



# NORTHSTAR NEWS

## A Cab Ride on a Sounder Commuter Train by Chris Palmieri



Our break at Tacoma to swap ends occurred under a brilliant red sky. It just so happened that our engine, SDRX 902, complimented this striking sunrise as it is painted in a temporary red-and-yellow paint scheme celebrating the City of Tacoma. **Photo By Chris Palmieri**

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### MEETING NOTICE

The May meeting of the Northstar Chapter NRHS will be held at **7 pm, May 17th, at the Twin City Model Railroad Museum.**

The program will be Mick Mackner and a potpourri of slides taken over the years.

## Northstar Chapter Officers

### Board of Directors

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<b>Chapter Mailbox:</b>	<b>Northstar Chapter NRHS PO Box 120832 St. Paul, MN 55112</b>		

**NOTE:** Consult the website for any announcements regarding chapter activities including cancellation of any meeting for any reason including weather.

### Membership Information

Dues are \$45 (\$33 for the National dues and \$12 for the Northstar Chapter dues). Family memberships are \$5 per person additional. The student rate is \$22 (\$16 for the National dues and \$6 for the Northstar Chapter). If you want to join, an application is available at <http://www.northstar-nrhs.org/>. Print out this application and send it with a check made out to "Northstar Chapter NRHS" to Northstar Chapter NRHS Membership Services, P.O. Box.120832, St. Paul, MN 55112.



### Directions to Bandana Square and the Twin City Model Railroad Museum

Exit I-94 at Lexington Parkway and drive north to Energy Park Drive. Turn left to the third driveway leading to the Bandana Square parking lot. Enter the middle door on the east side of the building. Go up the stairs and follow signs to the Twin City Model Railroad Museum. Go through the museum to the conference room. NO ADMISSION is required for the Northstar meeting.

### My GrandLuxe™ Adventure By H. Martin Swan

For years I have wanted to ride the *American Orient Express* or as it is now called the *GrandLuxe™ Rail Journeys*. But the cost, whew!

I knew it was time to put up or shut up. So I retired as Director of Emblem Sales for the NRHS and put all the money I would have paid to go to the two Board of Directors Meetings and National Convention into one *GrandLuxe™* trip. I was toying with the Denver to Oakland trip that they hold in fall, but then I saw their advertisement for



**St. Paul Union Depot Dreams**  
**From: <http://www.regionalrail.org/depot.html>**  
**Thanks to Cy Svobodny**



**Artist's conception of the St. Paul Union Depot Intermodal Transportation Center.**



**Artist's conception of the St. Paul Union Depot Intermodal Transportation Center concourse.**

the Antebellum South Rail Journey. The trip started in New Orleans and moved to Jackson, then Savannah, Charleston, and Richmond before ending in Washington, DC. (There is a reverse itinerary.) Stops were made at Jackson, Savannah, Charleston and Richmond to visit the South, trying to create the illusion of a pre-Civil War South and also several Civil War battlefields. (Antebellum means "before war"). This seemed to me a perfect trip. I have always been a bit of a historian on the Civil War and one of the side trips was to visit the famous Stone Wall from the first battle of Fredericksburg. OK, now to look at the prices. Gulp! A single sleeping car room (or cabin in *GrandLuxe™* terminology) without shower would "only" run me \$5400 if I purchased 4 months prior to the trip, plus about \$500 for trip insurance—add \$300 if I wanted a shower (I chose the non-shower room—shower down the hall).

*GrandLuxe™* does not run sleeping cars as they were built. Almost all rooms are of their own design with the possible exception of the Vintage Pullman, which appears to be a Pullman bedroom (with the long sofa). Even that room has enhancements. The single room I ordered, from the photos in their website, appeared to a Pullman roomette with the room expanded to the corridor aisle. The toilet and wash facilities are enclosed and there is plenty of room between the bed (when down) and the corridor wall for luggage and even a chair. It looked like a nice room and plenty big for me.

