



NRHS

# Northstar News

Publishers of the Minnesota Rail Calendar

**Note: NEXT MEETING SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 21st 2024**



*L: Amtrak WB Borealis at La-Crosse depot -Bob Ball*

*R: CPKC unit in New Paint Scheme in Kansas City May 2024 -Jeff Terry*



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## Meeting Notice:

**Saturday September 21st, 2024 6:15 pm** At Roseville Lutheran Church, our May Meeting also will be a ZOOM meeting. Note: in 2024 meetings will held on the **2nd Saturday of the month, Except September!**

**Program:** "Ever wanted to ride the Rocky Mountaineer? Now you can! This month's program will feature Jack Barbier's video of a recent "Gold Leaf Service" trip Banff-Vancouver. Get ready for a great ride through the awesome Canadian Rockies!"

Informal Dinner at Keys Restaurant -Lexington and Larpen-teur Avenues at 4:15 pm September 21st, 2024.

Please join us in-person at Roseville Lutheran Church, Saturday September 21st 2024 at 6 pm. Doors open at 5:50pm. Our business meeting will begin at 6:15 followed by the program.

If you are unable to join us in person, the Zoom Meeting log-in information are here: NRHS September 21, 2024 Meeting Time: Sep 21, 2024 6:00 to 8:45 pm Central Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting <https://tinyurl.com/yn3hskpy> or <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89403499480?pwd=1hAa20BW5rAg0qoXsexr3tCtaQoTgD.1>

**Meeting ID: 894 0349 9480**

**Passcode: UP4014**

Dial-in, audio only: (507) 473-4847

Meeting ID for dial-in users: 894 0349 9480

Passcode for dial-in users: 800932

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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: NEXT Issue out around October 1st 2024!*

From the Lake Superior Transportation Club: The Lake Superior Railroad Museum is hosting the Minnesota Free-Mo Modelers operating layout on Sept 28 from 10AM to 5 PM and on Sept 29 from 10 AM till noon in the St. Louis County Depot Great Hall at 506 W. Michigan St. in Duluth MN, 55802. Admission to the Free-Mo layout is free. (Also noted on last page) Admission to Lake Superior Railroad Museum is \$14.



### **We have a new Treasurer!**

We have a new Treasurer, John Chute. John was officially appointed Treasurer on July 14<sup>th</sup> 2024. (the official letter of acceptance now is on record at our chapter Archives.) John has contributed many things to the Great Northern Railway Historical Society. John replaces Russ Isbrandt. Please join our BOD and welcome John to the position as Northstar Railway Historical Society Treasurer. The Board looks forward to working with John Chute in the future. Photo by Richard Tubbesing



Our outgoing Treasurer Russ Isbrandt is a long-time member of our chapter and the NRHS and has contributed 'Yoman' work for our Chapter. Your newsletter editor and BOD wish to Thank Russ Isbrandt for his (too many to list) many contributions to our chapter over many years. Thank YOU, Russ. You have been (and still are) such a valuable member to our organization! Photo by Dawn Holmberg



## Bus trip to Trego WI August 10<sup>th</sup> 2024

We had a great trip with partly sunny skies and cool temperatures to ride the Wisconsin Great Northern 'Pizza Train'. Wisconsin Great Northern Owner Greg Vreeland gave our 18 Attendees a memorable ride in a just acquired and restored ex-GN Ranch car. The Pizza cooked on board the train was very tasty! We also got a look at the CB&Q 'Mark Twain Zephyr'. It is hoped that the Mark Twain Zephyr will be operational sometime next year! It is only one of the few CB&Q Shovel Nose Zephyr to still exist.. The 1936 Denver Zephyr's were shipped to Saudia Arabia in the 1970's, believed to be in storage. The Pioneer Zephyr of 1934 is restored and displayed at the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry.



*Group Photo outside the Trego depot by Dawn Holmberg*



*Inside the GN Ranch Car by Richard Tubbesing.*

## Bridge Collapse Closes Ontario Rail Line, Just North of Minnesota Border

Duluth Tribune Thu, Aug 15, 2024 at 8:13 PM Provided by Frank Willkie and Dan Meyer



*Duluth Tribune, 1. A Canadian National bridge over the Rainy River in Fort Frances, Ontario, has collapsed. Trains Newswire: 2. Rainy River Property Owners Association via Facebook. 3. The Rainy River bridge dates to 1908. Rainy River Property Owners Association via Facebook*

A rail bridge across a channel of Rainy Lake, east of Fort Frances, Ontario, and just north of the U.S.-Canada border at Minnesota, was damaged after part of the structure collapsed on Wednesday, Aug. 14.

Contributed / Ontario Provincial Police

A railway bridge in Ontario — just north of the Minnesota border — collapsed Wednesday, Aug. 14, blocking rail and boat traffic. Local officials and CN Railway said there were no reports of injuries. The collapse did not happen while a train was crossing.

The span is known as the Five-Mile Bridge, crossing a channel of Rainy Lake a few miles northeast of Fort Frances. It's on a rail line linking the CN network to the Port of Thunder Bay, and does not affect the main rail line crossing the border at Fort Frances and Rainier.

Photos from the scene posted online showed part of the bridge that allowed it to lift, to let larger boats pass underneath, collapsed and caused damage to the tracks. The town of Fort Frances asked boaters to stay away from the area.

CN Railway said Thursday that crews have started repair work, but the bridge remains closed for now.

The railway also said that "environmental crews have contained and are recovering a release of biodegradable, non-toxic hydraulic oil related to the incident." CN thanked local first responders for their response to the collapse.

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With the bridge unable to open, barges and large boats are not able to traverse between the southern and northern parts of Rainy Lake, a sprawling body of water covering more than 200,000 acres along the international border. The operator of a boat taxi service used to shuttle people and goods around the lake told CBC Thunder Bay that the bridge collapse will have a significant effect on the business.

*This story was written by one of our partner news agencies. Forum Communications Company uses content from agencies such as Reuters, Kaiser Health News, Tribune News Service and others to provide a wider range of news to our readers. Learn [more about the news services FCC uses here](#)*

[https://www.duluthnewtribune.com/news/minnesota/bridge-collapse-closes-ontario-rail-line-just-north-of-minnesota-order?utm\\_source=email&utm\\_medium=newsletter&utm\\_campaign=dailypm&utm\\_market=duluthnewtribune](https://www.duluthnewtribune.com/news/minnesota/bridge-collapse-closes-ontario-rail-line-just-north-of-minnesota-order?utm_source=email&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_campaign=dailypm&utm_market=duluthnewtribune)

Trains Newswire: FORT FRANCES, Ontario — A Canadian National Railway lift bridge in Fort Frances has collapsed, [the website NWOneswatch.com reports](#).

CN said in a statement to website operator Dougall Media on Wednesday, Aug. 14, that it was responding to “an incident” involving the bridge across the Rainy River that provides its connection to the Port of Thunder Bay, Ont., and that the waterway was blocked. The railroad said no train was involved in the incident and that the cause was under investigation.

In a statement on Thursday, Aug. 15, the railroad said its crews have begun repairs on the bridge, which “remains closed until further notice. Environmental crews have contained and are recovering a release of biodegradable, non-toxic hydraulic oil related to the incident.”

The CEO of the Port of Thunder Bay, Chris Heikkinen, [told the CBC](#) he expects CN will work with CPKC to insure both railroads are still able to serve the port, which primarily handles grain traffic, but that delays in service could result.

“Volumes on CN are probably 30 to 40% of the grain that the port receives,” Heikkinen told the broadcaster, “... so its a sizeable chunk.”

[In 2023](#), the port handled 9.63 million metric tons of cargo; grain accounted for 7.26 million metric tons of that total.

According to the website [historicbridges.org](#), the bridge, known as both the Five-Mile Bridge and the Rainy River Lift Bridge, dates to 1908 and is a single-leaf bascule bridge with a total length of 541 feet and a 134-foot main span.

— Updated Aug. 15 at 4:25 p.m. with new statement from CN; updated at 8:05 p.m. with additional information.

## Is the Amtrak Borealis Train Really Profitable? Metro News - Borealis Train

By [Adam Platt](#) July 15, 2024 From Rick Krenke Thu 7/18/2024 1:09 AM



*Interior shot of an Amtrak Horizon rail car, which is used on the railroad's Borealis route to Chicago. PHOTO BY WIKIMEDIA USER ITSADOC / SHARED UNDER CREATIVE COMMONS*

The new route from St. Paul to Chicago had a good first month, but most of what's been reported beyond that is wild hyperbole.

**-On May 21**, Amtrak debuted a second train in the St. Paul–Chicago market. Initial ridership was encouraging, prompting a wave of [media attention](#) turning all sorts of supposition into fact, including that the train was profitable, had stolen a substantial portion of the air travel market, and would quickly lead to a third and even fourth Amtrak service in the corridor. I've been covering rail transportation in the region since the 1990s and the drumbeat of nonsense got so thick on social and mainstream media that I decided to do some of my own ciphering.

Here goes:

**-Some History:** Twin Cities–Chicago used to be the most competitive rail corridor in the nation. For much of the 20th century, three to six railroads competed, operating over 20 trains a day in each direction, some traversing the route in under seven hours. Jet travel and interstate highways killed long-distance passenger rail in America, and by the advent of Amtrak in 1971, the route was down to just a couple railroads and fewer than five

Amtrak pared it to one, the Empire Builder, which runs Chicago to Seattle/Portland over parts of the old Milwaukee Road and Great Northern (now CPKC and BNSF Railroads). Amtrak briefly funded a second train in the corridor from 1978–1981, an overnight Chicago–Duluth service via St. Paul. Otherwise, it's been status quo for most of the last 53 years.

**-What Created Borealis:** The history of efforts to improve service in the corridor is too convoluted for this article, but a few years ago states were given responsibility for funding and marketing Amtrak services under 750 miles. (Initially the federal government pays 90% of the cost of those services, but over time the states became increasingly responsible for deficits.) Minnesota, Illinois, and Wisconsin began working to create a second daily Twin Cities–Chicago train. This effort had certain advantages over other regional “wish list” startups that Biden-era funding has encouraged: There was an existing route which already had passenger service, so stations and most of the infrastructure was in place. There was a host railroad, CPKC, that had a good relationship with Amtrak, and a reputation for handling its trains efficiently, which can't be said for most American railroads. And CPKC was looking for federal approval for its merger, which incentivized it not to fight the multi-state effort. CPKC even agreed to start running the train before certain agreed-on infrastructure improvements were made to its railroad. The process took several years, without clear timelines, but suddenly it was announced in early May that the service would begin in 10 days.

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**-What Is Borealis?** Borealis is not technically a new train from Amtrak's perspective. This is important. It's an extension of one of Amtrak's seven daily Chicago-Milwaukee "Hiawathas." Amtrak operates several higher-frequency regional corridors out of Chicago Union Station serving routes of 250 miles or less. Amtrak is a tenant in that corridor of Metra, which runs Chicago's network of suburban commuter trains, and then CPKC Railway for the rest of the route. Using the existing Chicago-Milwaukee "slot," meant fitting the train into the dense Chicago commuter network was simple. While the Empire Builder is a long-distance, federally supported double-decker train, with dining car, sleeping rooms, sightseer lounge with glass roof, and roomy coaches, Borealis is quite different. It operates with a modified commuter car design known as "Horizon." Seating is more comfortable than airline or bus, but denser than most Amtrak services of seven-plus hours. The only amenity is a snack car, of a different 1970s Amtrak design, offering a rather rudimentary array of frozen and packaged snacks. Wi-Fi is promised, but reports are it's non-existent. Amtrak spokesman Marc Magliari says the route operates off cellular services and will be negatively impacted when the train is in areas with little to no coverage. Amtrak is equipment-constrained due to a years-long backlog of cars awaiting repair and maintenance as the railroad faces shortages of qualified technicians to put them in good working order. It also has lots of new corridor equipment on order, but it will likely be several years before it shows up on Borealis, as other corridors are ahead of it in need and priority, says Magliari.

**-Ridership:** Many of the articles touting the route's amazing success based it on the first ten days of ridership. The hype made it all the way up the media food chain to [Fast Company](#). Looking at the train's first full month, June, from data released by Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers—aka WisARP, a Wisconsin passenger rail advocacy group—and provided by Wisconsin DOT, Borealis averaged 330 riders westbound and 288 riders eastbound. (The disparity is probably due to the fact that the westbound Borealis traverses Chicago-Milwaukee in a low-demand time of day, while the eastbound runs through at peak hours.). Amtrak does not break out point-to-point ridership data for competitive reasons, says Magliari. So we don't know how many Borealis riders are new to Amtrak and how many were historic Empire Builder riders. The new service can't be deemed successful unless it expands existing ridership in the corridor, rather than simply sharing what exists. Magliari also pointed out that Amtrak would never draw conclusions about the success of a train with such little data. He noted that summer is MSP-Chicago's busiest season, and the early data was expected to be robust.

**-The Milwaukee factor:** Then there's the issue of Chicago-Milwaukee ridership. Remember, Borealis is an existing train in that corridor. Amtrak would not provide data about how many of Borealis's riders rode only that portion of the route, but WisARP released WisDOT data in May noting 38.5% of Borealis May ridership was Chicago-Milwaukee, meaning fewer than 200 of the train's roughly 300 daily riders were using the "new" train. In June 2023, Chicago-Milwaukee service averaged 144 riders per train. Extrapolating the data, it's possible nearly half of Borealis ridership is existing Hiawatha riders. And a portion inevitably have switched off the Empire Builder, which arrives in St. Paul from Seattle several hours late many days. Magliari says Amtrak would prefer that Chicago-Twin Cities riders use Borealis allowing it to sell more Empire Builder tickets to passengers traveling to St. Cloud or Minot or Glacier Park, who often couldn't get a reservation because of peak loads on the Chicago-Twin Cities portion. (Amtrak can use pricing to dissuade local riders from using the Builder. The two trains are scheduled only three hours apart in each direction.)

**Plane slayer:** To the supposition that Borealis had "stolen" or generated, nearly overnight, 10%-20% of the ridership of the Chicago-MSP air corridor, well, let's dig into that. On an average summer Friday, there are 26 nonstop flights between MSP and Chicago's two airports, 27 on the Fridays Sun Country operates a flight. These services range from 70-seat regional jets to nearly 200-seat Boeing 737Max jets. Using an average capacity of 125 seats, that's roughly 3,300 seats each way in the air corridor. Based on the above data, it appears Borealis has taken the equivalent of a single mainline jet flight, or maybe 5% of the daily air passengers.

**-Profitability:** Most media covering the Borealis boomlet relied on advocates touting stats from Amtrak's May 2024 route performance data, which showed the train with \$100,000 in operating income, making it one of only two profitable Amtrak routes (the DC-Florida Auto Train is the other). The problem is that's wrong on multiple levels. First, explains Magliari, Amtrak's data only measures direct costs like crew and fuel and microwave pizza. It doesn't include indirect costs shared by Borealis and the Builder and items like debt service and depreciation, etc. Secondly, even a casual reading of the single line of financial data Amtrak shows \$300,000 in gross ticket revenue but \$600,000 in operating revenue. That other \$300,000 constitutes state subsidies to the train. Without them, Borealis would have lost \$200,000, or an average of \$10,000 per trip. (I don't mean to suggest the train, as a public service, isn't justified—it just ain't making money.)

**-Prospects for a third train:** Rail advocates and journalists alike fell all over themselves to proclaim the immediate justification for a third service on the route. Once Borealis' consortium of states is able to parse exactly how many new riders it has attracted to the corridor, it can get about the task of thinking about the future. Amtrak's fiscal year ends Sept. 30 and Magliari says autumn would be a reasonable time to dig into the data, which would be best-case-scenario, because it would only cover peak ridership months. And a third train would require an agreement with CPKC, if not Metra. No such agreement exists, says Magliari. (MnDOT appeared to pour water on the prospects for a third train in this just published article.)

**-Whither Madison?** One of the great missed opportunities of Borealis is Madison. The University of Wisconsin's main campus and State Capitol attract thousands of trips from the Chicago and Twin Cities area each day. Madison's geographic position, on an isthmus oriented SW to NE, historically made it circuitous to serve from a NW to SE oriented train, and now most of Madison's rail links have been cut. Amtrak's closest stop is Columbus, Wisconsin, a 40-minute drive to the northeast. Despite Borealis' advent, there remains no connecting shuttle bus service from Columbus timed to serve Twin Cities-bound or originating trains, disenfranchising dozens of potential daily riders. Madison continues to remain a bridge too far for Amtrak.

**-Bottom line:** Best-case scenario, Borealis is generating around 150 new riders per trip outside the Chicago-Milwaukee corridor. But it's impossible to know without endpoint data from the Empire Builder if all 150, or 100, or just 50 are new riders on the route. That data is key to judging the train's success. And any way you cut it, Borealis will need hundreds more riders to turn a profit and justify a third service and new equipment, which is at best, years off.

# MET COUNCIL TAKES “BIG STEP,” SENDS BLUE LINE EXTENSION PROJECT TO CITIES FOR VOTE 5:35 PM | Friday, July 26, 2024

[Copy](#) [Link](#) [Email](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#)

In what’s described as a “big step” forward for the METRO Blue Line Extension light rail project, the Metropolitan Council voted this week to send the [estimated \\$3 billion project](#) to cities along the route to decide whether to approve the line.

The process is called municipal consent. The Met Council vote on July 24 was 10-3.

The Blue Line Extension route would connect Target Field in Minneapolis to Robbinsdale and Crystal before ending by the Target campus in Brooklyn Park.

One of the dissenters, Judy Johnson, pointed out that cities are in a difficult spot with their vote because they aren’t allowed to switch the mode of transportation from light rail to bus rapid transit. Johnson represents District 1 on the Met Council, which includes Plymouth and Maple Grove.

“This is the area if a city feels this isn’t the right project for them, they’re really boxed in,” said Johnson.

Some elected officials in [Robbinsdale and Crystal oppose the current route](#) because it runs right down the middle of County Road 81, also known as Bottineau Boulevard.

Johnson said she has heard from constituents wondering why bus rapid transit isn’t being considered.

Municipal consent votes are expected to take place in the next couple months, which Johnson said she preferred to have happen after the fall elections.

‘WE’RE STUCK IN THIS PROCESS’

State law doesn’t permit cities along the planned route to vote to choose bus rapid transit, but instead must decide on the plans for the actual project.

Besides Johnson, Met Council members Susan Vento and Wendy Wulff also voted no.

“There is serious problems with this project in terms of cost versus ridership and property impacts that seem like the only way to solve them would be to look at BRT as a mode rather than LRT,” said Wulff.

A decision to reset would ultimately rest with Hennepin County, which has supported going with light rail.

Johnson said unless Hennepin County decides to change its mind, “we’re stuck in this process.”

SUPPORT FOR LIGHT RAIL

Met Council Chair Charlie Zelle pointed out in the 10-3 vote that he has also heard strong support for light rail and against using bus rapid transit.

“I’ve heard an equally and frankly stronger number of voices saying ‘no, this is the mode. And as an extension of a robust Blue Line, that this is actually an appropriate investment,’” said Zelle. “I’ve heard it all.”

Met Council member Reva Chamblis, who represents District 2 that includes Brooklyn Park and Osseo, also supported the project. She said light rail for this region has been looked at “for decades.”

