

**CPKC: IN THE CROSSHAIRS OF A TRADE WAR**

June 2025

# Trains®

## Last trains from Grand Central

Why intercity service  
from the New York  
City landmark  
came to an end

### PLUS

- The Sartigan Railway grows from the old Quebec Central
- Rhätische Bahn: Through the Alps, not around them
- Riding Amtrak's unusual New York-Savannah *Palmetto*





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Amtrak FL9 No. 486 leads the Lake Shore Limited through Spuyten Duyvil, N.Y., as it nears the end of its trip from Chicago on Feb. 23, 1991. Scott A. Hartley

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## From the Editor



### Carl Swanson

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Even those who have never seen it can instantly recognize the main concourse of New York City's Grand Central Terminal. Architectural historian H.R. Hitchcock, quoted in William D. Middleton's 1977 history *Grand Central*, called the massive concourse (275 feet long and 120 feet wide under a vaulted ceiling 125 feet high) "one of the grandest spaces the early 20th century ever enclosed."

The vast terminal complex is still there, of course, and it remains a masterpiece. But the last long-distance passenger train departed in 1991.

On page 14, Scott A. Hartley explains Amtrak's cross-town move to Penn Station and the days leading up to Grand Central becoming a commuter station.

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*Trains* (ISSN 0041-0934, USPS 529-850) is published monthly by Firecrown Media Inc., 405 Cherry Street, Chattanooga, TN 37402. Periodicals postage paid at Chattanooga, TN and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Trains*, PO Box 850, Lincolnshire, IL 60069.





## Amtrak CEO Gardner ousted

Under pressures including call for privatization, company looks to cut costs

▲ Amtrak's *Empire Builder* passes a CPKC train with CSX power in Brookfield, Ill., on Oct. 10, 2024. Presidential advisor Elon Musk has called for Amtrak's privatization. David Lassen



CEO Stephen Gardner speaks at Amtrak's annual public board meeting, held in Seattle in December 2024. Bob Johnston

**AMTRAK CEO STEPHEN GARDNER ANNOUNCED** he was resigning on March 19, with the Reuters news service reporting he was forced out by President Donald Trump's administration.

Facing pressures including a call from Trump advisor Elon Musk to privatize the service, Amtrak subsequently said it was looking at cost-saving measures including possible cuts to administrative positions.

"I am stepping down as CEO to ensure that Amtrak continues to enjoy the full faith and confidence of this administration," Gardner said in a statement. "I am so proud of what the Amtrak team has accomplished to bring passenger rail service to more people and places across the country over these past 16 years, and I thank the Board for their trust and support."

Gardner had been CEO since January 2022. With Amtrak since 2009, he previously served in positions including

chief operating and commercial officer and president.

Roger Harris, president since July 2022, is now Amtrak's top official. He informed employees of possible cuts in a March 27 email. In a statement the next day, the company said, "Given the current environment, the Executive Leadership Team and the Board have determined that we must act now. We will do this by examining our costs, including the size of our management staff, in a proactive and controlled way. In addition, we will be more selective in starting new projects and will look harder for efficiencies and innovative ways to address the problems and opportunities we face."

Gardner's departure came two weeks after Musk told a tech conference that Amtrak should be privatized, saying the passenger operator was "sad" in comparison to China's high-speed rail — a heavily funded government operation.

Musk offered no specifics on how Amtrak could be privatized or what company would be interested in running a passenger railroad that posted a \$705 million adjusted operating loss in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30. He also said anything that can be privatized should be, including the U.S. Postal Service.

Amtrak's response included a statement noting its record ridership and revenue in fiscal 2023-24, saying it was on a path to achieve "operational profitability" for the first time during the Trump administration. The company also issued a "white paper" report pointing out barriers to privatization and Great Britain's negative experience moving from public to private passenger operations.

Earlier, Trump nominated Robert Gleason, former head of the Pennsylvania Republican Party, for the final vacancy on the Amtrak board. — *Bob Johnston and Bill Stephens*





Horizon cars from two *Hiawatha* trainsets (foreground) sit in Amtrak's Chicago yard March 26, the day the cars were pulled from service. Bob Johnston

# Amtrak sidelines Horizon car fleet

Corrosion issues lead to cars' removal, widespread cancellations

**AMTRAK REMOVED ITS HORIZON RAILCAR FLEET** from service in March, citing concerns about corrosion, leading to numerous train cancellations and exacerbating an existing equipment crunch.

