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April 2025

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Success in anthracite country

Reading & Northern turned castoff lines into a regional powerhouse



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- BNSF's double-tracking persistence pays off
- United Kingdom marks 200 years of railroading
- Colorado Pacific, a historic route saved as a short line

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From the Editor



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Reading Blue Mountain & Northern, headquartered in Port Clinton, Pa., is likely best known for its active program of steam- and diesel-powered passenger trains, headlined by Reading T-1 4-8-4 No. 2102. But, as Correspondent Scott Hartley details in his article starting on page 12, its freight operations are an even more interesting story.

The Reading & Northern is Pennsylvania's largest privately owned railroad.

Threaded together from cast-off lines, the R&N is thriving. In 2024, it hauled 10% fewer revenue carloads than in 2023, yet set a revenue record, thanks to a more-lucrative traffic mix. A remarkable performance from savvy railroaders. (And its steam trains are pretty great, too.)

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California drops zero-emission locomotive rule

State will not seek EPA waiver to require emission-free units by 2030

▲ An EMD Joule battery-electric locomotive is displayed at Pacific Harbor Line's facility in Wilmington, Calif. A California agency has dropped its effort to mandate use of zero-emission locomotives in the state by 2030.

David Lustig

THE CALIFORNIA AIR RESOURCES BOARD HAS SCRAPPED its controversial rule that would have required use of zero-emissions locomotives in the state beginning in 2030.

CARB informed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in January that it was withdrawing its requests to enforce zero-emissions rules covering trucks and locomotives. The move came a week before the inauguration of President Donald Trump, who frequently criticized CARB's regulatory efforts.

"Withdrawal is an important step given the uncertainty presented by the incoming administration that previously attacked California's programs to protect public health and the climate and has said it will continue to oppose those programs," CARB Chair Liane Randolph said in a statement.

Because CARB's regulations are stricter than those at the federal level, the agency requires waivers from the EPA in order to enforce them. It will no longer pursue those waivers

for the regulations regarding locomotives and diesel-powered trucks.

The regulation would have banned any locomotive that is 23 years or older from operating in California and set dates after which all locomotives with engines built after certain years must operate in a "zero emission configuration."

Railroads operating in California would have had to begin contributing to a spending account where money would be set aside for the acquisition of zero-emission locomotives.

The Association of American Railroads challenged the regulation in federal court, saying it would have mandated investments in locomotives that aren't yet commercially viable while limiting the lifespans of more than 25,000 locomotives currently in use.

The AAR welcomed CARB's decision. "As we move past this untenable proposal," AAR spokeswoman Jessica Kahanek said in a statement, "railroads look forward to advancing their

already strong sustainability profile and further reducing emissions in the years to come."

BNSF Railway had said the CARB regulation threatened the viability of its proposed \$1.5 billion Barstow International Gateway intermodal terminal.

"We are encouraged that CARB has pulled down their request for a waiver with the EPA," CEO Katie Farmer told the Midwest Association of Rail Shippers conference. Farmer said BNSF now has a path to move forward with its investment in Barstow, where it aims to gather container traffic from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. At Barstow, cargo would be sorted and transloaded, then sent east on double-stack trains.

Chuck Baker, president of the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association, hailed demise of the rule, saying it "would have threatened the very existence of short lines in California and in other states where such a rule could have been copied." — *Bill Stephens*

FRA approves program for first test of autonomous railcars

Parallel Systems' self-propelled container flatcars will be tested on Genesee & Wyoming lines in Georgia

THE FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION will allow Parallel Systems to test its autonomous, self-propelled flatcar system on two Genesee & Wyoming short lines in Georgia.

The FRA in January approved the request, made in August 2023 by Parallel, Georgia Central Railway, and Heart of Georgia Railroad, to allow testing of the battery-electric container cars, which take aim at short-haul intermodal markets.

The agency's Railroad Safety Board reviewed the waiver petition and supporting documentation, attended a demonstration at the MxV Rail test facility in Pueblo, Colo., and conducted a public hearing.

"The Board has determined that granting the Petitioners' request ... is in the public interest and consistent with railroad safety," Karl Alexy, the FRA's associate administrator for railroad safety, wrote in a Jan. 16 letter to Georgia Central Railway President James Irvin.

It was not immediately clear when the pilot program would begin.

Parallel's prototype flat car can carry one intermodal container 500 miles on a single battery charge. The batteries in each truck power the car's traction motors. The autonomous system relies on cameras and sensors, as well as software in computers on board the car and at a data center.

The approval grants Parallel and the two railroads 22 waivers from car and locomotive regulations that cover everything from cabs and sanders to brake valves and uncoupling levers. It includes 23 conditions they must follow during the pilot program.

Parallel and G&W plan a seven-phase test program, with complexity of operation increasing with each phase. The FRA must deem each phase successful before the companies can move on to the next phase.

The FRA received 154 comments during the public comment period. Of those, 32 supported the pilot program while 122 raised concerns. Alexy's letter indicated many of the concerns raised were relevant only to general operation, not the test pro-

gram. "These comments will certainly be important when/if railroads seek approval for further testing or to operate," he wrote.

Parallel's battery-electric cars — which can run alone or together as an autonomous platoon of up to 50 cars — each carry a single container. They can operate at up to 25 mph and tackle grades as steep as 3%. They're also undergoing testing in Australia.

The tests aim to evaluate the three primary components of the Parallel system: The autonomous vehicles themselves, the user terminals that allow people to control the equipment, and the computer servers

that send data between the vehicles and the user terminals.

Parallel Systems' autonomous container flatcars have received the go-ahead for testing on two Genesee & Wyoming short lines in Georgia. Parallel Systems

The test's first phase will involve only a 2-mile section of track on the Heart of Georgia that's free of grade crossings. The test track will be severed from the rest of the railroad by removing rails at both ends.

The testing gradually escalates until it involves operations on a 160-mile section of both railroads in phases six and seven. Phase six will include operations mixing with conventional rail service, while phase seven could include a limited number of revenue container moves. — *Bill Stephens*



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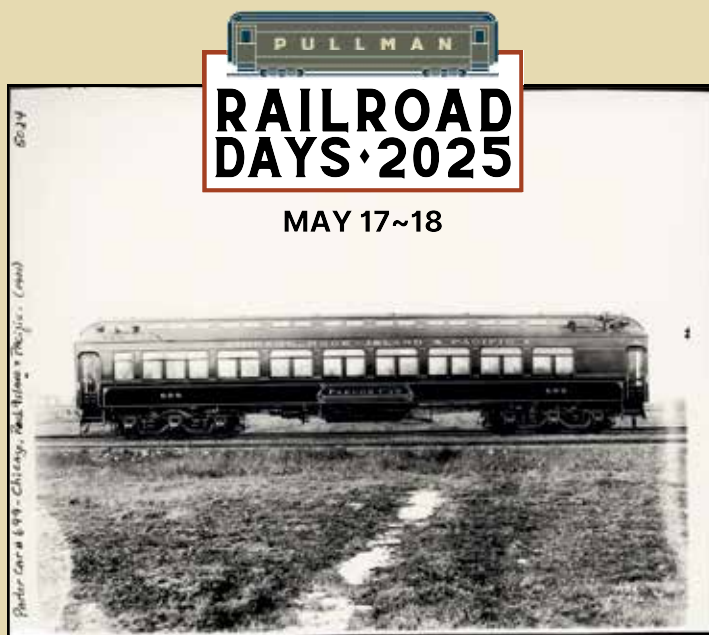
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"We believe that this hybrid system, if successful, could substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions from our yard operations, while maintaining our commitment to customers and communities across our network," Patrick Whitehead, executive vice president and chief network operating officer, said in a statement. Canadian National

Patrick Fuchs was appointed as chairman of the **SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD** by President Donald Trump, replacing Robert E. Primus, who had been appointed by President Joe Biden. Primus remains on the board, which is currently split 2-2 between Republicans and Democrats with one seat vacant. Fuchs, who joined the board in 2019, has said he would like to streamline the board's processes, having called out the agency's inability to meet its own deadlines in recent rulings.

ROBERT A. WEGNER, a 42-year employee of Kalmbach's art department, died Jan. 6, 2025, at age 83. Wegner graduated from Hartford Union High School in Wisconsin in 1958 and attended one semester of art school before landing a job with Kalmbach. He was particularly celebrated for his well-researched maps for *Trains* and his layout track plans for *Model Railroader*.



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Regulators approve CN's acquisition of Iowa Northern

In split vote, members of Surface Transportation Board have reservations over competitive aspects

THE SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD HAS APPROVED Canadian National's acquisition of 218-mile regional Iowa Northern Railway.

The board's decision, announced Jan. 15, 2025, also imposed several conditions to offset potential anticompetitive aspects of the \$230 million deal. Among them: The development of a scheduled local service plan, keeping gateways open on commercially reasonable terms, and maintaining competitive access to locations with voluntary reciprocal switching agreements.

The merger will become effective on Feb. 13. The board also approved a pair of related trackage-rights deals. CN gains trackage rights between Cedar Falls and Manly, Iowa; Iowa Northern gains rights from CN's Chicago, Central & Pacific on routes out of Waterloo, Iowa.

A 3-1 vote reflected a split on the board, which failed to meet its own July deadline to reach a decision in the case. Chairman Robert E. Primus cast the lone vote against the deal, while board members Patrick Fuchs, Karen Hedlund, and Michelle Schultz issued their own separate concurring statements.

The board members made it clear that in reaching the decision they wrestled with the statutory requirement to approve the deal unless its anticompetitive effects would

be outweighed by the public interest.

Fuchs, subsequently named board chairman, said the decision was an acceptable compromise. "Though some of the decision's analysis and conditions do not reflect my first preferences, it includes justifiable competition-related protections for shippers while, in effect, increasing the IANR system's financial stability, offering modest operational benefits in some circumstances, and reducing uncertainty for parties," he wrote.

The decision came well after the board's July 2024 deadline, and Primus indicated at

January's Midwest Association of Rail Shippers meeting that reflected the board's current makeup of two Democrats and two Republicans. One seat is vacant.

"I don't like missing deadlines," he said. "Applicants deserve to have their decisions rendered in a timely manner. But the reality is, with the current board makeup, negotiations and deliberations take longer, and consensus can be harder to come by. Sometimes there are philosophical differences that must be considered. Herding cats it's not, but it is very difficult." —

Bill Stephens and David Lassen



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An Iowa Northern train delivers ethanol cars to Canadian National at CN's Waterloo, Iowa, yard on April 16, 2019. The STB has approved CN's purchase of Iowa Northern. Craig Williams

BNSF's double-tracking persistence pays off

Growth proves the wisdom of Krebs' vision for the Southern Transcon



Bill Stephens

bybillstephens@gmail.com
Analysis: Trains.com

Normally the addition of a 3.5-mile stretch of second main line isn't cause for celebration. But when those 3.5 miles happen to be the final section of regular double track added to BNSF Railway's 2,200-mile Southern Transcon, well, then it's a major milestone.

BNSF cut over the new trackage between Rose Hill and Mulvane, Kan., on Nov. 18 as the capstone to a 51-mile double-tracking project. Fittingly enough, the first train to roll over the Emporia Subdivision's newest iron was a Z-symbol hotshot.

Intermodal is BNSF's bread and butter. It's also the primary reason that, back in 1992, Santa Fe CEO Rob Krebs committed to laying down a second main alongside the 512 miles of single track that then existed between Ellinor, Kan., and Belen, N.M.

Krebs saw the single track as a barrier to providing fast, frequent, and reliable domestic intermodal service for customers like UPS and J.B. Hunt. Krebs' vision: Create a super railroad with bidirectional centralized traffic control, two main tracks, and universal crossovers spaced 10 miles apart all the way from Chicago to LA.

Adding a second main track year after year is a case study in persistence — not to mention confidence that traffic growth would justify the expense.

It's also a tradition BNSF inherited from the Santa Fe. Krebs was standing on the shoulders of AT&SF leaders who pushed landmark improvement projects like the Belen and Crookton cut-offs and grade and curve reduction programs.

Double track was a focus early on for the Santa Fe. In 1910 Santa Fe began an effort to add a second main track from Dalies, N.M., to San Bernardino, Calif., just two years after completing the Belen Cutoff that freed the railroad from Raton's 3.5% grades.

The rationale for the improvements, then and now, was to build a faster, more efficient, higher capacity railroad that could attract premium traffic to and from California.

Progress never moves in a straight line, though, so it's no surprise that BNSF took a double-tracking breather four times.

After building 300.28 miles of second main between 1993 and 1999, BNSF hit the brakes because Wall Street took Krebs to task for what analysts considered lavish capital spending. Work resumed in 2003, and by the end of 2009 there were 196.15 additional miles of new second main in service, a figure that includes former sidings upgraded to main line standards.

The Great Recession prompted a pause in 2010. The Bakken crude oil boom forced BNSF to focus all of its capacity expansion efforts on the Northern Transcon from 2012 through 2014. Just 19.65 miles of second main were added on the Southern Transcon in 2015-16. Then BNSF got going again with the Emporia Sub project in 2019.

Time has proved Krebs right — and Wall Street skeptics wrong — as BNSF's intermodal volume has surged. Last fall BNSF set several monthly intermodal volume records. It's hard to imagine that growth without Krebs and successors Matt Rose, Carl Ice, and Katie Farmer chipping away at the railway's single-track bottlenecks.

Which brings us back to the Emporia Sub. When intermodal volume peaks midweek, it's where the eastbound and westbound hotshot fleets meet. BNSF had been using a sort of directional running system in the area: Westbound and priority traffic stuck to the Emporia Sub, while a couple dozen eastbounds per day ran via Newton, Kan., on the Arkansas City Sub, a route that's 90 minutes longer.

The double track has had an outsized operational impact because the Emporia Sub's short passing sidings limited where trains could meet. Now BNSF gets a productivity and service boost from eliminating meets and bringing eastbound traffic back to the faster Emporia Sub.

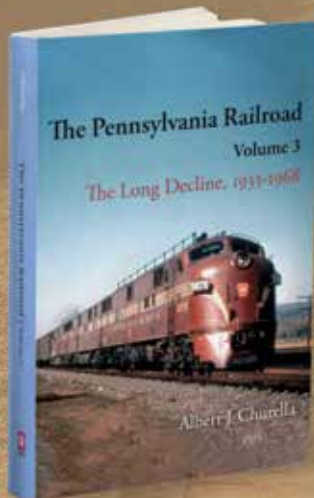
The Southern Transcon's remaining single track sections involve two big bridges. The first, 1.5 miles over the Missouri River at Sibley, Mo., is being taken care of, with a second span set to open in 2027. That leaves just 2.7 miles of single iron over the Salt Fork River at Alva, Okla., which at 45 trains per day is the lowest-density segment of the route. BNSF says traffic levels will determine when a second bridge goes up.

