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In this issue

March 2025

Vol. 85, No. 3

Features



Delaware & Hudson's ghosts of Oneonta p. 12

Memories of the last days of the maintenance heart of D&H's south end **Stan Trzoniec**



Riding a short, slow, and spectacular Swiss line p. 22

The Vigezzina-Centovalli Railway is a hidden gem — but perhaps not for long **David Lassen**



COVER STORY Maine to Miami using 55 trains p. 30

Four days, 19 separate operators, and 12 different locomotive models **John Friedmann**



Railroading in the extreme p. 38

Exploring the Skagway, Alaska, area on an assignment to photograph the White Pass & Yukon **David Lustig**



Gallery p. 56

Images of railroading from *Trains* Magazine contributors

ON THE COVER:

Charger No. 113 leads a Brightline train through Stuart, Fla., on Oct. 15, 2024. Author John Friedmann rode Brightline during a four-day Maine-Miami trip. Scott A. Hartley

In every issue

News p. 4

VIA Rail Canada's equipment request includes dome cars; Trains.com forums return

Bill Stephens p. 8

UP-short line deal aims to improve service

John P. Hankey p. 10

Why 2025? Railroading's bicentennial is surprisingly complex

Great Railfan Roads p. 44

Follow California 99 for busy Central Valley railroad action **John Friedmann**

Brian Solomon p. 50

How to plan a heritage railroad visit

Preservation p. 52

The Oregon Rail Heritage Foundation buys short line

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From the Editor



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Railroad adventure is a common thread running through this issue. John Friedmann, for instance, recently found time for a rail trip from Maine to Miami — with a difference.

John aimed for one journey stringing together as many different intercity, commuter, and rail transit segments as possible. The result? Fifty-five trains from 19 separate operators over four days.

David Lustig recalls an assignment to photograph Alaska's White Pass & Yukon. Nothing to it — until they warned him of bears.

Senior Editor David Lassen traveled to Switzerland to explore a little-known but spectacular line.

Finally, Brian Solomon has tips for planning a railroad adventure of your own.

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VIA equipment request calls for new domes

Company seeks nine car types in plans for single-level long-distance fleet

▲ Dome cars are among nine car types in VIA Rail Canada's request to carbuilders for new equipment.

Two images, VIA Rail Canada

VIA is also calling for dining cars with full kitchens in its plans for a new long-distance fleet.



VIA RAIL CANADA has issued a formal "Request for Qualification" for prospective carbuilders to replace long-distance, regional, and remote-service passenger cars that date from the mid-1950s — an order that would include new dome cars, as well as the first all-berth sleeping cars in decades.

The request issued in December follows a November RFQ for locomotives to power

the new single-level equipment. It comes after the Trudeau government earlier this year committed to fund a new fleet. This would allow VIA to retire stainless-steel rolling stock that entered service on Canadian Pacific in 1954, as well as British-built Renaissance coaches and sleepers dating to the 1990s. Both aging fleets have become increasingly difficult to maintain.

The new trainsets would equip the Toronto-Vancouver, British Columbia, *Canadian*; the Montreal-Halifax, Nova Scotia, *Ocean*, and other trains outside the Quebec City-Windsor, Ontario, corridor. Without the new equipment, the non-corridor service would face elimination because the company has determined its recently added Venture trainsets are not suitable for long-distance passenger needs.

VIA is seeking nine differ-

ent car types, including four varieties of sleeping car. It arrived at that number — after beginning with an initial list of 21 potential car types — in part through a collaborative process of individual discussions with prospective carbuilders that began in 2023.

Arnaud Lecaze, VIA's vice president of fleet renewal programs, tells *Trains*, "At the end, we found out what they can do — and what they cannot do. We're not saying there's no risk, but we are confident enough that the specifications are aligned with the discussions we had with them." Of the eight carbuilders who originally expressed interest, four entered in active talks, he says.

The car types that are part of the request include sleeping cars that will offer a variety of accommodations, but not in the same car.

• **Baggage:** Must accommo-

date large items delivered to remote stops and contain climate-controlled areas for dogs.

- **Coaches:** These will be suitable for either short day-time use or multi-night trips.

- **Dining:** An illustration provided by VIA shows a double-window, Viewliner-type design, which Lacaze confirmed is high on VIA's wish list. (However, VIA cautions that the illustrations are suggestions based on feedback from manufacturers, not necessarily an exact depiction of what will be built.) A VIA press release says the cars "will have a full kitchen, allowing our chefs to prepare tasty meals using fresh ingredients, with an emphasis on local produce."

- **Room sleeper:** Gone is the "cabin for one" roomette. All accommodations will be for two, with facing seats. Details on the room size appear to be subject to further design input, but "the intention," Lacaze says, "will be to have a row of upper-berth windows."

- **Accessible sleeper:** All rooms will accommodate passengers with disabilities. The larger accommodation would be similar to a bedroom layout.

- **Berth sleeper:** A surprise inclusion, an all-section car will help bridge the pricing and comfort gap on overnight journeys. In the post-World War II lightweight era, only the *California Zephyr* and some Union Pacific trains debuted with streamlined all-section cars, which were later converted to coaches. The great advantage of berths is that passengers can socialize and see landscape on both sides of the train.

- **Prestige sleeper:** The current, pricey version has been a hit on the *Canadian*. The number of bedrooms will be determined by what the manufacturer can cost-effectively build while retaining the desired features, such as the fold-down double bed.

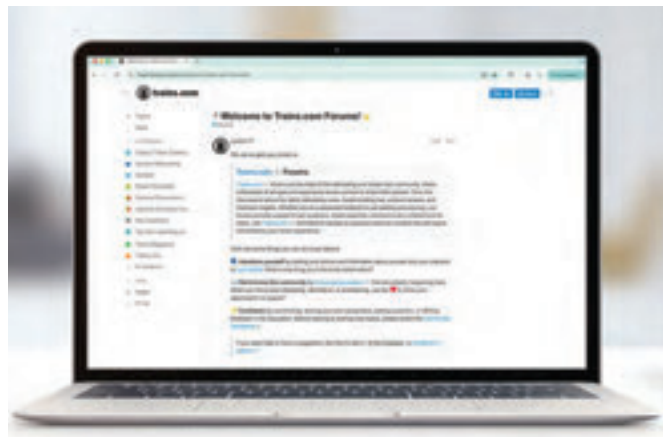
- **Panorama lounge:** The design reinvents the Panorama coach from Colorado Railcar, which VIA acquired from BC Rail's defunct *Whistler Northwind*, as a full-window lounge with curved roofline glass.

- **Dome-lounge:** This would only be employed on the *Canadian*. "It's not possible to duplicate the *Park* car's round end — it would cost a lot," Lacaze says, referring to the popular dome-lounge-observation cars. "It will be like the Skyline lounge car." There will be some type of lift allowing passengers with disabilities to get to the dome. "We don't want to be prescriptive," he says. "We will work with the manufacturer to make it fully accessible."

VIA expects to select a package from a single builder. "We are open to any proposed joint venture," Lacaze says, "but there will be one contract." Timelines for delivery and the sequence of production have been discussed with each manufacturer and are in the RFQ.

The last time a complete set of long-distance passenger cars of all types was conceived was Pullman-Standard's Superliner order of the mid-1970s, developed under Amtrak's then-president, Paul Reistrup. That equipment was reprised with Bombardier-built Superliner IIs in the early 1990s.

VIA's collaborative approach to its RFQ is in contrast to what *Trains* has learned from various sources about how Amtrak has addressed prospective carbuilders with its pending long-distance bilevel equipment order. Amtrak's initial Request for Proposals was issued in December 2023 with specific requirements for manufacturers, such as elevators in certain cars. At least 10 amendments to the RFP followed, based on what the two remaining bidders were willing to attempt; the most recent RFP deadline was mid-December 2024. — Bob Johnston



The Trains.com forums are once again available to readers, following a significant update to cloud-based technology to replace the prior, outdated system. Firecrown Media

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Modern, cloud-based technology improves on outdated platform

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We hope you will encourage friends and colleagues across the railroad community to rejoin or join the new *Trains* forums.

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Please share ideas on what we can do to grow the community. You can find me in the *Trains* forum as FreightAlley.

See you there! —
Craig Fuller, Firecrown Media CEO



Craig Fuller



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G&W short line to take over local service from Union Pacific in Eugene, Ore., area

Central Oregon & Pacific deal will allow faster, more flexible service, railroads say

GENESEE & WYOMING SHORT LINE

Central Oregon & Pacific Railroad will lease and operate nearly 28 miles of Union Pacific trackage in the Eugene, Ore., area in a deal to take over the Class I railroad's local switching operations. The railroads said the move will improve service for local customers.

The change allows UP to reduce the number of times a railcar is handled and create greater efficiencies, while providing more flexibility and agility for both railroads to meet current customer needs and anticipated growth, according to a December announcement.

"G&W has a proven track record in operational flexibility and providing excellent customer service," said Union Pacific Executive Vice President of Operations Eric Gehringer. "Those strengths, combined with Union Pacific's unmatched franchise and access to critical markets nationwide, position us to provide customers with the service we sold them and grow together."

The 306-mile Central Oregon & Pacific interchanges with UP in Eugene.

"Union Pacific can count on CORP to operate their Eugene, Ore., yard safely and efficiently," G&W CEO Michael Miller said. "In partnership with Union Pacific, our team is ready to deliver the customer-centric first- and last-mile rail service that customers have come to rely on from G&W railroads so that we can grow together."

A filing with the Surface Transportation Board says the short line will lease 27.58 miles, plus UP's Eugene Yard and "certain related excepted track."



The Central Oregon & Pacific will take over local switching work of Union Pacific in the Eugene, Ore., area. Genesee & Wyoming

The G&W short line will serve 22 customers on the leased trackage. UP would not say how many jobs are affected by the transaction, but that it had been in contact with employees, including providing information about employment opportunities at UP, CORP, or other G&W railroads. CORP notified UP employees that the short line has 20 job openings, including 15 train crew positions, two mechanical jobs, and three maintenance-of-way positions.

Union Pacific road train crews will continue to work out of Eugene Yard.

The deal is reminiscent of one between Canadian National and Watco in Louisiana. In 2021, CN handed off local switching at a nine-plant petrochemical complex to new Watco short line Dutchtown Southern. With Dutchtown Southern providing service seven days per week — up from five — and offering multiple switches per day, traffic grew 47% in the 1.76-mile short line's first year.

Union Pacific and G&W say they are

working with customers to ensure a smooth transition once the plan takes effect following STB approval.

"G&W has a proven track record of service in the PNW and this move allows us to take dwell out of the terminal, enhancing car cycle time — ultimately providing better service to our customers," UP spokeswoman Kristen South said in an email.

Jeremy Ferguson, president of the SMART-TD union that represents conductors, blasted the transaction.

"This lease is a blatant example of hedge fund-driven railroading, where the financial interests of Wall Street inves-

tors outweigh the safety and wellbeing of workers and communities," he said. "The unionized, highly-trained workforce that Union Pacific is discarding has the qualifications necessary to operate these trains safely. By replacing them with a less experienced and less qualified workforce, UP is not only jeopardizing rail safety but also diminishing the ability to ensure smooth and reliable service for the businesses and industries that depend on this vital transportation network."

Independent analyst Anthony B. Hatch says having Central Oregon & Pacific perform local service and UP handle the long haul combines the strengths of short lines and Class I railroads. The deal should produce carload volume growth, if the Dutchtown Southern is any guide, he says.

But Hatch wondered about how the outsourcing of local service to a short line would affect labor relations at Union Pacific. — *Bill Stephens*

NEWS BRIEFS

Senate approves four new members for Amtrak board

The **U.S. SENATE** confirmed four new members of the **AMTRAK** board of directors in a session ending early on Dec. 21, 2024. David Capozzi, Elaine Clegg, Ron Bartory, and Lanhee Chen were confirmed on a voice vote. They join Anthony Coscia, Christopher Koos, and Joel Szabat, who in January became the first board members confirmed by

the Senate since 2015. One spot remains to be filled. Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner and the U.S. Secretary of Transportation complete the 10-member board.

President-elect Donald Trump said he would choose **DAVID FINK** as administrator of the **FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION**.

Fink was president of Pan Am Railways from 2006 until the railroad's purchase by CSX in 2022. Trump said in a social media post that Fink is a "fifth-generation railroad-er" who "will bring his 45-plus years of transportation leadership and success, which will deliver the FRA into a new era of safety and technological innovation."



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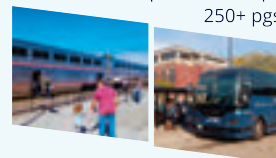
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VIA Rail Canada gives dome cars a future

New long-distance fleet includes domes, which would be the first built since 1958



Bill Stephens

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Analysis: Trains.com

The December news out of Montreal was a stunner: VIA Rail Canada will outfit its long-distance, regional, and remote-service trains with new single-level equipment — including dome cars for its flagship, the Vancouver-Toronto *Canadian*.

VIA Rail's 70-year-old Budd-built stainless steel fleet is a testament to durability and design. But nothing lasts forever, and despite all their classic streamliner charm, the venerable Budd cars have served well beyond their useful lives.

Industry observers had expected VIA Rail to follow Amtrak's lead as the U.S. passenger railroad looks to replace its aging bi-level long-distance fleet. Canada, the thinking went, would simply have its next generation equipment tacked on to whatever Amtrak ordered. Instead, VIA has leapfrogged ahead of Amtrak.

Now, with funding approved in Ottawa and the promise of new equipment on the horizon, VIA Rail is making a statement: The *Canadian* is here to stay and it's getting a 21st-century makeover worthy of the last great streamliner.

Let's start with the dome car. For you and me, the dome offers a front-row seat to the railroad, where you can immerse yourself in the tracks, signals, and trains ahead. For the typical passenger, the 360-degree glass is simply the best way to soak up Canada's landscape, from the Rockies to the Prairies and on to Ontario's

forests and the Toronto skyline. In either case, there's no substitute for a dome car.

Purists will lament the lack of a classic round-end dome-observation car. There's no argument that VIA's *Park* series cars are an iconic exclamation point on the end of the *Canadian*. But VIA says those curvy derrieres would be too expensive to build today. That's a pity, as is VIA's plan to equip only the *Canadian* with domes. There are regional train routes — VIA's service linking Jasper, Alberta, with Prince Rupert, British Columbia, comes to mind — that have scenery deserving of a dome.

But what's important is that the dome car is coming off the endangered species list. Domes were all the rage after World War II as railroads sought ways to appeal to passengers. No domes have been built since 1958, and the fear had been that VIA's domes would not be replaced — or could not be replaced if VIA re-equipped its trains with bi-level equipment. So, long live the dome.

There's much to like in the rest of VIA Rail's proposed acquisition of 300 cars and 40 locomotives. Every car type (save baggage, for obvious reasons) features an abundance of glass that should create an open feeling inside while offering passengers great views outside, particularly in the panorama lounges that feature couches, tables, and floor-to-ceiling wraparound windows.

Dining cars will get the wraparound treatment, too. And — Amtrak take note — they will, in VIA's words, "have a full kitchen, allowing our chefs to prepare tasty meals using fresh ingredients, with an emphasis on local produce." VIA gets it: Meals made to order in the galley and served at your table are not a frill. They're an essential part of the passenger train experience.

VIA also seeks four different types of sleeping cars. A "Room sleeper" compartment will accommodate two people, with facing seats by day and upper and lower bunks at night. All rooms in the "Accessible sleeper" will be able to serve people with disabilities. The "Berth sleeper" is a blast from the past: The all-section car caters to loonie-conscious passengers who want more overnight comfort than coach but don't want to splurge for a private room. At the other end of the budget spectrum, "Prestige sleepers" will feature large rooms with fold-down double beds.

VIA Rail puts an asterisk on its illustrations of the proposed equipment: They're conceptual. The final designs may differ, and much will depend on budgetary considerations. But the fact that prospective manufacturers have been in on the process from the beginning suggests that what VIA has in mind is within the realm of the possible.

