



NRHS

Northstar News

Publishers of the Minnesota Rail Calendar

Next Meeting Saturday November 9th 2024 Roseville Lutheran Church



*L: Members John Chute, Roger Libra on NKP #765 trip at Hillsdale MI Sunday Oct 20 2024, R Tubbesing Photo
R: Our tables Selling stuff at the Great Train Show Canterbury Expo Center Sat Oct 26, 2024 –Robert Thurn Photo (pictured are: G Holmberg, John Goodman, Richard Tubbesing, Dawn Holmberg & Dan Meyer)*



Table of Contents

Chapter Officers, Meeting Notice, Editor Column	Pg's 1, 2
From the Editor , Chapter Officers	Pg 2
Meeting Minutes	Pg's 2, 3
Minneapolis Blue Line Extension	Pg 4
CPKC Holiday Train	Pg 4
North Pole Express	Pg 5
Amtrak Borealis	Pg 5
Railroading Heritage of Midwest America Report	Pg 6
Passenger Line between Albert Lea and Northfield	Pg 7
Ore Rail News	Pg 7
Amtrak News (4 articles)	Pg's 8,9,10
BNSF News (4 Articles)	Pg's 10,11
UP News (6 Articles)	Pg's 11,12,13,14,15
CPKC News (4 Articles)	Pg's 15,16,17,
CN News (3 Articles)	Pg's 17,18,19
Other Railroad News (13 Articles)	Pg's 19,20,21,22,23,24, 25,26,27,28
FRA Awards CRISI Grants (excerpts for area states)	Pg 22
Preservation, Museum, and Steam News, Historical News	Pg's 29,30,,31.32,33
November 6 in Railroad History	Pg's 33,34
Trains in Movies	Pg's 34,35
CRISI Grants for Alaska, South Dakota	Pg 35
C&NW RR Slides, Railfan Events	Pg 36

Meeting Notice:

Saturday November 9th, 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.

Program: Photos by Richard Tubbesing
1970's around Dayton's Bluff, Many steam chases in the Midwest and west, many steam Photo specials with #261, #765, #4449, #2719, and more... Audience can choose many subjects they would like to see!

An informal Dinner at Keys Restaurant -Lexington and Larpenteur Avenues at 4:15 pm November 9th 2024.

Please join us in-person at Roseville Lutheran Church, Saturday November 9th, 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 November 9th, 2024 Meeting:

Meeting ID: 837 9960 0288

Passcode: 277336

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83799600288?pwd=xsXMnUf8iENGELpF7DObtZeRu584SO.1>

Dial-in, audio only 507 473 4847

Northstar Chapter Officers and Staff

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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 will be out around December 5th, 2024.

This Issue will contain a sign-up Brochure for our Holiday Banquet at Mancini's Restaurant in St Paul. (on Email copy it will be an additional attachment) Choices for meal is Steak or Chicken. Please send in your reservation promptly.

Program will be photos by Jack Barbier of Amtrak's early years.



From the BOD : John Goodman has retired from his chairmanship as NRHS Convention Chairman. We want to thank John Goodman for his yeoman's work as NRHS Convention Chairman. The NRHS Conventions have been tremendous successes year after year due to John's work.!

Meeting Minutes October 19 2024, Roseville Lutheran Church

The meeting was called to order at 6:20 pm by President Dan Meyer. There were about 15 members and Guests present. A quorum was determined. (3 of 4 directors and 20% of membership) A motion to members by President Dan Meyer to approve the meeting minutes from October Newsletter from the September 2024 meeting was floored. The motion was carried.

Trip Director Report. The Trip Director report was given by John Goodman. We need to decide what Trips to consider for next year. The Bus Rental for a trip is very expensive. We do not have any news on the status of the steam engine on the Boone and Scenic RR in Iowa. The Duluth Museum has been running DM&IR #332 steam engine this year. John stated he is open to what trip we will do next year. If the Mark Twain Zephyr is done, a trip to Trego Wisconsin should be considered. Dan and John suggested we do a Amtrak Borealus Trip to Red Wing and return. Dan Meyer suggested we could do a trip on the Borealus to LaCrosse, Tomah Wisconsin or to Wisconsin Dells.

Continued on next page:

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John Chute and Richard Tubbesing stated they have done the Wisconsin Dells trip twice this year and have about 2 hours at the Dells for dining and returned on the Amtrak Empire Builder. The Round trip to the Dells cost about \$97 which includes Borealis business class. Richard Tubbesing stated that Restaurants at the Dells are about 1 to 3 blocks away, and the closest Bar Restaurant opens at 3PM. Treasurer's Report. The Treasurer report was given by John Chute. Our Chapter (not Including the Calendar account) balance for October was on par from previous months. John stated that he plans to have dues renewals out early next month. John Chute stated he sent a check for two tables at the Canterbury Great Train Show later this month. President Dan Meyer took a poll on who will help staff the Canterbury train show. There were four volunteers. John Goodman has the Cash box. Richard Tubbesing stated we have a donation of VHS tapes from Roger Libre. Dan Meyer stated that VHS tapes sell very slowly at flea markets.

Library/Storage/ Flea Market Report. The library report was reported by John Goodman. When John Goodman went to a presentation at the Twin Cities Model Railroad Club there was a vacant room that looked to be available. John Goodman stated that could be a place for our Library and weekly member get-togethers on Wednesday. Dan Meyer stated we have to look at what the rental cost would be and we will look into that matter. Calendar Report. Dawn Holmberg gave the Calendar Report. We have 2025 calendars for sale. She has distributed calendars to some Twin City retail outlets and has taken calendars to the Lake Superior Railroad Museum. Dawn stated that Richard Tubbesing has sold some calendars to his friends. and quality seems to be better. We sold 11 Calendars at the Fair Ground Flea market. Dawn Stated that we should have a good deposit coming to our calendar account. Dawn stated that she has contacted the NRHS and they will put an AD for the Calendar in their next newsletter. Dawn stated that she met with Steve Barry and he will put an announcement of the calendar in the Railfan and Railroad Magazine. John Goodman stated we have a separate bank account for the Calendar and the balance is in good shape.

Newsletter Report. The newsletter report was given by Richard Tubbesing. The November Newsletter will be out somewhere between the 1st and 5th of November. The November Newsletter issue will have a brochure in order to attend our Holiday Banquet Sunday December 1st at Mancini's Restaurant in St Paul. Richard Tubbesing stated that the cost of printing the black and white copy last month of the newsletter was about \$75. Wayne Torseth asked how many copies of the black and white version of the newsletter do we send. Richard Tubbesing stated we send 25 copies by snail mail which includes 20 members and 5 complimentary copies to historical societies and other chapters. Dan Meyer stated that if anyone has stories of railroad interest to put in the newsletter contact Richard Tubbesing. National Representative Report. The National (NRHS) report was given by Dawn Holmberg. At the Wilmington DE Conference last month the NRHS is still working on the financials since they have switched auditing companies. NRHS Vice President Ernst sent Dawn updated files which she posted on the NRHS web site. Bob Bitzer also sent updated files that were posted to the NRHS web site. Dawn reported that the NRHS is well into the black with donations and membership dues. NRHS Investments are also doing well. At the Wilmington conference there was an Advisory Council and a couple of BOD Meetings. All committee chairmen were retired, and new committee chairmen rehired in accordance in time in with the BOD officers election. John Goodman has decided to retire as the Convention Chairman position. Mike Youhas became co-chair of the convention committee and Dan Meyer appointed Audio-visual Advisor. Dawn will stay on as an NRHS Web Person. John Goodman, Skip Waters and Charley Webb committee Chairmen were replaced for 2-year terms. John Goodman gave a report on this year's NRHS convention. The NRHS is still working on the financials since they have switched to auditing companies. A good Conference was held at Wilmington with train rides and shop tours. At the conference John Goodman was recognized for all the NRHS convention work he has done and received raucous applause. The latest NRHS bulletin has been recently sent out to members. The NRHS News will be coming out in three parts and feature the Pennsylvania Convention this year. Dawn will also be receiving a quarterly report on our Chapter membership. Dan Meyer stated that the NRHS is starting a periodic 'Fireside Chat' were by members via ZOOM can communicate with NRHS Board. Web Report The web report was given by Dan Meyer. The new Web Server is working fine. Dan will post information on the fall Flea market and railfan activities and information on the holiday party on the web site. Dan stated we are also on Facebook, and you can garner information on our chapter there.

Cheer Committee. The health of several members was discussed. John Goodman stated that Dave Norman attended the Fairgrounds flea market. Glen Holmberg reported that Bob Clarkson has moved to an Assisted Care Facility. Glen Holmberg has seen Dave Norman. Glen is still working on Dave Norman trolley layout. Dawn Holmberg stated that Nancy Rumler sent a Facebook message to Dan and Dawn on their anniversary.

Old Business to report. No Old Business to Report.

Nominating Committee Report. John Goodman stated that he has found no interest in running for the BOD. If things don't change, the current four BOD Officers will be placed in nomination next month. Dan Meyer, Dawn Holmberg, Richard Tubbesing and John Chute are nominated. New Business Report. John Goodman reported on the Holiday Banquet. It will be held on Sunday December 1, 2024 at Mancini's Restaurant in St Paul from 3pm to 6pm. From 3-4pm will be a social hour, dinner at 4pm and the program to begin at 5pm. Program will be photos by Jack Barbier. Choices are chicken and steak, with hors d'oeuvres. The cost will \$39. A brochure will be included with the next newsletter to make your dinner selection and send send your payment.

A motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:50 was made. Motion was carried.

Announcements. Wayne Torseth stated on the way back from out east, he caught the Big Boy in Iowa on its Midwest tour. John Goodman stated that an agreement was made by the Fort Wayne Historical Society to restore to operation the NYC 4-8-2 #3001 at the Elkhart IN NYC Museum. The cost is estimated to be in the three to four million range. It will hopefully be operational by 2030. October Program will be a program why there is no transcontinental railroad in the United States by Ross Hammond. Richard Tubbesing stated he has many photos from the last 30 year he is willing to share at the next meeting. Roger Libre has volunteered to do a DVD on our Indiana trip with NKP #765 early next year. Bob Ball, Greg Smith are other possibilities for programs next year. Bob Ball stated at the Fair Grounds Flea Market some of his slides from 30 years ago have been showing up. Bob suggested it would be a good program to show some of these slides at a future program.

Respectfully Submitted by Secretary Richard Tubbesing

Minneapolis Grants Consent for Blue Line Extension Through City's North Side

Sent: Thursday, October 3, 2024 at 01:40:45 PM CDT Rick Krenske

Subject: Metro News - Minneapolis Approves Blue Line Extension



Light rail trains on the Blue Line depart the Warehouse District/Hennepin Avenue station in Minneapolis. Jennifer Simonson | MPR News file photo

The Minneapolis City Council signed off Wednesday on the proposed route of a light rail line that will run through a section of the city's north side. The council granted municipal consent for the [Blue Line extension](#), a 13-mile route through Robbinsdale, Crystal and Brooklyn Park. However, some council members said they could only get to a yes vote after some of their concerns with the route were addressed.

Council member LaTrisha Vetaw added an amendment to the municipal consent resolution, which raises concerns about a section of the route that crosses Theodore Wirth Parkway at-grade and threatens to disrupt emergency vehicle traffic to nearby North Memorial Hospital.

"Those two issues, the at-grade crossing and it affecting Theo Wirth and Victory Memorial Parkway, and also the hospital's concerns have been the conversations I've had, most of the conversations I've had, with Ward Four residents," she said. "And so I just wanted to make sure that was included in our resolution. It is something that I'm going to be very vigilant about moving forward on this project."

The amended resolution passed by the council includes language noting the objections by the hospital and the city's park board and encourages the Met Council's project office to consider alternatives to an at-grade intersection such as a tunnel, trench or elevated track.

Council member Michael Rainville, who represents a section of downtown that will be impacted by the extension, said at first he wasn't going to support the resolution. Then he had a conversation with Metropolitan Council chair Charles Zelle that eased his concerns. "I have two blocks in my ward of this line of this route, but it's going to greatly impact the condo owners," he said. "There's two condos and the Salvation Army. So part of my yes is that you figure out how they will not suffer economic loss. That's a must."

Rainville added that he also has concerns about the potential for crime on a light rail platform planned in his ward. The route will travel through a large section of Council member Jeremiah Ellison's ward. He said he wants to make sure concerns about displacement of his residents are taken seriously.

"When I think about the kind of infrastructure that northsiders deserve, the light rail is that, but when I also think about the kind of impacts that come with transit-oriented development, we know that displacement becomes a real threat to the identity and to the people that live along some of these routes," said Ellison.

A long-time northsider, Ellison said he's encouraged that as the project goes forward, anti-displacement will remain a high priority. "I feel like with the resolution that we've attached to this document, to this action, I feel like we are well equipped to ensure that anti-displacement not only has a voice in the municipal consent process but that it that it becomes a real thing that we're going to execute down the line."

Last month, dozens of people spoke at a [public hearing](#) about the proposed route. Some of the people who spoke out against the route were northside residents or business owners concerned about safety risks posed by the trains and were concerned about how the route would limit access to some businesses and institutions.

Earlier this week, the cities of Crystal and Robbinsdale also granted municipal consent for the project.

Metro News CPKC Holiday Train Minnesota Stops

Friday, October 11, 2024 at 01:35:51 PM CDT Provided by Rick Krenske

Here is the list of Minnesota stops for the CPKC Holiday Train.

Dec 10	14:15 - 14:45	La Crescent	215 South Chestnut Street
Dec 10	15:45 - 1615	Winona	65 East Mark Street
Dec 10	17:45 - 18:15	Wabasha	Bruegger Park - Gambie Avenue
Dec 10	20:15 - 20:45	Hastings	500 East Second Street
Dec 11	17:15 - 17:45	Cottage Grove	7064 West Point Douglas Road
Dec 11	19:00 - 19:30	St Paul Union Depot	214 East 4th Street
Dec 12	17:00 - 17:30	Golden Valley	Golden Hills Drive
Dec 12	18:15 - 18:45	St Louis Park	Lake Street & Library Lane
Dec 12	20:15 - 20:45	Minneapolis	37th Avenue & Stinson Boulevard
Dec 14	16:30 - 17:00	Loretto	Road 19, Hennepin County
Dec 14	18:00 - 1830	Buffalo	5th Street Northeast
Dec 14	19:30 - 20:00	Annandale	Downtown Park - Harrison Street
Dec 14	21:00 - 21:30	Eden Valley	State Street - State Highway 22
Dec 15	10:15 - 10:45	Glenwood	20 - 15th Street Northeast
Dec 15	11:45 - 12:15	Alexandria	8th Avenue & Nokomis
Dec 15	14:45 - 15:15	Detroit Lakes	Holmes Comm Center - 826 Summit



North Pole Express *DECEMBER 6-8 & 12-15, 2024*



Children and trains go together during the Holiday Season like colorful lights, brightly iced cookies, festively wrapped gifts, family and friends. Please join the nonprofit Friends of the 261 annual journey on the North Pole Express.

The North Pole Express is our group's largest yearly fundraiser enabling us to continue to operate and maintain the stars of the show, the Milwaukee Road #261 steam locomotive, built in 1944, operating the first weekend. Followed by Milwaukee Road #32A, an E9 diesel built in 1956, operating the second weekend. Experience a ride in one of our historic rail cars pulled by these classic center pieces of engineering.

Our show is brought to you by our excited ALL volunteer crew, Santa and his elves that promises to make this a memorable Holiday Tradition.

Climb aboard this holiday train from the past that includes the North Pole and a visit from Santa himself! Avoid the trouble of setting up your old train set around the tree this year and let us provide you with a REAL steam train for the holidays.

Buy tickets at <https://261.com/npe/>

Amtrak's Borealis Train Ridership Reaches 100K in Five Months

The St. Paul-Chicago route is exceeding projections. Provided by Rick Krenske

By [Tim Harlow](#) The Minnesota Star Tribune OCTOBER 24, 2024 AT 2:58PM



Amtrak's Borealis train line from St. Paul's Union Depot to downtown Chicago began in May. (Richard Tsong-Taatarii/The Minnesota Star Tribune)

Amtrak's Borealis line running between St. Paul's Union Depot and downtown Chicago hit a milestone this week with 100,000 riders, a feat achieved in just 22 weeks [since service began in May](#).

Original projections from Amtrak and the Minnesota Department of Transportation showed between 125,000 and 135,000 passengers would ride the train annually. Other projections showed as many as 232,000 riders annually. Either way, the train, which includes Minnesota stops in Red Wing and Winona and serves multiple cities in Wisconsin before arriving in Illinois, is blowing away those projections, said Brian Nelson, president of All Aboard Minnesota, an advocacy group focused on the expansion and development of intercity rail.