Municipal consent votes are expected to occur between August and October.

## Metro News - Metro Transit News Coming Aug. 1: Metro Transit Operators to Get Pay Bump -

Monday, July 29, 2024, 12:02 PM, Frederick Krenske



*A rider boards a Green Line light rail train in St. Paul.*

*Tim Nelson | MPR News*



*Metro Transit General Manager Lesley Kandaras chats with Metro Transit Police Chief Ernest Morales III ahead of a news confer-*

Beginning Thursday, Metro Transit workers will see a bump in wages as part of an effort to recruit workers and expand service. Operators are expected to see nearly \$29 per hour while technicians will see over \$39 per hour, including new hires. Other incentives will go into effect such as hire-on bonuses for those with and without commercial licenses. Lesley Kandaras, Metro Transit’s general manager, said the Metropolitan Council and worker’s union ratified a new contract earlier this year to make the pay increases possible. Over 200 bus and train operators have

Metro Transit said the new hires are leading to the expansion of services offered, including the increase of frequency in which light rail trains will run. “Fundamentally, for us to provide more service we need people, so it’s a primary focus of ours,” Kandaras said. Starting Aug. 17, Blue and Green Line trains will run every 12 minutes between 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. daily. Orange Line buses and Route 80, which runs along White Bear Avenue, will also see a frequency increase in daily operations.

Route 4 will see changes to improve speed and mobility as part of the [Better Bus Routes program](#).

Other services to be expanded include three new transit lines set to [open in 2025](#) and six new State Fair Express Bus Service Park & Rides across the metro. Ridership for the first six months of this year has jumped 9 percent, according to Metro Transit. The average number of riders on the system is estimated at about 144,000 per week with August being the peak month due to summer events and activities. Metro Transit also plans to hire more police and community service officers.



## First Look: Midwest States' Venture Coach-Café Debut

By Bob Johnston | July 15, 2024 | Last updated on July 27, 2024



*The first Siemens Venture coach-café to enter Amtrak Midwest service, No. 4301, is part of train No. 305 at Bloomington-Normal on July 9, 2024.*  
**Bob Johnston**

*Lincoln Service train No. 300 arriving in Chicago from St. Louis on July 6, 2024, has the same arrangement of the consist described for the July 9 trip: The coach-café is positioned immediately behind the Charger locomotive, followed by three Venture coaches and the business-class car on the rear.*  
**Bob Johnston**



**L:** *A passenger places a bulky suitcase in the business-class car's luggage rack before the trap was closed at Chicago Union Station. Note how the well-lit retractable steps provide easy access from the platform.* **Bob Johnston** **M:** *A woman walks toward the cafe, while a man coming out of the snack bar section carries a cardboard tray of food and beverages. There is no seating area for passengers.* **Bob Johnston** **R:** *The brightly lit snack counter has double-stacked microwaves and wide refrigerators to facilitate food service.*  
**Bob Johnston**



**L:** *A passenger who has just purchased food (wearing headphones) tries to get past those waiting to be served.* **Bob Johnston** **M:** *A space near the service counter is designed with low-level counters to accommodate passengers with disabilities.* **Bob Johnston** **R:** *The coach-café's crew seating area. There is room for two crew members.* **Bob Johnston**

CHICAGO — The first of 17 Venture coach-café cars built by Siemens for Midwest States has finally debuted on one daily Chicago-St. Louis *Lincoln Service* round-trip.

*Trains News Wire* sampled the new entry out of Chicago to Bloomington-Normal, Ill., last week on train No. 305, a 5:20 p.m. departure. The trainset returns the next morning as *Lincoln Service* No. 300, which is scheduled to arrive into the Windy City at 9:25 a.m.

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Divisions of Illinois and California transportation departments, not Amtrak, led and managed the procurement of single-level Venture cars and Charger locomotives. Though they agreed on aisle width and the same type of coach seat, the two agencies arrived at different ideas of how their respective rolling stock was to be configured. The Midwest cafes went through a variety of changes from what was initially envisioned as a standardized design; California opted for vending-machine cars that still have not debuted on the *San Joaquins*.

The all-Venture, five-car train waiting on Chicago Union Station's track 18 on a stormy July 9 had its coach-café immediately behind the locomotive, followed by three coaches and a business-class car on the rear. The original plan was to run the coach-café and business-class cars together, since business-class passengers get a free non-alcoholic beverage on Midwest trains. Another reason the two cars were to be paired is that the business-class car, with one seat on one side of the aisle and two on the other, has a built-in wheelchair lift for passengers with disabilities.

News Wire bought a coach ticket and used an Amtrak Guest Rewards upgrade coupon to sit in business class, whose passengers received priority boarding on what conductors said was a sold-out train. After boarding that group in the last car, the conductor closed the trap so he could direct passengers to coaches corresponding to stops where traps would be opened.

On this trip, the overhead passenger information display system and automated announcements weren't operational. Following the obligatory safety and no-smoking advisories after an on-time departure, a conductor added, "We have a new café car; it's at the front of the train. There are no seats to eat your food. If you make a purchase, you must take the food back to your seat."

Walking forward as No. 305 speeds at 79 mph in the driving rain between the Summit and Joliet stops, only a smattering of single seats remain unoccupied. This includes the café car's coach section, which has six rows of double seats on one side of the wide aisle and eight rows on the other. The section is roughly comparable in size to the business-class section of Amfleet I and Horizon cafe Cars, but Illinois opted to increase business-class capacity by making that an entirely separate car.

Illinois DOT spokesman Scott Speegle tells News Wire, "While final consist of decisions are made by Amtrak, we have requested that the business class car is at one end of the consist to give those customers greater privacy. Ideally, we would like the café car placed in the middle of the consist to give all customers easier access to the cafe." He says that as the Venture coach-café receives final acceptance by the agency and Amtrak, they will first fill out the *Lincoln Service* lineup of four round trips before being deployed to other Midwest routes.

As currently positioned, everyone lines up while waiting to be served at the snack bar in a hallway with large windows on one side, reminiscent of views experienced on Talgo cafe cars.

The cafe's snack bar serves the same variety of fresh deli sandwiches, jumbo hot dogs, cheeseburgers, chips, soft drinks, and alcoholic beverages, including domestic and imported beers, available on all Midwest Cafe cars.

The counter itself is inviting. Cody, the attendant who kept busy with a steady stream of customers during the dinner hour, remarked to a customer, "They designed this car seven years ago. I like the layout, but there is no place to sit and converse with passengers." Challenges occur, however, when a recently served passenger returns from the condiment table on the other side of the snack counter with food.

This is not unlike the problem encountered in any Amtrak café cars, but in those cases there is more maneuvering room directly across from where people are served. Also, anyone in a wheelchair would have trouble passing the service area to access the spacious room on the other side of the snack bar that is outfitted with electrical portals on low-level counters.

This might be a place where passengers could congregate, albeit without any seating, but travelers are told they must return to their seats after purchasing food, so "hanging out" in the relatively sterile room isn't an option. This may change if the business-class car is positioned next to the coach-café. I like the layout, but there is no place to sit and converse with passengers."

When Amtrak took delivery of Amfleet I food service cars in the 1970s, "Amcafés" had coach seats on both sides of a snack bar; "Amclubs" had a first class "club" section on one side and coach seats on the other; and "Amdinettes" had booth seating on one side and coach seats on the other. Eventually, by popular demand, coach seating was eliminated in all of these configurations. Business class two-and-one seating was retained along the lines of the Amclub design, though all of those cars now have tables on the other side of the snack bar, not coach seats. Amfleet cafés on virtually all *Northeast Regional* trains offer table seating on both sides of the snack bar, a feature extremely popular with laptop-toting customers.

So it is puzzling why tables aren't offered as a place to congregate away from coach seating on the Midwest's Venture cafés. When people board at intermediate stops and can't find seats together, café seating offers an opportunity unique to train travel for travelers to spread out, and, of course, spend some money. There are a number of table-facing seats in both coach and in business class, but these are the first to be snapped up when travelers board at departure stations.

The only table in the car is a small desk opposite from where passengers line up for the snack bar. It's labeled "crew seating," and during the trip a conductor could usually be found ensconced there.

Of note, however, is that returning to Chicago from Bloomington-Normal the same evening at about 8:30 p.m. on *Lincoln Service* train No. 306, the train was also very crowded but virtually no one visited the Horizon café-business class car. This was despite the attendant regularly announcing that he was open and serving. Perhaps it was the late hour. Or just maybe, today's Amtrak clientele are simply content to stay in their seats with their phones.



## BNSF Deals with Two Derailments (updated)

By Trains Staff | July 20, 2024 | Last updated on July 21, 2024 Incidents occur in Kansas, Minnesota



A screenshot from [a drone video by a WCCO-TV reporter](#) shows a BNSF derailment in Big Lake, Minn.



CBS News Aerial Photos Big Lake MN Derailment -July 2024

BNSF Railway is working to clean up a pair of derailments that occurred early today (Saturday, July 20). No injuries or hazardous materials situations resulted from either.

The first was reported at approximately 12:46 a.m. near Ottawa, Kan., on BNSF's Emporia Subdivision, blocking both main tracks. The only cargo spilled was a large amount of corn, [according to the Franklin County Sheriff's Office](#). A photo from the Sheriff's Office shows cleanup in progress for a significant but undetermined number of derailed cars. [An updated BNSF customer advisory](#) estimated one track of the main line would be reopened by 7:30 a.m. Sunday and the second track by 9:30 a.m. The second was reported at approximately 3:16 a.m. at Big Lake, Minn., 46 rail miles west of St. Paul, Minn., on the railroad's Staples Subdivision. [The Shelburne County Sheriff's Office reports](#) on Facebook that 15 cars were involved; images from the scene show an intermodal train was involved. [The railroad's advisory to customers](#) estimates one track will be reopened at 7:30 a.m. on Sunday, and the second at approximately 7:30 p.m.

The derailment led to a detour for today's eastbound *Empire Builder* through Willmar, Minn.; the train departed St. Paul, Minn., at 3:22 p.m., 6 hours, 32 minutes late, and was 6 hours, 46 minutes late as of its stop at Wisconsin Dells, Wis., at 7:44 p.m. The train status tool on [Amtrak.com](#) says the westbound *Builder* that departed Chicago today is currently projected to make a similar detour, leading to a delay of up to 4 hours.

— Updated July 21 at 9:10 a.m. with estimated reopening of main line at site of Ottawa derailment.

## BNSF Clears Routes After Two Derailments

By Trains Staff | July 22, 2024\_\_

Lines reopened in Kansas, Minnesota

BNSF has reopened the main lines involved in both its derailments on Saturday, July 20, the railroad reports.

The first of those incidents occurred about 12:45 a.m. near Ottawa, Kan., on the railroad's Emporia Subdivision [see ["BNSF deals with two derailments,"](#) *Trains News Wire*, July 20, 2024]. One main line there was reopened at 8:30 a.m. on Sunday, July 21, and the other at 12:30 p.m., [the railroad reports](#). The line on the Staples Subdivision near Big Lake, Minn., was the site of a derailment at approximately 3:16 a.m. Saturday. One main track was opened there at 6:45 a.m. Sunday and the other reopened at 7:30 p.m., BNSF said in [a customer advisory](#). That derailment had led to rerouting of Amtrak's *Empire Builder*, as well as cancellation of special trains by the Northstar commuter rail service for weekend Minnesota Twins games.

## Metro News - State Rail Plan Needs Your Input Wednesday, July 24, 2024, 10:54 AM, Frederick Krenske

To learn more, visit the plan webpage at: [talk.dot.state.mn.us/state-rail-plan](http://talk.dot.state.mn.us/state-rail-plan)

Thank you to everyone who has participated in the Minnesota State Rail Plan update process thus far. We still need your input! The Minnesota State Rail Plan addresses a variety of topics important to the future of rail including safety, economic development and possible expansion of passenger rail. With more than 4,000 miles of freight and passenger rail lines in the state, the MSRP provides an overall vision for future development of the rail system and identifies priority rail corridors. **Take our passenger rail survey** Our [current survey](#) focuses on passenger rail with a goal of understanding needs for improved connectivity, safety and sustainability. Your input is critical to ensuring that the Minnesota State Rail Plan reflects the needs and priorities of our communities. By taking this survey, you will have a direct hand in crafting a transportation system that serves the needs of Minnesotans and shapes the future of passenger rail in Minnesota. How to participate Visit the project webpage: [talk.dot.state.mn.us/state-rail-plan](http://talk.dot.state.mn.us/state-rail-plan) [Complete the survey](#): It will take approximately 10 minutes of your time [Subscribe to State Rail Plan email updates](#) to participate in future public meetings or events





# —AMTRAK News—



BUREAU OF  
ADVENTURE

## #18: Amtrak's Next Generation Trains Look Awesome

-provided by John Goodman, Ray Bensen Jr

[JESS PETERSON](#) AUG 17, 2024 A leaked RFP for Amtrak's long-distance fleet has some juicy details. These are the takeaways...

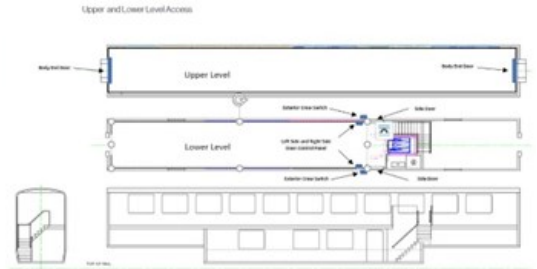
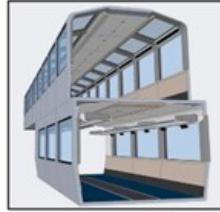
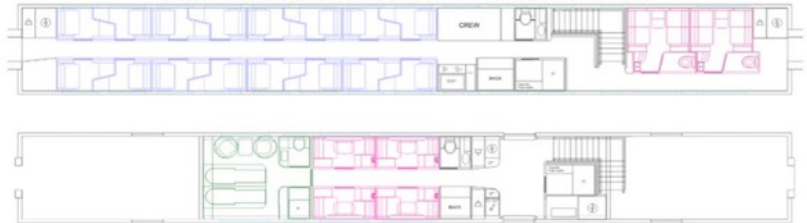


Figure 12-1: Door Positions

Upper and lower Level Access -Figure 12-: Door Positions

Figure 12-: Conceptual Car Type Arrangement - Standard Sleeper



-Figure 1-12: Conceptual Car Type Arrangement -standard Sleeper

Top: Amtrak's press release and the full RFP. Bottom: Figures from the RFP showing window arrangements and a premium sleeper compartment

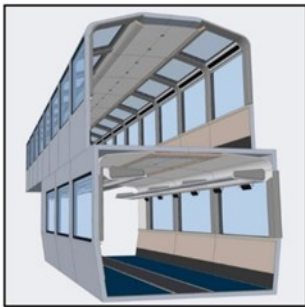


Figure 11-88: Coach Interior Structure



Figure 11-85: Premium Bedroom Ceiling Pool Light Locations



Figure 11-89: Premium Bedroom Cabin



Figure 11-93: Premium Bedroom light Locations



Figure 11-80: Club Bedroom Cabin

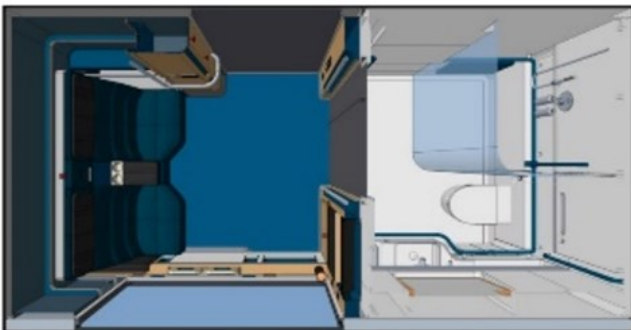


Figure 11-09: Accessible Twin Cabin

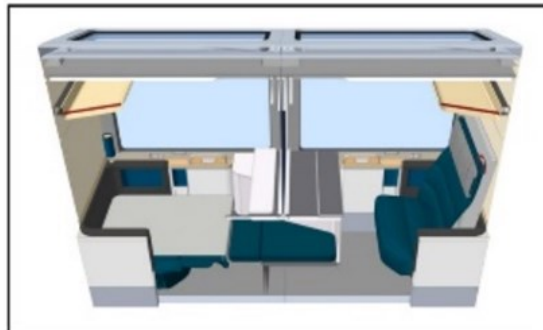


Figure 11-73: Solo Suite Cabin



Left to right, top to bottom -Figure: 11-89 Premium Bedroom Cabin -Figure: 11-93 Premium Bedroom light Location  
-Figure: 11-80 Club Bedroom Cabin -Figure: 11-09 Accessible Twin Cabin -Figure: 11-73 Solo Suite Cabin

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Today's Sightseer Lounge Cars are shared between coach and sleeper passengers. They very popular and almost always full. Image source: [wikipedia](https://www.wikipedia.org)

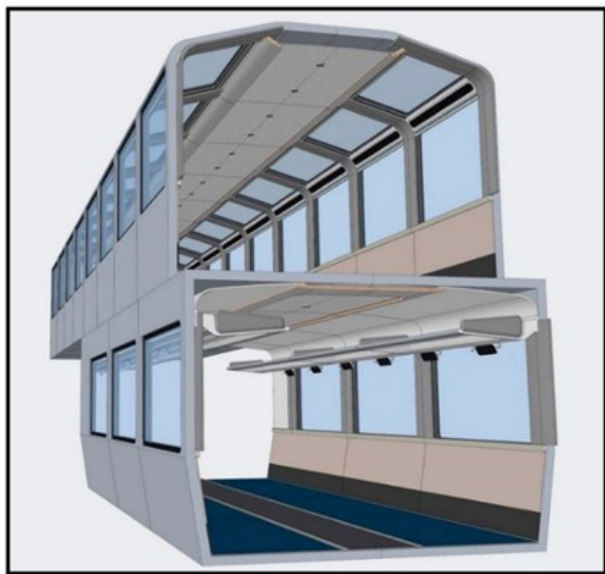


Figure 11-55: Coach Interior Structure

-Figure 11-55: Coach Interior Structure

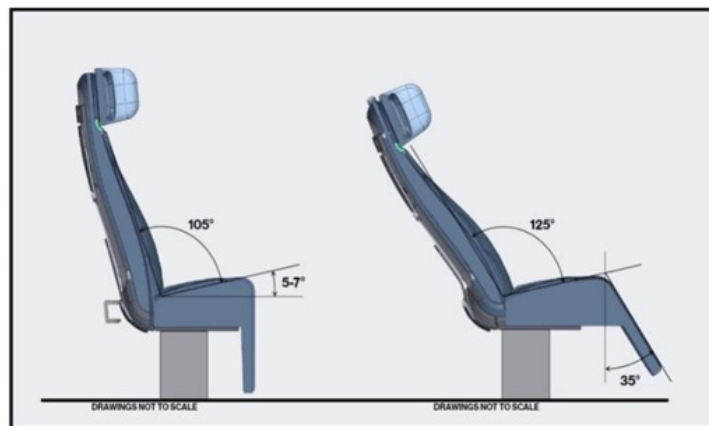


Figure 11-58: Standard Coach Seat Recline

-Figure 11-58 Standard Coach Seat Recline  
-Figure 11-59: Premium Coach Seat Dimensions

Figure 1-10: Conceptual Car Type Arrangement – First Class Lounge



Figure 10-15: First Class Bar Layout - Elevation View 1

#### First Class Lounge Bar

##### a). Vision

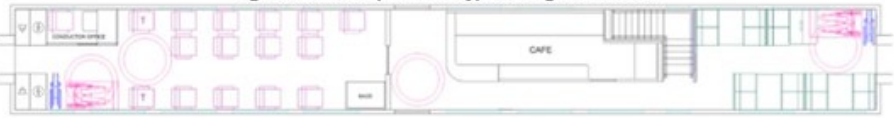
- i). The bar is the social epicenter of the train for First Class Passengers, providing a chance to meet other passengers over drinks and snacks while taking in the views. In its external look, it should speak to the historical romance of rail travel, with a grand classically inspired architecture, while also having contemporary details to ensure a more future facing aesthetic. The bar must convey the ambience and aesthetics that are synonymous of a premium first-class service.
- ii). The bar space has a dual purpose within the lounge:
  - (1) During the morning it has a self-service coffee and refreshments area
  - (2) Later in the day it becomes a traditional, staffed bar.

