



NRHS

Northstar News

Publishers of the Minnesota Rail Calendar

Happy New Year!



*L: BN-CP Transfer
EB in St Paul Nov
11 2020 –Bob Ball
Photo*

*R: LSRM DM&IR
SD18, GN Hustle
Muscle moving
Storage cars in
Duluth Dec 16
2018 –David
Schauer Photo*



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Meeting Notice:

Saturday January 6th 2024 6:15 pm At Roseville Lutheran Church, our January Meeting also will be a ZOOM meeting. Note: in 2024 meetings will held on the 2nd Saturday of the month (Except January).

(January Program: Greg Smith slides from his collection)

Informal Dinner at Keys Restaurant -Lexington and Larpen-teur Avenues at 4:15 pm January 6th, 2024.

Please join us in-person at Roseville Lutheran Church, Saturday January 6th 2024 at 6 pm. Our business meeting will begin at 6:15 followed by the program.

If you are unable to join us in person, the Zoom Meeting login information are here: If you are unable to join us in person, the Zoom Meeting login information to the Zoom meeting is here: Topic: Northstar Chapter, NRHS January Meeting Time: Jan 6, 2024 17:30 Central Time

Meeting ID: 899 3745 8198 Passcode: 196924

Join Zoom Meeting URL

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89937458198?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89937458198?pwd=MlhCTS90NkZ1dE5NTUZaMnhHZ25JUT09)

[pwd=MlhCTS90NkZ1dE5NTUZaMnhHZ25JUT09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89937458198?pwd=MlhCTS90NkZ1dE5NTUZaMnhHZ25JUT09)

or

<http://tinyurl.com/mtx6avkt>

Dial in (audio-only)

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Meeting Location: From the east or west take MN 36 to Lexington Avenue. Drive south on Lexington Avenue to Roselawn Avenue and turn right. The large lighted parking lot is on your right as you travel west on Roselawn. Use the lower entrance to the church and turn left through the commons area. We'll be in room 40, The Diamond Room. (1215 Roselawn Ave W Roseville MN 55113)



From the Editor: Programs for future meetings are open. Feb-thru May 2024 are open. Contact either Jphn Goodman or Richard Tubbesing at the above E-mails to schedule and show your program.

Our Holiday Banquet was a great success. We had over 40 in attendance. The food was great at Mancini's Restaurant in St Paul. The program on the North Coast Limited was an awesome presentation authored by Northern Pacific Historian Bill Kubler. Many thanks go to John Goodman for arranging this event.



The CPKC Holiday train made its annual visit to the Twin Cities. L: Train at Crystal MN R: Holiday Train at Cottage Grove MN Photos by Dawn Holmberg

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Holiday train at St Paul Union Depot



Holiday Train Entertainers -Photos by Dawn Holmberg

---MSM News---



L: Duluth Streetcar at Excelsior Car Barn Nov 7 2020

R: Duluth Car at Excelsior Ticket Booth Nov 7 2020

Bob Ball Photos

**Metro News - Minnesota Streetcar Museum History**

On Tuesday, September 5, 2023, 11:45 AM, Frederick Krenske

Our museum's history. Our museum began in 1962, 61 years ago. To put that in perspective, streetcars under the corporate name of Twin City Rapid Transit ran for 62 years. So although our mission is to preserve and interpret Minnesota's streetcar history, we've accumulated plenty of our own. Thankfully it's well documented. We have copies of all the early newsletters, visitor brochures and PR pieces from the 1960s and early 1970s. From 1970 until 2005, the bi-monthly, later quarterly, Minnegazette chronicled all museum happenings in great detail. The first Streetcar Currents appeared in 2003 as a separate newsletter for the MTM Traction Division. The monthly Currents (every two months in the winter) continues to document all museum activity. Want to learn more about our museum's history? There's plenty available on our trolleyride.org website. Under Museum History is a narrative history. You'll also find a link to Museum Chronology, a timeline of events in our history. Under Member Resources is a link to all the Streetcar Currents issues dating back to 2009. Under Organizational Documents are MSM Board of Directors meeting minutes back to 2013. There's more online material to come. All the Minnegazettes and earlier newsletters have been scanned and at some point will be posted on the website. In the meantime I have digital copies and will make them available on request. If you really want to get into it, come visit me in the Russell Olson Library on a Saturday morning. We have a complete set of Minnegazettes, old member directories and lots of photos and video of museum activity back in the day. We're now a venerable organization and there's a lot to know about us.

Metro News - Latest Lake Harriet Streetcar News

Wednesday, December 6, 2023 at 10:57:04 AM CST -Rick Krenske From the Streetcar Currents newsletter:

A single landlord for CHSL- done. We now have a single CHSL landlord, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. At their November 15 meeting they approved leasing the City-owned former streetcar right of way, and subleasing it to us. As part of the same agreement, they renewed the lease of the Park Board land that we occupy under the depot, part of the car barn and most of the northern portion of the streetcar line. Our lease is now in place until 2043, with an option to extend for an additional 10 years. The Linden Hills depot platform. Following the end of Holly Trolley operations on December 3rd, we began disassembling the Linden Hills wood depot platform, which has reached the end of its useful life. (See photos at bottom of page and on page 6-Ed) Next year we'll try operating on the original TCRT concrete platform. In the process we removed the wood bench seats, which will be reinstalled next spring on the concrete. As this is written, the wood under framing is still in place, to be removed later. Because the concrete is low relative to the track, we'll build long step boxes for entering and exiting the streetcars. Removing the platform will allow us to harvest the many streetcar tokens that have fallen through the cracks over the last decade or more.

Milwaukee Road No. 261 Makes Second Run in 2023

By [Steve Glischinski](#) | November 30, 2023 4-8-4 to pull weekend North Pole Express trains at St. Paul Union Depot



Milwaukee Road No. 261 brings its North Pole Express train down Westminister Hill on BNSF Railway in St. Paul, Minn., on Nov. 30, 2023, ahead of a weekend of North Pole Express trips. Steve Glischinski

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Railroading Heritage of Midwest America's Milwaukee Road 4-8-4 No. 261 made its second run of 2023 today (Thursday, Nov. 30) operating from its home base in Minneapolis to St. Paul Union Depot. Friday through Sunday, Dec. 1-3, the locomotive will run short "North Pole Express" trips at the depot in what has become a holiday tradition. This is the second trip of the year for No. 261 — it moved in June from Minneapolis to Union Depot for display at Union Depot Train Days.

The North Pole Express will also operate the weekend of Dec. 7-10, but those trips will be pulled by RRHMA's Milwaukee Road E9 No. 32A. RRHMA President and Chief Operating Officer Steve Sandberg has said that keeping No. 261 under steam for the five days between trips in what has often been bone-chilling Minnesota cold was expensive and hard on crews. Add in the fact that many people don't even notice that a diesel is up front means No. 261 will go back to its Minneapolis shop after the last trips Dec. 3. No. 261 has been pulling North Pole Express trips in St. Paul since 2014, except in the COVID-19 year of 2020. The event has become RRHMA's most popular event and biggest fundraiser. The train includes lounge car *Wisconsin Valley*, coach *Wenonah*, two bilevel coaches, and another lounge car. No. 32A provides head-end power.

Flue Tubes Arrive RRHMA-Silvis! Friday, December 22, 2023, 9:03 AM, RRHMA



Both photos:
RRHMA



Over the last month, volunteer crews have been busy working away at many things at RRHMA-Silvis. Follow the link below to read all about it!

New flue tubes have arrived for both 5511 and UP Challenger #3985. Stay bolt caps from our friends at Strasburg Railroad have arrived as well.

Work on Southern Pacific business car Stanford continues. Lettering has been applied to the car in the original Southern Pacific styling.

[Read more about the progress being made at RRHMA.com](#)

It's dues time again for RRHMA, but before I speak briefly about our activities and goals, I want to say thank you to all our members and friends for your generous support over the years. Thanks to your dues and donations, we've been able to bring new life to RRHMA-Silvis.

Thanks to your support, we are able to keep moving ahead. By renewing your membership, and making an additional donation, we will continue our progress.

Remember, your dues and donations are fully deductible under both federal and state income tax law, so if you act before the end of the year you can deduct the amount on your 2023 income tax return. You can renew and donate by sending the notice back by mail, or simply following the link below. Thanks again for your continuing support.

2023 Northern Lines Thursday, December 21, 2023, 9:31 AM



Things may have seemed quiet over the summer for the Friends of the 261, but they have been quite far from that. Many things have been progressing in the shop of the 261.

The Friends have been contracted by MTM to work on James J Hill's private rail car, Wisconsin Valley received interior upgrades, upgrades to the former C&NW Bi-levels, and more.

[Read More](#) It's dues time again for the Friends of the 261, but before I speak briefly about our activities and goals, I want to say thank you to all our members and friends for your generous support over the years.

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Thanks to your dues and donations, we've been able to keep 261 in operation and update our car fleet.

Thanks to your support, we are able to keep moving ahead. In 2024 we are planning more trips with 261, more car charters, and international tours. By renewing your membership, and making an additional donation, we will continue our progress.

Remember, your dues and donations are fully deductible under both federal and state income tax law, so if you act before the end of the year you can deduct the amount on your 2023 income tax return. You can renew and donate by sending the notice back by mail, or simply following the link below.

Thanks again for your continuing support. I hope to see you on a Friends of the 261 excursion or charter in 2024!

[Donate Now!](#)

Mid-Continent Museum Launches Restoration of Oldest Surviving Electro-Motive Motor Car

[By](#) | December 14, 2023 Gas-electric built in 1925 last ran in 1987; FMW Solutions will rebuild original Winton engine



Montana Western No. 31, the oldest surviving Electro-Motive gas-electric railcar, peeks out of a storage building at the Mid-Continent Railway Museum in 2021. The Museum has launched a project to restore the car, built in 1925, to operating condition. David Lassen



The Winton engine is removed from the railcar for shipment to FMW Solutions for disassembly and assessment. FMW Solutions

NORTH FREEDOM, Wis. — Mid-Continent Railway Museum is launching a project to restore to operating condition its Electro-Motive Corp. motor car, the oldest surviving piece of EMC equipment.

Montana Western No. 31, built by EMC in 1925 for Great Northern Railway as its No. 2313, is the 13th railcar built by the company that celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2022. It was featured in [this Trains Live video](#) last year. The museum said in [a press release](#) that it will work with FMW Solutions, a rail engineering firm with experience in preservation projects, to restore the gas-electric car, named as a Historic Mechanical Engineering Landmark in 2023 by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. The project is expected to cost \$300,000; volunteers are welcome to support the project and contributions are welcome [at the museum's website](#).

“Great Northern No. 2313 is already an important display piece, but we want to provide visitors with an immersive and moving experience that tells the story of railroad technology through the last century,” said Rusty Schramm, project manager. “We have recently undertaken repairs to the roof, radiator, control system, and fuel tank, but the antique Winton engine has not operated since 1987, and will be our first major undertaking.”

Restoration of the engine will be aided by a large supply of original Winton parts donated to the museum by the Sperry Rail Service when it was retiring its Winton-engined rail inspection cars.

“As someone who has spent my career dedicated to the maintenance and preservation of EMD locomotives, having the chance to oversee the restoration of this historic engine is a distinct privilege,” said FMW Senior Mechanical Associate and Winton Project Lead Allen Rider. “The engine/generator arrived at the FMW Tennessee machine shop earlier this month, and we will begin the initial disassembly and inspection in the coming weeks.”

A formal restoration plan will be developed following that initial inspection and assessment, with engine restoration at the FMW facility in Soddy-Daisy, Tenn.

“Our goal is to have her up and running in time for her centennial in 2025,” Schramm said. “It’s a worthwhile goal and achievable with donations and volunteer help.”

Federal Grant to Upgrade Empire Builder Route in Montana

[By](#) | December 8, 2023 **Money to fund improvements on BNSF in Malta, Mont., area**

WASHINGTON — BNSF Railway will receive a federal grant for \$14.9 million toward infrastructure improvements in and around Malta, Mont., U.S. Sen. Jon Tester announced Thursday.

The money, from the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Grant Program, is to improve service on the route of the *Empire Builder*. Specifically, it will help with final design and construction of track, bridge, signal and other improvements, eliminating a bottleneck in the Malta area.

“As someone who’s spent his entire life in north central Montana, I can tell you firsthand just how critical the *Empire Builder* is to keeping communities connected and helping Montana small businesses thrive,” Tester said in [a press release](#). “... These funds will help ensure smooth and reliable service along the Empire Builder [route], and I’m proud to have worked across the aisle to make it happen.”

Chicago & North Western’s Bilevel ‘Flambeau 400’

[By Mike Schafer](#) | December 3, 2023 -Provided by Rick Krense **Passengers enjoyed top service between Chicago and northern Wisconsin on bilevel equipment**



C&NW’s two-car *Flambeau 400* picks up passengers at Rhinelander, Wis., on Sept. 3, 1964. J. David Ingles photo

Into the 1960s, Chicago & North Western passenger trains blanketed the Upper Midwest, especially in Wisconsin — a popular vacationland until the jet airliner beckoned travelers instead to the likes of Southern California, Miami, and Las Vegas. In the late 1950s, new C&NW management saw the writing on the walls of the railroad’s majestic North Western Terminal in downtown [Chicago](#) that the future of the intercity passenger train involved a guillotine.

This did not go over well with Wisconsin, which threatened to block train-offs unless some sort of agreement could be made. The result? The state established an agreement with C&NW to upgrade selected principal trains while chopping runs that had fallen victim to competitors (notably Milwaukee Road). The result? C&NW’s lucrative Chicago-Milwaukee-Green Bay corridor would stay busy and with all modern lightweight equipment (notably that from the discontinued *Twin Cities 400*) and new bilevel rolling stock for the *Peninsula 400* and the *Flambeau 400* both of whose routes extended well beyond Green Bay to Ishpeming, Mich. (393 miles), and Ashland, Wis. (450 miles), respectively.

North Western made a wise move here. Already, in the 1950s, the railroad had established a modernized suburban-train network fanning north and northwest of Chicago with bilevel Pullman-Standard rolling stock (some of which remains in service). To upgrade the *Flambeau* and *Peninsula 400*s, C&NW ordered more P-S bilevel stock but outfitted with long-distance interiors: reclining seats, rotating seats for parlor-car service, cheery wall coverings, and luggage compartments. Lightweight, single-level dining and club cars from discontinued trains (notably the *Twin Cities 400*) were rebuilt with false roofs to match the new bilevel coaches and parlor cars.

Some of you readers have already figured out the long story. Should these trains ever be discontinued (which of course happened when Amtrak began operations), then C&NW could simply modify the coaches for suburban service — although the reality was that the cars were sold to Amtrak.

Serving the storied North Woods territory of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, the *Flambeau 400* became a favorite name train for this writer, using this train in the mid-1960s to do some vacationing, although I never covered the entire 450-mile route and nearly 12-hour ride to Ashland, detaining instead at Rhinelander, Wis.