So it was that on April 5, I boarded the *Empire Builder* in a bedroom (I used Amtrak Reward points and had a bedroom from St. Paul to New Orleans and from Washington, DC back to St. Paul. I decided I might as well live it up) to head south. Arrival time in Chicago was a little down but nothing serious. After a couple of hours wait, I boarded the short *City of New Orleans* (2 coaches, *Cross-Country Café*, one sleeper as sleeper and one sleeper a dormitory with some rooms sold to the public) and headed south. This train becomes only the 3rd Amtrak long distance train I have ridden from point of origin to destination in one continuous trip, the others being the *Capitol Ltd.* and the *Lake Shore Ltd.* (when it was out of New York's Grand Central Station).

Arrival into New Orleans was early and there, sitting at the station two tracks over, was my *GrandLuxe™* train. A station employee put my luggage in an electric cart and took them plus me into the station and then out again to my car. I was in *Paris* cabin H. Waiting at the vestibule was my "butler" Mark. This is an uncomfortable term and even Mark didn't like it, but that is what *GrandLuxe™* calls its car attendants.

Mark picked up my luggage and took me down to cabin H. As soon as I entered, I figured a mistake had been made. I was in a Presidential Suite!!!!!! I quickly pointed out to Mark that I had only purchased a single room. Nope, this was where they had assigned me so Welcome Aboard. Oh Golly Gee!

There is more room in the Presidential Suite than there is in some rooms in my house! (See the electronic edition for photo's of Marty's Presidential Suite.) At the door end there was a long Pullman style sofa and next to the door a deep walk in shower. The sofa made up into a bed which I didn't use. At the far other end of the room was a Pullman roomette style bed (up) so at this point a Pullman roomette single sofa. Next to the roomette bed were the "facilities" and along the corridor wall there was a deep closet that ran from the top of the car to my waist and below that two drawers for unpacking and storing clothing while on board. I just sat back and stared. Never have I seen so much room in a rail car. In addition there was a small table by the long sofa with a split of Champagne resting in it. This during the journey disappeared. I never opened it or took it home.

The car had copious amounts of wood in it. The corridor was lined with wood on both the window side and the

cabin side. The butlers would be seen, when not helping a passenger, waxing the woodwork with a bottle of Pledge Clean and Wax. I was told they did the entire aisle twice a day, and then they got down on their hands and knees and polished the aluminum casing for the heating ducts. As a result there was always a slight Pledge wax smell in the air. The train was clean, very clean, and they



kept it clean.

All sleeping cars had rooms which were expanded to the corridor. As a result, walking down a car was just like walking in a Budd or Pullman all-bedroom, compartment drawing room sleeping car.

We had a short train, only 10 cars including equipment cars (2). We only had 49 passengers out of New Orleans and 51 passengers out of Savannah.

From front to end the train consisted of:

Amtrak engines (2 back to back)

2 work cars

<i>Monte Carlo</i>	Ex-C&O car, purchased by the B&O for the <i>Capitol Ltd.</i> , originally named <i>Opequon</i>
<i>Charleston</i>	Ex-St. Louis Car Company car which served on UP and Amtrak
<i>Copper Canyon</i>	Ex-GN Great Dome <i>River View</i>
<i>Zurich</i>	ACF car for UP, built as a 24 seat diner with 29 lounge seats
<i>Chicago</i>	St. Louis Car Company for UP, originally an 8 seat café, 24 seat diner and 16 seat lounge
<i>Seattle</i>	Built by ACF as a 14 section sleeper for UP named <i>Alpine Meadows</i> , rebuilt as a 44 seat leg rest coach
<i>Paris</i>	Pullman Standard sleeper built for the SP for <i>Cascade</i> service
<i>Savannah</i>	St. Louis Car sleeper built for UP
<i>New York</i>	Originally NYC <i>Sandy Creek</i> , ran on the <i>20th Century Ltd.</i>

*Zurich* and *Chicago* were dining cars, *Seattle* (with piano)

our mid-train lounge car, and *New York* the rear end obs car. *Monte Carlo*, *Charleston*, *Paris* and *Savannah* were sleeping cars. I cannot tell you the configuration of the sleeping cars, I can't find any *GrandLuxe™* car diagrams which give that information. *GrandLuxe™* has 7 different configurations. To see photos and drawings of the rooms go to [www.GrandLuxeRail.com](http://www.GrandLuxeRail.com).

The cars used Amtrak engines for head-end power. If Amtrak head-end power was interrupted, then each car had its own generator which kicked in after about a minute to provide power for that car. This did happen occasionally.

