

TRAVEL: PENNSYLVANIA'S ICONIC RAILROADS

November 2024

Trains

Railroading in the heart of Texas

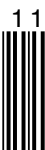
Houston's 185-mile Port Terminal Railroad
Association keeps cargo moving



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- Virginia, North Carolina forge new passenger link
- In my own words: Technology saves a sleepy crew
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Railroad photography makes lasting memories

From the Editor



Carl Swanson

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In just about any railroad merger, the fate of closely paralleling main lines is one of the many details to be addressed. That was certainly true when the Seaboard Air Line and Atlantic Coast Line merged in 1967.

As it happened, it was generally the Seaboard line to be downgraded to secondary status or even removed outright. That was the case with the 135 miles of CSX's former SAL between Petersburg, Va. and Raleigh, N.C.

Not any longer.

North Carolina and Virginia are cooperating in a multi-billion-dollar project to turn the old Seaboard main into a new passenger corridor drawing more than a million travelers a year from airlines and Interstate. It may be the ultimate comeback story.

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Government sues NS over handling of 'Crescent'

Suit over Amtrak's right of preference is first of its kind since 1979

▲ The northbound *Crescent* crosses the Roanoke River and former Virginian Railway main line at Altavista, Va., on April 2, 2022. The train would have passed here in darkness before Amtrak and Norfolk Southern agreed to a lengthened schedule in 2021 to improve on-time performance. NS' handling of the train is the subject of a lawsuit.

Grady McKinley

THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT filed suit against Norfolk Southern in July, alleging that its poor handling of Amtrak's *Crescent* violates the federal rule that gives passenger trains the right of preference over freight traffic.

The suit filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia — the second of its kind since Amtrak gained the right of preference in 1973 — stunned freight rail officials. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg told *Trains* that the suit was necessary because railroads routinely delay Amtrak by prioritizing freight trains.

A similar case, which Amtrak brought against Union Pacific in December 2022 over freight train interference with the *Sunset Limited*, is making its way through the Surface Transportation Board. It's the first such dispute brought to the STB since the agency gained the authority to investigate violations of the federal Amtrak minimum service standards that went into effect in 2020.

The Justice Department's 16-page complaint contends that NS regularly fails to give

the *Crescent* preference over freight trains, leading to delays that harm and inconvenience passengers, impede passenger rail transportation, and negatively affect Amtrak's financial performance. The New York-New Orleans *Crescent* operates on NS-owned or managed track for 1,140 of its 1,337 route-miles, between Alexandria, Va., and New Orleans.

Last year, according to Amtrak data, 57% of *Crescent* pas-

We hope to resolve these concerns and continue to make progress together."

Why was the *Crescent* case brought through the Justice Department rather than the STB? "I think you're going to see an all-of-the-above strategy, because the bottom line is that we've got to get results," Buttigieg told *Trains*. "Federal law already requires Class I railroads to get out of the way when there's a passenger train coming,

"I THINK YOU'RE GOING TO SEE AN ALL-OF-THE-ABOVE STRATEGY, BECAUSE THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT WE'VE GOT TO GET RESULTS."

— TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY PETE BUTTIGIEG

sengers arrived on time, well below the 80% threshold required under federal standards.

Norfolk Southern says it is "committed to complying with the law, working together, and honoring our commitments. Over the past several months with Amtrak, we have focused on the on-time performance of the *Crescent* passenger train.

and too often we see noncompliance that is a major source of delay and therefore frustration."

In a May letter, Amtrak requested that the Justice Department take action on freight train interference, which it says is the No. 1 cause of delays on host railroads. It was unclear why the lawsuit targets only NS and its handling of the *Crescent*. Six

long-distance trains had worse on-time performance last year, according to Amtrak data. All 15 Amtrak long-distance trains that operate on the Class I railroads failed to meet federal on-time performance standards last year, as did the vast majority of state-supported routes that operate on host railroads.

Some industry observers suspect politics played a role in the decision to single out Norfolk Southern. Earlier this year the Justice Department faced criticism from Congress after it reached a settlement with NS regarding its hazardous materials derailment in East Palestine, Ohio — a decision made before the National Transportation Safety Board released its report on the wreck. The suit, they say, would show the Justice Department is not soft on NS.

The Justice Department has always had the authority to enforce Amtrak's right of preference. Its 1979 case against Southern Pacific was dropped after *Sunset Limited* on-time performance improved.

Amtrak argues the threat of enforcement has tended to improve performance. Long-distance train on-time performance, which was below 50% when the Justice Department filed its complaint against Southern Pacific in 1979, jumped to above 60% in 1980 and ultimately peaked above 80% four years later. More recently, the *Sunset Limited's* performance has improved since Amtrak filed its STB complaint against UP.

OPERATIONAL CHAOS?

Rail shipper groups say Amtrak's poor on-time performance is merely a reflection of Class I railroad freight operations. "This is a symptom of freight rail network capacity and fluidity problems. While some may view it as a zero-sum game, the root cause is that the railroads, not just NS, have elected to avoid investing in adequate staffing and adequate track capacity," says Ann Warner, who represents shipper groups including the Freight Rail Customer Alliance and National Industrial Transportation League.

Wick Moorman, who served as Amtrak's chief executive for a year after retiring as CEO of Norfolk Southern in 2015, says the preference statute is open to interpretation. The frustration at Amtrak, he says, is what does preference mean? "The first thing you have to do is define preference and link it to some acceptable level of on-time performance," Moorman says.

Rick Paterson, a railroader turned financial analyst at Loop Capital Partners,

closely follows the performance metrics that the freight railroads are required to report to the STB. He says shippers' concerns are justified. "There's certainly a recipe for chaos here if every Amtrak train suddenly becomes a true hotshot and everything ahead has to get out of the way," Paterson says. "We've seen situations in the past when the railroads tried to run fast small parcel intermodal hot shots for UPS, but the operational disruption was untenable."

Several railroad operating officials also pointed to the UPS bullet train experiments of two decades ago as what can happen when priority trains see nothing but green signals and can run at track speed over their entire routes. BNSF Railway parted the waters for the once-weekly UPS hotshot that left Los Angeles on a Monday and was due in New Jersey by Friday. BNSF determined

Amtrak says there's no evidence that providing passenger trains with preference limits the efficiency of the freight network, hurts service, or brings freight to a standstill.

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

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



The *Crescent* is tied down in Lynchburg, Va., during a lengthy delay caused by a snowstorm and downed trees on Jan. 4, 2022. Garland F. Harper

that the delays the bullet train inflicted on the rest of its traffic were unacceptable. NS reached the same conclusion after test runs east of Chicago. Union Pacific picked up the baton, however, and ran the service for a few months in conjunction with CSX. But UP threw in the towel, too, due to the collateral damage the hotshot caused.

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

noted several times while he was chairman.

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

Some observers say it's unclear whether and to what extent federal courts will balance Amtrak's right of preference with the need to efficiently move freight. The freight network must remain fluid, Oberman says, noting that if it doesn't, then Amtrak service and the economy would both suffer.

— Bill Stephens and David Lassen



Canadian Pacific and Canadian National power handles CP local T69 at the Woodstock, Ontario, station on Feb. 23, 2022. CPKC and CN faced brief shutdowns in August. Kyle Stefanovic

Government action quickly ends Canadian shutdowns of CN, CPKC

Labor minister sends dispute to binding arbitration; union plans court challenge

A FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND work stoppage in Canada at both Canadian National Railway and Canadian Pacific Kansas City in August was halted relatively quickly by the country's labor minister. However, his move to send the dispute between the railroads and Teamsters Canada Rail Conference to binding arbitration to settle the labor dispute still faces a court challenge from the union.

Barely 17 hours after the two railroads locked out members of the TCRC on Aug. 22, Labor Minister Steven MacKinnon announced he was ordering the railroads to resume operation and would require them to participate in binding arbitration to settle their contract dispute.

After MacKinnon invoked a rarely-used section of Canada's labor code, a degree of confusion followed. CPKC said it would await the formal ruling from the Canada Industrial Relations Board, and the TCRC said it would keep its picket lines at that railroad in the meantime. CN said it would end its lockout immediately and the union announced it would return to work — only to reverse course and issue a 72-hour strike notification, effective at 10 a.m. on Aug. 26. The union said it made the move "to protect workers' right to collective bargain" and "to pressure CN into negotiating an agreement."

Ultimately, however the CIRB affirmed MacKinnon's ruling, reopening the railroads as of 12:01 a.m. Aug. 26 and starting the arbitration process Aug. 29. In the interim, it blocked any further work stoppages, voiding the TCRC strike notice against CN.

The CIRB's two essentially identical rulings — one for each railroad — came

on Saturday, Aug. 24, the day after a 9-hour hearing involving the two railroads and the union. The decisions said that the board had determined it "does not have the authority to review the minister's directions or to assess their validity," saying it is a federal-court matter. Further, the board said it "has no discretion or ability to refuse to implement, in whole or in part, the minister's directions or to modify their terms."

In addition to imposing arbitration, the board also extended the terms of the last labor contracts with the two railroads — which had expired on Dec. 31, 2023 — until the date when new contracts are completed under the arbitration process.

Not surprisingly, the union — while saying it would abide by the decision — also said it would appeal in federal court. Those appeals were filed Aug. 30.

"This decision by the CIRB sets a dangerous precedent," TCRC President Paul Boucher said in a statement. "It signals to corporate Canada that large companies need only stop their operations for a few hours, inflict short-term economic pain, and the federal government will step in to break a union. The rights of Canadian workers have been significantly diminished today." The union argues that the decision violates the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms by denying workers the right to strike and collectively bargain.

The railroads, which had both sought binding arbitration, reacted more positively to the decision. CPKC asked union members to return to work a day ahead of

the Monday deadline "so we can get the Canadian economy moving again as quickly as possible." The union declined.

CN, like CPKC, said it was prepared to comply with the order.

"While CN is disappointed an agreement could not be reached at the bargaining table," the railroad said in a statement, "the company is satisfied that this order effectively ends the unpredictability that has been negatively impacting supply chains for months."

Each side had blamed the other as the dispute approached a lockout.

The union said both railroads were seeking contract concessions on work rules that created safety risks regarding fatigue, and that CN was seeking changes including a forced-relocation policy.

CPKC CEO Keith Creel, in a statement ahead of the lockout, said union leadership was making "wildly inaccurate characterizations" and "showing no regard for the truth," and disputed that the railroad's proposals compromised safety in any way.

CN, meanwhile, claimed that TCRC statements were intended to "distract from the real issue: the Teamsters' inability or unwillingness to negotiate seriously." CN had used this argument to ask MacKinnon to impose binding arbitration ahead of the Aug. 22 lockout, a request that MacKinnon had declined on Aug. 15.

Perhaps some clarity about the sticking points during negotiations will emerge as a result of arbitration.

Unless, of course, the courts intervene. — David Lassen



TWO ERAS OF CALTRAIN operation meet at Millbrae, Calif., on Aug. 11, 2024, as a Stadler electric multiple-unit trainset meets a train powered by an F40PH-2 diesel. Two EMUs were in operation that day, the first with the Stadler equipment in public service; additional electric trainsets will gradually be added until the switch to full electrified operation between San Francisco and San Jose, Calif., currently slated for Sept. 21. Elrond Lawrence

Race begins to launch Amtrak Gulf Coast service in early 2025

Mobile, Ala., agrees to operating contract, station lease

THE SUPER BOWL will be played in New Orleans on Feb. 9, 2025. Mardi Gras' Fat Tuesday celebration, perhaps the biggest event both there and in Mobile, Ala., is March 4. The race is on to launch Amtrak Gulf Coast service between those cities by then, following Aug. 6 votes by the Mobile City Council in support of the service.

"That's the goal: get the service up and running for those big events," says Southern Rail Commission Chairman Knox Ross. "It would be a great way to show the public that you are in the middle of the action."

Starting two daily round trips in time will be a challenge, even with the council's approval of a three-year station property lease and Amtrak operating agreement. Site preparation for a station platform and pocket track in Mobile couldn't begin until those agreements are signed; neither could use of funds from the \$178.4 million infrastructure grant approved in 2023 — for track and signal improvement deemed necessary by CSX, Norfolk Southern, the Port of Mobile, and Amtrak.

Mobile's council voted 6-0 for the lease, a three-year operating agreement, and a funding deal with the Alabama Port Authority.

But the support came with strings attached: The agreement between the city and

Amtrak can be terminated if service is increased to more than two round trips per day, or extends east or north of Mobile. And the Port Authority can end its deal to contribute \$1 million in funding support if the city's lease with Amtrak is terminated.

Mobile was placed in the atypical position of providing an operating subsidy when Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey opposed support to match that of Mississippi and Louisiana. Passenger operation also faced opposition from the Port of Mobile, concerned it would interfere with freight service at the port.

Eventually, an effort led by Mayor Sandy Stimpson — who pointed out improvements from the federal grant will last even if the passenger service does not — helped create an agreement in which the port contributes to the operating subsidy. The state indicated that it might also provide funds, but has not made a specific commitment.

"We've been able to get across a high hurdle, and a key one," said Amtrak spokesman Marc Magliari, "because the city staff, led by the mayor, and the city council both engaged with us over the last several weeks to answer their questions and agree to some amendments to obtain a vote that some thought was impossible." — *Bob Johnston and David Lassen*

NEWS BRIEFS

FTA orders safety actions for New York subways

The **FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION** issued a special directive ordering New York's **METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY** to address "an escalating pattern of safety incidents" regarding track workers on the New York subway system, citing 38 near-miss incidents in 2023 — a 58% increase over 2022. The directive came after an audit triggered by the November 2023 death of a flagger hit by a train. The MTA said in a response letter that it "strongly dispute(s)" the findings and would appeal.

CSX, NORFOLK SOUTHERN, and BNSF RAILWAY announced tentative five-year agreements with several unions, four months ahead of the opening of the next round of national bargaining. As of Labor Day, CSX had agreements with 11 unions covering 15 work groups; NS had deals with nine, and BNSF with six. CSX CEO Joe Hinrichs said the deals were driven by a desire to avoid the prolonged, contentious negotiations that nearly led to a strike in September 2022. "Companies that have their employees engaged and appreciated and motivated perform better than those that don't," Hinrichs told *Trains*. "And that's the environment we're continuing to try to achieve here."

A coalition of nonprofit organizations entered an agreement with **NORFOLK SOUTHERN** to buy the Saluda Grade, the former Southern Railway route once America's steepest mainline right-of-way. The **SALUDA GRADE TRAIL CONSERVANCY** has a year to come up with the funds to purchase the route, which it would turn in a 31-mile trail linking North and South Carolina. Terms of the deal are confidential at the request of NS.

The **SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD** ordered **UNION PACIFIC** and **METRA** to enter board-sponsored mediation over financial terms of Metra's contract to continue operations on three Chicago-area UP lines. Union Pacific sought the mediation, saying that while the two sides had made progress in negotiations dating to 2019, it might help complete a deal. Metra said the move was premature and that negotiations stalled because UP would not provide necessary financial information for it to evaluate the railroad's proposal.

BRITAIN'S ROYAL MAIL

to end rail operations

Almost 200 years of mail by rail to be discontinued
by Keith Fender

THE BRITISH POSTAL SERVICE, Royal Mail, announced it will stop using its dedicated fleet of mail and parcel carrying trains in October, giving three months' notice to DB Cargo, the rail freight company that runs the trains on its behalf.

Royal Mail told DB Cargo this is because of the cost of running electric trains — British electricity prices have risen considerably since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 — and because its purpose-built train fleet now needs expensive investment. Royal Mail will switch the mail and parcels to road transport. The postal company has also been investing heavily in “green” trucks using hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) instead of diesel, as well as battery delivery vans. It is using this, plus plans to reduce its use of short-haul air flights, as evidence that it is not dropping plans of achieving net-zero emissions by 2040.

A RAIL PIONEER

Royal Mail is called that because it was originally set up to carry the King's mail. King Henry VIII (more famous for having six wives) formally established it in 1516 and Charles I (famous for being executed, and giving his name to Charleston, S.C.) opened it up to other users in 1635, largely to subsidize his use of the system. In the following centuries the British Post Office led the world, in 1840 introducing cheap “Penny Postage” and inventing postage stamps.

Mail being carried by railways started even earlier, in 1830, with the opening of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway. In 1838, sorting mail on moving trains began between London and Birmingham, and within a few years most rail companies had dedicated equipment and began running trains under contract to the Post Office.