The *Flambeau 400* was an efficient operation. Northbound, the train left Chicago in late morning, allowing for an excellent lunch before arriving at Green Bay in late afternoon. There our northbound train met the southbound *Flambeau*, and during the extended stop, the station switcher pulled the baggage-tap-lounge car, coach-parlor car, and diner off the front of the northbound train and shoving them onto the back of the southbound train. Very efficient!

Of course, as the ‘60s grew to a close, the cutbacks began. *Flambeau 400* service north of Green Bay became seasonal only — summer and the Christmas/New Year period. On Jan. 3, 1971 — the next-to-the-last day of *Flambeau 400* holiday service — three of us photographers followed the southbound run out of Ashland as far as Antigo, Wis., when a snowstorm forced us to cut and run back to Illinois.

At this time, the new Amtrak law was already in effect, prohibiting railroads that had signed on to join Amtrak to discontinue any of their intercity trains until April 30, 1971. My claim — arguably, I suppose — is that, in a sense, on that snowy day in January 1971, we had photographed an intercity passenger train would be the first intercity passenger train to be discontinued per the Amtrak law. (Yes, the Chicago-Green Bay portions of the *Flambeau 400*s did make their last runs on April 30, 1971.)



On Saturday, December 9, 2023, 2:53 PM NEWS BULLETIN!

Exciting Developments for Passenger Rail!

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has just revealed the routes it has selected nationwide to help state Departments of Transportation plan and expand new passenger rail routes around the country. What this means is that the Federal Railroad Administration will help and partner with state DOT's providing them with an initial \$500,000 for study and planning purposes.

This is an impact directly from the Infrastructure and Jobs Act passed by US Congress two years ago.

What does this mean for Minnesota? Quite a bit actually. Here is the list of routes selected in and around Minnesota to build out new passenger rail corridors along with the descriptions provided for each corridor from the FRA:

1. The 2nd Train between the Twin Cities and Chicago. Service Expansion via La Crosse (Up to \$500,000) Wisconsin Department of Transportation. The proposed corridor would initiate a new daily round trip between Chicago, IL, and St. Paul, MN to complement the existing Amtrak long-distance Empire Builder, with an extension to Minneapolis, MN. The proposed corridor would also include a study of potential additional frequencies. The corridor sponsor would enter Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan. AAMN note - as we understand it, this study money will help WisDOT prepare the final design and construction documents. The 2nd Train is scheduled to begin service in 2024, maybe even this spring.

2. Northern Lights Express (Up to \$500,000) Minnesota Department of Transportation. The proposed corridor would connect Minneapolis to Duluth, MN, through Cambridge and Hinckley, MN. The proposed corridor would provide new service on an existing alignment. The corridor sponsor would enter Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan. AAMN note - as we understand it, this study money will help MnDOT update the Environmental Impact and Design studies last completed in 2017.

3. Milwaukee-Madison-Eau Claire-Twin Cities Corridor (Up to \$500,000) Wisconsin Department of Transportation The proposed corridor would connect Milwaukee, WI, to Minneapolis, MN through Madison and Eau Claire, WI. Same description as above.

4. Eau Claire-Twin Cities Corridor (Up to \$500,000) Eau Claire County, MN The proposed corridor would connect St. Paul to Eau Claire, MN. Same description as above.

5. North Coast Hiawatha (Up to \$500,000) Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority The proposed corridor would restore a connection between Chicago, IL, and Seattle, WA, or Portland, OR, through Milwaukee, WI; La Crosse, WI; Eau Claire, WI; St. Paul, MN; Fargo, ND; Bismarck, ND; Dickinson, ND; Glendive, MT; Billings, MT; Bozeman, MT; Butte, MT; Helena, MT; Missoula, MT; St. Regis, MT; Sandpoint, MT; Spokane, WA; and Pasco, WA. The proposed corridor would provide new service (restoring a route that Amtrak discontinued in 1979) on an existing alignment. The corridor sponsor would enter Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan.

We will keep you posted as these plans develop. The routes listed above would be a great step forward to developing a connected passenger rail system for Minnesotans if they are implemented. We will definitely keep you posted as these plans develop. These are exciting times for anyone that wants to see passenger rail service expansion! Stay tuned!

If you wish to read all the routes selected by the FRA nationwide, here is the full list:

FRA Nationwide Corridor Selections www.allaboardminnesota.org

Metro News - Passenger Rail

Friday, December 8, 2023, 12:48 PM -Rick Krenske

PASSENGER RAIL: From Peter Passi via *Duluth News Tribune*, **VERBATIM:** "Supporters of the Northern Lights Express line had reason to feel a bit crestfallen Friday morning, as they received disappointing news of scant initial federal funding for a project that promises to restore passenger rail service between the Twin Ports and the Twin Cities.

The Minnesota Legislature has set aside \$194.7 million in support of the project, in hopes that it would leverage four times as much federal aid. But the Northern Lights Express came up short in the latest round of allocations announced by the Federal Railroad Administration early Friday morning. The NLX didn't strike out entirely, however, receiving Corridor Identification funding to the tune of up to \$500,000.

Those federal funds are intended to help the Minnesota Department of Transportation 'enter Step 1 of the program, to develop a scope, schedule and cost estimate for preparing, completing or documenting its service development plan,' according to a news release from the Federal Railroad Administration."

Gladstone and Railroads Have Long History | News, Sports, Jobs - Daily Press

Sun, Nov 26, 2023 at 10:53 AM from Ray Benson -Provided by John Goodman

Subject: Gladstone and railroads have long history | News, Sports, Jobs - Daily Press

Great story



R. R. Branstrom | Daily Press Inside the cab of 730, seats are being replaced, and fresh wood has gotten a coat of green paint.



R. R. Branstrom | Daily Press Tom Stearns uses his tractor to load gravel into a wheelbarrow manned by Nathan Dale from the City of Gladstone's Park and Recreation Department while John Norkooli waits with another.

GLADSTONE — The Soo Line steam locomotive alongside US 2 arrived in Gladstone 63 years ago, but it represents an industry and company that helped build the town long before.

In 1883, millers in Minneapolis — a major lumber producer and the nation's foremost leader in flour production — sought a way to transport goods without crossing through Chicago. The solution was a direct line of approximately 500 miles to the port of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada, where there was a connection with the Canadian Pacific railway. The new line established by the Minnesota magnates was called the "Minneapolis, Sault Ste. Marie and Atlantic Railroad," and it reached Sault Ste. Marie ("the Soo") in 1887. Initially, the line leased trackage rights for a portion of track belonging to another railroad — the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis & Omaha — between Minneapolis and Turtle Lake, Wis., but in 1888, the Minneapolis, Sault Ste. Marie and Atlantic built a subsidiary, christened "Minneapolis and St. Croix," which connected the origin point to Turtle Lake. Around the same time, they also incorporated the Minneapolis and Pacific line, which ran to the Dakotas so that wheat from farms there could be brought to Minneapolis for milling.

Before the final destination had been decided and the businessmen were still plotting a route, they sought a deepwater port. Little Bay de Noc came under scrutiny. Escanaba had existing ore docks and traffic, so that was off the table.

At the museum and gift shop dedicated to 730, located at 921 Delta Ave. in Gladstone, John Pickard, president of the Gladstone Michigan Soo Line Steam Engine #730 Authority, showed the Daily Press a black-and-white photograph of a ship leaving port — a ship of a kind not commonly seen today.

"This steamship right here is the one that W.D. Washburn, the president of (what would become) the Soo Line, came here to look for a port — they went all the way up the bay to Rapid River, looking for the best place to have their railroad," said Pickard, unraveling a string of history.

Undeveloped Gladstone, with land available for a rail yard and a point at which to load flour boats, was a perfect stop. At the time, Pickard explained, all that existed was a small fishing village on a point, used by a Captain Saunders from Bailey's Harbor, Wis. The land was owned by Mason and Van Cleve, who agreed to give it to the railroad if they would help develop a town, Pickard said. With all the costs associated with building and operating railroads, a big investor was needed. It happened just after the line reached Gladstone and needed to build a bridge to cross the Escanaba River. Canadian Pacific Railway (CP) became the major financier — with two major stipulations. The route would continue to Sault Ste. Marie, where it could connect with existing CP lines. The other mandate was that all the subsidiaries be consolidated. On June 11, 1888, they merged and became the Minneapolis, St. Paul and Sault Ste. Marie Railway — nicknamed "Soo Line."

In the years that followed, Wisconsin Central became a ward of the Minneapolis, St. Paul and Sault Ste. Marie Railway, beginning in 1909. In 1961, another merger consolidated Wisconsin Central; the Minneapolis, St. Paul and Sault Ste. Marie; and the Duluth, South Shore and Atlantic Railway. Only then did "Soo Line Railroad Company" arise as an official name. The "new Soo" went about acquiring more lines, not all of which paid off. The purchase of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad — better known as "the Milwaukee road" — in 1985 plunged Soo Line into debt.

Canadian Pacific, which had held a majority stake in Soo Line since 1888, bought it out entirely in 1990. CP is partnered with Canadian National (CN), which had originally been formed by the Canadian government in 1910 to control failed railroads that had fallen into their hands. The railyard in Gladstone alongside U.S. Highway 2 to the west now belongs to CN, and trains that run today on tracks that had previously been on the Soo Line are operated by either CP or CN.

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The steam engine that currently sits in Gladstone — 730 — was built in 1911 by the American Locomotive Company in Schenectady, New York. Throughout the '20s, '30s and '40s, regular maintenance was logged as it travelled over three million miles. 730 had one documented accident: In March of 1922, the train derailed in the snow in Frederic, Wis., where it sat until the snow melted. Exclusively for passenger service, 730 ran from Minneapolis to Illinois, North Dakota and Wisconsin — never in Michigan — until diesel engines made steam power obsolete. According to Pickard, the locomotive sat on an unused bit of track in Shoreham, Minn., for years, and the railroad was about to harvest several old engines for scrap metal. In 1959, William Heslip and Peter Cannon — retirees who had worked for the Soo Line — organized a group and approached Soo Line about obtaining a historic engine for the City of Gladstone.

In addition to Heslip and Cannon, the group of Soo Line retirees included original president Don Buckmaster, Bob Bowman, Pete Standing, Jim Kennedy, Ken Pickard, Jack Krout, Jim Tuffnel, Jack Soderman, Melvin Bloomquist, O'Neil Groleau, Stan Jugo, William Cassidy, Douglas Schafer, Jerry Lynn Clark, Rudy Kukanic, Clarence Carrier, and Russ Case on the first charter, according to a list provided by the present Authority. The retirees successfully attained their goal in 1960; the railroad donated 730 to Gladstone. Soon after, cyclone (chain-link) fencing was installed around it.

From 1970 to 1980, Case, an avid rail fan, painted and maintained the relic, reportedly refusing to accept help from others.

In 1983, the Soo Line retirees held fundraisers for a covered structure to protect the engine from the elements. The \$6,000 raised was not enough, so they reached out to Congressman Bart Stupak, who secured a grant with the Army Corps of Engineers. The City of Gladstone donated sandblasting and painting services. In 1985, the shelter was built by the Army Corps of Engineers.

In 1986, Tom Fisher of Fisher Monuments in Escanaba manufactured and donated an informational bronze plaque to be affixed to the side of the coal tender.

By 1998, many of the retirees had passed away, so a new committee was formed, organized by Gary Stiles. The 25-person committee enlisted the aid of Escanaba & Lake Superior Railroad's John Larkin, who pledged over \$50,000 for repairs to 730. Contributors to those efforts included EL&S and Pearson Asbestos Removal. In 2000, the canopy along the highway sat empty for several months as restoration took place at EL&S in Escanaba before the locomotive was brought back to Gladstone.

Another 20 years passed, and the call arose for another era of efforts. John Pickard — whose father had worked on the Soo Line and been on the original charter of retirees — rallied a new wave. The Gladstone Michigan Soo Line Steam Engine #730 Authority kicked off in 2021. John Norkooli, who had also participated in the previous committee chaired by Stiles, now sits as Vice President and takes some of the manual labor into his own hands. Several instrumental figures in the upkeep often act on their own time and dime.

Members from the International Union of Painters & Allied Trades cleaned and painted the locomotive. This task was aided by the Gladstone Volunteer Fire Department, though caution had to be utilized with the high-pressure hoses, as the metal is weak in places. Hundreds of pigeons had taken to nesting under the shelter — on the engine and even inside the cab. Norkooli indicated how deep the bird droppings were by holding his hands a foot apart; it was unclear whether he was exaggerating. The mess has since been shoveled out.

The city of Ladysmith, Wis. — also on the Soo Line — has a steam engine similar to 730 and other pieces of railroading history that Pickard described as very well-preserved through funding by the City of Ladysmith.

"I met the folks in Ladysmith. I met the city manager; he came down and gave me a tour of their engine — they have a big facility there," Pickard said. "That comes right out of their budget every year. They say, 'we give so much money to this railroad fund there to keep it looking really nice.' That's where I saw the bird net."

Money raised for Gladstone's bird netting, which went up in 2022, was donated by Great Lakes 1st Federal Credit Union; the Lions Clubs from Gladstone, Wells and Bark River; the Soo Line Historical and Technical Society; the Rotary Club of Escanaba; Delta Appraisal Services; John Malnar; Iverson's Home Center and dozens of other organizations and individuals.

Volunteers from the Michigan Regional Council of Carpenters, the Michigan Building and Construction Trades Council and the Upper Peninsula Construction Council helped install the netting. When difficulty arose reaching the highway side, where ground is uneven, Norkooli approached Loyal Tree Service about hiring the bucket truck. Brady LeDuc agreed to help and took on the job at no charge.

Railroad ties from EL&S were used to hold down the netting after it was discovered that pigeons were still able to get under it. Finally, the area seems to be bird-free.

Andrew Hess of Hess Knifeworks polished the numbers on the front of the train, which now gleam and reflect the lights installed by NK Electric and paid for by John Larkin.

Tom Fisher rebronzed the plaques, which are to be reattached soon.

Christmas lights are up on the locomotive once again, and this week, white-washed rock was added around the base.

Pickard said that efforts by Angelo Marrone, Rick Prica, Bill Marmalick, Jack Soderman, Diane Krouth, Michael Smith, Brad Reed, Tom Stearns, Ann McCarthy, Wayne Johnson and William Schmitt have been appreciated. The Authority also wishes to thank everyone who has donated to the cause, and is still accepting through the Community Foundation of Delta County (2420 1st Ave. South in Escanaba).

The organization meets on the second Monday of each month at 4:30 p.m. at the museum shop at 921 Delta Ave. They are looking for volunteers to fill positions and help run the shop, which sells shirts and sweatshirts but has not been able to set regular opening hours yet. The group's major fundraiser is a golf tournament sponsored by many local partners. Next year, it will be on June 27 at the Escanaba Country Club.

In September of 2024, the convention for the Soo Line Historical and Technical Society will be held at the Island Resort and Casino. The event, which travels around the Midwest and was this year held in Rhinelander, Wis., last came to Michigan in 2003.

Workin' – And Volunteering – On the Railroad

Railway Age Written by [BNSF Railway Corporate Communications](#) December 08, 2023



The “chug chug” of the steam locomotive is music to the ears of John Mobley, who is one of fewer than 100 people in the U.S. qualified to operate a steam locomotive.