"The fact that Borealis has reached 100,000 in 22 weeks is hugely significant," Nelson said in an interview Thursday. "It proves there was a need for the service." Amtrak debuted Borealis on May 21 and celebrated its achievement this week by handing out "100-Grand" candy bars and commemorative certificates to riders on eastbound and westbound trains. The line is operated by Amtrak under contracts with transportation departments in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois.

Ridership started strong with 18,500 passengers hopping on board during its first month of service. Since then, numbers have remained strong with more than 22,000 riding in August followed by a slight dip to just under 18,800 in September, according to All Aboard Minnesota.

"Passengers are voting with their feet when they buy a ticket and walk on board Borealis. We expect them to keep riding the train, and we expect they'll ride more trains when they are added," said Winona County Commissioner Chris Meyer, who also serves as vice chair of the Great River Rail Commission, another rail-advocacy group. "It is clear that residents of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois recognize the benefits of train travel on Borealis."

Borealis departs St. Paul at 11:50 a.m. daily and arrives in Chicago about 7½ hours later. Trips from the Windy City to Minnesota leave at 11:05 a.m. and arrive in St. Paul about 6:30 p.m. The line's full trains come as Amtrak is on track to set a record ridership this year, Amtrak President Roger Harris said.

"Reaching 100,000 passengers in less than six months is a testament to the good things that can happen when we provide a service that is needed," said MnDOT Commissioner Nancy Daubenberger. "We are very excited to reach this milestone and look forward to strengthening our partnerships with communities, as well as federal, state and local governments, and Amtrak to continue providing a safe, reliable and sustainable transportation option."

History's Future



Be the First to See **Locomotive #537** in Its Stunning New Colors



The latest addition to the RRHMA – Silvis fleet, Locomotive #537, has undergone extensive renovations to ensure it remains operational for years to come. As part of this overhaul, the locomotive received a stunning new exterior transformation. Be among the first to witness #537's breathtaking new look at RRHMA's Tractors & Trains event! Get your tickets now for this exclusive reveal!



Jeddo Coal #85 now at Silvis!

All aboard! Jeddo Coal #85 is ready to roll at RRHMA-Silvis, offering an unforgettable ride for passengers of all ages. Don't miss out on this historic experience! Get your tickets now at RRHMA.com and SAVE \$5 per ticket when you book in advance. Tickets are going fast—secure your spot today!



Tractors & Trains a Big Hit!

Thank you to all those that came out to see us at our first annual Tractors & Trains. This event helps support RRHMA-Silvis and its mission to preserve railroading history.

RRHMA's first ever Tractors & Trains was an event to behold. Many smiling faces, plenty of knowledge was shared with a great time had by all! Let's highlight some of the big attractions at this year's Tractors & Trains. By far the biggest accomplishment by RRHMA-Silvis Volunteers & staff was the unvailing of former ATSF #537 back to its former glory in its Warbonnet paint scheme. Volunteers & Staff alike have put many hours into making sure it was just right.

Also joining the show was Jeddo Coal #85. Jeddo Coal Company #85, nicknamed "Mack," is a standard gauge, coal burning, 0-4-0 Tank Steam Engine owned and restored by Gramling Locomotive works. The locomotive was built in 1928 by the Vulcan Iron Works, in 1933 it was sold to the Jeddo – Highland Coal Company. Jeddo named it Engine #85 and used it in their mining operations until 1964 when they sold it to a collector who moved it to Horseheads, New York.

Jeddo Coal #85 was used through out the day pulling riders aboard some of RRHMA-Silvis coaches through the yard. Also giving passengers a ride around RRHMA-Silvis was CN's Little Obie. Owned by Canadian National, Little Obie is used help promote rail safety to kids, CN is committed to ensuring that Little Obie can stop at events across Canada and the U.S. Also making an apperiance at the event were the Free-Mo modelers. The Free-mo Modelers are a group of model railroad enthusiasts who construct, operate and display HO (1:87 scale) and N (1:160 scale) modular model railroad at different locations around the country. The massive layout covered almost 150 square feet of shop space.

MN: Should Passenger Rail Line Between Albert Lea and Northfield be in Next State Rail Plan?

Oct. 29, 2024 By Sarah Stultz Source Albert Lea Tribune, Minn. (TNS) Provided by Rick Krenske

Local government leaders across southern Minnesota are continuing to discuss the possibility of passenger rail lines in this part of the state, including a line between Albert Lea and Northfield and then north to the Twin Cities.

Local government leaders across southern Minnesota are continuing to discuss the possibility of passenger rail lines in this part of the state, including a line between Albert Lea and Northfield and then north to the Twin Cities.

The 2015 Minnesota State Rail Plan included phase one designation for two corridors — one between the Twin Cities and Mankato and the other between Northfield and Albert Lea. A phase one project is one that is prioritized by the state and considered next in line to be completed somewhere in one to 20 years, said former Northfield City Councilor Suzie Nakasian, who is a part of the effort.

Because the state rail plan is required to be updated every 10 years, the Minnesota Department of Transportation has engaged the public again regarding updating the plan for 2025. She said the passenger rail lines proposed in the 2015 plan are not guaranteed to be in the 2025 plan, and that what ends up in the new plan largely depends on what they hear from the public and elected leaders in communities.

Being included in the plan qualifies projects for not only state funding but also federal funding, as the federal government looks to the state plans.

She said it is important the state continue to prioritize the lines from the 2015 plan and that they also add the east-west Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern Railroad line for passenger rail.

She asked that mayors, councilors and commissioners who support the project sign on to a joint letter.

Nakasian's comments came during a meeting Thursday with officials from across the region about the projects.

She said though the public comment period has closed, MnDOT always welcomes input from elected leaders, and she encouraged leaders to lobby for the designation of the lines if they are in support of them.

There have been two significant developments since the 2015 rail plan was published, she said, though she noted that much could depend on who is elected in November.

In November 2021, the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passed with an appropriation of \$66 billion for passenger rail. She said by 2022, the Federal Railroad Administration had rolled out four projects and was hoping to create a national network.

She said since the first request for proposals, 69 regional projects have come online, and noted the southern Minnesota projects could be in that pipeline.

She noted that projects that move forward are championed by regional groups.

"It's very well attested that the corridors that have moved forward for implementation are those that have a regional coalition of cities and counties that work together to advance the project and advocate for various funding available," she said.

In May, the Federal Railroad Administration published a national study regarding long-distance corridors that warrant addition to the Amtrak network. She said one of the corridors that warranted addition to the system could involve the southern Minnesota corridor as well.

She also referenced a train that ran through Albert Lea and Northfield to St. Paul in the 1940s through 1960s.

Though no funds have been appropriated for long-distance projects, if these projects advance, the state will need to get its plans in place.

The group of city, county and other advocates will meet again in January and consider the political landscape for the projects and likely organize a formal coalition.

Freeborn County has been part of the conversation in the past and last approved a letter supporting the passenger rail project in 2008.

OreRail] Ore Rail - Digest #555

New Ballast on Gunn Line

From: [Bruce K](#) Date: Tue, 22 Oct 2024 11:36:40 PDT

I was very surprised yesterday (Monday) that BNSF is dropping a lot of new ballast on the Gunn line west of Nashwauk, including a train yesterday afternoon.

Enquiring minds want to know what's up there?

Bruce Kettunen Mt. Iron, MN

Ore Rail - Digest #556 Re: New Ballast on Gunn Line

From: [Chuck Corwin](#) Date: Thu, 24 Oct 2024 10:49:47 PDT

Last week Oct 16, 2024 I had photographed a string of ballast cars at Kelly Lake parked on the siding (old Casco Main).

I have not heard anything on this end. Could be anticipation of Mesabi Metalics starting up in a little over a year from now. Or maybe Calumet Reclamation (Scranton Iron) gearing up.

Chuck

On Tuesday, October 22, 2024 at 01:36:41 PM CDT, Bruce K via groups.io <lowercherty@yahoo.com@groups.io> wrote:

I was very surprised yesterday (Monday) that BNSF is dropping a lot of new ballast on the Gunn line west of Nashwauk, including a train yesterday afternoon. Enquiring minds want to know what's up there?

Bruce Kettunen Mt. Iron, MN



---AMTRAK News---

Public Amtrak Board Meeting set for Seattle in December

By Bob Johnston | October 27, 2024

Registration required for in-person and online participation; board members await Senate confirmation



Amtrak President Roger Harris explains company initiatives at the public Amtrak Board of Directors meeting at Main Street Station in Richmond, Va., on Dec. 1, 2023. The 2024 public meeting will be in Seattle.
Bob Johnston

WASHINGTON — Amtrak announced late Friday that its federally mandated annual public Board of Directors meeting will be held in Seattle on Dec. 4, 2024.

As in past sessions staged at St. Louis Union Station in 2022 and at Richmond, Va. Main Street Station in 2023, company officials will review operating results from the just-completed fiscal year and provide an overview of strategic priorities for 2025. The gathering will be held at Seattle's Embassy Suites in Pioneer Square from 9 a.m. to noon Pacific Time and will be live-streamed. [A press release](#) on Amtrak's website says a "panel discussion with Amtrak partners" will begin the meeting. A question-and-answer session will also be held, though "participation will be limited."

Those planning to take part must register by Nov. 25 and specify whether they will be attending in person or online; a registration link [is available here](#).

It is unclear which board members will attend in an official capacity. Recent nominees Ron Batory, Elaine Clegg, David Capozzi, and Samuel Lathem answered lawmakers' questions at a U.S. Senate Commerce Committee confirmation hearing last September [see ["Nominees to Amtrak board support national network ..."](#) *Trains News Wire*, Sept. 12, 2024]. Shortly thereafter, a fifth nominee, Lanhee J. Chen, attended a separate hearing. However, the full Senate must confirm each individual, and it does not return to Washington until Nov. 12, when senators have nine working days to act before the Thanksgiving holiday.

Chairman Anthony Coscia, and board members Chris Koos and Joel Szabat were confirmed in January 2024 and have attended the non-public meetings since then. Members with **expired** terms continue to serve until their replacements are confirmed. They are vice-chairman Jeffrey Moreland, Albert DiClemente, Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, and Christopher Beall.

Amtrak Asks STB to Dismiss Gulf Coast Case

By Trains Staff | October 26, 2024

Passenger operator says terms of settlement with freight railroads have been fulfilled



Amtrak's westbound Gulf Coast Limited prepares to depart Mobile, Ala., for New Orleans on the morning of July 29, 1996. Amtrak has asked the Surface Transportation Board to dismiss its effort to compel CSX and Norfolk Southern to allow new service on the route, saying the terms of a settlement between

WASHINGTON — Amtrak has asked the Surface Transportation Board to dismiss its petition asking the board to compel freight railroads to allow operation of Gulf Coast service between New Orleans and Mobile, Ala., saying the terms of an agreement between the passenger operator, CSX, Norfolk Southern, and the Alabama State Port Authority have been fulfilled — even though the service has yet to begin. Amtrak filed the petition in March 2021, saying five years of discussions had not led to an agreement allowing the launch of the train [see ["Amtrak asks STB to require CSX, NS ..."](#) *Trains News Wire*, March 16, 2021]. That led to 11 days of hearings before the board — largely centering on the concept of "unreasonable impairment" of freight service — followed by board-ordered mediation before the parties announced they had reached a settlement in November 2022 [see ["Amtrak, freight railroads say they have a deal ..."](#) Nov. 22, 2022]. The settlement — terms of which remain confidential — avoided a precedent-setting decision by the board on Amtrak's right of access, requirements for infrastructure upgrades before passenger service can be launched, and the board's ability to impose terms for passenger operations. Amtrak says its [request for dismissal](#), filed on Thursday, Oct. 24, is unopposed by CSX, NS, and the port authority.

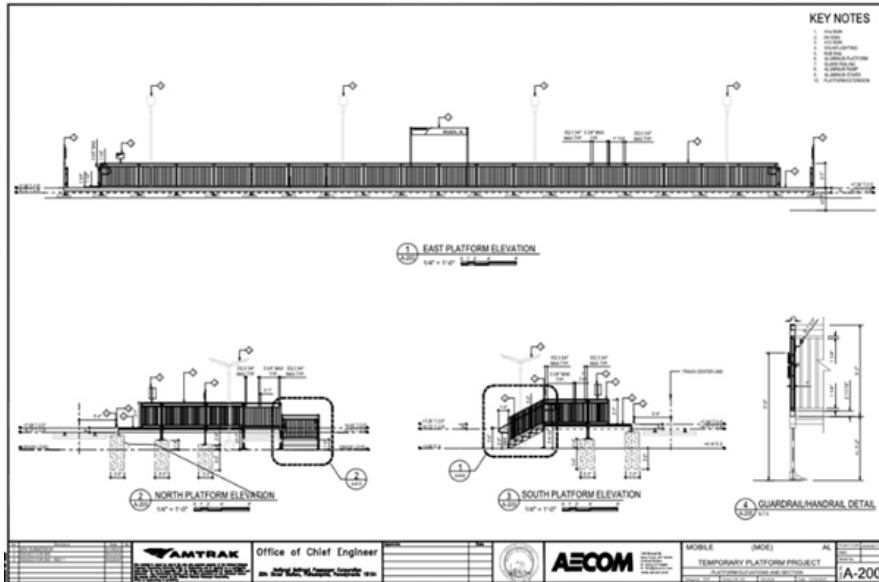
The company requests that it be dismissed with prejudice, meaning it could not be refiled. The filing came two days after ground-breaking for a layover track and station platform in Mobile, Ala., one of the elements that has been holding up the start of service since the settlement was announced.

Amtrak said that as of that date, "conditions necessary to resolve this matter ... have been satisfied" to the point that Amtrak is asking for the dismissal. That includes full execution of a \$178 million Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements grant for infrastructure work on the route, which also occurred Oct. 22.

Mobile Groundbreaking Yields No News on Start for Amtrak Gulf Coast Service

By Trains Staff | October 23, 2024

Construction begins on station platform, layover track



Plans for the Mobile station platform were presented at a hearing earlier this year. Groundbreaking for the platform and a layover track were held on Tuesday, Oct. 22. AECOM via Mobile Board of Zoning Adjustment

MOBILE, Ala. — Two ongoing questions about Amtrak's Gulf Coast service — when it will begin and what the New Orleans-Mobile trains will be called — remained unanswered during a Tuesday, Oct. 22, groundbreaking ceremony for a station platform and layover track in Mobile. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and Federal Railroad Administration Administrator Amit Bose were among officials on hand for the ceremony at the former site of Mobile's Amtrak station, destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Acknowledging the lengthy process of restarting the train, Buttigieg [told AL.com](#) there is a need for a better way to "align our processes" in dealing with multiple layers of government as well as private companies. Amtrak announced in 2021 that it planned to start the service the following year, although that was a unilateral announcement the company said was driven by five years of negotiations without a conclusion [see "[Amtrak seeks to start New Orleans-Mobile service ...](#)," *Trains News Wire*, Feb. 26, 2021].

A case before the Surface Transportation Board, a still-confidential agreement between Amtrak and the host railroads, and lengthy negotiations with Mobile over the station site and funding have all contributed to pushing back the start of service, now projected for some time in 2025.

"My experience is the more players involved, the longer it takes to do something," Buttigieg said. "You have a situation here that is multi-state, public and private, federal and local, and each layer means you have to go through more folks to get a decision." The groundbreaking was for a 3,000-foot siding for Amtrak trains and a station platform but not a station itself; Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson told *Al.com* the city has a design to pursue but will wait to see if Amtrak service succeeds. "If we have a real need for it, then we'll spend the money at that time," Stimpson told the news site. "I will take city money and grant money. The prudent thing is to make sure the thing is successful."

Seventeen Amtrak Employees Resign Over Health Care Fraud Investigation

By Trains Staff | October 16, 2024

Case has resulted in at least six guilty pleas, agreements for more than \$11.6 million in restitution

WASHINGTON — Seventeen Amtrak employees in the Northeast have resigned in connection with an investigation by Amtrak's Office of Inspector General into alleged health care fraud.

The employees who have resigned are based at New York Penn Station or an Amtrak base in New Jersey. They include two gang foremen, four linemen, three truck drivers, six welders, a trackman, and an electronic technician, the Office of Inspector General said in [a press release](#) today (Wednesday, Oct. 16). Five members of that group are among [10 people indicted in June](#) as a result of the investigation into conspiracy to commit health care fraud.

According to the investigation, health care providers submitted false claims of more than \$11 million in claims between 2019 and 2022 for services that were never provided and were medically unnecessary, using the information of current and former Amtrak employees who received kickbacks from health care providers for their participation.

In the most recent legal action resulting from the case, New York acupuncturist Punson (Susie) Figueroa [was sentenced to 34 months in prison](#) in September, along with three years' supervised release, and ordered to pay \$9.05 million in restitution. She had entered a guilty plea in March to conspiracy to commit health care fraud.