Travelling Post Office trains with postal sorters [Railway Post



▲▲ The Great Western Night Down Travelling Post Office train at Reading, England, in 1984. Such trains, with onboard postal sorters, lasted until 2004. Three photos, Keith Fender

▲ The interior of a French TGV mail train, designed to accommodate roll cages, not sorters. Current British trains are similar.

► Royal Mail No. 325013 leads two more of the purpose-built Class 325 EMU units through Oxenholme, England, on June 28, 2018. The EMUs' need for overhauls is one factor in the decision to end service.



Offices in U.S. parlance] ran in Britain until 2004. By the 1950s, the TPO network covered all routes from London to major cities, making possible next-day delivery to remote villages. National rail company British Rail replaced a mixed fleet of old cars with 170 purpose-built TPO cars between 1959 and 1977.

In recent years, the TPOs operated from a new rail/mail hub in Willesden, North London, replacing the operation using passenger stations in central London; moving mail on regular passenger trains ended at the same time. To make the new hub more efficient, a fleet of 16 new four-car, mail-carrying 100-mph electric multiple-unit trains, known as Class 325, were bought by Royal Mail in 1995. These carried mail in roll cages and had no onboard postal staff. These are the only mail-carrying trains still in use, although some mail and parcels moves in standard shipping containers on intermodal trains.

For a few decades in the 20th century, the postal system boomed, with advertising mail increasing volumes enormously. Since the late 1990s this has changed, as advertising moved online and onto peoples' phones, as did acts like paying bills. As in most countries, these days the main business is the highly competitive delivery of packets and parcels for online retailers. Royal Mail was privatized in 2013 and is currently in the process of being bought for around \$4.5 billion by a company based in the Czech Republic.

ELECTRICITY AND MAINTENANCE COSTS

In an internal briefing for DB Cargo UK staff shared within the British rail industry, company CEO Andrea Rossi talks about his "profound disappointment" at the decision. He calls it "a major U-turn by Royal Mail, which had previously committed publicly that it

would increase its use of rail freight." Rossi tells his employees, some of whom may lose their jobs, that "Royal Mail has made it clear that its decision is purely down to the increasing costs of electric traction and the high investment needs of its aging Class 325 fleet."

Rossi said he was seeking urgent talks with the new British government and other policymakers to see what can be done to level the playing field between rail freight and what he describes as "the heavily subsidized road haulage sector." He noted the government's own policy goal of switching freight from road to rail.

He also said he had lobbied the previous government to reduce or financially assist rail companies with the higher electricity costs, as these are "beyond the price our customers can afford to pay." These costs led DB Cargo to remove its electric locomotives from use. By comparison, competitor Freightliner, owned by Genesee & Wyoming, resumed use of electric units after a short period in 2023 when it sidelined them due to the cost of power.

The end of mail by rail in Britain was previously threatened in 2003-04. Then, reliability as well as cost was part of the problem. On that occasion Royal Mail changed its mind and, with a new contractor, resumed use of its postal EMUs, then only 10 years old. Now, much older, they need major overhauls.

Similar moves away from rail have occurred elsewhere in Europe, although parcels and online shipments are routinely carried in intermodal trains by logistics firms such as DHL. In France, there was once a dedicated fleet of high-speed postal TGV trains but these were sidelined in 2015. In Germany, the Netherlands, and Austria there are no longer dedicated mail trains or cars. However, in Switzerland, Sweden, and the Czech Republic mail still moves in railcars owned or operated by the postal service. **I**



Railroads' undoing and evidence of better times

1973 and 2024 have nothing in common.

Or do they?



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Analysis: Trains.com

While searching the *Trains* archives the other day, I stumbled upon a December 1973 commentary by Editor David P. Morgan, who was pondering the future of railroading. I was struck by how many of the same concerns that he raised during one of the darkest periods in rail history still ring true today as the Class I railroads struggle to grow.

"During the course of the long downhill journey of the railroads ... we grooms of the iron horse seldom have lacked for either causes of the rail's undoing or evidence of better times ahead," Morgan wrote.

Morgan's undoing category included onerous Interstate Commerce Commission regulations that tilted the playing field in favor of trucks, barges, and airlines while saddling railroads with unprofitable routes and services. He blamed rail union featherbedding. And DPM lamented that Amtrak didn't cover freight railroads' costs of operating its passenger trains.

"Yet," Morgan wrote, "we tell ourselves and anyone else who will listen that our day is coming." There were plenty of arguments in favor of better times. Technology and mergers would be saviors. Economic growth would produce an unthinkable leap in ton-miles. Thanks to the dawn of the environmental movement, fuel-sipping railroads would become the preferred way to move freight and people with less air pollution.



Trains like Amtrak's *Sunset Limited*, photographed at Temple, Texas during a March 1973 detour over the Santa Fe, didn't pay freight railroads enough to cover their costs of operation. Steve Patterson

"Now, all we've told ourselves and anyone else who will listen is plausible, defensible, demonstrable, even if our track record to date says that our arguments have not been convincing," Morgan wrote. "The trouble is, our reasons — including the ecology/energy-shortage plea — have been good but imperfect. The record indicates that there is less and less demand for much of today's railroading. Sometimes the rails' prices ... are too high. Mostly, though, the rails' service in terms of reliability, speed, and freedom from damage is inferior to that of the truck."

The America that depended on boxcars, Morgan concluded, had been replaced by one reliant on freeways and that "otherwise behaves in a manner increasingly incompatible with freight trains that average 20 mph and freight cars that spend more than 21 of each 24 hours ... standing still."

What has changed in the 51 years since Morgan wrote those words? Well, everything. And nothing.

In the Everything Department: The Staggers Act brought deregulation. Conrail rescued the bankrupt Northeastern railroads. Mergers resulted in just six major systems. Unprofitable and redundant routes were ripped up or spun off, while duplicate facilities were scrapped. Commuter operations and their red ink were shifted to transit agencies. Freight trains run with a crew of two. And technology? DPM would hardly recognize it.

All this has made railroads immensely profitable. There are no more Penn Centrals or main lines that wouldn't meet branchline standards. Today's physical plant is immaculate.

But in the Results Department — that is, taking freight off the highways and fulfilling the optimism of 1973 — the record has been underwhelming.

Where railroads have been handed high-volume, long-haul business, they've done well: Wyoming coal, Gulf Coast chemicals, international intermodal. Railroads also built a domestic intermodal network that, while skeletal, is a successor to the boxcar.

And yet rail traffic trends fit squarely in the Nothing Has Changed category despite the slaying of the ICC bogeyman. Carload volume badly lags economic growth, industrial production, and rising truck tonnage. Intermodal has lost share to trucks since 2015. And thermal coal is a dead man walking.

Rail service still can't match trucks and cars still spend too much time sitting. Yet we can always hope. "Evidence of better times ahead," as DPM would call it, includes potential carload growth from a North American manufacturing renaissance, technology showing customers where freight cars are in real time, and new traffic from shippers aiming to reduce carbon footprints by using railroads that emit 75% less greenhouse gases than trucks.

This much is certain: The more things change, the more they remain the same. **I**

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Above: Burlington 4960 and 5632 lead a train for the Illini Railroad Club through snow-covered fields between Chicago and Savanna, Illinois, on April 1, 1962. Photograph by John E. Gruber, Gruber-04-14-096, and from our new book, Burlington's Spectacular Steam Program

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Rescuing

Neighboring states partner in building a transformational passenger-rail link

by Frederick Plous

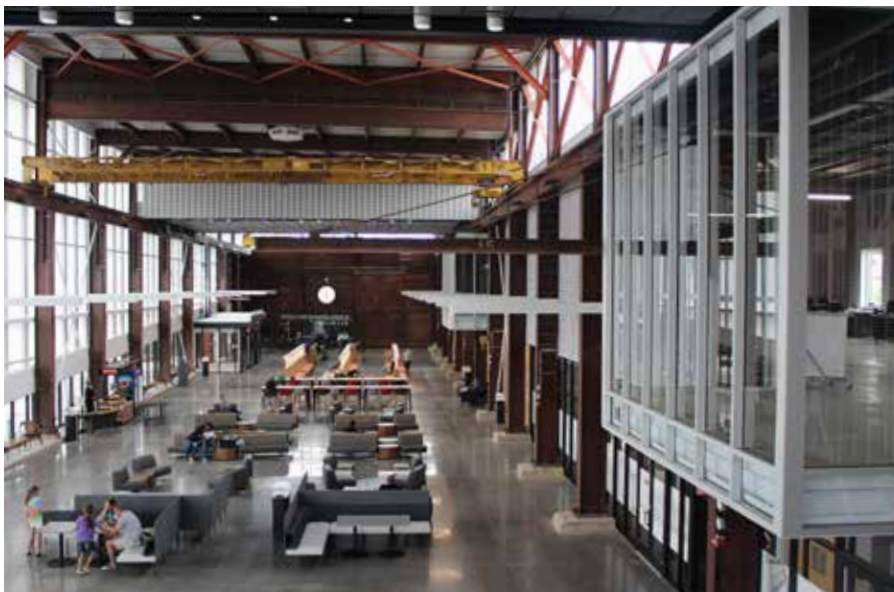


the S Line



Northbound train No. 22, the *Silver Star*, kicks up snow in January 1962 on the double-track line between Crabtree Creek and Neuse, N.C. This line is the focus of a new rail corridor linking Virginia and North Carolina. Wiley Bryan; Robert Richardson collection





This bright, spacious concourse and waiting area welcomes riders to the new Amtrak station in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Virginia and North Carolina are up to something big. The two adjacent states are cooperating, collaborating, and co-funding the restoration of 134.5 miles of idle and — in some spots — missing railroad to create a 110-mph interstate passenger-speedway.

It's called the "S Line" and, once restored from Raleigh, N.C. to Petersburg, Va., it will transform the way people travel between the Southeast and Northeast. Advocates say the resurrected S Line could divert more than a million travelers a year from the airlines and congested I-95 to fast passenger trains.

Yesterday and today on the S Line

It was not a good time for American trains when the Seaboard Air Line Railroad and the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad merged in 1967. The Interstate Highway System was more than half completed, and new jet airliners were cutting flying times

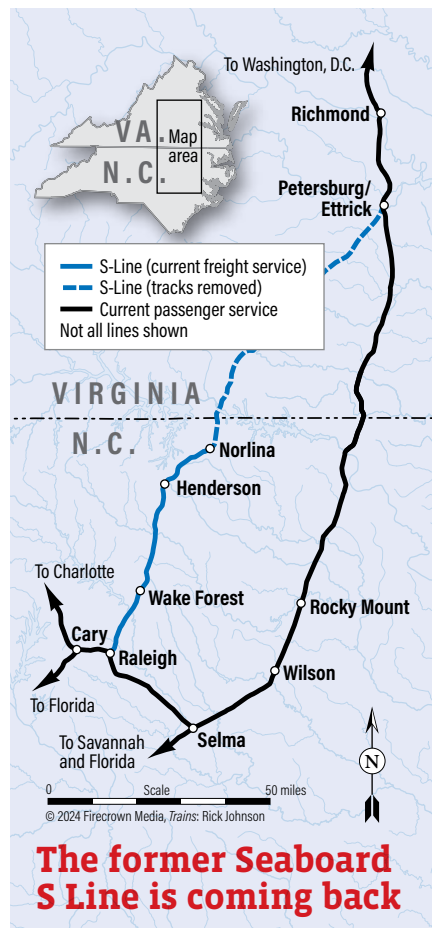
◀ A 2015 image, top left, shows the Raleigh wye before construction of the new Amtrak station. Seaboard (and later, SCL and Amtrak) trains once used the tracks curving to the left to head north on the S Line. The SAL/SCL/Amtrak station was located out of the picture to the left. When portions of the S Line were abandoned, the Amtrak stop was relocated to the former Southern Railway depot beyond the trees on the right leg of this wye. The new station, seen at the bottom left in the 2018 photo, was constructed in the middle of the wye with the new high-level platforms, facing to the south. When the S Line is reactivated, additional platform tracks will be built to serve that route from the station's north side. Three photos, Bob Johnston

in half. American travelers were bailing from the trains, including those serving the once hotly contested New York-Florida market, where Seaboard and ACL each ran a fleet of ballast-scorching overnight trains whisking vacationers from New York to Miami in 25 hours. The Boeing 707 did it in three.

Freight shippers were bailing too. As I-95 approached completion, Florida citrus and vegetables began barreling toward Northeastern markets in highway semi-trailers instead of railroad refrigerator cars. The remaining rail traffic could not support two competing carriers, so Seaboard and the ACL merged, eliminated many of their passenger trains, and consolidated so much freight service that the new company eventually would take hundreds of miles of duplicative main lines out of service.

Wherever the two railroads paralleled each other closely, the Atlantic Coast Line route was called the A Line, while the Seaboard route was called the S Line. Usually it was the Seaboard route that got chopped.

That's what happened to the 135 miles of former Seaboard track between Petersburg, Va., 27 miles south of downtown Richmond, and Raleigh, capital of North Carolina. Because the Atlantic Coast Line had a more direct New York-Florida alignment 30 miles east of Seaboard's, Seaboard successor CSX Transportation had shifted much of its traffic off the S Line between Petersburg and Raleigh by 1986. But the direct route to Florida was not the direct route to Raleigh. Shutting down that part of the S Line resulted in Amtrak's *Silver Star* following the A Line to Selma, N.C., and making a hard right turn to the northwest on Norfolk Southern's North Carolina Railroad to reach Raleigh through the back



The former Seaboard S Line is coming back

door. Amtrak's New York-Raleigh-Charlotte *Carolinian*, introduced in 1990, would also use the "Selma elbow," adding an hour to both trains' running times.

While all passenger service was eliminated from this segment of the S Line, a freight fragment survived. CSX Transportation retained the southern 69 miles for a daily switching job serving local industries. But the retained segment lost its block signals, and maintenance was downgraded from fast-passenger to local-freight status. It also lost its northern connection: All 65 miles of the S Line track in Virginia was pulled up, leaving only ballast and weeds.

Now, four decades after its forced retirement, the S Line mileage between Petersburg and Raleigh is poised to undergo not just restoration, but transformation. It will become a 110-mph passenger railroad that will cut hours of running time from current passenger schedules and transform rail from a bit player to a star in the Southeast-to-Northeast travel market.

It also will transform Richmond-Raleigh into a hot new passenger-rail corridor. The key is a bi-state agreement virtually unprecedented in the history of government-funded passenger rail service in the U.S. Pursuant to an Interstate Compact established in 2004, Virginia and North Carolina are working — together — not just to

restore and rebuild the S Line, but to configure the passenger services that will operate over it into a regional corridor rather than a mere intermediate segment on an essentially long-distance route.

Big budget, long timeline

Restoration and transformation of the S Line is expected to cost around \$4 billion and take at least 6 years. But the first heavy lift, federal funding, is well under way. In 2020, the project received a \$47.5 million Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements, or CRISI, grant for purchase of the right-of-way from CSX Transportation. North Carolina will use its share to purchase the 80.7 miles between Raleigh and Norlina, just south of the Virginia state line. Virginia will buy the 76.5 miles from Norlina to Petersburg.

In addition, North Carolina received a \$57.9 million Transit-Oriented Development grant for a study of station locations and a \$3.4 million Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity

(RAISE) grant for mobility-hub plans.

The last two grants are important because in addition to Amtrak through service from Raleigh to Richmond, North Carolina plans a commuter service linking Raleigh to its northern suburbs. Those potential stops were rural villages Seaboard's Florida trains bypassed. So identifying which are eligible to become commuter stations is essential.

Piedmont route will be extended

A \$1-billion Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Rail (FSPIR) grant — third largest in the history of the program — will fund design and construction of the initial 17-mile segment of the S Line from Raleigh to Wake Forest. When those improvements are completed, North Carolina's state-funded Charlotte-Raleigh *Piedmont* service will be extended and Wake Forest will be its new eastern terminal.

How to spend \$1 billion in 17 miles

Why so much money to restore such a small stretch of railroad?

Because the project isn't so much a restoration as it is the creation of a new railroad unlike anything ever seen in North Carolina.

"The first 17 miles — Raleigh to Wake Forest — represent a very complex engineering challenge because the area is so built up now," says North Carolina Department of Transportation Rail Director Jason Orthner. "Some of the two-lane country roads that were there 50 years ago are now six-lane city streets, so we're going to have to build grade separations where those streets cross the tracks. Some of the utilities — water mains, sewers, electrical lines, traffic signals, and street lighting — also will have to be reconfigured."

