Minutes of Feb. 15, 2003 Membership Meeting

Northstar Chapter NRHS Chapter President Dan Meyer called the meeting to order at 7:20 p.m. in the St. Paul Fire Department Training Center with 18 members and guests present. A motion was made, seconded, and carried to approve the minutes of the January 18, 2003 meeting of the Chapter, as published in the February 2003 issue of Northstar News.

Treasurer Joe Fishbein was not present to give a report.

National Director Marty Swan reported that he now has an assistant to help him handle NRHS emblem sales. The next NRHS national BOD meeting will be in Richmond, VA on April 6th. National will not charge us for publicity for the 2004 National Convention if it can be sent out as part of regularly scheduled NRHS publications, such as the sheet on NRHS activities that is mailed out with the NRHS Bulletin. NRHS National President Greg Malloy will be traveling to Cuba in April.

This year, the Iowa Chapter will be commemorating the 50th anniversary of its founding.

Trip Director John Goodman reported that he was in Nashville last month for the annual convention of AARPCO, where he made important contacts. Railway Age had an article on the Union Pacific. It said that the UP may phase out fan trips, as there are too many complications.

Engine 261 will be running in early May and will make an overnight trip to Duluth and back the weekend before Memorial Day.

John talked about the plans for rail festivities in Baltimore in 2004. He discussed fan trip possibilities locally. He noted that we had few people sign up the last time we tried to put together a trip to Duluth. John said that he had heard rumors about possible operations of engine 2719, but didn't have any definite information. A question was asked about whether we could put together a one-way train trip to Duluth, with bus the other way, like we did before.

Glen Holmberg is continuing to act as interim Northstar News editor and production manager. We still need a new editor. If we can get enough news items and articles off the Internet, Glen might be able to continue putting it together. Dan Meyer noted that it doesn't take a huge time commitment to put out an issue.

The 2004 convention committee had a meeting this afternoon. We need to talk about the chapter's legal status. Information on this, including any by-law changes required to clarify our status, will be published in an upcoming issue of Northstar News. Notice must be in the hands of members 7 days in advance of the meeting and we must have at least 15% of the paid-up membership present to qualify as a quorum. The committee is working on ticketing, trips, a night photo session, and speakers.

Other Old Business - Dick Prosser's operation was delayed, but he should be able to come here this spring to give one of his slide shows.

The Holiday Banquet was discussed. It was decided we will go back to Tinnucci's. Russ Isbrandt moved for Marty Swan to be authorized to make reservations for our traditional day, the first Sunday in December. The motion was seconded by Dennis Louden and was carried.

New Business - Plans for the annual chapter picnic were discussed. Some of the locations suggested included Prescott or Red Wing. It was also suggested that it be held in place of the regular August membership meeting. Another activity suggested was a joint get-together with the Iowa Chapter at the Iowa Trolley Park in Clear Lake, IA. Dan Meyer said that he would check into the possibilities. A question was asked about the 8327 restoration project. Marty Swan sent a NRHS grant application form to Bill Herzog so we can apply for funds for cosmetic restoration on the engine.

Dan Meyer reported that the area at Hoffman is a security area, so rail fans shouldn't get too close or do anything suspicious. Door prizes were awarded, consisting of two railroad calendars and a certificate for 10 shares of B&O RR stock. It was announced that back issues of the exchange newsletters were available at the front table.

Tonight's program is a video tape Bob Koetz had purchased. The tape had extensive coverage of the Chicago & Illinois Midland in the late steam and early diesel era. There were also sequences on the Illinois Terminal and the North Shore Line interurbans and scenes of the Twin City Zephyrs.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made, seconded, and carried at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, David Norman, Secretary Northstar Chapter NRHS

Railroad news----Press release by the Union Pacific Railroad.

The Union Pacific Railroad owns and operates a conventional radio system that covers the 25 western states of the U.S. This high-tech rail carrier utilizes not only two-way radio, but also wireless data and 9,000 miles of fiber optic cables to support its highly sophisticated operations.

From the railroad's centralized dispatch center for train operations, between 700 and 800 trains are dispatched daily to points throughout the western half of the U.S. Its conventional radio system has expanded steadily over the years to more than 3,700 base stations, 17,000 portable radios, 4,3000 locomotive radios and several thousand mobile radios.

Now, Union Pacific is preparing to take a major step forward with plans to ultimately migrate the majority of its system from analog to digital technology. The new system will be based on the APCO Project 25 digital standard and will primarily operate as a conventional system with trunking utilized in some high congestion areas.

The first areas to be migrated would be the beginning and end points of the rail lines, which typically are located in busier urban areas. However, the low usage stretches in between the major terminals will remain analog until there is a need for a digital system.

"That's the advantage of a conventional system. We can communicate over both analog and digital systems to provide the most cost-effective solution to our business," says Kemp.

The data capabilities of the new digital system should help convince the company to allocate the capital necessary to fund the system. Kemp points out that data will provide vital information to improve the safety and operating efficiency of the railroad.

Union Pacific has some 4,000 locomotives in service, each one valued at an average of about $1.5 - 2 million. That adds up to over $6 billion in assets that are moving around the U.S. at any given time, which makes asset utilization especially important. Data offers the opportunity to ultimately provide a wide range of information about the current condition of each locomotive and send that information directly back to the central database.

Fuel monitoring is also a critical issue for the railroad since it spends about $1 million a day on diesel fuel. The objective is to improve the entire fuel management process and take advantage of lower fuel purchase prices and storage costs. With new devices to monitor the fuel levels at different stops, the data system eventually can be used to help schedule refueling stops more efficiently.

"I'm confident that once the operating department sees what we can do, money will be allocated so we can start implementing base stations even in outlying areas where spectrum efficiency really isn't an issue," says Kemp.

Key issues, such as multiple sourcing and interoperability, affect railroads as much as they affect public safety agencies. After all, a train that travels across country could use tracks belonging to several different railroads. Until Project 25, Kemp says, interoperability in the railroad industry has unfortunately created a "lowest common denominator" form of communications.

"We still use carrier squelch, for example," he says. "So it was a perfect match to be aligned with this new set of standards and the FCC requirements for narrowband (12.5 kHz) operation."

Not surprisingly, Kemp stresses that Union Pacific's planned digital system will be Project 25 compliant. He's also anticipating the many new benefits of digital technology, such as consistent audio quality, integrated voice and data, embedded signaling for unit ID, enhanced encryption, data port and more.

Kemp emphasizes that conventional two-way radio technology always has been and always will be vital to Union Pacific's communications. He also points out the railroad's conventional systems play an important role in the critical "hump yard" operations. The "hump" is a big hill in the middle of a railroad yard where cars are put together to build trains as long as a mile or more. On the upside of the hump is a track, and on the downside the track branches into a network of tracks. A switch engine pushes a series of box cars up the side of the hill and over the hump. The cars then are free-toll down the other side and are guided to a specific track to join a train that's going to a specific area. The conventional radio system connects the yard operator in the control tower, the engineer on board the locomotive that's doing the shove, and the person pulling the pin to release the cars as they come over the hump. "This demands exact timing and constant communications," according to Kemp. "This is another situation where conventional radio works perfectly for us."