-Figure 1-10: Conceptual Car type Arrangement – First Class Lounge

Figure 1-8: Conceptual Car Type Arrangement - Diner



Figure 1-9: Conceptual Car Type Arrangement - Café



-Figure 1-8: Conceptual Car Type Arrangement -Diner  
-Figure 1-9: Conceptual car Type Arrangement - Cafe

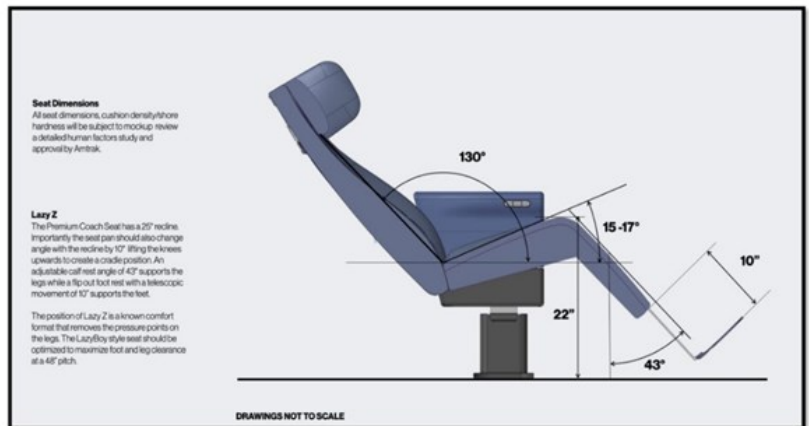


Figure 11-59: Premium Coach Seat Dimensions

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**Figure 1-3: Standard Trainset Makeup**

Total Cars	End Coach	Standard Coach	Priority Coach	Diner	Café	Lounge	Priority Sleeper	Standard Sleeper	Utility Car
10	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1

**Accessible Core**

**End Coach (not accessible, no elevator)**

Upper Level: 70 seats

Lower Level: 28 seats

**Standard Coach (accessible, but no elevator)**

Upper Level: 51 seats

Lower Level: 24 seats

**Priority Coach (accessible and has elevator)**

Upper Level: 31 seats (premium)

Lower Level: 15 seats (premium)



Link to a Youtube Video Preview: <https://youtu.be/7pZkdvgTnI>

Amtrak is replacing their long-distance trains, and the plans are exciting.

In December 2023, Amtrak released an RFP (Request for Proposal) to potential manufacturers of the new equipment.

Through [FOIA](#) requests, the RFP was posted a few months ago on [twitter](#) and [reddit](#). I read the 1,000+ pages so you don't have to 🧐. Let's get one thing out of the way: I'm a train nerd and Amtrak fan.

But... this RFP is broadly interesting for two reasons:

**Leading-edge passenger experience** - like [Austria's Nightjet](#) (video below 📺), Amtrak is taking this opportunity to update the over-night rail experience. The RFP explains what it will look like.

**A real-life transportation spec** - this is a window into how transportation projects happen. If you're interested in the design of planes, trains, or ships, read on...

*Nightjet introduced new sleeper trains in 2022. The sleeper compartments are a jump in passenger comfort in Europe. Unlike Amtrak, Nightjet trains don't have public areas since they're mostly used on ~12-hour overnight trips.*

## Amtrak is upgrading the first-class experience

With these new trains, Amtrak is improving sleeper compartments and public areas for premium passengers while offering a good-enough experience in coach.

Why?

Jarrett Walker [puts it best](#): Amtrak has always faced a tension...

between ridership goals — which require focusing on its best markets — and coverage goals — which require covering the entire country.

[...]

Amtrak's long-haul trains have two roles: they are [marketed as a scenic and relaxing way to travel](#) between cities if you're not in a hurry, but people also use them for access to towns along the way.[...] These services do as well as they do only because they combine both markets, so each kind of user depends on the other for the total package to make sense.

-Jarrett Walker

If you accept Amtrak must operate long-distance routes, they'd be wise to **lean into the "land cruise" experience** for premium passengers. There's clearly a willingness to pay for premium rail experiences - just look at the top prices on [The Canadian](#) or [Belmond](#) - and higher revenues can reduce the subsidies these trains require.

## Higher-quality and more varied sleeping compartments

Sleepers will have several cabin categories, most of them new:

**SoloSuites**, a category below today's existing "roomettes", which allow solo passengers to travel in privacy without paying for two beds. To save space, they use footwells similar to lie-flat business class airline seats.

**Roomettes**, the two-passengers economy compartments, will continue to be offered. These are Amtrak's most popular and economical sleeper accommodation today.

**Club Bedrooms** will replace today's "Bedroom" category. Like the Bedrooms, they feature an en-suite bathroom/shower. Unlike today's Bedrooms, they can accommodate up to 4 people. They feature two couches that convert to two 48"-wide beds. It will be tight for a family of four and lux for a couple.

**Premium Bedrooms** are the most spacious accommodation, taking advantage of the whole 10' width of the train. They feature separate queen bed two seats, a writing desk, windows on both sides, and a separated shower and bathroom.

**Accessible twin, double, and premium** compartments will have larger doors and bathrooms, and they'll match the luxury level of the roomette, club, and premium accommodations.

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Conceptual layout of a standard (non-accessible) sleeper. They propose 16 solosuites + 2 club bedrooms on the upper level and 1 premium bedroom + 4 roomettes on the lower.

Layouts, materials, and lighting look great 

Top-left and top-center: Premium Bedroom, the most spacious cabin. Top-right: Club-Bedroom, the lowest category with an en-suite bathroom. Bottom-left: Accessible Twin. Bottom-center: two Solo Cabins facing each other. Bottom-right: the airline business-class-style footwell for the SoloSuite Compartments.

Top of Form

Subscribe

Bottom of Form

### New public areas & service concepts

For the first time, sleeper passengers will have their own **First Class Lounge**.<sup>1</sup> During the day, the lounge will serve coffee and snacks and passengers will be able to socialize in varied seating arrangements. In the evening, a bartender will serve wine, beer, and cocktails. Here's an excerpt from the RFP:

The bar is the social epicenter of the train for First Class Passengers [...]

The bar must convey the ambiance and aesthetics that are synonymous of a premium first-class service.

Excerpts from different parts of the RFP describing the First Class Lounge

In addition to the first-class lounge, there are two other public areas:

**The dining car**, which serves seated meals similar to Amtrak's current dining cars. On current trains, multi-course meals are included for sleeper passengers and extra-cost for coach passengers, if there's space.

**A cafe car**, which serves snacks, drinks, and pre-made meals to all passengers. When trains are split or when Amtrak decides to cut costs on some routes, these will take the place of the full dining cars.

One thing to note: **while first-class (sleeper) passengers gain a private lounge, coach passengers lose one**. On today's long-distance trains, coach and sleeper passengers share the Sightseer Lounge car (with a cafe downstairs). The lounge is very popular - just look at those windows. I often have trouble finding a seat.

With the new design, **Amtrak is reallocating lounge space to sleeper passengers, an attempt (I'm guessing) to increase the value of First Class**. Coach passengers will grumble, but I doubt this will reduce demand for Amtrak's low-priced coach seats. Instead, it may incentivize more passengers to upgrade.

Beyond these three food service areas - the diner, the cafe, and the first-class lounge - Amtrak will also add in-room and at-seat dining. Meals will be loaded into airline-style carts for distribution throughout the train, and the dining car will be fitted with a lift to bring the carts down to the kitchen.

### Skylight Windows

One of the best design features of Amtrak's Superliners are the skylight windows in Sightseer Lounges. In the RFP, Amtrak asks for the option to put these skylight windows in almost every part of the train. The upper level of coaches, dining cars, lounges, and solo suites would get these skylight windows, if Amtrak exercises the option. Aside from solo suites, sleeper compartments would not get skylights since they'd be covered by upper berths. I hope Amtrak exercises this option, at least in all the public areas.

If you're wondering how you'd sleep with those skylight windows at your seat, Amtrak has specified two layers of electronically-controlled window shades - a sun shade and blackout blinds.


### Two Tiers of Coach

With these new trains, Amtrak is introducing a distinction between standard coach, with 2x2 seating and 43" of seat pitch, and premium coach, with 48" of seat pitch and 2x1 seating. Standard coach will certainly be a downgrade from today's Superliner coach cars, which have a ridiculously-generous 50" seat pitch. Premium coach could be better than today if the seats are better designed for sleeping.

### Digital Improvements

I'm impressed with this part of the RFP. Amtrak's done their best to request a modern, future-proof system. A few highlights:

Public areas will have plentiful digital signage that helps passengers navigate. Signs will detect the train's arrangement and update automatically.

Every seat row and every compartment will have a screen connected to the reservation system. The screen will automatically display if a place is reserved and to which cities (no more paper slips ).

Sleeper compartments will have RFID locks, similar to modern hotel rooms.

Capability to show live location, next stop, and information about the passing scenery.

No in-seat or in-compartment entertainment, aside from the Premium Bedrooms, which will have a larger 43" screen. I assume that's supposed to be a TV.

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### **Amtrak is sticking with 2-level cars**

Left-top: Original Superliners under construction. Left-bottom: RFP diagram of coach interior structure. Right: Diagram RFP showing door arrangement.

Among train nerds, there was speculation that Amtrak would replace Superliners (2-level trains) with single-level cars. Taller trains can't operate in parts of the east coast due to clearance issues, so there is an argument for standardizing around equipment that can travel throughout North America. Single-level trains also have an advantage around accessibility - there's no need for on-train elevators, which add complexity and take up space.

Amtrak seems to have decided that they'll keep the divided (single-level) Eastern Fleet and (bi-level) Western Fleet. There are four reasons to continue with bi-level trains:

**Higher capacity:** bi-level cars have ~50% more floor space than single-level cars.

**Better views:** windows on the upper-level sit a few feet higher. This is beneficial on scenic long-distance routes in the American West.

**Low-floor boarding:** most western train stations have low platforms or no platforms at all. Two-level cars have lower doors.

**Interoperability with Superliners:** the RFP doesn't specify this, but I'd guess that it will be possible to couple Superliners to the ends of these new trains (though not in the middle, due to the semi-permanent coupling. More on that below...).

### **Accessibility is a major driver of this design**

The current Superliners were designed in the late 1970s, and they reflect accessibility requirements of that era. Wheelchair users are confined to the lower level of their coach or sleeper car. They can't move through the train, so food must be delivered to their seat or compartment.

The new trains allows wheelchair users to access the upper level on a lift. Once they're on the upper deck, they can access all public areas via 32-inch aisles and 40-inch open gangways between cars.

Figure showing a standard 10-car trainset. Green annotation is mine. "Standard" coaches and sleepers will be outside the accessible core.

Trains will have an accessible core made up of 5 cars: a priority coach (with lift), cafe, dining car, first-class lounge, and priority sleeper (with lift). Wheelchair users will board the train at the priority sleeper or priority coach, take the lift upstairs, and then navigate the core of the train on the upper level. Non-accessible coaches and sleepers can be added to each end of the train.

These wide walkways and open gangways will make the core more spacious, appealing, and easier to navigate for all passengers (hello universal design).

Universal accessibility does require lower density in the core. Check out this comparison of three different coach types. While the "end coaches," which are outside the accessible core, seat 98 passengers, accessible cars seat between 46 and 75, depending on the arrangement. The additional space is needed for wider walkways, larger bathrooms, wheelchair turning circles, and re-arranged electrical & storage space.

A comparison of coach capacity on three different coach types. Top: an End Coach, which is not accessible, can seat 98 passengers. Middle: the Standard Coach seats 75 passengers. Bottom: the Priority Coach seats 46 passengers, although this is driven by the 1x2 seating required to make a 32" wide accessible aisle.

### **A few technical details caught my attention**

**Range** - Amtrak specifies 72 hours of continuous use. Most critical systems can do more. Water is extremely heavy, but these trains will carry enough for 6 days of continuous use, aside from the food-service cars, which will be topped up en route. Toilets can go 5 days between service cycles.

**Gray water** - used water from showers, sinks, and food service will be retained and re-used to flush toilets. This part of the spec is a bit vague, so I assume that overflow will still be dumped on the tracks. I'm curious how much gray water will be retained. Black water (toilet waste) is always stored and removed at stations.

**Open Gangways** - these trains will be semi-permanently coupled, allowing them to have open gangways! That will make passing between cars much more pleasant.

**Semi-permanent coupling** - most Amtrak trains have independent train cars, which are easily separated. The downside: passing between cars is clunky (and not accessible). Permanent coupling allows much more comfortable and accessible connections. Downside: if something breaks on a single car, the whole train is taken out of service. Amtrak is asking for a compromise - the RFP requires trains to be reconfigurable within 60 minutes without special equipment.

**They thought of everything** - a lactation room, bike racks, and a gun locker (US) are specified.

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### The RFP is extremely prescriptive

This is a great example of overly-detailed American transit RFPs, which Alon Levy ([Transit Costs Project](#)) has written about. European operators write looser 50-70 page RFPs, asking manufacturers to fill in the details to meet high-level requirements. American operators basically design the trains for themselves, forcing manufacturers to build more expensive, custom trains to meet their requirements.

The most glaring problem is that those designs are not at all what the rest of the world does. A few of the changes are modular, including the platform height and the loading gauge. The others are not; the consultants who write the design specs do so without trying to fit themselves to common products made by the multinational vendors.

Then, those specs are extremely detailed; there's little room for a vendor to try to pawn off a standard Coradia or FLIRT and make that fit with little modification. The RFPs run into the deep hundreds of pages; SEPTA had one with more than 500 pages, and Amtrak's most recent one ran to, I believe, 1,000. They define even what a train is, as opposed to the looser RFPs common in Europe – Spanish RFPs are 50-70 pages and have single-digit summaries, detailing just how many cars are needed, what the loading gauge is, what electrification is required, and what the expected performance level is.

-Alon Levy

### Final thoughts

As an Amtrak rider, I'm very excited about what this RFP signals for the future of long-distance trains in the US. I'm looking forward to my first ride in a Club Bedroom, eating in the diner with skylight windows, and sipping on a real cocktail in the first-class lounge.

Last month, the Canadian government announced they had allocated funds for VIA Rail to replace their long-distance fleet, which is even older than Amtrak's. I wonder if these Amtrak designs, or some variant, will operate in Canada as well. Time will tell ☹️

## Amtrak On-time Performance Woes Mirror Host Railroad Freight Service, Shippers Say

By Bill Stephens | August 7, 2024

If a main line corridor isn't handling freight trains well, Amtrak service suffers, too



The southbound Amtrak Crescent leaves Meridian, Miss., for New Orleans, on host railroad Norfolk Southern. Bob Johnston



The eastbound Southwest Chief (center) overtakes a BNSF freight and meets the westbound Chief at Hinsdale, Ill., in March 2018. David Lassen



L: Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner addresses the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's Rail Subcommittee hearing on June 12, 2024. YouTube

Rail shipper groups say the poor on-time performance of all 15 Amtrak long-distance trains — which prompted the Justice Department to file a lawsuit last week against Norfolk Southern for its handling of the *Crescent* — is merely a reflection of Class I railroad freight operations.

“This is a symptom of freight rail network capacity and fluidity problems. While some may view it as a zero-sum game, the root cause is that the railroads, not just NS, have elected to avoid investing in adequate staffing and adequate track capacity,” says Ann Warner, who represents several shipper groups including the Freight Rail Customer Alliance and National Industrial Transportation League.

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Class I railroad freight service, shippers argue, suffers from Wall Street's insistence on low operating ratios and keeping capital expenses to a minimum in order to fund share buyback programs.

"The result is that they run trains that are too long for their existing sidings, causing congestion, degraded velocity, poor service, and a lack of resiliency," Warner says. "These are the same problems that plague shippers generally — Amtrak is just the canary in the coal mine."

Wick Moorman, who served as Amtrak's chief executive for a year after retiring as CEO of Norfolk Southern in 2015, says the canary analogy is correct. While at the helm of NS, Moorman would take a close look at Amtrak performance on each corridor. "If Amtrak wasn't running well, you needed to take a look at what else was going on," he says.

The Justice Department suit, which contends NS has not given the *Crescent* the right of preference over freight trains, is only the second filed since Amtrak was created in 1971. A similar case, which Amtrak brought against Union Pacific in December 2022 over freight train interference with the *Sunset Limited*, is making its way through the Surface Transportation Board. It's the first on-time performance dispute brought to the STB since the agency gained the authority to investigate violations of the federal Amtrak service standards that went into effect in 2020.

Moorman says the preference statute is open to interpretation. The frustration at Amtrak, he says, is what does preference mean? "The first thing you have to do is define preference and link it to some acceptable level of on-time performance," Moorman says. The second step is creating an enforcement mechanism that will ensure that level of on-time arrivals, he says.

Some rail shippers are nervous that a strict interpretation of the right of preference will degrade freight service. Rick Paterson, a rail-roader turned financial analyst at Loop Capital Markets, closely follows the performance metrics that the freight railroads are required to report to the STB each week. He says shippers' concerns are justified in busy freight corridors shared with Amtrak trains.

"There's certainly a recipe for chaos here if every Amtrak train suddenly becomes a true hotshot and everything ahead has to get out of the way," Paterson says. "We've seen situations in the past when the railroads tried to run fast small parcel intermodal hotshots for UPS, but the operational disruption was untenable."

Several veteran railroad operating officials also pointed to the UPS bullet train experiments from two decades ago as an example of what can happen to overall service levels when priority trains see nothing but green signals and are able to run at track speed over their entire routes.

BNSF Railway parted the waters for the once-weekly UPS hotshot that left Los Angeles on a Monday and was due in New Jersey by Friday. BNSF determined that the delays the bullet train inflicted on the rest of its traffic were unacceptable. Norfolk Southern reached the same conclusion after its participation in the test runs east of Chicago. Union Pacific picked up the baton, however, and ran the service for a few months in conjunction with CSX. But UP threw in the towel, too, due to the collateral damage the hotshot caused to the rest of UP's traffic, including its high-priority Z trains.