Growth drives need for rail

Population growth and urbanization may have confronted the S Line project with serious challenges. But that's a good thing, because they are the same forces that made the project necessary in the first place. The S Line had to be not just brought



Seaboard Air Line train No. 4, the northbound *Mail & Express*, roars over Crabtree Creek at Edgeton, N.C., shortly after crossing the original Norfolk Southern. In this photograph, taken in the early 1960s, one can see an original pre-Civil War stone pier under the modern bridge.

Wiley Bryan; Robert Richardson collection



back but transformed because the once-empty spaces along the alignment are now full of people and industries in need of fast intercity passenger and commuter trains.

That growth is no accident. Most can be attributed directly to the tri-campus academic/technology complex known as the Research Triangle, and the communities that grew up around it in the last 50 years.

In 1967, the year the ACL-Seaboard merger led to the closure of the S Line, Raleigh was a typical, sleepy Southern capital city. Its population was 133,000 and its chief industries were state government and tobacco, the latter a pillar of the North Carolina economy predating the state's establishment as a British colony in 1729.

But in the years following the 1964 Surgeon General's report documenting the connection between tobacco and lung cancer, cigarette factories and warehouses began to close, and tobacco acreage began a long decline. North Carolina business leaders, elected officials, and educators began planning a more robust and dynamic econ-

omy for the rolling Piedmont region between the Appalachians to the west and the windswept capes and tidal marsh country facing the Atlantic coast.

The solution they sought turned out to be hiding in plain sight. Three esteemed universities, all clustered within a short distance of the capital, formed the nucleus of a post-tobacco economy based on education, scientific research, and commercialization of research successes into new products, industries, and jobs. Duke University at Durham, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and North Carolina State University at Raleigh began a historic collaboration to re-invent the economy of the Piedmont region, and they succeeded.

Today the North Carolina Research Triangle has taken its place with California's Silicon Valley and the Route 128 Tech Corridor around Boston as a churning technocommercial incubator district. Where tobacco warehouses and cigarette factories once stood, laboratories and production

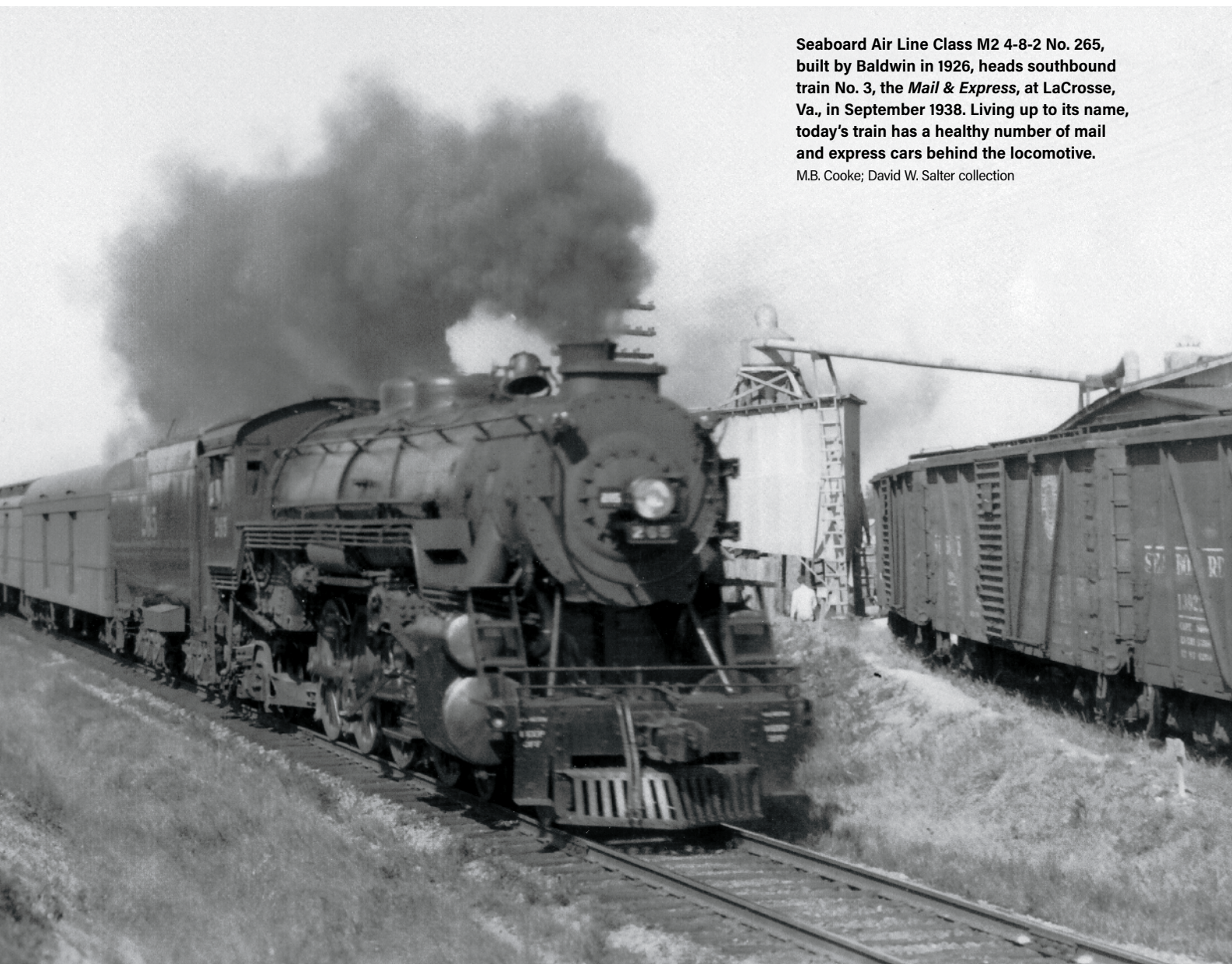
facilities for Panasonic, Merck, Siemens, Sumitomo, Infosys, and dozens of other household names now generate billions of dollars annually in sales, salaries, and taxes.

From its 1967 population of 133,000, the area now represented by the Research Triangle has exploded to a major metro area of over 2 million — and it's still growing. The Kennan Institute says it's the fourth-fastest-growing urban metropolis in the nation.

North Carolina gets into trains

One happy by-product of the Research Triangle's success was a new passenger-rail service to connect the fast-growing Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill metro area with the state's booming commercial and banking center, Charlotte.

Amazingly, even during the so-called Golden Age of Rail, Charlotte and Raleigh had never been connected by a through passenger train, even though the tracks connecting the two cities were owned by the state-owned North Carolina Railroad Co.



Seaboard Air Line Class M2 4-8-2 No. 265, built by Baldwin in 1926, heads southbound train No. 3, the *Mail & Express*, at LaCrosse, Va., in September 1938. Living up to its name, today's train has a healthy number of mail and express cars behind the locomotive.

M.B. Cooke; David W. Salter collection



The goal of rebuilding the Seaboard S Line seemed very far away when this photo was taken at Norlina, N.C., in October 2007. A structure once used for maintenance still stood but the right-of-way was no longer visible. Norlina is the place where the now-abandoned branch to Newport News, Va., once diverged. Two photos, Bob Johnston

and historically were leased to the Southern Railway. Southern scheduled its Raleigh trains only to Greensboro, where they connected with its mainline trains to Washington and New York. Raleigh-Charlotte traffic was deemed too modest to merit its own set of trains.

That changed in 1990, when Amtrak began operating its daily *Carolinian* between New York and Charlotte via Raleigh. Even though the loss of the more direct S Line forced the train to backdoor its way into Raleigh via the time-consuming Selma elbow, the train proved popular — and not just for interstate travel. North Carolinians began using it for local travel as well, inspiring the state to fund its own Charlotte-Raleigh service, using state-owned and maintained locomotives and rolling stock. The first *Piedmont* frequency was launched in 1995. A second trip was added in 2010, a third in 2018 and a fourth in 2023. Now acknowledged as a true corridor, Raleigh-Charlotte generates 600,000 rides per year.

And it's getting ready for more. Under its Piedmont Improvement Program, NC-DOT has expanded the corridor's capacity and increased train speeds by investing nearly \$600 million in new infrastructure since 1995. Slightly more than half the route — the 92 miles between Charlotte and Greensboro — is now double tracked, and the remaining 82 miles to Raleigh have been outfitted with reconfigured curves for higher speeds and additional passing tracks

accessed via high-speed, remote-controlled turnouts. Over the entire route, more than 40 grade crossings have been closed, and the 13 busiest have been replaced by viaducts that carry highways over or under the tracks.

The Richmond-Raleigh corridor is the most expensive state-supported passenger-rail infrastructure program outside of the California High Speed Rail project.

Virginia discovers rail

North Carolina's northern neighbor Virginia doesn't have a Research Triangle, but it does have the Golden Crescent, an arc of productivity, prosperity, and growth with one horn anchored in suburban Washington, D.C. and the other in Hampton Roads, the vast tidal estuary where container ships load and discharge their cargoes at the bustling twin ports of Norfolk and

Newport News.

But the Golden Crescent has developed some tarnish. Highways are jammed with truck traffic serving gigantic new warehouses, and charming rural villages have been turned into sprawling suburbs. A particular problem has been Interstate 95, the major asphalt link between the Northeast and Florida and the source of the largest and most persistent backups in the nation's highway system. The Golden Crescent is home to three of the top 90 most congested areas in the nation, including Greater Washington, which ranks No. 2.

Highway congestion first led Virginia to a rail solution in 1995, when the state established Virginia Rail Express to operate commuter trains into Washington from suburban Virginia points located on both

the Norfolk Southern and CSX Transportation's former Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad.

VRE's success — plus a seemingly uncontrollable growth in traffic congestion — later led Virginia to begin funding its own Amtrak corridor, starting with a Lynchburg-Washington/Northeast Corridor train over Norfolk Southern's former Southern Railway main line in 2009. Doubters claimed the new train would merely cannibalize passengers from Amtrak's *Southern Crescent*, which follows the same rails on its daily trip from New York and Washington to Atlanta, Birmingham, and New Orleans. But the new state-sponsored train, timed for local Virginia passengers, found its own market of 100,000 passengers in its first year and 150,000 in Year 2. *Crescent* ridership was not cannibalized. In fact, ridership on both trains just kept growing.

Virginia followed up by sponsoring startups on three more corridors. Washington-Richmond was extended to Norfolk in 2013; and for the first time, the aforementioned Lynchburg Regional was extended west over former Norfolk & Western tracks to Roanoke in 2018. The Newport News and Roanoke corridors now offer two round trips daily. The Washington-Norfolk line has three. And the main stem from Washington to Richmond has its own state-supported frequency along with the trains to Newport News and Norfolk. Plus, Virginians also can buy tickets for local passage on Amtrak's trains that pass through Virginia on their way to more distant points: the *Silver Star* and *Silver Meteor* to Florida, the *Palmetto* to Charleston, and the *Carolinian* to Charlotte.

Ridership on all of the Commonwealth-sponsored trains is growing robustly and seems to have exerted a multiplier effect on the greater system: In 2023 state-sponsored plus Amtrak trains carried a record total of more than 2 million passengers.

Funding and the authority to use it

Further growth, however, will depend on expanded capacity in the Richmond-Washington corridor. Virginia is going to create that capacity, but it had to take some unique legislative and legal steps to address the issue.

"One of the keys to success was the creation of a dedicated Passenger Rail Fund," said Danny Plaugher, executive director of Virginians for High Speed Rail. "In 2013 Virginia got a dedicated slice of the sales tax directed to passenger rail — \$50 million in the first year. That revenue continued growing until 2020 when the Legislature created the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority and restructured our entire transportation funding system."



Putting passenger rail development under an independent public authority instead of the typical state department of transportation has some unique advantages, Plaughner noted. An authority need not depend on a legislature for funding or for legal permission to act. It can act independently by owning rail assets, issuing its own infrastructure bonds, and spending its own funds with minimal interference from the executive or legislative branch. It can even use government's power of eminent domain to acquire private property for right-of-way and erection of buildings.

"VPRA has its own procurement rules, which are less onerous than the state's," Plaughner said. "Putting passenger rail into a body that could be a steady hand over time, providing continuity even as legislatures and governors come and go, makes it easier to plan and complete expensive, expansive and long-term projects."

That combination of independence and continuity is especially important in Virginia, Plaughner said, because of the state constitution limiting the governor to one term. An agency requiring funds for a long-term project cannot rely on leadership from a timed-out executive.

"A new governor spends his first two years just figuring out where the levers of power are," Plaughner said.

"By the time he figures out how to get things done, he's only got another two years to launch a project and there's not enough

time left for follow-through."

Buying ROW, building more tracks

In 2019, the Commonwealth of Virginia announced a novel approach to creating more passenger-train infrastructure: Under its new Transforming Rail in Virginia initiative it paid CSX Transportation \$386 million to purchase 223 miles of track and 163 miles of right-of-way without track.

That latter figure includes not just the Virginia segment of the S Line, but also some 120 miles of untracked space on CSX's double-tracked main line between Richmond and Arlington, Va., just across the Potomac from Washington, D.C.

Like most U.S. railroads, CSX's predecessor in the Richmond-Washington corridor — the Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad — acquired more land than it needed when it began assembling a right-of-way in the 19th century.

RF&P's footprint was 100 feet wide — enough for four tracks — but it never built more than two. So the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority bought the empty half, on which it will build its own 110-mph passenger track. That should provide enough capacity for hourly, 90-minute Richmond-D.C. shuttles, as well as for all the new interstate frequencies coming up from North Carolina via the restored S Line.

"And our trains will still have access to the two CSX freight tracks for meets and overtakes," Plaughner added.

A Charlotte-bound *Piedmont* continues on original trackage in September 2015, before additional tracks were added and the route shifted to the right. North Carolina roadbuilders participated in the upgrade, funded with a \$550 million federal grant.

No solution but rail

Acquiring the surplus CSX land, installing track and supplementing the century-old Long Bridge across the Potomac with a second double-track bridge just for passenger trains is going to cost Virginia an estimated \$4 billion. Together with what North Carolina is spending on its end, the Richmond-Raleigh corridor is the most expensive state-supported passenger-rail infrastructure program outside of the California High Speed Rail project linking Los Angeles and San Francisco. That cost probably will exceed \$20 billion.

Why so much spending and planning on a corridor that wasn't even on most planners' wish lists 20 years ago? Because growth — in populations, business activity, and personal and corporate income — is reconfiguring regional travel patterns and herding business and personal travel into new channels, some of which are best served by passenger trains. Passenger-rail advocates have long talked about the Northeast Corridor, the Chicago-Detroit Corridor and the Cascades Corridor. When the S Line is rebuilt, the Raleigh-Richmond-Washington Corridor will get its own entry in the Corridor catalog.

Ideal distance

But growth is only half the story. The other half is geography, including the fundamental issue of mileage: Raleigh and Richmond are 161.5 miles apart. Assuming the two endpoints are big enough and busy enough — and Raleigh and Richmond are — and assuming the track is fast enough, as the S Line will be, that's a passenger-rail corridor, with fast, frequent trains connecting the two end points (plus Washington, 127 miles further, a major driver of travel).

Because of commercial growth in the Triangle and Crescent, Raleigh-Richmond has become a serious business-travel corridor and so has Raleigh-Washington. But which mode the traveler chooses for corridor travel is problematic, because both Raleigh-Richmond and Raleigh-Washington fall firmly into the too-short-to-fly/too-far-to-drive bucket.

Driving especially is a pain because of the notorious backups on I-95, the nation's busiest Interstate. The road has a terrible accident record, and the right lanes teem 24/7 with those semi-truck trailers that had plundered the prime merchandise traffic from the Seaboard and the ACL.

"Everybody in this part of the country has at least one I-95 horror story," said Orthner. "The real interest in Raleigh-Washington travel is to give people productive time on the train compared to air travel. And there is a big travel market between Raleigh and Washington."

No way out

When the Virginia DOT conducted a study of possible solutions to the dire I-95 congestion, it soon found itself in over its head. Consultants said the standard congestion fix, simply adding more traffic lanes, could not solve the problem.

"The I-95 study analyzed many potential improvements to this critical corridor," VDOT Secretary Shannon Valentine reported in 2021. "It found that widening I-95 by one lane in each direction [from Richmond to Washington] would cost \$12.5 billion. While the cost was staggering, the most sobering part of the analysis was that by the time construction was completed in 10 years the corridor would be just as congested as it is today. That finding is what led Virginia to rail."