In a March 26 statement, the company said it had "discovered corrosion in several Horizon railcars and, while working with the manufacturer, decided to remove the equipment from service after learning of additional areas of concern from intensive inspections of multiple cars."

A total of 70 cars — 61 coaches and nine food-service cars — were affected, impacting service on the *Amtrak Cascades*, *Hiawatha*, *Borealis*, and *Downeaster* routes. They are part of a fleet of 104 cars ordered from Bombardier — now part of Alstom — delivered in 1989-80.

In response to subsequent questions from *Trains*, Amtrak said discovery of corrosion on one car led to inspection of others, where corrosion was found "in areas not normally visible during periodic inspections." The company did not offer details, but a *Trains* source described significant structural issues. Amtrak said its investigations show that corrosion is being accelerated by "the amount of water, ice,

and de-icing treatments that have accumulated over the lifecycle of the trains." At deadline, Amtrak said it had not identified a method of repair.

The cars are based on Comet commuter railcars first built for NJ Transit and its predecessors. NJ Transit, responding to a *Trains* inquiry, said it had not found any issues during initial inspection of its Comet II cars.

The largest resulting service disruption came in the Pacific Northwest, where 26 cars were sidelined, leading to buses replacing trains on all but one of the seven daily *Cascades* round trips in the Vancouver, British Columbia-Eugene, Ore., corridor. One Seattle-Eugene round trip continued to operate, using the *Cascades*' lone operable Oregon-owned Talgo Series 8 trainset. (A second is awaiting repairs after hitting a tree during a November 2024 storm.)

Restoration of other trains began April 1, using Amfleet I cars repositioned from elsewhere Amtrak's system. Those trains initially ran with reduced capacity — two coaches and a café, with just 17 Business Class seats — in order to restore frequencies as quickly as possible. The Washington State Department of Transportation said some trains would have just half their normal seating

capacity, and was uncertain how long those limitations would remain in place.

Chicago-Twin Cities *Borealis* service resumed with three-car consists of bi-level Superliner equipment after one day of cancellations. The train had usually operated with four Horizon cars and an Amfleet café; four-car Superliner trains had occasionally filled in previously when Horizons were sidelined with maintenance issues.

The Chicago-Milwaukee *Hiawatha* service initially saw three of its six daily round trips replaced by buses; some trains were able to continue running because the *Hiawatha* fleet also included Siemens Venture and Amfleet cars. But by March 30, all train service had been restored.

Patricia Quinn, executive director of the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, said in a March 26 email that the *Downeasters* had been operating for several months with one Horizon car and three Amfleet cars, but that she had been informed the night before that the Horizons were being pulled from service. "Effective today," Quinn wrote, "*Downeaster* service is operating five round trips daily with three Amfleet coaches in each consist."

— David Lassen



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# Union opposes CSX bid to use 'Zero to Zero' automation

Request to use automatic start-and-stop Trip Optimizer feature pending at FRA

## THE UNION THAT REPRESENTS CONDUCTORS

says it will ask the Federal Railroad Administration to deny CSX's request to become the first to use Trip Optimizer's Zero-to-Zero feature, which allows the cruise-control system to automatically start and stop trains.

CSX sought FRA permission to use Zero-to-Zero in 2022. The FRA has yet to decide on the safety waiver request, partly due to the need to conduct a detailed study and partly due to the agency's reluctance to approve technology-related waivers during the Biden administration.

CSX has said the goals of using automatic start and stop are to save fuel and improve safety by reducing the potential for train pull-aparts.

The SMART-TD union doesn't buy that. It sees Zero-to-Zero as a gateway to autonomous operations.

"While CSX claims the system will reduce fuel consumption and emissions, SMART-TD believes these claims are little more than a smokescreen for CSX's true intentions: cutting costs at the expense of safety," the union says.

If the FRA approves CSX's plan, other Class I railroads will likely follow CSX's lead and seek permission to use Zero-to-Zero.

The union claims Trip Optimizer — which has operated trains for more than

300 million miles — is "not ready for prime time," is unreliable, and poses a safety risk.

"A computer system or an algorithm cannot replace the skill, judgment, and adaptability of a trained engineer and conductor. Allowing a system that depends on flawed technology to control the train's most essential safety feature is a dangerous gamble," the union says.

In conventional Trip Optimizer use, the system's auto throttle mode is not designed to operate at slow speeds. Wabtec says Trip Optimizer can apply dynamic brakes, and when air brakes are required can recommend how much air the engineer should use and for how long, as well as when to release brakes.