To be continued in the June issue.

### A View from the Cab Car of a Sounder Commuter Train By Chris Palmieri

Sound Transit (Sounder) commuter trains operate on BNSF between Tacoma and Everett on BNSF rails with BNSF crews and BNSF supervision. On Friday, 15 February, 2008, I made a round trip between Seattle King Street Station and the Sounder Tacoma Dome Station using the first weekday southbound departure from Seattle King Street Station, train no. 1501. Upon arrival at Tacoma, the crew swapped ends and, after a 10 minute layover for passenger work, the equipment departed Tacoma for Seattle as the fifth northbound weekday departure, train no. 1508.

The Tacoma Dome Station is not on BNSF property. The southernmost mile of the Sounder run is on local shortline Tacoma Rail's Mountain Division. Grabbing my attention was the fact that our signal indication off TR's main track into the stub end depot track was a "Diverging-Clear", a signal indication that in most places in the world indicates that next signal would be a version of approach or better. At this location, of course, there is no next signal, just a bumper and a public street. Ahh...to be a shortline....!

While the early morning trip on train no. 1501 yielded no photos as it was a pre-sunrise run, our break at Tacoma to swap ends occurred under a brilliant red sky. It just so happened that our engine, SDRX 902, complimented this striking sunrise as it is painted in a temporary red-and-yellow paint scheme celebrating the City of Tacoma. (See cover.)

An exciting sight to those of us in the passenger train business is station platforms packed full of passengers. All of the stations on the Sounder system fall into this category. Here are a few shots as we pull into Puyallup, WA. (page 5)

Over 1,000 people will be packed in our train on arrival at Seattle. At most of the depots we hit the platform well over 50 MPH, coming to an exact stop every time. You will note that the passengers are lined up in columns. At all of the Sounder stations (except for Tukwila), in the pavement behind the yellow line are decorative squares





with the station name embedded in concrete spaced at exactly the same distance as the doors on the coaches. The passengers are quick to shoot the engineer a nasty look if it appears he will not stop exactly on spot.....must be the side-affect of all that Starbucks in the morning.  
Next Stop - Sumner, WA.



BNSF Auburn Yard lies between Control Points Ellingson and Rainier. Auburn Yard is used to stage and adjust DP power on PNW grain trains as well as some classification for local business.



Immediately north of Auburn Yard is the Sounder Auburn Depot.



Looking more like an industry than a depot is the next stop - Kent, WA.



Having just completed our passenger work, the engineer has just opened up the throttle as southbound Amtrak Talgo train No. 501 races through the depot on Main Track 1 at track speed. Amtrak trains do not stop here.



At 79 MPH, three green BNSF SD40-2s powering a Ra-



banco "Garbage Train" are just a fleeting thought as they blur by - the red-yellow flags serve as a reminder that we will be entering Maintenance of Way Form B limits in 2-miles. (See electronic edition extra pages for photo.) Tukwila, WA is the last stop before Seattle. The depot



is also used by Amtrak and is the least attractive of all in the PNW. A new depot is on the drawing board. On the approach to King Street Station in Seattle we meet SDRX 907 wearing the traditional Sound Transit paint scheme. The 907 leads one of the 3-car Everett trainsets which has completed its morning run and is seen entering the Seattle Coach Yard lead off Main Track two just south of King Street Station. These trains lay over at the coach



yard during the day between the morning and evening rushes.

Here is a shot from the ground of our train heading for the Coach Yard after detrainig all pasengers at King Street Station. Note the construction of new main tracks in the foreground. This is part of a major capital improvement project that will allow expanded passenger train operation without affecting the freight network. It is expected that these tracks were to enter service in April. Sound Transit purchased all of the equipment it would need for full operation when it was created and has leased excess sets to the Virginia Rail Express and Los Angeles' Metro-link. These sets are now being recalled to Seattle for overhaul and preparation for the final (for now) increase in Sounder service slated for September 2008. (More photos in the electronic edition extra pages.)