Nor does flying offer a practical alternative. Richmond and Raleigh are too close to make direct flights practical, so Raleigh travelers must take a feeder flight to Charlotte and change to another flight for the

leg to Richmond. Each leg takes about an hour of flight time, but the layover in Charlotte can run anywhere between 59 minutes and 4 hours, and ground travel to the airport plus the security and check-in rituals can eat up another hour of time, making flying no faster than driving. A round-trip air coach ticket costs about \$250.

Answer: a train corridor

Restoration of the S Line, including an upgrade to 110-mph passenger-train speeds, thus would be a boon to travelers between these two points. In fact, it's the only solution. A search of old timetables suggests the possibilities of an old route made new again.

In 1956, two of Seaboard's fastest New York-Florida trains ran non-stop between Raleigh and Petersburg. The *Silver Meteor* covered the 157 miles in 2 hours, 15 minutes, with another 32 minutes required for the 27 miles to Richmond. The *Silver Star* raced from Raleigh to Petersburg in 2 hours, 30 minutes, using 37 minutes to cover the last 27 miles to Richmond.

That level of performance could have been the basis for a Raleigh-Richmond corridor, except for two historic realities: Neither Raleigh nor Richmond was big enough or economically important enough at the time to form a rail corridor, and Seaboard was in the New York-Florida business and did not cultivate intermediate city pairs. The trains ran at the wrong time for Richmond-Raleigh business travelers, and there weren't enough frequencies.

But the potential was there. Seaboard's 1956 trains traveled at a maximum speed of 79 mph. The next generation of S Line trains will travel on track

signaled for 110 mph, covering the entire Raleigh-Richmond distance in about 2 hours, 30 minutes. A Raleigh-Washington trip will take about an hour longer. The airlines offer non-stop direct flights between Raleigh and Washington, but the total flying and ground time make air travel times about equal with rail timetables over the new S Line. And the deteriorating driving conditions on I-95 strongly suggests travelers in this corridor are ripe for a rail alternative.

A Northeast Corridor extension

The rise of the Research Triangle and Golden Crescent, plus reconstruction of the S Line, will create a new high-performance passenger-train corridor where none existed before.

More population, more jobs, and more personal income represent the ideal conditions for a rise in travel demand.



More population, more jobs, and more personal income represent the ideal conditions for a rise in travel demand and a change in travel habits, which is exactly what's been going on between Raleigh and Richmond and all the way to Washington.

Raleigh no longer is just a crew-change point for overnight trains between New York and Miami. It's a destination in its own right. All that's needed to complete the transition is a high-performance passenger-train service.

North Carolina has exhibited a strong degree of independence in organizing and managing its intra-state *Piedmont* corridor between Charlotte. It bought and refurbished its own fleet of railcars and locomotives, established its own maintenance shops and rebuilt or replaced all



the stations on the route. The service has its own website and phone number, volunteers who assist passengers on board and at stations, and its own advertising program.

But Orthner said the extension of rail service from Raleigh to Richmond and Washington, D.C., will resemble an Amtrak operation.

"Richmond has effectively become a southern extension of the Northeast Corridor, and most of the Raleigh-Richmond trains will continue on to Washington and New York," he said.

In addition, the rolling stock is likely to be Amtrak's new Airo-series coaches from Siemens Mobility. With Siemens now building a new factory to produce Airo cars along the Piedmont Corridor at Lex-

ington, N.C., shopping elsewhere for equipment would be unthinkable.

A night train possible?

But Amtrak operation does not totally rule out other options. The mileage between Charlotte and New York via the S Line is 523, a segment Seaboard's *Silver Meteor* covered in 9 hours, 35 minutes.

Using the new 110-mph track in North Carolina, Virginia, and on the Northeast Corridor, a modern train could probably do the same trip in a little over 8 hours.

What if an overseas company such as European Sleeper or the Austrian Federal Railroad approached North Carolina with an offer to run an overnight Raleigh-New York sleeping-car train like those changing business-travel habits across Europe?

Seaboard Air Line train No. 23 rumbles through Bracey, Va. The 1967 merger between SAL and the Atlantic Coast Line led to the elimination of hundreds of mile of duplicative routes, including much of this 135-mile line between Petersburg, Va., and Raleigh, capital of North Carolina. Now it's coming back. Wiley Bryan; Robert Richardson collection

"We are not leaving any stones unturned in our analysis, and that is certainly one of them," said Orthner. "We are not dismissing any option for daylight or overnight travel."

"That's what this is all about," said Raleigh Mayor Mary-Ann Baldwin as she accepted the \$1 billion grant for rebuilding the first 17 miles of the S Line last Dec. 5, "getting people from one place to the next in an easier, faster and cleaner way." **I**

The Port Terminal Railroad
Association's centennial
GP38-2s work dockside at
the Houston Ship Canal on
Aug. 13, 2024. Jim Allen

H



THE HEART OF HOUSTON

The Port Terminal Railroad Association keeps carload traffic moving

by Bill Stephens



Jeremy Thomas, the first-trick yardmaster at the Port Terminal Railroad Association's North Yard, spends a few minutes going over switch lists with a crew that's building an outbound train. With that task checked off his to-do list, you get a moment to ask him about his typical day. "It's nonstop, all day, every day," says the yardmaster, who everyone calls J.T. "Nonstop phone calls, nonstop radio."

And then, right on cue, he proceeds to prove it.

One phone is glued to his right ear. A second conversation carries on via speakerphone. On the radio, a train crew interrupts to ask for permission to make a shove move, which he approves in his role as dispatcher for the railroad's North Shore Subdivision.

A Union Pacific train crew walks into the office, prompting J.T. to pull up a video feed of the yard's north end. He zooms in and spies their empty grain shuttle train on track 60. He lets the crew know where they can find the train, GSHOSRO8. J.T. hands the crew paperwork, asks them to make sure the end-of-train device is on, and tells them to have a safe trip.

Then it's back to the conversation in his right ear. "We'll squeeze 141 in here, I believe," J.T. says, referring to the in-



bound job from Manchester Yard. "We'll get that high-and-wide out, too."

Finally, a nagging question from the speakerphone: Where are a handful of freight cars? J.T.'s fingers move to the keyboard to search the railroad's new car management system.

It's only the third day since the software went live in early April, so the answer doesn't come as quickly as he would like. "We're playing catch up," he explains.

You get the sense that if J.T. had an extra pair of hands he'd juggle even more tasks and somehow manage to keep all the balls in the air — and North Yard and the North Shore Sub running smoothly.

The yardmaster's office is a lot like PTR A itself. There's always something in motion. And there better be, given the 2,500 cars that PTR A switch jobs must spot and pull every day at the 226 customers that line both sides of the Houston Ship Channel. On this April day, the first shift alone will see 15 engine starts, with each job covering its assigned territory on PTR A's 185 miles of track. Second shift will have 17 engine starts, while the third trick will have a dozen. Plus, one crew per shift also handles inbound loaded and outbound empty Union Pacific, BNSF Railway, and Canadian Pacific

One of the railroad's 28 leased GP38-2s experiences typical port-area scenery while working the Equity Lead. Two photos, Bill Stephens





Kansas City unit trains of grain, coke, coal, ethanol, crude oil, and steel pipe.

This is, in other words, one busy railroad. It's a key cog in the machine that is the Houston Terminal and its complex web of main lines, yards, junctions, and industrial trackage. "You basically control the heart valves of the terminal here," PTRA General Manager Ricky L. Wells says. "If we start holding trains out, it just creates a black hole and it'll suck everything in."

These days there's no need for heart bypass surgery at PTRA. Last year the railroad fluidly handled 321,647 cars and intermodal containers. The roughly 59%-39%-2% split of this volume reflects the pecking order of the Class I railroads that operate in Houston. UP's No. 1, BNSF plays second fiddle, and CPKC is a distant third.

Commercially, there's no understating PTRA's importance. It's a major source of traffic for UP and BNSF in Houston. And it's absolutely

critical for BNSF because of the access it provides to lucrative chemical business that UP otherwise has locked up in former Southern Pacific and Missouri Pacific territory on the Texas Gulf Coast.

At a time when merchandise traffic is in decline in most areas of North America, PTRA remains a carload stronghold. Yes, the railroad handles BNSF international double-stack moves in and out of the Barbours Cut intermodal terminal. And, yes,

those grain trains come in hot and heavy from September through February. But this is a railroad dominated by tank cars and covered hoppers for the petrochemical industry, with steel coil cars, bulkhead flats of pipe and steel, and the occasional boxcar sprinkled in for good measure.

The PTRA marks its centennial this year, and its role today remains the same as it was in 1924: To provide Houston's railroads with access to

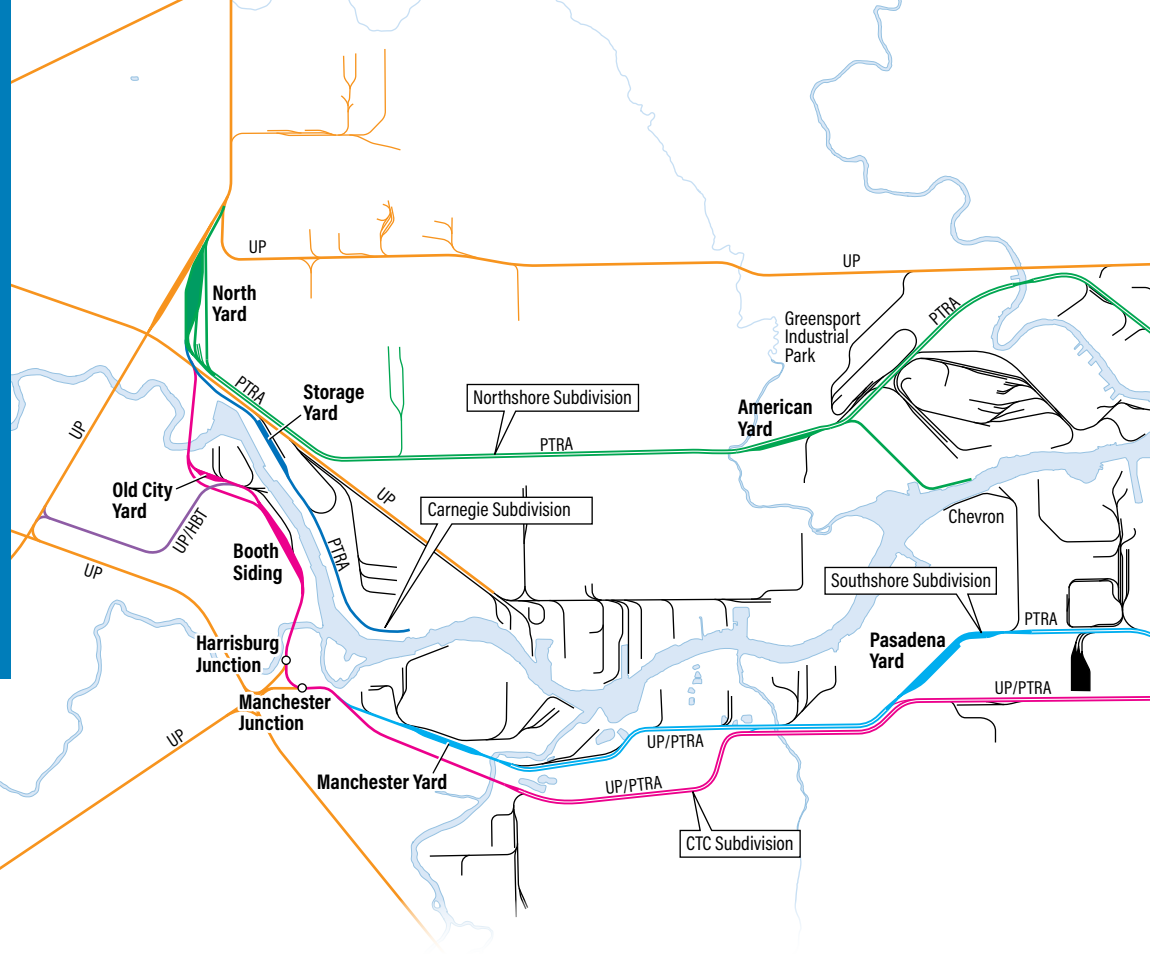
At Manchester Yard, PTRA job 240, left, pulls a cut of cars onto the lead while job 241 shoves a cut of cars on April 10, 2024.



Chemicals may be king on the PTRA, but the railroad also handles intermodal traffic and a seasonal burst of grain.

Mark Lipczynski

**"YOU BASICALLY
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OF THE
TERMINAL ...
IF WE START
HOLDING TRAINS
OUT, IT CREATES
A BLACK HOLE
AND IT'LL SUCK
EVERYTHING IN."
— PTRA
GENERAL MANAGER
RICKY L. WELLS**



PTRA MK1500Ds Nos. 9610 and 9608 flank BNSF ES44AC at Pasadena Yard on the PTRA's South Shore Sub on April 8, 2017. The Morrison-Knudson units were the first to carry PTRA markings. Tom Kline



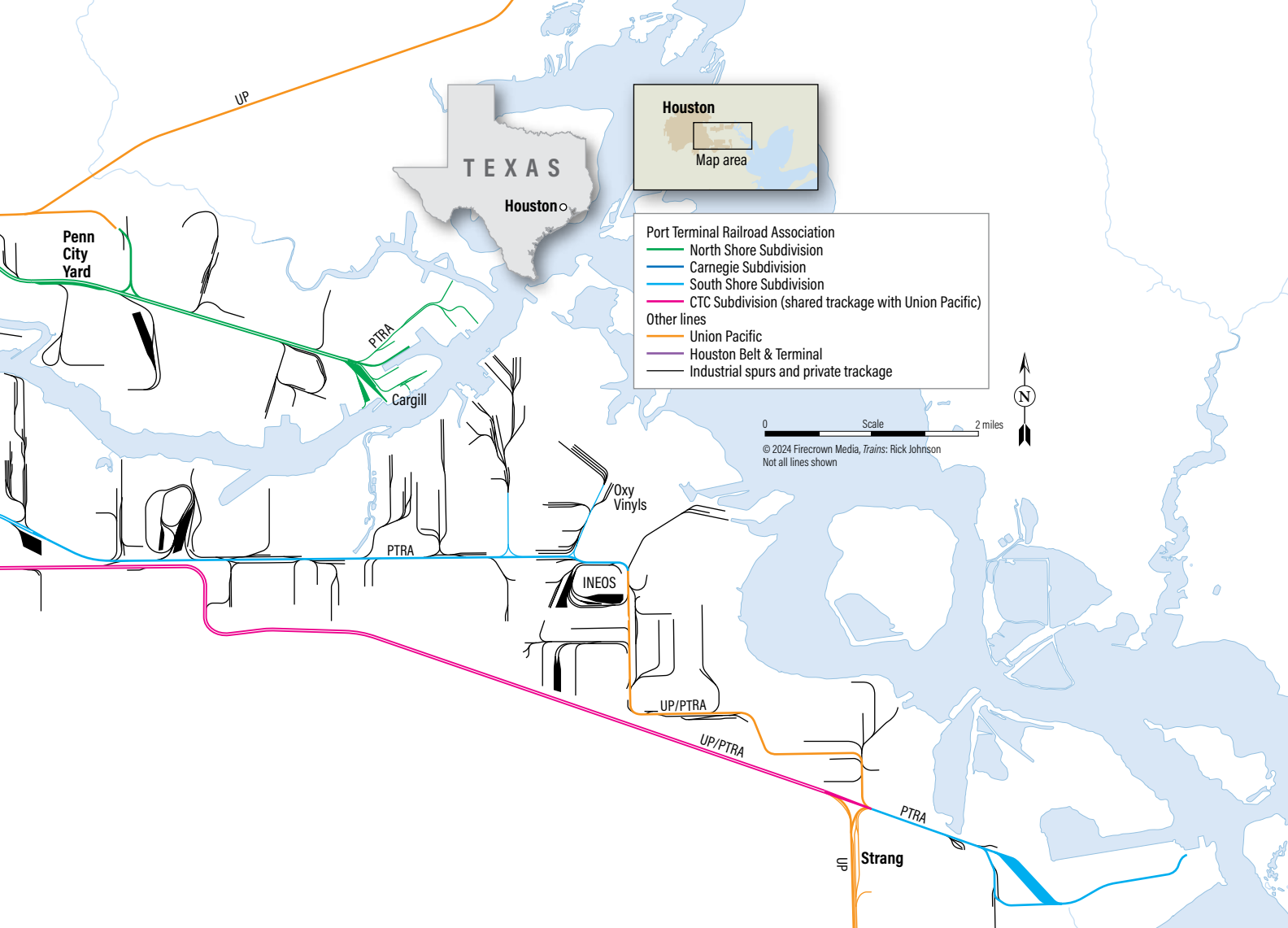
the dense cluster of industries and marine terminals lining the Ship Channel. In the beginning, PTRA member lines were the 18 railroads that served Houston. Today, thanks to merger upon merger over the decades, the PTRA's participating railroads are Class I systems UP, BNSF, and CPKC, plus the Houston Belt & Terminal. Port Houston remains the railroad's landlord, and the Class I railroads are called

member lines. Each has a seat — and equal say — on the PTRA board. The PTRA is a non-profit operation, with UP, BNSF, and CPKC paying the railroad's costs in proportion to their share of carloads.