“Not many people do this,” Mobley said of his and others’ volunteer work with the [Southern California Railway Museum](#) in Perris, California. “Inside the steam engine, it’s noisy and hot, but all you have to do is put someone’s hand on the throttle, and it’ll stick with them for life.” Mobley, a conductor/engineer and safety leader for [BNSF](#) in San Bernardino, California, got hooked on steaming when the museum needed a pilot for the engine’s dedication ceremony in 2016. Because he’s qualified as a locomotive engineer, he knows what to expect from the right-hand side of the cab. But mastering a steam locomotive takes additional skills — and being in charge of a boiler is no easy task. “There are a lot of hoops to go through to know how to safely operate these,” he explained. “They have older-style airbrakes, and you’ve got to constantly watch the steam pressure and temperature. It’s different from running a diesel [locomotive], where a computer will tell you about any anomalies.

. Steam is manual, with lots of valves to control.” Mobley noted there’s a “feel” for how the engine’s operating. As an engineer, he has to have a partnership with the fireman to make sure everything runs smoothly, and as a safety leader, he underscores why communication in the cab is so important. “The fireman and engineer work in tandem. I worked the fireman job to understand what it takes. Too much fire and smoke are not a good thing,” he said of the oil-fired engine the museum owns. The museum offers visitors a chance to take excursions and climb aboard a steam locomotive, which came from the Ventura County Railway. “No. 2” was built in 1922 and spent its early years hauling timber and lumber in Washington. In 1943, it came to California, where it moved freight, supplies for World War II, and agricultural goods. Currently the locomotive is out of service as it undergoes a period of inspections, overhaul and repairs to ready it for its second century in operation. As a board member for the museum, Mobley, who is a former local chairman for his union, encourages coworkers to get involved with the museum to share the history of railroading with the next generations. “Any time I have the chance to let someone ride in the cab or pull the throttle, I do it. Why waste an opportunity to learn?” Mobley said. “Being a railroader is something to be proud of. I can share a little bit of my history with the railroad with others.” His devotion to railroading goes back long before his career, which began in 1997 following his time in the Air Force. Mobley is a third-generation railroader after his father and grandfather, so he grew up immersed in railroading. “My dad would bring model trainsets and a big brass bell to the school and talked to us about railroad safety,” Mobley recalled. “There were trains everywhere at our house.”

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Mobley's grandfather, Byron Knight Mobley, began his railroading career in 1938 with BNSF predecessor the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway (ATSF or Santa Fe), eventually retiring in 1975. Mobley's father James Louis Mobley hired on in 1966 and retired in 2007. Together, the three generations of Mobleys have more than 100 years of combined service with BNSF and its predecessors. Both on and off the clock, Mobley loves what he does. His enthusiasm inspires the museum's visitors interested in railroad history and makes their experiences memorable. Mobley says it's fulfilling to see children and parents alike with smiles on their faces. An annual event that the museum offers is the Polar Express, a train ride using the museum's passenger rail cars and diesel locomotive. On board the train, decked in sights and sounds of the motion picture, guests are immersed in theatrical onboard entertainment, served hot chocolate and cookies by dancing chefs and read along with the children's book that the movie is based. Then Santa and his helpers board the train to greet passengers.

The Polar Express runs through Dec. 30 at the museum, with Mobley on call to operate the train's diesel locomotive if needed. "I was born into this. It's a lifeblood," Mobley reflected of his work with the museum. "I always encourage that interest. Sometimes you think a moment can be insignificant, since you do it every day, but seeing the twinkle in a kid's eye is like nothing else. The excitement is palpable."

---Year In Review by Trains Newswire---

News Wire Year in Review: The Year in Preservation

[By Bob Lettenberger, Trains Associate Editor](#) | December 20, 2023 **Big bucks for big buildings were a theme in 2023** A rendering of the planned visitors' center at the Nevada State Railroad Museum, Boulder City, as shown in a video screenshot.



A rendering of the planned visitors' center at the Nevada State Railroad Museum, Boulder City, as shown in a video screenshot



A rendering of the planned redesigned museum entrance at the South Car Works building. B&O Railroad Museum



Three cars from Pennsylvania Trolley Museum's collection congregate on the double-track trolley street in front of the museum's new Welcome & Education Center on Nov. 10, 2023. Dan Cupper



Crowds mill around Santa Fe No. 2926 during its appearance at an Albuquerque brewery in May, its first trip — albeit a short one — away from its restoration facility. Alex

Add it up — a million here, a million there — and soon you've got some serious money. Looking back on 2023 in railroad preservation, the large sums secured for new museum facilities adds up to be the biggest story.

The tally sheet shows the State of Nevada budgeted \$23 million for a new visitors' center at the Nevada State Railroad Museum in Boulder City. The state earmarked an additional \$7.6 million to remodel the freight barn at the Nevada Northern Railway and \$800,000 to stabilize the depot at the East Ely Railroad Depot Museum.

CSX Transportation set the pace for the B&O Railroad Museum's campus transformation with a \$5 million contribution and landed Joe Hinrichs, CSX president and CEO, to serve as campaign chairman.

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The South Baltimore Gateway Partnership added \$1 million. The goal — \$30 million — will create a new museum entrance, amphitheater, and renovate the 33,000-square-foot South Car Works into exhibit, archive, and educational space. The new facilities will open for the 2027 bicentennial of American railroading.

The Pennsylvania Trolley Museum opened its new \$15 million, 21,000-square-foot welcome center. Fundraising had been in progress since before the COVID pandemic, with delays causing the total cost to balloon by 40%. The new facility features interactive science and technology exhibits related to trollies, education space, and the museum store.

The Texas legislature's budget contained \$10 million for track work, including rail, tie, and ballast replacement, on the Texas State Railroad, a tourist line in Palestine, Texas. Some of the rail to be replaced is over 100 years old.

Expansion plans at the National Railroad Museum in Green Bay, Wis., got a boost when the state chipped in \$7 million toward a 32,040-square-foot addition to the Lenfestey Center, its main exhibit hall. The addition will allow for expanded exhibits around newly restored pieces and more space for educational programming and events.

The planned 20,000-square-foot exhibit building at the Western Pacific Railroad Museum in Portola, Calif., got a \$1 million boost from a U.S. Department of Agriculture grant. The facility will house 10 to 16 pieces of rolling stock and serve as a disaster evacuation center. These projects alone represent a \$69.4 million investment in American rail preservation.

The past year also held a number of significant anniversaries.

It was Aug. 2, 1873, when Scotsman Andrew S. Hallidie launched what would become a symbol of San Francisco — the cable car. It was 150 years ago that Hallidie's first cable car ran along Clay Street.

In England the celebration was for the *Flying Scotsman*, an A1-class 4-6-2 Pacific steam locomotive, that reached the century mark.

The *Scotsman*, designed by Sir Nigel Gresley for the Great Northern Railway, is the first British locomotive to achieve a verified speed of 100 mph. The locomotive entered service Feb. 24, 1923.

Restoration work continued in 2023 on numerous steam locomotives. Several big-name engines were put back in service. Count among this number Pere Marquette No. 1225 and Santa Fe Nos. 2926 and 3751. Smaller and less heralded, but noteworthy in terms of perseverance, is the return to operation of SMS Rail's Alco 0-6-0, completed after 14 years. The locomotive, built for the U.S. Army, will see excursion duty in 2024.

Diesels increasingly made preservation news, with a growing number of units donated to museums or otherwise securing restoration. Leading the list of internal-combustion headliners were Nickel Plate PA No. 190 and Union Pacific DDA40X No. 6936. The former Santa Fe and Delaware & Hudson Alco was acquired by Genesee Valley Transportation from preservationist Doyle McCormack for use on the company's office-car train and other special moves; the 6936 will be the only operational DDA40X thanks to the restoration work of Railroading Heritage of Midwest America at its Silvis, Ill., facility, after donation by UP last year.

In January, the new year, only 10 days old, was marred by the death of preservation feline Dirt, the Nevada Northern Railway Museum's shop cat. Dirt was 15 years old and had been a fixture in the shop since found there in 2008. The Facebook obituary post to date has been "liked" by more than 36,000 people, has garnered 5,400 comments, and 17,000 shares. Dirt was laid to rest near the museum depot in Ely, Nev. Although there is sorrow over Dirt's passing, the museum has adopted a new shop cat, DJ — Dirt Jr.

Previous News Wire coverage:

["Dirt, famed Nevada Northern shop cat, dies at 15,"](#) Jan. 11, 2023.

["Genesee Valley Transportation acquires PA locomotive for office car train and excursion operation,"](#) March 2, 2023.

["Santa Fe No. 2926 to make short trip for Albuquerque fundraiser,"](#) May 1, 2023.

["San Francisco kicks off 150th cable car anniversary,"](#) May 5, 2023.

["Western Pacific museum receives grant for display building,"](#) June 7, 2023.

["Nevada rail museum in Boulder City receives \\$23 million for new visitor's center,"](#) June 8, 2023.

["CSX makes \\$5 million gift to B&O Railroad Museum,"](#) June 8, 2023.

["Texas budget includes funding for heritage railroad,"](#) June 12, 2023.

["Silvis shop continues work on several projects,"](#) July 11, 2023.

["Santa Fe No. 3751 to appear at LA Union Station event in September,"](#) July 13, 2023.

["B&O Museum receives \\$1 million for South Car Works Building project,"](#) Sept. 27, 2023.

["National Railroad Museum to receive \\$7 million for expansion project,"](#) Nov. 2, 2023.

["Pere Marquette No. 1225 returns to service after wheel and running gear rebuild,"](#) Nov. 9, 2023.

["Pennsylvania Trolley Museum opens \\$15 million interpretive center,"](#) Nov. 13, 2023.

["CSX's Hinrichs to chair B&O Museum capital campaign,"](#) Nov. 14, 2023.

["SMS Rail Lines 0-6-0 returns to steam, certified for operation,"](#) Nov. 25, 2023.

["Flying Scotsman celebrates a century,"](#) Dec. 8, 2023.

News Wire Year in Review: Top International Stories, part 1

[By Keith Fender](#) | December 19, 2023 **New high-speed lines open in Europe, Asia; alternative propulsion developments continue**

The year 2023 has seen major new rail lines enter service around the world, with new high-speed lines opening as far apart as Spain and Indonesia. High speed developments weren't quite as positive in the United Kingdom, where part of the HS2 system was axed by the government. And new railway technology, in the form of battery-powered trains, began operating in Germany.

High speed in southern hemisphere

In Asia the first high speed line in the southern hemisphere opened Oct. 2 between the Indonesian capital Jakarta and the city of Bandung, serving a combined population of over 45 million people (the Jakarta conurbation has 34 million people and Bandung around 11 million). Track laying only began in April 2022 and the line was fully operational within 18 months.

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A Eurostar arriving in Amsterdam from London on Dec. 14, 2023. Direct Amsterdam-London service will halt in June 2024 for about six months to accommodate station rebuilding. Eurostar, meanwhile, is facing the prospect of new competition through the Channel Tunnel. Keith Fender



A RENFE Class 130 Alvia train exits the Pajares Base Tunnel. This type of train will be used for passenger service; it can change gauge and voltage, overcoming the new line's operating complexities. Courtesy ADIF AV



The first route to see regular battery electric multiple-unit service in Germany was the short commuter rail line from Kiel to Kiel Oppendorf, shown on Nov. 14, 2023. Keith Fender

The 89-mile-long, 219-mph (350 kilometer per hour) high-speed line was opened by Indonesian President Joko Widodo. Twelve 600-seat trains branded as “Whoosh” operate on the new line. These CR400AF “Yawan” high-speed EMUs were built in China by rail engineering conglomerate CRRC. A joint venture of Indonesian and Chinese state-owned companies operates the trains, with 34 train pairs daily and multiple departures per hour. There are two intermediate stations in addition to termini at both ends.

In Spain the country's king opened a new railway line linking the northern province of Asturias to the rest of the Spanish high-speed network on Nov. 29; regular service began the next day. The 31.25-mile new section of railway includes the 15.43-mile Pajares Base Tunnel, now Europe's seventh-longest rail tunnel, built underneath the Cantabrian Mountain range. The new \$4.4 billion line shortens the distance by rail from the cities of Oviedo to León by 23 miles, avoiding the old steeply graded and circuitous line over the Pajares Pass. Journey times for both passenger and freight trains have been reduced by over an hour.

Construction of the twin-bore base tunnel took 20 years beginning in 2004. Complex geology and high levels of water ingress from aquifers delayed progress multiple times, and on several occasions opponents of the project suggested it be shelved. The new line is technically complex as it aims to accommodate all the trains that used the old line through the mountains (which will likely be abandoned at some point), as well as the new high speed services. To do this, both standard gauge and 1,668mm/5-foot, 5 21/32 inch Iberian broad gauge tracks have been laid. To add even more complexity, the new tunnels use the 25kV AC electrification of all of Spain's high speed network — but the broad gauge trains will all be freight and there are hardly any freight locomotives in Spain that can switch from the 3kV DC used everywhere else on the broad gauge network to 25kV AC. A gauge changer for high speed trains has been built at the north end of the base tunnel to enable special gauge-changing high speed trains to switch to the broad gauge for the remainder of their journey north into Asturias.

Less progress in Britain, but possible competition for Eurostar

In Britain, the government decided in October to cancel the northern section of the planned HS2 high speed line that would have connected Birmingham with Manchester. Despite the political decision, planning for parts of the route is still underway, as some sections are needed for other new rail links planned around Manchester. The original southern section of the HS2 project connecting London and Birmingham is partly built and will be completed, although it is unclear when the planned London Euston terminus station will be constructed.

On the existing British high speed route from London to Paris and Amsterdam via the Channel Tunnel, the possibility of competition for established operator Eurostar seem to be becoming a probability with no less than six other operators — some start-ups, some well-financed state rail companies — announcing plans to offer services within the next few years. Eurostar itself has merged with the Paris-Amsterdam/Germany international high speed company Thalys, rebranding both services as Eurostar; it says it's aiming for 30 million passengers annually by 2030 systemwide.

The first of what will be several fleets of new battery electric multiple-unit (BEMU) trains entered service in Germany in October. The BEMU concept is for trains to work as normal EMUs when overhead power is available but to use batteries on non-electrified lines, with up to 90 miles between recharges. All of the BEMU fleets planned in Germany are designed to offer similar operating performance whether using overhead power or batteries.

The first fleet to enter service, on Oct. 1, were some of 55 two-car Class 526 Flirt Akku BEMUs (“Akku” is battery in German) supplied by Stadler to the transport authority in the northern German state of Schleswig Holstein. The transport authority awarded the \$655 million contract for the new fleet and its maintenance for 30 years in 2019, and will lease the equipment to its contracted passenger operators. The contracts cover the majority of non-electrified rail routes in the state; once fully BEMU-operated, they will help Schleswig-Holstein achieve 68% electric operation for its regional services, despite most lines lacking overhead electrification — saving around 2 million gallons of diesel fuel and 26,000 metric tons of CO2 emissions each year.

In the Stadler trainsets, the batteries are carried in roof-mounted sections or under the floor, so they don't reduce capacity inside the train. In mid-December, many of the trains had to be temporarily removed from service due to software issues, which Stadler expects to have fixed early in 2024.