"Passenger trains are just as disruptive to the operation and sap main track capacity," a former chief operating officer says. "Yes, they are shorter and pass quicker; however, the dispatching teams' planning and setting up of the railroad still creates a ripple effect of delays had they not been there."

A veteran network operations official says the Precision Scheduled Railroading strategy of running fewer but longer trains creates a capacity dividend that should benefit Amtrak. "Run an operating plan that minimizes the number of active trains on the network, which enables the hotshots to get out and run," he says. "It is much easier to run a train with seven 10,000-foot trains versus 10, 7,000-foot trains, and the reduction in active trains has dramatic effects on train velocity and schedule adherence."

Amtrak did not respond to a *Trains News Wire* request to interview CEO Stephen Gardner about preference matters. But Gardner, in November 2020 testimony to Congress, said there's no evidence that providing passenger trains with preference limits the efficiency of the freight network, hurts service, or brings freight to a standstill.

Freight railroads, Gardner noted, can seek relief from the STB if they believe that Amtrak trains harm freight operations. "The fact that not one railroad has sought such relief suggests that either railroads do not believe providing preference affects the quality of service provided to shippers or the railroads are not providing Amtrak with preference in the first place," Gardner told Congress.

The Association of American Railroads declined to comment on the Justice Department lawsuit and referred questions to individual host railroads, which also declined to comment.

But in testimony last year before a House Transportation and Infrastructure subcommittee hearing on Amtrak service, AAR CEO Ian Jefferies noted that freight railroads welcomed the opportunity to exit money-losing passenger service with the creation of the national passenger railroad in 1971. "Freight railroads were also required to provide 'preference' to Amtrak service on their lines, a right that exists to this day but in a fundamentally different freight and passenger rail landscape," Jefferies said, noting that Amtrak is not required to support capacity improvements.

When Amtrak was granted the right of preference in 1973, freight railroads had excess capacity. But the Staggers Act of 1980, which partially deregulated the industry, helped spark a freight rail renaissance while also permitting the abandonment of redundant main lines.

The freight railroads also lifted sections of double-track or multiple-track main lines. As a result, the Class I railroads today concentrate far more tonnage on far less mainline trackage, leaving Amtrak competing for limited capacity. "The Class I railroads are a bit like the man who murders his parents and then asks for mercy as an orphan," former STB Chairman Martin J. Oberman noted several times while he was chairman.

Oberman, who retired in May, tells *Trains* that the board is handling the *Sunset Limited* case while fully recognizing the complexity and nuances of the way a national freight and passenger network should work.

Some observers say it's unclear whether and to what extent the Justice Department and federal courts will balance Amtrak's right of preference with the need to efficiently move freight.

The freight network must remain fluid, Oberman says, noting that if it doesn't, then Amtrak service and the economy would both suffer.

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There's no question that enforcement is required, Oberman says, because there are many times when host railroads intentionally fail to give Amtrak preference. The question, he says, is what the remedy should be so that trains meet on-time performance standards. Is additional capacity needed? If so, should taxpayers be on the hook or should the host railroad chip in as well? And if so, what should the public-private funding split be?

Gardner told Congress that a lack of preference enforcement has meant that public investments in rail capacity projects have not produced the desired improvements in on-time performance.

Norfolk Southern has said that it's "committed to complying with the law, working together, and honoring our commitments. Over the past several months with Amtrak, we have focused on the on-time performance of the *Crescent* passenger train. We hope to resolve these concerns and continue to make progress together."

## FRA Makes Available \$153 Million to Aid New or Improved Passenger Service

By Trains Staff | July 15, 2024 \_Restoration and Enhancement Program funding sees significant increase



*Amtrak's newest train, the Borealis, has P32-8BWH No. 500 on the point as it heads west through Brookfield, Wis., on July 11, 2024. The FRA has announced more than \$150 million is available for new or improved passenger service. David Lassen*

WASHINGTON — The Federal Railroad Administration on Friday announced the availability of more than \$153 million in grant funding to initiate, restore, or improve intercity passenger service.

The funds under the FRA's Restoration and Enhancement Grant program are to assist with operating costs on projects that establish new routes, restore service on routes that previously had passenger service, or add to service on existing routes. For up to the first six years of a new, restored, or improved service, they cover expenses such as crew costs; station costs such as ticket sales, customer information, and train dispatching; routine maintenance costs; marketing; and administrative costs. The program "plays a vital role in bringing world-class rail passenger service to all American by improving rider satisfaction and making possible new routes and services," FRA Administrator Amit Bose said in [a press release](#) announcing the program's Notice of Funding Opportunity. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said, "Safer, more frequent, and more accessible passenger rail services — made possible with funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law — will expand travel and commuting options, creating newly efficient and sustainable opportunities to get around the country." This is the first round of funding made available for the program since funding was greatly increased by the infrastructure law. \$4.4 million in funds were awarded in fiscal 2017, and \$22.4 million in fiscal years 2018-2020. The Notice of Funding Opportunity [is available here](#); more details on the program [can be found here](#).

## Significant Delays, Cancellations Disrupt Amtrak's Network

By Bob Johnston | July 12, 2024 \_Many problems occur at termi-



*On its way to a 4-hour, 40-minute late arrival in Chicago, the eastbound Empire Builder crosses Brookfield Road in Brookfield, Wis., on July 11, 2024. David Lassen*



*After departing Chicago more than 3 hours late, the westbound Borealis — scheduled to depart Milwaukee at 12:39 p.m. — is just 20 minutes west of that station stop in Brookfield,*

CHICAGO — Amtrak's stretched-thin and aging fleet is encountering significant challenges to reliability across the entire system this week as national network trains remain sold out for many segments.

*Sunset cancelled*

With Tropical Storm Beryl causing widespread flooding in the Houston area early in the week, Amtrak truncated the eastbound *Sunset Limited* at San Antonio, Tex., on Tuesday, July 9. Widespread power outages continued to plague the Houston area through the week.

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Eastbound and westbound *Sunset* departures from both New Orleans and Los Angeles were cancelled on Wednesday, July 10, leaving no service across west Texas and southern New Mexico and Arizona since last weekend. The triweekly train is set to resume today (Friday, July 12) from California and Saturday from New Orleans.

En-route delays

Though Amtrak does not always explain the exact reason trains are delayed, host railroad congestion, track problems, and mechanical issues are likely culprits. Particularly noticeable this week are the number of trains affected by delays that are so extensive that trains miss connections at endpoints.

Trains delayed en route include:

### ***California Zephyr:***

— July 6 departure from Emeryville, Calif.: 6 hours, 32 minutes late into Chicago. Lost 3 hours between Reno, Nev., and Salt Lake City, another 3 hours waiting for a rock slide to be cleared west of Glenwood Springs, Colo.

— July 9 departure from Emeryville: Lost 7 hours between Elko, Nev., and Salt Lake City on UP. Scheduled to arrive at 2:39 pm. On Thursday, July 11, it actually arrived at 2:31 a.m. today (July 12), 11 hours, 52 minutes late.

- July 11 departure from Emeryville: Lost 4 hours between Reno and Winnemucca, Nev. on UP. Arrived in Omaha, Neb., this morning at 10:39 a.m., 4 hours, 45 minutes late.

### ***Empire Builder:***

— July 6 departure from Seattle: Lost 2 hours between Everett and Ephrata, Wash., and another 2 hours Spokane to Whitefish, Mont., all on BNSF due to “track maintenance and mechanical issues.” More than 4 hours late into Chicago.

— July 8 departure from Seattle: Lost 4 hours from Havre to Wolf Point, Mont. Arrived Chicago more than 6 hours late at 10:54 p.m.

— July 9 departure from Seattle: Lost 3 hours from Havre to Wolf Point. Arrived in Chicago at 9:25 p.m., 4 hours, 40 minutes late.

— July 9 departure from Chicago: Lost 1 hour waiting for a rested crew at Minot, N.D. and another 3 hours Wolf Point to Havre. Arrived in Seattle 4 hours, 9 minutes late, which meant departure of eastbound No. 8 of July 11 was delayed.

— July 10 departure from Seattle: Late departure because westbound train was late. Lost about 3 hours from Havre to Wolf Point. At this writing, 5 hours, 29 minutes late as of its most recent stop in Staples, Minn.

The eastbound *Builder*, which is supposed to leave St. Paul three hours ahead of the *Borealis*, has departed several hours after the new state-supported train four of the last five days.

### ***Southwest Chief:***

July 7 departure from Los Angeles: Lost 4 hours between Barstow and Needles, Calif.; another 2 hours into Albuquerque; was around 8 hours late from LaJunta, Colo., to Chicago, where it arrived at 10:45 p.m. on July 9 instead of 2:50 p.m. The delay was attributed by Amtrak’s “train status” to “mechanical issues.”

July 9 departure from Chicago: Lost 4 hours between Garden City, Kan., and Lamar, Colo. Arrived Los Angeles at 12:53 p.m. Thursday, nearly 5 hours late.

### ***Coast Starlight***

July 7 departure from Seattle: Lost 3 hours between Eugene and Chemult, Ore., and another 2 hours south of Salinas, Calif., on UP. Arrived into Los Angeles at 12:50 a.m., almost 4 hours late.

Other delays

The following trains were either delayed more than an hour departing or hours late at the first stop. *Trains News Wire* has not been able to confirm reasons for all of the delays and this is not an all-inclusive list:

#### **July 7:**

*Capitol Limited:* Chicago, 3 hours, 5 minutes late (9:45 p.m.)

*City of New Orleans:* Chicago, 1:44 late (9:49 p.m.)

#### **July 8:**

*Northeast Regional* No. 134: Roanoke, 2:43 late (9:03 a.m.)

*Borealis:* Chicago, 3:04 late (2:09 p.m.)

*Hiawatha* No. 329: Chicago, cancelled (scheduled 6:10 a.m.)

#### **July 9:**

*Cardinal:* Chicago, 1:39 late (7:34 p.m.)

#### **July 10:**

*Capitol Limited:* South Bend, Ind., 5:10 late (2:19 a.m.)

Also on July 10, Amtrak says both the westbound *California Zephyr* and *Southwest Chief* were delayed 6 hours after being combined to operate over a detour route following a temporary track closure (because of a derailment) on the regular route west of Plano, Ill.

The *Zephyr* was running 7 hours late at Salt Lake City and the *Chief* was 8 hours late at Kingman, Ariz., on July 12

There have also been a variety of Northeast Corridor cancellations over the past few weeks in addition to disruptions caused by power outages. On Wednesday, July 10, one *Acela* and two *Northeast Regional* early-morning round trips were annulled “due to crew shortages and high shop counts,” according to an advisory obtained by News Wire.

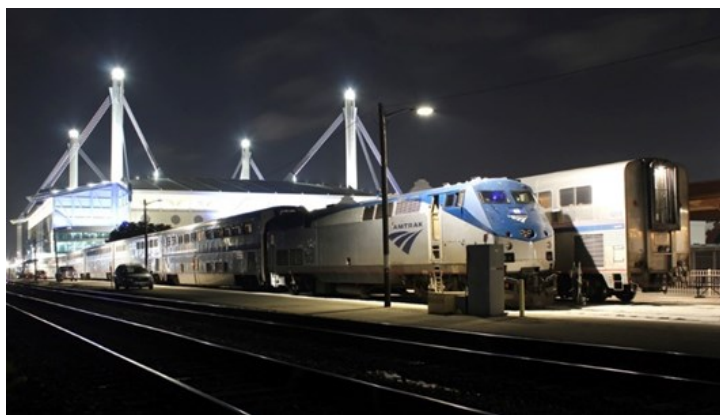
Amtrak provides indispensable mobility to rural markets, many of which are served overnight. Extensive delays are especially impactful to travelers who arrange their schedules to board once-per-day (or less) trains in the wee hours.



# Amtrak Adds to Texas Eagle Capacity with Dedicated Sunset Through cars: Special Report

By Bob Johnston | July 29, 2024

Other long-distance consists adjusted to capture demand with limited equipment



*The inbound Texas Eagle and westbound Sunset Limited prepare to exchange a coach and sleeping car at San Antonio on June 9, 2021. Beginning in September, the Eagle will gain additional cars on the days it connects with the Sunset. Bob Johnston*



*A "cut-off" Superliner sleeper and coach sit idle at San Antonio on the July 26, 2003, as the westbound Texas Eagle prepares to drop its through cars to Los Angeles for the Sunset Limited. The coach and sleeper in the foreground will head east on the Eagle the next time*

WASHINGTON — Beginning Sept. 3, the daily *Texas Eagle* will gain a Superliner sleeping car and coach three days a week in each direction, adding seats, rooms, and revenue on a train that has suffered near-daily sellouts since capacity and amenity downgrades as part of October 2020 cuts driven by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The additional cars will be on Chicago departures on days when the *Eagle* connects with the triweekly *Sunset Limited* in San Antonio. The eastbound train will begin benefitting from the additional capacity with the Sept. 8 departure from Texas.

Harris Cohen, Amtrak's service and consist planning director, last week shared equipment assignments and strategy at length with News Wire. He says, "We've been analyzing operations to increase ridership and revenue opportunities throughout the long-distance network." Cohen found existing practice at San Antonio is "largely inefficient from an equipment standpoint." The new plan, he adds, "will improve equipment utilization by eliminating layover cars and reduce San Antonio switching."

Cohen conferred with the transportation and mechanical departments, "and we determined this would be an improvement. It did require one additional coach we were able to provide to the coach and sleeper in the foreground will head east on the *Eagle* the next time there are no through cars from the eastbound *Sunset*." Bob Johnston

For more than two decades, an *Eagle* Superliner coach and sleeper from Chicago would either be conveyed to the *Sunset* or sit idle for as many as five days if the cars happened to arrive on an evening when the *Sunset* didn't operate.

Amtrak lived with the inefficiency, in part, because a multi-hours-late train from Los Angeles during Union Pacific's early 2000s meltdown period would jeopardize an on-time eastbound *Texas Eagle* San Antonio departure. Buses would often be chartered so connecting passengers could "catch" the train at Fort Worth, Texas. But when the *Eagle* lost a Sightseer Lounge, third coach, and transition sleeper to accommodate onboard crew, the reduced capacity translated to regular sellouts and high prices.

Now, starting in September on Tuesday, Friday, and Sunday out of both Chicago and San Antonio, the *Eagle* will operate with two sleeping cars and three coaches; an additional Chicago-St. Louis coach will continue to be added daily to augment capacity on the *Lincoln Service* corridor. The new arrangement simplifies San Antonio switching because every time the westbound *Eagle* arrives in the evening, it will leave the following morning with the same core consist.

Asked when the *Eagle* might regain a Sightseer Lounge, Cohen would only say that it "won't be in the winter plan." Amtrak spokesman Marc Magliari interjects, "We have lots of intentions all over the system because we are still restoring cars."

System additions and subtractions

Other trains around the national network will undergo consist changes that reflect Amtrak's current equipment availability limitations but attempt to address where capacity is needed most. All have experienced sleeping-car and coach sellouts most of the year to date. From west to east:

***Sunset Limited* (Los Angeles-New Orleans, Superliners):** A coach-baggage car (seating only on the upper level) will be added in September. The train currently operates with one coach, one sleeper (plus the *Texas Eagle* revenue cars west of San Antonio), a Sightseer Lounge, diner, and baggage car. Cohen says, "Looking ahead, we do intend to add the transition sleeper back in a future season."

***Coast Starlight* (Los Angeles-Seattle, Superliners):** Picks up a second full coach in September. It now runs with two standard sleepers, a transition sleeper, one full coach and one coach-baggage, plus a lounge and diner.

***Southwest Chief* (Los Angeles-Chicago, Superliners) and *Empire Builder* (Seattle/Portland, Ore.-Chicago, Superliners):**

The *Chief* gains a full coach on Aug. 1 but loses a second sleeper in early September. The L.A.-Chicago train has struggled all year with one full coach and a coach-baggage. Unfortunately, the coach is coming off the Seattle section of the *Empire Builder* during the height of the summer tourism season.

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Cohen explains, “We’re seeing growth all around between the [Chicago-St. Paul] *Borealis* and the *Empire Builder*, but we think a third coach on the *Chief* will be more valuable than a fourth coach on the *Builder*.” The Portland section retains its full coach and coach-baggage, plus Sightseer Lounge and sleeping car. That still isn’t sufficient capacity on a route with popular intermediate destinations, even in the fall and winter months.

A significant problem also is that the *Builder*’s Seattle section does a brisk coach business west of Spokane, so sellouts on that segment will hurt long-distance patronage. However, the same situation has been occurring often in Illinois on the *Chief*.

The five regularly assigned sleeping cars the *Chief* is losing (one for each of its five trainsets) will provide two *Auto Train* car lines on its two trainsets as its peak season ramps up.

**California Zephyr (Emeryville, Calif.-Chicago, Superliners):** The train is assigned a transition sleeper and two standard sleeping cars, but only one coach and one coach-baggage in addition to a diner and lounge. “We recognize that the *Zephyr* needs another coach but we don’t have the ability to do that right now,” says Cohen. Six coaches would be needed.



## --- BNSF News ---

### BNSF Police Believe Teen Intentionally Caused Nebraska Derailment

By Trains Staff | July 22, 2024

#### Railroad seeks prosecution for felony criminal mischief

BENNET, Neb. — BNSF Railway Police believe a 17-year-old Nebraska boy intentionally caused a derailment earlier this year, recording it and posting it on line.

[The Lincoln Journal Star reports](#) the BNSF police have referred the boy to the Lancaster County Attorney’s Office for prosecution of felony criminal mischief as a result of the April 22 derailment involving a loaded coal train in Bennett. The railroad says the derailment caused an estimated \$350,000 in damage.

[KLKN-TV reports](#) that two locomotives and five cars derailed. An investigation found a switch at the scene had been tampered with, and found security-camera footage of a male walking toward the switch, then driving off, and the same individual and vehicle setting up recording equipment prior to the derailment. An investigator reportedly spoke to the suspect at the derailment scene, who described himself as a “railroad enthusiast” and showed the investigator cellphone video of the derailment.

BNSF has requested a search warrant for the teen’s recording equipment and cell phone, saying the devices “may contain evidence” linking him to the crime.

No one was injured in the April 22 derailment. Bennet is about 23 miles southeast of Lincoln on BNSF’s Nebraska City Subdivision.

### Nebraska Teen Accused of Causing Train Derailment for YouTube Video

July 26, 2024 Updated Fri., July 26, 2024 at 10:41 p.m. By Jessica Schladebeck New York Daily News

A Nebraska teenager has been accused of [forcing a train to derail](#) so he could record the incident and share it on YouTube, according to court records.

The 17-year-old, who was not named, was charged with two felony counts of criminal mischief in Lancaster County Juvenile Court, but prosecutors have already filed a motion to have the case transferred to adult court, NBC News reported.

According to an investigation carried out by BNSF Railway, the teen [tampered with a railroad switch](#), causing two locomotives and five loaded BNSF cars to veer off the tracks near Bennet on April 21.

While the trains did not flip over, one of them crashed into an empty coal car, resulting in more than \$350,000 in damage, per court documents.

Just before the crash, the conductor said he attempted to make an emergency stop but ran out of time before he could do so.

He told investigators a misaligned switch, at a crossing near Monroe and Juniper streets, caused the crash. He noted that a padlock for the switch had also been missing, indicating it had been tampered with.