The concepts themselves are exciting, hinting at a train that blends modern style with the timeless appeal of the *Canadian*. Whether the new equipment lives up to VIA's vision remains to be seen, but the intention is clear. VIA Rail is thinking big. **I**



In a view from the Skyline dome, VIA Rail's eastbound *Canadian* meets a Canadian National sulfur train with former CREX ES44AC No. 2792 in charge in British Columbia in February 2023. Bill Stephens

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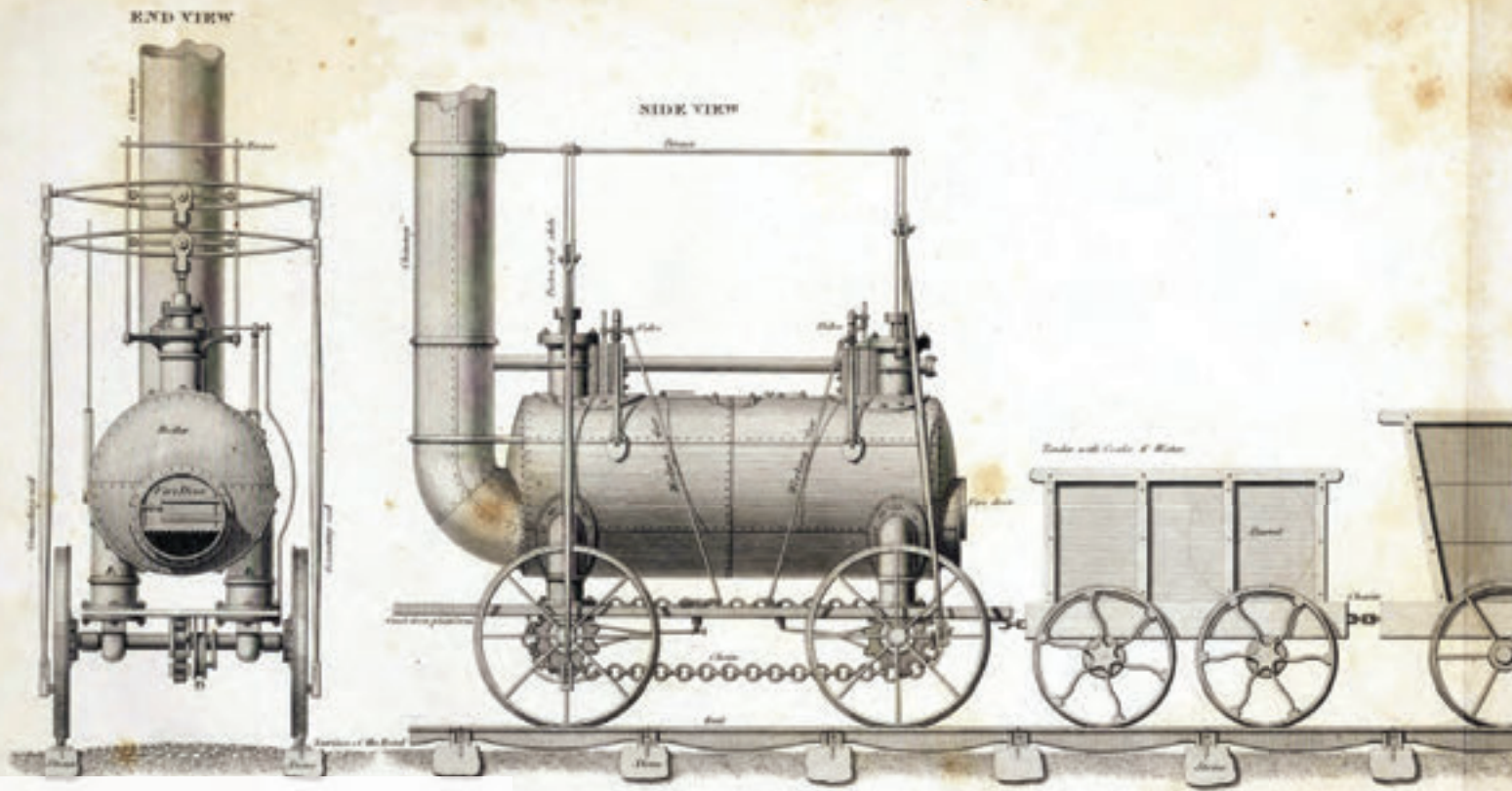
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Why 2025?

Navigating sloppy history, willful ignorance, and corporate malarkey

▲ William Strickland, a gifted American artist, architect, and engineer, spent nine months in England in 1825 studying that nation's new railroads. His report, illustrated with drawings taken from careful measurements, helped pave the way for railroads in the U.S. Public domain

THIS YEAR MARKS the 200th anniversary of the opening of the first modern steam railroad in Great Britain. It also represents the 200th anniversary of the first credible proposals for a railroad in the United States. Most of all, it is an opportunity to correct two centuries of sloppy history, willful ignorance, and corporate malarkey surrounding the origins of the American Railroad.

It isn't so much that they lied to us. They just didn't bother to tell the truth.

The truth is Americans knew what steam railroads were, what they were capable of, and how to build them by the mid-1820s.

CREATION MYTHS

In the fuzzy retelling of railroading's creation myths, the United States was innocent of technology and longingly looking westward to break sod and create a new agrarian paradise. Canals were the answer, but the Appalachian Mountains were

in the way. The trade of the entire Great West would naturally drain toward New Orleans, while major eastern seaboard cities would wither and die. It was a convenient fiction with just a hint of truth.

For the rest of the 1800s, variations on that theme were good enough for almost everyone concocting early railroad history. Keep in mind that the discipline of history was still in its infancy, and the public had a huge appetite for entertaining stories with little regard for accuracy or truth.

My own railroad — the Baltimore & Ohio — cooked up its own creation myths. In one, the brother of a leading Baltimore banker went to England at about the time the city was losing trade to New Orleans. He wrote back, describing this wondrous invention, whereupon the City fathers quickly began building a railroad to the Ohio River. That crock of horsefeathers was still rattling around in the Chessie System

Public Relations Department in the early 1970s.

As often the case, the facts concerning the origins of the railroad were lounging about in plain sight.

After about 1800, Great Britain was actively and rapidly improving on the crude tramways that had existed for a century. A colliery engineer from Cornwall pieced together the first working steam locomotive in 1804.

Great Britain's Industrial Revolution was in full swing. One commentator in 1825 estimated that Britain had upwards of 10,000 steam engines working in mines, mills, canals, and workshops. Factories crowded large cities and small towns alike as Great Britain fancied itself the "workshop of the world." Most of our manufactured goods still came from Europe as we were undertaking our own Industrial Revolution after about 1800.

Great Britain's Stockton & Darlington Railway opened in



mid-1825 as the world's first modern railway. It was effectively a double-track railroad extending 26 miles between collieries and its namesake cities. Steam locomotives powered trains from the start. It was a well-built common carrier, not merely a low-speed plateway with horses pulling wagons.

The U.S. watched all of this carefully. An ocean still separated the two countries. They had fought two wars in the course of American Independence. Still, Great Britain and the United States shared a common culture, language, extensive reciprocal trade, and the kinds of close personal and commercial ties that made their economies interdependent.

News and opinion flowed freely from British and European ports to Atlantic and Gulf seaports, then quickly diffused inland as fast as our roads, rivers, and canals allowed. America knew quite well what was going on in Great Britain's Parliament, banking houses, factories, and railroad offices.

A casual keyword search of U.S. newspapers from 1825

yielded 191 articles in dozens of publications reporting on the advantages of British railroading. It was the practice for newspapers, even in small towns, to reprint articles of interest from domestic and foreign papers. Many of those reprinted reports on railways were lengthy, highly technical, and surprisingly convincing as to the superiority of railroad transportation.

The one consistent refrain was that although railroads were in early stages of development and costly to build, they had advantages in function and efficiency over even the best-run canals or turnpikes.

By 1825, the emerging question was not whether railways could prosper in the U.S., but when and by whom they would be built. Local editors repeatedly offered the opinion that this rapidly improving technology would be ideally suited to the conditions existing in America.

RAILROADS IN AMERICA

Unsurprisingly, Pennsylvania was the cradle of American railroading, even if our industrial revolution had first taken root in New England. Philadelphia was a seat of commerce, culture, politics, and industry. As a consequence of embargoes on coal and iron from Great Britain during the War of 1812, American entrepreneurs began developing domestic fuel and iron industries, especially in the Keystone State.

Pennsylvania had many rivers, but also dug canals to open its hinterlands. Pittsburgh grew at the confluence of two substantial rivers that formed a third, the Ohio River, which in turn opened almost the entirety of what was then "the West." Early on, the state understood that key to its prosperity was connecting Atlantic tidewater at Philadelphia with the Ohio River — and thus, the future of the American economy.

That is why, in January 1825, the state-sponsored Pennsylvania Society for the Promotion of Internal Improvement sent 37-year-old William Strickland to Great Britain for a nine-month

investigation of that country's canals, turnpikes, and railroads.

Strickland was a gifted artist, architect, and engineer working at the height of his powers. He returned in late 1825 and immediately submitted a thorough analysis of British transportation, including detailed accounts and drawings of its railroad technology. In essence, this was the basis for the original Pennsylvania Railroad/Main Line of Public Works, linking the Commonwealth's two major cities via Harrisburg.

By then, the United States had a few dozen crude tramways similar to the nearly 2,000 in use in Great Britain. The inventor Oliver Evans had built a prototype steam-powered amphibious vehicle in the late 1790s. Thomas Leiper had demonstrated a model of a railroad vehicle in 1809, and by 1810 had built an effective tramway for his quarry business at Crum Creek, south of Philadelphia.

John Stevens was a remarkable man and prolific inventor. New Jersey issued him the first state charter for a railroad in 1815. Ten years later, in 1825, he built a small demonstration railroad. The steam locomotive he cobbled together ran around a circular track at Castle Point, his estate in Hoboken, N.J. A model of his locomotive is in the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania.

Adopting a complex, expensive new technology in a relatively undeveloped place like America involved risk. Nor were there the robust financial markets, a skilled labor pool, or even the legal and commercial frameworks in place here that were so helpful to railroad builders in Great Britain.

That is why Nicholas Biddle's 1825 endorsement of a railroad from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh was so important.

Biddle was no mere interested citizen or tinkerer. He was among the most well-educated, experienced, brilliant men on the continent. In 1825 Biddle also happened to be the president of the Second Bank of the United States, the rough equivalent of the cur-

rent Federal Reserve Bank. He had a front row seat to every aspect of the American economy, its foreign trade, the progress of science and technology, and a keen grasp on politics.

SETTING A DATE

By 1825, all the necessary pieces were in place to initiate America's "Railroad Century." The conditions on the ground were ripe. The technology was available, if not yet matured. The need was manifest and perhaps exigent. Great Britain offered precedents, talent, and textbooks on how to actually build railroads and rolling stock even when America was largely incapable of creating them. Important people were convinced that the railroad was a viable technology.

We could, I suppose, date the American railroad from the opening of the Granite Railroad in Quincy, Mass. in 1826. That was more of a conventional tramway. The Mohawk & Hudson project, chartered also in 1826, was a short portage railway.

The Baltimore & Ohio of 1827 long asserted that it was in fact the country's first "real" railroad, but that claim also shades the weight of evidence and perpetuates a bit of corporate wishful thinking.

I am comfortable that we can — and, should — mark the bicentennial of railroading in the United States in 2025.

That doesn't detract from the Stockton & Darlington's equally consequential 2025 bicentennial. Both are bookends and the beginning points of similar, but divergent, traditions of railroading.

Each represents cause for celebration. And for us, perhaps the obligation to put to rest the fables, fabrications, and assertions that have clouded the industry's origins for 200 years. There was never a great mystery. We simply never bothered to assemble a reasonable facsimile of what really was going on.

American railroading, and those of us fascinated by its history, deserve nothing less. — John P. Hankey



Looking between the older buildings in the D&H Oneonta facility, during a May 1989 visit, a friend of the photographer walks through adding a human element to an otherwise deserted shop. Most of the yard was still intact.

Delaware & Hudson

GHOSTS IN ONEONTA

Once the railroad's thriving maintenance gem

Story and photos by Stan Trzoniec

Just about everything has changed, but no matter how many times I visit the Delaware & Hudson Railway, there is an excitement that something new may be discovered.

The thought of finding something new on the right-of-way or the back roads running near this legendary railroad always draws me in. In short, I'm forever enamored by its former presence in the Empire State, especially the Southern Tier region and more so on its Susquehanna Division.

While the railroad made a more than formidable impression on this author and the people in the region, the Delaware & Hudson has that "sense of place" like no other railroad I've photographed and written about over the years. Even today, traveling State Route 7, you can see the importance it

had on the area's economy, from the population to industries along the way.

DISCOVERING THE D&H

To me, there is no other location like this part of New York State. When I was a young boy, I spent balmy summer days on my uncle's farm just a scant 10 miles from Oneonta in nearby Portlandville, hunting, fishing, and getting stomach aches from eating too many green apples! Unknown to me at the time was that the Cooperstown Branch ran right through the town, but the tracks were pulled up years before I was born. While the Delaware & Hudson was the furthest thing on my mind, in later years I traveled back to the farm, and with it the rails that beat around the hills and dales from Oneonta to Cooperstown. Happily, the farm is still there



Closing the D&H Oneonta shop meant that it became a rolling-stock storage facility. A line of cabooses ranging from traditional to bay window are lined up for disposition. The now quiet open-air car structure looms in the background.

— regrettably, the Delaware & Hudson is not, especially the facilities at Oneonta.

Back in 1989, along with a few friends, I traveled to see what we could discover before Oneonta's will was read. We rented a large RV, and when, for example, we arrived at one particular spot in Oneonta, the yard and facilities seemed to impress us the most for photos and the general history of the line. We made it a habit to ask permission before walking around the property. Much to our chagrin, however, nobody could be found to ask. It was during the week, during normal working hours, but the place was deserted.

You could see something was going to happen, or already was happening, by just the contents of the yard. Cabooses were lined up, rolling stock was in various states of repair, and while there was some power around the periphery, all was quiet. During this day, I had my Mamiya 6x7 camera with me loaded with Tri-X film, so I documented the area in a more somber monochromatic mood.

THE GENERATIONS OF A GRAND FACILITY

The once grand maintenance facility that had served the Delaware & Hudson's Albany & Susquehanna Division seemingly forever was over. From its beginnings in the late 1800s and through its ensuing years, the railroad, including the huge Oneonta maintenance facility, had survived in place, if only through mergers and takeovers.

While the Guilford, Canadian Pacific, and finally Norfolk Southern all took turns hammering at the "shrine" in Oneonta, the yard there still lives, although barely. It has an almost nonexistent life compared with the activity it had in years past. Taking a few days, I journeyed to the Oneonta yard and, much to my dismay, the yard is now one flat plain of land stretching as far as the eye can see. The famous landmarks like the FA Tower, the overhead walkway, and all but a few of the buildings are gone, with only photographs allowing us to keep their memory.

As mentioned previously, at one time, a few of us had the run of the place, and we spent nearly a full day photographing the yard, with emphasis on the maintenance buildings. Just walking around, you could sense the history surrounding this location and the men who spent their entire lives employed here. On the downside, the place was in full decay and with time running out for the Delaware & Hudson. We photographed what was left. In 2023, the giant coaling tower stood tall like something out of *Star Wars*, but now that is gone, with only the huge smokestack remaining towards where the south end of the yard was located.

THE CENTER OF D&H OPERATIONS

In its prime, Oneonta was a key location for most D&H operations. About 38 timetable miles south of town at Nineveh, N.Y., the Pennsylvania Division split from the Albany & Susquehanna, which made Oneonta a good location to make up and classify trains for



During a visit in the early 2000s, the imposing concrete coaling tower, looking like something out of *Star Wars*, was still standing. Today it is gone.



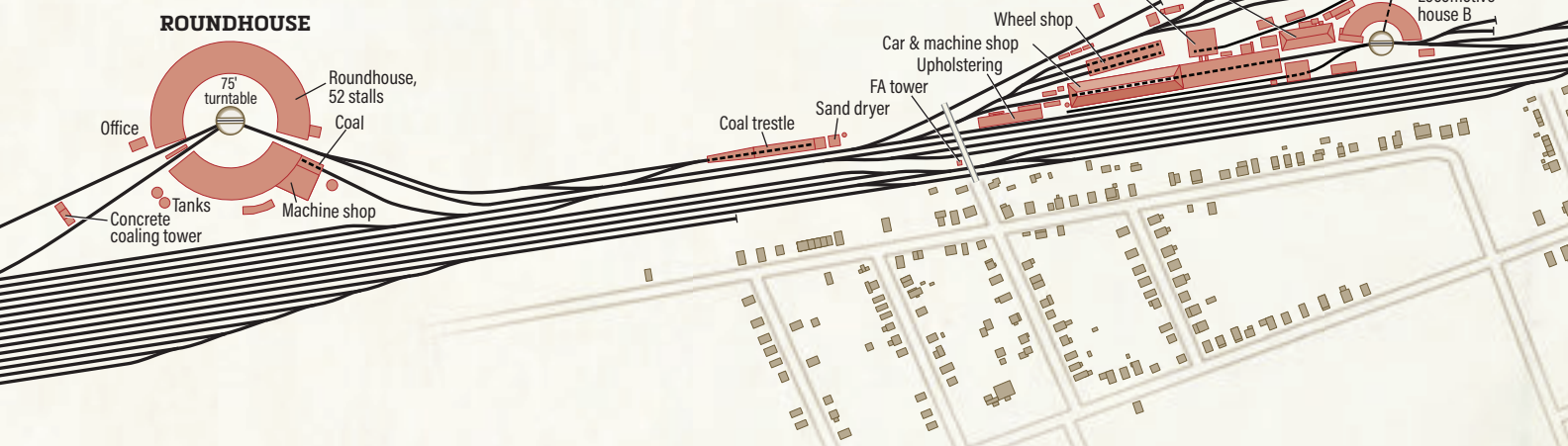
movements to Binghamton and south into Pennsylvania. In addition, as a crew change point, local freights and a base for helpers were all positioned in Oneonta.