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Multiple BEMU fleets are being introduced in Germany in the next two years. Twenty Siemens Mireo+B'Class 563 BEMUs will enter service on regional routes from Offenburg serving the Black Forest in early 2024, and another 31 are on order for services east of Berlin beginning in late 2024. Eleven Alstom-built Coradia Continental BEMUs are scheduled to run services in Saxony, from Leipzig to Chemnitz, beginning early in 2024. CAF is also building a fleet of 73 Civity BEMUs for transport authorities in the Ruhr region, for use from late 2025 onward, while Stadler has won further orders for its Flirt Akku with two fleets on order for operation by DB Regio in western and eastern Germany as of 2025-26.

Previous News Wire coverage:

[“Siemens presentation offers opportunity to compare hydrogen, battery-powered trains,”](#) May 4, 2023.

[“Eurostar to be blocked from Amsterdam for a year,”](#) June 13, 2023.

[“British government axes part of planned high-speed route,”](#) Oct. 4, 2023.

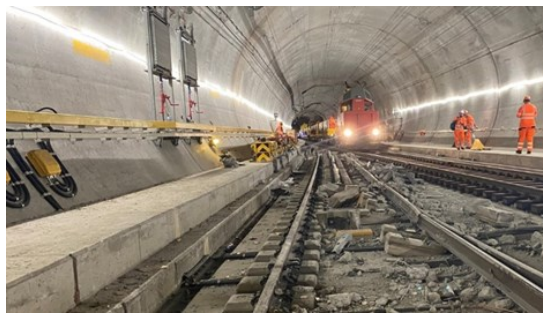
[“Indonesia launches country’s first high speed train,”](#) Oct. 6, 2023.

[“First of many battery trains enter service in Germany,”](#) Nov. 16, 2023.

<https://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/competition-heats-up-under-the-english-channel/>

News Wire Year in Review: Top International Stories, Part 2

[By Keith Fender](#) | December 20, 2023 **Gotthard Base Tunnel derailment, Ukraine war remain in spotlight**



Diversions of long-distance services using SBB's newest Giruno trains over the historic Gotthard Pass route will continue on weekdays until September. A pair of Girunos enters the Gotthard Tunnel at Göschenen on Nov. 11, 2023, with a south-bound train. Keith Fender

Damage from the Aug. 10 derailment inside the Gotthard Base Tunnel is clearly visible during repair work in November. SBB

Before the Ukraine war, joint Finnish-Russian-operated Karelian Trains Allegro 'Pendolino EMU Sm6 7751 arrives at Tikkurila, east of Helsinki, with Helsinki-St. Petersburg Finlandskaya service >on April 17, 2018. Finland's VR is now planning to use these trains just in Finland.

A major accident in the world's longest rail tunnel, and the continuing role of railways in the Ukraine war, comprise the second part of our look at the top international rail stories of 2023.

Switzerland's Gotthard Base Tunnel closed

The derailment of a freight train in the world's longest rail tunnel on Aug. 10 led to the twin-bore Gotthard Base Tunnel under the Swiss Alps being closed completely for two weeks, as some wreckage had spilled into the second tunnel bore. Once that was cleared, the undamaged bore reopened for up to 100 freight trains a day using the one undamaged tunnel, but the other one requires over a year of repair work.

In September, the Swiss accident investigation confirmed a broken wheel on one freight car had caused the derailment, and that the initial derailment of the northbound train in the westernmost bore went undetected for some miles, causing relatively limited damage — until the damaged wheel hit switches at the Faido emergency crossover, leading the train to break up, with some cars totally wrecked. The investigation has shown the wheel manufactured in 2008 failed due to multiple cracks, initially in the tread, which through vibration in operation had spread, leading to a major fracture. The Swiss Transportation Safety Investigation Board told the media that despite modern, state-of-the-art trackside monitoring systems in use, such failures cannot be detected. Swiss National Railways, or SBB, resumed limited passenger operation using the Base Tunnel as of Dec. 10, with 31 passenger trains using the route on weekends, when repair work pauses; this had begun on a much smaller scale in late September. Otherwise, passenger trains from central Switzerland to cities in the southern canton of Ticino or Italy have been using the classic Gotthard mountain route, adding to journey times and limiting operational flexibility, as clearance restrictions prevent the use of bilevel trains that operate through the Base Tunnel. The Base Tunnel is expected to fully reopen in September 2024, with repairs likely to cost more than \$120 million.

Railways remain vital to both sides as Ukraine war grinds on

By New Year's Day, the war between Ukraine and Russia will have been underway for over 675 days following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022. Railways remain vital to the military on both sides, which use them to move equipment and troops from all over their countries. For both sides, railways also play a vital role in moving supplies from other countries — in Ukraine's case, equipment supplied by the USA and NATO allies via ports in western or southern Europe, and in Russia's case, munitions from North Korea, which has a direct rail connection to the Russian network in the Far East.

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In late November it was reported by Russia and Ukraine that the longest rail tunnel in Russia – the nearly 9.6-mile, single-track Severomuysky Tunnel on the Baikal–Amur Mainline (BAM) in eastern Siberia — several thousand miles east of Ukraine — had been damaged by explosions onboard a passing train. Reports suggest a nearby viaduct on alternate mountain route in the same area was targeted a day later, and Russian authorities then reportedly arrested a Belarusian citizen on suspicion of blowing up railway cars on the line, acting on instructions from the Ukrainian secret service. The BAM route is the more northern and modern of the two Trans-Siberian routes, and is likely being used to ship munitions supplied by North Korea for use in Ukraine. The Severomuysky Tunnel was completed in 2002 and opened in 2003.

In the eastern part of Ukraine, occupied by Russia in early 2022, it has been reported that Russia is building a new railway line to connect the Crimean Peninsula (illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014) via land it occupied in February 2022. The new line will head south from the Russian city of Rostov on Don, near the coast of the sea of Azov, joining the existing rail network in Crimea. While Russian politicians have announced the construction, it's unclear how much actual work has begun. The corridor the line would use already has one rail line south from the occupied city of Melitopol and is a key target for Ukrainian forces seeking to recover their territory. If built, the new line would provide another alternative to the bridge over the Kerch Strait connecting Russia with Ukraine, which has been the target for repeated Ukrainian attacks.

Due to the danger of Russian air attacks, foreign leaders visiting Ukraine have had to take the train from the border with Poland. U.S. President Joe Biden did this from Przemyśl, Poland, on Feb. 20 to visit Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Playing on the name of the aircraft Biden usually uses to travel, this led Ukrainian Railways (UZ) to nickname the VIP saloon “Rail Force One.” The car was built in 2005 by Polish train builder Pesa Bydgoszcz and is equipped with two bedrooms and a conference room, and has been used during 2023 by several foreign leaders visiting Kyiv.

Away from the actual fighting, the war has had major impacts on the European rail industry, especially for the train manufacturers that sourced parts and people from Ukraine. Both are now less easy or impossible to access. For Russia, what had become a growing and lucrative rail freight transit route from China to European countries has seen volumes fall dramatically, although not completely disappear. All passenger rail links between Russia and Europe were severed within days of the Ukraine invasion, and several countries that border Russia have closed cross-border railways. In Finland, which has closed almost its entire border with Russia, state rail company VR announced it was taking ownership of four Alstom-built Allegro tilting trains it owned in a joint venture with Russia's rail company RZD. The trains were built for service on the St Petersburg-Helsinki route, but services ended in March 2022. VR plans to use the trains for domestic service in Finland in 2024, although RZD has objected saying the move is illegal.

Previous News Wire coverage:

Gotthard Base Tunnel:

[“Derailment closes Switzerland’s Gotthard Base Tunnel,”](#) Aug. 10, 2023.

[“Gotthard Base Tunnel repairs to extend into 2024,”](#) Aug. 16, 2023.

[“One tube of Gotthard Base Tunnel reopens for freight traffic,”](#) Aug. 23, 2023.

[“Swiss to increase long-term tunnel capacity, repairs underway on Gotthard Base Tunnel,”](#) Sept. 11, 2023.

[“Gotthard Base Tunnel repairs make take until September 2024,”](#) Nov. 2, 2023.

[“Swiss plan will significantly increase weekend passenger traffic through Gotthard Base Tunnel,”](#) Nov. 18, 2023.

Ukraine war:

[“Ukraine’s railways mark one year of war,”](#) Feb. 27, 2023.

[“Railways take over grain exports from Ukraine,”](#) Aug. 1, 2023.

Shippers and Railroads Square Off Over STB’s Service-based Reciprocal Switching Proposal

By Bill Stephens | December 21, 2023 **Railroads aim to limit scope of traffic that would fall under proposed rule, while some shippers advocate for much broader application of reciprocal switching to boost competition**



As the Surface Transportation Board debates reciprocal switching, shippers argue it will increase competition and provide better customer service. The railroads, however, counter that such switching will slow traffic and increase emissions as more locomotives will be required.

WASHINGTON — The Surface Transportation Board’s controversial service-based reciprocal switching proposal faced another round of criticism this week, with many shippers saying it doesn’t go far enough and railroads saying it’s an unworkable, unrealistic rule that goes too far.

The proposal, unveiled in September, would allow shippers located in terminal areas to seek access to a second railroad via reciprocal switch if the serving carrier failed to meet one of three performance standards over a 12-week period.

Railroads risk a reciprocal switch case if: They don’t deliver at least 60% of cars within 24 hours of the original estimate; average transit time increases by 20% to 25% compared to the prior year; and their success rate for spotting and pulling cars within a given service window falls below 80%.

Rail customers, in replies this week to an initial round of comments that were filed in November, expressed a wide range of views on the proposed rule.

Some shippers welcomed the rule, and backed it as written. Some sought much tighter on-time performance standards, saying the current proposal would do no good — noting that it would give railroads a 24-hour grace period on late deliveries.

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Others said the proposal should serve as the foundation for a broad-based reciprocal switching rule that would allow many more sole-served shippers to receive service from a second railroad. And some said that the STB should boost competition by granting railroads trackage rights throughout terminal areas.

But shippers were united on one item: They said the service standards should apply to all rail traffic.

Railroads have argued that the STB lacks the power to impose service standards on shipments that move under contract or are commodities that are exempt from board regulation. Only about 5% of rail traffic would qualify if the rule applied only to traffic that moves under tariffs and involved regulated commodities.

“The most effective way to address inadequate rail service is to allow more competition through reciprocal switching,” a coalition that includes the American Chemistry Council, The Fertilizer Institute, and The National Industrial Transportation League told the board. Shippers told the STB that railroads sought to neuter the proposal.

But railroads emphasized that contract moves should be exempt from service standards and regulation because Congress intended for contracts to replace government regulation as part of the Staggers Act of 1980. They also pushed back against shipper suggestions that the rule’s proposed 60% on-time performance standard be tightened.

The railroads also said that carload service is inherently variable due to a combination of factors that include swings in volume, seasonality of traffic, bad weather, dispatching decisions made by terminal railroads, and other third-party actions beyond the railroads’ control.

“Manifest carload networks are not designed to be assembly lines that use a fixed ratio of inputs to spit out identical and repeatable outputs day after day, week after week, month after month,” Canadian Pacific Kansas City wrote in its comments. “They are designed to adapt to varying inputs and other circumstances in ways that yield varying outputs as a matter of normal course. The fact that a network can achieve well in excess of 60 percent on-time performance on average says nothing about the likelihood that individual lanes will trip the Board’s thresholds as the result of routine and indeed planned variations in service performance.”

The Association of American Railroads said the original estimated time of arrival metric can’t by itself establish the need for a reciprocal switching order and that the measure should not apply to unit trains.



---Amtrak News---

Amtrak Cites Major Ridership Increase in Fiscal Year-end Report

[By](#) | November 30, 2023 **Ridership increases almost 25% over 2022, led by Northeast Corridor results**



Amtrak Acela trains meet on the S curve at Elizabeth, N.J. Northeast Corridor results led an overall ridership boost, Amtrak said in releasing results for fiscal 2023. David Lassen

WASHINGTON — More than 28 million passengers rode Amtrak in its 2023 fiscal year, the company today in announcing results for the year that ended Sept. 30.

“Amtrak ridership continues to set post-pandemic records thanks to our customers who were anxious to travel again and attracted to the many benefits of train travel,” CEO Stephen Gardner said in a press release. “This resurgence was made possible by our dedicated employees, our many state and host railroad partners, and ongoing support from the Biden Administration and Congress. We’re inspired by the soaring demand for intercity passenger rail and are eager to continue connecting more people and places.”

The 28.6% million customer trips represent a 24.6% increase over fiscal 2022, the company notes. This includes:

— A 31.3% increase on Northeast Corridor services, with *Northeast Regionals* up 29.2% and surpassing pre-pandemic levels. Acela ridership increased 38% and edged above pre-pandemic levels by 8% in the fourth quarter, although the total of 2.96 million riders remains more than 600,000 below the total for pre-pandemic fiscal 2019.

— A 22.7% increase in state-supported services, which saw an additional round trip in the Charlotte-Raleigh, N.C., *Piedmont* corridor; restoration of *Amtrak Cascades* service to Vancouver, British Columbia, as well as doubling of trips between Portland and Seattle; and — albeit on a limited basis — the return of *Adirondack* service between New York City and Montreal for the first time since 2020. State services including the *Downdeer* and those in Virginia and North Carolina set monthly or annual ridership records.

— A 12.9% increase in long-distance ridership, aided by the return of a full pre-pandemic schedule. More than 45% of the total increase (204,736 of 450,712 riders) is attributable to almost a full year of operation by the *Silver Meteor*, which was suspended in January 2022 and did not return until Oct. 14 of that year, early in the 2023 fiscal year. Total operating revenue (including payments for state-supported routes) was \$3.4 billion, up 20% from 2022, driven by increases in ridership and ticket revenue. The adjusted operating earnings of \$752.2 million are an increase of \$130 from the prior fiscal year.

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The company also noted that it made its largest annual capital investment ever, almost \$3 billion on rolling stock, stations and other facilities, and right-of-way infrastructure, and that it welcome more than 4,800 new hires. A more detailed list of the company's achievements in the fiscal year [is available here](#).

"As we build a new era of passenger rail with more modern trains, expanded routes, more frequent service, upgraded stations, and renewed infrastructure," said Amtrak Board Chair Tony Coscia, "Amtrak will continue to deliver major improvements for current and future Amtrak customers over the coming decade."

Watch *Trains News Wire* for further analysis of the fiscal-year results.