Nonetheless, it's hard to understate the importance of what BNSF has accomplished in a world focused on the next quarterly earnings report. The Southern Transcon double-tracking is proof that persistence pays off in an industry where success requires long-term thinking — and sticking to it. **I**



BNSF Railway hotshot Z-WSPSBD3-04 rolls west through the Rose Hill, Kan., crossovers on Dec. 5, 2024, at what used to be the west end of Rose Hill siding. Keel Middleton

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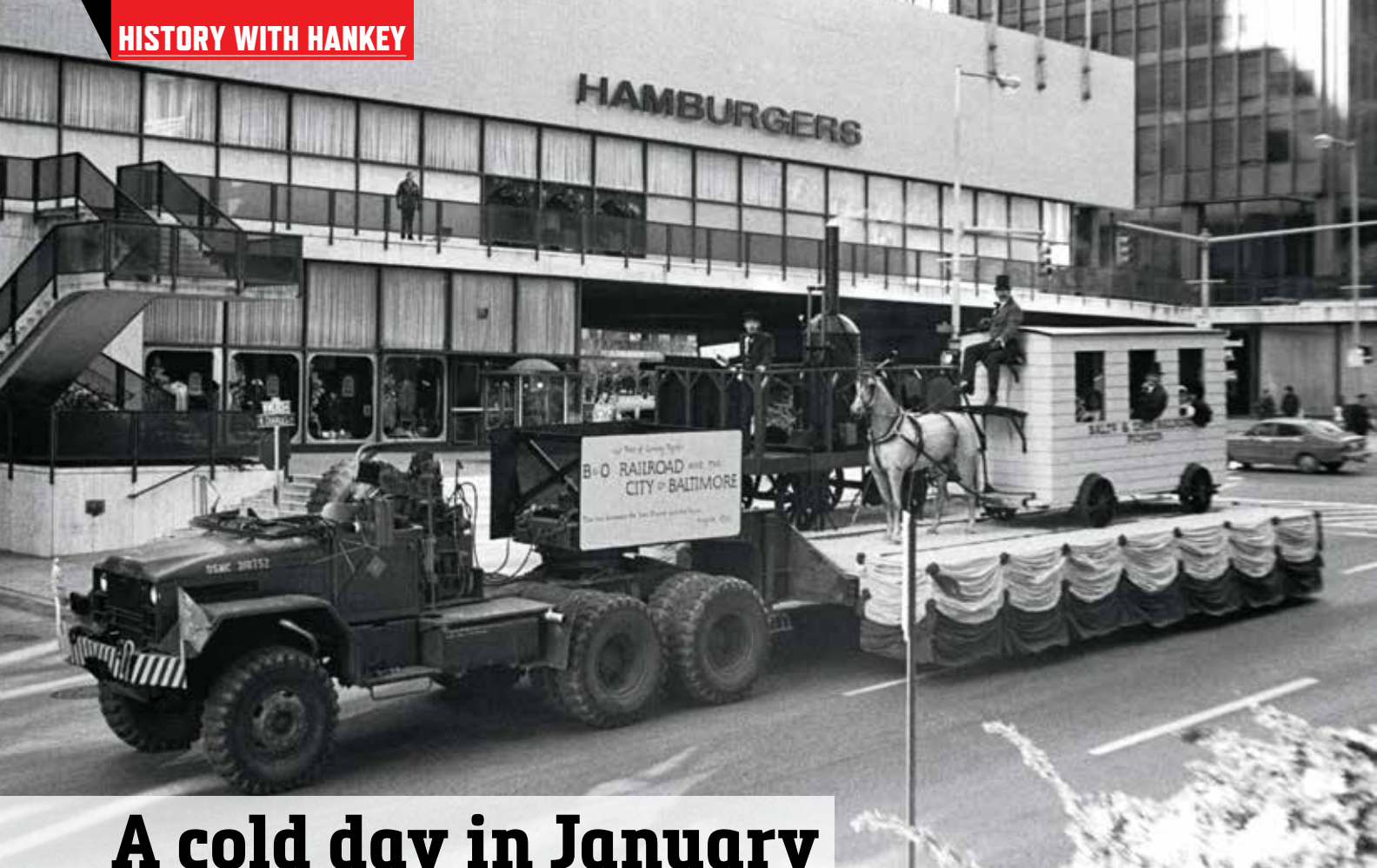
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A cold day in January

A railroad-themed float at a president's inauguration

▲ The City Hall parade passes the since-demolished Hambergers department store. A Marine Corps tractor was fine for this short, local parade. It would have raised eyebrows at the inaugural event. Baltimore & Ohio Museum

THE DEATH OF FORMER PRESIDENT Jimmy Carter in December of last year and the recent inauguration of another president brought back a flood of memories. It also reminded me of how railroading can take you places you otherwise might never get to see.

I was in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 20, 1977, the day of Carter's inauguration. Standing on a flimsy wood locomotive. Next to a large plaster horse. On top of a borrowed U.S. Marine Corps trailer. Experiencing the early stages of hypothermia. How I ended up in charge of the Association of American Railroads float in the inaugural parade is a long story.

CALLING IN FAVORS

A few months before, the City of Baltimore had "requested" that Chessie System create a suitable float for a Jan. 2, 1977, parade celebrating the rededication of its 100-year-old City Hall. At the B&O Railroad

Museum's Mt. Clare Shops, we were in the final stages of a major rehabilitation and frantically getting ready for the B&O's 150th Anniversary in February of that year. The city had done the railroad many favors, and so we were instructed to build a nice float, with no budget, no extra staff, in about six weeks over the Christmas holidays. "Without fail," as they liked to say at Chessie HQ in Cleveland's Terminal Tower.

We occupied the adjacent 1870s Passenger Car Shop and commandeered an elderly forklift truck. Marian Smith, the museum's long-serving and resourceful manager, called in favors from all over Baltimore Terminal as Plan A quickly jelled. We didn't have time for a Plan B or much deliberation.

The theme was "Celebrating the 150th Anniversary of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad," and representing the mythical race between *Tom Thumb* and the horse seemed the best op-

tion. The operating replica of the *Tom Thumb* was too heavy to handle, so we settled on the wood full-sized replica the railroad created for the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

The locomotive would pull the 1927 replica of the "Director's Car," but using a real horse to pull the replica Horse Car was out of the question. We had neither time nor skills to sculpt one, and you just don't wander down to Sears or Montgomery Ward and pick up a full-size fake horse.

My colleague Jodee Sacco reached out to the equestrian community for help. Quickly we were directed to the last surviving saddlery in Baltimore City, Louis M. Vordemberge & Son. The shop happened to have a magnificent plaster model of a noble steed in its front window, where it had stood since the last century. After much persuasion, its staff agreed to let us borrow it.

Then there was the matter

of quickly finding a trailer on which to build the float. Chessie didn't have an available gooseneck trailer, so Jodee reached out to local armed forces reserve units. The Marines had a heavy-duty tractor-trailer we could use — so long as it was for a local civic purpose and a Marine could accompany it at all times.

We recruited a dozen or so Chessie folks from the B&O Central Building downtown to populate the horse car and director's car. Baltimore's remaining theatrical costume shop, A.T. Jones, did a fine job of backdating all of us to 1830.

A PRESIDENTIAL ENCORE

The city parade went off without a hitch. Not more than a couple days later, my phone rang. Again, it was Chessie HQ, and again they had a directive as clear as any red signal I've ever faced. The float was going to be in the presidential inaugural parade two weeks hence, representing the 150th Anniversary of American Railroad. Without fail.

We were told that the AAR had seen or heard of the float and requested Chessie repurpose it for the inauguration. I suspect that another float had something to do with the sudden decision. The Southern Railway was also celebrating the 150th Anniversary of its earliest predecessor and had built a beautiful working replica of its first locomotive, the *Best Friend of Charleston*.

That locomotive would appear in the inaugural parade, boiling water and turning wheels as the centerpiece of the South Carolina state float. No one I ever spoke with would openly admit it, but I'd lay dollars to donuts that both Chessie and the AAR decided it just wouldn't do for South Carolina to steal the show while no one else celebrated the sesquicentennial of the railroad industry in general. A half-century ago, good old-fashioned railroad public relations still mattered.

The first snag was the tractor. It simply would not be appropriate for a Marine Corps vehicle to pull an inaugural

parade float celebrating private enterprise — regardless of the fact that U.S. Army engineers had been detailed to America's first railroads to assist with their location.

Baltimore is a major port city with a lot of drayage going on. We reached out to Ringer Trucking, which had a beautifully restored 1940-something Mack tractor it trotted out for special moves. Gary Ringer, the firm's owner, was delighted to pitch in with it, and even drive.

The next snag was getting the float to and from D.C., 40 miles away. We could safely manage 15 mph over the road, which also made us a rolling roadblock. After much explaining, the Maryland State Police agreed to a roundabout route and an escort to the D.C. line. However, we could only move between midnight and 5 or 6 in the morning. It took us two nights to get there and two to get back. That subtracted four more nights of sleep.

SAFETY SNAGS

The inaugural committee provided prep space in an empty brick shop building at the Washington Navy Yard. It had the ambience of a prison and the warmth of a meat locker. But at least it was inside.

We did have to reinstall the red-white-and-blue cotton bunting, which hung from the deck almost to the ground. Everyone agreed the letters "DoD" or "USMC" shouldn't show too prominently.

The day before the parade, a chap from the Secret Service stopped by. We were not special — every float got a going-over. As I was officially the "Parade Marshal" for this particular float, I had the privilege of being told we could not participate because the bunting was too close to the ground. Someone could hide underneath and suddenly menace the President.

Negotiations ensued. The bottom of the trailer was roughly 20 inches above the pavement. After much lifting of bunting and a bit of common sense, the Secret Service agreed that the threat profile was manageable. We were in.

Or so we thought. A few hours later, an inspector from the D.C. Fire Marshal's Office introduced himself and did a final safety check. He showed up around 4 p.m., just as we were hoping to wrap things up and find warmth, hot food, and sleep — somewhere.

With a pair of scissors from his pocket, he snipped a few inches of bunting from an in-

**WE WERE
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THE CHRISTMAS
HOLIDAYS. 'WITH-
OUT FAIL,' AS THEY
LIKED TO SAY AT
CHESSIE HQ IN
CLEVELAND'S
TERMINAL TOWER.**

conspicuous place and touched a corner of the cloth with just a hint of flame. In a second or two it was ash on the floor. We were surprised. He was not.

More negotiations ensued, and he was adamant that the float could not appear in the parade. Then he took pity on us, and said there was a paint store 20 minutes away in northeast D.C. If I could get there in time and they had a certain kind of liquid fire retardant, and if we thoroughly sprayed the bunting with it, he would come back in the morning and test it again.

Never before and not since have I made such good time getting through D.C. traffic. I bought every can of the stuff they had plus a couple of pump sprayers and was leaving the store as they were turning off the lights. Back at the Navy Yard, we soaked the bunting and headed to Baltimore for a very few hours of sleep.

Early the next morning — the day of the parade — the inspector again hacked off a piece of bunting but couldn't light it.

The water-based retardant had not dried — it had frozen solid. It would have taken an acetylene torch to set the bunting aflame.

"You're good to go," he said.

AUGUST IN JANUARY

And so, when called, we lumbered to a vast parking area at RFK Stadium and waited to take our place in the lineup. We were fortunate that we had only a handful of folks and not an entire marching band or military unit. No rifles, skimpy costumes, or tubas for us — just nice warm coats.

Except that I took mine off at the foot of Pennsylvania Avenue. The race between the engine and a horse allegedly took place in the summer of 1830, and if I was to be channeling Peter Cooper it was also going to be August, but in Washington, at 25 degrees with a stiff wind blowing. I was young and stubborn and learned a lesson about winter clothing that day.

The high point was passing the president's reviewing stand and having the good sense to gesture in the direction of President Carter. Apparently, the CBS video feed caught me waving and cut to the president clapping. He might have been clapping at the previous float, but whatever happened made Cleveland HQ very happy. There was a congratulatory telegram waiting for me when I got home the next day.

The rest of the parade was uneventful but incredibly cold. By the time we made the turn at the west end of Pennsylvania Avenue to return to the starting point, I knew I was in a bit of trouble. At RFK Stadium, the crew got me down off the thing and helped me onto a warm bus. I don't recall how I got to my brother's apartment in D.C.

I recovered enough by evening to make it to one of the inaugural parties, which reminded me greatly of a crowded college mixer. That was a disappointment, but at least the day ended without major disaster, without discernible frostbite, and in a nice warm bed. Sometimes, that is as good as it gets. — John P. Hankey

Mining anthracite

Entrepreneurial owner
builds castoff lines
into regional powerhouse
Reading & Northern



success in country

Story and photos
by Scott A. Hartley



Operations Department staff at Reading & Northern's Port Clinton headquarters prepare to give a roll-by inspection of the North Reading Fast Freight — led by locomotives with a special Fast Freight paint scheme — on May 23, 2024.



Reading & Northern owner and CEO Andrew M. Muller Jr., is at home with the throttle of the railroad's former Reading 4-8-4 No. 2102.



Purple NW2 No. 413, built for the Erie in 1948, was the first locomotive of Reading & Northern predecessor Blue Mountain & Reading when it began operations in 1983. It is switching a passenger consist at Temple, Pa., Sept. 15, 1985.

It happens six afternoons a week. We're inside Reading Blue Mountain & Northern's headquarters at Port Clinton, Pa. The replica 19th-century offices usually are abuzz with activity, but shortly after 2 p.m., conversations seem to stop. Even the railroad's always-busy customer service representatives speak in muted tones. The day switcher crew has parked and shut down their green and yellow SW8 on a siding.

The occasion? In a few minutes, the railroad's North Reading Fast Freight will pass on its 228-mile round trip the length of the Main Line between North Reading and Pittston, Pa. It is the star among several scheduled "Fast Freight" trains.

Class I roads may embrace the Precision Scheduled Railroading concept, but RBMN actually has the "scheduled" part. Train NRFF has a scheduled time by each location on its route, and crews are expected to run on schedule. Everyone on the railroad knows owner and CEO Andrew Muller Jr. keeps a close eye on the train, even peeking at lineside cameras when he is off the property. But there is no need for worry, as NRFF rarely runs late. Employees know this train represents the railroad's attention to detail, and they watch NRFF pass with pride.

The Reading Blue Mountain & Northern — marketed as "Reading & Northern" — has come a long way from humble beginnings as the 13-mile Blue Mountain & Reading in 1983. In 2024, the 325-mile Pennsylvania regional moved 32,764 freight carloads and carried 339,000 passengers.

Although the North Reading Fast Freight may symbolize the R&N's pride, its big business in 2025 is anthracite coal.



With the historic 11-story Markle Bank & Trust Co. Building, built in 1910, as a backdrop, Reading & Northern SD40-2 No. 3057 leads a train of dried anthracite through downtown Hazleton, Pa., on Norfolk Southern trackage, on May 24, 2024.

Even as Class I bituminous coal loadings plummet as power plants switch to other fuels, there is growing worldwide demand for anthracite, and Reading & Northern serves all eastern Pennsylvania mines. R&N hauled 1.11 million metric tons of that coal — in 10,718 carloads — in 2024, turning it over to interchange partner Norfolk Southern to forward to rail customers nationwide or to ships for export.

Regional railroad, hometown roots

Andy Muller, a former schoolteacher and successful coin and precious metals

dealer, tells his story: "I had made a lot of money in the coin business," he says. "I retired when I was 34 years old, and I was doing nothing."

The conversation initiating what is now the Reading & Northern is not what one might expect.

"I was sitting in a barroom, and a guy yells over that they're going to tear the railroad out in my hometown," he says. That was Hamburg, Pa., and "the railroad" was 13 miles of the former Pennsylvania Railroad between Hamburg and Temple operated by Conrail, which wanted to abandon the line.

"I thought they shouldn't be tearing out railroads, and I don't want to see this one torn out." His decision only took a few minutes: "You know what, I'm going to try to buy it. And I went home and told my wife."

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania purchased the line but was reluctant to lease it to Muller because of his lack of railroad experience. Muller scoffs at the memory.

"Railroads are just a business," he says. "They are no different than any other. When I approached this like a business, with my passion for railroading, it made me extremely successful. I did everything for the long term."

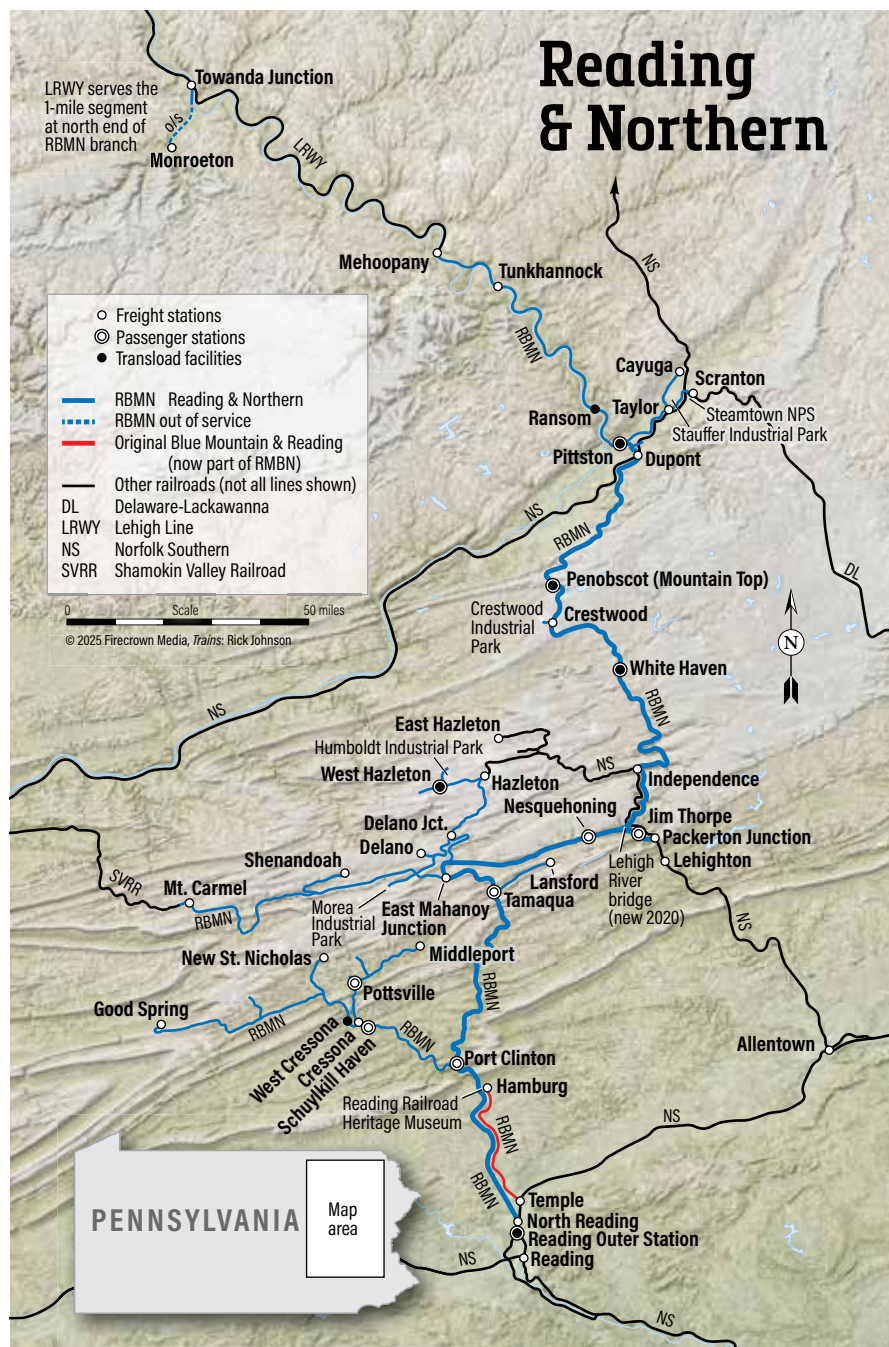
He says he received the support of the six remaining freight customers, and eventually the state leased him the line. Blue Mountain & Reading began freight operations in 1983 with a purple EMD NW2. Trackwork was the first order of business; trees were growing between the rails on a line that had handled 900 carloads in 1979.

