



# NORTHSTAR NEWS

## Western Rail Odyssey By Joe Fishbein



Amtrak train #4, the *Southwest Chief* at Ribera, NM, between Albuquerque and Las Vegas, NM traveling through two back to back horseshoe curves at a track speed of 25mph. Photo by Joe Fishbein

Inside this issue		Meeting Notice
Officer Contact List	P.2	The November meeting of the Northstar Chapter will be at 7pm November 19th at the St. Paul Fire Department Training Center, 1695 Energy Park Drive, St. Paul (Snelling and Energy Park Drive just east of Midway Stadium). Dawn Holmberg and Dan Meyer will present their slides of the Oakland to Portland special NRHS convention train.
The President's Page	P.2	
Soo Line Historical Society Contribution Request	P.3	
Western Rail Odyssey - 5,700 Miles and 15 states via Amtrak	P.4	
News Item from All Aboard News Group	P.8	
News Item From Trains Magazine News Wire	P.9	LAST CHANCE TO SIGN UP FOR THE HOLIDAY BANQUET. SEE PAGE 9!
Meeting Minutes from October Meeting	P.9	
Holiday Banquet Reservation Form	P.9	



## Northstar Chapter Officers

### Board of Directors

President	H. Martin Swan	Email: <a href="mailto:HMSwan@webtv.net">HMSwan@webtv.net</a>	Phone: 612-961-1684
Vice President	Mark Braun	Email: <a href="mailto:mkbraun@hutchtel.net">mkbraun@hutchtel.net</a>	Phone: 320-587-2279
Past President	Bill Herzog	Email: <a href="mailto:herzogminn@aol.com">herzogminn@aol.com</a>	Phone: 952-470-4021
National Director	Doug Johnson	Email: <a href="mailto:djoh322721@aol.com">djoh322721@aol.com</a>	Phone: 612-825-6458
Treasurer	Joe Fishbein	Email: <a href="mailto:jmf@visi.com">jmf@visi.com</a>	Phone: 651-457-1610
Secretary	Dave Norman	Email: <a href="mailto:nevad11@hotmail.com">nevad11@hotmail.com</a>	Phone: 612-729-2428
Trustee	Dennis Loudon	Email: <a href="mailto:bnsf@comcast.net">bnsf@comcast.net</a>	Phone: 651-698-8559

### Staff

Program Chairman	John Goodman	Email: <a href="mailto:good6012@amtrak.com">good6012@amtrak.com</a>	
Newsletter Editor	Russ Isbrandt	Email: <a href="mailto:risbrandt@comcast.net">risbrandt@comcast.net</a>	Phone: 651-426-1156
Webmaster	Dan Meyer	Website: <a href="http://www.northstar-nrhs.org">www.northstar-nrhs.org</a>	

Note: Consult the website for any announcements regarding Chapter activities including cancellation of meeting for any reason including weather.

## Membership Information

Dues are \$32 (this includes \$20 National dues and \$12 Northstar Chapter dues). Family memberships are \$3 additional. If you want to join, an application is available at <http://www.northstar-nrhs.org/>. Print out the application and send it with a check made out to Northstar Chapter, NRHS to Treasurer, Northstar Chapter NRHS, 1092 Humboldt Ave, West Saint Paul, MN 55118.

## The President's Page

Greetings: Winter is almost here. Get out the heavy coat, check the savings account to make sure you have enough money to pay your natural gas bill (or oil bill) and get ready for some winter railroading. Speaking of the gas or oil bill, how many of you can remember when your folk's or your grandparent's house was coal fueled. As a very young boy I can remember the coal truck coming up and sending coal

down the chute to the basement coal bin at my grandparent's house. Grandfather would go down every now and then to put some coal in to stroke the fire. It seemed perfectly natural to me. Eventually they converted to natural gas and the coal bin was converted into a storage area for Grandmother's jelly, watermelon preserves, corn and anything else she was canning (in jars though, not cans). They also installed a shower down in the basement. After Grandfather would bring me home from a wonderful night at the CB&Q stockyards (as

described earlier) we would clean up down there leaving our filthy clothes there for Grandmother to wash, before coming up to a late night snack that Grandmother would have prepared. Memories!

Each of you should have received a post card advising you of the talk and book signing by Dr. Don Hofsommer of copies of his new book "Minneapolis & the Age of Railways" being presented at the Mill City Museum. We were contacted by the Mill City Museum to let us know about this program and they asked if they could use our mailing list.

I had problems with complying with that request. In the first place, I discovered that we had no real policy concerning our mailing address list and in the second place, I get nervous about just handing that information out in this day and age. That being said, however, I realized that his program was something that our Chapter members needed to know about. What we did was ask the Museum to send us the post cards and we mailed them out at our expense (postage).

One of the problems with giving out the mailing list is that you lose control of it. The person whom you send it to might swear up and down that they will never give it to anybody else, but how do you know that they won't?