Zero-to-Zero goes further by giving Trip Optimizer control of the train's air brakes, allowing it to start and stop a train automatically. The system receives signal aspects and track authorities from the positive train control system.

What Zero-to-Zero can't do: Operate a train automatically in areas where there are no signals, such as yards, or when entering passing sidings that require a train to stop within half the engineer's range of vision.

But it can automatically stop and start trains on the main — for crew changes, for example — as well as departing from passing sidings.

"CSX has lauded the proven fuel efficiency and environmental benefits of Trip Optimizer technology for more than 20 years," railroad spokesman Austin Staton says. "CSX is interested in saving an additional 4.9 million gallons of fuel per year when moving between 0 and 9 mph with Zero-to-Zero Trip Optimizer."

"While we are disappointed in SMART-TD's misrepresentation of CSX's enhanced use of Trip Optimizer, review of this technology is currently pending before the FRA," he adds. "CSX will continue to work with the FRA during this product approval process."

Wabtec did not respond to an email

seeking comment on the union's claims.

But Gary Wolf, a prominent derailment investigator and rail safety expert, says neither Trip Optimizer nor its Zero-to-Zero feature pose a safety risk.

"The airline industry has been using autopilot systems to operate aircraft for many years. The trucking industry is moving forward with driverless trucks. Compared to aircraft and trucks, it is relatively simple to operate a train on a fixed guideway," Wolf says, noting automated control systems have advanced since introduction 20 years ago.

Starting and stopping freight trains is an engineer's biggest challenge, says Wolf, a former locomotive engineer.

"If technology can assess the relative slack in the train, the relative velocity and deceleration rates of each railcar and where they are on the grade, and the propagation rate of the air brake reduction, then there is no question that it can do a superior job day in and day out of controlling train forces and minimizing fuel consumption," Wolf says. "The skillset of locomotive engineers, like aircraft pilots, ... fits a bell curve. Automation has the ability to bring the average, or even subpar, engineer up to the A+ level day in and day out. It will provide consistency, safety, and reliability in performance."

The FRA's two-person crew rule, along with contract agreements between labor and the Class I systems, don't permit engineer-only operation on most trains. Railroads are challenging the two-person crew rule in federal court. — *Bill Stephens*



CSX freight Q409 moves from the siding to the main at Wilsmere Yard near Wilmington, Del., on Feb. 16, 2022. Michael S. Murray



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## Fixes

**APRIL 2025**

**Page 40:** The title of Santa Fe's Warren Henry was listed incorrectly. At the time of the article, he was assistant to the vice president of operations. He later became assistant vice president of operations.



# Metra asks STB to require UP to run its trains

Operator says service 'in jeopardy' with impasse over financial terms

**SAYING ITS SERVICE** on three Union Pacific-owned lines is in jeopardy, Chicago commuter rail agency Metra has asked the Surface Transportation Board to require UP to continue to allow service once the freight railroad no longer provides crews.

Metra's March 7 filing asks the board to provide terminal trackage rights, defining the entire Chicago area as a terminal, under a federal regulation allowing the STB to require such rights covering "terminal facilities, including main-line tracks for a reasonable distance outside of a terminal."

Union Pacific, which has long sought to exit the commuter operation it provides under a purchase-of-service contract, said earlier this year operations would be transferred to Metra in April. But the two sides have been unable to agree on financial terms accompanying that transfer. Metra's filing said the two sides were at an impasse, and that Metra "cannot accede to UP's unilateral and unreasonable economic terms."

Because of a 2023 court ruling, UP is not obligated to continue operating commuter trains, Metra said, meaning UP could deny Metra access to its lines. Throughout their dispute, which includes earlier STB-ordered mediation, both sides have said service will continue while the issues are resolved.

Union Pacific requested more time to respond, saying Metra's filing "raises significant threshold questions about the board's general jurisdiction ... and its specific jurisdiction over the lines at issue." The board granted a 20-day extension (UP had requested 30) and set a schedule to consider the case that would see the issue in the hands of board members by late June.