The teen, described in court documents as a train enthusiast, was the one who alerted authorities [to the incident](#) and was still on the scene when they arrived.

He approached the investigator and asked what caused the crash. When the investigator said he didn’t know, the suspect allegedly said, “obviously a switch was flipped the wrong way,” according to a warrant obtained by KOLN.

The teen also showed the investigator the video he took, but denied trespassing in the area and tampering with the switch. He was allegedly spotted setting up his camera and tripod near the crossing just four minutes before the train derailed, investigators said.

“In the days following the derailment, a video of the derailment was posted to YouTube account ZUnit06, which is believed be associated with (the teen),” an investigator wrote in the document. “This account features numerous videos of trains filmed in Bennet, NE and other locations in Lancaster County, NE.”

BNSF Railway operates trains on the rail to supply coal to a power plant in Nebraska City.



## Volume Growth and Expense Reductions Boost BNSF Operating Profits

By Bill Stephens | August 4, 2024

The improved quarterly results came despite 29% drop in coal traffic



*A BNSF Railway international stack train leaves Seligman, Ariz., in its wake on Aug. 10, 2022. Bill Stephens*

FORT WORTH, Texas — BNSF Railway boosted operating profits in the second quarter thanks to a combination of cost control and traffic volume gains.

The railway on Saturday, Aug. 3, said its operating income increased 1%, to \$1.8 billion, as revenue declined 2%, to \$5.7 billion. The operating ratio, at 68.2%, was flat compared to a year ago, as operating expenses declined by 3%.

But the quarterly earnings were negatively affected by cost accruals related to a [\\$394 million federal court judgment against the railroad](#). The judgment was issued in June related to the operation of oil trains through land owned by the Swinomish Tribe of Washington State. BNSF has appealed the decision.

“Excluding the impact of litigation costs, our earnings and operating ratio showed solid improvement,” BNSF said.

Overall volume for the quarter increased 4%, with gains in consumer products and agricultural shipments more than offsetting declines in industrial products and coal.

Volume for consumer products, which includes intermodal and automotive business, was up 15%, primarily due to higher intermodal shipments from West Coast imports and volume from a new intermodal customer.

Agricultural products traffic grew 11% due to higher grain exports and shipments of renewable fuels and fertilizer.

Industrial products volume fell 1% due to lower aggregates, taconite, minerals, and waste shipments. Petroleum products and plastics shipments were up, however.

Coal volume slumped 29% for the quarter as utilities turned to lower cost natural gas for electricity generation.

## BNSF Completes Belen, N.M., Area Capacity and Fueling Project

By Bill Stephens | August 7, 2024

A pair of new 20,000-foot processing tracks will speed fueling, inspections, and crew changes at the key Southern Transcon terminal



*A BNSF Railway intermodal hotshot departs the fuel pad at Belen, N.M. BNSF*

FORT WORTH, Texas — BNSF Railway has completed its multiyear project to add track and fueling capacity on the approach to its yard in Belen, N.M., where trains stop to change crews, undergo inspection, and have their locomotives’ fuel tanks topped off.

“Belen, New Mexico, is really the heartbeat of our Southern Transcon, accounting for about a quarter of BNSF’s entire fuel usage and 25% of our volume,” Jon Gabriel, vice president of service design, said in a statement.

The new facility, located timetable east of Belen in Becker, N.M., includes two new 20,000-foot processing tracks for fueling, inspections, and crew changes, the railway said today. The additions, located 10 miles from Belen, will enable trains to move through the terminal more quickly, ultimately improving capacity by 30%, BNSF says.

Belen handles about 80 trains per day and its fueling facilities pump an average of 750,000 gallons per day – and more than a million gallons on busy days, BNSF says.

## BNSF Makes Plans to Remove Bridge That Collapsed in June Flooding (updated)

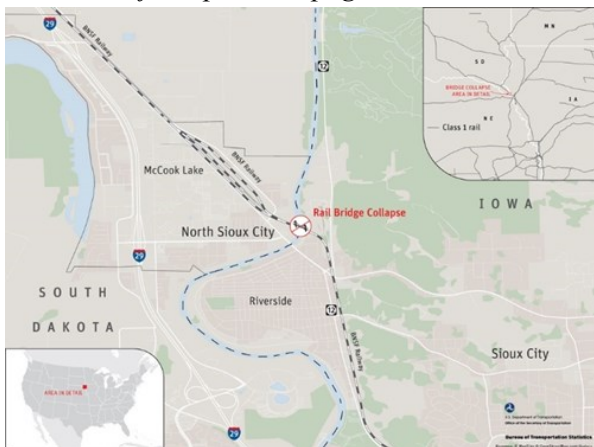
By Trains Staff | August 8, 2024 | Last updated on August 9, 2024

NORTH SIOUX CITY, S.D. — BNSF Railway is planning to use controlled blasting for the demolition of the bridge over the Big Sioux River that collapsed in flooding in June, [KTLV-TV reports](#).

The railroad has obtained the necessary local permits to conduct the blasting, but still needs a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that will allow changes to the river levee before it can proceed with the demolition process.

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The location of the collapsed BNSF bridge. U.S. Department of Transportation Bureau of Transportation Statistics

The bridge, also used by the D&I Railroad through trackage rights, collapsed the night of June 23 when the Big Sioux River crested more than 6 feet above its previous flood-stage record [see [“BNSF bridge on South Dakota-Iowa state line collapses,”](#) *Trains News Wire*, June 2024, 2024].

— Updated Aug. 9 at 7:30 a.m. with new date for first controlled blast, according to [a KTIV-TV report](#).

## BNSF to Federal Regulators: We’re Ready for the Grain Harvest

By Bill Stephens | August 13, 2024

CEO Katie Farmer disagreed with STB Chairman Robert E. Primus over how well the railroad handled last year’s fall harvest



An eastbound BNSF grain train rolls across the spectacular bridge over Two Medicine River at East Glacier, Mont. Tom Danneman

WASHINGTON — BNSF Railway has told federal regulators that it’s prepared for the upcoming fall grain harvest, but defended its performance last year amid weather-related disruptions to the broader supply chain. Surface Transportation Board Chairman Robert E. Primus requested the update from BNSF, which he said had struggled to handle the fall harvest in recent years. “I, along with many of your agricultural stakeholders, continue to have grave concerns about BNSF’s ability to adequately serve the anticipated demand, particularly that moving through the Pacific Northwest (PNW) corridor.” [Primus wrote in a July 23 letter to BNSF CEO Katie Farmer](#).

BNSF has adequate crews, locomotives, and capacity to handle the seasonal surge in grain traffic, [Farmer wrote in an Aug. 8 letter posted to the STB website on Aug. 9](#). But Farmer told Primus, “I respectfully disagree with your characterization that BNSF struggled to live up to our responsibilities during last year’s harvest.”

BNSF pre-positioned grain shuttle trains, as usual, but heavy rains delayed the harvest and prompted the railroad to hold empty trains at origin. This delay created an overlap in grain train loading schedules, so trains that had been held and trains with current reservations had to compete for crews.

In December, heavy rains hit the Pacific Northwest, which forced some export terminals to stop loading vessels. This prompted BNSF to stage loaded trains across the Northern Transcon.

“While BNSF has invested billions of dollars into our network to build resiliency in the face of weather-related challenges, externalities outside of our control and our customers’ control can and do affect the ability to load and operate trains,” Farmer wrote. “The cascading effects of these disruptions are an example of the unavoidable variability in any freight transportation service but should not be equated to service failure.”

BNSF grain exports via the Pacific Northwest increased 18% vs. prior season. BNSF grain-shuttle cycle time averaged 2.6 turns per month in September, October, and November last year, with a low of 2.2 in October and a high of 2.9 in September. For the first half of 2024, agricultural products volumes on BNSF are up 11%. The demand outlook is uncertain this fall considering unusually low corn and soybean export sales for this time of year, BNSF said. Nonetheless, BNSF is preparing to handle similar grain volumes to last year as part of its fourth-quarter demand forecast.

Primus also had requested information regarding service to and from Mexico, which is a major importer of U.S. grain. Ferromex has been experiencing bouts of congestion since late last year. “We can ill afford to again have BNSF lose access to more than 120 locomotives and have grain shipments embargoed and delayed during this year’s fall harvest,” Primus wrote.

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**A coalition of agricultural groups last month told the STB** that FXE's capacity has not kept pace with growth in cross-border rail traffic, and that while migrant surges affected the railroad's service, the main problem has been lack of capacity. Farmer said she shared the STB's concerns about disruptions to cross-border service. "Service to Mexico has been undeniably challenged this year, largely due to the impacts of the ongoing humanitarian crisis at the southern border," she wrote. "Indeed, our access to Mexico at certain interchanges has been closed on three different occasions over the past nine months, once due to an order from the Department of Homeland Security and twice due to Ferromex (FXE) embargoes."

The limited windows for interchange at the border crossings at El Paso and Eagle Pass, Texas, contribute to delays in clearing backlogs of all traffic, she wrote.

BNSF has worked with FXE to improve the flow of traffic. Efforts include daily conference calls, staging southbound traffic to take advantage of interchange windows at the border, and using permits and embargoes to manage volumes.

"For example, in late June we agreed to forego any southbound interchange for 48 hours to facilitate increased FXE northbound interchange to clear some of the congestion off its system," Farmer wrote.

BNSF handles more agricultural products shipments than any other U.S. railroad. Over the past decade, ag products shipments are up by 120,000 loads on BNSF, while the three other U.S. Class I systems have seen their ag products volume decline by a combined 200,000 carloads, Farmer wrote.

## Arizona Fire that Destroyed Homes Blamed on BNSF Track Work

By Trains Staff | August 19, 2024 15 Structures destroyed by June wildfire near Wickenburg, Ariz.



*Authorities say this June 2024 fire near Wickenburg, Ariz., was caused by BNSF track work. Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management*

WICKENBURG, Ariz. — A June wildfire that destroyed 15 structures near the town of Wickenburg and cost nearly \$1 million to fight was caused by BNSF Railway work, according to fire officials.

The 266-acre Rose Fire, which began on June 12 and was contained five days later, was started by sparks from a welder, grinder, or torch used to cut a section of rail, according to officials from the Arizona Department of Forestry. [KSAZ-TV reports](#) that investigators determined the work on the rail line was the fire's point of origin because of how the fire moved upslope away from the tracks.

A Department of Forestry spokeswoman said seven of the structures destroyed were primary residences. About 200 firefighters worked to control the blaze at a cost estimated at \$971,000.

BNSF spokeswoman Kendall Sloan, in [a statement reported by KPHO-TV](#), said "Fires along our rail line are infrequent, but we work hard to try and prevent them. In the rare event one occurs, we assist municipalities in suppression efforts and help the communities that are affected. ... We remain committed to learning from this incident by continuing to reduce the risk of fire around our tracks and working closely with local agencies during fire season."

Wickenburg is approximately 54 miles northwest of Phoenix on BNSF's Phoenix Subdivision.



## ---Union Pacific News---

### News Photos: Big Boy Heads West By Trains Staff | July 3, 2024

'Westward Bound' tour to reach Salt Lake City on July 4th



*L: Big Boy No. 4014 is notably without a diesel in the consist at Rock prings, Wyo., on its "Westward Bound" tour. Kevin Gilliam*

*R: Now with a diesel added behind the water tenders, the Big Boy's train makes its way through Green River, Wyo, on July 3, 2024. Kevin Gilliam*



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EVANSTON, Wyo. — Union Pacific Big Boy No. 4014 is four days into its “Westward Bound” tour, preparing for a Fourth of July move from Evanston to Salt Lake City after travel from Cheyenne, Wyo., to Evanston in three days of travel, with an off-day Tuesday in Rock Springs, Wyo., for an employee event.

The first two days, between Cheyenne and Rock Springs, with a layover in Rawlins, were notable as the first time since its restoration — other than a recent test run out of Cheyenne — that the 4-8-8-4 has operated unassisted by diesels. A diesel was added today to assist in switching moves, as were needed this afternoon in Evanston, and to provide dynamic braking on Thursday’s trip through Utah’s Echo Canyon.

Atypically, the Big Boy is hauling freight cars (though it probably technically qualifies as a mixed train because of the passenger cars that are part of its support equipment). This is because the UP passenger fleet is in use elsewhere. The train’s length has been determined in large part by the length of the tracks where it will lay over during its trip.

Today’s schedule includes a 30-minute “whistle stop” in Morgan, Utah, scheduled for 11:30 a.m. to noon at the depot in Morgan, 98 Commercial St. The Big Boy is slated to arrive in Salt Lake City at the city’s Central Station at 2:55 p.m., departing at 4:30 p.m. As always with these trips, schedules are subject to change. Online tracking [is available here](#), and the full schedule for the trip to Roseville, Calif., [is available here](#).

## News Photos: Big Boy On the Road in Nevada and California By Trains Staff | July 12, 2024

**Locomotive begins two days of display in Roseville, Calif.**



*Above and below, No. 4014 and its train navigate Nevada’s Arnold Loop, on the former Western Pacific near West Wendover, Nev., on July 6, 2024. Two photos, Elrond Lawrence A UP police officer interacts with a young fan during 4014’s “whistle stop” in Wells, Nev., on July 6, 2024. Elrond Lawrence*



*No. 4014 passes through Jungo, Nev., near Winnemucca, on July 9, 2024. Elrond Lawrence*

No. 4014 begins its eastward trip on Sunday, July 14, with its one excursion on this tour, a trip from Roseville to Sparks, Nev., to benefit the Union Pacific Museum. That trip is sold out. Information on the remaining tour schedule [is available here](#). The trip concludes July 26.

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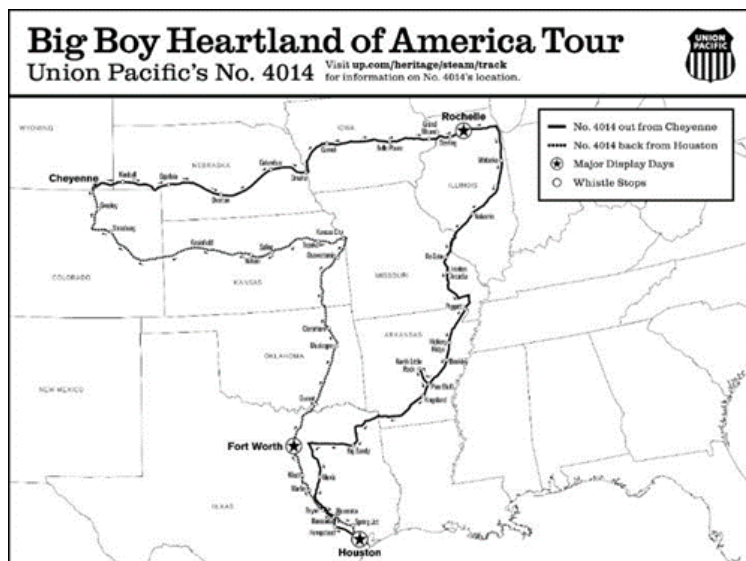


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No. 4014 crosses the Clio Viaduct after leaving Portola, Calif., on July 11, 2024. Joel Kirk

**Full Schedule Released for Big Boy's Fall 'Heartland' Tour** By Trains Staff | August 12, 2024  
10-state trip begins Aug. 28, concludes Oct. 23.



**Westward Bound Tour** CHEYENNE, Wyo. — Union Pacific has released the full schedule for the 10-state “Heartland of America” tour by Big Boy No. 4014, to begin Aug. 28 in Cheyenne and return there Oct. 23. As previously announced, public display events are planned for Sunday, Sept. 8, in Rochelle, Ill.; Sunday, Oct. 6, in Houston; and Thursday and Friday, Oct. 10-11, in Fort Worth, Texas. Viewing-only events are scheduled in Bryan, Texas (Oct. 8), Kansas City (Oct. 16), and Salina, Kan. (Oct. 18). As on other trips, a number of brief “whistle stops” are planned elsewhere on the route. Unlike the earlier trip to California, no public excursion is planned on this outing, but four cab rides are being auctioned to benefit the Union Pacific Museum Association and the UP Friend-to-Friend Network. Two will be offered Sept. 2 on the trip into Omaha, Neb., and two will be Sept. 4 outbound from Council Bluffs, Iowa. Each ride will be approximately 90 minutes in duration; riders must be 18 or older and comply with requirements listed on the site where bidding is being conducted. Bidding began this morning (Aug. 12) at 10 a.m. CT and will conclude Aug. 19 at 7 p.m. CT. [For information or to bid, visit this web page.](https://www.up.com/heritage/steam/schedule/index.htm) The Big Boy’s looping route will take it through Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas (crossing briefly back into Missouri at Kansas City, Mo.), and Colorado before returning home to Cheyenne. In addition to its public display dates, private Union Pacific employee events are planned in North Platte, Neb.; Rochelle; St. Louis; North Little Rock, Ark.; Dallas; Houston; Fort Worth; and Denver. To view detailed Heartland Tour Schedule click on link below: <https://www.up.com/heritage/steam/schedule/index.htm>

By Bill Stephens | July 25, 2024



*Union Pacific opened a new international intermodal terminal in Phoenix this year. UP*

OMAHA, Neb. — Union Pacific's profits rose in the second quarter despite a sharp drop in coal traffic.

"When you remove coal, our total volume was up 3% in the second quarter. This demonstrates that even in a tough freight environment, we are winning with our customers to bring new business to the railroad," CEO Jim Vena said on the company's earnings call today (Thursday, July 25).

Quarterly operating income increased 9%, to \$2.4 billion, as revenue grew 1%, to \$6 billion. Earnings per share rose 7%, to \$2.74. UP's operating ratio improved 3 points, to 60%. "Despite a challenging environment, we achieved strong financial results in the quarter," Vena says. "We continue to drive efficiency into the network, and the commercial team has done a good job generating price for the value we provide our customers." Overall, UP's volume for the quarter was flat compared to a year ago.

Bulk traffic declined 5%, due to a 23% drop on coal traffic as natural gas prices remained low and utility coal stockpiles remained elevated. Industrial products volume declined 3%. Premium traffic — which includes intermodal and automotive — was up 6% due to a combination of international and domestic intermodal growth and landing new auto contracts from Volkswagen and General Motors. UP slightly downgraded its outlook for the rest of the year. The railroad now said its volume expectations are uncertain based on economic indicators and weak coal demand. Previously UP expected muted traffic volumes this year.

The railroad's key operational metrics held steady despite the impact of flooding in both its southern and northern regions. "Our service was challenged in the quarter, but I'm pleased with our ability to recover," Vena says.

Freight car velocity was flat at 201 car miles per day. The manifest and automotive service performance index was flat at 84%. But the intermodal service performance index rose 4 points to 93%. UP's locomotive and workforce productivity metrics improved for the quarter. UP set an average train length record for the quarter, at 9,544 feet, which included a highest-ever monthly figure above 9,600 feet in June, says Eric Gehringer, executive vice president of operations. Gehringer praised UP's maintenance-of-way teams for quickly rebuilding flooded track, repairing bridges, and clearing trees in the wake of storms that hit the railroad this spring.

"Operating outdoors these past three months has not been easy," Vena says.

The railroad's derailment rate and personal injury rate both improved during the quarter, although UP did not provide specifics.