Nevertheless, there are legitimate requests for that mailing list, such as the one from the Museum. As a result I'm setting the policy that if we receive what appears to be a legitimate request for our mailing list, we will supply it. If you don't want your name on the mailing list that would be supplied as the result of such a request YOU MUST ADVISE US. YOU MUST FORWARD THE INFORMATION TO RUSS IS-BRANDT, EDITOR OF THE NORTHSTAR NEWS, AND REQUEST YOUR NAME BE REMOVED. If your name is removed you will not receive any information from any such organizations that we would choose to supply the mailing list. In my case, I don't want my home street address used. Russ knows this and the mailing list will show my lock box address. Again, if you don't want your name on the mailing list supplied to any organization that requests it and we deem to be legitimate, then you must let us know. For further information, we will NEVER sell our mailing list to anybody for any reason.

Don't forget to send in your banquet reservation to Dennis and you all have a GREAT THANKSGIVING.

## Contribution Request For The Soo Line Historical Society Archives Building Project By Jim George

We had a significant discussion of this at our last meeting in October, but for members not present here is a summary of that discussion.

For those not familiar with it, the Soo Line Historical and Technical Society is an approximately 1200-member organization headquartered in the upper Midwest and specializing in preserving the history of the Soo Line; old and new Wisconsin Central; Duluth, South Shore, and Atlantic; and various other predecessor and acquired lines. Over the years the Society has acquired an extensive archive of rare photos, slides, AFE's, engineering drawings, maps, reference books, and miscellaneous items. Much of this has come from the railroad itself from locations such as Stevens Point and Fond du Lac as the railroad has purged its files. There are over 1,000 boxes of AFE's alone. This is probably the largest archive of Soo Line material existing anywhere, dwarfing the collection currently held by the Minnesota Historical Society here in St. Paul. And the Soo's collection will continue to grow with expected future acquisitions from its members.

For the past 20 years the Society has struggled with housing this vast archive. It was originally housed in a school building in Neenah, Wisconsin until the school district requested that the collection be removed. Next they entered into an agreement with the UW-Oshkosh library for what was thought to be a permanent home, but after several years the library needed additional space and again the Society was asked to remove its collection. Since then the collection has been stored in a number of rented storage units and members' garages and basements.

After the removal of the collection from the University location, the Society's archive committee has investigated joint facilities with other Midwestern railroad historical societies. These include the National Railroad Museum at Green Bay, Lake Superior Museum of Transportation in Duluth, Jackson Street Roundhouse here in St. Paul, and the Mid-Continent Railroad Museum in North Freedom. None had the necessary space to house the collection. The state historical societies in both Wisconsin and Minnesota were also contacted, but again neither had the necessary space and only were interested in a small portion of the collection. Other alternatives were investigated but nothing satisfactory was found.

The Society's archives committee has concluded that to properly house, preserve, catalog, and make available this vast archive, they need to have their own facility under their own control. They are proposing to build their own building on land available under a long-term lease on the Neenah Historical Society campus. The Society plans to build a replica of the 1891 Neenah Wisconsin Central passenger depot at this location. There will be 3 levels to house the complete archives and to provide space for a railroad museum and library research space. It is estimated that this 5,000 sq. ft. building will cost approximately \$200,000. The Society membership has overwhelmingly approved this project and has pledged over \$40,000 in the first 2 months alone. They will be actively pursuing all other possible avenues of grants and funding.

I am a member of the Soo Line Historical Society, believe in



this project, and have made a significant personal pledge towards it. At the last Northstar NRHS meeting I discussed the project and suggested that this is something that our chapter might support with a major contribution. \$5,000 was offered as a possible amount. We have the financial means, and the nature of this project fits in perfectly with our mission statement and reason for being. And, after all, the Soo Line is a home-town railroad and this will be the premiere archive of that railroad. Some have thought that this project would be best left in the hands of the "professional" archivists. However there are examples of successful private organization archives that do an equal or even better job than public institutions, especially those public institutions that have experienced significant budget cuts over the years. I think that in many cases a dedicated and enthusiastic group of volunteers who understand, appreciate, and have a passion for the material can do just as well as the so-called professionals.

At our next meeting I hope to have a couple of members from the Soo Line archives committee as our guests who will discuss this proposal further and answer questions in more detail than I have been able to. In the meantime, please think about how the North Star can help in this worthwhile project with a major financial contribution.

## Western Rail Odyssey - 5,700 Miles and 15 states via Amtrak By Joe Fishbein

2005 has been quite a crazy year for me. We have been swamped at work, my yard is a weed-infested nightmare, and my 18-year old daughter, Sarah, got her first car (and I got the high insurance rates that come with it). So when my sister in Los Angeles called and invited me to spend a few days out there, I was more than ready for a break.

I like to travel by Amtrak, and not just because I'm a railfan. It's convenient, relaxing, and in many cases much less expensive than flying. I have family in Detroit, and make that trip by Amtrak at least once a year. However, it's been almost 20 years since I've taken an extended, multi-day train trip. The trip to L.A. seemed like a perfect opportunity to break that long dry spell.