According to the Office of Inspector General, in a June 2021 visit to Figueroa's office, an undercover officer was instructed to sign his name about 30 times to documents for services received but not to date those signatures; in a subsequent visit, he received an envelope with \$1,000. Figueroa used those documents to submit fraudulent claims. "We remain fully committed to bringing justice to health care providers who target Amtrak's health care plans as well as Amtrak employees who collude with them," Amtrak's Inspector General, Kevin H. Winters, said following Figueroa's sentencing. "We hope this case serves as a deterrent for health care providers and Amtrak employees who may choose to engage in such schemes, and we ask anyone who suspects or observes such fraud to report it to our fraud, waste, and abuse hotline."

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Figuroa joined a mounting number of suspects in the case who have entered guilty pleas and been sentenced. In June, a biller for Figuroa, Hyunji Choi of Woodside, N.Y., pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit health care fraud. Before that, a New Jersey doctor, Muhammed Mirza, was sentenced to 26 months in prison earlier this year for his role in the case [see [“New Jersey doctor sentenced ...,”](#) *Trains News Wire*, May 7, 2024]. Two other individuals, former Amtrak employee Devon Burt and Hallum Gelzer, pleaded guilty in June 2023 to charges of conspiracy to commit health care fraud and conspiracy to communicate extortion threats; as part of their guilty pleas, they agreed to pay restitution of \$959,072 and approximately \$1.66 million respectively. Also, a New York podiatrist, Michael DeNicola, pleaded guilty in 2022 to conspiracy to commit health care fraud, distribution of a controlled substance in furtherance of that scheme, and unlawful possession of a firearm. His sentencing is pending. Amtrak said in a statement that it “strongly condemns this reprehensible act uncovered by the OIG investigation. We regularly monitor for fraudulent payments and have challenged our healthcare providers to do better at uncovering and stopping these fraudulent schemes. This investigation sends a strong message to anyone who steals from Amtrak: you will be caught, and there will be consequences.”

— Updated at 1:30 p.m. CT to correct details of third paragraph on individuals submitting the false claims.



----BNSF News-----

BNSF, Electrical Workers Announce Tentative Contract Agreement

By [Trains Staff](#) | October 28, 2024

FORT WORTH, Texas — BNSF Railway and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers have reached a tentative agreement on a five-year contract, while the National Conference of Firemen and Oilers has ratified its agreement with the railroad. The BNSF-IBEW agreement is the ninth reached by the railroad in the last two months ahead of the opening of the next round of collective bargaining, and means 53% of the railroad’s union workforce is now covered by agreements. The IBEW agreement is comparable to those reached earlier with CSX and Norfolk Southern [see [“CSX announces tentative deals with two unions ...,”](#) *Trains News Wire*, Oct. 23, 2024, and [“Norfolk Southern, electrical workers announce ...,”](#) *News Wire*, Oct. 22, 2024]. The average annual wage increase of 3.5% works out to an 18.77% wage increase compounded over the five-year term of the contract. The agreement, which covers approximately 1,200 workers at BNSF, also includes improved vacation and sick-time benefits. It is subject to a ratification vote by members. “This new agreement reflects the IBEW’s commitment to ensuring that jobs in the freight rail industry are good jobs that provide economic security for our members and their families,” IBEW International President Kenneth W. Cooper said in a press release. No details on the NCFO ratification vote were announced. The union [announced the agreement](#) with BNSF in August, saying the five-year deal included a 17.5% wage increase and improved vacation and health benefits.

BNSF Nears Completion of Southern Transcon Double-Tracking Project in Kansas

By [Bill Stephens](#) | October 24, 2024

A 12-mile stretch of second main entered service in two phases over the past week



A westbound Z-train was the first revenue move over the new 12-mile section of second track on BNSF’s Emporia Subdivision in Kansas on Oct. 18, 2024. BNSF

FORT WORTH, Texas — BNSF Railway this week placed 12 additional miles of second main track into service on its Emporia Subdivision in Kansas as part of its Southern Transcon double-tracking project.

The new section of double iron, which runs between Augusta and Rose Hill, Kan., includes the seventh and eighth segments of the nine-segment project that’s been in the works since 2019. Work is still under way on the final segment of the 50-mile project, a 3.5-mile section between Rose Hill and Mulvane. As long as the weather cooperates, BNSF aims to have that stretch completed by the end of November.

The cutover of the 12-mile stretch was done in two phases, BNSF spokeswoman Kendall Sloan says. On Friday, Oct. 18, all traffic was moved over to the new main line (Main 2) between Augusta and Rose Hill. Then crews worked through the weekend to prepare the old single main track to be converted into new Main 1. The final cutover for segments 7 and 8 occurred on Tuesday.

The first revenue train over the new trackage on Friday was a westbound Z-train bound for San Bernardino, Calif., from Willow Springs, Ill.

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"Multiple years of expansion investment have opened up an additional 12 miles of double main track capacity near Augusta, KS – putting BNSF Railway's one of a kind 2,200 mi Southern Transcon between LA and Chicago at 99.995% double, triple or quadruple tracked," Jon Gabriel, BNSF's group vice president of consumer products, wrote in a LinkedIn post today.

"This commitment to growth through investment over the past several decades is one way we make intermodal service more "truck-like", as just like a highway, we can run traffic both directions simultaneously with passing lanes when needed," Gabriel wrote. "This unmatched capacity is how we run multiple priority intermodal trains per day in and out of SCAL between key markets like Chicago, DFW, Kansas City, Memphis and beyond...no need to stop a train every 10 miles to meet another throughout the trip."

Once the Emporia Subdivision project is complete, the Southern Transcon will have just two short sections of single-track: About 1.5 miles at Sibley, Mo., where BNSF crosses the Missouri River, and about 3 miles at Alva, Okla., the crossing of the Salt Fork River.

Washout Shuts Down BNSF Line in New Mexico

By Trains Staff | October 21, 2024

ROSWELL, N.M. — BNSF Railway's Carlsbad Subdivision has been closed by a washout near Roswell that will keep the line closed for most of the week, the railroad has informed customers.

An [advisory on the railroad website](#) says the washout was reported shortly after 7 a.m. on Sunday, Oct. 20. After assessment by BNSF personnel, the current estimate for reopening the line is Friday, Oct. 25, at noon MDT.

The Carlsbad Subdivision extends approximately 183 miles south from Clovis, N.M., to Carlsbad, with two industrial spurs of about 20 miles extending beyond Carlsbad. Roswell is about 107 miles south of Clovis.

Line projected to reopen on Friday

BNSF Line Reopened at Site of Montana Derailment

By Trains Staff | October 12, 2024

ESSEX, Mont. — Twelve cars of a BNSF grain train derailed near Essex early today (Saturday, Oct. 12), [KRTV reports](#). No injuries were reported. The incident occurred about 5:42 a.m. near Java, Mont., on the Hi Line Subdivision, according to [a BNSF customer advisory](#). Both tracks of the main line were affected; BNSF is estimating the first track will be reopened about 11 p.m. local time.

The derailment led to service disruptions for Amtrak's Empire Builder. According to the Amtrak Alerts feed on X.com, the Friday, Oct. 11, [departure from Portland, Ore., and Seattle](#) was halted at Whitefish, Mont., while [the Oct. 11 departure from Chicago](#) will be halted at Shelby, Mont.

The trains were to be turned at those locations with passengers bused 150 miles between the two communities, where they will resume their trips by rail. Eastbound No. 8 arrived in Whitefish at 10:31 a.m. today, while westbound No. 7 is, at this writing, due in Shelby at 5:58 p.m.

By Trains Staff | October 13, 2024

Second main near Essex, Mont., to be opened this evening

ESSEX, Mont. — One main track at the site of an Oct. 12 grain train derailment near Essex has been reopened, with the second expected to be reopened this evening, according to a BNSF advisory to customers.

A dozen cars were reported to have derailed at Java, Mont., early Saturday [see "BNSF grain train derails ...," Trains News Wire, Oct. 12, 2024]. BNSF's estimate for reopening the second main at the site is 8 p.m. Mountain Time.

Amtrak's Empire Builder has resumed operations through the area, a day after the train was cancelled in both directions between Shelby and Whitefish, Mont. Eastbound No. 8 that departed Seattle on Oct. 11 and was affected by that cancellation is currently projected to arrive in Chicago at 11:48 p.m., just over seven hours late.

---Union Pacific News---

Union Pacific's Big Boy Proves the Enduring Allure of Steam and its Ability to Connect with the Public: Analysis

By Bill Stephens | October 11, 2024

Wherever it goes, Union Pacific 4-8-8-4 No. 4014 draws a crowd and polishes the railroad's image in a way that nothing else can

Seemingly every resident of West, Texas – population 2,531 – has turned out to witness a spectacle. Townspeople are lined up on both sides of Union Pacific's Fort Worth Subdivision, which runs smack through the middle of downtown. All eyes are looking to the south, hoping to catch the first glimpse of UP 4-8-8-4 No. 4014. The world's largest steam locomotive is due any minute now. You can feel the anticipation in the crowd as the Big Boy's headlight pops into view at 1:43 p.m. on this sunny October afternoon. The 1941 Alco makes a grand entrance: Flags flying, bell clanging, whistle blowing, dual stacks talking. Many people raise their cameras and phones to capture the moment. Others plug their ears. And some simply watch, taking in the enormity of the locomotive and the spotless Amour yellow consist that comes to a stop right on schedule at 1:45 p.m. Ed Dickens, the manager of UP's heritage operations, meets local officials for a brief trackside ceremony designating West as a Train Town USA. Meanwhile, the UP executive team and members of the media climb aboard the *Walter Dean* dome lounge. The smiling crowd outside – now steam admirers, one and all – waves as the Big Boy begins rolling the train toward Fort Worth. On the outskirts of town, the entire student body stands in a trackside field and gets a living history lesson as the 4014 storms past. The Oct. 9 whistlestop in West is just one small slice of this year's Big Boy tours, which have generated an incredible amount of goodwill for Union Pacific.

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Union Pacific Big Boy No. 4014 is buttoned down for the evening of Oct. 9, 2024, in Fort Worth, Texas, where it awaits two public display days and third event for railroad employees and their fam-



Viewed from the Walter Dean dome lounge, a crowd watches Union Pacific Big Boy No. 4014 and its train depart West, Texas, on Oct. 9, 2024. Bill Stephens



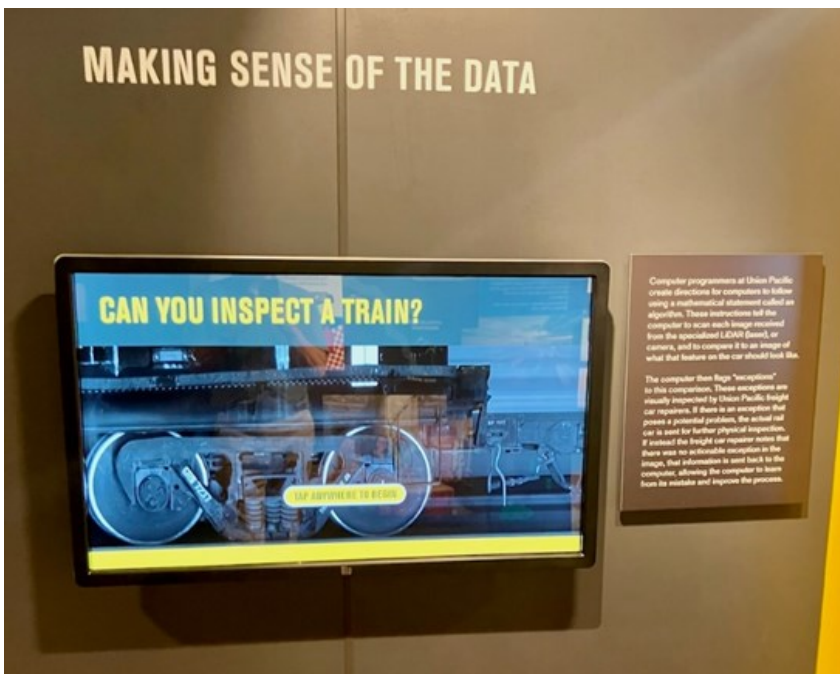
students from the West, Texas, middle and high schools got a living history lesson watching the Big Boy roll by on Oct. 9, 2024. Bill Stephens

“You can see the draw,” CEO Jim Vena says while glancing out the window.

How much of a draw? The Big Boy’s 10-state Heartland of America tour and five-state Westward Bound tour attracted more than 305,000 people to display days, plus an uncounted multitude at grade crossings and more than 50 whistlestops like the one at West. Display days also were set aside exclusively for UP employees and their families. The locomotive has star power on small screens, too. Union Pacific reached more than 9.2 million people through Big Boy posts on social media. And that’s not counting the 1.2 million who viewed an hourlong Big Boy episode of “Jay Leno’s Garage” on YouTube. 4014 also gained positive news coverage for the railroad in major media markets like Chicago, Houston, Fort Worth, and Salt Lake City. Membership in the railroad’s Steam Club, meanwhile, has topped 100,000.

The railroad industry’s image has taken a beating over the past few years due to the high-profile hazmat wreck in East Palestine, Ohio, labor upheaval, job cuts, and the service problems that followed the onset of the pandemic. These negative headlines have overshadowed the fact that railroads have a good story to tell, especially when you compare trains and trucks.

As Union Pacific shows, railroads have at their disposal the ultimate public relations tool: The steam locomotive. Once you have the public’s attention – and steam commands attention – it’s an opportunity to tell the advantages of rail. *The Experience the Union Pacific museum* car does just that at Big Boy display events. The car’s exhibits spotlight the iconic railroad’s history and technology, including an interactive display that lets you try your hand at inspecting wheels – and then humbles you by showing how much faster and more accurately an automated system can spot defects. The exhibits also remind people of the vital work the railroad does, from keeping the lights on and hauling crops to carrying your car from the assembly plant and delivering consumer goods to warehouses. And they highlight the fuel efficiency and environmental benefits of rail.



The Experience the Union Pacific museum car includes interactive displays like this one, which challenges visitors to spot wheel defects. Bill Stephens

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All this makes you wonder why Union Pacific and Canadian Pacific Kansas City are the only Class I railroads with steam programs. There's no question that it's a massive effort to launch a steam train tour. Or that steam locomotives burn cash. Yet the cost to run UP's heritage program amounts to a rounding error in a company with more than \$22.6 billion in annual revenue. It's hard to put a price on a railroad's reputation and image, but it's easy to see the benefits of a steam ambassador. Steam has a unique ability to connect railroads with lineside communities, current and retired employees and their families, and a public that has largely lost touch with railroads. "This is the biggest star. It really is," Vena says.

You can reach Bill Stephens at bybillstephens@gmail.com and follow him on [LinkedIn](#) and [X @bybillstephens](#)

Union Pacific Reports Higher Volume, Revenue, and Profits

By Bill Stephens | October 24, 2024

The third-quarter results are proof that the railroad's strategy is working, CEO Jim Vena says



A Union Pacific stack train departs the Port of Los Angeles. David Lassen

OMAHA, Neb. — Union Pacific's third-quarter financial results — with volume, revenue, and profits all on the upswing — are proof that the railroad's strategy is working, CEO Jim Vena says.

UP this morning (Oct. 24) reported that operating income increased 11%, to \$2.46 billion, as revenue grew 3%, to \$6 billion. Earnings per share increased 10%, to \$2.75. The railroad's operating ratio improved 3.1 points, to 60.3%, as operating expenses declined by 2%.

"Our third-quarter results do an excellent job of capturing the progress we've made under a strategy to lead the industry in safety, service, and operational excellence," Vena told investors and analysts on the railroad's earnings call. "And you're seeing how that leads to financial success. I'm very pleased with where we sit today compared to where we started a little over a year ago."

Volume increased by 6% overall in the quarter, driven largely by international intermodal and grain traffic.

Volume in UP's bulk segment declined 3%, as a 13% rise in grain traffic was not enough to overcome a 17% drop in coal volume. Volume in the railroad's industrial segment declined 2%, with gains in industrial chemicals, plastics, and energy traffic unable to offset declines in metals, minerals, and forest products business. Premium volume — which includes intermodal and automotive — grew 6%, thanks to a 14% increase in intermodal traffic.

The railroad's operational and service metrics improved for the quarter. Freight car velocity increased 5%, to 210 miles per day, as terminal dwell declined. The intermodal service performance index improved by a point, to 86%, while the manifest/automotive service index improved 5 points, to 89%.

"The operating team did a great job of improving service while we handled more business. That was possible due to the efficiency of our network and our ability to maximize asset utilization," Vena says. "While the business of railroading can be unpredictable, it's the fundamentals of how you operate the company — anticipating and reacting to change — that ultimately matters."

UP came into the year expecting a drop in international intermodal traffic. Instead, a number of factors — including labor unrest at East Coast ports and on Canadian National and CPKC in Canada — prompted importers to shift cargo to West Coast ports. Container volume surged at Los Angeles and Long Beach, as well as in Seattle/Tacoma, boosting UP's international intermodal traffic by 33% in the third quarter.