Stepping back in time, the Albany & Susquehanna Railroad, which began construction in 1851, reached Oneonta in August 1865. Now with the area

booming and the stagecoach line entering its final months of prosperity, the railroad was taking over, shortening the time and smoothing the ride from Albany. It was a series of "subscriptions" from the taxpayers along the route and the state, amounting to \$1 million, that finally made the rail trip to Oneonta possible. According to

THE D&H IN ONEONTA

A railroad shrine



Looking back 35 years, the famous FA tower was out of commission and boarded up while the footbridge was still standing. The yard was being used to store older, out-of-service rolling stock.



Susquehanna River



If only these buildings could share their story, they would write volumes about the history of the D&H shops in Oneonta. For the photographer, the closed facility was a gold mine of visual opportunities.

Despite the fact that time was closing in on the defunct facilities in 1989, the shop was neat and orderly. The floors had even been swept.



the history of the area, this date dealing with the arrival of the railroad “was considered to be Oneonta’s greatest day” to a crowd that overwhelmed even the town fathers.

For many years, Oneonta was one of the busiest railroad towns in New York. There were several train lines, a pair of depots welcomed passengers, and it wasn’t long before the yard in town became the city’s largest employer. This in part was due to the immense roundhouse built in 1906 on a tract of land measuring over 350 acres. The land, which at this point was the prime location for the yard, was actually a swamp that surveyed about a mile wide at

some places by quite a few of miles long.

For history, it is hard to fault the facilities at Oneonta and its beginnings. With reference material like Jim Shaughnessy’s book on the Delaware & Hudson and numerous online societies, the growth of the railroad and its yard in Oneonta comes into a sharper focus thanks to the efforts and the vision of Harvey Baker.

MR. BAKER’S VISION

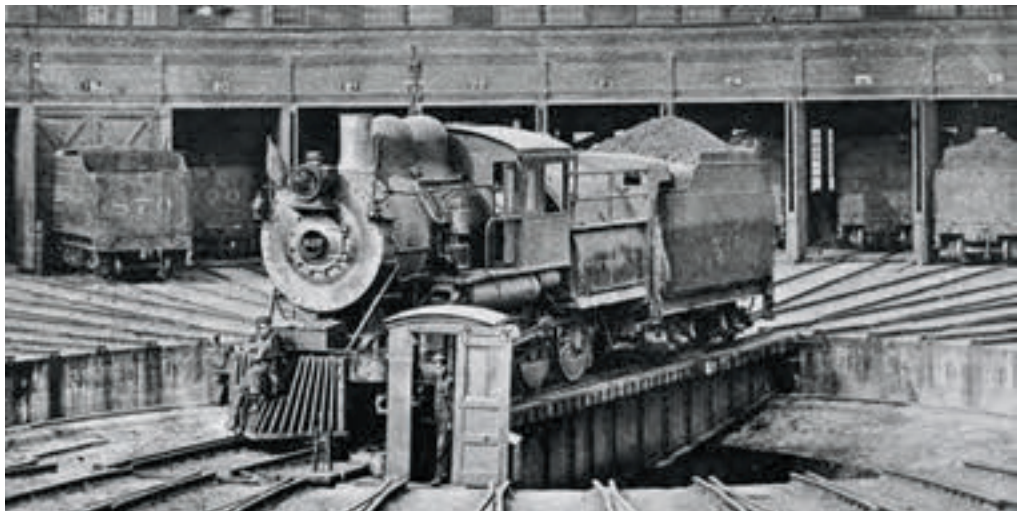
Baker was a perceptive businessman with a strong interest in Oneonta. He built up his holdings with a large mill complex including a large foundry and machine shop. He

was also into real estate, having amassed large parcels of land around the area. As time moved on, these became a large part of commercial Oneonta. With his vision, he knew that a rail connection to all points of the compass would be part of the town’s success and enhance its expanding industries. To help the process, he became a director of the Albany & Susquehanna — once the charter was finalized with his financial aid. He wound up as one of the railroad’s principal stockholders.

While all this was going on, he secured an area for the Oneonta shop facilities. With

This Alco “camelback” E3a 2-8-0 rides the Oneonta turntable in 1904. D&H later rebuilt the locomotive, which became No. 810.

H. F. Haight





the railhead moving quickly, the location for the shops gathered some competition between Oneonta and Colliersville, N.Y., the latter being only 6 miles to the north. The rights to where the shops should be went back and forth ending up with a bit of arm-twisting between Baker and Eliakim Ford, another A&S director. The discussion finally settled on the current tract of land in Oneonta. Work began on this part of the landscape, starting with drilling and draining the swamp. The area grew over the years, with shop buildings and

the first roundhouse built in 1870.

At one time, the railroad employed more than 1,700 people to care for the large amount of motive power and rolling stock then present on the D&H. Everything from steam locomotives to freight and passenger cars were maintained here. Looking at the list of facilities, Oneonta appears to have been the cornerstone of maintenance for the railroad's 14,000 pieces of rolling stock. In this facility, the D&H built wheel, wood, coach, and blacksmith shops, to name a few, in addi-

Jim Shaughnessy, noted rail photographer, also captured the Oneonta yard. Posed by the shops is this lineup of five locomotives, starting with RS36 No. 5012. All are idling waiting for a run south. The yard footbridge is at the top of the photo.

Jim Shaughnessy, Center for Railroad Photography & Art collection



In June 1921, work is progressing on an addition to the 52-stall roundhouse, which by many standards made it “the largest type of building in the world.” The boss must be here, as witnessed by that snappy Ford pickup truck parked nearby. CRP&A

tion to maintaining air brakes and completing wheel repairs all in a tight-knit, hard-working community.

During its tenure as a prime position in the scope of D&H operations, if Oneonta had one item to list as its claim to fame, it would have been the roundhouse. A look at aerial photos of the yard shows that this building formed a complete circle, making it a record railroad building in size for more than a century. Later, as the diesel became the primary source of motive power, the roundhouse was cut to 16 stalls. In 1993, when I visited and CP Rail owned the D&H, the rest of this classic building had been demolished.

A RECORD-BREAKING ROUNDHOUSE

The Oneonta facility was only 82 miles from Albany, N.Y. Both the maintenance facilities and yard were outgrown quickly. A new era was sparked in 1906 when construction began on a new engine and shop facility with a more modern, more efficient structure for maintaining the growing fleet of D&H motive power and roll-

ing stock. Up until a few years ago, the yard was used mainly as a staging area for older, less-used rolling stock destined for minor upkeep or scrap.

Detailing 1906 proved it was busy for the D&H with large investments — 57 locomotives, 2,014 coal cars and a dozen and a half milk cars — in addition to the freight yard being enlarged and modernized. In the same year, 152 miles of track had been completed with block signals and the company ventured into the electric railway field with the purchase of the Plattsburgh (N.Y.) Traction Co. With all this growth, the original roundhouse at Oneonta was starting to age and lose capacity, so a new, larger roundhouse was on the minds of many.

The 1906 roundhouse — enlarged in 1921 — was labeled as one of the best structures ever built in this design, and went a long way in easing the maintenance workload on the busy D&H. The roundhouse went on to be “the largest roundhouse in the world,” ending up with 52 stalls and a 75-foot turntable — later lengthened to 105 feet to

accommodate larger, more modern locomotives — in a building more than 400 feet in diameter. If you are good at math, that comes out to a circumference of 1,344 feet, or just a few feet over a quarter mile. The building housed more than 48 stalls long enough to hold locomotives up to 80 feet, with more than adequate space around each engine to work efficiently. Finally, to erect a building like this many bricks were required — around 1.5 million! It served the D&H for almost a half century until it was razed in favor of a smaller footprint in 1954.

MY PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

From a personal standpoint, looking back at what I witnessed in the brief times I was there, Oneonta had to be the high point in the maintenance and operation for the D&H. Separating myself from my friends for a while and disappearing behind some of the back buildings, you could almost hear the clanking of hammers, the steam locomotive air compressors pounding away and more recently, the soft



In 2010, the coaling tower lead has succumbed to the growth of nature. Not much later the large concrete structure itself would be removed.

idling of those Alco diesels ready to go, just waiting on the tracks next to the main line. Walking around the facility, you could see the history of the place with its red brick buildings, the boarded-up FA tower, old and decaying doors and tracks buried in the ground with just the railheads showing.

Over a century after they were built, the buildings around this complex were aging, but not enough to lose their presence from times past. Regrettably, with the Delaware & Hudson Railway now history, and new companies taking over, only the memories are left.

In this day and age, that's still a good thing. **I**

STAN TRZONIEC is an accomplished writer, photographer and book publisher known to the Firecrown family of publications and other magazines on the outdoors, photography and railroads. Acknowledgments are given here to the work and photos of Jim Shaughnessy and to the Center for Railroad Photography & Art for its help. This is his second Trains article.



Moving out of what once was the Oneonta facilities is a Canadian Pacific merchandise freight headed by No. 8833, a clean 3-month-old GE ES44AC. It is Aug. 22, 2007. CP purchased D&H in 1990, but sold the main line through Oneonta to Norfolk Southern in 2014.

A scenic view of a Swiss village built on a hillside. In the foreground, a dense forest of green trees covers the slope. A railway bridge with a blue and white train is visible on the right. In the middle ground, a large, light-colored building with many windows and a tall, ornate church tower are prominent. The background features rugged, mountainous terrain under a blue sky with scattered clouds.

SHORT, SLOW, AND SPECTACULAR

Vigezzina-Centovalli Railway is a 'hidden gem' among Swiss rail trips — but perhaps not for long

Story and photos by David Lassen



A Vigezzina-Centovalli Railway train crosses the Isorno River bridge at Intragna, Switzerland, on Sept. 19, 2024.



Great train rides don't have to be long. And they certainly don't have to be fast.

Switzerland excels in short but spectacular rail experiences, many built or created for tourists. Think of the many cog railways taking people to mountaintops, or the "World's Slowest Express Train," the *Glacier Express*, which takes 8 hours to cover 180 miles between the St. Moritz and Zermatt mountain resorts.

However, one of the country's great short train rides wasn't designed for tourists ... and isn't even entirely Swiss.

This is the Vigezzina-Centovalli Railway, connecting Locarno, Switzerland, in the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino, and Domodossola, Italy.

Just 52 kilometers long (32.3 miles) and unapologetically slow — a trip takes 1 hour, 54 minutes, which works out to a blistering 17 mph — the meter-gauge electric line was created to connect two major north-south passenger and freight

routes, the Gotthard and Simplon lines. But it became the key transportation link for a series of villages in the "hundred valleys" region of Ticino (hence the Centovalli name) and the adjacent Valle Vigezzo in Italy.

And quite a link it is. There's a reason for that 17-mph pace. Those 32.3 miles contain 32 tunnels totalling about 3.7 miles (including one of 1.7 miles into Locarno's underground terminal); 83 bridges; and, by the railway's count, 348 curves. These account for about half the trackage. From a low point of 204.43 meters (607 feet) in Locarno, it climbs to 836 meters (2,743 feet) in Santa Maria Maggiore, Italy, then drops to 267 meters (876 feet) in Domodossola, where the station is, again, underground.

Cecilia Brenni, communications consultant for the railway's Swiss operators — a different company handles operations on each side of the border — writes in an email that the numbers describe "the engineering masterpiece that



One of the Skoda/Codifer "Vigezzo Vision" trainsets crosses a stone viaduct near Palagnedra, Switzerland — one of the 83 bridges on the 32.3-mile, cross-border route.

for a century has allowed crossing the Centovalli and the Val Vigezzo." But, she continues, "numbers are not enough to tell the story and [of] the beauty of the landscapes that flow by the window." The Lonely Planet travel guides, she notes, have ranked it among the world's 10 most beautiful railways.

The scenery is indeed spectacular — deep valleys; heavily forested mountains; lakes; streams. Inevitably, the line has attracted tourists, even if it is somewhat off the beaten path. To date, most come from within Switzerland, Brenni says, but the

route is increasingly appreciated by visitors from Italy and Europe, as well as overseas. More than 600,000 people made the cross-border trip in 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; that number fell to about 370,000 at the peak of travel restrictions, but has rebounded.

Like a train leaving Locarno, those figures are likely to climb. With the *Glacier Express* and another celebrated meter-gauge trip, the St. Moritz-Tirano, Italy, *Bernina Express*, operating at 95% of capacity or better, travelers are seeking other experiences. And Travel Switzerland, which promotes Swiss tourism, wants them to consider the Centovalli. This summer, it featured the route as part of a "hidden gems" tour for North American and Brazilian travel writers and media influencers.

The railway's current trains are relatively small, and their limited capacity could pose challenges if more tourists do, indeed, flock to the route. Fortunately, the line is about to debut new trains from Swiss builder Stadler (see page 28), which will better position it to handle a ridership increase.

Spectacular views abound along the railway's two-nation route, and fall-colors trips are a major annual attraction.



SWITZERLAND

ITALY



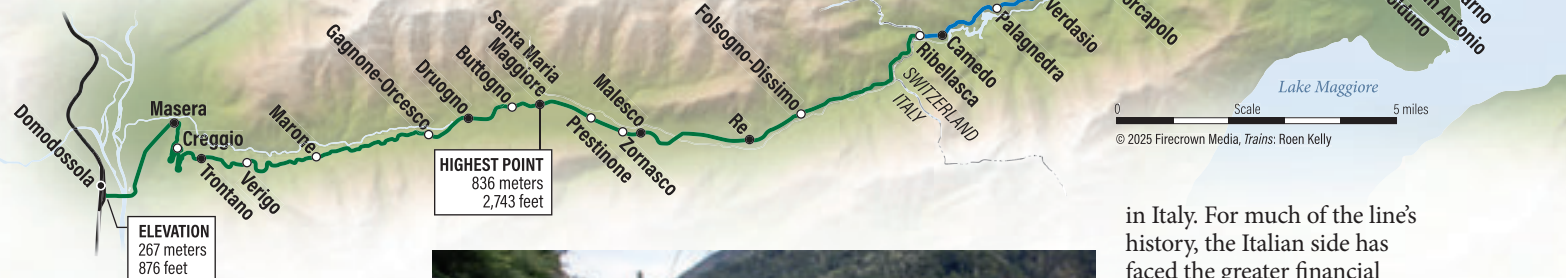
THE VIGEZINA-CENTOVALLI RAILWAY

— FART Ferrovie Autolinee Regionali Ticinesi
— SSIF Società Subalpina di Imprese Ferroviarie
— All other rail lines
— Tunnels

● Station stop
○ Stop on request station



ELEVATION
204.43 meters
607 feet



A BUMPY EARLY HISTORY

The Vigezzina-Centovalli Railway, which began regular operations Nov. 25, 1923, celebrated its 100th anniversary throughout 2023-24. The celebration included a limited-edition, Italian-language book — actually an attractively packaged set of four booklets and a map — addressing the line's history, architecture, people, and tourism. As that book recounts, the early years were difficult.

The story begins in 1898, when Locarno Mayor Fran Balli obtained a federal concession for a trio of rail lines to include one to the Italian border, where it would connect with an Italian counterpart. In 1904, Swiss and Italian organizations agreed to build a line between Locarno and Domodossola, but it took until 1912 to obtain funding, and the financing bank promptly failed the following year, stopping construction. Work eventually resumed only to be halted again in 1914 by the outbreak



The "Vigizzo Vision" trains, built in 2007, are notable for a design that emphasizes large windows, and places drivers in a small compartment, leaving room for passenger seats at the front windshield.

of World War I. After the war, building started again, and this time, it was finished: the construction parties working from either end met at Santa Maria Maggiore on March 27, 1923. A steam-powered train made the first trip across the full route that July; regular electrified service came four months later.