With the help of a timetable and Amtrak's web site, I hatched a plan: The *Empire Builder* to Portland, *Coast Starlight* to Los Angeles, *Southwest Chief* to Chicago, and the "*Builder*" again back to St. Paul. I contemplated taking the *Coast Starlight* up to Emeryville and the *California Zephyr* to Chicago instead, but rejected that idea for two reasons: First, I rode the most scenic part of that route, Denver to Salt Lake City, in 1979 aboard the original *Rio Grande Zephyr*, and it's pretty hard to top an experience like that. Secondly, I've never ridden the Santa Fe route before. (In fact, except for Chicago to St. Paul to Spokane, the entire trip was new mileage for me). And as it turned out, the CZ would have been detoured through Wyo-

ming anyway, due to track work.

Since I needed to make this trip on a tight budget, I originally was planning to ride coach the entire way. However, one of the agents at the St. Paul Amtrak station found me an inexpensive sleeper on the *Coast Starlight* that still kept the cost within my budget. Adding a sleeper to the *Empire Builder* and *Southwest Chief* would have added another \$1100 to the cost, so I stayed with coach seating for those portions. As an added bonus, going first class on the *Starlight* meant I could experience the *Pacific Parlour* cars that are unique to that train.

The short synopsis: It was a wonderful trip. With one exception (which in no way was Amtrak's fault), the trains were running on time or nearly so, the ride was comfortable, and the Amtrak personnel were friendly and helpful.

### *Empire Builder*

On Thursday night, September 22, I boarded the west-bound *Empire Builder* at St. Paul's Midway station, which departed promptly on schedule at 11:15 PM. I found a seat to myself in the front half of the car, midway between the stairs and the front vestibule. (A location I highly recommend if you're going coach. It's far enough forward to where you won't be disturbed by people using the stairs, but far enough back from the vestibule so the noise is minimal). It took me a while to get to sleep, partly from the excitement of starting the trip and partly because I had to find a comfortable position. I had the foresight to bring a pillow and small blanket with me, which helped a lot. The blanket helped to cushion the hard edges of the seat, and the full pillow was much more supportive than the micro-pillows that Amtrak provides. I also raised the leg rests on both seats, and was able to stretch out diagonally.

I slept on and off the first night, vaguely remembering the stops at Detroit Lakes and Fargo. The noise level was low, except for the girl sitting across the aisle from me. (What is it that compels young girls on trains to call their boyfriends on their cell phones at 3 AM? "Hi, it's me. I'm on the train now.") I woke up again briefly as we were approaching Grand Forks, and recall seeing the lights from the city stretched out in a line on the horizon – and I do mean "line." I slept some more, and eventually woke up somewhere between Devil's Lake and Rugby. We had lost time during the night, and departed Rugby 54 minutes late.

Friday was overcast, with occasional light showers. The fall colors were well under way in North Dakota. At Minot, during the service stop, local police went through a few of the cars with drug-sniffing dogs. They weren't looking for anything specific, but it's part of the heightened level of security that we unfortunately have to deal with these days.

Minot was also a designated smoking stop, a policy Amtrak

has started since banning smoking aboard all of its trains. It allows people to get off the train every few hours to satisfy their nicotine habit. As a non-smoker, I took advantage of those stops to get off, stretch my legs, and grab a few pictures. Having the entire train non-smoking is a tremendous improvement over the days when the lounge car was half smoking and half non-smoking. As a friend of mine once put it, having a non-smoking section in a restaurant [or lounge car] is like having a no-peeing section in a swimming pool.

We left Minot 26 minutes late, having picked up a little bit of time. As we progressed through western North Dakota into Montana, the landscape became much more rugged and desolate. The folded hills were filled with hay rolls and oil wells, with the occasional rusted-out car for interest.

I had lunch in the dining car around Wolf Point, MT. Since meals aboard Amtrak have been described many times in other travel accounts by chapter members, I'll skip that part of the story. Suffice it to say that the meals I had on all the trains (lunch and dinner; I brought my own provisions for breakfast) were very good, the prices were a bit high but not unreasonably so, and the dining car employees were courteous, friendly and pleasant to deal with. It was a very enjoyable experience in all cases.

When we reached Shelby, the padding Amtrak adds to their schedule became apparent. Despite leaving Havre 16 minutes late, we arrived in Shelby 22 minutes early. A quick check of the timetable showed that the average speed between Havre and Shelby, based on the listed times, is only 46 MPH. As we pulled into Shelby, a guy driving a pickup truck on a road parallel to the tracks had his arm out the window, giving the entire train a one-finger salute. I figured that he either had a problem of some sort with Amtrak, or else he was a representative of the Shelby Visitors' Welcoming Committee. (Or Our Secretary of Transportation—editor.)