The new railroad moved 80 cars its first year. BM&R also provided freight service briefly on three other state-owned, ex-Conrail branches. With the beginnings of a small system in place, Muller soon acquired two steam locomotives, a pair of E8 diesels, and a few passenger cars. The railroad's freight operations were strictly low-density, but BM&R quickly attracted national attention with its steam-powered excursion trains. In an era when large railroads were not reluctant to allow steam operations, BM&R's 4-8-4, 4-6-2, and E8s ranged far from home on Conrail and NJ Transit routes.

Muller looked to expand, but only with lines close to home. An obvious target was Conrail's network of former Reading Co. routes north of Reading. The big railroad had been moving 1.4 million tons of anthracite a year, largely for export to South Korea, according to Muller. That business ended in 1988, and Conrail had no interest in keeping the trackage for what little traffic remained, he says.

"I thought I could make it work, as the state did not want the line torn out," Muller says. Although Conrail had rebuilt the line's bridges, a track project stopped when the coal business ended. Assured of a state grant of \$6 million for trackwork, Muller began making monthly visits to Conrail's Philadelphia headquarters to pursue the purchase.

Wayne Michel, Reading Blue Mountain & Northern's current president, was Conrail's line sales and abandonments manager in the late 1980s. He remembers Muller "kept writing letters." Michel says "Andy had entrepreneur spirit, drive, youth, ambition, and money to make a go of it." Conrail sold Muller the 115 miles of coal-country trackage in 1990. Muller then formed Reading Blue Mountain & Northern — report-



ing marks RBMN — but began to market his railroads as the Reading & Northern. To this day, equipment may carry either name.

Although the anthracite export business was gone, Muller and his small team worked quickly to serve remaining customers and improve the physical plant. Green and yellow replaced the purple on additional diesels. Freight was the focus, and most passenger operations ended. Former Reading 4-8-4 No. 2102 handled a loaded coal train in April 1991, but was stored not long after.

The state grant went a long way toward improving tracks. The biggest customer was Lehigh Coal & Navigation, on a short segment of onetime Lehigh & New England Railway trackage near Tamaqua; it shipped

2,500 carloads of anthracite that first year. Other producers were in a cluster near Pottsville and along the onetime Reading freight line west of East Mahanoy Junction. Reading & Northern initially relied upon Conrail for car supply, but soon began to acquire its own hopper fleet. R&N added to its coal territory in 1992, when it picked up 9 miles of the former Lehigh Valley north of East Mahanoy Junction and additional Conrail trackage rights into greater Hazleton.

When, as part of a massive line-sale program, Conrail decided to spin off segments of its onetime Lehigh Valley main line between Allentown, Pa., and Athens, Pa., Muller was not surprised he was contacted. "It was another huge loser, with only 2,700

On Aug. 16, 2024, SD50 No. 5014 leads a train past an operating wig-wag grade crossing signal at Pittston, Pa.



cars annually,” he says. “But I had to get that railroad. There were only so many railroad lines within 50 miles of home.”

Conrail sold Muller only the midsection of its Lehigh Secondary between Lehighton and Mehoopany, as well as former Delaware, Lackawanna & Western trackage into greater Scranton. Conrail continued to serve and switch the Lehigh line’s largest customer, the giant Procter & Gamble plant at Mehoopany, routing cars there via its western portion of the Lehigh Secondary. Muller’s hopes of acquiring the remainder of the Lehigh Secondary were dashed when Conrail line sales were put on hold as Norfolk Southern and CSX planned to divide the railroad; NS, which ended up with the Lehigh, leased it to the new Lehigh Railway in 2009. But R&N had begun serving P&G in 2001, shifting much of the traffic to its own tracks. With little on-line business on the Lehigh Valley line south of Pittston, R&N earned revenue for several years hosting trackage-rights trains of NS and Canadian Pacific. The Crestwood Industrial Park near Mountain Top received regular service. More active was former Lackawanna trackage in the Wilkes-Barre area.

With the addition of Reading & Northern’s new “Lehigh Division,” it appeared Muller had assembled a Reading-Scranton through route, something no predecessor had managed. But the R&N-owned Reading and Lehigh Divisions were separated by 18 miles of track between Haucks and Jim



Former Reading 4-8-4 No. 2101 and 4-6-2 No. 425, built for the Gulf, Mobile & Northern, doublehead on Aug. 13, 2022, crossing the new Lehigh River bridge at Nesquehoning Junction, Pa. No. 425 is expected to return to operation this year following its FRA 1,472-day inspection.

Thorpe, owned by Carbon and Schuylkill counties. Although R&N had operating rights over the former Central Railroad of New Jersey line, short lines initially served on-line customers. R&N later leased the tracks and began serving customers, but Muller did not wish to pay for major infrastructure upgrades on track he did not own. (The counties sold Muller the route in 2021, and R&N forces currently are

improving tracks and installing CTC.)

Another obstacle was that Reading & Northern needed to use Conrail tracks at Packerton Junction, near Lehighton, to reach its own Lehigh Division. Muller recalls calling faraway dispatchers and “waiting for a half hour when there were no trains within 50 miles.” The solution was to reactivate an old CNJ bridge in Jim Thorpe and rebuild tracks to a point north

Steam and passengers: significant sidelines

Like freight service, R&N excursion operation keeps growing

SHANE FREDERICKSON LOOKS COMFORTABLE sitting in the fireman's seat of Reading & Northern No. 2102, as the big 4-8-4 makes a 16-mile backup move from the Port Clinton steam shops to North Reading to couple onto 2024's first Iron Horse Ramble train. A fourth-generation railroader, Frederickson is R&N's most senior engineer, hiring out on the Blue Mountain & Reading in 1983. He continually fine-tunes valves controlling the engine's stoker and water inputs. Chuck Trusdell is at the throttle; the two engineers will split the running over the daylong trip to the tourist town of Jim Thorpe and return. Frederickson is carefully listening to every sound of the engine.

In a short time, No. 2102 will singlehandedly lead a 15-car train filled with 600 passengers. Reading & Northern lets the big Northern out on the main line without a diesel helper, so the crew wants to make sure their engine is in perfect shape. Frederickson is smiling as he asks several times, "What do you think?" then answers his own question: "Pretty neat, huh?"

His confidence was justified. No. 2102 capably handled the day's work, bringing the passengers to Jim Thorpe and offering hundreds more at trackside a rare chance to see big steam at work.

"You cannot make a profit on a steam engine," declares Reading & Northern CEO Andrew M. Muller Jr. He speaks from experience, having owned No. 2102 for 40 years. It was stored for 30 of those years, emerging from a five-year, \$2.7 million rebuilding in 2022. Although the big 4-8-4 runs only about a half dozen times each year, it has become the symbol of the railroad's popular excursion services.

Muller began offering passenger service on the Blue Mountain & Reading in 1985. His focus turned almost entirely to freight until 2005, when he established the Lehigh Gorge Scenic Railway to tap into the tourist market in Jim Thorpe. Success there led to establishing diesel-powered passenger trains from several on-line towns to Jim Thorpe. Most popular are trains from North Reading and Pittston, both making day-long round trips. Trains began originating at a new station in Nesquehoning in 2024. R&N and LGSR carried more than 339,000 passengers in 2024. Muller says he was able to cover passenger losses until the operations finally became profitable in 2017. "I like to see the smiling faces when people get off the train."

Muller rides his trains. He might be seen at the throttle of No. 2102, although more often he and his wife Carol are on the open platform of one of R&N's business cars.

Overseeing passenger operations is Senior Vice President Matt Fisher. A former public-school educator, he started as a part-time car host in 2005, and became a full-time general manager in 2014. He works with a staff of 23 full-time and 69 part-time employees, and interacts with all of the railroad's departments to coordinate an always growing number of trains.

Things get busy at Jim Thorpe, as some weekends see four passenger trains moving at once. R&N's passenger fleet has grown to 55 cars, an increasing number of them first class. Three full-length domes are popular on the Lehigh Gorge trains. "Revenue is up significantly as tourists want a premium experience," Fisher says. Four Budd RDCs regularly handle the weekend trains from North Reading to Jim Thorpe, and also are assigned to private charters and rare-mileage excursions. — *Scott A. Hartley*



Reading & Northern engineer Shane Frederickson is in the fireman's seat of 4-8-4 No. 2102 on May 25, 2024.

of Lehigh, where R&N trains could directly access their line. R&N named the new interlocking "Independence."

Reading & Northern's Main Line became reality in 2020, with completion of a new bridge just outside Jim Thorpe. It allows trains to proceed from the former CNJ to the Lehigh line without changing ends. "I was obsessed with building that bridge," Muller says. After years of discussion, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania contributed \$10 million and the railroad \$4 million to make it happen.

With a 325-mile system assembled, Muller has placed emphasis in upgrading trackage, installing 126 miles of welded rail, and implementing centralized traffic control over the entire Reading-Pittston Main Line. (The Lehigh Secondary had CTC when it was acquired; that has been updated.) All R&N routes are dispatched from Port Clinton. Maximum freight speed

on the railroad is 40 mph. Passenger trains are allowed 45 mph.

It wasn't always easy

Tyler Glass joined Reading & Northern as a conductor in 1990, as the new railroad was taking over the neglected Reading coal-territory lines. Today he is executive vice president-operations, and has participated in every phase of R&N's development. The railroad grew a little bit at a time, he says. "Some days we did not have any reason to be happy. But we always felt it would get better. And it did get better, as the railroad kept building."

Growth can be challenging, he says: "It didn't happen overnight. It's a good thing, as we couldn't absorb it all at once." Adding mileage and shippers also requires quickly hiring and training more employees, and working with interchange partners to ensure they can handle R&N's extra traffic.

Reading & Northern currently serves 75 on-line customers. R&N considers companies across the country that receive Pennsylvania anthracite to be customers, as well.

Rail customers come and go. "Every year we may lose someone, and you spend all the time trying to get business," Muller says. "We have a marketing department equal to any railroad in the country. We're knocking on doors every day." Anthracite sells itself, he says, because new steel mills are opening, but attracting other on-line businesses is difficult: "Getting corporate change is almost impossible. But we are constantly beating up on them. We never give up."

Adding to business

Reading & Northern boosted its carload count in 2016 when it acquired 7 miles of track and switching rights in the Humboldt industrial Park in Hazleton. R&N serves 12 customers in the 5-square-mile park near



R&N trains meet at Humboldt Industrial Park at West Hazleton, Pa., on May 24, 2024. SD40-2 No. 1983 wears a 40th-anniversary paint scheme featuring Blue Mountain & Reading's original purple. The railroad serves a dozen customers at the industrial park.

busy Interstate 81. The railroad soon added a “fast freight” to interchange inbound and outbound Humboldt cars with Norfolk Southern each night.

In 2019, Muller established Ransom Warehouse & Transload and purchased a large building in Ransom, on the railroad's Susquehanna Branch. The facility can store commodities received by rail or truck for nearby customers; its proximity to Mehoopany allows Procter & Gamble to store wood pulp. This services uses a small fleet of black R&N boxcars.

Fracking — the process of extracting natural gas from underground shale — is common along the Marcellus Shale formation, which passes through northeastern Pennsylvania. In 2021, the railroad opened a transloading yard in Tunkhannock to handle carloads of Midwestern frac sand. Norfolk Southern delivers unit trains of sand in Reading, which then continue north on R&N. Yards in Pittston provide space for the long trains, and cuts of cars are brought to Tunkhannock by R&N local crews. Although business was down in 2024, Muller says “Fracking will be big in Pennsylvania and it's going to continue that way.”

The railroad found itself in the right place at the right time in 2022, when KME Mobile Equipment closed its fire apparatus plant at Nesquehoning, Pa. The town is just about midway on R&N's Reading to Wil-



Early morning fog from the nearby Lehigh River hangs over Reading & Northern's frac sand facility at Tunkhannock, Pa., on Aug. 16, 2024. The transload facility was opened in 2021 to handle the sand, which arrives in unit trains from Norfolk Southern.

kes-Barre main line, and Muller jumped at the opportunity to purchase the 10-acre, nine-building site. Although R&N administration will remain at Port Clinton, most mechanical and other functions are shifting to the new campus. A large structure with overhead cranes already is handling major locomotive repairs. Other buildings will accommodate car repair and rebuilding, training, police headquarters, passenger operations, motor vehicle repairs, and other functions. A new passenger station with a track, shelter, and boarding platform is immediately in front of the campus.

A paint shop at Nesquehoning will handle R&N's highway vehicles. Locomotive

and railcar painting will continue in West Cressona, keeping a crew of five busy.

Coal

Growing industrial needs and global conflicts have resulted in rapidly increasing demand for Pennsylvania anthracite, the sole source in the United States. Russia and Ukraine also are major suppliers, but their conflict has resulted in lower production, shipping issues, and international sanctions. This has made R&N a busy coal railroad, moving the material from 25 mines at 15 rail loading locations.

The Marketing and Sales Department includes several officers who report to

Michel. They cover consumer products, petrochemicals/minerals, customer service, distribution services, and coal. Heading coal marketing is senior vice president Bill Clark, who joined R&N after many years with Pennsylvania Power & Light and Norfolk Southern. He oversees vice presidents responsible for coal sourcing and coal business development.

Anthracite, used for home heating and steelmaking in the 1800s, was eclipsed by more plentiful bituminous coal. Conrail's decision to sell the majority of its lines in anthracite country seemed to signal the conclusion of anthracite's 20th-century decline. Instead, there is growing demand to feed the steel industry's increasing use of electric arc furnace production. Anthracite is also essential in recycling zinc from steel-making and for sugar beet processing, which helps explain Reading & Northern's hoppers in freight trains from coast to coast. Coal leaves R&N in carload lots or unit trains, interchanged with Norfolk Southern at Reading.

"We micromanage the coal business," Michel says. In 2024, Eric Peters, executive vice president of transportation and fleet management and a former NS operations official who joined R&N in 2020, added overseeing an expanding coal car fleet to his duties. The railroad owns 1,700 coal-carrying railcars — steel or aluminum, open-top or covered, dump-bottom, rotary dump, or rapid discharge. Some receiving customers drop coal directly into pits beneath the tracks, while others have conveyor systems. (Reading & Northern has invested in unloading systems for off-line customers.) In addition, four locations ship heat-dried anthracite, which must be handled in covered hoppers. All cars are secondhand, often purchased in large quantities during business downturns. "Andy buys cars when others are selling," Michel says.

Coal is not the only source of growth. Consumer products, forestry products, and chemicals also have expanded. The railroad interchanges with Norfolk Southern at Reading and Taylor Yard, near Scranton. Interchange with Canadian Pacific Kansas City moves via NS haulage through Taylor. "Our Norfolk Southern interchanges are perfect," Muller says. "I cannot say enough about the relationship I have now developed with NS."

Reading & Northern is a busy railroad, with an average of 20 crew starts each day.

Every car counts

Two crews have reported at 7 a.m. at R&N's tiny Tamaqua yard office. Director of Safety John Smolczynski, working in the field this day, conducts a job briefing, as both crews will be making up trains at the yard's north end, and another crew is at



A new locomotive shop is part of the R&N's Nesquehoning campus, a former fire apparatus plant acquired by the railroad in 2022. SW8 No. 801 has positioned SD50 No. 5021 for the installation of a rebuilt prime mover.



Coal the old-fashioned way: Reading & Northern engineer/conductor Chris Bost has dropped two loads on the main at Good Spring, Pa., and rides an empty hopper for the shove into Summit Coal's loading area on June 9, 2017.

work at the south end. Smolczynski will also move locomotives to hasten both trains' departures. Train QAED engineer John Shucavage and conductor Hudson Henry board GP39RN No. 2533 and make several moves in conjunction with the two other crews before receiving a clear CTC signal to head north on the Main Line. QAED, known as "the Delano Job," will work the Delano and Morea running tracks, both former Lehigh Valley branches. The crew will move cars for a plastics customer at Delano, and expects to pick up three loaded coal cars at Skytop, the end of the Morea track.