Plagued by high ticket prices, a fatal accident in 1924, and a workers' strike in 1926, ridership figures remained modest (40,000 to 50,000 cross-border transits) throughout the 1920s. The resulting financial straits only worsened with the coming of World War II, when cross-border travel between neutral

Switzerland and Axis member Italy plummeted to less than 500 trips a year between 1941 and 1944. A postwar rebound quickly saw a return to 1920s levels and beyond; border crossings passed 100,000 for the first time in 1956.

The route is operated by Ferrovie Autolinee Regionali Ticinesi (yes, the abbreviation is FART) on the 19.7 kilometers (12.2 miles) in Switzerland and Società Subalpina di Imprese Ferroviarie, or SSIF, for the 32.2 kilometers (20 miles)

in Italy. For much of the line's history, the Italian side has faced the greater financial struggle, and the condition of the rail line reflected this. A FART report in 1966 said it was unlikely operations would be able to continue in another three or four years "without proceeding with a complete renewal of the sub- and super-structure" in Italy. Milan newspaper *Corriere della Sera* was more blunt in 1973: "The Italian trunk of the Domodossola-Locarno line is going to pieces."

In retrospect, by then, a corner had already been turned. A key moment came in 1959, when the line was included in a nationwide Swiss ticket tariff system, reducing fares and spurring ridership growth. Cross-border ridership surpassed 500,000 for the first time in the 1960s, and remained above that figure until the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another threat to the line's survival, perhaps the greatest, came with a massive flood in August 1978. It did some 200 million Swiss francs in damage (about 423 million francs, or \$493 million, in 2024 funds). Questions whether the line could recover were answered swiftly when SSIF workers managed to reopen 17 kilome-



Palagnedra is among the stop-on-request stations seemingly in the middle of nowhere (the community it serves is 3 kilometers away). Posted schedules list trains you can flag down; locals are on the top pages, cross-border trains (most of which don't stop) below.

ters between Domodossola and Orcoese in just four days. The Italian government eventually provided some 4.6 billion lire (roughly \$5.6 million at the time) to aid in repairs, and service was fully restored in 1980-81.

Today's railway is an all-passenger operation. Freight service, never a major focus — it accounted for approximately 5% of annual revenues between 1940 and 1960 — expired in the 1980s.

THE RAILWAY TODAY

While the border once delineated a clear prosperity gap between the operating companies, that no longer seems to be true. Brenni writes, "decisions on matters that affect the entire line are taken in close cooperation between the two companies. There are regular coordination meetings between the two partners. In the event of disagreement on important decisions, a compromise solution is sought, with the common goal of maintaining the quality of service and meeting the

needs of passengers."

If the scenery is the Vigevana-Centovalli's big attraction, one of its charms is that it seems less Swiss and more Italian, which is to say more relaxed, than other rail lines. I briefly joined that previously mentioned travel writers tour

for a September trip from Domodossola to Locarno, and our group should have missed its train. We had a scheduled 14-minute connection in Domodossola, normally a comfortable margin. But our train from the junction city of Brig arrived there some 16 minutes

late (an almost unheard-of delay by Swiss standards) and immediately lost more time. One of our Travel Switzerland tour leaders called ahead, though, and the Centovalli train waited for us. This would be unlikely in most places, given the tight interconnection of Swiss trains, buses, and even ships.

Another sign thing came the next day, after the tour group had moved on while I stayed to explore the line further. In a day of riding local trains on the Swiss section (where such trains operate more frequently), I was never asked for a ticket or pass. (Don't take this as an invitation to ride without one: the penalty is 100 francs.) Intermediate stops were announced on some trains, not on others.

Many of those intermediate stations, incidentally, are stop-on-request only. And once you've been dropped off, you'll find that not every train will pick you up. The cross-border Centovalli Express trains will drop passengers at the request stations, but generally will not



A local train (denoted by the R70 placard in the window) arrives at Intragna, moments after crossing the bridge shown on pages 22-23. It's a short, downhill walk from the station to the highway bridge where that photo was taken.

stop for pick-ups; only the locals will do that. (There are exceptions; schedules posted at each station list the trains that will stop.) Some of those remote stations are worth visiting for the photo opportunities; for the more ambitious, most are connected by hiking trails. Since it is hard to understate the Swiss love of hiking, some stations saw good business even though there was no discernible nearby community.

One worthwhile, relatively easy intermediate stop is in Intragna, where it's a short walk downhill to the view of the Isorno River bridge that opens this article. The line has no shortage of other spectacular bridges, but this may be the most accessible.

The railway operates on 1,350-volt DC power; the maximum speed anywhere on the line is 60 kilometers per hour, or about 37 mph. (If any train reaches that, it does so only briefly.) While the railway awaits its new, Stadler-built trainsets, it operates using three types of equipment:

- Four-car panoramic trains with a distinct trapezoidal design emphasizing large windows, built in 2007 by Skoda/Codifer. The railway calls these "Vigizzo Vision" trains. Among the unique features is a small driver's compartment that takes up only a portion of the front of the lead car, leaving space for passenger seating next to the driver.

- Two- and three-car trainsets built in 1992-93 by Ateliers de Constructions Mécaniques de Vevey/SIG/ABB. The first of those companies became part of Bombardier; the second exited the railway business in 1995 and now focuses on packaging. ABB continues as a Swedish-Swiss electrical equipment firm. (The company is probably best known in the U.S. for its ALP44 locomotives built for NJ Transit and SEPTA.)

Four of these trainsets



IF YOU GO

SWISS TRAVEL PASS: The most essential tool for rail travel in Switzerland is the Swiss Travel Pass. It provides unlimited intercity rail travel (there are a handful of tourist-rail exceptions where it only provides a discount), and also covers local trams and buses. It's also good for discounts at museums. They're available for three, four, six, eight, or 15 days, in consecutive-day or flex versions. In 2024, the 15-day pass cost \$547 for second class, \$861 for first. Spring for first. Trust me. Second class is often packed; first class rarely is. Information and passes themselves are available at [swissrailways.com/en](https://www.swissrailways.com/en). For this particular trip, it's worth noting that travel through Domodossola, Italy, from either Locarno or Brig in Switzerland, is covered by the Travel Pass.

GETTING THERE: Locarno, the Swiss endpoint of the Vigezzina-Centovalli Railway, is — like most Swiss cities — easily reached by train. While several routings are possible from Zurich, the best (but not fastest) is on *Treno Gottardo*, operated by Südostbahn over the historic Gotthard Pass [see "Gotthard Pass Revival," March 2024]. It serves Locarno hourly, originating in either Zurich or Basel. Faster trips on the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) operate via the Gotthard Base Tunnel.

IN LOCARNO: The city with one of Switzerland's mildest climates — there are palm trees — is probably best known for its film festival, an 11-day event in August featuring open-air screenings in a piazza that seats 8,000. Lodging abounds; from personal experience, I can recommend the Binario 934 Smart Hotel ([binario934.ch](https://www.binario934.ch)), and Hotel City Locarno ([hotelcitylocarno.ch](https://www.hotelcitylocarno.ch)). Binario 934, next to the train station, is unassuming on the outside but offers 14 stylish, modern rooms. Some may be concerned the hotel is not staffed 24 hours a day — for arrival, you'll receive an email with a code to the front door; an envelope with your room key and other information will be inside. But when I had a problem with Wi-Fi, the morning staff went out of its way to solve the issue. Hotel City, where I stayed in 2023, is about an 8-minute walk from the station. Both have air conditioning, which is not a given in Switzerland.

Along with the Centovalli Railway, a recommended activity is the Locarno-Madonna del Sasso funicular, which climbs 568 feet in its 2,661-foot length — a maximum grade of 30% — and provides access to Madonna del Sasso, a Roman Catholic church and monastery worth visiting for its ornate interior. Views of the city and Lake Maggiore are spectacular from the top.

FOR MORE: Visit vigezzinacentovalli.com/en/ for more information on the Vigezzina-Centovalli Railway.
— David Lassen

Above: Locarno, Swiss terminus of the Vigezzina-Centovalli Railway, and Lake Maggiore fan out below in a view from the Madonna del Sasso church and monastery, a short funicular ride from the center of the city. The majority of the lake is to the south, in Italy.

received upgrades in 2011 including the addition of air conditioning. The three-car trains operate in cross-border Centovalli Express service; the two-car trains in local service still have windows that open, a plus for photographers. The trains have relatively tiny first-class compartments.

- A trainset dating to 1963, built by TIBB (Tecnomasio Italian Brown Boveri, later part of Bombardier Italy) and Schindler Waggonen Prattein. The railway lists this as its heritage train, but it appeared to be in regular service

in September 2024.

Advance tickets are advisable for the cross-border trains, and seat reservations (available for an additional 4 Euros, according to the railway's website) are probably not a bad idea. That September visit included a packed train for the tour group; the next day, the early Locarno-Domodossola



A new Vigezzina-Centovalli Railway train at InnoTrans, where the meter-gauge equipment was mounted on special wheels (the yellow objects) for display on standard-gauge track. Three photos, Keith Fender

NEW TRAINS COMING

IF INDEED THE VIGEZZINA-CENTOVALLI RAILWAY is to grow as a tourist attraction, it almost certainly needs equipment that can handle more riders.

Help is on the way.

Eight new trains from Switzerland's Stadler are being built. The trains were introduced locally at an October press conference; all eight are slated to be in operation next year.

"The new trains represent a significant step forward compared to our current rolling stock," Cecilia Brenni, communications consultant for FART, writes in an email. They have "been designed to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse clientele: they offer spaces reserved for families, with dedicated areas for strollers and prams ... and accessible areas for those traveling in wheelchairs." They also will have space to transport three to four bicycles — welcome news for the cyclists who already enjoy the winding roads of the Centovalli region, but currently face significant restrictions on bike transport, including a requirement that bikes be moved in bagged, disassembled form on the Italian section.

The new equipment's increased seating capacity ranges from 109 to 142 seats per car. "We have also integrated a dynamic information system to improve communication on board," Brenni writes, "making the journey not only more comfortable, but also more efficient and safe."

One of the trains was exhibited at the InnoTrans trade fair in Berlin; *Trains* European Correspondent Keith Fender noted that the trainsets are designed to be deployed in two-, three-, or four-car versions — unusual for electric-multiple unit trains, which usually have a fixed length. He gave the interior high marks, and was struck by one particular detail: The Swiss herald on the train's nose lights up when the headlights are on.

For FART, the new trains will allow hourly service between Locarno and the border town of Camedo, and, beginning in 2028, half-hourly service between Locarno and Intragna. "On a cross-border level," Brenni writes, "the new trains will offer faster and more comfortable connections to Domodossola, thus improving connectivity for those traveling between Switzerland and Italy." — *David Lassen*



Along with a general upgrade, the interior includes space for bikes and strollers that is lacking on current equipment.



Attention to detail: The Swiss cross emblem on the train's nose lights up when the headlights are illuminated.



train was virtually empty, but most others appeared at least two-thirds full. Local trains varied wildly in terms of ridership, from nearly empty to packed, but the first-class compartment rarely had another rider.

Among the railway's most popular offerings, Brenni says, are its fall foliage trains. The railway promotes them on its website, offering a special round-trip ticket including one intermediate stop for hiking or other exploration. Other special events are also listed on the website.

The Vigezzina-Centovalli Railway may have been born as a link to the Gotthard and Simplon lines, but today it has little in common with those two great conduits of commerce, which have lengthy tunnels and massive amounts of freight and passenger traffic.

But therein lies its attraction. Nicola Pini — whose detailed history section of the railway's 100th-anniversary book provides much of the background for this article — notes that tunnel projects to improve travel times on the Centovalli line would be prohibitively expensive, would likely save only a few minutes, and would "endanger the nature, if not the very exis-



A three-car Vevey/ABB trainset en route from Locarno to Domodossola snakes into the station at Corcapolo, completing a five-minute climb on a 6% grade from Intragna (366 meters/1,201 feet) to 463 meters/1,519 feet in two winding kilometers including two tunnels.



The heritage trainset arrives at Corcapolo, another stop-on-request station and a popular destination for hikers. The photo on page 25 is taken from the start of one of the well-marked trails near the station.



The railway's heritage trainset, which dates to 1963, passes a local waiting to depart at Verdasio, Switzerland. The building immediately behind the local is the base station for a cable car to the community of Rasa, accessible only by a 5-minute cable car ride or on foot.

tence" of the rail line by undermining its scenic attraction.

And so the railway should remain its slow, scenic self.

"It is necessary to consider — and respect — two different types of travelers," Pini writes, "those who choose the speed, and those who choose the experience; those who prefer the destination and those who prefer the journey. The former will probably go more and more to the Gotthard, the latter instead to Domodossola."

Anyone who has enjoyed the view from that bridge at Intragna would be confident they have made the better choice. **I**

Maine to using 5

Four days,
19 separate operators,
and 12 different
locomotive models

Story and photos by John Friedmann



The author's
Maine to Miami
journey included
Boston's Mattapan
trolley, one of the
last PCC-equipped
streetcar opera-
tions. Scott A. Hartley

Miami

5 trains





Boston's Green Line "E" Heath Street trolley uses the oldest subway tunnel in North America, dating back to 1897.

AN AMTRAK PASSENGER

can ride the length of the east coast from Brunswick, Maine, to Miami, Fla., in 38 hours, using only three trains to go 1,766 miles.

Instead, wouldn't it be interesting to maximize the trains you can cram into that trip? Just as Paul Simon says, there are "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover," there are at least 50 ways to ride trains down the eastern seaboard.

DAY 1, 12 TRAINS

"Get out of bed, Fred"

The day's first Boston-bound Amtrak *Downeaster* leaves Brunswick at 4:30 a.m., but I start my epic journey with the more civilized 7:10 a.m. departure. The five-car *Downeasters* are transitioning to Horizon cars, freeing up Amfleet for Northeast Corridor service until new rolling stock arrives. My Horizon's interior is bright and clean, feeling newer than its 35 years.

The *Downeaster* suffers an awkward three-quarter-mile backup move to the Portland station, but credit Amtrak crews and CSX dispatchers: the move takes only 11 minutes, including 5 minutes of station dwell. Construction is underway on double track that will permit expansion beyond today's five round trips.

I'm off the *Downeaster* at 10:11

a.m. at Woburn in Boston commuter territory. Despite temperatures in the 90s, the platform is stocked with pallets of ice-melt. I choose a seat in a single-level coach when my Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority express arrives, but its rough ride prompts a move to a 15-year-younger Kawasaki bi-level for the rest of the trip to Boston's North Station.

I've plotted a circuitous eight-train journey through Boston, hitting all four subway lines plus the Mattapan trolley. Scooting through North Station, I'm soon on a Green Line "E" Heath Street trolley which uses the oldest subway tunnel in North America (1897). My trolley is somewhat newer — a 20-something low-floor articulated model built by Breda that MBTA calls Type 8. I'm off at Government Center station to the Blue Line, a subway with a twist — the trains use both third rail and a pantograph, switching between modes mid-trip. One stop puts me at State, but the long walking transfer makes me miss an Orange Line train.

The next train is less than three months old and still has that new-car shine. MBTA would prefer the Orange Line cars be a bit less fresh — the contract with China-based CRRC (the world's largest rolling-stock manufacturer) has been problematic, and the final Orange Line cars are now due four years late.

The ride to the Red Line at Downtown Crossing takes only a minute, and 5 minutes later the MBTA public address system breathlessly announces a train "arriving with all-new Red Line cars!" from CRRC, equipped with uncomfortable low-backed hard plastic seats. Ashmont is end of the line, just after noon, and after a brief false start I find the Mattapan trolley.

I've stretched to include the Mattapan trolley, one of the last PCC streetcar operations. The 2.5-mile Ashmont-Mattapan High-Speed Line is a former New Haven Railroad branch converted to trolley service in 1929. PCCs have ruled since 1955, but today's cars are Pullman-built 1945-46 "wartime" cars that are among North America's oldest continuously operated streetcars.

Recently rebuilt car 3234 has a classic interior complementing its traditional orange livery. As soon as I climb aboard, we're off around the Ashmont loop. Today I ride in the back, enjoying the expansive rear

windows during the 9-minute ride to Mattapan.

