



NORTHSTAR NEWS

Best wishes for a great holiday season!



Chicago & North Western's *Peninsula 400* from Ishpeming, MI and Green Bay departs Milwaukee 35 minutes late, December 28, 1966, in thunder snow. In those days, before enginemen had to repeatedly "reboot computers" and snow piled deep in the engine rooms, there were two men in the cab and if necessary, one of them could head back into the engine room of a failing unit and repair it with chewing gum and bailing wire while the train remained on the move. Photo by Russ Isbrandt

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Banquet Notice

The December banquet of the Northstar Chapter of the NRHS will be held on December 4th at 4 pm, at Gulden's, 2999 Highway 61, Maplewood, MN. Exit I-694 at Highway 61 and drive south, turn right on County Road D.

Program: Bill Kuebler will show his presentation on the Northern Pacific and the wreck at Granite, Idaho in 1962. Mr. Kuebler is the author of a book on the *North Coast Limited*.

See the reservation form in this issue.

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MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Dues are \$51 (\$36 for the National dues and \$15 for the local dues). Family memberships are \$5 per person additional. The student rate is \$22 (\$16 for the National, \$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 payable to "Northstar Chapter NRHS" to Northstar Chapter NRHS Membership Services, P.O. Box 120832, St. Paul, MN 55112.

A subscription to this newsletter may be obtained for \$15 for either printed or electronic edition by sending a check to the post office box above specifying the form of the newsletter you desire. A subscription does NOT include voting privileges at chapter meetings nor any of the NRHS membership benefits and no membership application is needed.

Apologies for the Early Issue

Your editor apologizes for the early issue. The banquet reservation form in the November issue had several serious errors. In order to get the corrected reservation form in your hands before the deadline, it was decided to distribute the December issue early.

Russ Isbrandt, Editor

Central Corridor Construction Status By Fred Melo, Pioneer Press via Rick Krenski

ST. PAUL - Nov. 1, 2011 - A rebuilt downtown St. Paul skyway opened November 1st, kicking off a series of elements to be completed this month to wrap up the first of two years of heavy construction on the Central Corridor Light Rail Transit Project.

While much remained to be done by the end of November, much also had been accomplished since heavy construction began the first day of spring with roadway removal on University Avenue. With 32 percent of the construction complete, key accomplishments include:

1. Skyway was rebuilt and reopened over Fifth Street from Alliance Bank Center to the St. Paul Athletic Club, reconnecting the skyway system to the west end of downtown, the Xcel Energy Center and St. Paul River Centre.

2. The Central Corridor LRT Project's portion of the work to restore Union Depot's front entrance was completed last week, allowing Christos Restaurant to reopen soon in the depot head house.

3. Embedded track is in place over most of a six-block stretch of Fourth Street in downtown St. Paul from Broadway to Minnesota Streets.

4. Curved track installation began in late October on 12th Street between Robert and Cedar Streets.

5. A mile of track was in place on the western end of University Avenue in St. Paul.

6. The University of Minnesota transitway was rebuilt and reopened before the start of the Minnesota State Fair and the fall semester.

7. Structural steel was up at six stations - Union Depot, Capitol East, Snelling Avenue, Fairview Avenue, Raymond Avenue and Westgate.

8. Foundation work on platforms are in the ground at the Fourth and Cedar Street, East Bank and West Bank stations.

9. Westbound Washington Avenue was rebuilt on the West Bank.

10. A flyover or train bridge was built over Interstate 35W. The flyover connects Central Corridor tracks with the Hiawatha LRT line between the Cedar-Riverside and Metrodome stations.

Since late summer, extra crews have been working extended hours with two big goals in mind. One is to finish paving and open four lanes of traffic by November 30 on the western three miles of University Avenue in St. Paul between Emerald Street and Hamline Avenue. The other is to reopen Fourth Street in its final configuration by November 30. When finished, Fourth will have single lane two-way traffic east of Wacouta Street and single-lane one-way traffic westbound west of Wacouta.

"The streets and sidewalks will be returned to a drivable, walkable and plowable condition with full lighting as the contractor finishes its work this season on western University Avenue," said Mark Fuhrmann, program director for New Starts rail projects in the Twin Cities. "The contractor is working hard to fulfill its obligation and reopen two lanes eastbound and two lanes westbound between Emerald and Hamline."