Smolczynski, driving ahead in a company SUV, reports one hopper already is loaded. The train completes switching at Delano, picking up an empty covered hopper, and

continues the 5 rural miles to Skytop, where a dump truck is loading the second hopper with anthracite. Henry checks his paperwork and tells Shucavage the coal customer's scheduled "service window" continues for nearly 2 hours. R&N promises to serve each customer — whether on a busy line or a once-a-week branch — during an established 2-hour window, so QAED must wait. A few minutes later, the coal company's owner arrives, and indicates he will not be releasing the loaded cars today. QAED heads back to Tamaqua to help switch out cars for the evening's Fast Freights.

Muller points out QAED's one-car day is unusual. During a 2024 conversation with *Trains*, he says Reading & Northern had carried 344 cars the previous day.



Reading & Northern conductor Hudson Henry has lined the switch for train DEQA at Delano Junction on May 24, 2024. The short train is unusual, but CEO Andy Muller says every car counts.

Reading & Northern's North Reading Fast Freight passes the yard office at Penobscot, Pa., on Aug. 16, 2024. One of many replica structures on the railroad, the office was built in 2006.





Former Conrail U33Bs, seen at West Cressona on Feb. 9, 1991, were the first power for the new Reading Blue Mountain & Northern, and a step up from the Blue Mountain & Reading's switchers and ex-Santa Fe CF7s.

"Years ago, I heard that railroads wanted to get rid of boxcars. I can't believe that is a discussion," Muller says. "What are trucks? Carload freight!" He explains how every R&N carload counts: "You can't get a 100-car train without the 100th car."

Moving the business

In 2018, while larger railroads were adopting Precision Scheduled Railroading, Reading & Northern introduced "Fast Freights," running on schedules between specific endpoints. One of the first was the West Hazleton Fast Freight, between the Humboldt Industrial Park and North Reading. The North Reading Fast Freight of today initially ran only between North Reading and Jim Thorpe, Pa., where its cars could be picked up later by the Pittston Fast Freight for forwarding to the north end. That changed with the 2020 opening of the new direct-connection bridge at Nesquehoning Junction. Glass, the EVP-operations, observes: "No one thought that we could use one crew to make a North Reading to Pittston turn in 10 hours, but we do it six days a week."

Reading & Northern now has 357 full- and part-time employees, approximately 60 in train service. Muller says "the company hires based on good attitude." He will hire "people who have proven themselves at other railroads," but seems to prefer people with no railroad experience. "We want to train them the Reading & Northern way," he says. Glass says many train service employees also are railroad enthusiasts: "People are here because they love what they do."

Moving forward from the elderly switchers and former Santa Fe CF7s that

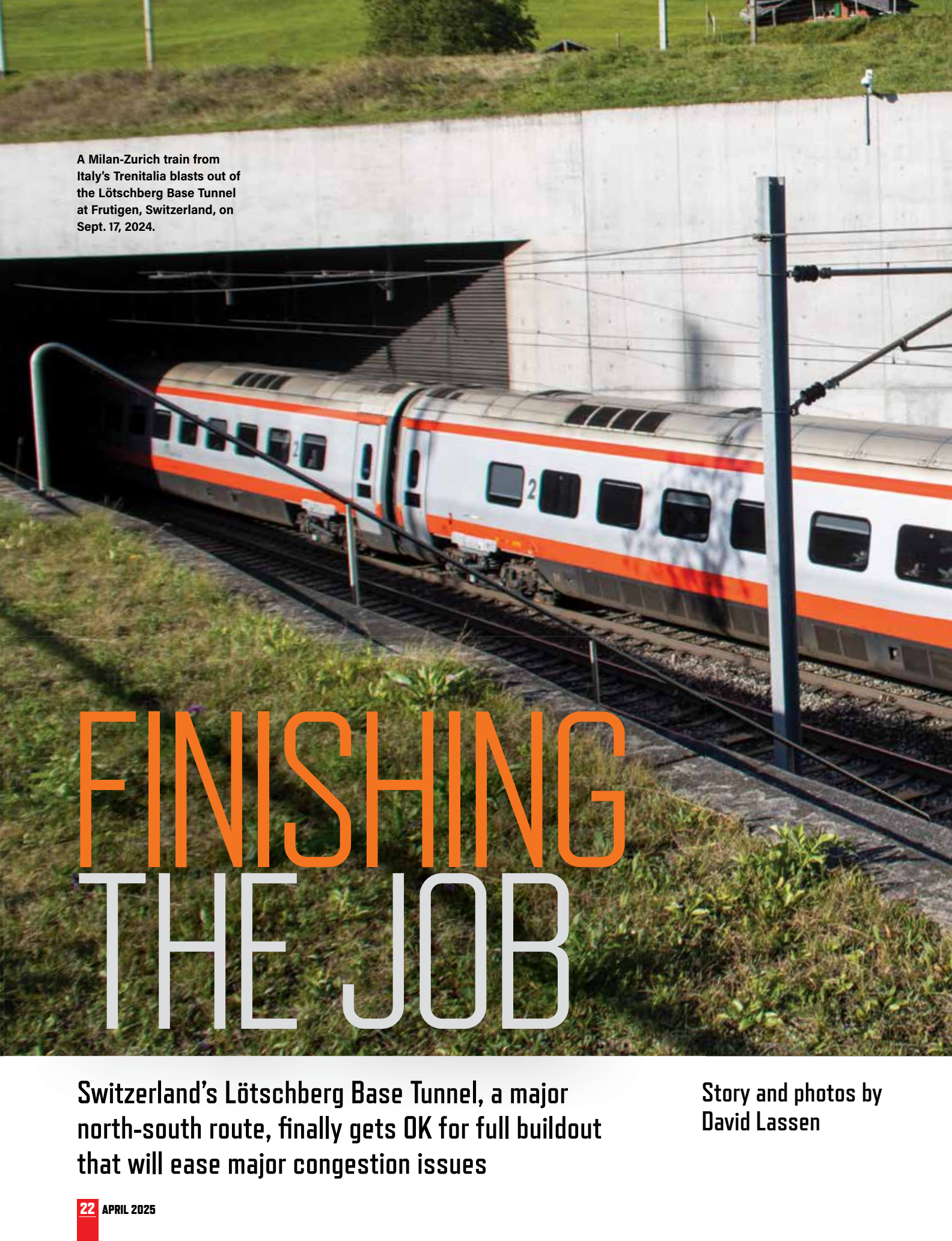
powered Blue Mountain & Reading trains, the new R&N relied on former Conrail U23Bs and U33Bs. They soon gave way to secondhand EMD locomotives from a variety of sources, including SD38s from Grand Trunk Western and Conrail, and ex-Union Pacific SD40-2s and SD50s. A handful of younger EMD switchers joined the ranks, as did a half-dozen Santa Fe GP30Us. More recent arrivals were more SD50s — this time from CSX — and a growing number of former Norfolk Southern SD40-2s and GP38-2s.

The railroad has taken advantage of a buyers' market for secondhand power. Some recent acquisitions have been stored on arrival to await future needs. Most power wears varied green-and-yellow schemes. Three ex-CSX SD50s wear a special black-and-white "Fast Freight" scheme; the same colors are on the F9A-B set that previously led Norfolk Southern's business train.

An entrepreneur

Michel does not hide his admiration of Muller. "Andy is one of the last entrepreneurs," he says. He points out others who have purchased marginal lines, and built them up or abandoned them — but ultimately departed the properties.

To this day, Muller owns the railroad and its equipment and real estate. He stresses that not having to answer to stockholders allows him to operate looking to the future. He has fulfilled his goal of creating a railroad system close to home and made profits where others could not. And as he reminds anyone he talks with, "I'm not a railroader. I'm a businessman who just happens to like trains." **I**

A high-speed train, white with orange stripes, is emerging from a tunnel. The train is on tracks with overhead power lines. The background shows a grassy hillside.

A Milan-Zurich train from Italy's Trenitalia blasts out of the Lötschberg Base Tunnel at Frutigen, Switzerland, on Sept. 17, 2024.

FINISHING THE JOB

Switzerland's Lötschberg Base Tunnel, a major north-south route, finally gets OK for full buildout that will ease major congestion issues

Story and photos by
David Lassen



Nobody does railroad tunnels quite like the Swiss. But even the Swiss have never done a major tunnel quite like this.

The Lötschberg Base Tunnel, a 34.6-kilometer (21.5-mile) tunnel that is part of the extensive New Railway Link through the Alps, or NRLA, opened in 2007.

More than two decades later, they're finally going to finish it.

The base tunnel — “base” distinguishes it from an earlier Lötschberg Tunnel, dating to 1913 and still in use — runs

from Frutigen, in the canton of Bern, south to Raron, in the canton of Valais. It was designed to have two single-track tunnels for its full length. But for cost and political reasons, the tunnel



A crowd awaits ceremonies on June 15, 2007, marking the opening of the Lötschberg Base Tunnel. Spectators are seated on stairs now used for emergency train evacuation. Three photos, BLS/Thomas Andenmatten

only has 14 kilometers of double track, at its southern end. The rest is single track.

This was part of a compromise also involving the Gotthard Base Tunnel, at 35.5 miles the world's longest rail tunnel [see "The Hole Truth," February 2017]. Gotthard was completed in full, but related projects were postponed or eliminated. At Lötschberg, the

existence of the original Lötschberg Tunnel allowed the base tunnel to be pared back.

"They decided, 'we won't make the whole tunnel ... we have the old line for some trains,'" says Willi Frauenfelder, a retired engineer — the technical kind, not the train-driver type — for BLS, the railway that operates the tunnel. He is one of 10 people who serve as guides

for appointment-only group tunnel tours. (On this day, his "group" is one U.S. journalist.)

The compromise version opened June 14, 2007. Along with the 14 kilometers of double track, another 14 kilometers has a tube for the second track, but it is finished only as a roadway for maintenance access and emergency evacuations. For the final 7 kilometers to Frutigen, an older, smaller tunnel — created for geological exploration in advance of the base tunnel — allows evacuations but is inadequate for rail use.

The tunnel can handle about 110 trains a day. The old route sees local passenger service, a few freight trains, and a busy car-transport service. But base tunnel capacity — about 50 passenger trains and 60 freights — has long since been reached.

"The cargo trains have increased a little," Frauenfelder says. "But passenger traffic has exploded, a lot more than planned." Thanks to the base tunnel, extensive commuter

traffic has developed between Visp, south of the tunnel, and Thun and Bern to the north. A train trip between Visp and Bern, the Swiss capital, takes as little as 57 minutes; Visp-Thun, as little as 36 minutes. That's an hour less than travel via the original tunnel, which required a train change in Brig. (By car, Visp-Bern is about 2 hours, per Google Maps, and that's off peak in good weather.)

BLS owns and operates 420 kilometers (261 miles) of railway, primarily in the canton of Bern but also in parts of six others. The initial-only name stems from predecessor Bern-Lötschberg-Simplon Bahn. BLS operates rail, bus, and boat passenger services, and offers freight service throughout Europe, with more than 20,000 trains annually. (Learn more at its website: bls.ch.) The company built the tunnel through a subsidiary, and has long sought its completion. In March 2024, it received the go-ahead: the Swiss parliament approved funding,

The concrete floor slab is installed in the west tube of the tunnel at Mitholz during construction in 2005.





Concrete forms were used for the tunnel's sidewalls, while the roof was sprayed with shotcrete.

about 1.7 billion Swiss francs — approximately \$1.86 billion — as part of a national package of rail projects. Completion is expected about 2034.

Approval came while the Gotthard Base Tunnel was still undergoing repairs from a derailment that limited its use for more than a year [see “Gotthard Pass Revival,” March 2024]. Did this influence the decision to finally complete the Lötschberg project? “The Swiss have seen it is necessary to have two lines through the Alps,” Frauenfelder says. “I think the accident has helped a little bit, yes.”

TUNNEL CONSTRUCTION

The 34.6-kilometer tunnel route actually involves about 88 kilometers (54.6 miles) of tunneling. That includes the separate but parallel primary tubes; various access tunnels; more than 100 connections between the parallel bores, created every 333 meters to allow evacuation access; and a section to position a tunnel boring machine. (That fairly lengthy tunnel was intended as the southern end of a new car transport operation. This was ultimately not developed because of its impact on overall tunnel capacity. The unfinished tunnel to Niedergesteln has now been sealed.)

The project relied more on blasting than the massive tunnel-boring machines used at the Gotthard Base Tunnel and many other modern projects. At Gotthard, machines did about 80% of the tunneling; at Lötschberg, it was more like 20%. The reasons, Frauenfelder explains,

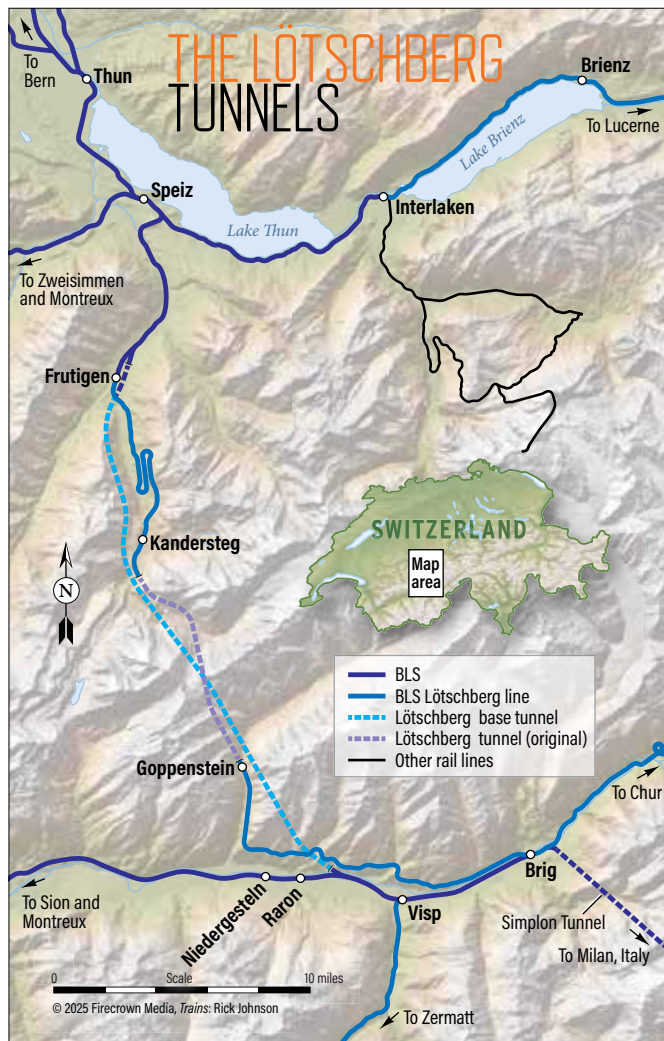
are that much of the geology did not lend itself to use of the machines, and there was no place at the north end of the tunnel to start a boring machine because of the town of Frutigen.

Construction was slow going. A blast would clear 1 to 4 meters of material, depending on the type of rock. (A meter, you’ll recall, is slightly more than a yard.) After the dust from the explosion settled and the material was cleared, some 110 holes would be drilled into the rock face and filled with a total of 400 kilos (about 880 pounds) of dynamite. The process was then repeated. It took about 8 hours to complete one cycle, so at best, progress was 12 meters in a day — twice that, if you take into account that tunneling was done from two directions. Still, tunneling began in May 1999; breakthrough, when the two sides met, came six years later.

The tunnel boring machines were faster. Working for 16 hours, followed by 8 hours of maintenance, they could make 25 to 30 meters a day, up to 50 meters on the best days.

Either way, it was difficult work, Frauenfelder notes. The ambient temperature inside was about 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit). “They tried to cool it with air,” he says, “but the stone is hot — hot like an oven.” (Today, the temperature is about 31 Celsius/88 Fahrenheit.)

The process of finishing the tube depends on how it was created. Prefabricated concrete sections complete portions made by boring machine;



An SBB passenger train is just a blur as it passes an observation window inside the base tunnel at Mitholz.

sprayed concrete is used on blasted areas. Either way, it requires more than installing concrete. First, a layer of plastic is put in place to prevent water from seeping into the tunnel. This guides it into a drainage system that runs beneath the tunnel. With the tunnel peaked near the center, about 40 liters

(10.5 gallons) a second flows from the north end, and about twice that from the south end. (A separate system handles drainage of water or other fluids that come from inside the tunnel.)

Since the water remains outside the tunnel, it is considered “clean,” but it cannot simply be



The ornate station of a BLS predecessor — no longer on an active rail line but a short walk from the current Frutigen station — has been restored to serve as a visitor's center for the tunnel project. The scheduled group tours begin here.

expelled into the nearest waterway; it is too warm and would be detrimental to wildlife. On the Frutigen end, this water goes into a fish farming operation that produces Oona caviar (look it up online). Another fish farm is near the south portal. Eventually the water cools and is returned to local waterways.