UP was able to handle the volume spike by tapping its capacity buffer of crews, locomotives, and well cars, Vena says. Containers spent more time on the docks, however, and UP's average intermodal train speed fell as volume increased.

Eric Gehringer, executive vice president of operations, says he expects intermodal train speed to rebound in short order as the railroad deploys more crews and cars in the Los Angeles Basin and works with CSX and Norfolk Southern to ensure that Eastern gateways are fluid.

"Was there pressure on the system? Absolutely," Vena said in an interview. But the entire supply chain, including steamship lines, port terminals, and shippers, worked together to move the freight without major backlogs, he says.

In the first half of the year, neither UP nor port officials were aware that there would be such a large swing in volume in the third quarter. Although Vena says the railroad and ports have good visibility on incoming volume, unexpected surges still occur. The fact that the ports and UP bent but did not break shows what the railroad and the ports of L.A. and Long Beach can handle. "It's a heck of a success story for us," Vena says.

UP said its safety performance improved during the quarter, but the railroad did not provide specific data on its employee injury or train accident rates.

The railroad updated its financial outlook for the remainder of the year. UP now expects fourth-quarter results to largely mirror those of the third quarter and improve on a year-over-year basis.

Two Charged in Looting of UP Freight Train

By Trains Staff | October 13, 2024

At least six were arrested in Friday incident on Chicago's West Side



A screen shot from a WMAQ video [posted to social media](#) shows a UP freight train being looted on Oct. 11, 2024.

CHICAGO — Two people have now been charged in connection with the looting of a Union Pacific intermodal train Friday on the city's West Side, [WLS-TV reports](#). Derrick Weathers, 53, and Lemar Hollingsworth, 21, are facing misdemeanor charges for theft. Weathers is also facing a felony charge for drug possession.

At least six individuals were have reported to have been arrested after a large group of people broke into containers on the stopped train on Friday afternoon and began removing items including flat screen TVs and air fryers [see ["Six arrested after looting ..."](#) *Trains News Wire*, Oct. 12, 2024]. Some of the items were recovered; WLS reports others have said some of the stolen items are being sold online.

[The Chicago Tribune reports](#) two of those arrested had been released by Saturday. Some news reports have said the looting was going on for some time before police responded, the *Tribune* reports Chicago police waited more than an hour for railroad police to respond and secure the tracks. The police response to the incident led Metra to halt operations through the area on its UP-West line for more than two hours.

Permits for Grain Trains to Mexico Resume

By Trains Staff | October 21, 2024

Grain traffic through Eagle Pass, El Paso gateways had been suspended after derailment

EAGLE PASS, Texas — Mexican railroad Ferromex will resume issuing permits for unit grain trains entering Mexico through the Eagle Pass and El Paso, Texas, gateways "as a result of the improved ag unit train crossing cadence and pipeline" beginning today (Monday, Oct. 21), [Union Pacific has informed customers](#).

On Oct. 12, UP announced that permits under two existing Ferromex embargos had been suspended as a result of a derailment in Mexico [see ["UP, Ferromex limit grain traffic ..."](#) *Trains News Wire*, Oct. 14, 2024].

Traffic flow for grain handled by Ferromex has been an issue this year, with shippers saying the Mexican rail operator was struggling to handle increased shipments, a contention disputed by Mexico's rail trade group [see ["Mexcio rail group 'surprised' at capacity concerns ..."](#) *News Wire*, Aug. 14, 2024].

UP Derailment in Louisiana Leads to Spill of Non-hazardous Material

By Trains Staff | October 18, 2024

17 cars involved in incident in Donaldsonville, La.

DONALDSONVILLE, La. — No injuries were reported when 17 cars of a Union Pacific train derailed today (Friday, Oct. 18) in Donaldsonville, leading to a spill of what is described as a non-hazardous chemical.

The derailment occurred about 7:30 a.m. A railroad representative [told WBRZ-TV](#) that cyanuric acid, used in herbicides and chlorine bleach, was spilled from three tank cars. Commander Cody Melancon with the Ascension Parish Sheriff's Office said there was "a white power substance on the ground that is non-hazardous, used to make medicine," the station reported, and said other cars on the train carried propylene, sulfuric acid, and refrigerated oxygen.

A grade crossing on State Routes 70 and 3098, initially closed as a result of the derailment, was reopened as of this evening, [WDSU-TV reports](#).

Donaldsonville is about 65 miles west of New Orleans on UP's Livonia Subdivision.

BLET Members Ratify Agreement Covering Transfer of Commuter Operations from Union Pacific to Metra

By Trains Staff | October 22, 2024 Agreement covers 307 union members



Metra UP West train No. 507 departs La Fox, Ill., on Oct. 19, 2024. Members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen have ratified an agreement covering the transfer of operations of commuter services from UP to Metra. David Lassen

CHICAGO — Members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen have ratified an agreement setting the stage for transfer of operations from Union Pacific to Metra on three Metra commuter lines, according to [a report on the BLET website](#). Union Pacific has been seeking to transfer operations on the UP North, Northwest, and West lines to Metra for some time, and UP announced in

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March 2023 that process had begun [see [“Union Pacific announces start of transition”](#) *Trains News Wire*, March 30, 2023]. Union contracts and such matters as pay and seniority have complicated that process; the BLET says the newly ratified agreement covers “vacation, flowback, and additional provisions” for a new operating entity, the Northeast Illinois Regional Commuter Railroad Corp., that will take over the operations from UP.

Some 307 BLET members are covered by the agreement.

No date has yet been set for the transfer of operations from UP, a Metra spokesman said last week.



---- CPKC News ----

CPKC Earnings Grow Despite Canadian Work Stoppage

By Bill Stephens | October 24, 2024

Traffic volume was up in all three of the railway's business segments



The first repainted CPKC units lead train M251 at Nahant, Iowa, on May 25, 2024. Jeremy J. Schrader

CALGARY, Alberta — Canadian Pacific Kansas City's third-quarter profits and revenue increased despite the impact of the four-day work stoppage in Canada, the railway reported on Wednesday.

Quarterly operating income rose 3%, to \$870 million, as revenue increased 6%, to \$2.56 billion. Earnings per share increased 7%, to 65 cents. CPKC's operating ratio increased 1.2 points, to 66.1%, as expenses rose 8% in the quarter, partly due to merger-related costs.

Third-quarter volume was up 4% when measured by revenue ton miles, CPKC's preferred metric. But traffic was down 3% on the basis of carloads and containers, largely due to the shift of short-haul cross-border intermodal traffic to rival Ferromex. The four-day work stoppage in Canada in August dented volumes by 3%. Revenue ton-miles grew across all three of CPKC's business segments.

Bulk was up 7% due to higher grain and potash volume. Merchandise RTMs were up 3% thanks to record automotive volume and growth in the energy, chemicals, and plastics category. Intermodal notched a 2% gain despite a 7% decline in domestic container traffic.

CPKC won a new Ocean Network Express international contract that began in June, while the Midwest Mexico Express service linking Chicago and points in Mexico continued to grow and is up 27% for the year to date.

“We remain on track to deliver full-year guidance,” CEO Keith Creel told analysts and investors on the railway's earnings call on Wednesday. CPKC continues to expect double-digit earnings growth for the full year, and now expects revenue ton miles to be up around 5% for 2024.

The railway's key operational metrics improved during the quarter. Average train speed was up 6% compared to a year ago, terminal dwell was down 8%, and fuel efficiency improved 2%. Train length and weight also were up.

“These results are particularly impressive given the challenges we faced in the quarter,” Chief Operating Officer Mark Redd says. The challenges included shutting down and then starting back up the CPKC network in Canada during the work stoppage, as well as a July derailment in North Dakota that temporarily closed the railway's main artery linking the Midwest with Western Canada. The fiery, 29-car wreck involved the release of hazardous materials, including methanol and anhydrous ammonia.

CPKC's safety statistics improved for the quarter, with the personal injury rate down 17% and the train accident rate down by 8%. During the quarter CPKC put six new sidings into service on its key north-south corridor in the U.S., Redd says. Two more will be completed by the end of the year, along with additional capacity improvements in the Kansas City area.

In Mexico, where CPKC has experienced congestion issues, the railway completed new passing sidings and a crossover and track alignment project in Escadado Yard near Monterrey. Similar investments in sidings and yard improvements – designed to keep local and yard jobs out of the way of through freights – will be completed elsewhere in Mexico by the end of the year, Redd says. In addition, the second span CPKC is building across the Rio Grande at the Laredo, Texas, gateway remains on schedule for opening by the end of the year.

CPKC has made upgrades to 175 legacy Kansas City Southern locomotives that allow them to lead trains in Canada.

Regulators Approve CPKC, CSX Acquisition of Meridian & Bigbee

By David Lassen | October 17, 2024 | Last updated on October 18, 2024

Transaction will create new direct connection for the Class I railroads in Alabama



The Surface Transportation Board has approved CPKC and CSX acquisition of the Meridian & Bigbee Railroad, creating a new direct connection for the two Class I railroads. Genesee & Wyoming

WASHINGTON — The Surface Transportation Board has approved acquisition by Canadian Pacific Kansas City and CSX Transportation of the [Meridian & Bigbee Railroad](#) from Genesee & Wyoming, allowing the two Class I lines to create a new direct connection at Myrtlewood, Ala.

The approval is effective Nov. 16, 2024.

In separate decisions, the board approved with conditions CSX's acquisition of 93.7 miles between Burkville and Myrtlewood, Ala., and CPKC's acquisition of 50.4 miles between Myrtlewood and Meridian, Miss. (The decision regarding the CSX portion [is available here](#), while the decision for the portion involving CPKC [is here](#).) Both decisions were by 4-0 votes, although board members Patrick Fuchs and Michelle Schultz offered separate concurrences in both cases.

CPKC and CSX announced the plan — which creates a through route linking the Southeast with Texas and Mexico, and improves CSX's access to Mexico via CPKC — in June 2023 [see [“CPKC and CSX to create direct interchange ...”](#) *Trains News Wire*, June 28, 2023].

Details were outlined in filings to the STB in October 2023 seeking approval of the transaction. CSX resumes operations of the Burkville-Myrtlewood segment, which it had leased to the Meridian & Bigbee, while CPKC acquires the Myrtlewood-Meridian segment, although the Meridian & Bigbee will continue to provide local service on that portion [see [“CPKC and CSX details their plans to connect ...”](#) *News Wire*, Oct. 11., 2023]. The railroads say they anticipate interchanging one pair of trains daily for at least the first five years.

The board said the deal was not likely to case “a substantial lessening of competition, the creation of a monopoly, or restraint of trade,” and that even if there were “some limited anticompetitive effects, they would be outweighed by the public interest in meeting significant transportation needs.” It will create more efficient rail service — through shorter, more direct routing —and increase competitive options, the decision states.

The decisions require CSX to maintain its Selma, Ala., gateway and to provide one shipper access to the Norfolk Southern at Selma at the Meridian & Bigbee's rate for five years, subject to reasonable cost escalation. It also includes conditions protecting employees affected by the line sale, and requires noise mitigation efforts regarding the CSX portion. However, the board did not grant conditions sought by Canadian National Railway or Amtrak in the CPKC portion of the transaction.

CN requested that CPKC be required to report all traffic crossing the CN line in Jackson, Miss., on CPKC trains, so that the board could consider supplemental orders if congestion results. The board declined, saying the anticipated one train pair per day should not impact service on CN, and CN could raise the issue with the board in the future if an issue arises. Amtrak sought to limit freight train lengths on the “Meridian Speedway” between Meridian and Shreveport, La., to the length of available sidings, because of the issues overlength trains can cause for passenger operations. The board declined because, while that would freeze in place current operating practice, CPKC argued there were situations where overlength trains could make sense and could operate without potential risk of interfering with passenger trains.

Norfolk Southern originally sought additional conditions, but withdrew that request following what it called “productive discussions among the parties and recent developments.”

CPKC Train Derails in Louisiana

By Trains Staff | October 14, 2024

Derailed cars included hazardous materials, but no spill reported



No injuries were reported in this derailment of a CPKC train near Simsboro, La., on Sunday. Lincoln Parish Sheriff's Office

SIMSBORO, La. — No injuries were reported when 19 cars of a CPKC train derailed Sunday morning between the towns of Simsboro and Grambling, La..

[The Ruston Leader reports](#) the derailment occurred about 6:30 a.m. The Lincoln Parish Sheriff's Office reports that some cars carried a hazardous material, although the material involved was not specified.

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Kip Franklin, Lincoln Parish director of homeland security and emergency preparedness, told the newspaper the location of the incident was fortunate, occurring a quarter-mile or more from the nearest residence.

CPKC workers were working Sunday evening to clear the wreck, which blocked state routes 563 and 150.

Simsboro is on the former KCS Vicksburg Subdivision, about 9 miles west of Ruston, La., and approximately 60 miles east of Shreveport.

CPKC Opens New US Operations Center

By Trains Staff | October 13, 2024

Ceremony marks completion of facility at Kansas City's Knoche Yard



CPKC has opened its new U.S. Operations Center in Kansas City, Mo. CPKC



In a screenshot from [a video posted to social media](#), CPKC CEO Keith Creel shows Kansas City, Mo., Mayor Quinton Lucas the railroad's new U.S. Operations Center. CPKC

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — CPKC on Friday, Oct. 11, marked the opening of its new U.S. Operations Center at Knoche Yard in Kansas City, Mo.

Mayor Quinton Lucas and CEO Keith Creel participated in the ribbon-cutting for the four-story, 46,000-square-foot tower completed in just 15 months. The structure is home to the U.S. Network Operations Center, yard operations, a training facility, and the CPKC police. It was built on the location where CPKC held the Final Spike ceremony marking the completion of the Canadian Pacific-Kansas City Southern merger; groundbreaking for the new building was part of that facility.

“Bringing together our U.S. operating centers under one roof in Kansas City and creating a top-of-the-line facility for our employees is crucial to completing that journey and being able to provide seamless and superior service to our customers across North America,” Mike Walczak, vice president network operations, said in [a press release](#). Muhammad A. Pasha, managing director facilities, said the building's designers “came up with a 1950s-themed railcar design which honors the history of both companies while serving CPKC with a beautiful layout for years to come.” Artwork and finishes reflect the heritage of both CP and KCS.



---- CN News ----

CN Imposes Axle-count Restriction on VIA's Venture Trainsets (corrected)

By Bob Johnston | October 14, 2024

‘Loss of shunt’ cited as reason; decision leads to equipment scramble

MONTREAL — Apparently triggered by one or more incidents in which a VIA Rail Canada Venture trainset failed to activate highway crossing warning devices, Canadian National is now requiring that all of VIA's Venture-equipped trainsets operate with 32 axles.

The edict came late Friday, at the beginning of Canada's Thanksgiving Day holiday weekend. It also follows more than two years of extensive testing and more than a year of revenue service in which VIA's newly arriving Siemens fleet operated on every segment of the Quebec City-Windsor, Ont., corridor.

Until now, VIA has standardized each Siemens-built trainsets with one cab car coach, three “economy” coaches and one business-class car. Four axles per car on the five coaches and four on the Charger locomotive add to 24 axles on the semi-permanently coupled trainset. As a result, VIA has scrambled to add equipment to already well-booked trains.

Sources tell *Trains News Wire* that there were a minimal number of disruptions on Saturday and Sunday; other sources were unable to confirm a report HEP-2 heritage coaches were to be used on some trains as axle-count cars.

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A Venture trainset handles Ottawa-bound VIA No. 37 approaching the Dorval, Quebec, station west of Montreal on Sept. 30, 2024. Canadian National has imposed axle-count restrictions on Venture equipment, reportedly because of issues with activation of grade-crossing signals. Bob Johnston



Workers examine a shunt antenna on a test train at Durand, Mich., on Sept. 13, 2023. Bob Johnston

This is highly problematic for VIA from an operational standpoint, because the Venture deployment plan calls for push-pull operation. Many of the trainsets handle a daily Quebec City-Montreal-Ottawa train, then soon reverse on the same route. The new equipment has efficiently operated these round trips almost exclusively through the summer. However, they have been slow to migrate to departures to and from Toronto for Ottawa, Windsor, Sarnia, and Montreal until a new servicing facility is completed there.

CN discovery of shunt issues

A VIA “system notice” released Friday to employees says the axle-count requirement was implemented because Canadian National discovered, “a potential risk of short warning times on crossings equipped with Grade Crossing Predictors (GCPs). Such crossings utilize technology to estimate train’s speed to determine a sufficient warning time for vehicular or pedestrian traffic.”

It adds, “We can’t just add more Venture cars. Due to existing reservations and planning constraints, we are limited in our ability to extend trains on short notice. That said, we are doing all we can to minimize impact through all available means.”