### Seen Around Town



**Union Pacific business train seen at Shakopee, April 18th, lead by Centennial unit 6936. In the May 2007 Northstar News, it was mentioned that Bill Wimmer, Vice-President, Engineering, preferred the unit because it picked up track issues so well. Photo by Denny Owings**

From the TwinCity Rails Yahoo Group: Andy Koetz reported that it rolled through the wye at Division St. in St. Paul at about 7 pm April 17th and went to Western Ave. A new crew was called for it, unknown if they got on at Western Ave. or down at Valley Park. The train was late by several hrs. as it was due here originally at 3:10 pm.

### From Railway Age

In an article that was headlined "Twin Cities & Western Railroad Persistence Pays Off", Railway Age chose the TC&W as short line railroad of the year. Testimonies such as the following are the reason. From Craig Hebrink, CEO of the Renville based Country Farmers Elevator co-op: "You won't make a wrong choice in selecting them as [Short Line] Railroad of the Year. They are well deserving of it." Mayor Jim Curtiss of Montevideo stated, "The TC&W has quickly become an important part of our community. What was once an almost dead railroad has now blossomed into an active and important part of the region's economy." Another comment from a business

familiar with the TC&W requesting anonymity stated, "It's one of the least bureaucratic railroads we've ever dealt with".



**2008  
SHORT LINE  
RAILROAD  
OF THE YEAR**



**This is how the 17 Bombardier cars for Northstar Commuter Rail will look. Details of the contract are on p. 7 of the April Northstar News.**

#### **Utah's *FrontRunner* joins U.S. passenger rail ranks—April 25th.**

Add *FrontRunner* as the latest U.S. commuter rail entity in daily operation, following its long-anticipated opening Saturday, April 26, with scheduled celebrations in and around Salt Lake City. The \$611 million *FrontRunner* line spans 44 miles, with eight stations between Pleasantview and Salt Lake City, where it connects with TRAX light rail services.

*FrontRunner* offered free rides to the public through April 30. After that, monthly passes cost \$145, with passes interchangeable with Utah Transit Authority express bus services. UTA is projecting about 5,900 daily riders initially, rising to 13,000 by 2020.

#### **Ex-Milwaukee Road Skytop Sleepers Removed from Buffalo Barge From Milwaukee Road Yahoo Group**

The defunct Buffalo, NY barge / restaurant built of ex-Milwaukee sleeper Skytops has been moved and car pieces removed. They were side shells and round ends which are now in 4 pieces having been cut by Wargo Enterprises Demolition and Excavation services to remove them and ship them by truck. The side walls and roof of the pieces are still intact, but this doesn't sound promising

for restoration. Apparently the *Coffee Creek* still exists and is being restored to Amtrak standards for tours. See [coffeecreek.info](http://coffeecreek.info).

#### **Meeting Minutes from April 19, 2008**

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 pm in the meeting room of the Twin City Model Railroad Museum by chapter president Mark Braun with 18 members and guests present. A motion was made, seconded, and carried to approve the minutes of the March 15, 2008 membership meeting, as printed in the April 2008 issue of Northstar News.

Treasurer Dan Meyer reported that income during the period from January 1, 2008 through March 31, 2008 included \$10 in chapter donations, \$120 in chapter dues, and \$264 in NRHS national dues, for total income of \$394. Expenses during the period were \$467.00 in NRHS national dues and donations and \$158.05 Northstar News expenses, for total expenses of \$625.05. Net income during the period was minus \$231.05. He reported that we now have 71 members (including family members) plus two chapter-only members.

We have a new membership application brochure for the chapter. It is available as a down-load from the chapter's website so people can print it out as needed. He distributed paper copies of the brochure to those at the meeting and encouraged members to give them to those people who might be interested in joining the chapter.

A question was asked about a membership directory for the chapter. Dan Meyer said that he would give the information for one to Russ Isbrandt so that it could be published either as a part of an upcoming issue of Northstar News or sent out with an issue.

National director Doug Johnson said that he had just returned from a NRHS national board meeting. He gave a report on the meeting. He described the meeting as very lengthy. He said that it "went on and on." NRHS did hire a librarian. Books and other materials from the NRHS library are now stored at Three Rivers, MA. Fourteen chapters now have zero members - in other words, they have lapsed. Doug talked about initiatives they are trying to bring people back.