West of Cut Bank, they were experiencing signal problems, and we had to run at restricted speed for several miles. However, it wasn't too much later when we could start seeing snow-capped mountains to the west. The tops were in the overcast, but it was still quite a sight after riding most of the day across Montana's "Big Sky" prairies. At Cut Bank, a naturalist from Glacier Park had boarded the train, and provided commentary in the lounge car about the surrounding geology and wildlife as we made our way up to Marias Pass. It was getting fairly dark by then, so we couldn't see a lot. On the west side of the pass, crews were working to clean up a freight derailment that had occurred a couple of days earlier. Several hoppers carrying corn had dumped their loads, and they wanted to get it cleaned up quickly before the corn started to ferment. (Grizzly bears are dangerous, but nothing compared to drunken grizzly bears).

I slept better the second night. I do remember waking up in Spokane in a very dark and quiet car, as the front half of the train had been disconnected to continue on to Seattle. At 5:30, a number of passengers boarded at Pasco, and since they seemed disinclined to sleep (including another girl with a boyfriend and a cell phone), I decided it was time to get up



View of the Columbia River Gorge looking forward from the Sightseer Car on the Portland section of the Empire Builder. Photo by Joe Fishbein

as well. The sun rose as we headed into the Columbia River gorge, and soon Mt. Hood could easily be seen in the distance. We finally pulled into Portland Union Station, 20 minutes early on Saturday morning, September 24.

I had originally planned to ride the Portland LRT and downtown trolley during my 4-hour layover, but there were some other things I had to do first, and ran out of time. I saw several trains from both systems, and they seemed to be very clean and comfortable.

#### *Coast Starlight*

Because I was going first class to Los Angeles, I was able to spend some time in the Metropolitan Lounge in the Portland station. The room is small but nicely appointed, with comfortable seating, free beverages and other amenities. As soon as the *Starlight* arrived from Seattle, we were able to walk out to the platform and board the train. It left Portland 6 minutes late.

The *Coast Starlight* is notorious for being very late into Los Angeles, to the point where it has earned the nickname "Starlate." I had been monitoring its performance on Amtrak's web site for a month before my trip; it was typically 4-6 hours late into L.A., and sometimes more. I told my sister, who would be picking me up, to check with Amtrak before driving downtown. I was due in at 9 PM, but I would almost certainly NOT be there at 9. (As I'll describe later, it arrived much earlier than I would have expected).

I settled into roomette 2, across the aisle from Bob, the car attendant. Tom, the *Pacific Parlour* car attendant, was on the



Amtrak #11, The Coast Starlight at Portland. Photo by Joe Fishbein

PA, pointing out scenic highlights along the way, which was a nice touch. North of Salem, we went into the hole for a freight, the first of many times that would happen on the trip. After Eugene, as we began the climb into the Cascades, we had to take the siding for the northbound *Coast Starlight*, which was running 6 hours late. Unfortunately, it got dark before we really got into the heart of the mountains, but I could hear the many tunnels we passed through during the climb.

I spent some time after dinner sitting in the *Pacific Parlour*. It's a very nice car, with a combination of plush chairs, bench seating and tables. A bar is at one end, with free (non-alcoholic) drinks for first-class passengers. Tom, the attendant, was very personable and had a strange sense of humor (as do I). We got along very well. After a while, I went back to my room, crawled into bed, and spent some time looking at the many stars in the sky outside my window as we glided through southern Oregon and northern California.

I slept very well, and woke up around sunrise the next morning as we were racing south through the Sacramento Valley. We pulled into Sacramento about an hour late, much better than the trains I had been monitoring before my trip. On the adjacent track was CalTrain 727, set to depart for San Jose. We continued south, losing a bit of time at each stop as we went through the Bay area, finally departing San Jose an hour and 40 minutes late.

Between Salinas and Paso Robles, the passengers were cautioned about rough track and were given safety instructions (keep your feet as wide apart as your shoulders when walking through the train, keep one hand free to brace yourself, etc.). After passing Paso Robles, a wine-tasting session was held in the *Pacific Parlour*. I know next to nothing about wine, but I enjoyed the three California varieties they were sampling,

and there were ample amounts of cheese and crackers available. The best part was enjoying the wine while we rode along cliffs and through tunnels, making the steep descent into San Luis Obispo. From there, we ran alongside the Pacific Ocean for over 100 miles to Santa Barbara.

Until I talked to Bob when I boarded at Portland, I hadn't been aware that sleeping cars were equipped with showers. Since it was getting dark, and I'd been riding for nearly 3 days, I decided it was time to try it out before one of the Amtrak on-board employees turned a hose on me. The shower had apparently been remodeled at some point, since the instruction plate bore little resemblance to the actual shower mechanism, but it wasn't hard to figure out. The shower was very nice, with ample hot water and good water pressure. Now I wouldn't have to worry about peeling the roof lining in my sister's car when she picked me up.

We were running about an hour late as we went through the tunnels between Simi Valley and Van Nuys. We finally arrived at Los Angeles Union Station 37 minutes late on Sunday night, September 25th – a phenomenal performance compared to its usual extremely late arrivals into L.A.