A quarter-mile from Mattapan, MBTA's Blue Hill Avenue rail stop is an old (1850s) station site reestablished to mitigate Boston's "Big Dig" highway project. I barely get comfortable in the cool multilevel when I have to get off at Fairmount, the next stop. Walking to Hyde Park station on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor, I grab some McDonalds — my first food since a *Downeaster* bagel.

Hyde Park station provides cheap thrills — Amtrak and MBTA trains whoosh past the low-level platform at speeds up to 105 mph. My 1:21 p.m. train provides a 5-minute ride to Route 128, a popular Amtrak station because of its easy auto access and big parking garage. Amtrak doesn't want short-haul Route 128-Providence, R.I., travelers cluttering up its Acela, but I pay the inflated ticket price because this is a last chance at Acela before the next generation Avelia Liberty trainsets. Acela regulars project a serious vibe, while I just look out the window as we top 150 mph.

In Providence, I explore Amtrak's brutalist concrete 1986 station, pleasant with a small rotunda hosting eating and retail options. Down below, the five tracks are numbered 7-5-3-1-2. Huh? Original owner New Haven numbered its tracks outward from the centerline, with odd tracks west of the centerline and even tracks east. Understanding doesn't make it less weird.

Using Amtrak to bridge the gap between MBTA and Connecticut commuter trains, I board Northeast Regional No. 175's head Amcoach, finding open seats since Boston boards from the rear. New London comes at 4:54 p.m., where I pass a pleasant hour watching ferries before my Shore Line East commuter train to New Haven. My train is lightly patronized, but the waterfront scenery and fresh M8 EMUs makes the \$10.75 fare a bargain. Four minutes early into New Haven keeps my day to just under 12 hours.

DAY 2, 23 TRAINS

"Make a new plan, Stan"

"This train doesn't stop at South Norwalk" is not what I want to hear from the conductor on Metro-North's 5:56 a.m. out of New Haven. I planned to change to a diesel-powered express off the Danbury Branch

at South Norwalk, but I misread the timetable. Luckily, a 6-minute connection to a local in Bridgeport will still enable me to catch the diesel train in South Norwalk.

One minute early into Bridgeport makes the local connection, and seven stops later we're into South Norwalk in plenty of time for the train from Danbury, which is a "Maxi-Bomb" set — seven Bombardier coaches pushed by a CDOT dual-mode P32AC. I bail at 125th Street in Upper Manhattan, where I switch to a Metro-North Hudson Line train to sample M7A EMUs that are cousins of the Connecticut M8s.

Recovered from my reading-comprehension failure, I hustle from Grand Central's lower level to the New York subway's "S" shuttle train. The short (2,400 feet) Grand Central-Times Square shuttle operates like a high-capacity horizontal elevator with two six-car R62A trains on dedicated tracks.

While negotiating the labyrinthine Times Square station after the 2-minute ride, I laugh at ads promoting vacation travel: "Whatever that smell is, it's not Canada." Canada would feel good right now — the platform is downright tropical. My 7 Avenue Express train shows at 8:25 a.m., a 10-car set of MTA's ubiquitous R142s. A 9-minute, four-stop ride is a great way to beat Manhattan traffic to downtown.

MTA's Park Place subway station connects to the PATH (Port Authority Trans-Hudson) train and allows me to transit New York's best train station (Grand Central excepted): the Oculus. Born out of 9/11, the Oculus is white-winged transportation center that connects 10 subway lines and the PATH service to New



Jersey in a soaring, sunlight-filled atrium that makes Amtrak's Moynihan Station look "meh."

Oculus is a "real" railroad station: PATH looks like a subway connecting Manhattan and New Jersey, but due to history PATH is classified as a commuter railroad and is Federal Railroad Administration-regulated.

PATH leaves at 8:51 a.m. and I'm off at the first stop, Exchange Place on Jersey City's waterfront, which was the Pennsylvania Railroad's passenger terminal serving New York City until Penn Station opened in 1910. I'm going to finish my trip to Hoboken Terminal above ground via New Jersey Transit's Hudson-Bergen Light Rail System (HBLRT), but my train bypasses Hoboken and I have to backtrack. My luck holds

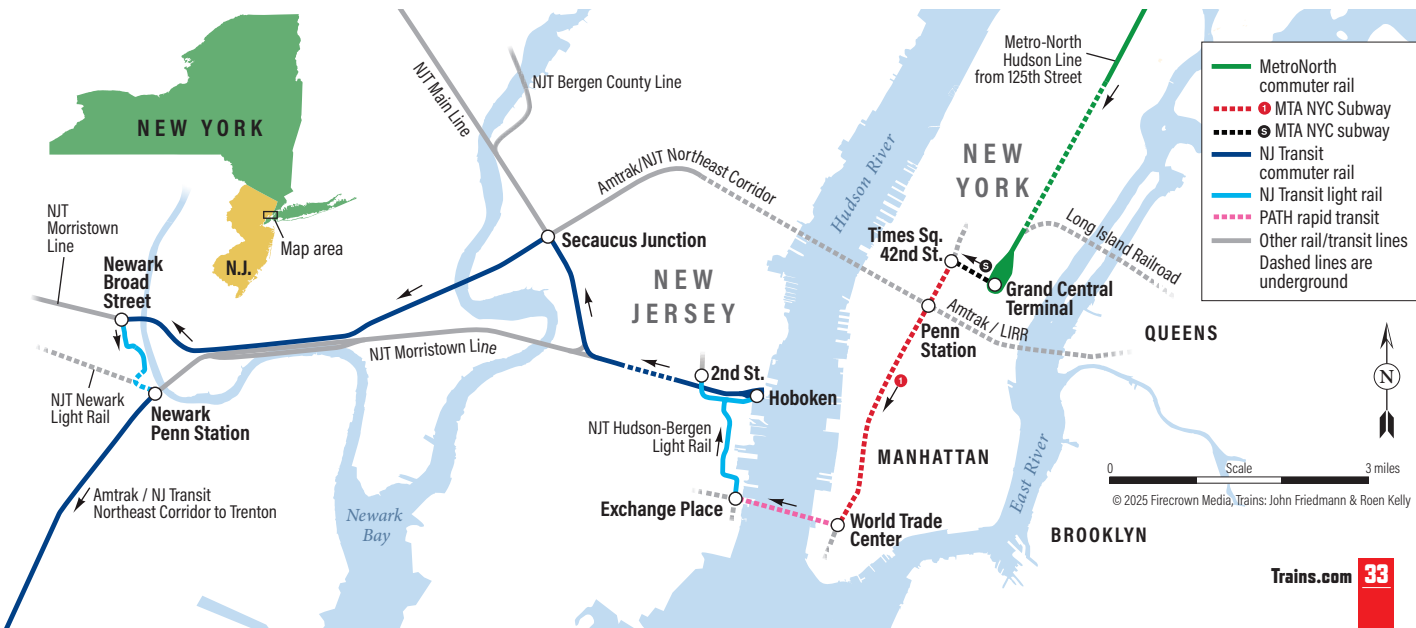
when a Hoboken-bound train shows up within minutes.

Hoboken Terminal is a grand waterfront station with train sheds, waiting room, and restored ferry slips. But NJ Transit's improved routes to Manhattan and lower post-pandemic ridership has made Hoboken feel lonely — more like a coach yard than a major terminal.

My NJT diesel-powered Waldwick local heads northeast to the NEC at Secaucus Junction. The one-stop, 10-minute ride packs in a lot of railroading — NJT's Hoboken facilities, Bergen Tunnels, West End wye over Conrail, and past NS' Croton Yard as an intermodal train arrives.

At Secaucus Junction, NJT's Hoboken Division diesel trains stop on the lower level. NJT Northeast

Hoboken Terminal is an impressive sight, but low ridership gives it a lonesome feeling.





Corridor trains serve the upper. The station's 2003 opening created a faster route to Manhattan for the diesel riders, and this summer day teens are using Secaucus Junction as a shortcut from the northern suburbs to the Jersey Shore.

Upstairs, my Montclair-Boonton Line train shows at 9:56 a.m. behind electric No. 4663. My route to Newark Broad Street runs via NJT's Kearney Connection, a 1996 linkage that allows more single-seat rides into New York City. During the 9-minute ride I see another NS Croxton-bound intermodal crossing Conrail's Point-No-Point-Bridge and former New York Central *20th Century Limited* observation car *Hickory Creek* awaiting Amtrak pickup.

The former Lackawanna Newark Broad Street station has always felt out of the way, so NJT extended Newark Light Rail (formerly the Newark City Subway) to connect Broad Street with Newark Penn Station in 2006. Newark Light Rail is a rare transit operation unaffected by the pandemic — November 2019 timetables are still in effect! The 1-mile trip on 2001 Kinki Sharyo LRVs ends in the basement of Newark Penn Station, and on my way out I notice sealed ticket windows (complete with grilles and change trays) made obsolete by proof-of-payment ticketing.

Amtrak's Newark Penn Station LCD departure screens display trains like an old-style split-flap Solari board, complete with the distinctive clickety-clickety sound — a "Fauxlari!" After grabbing popcorn and a Coke Zero, I head

upstairs to track level.

Newark Penn Station is an engineering marvel and train-watchers' delight: three levels of trains and an adjacent six-track, multi-level drawbridge. For my money, there are few better train-watching locations than Newark Penn Station's Platform D. The frequent trains come in hot, dwell briefly, and depart urgently.

My Trenton local arrives at 10:56 a.m., a 10-car single-level train pushed by an ALP46A electric. I had hoped to catch a last ride on a 40-plus year-old "Jersey Arrow III" EMU (named for the arrow-like logo) before replacement Multilevel III EMUs arrive on the property. Regardless, it feels good to ride the same train for the next hour.

The Trenton local does brisk business at intermediate stops and sustained 100 mph running gets us into Trenton 8 minutes early. Many passengers transfer across-the-platform to SEPTA MUs — including one with Reading "heritage decals" — but I'm headed upstairs into the station.

I had hoped to grab lunch at Trenton, but food options are unappealing. Instead, I walk across the street to a waiting NJ Transit River Line railcar, which departs on time at 12:27 p.m. — important, because my next connection is only 2 minutes! The Trenton-Camden River Line is suburban diesel-powered light rail on a shared Conrail freight line. It generates about 30% of the state's light-rail passenger miles with fewer than 10% of the passengers — and its \$1.80 fare is a great value for the 34-mile route.

The River Line almost becomes my undoing.

I'm transferring to a NJ Transit Atlantic City train at Pennsauken, but my Swiss-built DMU holds out of the station for a tardy north-bound to clear single track. My 2-minute connection becomes negative by the time we get into the station, but I'm relieved to hear passengers still waiting as I lug my suitcase up the bi-level station's stairs. I see my train's headlight, but it's not moving — aah, the raised Delair drawbridge over the Delaware has saved my connection!

I'm finally on the four-coach Atlantic City train 17 minutes late, riding south to Lindenwold to catch the PATCO Speedline to Philadelphia. PATCO — the Port Authority Transit Corp. — pioneered innovations like automatic train operation and magnetic farecards when it opened in 1969 and still compares favorably to both SEPTA and NJ Transit services.

I grab PATCO's front-view "rail-fan seat." Car 1040, Budd-built in 1968 and refurbished in the 2010s, proves that stainless steel can still look modern even after 50-plus years of service. We parallel a Conrail freight through Camden, and the ride over the Ben Franklin Bridge into Philadelphia is far more interesting than North Jersey's Hudson tunnels.

Twenty minutes behind schedule, I'm off at 8th and Market in Philadelphia to catch the Broad-Ridge Spur of SEPTA's Broad Street Subway. SEPTA has tried to kill this lightly-patronized spur several times, but it won't die! My two-car train — aging well for a 1982 Kawasaki product — deposits me in North Philadelphia at 2:50 p.m.

SEPTA's North Philly subway station used to be a major transfer point to PRR and Reading commuter services in a vibrant part of the city. Now the neighborhood is a shell and the transfer business long gone: Reading's imposing 1929 North Philadelphia station is restored, but as transitional housing. Instead, I walk down an unmarked alley to SEPTA's minimalist train station.

At 3:26 p.m. I climb aboard SEPTA Silverliner IV No. 382, delivered by GE to Penn Central circa 1975. Despite their half-century of service, the cars are SEPTA's workhorses and show stainless steel's

We trundle south into the Center City Commuter Connection, a 1984 route through downtown connecting the formerly separate Pennsylvania and Reading commuter networks. I get off at the former PRR Suburban Station, now 40 minutes late and regretting passing on lunch at Trenton. Philly pretzels tide me over as I wander SEPTA's underground labyrinth until a token clerk points me towards the 15th Street Subway-Surface trolley platforms.

I transfer to the Market-Frankford line, SEPTA's busiest, at 30th Street. The trip to the end of the line at 69th Street is faster than I remember, likely from the 2009 replacement of the elevated structure. The route is 5-foot, 2¼-inch gauge — Pennsylvania trolley gauge — making the Market-Frankford line broad gauge, while the Broad Street line is standard gauge. Got it?

My next ride is SEPTA's trolley Route 102 to Sharon Hill, which will put me within walking distance of the Northeast Corridor. This route differs slightly from the Subway-Surface trolleys — the cars are double ended and one-quarter-inch wider gauge! The route has a lot of private right-of-way and kudos to SEPTA for keeping up the line's many stone shelters.

Q&A

with John Friedmann

A There's an old joke about a traveler trying to buy a train ticket from Peoria to Chicago – "I must get there in the worst way!" And the ticket agent says "I'm sorry, but the Rock Island already left." Everyone focuses on the best way from A to B, but what is the "worst way?" The Eastern Seaboard, with its multitude of carriers and now with expanded options in Florida posed the most interesting challenge of how many times could you change trains while still progressing towards your destination.

A I really enjoyed planning the trip. It was a very nice diversion to sit inside during bad weather and figure out how to make the trip work. Armchair travelers used the *Official Guide* back in the day to create their trips — I did the same, but with the internet instead. The big cities offered so many options to work my way through them, so I tried to plan the trip to sample as many different providers, equipment, and routes as possible.

Because I didn't know how late Amtrak's *Silver Star* was going to run, I had four versions of Florida options in my pocket ready to pull the trigger on when needed.

I also thought of taking the “Inland Route” version of the trip — Boston-Springfield-New Haven — instead of via New London. The trade off was missing the Acela in exchange for the Hartford Line diesel service, so I stuck with my shore line route.

A Be careful of short connections, especially for trains that don't run frequently. I had a too-short connection in Pennsauken to NJ Transit's Atlantic City Line, but if I missed that I had a backup plan that would get me back on schedule. On the other hand, options for the often late-running *Silver Star* were very limited.

- Do what you like and don't do more than you can stand. The trip was great fun, but definitely wearying — understand your limitations.
- Take as little luggage as possible. The trip involved a lot of steps.
- Check and recheck your schedules. Every system has a different cadence for updating schedules, and each observes different holidays.

A screenshot of an iPhone home screen with a dark grey background. The screen displays a grid of 20 app icons arranged in 5 rows and 4 columns. The first four rows contain transit and utility apps: Amtrak, vtaconnect, CTtransit, MTA, TriMet, RidePATH, NJ TRANSIT, Petco, SEPTA, MetroMap, MO Transit, ChargePoint, SmartStop, Veho, Sunbair, and RoadPass. The fifth row contains Bing, Go, Transit, and Microsoft. At the bottom of the screen is a dock containing four icons: an envelope (Email), a green phone receiver (Phone), a location pin (Maps), and a camera (Camera). Above the dock is a search bar with the text "Search". The status bar at the top shows the time "5:12", signal strength, Wi-Fi, and battery level.



The D.C. Streetcar line opened a decade late, massively over budget, and doesn't really go anywhere, but it's still a fun ride.

basic and the 1872 station barely survives after decades of neglect. Although old, the Penn Central-era Silverliners on my Newark-bound train can still top 90 mph.

Delaware subsidizes SEPTA service to Wilmington and Newark, where we arrive at 6:57 p.m. Newark has a fancy new station building, but with a low-level platform because track and platform upgrades are still coming attractions. Amtrak bridges the commuter gap between Delaware and Maryland, and I'm grateful for the cool Amcoach on Regional No. 193, but an 89-mph average means I'm in Aberdeen, Md. in only 18 minutes. I'm ready to rest in something that isn't moving.

DAY 3, 11 TRAINS

"Beat the heat, Pete"

Aberdeen's restored 1940s PRR station is clean and cool and the six multilevels of my 6:38 a.m. MARC Penn Line train are populated by both Baltimore (45 minutes away) and Washington (1 hour, 40 minutes) commuters. Baltimore's Penn Station renovation has shut down the station's light rail branch, forcing a short walk to the nearby Mount Royal light rail stop in the already-rising heat.