The VIA-issued notice obtained by News Wire makes no mention of possibly waiving the axle-count requirement if speeds were limited. In the U.S., Canadian National has offered that trade-off to Amtrak in place of a requirement to run Superliners on a portion of Amtrak’s Illinois-financed Chicago-Carbondale, Ill., route.

It does mention that “shunt enhancer” antennas are being considered. This measure involving a locomotive-mounted device was being tested by CN in September 2023, as observed by News Wire [see [“Seeking answers on ‘loss of shunt’....”](#) Sept. 6, 2023]. Installation in the U.S. would require a waiver currently being evaluated by the Federal Railroad Administration [see [“Rail labor opposes Amtrak request...”](#) News Wire, July 6, 2024].

“Loss-of-shunt” instances arise sporadically on routes throughout the U.S. A specific incident or series of incidents often lead to the imposition of an axle-count or speed-limit requirement. The theory is that these increase the probability that either a greater number of wheels or more time for a train in a track circuit will ensure electric current conductivity between the rails.

VIA’s bulletin does not say what triggered the requirement on the Venture trainsets. Once such an incident occurs, regulators and operators have expressed understandable hesitancy to remove restrictions and declare, “it is now safe,” until a reason the fault occurred is explained. News Wire will continue to seek answers to those questions.

— Updated at 5:10 p.m. to note that a report of use of heritage equipment as axle-count cars could not be confirmed.

Canadian Union Calls for CN to Prioritize Passenger Operations

By Trains Staff | October 25, 2024

OTTAWA, Ontario — Unifor, Canadian’s largest private-sector union, is calling on Canadian National Railways to prioritize passenger operations — and for more government oversight of the relationship between freight and passenger service — in the wake of restrictions CN has placed on VIA Rail Canada corridor trains in Ontario and Quebec.

“This is about CN stepping up to fulfil its obligations to all rail users,” Unifor National President Lana Payne said in [a press release](#). “Passenger rail must be prioritized to ensure that services like VIA Rail can operate safely and efficiently.”

VIA does not have the statutory right of preference created in the U.S. for Amtrak trains (although Amtrak argues that preference is often not observed, as indicated in a current Surface Transportation Board proceeding over the *Sunset Limited* and a Justice Department suit against Norfolk Southern). Given minimal government oversight, Unifor says CN has a duty to work more effectively with passenger operators.

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A Venture trainset handles Ottawa-bound VIA Rail Canada train No. 37 approaching the Dorval, Quebec, station on Sept. 30, 2024. Canadian National restrictions on the Venture equipment have led Canadian union Unifor to call for CN to prioritize passenger operations. Bob Johnston

“CN’s responsibility goes beyond sending notifications—it must actively facilitate a rail system that accommodates all users,” Payne said. “As the owner and primary manager of these tracks, CN has a duty to ensure that passenger services are not compromised.” CN earlier this month imposed restrictions on VIA’s new Siemens-built passenger equipment for corridor service, saying there were issues with the trainsets activating grade-crossing warning devices. As a result, trains must slow from maximum speeds of 160 kilometers per hour (99 mph) to 72 kph (45 mph) when approaching some grade crossings to give the engineer time to provide visual confirmation crossing gates have activated [see [“VIA Venture slowdown limited ...”](#) Trains News Wire, Oct. 17, 2024]. Corridor trains are running an hour or more late as a result.

The union says the issue shows CN’s “dominant control over Canada’s rail infrastructure, impacting passenger rail service,” and that the Canadian government needs to reassert regulatory oversight to prevent freight railroads from sidelining passenger service.

Unifor represents some 320,000 workers, including mechanical and other non-operating personnel at both CN and CPKC, and maintenance, on-board personnel, and other workers at VIA Rail Canada.

Canadian National to Move Headquarters to New Location in Montreal

By Trains Staff | May 10, 2024

Railroad will occupy 18 floors of 28-story building



A rendering of Canadian National’s new headquarters in Montreal, slated for occupancy in 2028. CN

MONTREAL — Canadian National Railway will relocate its headquarters to a new location in Montreal beginning in 2028, the company and real estate developer Kevric announced Thursday.

CN will move to Kevric’s 600 DLG project, located at 600 De La Gauchetière Street West in downtown Montreal, and will cover the first 18 floors of the 28-story building, covering more than 440,000 square feet. Some departments will begin moving in 2026. The new location is only about 400 yards from the current CN headquarters at 935 De La Gauchetière Street West.

“CN has been part of downtown Montreal’s DNA for over 100 years,” Ghislain Houle, CN executive vice-president and chief financial officer, said in [a press release](#). “Maintaining our headquarters’ presence in the city’s core is integral to our identity. Our employees are our greatest competitive advantage and we were careful in choosing our new headquarters. We want to keep inspiring greater innovation and collaboration in a workplace that will nurture our employees’ growth.”

CN will have signage rights and will choose the new name for the building, built in 1983 as one of a pair of towers. It is being fully redeveloped to feature larger windows, greater environmental sustainability, and other updates such as touchless access technologies and motion-sensing lighting controls.

“We are proud to welcome CN’s head office at 600 DLG,” said Richard Hylands, Kevric president and founder. “This commitment by such a large organization confirms the importance of efficient, central work environments for corporations. We firmly believe in the crucial role of high-quality downtown office buildings in sustaining downtown Montreal’s role as an economic engine.”

--- Other RR News ---

FRA Proposes Automated Track Inspection Regulations

By Bill Stephens | October 25, 2024

The Association of American Railroads calls the proposal a missed opportunity to improve track inspection and rail safety, while the trackworkers' union applauds the measure

WASHINGTON — The Federal Railroad Administration this week proposed its first regulations on automated track inspection — but has left untouched the regulations that cover traditional visual track inspections.

The rule itself would have little impact on Class I and II railroads: They’re already meeting or exceeding the proposed inspection frequency with their various track geometry measurement systems, the FRA says.

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BNSF Railway uses autonomous and staffed automatic track geometry inspection cars. Here, a staffed train inspects track-age. BNSF Railway

The FRA says the purpose of the rulemaking is to “codify this industry practice while also setting baseline requirements for areas such as TGMS calibration, recordkeeping, defect remediation timeframes, and training.”

The Association of American Railroads says the regulation, as proposed, is a missed opportunity to improve rail safety because it does not allow railroads to scale back the frequency of traditional hi-rail and walking inspections of track in conjunction with automated track inspections.

In test programs run under waivers of FRA safety rules, Class I railroads say they have shown that use of automated track inspection technology — while having track inspectors focus on switches, diamonds, and other trouble spots rather than frequently out inspecting mainline track — improves defect detection.

“Automatic Track Inspection technology has a proven track record of enhancing safety, which is the why railroads have pushed for the operational flexibility to expand its use for years. Past pilots have clearly established that this technology is more effective than visual inspections across a variety of settings,” AAR spokeswoman Jessica Kahanek says.

“In issuing the [proposed rule], FRA misses an opportunity to set the optimal level of visual and ATI inspections, enhancing safety in an efficient way as the railroads proposed through [the Railroad Safety Advisory Committee]. The industry will continue to push for a regulatory structure that enhances both safety and efficiency.”

Fearing job losses and an erosion of safety, labor unions have opposed the expansion of safety waivers and a reduction in the mandated frequency of visual track inspections. But Class I railroads say the use of automated track inspection systems actually provides track inspectors with more work because the technology finds far more defects that they can then inspect and repair.

The Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees applauded the proposed ATI rule.

“We are encouraged that this rule recognizes the value of these technologies in ASSISTING human track inspectors,” said Roy Morrison, the union’s director of safety. “By requiring the integration of automated tools, the rule ensures a thorough and complete track inspection process, bringing modern efficiency without compromising on the high safety standards maintained by human inspectors.” The union said it’s important that the proposed rule stipulates that railroads must operate ATI technology in a way that complements, rather than replaces, the existing human inspection requirements set by the FRA. The union claims this approach ensures that automated inspections serve as an additional layer of safety, rather than a substitute, allowing track inspectors to focus on complex issues that may not be detected by technology alone.

“The requirement for timely remediation of track defects, just as human inspectors would do, is a crucial aspect of this rule,” Morrison added. “This ensures that any issues identified through advanced inspection tools are addressed quickly and effectively, minimizing risks to rail workers and the traveling public.”

Current regulations allow railroads to use automated track inspection systems but does not permit a reduction in the frequency of traditional visual inspections.

“TGMS technology, developed through an FRA-led research effort in collaboration with the rail industry, has been proven to quickly and accurately detect small changes in track geometry, and this proposed rulemaking would codify a standard for TGMS inspection frequencies to ensure that railroads live up to their safety responsibilities, now and in the future,” FRA Administrator Amit Bose said in a statement. “Workers performing visual inspections remain essential, as visual inspections check for numerous conditions beyond the scope of track geometry. By requiring TGMS inspections in addition to the currently required visual inspections, FRA proposes to enhance safety while promoting innovation through the use of technology.”

Railroads say the FRA [has stymied the rollout of improved track inspection processes.](#)

In June, [a federal appeals court ordered the FRA to allow BNSF Railway to expand its automated track inspection program](#) while simultaneously reducing the frequency of traditional visual inspections.

Railroads are permitted unlimited use of automated track inspection systems that rely on lasers and other technology to find track geometry defects. But without a waiver from the FRA they cannot simultaneously scale back the required frequency of visual inspections of main lines.

In 2018 the FRA granted BNSF an inspection waiver that covered seven segments of track totaling 1,348 miles on its Powder River Division in parts of rural Nebraska and Wyoming. The waiver enabled BNSF to reduce the frequency of track inspectors’ visual inspections to twice per month, weekly, or three times per week, depending on location and track classification. Inspectors were then able to spend more time focusing on trouble spots, such as switches.

In July 2020 BNSF argued that the two-year pilot was a success and sought FRA permission to expand its automated track inspection program systemwide. The FRA ultimately denied the expansion of the waiver, which prompted BNSF to file an appeal in federal court.

The FRA’s proposed ATI rule would require Class I and II railroads, as well as intercity passenger railroads and commuter railroads, to meet specified inspection frequencies on mainline and controlled siding track that transports annual tonnage greater than 10 million gross tons, regularly scheduled passenger rail service, or trains carrying hazardous materials.

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The proposed rule would require Class I and II railroads, as well as intercity passenger railroads and commuter railroads, to meet specified inspection frequencies on mainline and controlled siding track that transports annual tonnage greater than 10 million gross tons, regularly scheduled passenger rail service, or trains carrying hazardous materials.

The [full text of the proposed rule is available online](#).

The FRA is seeking comments on the proposed rule, which may be submitted via www.regulations.gov (Docket No. FRA-2024-0032) and by following the online instructions.

Portland, Ore., Puts Union Station Up for Sale

By Bob Johnston | October 21, 2024

Decision follows inability to find local funds to match federal grant



The exterior of Portland Union Station, as seen on June 20, 2008, is little changed today. Wilfs Restaurant, to the right of the entrance, remains a primary tenant and has morphed into a high-end eatery. The city is exploring sale of the station, which needs long-deferred improvements Bob Johnston



Oregon's two Series 8 Talgo trainsets make a rare dual appearance at Portland Union Station on June 7, 2015. A study suggests capacity improvements for the current track configuration to handle anticipated frequency expansion. Bob Johnston



On October 20, 2020, the eastbound Empire Builder prepares to depart. Renovation plans call for this pedestrian crossing to be closed and relocated further north to accommodate longer trains on that track. Bob Johnston

PORTLAND, Ore. — Following years of failed efforts to come up with money for a local match to apply for federal grants to help fund needed upgrades, the city of Portland has renewed efforts to sell Union Station.

Built in 1896 and on the National Register of Historic Places since 1975, the station's signature clock tower features a "Go By Train" sign established atop the structure long before Amtrak took over intercity operations in 1971. It is 10 years older than Seattle's King Street Station, is the oldest continuously operated rail passenger terminal on the West Coast, and needs some \$250 million in track and facility work. In 1987, the Portland Development Commission, now known as Prosper Portland, purchased the building and 31 acres of land from the Portland Terminal Railroad Co., a consortium of BNSF Railway and Union Pacific.

A MAX light rail service facility adjacent to the station now occupies part of that area. Surrounding real estate was sold to developers for apartments and offices, creating a vibrant commercial area known as the Pearl District. However, money from those sales was not set aside to fund significant capital improvements. News site [Oregon Live reports](#) Amtrak has recently "stepped back" from discussions to buy the property. Prosper Portland spokesperson Shawn Uhlman says "uncertainty about preservation costs and other priorities" were among the likely factors, but talks "did not evolve to a point where a price was agreed to." He adds, "Prosper Portland is seeking an entity with a strong regional transportation mission who can spearhead a large-scale renovation," and his organization "is not positioned to lead this work." The decision to sell the station follows efforts to pursue Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI) and Federal-State Partnership grants. Prosper Portland took step in 2021 and 2022 that would allow it to move forward on a programmatic agreement for final design of the "Portland Union Station Building and Tracks Improvement Project." The planning grant was for \$15 million. However, in a July 11, 2023, letter obtained by News Wire to the Federal Railroad Administration's Environmental Protection's Specialist and the Oregon Department of Transportation's liaison to the State Historic Preservation Office, project manager Shelly Haack said, "Prosper was unable to achieve FRA's minimum match requirement (\$7.5 million) so those applications were never submitted." The Oregon Department of Transportation was awarded a federal grant in 2010 that led to the hiring of consultants and development of an extensive renovation plan, whose details are still [available on Prosper's Union Station website](#).

The needed upgrades are extensive. They include reinforcing the building and tower, as well as revamping platforms and track layout "in anticipation of 2035 volumes." Among suggested changes are relocating a pedestrian crossing taking passengers from the central waiting room to the outer platforms.

While the renovation estimate has been pegged at \$250 million, the elderly facility needs more than a facelift, so that figure will certainly rise. It is not reasonable to expect any prospective buyer evaluating the property's commercial revenue potential to fund the rail-related improvements previously outlined. Nevertheless, Portland Union Station remains a crucial transportation hub hosting Oregon and Washington-sponsored *Amtrak Cascades* as well as the *Empire Builder* to Chicago and *Coast Starlight* to Los Angeles. It also facilitates regional bus and local transit connectivity that feed those services.

The situation illustrates how federal grant requirements can stymie much-needed improvements if communities can't come up with a local match and other transportation agencies are unable or unwilling to fill the void.

FRA Awards \$2.4 Billion in CRISI Grants to 122 Projects

By David Lassen | October 29, 2024 (7 pages,... Just Excerpts for our 5-state area)



A Caltrans F59PHI equipped with a shunt-enhancing antenna leads a test train near Durand, Mich., in September 2023. A program to install such equipment on Amtrak locomotives and cab cars is one of the projects receiving a CRISI grant as announced on Tuesday, Oct. 29. Bob Johnston

WASHINGTON — A total of 122 projects in 41 states and the District of Columbia have been selected for the Federal Railroad Administration's Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant program, announced early today (Oct. 29, 2024). The selected projects will receive more than \$2.4 billion in funding.

"Through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we're funding rail infrastructure projects that create jobs and expand workforce development, reduce costs for consumers, and directly benefit communities across the country," Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said in a press release. "Each project advances a future where our supply chains are stronger, passenger rail more accessible, and freight movement safer and more efficient." Congress and the FRA can be confident that short lines will put these public dollars to good use, providing new and efficient ways of serving customers, linking small town and rural America to U.S. and international markets, improving and expanding infrastructure that will drive safety improvements, and investing in next-generation technology and locomotives that will reduce the already low environmental impact of rail."

The complete list of awards is available here. A brief summary of each follows, with the maximum dollar figure to be awarded. Those covered in previous *Trains News Wire* reports have a link to the ear-

"In Iowa:

— \$29.9 million to the Iowa Interstate Railroad to replace four bridges, as previously reported here.

- \$19 million to the Cedar Rapids & Iowa City Railway for tie replacements along 56 miles of track, as previously reported in the story cited above.

In Minnesota:

— \$37.3 million to Progressive Rail for installation of welded rail, replacement of ties, improvements to turnouts, and ballasting and resurfacing on company-owned track in east central Minnesota.

— \$15.9 million to Minnesota Commercial Railway to replace nine older locomotives with six locomotives meeting Tier 4 emission standards.

— \$11.7 million to the Twin Cities and Western to replace jointed rail with welded rail on approximately 24 miles of the railroad's main line.

In Montana:

- \$6.4 million to Montana State University for a project to increase faculty, student, and youth engagement with rail-related topics and skill sets. Cal State Long Beach, the University of Memphis, and the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority are also involved. [This was previously covered in [this News Wire story](#), but more detail is now available.]

In North Dakota:

— \$20.7 million to the Red River Valley & Western Railroad to replace rail and build two new sidings on the railroad's 3rd Subdivision between Gwinner and Oakes.