In a related matter, Metra announced it was considering options to rename its lines, in part because it will need new labels for the current UP North, Northwest, and West routes. It surveyed riders on three options: a largely status-quo plan; an "M for Metra" plan that would number its lines 1 through 14; and a "Cardinal Direction System" using direction labels (N 1-4 for North lines, for example) as well as colors corresponding to the Chicago terminal station for each line. That process will continue into 2026. — *David Lassen*

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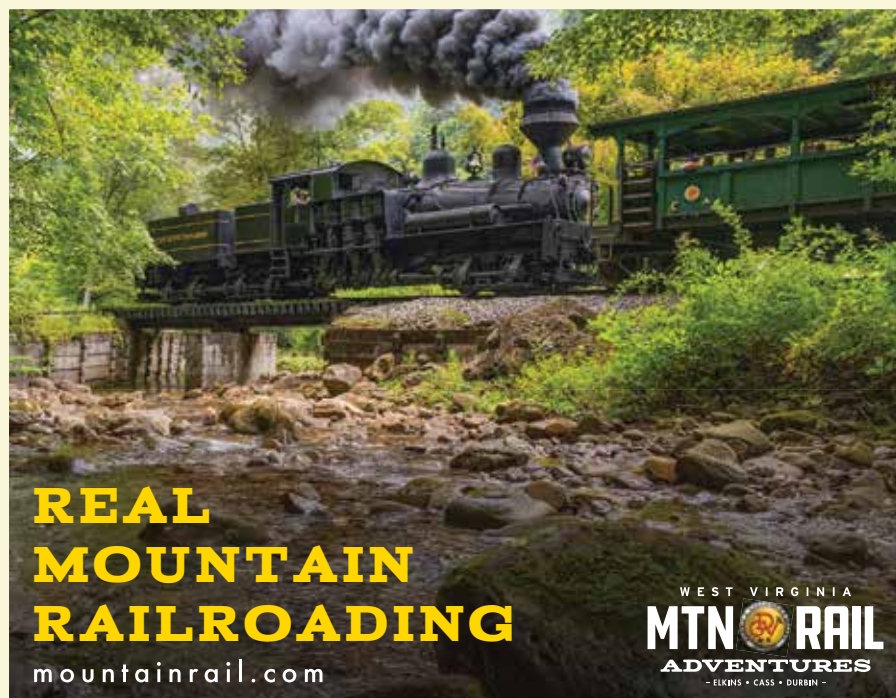
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**COLOR CODING:** Amtrak is adding color coding at car doors to help passengers identify where to board: green for coach, blue for Business Class, and red for First Class. The first examples were two Amfleet coaches released from the company's Bear, Del., shops. Amtrak/Matt Donnelly



**GOING GREEN:** Metro-North's latest heritage unit, honoring the New York, New Haven & Hartford, leads a train through Cold Spring, N.Y., on March 14, 2025. P32AC-DM No. 222 is wrapped with the green-and-yellow New Haven scheme used until 1954. Scott A. Hartley



**TRIAL RUN** Rocky Mountaineer's train passes Castle Gate near Helper, Utah, on March 28, 2025, during a trial run for expanded three-day Denver-Salt Lake City trips to begin in 2026, when the name will change to Canyon Spirit. The trip will feature layovers in Glenwood Springs, Colo., and Moab, Utah. Chip Sherman



## NEWS BRIEFS

## MBTA begins South Coast Rail service

The **MASSACHUSETTS BAY TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY** launched its long-awaited **SOUTH COAST RAIL** service on March 24, marking completion of a \$1.1 billion project that brought service to New Bedford, Fall River, and Taunton, Mass., the three largest cities within 50 miles of Boston that had previously been without commuter rail access. The extension of the existing Middleborough/Lakeville Line added 37 miles and six stations to the MBTA commuter rail network. Rides were free to and from the new stations for the first eight days, with free weekend service continuing through April.

Boosted by increased operations and lower ticket prices, **AMTRAK's** *Winter Park Express* ski train saw ridership increase by more than 150%, a state official said. Piper Darlington, director of the **COLORADO TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENT OFFICE**, told the state **TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION** at a March meeting that the train saw more than 41,000 bookings for 2024-25 season, up from about 16,000 the previous year. State funding helped lower ticket prices to as little as \$19 one-way, while the number of operating days increased from 40 to 69, and cars were added to increase train capacity.

For the second straight year, a state legislator has introduced a bill calling for privatization of the **ALASKA RAILROAD**. The bill introduced in February by state Rep. Kevin McCabe would require sale of the railroad to be completed in February 2027. McCabe was critical of the railroad's failure to help develop state resources during a hearing on the bill introduced in 2024.