Trip director John Goodman said that he had a meeting with Steve Sandberg. Restored Milwaukee Road steam engine goes into the shop September 20th for major boiler work. Trips along the Mississippi are planned for September 12 and 13. They will go on the former Burlington main line one way and on the former Milwaukee line the other way. Iron Horse Farm has injector problems with their small steam loco. John is planning to meet with a representative of the Iowa Northern to see if we can put together a trip over their line.

As far as the Cheer Committee knows, no one needs a card to cheer them up. Bob Koetz is having trouble with his foot, so he is house-bound. Northstar News editor Russ Isbrandt asked how people felt about photos from Mexico. Someone has sent in photos. Russ noted that the May issue is almost full already. Webmaster Dan Meyer gave a report about the chapter's website. Program chair John Goodman reported that tonight's program will be Dawn Holmberg's pictures of



the Railroad Passenger Car Alliance's convention at Duluth in January, plus video by Russ Isbrandt on some of his recent trips. Next month, there will be a potpourri. In June, he hopes to show slides from the collection of the late Kurt Peterson. He noted that the date for the June meeting will be moved to the second Saturday of the month, to avoid conflicting with the NRHS national convention. At this time, July is open. In August, we will have the annual chapter picnic. John noted that at this time he is at a loss for a program for our holiday party, but there is still plenty of time to plan for it. Suggestions were made to ask Steve Sandberg or John Luecke.

Old Business - The holiday banquet was discussed. Marty Swan reported that he got a quote from Tinucci's. He has the room tentatively reserved. A suggestion was made that we have a Sunday Brunch on the 51st floor of the IDS building. A motion was made that we go to Tinucci's. The motion was seconded and carried. We will have the banquet on the traditional date on the first Sunday in December, which this year will be December 7th. The suggestion was made that the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Northstar Chapter will be next year, 2009. John Goodman said that he wants to do what he called "an up-scale event" to celebrate the event. He said the event should be in June. The suggestion was made that the Minnesota Historical Society is now allowing events at the James J. Hill House, so we could have it there. There was a discussion of possibilities. John Goodman said that he would pursue the matter.

New Business - There was a meeting yesterday at Hudson, WI about High Speed Rail proposals. Wisconsin is way

ahead of Minnesota on this. The Wisconsin state agency has purchased the rail line from Milwaukee to Madison. Other developments were described. It is hoped that by 2012 there will be high-speed trains in and out of the St. Paul Union Depot, which will also be a bus terminal. Material about this will appear in the May issue of Northstar News. The proposed high-speed service between the Twin Cities and Chicago would take 5 hours and 31 minutes.

Announcements - Randolph Railroad Days will be next Saturday, April 26th. There will be a large flea market of railroad and model railroad items on the third Saturday in May at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds. The Hennepin and Overland Model Railroad Club in Minneapolis will be having an open house tomorrow.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made, seconded, and carried at 7:56 pm. After a break, the program was presented. It consisted of Dawn Holmberg's pictures of the Railroad Passenger Car Alliance convention, which was held at Duluth in January. This was followed by Russ Isbrandt's videos of his trips on Amtrak to Harrisburg, PA.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dave Norman, Secretary  
Northstar Chapter NRHS

<p><b>Tired of getting your Northstar News mangled by the post office? Email your newsletter editor at <a href="mailto:risbrandt@comcast.net">risbrandt@comcast.net</a> and get the electronic edition. It's in color and has additional pages.</b></p>
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Northstar News  
Northstar Chapter  
National Railway Historical Society  
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## Address Correction Requested



All photos on this page are by Chris Palmieri.

Green BNSF SD40-2s powering a Rabanco "Garbage Train" between Kent and Tukwila, WA.



Specially painted Sounder engine honoring the city of Tacoma.



One of the Sounder's Bombardier coaches at Seattle.





The plaque adorning the wall of Marty's room. Photo courtesy H. Martin Swan



Author Marty Swan enjoying his meal in the *Grand Luxe™* diner *Chicago*. Photo courtesy H. Martin Swan



View to the single roomette type seat which made into a single berth and water closet. Photo by H. Martin Swan



A broader view of the diner *Chicago*. Photo courtesy H. Martin Swan



Left: The wide Pullman sofa and table with Champagne upper left in photo. Photo by H. Martin Swan