored unit being loaded at Fort Carson, Colo., in December 2016.



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GREAT RAILFAN ROADS ACROSS THE CANADIAN PRAIRIES

The Canadian prairies offer a hidden gem of railfan road, albeit with a twist

By John Friedmann Photos by Glenn Courtney **PROVINCIAL HIGHWAY 14** between Edmonton, Alberta, and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, parallels the densest part of the Canadian National main line, hosts VIA Rail's iconic *Canadian* streamliner, and offers history, photo props, and even a sampling of CPKC's former Canadian Pacific. The twist? Highway 14 is actually two separate highways — Alberta 14 and Saskatchewan 14 — that don't connect!

Driving Western Canada's prairies is easy on uncrowded provincial highways, the scenery is pleasant, and the tracks are usually within sight and unimpeded. There is also a surprising amount of rail history and customer activity along the way.

Edmonton is a good starting point with ample food, lodging, and railroad things to do. While Canadian National's Walker Yard no longer humps cars, it is home to large diesel and car shops and lots of switching. Edmonton is CN's Canadian operating head-quarters and much of the rail activity comes from Alberta's petroleum drilling and refining activity that begins in earnest just north of the city.

Edmonton's VIA Rail station is an oddity — a 1998-constructed stub-end station along the *Canadian*'s through route. Also, don't forget Edmonton's three-line light rail system when touring the city.

THE WAINWRIGHT SUB

Heading east from Edmonton, it's 43 miles to Tofield, Alta., where CN's Wainwright Sub comes alongside just east of town.

The Wainwright Sub, completed in 1909 by Grand Trunk Pacific (GTP), is in the middle of CN's densest network segment between Winnipeg and Jasper, Alta., where annual volumes exceed 100 million gross tons.

Independent rail data collector RailState (see "RailState train data" sidebar) shows CN ran an average of 32 trains per day on this line in 2024's first quarter, with intermodal trains making up approximately 40% of the movements, followed by manifests. Grain moves in unit trains while chemicals and petroleum are usually in mixed freights. The Wainwright Sub is much busier than CN's scenic Prairie North Line, which is parallel to the



north and only averages three or four trains per day, according to RailState.

Shonts, a few miles past Tofield, features a red wooden grain elevator that's been out of use for at least 50 years, but does still make a good photo prop. A different red elevator from Shonts was saved, moved, and is restored at Calgary's Heritage Park. Ten miles east at Poe, another wooden elevator still stands. Both are endangered.

In contrast, Viking features a pair of modern, high-capacity grain terminals for loading unit trains. Parrish and Heimbecker's 150-car loop track terminal was completed in 2019 and is home to a black ex-CP SD40-2. But the real gem is at Cargill's nearby terminal — a former Burlington Northern C30-7 painted in Cargill's attractive green and white livery. This once-common unit is now rare as few C30-7s survive. Viking is a flag stop (advance notice required) for VIA's *Canadian*, which pauses at the nicely restored 1909 GTP depot, now also an art gallery and tea house.

CN'S BATTLE RIVER BRIDGE

Alberta 14 and the Wainwright Sub are side-by-side for 65 miles from Tofield to Irma. CN then diverges to the south for the scenic highlight — a massive steel trestle across the broad Battle River valley. At 2,775 feet long and almost 200 feet high, the bridge was Canada's longest free-standing railway trestle when built in 1908. Local boosters have built a viewpoint that provides excellent angles, requiring only a 3-mile detour from the nearby town of Fabyan.

Wainwright's station situation has come full circle. VIA Rail built a small and modern "stationette," but it was closed and recently torn

► VIA Rail F40PH-3 No. 6420 leads train No. 2, the eastbound Canadian, out of the siding at Hawoods, Saskatchewan, after meeting a westbound doublestack (still visible in the distance).

▼ Canadian National No. 3842 East passes the grain elevator at Asquith in south central Saskatchewan on Aug. 13, 2023. The village of 600 is 24 miles west of Saskatoon. down. Passengers again gather under the eaves of the 1930 CN depot that has been restored as the Wainwright District Museum and Visitors Center (it also houses an Italian restaurant).