As is current practice, track is fixed to the tunnel's concrete floor — there are ties, but no ballast. On one side, there's an elevated platform with a hand-rail; this walkway provides an escape route to those regularly

spaced connecting tunnels, allowing passengers from a disabled train to reach the other tube — some 40 meters away — for evacuation. Beneath that walkway are fiber communication cables and low-voltage electrical lines. On the other side, a smaller platform encloses the high voltage line carrying current for the rail line; about every 3 kilometers, this connects to the overhead catenary wire. This side also has thick high-voltage cables transporting electricity through the mountains for the rail network elsewhere.

"We buy electricity from SBB [the Swiss Federal Railways]," Frauenfelder says. "... It's our own network for the railway. SBB has some power plants in the valley, and [the cables] transport energy to the rest of Switzerland, instead of wires over the mountains."

GOING INSIDE

A visitor can see details of the tunnel structure because one portion of the second bore in the center section — otherwise a roadway — is finished like the active railway. This has been

used to test various technical aspects, but also provides an ideal way for tour groups to see what the railway tube looks like — since visitors can hardly be allowed to roam in a bore where trains operate at up to 200 kilometers per hour (125 mph). Nearby displays explain more about the project; there's also a small viewing window into the rail tunnel.

While useful, this area's days are numbered. It will be destroyed in the process of finishing the existing bore and excavating the final 7 kilometers

THE OLD ROUTE

Original Lötschberg Tunnel still plays significant role

IN THE MOUNTAINS ABOVE the Lötschberg Base Tunnel, the original Lötschberg Tunnel continues to serve as a relief valve for traffic through the lower route, as well as a shortcut for drivers.

The older tunnel, built between 1907 and 1913, is 14.6 kilometers long (just over 9 miles). It connects Kandersteg on its north end and Goppenstein at the south, with portals at 1,200 meters

(3,937 feet) and 1,216 meters (3,990 feet) respectively. Its summit, at 4,070 feet, is the highest point on the main Swiss rail network. In October 2024, BLS finished a six-year, 180 million franc (\$198 million) project to increase clearance and to convert it to the same sort of direct-fixed track structure as the base tunnel.

BLS operates hourly passenger trains via this route; it also

sees six to 10 freight trains per day. "They let the light trains go over the mountains, for which an additional locomotive is not necessary," says Willi Frauenfelder, the retired BLS engineer and base-tunnel tour guide.

Arguably, the route's most significant traffic is the car-transport operation between Kandersteg and Goppenstein. It saves drivers up to an hour, compared to a

ELEMENTS OF THE TUNNEL



The airlock door swings open after pressurization equalizes, allowing a vehicle to continue down the access road into the tunnel at Mitholz. This would be the route for rescue buses in an emergency.

to complete double tracking. The existing roadway, Frauenfelder explains, was done as cheaply as possible. It has the absolute minimum of concrete finishing to prevent rockfalls, and a much sturdier floor will be required for the rail line.

Our trip inside the tunnel was the third phase of a tour that began at a visitors' center in Frutigen, followed by a short drive to the spot where trains emerge from a tunnel under the town, then plunge into the base tunnel. (Accessible with-

out taking a tour, this is about a mile from the Frutigen station.) Stairs run alongside the track in the area between the tunnels. This — the widest stairway in Switzerland, Frauenfelder says — is where a train would stop for evacuation if a fire or another emergency developed within the tunnel, but the train was able to exit before halting.

Getting out of the tunnel, incidentally, is the preferred action, if possible.

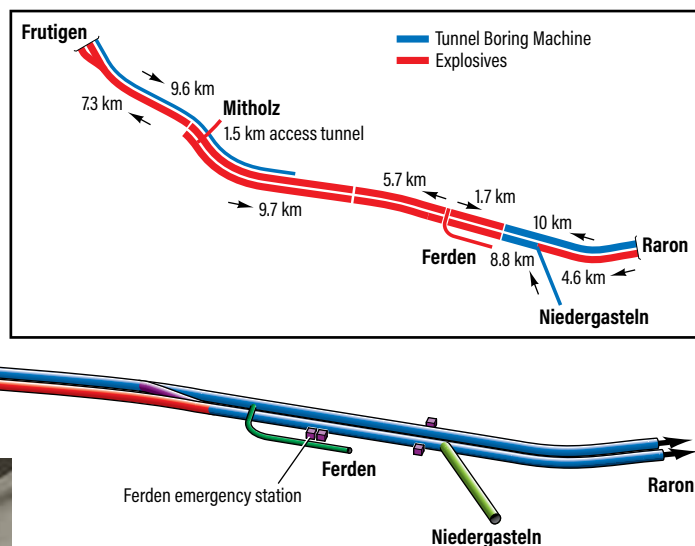
"A coach doesn't burn in 2 minutes," Frauenfelder says. "If

trip over the Alps. Drivers guide their vehicles onto special auto-carrier cars, then stay in the vehicles for the 20-minute trip through the tunnel. At the other end, they drive off and are on their way. These trains can run as frequently as every 7½ minutes; Frauenfelder says that on their best days, they have moved up to 10,000 vehicles.

Tunnel renovations should

make the ride more pleasant for those on the car-transport trains. Previously, to maximize clearance, the track had a minimal amount of ballast, which made the ride a bit rough, Frauenfelder says. And the auto-carrier railcars were only minimally sprung. So, he says, "the car was" His gesture made it clear there was a lot of bouncing up and down. — David Lassen

David Lassen



The massive vault at Mitholz that contains equipment for the tunnel's technical systems was, during construction, site of a concrete plant. Each of these vaults has a nearby twin to provide a backup.

you have a small fire, the coach should have about 20 minutes until it is a big fire. So [the driver] can, together with the train staff, decide, 'We try to go out.' It's better for the people when we go out."

The next-best option is to stop at an emergency station at Ferden, near the point where the tunnel goes from two tracks to one. There, the tunnel has an enhanced ventilation system to carry out smoke or fumes, as



Electric locomotives await car-transporter service in Kandersteg. The rust-colored units were in their final months of operation.



well as a large waiting room for passengers. “It’s not friendly,” Frauenfelder says, smiling. “No ticket office . . . nothing. But it is a little better to wait for a second train.”

We see a third option inside the tunnel during the tour’s final portion.

We drive into the moun-

tains and enter the tunnel at Mitholz; Frauenfelder calls the control center for access, and a gate into the mountainside swings open. We soon arrive at an airlock. A door closes behind us while the air pressure equalizes, then the door in front swings open, allowing us to proceed. The slight pres-

surization is another safety measure; in case of a fire in the rail tunnel, the difference in pressure would keep smoke from entering the evacuation area.

Once through the airlock, it’s a steep downward drive of more than a kilometer to reach the 14-kilometer roadway tunnel.

Lighted, with an antenna running along its top to allow cell or radio communications, this is the route buses would take to evacuate passengers from a train emergency in the segment where the roadway parallels the rail tunnel. This has never been necessary, although drills have twice tested the procedure.

IF YOU GO

Route with original tunnel includes a small-town gem

BLS’ ROUTE VIA THE ORIGINAL LÖTSCHBERG TUNNEL is another on the long list of scenic mountain rail routes in Switzerland; passenger service on that line is hourly. Kandersteg, the small town (population about 1,200) near the tunnel’s north portal, is a hiking and skiing destination in a spectacular setting. Its long tourism history predates the rail line, and outside of town is the Inter-

national Scout Centre, home of the World Organization of the Scouting Movement.

I stayed at the Chalet Hotel Adler [in German: <https://www.chalethotel.ch/>, or at Hotels.com]; my small single room had one of the greatest balcony views imaginable. There are plenty of lodging options, most within a short walk of the train station. To learn more, visit the Travel Switzerland

website (www.myswitzerland.com/en-us/); search for “Kandersteg.” (Among items that will come up is the Kandersteg Railway Trail, a 2-to-4-hour hike between Kandersteg and Frutigen.)

Speaking of hiking, it was about 2 miles from the hotel to the tunnel portal; a short trail leads to the portal (and beyond) from the base station and parking for the Kandersteg gondola ride.



An SBB intercity train exits the short tunnel below Frutigen and prepares to plunge into the base tunnel. The tracks climbing at right lead to Frutigen's station.

where else]," Frauenfelder says. In the 7-kilometer segment between Mitholz and Frutigen, where only the smaller tunnel exists and post buses would not fit, minibuses would perform the evacuation.

Our drive eventually ends at marked parking spaces, an incongruous sight deep within a mountain. We walk to the finished section described earlier, and then to one of the cross passages where passengers would take refuge if they had to evacuate at a spot other than the Ferden emergency station. The cavern is spartan, containing only a few relays for some of the tunnel's technical systems, with heavy sliding doors at each end. Frauenfelder uses the door at the roadway-tunnel end to demonstrate how easily it can be opened and closed, despite its bulk.

While there has never been a fire in the tunnel, these passages are used. Frauenfelder says five or six times a year, a train breaks down, or is blocked by one with mechanical issues.

Extensive monitoring minimizes the prospects for such issues. Systems check wheel and axle temperatures and car profiles, to make sure a load has not shifted into a potentially damaging position. Not surprisingly, these are very sensitive. European container freight, unlike that in the U.S., often includes soft-sided containers with tarp-like covers. A fluttering cover will set off the profile alarms; so will a protruding branch on a carload of logs.

The extensive Swiss Post Bus system, which supplements the national rail network, would supply the buses. It would take about 16 buses, pulled from regular service, to handle the number of people on an Intercity passenger train. "Maybe there are two hours where there are no buses [any-

Before and after the base-tunnel tour, I stayed in Spiez. The station there, a junction busy with freight traffic, is an excellent train-watching spot. It's 11 minutes by train from Frutigen and just 20 minutes from the tourist hub of Interlaken. (I visited Interlaken to use what may be one of the world's most expensive laundromats, but that's a story unto itself.) Spiez has plenty of hotels;

I stayed at Hotel Restaurant Seegarten Marina Spiez (<https://seegarten-marina.ch/de/>). Most hotels are near Lake Thun, while the station is above town; walks can be lengthy and steep.

BLS has a tunnel visitor center in Frutigen. Close to the train station, in an ornate restored station no longer on the main line, it has models and other information about the project. — *David Lassen*

"A cover that is not fixed can make a short with the (catenary) wire," Frauenfelder says. If the system detects a car out of profile, it takes a photo so the operator at the control center can identify the offending rail car; the train's driver is then notified and stops the train before entering the tunnel. He can see if he can fix it himself, request help to do so, or set out the car if necessary.

"We have about two or three trains with problems in a week," Frauenfelder says, "but most times, very small problems."

Our final stop before leaving is a surprisingly massive vault, one of 12 throughout the tunnel containing electrical, signaling, and other equipment required for operations. These are built into standard shipping containers; as technology advances, new containers with updated systems can be brought in and immediately plugged in to begin operations. The space may seem excessively large, but of course, there is a reason. Approximately 40% of the material excavated from the tunnel was turned into concrete for the project; the plant for that was here, within the mountain.

GETTING IT DONE

While funding to complete the tunnel has been approved, the wheels of Swiss democracy

move at least as slowly as their American counterparts. Opponents must have time to gather signatures for a possible referendum against the project; if that doesn't happen, there will be a period for the public to comment on and seek changes to the plan. The owner of Blausee (literally, Blue Lake) — a tourist destination particularly popular with Asians, Frauenfelder says — is above the tunnel route near Mitholz, and is known to object to the current plan. "So that's a sure two or three months later before beginning."

As of September 2024, minor preparation work — such as replacing existing cables — had begun, but Frauenfelder estimated it would be 2 years before the serious construction started.

That work will take some 8 years. In the 14-kilometer second bore that currently exists as a roadway, the road must be torn out and the bore must be finished to specifications of the existing rail tunnel, with the heavier concrete floor and the sealed tube that keeps water out. Even during the project, evacuation by bus has to be guaranteed. A new bore must be dug for the final 7 kilometers.

But when completed, the tunnel capacity will soar from 110 trains per day to 280. For BLS, that will be an outcome worth the wait. **I**



A BLS passenger train bound for Swiss capital, Bern, arrives in Kandersteg on Sept. 15, 2024. The route sees hourly service.

COLORADO



A line of grain hoppers trails Colorado Pacific SD70MAC No. 719 as it moves westbound near Haswell, Colo., in October 2024. The hoppers are being transferred from the line's east end to the yard at its west end.

J. L. Gattis

A seemingly constant feature of the railfan landscape since the mid-1900s has been the depressing succession of abandonments, some of which have come to be greatly regretted. In a twist only slightly less surprising than the proverbial “man bites dog” headline, an unlikely drama came to play out in the 2010s. A wealthy New Yorker employed the services of a couple of Tennessee firms to rejuvenate a moribund rail line on the Western prairie. This is the story of how a former Missouri Pacific main line once on the chopping block came back to life as the Colorado Pacific.

PACIFIC

THRICE TO THE RESCUE

An historic route is saved as a contemporary short line

by J. L. Gattis



THE SETTING

Follow Kansas Route 96 west and north across the state. At each successive town, the population dips and the elevation rises. Wichita, 400,000 people living 1,300 feet above sea level. Great Bend, the last town with a five-digit population at 14,372, elevation 1,840. Westward another 120 miles, Scott City, population 4,100, elevation 2,970. At Tribune, the last county seat before the state line, the elevation — 3,545 feet — exceeds the population — 784. Another 60 miles brings you to Eads, the seat

of Kiowa County, Colo.; only 632 people living at 4,200 feet. It's still State Route 96; however, the Kansas sunflower logo has been replaced by Colorado's blue stripes. Out here, seemingly every town has a grain elevator, but not every elevator has a town. And, when you meet a semitruck, it's most likely hauling a livestock or grain trailer.

Much of this country is wide open, almost treeless. Some of the land grows crops, some is for grazing, some appears to be non-productive. This part of the world has always been lightly inhabited. There

was a population spike after World War II, but since then, many places have declined or struggled to stay even. Far western Kansas, eastern Colorado: you can't really tell the difference. You are swallowed up in the vastness of the Great Plains.

A LATE START TO SETTLEMENT

It was into this country that the Pueblo & State Line, a subsidiary of Jay Gould's Missouri Pacific, built an east-west line in 1887. To draw settlers, who would create on-line business for the new railroad, the



The desolate prairie east of Pueblo, Colo., is captured in this undated John Barriger view of the tower guarding the Missouri Pacific-Santa Fe junction. The view is northeast along the Missouri Pacific. John W. Barriger III photo.; Barriger National Railroad Library at UMSL



N.A. Junction, east of Pueblo, is the Colorado Pacific's connection with BNSF Railway and the Union Pacific. The connection, previously cut when the line was cast off (top), was reconstructed (bottom) by 2021. The project added 2,700- and 7,600-foot long sidings, enabling the exchange of 110-car unit trains. Three photos, J. L. Gattis

Pueblo & State Line Town & Development Co. platted a succession of towns, often 7 to 8 miles apart. (Some of this route fell within the old Kansas Pacific land-grant corridor.) Towners, Colo., was at Milepost 488, then came Stuart at Milepost 494. After that, there was a series of towns in alphabetical order, Arden to Pultney. A few of these towns were renamed, and Sheridan Lake immediately supplanted nearby Arden. A drought in the 1890s dampened immigration, but another wave of arrivals in the early 1900s rejuvenated the area. Nevertheless, some towns barely or never took root.

THE RISE AND THE FALL OF THE RAILROAD

Over time, ownership of the many companies created for railroad construction and operation was shuffled. Identities of the P&SL route included Denver, Memphis & Atlantic Division, and Kansas & Colorado Pacific. It was rolled into the parent Missouri Pacific company in 1910.

As originally constructed, the Missouri Pacific line ran side by side with the Santa Fe for almost 30 miles east of Pueblo, to what Missouri Pacific timetables showed as Nepesta, Colo., but was about 2 miles from

the “real” Nepesta on the Santa Fe. The crossing acquired the name N.A. Junction. In 1967, the two railroads agreed to remove much of the duplication and share the rails.

After Union Pacific took over Missouri Pacific in 1982, the UP decided it did not need two Kansas City–Colorado routes. UP kept the Kansas Pacific route to Denver, and looked to unload the MP route to Pueblo. The Surface Transportation Board approved the abandonment in 1996, along with termination of Rio Grande’s overhead trackage rights on the line. Also, most of the former Rio Grande route west from Pueblo went dormant. The MP was formally merged into UP in January 1997. Later that year UP notified the STB it had discontinued service on most of the Colorado part, except for leasing a half mile at Towner, Colo., to Central Kansas Railway. In 2001, OmniTRAX turned this and other CKR lines over to Watco’s Kansas & Oklahoma Railroad.

The State of Colorado acquired what had become known as the Towner Line in 1998. In 2000, the Hammond Group leased the line with an option to purchase it. It operated the 122 miles from N.A. Junction to Towner under the name Colorado, Kansas & Pacific Railroad. By late 2003, however, CK&P was in trouble. The state looked for a new operator, and V&S Railway filed a notice in 2005 to lease the line.

Success proved to be elusive. V&S filed in 2012 to discontinue service over the western 61 miles of the line, from N.A. Junction to Haswell, Colo. During this time, there were questions over abiding by the technicalities of STB rules, including unauthorized removal of the rails.