SHIP CHANNEL TIES

Thousands of people lined the Ship Channel on Nov. 10, 1914, and heard a 21-gun salute echo across the water. From the White House,

President Woodrow Wilson officially opened the deepwater channel when he pushed an ivory button that fired a cannon by remote control. With that, a band played the national anthem from a barge anchored in the center of the Turning Basin, the head of navigation on the 52-mile waterway that links Houston with the Gulf of Mexico via Buffalo Bayou, the San Jacinto River, and Galveston Bay. Said



Presaging a move to come a decade later, a leased GATX Geep works with PTRA MK1500D adjacent to the ship canal on Jan. 22, 2012. Michael T. Burkhart

Sue Campbell, daughter of Houston Mayor Ben Campbell: "I christen thee Port of Houston. Hither the boats of all nations may come and receive hearty welcome."

The ceremony marked the completion of a two-year

dredging project that made Buffalo Bayou navigable to oceangoing ships; it previously could accommodate only shallow-draft vessels that would transload their cargo at Galveston. The project, the first of many to widen and deepen the

channel, launched Houston on its way to becoming the biggest port on the Gulf Coast and tops in the U.S. based on tonnage.

Within a decade it became apparent that rail access to the burgeoning port was woefully inadequate. Three railroads —



During a hi-rail trip on the North Shore Sub, Scott Sanders, PTRA director of regulatory compliance and security, inspects train No. 181. Two photos, Bill Stephens

Southern Pacific, Houston Belt & Terminal, and the International-Great Northern Railroad — each served parts of the Ship Channel. Naturally, the other 15 railroads in Houston all wanted in, and port officials were eager for an improved rail system.

The solution was the Port Terminal Railroad Association, a neutral railroad that provided all of Houston's railroads with unfettered access to the Ship Channel. PTRA, which sits mostly on land owned by what's now called Port Houston, began operations on July 1,

1924. Two years later the railroad handled 84,967 carloads, and by 1929 it operated 57 miles of track.

ONE GIGANTIC YARD

Today the PTRA is a heavy-duty, impeccably maintained railroad with 136-pound rail, seven yards, and numerous spurs that bend off the main line to reach sprawling customer facilities and public terminals. "It's the best infrastructure I've ever seen for really a gigantic classification yard, if you will, and 22 bridges being the key," Wells says, not-

ing the railroad has replaced or rebuilt all of its spans over the past few years.

For a terminal railroad, the PTRA's track looks gold-plated — and that's by design. PTRA's customer list reads like a who's who of chemical producers, petroleum refiners, and export terminals that handle huge volumes of tank cars laden with liquids or gases that are toxic, flammable, or both. A hazardous materials wreck inside the Houston city limits — which, with 2.3 million residents, ranks fourth largest in the U.S. — would be unthinkable

Specially painted PTRA locomotives celebrate the railroad's centennial with a Texas-flag inspired scheme (below); No. 1914 is one of two units commemorating the Port of Houston centennial. PTRA





catastrophic. “The level of track maintenance on PTRa is actually at a higher standard than terminal trackage of Class I railroads,” says Rollin Bredenberg, a retired BNSF and Southern Pacific operating



official who sat on the PTRa board for three decades, often as its chairman.

A 28-unit locomotive fleet composed entirely of leased GP38-2s keeps the PTRa’s traffic moving up to the maximum authorized track speed of 20 mph. They are clad in GATX’s blue livery with the exception of four glossy locomotives that debuted in special paint schemes this spring.

PTRa Nos. 1924 and 2024 celebrate the railroad’s centennial. They’re draped in a red, white, and blue scheme that’s a riff on the Lone Star State’s flag.

PTRa Nos. 1914 and 2014 sport Port Houston logos and are painted in a charcoal gray and white livery in a salute to the port’s centennial.

In 2022 the GP38-2s replaced the first locomotives to carry PTRa marks, the leased MK1500Ds that arrived on the railroad in 1998. Prior to that, PTRa relied on the member lines to supply motive power. It wasn’t uncommon to see motley lashups of Katy, Southern Pacific, and Missouri Pacific four-axle units wheezing on the point of PTRa trains. The practice was a headache for the

PTRa job 384 shoves tank cars into the Energy Transfer Houston Terminal on the North Shore Subdivision. Many customers have significant storage capacity; the terminal can handle 72 cars.



MK1500Ds Nos. 9617 and 9619 are parked on the main at the Penn City Yard on the North Shore Subdivision, waiting for a crew, on June 12, 2004. Across the tracks is a tied-down BNSF pipe train.

Tom Kline



PTRA job 134, working between Pasadena Yard and Barbours Cut, heads for the yard on PTR's main line. Three photos, Bill Stephens

PTRA because the Class I roads often sent their shop queens. An ancient, unreliable SP switcher that spent most of its time in the Hardy Street shop, for example, would instead keep the mechanics busy at PTR's shop at North Yard. PTR's Class I member lines became short of four-axle power in the mid-1990s, and the PTR board decided the railroad would be better off with its own locomotives.

PTRA has four subdivisions, two on each side of the Ship Channel. Thanks to

the high density of customer facilities, each sub is further divided into districts. Although the subs generally run geographically east-west, they're oriented north-south from a timetable perspective.

The 13.2-mile North Shore Sub is double track, with the exception of the single-track Green Bayou Drawbridge at milepost 7.4. Also north of the channel: the 4.8-mile Carnegie Sub, which serves the City Docks.

To the south of the Ship Channel, the CTC Sub — which

is shared with UP and sits on UP property — stretches 25 miles from Galena Junction at the south end of North Yard to all the way to Barbours Cut. UP controls the CTC Sub from its Spring, Texas, dispatching office. The South Shore Sub, which sits just north of the CTC Sub, extends 9.5 miles from Manchester Yard to Dow Service Road. It slices its way through chemical row, where massive chemical plants and refineries line both sides of the tracks. Among them: Facilities for Chevron Phillips, BASF, Pemex, Dow, Lubrizol, Total, INEOS, and OxyChem. The CTC and South Shore subs are connected through five junctions.

Combined, PTR's seven yards have a capacity for 5,000 cars. Customer facilities — which include intraplant yards, storage yards, spurs, loading and unloading spots, and loop tracks — typically hold a whopping 10,000 cars at any given time. The term spaghetti bowl does not even begin to describe the dense array of terminal trackage.

Rodney Bruton, the helper on Manchester Yard job 240, hustles to pull the pin as cars are kicked at the yard on April 10, 2024.





PTRA's largest classification facility is North Yard, site of the railroad's locomotive and car shops. It has six receiving and departure tracks, as well as 46 classification tracks with a capacity of 1,200 cars. UP, BNSF, and CPKC interchange with PTRA at the yard, which receives an average of 52 trains per week and departs 34.

Three other yards sit on the North Shore. Storage Yard has 19 classification tracks. It serves the City Docks and, as its name implies, is a place where flat cars, high-and-wides, and covered hoppers of plastic resin are stored. American Yard, a classification and serving yard for North Shore industries, features 10 tracks that can hold 400 cars. The three-track Penn City Yard handles traffic for customers on the North Shore's geographical east end.

The key facilities on the South Shore are Manchester Yard, which receives inbound interchange traffic from UP and BNSF, and Pasadena Yard, which handles outbound interchange moves with UP and

BNSF. Manchester's 26 classification tracks can hold 800 cars. Pasadena, surrounded by chemical and plastics plants, has 15 tracks with a capacity of 700 cars. The Pasadena yardmaster also does double duty as dispatcher for the South Shore Sub. Old City Yard's five tracks

serve a handful of customers near the Turning Basin.

THE PTR A HUSTLE

Manchester Yard, steps away from the PTRA headquarters, is bathed in the evening sun as yard jobs 240 and 241 switch parallel leads simultaneously. The pace is anything but leisurely. Rodney Bruton, the helper on the 240, moves at a speed somewhere between a brisk walk and a jog as he zips alongside the train and pulls the pin on cuts of tank cars being kicked onto their assigned tracks. Once they're all safely in the yard, PTRA No. 2202 grabs another cut. Bruton swings aboard the GP38-2's steps as it pulls back on the lead. From there the process repeats itself.

There's hustle in the jobs that spot and pull cars, too. Out on the South Shore Sub at Deer Park, job 133 shoves past you on the Equity Lead with a long string of tank cars at 9:50 a.m. Forty-five minutes later — after spotting and pulling cars at ITC Houston, then at Vopak Terminal, and finally at Clean Harbors — the 133 rolls by on its way back to Pasadena Yard with a string of empty tank cars.

"They get after it," Wells says of PTRA crews.

Turning over yard inventory quickly is essential if the PTRA — and by extension the entire Houston Terminal — is to

COMBINED, PTR A'S SEVEN YARDS HAVE A CAPACITY OF 5,000 CARS. CUSTOMER FACILITIES — YARDS, SPURS, AND LOOP TRACKS — HOLD A WHOPPING 10,000 CARS AT ANY GIVEN TIME.

Job 133 shoves a long string of tank cars on the Equity Lead on April 11, 2024.





After completing work at ITC Houston, Vopak, and Clean Harbors, job 133 heads out of the Equity Lead in Deer Park en route to Pasadena Yard.

Two photos, Bill Stephens

remain fluid. UP yard jobs pull traffic from North Yard to Settegast Yard twice a day, while BNSF and CPKC pull once each. At Pasadena Yard, UP pulls traffic twice per day, while BNSF pulls once daily. "Pasadena's 15 tracks need to be turned every 24 hours or it's a cluster," says Scott Sanders, a 26-year PTR veteran who started out as a conductor and now is director of regulatory compliance and security. The same holds true for unit trains, like the grain trains that typically arrive, unload, and depart within 24 hours.

You ask about average dwell in PTR's yards. Excluding cars being stored, the number of cars sitting for 24, 48, or 72 hours on this April day stands at precisely zero. It wasn't always this way at the PTR, which could be its parent railroads' problem child from time to time. The last time it acted up was in 2006, when PTR was

drowning in switching volume.

"PTR was just jammed up. Neither the UP nor the BNSF could get into the PTR, and PTR congestion was actually congesting both railroads in the Houston area," Bredenberg recalls. "It was very obvious that if we didn't solve the PTR, we were not going to solve the Houston area congestion."

Ultimately BNSF and UP decided to lighten the PTR's switching load by delivering trains that were pre-blocked for the largest customers on each side of the Ship Channel. BNSF did its classification work at Teague Yard, 150 miles north of Houston. UP sorted PTR's cars at the nearby Englewood and Settegast yards and as far away as Pine Bluff, Ark. UP built five blocks for PTR.

BNSF, for example, delivered a train to Pasadena Yard that included blocks that could be taken directly to Chevron, Goodyear, and Lyondell chemi-

cal plants. Tacked onto the end of the North Yard train was a solid block for American Yard. When the train would arrive at North Yard, PTR crews would peel off the block and immediately take it to American Yard, and from there parcel out the traffic bound for individual customers further down the North Shore.

UP built North Yard blocks at Pine Bluff and Settegast, an American Yard block at Pine Bluff, Pasadena blocks at both Pine Bluff and Englewood, and Manchester Yard and Oxy blocks at Englewood.

If PTR gets bogged down for 48 hours or more, that spells trouble in Houston and beyond. "If you don't have this thing squared away, it's going to create problems for hundreds of miles in just about every direction," Wells says. The UP veteran speaks from experience: He began his career as a trainmaster in Houston, and



worked multiple operational positions around the terminal for nearly a dozen of his 23 years at UP.

The key, Wells says, is staying on top of operations and relying on relationships with colleagues across the Houston terminal. “You stay out in front of things that start to simmer and don’t ever let ‘em get too hot,” he says.

The pre-blocking — which continues to this day, with PTRa also blocking outbound traffic for UP and BNSF — dramatically reduced the switching workload and gave the PTRa much-needed breathing room by creating yard capacity. That’s not to say capacity expansion projects aren’t necessary as chemical and plastics production is expected to continue to grow.

In 2019, the \$23 million Broadway double-track project eliminated a PTRa bottleneck that caused up to 2 to 4 hours

of delay per day for UP, BNSF, and PTRa trains. The project replaced a single-track road overpass with a double-track bridge and added 3,478 feet of second track eastward from Manchester Junction. Now the PTRa board is considering double-track projects to ease congestion between Pasadena Yard and Deer Park on the South Shore Sub. It’s a tricky place to add a second track, however, because the line is hemmed in by industries and a power transmission line.

Wells, who became PTRa’s GM in June 2022, says he inherited a well-running operation. But he has aimed to modernize the railroad’s technology, including its back-office systems. Up

next: Introducing remote-control switching. PTRa typically operates with three-person crews, and Wells figures that some jobs could be reduced to two people with, in some instances, assistance from a “super utility conductor.” At least some of the potential reduction in train crew employment from RC operations could be offset by scheduling changes that Wells says could improve the work-life balance for PTRa railroaders.

Wells can’t say enough about the pride the PTRa’s 309 employees take in their work, and credits them for the railroad’s 95% satisfaction rate that consistently comes back from customer surveys. **I**

Job 140 shoves into Pasadena Yard on the South Shore Subdivision. The 15-track yard can handle 700 cars.



An ATV delivers water to a UP train about to leave Settegast Yard, one of the facilities that pre-blocks trains for the PTRa.

Matthew Holman





POWER

Trains 2024 Photo Contest Winners



POWER IS A CONCEPT that applies across railroading. Think of a Big Boy thundering over Sherman Hill with a high-tonnage freight train. Others may think of high-speed rail or a set of diesels with heavy exhaust powering a coal train through the Appalachian Mountains.

The 2024 *Trains*-National Railway Historical Society Photo Contest drew 453 entries from 169 photographers. The interpretation of Power was diverse, as exhibited in the top eight photographs selected by the judges. The Grand Prize evokes a strong feeling of Power, given the immense size of the locomotive and the drama of early morning light.

In our First Place photo, one can imagine that the CSX train rumbling through town is the most

Sponsored by
NRHS
In addition to other prizes,
all winners will receive
a one-year NRHS
membership.

powerful thing these youngsters have ever seen. Our Second Place winner has juxtaposed a powerful commuter train zipping by as nature displays its power. Our five runners-up offer a range of interpretation from a high-speed Acela passing a solar energy collection

field to the raw power of steam illustrated by two of America's more famous restored locomotives. The judges gravitated to well-composed photographs, exhibiting strong technical execution, and an interesting or unique theme interpretation.

For your consideration, the 2025 photo contest theme is: The last mile. Is this the end of the track, a terminal, the scrap line, or a load delivered on a short line? — *Jeffrey S. Smith and Bob Lettenberger*

Runners-up

These photographers have each won a 3-year subscription to *Trains* Magazine or equivalent *Trains* products.



◀ Fred W. Kurtz

Taken in August 2017, this image offers a literal interpretation of "power" with an impressive number of locomotives captured in a single frame. This is a view of BNSF's Galesburg (Ill.) Yard taken from the County Road 10 pedestrian bridge using a telephoto lens to maximize compression. The image features numerous locomotive models and a wide variety of BNSF paint schemes.

- Panasonic GH5
- Leica 100-400
- ISO 200, 300mm, f5.7, 1/320

▲ Eugene Armer

After stopping to pick up additional passengers, Reading Blue Mountain & Northern Railroad T-1 No. 2102 restarts its train at Port Clinton, Pa. This was the 4-8-4's last outing of the year, a round trip from North Reading to Jim Thorpe, Pa., on Oct. 21, 2023. The locomotive displays raw steam power that excites those riding and watching. The backlighting contrasts the swirling smoke and blasting steam, framing the locomotive against a dark background. The tracks, dwarf signals, shop building, and "Yard Limit" sign all add context. Steam power lives!