The Canadian government expanded its financial commitment to the **HUDSON BAY RAILWAY** and the port of Churchill, Manitoba, providing Ca\$175 million over the next five years. That includes \$125 million for operation and maintenance of the 627-mile railway spun off from **CANADIAN NATIONAL** lines, the only year-round land transport available to the Arctic Ocean port. The railway and port are owned by **ARCTIC GATEWAY GROUP**, a partnership of 29 First Nations and 12 communities served by the railway.



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# CPKC keeps fingers crossed in trade war

The railway was built to tap  
North American free trade



**Bill Stephens**  
bybillstephens@gmail.com  
Analysis: Trains.com



Canadian Pacific Kansas City CEO Keith Creel is the calm in the center of an international storm that threatens to engulf his railroad.

With the 2023 merger of Canadian Pacific and Kansas City Southern, Creel's CP made a \$31 billion all-in bet on the combined railways' ability to tap growing free trade in North America.

But now the second Trump administration has launched a trade war. Although they were exempt from the reciprocal tariffs announced on April 2, Canada and Mexico were the first tariff targets, and have said they will respond in kind. Where this ends no one can say.

Certainly none of this looks good for CPKC, which earns 41% of its revenue from cross-border shipments. Perhaps no other company has more riding on the outcome of the spat involving the United States and two of its largest trading partners.

Yet Creel says the threat is overblown. Although the Trump administration aims to reduce trade imbalances, Creel says the economies of the U.S., Canada, and Mexico are inextricably linked. You just can't unscramble the omelet.

Trade disputes will be ironed out, Creel contends, and so CPKC will be able to fully exploit its ability to provide single-line service to all three countries.

Take auto production, for example. Auto and parts imports from Mexico and Canada are partially exempt from tariffs. Roughly 16 million new light vehicles are sold in the U.S. annually. Assembly plants in the U.S., however, only have the capacity to build

around 10 million cars and trucks. Plants in Mexico and Canada help plug that production gap. And increasingly it's CPKC that's bringing those vehicles to the U.S., thanks in no small part to its innovative closed-loop auto rack supply system. Periodic shortages of auto racks have plagued assembly plants, particularly in Mexico — so much so that automakers resort to short-sea shipping across the Gulf of Mexico to get vehicles to U.S. ports.

CPKC has solved this problem for General Motors. The railway picks up auto racks loaded with Silverado pickups at GM's assembly plant in Oshawa, Ontario, and delivers them to the auto ramp it opened in June in Wylie, Texas, outside Dallas. CPKC then forwards the empty auto racks to General Motors assembly plants in Mexico, where they're loaded with Chevrolet and GMC sport utility vehicles. CPKC then hauls them north to auto ramps in the U.S. and Canada, and completes the loop by returning the empties to Oshawa.

CPKC's auto traffic was up 23% last year. The best any other Class I could muster was 1% growth. Other automakers are expected to join CPKC's closed-loop system.

Cross-border intermodal is another area that Creel says will keep growing. Schneider is bullish on CPKC's Mexico Midwest Express service, which was up more than 40% in the first quarter. And Schneider executives see twice as much potential volume coming from truck conversion in the joint CPKC-CSX lane linking the Southeast with Mexico via their new Alabama interchange.

CPKC also is tapping a new intermodal market: Cross-border, temperature-controlled food shipments. Via an Americold cold storage facility scheduled to open this summer at CPKC's intermodal terminal in Kansas City, the railway will handle southbound shipments of beef and pork to Mexico. The containers will return northbound with loads of Mexican produce, food, and beverages bound for the Midwest, Southeast, and Canada.

Creel concedes that his railway is not tariff proof. If tariffs make U.S. markets less attractive to Canadian and Mexican companies, then those exporters are going to look elsewhere, he says. In this scenario, CPKC could become a land bridge fostering trade between Canada and Mexico.

Some observers say Creel is doing his best to put lipstick on a pig. No one wins a trade war, they say, and tariffs will raise prices, change consumer spending habits, and ultimately reduce the amount of cross-border freight available to CPKC. Plus, any increase in trade between Mexico and Canada could never fill the hole tariffs may blow in their trade with the U.S.