#### *Southwest Chief*

I spent 4 days in L.A. with my sister, visiting the King Tut exhibit at the art museum, attending a taping of the *Tonight Show* with Jay Leno, watching dolphins playing offshore at Malibu, wandering along Venice Beach, and fighting the crowds in Hollywood. All too soon, it was time to leave and start heading home.

The "*Chief*" was nearly full departing L.A. Thursday evening, September 29. I was once again in coach, and the car attendant was assigning seats as we boarded. I was supposed to be in seat 22, an aisle seat with a young guy already in the window seat, but I decided to grab the window seat across the aisle. The car attendant seemed to be a bit upset about it; I told her that I preferred a seat to myself, but that I'd move if she needed the space. As it turned out, I was able to stay where I was. (At Chicago, I apologized for messing up her system, thanked her for letting me stay in that seat, and gave her a tip).

We departed LAX on time, got about 500 feet out from the station, stopped, backed up a bit, and then sat there for another 15 minutes. I'm not sure what was going on, but we were 25 minutes late at Fullerton, our first stop. By now it was dark, and the popping in my ears told me that we had started our climb up to Cajon Pass. I also noticed that freight traffic was very heavy; it seemed like we were passing a west-bound freight (mostly double-stack trains) about every 5 minutes or so. I again settled in for the night, having perfected my seat configuration and blanket and pillow placement aboard the *Empire Builder*.

Sunrise found us speeding across the Arizona desert under

clear skies between Flagstaff and Winslow. I struck up a conversation with the guy across the aisle that I was supposed to be sitting with. He was a Marine, on leave from Camp Pendleton, going to Gallup for a family illness. He said that he had already done two tours of duty in Iraq, and was going over for a third time in January. I thanked him for his service, wished him luck, and told him to keep low.

New Mexico is an incredibly beautiful place, probably the scenic highlight of the entire trip (of what I could see in daylight). Deeply-carved red rock canyons are abundant. There was evidence of recent heavy rains, judging from a lot of standing water and rapidly-running streams. The westbound stack trains continued to slam by us every few minutes, and we frequently crossed between the two tracks to get around other freights. BNSF really seems to know how to get Amtrak over the road, in comparison to the problems UP has with the *Coast Starlight*.

The lounge car attendant, Paddy, was on the PA frequently to point out the scenic highlights around us. He also was pushing his "world-famous thermonuclear Bloody Marys" (guaranteed to put a glow in your cheeks and a mushroom cloud over your head). Again, Amtrak's schedule padding came into play, as we were 47 minutes late out of Gallup but 10 minutes early into Albuquerque. Albuquerque is a long service stop, with plenty of time to wander around, check out the Native American jewelry and crafts being sold by vendors on the platform, and enjoy the warm dry air.

A few minutes before we departed, I had a brief conversation with a plainclothes Albuquerque police officer who came aboard to talk to everybody in my car. He asked to see my ticket stub and to point out which pieces of luggage were mine. Again, he wasn't looking for anything in particular, but was doing a random security spot-check.

We proceeded east through northeastern New Mexico, and I watched as the terrain became flatter and more grassy. Since we had split from the main freight line at Dalies, just west of Albuquerque, we saw very little freight traffic. We could see mountains in the distance as we wound through the country, traversing the famous double-horseshoe curve near Ribera. This line is mostly single-track, and is still controlled with semaphore signals. We paralleled Interstate 25 for quite a distance, and even though the freeway had a posted speed limit of 75 MPH, we were going faster than many of the cars. We also saw herds of antelope and elk grazing as we rolled past.

We crossed from New Mexico to Colorado over Raton Pass, which seemed a bit anti-climactic after the rugged canyons we had seen earlier in the day. To the east of the tunnel, at the top of the pass, there is a sign indicating an elevation of 7,588 feet, the highest point on the entire Santa Fe Railroad.

We stopped at Trinidad around sunset, and then turned east for our nighttime run across Kansas.

I slept well again that night, knowing I wasn't missing much scenery in the dark, and woke up as we were entering Kansas City, 16 minutes early. Continuing east, we crossed Missouri at 85 MPH, passing many westbound stack and TOFC trains. Paddy continued to point out scenic highlights and promote his powerful concoctions over the PA. We cut across the southeast tip of Iowa, stopping at Fort Madison, and then entered Illinois. At Cameron, we crossed over from the ATSF to the CB&Q line (both now BNSF) for the run into Galesburg. Although we were 10 minutes late out of Galesburg, and stayed that way for the following few stops, we were 24 minutes early into Chicago on Saturday afternoon, October 1.

Chicago

Since I knew I needed to spend a night in Chicago to catch the *Empire Builder* home, I had contacted an old friend in Barrington, who invited me to spend a couple of days with him and his family. The plan was to call him when I got to Chicago and take the Northwest Line METRA train out to Barrington, where he'd pick me up.

From Union Station, I walked 2 blocks up Clinton Street to the Ogilvie Transportation Center. I had packed light for the trip, but it still wasn't easy to drag a wheeled duffle bag and a heavy shoulder bag through downtown Chicago. At the station, I noticed that a Northwest Line train was due to depart in 5 minutes, and the next one would be an hour later. I decided to jump on that one and call him from the Barrington station. I managed to find an empty seat and wedge my luggage in next to me. As we passed several stations that were little more than shelters, I started to wonder, "What if there's no pay phone at Barrington?" It turned out there was, and everything worked out OK.