In Wisconsin:

— \$72.8 million for the Muskego Yard bypass project in Milwaukee, [as reported here](#)

Passenger, Commuter Rail Operations Resuming in Florida

By Trains Staff | October 10, 2024

Friday to see return of Brightline, Tri-Rail, some Amtrak service



Amtrak's north-bound Silver Star meets a Tri-Rail train at Delray Beach, Fla., in January 2017. Tri-Rail will resume service on Friday following Hurricane Milton, while Amtrak service to South Florida is slated to resume Saturday. David Lassen

We are happy to report that the railroad received very minimal damage as a result of the storm and we expect be prepared for full service tomorrow," said David Dech, executive director of Tri-Rail's parent agency, the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority. "Our thoughts are with Central Florida and all who suffered through the worst part of the storm. We pray for a speedy recovery." Brightline, which halted service between West Palm Beach and Orlando, says that service will fully resume Friday, but did not specify when that would occur. .

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“[A post on X.com](#) indicates service will resume “as soon as all safety inspections are complete.” The company recommends checking [the Train Status page](#) of the Brightline website for up-to-date information. Amtrak will offer modified service for the *Silver Star* and *Silver Meteor* on Friday, according to [an advisory](#) on the company’s website. Northbound trains 92 and 98 will originate in Jacksonville, while southbound trains 91 and 97 will terminate there. The north- and southbound *Auto Trains* remain cancelled on Friday. The ticketing portion of [Amtrak’s website](#) indicates those trains will resume operation on Saturday, Oct. 12, which is also the first day the Silver Service trains are expected to run their full routes.

Orlando’s SunRail will resume operations on Monday, Oct. 14. That service has been suspended since Tuesday, Oct. 8. SunRail said in [a press release](#) that crews were assessing Milton’s impact today and resolving issues needing to be addressed before service could resume. That includes removing any obstructions on the right-of-way, reinstalling crossing gates that were removed prior to the storm, and conducting safety inspections. Service will not return this weekend because SunRail is a Monday-through-Friday operation.

Railroads Have no Choice But to Rebuild after Hurricane Helene: Commentary

By Chase Gunnoe | October 9, 2024

Lack of system redundancy makes flood-damaged lines a necessity



Sections of NS’s right-of-way at Marshall, N.C., are still in the French Broad River nearly two weeks after Hurricane Helene. Nathan Wike

ASHEVILLE, N.C. — Skepticism spread throughout the railroad community after Hurricane Helene’s devastating once-in-a-generation floods wiped out roadbeds, destroyed bridges, and left most of western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee unrecognizable. Some in the industry expressed doubt that CSX and Norfolk Southern would invest the dollars needed to repair widespread damages. More than 40 miles of CSX’s ex-Clinchfield Railroad between Erwin, Tenn., and Spartanburg, S.C., are gone, including two bridges, and many sections along 50 miles of NS’s ex-Southern S-Line between Marshall, N.C., and Old Fort, N.C., through Asheville, N.C., are washed away. But railroads don’t have the choice to not rebuild as they did 40 or 50 years ago. Class I railroads have rationalized their networks to the extent that there is very little redundancy, leaving few efficient alternatives in the event of a catastrophic event like Hurricane Helene.

CSX’s outage on the former Clinchfield is requiring coal, merchandise, and bulk trains to detour across the I-64 corridor between Russell, Ky., and Richmond, Va., and then down the Seaboard into Hamlet, N.C., before diverting west toward Charlotte, N.C., and into the western part of the state. This adds several hundred miles.

Choosing not to rehabilitate the Clinchfield would mean CSX has little through-route connectivity between Knoxville, Tenn., and Charlotte, N.C., a distance of more than 250 miles. While there is not a significant amount of carload business or through coal trains on this route compared to 40 years ago, the annualized gross ton-miles are still significant enough to justify the rebuilding, given few favorable alternatives.

NS doesn’t have a choice either. It has already downsized its S-Line as a through route between Morristown, Tenn., and Salisbury, N.C., after trimming operations at its Linwood Yard north of Salisbury. Western North Carolina carloads bound for Watco’s Blue Ridge Southern and NS-served customers in the Asheville region rely on NS trains traversing the Southern from Knoxville, Tenn., east into western North Carolina on the French Broad River. Through trains no longer operate east of Asheville, and south of Asheville, across Saluda Grade, is no longer an option. In order to preserve rail access to the area, NS has to rebuild in at least one direction from Asheville.

Norfolk Southern Donates an Additional \$400,000 for Hurricane Relief

By Trains Staff | October 10, 2024

Latest donation follows earlier contribution following Hurricane Helene

ATLANTA — Norfolk Southern has donated an additional \$400,000 to the American Red Cross to add in relief efforts following Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton, the company announced today (Oct. 10).

The company had previously donated \$100,000 to the organization for Helene relief on Oct. 1 [see [“Norfolk Southern donates ...”](#) *Trains News Wire*, Oct. 1, 2024]. The latest donation brings the company’s total disaster recovery support this year to \$775,000.

“As we stand alongside our communities during this challenging time, we’re not just offering financial support—we’re providing hope and helping rebuild what’s been lost,” Kristin Wong, Norfolk Southern director, NS Foundation and community impact, said in [a press release](#).

“This donation reinforces our commitment to being a trusted partner in recovery, not only for those communities impacted by the storms but also for our own team members who have been affected. Together, we’re making sure they have the resources needed for both immediate relief and long-term recovery.”

The company is also encouraging employees to donate by offering a two-to-one match of funds, and will continue hosting blood drives throughout the year.

North Carolina's Tweetsie Railroad Facing Lengthy Closure Because of Hurricane

By David Lassen | October 12, 2024

Theme park with narrow-gauge steam operation plans reopening on Nov. 29



The Tweetsie Railroad, a North Carolina theme park including a narrow-gauge steam rail operation, will remain closed until late November because of Hurricane Helene. Tweetsie Railroad

BLOWING ROCK, N.C. — The Tweetsie Railroad, a tourist railroad and theme park in western North Carolina, will be closed for the remainder of its fall season as a result Hurricane Helene, the company announced Friday. An announcement [posted on Facebook](#) reads, “Tweetsie Railroad will remain closed for the rest of the fall season to focus on community recovery efforts. We plan to reopen for Tweetsie Christmas on Nov. 29 and appreciate your continued support and understanding.”

[The Raleigh News & Observer reports](#) the Tweetsie is running a matching-fund challenge to support Hurricane relief efforts, after making an initial \$10,000 donation to the group Samaritan's Purse. It will match additional donations to any organization working on hurricane relief, up to another \$10,000. [More information is available here.](#) The Tweetsie Railroad is a 30-acre Wild West theme park between the towns of Boone and Blowing Rock. It is approximately 90 miles west of Winston-Salem and about 95 miles north-west of Charlotte. Its [rail operations](#) feature rides on a 3-mile route behind two narrow-gauge steam locomotives, a Baldwin 4-6-0 built in 1917 for the East Tennessee & Western North Carolina Railroad, and a 2-8-2 built by Baldwin in 1943 for the U.S. Army for use on the White Pass & Yukon.

Coos Bay, Ore., Port Receives Grant for Intermodal Project

By Trains Staff | October 19, 2024

Federal INFRA grant will address permitting, design, engineering for Pacific Coast Intermodal Port



COOS BAY, Ore. — The Oregon International Port of Coos Bay will receive a \$25 million federal grant for its intermodal project, the Pacific Coast Intermodal Port, the port has announced.

The grant, from the Department of Transportation's INFRA (Infrastructure for Rebuilding America) program, will go toward environmental compliance and permitting, as well as design and engineering work.

“The INFRA grant is a game-changer for the Port of Coos Bay and the Pacific Coast Intermodal Port Project,” Melissa Cribbins, executive director of the intermodal project, said in [a press release](#). “...This federal grant is a watershed moment for the region and adds the federal government to the growing list of critical supporters for one of the most impactful rural economic development projects in state history.”

The intermodal project, [described in more detail here](#), will include dredging of the Coos Bay Federal Navigation Channel to allow larger container ships to visit the port; a new rail-served intermodal terminal with a projected capacity of 2 million TEUs (20-foot equivalent units, the standard measure of container volume), and significant upgrades to the Coos Bay Rail Line, the 134-mile route interchanging with the Union Pacific near Eugene, Ore.

The port has twice made bids for Department of Transportation Mega Grants which would help fund significant improvements to the rail line, including increasing tunnel clearance, new sidings, and other bridge and track work [see [“Port of Coos Bay seeks Mega Grant ...”](#) News Wire, Aug. 27, 2023].

The Winner of the Preservation Award to Union Pacific...NRHS

Friday, October 11, 2024 at 01:16:35 PM CDT

Yuhas and Railway Age Executive Editor Marybeth Luczak presented the award to Union Pacific Oct. 11 at the Railway Supply Institute Expo and Conference in Chicago.

- William C. Vantuono, *Railway Age* The National Railway Historical Society, Railway Age and Railway Track & Structures have awarded Union Pacific's heritage program their second annual Historic Preservation Award, which recognizes and honors a North American common-carrier railroad for a historically significant preservation project. “We selected Union Pacific from among numerous entries in recognition of its ongoing commitment to preserving and operating historic steam and diesel locomotives, the centerpiece of which is 4014, the ‘Big Boy,’ its tradition of honoring predecessor railroads with heritage liveries on modern locomotives, and—most important—sharing its railroading heritage with the public,” said NRHS's Mike Yuhas. “NRHS members and Railway Age and RT&S readers are strong advocates for sharing the railroad industry's important history within North America.”



Left to Right: Josh Perkes, Senior Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer, UP; Mike Yuhas, Director-Elect, NRHS; and Marybeth Luczak, Executive Editor, Railway Age. Photo by Kat Mathis/RSI.

STB Passenger Rail Advisory Committee Holds First Meeting (updated)

By Bob Johnston | October 23, 2024 | Last updated on October 24, 2024

Metra's Derwinski, RDC's Posner voted as co-chairmen; three gatherings



Members of the STB Passenger Rail Advisory Committee gather Wednesday, Oct. 16, at Surface Transportation Board offices in Washington, D.C. Chairman Robert Primus (in front of the flag) opens the meeting. Bob Johnston



Metra's Jim Derwinski, elected as one of the committee's chairmen, listens to another committee member. Bob Johnston



An eastbound Norfolk Southern intermodal train passes stopped Lincoln Service train No. 318 in a view from the Chicago-bound Amtrak train south of Springfield, Ill., on July 22, 2023. Passenger and freight coexistence and preference is likely to be a topic the STB committee will address. Bob Johnston

WASHINGTON — Rail industry professionals from around the country assembled in the hearing room at Surface Transportation Board headquarters last week for the first meeting of the STB's Passenger Rail Advisory Committee. The initial session's purpose: to get acquainted with each other, discuss goals, and meet the four STB members to whom they will report.

Then-chairman Martin Oberman proposed forming the committee prior to his retirement. Its published mission is to "provide advice and guidance to the board, on a continuing basis, and to provide a forum to address passenger rail transportation issues in a manner that balances the interests of intercity and commuter rail passengers, and operators, government entities, freight rail shippers and carriers, railway labor, and the general public."

The full list of members is available [at the committee's website](#). The geographically diverse roster selected from more than 90 applicants includes officers from Amtrak; operating authorities; Class I railroads; regional railroads and short lines; commuter agencies and operators; rail labor; passenger advocacy organizations; and state transportation departments.

Following welcoming remarks by Chairman Robert Primus, Vice Chairman Karen Hedlund, and board members Michelle Schultz and Patrick Fuchs, committee individuals shared the qualifications that prompted their selection.

Derwinski, Posner named chairmen

The Advisory Committee charter provides for two co-chairmen to be elected by the majority of the group: one representing passenger rail interests and the other from freight rail. There were four nominees for the passenger position:

- Jim Derwinski, CEO/executive director of Chicago's Metra (Commuter rail category)
- Husein Cumber, chief strategy officer, Florida East Coast Industries (non-Amtrak)
- James Blair, Amtrak assistant vice president of host railroads (Amtrak)
- Roger Millar, Washington state secretary of transportation (state DOT funding Amtrak service)

There was no majority on the first ballot; in a run-off of the top two vote-getters, Derwinski topped Cumber.

On the freight side, Rail Development Corp. and Iowa Interstate Railroad Chairman Henry Posner was the lone nominee. He had a prior commitment at a Posner Foundation event, but Ida Posner, Rail Development Corp. vice president of strategic planning, attended and accepted the co-chairmanship on his behalf.

Ground rules

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Designated Federal Officer Brian O’Boyle explained Federal Advisory Committee Act requirements, which allow the public to observe the proceedings but not participate. There is currently no provision to live-stream the meetings; minutes of the event had not been posted one week after it took place.

Committee members voted to require in-person attendance, but yet-to-be-determined subcommittees will be able to meet remotely. The charter provides for two annual meetings, but the group decided on three gatherings in 2025 because many members were serving two-year terms that began in March 2024.

It is expected the committee will be available to assist the STB’s recently-established Office of Passenger Rail, which is involved with the dispute brought by Amtrak against Union Pacific’s handling of the *Sunset Limited* [see [“STB to end discovery portion of Sunset Limited on-time performance case.”](#) News Wire, Aug. 20, 2024].

Ethics Officer Chris Oehrle told the group, “You were brought in for your (outside of government) point of view and financial interest, but you can’t trade on your position. A government employee can’t have those interests without committing a conflict-of-interest crime.” But not so fast. He adds that any matter before the board can’t be discussed without all parties being present — the *ex parte* rule. When asked by News Wire during the next break if the Amtrak-UP on-time performance case can be discussed, Oehrle said committee members “can only advise the board in a general way; they can’t make an argument involving specifics of a proceeding under review.”

What it does mean, though, is that the committee’s expertise and varying points of view may help nail down a meaningful definition of what “preference” really means. That was one of the issues committee members brought up as they revealed challenges the group might attempt to solve. Derwinski noted, “Interstate commerce is vital to this country. It’s a big deal that we can’t get in each other’s way. This committee can help stimulate those conversations.” Of harnessing public funds to add capacity and speaking of his Brightline experience, Florida East Coast’s Cumber observed, “It becomes very tough with elected officials who have term limits when they can’t see a project come to fruition while they are in office. And the private sector has to be concerned with cost of capital. But if you can deliver these projects in a much more efficient way, I do believe there is a passenger rail renaissance out there.”

For Rail Development Corp.’s Ida Posner it’s liability insurance. “The high cost is a huge barrier, especially for smaller projects.” She also wants to explore how branch lines are valued in abandonment proceedings. “If we’re thinking long-term, what’s the best use of that infrastructure?” she asked. Liability and freight-passenger coexistence also topped Carl Warren’s list. The North Carolina Railroad President and CEO told News Wire, “[These concerns] are something our company has to think about all the time. The liability question is a big hurdle that doesn’t always get addressed at the right point in the project sequence. That makes it very challenging.” Warren’s state-owned tracks host the *Carolinian*, *Silver Star*, and *Piedmont* passenger trains as well as a variety of freight traffic. “We need to recognize where freight and passenger can reliably co-exist and when separate right-of-way and facilities make sense,” he said. California Capitol Corridor Managing Director Rob Padgett says working groups will likely be established around these topics for the next meeting, to be scheduled for February 2025. He tells News Wire, “They did a nice job of bringing a lot of different perspectives into the room. Presumably there also might be some value to organizations like the Federal Railroad Administration in terms of issues we might take up.” STB Chairman Primus concludes, “It’s a great forum to get issues out in the open without fear of retaliation.” — *Updated Oct. 24 at 5:45 p.m. to correct spelling of Oehrle and nature of ex parte rule.*

Weekly U.S. Rail Volume Shows Slight Gain

By Trains Staff | October 24, 2024

Traffic up 1.1% over same week in 2023

U.S. Rail Traffic¹
Week 42, 2024 – Ended October 19, 2024

	This Week		Year-To-Date		
	Cars	vs 2023	Cumulative	Avg/wk ²	vs 2023
Total Carloads	223,278	-4.6%	9,142,601	217,681	-3.3%
Chemicals	31,081	-1.4%	1,358,822	32,353	3.9%
Coal	58,350	-12.4%	2,362,113	56,241	-14.2%
Farm Products excl. Grain, and Food	18,082	5.2%	697,667	16,611	2.7%
Forest Products	7,584	-2.9%	346,112	8,241	1.6%
Grain	23,372	15.0%	842,335	20,056	9.7%
Metallic Ores and Metals	18,884	-15.8%	842,361	20,056	-3.2%
Motor Vehicles and Parts	15,357	1.1%	637,929	15,189	1.5%
Nonmetallic Minerals	30,281	-11.1%	1,248,164	29,718	-7.2%
Petroleum and Petroleum Products	10,295	3.5%	438,244	10,434	9.9%
Other	9,992	11.3%	368,854	8,782	2.5%
Total Intermodal Units	287,452	6.0%	11,042,994	262,928	9.0%
Total Traffic	510,730	1.1%	20,185,595	480,609	3.1%

¹ Excludes U.S. operations of CPKC, CN and GMXT.