Baltimore's Light RailLink ticket machines need upgrading, accepting only cash for 14(!) months. But Baltimore's LRVs move fast and I get off at Camden Station in plenty of time for MARC's 8:05 a.m. Camden Line service to Washington.

MARC's Camden Line is shared

with CSX and is measurably slower than the Penn Line, so it offers less than half the train service than the Penn Line. I leave the five-car train of 1993 Nippon Sharyo single-level coaches at Greenbelt, the terminus of Washington Metro's Green Line at the Capital Beltway.

My Metro ride is a study in contrasts: I catch Metro's newer 7000-series cars out of Greenbelt, then transfer at Fort Totten to older 3000-series cars. The 2015-era 7000s are much more "subway-like" than Metro's earlier rolling stock. The exterior is stainless-steel instead of brushed aluminum, but the biggest changes are inside. Goodbye carpeting, thick seat cushions, armrests, and muted lighting; hello thinner seats and more standee room.

Leaving Metro at Union Station, it's clear the station's 1980s revitalization needs a reset. Good news: the soaring 96-foot-high Main Hall is gloriously wide open, denuded of commercial clutter. I pick my way behind Union Station to catch the region's biggest mass-transit embarrassment: the D.C. Streetcar.

The D.C. Streetcar line opened a decade late, massively over budget and doesn't really go anywhere, but is still a fun ride. I ride a Czech-design United Streetcar Model 100, which covers the 2.2-mile route in 17 minutes. Rides are free because collecting fares would just add to the line's \$10 million annual operating cost.

There are plans to extend the streetcar eastward to connect with Metro, which I would have greatly

appreciated on this 90-degree day: instead, I trudge 15 minutes to the Stadium-Armory Metro station. A blissfully-cool trip via the Blue and Yellow lines is highlighted by pacing Amtrak's *Carolinian* on the adjacent CSX main line into Alexandria, Va., King Street Station.

King Street is a great afternoon train-watching spot — 30 of the 40 passenger trains are scheduled between noon and 8 p.m., and CSX threads freights through the passenger parade. My VRE train to Fredericksburg, Va., shows right on time at 1:23 p.m. — four bi-levels led by a MP36PH-3C.

VRE is the only East Coast purchaser of new gallery bi-levels — interestingly, ordered after sampling the multilevels other commuter operators favor. The cars have the characteristic "bi-level bounce" at speed even though heat restrictions have reduced the maximum to 60 mph this afternoon.

Fredericksburg is the south end of commuter territory until Florida, so I'm back on Amtrak. I plan to ride Amtrak Regional No. 95 to Petersburg, then switch to the *Silver Star*. Killing time in Fredericksburg, I search for a restroom and ice cream (success on both counts). Back at the station, the heat is stifling and No. 95's 3:44 p.m. arrival becomes 4:28. But northbound Amtrak No. 138 shows up at the same time as 95, each on the "wrong" platform, causing a mad scramble.

While on No. 95, the *Star* seems to be gaining on us. Managing risk, I change trains at Richmond, the next stop, instead of continuing south to Petersburg. It turns out I didn't have to worry — Richmond has two northbound Amtrak trains waiting for 95 to do its station work and heat restrictions making the *Star* later.

When the hour-plus late *Silver Star* finally shows, my sleeping car attendant Preston is full of extra effort — he quickly readies my room, gets me a dinner reservation, and even horse-trades a couple of Coke Zeros from the lounge for me to enjoy as we rolled through the North Carolina darkness.

Rebuilt Viewliner 1 *Potomac River* is solid — no annoying rattles that seem to plague Amtrak sleepers (Preston advises locking the upper berth cockeyed to keep it quiet). Unfortunately, the mattress pad just as solid, keeping sleep at bay until after Raleigh.

DAY 4, 10 TRAINS

"Time for speed, Reid."

I wake up in Savannah, 1 hour, 15 minutes late, and we shave off 6 minutes by Jacksonville. Can we make up enough time for a 35-minute connection to the Sunrail commuter train at Winter Park?

Historical data says "unlikely" — the connection worked only four times in July — so I have backup plans. Winter Park comes at 11:28 a.m., 83 minutes late. My new plan puts me on Sunrail at 12:06 p.m., and I book a Brightline Orlando departure while I wait.

Sunrail is Orlando's all-day commuter rail highway alternative instead of a peak-hour commuter railroad. Passenger counts are low, partly because the line doesn't serve the theme parks or the airport.

The trip into Orlando with MP32-PHQ No. 100 pushing two multilevels is slow (30 mph) and feels like one continuous grade crossing — the bell is always on. Speed picks up south of downtown and we roll into the Sand Lake Road station at 12:33 p.m.

Three letters are a four-letter word when they spell B-U-S. I wanted to make the entire Maine-Miami trip by rail, but there is no rail link to Brightline's Orlando airport station. A free ride, thanks to my Sunrail tickets, gets me to the airport by 1:03 p.m. and I ride the Terminal Link people mover to Brightline.

After scanning through a Brightline turnstile (the only time I show my ticket), I check out the attractive station. Brightline doesn't fool around — trains dwell only 25 minutes in Orlando before heading back to Miami. The trip starts slowly but we eventually accelerate to 125 mph — is there a better advertisement for Brightline than passing traffic on the adjacent Beachline Expressway? It's only 28 minutes to the Florida East Coast (FEC) main line in Cocoa, where the max is a sedate 110 to West Palm Beach.

Even with my goofy itinerary and a 12-minute crosstown walk, I'm at the West Palm Beach Tri-Rail/Amtrak station more than 2 hours ahead of the *Silver Star* I left hours ago (the *Star* does make a side trip to Tampa).

After raiding the station's vending machines, I board Tri-Rail's three-car P635 towards Miami. Tri-Rail is a contradiction — speedy commuter rail flawed by an inland route away from downtowns, although it does serve Miami's airport.

F40PH3-C No. 807 hustles us southbound into Miami's Metrorail Transfer station 2 minutes early. Metrorail Transfer connects Tri-Rail to Miami's Metrorail transit system, and now also serves as the connecting point for Tri-Rail's new Downtown Miami Link service via FEC.

The single-coach shuttle departs southbound onto FEC: I'm surprised by the 40-mph speeds on this 4-mile



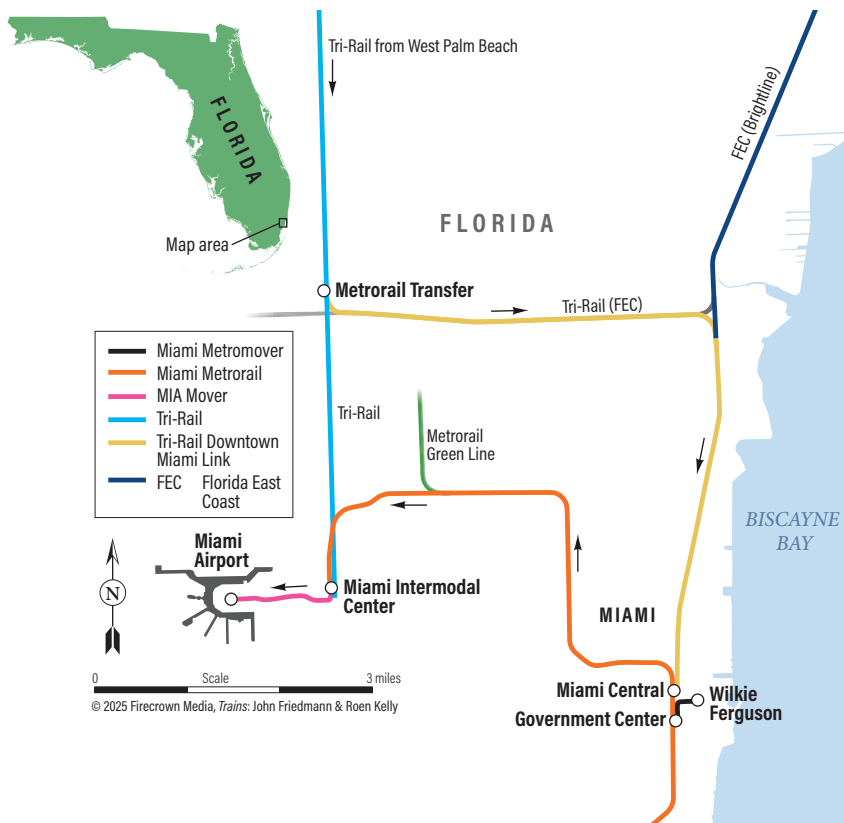
connector. The BL36PH seems to struggle up into Brightline's elevated MiamiCentral Station — is this Tri-Rail's steepest grade? It's 6:30 and I haven't had a hot meal since breakfast in the *Star*'s diner. MiamiCentral's fancy food hall is closed, so Chick-fil-A is the winner.

Metromover, Miami's 21-station automated people mover, shuns fancy for functional — basically an airport tram transplanted downtown running frequently and free. Metromover delivers me one stop to catch Miami Metrorail at Government Center. Hearing "Northbound train approaching," I hustle up the stairs and through the closing train doors. Whoops — wrong train. I get out at the next stop and catch a following Orange Line train to the airport. Metrorail is elevated so I watch a Tri-Rail train arrive with us at the airport's Miami Intermodal Center.

Miami's Intermodal Center handles Tri-Rail, MetroRail, busses and rental cars and was supposed to replace Amtrak's grungy Hialeah station ... in 2016. Amtrak and Florida DOT are still dithering.

As I ride the MIA Mover tram to the airport terminal, I total up my four days: 55 trains, 19 different operators and 12 different locomotive models. Ironically, the trip's biggest delay comes on my flight home. I

Miami's Metrorail Transfer station connects Tri-Rail to the Metrorail transit system, and serves as the connecting point for Tri-Rail's new downtown Miami Link service.



*Railroading
in the*

EX



EXTREME



Exploring the Skagway, Alaska,
area on a job photographing
White Pass & Yukon locomotives

Story and photos by David Lustig

Popping out of a tunnel, a southbound White Pass & Yukon test train with two of the rebuilt General Electric shovel-nose diesels makes its way to Skagway. Photographed from a Bell JetRanger helicopter.



Just south of Glacier station, our test train with the rebuilt locomotives holds in a passing siding as one of the WP&Y's regular excursion trips rolls by with an Alco-GE DL535E sandwiched between two GE units in their original form.

Alaska, no matter what the season, is a great place for photography. Due to its remoteness, once you leave one of the centers of civilization that dot the state, it could be 2025 or 1925. If you experience Alaska once, you will want to go back. I was thinking just that while sitting in the open side door of a Bell JetRanger helicopter hovering about 1,000 feet off the ground, waiting for a pair of newly rebuilt White Pass & Yukon Route Railway locomotives to pop out of one of the line's many tunnels.

I was sent to Skagway, Alaska, in 2009 and 2010 by Sygnet Rail Technologies to photograph their newly rebuilt units. My trip started with a non-stop flight from Southern California via an Alaska Airlines 737 to Seattle, then another Alaska 737 to Juneau. Forty-five minutes in a single-engine puddle jumper got me the remaining 100 or so miles to Skagway. Waiting for me was a clean and warm room in what I thought was the appropriately named Sgt. Preston's Lodge.

Sygnet was completing a contract originally won by Coast Engine and Equipment Co. of Tacoma, Wash. CEECO, as it was known, was at the start of a job that would take the railroad's shovel-nose General Electric locomotives, built in the mid-1950s, and totally rebuild them with new prime movers, cabs, electronic electrical systems,



Skagway — population 968 in 2010 — comes alive when tour ships, sometimes in multiple, are in port. The city fathers have done their best to keep the ambiance of the area intact. Imagine this in snow without the buses.

and traction motors. The aging original prime movers were removed and replaced with new Cummins QSK45L power plants.

To begin the process, each locomotive was barged from Skagway to Tacoma and then trucked via lowboy to Sygnet's shops at Tenino, Wash. Keeping eyes on the process were former CEECO President David Swanson, now the owner of Sygnet Rail, and Ed Hanousek, White Pass' superintendent of rail operations.

A short history of the WP&Y

Construction of the 3-foot gauge railroad began in 1898 to reach the gold fields

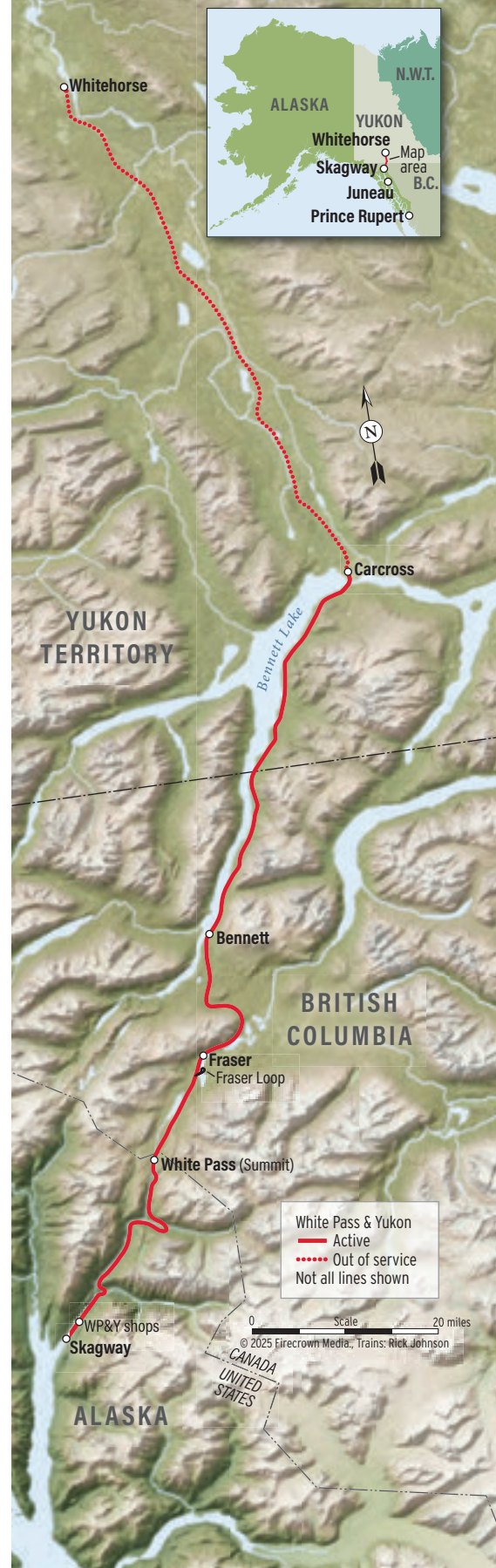
and ore mines, extending inland to Whitehorse, a city in Canada's Yukon Territory. For decades the railroad was the only reliable route of any form between its two end points. Steam was eventually supplanted by diesels hauling both passenger and freight trains.

A plunge in metal prices, which resulted in the closing of on-line mines, and improved highways spelled a temporary doom for the White Pass. Even though it was producing some revenue with passenger trains filled with tourists, it shut down in 1982.

An increase in Alaskan tourism brought back part of the railroad 6 years later. No



Wilderness, trains ... and bears: the WP&Y





longer depending on freight revenue, the line reopened from Skagway to White Pass, and running a truncated route to Carcross, Yukon Territory.

Today, the White Pass & Yukon Route is a vibrant, well-managed railroad with trains regularly backing up to the Skagway dock to pick up tourists right off the cruise ships. Recently, with many of the older diesels retired, including the shovel-noses, a half-dozen custom National Railway Equipment 3,000-hp diesels have taken over the bulk of the operations.

Recognizing both its historic value and tourist draw, the company has retained at least one of its 2-8-2 Mikados for occasional operation.

Back to 2009

When I was sitting in the helicopter doorway chasing the rebuilt units, the shovel-nose rebuilds were the new guys on the block and the company wanted me to document their arrival. David Swanson had to twist my arm to go to Skagway. (Just kidding — I was packing my stuff while he was on the telephone asking if I would be available!)

The city of Skagway did not disappoint. Realizing its main revenue comes from tourism, the city is a visitor's dream, with many of the original buildings housing everything someone might want to buy and bring back home. Many of the prices may scare you, but remember, it is Alaska.

After photographing the White Pass

No cell phone service, no roads ... and no help, if needed. This view of the northbound test train from the mouth of a tunnel at Milepost 18.8 required one to be dropped off and picked up by a speeder. During the wait in between, the photographer was alone ... unless a bear happened by.

yard and locomotive facilities in Skagway, I got a call to report to the railroad's passenger station and main office. The company had hired a local commercial helicopter operator for me to photograph the locomotives, and the railroad, from the air. The pilot was superb. Wherever we went, he would ask what angle I wanted. Waiting for the train to reach a certain spot, he would plant the helicopter almost as steadily as if we were still sitting on the ground.