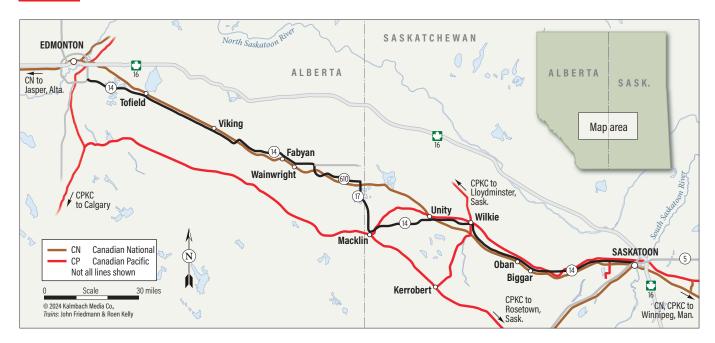
Ten miles east of Wainwright, a right turn on secondary Highway 610 will reunite you with CN at the east end of Heath siding, a frequent meet point. The topography undulates in this area, so 610 and the Wainwright Sub join and part from each other, but don't miss the Edgerton Museum ("Tea Cups to Tractors"), which includes the former GTP standard-plan depot and a nicely painted wooden CN caboose. At Chauvin there's another historic red grain elevator track-side (turn right at the World's Largest Softball), and another at Butze.

Nine miles south, Alberta 17 becomes Saskatchewan 17 as you cross the provincial boundary towards Macklin, 18 miles away.

At Macklin you encounter CPKC's Hardisty Sub, a secondary







route between Edmonton and Saskatoon that runs well north of the road's main line between Calgary and Moose Jaw, Sask. Rail-State data reveals the Hardisty Sub averages four daily trains with oil unit and manifests accounting for most movements. Should you be lucky enough to encounter a CPKC westbound, there is a sweeping S-curve in Macklin conveniently next to the highway. CPKC's Macklin Sub heads southeast and was recently upgraded for grain movements after being partially out of service.

Unless staying in Macklin for the World Bunnock Championship (a bone-throwing game likened to a cross between horseshoes and lawn bowling), leave town on highway 14 — this time, Saskatchewan 14 — heading east. You'll cross the Hardisty Sub a few miles east of town, but the main attraction is Unity, 35 miles away.

RECOMMENDED FOR THE RAILFAN

Despite a modest motto ("A good town in a good district"), Unity is recommended for the railfan. CPKC's Hardisty Sub goes over CN Wainwright west of town and runs generally parallel the rest of the way to Saskatoon. CPKC swings north of Unity (population 2,500), while CN runs right through downtown.

While VIA Rail's simple platform is nothing to write home about, the Unity and District Heritage Museum on the north side hosts the town's restored Canadian Pacific "Standard Plan Number 5" station and a late-model CN caboose. The adjacent North West Grain and Torq transloading terminals on Unity's east side have former BNSF SD40-2s.



Canadian National No. 3947 East meets a westbound as it arrives in Wainwright, Alberta, at first light on Aug. 26, 2023.

Wilkie, the junction of four CPKC subdivisions, is the next point of interest 20 miles east. The Hardisty Sub becomes the Wilkie Sub on its way to Saskatoon, while the Reford Sub (in service for only a few miles) heads south and the Lloydminster Sub strikes off to the northeast towards its namesake town. Wilkie has a siding, seven-track yard, and a large grain elevator — even though the old station is gone, check out the yard for local power.

Highway 14 follows CPKC's Reford Sub south past a large Parrish and Heimbecker elevator that hosts an elderly SW1200RS (often parked in a shed) until the road curves to follow the CN Wainwright Sub eastward. You may spot a unit grain train on the loading loop at Reford, just a few miles down the line.

Reford also hosts a wooden grain elevator nearby and other historic elevators can be found at Landis, Perdue, Leney, and Kinley en route to Saskatoon.

NEW YORK IS BIG ... BUT THIS IS BIGGAR

Saskatchewan 14 and CN are side-by-side for more than 25 miles until Oban, where CPKC's Wilkie Sub rejoins the party and is parallel into the former CN division point of Biggar. Biggar cuts a larger profile than its 2,166 population partly due to its "New York is big ... But this is Biggar" motto. Biggar's GTP station, long in poor condition, was recently torn down, but VIA Rail stops near the former station site. CN's modest yard (supporting a large malt plant) is worth checking out and CPKC serves a Viterra grain loading loop north of downtown.

From Biggar to Saskatoon, CPKC is often right next to Highway 14 while CN is parallel but slightly south. Just east of Dunfermline a CPKC spur crosses the road, en route to a huge Nutrien potash mine (also served by CN). Saskatchewan is the world's largest potash producer and unit trains for export are regular sights on both CN and CPKC. Just after Saskatchewan 14 crosses CPKC outside of Saskatoon, three big rail customers with their own locomotives are just south: Nutrien (potash), G3, and DG Global (grain). The Saskatchewan Railway Museum is nearby (see "Worth stopping for") and the CN Saskatoon yard, diesel shop and VIA Rail Station are all just east.