Episcopal Homes of Minnesota at Fairview and University is among businesses and institutions in the construction zone that

have endured months of disruption. But Marvin Plakut, president and chief executive officer of Episcopal Homes, takes a long view. "I keep coming back to this: Let's keep our eye on the prize. The Midway district of St. Paul is going to be a substantially superior place to live, work and have fun after light rail is finished than before it was started."

Property manager Barb Hofmeister at Court International, a large office building at Highway 280 and University, said her property lost no tenants and received no complaints from tenants as a result of construction. A new tenant moved into Court International in October, another tenant is coming in November and still another in January.

While exiting the parking lot in the evening was a "little bit of a hassle" when construction was occurring in front of the building, Hofmeister said, "We all figured out our tricks to get around it. We all know it's coming to an end shortly."

Overall, she said, "I thought it went extremely well. We've all learned to just live with it."

Kathy Bjerke, senior vice president at Park Midway Bank, which has a location at University and Vandalia Street, had a similar view.

"Despite some of the things that always go along with construction, the project is going to be good for the city. We're excited about the impact it can have on the Midway in terms of development," Bjerke said.

By November 30 in the Capitol area:

The Robert Street and University Avenue intersection is to reopen. Robert from University to 12th Street will have single lane two-way traffic restored. Twelfth between Robert and Cedar Streets will have two-lane traffic westbound restored.

In Minneapolis, crews for Ames-McCrossan Joint Venture, the contractor building the line's western three miles, have their to-do list for November, too.

By November 30, vehicular traffic is to be restored between Walnut and Oak streets on Washington Avenue. The first rail is to be installed by the end of the month on the East Bank.

In mid-November, the contractor would switch traffic from the north side of the Washington Avenue Bridge to the newly reconstructed south side to allow crews to rebuild the north side. They are strengthening the bridge to accommodate two tracks in the middle in addition to one lane of traffic in each direction on the outside.

The transit-pedestrian mall between Pleasant and Walnut Streets, which closed permanently in May to vehicular traffic, will remain under heavy construction throughout 2012.

Low marks by neighbors of the Central Corridor light-rail transit line work will hit the contractor in the wallet.

At the end of June, three committees composed of business owners and others who live or work along University Avenue in St. Paul gave Walsh Construction low marks for public accountability and responsiveness. The poor grade cut into Walsh's incentive pay for the second quarter.

The committees met again last month to grade Walsh for the third quarter. The results are out, and they are worse.

The contractor was awarded 33 percent, or \$23,200, of the available bonus pay of \$70,000 for the quarter, which ended September 30.

The company had received 42 percent of its incentive pay three months earlier, based on such categories as maintenance of access, safety, cleanliness and information distribution.

Laura Baenen, a spokeswoman for the Central Corridor project, said Walsh's scores were combined from surveys distributed to three Construction Communication Committees representing University Avenue, the Capitol area and downtown St. Paul. Central Corridor officials compiled a 21-page report from the committees' findings, and the finished document is peppered with complaints about construction vehicles blocking parking lot and business entrances, driveway curb ramps and a street turn-around.

"Signage was the most disappointing aspect of the construction," one unnamed committee member wrote. "Very mediocre and generic. Pedestrian aspect a joke!"

Another wrote that Walsh had little representation at the committee meetings and did not send senior company officials with enough clout to communicate public concerns and institute changes.

The bright spot? Some said public safety complaints were addressed more quickly compared with the previous quarter.

Business owners said the poor marks weren't the result of general resentment toward the project. Grades were sunnier for work on the other side of the Mississippi River. The joint-venture firm handling the Minneapolis leg of construction, Ames-McCrossan, received 80 percent, or \$20,000, of the available \$25,000 bonus after the same rating process.

Baenen said that in Minneapolis, where the contractor is busy working on the University of Minnesota's West Bank, Ames-McCrossan won points for accommodating special events such as home football games by opening two lanes of traffic on University Avenue. The contractor also held off on some utility and sidewalk work in front of Stadium Village businesses until nighttime.