[Union Pacific's earnings presentation is available online.](#)

## **Nevada Port Launches West Coast Intermodal Service with UP**

Progressive Rail News: Union Pacific Railroad 6/13/2024



*The Port of Nevada's new intermodal venture is the result of the port's collaboration with Union Pacific Railroad, ocean carrier CMA CGM Group and the Port of Oakland. Photo – Port of Nevada*

The [Port of Nevada](#) is now offering direct intermodal service for imports and exports between Fernley, Nevada, and the Port of Oakland, California.

The venture is the result of the port's collaboration with [Union Pacific Railroad](#), ocean carrier CMA CGM Group and the Port of Oakland, according to a port news release. The Nevada port is a 224-acre, inland port operation and intermodal ramp in northern Nevada that's owned and developed by Industrial Realty Group LLC (IRG).

"Direct rail access between Reno and the West Coast significantly increases the amount of cargo freight that can be shipped," said Stuart Lichter, president of the Port of Nevada and IRG. "This collaborative venture will provide our clients with a more efficient, reliable and environmentally sensitive way to transport goods."

The Port of Nevada features a full-service rail facility that's connected to UP's network. Rail operations include bulk commodity and transloading and storage of multiple commodities.

Meanwhile, the Alabama Port Authority has applied for a federal grant to launch an emissions reduction effort at its facilities. The authority's Port Operations With Emissions Reduction (POWER) Project would be funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Clean Ports initiative.

The authority is applying for \$69 million in funding to deploy new technologies, all of which will add to the growing number of electric and clean fuel vehicles already in use at the Port of Mobile, according to a port authority news release.

If awarded, the grant would help fund the acquisition of two electric switcher locomotives and other electric port equipment, and the installation of three shore power units at two marine terminals.

"We believe that, if the EPA approves this grant application, this funding can be put to use right away toward a variety of emissions reduction programs that will modernize port operations and further strengthen our environmental commitment," said Alabama Port Authority Director and CEO John Driscoll.





---- CPKC News -----



---- CN News ----

## Canada's Labor Minister Orders Arbitration to End CN, CPKC Work Stoppages, but Union Keeps Picket Lines Up (additional update)

By Bill Stephens and David Lassen | August 22, 2024

Teamsters Canada Rail Conference says it will review decision, seek legal counsel



*Canadian National and CPKC trains are idled in Canada after a lockout of Teamsters Canada Rail Conference workers began at 12:01 a.m. on Thursday, Aug. 22. Steve Smedley*

OTTAWA — The Canadian government has moved to end Canada's freight rail work stoppage — the first to shut down both Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Kansas City simultaneously.

However, while the two railroads say they are preparing to resume operations after Labor Minister Steven MacKinnon sent the dispute to binding arbitration, the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference says it will maintain picket lines while it reviews MacKinnon's action.

And the CBC reports that MacKinnon's move might not bring an immediate end to the lockouts of TCRC engineers and conductors that began at the two railroads at 12:01 a.m. today (Aug. 22). Also locked out were rail traffic controllers at CPKC represented by the same union.

"These collective bargaining negotiations belong to CN Rail, CPKC and TCRC alone — but their effects, and the impacts of the current impasse, are being borne by all Canadians," MacKinnon said. "As Minister of Labour, it is my assessment that the parties are at a fundamental impasse. Therefore, it is my duty and responsibility to invoke my authorities under the Canada Labour Code to secure industrial peace and deliver the short and long-term solutions that are in the national interest."

The existing contracts between the TCRC and both railways will be extended until new agreements are signed. Negotiated agreements are always preferable, MacKinnon said, but the needs of the nation outweighed the need for a contract deal reached at the bargaining table. "Workers, farmers, commuters and businesses rely on Canada's railways everyday, and will continue to do so. It is the government's duty and responsibility to ensure industrial peace in this critically vital sector," MacKinnon said. "Thus, we will be examining why we experience repeated conflicts in the railway sector and the conditions that led to the parallel work stoppages we are seeing. Canadians can be assured that their government will not allow them to suffer when parties do not fulfill their responsibility. Especially where their livelihoods, worker safety, and communities are at stake."

CN said in a statement this evening that it had ended its lockout as of 6 p.m. ET and initiated its recovery plan, acting in advance of a formal order from the Canada Industrial Relations Board "to expedite the recovery of the economy."

"While CN is satisfied that this labour conflict has ended and that it can get back to its role of powering the economy," the railroad said [in its statement](#), "the company is disappointed that a negotiated deal could not be achieved at the bargaining table despite its best efforts."

CPKC said it is preparing to restart operations and will provide further details about the timing once it receives the CIRB's order. "The Canadian government has recognized the immense consequences of a railway work stoppage for the Canadian economy, North American supply chains, and all Canadians," CPKC CEO Keith Creel said [in a statement](#). "The government has acted to protect Canada's national interest. We regret that the government had to intervene because we fundamentally believe in and respect collective bargaining; however, given the stakes for all involved, this situation required action."

The TCRC said it was keeping picket lines in place while it reviewed MacKinnon's move, the response by the CIRB, and sought legal counsel. The union's president, Paul Boucher, said the government's action "allowed CN and CPKC to sidestep a union determined to protect rail safety. Despite claiming to value and honour the collective bargaining process, the federal government quickly used its authority to suspend it, mere hours after an employer-imposed work stoppage. ... The two major railways in Canada manufactured this crisis, took the country hostage, and manipulated the government to once again disregard the rights afforded to working-class Canadians."

Boucher called the decision "shameful" and said the government had made the decision "only because they knew their minority could not gather the support needed to pass a legislated resolution to appease the railways." The union subsequently announced it will hold a rally outside CPKC headquarters in Calgary on Friday, Aug. 23, at 9 a.m. MT.

Meanwhile, Lisa Raitt, labor minister under former prime minister Stephen Harper, [told the CBC](#) that the parties still have to agree to arbitration: "Maybe you can write to the CIRB and ask them to impose binding arbitration ... but there's no way a minister can write a letter and say that everyone goes back to work and I'm sending you to binding arbitration."

MacKinnon said he is "confident" that his move will end the shutdown, but hedged in saying it would definitely do so, noting that the CIRB is an independent body.

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“They have a process that requires consultation with the parties,” he said. “They will be doing that and rendering a decision, I hope very quickly. ... I want to be deferential to the process that will unfold.”

CN and CPKC had both sought arbitration to end the dispute, with MacKinnon last week denying a request from CN to require arbitration [see [“Canada’s labor minister won’t send ...”](#) News Wire, Aug. 15, 2024]. At the time, MacKinnon said it was the “shared responsibility” of CN and the union to negotiate in good faith.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in [a post on X.com](#) that while collective bargaining is preferred, “When that is no longer a foreseeable option — when we are facing serious consequences to our supply chains and the workers who depend on it — governments must act.”

Transport Minister Pablo Rodriguez, reacting to MacKinnon’s move, [wrote on X.com](#) that the government “is acting to preserve the stability and certainty that our entire economy is renowned for across the world.”

The premiers of two prairie provinces with economies heavily reliant on rail transport — Scott Moe of Saskatchewan and Danielle Smith of Alberta, who had both called for federal action — welcomed the intervention in comments on X.com. [Moe wrote](#) that the government “took the appropriate action ... to end the rail stoppage and ensure our Canadian products are moving to market again.” [Smith wrote](#) that she was “pleased to see” that MacKinnon had taken action.

— *Substantially revised and updated at 6:58 p.m. CT, including comments from Teamsters Canada Rail Conference; updated at 8:05 p.m. CT with union plans for rally at CPKC headquarters.*

## A Canadian Rail Strike is Likely in Late August, CPKC CEO Keith Creel Says

*By Bill Stephens | July 30, 2024*



*A Canadian Pacific coal train, bound for export at Vancouver, exits Mount Shaughnessy Tunnel on Rogers Pass in British Columbia. CPKC CEO Keith Creel says a Canadian rail strike is likely in August. Trains collection*

CALGARY, Alberta — With labor negotiations at a standstill, a Canadian rail strike is likely to occur in late August, Canadian Pacific Kansas City CEO Keith Creel said today (Tuesday, July 30).

CPKC and the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference are still talking but remain far apart on a new contract, Creel said on the railway’s second-quarter earnings call.

The Canadian Industrial Relations Board has said it will release a decision by Aug. 9 on what commodities are vital to health and safety and must keep moving during a work stoppage. Members of the TCRC, which represents engineers and conductors on CPKC and Canadian National, have voted to authorize a strike that could begin with 72 hours notice once the CIRB decision is issued.

A strike would shut down both CPKC and CN in Canada. It also would affect commuter operations in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal because the trains operate on trackage dispatched by CPKC rail traffic controllers, who are represented by the TCRC.

“We’re far apart. It’s going to be a challenge,” Creel said of ongoing labor talks.

Last week CN lowered its financial outlook for the year, partly due to a traffic slowdown as customers divert traffic in anticipation of a strike. CPKC executives said a strike wouldn’t affect their outlook unless it dragged on for more than two weeks.

Creel said a strike will damage Canada’s reputation as a reliable trading partner, however, particularly since it may come about a year after a dockworkers strike shut down ports in British Columbia, which are gateways to Chicago, Toronto, and Montreal.

“It’s not a good outcome for anyone,” Creel says, noting that some container traffic still has not returned to Vancouver since the dockworkers strike. A rail strike may give customers “labor unrest fatigue,” he says.

“We’re going to not give up. We’re going to remain cautiously optimistic,” Creel says. “But we’re not going to do a bad deal, either.”

Meanwhile, a potential strike by dockworkers on the U.S. East and Gulf coasts could benefit CPKC-served ports of Lazaro Cardenas in Mexico, as well as Saint John in New Brunswick. Both could serve as alternatives to U.S. ports if dockworkers walk out.

CPKC recently ran test trains between Lazaro Cardenas, on Mexico’s Pacific coast, and its terminal in Kendleton, Texas, on the outskirts of Houston. CPKC Chief Marketing Officer John Brooks says the trains took 3½ days to reach the Houston area, excluding time the boxes spent on the dock at Lazaro, and were operated with U.S. port labor disruptions in mind.



## Northernmost Point on North American Rail Network to Lose Service

*By Trains Staff | August 11, 2024*

CN begins abandonment process for track segment to Hay River, Northwest Territories, following 2023 fires

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A portion of the CN system map shows the location of Hay River, Northwest Territories, well north of Edmonton, Alberta. Google Maps/CN

HAY RIVER, Northwest Territories — Canadian National Railway has begun the process of ending service to Hay River, which currently holds the distinction of being the northernmost point connected to the North American rail network.

[Cabin Radio reports](#) the railroad filed in May to discontinue service on its Meander River Subdivision between mileposts 354 and 376, most of the route between Hay River and Enterprise, NWT, some 40 kilometers (25 miles) to the southwest. Much of the track between the two communities was damaged in a wildfire last year. A CN representative said in an email to Cabin Radio that the decision came after “thoughtful engagement with local stakeholders and customers.” The email also said that after last year’s fires, the railroad had reallocated resources to restore service to Enterprise “to meet customer commitments” and that its engagement with customers and a cost analysis “revealed that the costs of repair for the lines were not proportionate to the volume commitments of customers in the region.”

But the decision raises concerns about supply-chain issues for the remote communities of the Northwest Territories, the territories’ infrastructure minister, Caroline Wawzonek, [told the CBC](#).

“It has a tremendous effect on really some of the most vulnerable Indigenous communities in the North,” Loss of the rail line will require trucking cargo from Enterprise to fill a link in the current rail-and-barge chain, and will lead to higher supply costs. A six-hour trip by truck from Hay River will become an 80-hour trip from Enterprise, she said.

Abandoning the line will require a three-year process. After a year, CN can attempt to sell the segment, but Wawzonek said a territorial government purchase “isn’t an appropriate use of tax dollars.” Similarly, the government said it is not willing to provide the \$15 million needed for repairs. (Cabin Radio notes that the territorial government has an annual revenue of about C\$2.5 billion compared to the railroad’s C\$17 billion.)

A former Hay River mayor who owns a rail yard in Enterprise that is a transloading hub, and will gain even greater significance, says the move may simply reflect changes that have already begun and will accelerate if the proposed Mackenzie Valley Highway, an all-weather road in the region, is built.

The former mayor, Brad Mapes, told Cabin Radio, “The logistics of the North has changed, and it’s only going to change. ... As the Mackenzie Valley Highway goes, the less and less barging is going to happen.” Historically, fuel and other cargo were delivered by train to Hay River, then moved by truck to Yellowknife or by barge on the Great Slave Lake to other communities.

The highway, however, does not have yet have funding or a timeline for construction. And this summer, the normal barge service has been disrupted by low water levels on the Mackenzie River, meaning much of the usual cargo traffic is being brought in by air, a far more costly operation.

Hay River is, by straight-line distance, some 510 miles north of Edmonton, Alberta. It is some 193 miles from the southern end of the Meander River Sub, in High Level, Alta.



## Fire Continues to Burn at North Dakota Derailment

By [Trains Staff](#) | July 6, 2024

BORDULAC, N.D. — Derailed cars of a CPKC train continued to burn as of early today (July 6) in Foster County, N.D., with an official saying the goal is to extinguish the fire in the next 12 to 18 hours.

[CNN reports](#) Foster County Emergency Management Director Andrew Kirking said a voluntary evacuation recommendation had been issued for residents within a 1-mile radius of the derailment, which occurred about 3:30 a.m. Friday and involves railcars carrying anhydrous ammonia, sulfur, and methanol [see [“CPKC train carrying hazardous materials derails ...,”](#) *Trains News Wire*, July 5, 2024].

Kirking told CNN crews are trying to bridge a bog to get heavy equipment to the scene to move the cars. Pumping trailers are being used to fight the fire, he said.

The National Transportation Safety Board said [in a post on X.com](#) that it is investigating the derailment.

## Operations Resume at Site of CPKC Derailment By Trains Staff | July 8, 2024

**All cars of hazardous materials removed from scene near Bordulac, N.D.**

BORDULAC, N.D. — All railcars containing hazardous material have been removed from the site of Friday's derailment of a CPKC train near Bordulac, and operations on the railroad's Carrington Subdivision have resumed, according to a company spokesman. The cars were safely removed on Sunday, spokesman Patrick Waldron said in an email [reported by the Jamestown Sun](#); he also said that track repairs were completed and the route reopened this morning (July 8).

The National Transportation Safety Board, which is investigating the incident, said the incident involved 29 cars of a train with two locomotives and 151 cars. The derailment early on July 5 included cars carrying anhydrous ammonia, methanol, and sulfur [see ["CPKC train carrying hazardous materials derails ...,"](#) *Trains News Wire*, July 5, 2024].

## Merger-related Traffic Growth Boosts CPKC's Revenue and Profits

By Bill Stephens | July 30, 2024

**Several cross-border traffic segments grew faster than anticipated despite overall sluggish freight demand**



*The first CPKC units painted in the railway's new livery lead train M251 at Nahant, Iowa, on May 25, 2024. Jeremy J. Schrader*

CALGARY, Alberta — Canadian Pacific Kansas City had a gangbuster second quarter as merger-related traffic synergies kicked in faster than expected and boosted revenue and profits, executives said on Tuesday. Although freight demand remains soft, CPKC has been able to create its own opportunities thanks to last year's combination of Canadian Pacific and Kansas City Southern, CEO Keith Creel says. "I'm extremely pleased with the first half of the year," he told investors and analysts on the railway's earnings call Tuesday afternoon.

CPKC's quarterly operating income — adjusted to reflect the April 14, 2023, CP-KCS merger as if it occurred on Jan. 1 — increased 17%, to \$1.37 billion, as adjusted revenue grew 8%, to \$3.6 billion. Adjusted earnings per share increased 27%, to \$1.05. The combined railway's operating ratio improved 2.8 points, to 61.8%.

Quarterly volume decreased 4% when measured by carloads, but increased 6% when measured by revenue ton-miles, CPKC's preferred metric.

The gap between carloads and RTMs, Creel says, can be explained by the loss of short-haul, cross-border intermodal traffic at the end of 2023.

That's when BNSF Railway and J.B. Hunt shifted their Mexico traffic away from CPKC and the Laredo gateway to Eagle Pass, Texas, and a connection with Ferromex.

The annual low-margin, short-haul volume that was lost totals about 170,000 containers. "RTMs should be the holy grail when it comes to this railroad, not carloads," Creel says.

The dynamic also shows up in CPKC's average length of haul. It was up 6% overall in the second quarter, Chief Marketing Officer John Brooks says, but domestic intermodal length of haul increased by double digits.

CPKC also enjoyed longer hauls on energy, chemicals, and plastics traffic moving in single-line service between Canada, the U.S.

Gulf Coast, and Mexico, Brooks says. As a result, energy, chemicals, and plastics revenue ton-miles grew 14% in the quarter.

Automotive RTMs increased 21% in the quarter thanks to longer hauls from Mexican assembly plants to destinations in the U.S. and Canada. And CPKC's Mexico Midwest Express premium intermodal service, carried on trains 180/181, grew by 50%.

"An area that we didn't expect to be as strong at this point was some of our grain into Mexico," Brooks says. In July, CPKC operated 15 grain trains from legacy CP origins to destinations in Mexico, compared to nine in June, and six in May. "We're seeing a nice ramp up in that bulk franchise," Brooks says.

International intermodal volume declined 9% as shippers diverted some traffic in anticipation of a potential Canadian rail strike. The loss of an international intermodal contract also dented volumes.

CPKC's key operating metrics improved during the quarter, with average train speed up 6% and terminal dwell down by 9%. The railway's train accident rate improved 4%, while the personal injury rate improved 38%.

[CPKC's earnings presentation is available online.](#)

## CN and CPKC Grain Plans Raise Potential Capacity Concerns for Upcoming Crop Year

By Bill Stephens | July 31, 2024

**CN points to maxed out capacity on main line to Vancouver, as well as new bridge bottleneck, while CPKC says labor strike would affect service**

MONTREAL — Canadian National is confident that it has the resources necessary to handle this year's grain harvest in Canada — which is expected to be larger than average — but says it has concerns about several issues that could crimp capacity

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*A crewman climbs aboard a westbound Canadian National grain train during a September 2023 crew change in Boston Bar, British Columbia. Bill Stephens*

In its annual grain plan released today, CN warns that its main grain-hauling route between Edmonton, Alberta, and Vancouver, British Columbia, may be at or above its overall capacity at times during the fall and into early next year, while its route to Prince Rupert, B.C., may sometimes operate at capacity. In addition, new capacity constraints may crop up in Vancouver due to the April completion of the Trans Mountain pipeline, which has increased fuel exports through Canada's busiest port. CN says its Second Narrows lift bridge over the Burrard Inlet, which leads to and from grain export terminals on Vancouver's North Shore, must be raised more often to accommodate increased marine tanker traffic. And that, CN says, will contribute to increased transit times for grain trains.

"CN is monitoring TMX vessel traffic impacts and working closely with customers to maintain supply chain fluidity and maximize capacity," the report says. "CN is engaged with the Port of Vancouver and the Government of Canada on this issue. Our goal is to reduce the unpredictability of the impact to bridge operations and ensure that both rail and marine traffic can maximize their volumes."