Elsewhere in Saskatoon, CPKC's Sutherland yard is surprisingly large and the diesel shop is viewable from Central Avenue. The highlight of CPKC's route through Saskatoon is the 1908 bridge across the South Saskatoon River. Uniquely, the single-track bridge deck is shared with the Meewasin River Trail, separated only by a waist-high wooden railing, to the delight of photographers.

RailState train data

COLLECTING ACCURATE train movement data can be frustrating, and railroads often guard their data. But an alternative is developing. RailState (railstate.com) collects train movement data for use by regulators, shippers, and investors through a network of independent (off right-of-way) sensors unaffiliated with the railways. RailState can tell you the frequency, size, and composition of trains; and by tracking individual cars between locations, velocity across specific parts of the rail network. RailState's sensors are most prevalent in Canada and the company is expanding in the western United States.

In fact, Saskatoon's CPKC bridge walkway is a good analogy for this trip: pleasant, quirky, and best done in the summer.

WORTH STOPPING FOR:

The **SASKATCHEWAN RAILWAY MUSEUM** has a small but interesting collection of railroad and traction equipment, and also educates visitors about its site as a World War I internment camp. The museum is located 3 miles south of Highway 14 on Saskatoon's east side and is open during the summer only (like many of the attractions mentioned in this article).

VIA's *Canadian*, the only classic streamliner still running with its original Budd domes and round-end observation car, is a prime photo target. Westbound VIA No. 1 is scheduled on CN Wainwright Sub in daylight on Tuesdays and Fridays while No. 2 is planned for an overnight run on Tuesday and Saturday nights (but check — the train often runs incredibly late).



Canadian National No. 2927 East approaches Ribstone, Alberta. The small community is about 30 miles east of Wainwright.

BESIDES THE RAILROAD:

- **WANUSKEWIN HERITAGE SITE.** This 590-acre site on the north side of Saskatoon has been a First Nations' sacred site for more than 6,000 years. Visitors can enjoy an interpretive center, trails, crafts and even a small bison herd.
- WEST EDMONTON MALL. This mall is so large ... you could probably make it the 650-mile Edmonton-Saskatoon round trip before whoever you left behind experienced the entire mall. West Edmonton is the second-largest mall in North America and has 800 stores and services, including an amusement park, ice rink and its own version of New Orleans' Bourbon Street. I

The author thanks Canadian rail expert Shawn Smith for his help with this article.



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Brian Solomon

THE HOLIDAY SEASON begins early for many heritage railroads, museums, and tourist train operators. On some lines there is only a short transition from the end of autumn Oktoberfests, pumpkin patches, and spooky trains to the start of Winter holiday excursions.

The 2024 holiday schedule is a long one for railroads staging licensed high-energy productions, such as Polar Express — adapted from the ever-popular Chris Van Allsburg story with rehearsals and marketing efforts begun many months before the first tickets are sold.

PLAN EARLY FOR HOLIDAY FUN

As of this writing in early September, many lines have holiday excursion tickets for sale online, but some popular trains and busy days have already sold out.

Connecticut's steam-hauled Valley Railroad offers North Pole Express trips with tickets

only available online with no walk-up sales. If this is on your Christmas list, please plan your booking early. A few years ago, I visited the Valley to make photographs and thought I'd take a ride to rekindle my Christmas spirit, only to be told, 'We're sold out.' But I enjoyed watching happy passengers board the train at dusk, and listening to the locomotive bell tolling as it pulled away from the platform in a waft of steam colored by the holiday lights (essexsteamtrain.com).

Many of Polar Express licensees begin operations in mid-November. North Carolina's Great Smoky Mountains Railroad runs its Polar Express train rides from Nov. 7 through New Year's Eve, with trains boarding at its Bryson City Depot (gsmr.com/the-polar-express); California State Railroad Museum offers its interpretation of this experience from Nov. 16 through Dec. 22, with trains

boarding on the Old Sacramento Waterfront at the Central Pacific Depot (californiarailroad. museum/events/polar-express); and Texas State Railroad Museum runs Nov. 15 through Dec. 28, departing from its Palestine Depot (texasstaterailroad.net/thepolar-express).

SANTA ON TRACK

On the busiest holiday railroads, Santa will be doing double duty and getting a real workout. By the time he loads up his sleigh on Christmas Eve, he'll be well into holiday overtime — Santa's not subject to Federal Railroad Administration hours-of-service rules.