*Empire Builder*, Redux

Monday, October 3, was the final day of my trip. It had been a great vacation, but after 11 days, I was ready to come home. I caught a late-morning Northwest Line METRA train (to avoid the morning commuter rush) back to downtown Chicago, and once again made the two-block trek to Union Station. Except for the very warm and humid weather, it wasn't too difficult. I had a couple of hours before the "*Builder*" departed, so I threw my stuff into a locker, grabbed some lunch, and spent some time looking at the architecture in Union Station's Great Hall. It's an amazing space, and the restoration they did back in the 1980s really brought back the grandeur of the place.

Most of you have ridden the "*Builder*" between Chicago and St. Paul, so there isn't much I can add. We left Chicago on schedule at 2:15, got into Milwaukee ahead of schedule, and after the requisite stop for the smokers, departed Milwaukee right on time.



The trouble began about 40 miles west of Milwaukee, near Oconomowoc Lake. We came to a slow stop on the main line, and the conductor announced that we were waiting for a freight train to get into the clear. After 20 minutes, the conductor announced that the train we were waiting for had been involved in a traffic accident, and that we were waiting for civil authorities to give us permission to proceed. After an hour of waiting, the conductor said that it would be at least another hour, and possibly more, before we could continue. Finally, after 2 hours and 15 minutes, an eastbound freight rolled by, and as soon as it cleared, we were under way.

Apparently, a car had been hit by the eastbound train that passed us, and the driver of the car was killed. Police were not sure what had happened, but the man who was killed lived next to the tracks in Oconomowoc. As we passed through the area, I could see the car on the south side of the tracks, upside-down and surrounded by emergency vehicles. We pulled into Columbus 2 hours and 27 minutes late, and continued to lose a few minutes at each stop. It was already dark at this point, so there was little to see outside the window.

We made up some time between Red Wing and St. Paul, but we still pulled into Midway station at 12:50 AM, 2 hours and 20 minutes late. There was only one taxi still at the station by then, and several of us had to wait until more cabs were called. Finally, at 1:45 in the morning, 11 days and almost 5,800 rail miles after I had left, I opened the front door of my house and dragged myself and my luggage inside.

#### Final Thoughts

As much as I enjoyed the trip, there are a few things I would do differently next time. The main thing would be to reverse the direction, so that I'd be going through the Cascades and Glacier Park in daylight.

I'm still not sure if I'd take a sleeper or not next time. On a sleeper, except for meals (and the *Pacific Parlour* on the *Coast Starlight*), you're pretty much sitting by yourself in the roomette. I enjoy talking to the other passengers, and would miss that with a sleeper the entire way. However, if I was traveling during the peak summer months, and the chances of me getting a seat by myself were slim, I might opt for the sleeper anyway.

The bad old days of poor Amtrak service seem to be gone for good. Everybody I had contact with at stations and on board, from car attendants to dining car staff to lounge car attendants, were uniformly friendly and helpful, and seemed to really be enjoying their jobs.

Finally, there are a couple oddities I noticed:

In the lower level bathrooms of the older cars, there are two

trash doors, one for diapers and sanitary napkins and the other for regular trash. Both of them empty into the same bin. Not only that, there are labels on the wall, which in some cases are reversed from what is embossed on the doors themselves.

There were a few Amish families traveling on all the trains I rode on. At Kansas City, during the morning *Southwest Chief* stop, one of the Amish women was out on the platform – talking on a cell phone.

During our 2-hour wait near Oconomowoc on the trip home, I spent some time talking to a young man standing in the vestibule area. He was headed to Wisconsin Dells to spend 4 days under house arrest for, as he put it, "mouthing off" to a cop in Milwaukee. He had called the authorities and told them about the delay, and although they weren't happy about it, there was nothing anyone could do. While we were talking, another man joined us, and said he was headed to Portage to spend 30 days in jail on a DWI charge. I guess you really do meet all sorts of interesting people on the train!

## News Item From All Aboard News Group

Man Jumps From Overpass Onto Top of Train

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS Published: November 4, 2005  
Filed at 1:15 a.m. ET

Posted by Don Mills of the All Aboard Group Nov. 4, 8:54am

CAMARILLO, Calif. (AP) -- A man jumped onto the top of an Amtrak train from a U.S. 101 overpass Thursday and was arrested miles down the track by sheriff's deputies who swooped in by helicopter.

Juan Lopez, 33, of Camarillo made the 20-foot leap about 9 a.m., authorities said.

"At this point the train starts pulling out and the witnesses see Mr. Lopez standing on top of the train waving to everyone in the parking lot," Deputy Julie Novak told KCAL-TV Los Angeles.

The Amtrak engineer, unaware Lopez was on top of the train, guided the train for another five miles before stopping in Somis. A county helicopter dropped deputies onto the train.