Amtrak Officials Outline New Goals, Initiatives at Public Board Meeting

[By Bob Johnston](#) | December 2, 2023 Company projects surpassing pre-pandemic ridership, revenue in 2024; details efforts to restore long-distance cars to operation



Amtrak President Roger Harris speaks during the company's annual public meeting on Friday in Richmond, Va. Bob Johnston

	FY23	FY24	Total
Long Distance	16	47	63
COVID Catch-up	11	12	23
Superliner	11	10	21
Viewliner I		11	11
Viewliner II		11	11
Wreck Repair	5	14	19
Amfleet II	1	1	2
Superliner	4	12	16
Viewliner II		1	1
Corridor	7	22	29
COVID Catch-up	7	22	29
Amfleet I	7	2	9
Horizon		20	20
Total	73	200	273

Amtrak detailed car restoration efforts in the 2023 and 2024 fiscal years at Friday's meeting. Bob Johnston

Amtrak is returning 63 Long Distance cars to service in FY 2023 – FY 2024.		
39 Superliner Cars	22 Viewliner Cars	2 Amfleet II Cars

A slide shown during the Amtrak meeting outlines plans for the cars to be restored to service in fiscal 2024. Bob Johnston

A \$28 million investment upgrades the Superliner fleet, enhancing nearly 400 passenger cars.			
Superliner Refresh	Total Fleet	% Complete	Target Complete
Coaches	149	~80%	Jan. 2024
Sleepers	155	~40%	March 2025
Diners & Lounges	87	~20%	Dec. 2024
Total Superliners	391	~50%	March 2025
Viewliner I refresh (49 Sleepers) to begin in FY 2024.			
A new accessible bathroom designed with community input is being added to 23 Superliner I Coach cars.			
Accommodate larger wheelchairs and include a changing room.			

The company said its project "refresh" the Superliner fleet is about 50% complete. Bob Johnston

(in Millions)	FY 2019	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024 AOP	% Fav/(Unfav)
Gross Ticket Revenue	\$2,354	\$1,776	\$2,291	\$2,524	9.3%
Ridership	32.0	22.9	28.6	32.8	13.1%
Adjusted Operating Results	(\$29.4)	(\$886.8)	(\$752.2)	(\$625.3)	17.4%
Capital Spend	\$1,611	\$2,257	\$2,963	\$5,547	87.2%

Details of Amtrak fiscal results for fiscal 2019 through 2023, plus projections for 2024. Bob Johnston

RICHMOND, Va. — Amtrak projects that it will surpass pre-pandemic figures for ridership and revenue in 2024, company officials said Friday as executives joined the board of directors for the company's second annual public meeting, an event mandated by 2021's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law held this year at Richmond's Main Street Station. This year's gathering was significantly more informative than the initial meeting last year in St. Louis, because top

managers and department heads, along with the leaders of North Carolina and Virginia passenger rail programs, were available in a pre-meeting "Expo" to explain various initiatives [see ["Hands-on 'Expo'"](#) *Trains News Wire*, Dec. 2, 2023]. Amtrak President Roger Harris recapped financial results released a day earlier [see ["Amtrak cites major ridership increase"](#) *News Wire*, Nov. 30], primarily comparing fiscal 2023 with the previous year. He noted that long-distance service were successful because "for the second year in a row it beat the half billion dollar benchmark." The state-supported aggregate suffered because California's *Pacific Surfliner* corridor was disrupted by mudslides, while the Acela service line suffered from weakened business travel and reduced frequencies due to four out-of-service trainsets. [*Trains News Wire* is preparing an in-depth revenue and ridership analysis incorporating a comparison with pre-pandemic 2019 results and a focus on individual routes and corridors.]

Regarding on-time performance, Harris says there have been challenges on the Northeast Corridor as a result of trackwork, though host railroad metrics have improved. He also presented tables outlining long-distance fleet restoration efforts by equipment type, as well as progress on a "fleet refresh" upgrade initiative. Twenty-three Superliner coaches are being refitted with fully-accessible bathrooms.

"The good news," Harris says, "is that by the end of fiscal 2024 we will have worked through all of the backlog and will have 2,205 cars in service versus 2,224 pre-Covid." The company's projections for fiscal 2024, which began in October, are a 13% ridership increase to 32.8 million passengers with a 9% revenue gain to \$2.5 billion, surpassing 2019 figures. Operating losses are expected to decline, while capital expenditures are set to grow 87%.

"Our goal is to achieve 66 million riders by 2040 to make a much bigger contribution in mobility," Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner says. His top four goals: Expanding partnerships and adding service "particularly to the Top 50 metropolitan areas," along with "serving the right communities with high-speed rail" while attaining a net-zero emissions goal. "To do this," he says, "we absolutely need a stable and secure source of long-term capital investment. It's what is transforming the nature of our business today with five years of dedicated funding to launch projects with money we know we have the ability to finish, not just start."

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Board member Tom Carper addresses the public board meeting in Richmond, Va., on Dec. 1, 2023. Bob Johnston

Q-and-A session is wide ranging

Prior to the officer reports at the beginning of the session, board members Jeffrey Moreland, Yvonne Burke, and Federal Railroad Administration Administrator Amit Bose covered aspects of the year's financial performance. Coscia said former Amtrak chairman Tom Carper would discuss ridership, but no numbers were forthcoming. Clearly deciding to go "off script," Carper — the resident and former mayor of Macomb, Ill. — described how changing workplace norms have created more opportunity for people to seek communities with a slower pace, great environment, and better quality of life. "They also need reliable broadband provided and transportation to nearby urban areas. And that's us: we're providing that right now," Carper said. "Trying to recruit a hospital administrator to a rural area is really difficult, but much less so if you [have the opportunity] to get on a train several times a day and get to the city. That's part of the package Amtrak has offered since it started. ... I thought it was important for you to know what's going on right now — a lot of positives. We're doing as good a job as we can, and we need to keep your support." The crowd applauded.

The meeting also included senior executives answering public questions on topics including:

Service Disruption passenger notification. "With our new system," Harris said, "we are able to get timely information to customers. We have increased our notifications to customers from one million to 24 million messages during the past year. It's terrible when there is any kind of delay but it is so much worse when we don't tell people what's going on."

Superliner deployment on state-supported trains. Harris said California has refurbished Superliners on long-term leases and Canadian National requires the long-distance cars for axle count to activate signals on the Chicago-Carbondale route [see ["Seeking answers on 'loss of shunt.'" News Wire, Sept. 6, 2023](#)]. "Absent those situations, we need to get the right equipment in the right places," he said. Not addressed was whether this need was taken into account when the company was making return-to-service decisions on sidelined equipment.

Dining service and coach customer participation. "As we bring Viewliner diners back into service, next on the [New York-New Orleans] *Crescent*, we will determine what kind of food service works for that train and those hours of operation," Harris said. "The question really is how much capacity is there to serve coach passengers. That's what we worked through [for traditional dining] on our western trains without impacting the quality of service."

Executive bonuses. Coscia addressed this frequent target of critics, congressional and otherwise. He explained that the company used to have a fixed benefit program — in other words, pensions — but replaced that with a bonus plan "tied directly to the company [performance]. The metrics used to determine bonuses are not just financial metrics, but are metrics related to customer service, on-time performance, and the ability to provide more ridership opportunities. Having said that, financial performance is obviously relevant in demonstrating the company's ability to be good stewards of the assets we are given." Exactly how these metrics are applied to mid-level positions has never been spelled out in detail.

Why all board meetings aren't public. "We have agreements with private parties," Coscia said. "We would be revealing not only confidential information but giving away most of our bargaining power in the marketplace. No business can operate that way from the standpoint of making critical decisions." He added that "it is absolutely critical" that the company communicate "where we are operating well, and where we are operating poorly."

Crews taking up tables in café cars. "One conductor might need to sit in one seat, but they shouldn't monopolize tables in the area," Harris said. "It's something we're working on from an enforcement perspective."

Dirty windows. "We have a robust car wash replacement program around the system," Harris said. "In the meantime, we are working on an interim program at key stations." News Wire had been advised of this multi-year program earlier in the year; a report is awaiting a schedule of the expected dates and locations new washing facilities will become operational.

Adirondack cancellations because of heat-related track issues. "Our chief track engineer is working with Canadian National to make sure we have the physical plant that can be more robust," Gardner said.

Lack of national network advertising. "The challenge has been that national media is very expensive," Harris said. "What we've found is advertising online is a far more effective return on investment and use of our pretty limited advertising dollars. Also, regional media and cable is far more important. We don't spend a lot of money on marketing because we don't have a lot of money to spend." Gardner added that budgets and promotions are timed to occur when capacity is available. "We usually sell out our sleeper space months before we hit the summer," he said.

Board Chairman Coscia concluded the session by noting, "One thing is crystal clear: people want to ride our trains. I wish we had more to offer, but that's what we are working [on] together toward the future."

Amtrak Service Suspended Between Seattle, Portland, Ore., After Landslide

[By](#) | December 5, 2023 **Suspension to run through at least Thursday morning**

PORTLAND, Ore. — Amtrak has suspended service between Portland and Seattle through at least 8:30 a.m. on Thursday following a landslide today (Tuesday, Dec. 5) near Vancouver, Wash., according to [a service alert](#) posted by the passenger operator.

The suspension of *Amtrak Cascades* and *Coast Starlight* service between the two cities follows a slide on BNSF Railway about 6 miles north of Vancouver, [according to KGW-TV](#). Freight operations have been restored through the area, but BNSF safety rules require a passenger-train moratorium through the slide area for 48 hours.

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Amtrak says trains will continue to run south of Portland, and between Seattle and Vancouver, British Columbia, with alternate transportation (in other words, buses) provided between Portland and Seattle.

News Photo: Amtrak HHP8 Tests as Cab Car

[By](#) | December 3, 2023 Locomotives could see new life years after retirement



One of Amtrak's retired HHP8 electric locomotives, with both pantographs removed, is being tested for possible use as a cab car. Amtrak is reportedly looking to bolster or replace its aging fleet of ex-Metroliner cab cars in the Northeast until Siemens' new Amtrak Airo equipment arrives. The 15 Bombardier-Alstom locomotives, delivered in 2001, were plagued by reliability issues and retired by 2015. *Trains News Wire* will provide more information on the project as it becomes available.

— Updated at 12 p.m. CST to correct location and train number in caption.

L: A long out-of-service HHP8 operates as a cab car on a test train No. 826 on Dec. 1, 2023, at Leaman Place, Pa., on the Harrisburg line. Gary Pancavage



---BNSF News---

Wisconsin Agricultural Cooperative Buys Land From BNSF for Grain Terminal

[By](#) | December 16, 2023 Facility at Hager City, Wis., will also handle fertilizer and propane



Agricultural cooperative Alcivia plans to build this grain terminal on land it has purchased from BNSF in Hager City, Wis. Alcivia

COTTAGE GROVE, Wis. — Wisconsin agricultural and energy cooperative Alcivia has purchased 40 acres and more than 21,000 feet of track from BNSF Railway in Hager City, Wis., to build a new grain terminal, the member-owned business has announced. The facility about 20 miles southeast of Minneapolis will serve producers in west central Wisconsin and southeast Minnesota, and will feature storage space for 3.9 million bushels of grain, with two 4,700-bushel-per-hour grain dyers and three 1,500-bushel capacity dump pits that will move grain at a combined handling speed of 60,000 bushels per hour. Also planned for the site are an unattended 24-hour, two-bay loading terminal for liquid fertilizer; a dry fertilizer transload, rail unload for liquid propane, and storage. "This new site will provide tremendous value to our members by offering state-of-the-art speed, space, and market access and utility," Alcivia CEO Jim Dell said in [a press release](#). "We are thrilled to be adding additional domestic and export market access that will have a positive impact on Alcivia members across our territory." Groundbreaking is expected later this winter, with project completion estimated for March 2025.

BNSF Tells Regulators That UP Aims to Block Interchange Access to Proposed Utah Short Line

[By Bill Stephens](#) | December 14, 2023 UP connecting track would be a barrier to interchange with Savage Tooele Railroad, BNSF says



Revival of this Utah branch line in Tooele County, along with construction of five miles of new track, is under Surface Transportation Board review. STB

WASHINGTON — BNSF Railway this week asked federal regulators to ensure that it can use its trackage rights over Union Pacific to interchange with a proposed new short line railway in Utah.

UP last month sought Surface Transportation Board permission to reinstitute common-carrier service over a 1.04-mile section of the abandoned Warner Branch. The connecting track would serve as a link between UP's Shafter Subdivision and the Savage Tooele Railroad, which aims to revive the 6-mile Warner Branch, restore a quarter mile of ripped-up track, and build 5 miles of new track in the Lakeview Business Park, which is being built in Grantsville, southwest of Salt Lake City.

[The STB is currently considering Savage's plans](#) as well as UP's petition to reactivate the connecting track.

BNSF is crying foul.

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"It appears that UP has structured its transaction with STR, including UP's retention of ownership and intended common carrier operation of the Connecting Track, in an attempt to establish a one-mile physical barrier between the Shafter Subdivision and STR intended to prevent BNSF from interchanging with STR and accessing customers at the Lakeview Business Park,"

[BNSF said in a regulatory filing.](#)

BNSF was granted trackage rights to operate over the Shafter Subdivision as well as the right to interchange with any new shortline connecting to the line as a condition of the STB's 1996 approval of the UP-Southern Pacific merger.

"STR stated throughout its petition for exemption that it anticipates interchanging with both UP and BNSF at Burmester, Utah, along UP's Shafter Subdivision," BNSF said.

"BNSF believes that, regardless of the ownership or regulatory status of the Connecting Track, BNSF should have the right to interchange with STR once the new shortline begins operating, consistent with STR's stated intent and UP's obligation," BNSF said.

BNSF alleges that the Savage Tooele matter fits a pattern: "UP's position regarding BNSF access to interchange with STR is the latest attempt by UP to erode the essential competition-preserving bargain that it struck to obtain Board authority for the UP/SP merger in 1996. Over the last quarter-century, BNSF has repeatedly and successfully sought to enforce the rights of BNSF and its customers under the UP/SP merger conditions – all in the face of UP's efforts to limit competition by restricting BNSF access."

BNSF Sued Over Grizzly-bear Deaths in Montana

[By](#) | December 15, 2023 **Conservation groups want railroad to alter operations to decrease chance of bear strikes**



A grizzly bear in Montana. BNSF has been sued over the deaths of bears hit by trains. Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

MISSOULA, Mont. — Wildlife conservation groups have sued BNSF Railway, saying the railroad's trains are violating the Endangered Species Act by hitting and killing grizzly bears.

[The lawsuit filed Thursday](#) in U.S. District Court in Missoula by WildEarth Guardians and the Western Watersheds Project says 63 grizzly bears have been killed by BNSF trains in an area of Montana designed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a "recovery zone" for the threatened bears. It asks that the court find that the railroad is violating the Endangered Species Act and order it to "cease causing take of grizzly bears" — such as wounding, killing, or capture — as well as other relief the court deems appropriate.

The suit argues that there are actions the railroad could take to lessen the chance a train could strike a grizzly bear, including reducing train speeds around curves, in canyons or other areas with few escape routes for bears; systems with flashing lights or bells that would warn of an approaching train; motion-sensor alarms or electrified mats near trestles to keep bears off bridges; preventing grain spills on the right-of-way; and promptly removing livestock carcasses from the railway.

"When a company chooses to operate in the epicenter of key habitat for a threatened species, it must take some responsibility to adapt practices to minimize its impacts on these animals," Sarah McMillan, wildlife and wildlands program director at the Western Environmental Law Center in Missoula, said in [a press release](#). Said Erik Molvar of the Western Watersheds Project, "The Burlington Northern railway runs right alongside Glacier National Park, some of the most prime grizzly habitat in the world, so the railway should be expected to slow down and take precautions to ensure grizzly bears aren't put at risk from train operations."