Some of that scheduling, however, was mandated after a legal battle between the Metropolitan Council and the University of Minnesota. Baenen noted that Ames-McCrossan had to work reduced hours to accommodate school research and special events, and the contractor had to restrict construction methods so vibrations would not interfere with sensitive scientific equipment.

Jim Segal, owner of Ax-Man surplus store in St. Paul, said he and other members of the University Avenue committee likely will ask the Central Corridor office to make changes in the survey forms they fill out to grade Walsh.

He found some questions strangely worded and hard to interpret. More worrisome, he said, he believed committee members hesitated to award points as low as 1 or 2 on a 10-point scale because it felt harsh and might seem to indicate the contractor had made no effort.

But the more generous the grade, the greater the incentive pay, and even low marks result in some bonus. In other words, an average grade of 5, the academic equivalent of failing, would allow Walsh to receive 50 percent of its allotted bonus. "And that's not fair," Segal said. "Bonuses should be awarded for superior work, not mediocre results," he said.

Baenen said there was no record Walsh had submitted a written response to the Central Corridor office about its poor grade. A call to Walsh was not returned. The \$957 million light-rail project linking downtown St. Paul and Minneapolis is expected to open in 2014.

From NARP

Congressional negotiators protect state-supported trains, but slash Amtrak operating funds and kill high-speed rail November 15th

House and Senate negotiators agreed on a fiscal 2012 “minibus” spending bill that includes transportation.

The bill funds Amtrak at \$1.42 billion and protects short distance services from the attack in the House subcommittee’s bill. But there is no new funding for the High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail Program of grants to states for infrastructure and equipment investments. The Senate had included \$100 million for this, the House nothing.

The Amtrak operating number is alarmingly tight at \$466 million, which is \$95 million (or 17%) below the 2011 level.

The bill is expected to pass both House and Senate.

In a victory for passenger train advocates, negotiators eliminated language from a bill passed by a House subcommittee that would have prohibited the use of federal operating funds on state-supported routes. This targeted such popular services as California’s *Capitol Corridor* and *Pacific Surfliner*, the Midwest’s *Hia-watha* and *Heartland Flyer*, and Maine’s *Downeaster*—among many others. Passage of this provision would have eliminated 150 weekday trains and stranded more than nine million passengers each year.

Amtrak capital funding was increased by negotiators above the Senate’s \$936 million and the House subcommittee’s \$898 million.

But the offsetting price is heavy. Amtrak Operating was slashed to \$466 million. While well above the House subcommittee’s proposal of \$227 million—which NARP believes would have forced a system shutdown—this was well below the Senate’s \$544 million and the 2011 level of \$561 million. The \$466 million figure is slightly more than the \$457.5 million Amtrak needed for 2011.

The new operating level presents a bigger problem than may first appear. Amtrak cannot count on record revenues every year, or on besting the bottom line in its budget (which it did for 2011 by \$30 million). A major economic downturn or accident could wreak havoc in fiscal 2012. Legislators, it seems, are looking to provide the bare minimum to keep existing trains running or, as some observers would put it, giving Amtrak “just enough to fail.”

Negotiators also included a provision encouraging Amtrak to build up an operating reserve account:

“The conferees encourage Amtrak to carry \$200 million in reserves within their operating account, and encourage use of any favorable ticket revenue to get to this amount before using this favorable ticket revenue on capital expenses unless such capital expenses are necessary to ensure the safe operation and maintenance of the passenger rail system.”

Given the very tight operating grant level legislators have just provided, it is not clear how they expect Amtrak to build up its reserves. This language perhaps is intended as advance warning that appropriators will continue to look at ways to eat away at Amtrak’s grant in future budgeting cycles.

The news was also bad for the High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail Program, which saw all funding eliminated. This comes as a disappointment, following a successful summer and fall by the Federal Railroad Administration. The FRA made great strides in clearing the way for states to request bids, hire engineers and workers, and begin upgrading tracks around the U.S. This zero-out could also negatively impact California’s Los

Angeles-to-San Francisco high-speed rail project, which has been caught in turmoil over a new business plan which increased the final price tag of the project. Nonetheless, funding already in the pipeline will provide a lot of jobs and service improvements over the next few years—if Congress does not continue to ratchet Amtrak funding down to the point where the trains stop running.