A few of the rebuilt units rest in Skagway. A significant spotting feature of these units is the streamlined fairing on the roof at the rear of the locomotives. The originals had a different appearance, as shown in the photo on page 40.

ingly overcast, and dank. Yuck.

Hugging the side of mountains and rattling over trestles, we stopped just short of the Canadian border at the mouth of a tunnel.

"I'm going to let you off here," the motorcar operator yelled over the Ford engine. "I've got to continue on to stay ahead of the train. After it turns around and comes back southbound, I'll be right behind it. About an hour and a half. By the way, there are bears in the area, so don't drift too far away from the tunnel portal. Have fun!"

Me, a few hawks, and maybe a bear or two.

It sounded okay until I realized the sound of the speeder was getting quieter as he went through the tunnel and backfired his way up the railroad.

So here I was, at the mouth of the tunnel, complete with dripping water. There were no roads in the vicinity, no cell phone service (I know, I tried) and only the sound of the nearby river, a few hawks (I presumed that's what they were), and a slight wind to keep me company.

For all of you reading this that think this would be bliss, well, I was not so sure. It was beautiful, serene, untouched by humans except for the railroad, and definitely wild country. But the idea of a bear roaming up to me and saying hello was not something I was looking forward to experiencing. Maybe from a helicopter, maybe at a zoo, but not here.

I kept telling myself that if a bear did spot me, he or she would look and say, "Nah, not worth the effort!"

After about 20 minutes, the headlight of the train came into view. I got the shot and then waved energetically. Everyone on board the locomotives and passenger cars happily waved back without realizing I wanted them to stop and pick me up!

The train passed by, went through the tunnel, and on to the Summit. I was alone again. I again checked for cell phone service. Nah.

About 45 minutes later I heard the now Skagway-bound train coming back downhill towards me, the exhaust echoing off the tunnel walls. And right behind it was my trusty speeder. I was happy with my photography; I was happier to get out of there.

"Were there actually bears here?" I asked, hoping my escort had been kidding.

"Oh yes," he replied. "All the time."

Aftermath

I was scheduled to visit Skagway a third time but only got as far as Juneau. Storms grounded everything north and even the daily 4-hour barge ride to Skagway was canceled. I spent the night in the airport and caught the morning's Alaska Airline 737 back to Seattle, and then home. I haven't seen Skagway since.

Do I recommend schlepping to Skagway to see the White Pass? Absolutely, and I heartily recommend it to people who are thinking of including it in their travel plans. The scenery, the town, the railroad operation, the weather, and the outstanding fresh seafood all combined to create a wonderful travel experience.

Just watch out for bears. **I**

Bear country

Another request was to shoot a train crossing one of the many trestles and bridges that dot the right of way. Railroad personnel had assembled a photo train with two of the new units and a string of passenger cars.

I asked for a spot that would be so remote that it would be almost impossible to duplicate by driving to it, perhaps somewhere that could be reached only by embarking on a decent hike. Management had the perfect spot just south of White Pass summit.

I hopped on a waiting motorized speeder — I think it had a small, repurposed Ford engine in it — and my guide and I were off. It was a cold day, windy, forebod-

GREAT RAILFAN ROADS

CALIFORNIA 99

The Central Valley has trains — lots of ‘em

By John Friedmann • Photos by Craig Walker



A BNSF local behind ET44C4s Nos. 3762 and 3746, holds the siding at West Allensworth, Calif., for an overtaking westbound Z-WSPST09-18 on Feb. 20, 2018. A pair of recently delivered Tier 4 diesels seem like odd power for a local, but locals on the BNSF's Bakersfield Sub can be quite lengthy.

CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL VALLEY

gets no respect. Fresno, Bakersfield, and even Sacramento are the butt of jokes by Los Angeles and Bay Area citizens. Railfans make trips to Cajon, Donner, and Tehachapi passes but seldom celebrate the tabletop-flat topography of the Golden State's midsection.

But the Central Valley has trains — lots of 'em — from two Class I railroads, Amtrak, and a surprising variety of short lines. Tying this all together is California Route 99 down the valley's heart. U.S. 99 once ran the length of the West Coast but lost its shield when parallel Interstate 5 was constructed. California 99 — the Golden State Highway — now looks like an interstate while running trackside for long stretches.

BNSF is the Central Valley's busier Class I, averaging about 20 freight trains per day on its Bakersfield (south of Fresno) and Fresno (north of Fresno) subdivisions. The BNSF trains serve three purposes: local business (mostly ag and intermodal) for customers in the Central Valley; through trains (primarily intermodal) to the San Francisco Bay area; and north-south trains that use BNSF's Inside Gateway route to the Pacific Northwest (these trains use UP trackage rights north of Stockton).

MORE TRACK, LESS TRAINS

Union Pacific has more Central Valley trackage than BNSF but runs fewer trains. Overlapping track from predecessors Southern Pacific and Western Pacific between Stockton and Sacramento accounts for the extra infrastructure, while UP's east-west Overland Route siphons some traffic that would otherwise run through the Central Valley. UP also has its parallel former SP Coast Line, but that route sees little through freight traffic.

Amtrak is a big player. BNSF handles 12 *San Joaquins* north of Bakersfield, 10 to and from the Bay Area and one round trip connecting Sacramento via Union Pacific's Fres-

no Subdivision. The *San Joaquins* rely on state-provided equipment, which is transitioning from F59s and California bilevels to Chargers and Venture trainsets. Former NJ Transit "Comet" commuter cars — reconfigured for intercity use — can also make an appearance. ACE — Altamont

field (BNSF yard), but beware — the shortline units are often a prime target for taggers.

HEADING NORTH

California Route 99 meets the railroads in Bakersfield, where UP and BNSF begin their separate routes up the Central Valley after sharing



Train MFRRV 11, a manifest that originated in Fresno is heading for Roseville, rolls north on the Union Pacific's Fresno Sub, just east of Sacramento near Madera on March 11, 2011. The train is powered by UP ES44AC No. 5433, UP AC4400CW No. 6289, GMTX No. 2164, and UPY GP15-1 No. 6031.

Corridor Express — runs eight daily trains between Stockton and San Jose over Union Pacific's former WP lines and is undergoing its own equipment transition. The line's six F40PHM-3s and Bombardier bilevels are being supplemented by four Siemens Chargers and 17 additional cars from Bombardier.

SMALL LINES, BIG BUSINESS

Short lines are big business in the valley. Of the 10 different short lines, Genesee & Wyoming's San Joaquin Valley Railroad (SJVR) dominates after becoming UP's and Santa Fe's operator of choice for most branches between Fresno and Bakersfield. SJVR operates its 371 miles with more than 25 four-axle units, including unusual NZE24Bs (Knoxville Locomotive units built from CSX gensets), PR30Bs (Progress Rail-rebuilt GP40s), and a BL20-2 (EMD's 1992 attempt to penetrate the rebuild market). Best chances for SJVR power are Exeter (shop and HQ), Fresno (UP yard) and Bakers-

field (BNSF yard), but beware — the shortline units are often a prime target for taggers. trackage over Tehachapi Pass. Amtrak's modern Bakersfield station was opened in 2000 after more than 20 years of temporary stations caused by the 1972 demolition of Santa Fe's depot. Four trainsets overnight at the two-platform station, but the first leaves at a bleary-eyed 4:12 a.m. Both UP and BNSF have mid-size Bakersfield yards and crews change here on some trains. UP's yard is easier to see from public property, while BNSF's is larger and busier. SP's rambling station stands (no longer used by UP) and can be photographed from Jackson Street. San Joaquin Valley operates several branches in the area and can be found running into both Bakersfield yards.

Heading north, Route 99 parallels UP's Fresno Sub for almost 60 miles from Oil Junction on Bakersfield's north side to Tulare. The mostly single-track railroad is next to the freeway, often with no barriers or fence to spoil the view. Two industrial operations add interest between Bakersfield and



Returning from the Jamestown, Calif. area, a pair of Sierra Northern Railway gensets head towards Oakdale. If the scenery looks familiar, it should. Dozens and dozens of movies, television shows, and commercials have been filmed on this line over the decades. David Lustig

Tulare: Western Milling's SE15B at Famoso, and J.D. Heiskell, south of Pixley, which has SD9s of SP and Central of Georgia heritage.

You can scratch the short-line itch at Tulare by taking a 17-mile detour northeast to Exeter, the San Joaquin Valley Railroad's home. SJVR's shop is located inside a wye between E and F streets, and there is a large rail-themed mural a block south on F street. Make your way back to Route 99 through Visalia (don't miss the former SP depot, now a restaurant). At Goshen, you'll find another outpost of Western Milling with an SE15B, and junctions with two branches of the SJVR. Just north, Traver's Foster Farms features an SD38 and RP20BD, often visible from Route 99.

STATIONS AND HISTORY

UP's main line is right next to California Route 99 for the first half of the 30-mile drive north to Fresno, but if you want to stay really close, switch onto Golden State Boulevard at Kingsburg. Kingsburg also boasts a beautifully restored Southern Pacific station (open Wednesdays 9 a.m. to noon) and a water tower designed to look like a Swedish coffee pot.

In Fresno, North Avenue (ironically on the south side) will take you to Fresno's Calwa (California Wine Association) crossing of the UP and BNSF

main lines. The site is busy and accessible, but not photogenic — light industry and highway overpasses pass for scenery. BNSF's midsize Calwa Yard is north of the diamond and partially visible from adjacent Railroad Avenue.

Fresno has plenty of railroad history. Amtrak's former Santa Fe station and division headquarters downtown dates from 1899, and is an easy side trip from California Route 99. After being closed to passengers for 40 years the building was renovated and reopened in

2005. Less than a mile away, the former Southern Pacific station predates the Santa Fe station by a decade and hasn't seen passengers since 1971. But passengers will return (eventually) when the SP facility is restored and incorporated into California High-Speed Rail's Fresno station. The rarest artifacts in Fresno are two "wig-wag" crossing signals in service at Hamilton and Cherry street crossings on a SJVR-operated piece of former SP. UP's Fresno Yard can be found on Fresno's north side, sand-

wich between Route 99 and Weber Avenue.

UP and California Route 99 resume their side-by-side running just north of the UP yard all the way to Modesto, almost 100 miles. Road and rail diverge only to bypass en-route towns or accommodate freeway interchanges. Look for A.J. Gilbert's facility on the west side of the road at Keyes, just south of Modesto — it has several locomotives of its own that are often visible.

Modesto is the inspiration for the movie *American Graffiti*, and although the original drive-ins are long gone, the city has plenty of railroading. Southern Pacific's 1915 station is now part of a transit center and open to the public. But the real goal is to get a UP freight crossing I Street with the Modesto Arch (slogan: Water - Wealth - Contentment - Health) in the background. Since the arch is lit, the shot can even work at night. To the east, Modesto's Amtrak station on BNSF features a Santa Fe 4-8-4 on display.

CLASSY MODESTO DIESELS

Don't leave Modesto without seeking out the Modesto & Empire Traction, a family-owned short line that replaced its long-time stable of GE 70-



Fourteen miles north of Bakersfield, the BNSF's Lone Star Branch splits off the Bakersfield Sub's main line and heads west. On March 11, 2011, train No. Y-BAK3071-101 waits among the almond blossoms (and a lot of bees) behind GP38 No. 2163 and GP38-2s Nos. 2316 and 2319 at Shafter, Calif.



Slowed by a report that a crossing gate had been struck by a truck, Amtrak *San Joaquins*, train No. 716, creeps through the S-curves in Ballico, Calif., on BNSF's Stockton Sub on June 14, 2019. The Oakland to Bakersfield train is past the affected grade crossing and is slowly accelerating as it approaches the bridge over the Merced River.

tonners with an 11-unit fleet of SWs and gensets painted in its classed red and silver scheme. The short line serves the Beard Industrial District from its shop on McClure Boulevard.

California Route 99 continues to parallel Union Pacific for 10 miles north of Modesto, but you would be forgiven for diverting northeast to check out the Sierra Northern's original Sierra Railroad route (of steam and Baldwin diesel fame), which connects to the BNSF at Riverbank. SERA's yard at Oakdale is overflowing with gensets and other stored power, while the company's last remaining Baldwin — S12 No. 42 — is in the Riverbank Industrial Center but can be difficult to see from public property.

Heading north to Stockton, the railroad geography changes. UP's Fresno Sub continues northward to Sacramento, crossing and paralleling UP's Oakland Sub at Stockton. The Oakland Sub is the former Western Pacific main line which comes east from the San Francisco Bay Area, turning north at Stockton towards Sacramento. The parallel Fresno and Oakland subdivisions both serve UP's Lathrop intermodal terminal south of Stockton. Closer to downtown, UP's Stockton Yard is a former Western Pacific facility adjacent to the de-emphasized ex-SP yard. BNSF also has an intermodal terminal south of Stockton at Mariposa which is being expanded and operates a

carload yard (Morman) in Stockton proper.

HEADING FOR THE BAY

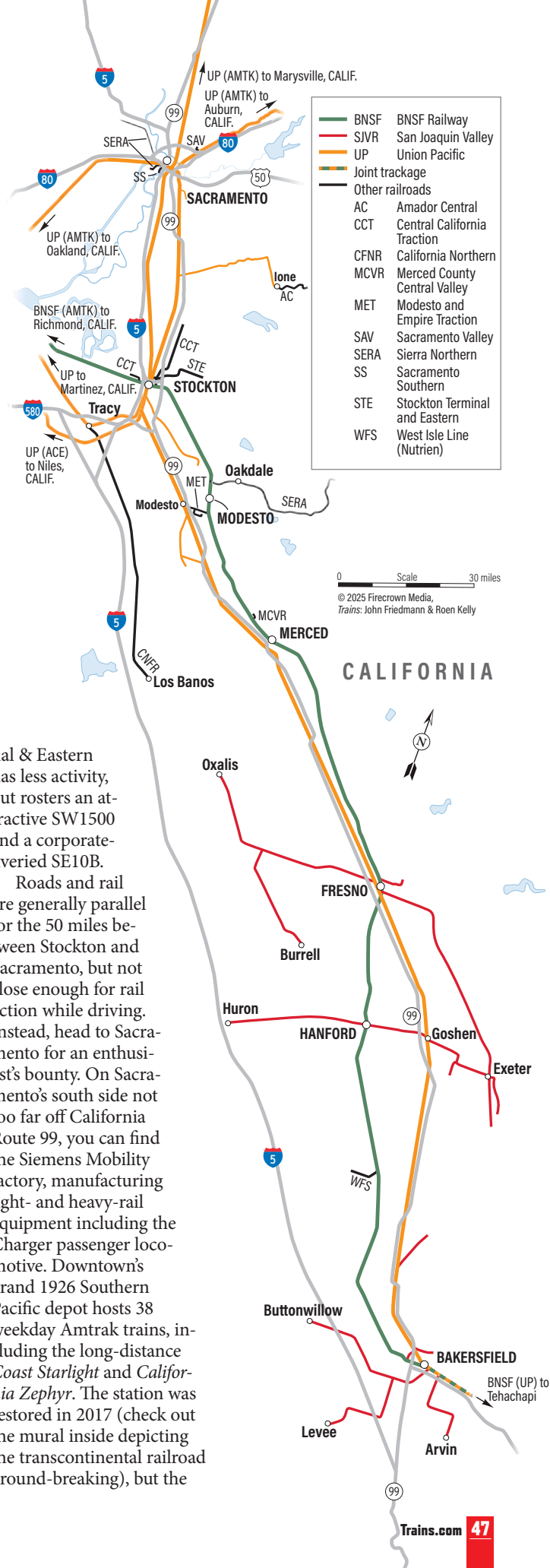
At Stockton, BNSF's route turns west out of the valley towards the Bay Area, complicating passenger train routings. Ten Amtrak *San Joaquins* follow the BNSF route and stop at the appropriately named San Joaquin Street Station, a former Santa Fe mission-revival depot dating from 1900. The remaining Sacramento-Bakersfield Amtrak round trip uses UP tracks to complete its route, so it instead stops at Stockton's much grander former SP depot. The SP depot is also the endpoint for eight daily ACE trains between Stockton and San Jose.

To catch all the mainline trains — passenger and freight — head to the BNSF/UP diamond crossing at the former site of Stockton Tower, located off Aurora Street southeast of downtown. Construction to grade separate the crossing — which may be the busiest in California — started in 2024 so vistas are already changing even as trains continue to flow.