The suit said BNSF has failed to receive an Incidental Take Permit that would address the deaths, and has failed to complete a Habitat Conservation Plan outlining measures to reduce bear strikes. BNSF said in [an email to the Flathead Beacon newspaper](#) that the delays in completing the plan reflect the company working with the Fish and Wildlife Service to "respond to and address public comments and incorporate data and information" from Fish and Wildlife and grizzly bear monitoring in the area after BNSF's application was submitted.

BNSF Train Derails in Arizona

[By](#) | December 20, 2023 **Southern Transcon reportedly blocked; Southwest Chief affected**



L: A BNSF derail ent this morning in Adama, Ariz., involved a locomotive and 21 cars, according to authorities. Apache County Sheriff's Office

ADAMANA Ariz. — One locomotive and 21 cars of a BNSF Railway train derailed this morning in eastern Arizona, KNXV-TV reports.

No injuries were reported and no hazardous materials were involved in the incident that occurred about 7:30 a.m. about 20 miles east of Holbrook, Ariz., and about 45 miles from the New Mexico border. The railroad told the station that the cause is being investigated. KAFF radio reports east and westbound rail traffic is being blocked by the derailment.

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That includes Amtrak's Southwest Chief; according to the Amtrak website the westbound Chief was being held in Albuquerque, N.M., as of 4:18 p.m. MT because of the derailment. The eastbound Chief was last reported as being held in Winslow, Ariz., as of 11:04 a.m. with a delay of up to six hours expected. No further updates have been made on that train to the Amtrak website, and the train no longer shows on the Amtrak train tracker map.

BNSF Near Reopening of Southern Transcon in Arizona

By | December 21, 2023 **Cleanup continues after derailment at Adamana, Ariz.**

ADAMANA, Ariz. — One track of BNSF's Southern Transcon main line is expected to reopen today (Thursday, Dec. 21) through Adamana at approximately 7 a.m. local time following a Wednesday derailment, according to [a customer service update](#) by the railroad. No estimate has yet been determined to reopen the second track through the site.

One engine and 21 cars of a freight train derailed at the site on Wednesday morning, blocking both mains and disrupting Amtrak's *Southwest Chief* [see ["BNSF train derails in Arizona,"](#) *Trains News Wire*, Dec. 20, 2023].

Passengers appear to have been bused around the derailment Wednesday, with trains turned at Winslow, Ariz., and Albuquerque, N.M. The eastbound train that departed Los Angeles on Tuesday night was, as 8 a.m. CST today, operating 8 hours behind schedule as of its departure from Lamar, Colo., and was reported to be stopped west of Garden City, Kan., due to congestion. The westbound train delayed by the derailment is reportedly to be slightly more than an hour behind schedule. Wednesday night's eastbound departure from Los Angeles left as scheduled and is slated to reach the derailment scene after the projected reopening of the first track.

BNSF places the accident scene about 21 miles east of Sun Valley, Ariz.



----UP News----

Union Pacific Service Metrics Show Continued Improvement

By | December 1, 2023 **On-time performance for intermodal traffic is 94%, manifest traffic 80%, and bulk unit trains 90%, UP says in a customer update**



A Union Pacific train heads downgrade at Woodford on California's Tehachapi Pass on Feb. 11, 1919. David Lassen

OMAHA, Neb. — Union Pacific is touting service improvements in an update to customers.

"We know that delivering consistent and reliable service is what you expect, and we continue to make improvements to our service product. I'm pleased with the progress that we have sustained over the past few months," Kenny Rocker, executive vice president of marketing and sales, wrote in an update to customers today.

The list of operations metrics reported to the Surface Transportation Board this week compares the railroad's performance to mid-April of 2022.

Car Velocity: Improved 25% to 221 miles per day.

First Mile, Last Mile: Improved 2 points to 92%.

Trip Plan Compliance:

— Bulk (unit train): Improved 24 points to 90%.

— Manifest: Improved 21 points to 80%.

— Intermodal: Improved 24 points to 94%.

Class I Briefs: CSX/UP, NS

Railway Age Written by [Marybeth Luczak](#), Executive Editor December 07 2023



L: CSX and UP have been recognized on the America's Most Responsible Companies List

CSX and Union Pacific (UP) earn spots on the "most responsible" companies list published by Newsweek magazine. Also, Norfolk Southern (NS) employees in November came together to support charitable organizations across the 22-state network.

CSX / UP

SX and UP have been recognized on the America's Most Responsible Companies List for 2024.

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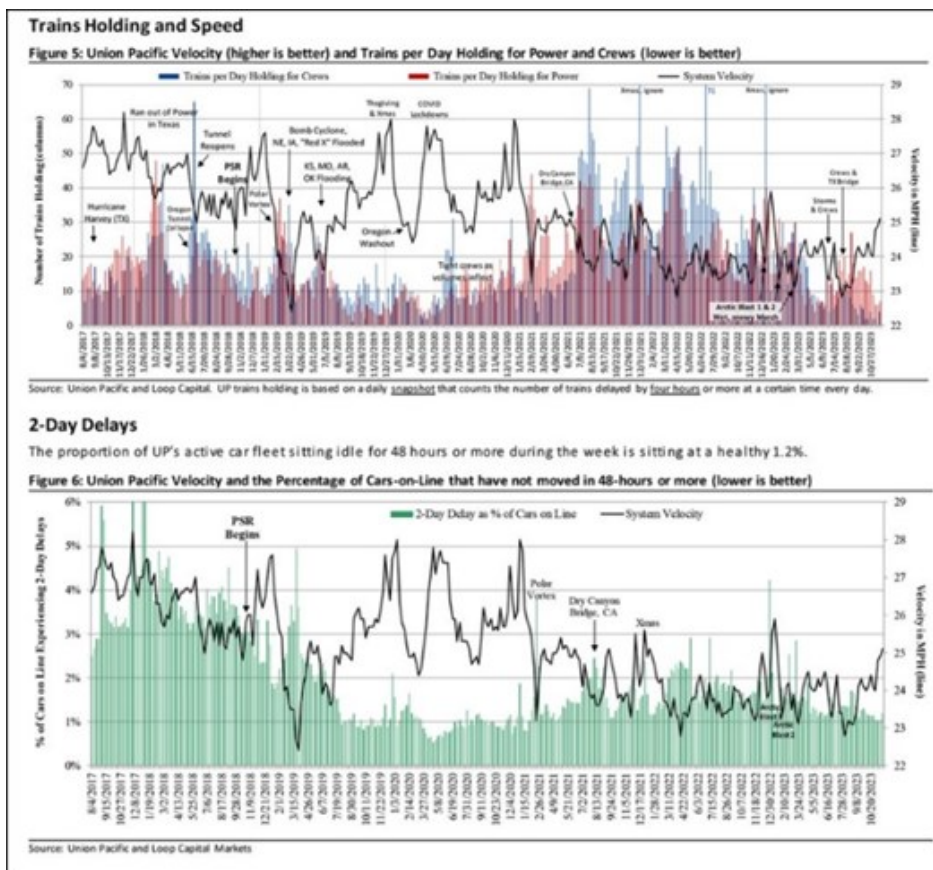
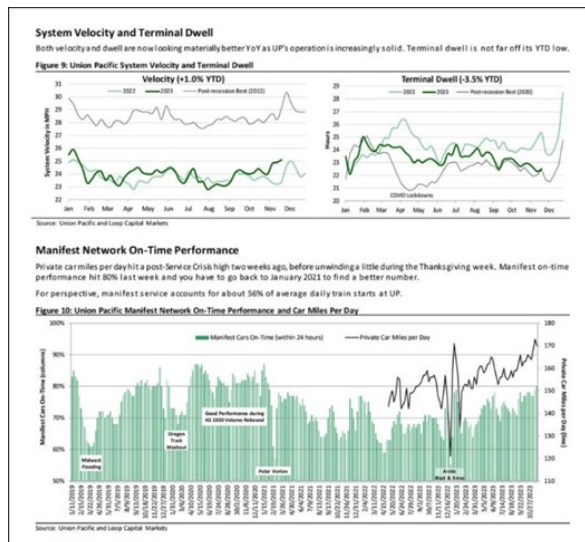
The 600 “most-responsible” companies included on the list were chosen from among the 2,000 largest U.S. public corporations based on revenue, according to Newsweek. Newsweek and Statista, a global research and data firm, created the annual ranking of the companies that best demonstrate the qualities of good corporate citizenship based on environment, social and governance (ESG) criteria. CSX and UP appeared at No. 258 and No. 569, respectively, on the overall list, and at No. 4 and No. 19, respectively, among the 20 in the Transportation & Logistics sector. Other Transportation & Logistics-sector companies earning spots on the 2024 list include C.H. Robinson (No. 1 of 20 in the sector); J.B. Hunt Transport Services (No. 2 of 20); Knight-Swift Transportation (No. 16 of 20 in the sector); and Wabtec (No. 17 of 20 in the sector). The other sectors represented on the list are: Automotive & Components; Consumer Goods; Energy & Utilities; Financial; Health Care & Life Sciences; Hotels, Dining & Leisure; Materials & Chemicals; Professional Services; Real Estate & Housing; Retail; Software & Telecommunications; and Technology Hardware. “Being a responsible corporate citizen is more than a policy statement at CSX; it’s a commitment we demonstrate every day through our actions and results,” said Joe Hinrichs, President and CEO of CSX, which was included on the list for the third consecutive year. “We’re continually finding innovative ways to reduce emissions and support our customers’ supply chain carbon-reduction goals. We also engage with communities to enhance safety, and we work tirelessly to increase diversity and inclusion in our workforce.”

Union Pacific Running Well

Railway Age Written by [Rick Paterson](#), Managing Director, Loop Capital Markets December 4th 2023



Union Pacific photo



Tags: [Loop Capital Markets](#), [Opinion](#), [Union Pacific](#)

Since the early 2022 Service Crisis, we’ve seen the U.S. railroads, one-by-one, reach a point where service is arguably fully restored, at least to where it was prior. CSX was quick to rebound in late 2022, BNSF made good progress over the first half 2023 and reached a good operating state by late summer, and now we can declare Union Pacific running well and in good shape. After some fairly stagnant operating metrics in the first half of 2023, followed by a tough summer and then Tropical Storm Hilary taking out a bridge in southern California in late August, we saw a visible step-up in UP’s operating performance in September and October. Over those two months, terminal dwell came down 3.4% sequentially, the proportion of the car fleet sitting idle for 48 hours or more fell from 1.4% to 1.1%, manifest on-time performance improved from 72% to 78%, intermodal on-time performance rallied from 82% to 90%, total car-miles per day improved from 196 to 224, and private car-miles per day went from 157 to 164. In November, the icing went on the cake in the form of better network velocity, plus extended gains in some of these metrics. UP now has a good operating story to tell, with some of these metrics at or near multi-year highs.

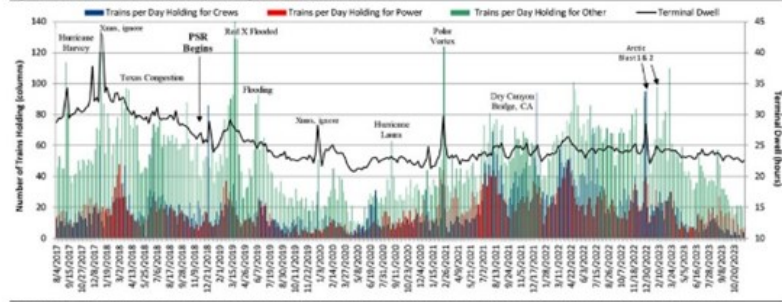
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Trains Holding for Power, Crews, and 'Other'

Trains holding for all reasons other than power and crews (flooding and bridge outages, for example) improved from 19 to 18 per day in the most recently reported week, which is very good by historical standards.

Figure 7: Union Pacific Trains per Day Holding for Power, Crews and 'Other'

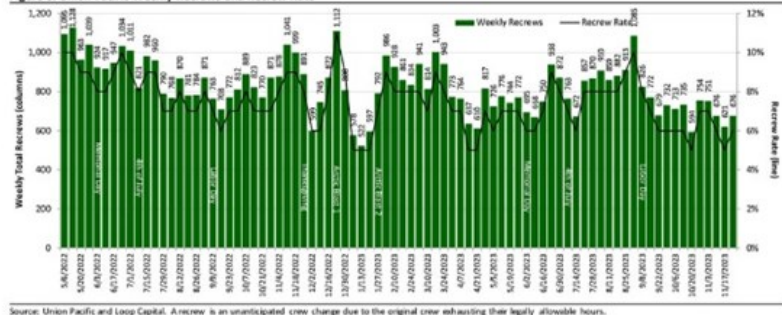


Source: Union Pacific and Loop Capital. UP trains holding is based on a daily snapshot that counts the number of trains delayed by four hours or more at a certain time every day.

Recrews

UP experienced 676 unplanned recrews in the week ending 11/24 at a 6% recrew rate. It was 891 at 8% in the same week a year ago.

Figure 8: Union Pacific Weekly Recrews and Recrew Rate



Source: Union Pacific and Loop Capital. A recrew is an unplanned crew change due to the original crew exhausting their legally allowable hours.

Tags: [Loop Capital Markets](#), [Opinion](#), [Union Pacific](#)

Is there a Jim Vena effect here, or would this final restoration in service and efficiency have happened at the same pace regardless? We don't know and don't really care. As long as UP is running well, we're happy. Congrats to Eric Gehringer and team. What does it mean for investors?

For the first time since 2020, in Q4 UP is likely to have higher volumes YoY (low single-digits) and materially better operating performance. Normally this would be very positive, but we haven't yet lapped the big labor cost increases from the late 2022 industry labor deal, so earnings expectations still need to be tempered.

What's more important, in our view, is the fact that the network is now in a state where it can process higher macro-driven volumes at high incremental margins. Clearly, we don't know when the rebound in freight demand will occur, and—just like any of the railroads—there's a question mark whether UP can handle higher loads while still maintaining acceptable operating efficiency and on-time performance. But time is now on UP's side as it presumably strives to enhance resiliency before the network is invariably tested.

Hershey Rail Park on UP Line Taking Shape

Railway Age Written by [Marybeth Luczak](#), Executive Editor December 08, 2023



Photograph of the 300-acre Hershey Industrial Rail Park near Hershey, Neb., courtesy of North Platte Chamber and Development Corporation.

White River Soy Processing, LLC (White River) will develop an oilseed processing plant at the 300-acre Hershey Rail Park, which is eight miles west of North Platte, Neb., and borders the Union Pacific (UP) main line.

The North Platte Chamber and Development Corporation on Dec. 7 reported selecting White River to develop the plant, which will be located on 80 acres of the rail park. Omaha, Neb.-based White River develops and operates oilseed processing facilities in the U.S.; it owns a soybean crush facility in Seymour, Ind.