RESCUED JUST IN TIME

At the same time that V&S wanted to get out, Stefan Soloviev wanted to go all in. A New Yorker, Soloviev is ranked as the 26th largest U.S. landowner with 408,000 acres — that’s more than nine times larger than Washington, D.C. With a big stake in western Kansas and eastern Colorado farmland, he saw this rail line as a more economical conduit to ship grain. (The Soloviev Group includes holding company KCVN, LLC, and its subsidiary, Crossroads Agriculture.) Using the provision under which the STB can require the sale of a rail line, in March 2016, KCVN and subsidiary Colorado Pacific Railroad filed to acquire the line between N.A. Junction and Towner, alleging that V&S “engaged in a systemic plan to drive traffic off the Towner Line with the ultimate aim of abandoning it and selling the line’s rail assets.” KCVN offered to pay more than \$2.5 million, and spend an estimated \$3.5 million to restore service. In late 2017, the STB approved the sale with a \$10 million price tag. Ownership changed in January 2018. As an historical aside, a Kansas Pacific



Railway land map from the distant past had drawn a “Colorado Pacific” line proceeding west from Las Animas, Colo.

To revive his new property, Soloviev engaged Tennessee’s Crouch Engineering. Line rehabilitation to Class 2 (25 mph) and 286,000-pound standards began in early 2019. Needing an on-site project manager, Harvey Crouch got in touch with Matt Prince of CWC Rail, also in Tennessee. Prince had a background in various aspects of railroad operation and shortline management. He is qualified to inspect track and equipment, and to operate trains.

In addition to the track upgrade, workers installed new milepost signs, removed gravel and asphalt from flangeways at road crossings, and replaced a burnt-out trestle with corrugated metal pipes. CPR inherited a mix of bridge types: Some are built of treated wood pilings, others are concrete. The rehabilitation was mostly complete by the end of 2019. A celebration ceremony was planned for late April 2020, but COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns nixed that.

Attention next turned to the west end and reinstating the connection at N.A. Junction with the joint BNSF–UP main line running east from Pueblo. A switch was restored and two sidings constructed — one with about 2,700 feet of clear length, the other about 7,600 feet — at a cost of more than \$3 million. Completed by the beginning of 2021, the longer siding provides a place to interchange 110-car unit trains.



Even before crews restored the west-end switch connection with BNSF and UP at N.A. Junction, car storage provided a revenue stream. The numerous now-inactive signals are reminders that Missouri Pacific’s sleek *Colorado Eagle* once crossed the Great Plains in the middle of the night.



On related fronts, in late 2019, Soloviev tendered a \$10 million offer to buy the mostly dormant former Rio Grande Tennessee Pass line from Union Pacific. The STB rejected the application, but the request could be modified to address stated concerns and refiled. To fend off this offer, UP entertained an alternative arrangement with the Rio Grande Pacific shortline holding company, but there has been little apparent progress toward operating on this segment.

The financial troubles of another holding company, Iowa Pacific, created an opportunity that did pan out. With Iowa Pacific bankruptcy proceedings in progress, Soloviev's company submitted a bid in late 2022 to acquire southern Colorado's San Luis & Rio Grande. Upon purchase in early 2023, it became Colorado Pacific Rio Grande Railroad. Later that year, the railroad went back to the STB, requesting after-the-fact authority to acquire and operate the 1½-mile Blanca Spur. The spur had fallen between the cracks over many decades, changed owners and operated without requisite government approval.

The SL&RG purchase gave Colorado Pacific access to the Alamosa, Colo., shop facilities. Also with the acquisition came tracks occupied by passenger cars the previous owner had used for excursions, and a menagerie of derelict diesels.

In late July 2024, Soloviev Investors formalized an agreement with the owners of San Luis Central to acquire this 13-mile short line, which branches off the Colorado Pacific Rio Grande. SLC began operating in 1913, hauling sugar beets. In late May 2024, it was embargoed after the collapse of an irrigation culvert under the track near its connection with CPRG. (Repair work reopened the line in September 2024.) On Aug. 23, 2024, Soloviev filed with the STB to take over the SLC, and operate it as Colorado Pacific San Luis. In November, the STB granted an exemption allowing the SLC to be sold to an entity that also owns the railroad to which it connects.

HOW THESE RAILROADS RUN

With the completion of upgrades, Colorado Pacific (Class III) is a 122-mile railroad between N.A. Junction and Towner, Colo. The additional 11 miles of sidings can store an estimated 1,000 cars. The rails run in three counties — Kiowa, Crowley, and Pueblo — although the majority of the line and business is in Kiowa County. Matt Prince, the CWC Rail owner, decided to relocate and stay on as manager of the operation, which is based in Eads.

Watco's Kansas & Oklahoma, which occupies the ex-MP line as far west as Towner, was initially contracted to run CPR trains

From 2019 to 2022, Watco's Kansas & Oklahoma short line was contracted to operate the Colorado Pacific. In 2021, K&O GP39-2 No. 3933 pulls a string of stored coal empties eastward toward the Towner, Colo., connection. Two photos, Nathan D. Holmes

with its Scott City, Kan., crews. The STB approved this arrangement in June 2019. CPR leased a GP38 locomotive from Watco (WAMX No. 3831 was repainted in a CPR blue color scheme). The infrequent activity consisted of a few movements eastward from grain elevators, plus car storage. The contract with K&O was not renewed, and a July 2022 STB decision allowed K&O to discontinue service over the line. The role of Matt Prince's CWC expanded to both managing and operating for the owner.

In late summer 2022, two blue-and-white SD40-2s (Nos. 1923 and 1964), leased from National Railway Equipment, arrived via N.A. Junction. Additionally, in late 2023, 10 former BNSF SD70MACs were acquired, with four assigned to CPR. These units are in a two-tone blue scheme. Two of the locomotives are awaiting repair in the Alamosa shop before reporting for duty at Eads.

Restoring the railroad constituted part of a bigger strategy. On-line storage for crops such as wheat and milo is required to generate freight traffic. While there were other silos on the railroad corridor, Solo-



view decided something else was needed. Announcements in fall 2020 said that there would be a new trackside Crossroads Agricultural facility, leased by Scouler Co. However, by the time it opened in 2022, the massive trackside bulk storage and train loading complex was branded for Weskan Grain. Constructed east of Sheridan Lake, at what is now referred to as Stockton (old timetables labeled it Stuart), the seven concrete towers of various sizes can easily fill a unit grain train.

Another revival milestone was reached when the first unit train was loaded with milo at the Weskan facility in May 2023. For this attempt, it took about 6 hours to run from N.A. Junction to Stockton. After filling the hoppers, CPR took them back west. In total, the move consumed 36 hours. The cars went to the Houston area. With more experience, two crews can now turn a train in about 24 hours. The first crew takes the train from N.A. Junction to Stockton, a second crew takes over to load, then the rested first crew returns the loaded train west.

Weskan Grain also built a smaller satellite facility at Galatea in the western part of the county. CPR purchased 165 covered hoppers, displaying various forms of CSX heritage, to shuttle grain from Galatea to the main storage at Stockton.

These days, three people plus a part-



An eastbound Colorado Pacific haul passes the new Weskan Grain storage facility en route to the large Stockton storage plant in March 2024. Handling the train is CPR SD40-2 No. 1964, one of two on the roster. No. 1964 traces its roots to the Penn Central in January 1971.

timer keep the line running. A unit grain train may turn around once a month, with more action after harvest times. Wheat is harvested around the end of June, while milo is in October.

No freight has been interchanged with K&O at Towner, but that may develop in the future. At present, a derail is on the track east of the Stockton storage facility. CPR continues to store idle freight cars, such as coal hoppers. Clean energy could be another source of revenue for the rail-

road: There have been discussions of shipping and transloading components for wind farms being planned or constructed on the eastern Colorado prairie.

Sister road Colorado Pacific Rio Grande has a mix of Class II and Class I track, some rated for 263,000 instead of the industry-standard 286,000 pounds. The 16 employees typically run trains four days a week, transporting a mix of potatoes, barley, fertilizer, lava rock, and propane.

On its east end, this 150-mile former

Sister railroad Colorado Pacific Rio Grande, running along the former Denver & Rio Grande Western makes a twice-weekly turn from Alamosa to Walsenburg, Colo. The train is assembled in the Alamosa yard with cars from Antonito and Monte Vista.

Three photos, J. L. Gattis



The Alamosa-Walsenburg round trip is longer than the 12-hour service limit, so CPRG splits the trip between two crews. Here, the second crew is taking over at Walsenburg for the return to Alamosa.



D&RGW line enters Walsenburg, Colo., on 5 miles of trackage rights over Union Pacific, where it interchanges with UP. Proceeding westward via La Veta Pass at over 9,200 feet, it drops into the San Luis Valley town of Alamosa, the operation base. There, it splits. One line goes west, where, at Sugar Junction near Monte Vista, CPRG provides the sole connection for the former San Luis Central, now in the Colorado Pacific fold. The line west of Monte Vista is inactive. A company offering railbike tours operates on the west end tracks, at South Fork. The other branch runs south to Antonito, where the rails end at a perlite mine. In the distant past, Rio Grande dual gauge tracks in this area marked the transition to narrow gauge before proceeding to the south and west.

Four of the newly acquired SD70MACs work this road, while two others are used for parts. There is also a GP40-3.

Operating over LaVeta Pass entails challenges in addition to the obvious grades. Snow hangs around late and arrives early, and occasional rock slides can close the line.



SLC came with veteran power. In late 2024, the government announced a \$1 million grant for track upgrades between Mileposts 10.1 and 15.2.

EFFECTS AND REACTIONS

One hallmark of Colorado Pacific's presence has been good company citizenship, in the form of support of and involvement in local civic activities. A North American Railcar Operators Association chapter has run its railway motorcars — track speeders — on CPR as part of Christmas celebrations at Eads, and has run on CPRG over scenic La Veta Pass.

Folks in the San Luis Valley were not only relieved to get a new freight operator they can depend on; they also have been pleased with CPRG's community involvement. A county commissioner said that in the past, the county had "struggled" to get cooperation from the railroad in grade-crossing maintenance, but the current owners "have been very responsive."

On the eastern Colorado prairie, reactions have been mixed. Recall that the rail-

Many people in the Eads community have shown support for the revived railroad, including Betsy Barnett, publisher of the *Kiowa County Independent*. Barnett commissioned a mural, completed in December 2023, for one wall of the newspaper's office, which features a stylized Colorado Pacific locomotive in the "E" of "Welcome to Eads."

road is one facet of the larger land-owning and grain storage operation. Kiowa County has two weekly newspapers: One has been a booster for the railroad, the other not so much. Rightly or wrongly, some have expressed the concern that Weskan's access to the more economical CPR rail transport gives it a price advantage. Presently, a track-side competitor has been trucking its grain into Kansas for rail transport, instead of loading directly into railcars on CPR.

Regardless, to date, Soloviev's investments have revived three Colorado railroads. It will be interesting to see what unfolds next. **I**

The author thanks Nathan D. Holmes for contributing his photographs in this article.

Story and photos by Robert H. Leilich

We got away with it

Unofficially “borrowing” trains — for science!





Five nearly new General Electric U28CG passenger locomotives have a Flexi-Van container on flat car train rolling at 84 mph at Verona, Ill., during the October 1966 test.

Had something bad happened, we would be getting out of prison about now ...

In late September 1966, a young Dave Gunn, then with the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe's Transportation Department (and later head of several transit agencies and president of Amtrak), Bill Paul (in the Economic Planning Group), and Warren Henry (assistant to the general manager) hatched a scheme to compare high-speed train resistances between trailer on flat car (TOFC) and container on flat car (COFC) trains.

The goal was to estimate operating cost differences between these two train types. With no container trains on the Santa Fe, Dave contacted his good friend Jim McClellan, who worked with New York Central's Strategic Planning Group. Jim (later senior vice president of planning for Norfolk South-

ern and now deceased), forever a maverick railroader, enthusiastically joined in the plan.

Jim proposed borrowing a NYC U.S. Post Office Flexi-Van COFC train. Dave, in turn, thought he could arrange to borrow a Santa Fe United Parcel Service TOFC train. They shared the idea among a cadre

of low-level employees on both railroads, all of whom thought it was a great idea since no one knew how significant the differences in train resistance might be. I, a young rookie in the Santa Fe's Transportation Department, got wind of the proposal and eagerly joined the planning effort.

We knew helping ourselves to these trains was not exactly acceptable and could get everyone in trouble, which is why plans were never submitted higher up the food chain where they surely would have been rejected. I believe the highest it got was at the superintendent level (except for Warren Henry, who took a pledge of secrecy).

MIDNIGHT DIVERSION

While Dave and Jim worked on the operating side to arrange for a midnight diversion of the two trains from their intended

destinations, I worked on borrowing some relatively new General Electric six-motor GE U28CG passenger locomotives that could easily run at 90 mph.

Using the Davis formula to estimate resistance, I calculated we needed 3½ locomotives for the TOFC train to reach 90 mph. Just to be sure, I arranged for five units plus a dynamometer car to measure drawbar pull at different speeds. I also contacted the Santa Fe's Engineering Department to arrange for rail joint deflection measurements to capture the effect of train dynamics on track at different speeds.

Dave picked a 13-mile section of Santa Fe's main line between Coal City and Verona, Ill., as the best location for the test. The line was fairly straight, level, and had relatively few grade crossings. With weather forecasts for bright skies and



Bill Hennesey (at left) and future Amtrak President Dave Gunn, photographed at Verona, Ill., assisted with the experiment.

The combined COFC and TOFC test trains, with a Santa Fe Railway dynamometer car coupled behind the locomotives, rounds a curve at Lemont, Ill., en route to the beginning of high-speed test runs at Coal City, Ill.



low winds, the tests were planned for the weekend of Oct. 8 and 9, 1966.

With all arrangements surreptitiously in place, Jim, under the cover of darkness, escorted the U.S. Post Office container train from Chicago's New York Central 47th Street yard on Friday, Oct. 7, to Santa Fe's Corwith Yard. At the same time, Dave secured the UPS trailer train. The Post Office train wasn't officially interchanged to avoid suspicions over what a NYC mail train was doing on the Santa Fe.

Upon arrival, the Santa Fe's carmen declared the Flexi-Van train a "hospital train" because it had so many mechanical defects, especially related to braking. They spent the rest of Friday night and much of Saturday bringing the mail train up to snuff and making sure the UPS train also was in good

shape. Train sizes were adjusted so that they had an equal number of trailers and containers and that net tonnage was nearly the same. Air resistance was going to be the biggest factor at high speeds.

Sunday morning, Oct. 9, was a beautiful fall day. The five GE U-boats slipped out of Chicago's Corwith yard in early darkness with both trains in tow. At Coal City, the Flexi-Van COFC train was set out, and the TOFC train run at increasing speeds to measure drawbar pull and rail joint deflections. Runs were made in both directions to average the results. At full power, the TOFC train could barely reach 70 mph, showing how poorly the Davis equation was at estimating high-speed TOFC train resistance. (It wasn't until 1968 that the Association of American Railroads published a modified

Davis equation, which made use of some of our data.)

The tests were repeated with the string of Flexi-Van container cars. A speed of 84 mph was easily achieved and it was decided not to go faster. With much data and no mishaps, the team packed up and headed back to Chicago. Again, under the cover of darkness, the mail train was returned to the NYC and both trains placed to await Post Office and UPS employees on Monday morning. We got away with our experiments and gained knowledge that would encourage container and double-stack train development.

AN ALARMING SUMMONS

About two weeks later, I got a terse phone call to meet with Santa Fe President John S. Reed. I feared my one-year career with the Santa Fe was at an end. Nervously entering the inner sanctum of the Most High, Reed asked if I knew anything about certain high-speed tests he had just learned about. Nervously looking at the floor, I confessed I did.

He said, "I also heard that you took some 8-millimeter movies of the tests."

"Yes sir," I stuttered, thinking I might soon need a change of underwear.

Reed then said, "Well, I'd like you to show your films at the Board of Directors meeting next week and to tell us more about the results of these tests."

What a relief: Not only had I escaped being canned, the railway's leading executives wanted to know about our team's findings!

Today, the opportunity for experimentation and risk-taking by young railroaders is virtually gone, as the ability to connive below the noses of senior execs is more difficult and lawyers would quash any such efforts on the grounds of potential liability. Those were the good old days when I, acting as a temporary car agent for the AAR, could use homemade chocolate chip cookies to get Belt Railway of Chicago yard clerks to divert boxcars to the Santa Fe for grain loading.

Looking back, railroading then could be a lot of fun. **I**



Bill Tuinstra of Santa Fe's Engineering Department setting up reference string to measure rail joint deflection.



GREAT RAILFAN ROADS

ROUTE 66

The country's greatest railfan road is a fallen flag

Story by John Friedmann • Photos by Elrond Lawrence

ROUTE 66 HAS LARGELY BEEN replaced by Interstate 40 across Arizona and New Mexico, and hasn't officially been a U.S. highway since 1985. But the Main Street of America still occupies a big place in American culture and has become a tourist attraction in its own right. Like railroads merged out of existence, Route 66 lives on in the minds of its admirers and its surviving segments remain great railfan roads, especially

paralleling BNSF's former Santa Fe Southern Transcon through Arizona and New Mexico.