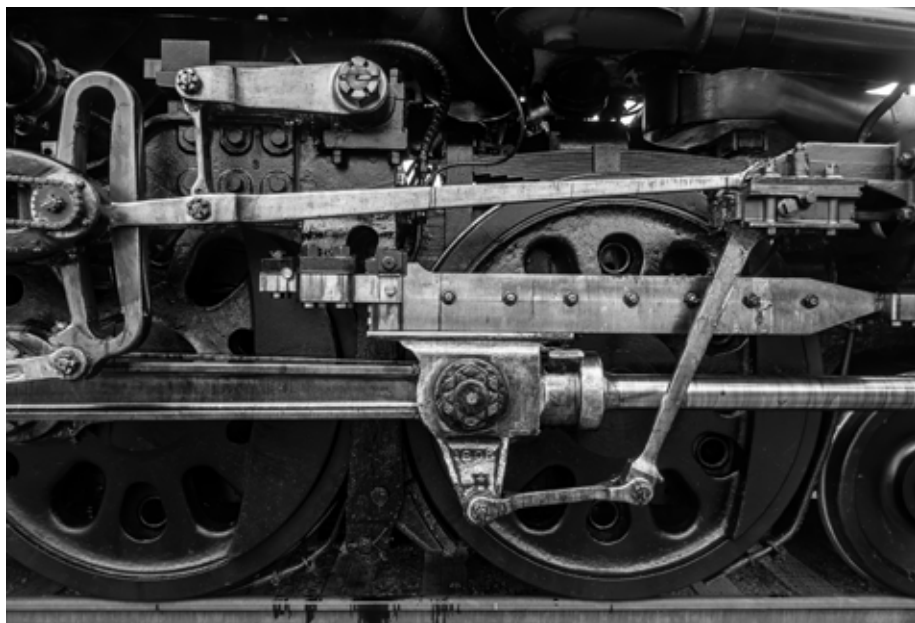
- Nikon D7200
- Nikkor 70-300 zoom at 240mm
- ISO 400, f16, 1/500th



▲ Daniel Spitzer

This image captures the future of power — at least for high-density railroad routes. Clean energy, in this case solar, is converted to electricity, which in turn powers an Amtrak *Acela* running on the Northeast Corridor between Boston and Washington. The train speeds along at 150 mph on one of the fastest sections, just east of North Kingstown, R.I., passing a massive solar collection field that may be helping to power it along the route. The two Acela power cars can together draw over 9,200 kW, more commonly expressed as 12,400 hp, from the overhead catenary. The image was captured in April 2023 from a small airplane, circling approximately 1,200 feet overhead. Daniel Spitzer was in the cockpit as both solo pilot and aerial photographer.

- Leica SL2
- m200 mm
- ISO 400, f4, 1/3200 sec.



▲ Mark Ryan

This partial view of Union Pacific Big Boy No. 4014's front engine — including driving wheels, connecting rods and reversing gear — conveys just a hint of the complexity built into the massive steam locomotive's process of converting fuel (originally coal, now oil) and

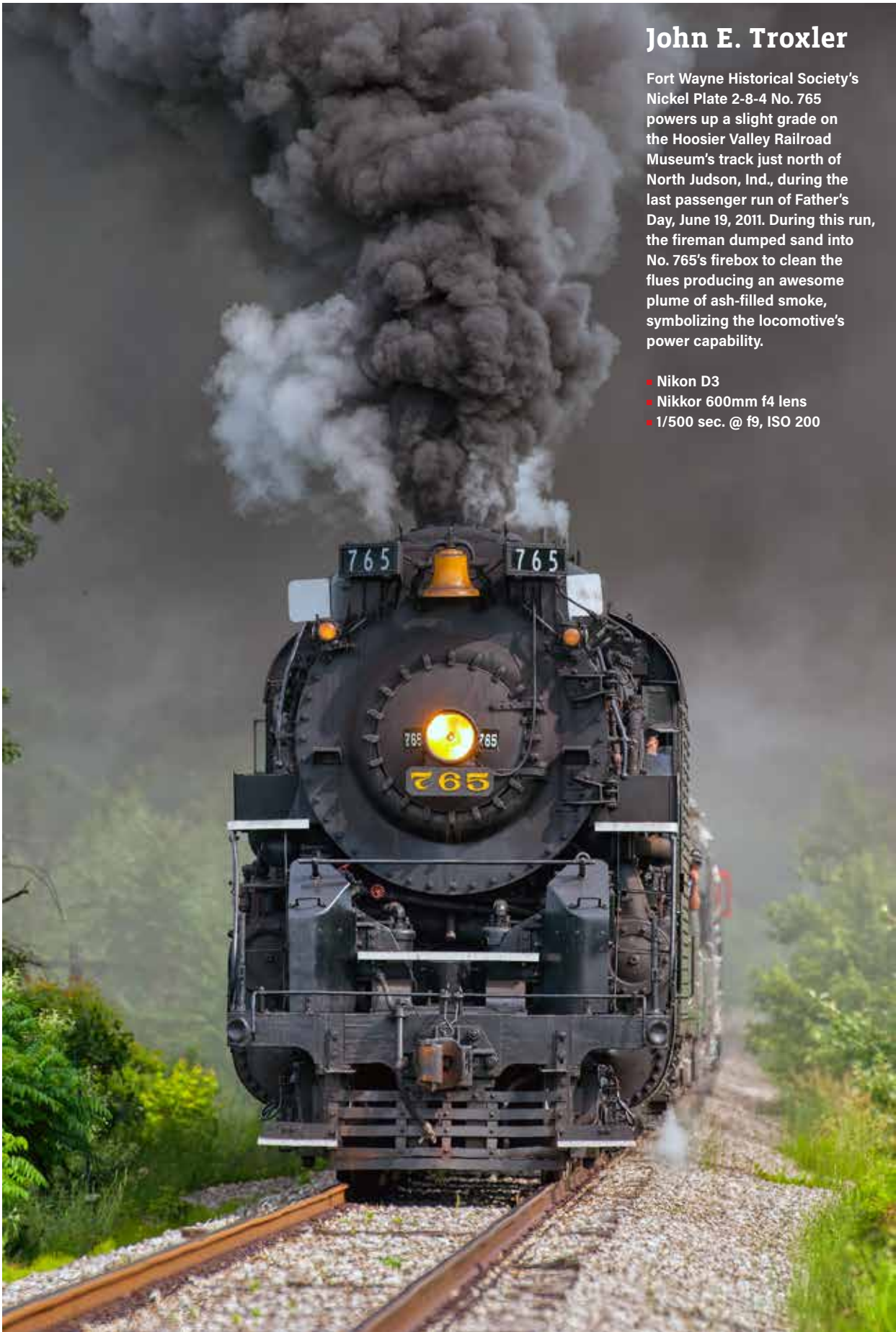
water into the power for hauling heavy freight trains over the mountains of Utah and Wyoming.

- Panasonic LUMIX DMC-FZ2500
- 24-480mm Leica zoom
- 1/160 sec., f3.5

John E. Troxler

Fort Wayne Historical Society's Nickel Plate 2-8-4 No. 765 powers up a slight grade on the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum's track just north of North Judson, Ind., during the last passenger run of Father's Day, June 19, 2011. During this run, the fireman dumped sand into No. 765's firebox to clean the flues producing an awesome plume of ash-filled smoke, symbolizing the locomotive's power capability.

- Nikon D3
- Nikkor 600mm f4 lens
- 1/500 sec. @ f9, ISO 200







Second prize

Todd Halamka

Won \$250 for his Metra rush hour photo.

The story of this image explores the relationship of train power as juxtaposed to the power of Mother Nature. Trains run 24/7/365, no matter the weather. Here a series of evening rush-hour Metra commuter trains race westbound, just east of Western Springs, Ill. A thunderstorm erupts with perhaps the single most powerful event in nature: An enormous bolt of lightning that momentarily illuminates the night scene. In an interchangeable word play, the trains thunder down the main line at 79 mph while a burst of lightning registers the stormy night scene.

- Cannon 5d Mark 3
- 24-105mm
- f11, 8 sec.

First prize

Brian Sellers

Won \$500 for his photo of youth and CSX.

For more than 150 years, La Grange, Ky., has embodied the timeless power of railroading. Nestled among the boutiques, cafes, and antique shops of its historic district, this quintessential Midwestern town bustles with activity; yet 10 to 12 times daily, its rhythm of commerce takes a different track as a CSX freight slices through the middle of Main Street. While many towns erect barriers and quiet zones to shield themselves from the railroad's influence, La Grange stands apart, embracing its long running rail heritage. The town hosts an observation tower, railroad museum, and rail cams, allowing fans everywhere the opportunity to experience high-horsepower diesels on the streets of Oldham County. On this warm summer afternoon, Aug. 14, 2021, several young visitors give a friendly salute to the crew of CSXT ET44AH No. 3454, enjoying the unique sights of La Grange and the enduring allure of the powerful iron horse.

- Nikon D7100
- f5.6, 1/500 sec.





Grand prize

George Hiotis

Won \$1,000 for his photo of Union Pacific No. 3985.

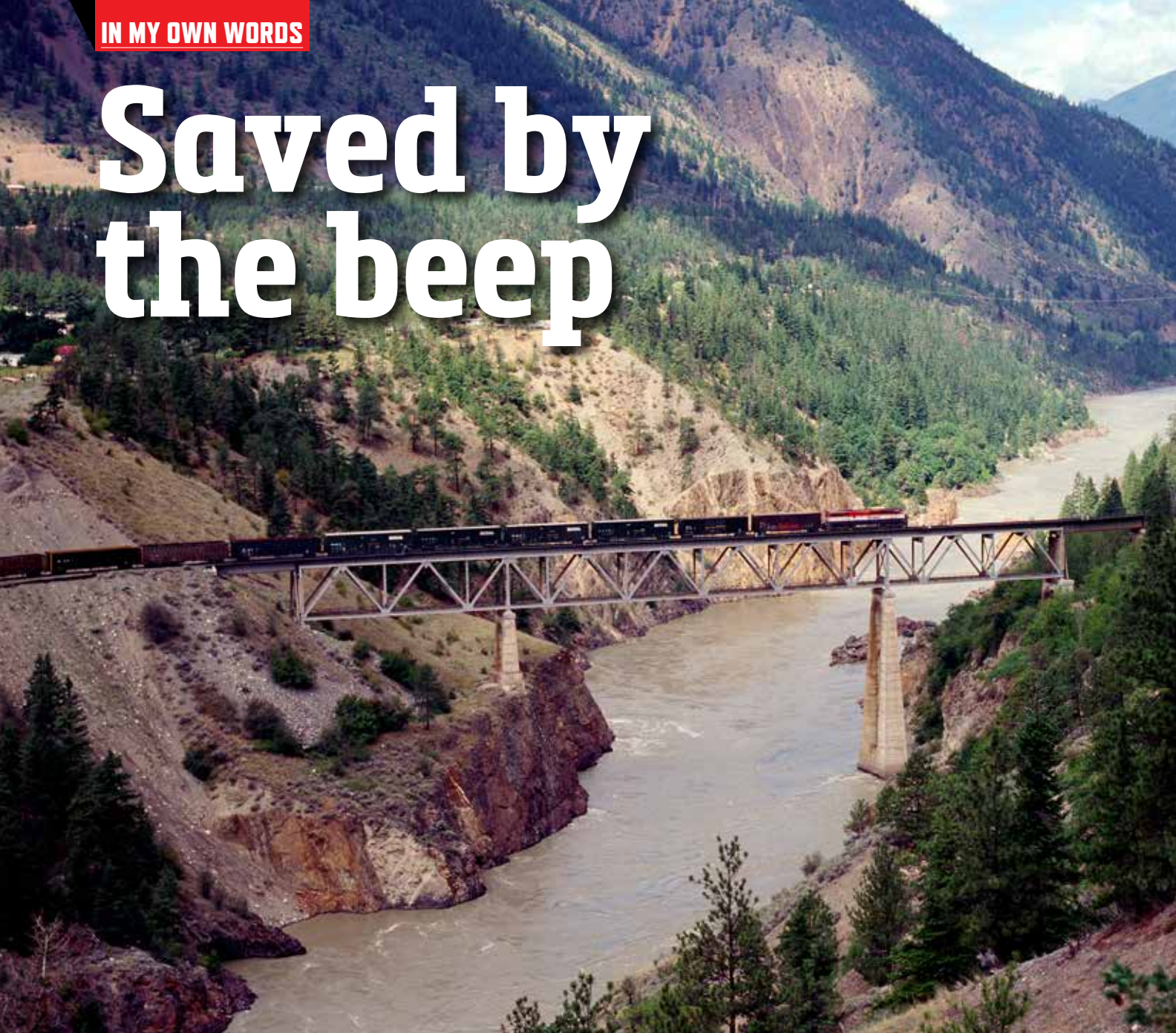
By any standard, Union Pacific 4-6-6-4 Challenger No. 3985 is a massive locomotive, among the largest ever built; a prime example of man's scaled-up ambitions. When steamed up, she is a loud, giant, hissing beast from which every sound is indicative of her enormous power, be it her throaty whistle or thundering exhaust at track speed, which causes the ground to shake and onlookers to cover their ears. Her sheer size towers over the tallest individual, making them appear as a dwarf. The combination of a rising sun bathing the locomotive in golden light, the rail worker dwarfed by No. 3985, steam enveloping the scene, and the hammer that seems inconsequential to the large locomotive, all produce an overwhelming feeling of power for the viewer. No. 3985 was being prepared for a fan trip when this scene occurred in Cheyenne, Wyo., on the cold morning of April 23, 1981.

- Nikon camera
- 300 mm lens
- Kodachrome film
- exposure data not recorded





Saved by the beep



Technology saves the crew during a holiday work marathon

by Adrian Telizyn

IN MAY 1996, during the long Canadian weekend celebrating Victoria Day, a national holiday, there was a crew shortage in Lillooet, British Columbia, on BC Rail.

Normally, Lillooet had a fairly quiet joint conductors spare board — one could sit second-out for the better part of a week!

That weekend, most of the six-man Lillooet Unassigned Service Pool (freight “chain gang” to U.S. readers) had booked

off. As a brakeman sitting on the Lillooet spare board, I could expect a guaranteed 60 hours at \$23.47 per hour if I did not turn a wheel. The unassigned conductors got 80 hours at \$26.36.

The engineer’s auxiliary board was under a different union agreement, and they got something similar to the brakemen.

At midnight my phone started to go off. I was called to go north on the VO

Lillooet, British Columbia, is situated in the Canadian Rocky Mountains. BC Rail tracks crossed and ran along the Fraser River, as seen here on July 25, 1997. Railroading in this territory presented challenges requiring one to be awake and alert, especially on long holiday weekends. Martin K. O’Toole

(Vancouver-Omineca). The run to Williams Lake took about 5 hours, depending on meets. With everyone booked off, and few southbounds, the trip went quickly. We beat the contractual mandatory rest clock into the Lake in the early morning. I was promptly called deadhead “not coupled with service” upon arrival to go back to Lillooet with my hog. That put \$421.76 and 16 hours into my pocket. Not bad!



In the mid-1990s, BC Rail still ran Budd RDC cars in passenger service. Paused here at Williams Lake station, they will head south meeting our author's train near Exeter. Marty Bernard

go north again? Hell, yes! When you are junior in a very senior crew base, you make your hay when the sun shines.

We went north on the VC around 5 p.m. We both were now awake or working nearly 17 hours. I wanted that next \$210.88 minimum day. The average 26-year-old thinks he is much tougher than he really is. Trouble was brewing!

We had a meet at Moran, had to set out at Koster, and it was now quite late in the next evening. I was dog-tired, and my eyelids were doing the slow blink. The hog was clicking the mic on his radio to reset the TMACS crew alerter before it even beeped. Everyone in the industry was good at that.

We had to meet the southbound PV (Peace-Vancouver) at Potter and take the siding per the current OCS clearance I copied from the Rail Traffic Controller.

My hog and I were both desperately trying to stay awake at this point. This was going to be a hard \$1,000 to earn while dragging our underpowered train uphill towards Potter at 25 mph. Power through!