"The Chamber has invested several months of time and energy, as well as conducting a very extensive feasibility study to land an oilseed crushing plant in our region," Chamber President and CEO Gary Person said. "We have an ideal Midwestern location with an emerging industrial rail park and inland port authority, agriculture producers committed to the concept, and we can offer an incentive package that makes the project very attractive for investors. We are excited about our partnership with White River and have full confidence in their experienced team of professionals that will drive this project to a success as the anchor in our business park."

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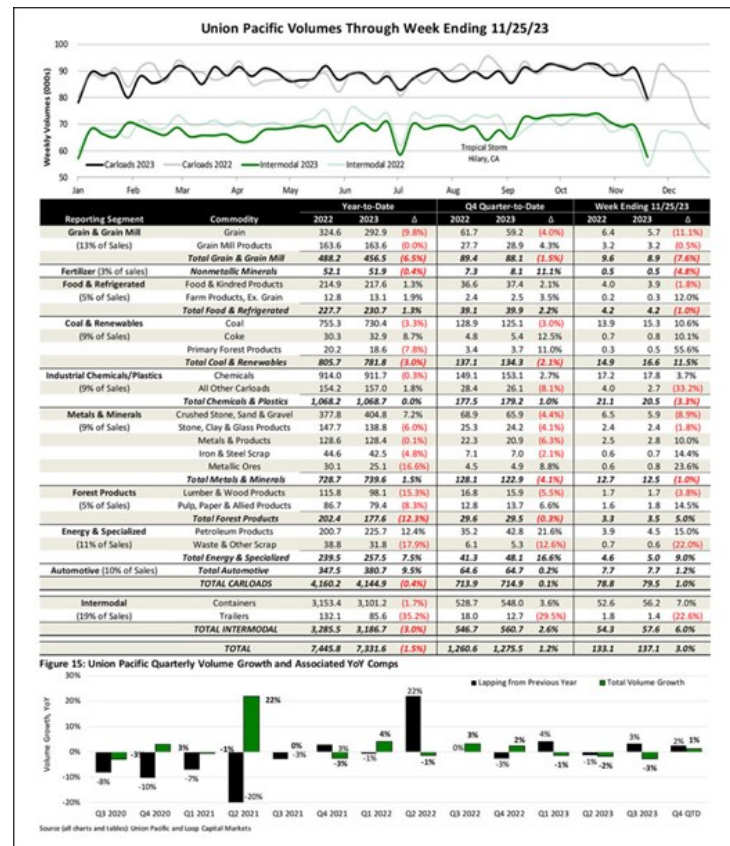
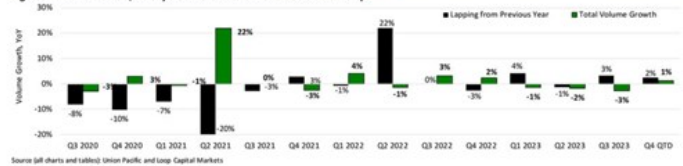


Figure 15: Union Pacific Quarterly Volume Growth and Associated YoY Comps



Source: Self-Reports and Subsid Union Pacific and Loop Capital Markets

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According to the Chamber, the project has received support from Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen, UP, the Nebraska Legislature, Lincoln County Commissioners, the Village of Hershey, the City of North Platte, Greenbrier Rail Services, various utility partners, and local landowners.

It reported that the existing Greenbrier building has been purchased in a cooperative effort between the Chamber and Lincoln County and “will serve as a catalyst to develop the remainder of the rail park.”

Now that White River has been selected, Co-Founder and President Walter Cronin said the company is “focused on completing the capital raise.” He noted that the “support from our investors and partners has been instrumental to our progress and will continue to play a crucial role in bringing this great opportunity to fruition. We also extend a sincere thank you to the Chamber for selecting us as the developer and to Gov. Pillen and many community partners for their support.”

With Two Key Mexico Rail Gateways Shut Down, Cross-border Freight Begins Stacking Up (updated)

[By Bill Stephens](#) | December 18, 2023 Customs and Border Protection closed the Eagle Pass and El Paso, Texas, rail bridges this morning so staff could be diverted to migrant surges



Bound for BNSF Railway trackage rights on Union Pacific, a Canadian National locomotive leads a northbound BNSF train across the Rio Grande at Eagle Pass, Texas, in May 2019. Bill Stephens



Two of Union Pacific's gateways to Mexico remain shut down today on orders of Customs and Border Protection. BNSF Railway uses Eagle Pass via trackage rights on UP, while it has its own crossing in El Paso, which also is shut down. UP

“Union Pacific is in close communication with multiple government agencies and our customers, insisting the Eagle Pass and El Paso border crossings be reopened for the businesses and consumers relying on goods at this critical time for the economy,” Jaixen says. “The company understands the humanitarian crisis at hand, but migrants are not crossing the border on trains, and it is imperative the borders are opened as soon as possible.” BNSF agreed.

WASHINGTON — The temporary shutdown of the U.S.-Mexico railroad border crossings at Eagle Pass and El Paso, Texas, has thrown a kink into supply chains that demand reliability. Eagle Pass and El Paso are the No. 2 and No. 3 rail gateways by volume, respectively.

Union Pacific says the closure has prompted it to place an embargo on Mexico-bound freight moving on 60 trains and being processed in more than 50 rail yards. “This traffic amounts to over 4,500 cars spanning 265,000 feet and weighing in excess of 420,000 tons being held north of the border,” railroad spokesman Mike Jaixen says. “There is an equivalent amount of northbound traffic currently held south of the border.”

UP and trackage-rights tenant BNSF Railway interchanged an average of 16 trains per day with Ferromex via Eagle Pass in October, according to Bureau of Transportation Statistics data. It's a key route for Mexican beer, auto parts, finished vehicles, and appliances, among other commodities. The same three railroads exchanged an average of 7.3 trains per day at El Paso in October, according to BTS data.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection announced on Sunday night that it would temporarily close the Eagle Pass and El Paso rail gateways at 8 a.m. today as the agency shifts personnel to handle another surge in migrants crossing the border.

The top rail gateway, the Canadian Pacific Kansas City Laredo-Nuevo Laredo crossing, remains open. It handled 24 trains per day in October for CPKC and UP, according to BTS data.

“The urgency of reopening these crossings and restoring rail service between the two nations cannot be overstated,” Association of American Railroads CEO Ian Jefferies said in a statement today. “There are not separate U.S. and Mexican rail networks; there is only one interconnected North American rail network. Every day the border remains closed unleashes a cascade of delay across operations on both sides of the border, impacting customers and ultimately consumers.” Railroads have worked closely with customs officials on both sides of the border to create an efficient and effective screening process, Jefferies says. “As CBP continues to address the exceptionally challenging humanitarian crisis, railroads urge CBP to also safeguard the nation's supply chain from further disruption.” UP says the border crossings — which handle 45% of the railroad's U.S.-Mexico freight — should be reopened as quickly as possible.

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“BNSF is committed to border security as well as protecting the U.S. economy. BNSF Railway was disappointed to learn that the Eagle Pass and El Paso border crossings have been closed, given how important the movement of goods by rail is for businesses, consumers and the economy, particularly with Christmas just days away,” spokesman Zak Andersen says. “We are in regular communication with CBP and other federal agencies urging both crossings be re-opened immediately. We are also working closely with our customers to meet their needs and to prevent further congestion stemming from the crossing closures. Every day of closure increases the impact to the supply chain for critical commodities, including automobiles, industrial products, and grain.”

The Eagle Pass rail gateway was shut for four days in September after Ferromex suspended operations for safety reasons due to a surge in migrants riding its freights to the border. Service resumed a day after a delegation of UP officials, led by CEO Jim Vena and President Beth Whited, met with officials in Eagle Pass.

CPKC, BNSF, UP, and Canadian National — and their respective intermodal customers — have been aiming to grow rail’s relatively small share of cross-border traffic. While intermodal traffic linking Mexico with the U.S. and Canada has been growing, truck traffic has been growing even faster.

The joint CN-UP-Ferromex Falcon Premium intermodal service uses the Eagle Pass gateway. BNSF and J.B. Hunt announced last month that they will shift their cross-border intermodal traffic to the Eagle Pass gateway effective Jan. 1.

Independent analyst Anthony B. Hatch says the shutdowns are a concern at a time when near-shoring is boosting manufacturing investment in Mexico as well as cross-border trade in North America.

And much like recent issues south of the border — including periodic protests blocking main lines, imposition of passenger service, and cancellation of contracted projects — the bridge closures should be considered a cost of doing business in Mexico, Hatch says. The closure of the rail border crossings comes just days after a new short line sought regulatory approval to build a rail and highway bridge over the Rio Grande at Eagle Pass.

Green Eagle Railroad, a subsidiary of Puerto Verde Holdings, aims to build a new 19.12-mile secure cross-border corridor that includes 1.335 miles of double track between UP’s Clark’s Park Yard and a new double-track span over the Rio Grande, followed by a 17.79-mile single-track line to Ferromex’s Rio Escondido Yard in Piedras Negras.

The corridor would be fenced, include customs processing facilities, and have no grade crossings because it would bypass the urban centers of Eagle Pass and Piedras Negras. Green Eagle hopes to divert UP and BNSF traffic off the current bridge to its proposed route.

Note: Updated at 10:20 a.m. Central with comment from AAR and analyst Anthony B. Hatch. Updated at 11:30 a.m. to increase the percentage of UP cross-border traffic affected by the gateway closures, based on the latest information from the railroad. Updated at 1 p.m. Central with comment from BNSF.

One Crew Member Hurt as UP Train Derails After Grade Crossing Collision

[By](#) | December 17, 2023 **Train hits truck with oversized load west of Fort Worth, Texas**



One crew member was injured in this derailment of a Union Pacific train on Sunday, Dec. 17, in Weatherford, Texas. Texas Department of Public Safety

WEATHERFORD, Texas — One crew member suffered what were reported to be minor injuries after a Union Pacific train derailed after hitting a truck hauling an oversized load at a grade crossing today (Sunday, Dec. 17), [the Fort Worth Star-Telegram reports](#).

Two engines and 17 cars of the train derailed in the incident about 9:30 a.m.; an image on [the KXAS-TV website](#) show multiple double-stack intermodal cars derailed across a roadway. The station reports Parker County Emergency Services said it worked to clear a fuel spill that resulted from the incident, but no other hazardous materials were involved.

The collision occurred at the intersection of Farm to Market Road 5 and Annetta Centerpoint Road in Weatherford, about 23 miles west of downtown Fort Worth.

The Texas Department of Public Safety said the train’s engineer was taken to a hospital with minor injuries. Information on the condition of the truck’s driver was not available.



---CN News---

CN to Acquire IANR

Railway Age Written by [Marybeth Luczak](#), Executive Editor December 06 2023

IANR serves upper Midwest agricultural and industrial markets, hauling such commodities as biofuels and grain. According to the regional’s website, it handles more than 60,000 carloads per year. Established in 1984, IANR runs diagonally through Iowa northwest to southeast from Manly to Cedar Rapids, with branch lines from Waterloo to Oelwein and from Forest City to Belmond (see map below).

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Canadian National will acquire Iowa Northern Railway, the short line operating on a portion of the former Rock Island founded in 1984. Iowa Northern



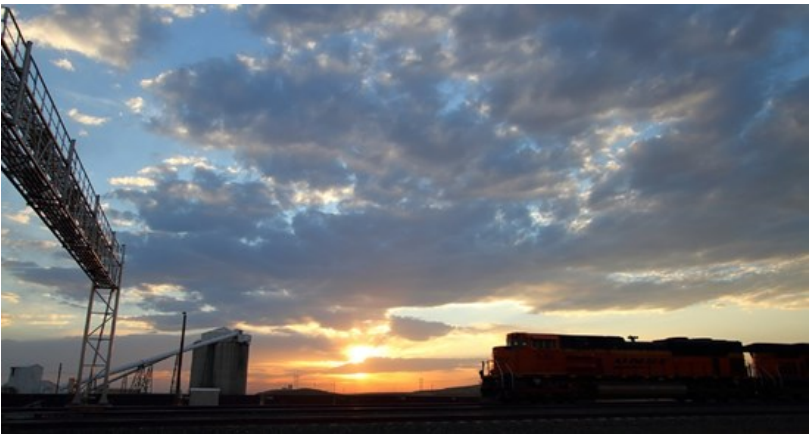
The Iowa Northern connects with Canadian National at its midpoint and also interchanges with Union Pacific, Canadian Pacific, and the Cedar Rapids & Iowa City. Iowa Northern

When a group led by Daniel Sabin, a second-generation railroader and current Chairman, took over management in 1994, the regional handled 15,000 revenue cars annually and its average track speed was under 10 mph, according to IANR. IANR also interchanges with Union Pacific (UP) at Manly; Canadian Pacific Kansas City at Nora Springs; and UP and *Railway Age* two-time Short Line of the Year honoree Cedar Rapids and Iowa City (to Iowa Interstate Railroad) at Cedar Rapids. “We are delighted to have reached an agreement with Iowa Northern Railway,” said CN President and CEO Tracy Robinson, *Railway Age*’s [2024 Railroader of the Year](#). “We look forward to the opportunities our combined network will provide customers, farmers, and our partners to respond to the needs of their existing and new markets. By enabling all of us to play an even more important role in this critical supply chain and densifying our southern network, we are accelerating sustainable, profitable growth.” “We are very pleased to have reached a deal with CN,” Daniel Sabin said. “We believe CN shares IANR’s commitment to local stakeholders and that this transaction will be beneficial for customers, employees and the local Iowa economy. We are confident that, as part of CN, IANR will be able to continue to provide reliable first and last mile service to our local customers while providing them access to a much broader network and market.” For more on IANR, read “[Maintaining Laser Focus](#)” in *Railway Track & Structures*, a *Railway Age* sister publication.

---Other News---

Brighter Days Ahead

Railway Age Written by [William C. Vantuono](#), Editor-in-Chief December 04 2023



William Beecher photos



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2024 FREIGHT RAIL OUTLOOK, *RAILWAY AGE* DECEMBER 2023 ISSUE: In more ways than one, 2023 was marked by a few dark clouds. In 2024, look for them to scatter, pushed by warmer prevailing winds. (*With Jason Seidl and Patty Long*) *Resiliency* is “the capacity to withstand or to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness.” *Resilience*, a closely related word, is “the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences.” Both words describe the railroad industry for the past few years, perhaps especially so for the past 12 months, given all the problems we’ve had to spend considerable time and resources solving. Some may prefer to use *challenges*, a softer word than *problems*, but I feel compelled to point out that problems are *solved*, while challenges are *addressed*. This is hard work that actually never stops, and is never easy.

To paraphrase President John F. Kennedy’s 1962 address at Rice University, “We choose to be railroaders not because it is easy, but because it is hard. Our long-term goals will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because our challenges are ones we are willing to accept, unwilling to postpone, and intend to win.”

We’re not, of course, talking about a manned mission to the moon. We’re talking about operating safely. Growing market share. Competing, while cooperating to better the industry as a whole. Providing excellent customer service. Taking care of our employees. Leveraging advanced technology. Earning a decent return on investment. Improving public confidence in, and understanding of, the important things we do for the global economy. Keeping regulators and politicians off our backs.