² Average per week figures may not sum to totals as a result of independent rounding.

Year-to-date North American volume is up 2.3% through 42 weeks; that includes flat volume in Canada and a 2.7% increase in Mexico.

WASHINGTON — U.S. weekly rail traffic showed a modest gain for the week ending Oct. 19, 2024.

According to [statistics from the Association of American Railroads](#), volume was 510,730 carloads and intermodal units, a 1.1% increase over the same week in 2023. That includes 223,278 carloads, down 4.6% from a year ago, and 287,452 containers and trailers, up 6%. Through 42 weeks of 2024, carload volume is down 3.3% while intermodal units show a 9% gain for an overall increase of 3.1% compared to the same period in 2023.

North American volume for the week, as reported by nine U.S., Canadian, and Mexican railroads, included 333,360 carloads, down 4.4% from the corresponding week in 2023, and 368,573 intermodal units, up 3.1%. The overall volume of 701,933 carloads and intermodal units represents a 0.6% decline from the same week in 2023.

VIA Venture Slowdown Limited to CN-maintained Track: Analysis

By Bob Johnston | October 17, 2024 | Last updated on October 22, 2024
 Few details emerge regarding the railroad's pre-holiday edict



Quebec City-bound VIA train No. 22 prepares to stop at Dorval, Quebec, on Oct. 1, 2024, less than two weeks before Canadian National imposed speed restrictions on Venture trainsets. On Oct. 17, with those restrictions in place, it was more than 2 hours late arriving at its final destination. Bob Johnston



A Budd-built HEP-2 coach and three "Light Rapid Comfortable" cars await departure from Ottawa to Toronto on Sept. 30, 2024. VIA has routinely operated the LRCs in four-car sets for decades without incurring loss-of-shunt incidents. Bob Johnston



A trainload of passengers await the boarding announcement at Ottawa on Sept. 30 for Venture-equipped train No. 26 headed for Montreal and Quebec City. Travelers on the route continue to be severely impacted by tardy arrivals. Bob Johnston

MONTREAL — When safety is on the table, there can be no debate about measures taken to ensure it. So when Canadian National informed VIA Rail Canada last Friday that all Venture trainsets of less than 32 axles could not operate at track speed across highway crossings equipped with warning devices triggered by Grade Crossing Predictors, the operator had no recourse but to immediately comply [see ["CN imposes axle-count restriction ..."](#), *Trains News Wire* Oct. 14, 2024]. Still unanswered is why CN chose the beginning of Canada's Thanksgiving Day holiday weekend to impose the restriction and what role the railroad's track maintenance or other factors might have prompted the decision. In response to a *News Wire* request for more details, a VIA spokesman says, "No incidents or issues at level crossings have been reported to VIA Rail since the Venture trains have been in operation." The trainsets were tested on all routes to the satisfaction of regulatory agency Transport Canada and host railroads before VIA's acceptance in 2021, and have operated in revenue service since Nov. 8, 2022, "with CN's collaboration and approval."

Canadian National spokeswoman Ashley Michnowski, responding to the same inquiry, explains, "We advised VIA very early on in the process (October 2021) that operating at a 24-axle count could create issues." This was confirmed, she says, in March 2024. "We immediately notified VIA and took necessary measures to protect the public by reverting to CN's 32-axle minimum requirement or imposing restrictions on the designated routes that VIA was operating this fleet on."

VIA tells *News Wire* slowdowns at crossings were indeed mandated then on portions of the Montreal-Quebec City corridor, but reiterated that CN failed to divulge any specific incident or incidents where the crossing activation issue, known as loss of shunt, occurred. And that was in March.

Canadian National only said, "it was discovered on Oct. 11, 2024, that these Venture trainsets were operating in expanded service with crossings which may experience shunt loss and thus be unprotected, CN took immediate measures to issue the proper instructions to protect the safety of train operations and crossings."

Engineers must slow their trains enough to visually confirm that warning devices are operating at least 20 seconds prior to the train's approach to crossings. A Transport Canada official [told a reporter for broadcaster CTV](#) that this was 72 kilometers per hour (about 44 mph).

Michnowski's statement further notes that "shunt enhancer antennas" are in use in the United Kingdom. The locomotive-mounted device appears to be the railroad's blanket solution to otherwise unexplained instances where loss of shunt on certain CN track segments — but not others — has resulted on equipment-specific and axle-count requirements if maximum authorized track speeds are to be maintained.

In the U.S., a years-long mandate requiring seven Superliner on Amtrak's Chicago-Carbondale, Ill., regional route has prevented 14 long-distance cars from providing much needed capacity elsewhere [see ["Short consists constrain Capitol Limited ..."](#), *News Wire*, Jan. 19, 2024].

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Today (Thursday, Oct. 17), train No. 22 from Ottawa was 10 minutes late leaving Coteau on the all-VIA route. On CN, it departed Montreal 40 minutes late, was 1 hour, 20 minutes behind schedule at St. Hyacinthe, Que., and arrived at Quebec City at 1:59 p.m. instead of 11:40 a.m., well after any passengers' lunch appointments. In the other direction, VIA No. 35 was an hour late over CN leaving Coteau, but the train lost only 8 minutes more on the way to Ottawa.

Only Venture-equipped VIA trains are affected by the edict, so the pain will be felt mostly on the Quebec-Ottawa round trips where those trainsets predominate. VIA says it "continues to engage in constructive dialogue with CN to find solutions to this situation and ensure that our safe and modern trains can continue operating on CN infrastructure without impacting travel times for passengers." Canadian National's statement claims the company "is committed to keep working with VIA and all our passenger service partners on this issue to protect safety and allow for the best possible operating conditions."

Without transparency and incident-specific explanations, however, the traveling public deserves more than platitudes, especially from CN.

Union Urges Department of Transportation to Bar Federal Grants to Brightline Florida

By Bill Stephens | September 24, 2024

The Transport Workers Union of America says that the passenger railroad is trying to bar onboard service personnel from joining a union



Meals are delivered from a cart on a Miami-bound Brightline train on Sept. 23, 2023. Bob Johnston

WASHINGTON – The Transport Workers Union of America, AFL-CIO, has asked Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg to deny Brightline Florida any additional federal funding, arguing that the company has sought to block its employees from joining a union.

The TWU, in a Sept. 19 letter to Buttigieg, noted that nearly 100 Brightline onboard service personnel are seeking union representation. TWU says that it was able to show the National Mediation Board in August that more than half of Brightline Florida's onboard service workers wanted to unionize.

"Since that time, Brightline Florida has repeatedly and aggressively blocked these workers from exercising their right to freely be represented by the union of their choice," TWU President John Samuelson wrote.

The union contends that Brightline Florida has run afoul of an executive order that President Joe Biden signed earlier this month directing the Department of Transportation to prioritize funding projects that promote positive labor-management relationships, including voluntary union recognition and employer neutrality regarding union organizing.

Brightline Florida has received \$36 million in Federal Railroad Administration CRISI grants and has requested additional funding through several FRA grant programs. Among them: Programs designed to improve grade crossing safety and eliminate grade crossings.

"Unless and until Brightline Florida ends their anti-union efforts, the TWU strongly opposes all of these applications," Samuelson wrote.

The union also asked DOT to investigate whether Brightline should be required to return funding obtained through prior federal grants.

"Faced with workers' desires to unionize, Brightline and its president, Patrick Goddard, have deliberately chosen the path of confrontation and acrimony," Samuelson said in a statement today. "This will not end well for the bosses. Although Brightline bosses are anti-worker, President Joe Biden is not. The U.S. DOT now must give funding priority to companies that don't interfere with workers seeking to unionize. Brightline absolutely doesn't fit that description. They should be at the bottom of any list. This forthcoming debacle, created by Goddard, is totally avoidable but only if he stops his anti-worker, anti-union campaign."

The union also claims that Brightline is arguing, before other federal agencies, that it is not a railroad under the Railway Labor Act. Rail labor unions have harshly criticized railroads' safety records in recent years. Why would the TWU oppose federal funding for grade crossing safety projects on Brightline?

"Rather than putting the company's future and safety projects in jeopardy, we are in fact protecting them and providing job security for our members. By forcing Brightline to admit its true status under law as a rail carrier, we are solidifying its eligibility for federal grants," a union spokesman says.

Brightline says it aims to provide a good workplace for all of its employees.

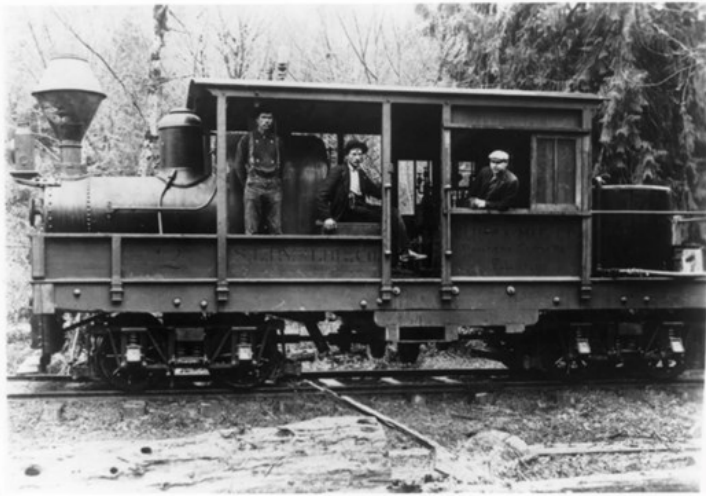
"Brightline recently signed a historic agreement with organized labor to build and operate Brightline West (including the TWU) and have always recognized our teammates right to explore representation. That said, there are longstanding jurisdictional channels that regulate and oversee this process and it's in everyone's interest – especially our employees – to get those right," says Ben Porritt, Brightline's senior vice president of corporate affairs. "While that decision plays out, we'll continue to focus on our goal to provide the best workplace experience for all teammates, allowing for career and individual growth."

--- Preservation, Museum and Steam News & Historical News---

One-of-a-kind Climax Locomotive Donated to Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad

By Trains Staff | October 24, 2024

Locomotive built in 1907 to be restored to operating condition



A Class A Climax locomotive, in this case SL Railway & Lumber Co. No. 2, shows what Cabin Creek Lumber No. 1 would have looked like when new. Oregon Historical Society/John Labbe, via Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad



The frame of Cabin Creek Lumber No. 1 leaves Cabin Creek, Wash., crossing over BNSF Railway tracks near Easton, Wash. Trevor Park

GARIBALDI, Ore. — The world's only surviving standard gauge Class A Climax locomotive, Cabin Creek Lumber Co. No. 1, has been donated to the Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad, the railroad announced today (Oct. 24, 2024).

The family of the late Victor C. Monahan donated the locomotive, which Oregon Coast Scenic intends to restore to operating condition. It would join a collection that includes a Shay and multiple Heisler locomotives, which will give it a representative of each of the three major geared locomotive manufacturers.

While Class B and C Climax locomotives survive elsewhere, the only other Class A locomotive is a 3-foot gauge locomotive undergoing restoration by the Corry Rail & Industrial Legacy Society and Museum in Corry, Pa., the home of the Climax Locomotive Works. Oregon Coast Scenic will consult with the Corry group as part of the restoration of Cabin Creek No. 1. The railroad already possesses key components, including a suitable boiler and Class A steam locomotive engine set returned to the U.S. from New Zealand.

"Today is a day that has been more than two decades in the making for me," said Scott Wicker, the railroad's founder and chief mechanical officer. "When I acquired the Climax A engine set from Richard Dunn years ago, I knew I had to get this engine to unite the two together. I am very excited about this." Dunn, one of the authors of the 2002 book, "The Climax Locomotive," rescued the engine set from New Zealand.

The locomotive was moved from Cabin Creek, Was., to Tillamook, Ore., on Oct. 16. Because of its small size, hopes are it will become a traveling exhibit representing the Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad at events across the U.S.

Built in 1907 at the Climax Locomotive Works as shop No. 804, the 20-ton locomotive has a wooden-frame, two-truck design. It originally featured a wood-fired tee-style boiler and two-cylinder vertical engine, along with a unique two-speed transmission allowing the locomotive to shift between two different gears. It was built for the Cascade Lumber Co. of Easton, Wash., and later sold to Cabin Creek. In the early 1940s, the steam engine was replaced with a White truck engine, which helped keep the locomotive in service into the 1970s. After the Cabin Creek mill shut down, a portion of the railroad and the locomotive was saved, and some restoration work was done including rebuilding of the wooden frame.

The railroad says the project is possible only because of the foresight and effort of multiple generations of the Monahan family, and that it is "honored to have been entrusted with this artifact that is legendary in the railfan community and a family heirloom for the Monahans.

"The Oregon Coast Scenic also thanks Burden's Towing of Tillamook for moving the locomotive.

Shay Moved into Oregon Rail Heritage Center Engine House

By Trains Staff | October 16, 2024

Locomotive had been at Portland, Ore., facility since February



Shay locomotive Mt. Emily Lumber No. 1 now shares engine-house space with another Lima product, Southern Pacific No. 4449, at the Oregon Rail Heritage Center. Friends of the SP&S 700 via Facebook

PORTLAND, Ore. — Mt. Emily Lumber No. 1, a three-truck Shay locomotive built in 1923, has been moved into the engine house at its new home, the Oregon Rail Heritage Center. The move came Tuesday, Oct. 15, according to [a Facebook post](#) from the Friends of the SP&S 700.

The center plans to use the locomotive for excursions once it under goes its required Federal Railroad Administration 1,472-day inspection.

The locomotive was previously property of the Oregon Historical Society, which had no place to store it and selected the Heritage Center to become the new owner in 2022, after the City of Prineville — which had taken care of the Shay since 1994 — requested an end to that long-term loan. The Shay had been on a flatcar at the Heritage Center since February [see [“Shay locomotive arrives ...”](#) Trains News Wire, Feb. 16, 2024].

Nickle Plate SD9 Shines on Indiana Rail Experience Cigar Train

By Steve Smedley | October 14, 2024 | Last updated on October 15, 2024

Trip is one of several themed rides among excursions offered by Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society, Indiana Northeastern Railroad



With a cigar clenched in his teeth, Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society Executive Director Kelly Lynch stands on the nose of Nickel Plate Road SD9 No. 358 as engineer Will Carney gingerly moves the Rocky Patel Rolling Smoke Cigar Train across Spring Street in Hillsdale, Mich., on Oct. 12, 2024. The train will have a short layover while riders dine at the Hillsdale Brewing Co. Steve Smedley



Gary Pacos, left, and his son Brian, of Buffalo, N.Y., wave from the door of a former circus elephant car a former elephant car as they enjoy cigars on the excursion as it enters Michigan from Ray, Ind., on Oct. 12, 2024. Steve Smedley



A Michigan State Police trooper watches as Nickle Plate SD9 No. 358 leads the cigar train northward through Montgomery, Mich., on Oct. 12, 2024. Steve Smedley

PLEASANT LAKE, Ind. — The Indiana Rail Experience operated its second cigar train using Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society passenger cars on Saturday, Oct. 12, 2024, on host railroad Indiana Northeastern. The “Rocky Patel Rolling Smoke Cigar Train” train operated behind Nickel Plate Road SD9 No. 358 in pull-pull fashion from Pleasant Lake to Hillsdale, Mich., and back, with Indiana Northeastern GP30 No. 2185 leading the return trip from Hillsdale.

The restored SD9 — one of 20 units built for the Nickle Plate to replace steam engines like the historical society’s star Berkshire No. 765 — is one of the few operating versions of that model in the United States. Norfolk Southern donated the SD9, already being scrapped, to the Fort Wayne society in 2010. Volunteers worked on the EMD locomotive in Ft. Wayne until 2021, when its 16-cylinder 567C engine once again turned over. The locomotive was then moved to Progress Rail in nearby Muncie, Ind., which restored it to its as-delivered paint scheme, releasing it in July 2023.

Indiana Northeastern shop forces then performed several hours of troubleshooting and repairs at the railroad’s state-of-the-art engine facility at Hudson, Ind.

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"It's incredible," said Kelly Lynch, executive director of the Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society. "I've never felt emotional about a diesel, but No. 358 — when it was unveiled at Progress Rail there wasn't a dry eye in the house."

The SD9 performed flawlessly on Saturday's six-car train. "It's a sweetheart," said volunteer engineer Will Carney, an Amtrak road foreman of engines from St. Louis, "but my favorite is GP30 No 2185."

Many of those aboard, however, were attracted by the cigars, not the railroading. The train was sponsored by Rudy's Cigar Shop in Ft. Wayne and featured Rocky Patel Premium Cigars. Patel was onboard the train talking to ticket holders about his hand rolled brand, manufactured in cigar plants in Central America, including Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic. The trip featured three classes of tickets, with passengers all receiving associated Patel cigar "swag."

Detroit Police Officer Greg "Smittie" Smith said, "I'm a cigar aficionado. The ride was exuberant, peaceful, exhilarant, and different. It's like six hours just went away."