Pennsylvania's Strasburg Rail Road has four distinct seasonal offerings, which employ a variety of vintage passenger cars. Santa's Paradise Express offers a classic Santa train experience. It's ideal for young visitors and first-time train riders. The train includes a visit

steam colored by the holiday lights (essexsteamtrain.com).

Many Polar Express licensees begin operations in mid-November. North Carolina's Great Smoky Mountains Railroad runs its *Polar Express* train rides from Nov. 7 through New Year's Eve, with trains boarding at its Bryson City Depot (qsmr. com/the-polar-express); California State Railroad Museum offers its interpretation of the experience Nov. 16 through Dec. 22, with trains boarding on the Old Sacramento Waterfront at the Central Pacific Depot (californiarailroad.museum/events/polar-express); and Texas State Railroad Museum runs Nov. 15 through Dec. 28, departing from its Palestine Depot (texasstaterailroad. net/the-polar-express).

SANTA ON TRACK

On the busiest holiday railroads, Santa will be doing double duty and getting a real workout. By the time he loads up his sleigh on Christmas Eve, he'll be well into holiday overtime — Santa's not subject to Federal Railroad Administration hours-ofservice rules.

Pennsylvania's Strasburg Rail Road has four distinct seasonal offerings, which employ a variety of vintage passenger cars. Santa's Paradise Express offers a classic Santa train experience. It's ideal for young visitors and first-time train riders. The train includes a visit with the bearded man in the red suit and Mrs. Claus, and the opportunity to send a wish list using the North Pole Express Mailbox at the East Strasburg station.

Mature travelers may want to book a premium seat on the Night Before Christmas. This provides an opportunity to travel on the President's Car, the railroad's one-of-akind former Reading Co. Edwardian-era executive observation car, where you can experience fine holiday travel for a reasonable price (strasburgrailroad.com/christmas-train).

While visiting eastern Pennsylvania there are plenty of other holiday trains in the neighborhood. Steamtown in Scranton hosts The Iron Horse Society's North Pole Limited (theironhorsesociety.com/tickets), an affordable hour-long excursion from the Scranton Yards to Nay Aug Park using the former Baldwin Locomotive Works 0-6-0 No. 26.

Northern Central Railway of York, Pa., operates diesel excursions on the former Pennsylvania Railroad's Northern Central route from New Freedom. It runs weekend Christmas Elves Express trains Nov. 29 through Dec. 22. These pass through the town of Railroad, Pa. (northerncentralrailway. com). Nearby is the Stewartstown Railroad, a quaint and slightly elusive tourist railway. It runs short Santa Claus Express weekend excursions from the station in its namesake village (stewartstownrailroadco.com).

A visit to the Illinois Railway Museum is in order if you'd like to sample the 40-minute Happy Holiday Railway, where Santa rides the train and the ticket price includes an electric trolley ride. Equipment and buildings will be brightly lit with holiday lights.

This event runs on select dates from Nov. 29 through Dec. 23, from the East Union Depot. (irm.org/event/happy-holiday-railway).

Christmas begins on Colorado's Georgetown Loop on Nov. 8 with two offerings; the 1-hour, 15-minute Santa's Rocky Mountain Adventure; and the nocturnal Santa's Lighted Forest that features the display of some 300,000 lights. Santa, of course, makes an appearance on every train. Consider an upscale holiday experience and travel aboard the Waldorf Presidential Club car or one of the railroad's other elegant parlor/club cars.

After Christmas, the railroad fields its Victorian Holiday Celebration featuring Ebenezer Scrooge rather than Santa, who will, by then, certainly be needing a holiday of his own. Trains depart from Georgetown Devil's Gate (**qeorgetownlooprr.com/winter**holiday-trains). — Brian Solomon

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No. 3001 is one of two remaining New York Central 4-8-2s

▲ New York Central Mohawk No. 3001 rests next to Pennsylvania Railroad GG1 No. 4882 in the vard at the National New York Central Railroad Museum in Elkhart, Ind. One of two remaining NYC 4-8-2s from a fleet of 600, plans call for an operational restoration of No. 3001 by the Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society, operators of Nickel Plate No. 765. NYCRRM

NEW YORK CENTRAL RAILROAD NO. 3001 has been set on a path toward operational restoration, according to the City of Elkhart, Ind., and the Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society, operators of Nickel Plate No. 765. The locomotive is currently displayed at The National New York Central Railroad Museum, located in Elkhart. The city, which owns the NYCRRM, is partnering with the Historical Society to assess the museum, creating a new strategic plan for its redevelopment.