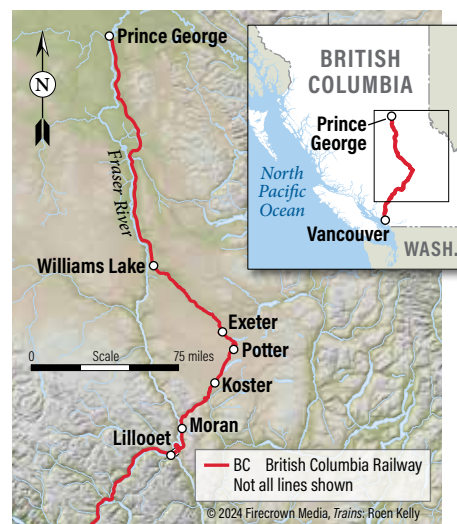
On BC Rail, the northbounds usually cleared the main track, and the courtesy was that whomever got to the meeting point first had to reverse the switch.

Thanks to technological change and the introduction of cabooseless trains, hot box and dragging equipment detectors from Southern Technologies had been installed every 60 miles.

These Safety Inspection Systems would beep on the radio when the locomotive occupied the track circuit. That way crews knew that the inspection was underway.

At mile 236.8 was just such a detector. My hog and I were both asleep with the cab windows open, for who knows how long.

There was a really loud beep on channel 5. We were both startled awake, hearts pounding. We could see a headlight directly in front of us on dim. The engineer put the train into emergency. At that point, we did not really know where we were.



The oncoming PV crew started to trash talk us on the radio, making comments about our ancestry and why we were so slow that *THEY* had to get the south siding switch Potter.

The air was recovered, and we slowly pulled north and entered the siding, saying nothing back to their catcalls.

We were both wide awake with fear and literally vibrating in our seats the rest of the way into Williams Lake.

I would never work a ticket-splitting marathon like that again in my railroad career.

We both booked 14 hours rest in the Lake bunkhouse and went to bed shaking in fear.

In retrospect, \$1,265.28 in 30 hours was just not worth it.

Saved by the beep. **I**

ADRIAN TELIZYN worked in train services for 13 years on BC Rail and its successor Canadian National. He left railroading to become a power manager for a Canadian oil company, supervising pipeline operations and crude-by-rail.

Needless to say, we slept in the cab all the way back.

When we arrived at the Lillooet booking-in room, Maurice, the terminal supervisor, asked us if we wanted to go north again on the VP (Vancouver-Peace). Of course!

The VP was a hotshot TOFC train making few stops. We did not even have to set out trailers at Exeter, where we met the Budds — Budd RDCs running between Prince George and Vancouver. Again, we beat the clock into the Lake and got turned to deadhead not coupled. Another \$421.76! Things are looking up in the wallet.

Nobody at the crew office caught on — we had already worked nearly 10 hours and had been up since midnight.

Again, we walked into the Lillooet bullpen, and were greeted by Maurice. Want to

GREAT RAILFAN ROADS

PENNSYLVANIA'S

U.S. 22

An unbeatable combination of history and action

By John Friedmann • Photos by Dan Cupper

IT TAKES LESS THAN 6 HOURS to drive across Pennsylvania using Interstate 80 (boring) or the Pennsylvania Turnpike (expensive and boring). Instead, drive through Pennsylvania on U.S. Route 22 for a plethora of really interesting railroad sites and plenty of trains. Even on a multi-day trip there is almost too much to see — hard choices are ahead!

U.S. 22 runs from Cincinnati to Newark, N.J., and generally follows the former Pennsylvania Railroad and Reading mainlines across Pennsylvania. U.S. 22's railroad interest comes from the scope and variety of railroad attractions along the way — like a horizontal Christmas tree, with the railfan attractions as ornaments.

Since Pittsburgh has enough rail attractions for its own article, the western tip of this article's tree is the steel-hauling Union Railroad in that city's eastern suburbs. Soon after Business U.S. 22 separates from the Parkway East (I-376), it passes over the Union; the line's shops are below. A quick left past the "Welcome to Monroeville" sign

and through the Sam's Club parking lot is the easiest way down. The shops are off-limits, but adjacent Thompson Run Road yields views of the diesel-era shop building and 15-stall roundhouse and turntable.

For the next 30 miles, Route 22 splits the difference between Norfolk Southern's former PRR main line to the south and the low-grade NS Conemaugh Line to the north. U.S. 22 crosses above the Conemaugh Line at Blairsville, and a right turn takes you to the 1893 depot and a remaining spur of the former Pennsy Indiana (Pa.) branch.

Continue on U.S. 22 for 13 more miles until you turn on Pennsylvania Route 56 for Johnstown. Along the way at Seward, the road crosses under one track of the NS Pittsburgh (main) Line, goes over the Conemaugh River and then over the other two tracks of the Pittsburgh Line.

A RAIL HISTORIAN'S BOUNTY

Although Johnstown shows the scars from the steel industry's demise and three devastating floods, the city is a rail histori-

an's bounty. Downtown's Amtrak station is the most substantial PRR station remaining between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh and is only two blocks away from the Johnstown Flood Museum. You may get lucky and find the former Conemaugh & Black Lick Railroad (now operated by Lehigh Valley Rail Management) running on a weekday morning, or activity on CSX's S&C Subdivision, which branches off CSX's main line 40 miles south in Rockwood, Pa. Johnstown's Inclined Plane, dating from 1891, is out of service for renovations but provides worthwhile views when operating.

Johnstown is the foot of the PRR's



Reading & Northern F-units, leading the 'Oneida Clipper' excursion, pause at R&N headquarters in Port Clinton, Pa.



Norfolk Southern Train No. 11J — a solid consist of empty multi-level autorack cars returning to a vehicle manufacturing plant in the Midwest led by an EMD SD70ACe — pauses beside the Lehigh River at Bethlehem, Pa., on NS's Lehigh Line on Aug. 31, 2015. Idled in 1995, the historic Bethlehem Steel Corp. steel mill in the background has been partly preserved, with some of the 1,800-acre site repurposed as a casino and hotel.

to the Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site, a hidden gem in the region's rich railroad history. Before Horseshoe Curve and the Pennsylvania Railroad, the Allegheny Portage Railroad hauled canal boats over the Alleghenies through a series of inclined planes. A short section of plane, an engine house, and other structures are now preserved as part of a historic park.

The planes' successor, PRR's summit of the Alleghenies at Gallitzin, is just north. Three mainline tracks run through two tunnels but the routes are separated from each other. A viewpoint off of Tunnelhill Street provides a view of both lines as they come together eastbound. Keep going north on Tunnelhill Street and taking the right turn for Altoona will lead you to Horseshoe Curve, perhaps the country's most famous railroad engineering landmark. The curve has a visitors' center and a funicular to take patrons up to track level. Both the curve access and its operator, the Railroaders Museum in Altoona, are open Thursday-Sunday so check hours when planning your visit.

The Railroaders Museum, home to under-restoration Pennsy K4 Pacific No. 1361, is one of many places in Altoona where you can view the Pittsburgh Line. Nearby, 1915-built former Pennsy ALTO tower is privately owned and still trackside.

assault on the Alleghenies. The west slope doesn't have Horseshoe Curve, but the 25-mile grade is spectacular in its own right. Distributed power has reduced but not eliminated the need for helpers over the Alleghenies and its heaviest use is between Johnstown and Altoona. From Johnstown, continue eastward on state Route 56, then get on U.S. 219 north.

This temporarily takes us away from the Norfolk Southern main line — unfortunately, sights along the railroad (including bypassed Staple Bend Tunnel, the first rail tunnel in the United States) aren't easily accessible by car.

Our route rejoins the Pittsburgh Line in South Fork, worthwhile for the nearby Johnstown Flood Memorial or to look for a South Fork Secondary coal train at the small NS yard.

Starting in South Fork, state Route 53 plays tag with the tracks until the top of the hill at Cresson. Cassandra's railroad overlook or "Iron Bridge" is worth a short detour — this now traffic-free bridge over the tracks is a great place to relax and watch the railroad parade.

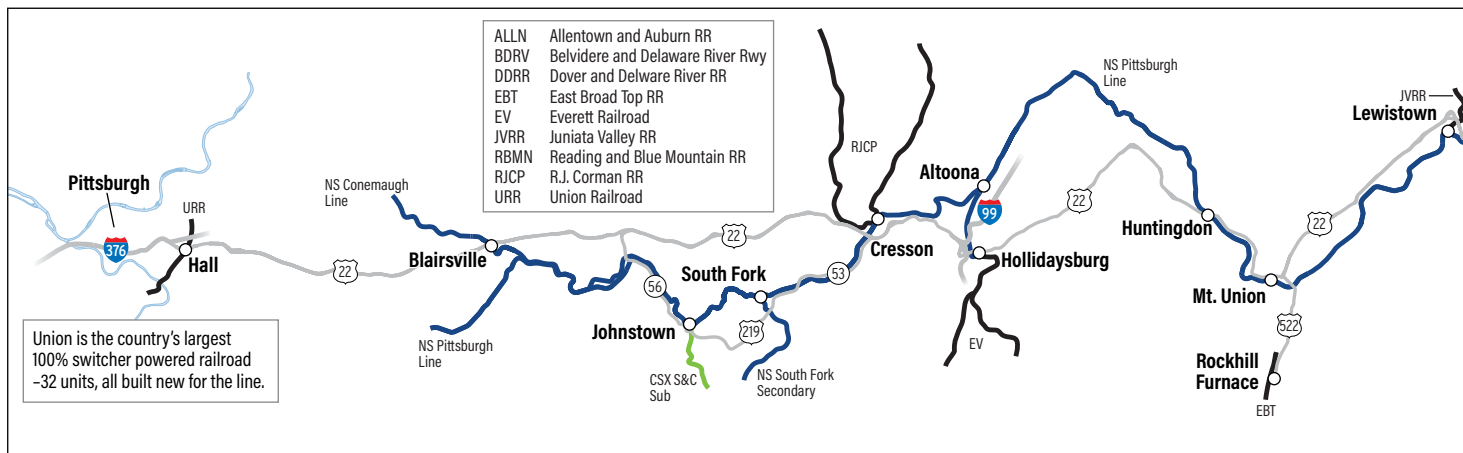
This, the busiest section of NS' Pittsburgh Line, often hosts more than 50 train movements per day.

A HIDDEN GEM

Cresson marks the junction with R.J. Corman's central Pennsylvania lines, which haul mostly coal and grain. Corman has a small yard just west of the now-closed NS helper-engine terminal and adjacent Cresson Steel scraps locomotives and parts. Leaving Cresson on old U.S. 22 takes you



A westbound Norfolk Southern stack train, led by ES44AC No. 8122 and C44-9W No. 8992, climbs Horseshoe Curve at Milepost PT 242, 5 miles west of Altoona, Pa., on NS's Pittsburgh Line, on May 27, 2013.



Altoona's 8th Street viaduct has a convenient sidewalk that overlooks Norfolk Southern's Rose Yard while Chestnut Avenue runs along the edge of Juniata Shops, NS' largest locomotive backshop. Don't bother with Altoona's charmless Amtrak station, though.

Only 7 miles south of Altoona, Hollidaysburg is the home base for Everett Railroad's passenger excursions, which are often powered by 2-6-0 No. 11, built in 1920 for Cuba but never sent abroad. Everett has an engine house at next-door Duncanville, adjacent to the wye with the NS Cove Secondary from Altoona. Route 22 runs in between Hollidaysburg's massive former PRR Samuel Rea car shop (closed by NS in 2002) and the active Curry Rail Service shop located in a former Berwind-White facility. Look for several industrial engines switching the shops and car storage yard.

U.S. 22's route east from Hollidaysburg starts far south of the NS main line, although traces of PRR's former alternate

route bypassing Horseshoe Curve can be spotted. A short detour through downtown Huntingdon will yield an out-of-service bridge from the Huntingdon & Broad Top Mountain Railroad (mostly abandoned in 1954) crossing the Juniata River; the restored former PRR HUNT interlocking tower; and the substantial PRR station, set back behind the current Amtrak shelter along the busy NS main. U.S. 22 provides good photo opportunities east of Huntingdon before the railroad crosses the river at Mapleton.

At Mount Union, turn right onto U.S. 522 for an 11-mile but century-long side-trip back in time to the East Broad Top Railroad. The 3-foot gauge EBT is a time capsule since it ceased hauling coal in 1956 and benefactors have led a recent revival. Steam operations have resumed as have tours of the extensive and intact shops. U.S. 522 follows the EBT (inactive and active) almost to the railroad's Rock-

hill Furnace headquarters. If narrow-gauge steam isn't enough, next door the Rockhill Trolley Museum operates its Shade Gap Electric Railway on a former EBT branch. The museum has a varied Pennsylvania-centric collection, including a Red Arrow Lines (nee North Shore) Electroliner!

Retrace your steps up U.S. 522 to U.S. 22, and divert onto Business Route 22 on Lewis-town's outskirts to head into town and re-connect with the NS Pittsburgh Line. You'll find the wood-framed Amtrak station, also home to the PRR Technical and Historical Society's archives, and the Juniata Valley Railroad, which operates a pair of SW9s on former PRR branches out of the adjacent yard. The depot waiting room is open for Amtrak's *Pennsylvanian*, soon to be supplemented by another Pittsburgh round trip.

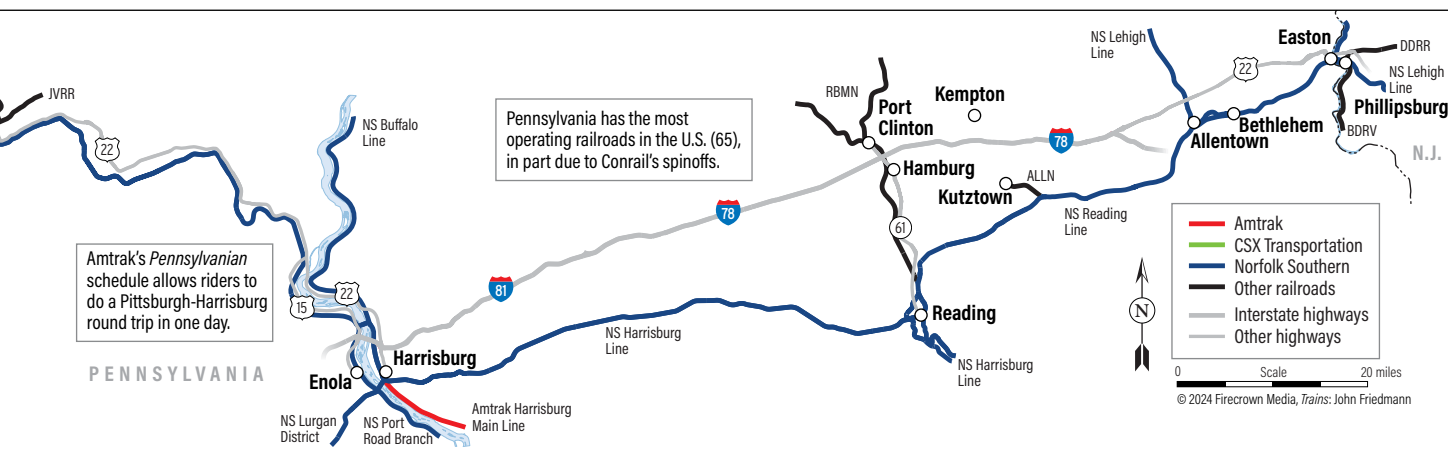
Both road and rail follow the Juniata River eastward toward Harrisburg, generally on opposite sides of the river until the Susquehanna River at Clark's Ferry. Route 22 crosses the Susquehanna here and follows the NS Buffalo Line down the east bank to Harrisburg. Instead, drive U.S. 15 which lets you watch trains on the much-busier Pittsburgh Line down the river's west side.

For even better views of Harrisburg's famed Rockville Bridge (the world's longest stone-arch bridge) duck under the tracks in Marysville to Main Street and head south. You'll also pass the railfan-oriented Bridge-view Bed & Breakfast, offering train views on two sides! Route 15 takes you by Enola, NS' primary carload yard in the Harrisburg area. There's no access from the river side, so work your way up and down the road for the best views.

Harrisburg is the Northeast's distribution hub (many expressways converge here), and NS has large intermodal terminals in Harrisburg proper and just east on the site of the former Reading Rutherford hump yards. The 1887 Amtrak station features a GG1 electric displayed under its trainshed along with 26 weekday trains (all push-pull with ACS-64 electrics except the *Pennsylvanian*). The Capital Area Greenbelt trail along Har-



Amtrak No. 43, the westbound *Pennsylvanian*, crosses the 48-arch 1902 Rockville Bridge over the Susquehanna River at Marysville, Pa., on Feb. 16, 2024, with P42DC locomotive No. 125 leading. At top are the old and new alignments of U.S. Route 22, the William Penn Highway.



risburg's riverfront provides excellent views of the former Reading concrete-arch bridge across the Susquehanna, used by all NS trains to and from the south.