"We found the train. We still found Mr. Lopez on top of the train. He was being uncooperative and not following their orders so they actually had deputies on the ground distract him while other deputies sneaked up behind him," Novak said.

It was then they discovered Lopez had a broken ankle. He was restrained and taken to Pleasant Valley Hospital Medical Center.

"Because of the incident and the history we have with him -- we've had some psychological incidents -- so the hospital is going to do an evaluation," Novak said.



News Item From Trains Magazine News Wire  
Friday Nov. 4th

WASHINGTON — Calling it one last chance for the Senate to be heard on whether it wants a national passenger rail system, Senator Trent Lott of Mississippi Thursday asked the Senate to adopt as an amendment to the budget reconciliation bill, the Amtrak reform bill he introduced in July. The amendment was adopted by a vote of 93-6.

"I know it is highly unusual to add an authorization bill to reconciliation, but time is running out," said Lott, the chairman of the Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Subcommittee. "Despite the Commerce Committee having reported out this bill in July, we have been unable to schedule it for the full Senate. Because the Administration has indicated it will not support any funding for Amtrak this fiscal year unless Congress enacts Amtrak reforms, it is imperative for the Congress to make its voice heard on Amtrak. Time is running out."

The Amtrak reauthorization bill centers around three themes: reform and accountability, cost cutting, and creating funding options for the states.

"The amendment improves how Amtrak works and ensures that the taxpayers' money is used more effectively," Lott said. "It cuts the Amtrak operating subsidy by 40 percent and creates a new rail capital grant program that states can use to start new inter-city passenger rail service. It requires Amtrak to develop much better financial systems and be held accountable for its use of federal funding."

# Minutes of the October 15, 2005 Membership Meeting of the Northstar Chapter NRHS

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by chapter president Marty Swan in the St. Paul Fire Department Training Center with 18 members and guests present. Marty noted that he had recently broken his hearing aid, so he warned people that he might have a little trouble hearing them. Marty asked if there were any guests or new members present. There were several guests - Jim Kleven and Bob Foster. A motion was made to approve the minutes of the September 17, 2005 membership meeting, as published in the October 2005 issue of Northstar News. The motion was seconded. A minor correction was made - the name of Ron Linebarger was misspelled. The motion to approve the minutes, as corrected, carried. No chapter member had any serious health or other problems that we were aware of, so there was no Cheer Committee report.

Treasurer Joe Fishbein gave his report. As of September 1, 2005, we had \$3,307 in the checking account. Income during September was \$2,114 in final funds payment from the National Convention Committee and \$1 in checking account interest, for total income of \$2,115. Expenses were \$101 in newsletter expenses and \$15 for pop for the chapter picnic, for total expenses during September of \$116. Cash in checking account, as of September 30, 2005, was \$5,306, of which \$3,566 was in the General Fund and \$1,740 was in the GTW 8327 Restoration Fund. Funds in CDs and investments, as of September 30, 2005, were \$32,000. We currently have 90 members in the chapter, of whom 2 have paid dues for 2006. Joe said that he hadn't heard yet from the NRHS national office about when the membership renewal forms would be sent out.

Trip chairman John Goodman is in St. Louis for a meeting of the 2006 NRHS National Convention Committee. He is continuing to explore a possible weekend trip to Illinois Railway Museum at Union, IL, with a possible side trip to the railfan viewing area at Rochelle, IL.

Northstar Chapter Holiday Banquet December 4, 2005

The annual banquet will be held at Mancini's Char House 531 West 7th St., St. Paul, MN beginning with a social hour at 4pm. Greg Smith will present Railroadng History in the Twin Cities following the meal.

Meal Choices:

8 oz. Sirloin Steak

Number desired

10 oz. Chicken Breast Battered

Number desired

10 oz. Chicken Breast Broiled

Number desired

12 oz. Walleye Fillet Battered

Number desired\_\_\_\_\_

12 oz. Walleye Fillet Broiled

Number desired

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Total \_\_\_\_\_ X \$21.00=\_\_\_\_\_

All meals are \$21 including beverage, tip, tax and desert.

Please make check payable to the Northstar Chapter NRHS and mail reservation to :

Dennis Loudon,

Holiday Party,

1895 Wordsworth Ave.

Page 9

St. Paul, MN 55116

Reservation deadline is November 29th.

where the BNSF and UP mainlines cross. Marty said that he had a letter to pass along to John about a possible trip for the Iowa Chapter NRHS over the electric railroad from Mason City, IA to Clear Lake. We might be able to join this trip. National director Doug Johnson is also in St. Louis. He plans to attend the fall NRHS Board of Directors meeting in early November, representing the Northstar Chapter. He plans to vote for Marty to become Central Region Vice President. Northstar News editor Russ Isbrandt reported that he is still looking for more "How I Became a Railfan" articles. Housing chairman Mike Mackner was not present to give a report. Dennis Loudon reported on plans for the Holiday Banquet. Reservations are trickling in slowly. Dennis reminded everyone that the deadline for reservations is November 29th. The Election Committee was mentioned - all incumbents are willing to run for re-election. Marty asked there were any other members who wished to be candidates for any office or who wish to nominate someone, but received no response. The election will be held at next month's meeting. Bill Herzog was not present to report on the GTW 8327 restoration project.