Several Stockton short lines are worth a stop but can take work to catch. Central California Traction's red SW1500s, hybrids and gensets are photogenic, but the carrier does much of its work inside the Port of Stockton. The independently operated CCT is jointly owned by Union Pacific and BNSF. OmniTRAX's Stockton Termi-

nal & Eastern has less activity, but rosters an attractive SW1500 and a corporate-liveried SE10B.

Roads and rail are generally parallel for the 50 miles between Stockton and Sacramento, but not close enough for rail action while driving. Instead, head to Sacramento for an enthusiast's bounty. On Sacramento's south side not too far off California Route 99, you can find the Siemens Mobility factory, manufacturing light- and heavy-rail equipment including the Charger passenger locomotive. Downtown's grand 1926 Southern Pacific depot hosts 38 weekday Amtrak trains, including the long-distance *Coast Starlight* and *California Zephyr*. The station was restored in 2017 (check out the mural inside depicting the transcontinental railroad ground-breaking), but the





An eastbound San Joaquin Valley freight rolls through Fresno on Feb. 17, 2018 behind PR30B No. 3003. The PR30Bs are four-axle Electro-Motive units manufactured by Progress Rail with 2,995 hp Caterpillar engines aftertreatment-equipped to reach Tier 4 emission standards.

platforms were moved about 1,000 feet away from the headhouse as part of a mainline realignment. Sacramento's Western Pacific depot also stands and has been serving restaurant patrons for almost as long as it served rail passengers.

Sacramento's railroad jewel is only three blocks from the Amtrak station. The California State Railroad Museum (CSRM) in Sacramento's Old Town hosts a western-focused railroad collection ranging from an 1862 Central Pacific 4-4-0 to an Amtrak F40PHR from 1978. The museum's exhibits are engaging and the equipment displayed inside is well restored.

Outside, CSRM's Sacramento to Southern offers 45-minute excursions Friday-Saturday-Sunday during the summer (pro tip: spring for the extra fare to ride in one of the three first-class cars that rotate in the service). CSRM stores part of its collection in the former SP shop buildings nearby, which have become more viewable as the site is redeveloped, but the buildings themselves are not open to the public.

Sacramento's two hottest spots for freight are the Haggins and Elvas wyes, south of the American River. At Haggins, the former SP Overland Route to Oakland flies over the former

Western Pacific main line, with connections including one used by Amtrak's *Coast Starlight*. Amtrak's pair of Sacramento *San Joaquins* use the nearby Evlas wye, which marks the end of UP's Fresno Sub. While UP owns the area main lines, BNSF trains can be seen exercising trackage rights. Finally, UP's Davis hump yard in Roseville about 20 miles east is busy as the area's carload hub. Look for Union Pacific's Donner Pass snow equipment (including rotary snowplows and former F7B power cars) stored at the yard during warmer months.

There are a few smaller operations around Sacramento. Sierra Northern serves the Port of Sacramento with first-generation GPs and gensets and operates the *River Fox* excursion train on a disconnected section of the former Yolo Shortline along the Sacramento River. Patriot Rail's Sacramento Valley Railroad operates a pair of GP15s at the McClellan Business Park on Sacramento's east side. If you are tired of driving, Sacramento's light rail system offers enough mileage for a solid half-day of riding.

California Route 99 not only gives a front-row seat to today's railroad scene in the Central Valley — it offers a peek into the future. Along the route travelers can see newly built bridge-

es, viaducts, and grading for California's high speed rail project, which has focused its San Francisco-Los Angeles route construction in the Central Valley. The future high-speed route parallels California Route 99 between Merced and Fresno, and it is impossible to ignore the activity. Although service isn't projected to begin until 2030 at the earliest (funding permitting), new structures will continue to change the railroad scene in the Central Valley.

WORTH A STOP:

- **RAILTOWN 1897.** Although 45 miles east of California Route 99, Railtown 1897 (now a California State Park) does a remarkable job of preserving the heritage of the Sierra Railroad in the Sierra foothills. The park also pays tribute to the hundreds of movies and television shows that were filmed on the property.

- **SHORT LINES.** Seek out some "non-chain" short lines: Modesto & Empire Traction in Modesto, Central California Traction in Stockton, and the several locations of the Sierra Northern.

- **RIDE A SPEEDER.** The former Amador Central Railroad and the El Dorado Western Railroad (both east of Sacramento) offer motorcar rides through increasingly rare rural

landscapes. The nearby Placerville and Sacramento Valley Railroad offers both train and motorcar rides.

IF TIME IS SHORT: Because California Route 99 is almost an interstate highway, you'll make good time driving through the Central Valley, while tracks are nearby for most of the journey. Fresno is a good midpoint on the trip, where the BNSF and UP yards and the Amtrak station are all accessible with minimal detours.

A WORD OF CAUTION: While California's Central Valley cities are smaller than San Francisco or Los Angeles, they have similar urban problems. Be aware of your surroundings and keep an eye on your belongings.

BESIDES THE RAILROAD:

- **NATIONAL PARKS.** Yosemite is a headline national park and the entrance is only 60 miles from Fresno. But Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks are nearby and worth a look for their giant sequoia trees.

- **OLD SACRAMENTO.** The historic district features buildings dating to the 1860s, and includes the waterfront shopping and entertainment district. The railroad museum is an anchor, but don't miss the Delta King steamboat. **I**



Trains Photo Contest

The Last Mile
is the 2025 theme

The Last Mile evokes many thoughts about railroading — the end of a branch line, a station, or a museum. The Last Mile transcends time. It is not just about railroad equipment, but people and activities or situations. What is your vision of the Last Mile?

Sponsored by the
National Railway Historical Society

NRHS

Submit up to three of your railroad photographs
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2021 Grand Prize, Philip A. Weibler, Gray Area



How to plan a heritage rail visit

Do your research and avoid disappointment

▲ Among the less frequent heritage train rides are those operated by Pennsylvania's Bellefonte Historical Railroad Society. Bellefonte's RDC1 No. 9167 is former New Haven Railroad No. 40. Brian Solomon

PLANNING A VISIT to a heritage operation? You can avoid disappointment by researching your journey using readily available tools. While this may seem obvious, the specifics can elude even seasoned travelers.

The internet and smartphones have changed travel. A wealth of up-to-the-minute information is available at your fingertips. This makes it much easier to plan but can penalize travelers who fail to use these tools effectively.

The ability to rapidly disseminate information may result in more people traveling to popular locations as well as the smaller venues — destinations that can sell out quickly.

Small tourist railways that were once obscure destinations can now be widely known and easily accessible. This is good news for heritage railways looking to boost their ridership, but can be frustrating to travelers who prefer to explore spontaneously.

Events offer visitors exciting opportunities but they also present challenges. Many heritage railroads rely heavily on the patronage of the general public to sustain operations, with only a small portion of riders consisting of serious railway enthusiasts. Hosting themed events is a good way for these operations to make train rides more appealing.

If you are interested in visiting a specific railroad, pay close attention to the railroad's website and social media to learn about their operations and upcoming events. If an event catches your interest, book your tickets as early as possible. This is especially true if there's a specific time of day, time of year, or type of equipment that you are hoping to experience.

I recall a conversation overheard during my years of marketing and schedule planning for New Hampshire's Conway Scenic Railroad. During the fall foliage season one October, I

listened as a disappointed guest pleaded with a ticket agent for a seat in the Budd Vista dome at a time when every seat on the train was sold and had been for months. He had traveled many miles but hadn't realized trains might sell out during the railroad's busy season!

It's not just the casual rider that gets caught unaware. In October 2023, the Bellefonte Historical Railroad Society planned a series of excursions from its Pennsylvania namesake city using its former New Haven RDC1. I checked its website (bellefontetrain.org) for schedule information but my wife Kris and I were surprised to be caught in a traffic jam when we arrived. As it happened, the RDC trips coincided with Bellefonte's annual fall festival. While I managed a few photos of the historic RDC, had my research been a little more thorough, I would have known to arrive much earlier in the day! — *Brian Solomon*

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Oregon Rail Heritage Foundation purchases short line

Additional excursions, volunteer opportunities anticipated

▲ Soon Southern Pacific No. 4449 will be running on its own short-line track in Portland, Ore. The Oregon Rail Heritage Foundation has announced plans to purchase the Oregon Pacific Railroad's East Portland Division. On Dec. 18, 2021, No. 4449 leads the foundation's Holiday Express across SE Tilikum Way. The track is part of the OPR. Alex Gillman

THE OREGON RAIL HERITAGE FOUNDATION, which operates the Oregon Rail Heritage Center in Portland, Ore., announced it will purchase the Oregon Pacific Railroad East Portland Division, a 5.5-mile industrial shortline branch. The acquisition will enable the Foundation to expand its historic rail operations.

"Acquiring the Oregon Pacific Railroad honors [OPR founder] Dick Samuels' remarkable legacy while securing a permanent future for rail excursions, preservation, and education ...," says Rick Franklin, Foundation president. "This transformative step enables us to connect with our community in deeper, more impactful ways, bringing history to life through expanded excursions and enriched volunteer opportunities."

The Foundation's Oregon Rail Heritage Center is home to Portland's historic locomotives: Southern Pacific *Daylight* 4-8-4 No. 4449; Spokane, Portland & Seattle 4-8-4 No. 700; and Oregon Railway & Navigation 4-6-2 No. 197. A fourth steam locomotive joined the collection in 2022 and was moved to the Center in October 2024: Mt. Emily Lumber No. 1, a three-

truck Shay. All four locomotives are or will be maintained in operational condition.

The Oregon Pacific Railroad is a freight line in the Portland industrial district. The railroad, founded by Richard Samuels and currently operated by his sons — Tim, Brian, and Craig — has been supportive of the Heritage Center's preservation and operation efforts. The senior Samuels, who died in 2021, started the Oregon Pacific in 1991 by purchasing the Portland Traction Co. from the Southern Pacific and Union Pacific. The line, running between East Portland and Milwaukie, Ore., traces its roots to 1904 when it was built by the Oregon Water Power & Railway Co.

Richard Samuels was passionate about railroading. Under his direction, and working with ORHC, the railroad offered a series of Saturday train excursions and other trips for a number of years. Following his death, the ORHC took over operation of the excursions in 2022.

"The sale to the Center really honors [Dick] Samuels' love of trains," says Renee Devereux, ORHC executive director. "He loved to see kids on the trains. He loved teaching anyone

about railroading. To be able to operate over his line is an honor to him."

Freight operations will continue on the line, says Devereux, although the future operator is being discussed. "The freight operation is a for-profit business," Devereux says. "We [the ORHC] are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. There is some balancing we will need to do in this area." Continued freight operations will also provide additional revenue for the ORHC. Track maintenance will fall to the ORHC, and will offer new volunteer and educational opportunities.

The sale is scheduled to close in October 2026 at a price of \$3 million, for which the Center will be conducting a capital campaign starting this year. "This acquisition is a community effort," says Franklin. "Every contribution ... brings us closer to realizing a shared vision of a thriving, accessible rail heritage in Portland."

For more information on the planned purchase, how you can help, or other ORHC volunteer opportunities, please contact Devereux or Roger Woehl, Oregon Rail Heritage Foundation vice president at orhf.org. — Bob Lettenberger

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www.historicrailpark.com 270-745-7317

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2180 South Carson Street, Carson City 89701



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

carsonrailroadmuseum.org 775-687-6953

NEVADA Boulder City

NEVADA STATE RAILROAD MUSEUM

601 Yucca Street, Boulder City 89005



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

boulderrailroadmuseum.org 702-486-5933

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

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www.nationalrrmuseum.org

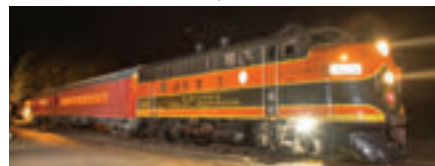
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RAIL SHOWS AND EVENTS

MARCH 2, 2025: Jersey Central Train Show & Sale. Mother Seton Regional High School, 1 Valley Road, Clark, NJ 07066. Sunday, 9:00am-3:30pm. Admission: \$7, children under 12 free, \$14 family. Model trains, railroadiana, books, etc. Refreshments available. For information: Heinz Ricken, hricken@gmail.com, 908-272-3910, or Mitchell Dakelman, dakelman@aol.com, 908-208-2522

MARCH 8, 2025: PORTLAND, OR. Saturday 9am-3pm. Willamette Model Railroad Club Swap Meet. Kliver Armory, 10000 NE 33rd Dr., 97211. Admission: \$6.00 Adults, 12 & under free w/adult. Free Parking. Food available. Over 114 tables, all gauges. Table rentals: \$30/\$35. Website: wmrrc.com For Table Reservations contact: Roger Rees, wmrrcswapmeet@gmail.com, 503-256-2248 (no text).

MARCH 29-30, 2025: Lincoln Square Train Show, 100 W. High St., Urbana, IL 61801. Saturday 8am-5pm, Sunday 11am-4pm. Hosted by Illinois Terminal Division, NMRA. FREE public admission. Railroadiana and historical societies. Freemo set-up and run. Free parking, wheelchair accessible. Vendor table info at <http://itd.illinoisterritorialdivision.org/show/show.htm>

APRIL 5-6, 2025: Rocky Mountain Train Show. National Western Complex, 4655 Humboldt St., Denver, 80216. Saturday, 9:00am-5:00pm, Sunday 9:00am-4:00pm. 3 acres of model trains, all scales, 30 layouts, 700 sales tables, clinics and more. Admission \$15.00, under 12/scouts in uniform FREE. Free Parking. 303-364-0274

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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Big E Productions.....	9	Nevada State RR Museum, Carson City...	53
Bridgeview Bed & Breakfast.....	53	Old Hotel Art Gallery.....	54
Chaddick Institute at DePaul.....	7	Ron's Books	7
Colorado Railroad Museum	53	Sumpter Valley Railroad	53
Cordele Main Street.....	9	Strasburg Railroad Company.....	9
Historic Railpark & Train Museum.....	53	Tourist Trains Guidebook.....	60
Leadville Colorado & Southern Railroad Company.....	53	Trains & Travel.....	7
Monongahela River, RR & Transport Museum...	7, 53	Trains Photo Contest.....	49
Nadinepaints	9	Trains Tours.....	51
National Railroad Museum.....	54	Trains.com Forums	2
Nevada State RR Museum, Boulder City..	53	Whitewater Valley Railroad	53
		Wisconsin Great Northern Railroad	54

In the April issue



Reading & Northern: More than steam

The Reading Blue Mountain & Northern is known for its steam excursions, but the regional railroad is a **TRAILBLAZER IN FREIGHT** as well. In 1966, three maverick railroaders conducted **SECRET TESTS** — and got away with it. The inside story of **SWITZERLAND'S** 21.48-mile, 1.7-billion Swiss franc Lötschberg Base Tunnel.

On sale March 11, 2025



Midwest morning rush

Norfolk Southern train
No. 255 — a Triple Crown
RoadRailer — proceeds
westbound through the
small town of New Waverly,
Ind., during the early
morning of Aug. 14, 2016.
This is the former Wabash
Railroad, now part of the
NS Illinois Division.

John E. Troxler





Back to the mine

A Utah Railway empty coal train snakes along the Price River at Kyune, Utah, on Union Pacific's ex-Denver & Rio Grande Western main line, April 4, 2014. On the point is Morrison-Knudsen MK50-3 No. 5003, one of six such units rebuilt by MK with EMD 3,500-hp prime movers. Utah, owned by Genesee & Wyoming since 2002, no longer hauls coal.

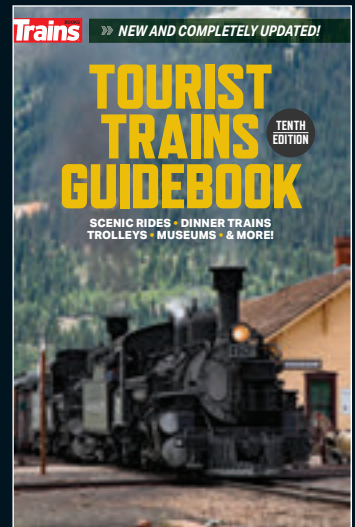
Scott A. Hartley

A first responder salute

One of three GE ES44AH locomotives in the CSX Pride in Service program, No. 911 salutes first responders. Here it leads train B670 near North Cove, N.C., on Oct. 10, 2022. Other Pride in Service units are No. 1776, saluting veterans, and No. 3194, honoring law enforcement. Grady McKinley



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