Both BNSF and Route 66 run from Chicago to the Los Angeles area. But the "modern" (post-1937) Route 66 doesn't come alongside the Southern Transcon until the middle of New Mexico, east of Laguna along BNSF's Gallup Subdivision. The Gallup Sub and the adjacent Seligman Subdivision to the west are part of the dens-

est long-haul section of BNSF's Southern Transcon, with more than 70 trains per day generating annual density of more than 150 million gross tons per mile. The route is entirely double-tracked across Arizona and New Mexico with some segments of triple and quadruple track. Amtrak's daily *Southwest Chief* runs the route as well, albeit mostly in darkness.

After Route 66 meets BNSF near Laguna, an imposing rock

formation provides an excellent photo backdrop in just a few miles. Here and elsewhere in the Southwest, be respectful of photography restrictions when passing through Native American communities. For about 70 miles from Laguna to the Western Continental Divide, Route 66's pavement still exists as a separate road from I-40. The 34-mile section of Route 66 from Grants, N.M., to the Continental Divide is almost always



parallel to BNSF while offering the history and whimsy of the Mother Road. At Grants, motorists pose under the U.S. highway-shaped Route 66 “arch” (which becomes a “neon arch” at night), adjacent to a nicely restored Santa Fe caboose and barely a block away from BNSF’s main line.

Heading west, the junction of BNSF’s Lee Ranch Sub at Baca, near Prewitt, N.M., adds coal trains to the westbound

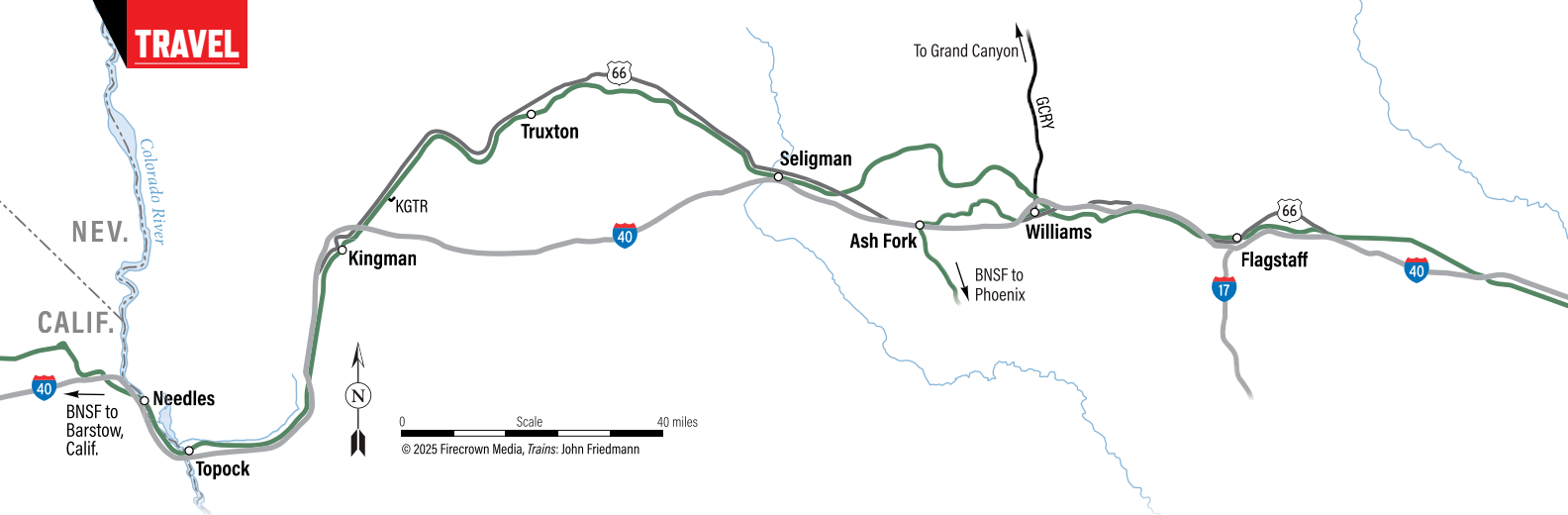
flow. These coal trains originate at the El Segundo mine and run to the Cholla power plant east of Winslow, Ariz. Idled power-plant railroad Escalante Western is nearby, but the line’s colorful EMDs shipped out once the nearby power plant shut down in 2020.

You can feel the gradual rise heading west from Grants, but unlike other transcontinental routes, the Continental Divide isn’t a major event on

the Gallup Sub. Santa Fe managed the summit by constructing a separated westbound main for 28 miles approaching the Divide, limiting the grade to 0.6%. Route 66 ends (temporarily) at the Continental Divide. Before jumping on I-40, stop at the dusty Top of the World souvenir store — it also features New Mexico’s Red Cliffs and frequent BNSF trains out back.

Thirteen miles east of Gallup, N.M., Route 66 again be-

Eastbound BNSF in a popular scene from Route 66 at Winona (“Darling” on the railroad), Ariz., in 2009. This shot is virtually the same today although you’ll likely see fewer locomotives in the ‘Heritage 2’ paint scheme.



The classic “Here It Is” sign, across the street from the Jack Rabbit Trading Post, with an oncoming BNSF westbound on May 17, 2012.

comes a separate road while running right next to BNSF into the largest city between Albuquerque, N.M. and Flagstaff, Ariz. Gallup is a good overnight stop with plenty of hotels and a bounty of vintage neon along and near Route 66. Gallup’s Mission Revival Santa Fe Station is well cared for as the turquoise-accented Gallup Cultural Center and the city’s visitor center. Amtrak still rates a waiting room, but the platform is fenced off in deference to BNSF’s fast and frequent trains. BNSF’s small yard is just to the west, and a former Defiance Coal 0-4-0T steam locomotive is displayed at We the People Park just off I-40.

Route 66 stays close to BNSF west out of Gallup for the next 27 miles across the Arizona border, providing a variety of trackside and near-trackside views through historic Navajo territory.

At Coronado Junction, Ariz., BNSF’s Coronado Sub splits off to the south, serving two large coal-fired power plants. Road and rail diverge until Holbrook, Ariz., where you should keep an

eye out for the green-and-white Alcos of the Apache Railway. While Apache’s activity is greatly reduced since the 2012 closure of the line’s major customer, the railroad still rosters nine Alco-design locomotives and runs from headquarters at Snowflake, Ariz., 38 miles to the BNSF interchange at Holbrook. One of Apache’s RS36s is being prepared for display outside Holbrook’s county courthouse.

Driving through Holbrook (supposedly one of the inspirations for Disney-Pixar’s *Cars* movie), look for the kitschy dinosaurs displayed around town, some of which are refugees from a long-gone Route 66 attraction. There’s a small herd of dinos across the tracks from the former Santa Fe depot. While rolling west on I-40 toward Joseph City, Ariz., look for Cholla power plant (destination for that New Mexico-mined coal mentioned earlier) and the Jack Rabbit Trading Post on a Route 66 remnant west of town.

A westbound BNSF double-stack train is seen at Mesita, N.M., shot from Route 66 on Nov. 19, 2016.

Winslow, Ariz., is an iconic Route 66 town with plenty to offer the railfan. The trackside former Harvey House, now the La Posada Hotel, is worth a stop. Life imitates art driving through its historic downtown as you pass Standin’ On the Corner Park which was created to commemorate the town’s mention in the Eagles’ 1972 hit *Take it Easy*. BNSF’s medium-sized yard is on Winslow’s western side, and its big parking lot reflects the town’s role as a BNSF crew change point.

BNSF’S SELIGMAN SUB

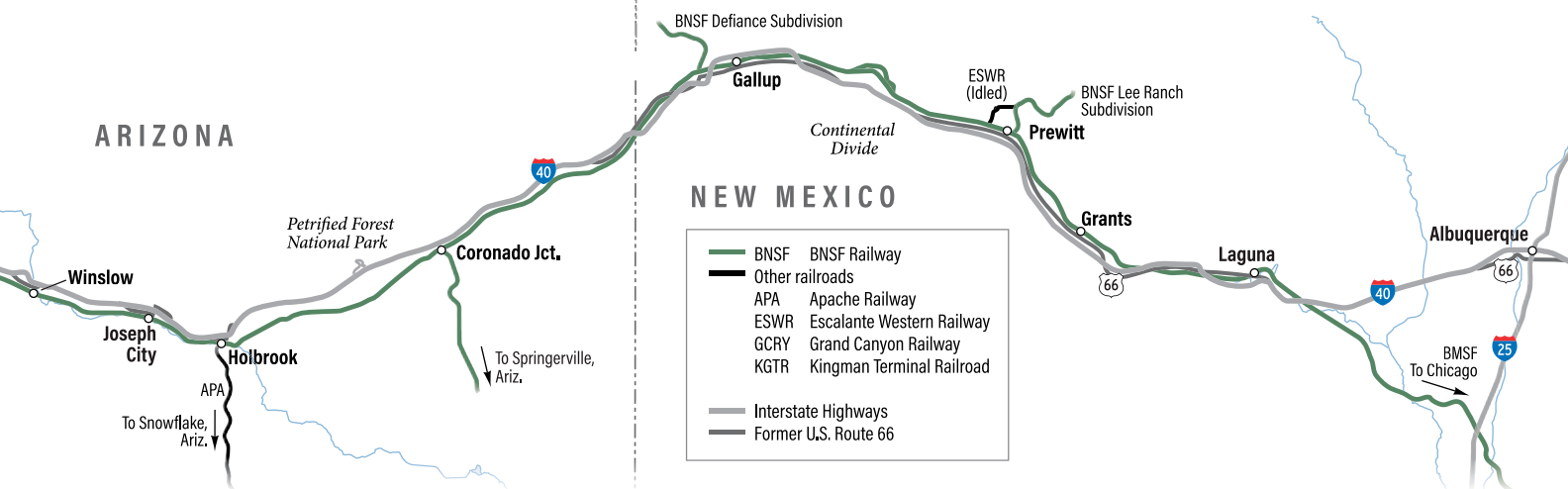
West out of Winslow, the railroad becomes BNSF’s Seligman Sub, a railfan favorite and the subject of several *Trains* articles. The railroad climbs steadily for more than 60 miles to the Arizona Divide, the split between the Gila and Colorado River watersheds. At 7,352 feet above sea level, the Arizona

Divide is more than a hundred feet higher than BNSF’s passage over the Continental Divide. Don’t be surprised — trains west of Winslow can run “wrong-main” to take advantage of Santa Fe-era line improvements to ease grades.

Interstate 40 runs alongside BNSF for 15 miles leaving Winslow, but the railroad then diverges northward for about 28 miles. At I-40’s Winona exit, follow U.S. 66 away from I-40 and alongside BNSF for 8 miles into Flagstaff. This is high country (about 7,000 feet elevation) and the desert gives way to pine forests.

Route 66 and the Seligman Sub compete to be Flagstaff’s main drag — the city’s Tudor-style Amtrak station (built 1926, now the visitor center) lies between Route 66 and BNSF. Overnight travelers who want train views can choose one of the many Route 66





motels facing the Seligman Sub. Or you just pause to bowl a few frames between trains at Starlite Lanes, across Route 66 from the rails. You'll see the logging 2-8-0 displayed near the Amtrak station when passing through, but a more interesting locomotive — a 2-6-6-2 from Southwest Forest Industries — is displayed at the Pioneer Museum north of town.

Leaving Flagstaff, BNSF peaks at the Arizona Divide just past where old Route 66 joins I-40, which stays closer to the railroad than Route 66 until Exit 165, just past Williams Junction, Ariz. The junction is where Santa Fe's original mainline through Williams diverges from the 1960-built Crookton Cutoff, a 44-mile stretch built to avoid punishing grades and curvature. Williams Junction was an Amtrak stop for Grand Canyon-bound tourists from 1999 to 2018, but those travel-

ers are now handled by a Thruway bus from Flagstaff.

GRAND CANYON RAILWAY

Williams is still served by BNSF's line to Phoenix — which only sees a few trains per day in contrast to the adjacent Seligman Sub — but the real attraction is the Grand Canyon Railway. Grand Canyon tourist trains leave from the former Santa Fe depot complex at 8:30 or 9:30 a.m. depending on the season, with a second daily round trip on peak days and steam operations about 10 days per year. Nearby, an older former Santa Fe depot-freight house combination now houses the Williams Visitor Center along Route 66. Williams has a lot of Route 66 history for a relatively small town, in part because it is located on the last stretch of Route 66 that was supplanted by I-40, in 1984. Don't miss the Grand Canyon



Grand Canyon Railway F40 No. 237 departs Williams, Ariz., on May 18, 2012. The railroad assigns steam to its train 10 times a year.

Railway's shops, which are located between I-40 and the relocated BNSF mainline on Williams' north side. Some equipment for the planned Arizona State Railway Museum is stored here.

I-40 follows the Phoenix Sub on the old Santa Fe mainline alignment for 25 miles to Ash Fork, Ariz., while the newer Cutoff runs well to the north. Five miles past Ash Fork at Exit 139, jump off I-40 onto Route 66 for an extended run away from the interstate. BNSF soon crosses under and comes alongside as road and rail come into Seligman, Ariz.

Population 446, Seligman claims to be the "Birthplace of Historic Route 66" based on the town's successful campaign to have Arizona designate the road as an historic highway. Seligman is all-in on celebrating Route 66, and the highlight is Delgadillo's Snow Cap, a classic drive-in that provides both refreshment and the opportunity to train-watch only a block from the main line.

The stretch of Route 66 between Seligman and Kingman,

Ariz., (87 miles) strays from I-40 and evokes a bygone era with throwbacks like the Burma-Shave roadside signs west of Seligman. The ride through the Hualapai tribe's reservation also provides samples of high-volume modern railroading during the stretches when BNSF is adjacent to the road.

One of BNSF's most recent investments in the Southern Transcon lies between Seligman and Kingman — the Truxton Flyover. The 2020 flyover fixes much of the congestion created by the need to switch to "wrong-main" running to manage grades on the Seligman sub by elevating and crossing Main 2 over Main 1 in the wide-open Arizona desert. The flyover is visible from Route 66, two miles west of the "blink and you'll miss it" hamlet of Truxton.

Thirteen miles farther west on Route 66, don't miss the Hackberry General Store. Hackberry was once an important cattle shipping point (third largest in Arizona), but now mostly features the General Store's extensive Route 66





Apache Railway MLW C424 No. 98 leads a southbound coal train out of Holbrook, Ariz., on May 17, 2012.

memorabilia collection. There's very little to separate you from the railroad between Hackberry and Kingman and the open territory allows plenty of advance warning of train movements.

RAILROADS OF KINGMAN

Entering Kingman, stop at the airport to see Patriot's Kingman Terminal Railroad, which operates DeQueen & Eastern GP38-2 No. D-28 in a paint scheme honoring troops and veterans, supplemented by a pair of SW1500s. Aside from the nicely restored Santa Fe 1907 depot still served by Amtrak (and home to the modest Kingman Railroad Museum), there aren't many BNSF facilities in town. But from a Route 66 perspective, Kingman punches above its weight. The Arizona Route 66 museum is bracketed by railroad interest — the BNSF main line on one side and a Santa Fe 4-8-4 displayed across the street. There's a drive-through Route 66 arch

for pictures framing you in your car, or framing a passing BNSF locomotive, or both.

You can follow the railroad (one main line — the tracks separate for about 10 miles) out of Kingman, but you soon need to get on I-40. Route 66 originally took a scenic and hilly route to the Colorado River at the California border, but far away from the railroad. Santa Fe instead built an easier route around, not through the Black Mountains and Route 66 opted to follow 70 years later, in 1952. Today, I-40's footprint has obliterated traces of Route 66 across the stark Sacramento Valley, but the interstate generally stays within sight of the Seligman sub.

Before leaving Arizona, consider a stop at Topock 66, a bar-restaurant on the Arizona side of the Colorado River. The casual hangout features excellent views of the 1945-built BNSF bridge and even has its own marina, but the décor isn't

100% family-friendly. The Seligman Sub ends in East Needles, a few miles east of BNSF's crew change and Amtrak's station in Needles, Calif. Want to continue west? Check out David Lustig's "Desert Railroading at its Finest" feature in the April 2024 *Trains*.

WORTH STOPPING FOR

• **FLAGSTAFF** — This 145,000-population metro is the hub for northern Arizona and is a more than worthwhile city for eating, sleeping, or just visiting. There are a number of good photo spots around town (don't miss the Route 66 bridge to the east), or just hang out at the depot and enjoy the train parade.

• **LA POSADA, WINSLOW** — One of the last remaining Harvey Houses has been reimagined as a boutique hotel only steps from the town's Amtrak platform. Even if you can't stay overnight, check out the public spaces and dine at the hotel's Turquoise Room restaurant for breakfast, lunch or dinner.