"We treat this collaboration and the acquisition of the 3001 with great excitement and seriousness," says Kelly Lynch, the society's executive director. "The locomotive's future has been uncertain for decades, but we have the ideal railroad venue and the passenger train to

pair with it. With consistent and demonstrated donor support, we believe it can be a maior attraction that will welcome thousands of people from around the world while also renewing interest in the National New York Central Museum."

No. 3001, an Alco L3a-class 4-8-2, was delivered in November 1940. It is one of two remaining NYC Mohawks, as the railroad labeled the wheel arrangement. At one time, the NYC rostered 600 4-8-2s, the largest fleet in the United States. The other remaining Mohawk, No. 2933, a 1929 L2d class, is in the National Transportation Museum at St. Louis.

Pending successful fundraising efforts, No. 3001 will be the only operating NYC steam locomotive. Plans call for it to run over former NYC trackage, pull-

ing former NYC passenger cars as part of the Indiana Rail Experience, a collaboration between the Historical Society and the Indiana Northeastern Railroad Co. to provide train excursions.

The project also involves evaluating the museum's rolling stock to determine which pieces will play a role in future exhibits. The goal is to improve exhibits and position the museum as an anchor for neighborhood development in downtown Elkhart. The NYCRRM is located along the busy Norfolk Southern line on the downtown's south end.

Restoring No. 3001 will cost around \$4.3 million. The first funding milestone is raising \$500,000 by May 3, 2025.

For more information or to support the project, please visit: fortwaynerailroad.org -Bob Lettenberger

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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

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Carson City

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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 ces 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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RAIL SHOWS AND EVENTS

DECEMBER 7 & 8, 2024: San Joaquin Valley Toy Train Operators, Inc. Model Train Show. Saturday 10am-5pm. Sunday 10am-3pm. Admission: \$10, kids under 12 free w/adult. Operating layouts, vendor tables, free parking, pizza food truck. Stanislaus County Fairgrounds, 900 N. Broadway, Turlock, CA. Information: Jack Smith 209-765-1354 or Vern Cowan 714-686-7165 www.sjvttoinc.com

JANUARY 25, 2025: The 33rd Annual Great Tri-State Rail Sale. La Crosse Center, 2nd & Pearl Streets, La Crosse, WI. 9:00am-3:00pm. \$8.00, under 12 free. Model, Toy & Antique Trains & Memorabilia, Sale & Swap Meet. 608-781-9383. www.4000foundation.com

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

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In the January issue



Meet California's high-speed rail guru

Ron Diridon, California's HIGH-SPEED RAIL VISIONARY, has gone from trainman to having a passenger station named after him. Four concrete viaducts are **ENGINEERING MASTERPIECES** of the former Delaware, Lackawanna & Western. A fleet of PASSENGER CARS with a

connection to Houston's Astrodome. On sale December 10, 2024







Next stop: North Pole

Bounding through the snow on Dec. 20, 2010, outside New Hope, Pa., 2-8-0 No. 40 leads the New Hope & Ivyland North Pole Express on a magical journey to visit Santa. No. 40 was delivered to South Carolina's Lancaster & Chester Railway in December 1925.

Mitch Goldman

Post-holiday trek

The sun has just begun to crest the horizon as Pere Marquette No. 1225 steams south through rural Owosso, Mich. Built in 1941 by the Lima Locomotive Works, the animated version stars in the Polar Express movie. On Jan. 13, 2019, No. 1225 is running not to the North Pole, but as part of a photo charter. Doug Boudrow









The Big Apple sans snow

Christmas is only four days away on this snowless, misty, rainy Dec. 21, 2018. The holiday decorations shine brightly along Queens Boulevard, Queens, as the inbound and outbound No. 7 subway trains meet at the 40th Street station. There will be no white **Christmas for New York** City this year! Eugene Armer



A snowy evening

Snow gently falls around the picturesque Westport, N.Y., depot on Nov. 30, 2008, as Delaware & Hudson GP38-2 No. 7312 breaks the winter silence with its passing. A little over 65 miles south of the Canadian boarder, Westport is nestled along the western shore of Lake Champlain. Gary Knapp

Decorated with real icicles

Norfolk Southern GP40-2 No. 3039 leads train No. H76 through trees tinseled with a wintry mix of real icicles near Landsdown, N.J., a few days before Christmas on Dec. 17, 2019. Jerry Dziedzic









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