Following are two perspectives on what 2024 could bring. Perhaps things will turn out “just right,” at least for now. *Inoltre!*



Jason Seidl

Jason Seidl

Do you feel that wind blowing in your hair (or maybe just across your bare head if you are aerodynamically quaffed like me)? Those are the changes that have been taking place or are about to take place in the rail industry. For the first time in a long time, high-level executives are taking a sober look at service levels, supply chain visibility and overall customer experience. Indeed, we are hearing encouraging language from the C-Suite, and it reminds me of a time 20 years ago when Matt Rose took over at BNSF and started uttering unheard of phrases like “we must earn our cost of capital.”

Specifically, Joe Hinrichs of CSX has been leading the way in pushing change, both at his railroad and the entire industry. His actions even got him named Transportation Person of the Year by NEARS (North East Association of Rail Shippers). From the moment he took over the reins at CSX it felt like his tenure was going to be different as he stressed culture and service from day one, a focus on which he has thoroughly followed through, in our assessment. A former railroad customer himself, Hinrichs has stated that CSX is first and foremost a service provider. He appears to recognize that the industry must improve its service, ease of doing business and supply chain visibility to begin to grow again.

We are also encouraged that, in his first public communication to his rank-and-file membership, Union Pacific CEO Jim Vena stressed growth via service and operational excellence.

It may seem odd to talk about growth in an industry that has not grown volumes at all over the past decade. However, growth is needed for the health of the rail industry over the longer term. Sure, we could see industry volumes grow next year, but it may just be easy year on year comparisons. Longer-term growth may not come easily as the trucking industry will not want to give up some of the gains it has made against their railroad counterparts. Growth will also likely require all the rail industry pulling in the same direction. It appears for the moment the industry is willing to do so as it is clearly saying the right things, but how much rope the investment community is willing to give them remains to be seen. The length of this rope, however, is likely longer than the one the regulators have been willing to give.

The regulators have played a much larger role over the past few years in the railroad industry. Under the leadership of outgoing Chairman Oberman, the Surface Transportation Board (STB) approved the CP/KCS merger, which will likely go down as the last of the big Class I mergers. The STB sought to protect and enhance competition/service with this merger and thus far it seems they have. The rise of new rail services out of Mexico, such as the UP/CN/GMXT Falcon Premium service and a new interchange agreement to reach the southeast with CSX and G&W, are shining examples of enhancing competition and service. The STB also announced its long-awaited proposed rulemaking on reciprocal switching. While it would be a wild stretch to call this a win for the railroad carriers, we believe it could have been far worse as many in the industry were expecting a mileage-based ruling.

The future direction of the STB, however, is in question after the shocking announcement that Chairman Oberman will not seek re-nomination for a second term. A new Chairperson could be named with board members Primus (who has taken the toughest stances against the rail carriers in the past) and Hedlund the likely choices as they are Democratic nominees. President Biden could also appoint a new board member to take over the role of Chairperson, but the likelihood of that option appears slim in our view given other more pressing domestic and international issues. Indeed, the STB has functioned many times in the past with less than a full slate of members. The length of a replacement will also depend on the outcome of the 2024 elections as a Republican victory would likely change things yet again.

All of this brings us to the financial outlook of the railroad space. Railroad stocks have underperformed in 2023 with all names trailing the broader market and the group falling roughly 4% (albeit largely due to a ~15.5% drop by Norfolk Southern) vs. the SPX (Standards & Poors Index), up ~19% during the same period. Pressure on volumes and pricing have coupled with rising costs, a major derailment and tech issues to limit 2023 financial performance. The carriers have found themselves at the low point of the past two decades in their price vs. cost tradeoff for most of this year. This, however, should change as we move through 2024. First, we are starting to see some inflationary costs abate somewhat. Second, and more important, the railroads are expected to continue to attack their longer-term contracts as they roll over (recall ~50% of a railroad’s book of business rolls off every year) to account for higher costs. Finally, it appears that truck pricing has hit a bottom and should have nowhere to go but up. This should help a great deal on the intermodal side, but we expect it to have a larger impact on 2025 results.

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We believe it is this dynamic that has rekindled long-only investor interest of late. While truckload stocks may react first in the cycle, the railroads should set up really well toward the middle of 2024, in our opinion.

Jason Seidl is Managing Director, Industrials – Airfreight & Surface Transportation, TD Cowen, a Division of TD Securities.

Patty Long

As an advocate for railway suppliers, it is part of my job to understand influences impacting policies and perceptions around the movement of people and goods via rail. Our members develop products and technologies for both!

Lately, I've noticed a troubling schism in some Congressional circles that lauds privately owned and funded freight rail for its economic and environmental benefits while disparaging passenger rail as a wasteful use of taxpayer dollars. In doing so, I fear that our "friends" on the Hill are throwing the baby out with the bath water.

The "baby" in this case, is U.S. employment directly supporting rail supply, which in 2020 was an estimated 242,000 jobs and more than 700,000 when you include indirect and induced employment. A year later, a bipartisan majority in the U.S. Congress passed the Investment in Infrastructure and Jobs Act (IIJA) to invest U.S. taxpayers' dollars to create even more jobs while updating a system that is critical to our country's economic and environmental health and national security.

Sadly, this once-in-a-generation opportunity is struggling under the weight of extreme inflation, post-COVID ridership declines, procurement delays and in some cases, waste, and abuse that is difficult to defend. But to move forward we must condemn inefficiency and hold organizations accountable while supporting investment in American jobs.

According to the USDOT, an investment of \$1 billion in public transportation creates roughly 36,000 jobs. A more tangible example of this is the production of new Amtrak Airo™ trains—manufactured by RSI member Siemens Mobility—that will create new engineering and manufacturing jobs with more than 3,500 parts built by nearly 100 suppliers in 31 states. This illustration and others like it must find their way into the mainstream media. But it is no secret that negative examples sell more papers and produce more clicks, particularly in years that are divisible by 4.

As we head into an election year, I caution our legislators to avoid the easy sound bites and finger pointing as it relates to funding of passenger rail. Rather, I invite them to work with us on the serious business of fixing systemic issues that can and should be addressed. Procurement reform to address implementation delays is not a sexy campaign topic, but it will yield real benefits for real people in manufacturing towns across the United States.

As representatives of both freight and passenger suppliers, the Railway Supply Institute, is working to help small manufacturers navigate difficult issues related to Buy America and domestic preference laws. These complexities create barriers to entry limiting what should be a healthy and robust supply chain. This past spring, we worked with government agencies to address inflation adjustments for firm-fixed price contracts that were driving small suppliers out of business or into other industries. And, through our training, best practices and standards development, we are helping to connect small businesses with large customers who need their services.

We have an even greater potential for growth in uniting and aligning with other stakeholders—engineering and construction firms, state governments and labor unions—all of whom have a vested interest in system reform and the potential it provides for real job creation. At Railway Interchange, we brought all of these groups together for a candid discussion about how our organizations can and should be working together.

But we need our elected official on board! This summer, the RSI and a half dozen of our members hosted an event on Capitol Hill to showcase the technological innovations that are making the rails safer, greener and more efficient. More importantly, we started a dialogue about how they—both the Congress and Executive branch—can and should support that investment.

At the end of the day, we all want the same things: efficient and productive use of the taxpayers' dollars to support our nation's infrastructure in a way that encourages investment and creates good jobs. Together, we can connect the dots between funding and jobs, hold organizations accountable and fix what is truly broken.

Patty Long is President of the Railway Supply Institute, which connects members to their customers and partners, advocates on behalf of freight and passenger railway suppliers in the legislative and regulatory process, and advances safety, innovation, technology and sustainability in the industry.

Cass Support Group Mountain State Railroad & Logging Historical Association to End Operations [By Alan Byer](#) | December 1, 2023 **Organization, which supported heritage railroad prior to operation by private company, will be merged into another organization**

CASS, W.Va. — The Mountain State Railroad & Logging Historical Association, founded in 1982, which played a key role in support of the Cass Scenic Railroad, will conclude operations, its president has announced.

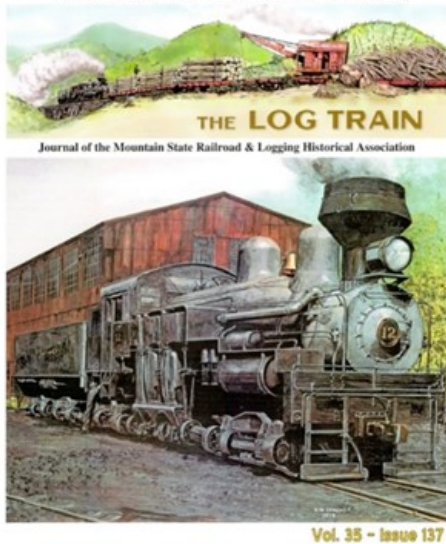
Association president Matt Wilson informed members in a Nov. 24 letter that the organization will become part another group, Friends of Cass — formerly a committee of the Mountain State organization — that will concentrate on preservation of the actual town of Cass, W.Va.

From its formation, the historical association worked almost exclusively to preserve and enhance the railroad assets of the state-owned Cass Scenic Railroad, and that role became superfluous when a private company, Durbin & Greenbrier Valley Railroad, took over Cass rail operations in 2015. Included with the letter was a postcard, addressed to the organization, that allowed current members to vote on dissolution and indicate what should happen to their remaining dues, almost all of which would have been allocated to issues of *The Log Train*, the association's journal. Accompanying the letter and postcard was a copy of the final issue of *The Log Train*. Its front and back covers were reproductions of two paintings by the late Richard Sparks, one of the association's original officers, and the bulk of the issue consisted of photographs by the late Russell Baum, arranged in milepost order and colorized by Wilson, the editor. Baum, was the person most responsible for West Virginia's acquisition of Mower Lumber Co.'s Cass operation in the early 1960s.

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THE LAST-EVER ISSUE!



The cover of the final issue of *The Log Train*, the magazine of the Mountain State Railroad & Logging Historical Society.

Arguably one of the most productive and consequential volunteer railfan support organizations ever, the association accomplished much over its relatively short lifespan after being organized by the legendary photographer and historian John P. Killoran, Cass Scenic's first superintendent, in 1982. The group's first big project was Whittaker Camp No. 1, built between 1991 and 1994 and described by Sparks as "a bold step ... to create a 1940s logging camp reconstruction having representative shanties, camp cars, log cars, log loader, and an aerial skidder. The project involved volunteers building 1,400 feet of new track, including three switches, and utilizing historic Mower and Meadow River heavy logging equipment that was otherwise just sitting in the yard at Cass." Whittaker and Bald Knob train riders still have the opportunity to see and explore Camp No. 1.

In 1998, the organization purchased the materials and provided volunteer labor to link the Cass Scenic Railroad with the state's recently acquired CSX (Western Maryland Railway) Elkins subdivision at Spruce, allowing outside rail access to Cass. That same year, the association provided a down payment for a 90-ton Shay for sale at a San Diego museum; arranged for tractor-trailer transport of the locomotive to Cass; and then dispatched six volunteers to help four Cass Scenic Railroad employees pack and load the locomotive in San Diego. Today, that locomotive operates regularly as Cass Scenic Shay No. 11.

The organization began what would prove to be its largest, most complicated and, ultimately, last big project in the late 1990s: the return of former Middle Fork Railroad three-truck Climax No. 6 to operation as Cass No. 9. Before the association could begin this gargantuan task, the state stipulated that the organization would have to build a dedicated restoration shop. Using donated materials and volunteer labor, the organization completed this new shop, later dedicated to Killoran, by summer 2001.

Grady Smith, former Cass Scenic hostler and a highschool shop teacher, took on leadership responsibilities and, over the next 14 years, he and a dedicated, ever-changing group of volunteers completed 80% to 85% of the job before turning it over to the Cass shop crew in 2015. The locomotive operates today for the Cass Scenic Railroad [see "Phoenix rising in West Virginia," *Trains Magazine*, January 2020].

After 2015, for a variety of reasons, the group's membership began to decline, falling from a high of 750 to about 400 today, which prompted the dissolution process to take place over the next few months. Wilson suggests folding the historical association into Friends of Cass may very well be the beginning of something important, and only time will tell.

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UNION DEPOT: From Rick Krenske via *Pioneer Press*, [Friday, November 17, 2023, 1:26 PM](#)

VERBATIM: "More than a decade ago,

Ramsey County poured \$243 million into purchasing, renovating and reviving the downtown St. Paul Union Depot, a 1920s-era transit hub that hadn't hosted passenger trains since 1971. Situated on 33 acres of riverfront property off Kellogg Boulevard, the neo-classical train depot welcomed their return in May 2014 when Amtrak's Empire Builder began rolling in a morning trip to Chicago and a return trip at night. Transit advocates say discontent with Ramsey County's management of the depot has created a stir within the nation's long-distance passenger rail provider. An internal Amtrak memo reportedly outlines concerns about the county using the downtown hub primarily as a banquet facility. That comes on top of worries about crime and loitering inside the cavernous riverfront depot, which is otherwise short on foot traffic. **Brian Nelson**, president of the rail advocacy coalition **All Aboard Minnesota**, obtained a copy of the Amtrak memo and recently forwarded it to Ramsey County leadership."



Hennepin Overland Proposed Schedule
 2024 Provided by Bill Dredge Times:
 1:00pm – 4:00pm
 Trains after Dark(6:00pm-9:00pm)
 Adult Fare \$10

February 3, 4, 10(Trains after dark), 11, 17, 18, 24, 25
 March 2, 3, 9(Trains after dark), 10, 16, 17, 23, 24, 30 (Closed
 March 31-Easter Sunday)
 April 6, 7, 13(Trains after dark), 14, 20, 21, 27, 28(Pot luck)



Night Trains 2024 Season Night Trains runs from January 2024 through February 2024 with additional bonus nights, including **Black Friday Night Trains – New Year’s Week Bonus.** Its open Every Saturday (from January 1st to February 24, 2024.) The event runs from 3:00pm to 7pm, tickets will be sold for 2 hour time blocks. \$15 per guest, children 4 and under are free. Location: **668 Transfer Road Suite 8 Saint Paul, MN 55114 651-647-9628**

Railfan Events (Thanks to Rick Krense, Bill Dredge)

Northstar Chapter NRHS Meeting	Saturday January 6th 2024 6:15—8:45 pm	Roseville Lutheran Church Roselawn Ave Roseville MN	Free—guests are welcome
Woodbury –The Newport Railroad Club Flea Market	January 13, 2024 9:00 am—2:00 pm & May 4th 2024 9am—2pm	Woodbury High School 2665 Woodlane Drive Woodbury, MN	\$7
Model Train Show at Century College	Saturday, February 3, 2024. 9:00 am to 2:00 pm ‘ & April 6 2024 9am—2pm	3401 Century Avenue N. White Bear Lake, MN 55110	\$7
North Metro Model RR Club	Saturday, March 2 2024 9:00 am—2:00 pm	VFW Club Coon Rapids 9am - 2 pm 1919 Coon Rapids Blvd. Coon Rapids, MN 55433	\$7
Twin City Model Railroad Museum Hobby Show and Sale	Saturday, May 11, 2024 from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm	MN State Fairgrounds – Education Building 1372 Cosgrove Street	\$7

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