East from Harrisburg, Route 22 becomes part of Interstates 81 and 78 and runs well north of Norfolk Southern's ex-Reading Harrisburg Line. But the heart of the Reading still beats 50 miles east in the form of the Reading Railroad Heritage Museum and the Reading Blue Mountain & Northern Railroad (RBMN). Just a few minutes south of Exit 29 in Hamburg, the Reading museum features more than 70 pieces of rolling stock and an exhibit hall. (Ironically, the museum is located along former PRR trackage).

Turning north at exit 29 takes you to RBMN's Port Clinton headquarters, whose buildings are built in a retro-Reading style. The successful regional railroad is sensitive to trespassers but is generally tolerant of safety-conscious photographers in their parking lot. To support an expanded excursion program (including former Reading 4-8-4-No. 2102), RBMN built Reading Outer Station 14 miles south of I-78 on Route 61, featuring a Reading-style interlocking tower, water tank and displayed ex-Canadian Pacific ten-wheeler.

Two tourist railroads offer diversions along the way to Allentown on I-78. The Wanamaker, Kempton & Southern operates 4½ miles of a former Reading branch 7 miles north of I-78, while the Allentown & Auburn Railroad runs from Kutztown (6 miles south of the Interstate) to the NS interchange in Topton.

Route 22 reasserts its independence when I-78 splits off on the west side of Allentown, although U.S. 22 stays a limited-access highway. The Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton area (airport code: ABE) was a major rail gateway in the pre-Conrail era; now, warehousing is a major business in the Lehigh Valley. Norfolk Southern operates Allentown Yard where Reading, Central Railroad of New Jersey and Lehigh Valley all interchanged freight. The yard is stretched out along the north side of the

Lehigh River and yard action can be seen from River Drive. Canal Park provides scenic views at the west end of the yard. Nearby, R.J. Corman operates just over a mile of former CNJ and LV trackage in Allentown with a single GP16.

Through trains bypass the yard by using a separate main line south of the Lehigh River, but both routes come together in Bethlehem under the city's iconic "Hill to Hill Bridge," which spans both the river and railroad — a sidewalk on the bridge's west side provides views of the railroad crossing the river. Nearby, you can find Bethlehem Union Station, Lehigh Valley's former headquarters building and the LV freight station (still occupied by Norfolk Southern).

There are two remnants of hometown Bethlehem Steel worth noting: an elevated walkway that allows close-up views of the remains of the steel plant; and Lehigh Valley Rail Management's former Philadelphia, Bethlehem & New England mill railroad.

Today, the short line's business has shifted from steel billets to intermodal boxes, operating Bethlehem's intermodal terminal for Norfolk Southern. NS and LVRM connect along the river, and you can see the short line's yard and engine terminal off Shimersville Road in Bethlehem.

Route 22 continues to next-door Easton, which abuts the Delaware River — Pennsylvania's eastern boundary. Easton features three rail bridges across the Delaware: from north to south, they are the former Lehigh & Hudson River Railroad (now the NS Portland Secondary); CNJ (NS Lehigh Line main); and LV (NS, out of service). Railroad archeologists can also discern the LV passenger station's below-grade remnants along Canal Street.

Across the Delaware River is Phillipsburg, N.J., offering a surprising variety for the train watcher. Phillipsburg Union Station (CNJ-DL&W) and adjacent PU (Phillipsburg Union) Tower are both restored



A Norfolk Southern double-stack train emerges from the west portal of 3,612-foot-long Allegheny Tunnel at Gallitzin, Pa., elevation 2,200 feet, the highest point on the former Pennsylvania Railroad main line, on Feb. 14, 2019.

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Besides the railroad:

THERE ARE FIVE AMUSEMENT PARKS near this route across Pennsylvania: Kennywood (Pittsburgh), DelGrosso's and Lake-mont Park near Altoona, and Allentown's Dorney Park. The much-larger Hershey-park near Harrisburg offers diversions for the entire family beyond rides. Finally, Easton's Crayola Experience (in the company's headquarters town) lets children of all ages create their own crayons!

and open to visitors. The Phillipsburg Railroad Historians Museum on the other side of the NS Lehigh line features miniature railroad rides and several pieces of full-size equipment. Also, NS and short line Dover & Delaware River Railroad interchange nearby several times a week.

Phillipsburg's most interesting operation is the Belvidere & Delaware River Railway, operator of part of the former PRR "Bel-Del" branch south from Phillipsburg along the Delaware. Delaware River Railroad Excursions operates excursions, often using Chinese-built former NYS&W 2-8-2 No. 142. Everything in Phillipsburg is close by — excursions are only steps from Phillipsburg's restored Union Station. From here, you can continue east towards New York City, but if you want to head back the way you came, it'll cost you — there's a \$1.50 toll to get back into Pennsylvania on Route 22.

WORTH STOPPING FOR:

- The Altoona area offers several railfan-oriented places to stay: Cresson's Station Inn provides mainline views; Gallitzin's Tunnel Inn is right next to the tracks; and the Cassandra Railroad Overlook Motel is just a few blocks from the west slope overlook.

- The Harrisburg Chapter NHRS operates two remarkable sites in downtown Harrisburg. Restored HARRIS tower downtown features simulated train movements from the Pennsy's heyday while NS mainline trains rumble by. The former PRR Power Director's office in the nearby Amtrak Station is exceptionally preserved and occasionally opened for tours by the chapter.

IF TIME IS SHORT:

- If time constraints force use of the Pennsylvania Turnpike or I-80, Horseshoe Curve, and Altoona are only an hour or less detour each way via Interstate 99. Farther east, several expressways provide loops through the Harrisburg area on both sides of the Susquehanna. **I**



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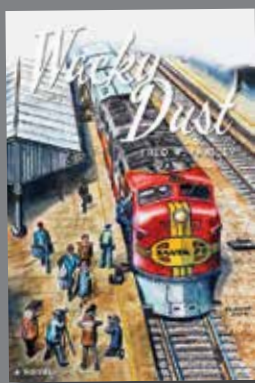
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Kalmbach Media donates historic art collection

CRP&A receives original works featured in magazines, books

▲ Among the 58 original works donated by Kalmbach to the CRP&A is *Roaring through Roundout*, a watercolor on paper by Gil Reid. The painting of a Milwaukee Road Class A Atlantic in 1935 illustrated the cover of *The Hiawatha Story*, Kalmbach's most successful hardcover book.

Center for Railroad Photography & Art

THE CENTER FOR RAILROAD PHOTOGRAPHY & ART in Madison, Wis., has received the Kalmbach Media art collection, a total of 58 original paintings spanning the company's history since its founding by A.C. Kalmbach in 1934.

Scott Lothes, CRP&A executive director, announced the acquisition after working closely with Kalmbach executives to keep the collection together in a permanent home.

The works were commissioned for use in *Trains Magazine* and Kalmbach Books and were displayed at Kalmbach's Waukesha, Wis., headquarters. Railroad artists like Howard Fogg, George Gloff, Gil Reid,

Ted Rose, John Swatsley, and many of the company's own illustrators and designers are represented in the donated pieces. The images have appeared in the pages of Kalmbach's magazines or on their covers, or been part of best-selling books such as *The Hiawatha Story* and *The Nickel Plate Story*.

"Kalmbach is a name that has thrilled, educated, and inspired generations of railfans, photographers, and artists, and this collection couldn't be a better expression of the Center's mission to preserve and celebrate significant railroad art," said Lothes. "It's a tremendous honor and responsibility

to care for the Kalmbach art collection, and to honor the work of so many artists and designers who poured their talents into illustrating the railroads that they loved."

The collection has been moved to Madison as Kalmbach sold its longtime Waukesha offices. *Trains*, *Classic Trains*, *Model Railroader*, *Classic Toy Trains*, and *Astronomy* magazines were sold to Fire-crown Media of Chattanooga, Tenn. The former Kalmbach titles will continue to be based in Wisconsin with a new office in the Waukesha area.

"The Center is beyond thrilled to be the recipient of the Kalmbach art collection,"

said Bon French, CRP&A board chairman. "Not only is it a spectacular collection in its own right, but the art invokes many memories for those of us that frequented the hallowed halls of the Kalmbach offices. As the Kalmbach name will otherwise disappear, it's great that we can preserve the legacy of a 90-year-old company with a revered name through the collection."

"I can't imagine a better outcome for Kalmbach's corporate art collection than to have it find a permanent home with the Center," said Kevin P. Keefe, a Center board member and former Kalmbach vice president-editorial, as well as a past editor of *Trains*. Keefe brought the collection to light in the mid-2010s when he detailed the most important pieces and their histories in a company report he authored prior to his retirement. "In so many ways, *Trains* and Kalmbach Books played indispensable roles in creating the world of railroad imagery we love so much, and the company's original art is a big part of that legacy."

"Over the years, there has been a strong bond between Kalmbach and the Center. The donation of this collection is a celebration of that relationship."

Kalmbach CEO Dan Hickey said founder A.C. Kalmbach "would be very proud to know that the railroad art accu-



The Kalmbach art collection arrives at the CRP&A's Madison, Wis., archive. Moving the images were (from left): Inga Velten, Lisa Hardy, Kevin Keefe, and Adrienne Evans. CRP&A, Gil Taylor

mulated by Kalmbach Media and enjoyed by our employees for decades will also be appreciated by future generations through the expert stewardship of the Center."

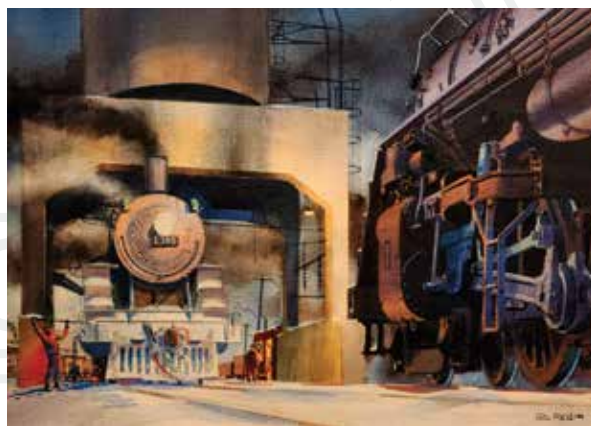
The Kalmbach art collection joins the CRP&A's already impressive holding of more than 500,000 photographic images

plus additional original railroad art. The photographic work of John Gruber, Ronald C. Hill, Stan Kistler, Henry Posner III, Jim Shaughnessy, and Karl Zimmermann are among the Center's holdings.

For more information on the CRP&A, please visit railphoto-art.org. — *Trains staff*



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Rail travel photography

Make the most of your railroad images

▲ In August 1984, the tower operator at Montreal's Central Station entertained a young American visitor who had just arrived on Amtrak's *Montrealer*. The following spring, the operator was given a few prints as a "thank you." Two photos, Brian Solomon

▼ In August 2024, using her iPhone, the author's wife, Kris, captures a view of Amtrak's new *Acela* trains stored at 30th Street Station in Philadelphia.

OVER THE COURSE OF MY half-century of railroad photography, I've seen technology completely change the ways we make photographs. Even so, when it comes to compelling photography your eye for images will pay dividends far greater than that provided by the latest and greatest camera.

For example, I still enjoy the photographs I made on a memorable trip 40 years ago.

In 1984, two months after graduating high school, I

embarked on a grand Amtrak adventure using a student USA Rail Pass that allowed me to select three destinations in the eastern region for a fixed coach fare. I traveled to Montreal, Washington, D.C., and Chicago and saved money by sleeping on the train between destinations. My trip started with my father driving me to Springfield, Mass., where, just after midnight, I boarded the northward *Montrealer*. In Montreal, I visited signal towers and traveled on local passenger trains.

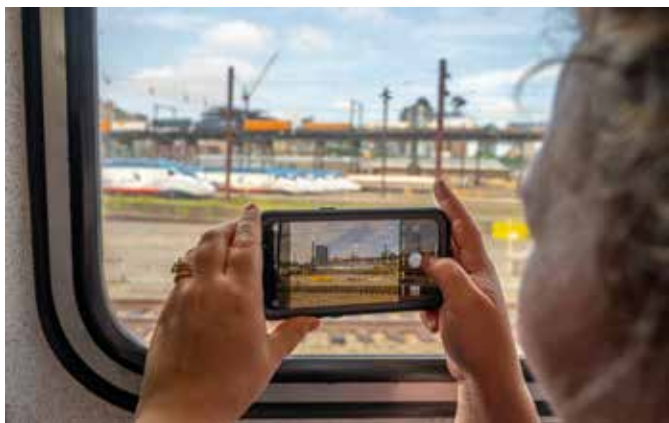
In Washington, D.C., I visited friends and took the Metro to Alexandria, Va. to photograph freights departing Potomac Yard.

After a trip on the *Cardinal* that took me over the former Chesapeake & Ohio through West Virginia, I spent several memorable days around Chicago, where I sampled Chicago Transit Authority trains, took a city bus to the Museum of Science & Industry to see the record-setting Chicago, Burling-

ton & Quincy *Pioneer Zephyr*, rode the South Shore Line to South Bend, Ind., and made commuter rail trips over the Metra commuter rail system's Chicago & North Western and Burlington lines.

To document my travels, I carried a pair of 1930s-era 35mm Leica rangefinder cameras with eight rolls of Kodachrome, two rolls of Ektachrome, and a big bag of Kodak Tri-X 400 ISO black & white film. I calculated exposures using a 1960s-era General Electric hand-held light meter and carried everything — cameras, film, a change of clothes, some reading material, and snacks — in a compact backpack. I carefully budgeted film to make each frame count. Forty years later, the majority of these photographs have survived the test of time.

Photography today is much easier. We don't need to carry bags of film, light meters, or deal with tricky manual focus mechanisms. Low light isn't a prob-



lem, and digital media can store thousands of images. We can view results immediately and quickly learn from our efforts.

Back in 1984, I focused on making photos rather than looking at them. Freed from squandering precious time reviewing my efforts, I absorbed the sights around me.

In 1984, I aimed to capture the whole experience of my trip. Some of the most memorable images taught me to look beyond the obvious. My photo of a Canadian National tower operator speaking on the phone was a more interesting image than the photo I also took of VIA Rail MLW FPA4s. I also captured a CTA employee sweeping the wooden platform on the Chicago Loop, made a ground-level view of a dwarf signal at North Western Station, and took a self-portrait on a wooden bench in Chicago Union Station.

Today, I typically carry a Lumix pocket camera as well as a Nikon Z-series mirrorless camera. Using a Leica Vario-Summilux lens, my "wee Lumix" is the direct descendant of the Leica rangefinders I used on my early trips. To avoid missing photos, I always bring at least one spare battery and a charger, plus extra storage cards. I've learned the hard way that hundreds of digital images can disappear in an instant as the result of user error or card failure, so I carry a lightweight laptop to download, review my images, and back up photos as soon as I can.

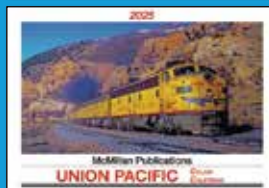
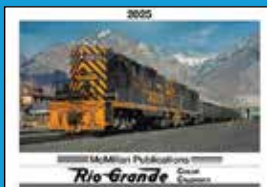
Admittedly, I do things the hard way.

While my wife sometimes carries her mirrorless camera, she often prefers the one-piece, multi-purpose device called a smartphone for her travel photos. This allows her to quickly share photos of our adventures via social media.

Although the phone captures less information than many stand-alone cameras, its ease-of-use and built-in image correction produces visually pleasing images without the need for time consuming post-processing. Purists may ask: "Are these good enough for print?" That depends on the application and size of reproduction. Take a look at my July *Trains* Travel column: Wayne Duffett exposed the three photos using his 8 megapixel Google Pixel 6 Android phone, and I thought these reproduced very well in the magazine. My wife has several 11x14-inch prints from her phone hanging on our wall.

More important than your choice of equipment is your vision. Keep your eyes open, soak in your experiences, seek the unusual, and enjoy your trip through photos of your friends, family, the trains you ride, and the places you experience. Take chances. You don't need to budget each and every frame like I did in 1984 but please remember to back up your images so your travel photos remain with you for a lifetime! — *Brian Solomon*

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