• **PETRIFIED FOREST NATIONAL PARK** — The Painted Desert Inn in Petrified Forest National Park is worth the short detour.

Constructed in 1937, the inn was operated by Santa Fe concessionaire Fred Harvey for 16 years prior to its 1963 closure and is now a museum showcasing southwestern art, and the inn's painted skylights are original to the building. The rest of the park is well worth checking out.

About Route 66

Route 66 evolved over time from its official debut in 1926 to its final deflagging in 1984, adjusting its routes as new roads opened and alignments improved.

Although Route 66 — like the Santa Fe Railway — ran from Chicago to Los Angeles, the road followed many railroads instead of just one. Among the railroads along Route 66: Gulf, Mobile & Ohio and Illinois Central from Chicago to St. Louis; Frisco from St. Louis to Oklahoma City; Rock Island from Oklahoma City to Tucumcari, N.M.; Southern Pacific from Tucumcari to Santa Rosa, N.M.; and Santa Fe across New Mexico, Arizona, and into the Los Angeles basin.

— John Friedmann

BESIDES THE RAILROAD

• **GRAND CANYON** — The South Rim of the Grand Canyon is only an hour north of Williams and well worth a visit. Ride the train and/or stay overnight if you have time (the El Tovar Hotel drips with history).

• **SEDONA** — This Arizona resort town is 30 miles south of Flagstaff, and offers majestic views, spas and wellness stops galore and an active arts scene. Take a hot-air balloon ride if you get a chance!

• **TRIBAL LANDS** — Arizona and New Mexico are each home to more than 20 recognized Native American tribes. Tribal Feast Days are a treat, with traditional dances, activities, crafts, and cuisine. Not all feast days are open to the public, so be sure to understand what is and is not allowed.

IF TIME IS SHORT

Passing through on I-40? Choose a trackside stretch of Route 66 to counter the stress of the interstate — Seligman to Kingman is a favorite — while keeping you moving towards your destination. On a non-train vacation? Escape to trackside and enjoy the parade. **I**



An eastbound BNSF grain train is a golden serpent beside I-40 (Route 66's replacement), approaching Winslow, Ariz. on Dec. 6, 2017.

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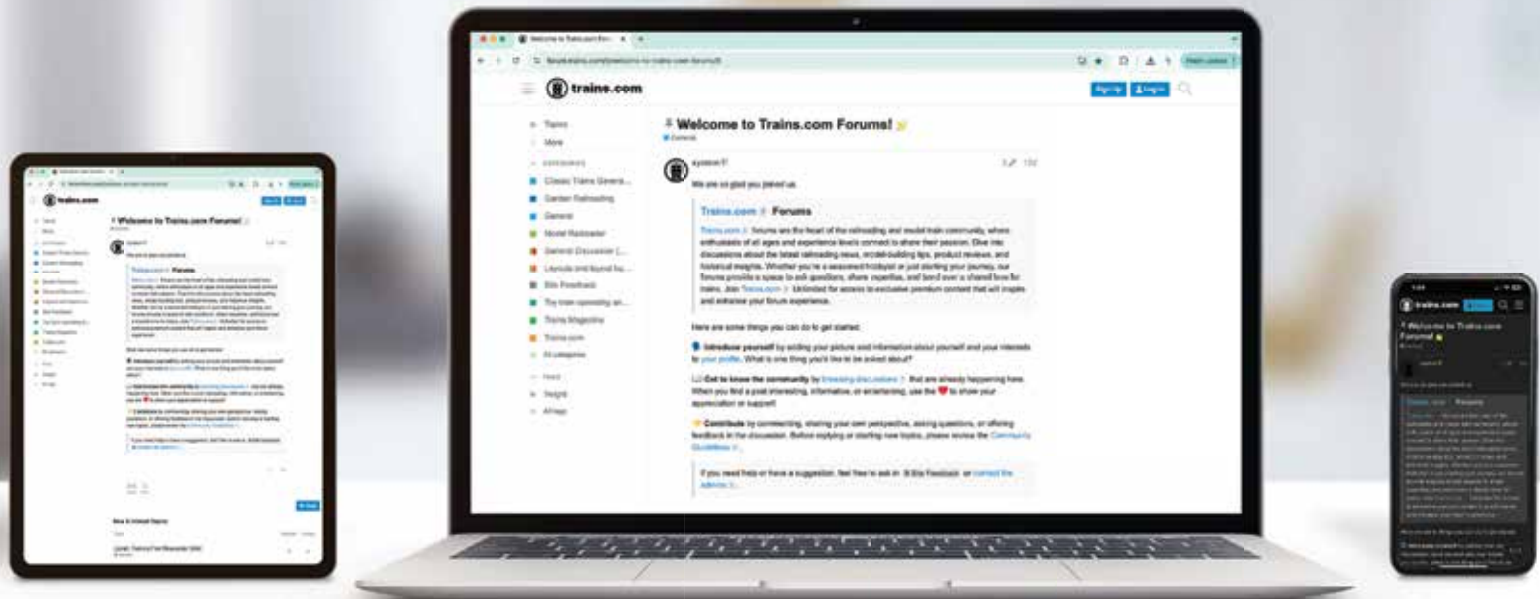
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Winners announced in the Trains November 2025.

2021 Grand Prize, Philip A. Weibler, Gray Area



Railway 200

United Kingdom celebrates two centuries of railroading

▲ The North Yorkshire Moors Railway is among dozens of steam-operated heritage railroads in the United Kingdom. In 2025, it will be among British lines celebrating Railway 200, marking two centuries of railroading. Two photos, Brian Solomon

THE STEAM ENGINE'S INVENTION

and the conception of the modern railway rank among Britain's great contributions to the world. In 2025, the United Kingdom is celebrating Railway 200, marking the bicentenary of the Stockton & Darlington Railway, which opened for service on Sept. 27, 1825.

Located in the northeast of England, the Stockton & Darlington Railway was an evolutionary milestone.

The world's first public steam railway, the Stockton & Darlington's first line connected coal mines near Shildon with the cities of Darlington and Stockton.

The railway is widely acknowledged as paving the way for the explosive growth of the industry by successfully blending several crucial elements of railroading, including securing a charter from parliament, es-

tablishing public commercial operation of long trains carrying freight and passenger traffic, operating trains hauled by steam locomotives, the use of wrought iron edge rails, and establishing railroad-specific business practices.

More than just a historical commemoration, Railway 200 is a public awareness campaign encompassing dozens of separately organized rail-focused events across the United Kingdom and beyond. Railway 200 aims to entertain, educate, and inspire awareness about the nation's railroads past, present, and future.

For a general overview, participants list, and events, visit railway200.co.uk.

A YEAR OF EVENTS

Among the planned festivals is the nine-month S&DR200, organized by Stockton-on-Tees

Borough Council. This will run from the end of March through November and will feature free outdoor events and exhibitions, as well as art exhibitions and creative displays focused on the early operation of the Stockton & Darlington in County Durham. Visit sdr200.co.uk for more information.

Also in northeastern England, the National Railway Museum at York and its affiliated Locomotion Railway Museum at Shildon are planning a variety of events this year. Both feature extensive collections of railroad rolling stock. The latter will be displaying three of the world's earliest locomotives, including the Stockton & Darlington's *Locomotion* No. 1 of 1825. Built by George Stephenson, the *Locomotion* is the first steam locomotive to work a public railway.

The museum's New Hall is

focused on the region's instrumental roles in early railroad development, especially significant since S&DR's shops were located at Shildon, making the community the world's first railway town.

Among the preserved railways in the northeast participating in this year's celebration is the North Yorkshire Moors Railway, which is centered on Grosmont Station. On select dates in May, it will be running the Railway 200 *North Yorkshire Pullman*, which is a plush train using 1960s railcars to offer a high-end classic dining experience. While in the United States "Pullman" was largely associated with over-night sleeping cars, in the UK Pullman trains offered more luxurious rail travel.

In the south, the Mid Hants Railway, known as the Watercress Line, has a series of excursions planned in March centered around the return to service of Bullied Pacific *Canadian Pacific*. Acclaimed railroad equipment designer Oliver Bullied is perhaps best known for his engines built for the Southern Railway; among these were the three-cylinder *Merchant Navy* Class 4-6-2s, of which *Canadian Pacific* is among the surviving serviceable examples.

The famed Welsh narrow gauge Ffestiniog & Welsh Highlands Railway has combined the Railway 200 celebrations with commemoration of the 70th anniversary of excursions on its preserved railway.

On the weekend of June 20-22, the Ffestiniog will host the Railway 200-FR Platinum Jubilee Weekend, an event that will culminate with its "200 Wheels on the Cob" exhibition of narrow-gauge locomotives displayed on the iconic Cob embankment.

Great Central Railway, Britain's only double-track heritage railroad, is hosting its Railway 200 Open Weekend on July 5-6. The railway, part of the old Great Central Railway linking Manchester and London, is located in the university town of Loughborough in the East Midlands of England, between the cities of Leicester and Nottingham.

Among England's most popular heritage railways is the Severn Valley, which operates 16 miles of a former Great Western Railway secondary route from a connection with the national network at Kidderminster



Among the events planned for Railway 200 is Mid Hants Railway's return to service of *Merchant Navy* Class Pacific *Canadian Pacific* in March 2025. The locomotive is seen here working Mid Hants excursions in March 2007.

and Bridgnorth. It celebrates 60 years of service this year, and among the events planned are its Steam Galas on April 18-21 and September 18-21, plus a Spring Diesel Festival to be held May 15-18.

In the southwest, West Somerset Railway has its Spring Steam Spectacular scheduled May 2-5. Among the anticipated visiting locomotives for the event is the LMS *Bahamas*, a Jubilee Class 4-6-0 type built in 1935.

Events showcasing a mix of historical and modern themes include Alstom's The

Greatest Gathering at its Litchurch Lane Works in Derby, where, on Aug. 1-3, it will host the "largest temporary assembly of trains and railway-related artifacts in a generation." Included are train rides, scale railway displays, and music.

The variety of events, operations, and equipment displays will make 2025 a great year for exploring UK railroads past and present, and hopefully will succeed in raising awareness of the significance of rail transport to a new generation. — *Brian Solomon*

Travel with Trains

TRAINS MAGAZINE will host a 200th anniversary steam celebration tour of the United Kingdom Sept. 23 through Oct. 2, 2025, led by Associate Editor Bob Lettenberger. Contact Special Interest Tours, www.specialinteresttours.com. (845) 202-3327, for more information.

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Union Pacific dome-diner restoration begins

Finished car will become feature of new museum building

▲ Former Union Pacific dome-diner No. 8003 rests on the grounds of the National Railroad Museum in Green Bay, Wis., awaiting the next phase of its restoration. The UP was the only railroad to have dome-diners, and No. 8003 is the last one in its original configuration.

Two photos, Bob Lettenberger

BOWING TO COMPETITIVE PRESSURE from other western railroads, the Union Pacific finally added dome cars to some of its named trains in 1955. A 35-car, \$10 million order with American Car & Foundry brought 10 dome-chair cars, 10 dome-diners and 15 dome-lounge-observation cars to the railroad. The UP was the only railroad to offer dome-dining cars in its passenger fleet.

Counting dome-diner *Sky View* from General Motors' *Train of Tomorrow*, the UP rostered 11 dome-diners. In 1971, with the onset of Amtrak, the UP disbursed its excess passenger cars. Dome-diner No. 8003 was acquired by the National Railroad Museum in Green Bay, Wis. No. 8003 is one of six remaining today and is the only one still in original condition with furniture, fixtures, and artwork all in place. The other five dome-diners have been scrapped.

The museum has begun a 3-year restoration project, which will return the dome-diner to its 1955 condition. Once completed, No. 8003 will become part of an exhibit discussing railroad art and passenger train marketing to be located in the museum's new Fox

River Expansion building, says Jacqueline Frank, museum CEO. The new building addition is slated to open in September 2025.

"The restoration will return the car to its original condition so that visitors can learn from it and experience what times were like when the car was first introduced," Frank says. "Operational restoration would modify the car in ways that would hide its original characteristics. This is a true restoration project."

The 85-foot-long dome-diner served 28 on the main level, 18 in the dome and 10 in what was labeled the Gold Room, under the dome. From the AC&F order, dome-diners Nos. 8000 to 8004 were assigned to the *City of Los Angeles* running between Chicago and its namesake city. Dome-diners Nos. 8005 to 8009 became part of the *City of Portland* lineup.

The car has been through asbestos mitigation, says Daniel Liedtke, museum curator. The next major step will be lead paint removal and body work.

Art conservation and restoration is another interesting aspect of this project. At each end of the main dining space, the UP had commissioned wall art

reflecting natural scenes specific to Southern California. One of these, located near the dome stairs, is painted directly on a half-inch thick laminated glass panel, which serves as a room divider. The Midwest Art Conservation Center in Minneapolis will be retained to clean and repair these pieces, says Liedtke. The wall panels in the Gold Room feature a "Hollywood opening night" motif unique to the *City of Los Angeles* dome-diners. These panels will also be cleaned and repaired.

"Considering the size of the car and railroad objects, in general, it is neat to be doing such delicate work," Liedtke says. "When finished, people will be able to see the details of the car. They will be able to experience what happened within the car, especially all of the little things that made rail dining special."

Before completion, No. 8003 will also have its windows replaced and resealed, the electrical system inspected and repaired, carpeting cleaned, flooring repaired, and new paint applied inside and out.

For additional information about this project or the National Railroad Museum, visit: nationalrrmuseum.org. — Bob Lettenberger



The project includes restoration of the car's original artwork. This is one of four pieces displayed in the main dining area. The image is a scene specific to Southern California as No. 8003 was assigned to the streamliner *City of Los Angeles*.

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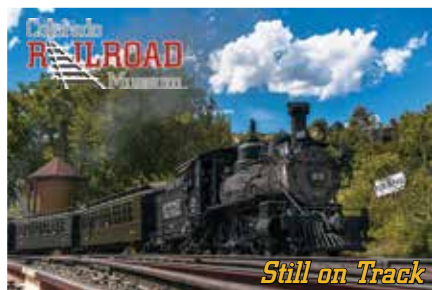
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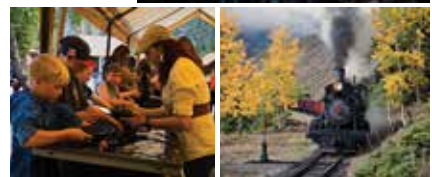
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carsonrailroadmuseum.org 775-687-6953

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In the May issue



Dispatching dilemma for Amtrak

Amtrak and host railroads square off over how **PASSENGER TRAINS** should be dispatched. Final days for former Chesapeake & Ohio **CANTILEVER SIGNALS** in Appalachia. One of many small towns lining the Union Pacific/BNSF between Seattle and Portland, Ore., Winlock, Wash., is a **RAILROADING HOT SPOT**.

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RAIL SHOWS AND EVENTS

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

JUNE 8, 2025: 49th Annual Kane County Railroadiana and Model Train Show. Kane County Fairgrounds, 525 South Randall Rd., St. Charles, IL. Sunday, 10:00am-3:00pm. Admission: \$6.00 w/tax. Tables starting at \$65.00. Information: 847-358-1185, RussFierce@aol.com or www.RRShows.com

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

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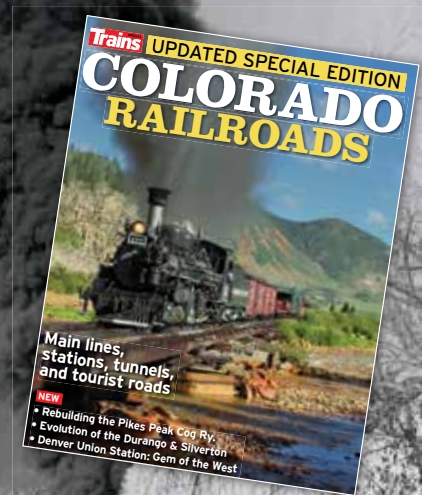
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The Jordan Narrows

Between Salt Lake City and Provo, Utah, the Narrows is where the Traverse and Oquirrh mountains meet at Point of the Mountain, a narrow river canyon. A Utah FrontRunner, with Motive Power MP36PH-3C No. 21 pushing, passes on Oct. 21, 2017. James Belmont



Lake Forest spring

The trees are in bloom on a spring evening — April 24, 2010 — in Lake Forest, Ill. Once the route of the Chicago & North Western's 400, tonight a Metra Union Pacific North service, still operating on the left side like the C&NW, heads for Kenosha, Wis. Travis Dewitz

Total eclipse

The routine: Metrolink train No. 608 approaches the Fullerton, Calif., stop at 7:01 p.m., Feb. 20, 2008, signaling the end of another day for some commuters. The unusual: In the sky, a total lunar eclipse in progress. At 7:01 p.m., the moon entered a 50-minute period of total eclipse in Earth's shadow. David Styffe



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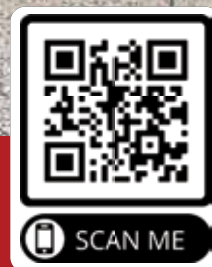
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