CN urges grain producers to consider using routes that have ample capacity, such as its main lines to export terminals in Thunder Bay, Ontario; Duluth, Minn.; and on the St. Lawrence Seaway in Eastern Canada. Shippers also could take advantage of Prince Rupert when the BC North line is operating below capacity. "Corridor balance is required to maximize supply chain capacity and throughput," CN says.

CN says that it's concerned about potential negative impacts from new federal labor regulations, extended interswitching rules, and the inability of Vancouver export terminals to load vessels in rainy weather.

"As we look to the new crop year, one real challenge for CN is the availability of labor, specifically the operating crews that run our trains," CN CEO Tracy Robinson wrote. "This is a result of overall Canadian labor market conditions and low unemployment rates coupled with the real impact of federal labor regulations that came into effect in May 2023 that requires approximately 15% more people to move the same amount of freight."

The railway has increased its focus on crew hiring and retention, she says.

CN also says 2023 extended inter-switching rules have reduced capacity and efficiency and should not be renewed beyond their scheduled March 2025 expiration date. The rules frequently result in longer routes that extend cycle times and require more covered hoppers to handle the same amount of volume.

Finally, CN encouraged the Canadian government to resolve the long-standing issue of West Coast ports not being able to load grain vessels while it's raining.

"Heavy, persistent rainfall occurs at Canada's West Coast ports every year. Like clockwork, every time it rains, grain movement slows down at terminals. However, rain is a solvable problem and wet weather should not impact modern grain terminal operations on the West Coast of Canada," the railway says. "Operational and infrastructure solutions to this problem are in place in the U.S. Pacific Northwest, which is an area with the exact same issue. Rain should not reduce supply chain capacity, especially in Vancouver where capacity is limited, and inefficient operations have a negative effect on the entire supply chain."

The crop year runs from Aug. 1, 2024, to July 31, 2025. During the last crop year, CN handled an all-time monthly grain tonnage record in February.

Canadian Pacific Kansas City, which also released its grain plan today, echoed CN's concerns about labor, extended inter-switching, and the impact of wet weather on ship loading in Vancouver. "The federal government can show leadership by addressing these key, avoidable constraints on the overall performance and export capacity of Canada's grain supply chain," CPKC said. CPKC's grain plan put more emphasis on the potential impact of a looming strike by members of the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference, which represents the railway's engineers, conductors, and rail traffic controllers in Canada. CN also has yet to reach an agreement with the TCRC.

"CPKC is well-positioned to supply the transportation capacity to move Canada's grain and grain products throughout the duration of the 2024–2025 crop year. However, the threat of a TCRC work stoppage in the coming weeks or months could negatively impact grain supply chain performance during the upcoming crop year," the railway says.

After two years of below average grain harvests in its service territory on the southern Canadian Prairies, CPKC expects a return to more typical demand this year. CPKC expects to be able to meet that demand, but warned that shippers should take advantage of capacity when it's available.

"Unused rail capacity for grain transportation was a key feature of the 2023–2024 crop year. In fact, more than 8.8 MMT of capacity for Canadian grain transportation on the CPKC rail network went unused during this past crop year," the railway said. "This equates to approximately one quarter of the capacity CPKC had available relative to the supply targets outlined in last year's grain report. Capacity cannot be saved up and used later; capacity unused in the week it is available is lost capacity that cannot be recovered." CPKC noted that the CP-KCS merger has offered Canadian grain producers new single-line routes to the U.S. Gulf Coast and destinations in Mexico. "The increased destination optionality afforded to Canadian grain shippers allows them to further penetrate markets and realize opportunities beyond the traditional Vancouver and Thunder Bay export programs," the railway said.

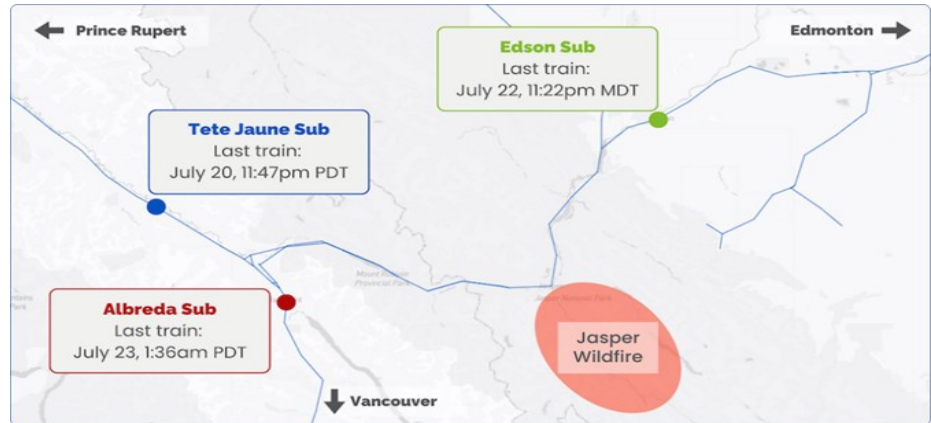
# CN Reopens Main Lines to Key British Columbia Ports While Monitoring Alberta Wildfires

(updated) By Bill Stephens | July 24, 2024

The fires are threatening the resort and division point town of Jasper, which had prevented CN traffic from moving to and from Vancouver and Prince Rupert



After bringing a Vancouver-bound stack train into Boston Bar, British Columbia, a Canadian National train crew member heads for the nearby bunk house in September 2023. Bill Stephens



RailState's sensors located around Jasper, Alberta, have tracked the impact of the closure of CN's main line due to wildfires.

MONTREAL — Canadian National was able to reopen its main line through Jasper, Alberta, this afternoon while keeping a close eye on a pair of wildfires that have been threatening the resort town. “CN resumed rail operations at approximately 12 Noon MST on Wednesday, July 24, through Jasper. In collaboration with the Unified Incident Command center managed by Parks Canada, CN developed and implemented an operational plan that allows trains to safely travel through the area to ensure that goods could continue moving,” CN spokeswoman Ashley Michnowski says. “In addition to the continued efforts of CN’s Trident firefighting train, a second firefighting train, Neptune, is on route to the Jasper area to assist in maintaining track safety and fire fighting efforts.”

CN said it has offered its support to Jasper and Parks Canada to assist in mutual efforts in fighting the wildfire where possible. It also has provided 20,000 liters of fuel to Jasper Park Lodge and offered assistance to Valemount, British Columbia, where Jasper residents – including CN employees and their families – headed after an evacuation order was issued on Monday night. The reopening of the main line will help CN ease a backlog of traffic that had built up since the railway began shutting down operations earlier this week. On Monday night local officials ordered an evacuation of Jasper and Jasper National Park. More than 25,000 people have evacuated the park and the town that’s a CN division point, according to the *Edmonton Journal*. Data from RailState, a firm that monitors rail traffic through a sensor network located along main lines in Canada and the U.S., shows the extent of the congestion as CN had been forced to hold trains in British Columbia and Alberta. “This is a major disruption and comes at a particularly vulnerable time,” RailState Chief Commercial Officer John Schmitter said. “There are other large fires threatening rail lines right now and months remaining on fire season.” CN’s Albreda and Edson subdivisions meet at the division point of Jasper, where CN also has a small yard. The Albreda Sub funnels traffic to and from Vancouver — Canada’s busiest port complex — and connects with the Tete Jaune Subdivision to the Port of Prince Rupert, B.C. The Edson Sub, meanwhile, handles traffic bound to and from Edmonton, Alberta. On the Tete Jaune Sub, RailState has a sensor in Dunster, B.C., that has recorded an average of 13 trains per day in recent weeks. Prior to today’s reopening, the last train RailState spotted was a westbound manifest train just before midnight on Saturday. On the Albreda Sub, RailState’s sensor in Valemount has recorded an average of 18.5 trains per day. The last train seen by RailState at Valemount was a manifest train at 1:36 a.m. on Tuesday. That train ultimately headed for Prince Rupert, however, and the last east-west traffic passed through Valemount on Saturday, RailState said. RailState has a sensor at Hinton, Alberta, on the Edson Sub, where it has recorded an average of 44 trains per day recently. The last train to pass Hinton was a westbound grain train at 11:22 p.m. on Monday. The grain train was among those being held east of Jasper. At least five westbound trains were being held near Hinton, with another 13 parked between Stony Plain, Alberta, and Hinton, since Monday, RailState said. Some 25 eastbound trains out of Vancouver were holding in and around Kamloops, B.C. Winds were expected to pick up today, which could bring the fires closer to Jasper, emergency officials said. Firefighters may get some relief from rain that’s expected to fall Wednesday night into Thursday. One of the fires was 3 miles from Jasper on Wednesday morning, while the other was 5 miles outside the town. Jasper is a stop for VIA Rail’s *Canadian*. VIA trains 5 and 6, which serve Prince Rupert, originate and terminate in Jasper. On its website, VIA cautions passengers “that in the event that we cannot guarantee safe operation, trains traveling in that region might be canceled prior to their departure or while en route, without offer of alternate transportation. Trains may also incur delays and air quality may be impacted.” The westbound *Canadian* scheduled to depart Toronto on Wednesday, July 24, and the eastbound train scheduled to depart Vancouver on Friday, July 26, could be affected, the company says, adding that passengers with reservations would be contacted and advised of any service disruption. Rocky Mountaineer has canceled two excursions scheduled to depart yesterday. These are “Rainforest to Gold Rush” from North Vancouver, B.C., to Jasper over CN’s former BC Rail route via Prince George, and “Journey through the Clouds” on the same Jasper-Vancouver route used by the *Canadian*. Updates to other trips that might be canceled [will be posted on the Rocky Mountaineer website](#).



# --- Preservation, Museum and Steam News ---

## Durango & Silverton Again Up and Running to Silverton

By Trains Staff | July 3, 2024

Railroad quickly restores operations after latest slide



DURANGO, Colo. — The Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad has made quick work of its latest slide disruption.

The heritage railroad said on its Facebook page that it has resumed service to Silverton today (Wednesday, July 3) after Tuesday trains to Silverton were halted by a Monday night slide at milepost 486.0, near Needleton. That slide came after what the railroad called “significant weather events over the last 24 hours.”

The brief interruption followed a more extensive slide at milepost 485.9 that shut down Silverton service from June 22-27 [see “Durango & Silverton restores full operations,” Trains News Wire, June 28, 2024].

*A Durango & Silverton train awaits passengers in Silverton, Colo. Service to Silverton has again resumed after a brief disruption because of a landslide. David Lassen*

## Sioux City Museum Announces Joint Effort to Return Great Northern 4-6-2 to Operation

By Trains Staff | July 5, 2024

Announcement comes as museum begins flood recovery efforts



*L: The Sioux City Railroad Museum has announced a joint effort to restore Great Northern 4-6-2 No. 1355 to operating condition. American Heartland Railroad Society*

*R; GN No. 1355 stands in flood waters at the Sioux City Railroad Museum on June 24, 2024. Sioux City Rail-*



SIoux CITY, Iowa — Already facing one major project — recovery from major flood damage — the Sioux City Railroad Museum announced Wednesday that it would take on another: restoring one of the museum’s steam locomotives to operating condition. The museum, its parent Siouxland Historical Railroad Association, and the American Heartland Railroad Society are beginning a joint effort to restore Great Northern 4-6-2 No. 1355 to operation. Siouxland Historical Railroad Association President Larry Obermeyer, also the museum’s board president and CEO, said the museum and American Heartland society are “pooling our resources, knowledge, and expertise” to restore the locomotive. “This organization has a lot of young people who have studied the heritage crafts involved with locomotive restorations,” he said, “and they bring together what resources and knowledge and expertise that our volunteers did not have.” Museum director TJ Obermeyer said the project is something the community and region “can rally around and really be proud of. That’s really the goal.” [According to the Great Northern Railway Historical Society](#), the Class H-5 locomotive began life as a 4-6-0 built by Baldwin for GN in 1909. It was rebuilt by GN’s Dale Street Shoops in St. Paul to a 4-6-2 in 1924, undergoing conversion from oil to coal firing in the process. It ran in passenger service until 1950, handling such notable GN trains as the Oriental Limited and Empire Builder, then service in Missabi Range ore service until its retirement in 1955. It was donated to Sioux City and placed on outside display in July in 1955, and saved by the newly formed Siouxland Historical Railroad Association in 1984. “We are going to restore the engine back to operation with the goal of bringing business and tourism to Sioux City,” said Logan Stilwell, president of the [American Heartland Railway Society](#), also a Sioux City-based nonprofit. “... I’m very thankful for the Obermeyer family for giving us this opportunity, and the community for standing behind us after this horrible flood.” The museum has been shut down since June 23 flooding that overwhelmed its facilities in the former Milwaukee Road Sioux City Engine Terminal and Car Repair Shops, sustaining extensive damage to all its buildings and a number of displays [see [“Iowa railroad museum shut down ...”](#), Trains News Wire, June 24, 2024]. KCAU-TV reports 50 to 60 volunteers have been helping out at the museum since the flood waters receded; TJ Obermeyer told the goal is to have the museum reopened by Labor Day, with key exhibits and buildings reopened in a fashion that allows visitors to move through the grounds safely without passing through damaged areas or those still under construction. Those interested in donating to the steam engine restoration or flood recovery efforts can do so [at the museum website](#)

## Santa Fe No. 2926 Makes First Visit in 2024 to Albuquerque's Rail Yards

By Lucas Iverson | July 5, 2024

The 4-8-4 takes a mainline stroll for annual convention; Next run scheduled in late September



*A private night photo session titled Steam at the Albuquerque Rail Yards was held on the evening of Sept. 30, 2023, with Santa Fe No. 2926, led by award-winning photographer Steve Crise. The 4-8-4 returned to the facility June 26-27, 2024.*

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — The long-awaited Albuquerque convention by the Santa Fe Railway Historical & Modeling Society, previously postponed due to COVID-19, called for a visit to the downtown's Rail Yards as part of the annual gathering. Adding on to the itinerary was the June 26-27 appearance of steam locomotive No. 2926, making its first mainline visit to the former ATSF facility in 2024 and its second since restoration. "The locomotive performed as planned," said Mathew Casford, chief of rail operations for New Mexico Heritage Rail, which owns the locomotive. "This was a celebration for the capital outlay funds we were able to get from the state to relay the turntable lead." [Last year's visit](#), during the first New Mexico Railroad Days, staged No. 2926 north of the shop complex near the Alvarado Transportation Center. With recent track work completed by Heritage Rail volunteers and advanced coordination with New Mexico Rail Runner Express and BNSF Railway, the 4-8-4 overnights at the south end, residing next to the turntable and foundation of the former roundhouse for the first time since 1956. "We're working with the city [which owns the property] and state in seeking additional funds to do a makeover of the south Rail Yards," Casford explains, while also noting continuing restoration to the turntable and future track work to the shop lead.

"The other place we're looking at investing money in is the industrial spur between our restoration site and the main line, because there is some track that would do us a lot of good if it was upgraded."

Like last year, No. 2926 and its tool car left the site on June 26 for a short ferry move over the spur and onto the ex-Santa Fe Transcontinental main line. The locomotive returned home the following day, departing the Rail Yards with the sound of its whistle echoing throughout the currently vacant machine shop. Once again, it was a solo operation as the positive train control system wasn't active along the traversed section of the main line.

Despite an already implemented LeaPTC system, Casford confirms full PTC compliance for No. 2926 will now be required for expanded operations, including any chance for passenger excursions. A capital fundraising campaign is currently underway while both he and the non-profit organization develop a unique and predictably expensive solution to run along state-owned tracks operated by multiple entities.

"We need to figure out what is the best way for us to fit in Rail Runner, Amtrak, BNSF, and NMDOT's equation so that there is no heartburn over something that's not normal to them," he says. "Whenever we do find a solution, we do know that it's going to cost money and an existential amount."

In the meantime, NMHR is preparing the locomotive for its second outing to the Rail Yards, scheduled Sept. 27-29 during New Mexico Railroad Days. "Each and every time we fire up No. 2926, we have a running punch list of the things that the guys have observed and need to address when not hot," Casford explains. "This time around, they're looking at the packing glands around the piston valves and the main piston rods because they were leaking."

"Now we're getting to the point that all the big leaks are getting chased out and doing the individual valve lapping. Whether we wanted to or not, NMHR is trying to carry on the standards of the Santa Fe excellence. We're custodians of one of their Cadillacs."

Visit the [New Mexico Heritage Rail website](#) for more information.



*Soo Line 2-8-2 No. 1003 performs in the snow during a Trains Magazine photo charter in November 2001. A two-day charter featuring the locomotive is set for this November. David Lassen*

## Two-day Freight Photo Charter Offered with Soo Line No. 1003

By Trains Staff | July 18, 2024 Wisconsin event set for Nov. 2-3

Ethan Brodie and Brodie Photography are organizing a two-day photo charter in November featuring Soo Line No. 1003, the 1913 Alco 2-8-2 operated by the Hartford, Wis.-based Steam Locomotive Heritage Association. One- and two-day tickets will be offered for the event Nov. 2-03, which will feature No. 1003 pulling a freight train including additional cars provided by the Wisconsin & Southern. Participants will drive by their own vehicles to locations that will be provided to paid participants. The event schedule will differ each day to provide a variety of morning, afternoon, and evening lighting; some photo locations will feature vintage vehicles and staged scenes.

Tickets — priced at \$275 for Nov. 2, \$325 for Nov. 3, or \$475 for both days — [are available here](#). For more information, contact [brodiephotography412@gmail.com](mailto:brodiephotography412@gmail.com).



## Connecticut's Valley Railroad to Host Two-day Steam Photo Event

*By Trains Staff* | August 7, 2024

**Oct. 8-9 event to feature two locomotives, freight and passenger consists**



*Valley Railroad Alco 2-8-2 No. 40 will be featured on the first day of a two-day photo event this October. Kevin Madore*

ESSEX, Conn. — The Valley Railroad Co. will be the site of a two-day photography event Oct. 8-9 featuring the heritage railroad's steam locomotives. Steam Charters, hosted by Dak Dilon Photography, is organizing the event. Plans for Oct. 8 call for a freight train from Old Saybrook to Goodspeed station to be pulled by Valley Railroad No. 40, an Alco 2-8-2 built in 1920. The consist will receive six to seven freight cars and several passenger cars; the passenger cars will be detached at each photo location. The day will conclude with a night photo session at Essex station and yard. Activity on Oct. 9 will feature Valley Railroad No. 3025, a 2-8-2 built by the Tangshan Locomotive & Rolling Stock Works in China in 1989 and modified and lettered to resemble a New Haven locomotive. It will operate with a train highlighting the railroad's Pullman rolling stock.

Activity both days will begin at sunrise and will feature numerous photo locations. The cost is \$725 per person, with the event limited to 35 participants. [More information or registration is available here.](#)

## Illinois Railway Museum Sets Night Steam Photo Shoot

*By Trains Staff* | August 9, 2024 | Last updated on August 12, 2024

**Sept. 7 event to feature Frisco Decapod No. 1630**



*Illinois Railway Museum will host a night photo event featuring its Frisco 2-10-0, No. 1630, on Sept. 7. IRM*

UNION, Ill. — The Illinois Railway Museum will host a night photo shoot featuring Frisco No. 1630, its 1918 Baldwin 2-10-0, on Saturday, Sept. 7, 2024. The event begins at 5 p.m.