A member of the chapter, John Melius, passed away earlier this year. Donations to the Boy Scouts had been requested as a memorial to him. Ron Linebarger moved that the chapter donate \$50 to the Boy Scouts as a memorial to Mr. Melius. Bob Koetz seconded the motion. After a discussion, the motion carried. Marty asked if there was any other Old Business, but there was no response. It was mentioned that obituaries to Mr. Melius had appeared in Northstar News and the St. Paul Pioneer Press.

New Business - Jim George said that he had an idea that he wanted to present to the group. He emphasized that we should not make a motion at this month's meeting and that he would give information about the proposal for publication in Northstar News, so that members could study it before any decision was made. The Soo Line Historical Society has accumulated lots of files from the railroad and is now doing fundraising to build their own archives. They have land at Neenah and want to build a replica of the original depot that once was there. The estimated cost would be \$200,000. During the discussion, it was mentioned that they have approached major libraries, railroad museums, etc., but none of them want to take over the

Northstar News  
Northstar Chapter NRHS  
4036 Birch Knoll Drive  
White Bear Lake, MN 55110

## Address Correction Requested

collection. Jim suggested that the chapter donate \$5,000 toward the project. A suggestion was made from the floor that the matter be tabled until the next chapter Board of Directors meeting. The board must approve all expenditures of more than \$500 unless those expenditures are authorized by vote of the membership. After more discussion, Jim said that he would write the article and we can discuss the proposal again at a future membership meeting. There were no other items of New Business.

Announcements - Someone suggested using part of the money we made from the national convention to reprint a book on Minnesota railroads. The National Association of Railroad Passengers will be having a meeting in Minneapolis soon. There will be a presentation on Thursday, November 3 by rail historian Don Hofsommer at the Mill City Museum in Minneapolis. The Northstar Chapter will send out postcards announcing the event. Someone mentioned that we need to establish a policy for use of our mailing list. Russ Isbrandt said that he wants to put out a chapter roster - anyone who does not want their information published should notify him. Roger Clark said that Greg Smith had shown him 8 mm. rail movies from the Dick Prosser collection. There is an arts center in Edina where people can transfer such material to DVD format. Suggestions were made that this could be an alternate program for the Holiday Party and that the chapter issue copies of these for sale. Roger Clark will present tonight's program.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made, seconded, and carried at 7:56 p.m. It was announced that exchange newsletters and an old railroad calendar are available at the front of the room. After a break, Roger Clark presented the program. He announced that he hadn't organized his slides of his Colorado trips, so instead he showed vintage scenes of midwestern railroads.

Respectfully submitted,

Dave Norman, Secretary Northstar Chapter NRHS

# TRAIN CONSISTS

Amtrak westbound "Empire Builder", Train 7/27, Havre, MT,  
9/23/05

178, 86 GE P42DC  
1206 Baggage  
39045 Sleeper  
32068 Sleeper  
32050 Sleeper  
38057 Dining Car  
31013 Coach  
34027 Coach  
33006\* Sightseer Lounge  
34117\* Coach  
31003\* Coach  
32033\* Sleeper

39046	Sleeper
32051	Sleeper
32069	Sleeper
38057	Dining Car
34134	Coach
31010	Coach
33028	Sightseer Lounge
31031	Coach
34106	Coach
32060	Sleeper

\*these 4 cars, along with added P42DC locomotives 187 and 138, were split from the train at Spokane and became the Portland section, train 27.

Amtrak southbound "Coast Starlight", Train 11, Portland, OR,  
9/24/05

122, 116, 450 GE P42DC (2), GM F59PHI  
1208 Baggage  
39019 Transition Sleeper  
32063 Sleeper  
32053 Sleeper  
32073 Sleeper  
39975 Pacific Parlour  
38065 Dining Car  
33049 Sightseer Lounge  
34058 Coach  
34504 Coach  
34113 Coach

Amtrak eastbound "Southwest Chief", Train 4, Albuquerque,  
NM, 9/30/05

56, 47, 60 GE P42DC  
53502 Dinette  
54568 Coach  
1228 Baggage  
39033 Sleeper  
32077 Sleeper  
32081 Sleeper  
38028 Dining Car  
33004 Lounge  
34055 Coach  
34022 Coach  
34044 Coach  
32000 Sleeper  
74053 ExpressTrak Boxcar (AMTX)  
74066 ExpressTrak Boxcar (AMTX)  
74026 ExpressTrak Boxcar (AMTX)  
74044 ExpressTrak Boxcar (AMTX)

Amtrak westbound "Empire Builder", Train 7/27, Milwaukee,  
WI, 10/3/05

24, 3 GE P42DC  
1159 Baggage