Grace Voelker, one of three cigar girls working the train and selling cigars said, "It's a great experience. It pulls you out of the normal day and takes you back to a bygone era."

Two former Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus elephant cars have been converted for excursion service, with four large Dutch doors providing open-air access for passengers enjoying fall colors and a beautiful day on the nearly seven-hour ride. The trip is one of several themed rides during the year, making what was one a rare-mileage railroad for enthusiasts part of a highly successful excursion operation.

As the train passed me at Montgomery, Mich., under the watchful eyes of a Michigan State Police patrol car, the smell of No. 358's diesel exhaust mixing with cigar smoke easily reminded me of my late father, an avid cigar smoker. "Rolling Smoke" indeed.

New York Central Mohawk No. 3001 Joins Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society Fleet for Potential Return to Steam

By Trains Staff | October 9, 2024

Organization announces American Locomotive Project and initial challenge grant for \$4.3 million restoration; partnership unveils redevelopment plans for National New York Central Railroad Museum



New York Central Mohawk No. 3001 joins Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society fleet for potential return to steam. Society Executive Director Kelly Lynch holds a press conference at the National New York Central Railroad Museum in Elkhart, Ind., on Oct. 9, 2024. Kevin Keefe

ELKHART, Ind. — The stage is set for a new partnership between the Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society, the City of Elkhart, and the National New York Central Railroad Museum, announced in a press conference at the museum campus today (Oct. 9, 2024).

The society — owner and operator of Nickel Plate Road 2-8-4 No. 765 — will acquire several pieces of equipment from the museum, with the ultimate prize being [NYC 4-8-2 "Mohawk" No. 3001](#). [The society has announced](#) the American Locomotive Project, a \$100,000 kick-off challenge grant for the \$4.3 million restoration project, and an initial goal of raising \$500,000 by May 3, 2025.

"The effort will not be able to move forward without broad and consistent donor support, which we believe we can forecast from the pledges," says Fort Wayne Executive Director Kelly Lynch. "As much as this effort may be driven by emotion and history, it has to be driven by data and logic, too."

If fully funded, the multi-year effort would include repairs to the boiler, firebox, running gear, and appliances. Initial inspections to the 1940-built L-3a of the American Locomotive Co. have already been performed by contractor and consultant FMW Solutions, with support from former Norfolk Southern CEO Wick Moorman.

Success would result in the first operational New York Central steam locomotive since May 1957. No. 3001 would join No. 765 as an excursion stablemate in the Indiana Rail Experience, the excursion partnership between the society and the Indiana Northeastern Railroad.

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The National New York Central Railroad Museum in Elkhart, Ind., lies adjacent to NS Chicago Line



NYC 4-8-2 No. 3001 at the National New York Central Railroad Museum, Elkhart, Ind., on April 28, 2017. Dan Cupper

The locomotive would operate on ex-NYC trackage between Coldwater, Mich., and Steubenville, Ind., with trains including [passenger cars of the former “Great Steel Fleet.”](#)

Details have yet to be released regarding No. 3001’s relocation to its restoration site, along with the other newly acquired equipment. Donor pledges can be made by mail to Re: 3001, PO Box 11017, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 46855, or online at the americanloco.org website.

“We have been the stewards of the Mohawk for many years,” said Elkhart Mayor Rod Roberson. “Although we have had no shortage of pride and admiration for this historic machine, we lacked the expertise to be able to preserve it in the way it deserves. We are thrilled to be able to announce this partnership and a new life for the Mohawk.”

The collaboration will also develop a new long-term strategic plan in revitalizing the National New York Central Railroad Museum in downtown Elkhart. An assessment of the museum’s collection will be followed by a de-accession plan for select equipment, allowing qualified parties to express their interest in acquiring those pieces. A master plan will follow for improving the outdoor displays of the remaining collection, along with plans to position the museum as an anchor for neighborhood redevelopment. The public will have an opportunity for input on that plan in 2025.

Coos Bay, Ore., Port Receives Grant for Intermodal Project

By Trains Staff | October 19, 2024

Federal INFRA grant will address permitting, design, engineering for Pacific Coast Intermodal Port

COOS BAY, Ore. — The Oregon International Port of Coos Bay will receive a \$25 million federal grant for its intermodal project, the Pacific Coast Intermodal Port, the port has announced.

The grant, from the Department of Transportation’s INFRA (Infrastructure for Rebuilding America) program, will go toward environmental compliance and permitting, as well as design and engineering work.

“The INFRA grant is a game-changer for the Port of Coos Bay and the Pacific Coast Intermodal Port Project,” Melissa Cribbins, executive director of the intermodal project, said in [a press release](#). “...This federal grant is a watershed moment for the region and adds the federal government to the growing list of critical supporters for one of the most impactful rural economic development projects in state history.”



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The intermodal project, [described in more detail here](#), will include dredging of the Coos Bay Federal Navigation Channel to allow larger container ships to visit the port; a new rail-served intermodal terminal with a projected capacity of 2 million TEUs (20-foot equivalent units, the standard measure of container volume), and significant upgrades to the Coos Bay Rail Line, the 134-mile route interchanging with the Union Pacific near Eugene, Ore. The port has twice made bids for Department of Transportation Mega Grants which would help fund significant improvements to the rail line, including increasing tunnel clearance, new sidings, and other bridge and track work [see ["Port of Coos Bay seeks Mega Grant ..."](#) News Wire, Aug. 27, 2023].

Soo Line No. 1003 Set for Santa Train Appearance

By [Trains Staff](#) | November 1, 2024

Locomotive to appear in Hartford, Wis., on Nov. 9



Soo Line 2-8-2 No. 1003 performs in the snow during a Trains Magazine photo charter in November 2021.

HARTFORD, Wis. — Soo Line 2-8-2 No. 1003 will make its annual appearance for the Hartford Santa Train on Saturday, Nov. 9. The 1913 Alco, operated by the non-profit Steam Locomotive Heritage Association, is a fixture at the Hartford event, held in conjunction with the community's annual Christmas Parade.

The Santa Train will be at the corner of Main Street and Wisconsin Avenue in Hartford from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.; see the Steam Locomotive Heritage Association website for more information. The Christmas Parade begins at 3 p.m. More information on the parade and related events is available [here](#).

The locomotive's appearance is hosted by the association, the Wisconsin & Southern Railroad, the Hartford Business Improvement District, and the Hartford Area Chamber of Commerce.

Hartford is approximately 40 miles northwest of downtown Milwaukee.

November 06 in Railroad History: Union Pacific Railroad Completed

From: [Joseph Lechner](#) Date: Mon, 06 Nov 2023 02:55:02 PST -Provided by Rick Krenske

"In one sense, a railroad is never completed. There is never, or hardly ever, a time when something more cannot be done, and is not done, to render the most perfect road more complete than it was before. This fact is well exemplified by the history of the early railroads of the country. At first, many of them were constructed with a flat rail, or iron bar, laid on wooden string-pieces, resulting in what was known, in former times, as snake-head -- the bars becoming loose, and curving up in such a manner as to be caught by the cars, and forced through the floors amongst the passengers. Then came the "T" rail; and finally the "H" rail, which itself passed through many successive improvements.

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Finally, steel rails in the place of iron rails have been adopted as the most perfect, durable, safe, and economical rails on extensive lines of road.

"Bridges were first made of wood, then of stone, then of stone and iron. Grades originally crossed and, in most cases, do still cross, highways and other roads on the same level. The most improved plan is to have them, by means of bridges, pass over, or under, intersecting roads.

"A single track is all that is deemed necessary to begin with; but now, no railroad of any pretensions is considered perfect until it has at least a double track. Depots and station-houses are at first mere sheds, which are deemed sufficient to answer the purpose of business. These are succeeded, as the means of the company admit, by commodious station and freight houses, of a permanent and ornamental structure.

"And so the process of improvement goes on so that is often a nice question to determine what is meant by a complete, first-class railroad; and – if a question of right or obligation between parties depends upon the completion of such a structure, courts are obliged to spell out, from the circumstances of the case, and the language and acts of the parties, what they mean when they use such terms."

- Joseph Philo Bradley, Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court
Library of Congress

May 10, 1869 is commemorated as the day when Central Pacific was joined to Union Pacific by driving the golden spike. However, on that date the railroad still contained "imperfections" that had to be corrected.

Union Pacific received generous land grants along its right-of-way. Half of that land would not become available until all defects in the railroad had been corrected. Therefore, UP wanted to have its line officially completed as soon as possible.

However, the Union Pacific had also received construction loans that had to be repaid to the federal government. Repayment was expected to begin after the road was completed and open for business. The railroad had to pay an amount each year equal to at least 5% of its annual earnings. From that perspective, it was to UP's advantage to remain "incomplete" as long as possible.

You can't have it both ways, at least not forever. A lower court had already ruled that the railroad's actual completion date was November 6, 1869. That was the date when the Secretary of the Treasury authorized payment to Union Pacific for the 13.68 miles between Milepost 1020 (measured from Omaha) and Ogden, Utah. A decade later, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld that finding.

In the Supreme Court's majority opinion, Justice Bradley concluded:

"The plea that the Government still retained a portion of the public lands which the company was to receive, as security for the supply of certain deficiencies in the road, cannot avail to diminish the strength of the estoppel. This was done by the voluntary agreement of the company itself. And as, by making this concession, it succeeded in obtaining the formal acceptance of its road for the sake of the benefit to accrue therefrom, to wit, the procurement of the subsidy bonds, the company ought to be willing to bear the burden of such acceptance, to wit, the payment annually of five per cent of the net earnings of the road on account of the bonds. It would be an unfair construction of the acts of the parties under the law, to hold that the road was completed for one purpose and not for the other. We think, therefore, that the Court of Claims was right in deciding that the road was completed on the sixth day of November, 1869, so far as the duty of the company to account for five per cent of its net earnings is concerned."

Union Pacific may have been completed on November 6, 1869; but technically, the *transcontinental railroad* wasn't. The United States did not yet have a continuous rail system from the East Coast to California. Passengers still had to cross the Missouri River by ferry between Council Bluffs and Omaha. (the Union Pacific was "off the hook" because the Pacific Railroad Act of 1862 stipulated "construction of a railroad and telegraph line from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean"-- it didn't specify which bank of the river.)

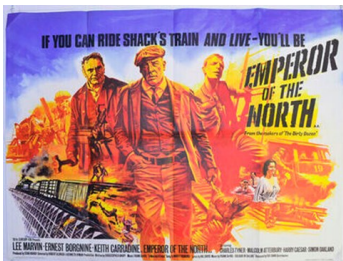
Our transcontinental rail system wasn't truly complete until this bridge across the Missouri River opened in March 1872.
Joseph Lechner

So You Think There Aren't That Many Movies with Trains, huh? Guess again.

A to Z: Trains in movies. Trainsmag.com has the list:

<https://www.trains.com/trn/railroads/history/trains-in-movies/>

By Trains staff | July 6, 2023 The good, the bad, and the ugly in railroad films.



Emperor of the North Pole, starring Lee Marvin, Keith Carradine and Ernest Borgnine, opened in theaters fifty years ago today. Its title was later shortened to **Emperor of the North**. The film is about hobos during the 1930s, and is set in the state of Oregon. It was based, in part, on the books **The Road** by Jack London and **From Coast to Coast with Jack London** by A-Number-1 (the pen-name of real-life hobo Leon Ray Livingston).

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Carradine's character uses the same nickname "Cigaret" that Jack London used when he traveled the rails (1894-1895) and, like London, is the young traveling companion to the older "A-Number-1" (played by Lee Marvin).

"Shack" (Borgnine) is a sadistic railroad conductor who prides himself on forcibly removing any hobo who tries to ride his train. He uses an assortment of makeshift weapons, including a hammer, a steel rod, and a chain.

A-Number-1 manages to hop the train with the younger, less-experienced Cigaret not far behind. At the next stop, A-Number-1 evades Shack and escapes into the hobo jungle, but Cigaret is caught. Shack threatens to kill Cigaret, who is bragging that he and he alone got a free ride. Shack is distracted when he learns that A-Number-1 (whom he knows by reputation) has announced that he will become the first hobo to ride Shack's train all the way to Portland. The other hobos agree that anyone who can successfully ride Shack's train will have earned the title "Emperor of the North Pole". Shack's fellow railroaders dislike him and place bets on whether A-Number-1 can elude him, spreading the news far and wide via telegraph. A-Number-1 hops the train and does everything he can to steer clear of Shack, pulling a series of pranks with the help of other hobos, such as running Shack's train into a siding. He tries to rid himself of the company of Cigaret, who tags along and makes a general pest of himself. Shack succeeds in ejecting the two, but they board a passenger train that overtakes Shack's train, and ride it to Salem. The two hobos re-board Shack's train after it arrives in Salem. The story ends with a climactic fight, involving heavy chains, planks of wood and an ax. A-Number-1 ultimately has Shack at his mercy, but instead of killing him, he just throws him off the train. He then tosses Cigaret off for bragging about how "they" defeated Shack, telling the kid he could have become a good bum but he's got no class. **Emperor of the North** was filmed on the Oregon, Pacific and Eastern Railway in and around Cottage Grove OR. It "stars" OP&E's Mikado #19 under steam.

Rail Projects in Alaska, South Dakota, Receive Federal Funds

By Trains Staff | October 15, 2024

In Alaska, for the Alaska Railroad:

- Up to \$11.6 million for terminal track rehabilitation in Seward and Fairbanks. At both locations, 70-pound rail will be replaced with heavier rail, wood ties will be replaced with steel ties, and the tracks involved will be ballasted and resurfaced; in Fairbanks, new turnouts will also be installed.
- Up to \$4 million for the acquisition of approximately 20 new flat cars to be used for both intermodal and manifest freight service.

In South Dakota:

- For the Dakota Minnesota Valley & Western Railroad, up to \$17.6 million for rehabilitation of the Britton Line. The work will include 9.2 miles of installing 115-pound jointed rail; installation of approximately 27,250 ties, 58,800 tons of ballast, skew tie correction, and surfacing; environmental review, design, and construction to replace four switches and install four new concrete crossings.
- For the Rapid City, Pierre & Eastern Railroad, up to \$14.06 million for the Upper Black Hills Corridor Upgrade Project. This will involve upgrading approximately 16.13 miles of rail, replacement or improvement of 34 structures, new turnouts, surfacing, ballast shoulder profiling, and grade-crossing improvements, allowing the project area to handle 286,000-pound standard railcars. The RCP&E will provide a 30% non-federal match.
- For the D&I Railroad, up to \$9.96 million for a main line rail relay project. The project involves replacing 12 miles of jointed rail with 115-pound welded rail, replacement of ties and ballast as needed, and improvements at 17 grade crossings.
- For the Ringneck & Western Railroad, up to \$8.3 million for grade crossing stabilization and repair. The project will include approximately 31,600 ties, 17,000 tons of ballast, 44.5 miles of surfacing, and replacement of culverts or bridge work at five locations.
- For the Sisseton Milbank Railroad, up to \$3.24 million for culvert rehabilitation, along with replacement of about 3,500 ties at the culvert locations.
- For the Belle Fourche Industrial and Rail Park, up to \$963,440 for a track inspection project. The project includes 2,695 feet of new track construction, 110 feet of track alignment, and installation of a new turnout. The track realignment will allow direct unloading from railcars to trucks on both sides of each track. Gravel laydown areas will also be constructed to facilitate loading, unloading, and temporary storage.



Are You a C&NW fan? Here's a Link to a C&NW Slide Show.

Monday, October 21, 2024, 3:45 PM, Frederick Krenske <rick@usjet.net> wrote:

Preston Cook's Chicago & North Western Memories

From: [Dan K.](#)

I just found that Preston Cook's C&NW pictures are now on the John W. Barriger III National Railroad Library website. Some great stuff there.

Dan K.

[Preston Cook's Chicago & North Western Memories Slide Show](#) <--click here

Railfan Events

Northstar Chapter NRHS Monthly Meeting	Saturday November 9th 2024 6:15pm—8:45pm	Roseville Lutheran Church 1215 Roselawn Ave W Roseville MN 55113	FREE -Guests are Welcome
Century College Model RR Flea Market	Saturday Nov 23 rd , 2024 9:00am - 2:00pm	Century College West Campus 3401 Century Ave N White Bear Lake MN 55110	\$7
North Metro Model RR Club Rail-road Flea Market & Open House	Saturday Dec 2nd 2024 9:00am—2:00pm	Coon Rapids VFW Building 1919 Coon Rapids Blvd Coon Rapids MN 55433	\$5
North Pole Express	DECEMBER 6-8 & 12-15, 2024	St Paul Union Depot	See 261.com for tickets
Trainfest	November 23-24, 2024 9:00am to 5:00pm	400 W Wisconsin Ave, Baird Center Milwaukee, WI 53203	2-day \$25; Saturday \$20; Sunday \$15

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