Amtrak’s Great Dome Car came to the Midwest for Thanksgiving

Amtrak’s “Great Dome” car is running the next several days on Amtrak’s short-distance corridors radiating from Chicago. This is the same car that ran this fall and last on certain runs of the *Adirondack* and *Cardinal*. The car is scheduled to run as follows (train numbers in parentheses):

Nov. 21— 5:30 pm from Quincy to Chicago (382)

Nov. 22 — 5:15 pm from Chicago to St. Louis (305)

Nov. 23 — 4:35 am from St. Louis to Chicago (300);

12:16 pm from Chicago to Detroit and Pontiac (352)

Nov. 24 (Thanksgiving)—6:05 am from Pontiac

(6:48 am from Detroit) (351)

Nov. 25 — 7:00 am from Chicago to St. Louis (301);

3:00 pm from St. Louis to Chicago (304)

Nov. 26 — 9:25 am from Chicago to St. Louis (303);

5:30 pm from St. Louis to Chicago (306)

Nov. 27 —4:05 pm from Chicago to Carbondale (393)

Nov. 28—7:30 am from Carbondale to Chicago (390)

This is the only dome car Amtrak runs. In the 1950s and 1960s, the car ran between Chicago and Seattle on the *Empire Builder*, then operated by the Great Northern Railway and the Chicago Burlington & Quincy Railroad. Amtrak most recently refurbished the car in 1999. The car was “for Pullman passengers only.” By 1970, this was the only lounge on the train, so coach passengers were allowed to use the “colorful beverage lounge in the lower section”.



The Great Dome in Charlottesville, VA, behind Amtrak’s Cardinal in November 2011. Photo by NARP member Matt Johnson (tracktwenty-nine on Flickr)

From Railway Age Breaking News

Chicago to Detroit rail corridor RFP for investment plan and environmental study issued

Tuesday, November 15, 2011

The Michigan Department of Transportation, in partnership with the Illinois Department of Transportation, Indiana Department of Transportation and Norfolk Southern, issued a Request for Pro-

posal for services of a qualified and experienced transportation (planning, environmental and engineering services) consultant or consultant team to complete a Service Development Plan and a Federal Railroad Administration Tier-1 Environmental Impact Statement for the Chicago, IL -- Detroit/Pontiac, MI, Rail Corridor.

The FRA issued a Notice of Funding Availability on April 1, 2010, for the High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program in the Federal Register. In response, MDOT submitted an application, which was selected by the U.S. Department of Transportation to receive funding to develop a Passenger Rail Corridor Investment Plan.

The 304-mile corridor between Chicago and Detroit/Pontiac is part of the Chicago Hub Network and is a federally designated High-Speed Rail Corridor. The existing corridor is also one of several major branches in the hub-and-spoke passenger rail system centered in Chicago, part of the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative.

In Chicago, construction started in October on the Englewood Flyover, a \$133 million project to eliminate one of the Midwest's worst rail bottlenecks and reduce delays for passenger service. The project, made possible by \$126 million in federal funding and \$6.6 million in matching state funds, also will make preparations for additional tracks for expanded 110 mph service from Chicago to Detroit, Cleveland and the East Coast.

From Trains Newswire

Amtrak restores service to North Dakota station after 5-month absence

Published: November 14, 2011

MINOT, ND — Amtrak's *Empire Builder* will call at the railroad's ex-Great Northern Minot station again November 15th for the first time since June. Record-setting floods closed the *Builder's* path

on BNSF rails through the city in late June and early July and damaged the station, forcing its closure.

Amtrak and local contractors have been working on an aggressive schedule in an effort to reopen the station in time for the busy Thanksgiving travel season. While the train will begin calling at Minot again, Amtrak isn't yet offering baggage service through the station, as more repairs are needed.

Canadian Pacific route picked for Chicago-Twin Cities high speed link

Published: November 17, 2011

ST. PAUL, MN — The Federal Railroad Administration has selected Canadian Pacific's Chicago-Twin Cities route as the preferred link between Chicago and St. Paul, the St. Paul Pioneer Press has reported. The route would see trains pass through La Crosse, WI, and Red Wing, MN, rather than over an alternative Union Pacific line through Eau Claire, WI.