Tickets are \$100 and participation will be limited. No. 1630 will be staged at locations around the property with actors wearing period-appropriate attire. Coordination and lighting will be provided by David Zeman and Ralph Durham; participants are encouraged to bring their own tripod and a camera with allows them to manually control shutter speed, aperture, and ISO. Tickets and additional details are available at [this page on the IRM website](#)

## Former Nickel Plate Pullman to Join Indiana Rail Experience (corrected)

*By Trains Staff* | August 14, 2024

**Tickets available for Amtrak charter moving 'Kitchi Gammi Club' from New York City**



*Heavyweight Pullman car Kitchi Gammi Club at New York's Sunnyside Yard. Lou Capwell*

FORT WAYNE, Ind. — Pullman railcar *Kitchi Gammi Club*, built in 1923, assigned to Nickel Plate Road passenger service after a 1937 modification, and later converted to a business car for that railroad, will move from New York City to become part of special events at the Indiana Rail Experience this October and December, the Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society has announced.

Tickets to ride the car will be available on its Amtrak charter from New York to Chicago to Grand Rapids, Mich., as well as on its seasonal Indiana Rail Experience excursions, will be available at [the Indiana Rail Experience website](#). The Kitchi Gammi Club operated in Nickel Plate passenger service until 1953, then was converted into a business car. After later serving in wreck train service, it was deemed surplus and was restored and operated between 1988 and 2019 by the Virginia Rail Investment Corp. and owners Chuck Akers and Chuck Jensen. [The car's full history is available here.](#) It will be accompanied on the move to Indiana by former Union Pacific Budd sleeper *Pacific Island*, [operated by Adios Rail](#).

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Arrival in Grand Rapids will be on Sept. 8, followed by move to northern Indiana by freight train. Ten individual overnight tickets, six double-bedroom overnight tickets, and a limited number of one-way tickets are available for the Amtrak portion of the trip. A berth aboard *Kitchi Gammi Club* is \$950. A double bedroom for two aboard *Pacific Island* is \$2,500. One-way individual tickets between Waterloo and Chicago, or Chicago and Grand Rapids, are \$325. Passengers will be responsible for their own return travel, lodging, and accommodations.

*Kitchi Gammi Club* and *Pacific Island* will operate on the Indiana Rail Experience's previously sold-out Fall Colors Steam Special between Pleasant Lake and Hillsdale, Mich., on Oct 19-20, and board the diesel-powered Autumn Limited Oct. 25-27. Both cars will also be part of Indiana Christmas Train dates throughout December.

— Updated at 11:50 a.m. CT to correct location to Waterloo, Ind.

## James E. Strates Shows Carnival Train Scheduled for Aug. 1 Trip to Western New York Fair

By Bill Stephens | July 26, 2024

**The Strates equipment is currently shuffling off to Buffalo, N.Y., via CSX, which will hand the train to short line Buffalo Southern for the trip to the Erie County Fair**



HAMBURG, N.Y. — The James E. Strates Shows carnival train, the last of its kind, is scheduled to run to the Erie County Fairgrounds south of Buffalo, N.Y., on Thursday, Aug. 1.

The train, which has been sidelined since the pandemic, is currently en route to Buffalo, N.Y., in regular merchandise service on CSX. Once there, it will be interchanged with short line Buffalo Southern for the trip to Hamburg. The Erie County Fair will host Train Day at the former Erie Railroad depot at 4 Scott St. in the Village of Hamburg. The event will kick off at 9 a.m. with an anticipated train arrival between 11 a.m. and 11:30 a.m., the fair announced today.

The return of the Strates train coincides with the 100th anniversary of the partnership between the family-run carnival company and the Erie County Fair. It is considered the longest continuous run of any one carnival midway and a fair in the U.S.

Strates rail cars have been mechanically overhauled and cosmetically restored for its return, including the application of retro-inspired color schemes and lettering.

*On May 3, 2016, The James E. Strates Shows train P-922 rolls eastbound on CSX's Philadelphia Subdivision in Elk Mills, Md. Michael S. Murray*

The Aug. 1 event will feature vendors selling 2024 Train Day t-shirts, and the U.S. Postal Service will be on hand with commemorative Fair Train Finale cancellation marks featuring Carnival Nights stamps. Artcraft Toy Trains will be taking pre-orders for Atlas O-scale officially licensed and authorized Strates Shows Carnival Show Train cars.

[More information about the event is available online at the Erie County Fair website](#)

Future moves involving the Strates train are unclear.

"The Strates Family has yet to determine the long-term plan of its rail transportation program as it has successfully transitioned to using over the road trucks," spokesman Marty Biniasz says. "The limited return to rails during the summer of 2024 coincides with the celebration of our 100-year partnership with the Erie County Fair in Hamburg, N.Y. This is the only planned use of the Fair Train during the 2024 season."

## --- Other RR News ---

### Railroads' Lumber Business has Weathered High Interest Rates; Fed Interest Rate Cuts Can Only Help: Analysis

By Chase Gunnoe | July 16, 2024

**Lumber traffic remains nearly level with 2023**



*Canadian National EMD SD70M-2 No. 8836 leads a merchandise freight, with five loaded center beams on the head end, passes the still-manned Elgin, Joliet & Eastern JB Tower in West Chicago, Ill., crossing the UP's ex-Chicago and North Western mainline. CN and UP are America's biggest transporters of lumber by rail. Chase Gunnoe.*

WASHINGTON — Thirty-year-high mortgage rates and a double-digit decrease in U.S. housing starts from a year ago has only curbed Class I railroads' lumber business by about 3,300 carloads, down just 1%, compared to July 2023. Now proposed Federal interest rate cuts could rejuvenate residential housing starts and give railroads' lumber business a jolt.

U.S. Class I railroads, including the U.S. rail traffic of Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Kansas City, have moved more than 244,000 carloads of lumber so far this year, managing to keep the business mostly flat in the past year despite soaring

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mortgage rates that peaked at 7.7% for a 30-year fixed mortgage in October 2023.

Mortgage rates remain high today at 6.8% on average, mostly on par with last summer and well above historical norms, according to data from mortgage company Freddie Mac. At the same time, U.S. housing starts have continued to fall, decreasing 5% from April to May 2024 to an annualized rate of 1.28 million homes, the lowest since July 2020, and down 18% from a year ago, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.

With inflation cooling and the Fed expected to decrease interest rates at least once in 2024, this could eventually entice home builders and prospect buyers to re-enter the market, increasing demand for lumber, and giving railroads the opportunity to capture new demand. Housing starts are now on-par with pre-pandemic July 2019's 1.24 million homes, after the pandemic uprooted the industry, causing new residential construction to spiral to 931,000 homes in April 2020 before rallying to a peak of 1.83 million homes two years later in April 2022.

As borrowing costs increased, the housing market cooled, and lumber prices dropped. High interest rates are impacting home buyers' affordability and the cost to build new homes is more expensive than two years ago. This is keeping housing inventory low and buying subdued, further contributing to a U.S. housing shortage estimated at more than three million homes, caused in part by decades long periods of too few new homes being built.

As for how railroads are managing this quandary, volume isn't down as much as some would think. In the U.S., Canadian National moves the most lumber of any Class I railroad, having hauled 66,277 carloads so far this year. Its business is down 2.7% year over year, a decrease of about 1,845 carloads. In comparison, Union Pacific, the second-largest hauler of lumber by volume, has tallied 55,341 carloads, down 4%, or about 2,000 fewer carloads.

Both BNSF Railway and Canadian Pacific Kansas City's lumber business is flat, down less than 1% compared to a year ago. In the East, CSX Transportation's lumber business is down 1%. In contrast to other carriers, Norfolk Southern's lumber business is up 1,275 carloads, or 5% ahead of last year. The carload data is compiled and published by each Class I railroad as part of its weekly reporting to the Association of American Railroads.

But falling interest rates aren't a sure bet that railroads will start hauling more center-beams. Trucking is the perpetual thorn in the side for railroads and decreased consumer discretionary spending, also a byproduct of high interest rates, has truckers ready to work. Railroads will have to get creative to capture business in short-haul markets supplied by southern yellow pine in the Southeast or spruce pine and other fibers originating from the Pacific Northwest where trucks can be more flexible and cost effective.

The pandemic-induced days of \$1,500-per-thousand-board-foot for lumber have ended and railroads will have to be increasingly cognizant of lumber producers' focus on cost and transportation spend as the market rebalances. Lumber futures are currently trading at \$435-per-thousand-board-foot, more on par with pre-pandemic pricing.

In preparation for the highly anticipated, but gradual expectation of loosened monetary policy, now is the time where railroads are — or should be — developing strategies to bolster this business unit before front yards start filling up with for sale signs.

## Volumes are Up, But Stocks are Down as Class I Railroads Finish First Half of 2024: Analysis

*By Chase Gunnoe | July 18, 2024*

**Traffic alone not enough to generate positive activity by investors**



*A pair of Norfolk Southern EMD SD40Es assist eastbound a double stack intermodal train of mostly J.B. Hunt containers eastbound through Cassandra, Pa. NS's intermodal volumes are up 7% through the first*



*An eastbound Union Pacific coal train negotiates Byers Canyon on the former Denver & Rio Grande near Hot Sulphur Springs, Colo. UP's coal business is down 22% through the first half of 2024. Chase Gunnoe*

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — Railroads are moving more traffic than a year ago, but investors aren't piling into railroad stocks. The stock prices of four of the five Class I railroads trading on the New York Stock Exchange are down this year despite railroads' volumes being flat, or up slightly, through the first half of 2024 compared to a year ago, according to weekly carload data compiled and published by each railroad.

CSX Transportation, Norfolk Southern, Union Pacific, Canadian National, and Canadian Pacific Kansas City, the five publicly traded Class I railroads, finished the second quarter with lower share prices than at the start of the New Year, despite four of those railroads seeing a rise in traffic over the same period.

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It's imperative to note that a volume increase doesn't guarantee increased profitability, or that railroads generated more net income through the first half of the year because of a bump in volume. Those financial details, including average revenues per carload, will be fleshed out when the railroads share their second quarter earnings in the weeks ahead.

But what we can say is that rail traffic, notably intermodal, is up across most railroads, but it isn't getting the attention of investors. Norfolk Southern stock finished the second quarter down 8%, but its overall volumes are up 3% year-over-year. Intermodal traffic is up 7% and merchandise is nearly flat, up less than 1%. The railroad's coal business is down 3%.

Shares of Union Pacific finished the second quarter down 7% on mostly flat volume. Intermodal is up 3%, but merchandise traffic is down 3%. UP has moved about 88,000 fewer coal carloads compared to this time last year — a 22% drop.

Canadian National's stock was down 5% at the end of June with volumes up less than 1%. Like its peers, intermodal business is up, increasing 5% year over year. Merchandise traffic is down less than 1% and coal is down 14%.

CSX shares closed the second quarter 3% below where they started the year, even though the railroad's traffic is up 2% year over year. CSX has seen a 5% increase in intermodal and its merchandise business, like NS and CN, is down less than 1%. CSX's coal franchise is down 1% for the year, a difference of about 6,000 carloads, despite a closure to the Port of Baltimore that curbed export shipments through the port in the second quarter. Canadian Pacific Kansas City finished June with shares losing less than 1% from the start of the year. Its business is the only Class I to see a year-over-year decrease in volume with total traffic down 4% at the end of June. Intermodal is down 7% and all other carloads are down 1%, including coal, posting a 10% decrease from a year ago.

Asked why railroad stock prices and volumes are moving in opposite directions, independent analyst Anthony B. Hatch says the industry is still in or just exiting a freight recession and railroads' coal business is significantly down.

Combining the coal traffic of each of the five publicly traded Class I railroad reveals that through the first half of the year, these railroads hauled 160,000 fewer coal carloads, a decrease of 10%. Union Pacific alone shipped 80,000 fewer carloads in the first six months of 2024 compared to a year ago. In addition to coal's decline, Hatch says there are no signs of an economic inflection, but notes that railroads are continuing to right the service ship by providing better and more reliable service to its customers.

As earnings get closer, railroad stocks have slightly improved in the first two weeks of July. Shares of Canadian Pacific Kansas City have gained 7% so far this month, making it the only railroad whose stock is now higher than at the start of 2024 — up 5% from January. Kicking off the third quarter, Norfolk Southern and Canadian National shares have gained 3%, Union Pacific up 2%, and CSX has added less than 1%, however shares of each are still down year-to-date as of Friday, July 12.

What merchandise traffic is driving volume gains?

Using the most recent weekly carload data comparing year-over-year volumes, the biggest percentage gainers across different commodity groups at each of the publicly traded Class Is is mixed. CSX's petroleum business is up 16%; farming products, excluding grain, up 10%, and primary forest products up 9%. Nine of the 20 commodities recognized by CSX are up. Norfolk Southern's primary forest products business is up 20%; waste and scrap up 7%; and lumber and wood is up 5%. 12 out of 18 commodities are ahead of last year. Union Pacific's petroleum products franchise is up 12%; metallic ores up 9%; and pulp, paper and allied products up 8%. 12 of its 20 carload groups are outperforming last year. Canadian National's crushed stone business is up 13%; stone, clay, and glass up 10%, and petroleum products and food and kindred products are each up 6% year-over-over. 10 of its 20 commodities are ahead of last year's volumes. And at Canadian Pacific Kansas City, primary forest products are up 27%; metallic ores up 22%, and iron and steel shipments are up 16%. Eight of the 20 commodity groupings at CPKC are outperforming last year.

It's unclear if some of these volume gains are the result of railroads' concentrated efforts to improve service and dependability, and hire more workers, or if macroeconomic headwinds are waning, or a combination of both.

Hatch says what matters most in upcoming earnings reports will be commentary from the railroads.

CN will kick off second-quarter financial reporting on July 23, followed by NS and UP on July 25, CPKC on July 30, and CSX on Aug. 5.

## CSX Unveils Heritage Locomotive Celebrating Chicago & Eastern Illinois Railroad

*By Bill Stephens | July 23, 2024*



*CSX unveiled its 17th heritage locomotive, a salute to the Chicago & Eastern Illinois, at its Waycross, Ga., shop. CSX*

CSX CEO Joe Hinrichs today unveiled the railroad's 17th heritage locomotive, which pays homage to the Chicago & Eastern Illinois Railroad. "Another great job by our ONE CSX team in Waycross, Georgia. Founded in 1877, C&EI Railroad connected Chicago with southern Illinois, St. Louis, and Evansville, IN. In the 1960's C&EI was purchased by both the Missouri Pacific Railroad and Louisville & Nashville Railroads (L&N). The L&N piece, through Evansville, IN became part of CSX," Hinrichs wrote on LinkedIn. "The Missouri Pacific piece became part of Union Pacific. Thanks again to everyone who helps bring these heritage units to life so we can celebrate our history and heritage while also showcasing that we are ONE CSX team moving forward. Enjoy. The back end of this engine is particularly interesting." The 1877 joins others in the railroad's growing heritage fleet, which includes locomotives honoring the Georgia Railroad; Pittsburgh & Lake Erie; Family Lines; Pere Marquette; Richmond, Fredericksburg & Po-

Chesapeake & Ohio; Louisville & Nashville; Atlantic Coast Line; New York Central; Monon; Western Maryland; and Seaboard Coast Line. All of the units have been painted at CSX's shop in Waycross, Ga.



Provided by member Bill Dredge August 2024



2501 East 38th Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55406  
612-276-9034

hennepinoverland.org

#### KEY

	Closed to Public
	Regular Hours 1pm-4pm
	Trains After Dark 5pm-8pm
	All Day Trains 1pm-8pm
	Cleanup Day (Closed)

#### August

21	Last Day of Dirty Work
22	Cleanup Day (Closed)
24	Cleanup Day (Closed)
29	Cleanup Day (Closed)

#### September

5	Cleanup Day (Closed)
7	Opening Day
22	Youth/Family Day

#### October

#### November

29	Black Friday Special
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#### December

20	Trains After Dark
21	All Day Trains
27	Trains After Dark

## 2024-25 Open House Calendar

### July 2024

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

### August 2024

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

### September 2024

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

### October 2024

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

### November 2024

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

### December 2024

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

### January 2025

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

### February 2025

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	

### March 2025

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

### April 2025

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

### May 2025

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

### June 2025

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

### January

11	All Day Trains
12	Youth/Family Day

### February

8	All Day Trains
9	Youth/Family Day

### March

8	All Day Trains
9	Youth/Family Day

### April

12	All Day Trains
13	Youth/Family Day
20	Easter (Closed)
27	Last Day of Season
27	End of Season Potluck

### May

### June



668 Transfer Road  
Suite 8  
Saint Paul, MN

Monday: 10am – 3pm  
Friday: 10am – 3pm  
Saturday: 10am – 2pm (Regular Operations)  
10am – 5pm (March to October)

Adults \$10 (5 years and older)

Children 4 and under are FREE!

<b>Northstar Chapter NRHS Monthly Meeting</b>	<b>Saturday September 21st 2024 6:15pm—8:45pm</b>	<b>Roseville Lutheran Church</b> 1215 Roselawn Ave W Roseville MN 55113	<b>FREE</b> -Guests are Welcome
<b>Twin City Model Railroad Museum Hobby Show and Sale</b>	<b>Saturday, September 14, 2024 from 9:00am to 2:00pm</b>	<b>MN State Fairgrounds – Education Bldg.</b> 1327 Cosgrove Street Falcon Heights, MN 55108	<b>\$7</b>
<b>Lake Superior Transportation Club Model RR flea market</b>	<b>Saturday Sept 28, 2024 10:00am to 5:00pm</b>	<b>Lake Superior Railroad Museum</b> 506 W. Michigan St. Duluth MN, 55802	<b>Free, \$14 Admission to the Lake Superior RR Museum</b>
<b>The Lake Superior Railroad Museum Minnesota Free-Mo Modelers operating layout</b>	<b>Sept 28<sup>th</sup> and Sept 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024 10:00am - 12:00 Noon:</b>	<b>St. Louis County Depot Great Hall</b> 506 W. Michigan St. Duluth MN, 55802.	<b>Free</b>
<b>Newport Railroad Club Flea Market</b>	<b>Saturday October 12th, 2024 9:00am - 2:00pm</b>	<b>Woodbury High School</b> 2665 Woodlane Drive Woodbury, MN	<b>\$7</b>
<b>Great Train Show</b>	<b>Saturday –Sunday Oct 26<sup>th</sup> and Oct 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024 10:00am - 5:00pm</b>	<b>Canterbury Park Expo Center</b> 1100 Canterbury Rd. Shakopee, MN	<b>\$29 for both days \$15 per day</b>
<b>Century College Model RR Flea Market</b>	<b>Saturday Nov 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024 9:00am - 2:00pm</b>	<b>Century College West Campus</b> 3401 Century Ave N White Bear Lake MN 55110	<b>\$7</b>
<b>North Metro Model RR Club Railroad Flea Market &amp; Open House</b>	<b>Saturday Dec 2nd 2024 9:00am—2:00pm</b>	<b>Coon Rapids VFW Building</b> 1919 Coon Rapids Blvd Coon Rapids MN 55433	<b>\$5</b>

Northstar News  
8310 University Ave NE APT: #420  
Fridley MN 55432  
Address Correction Requested