"Now we can focus all our efforts on developing that one corridor," said Dan Krom, director of the Minnesota Department of Transportation's passenger rail office.

Zephyr, BNSF trains rerouted after Iowa bridge fire

Published: November 18, 2011

CRESTON, IA — Fire claimed a bridge on BNSF's Lincoln, NE, to Galesburg, IL, main line last night, forcing the rerouting and staging of the railroad's trains. Amtrak's *California Zephyr* is crossing Iowa and Illinois on Union Pacific with buses making intermediate stops.

The fire struck around 6:30 pm November 17th. BNSF spokeswoman Amy McBeth says the cause remains under investigation. The railroad had planned to restore the first of two main tracks to service this afternoon, with the second main track reopening tomorrow morning. BNSF has warned customers to expect delays of 24 to 48 hours for shipments that normally use the line.

The Northstar Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society Annual Banquet December 4, 2011, starting at 4 pm

at

Gulden's Restaurant and Bar

Located at 2999 Highway 61, Maplewood, MN

Exit I-694 at Highway 61 and drive south, turn right on County Road D

Price: \$25.00

Includes buffet of roasted turkey, Swedish meatballs, or Lasagna, choice of two salads, vegetable, potato, dessert, beverage, taxes and tip.

Program: Guest speaker Bill Kuebler will show his presentation on the Northern Pacific and the wreck at Granite, Idaho in 1962. Mr. Kuebler is the author of a book on the *North Coast Limited*. However we must advise that his work schedule with Delta Airlines may affect his availability to present this program on this day. Alternative plans are being made if this were to occur.

Reservation Deadline: November 30th.

Member.....\$25.00 Name:_____

Guests (Number)_____ @ \$25.00_____

Total Remitted \$ _____

Phone number of member (in case we need to contact you) _____

Make checks payable to "Northstar Railway Historical Society"

Send to: John Goodman, 8409 13th Avenue South, Bloomington, MN 55425-1705

email: jhgoodman2001yahoo.com for last minute reservations



Chicago and North Western's *Flambeau 400* departing Milwaukee via the Milwaukee Road's Northern Division, December 26th, 1966. The Green Bay and Ashland bound train shows a very healthy 7 car consist. Photo by Russ Isbrandt

Railfan Calendar

Northstar Chapter Annual Banquet

Sunday, December 4, 4 pm - 8 pm. Gulden's Restaurant, \$25. See the reservation form on the back of this page.

Twin City Model Railroad Museum Night Trains

Saturday nights (Except Christmas Eve) November 26th through February 26th, Twin City Model Railroad Museum, 1021 Bandana Blvd., Suite 222, St. Paul. Admission: \$8 individuals, \$25 for immediate family.

Northstar News

Northstar Chapter

National Railway Historical Society

1515 Creek Meadows Drive NW

Coon Rapids, MN, 55433-3768

Address Correction Requested

Canadian Pacific Holiday Train

Sunday, December 11

Hastings – 4:00 pm, CP Depot, 500 East Second St.

Cottage Grove – 5:30 pm, West Point Douglas Road, South of Seiben Bridge in front of the Youth Service Bureau

Minneapolis (Shoreham) – 8:15 pm, CP Shoreham Yard, 2800 Central Ave. NE

Tuesday, December 13

Loretto – 4:15 pm, Hennepin County Road 19 Railroad Crossing/Chippewa Trail

Buffalo – 5:45 pm, 612 NE 3rd Ave., behind McDonald's on Highway 55

Newport Model Railroad Club Open House

Saturday, December 17, Sunday, December 18, 1 pm - 5 pm, Monday, December 19, Friday, December 23, Monday December 26, Friday December 30th and Monday January 2 all 7 pm -10 pm.

Newport Model Railroad Club Train Show and Sale

Saturday, January 14, 10 am - 3 pm, Woodbury High School, 2665 Woodlane Drive, Woodbury, MN. Admission: \$5.00 adults, children 11 years and under free.

The Great Tri-State Rail Sale

Saturday, January 28th, 9 am - 3 pm, La Crosse Center, 2nd and Pearl Streets, La Crosse, WI. Admission: \$5.00, children under 12 free.