Will tariffs once again merely be a negotiating tool? Or will they signal the beginning of the end of CPKC's ability to cash in on North American trade? For now all CPKC can do is keep its fingers crossed — and hope the storm blows over. **I**



With a cut of auto racks in tow, the first repainted CPKC units lead train No. M251 at Nahant, Iowa, on May 25, 2024. Jeremy J. Schrader



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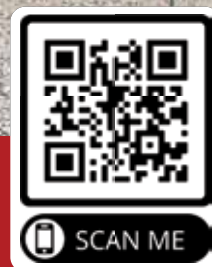
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# Another view of the Civil War

An era of rapid and profound transition in railroading

▲ Replacing the bridge over Potomac Creek in Northern Virginia was one of the first challenges facing the newly created United States Military Railroad under the direction of Gen. Herman Haupt. Retreating Confederate forces had destroyed the original 1842 bridge near Fredericksburg. Haupt directed a contingent of ordinary soldiers, local farmers, and whoever else he could find to cut sufficient timber to erect this 400-foot-long, 100-foot-high temporary trestle. It took nine working days and reopened a vital rail link for the Union Army. The engineering was quite conventional. The speed with which it was built under trying circumstances was remarkable. Andrew J. Russell photo, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

**ALMOST EXACTLY 160 YEARS AGO**, the American Civil War wound down to a messy and anticlimactic end. By December 1864, it was apparent the Union had prevailed. It didn't necessarily win, but at least southern secession had been thwarted.

If noticed at all, the anniversary might be an occasion to recount the many roles railroading played in the war.

The standard narrative is that railroad mobility was a crucial supporting factor in supplying and enabling northern armies, ensuring victory.

I'd like to turn that well-worn interpretation on its head and ask a different question. What did the war do to, and for, railroad transportation?

The changes were rapid, profound, lasting, and formed the real basis for a century of truly "modern" railroading.

## THE PIONEER PHASE

We toss about the term "pioneer" without having to be specific. Some pioneer phases unfold over hundreds of years. Proposing 35 years (1825-1860) for railroading's pioneer phase doesn't seem unreasonable.

The first dozen years were on a steep learning curve. Then

came the Panic of 1837, an economic upheaval second only to the Great Depression of almost a century later. It wasn't until about 1850 that the country was humming along again and in a position to expand beyond the Mississippi Valley.

While the 1850s were productive and railroading did innovate (the initial adoption of steel, embrace of the telegraph, use of coal as fuel, opening of reasonably long railroads), it generally remained conservative (almost timid) in its business models and strategic thinking. That was especially true in the South.

Northern railroads recognized the need to connect major cities, connect seaports with productive hinterlands, and generally understood that railroad mobility, mixed economic development, and prosperity were intertwined and mutually reinforcing.

In the South, coastal and riverine transport linked major places. Railroads primarily connected major coastal cities with interior points catering to the cotton trade, the foundation of the economy, the plantation system, and foreign trade. All three depended on slave labor.

Political power, especially in the U.S. Senate, was almost equally divided and had for decades been in a stalemate over the expansion of slavery into newly forming western states.

Three colossal forces collided to upset that delicate balance. The first was the almost irresistible pressure to expand white settlement west of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. That was the powder.

Throughout the 1850s, railroad technology improved and capital flowed. Entrepreneurs were pushing railroads westward, opening up vast expanses of land for agriculture. The discovery of gold and silver in Colorado fed the illusion that untold wealth lay about for the taking. Railroads could provide access. That was the fuse.

The organization of territories and new states was the spark. Earlier compromises to keep the number of free and slave states equal had held for a few decades. This time, it looked like the admission of more new free states than slave states, coupled with the rise of an avowedly anti-slavery party headed by a young Illinois lawyer named Lincoln, would mean the end of chattel slavery



in the United States. Lincoln's election in 1860 made war inevitable.

Thirty-five years into the industry's existence, railroads strongly influenced the timing, proximate causes, and even the war's conduct. It was not unexpected. But no one was prepared for how it unfolded.

### A DECADE OF HELL

Both North and South recognized, at least superficially, the potential of railroad mobility. That was demonstrated at the first Battle of Bull Run when the timely arrival of fresh Confederate troops enabled the rout of poorly organized Federals. The South was the first to move a large body of men and equipment a great distance by rail, in a surprisingly short time.

What the North quickly grasped, and the South never fully seemed to, was that conflict at this scale was a war of attrition and logistics. The Union encouraged industrial production, exploited resources, and ratcheted up every technology and advantage at its disposal. The South, for a variety of ideological reasons, avoided interfering with private industry, did not exercise much control of its railroads until it was too late, and never grasped the reality that total war required a very different way of playing the cards in your hand.

The creation of the United States Military Railroad was a stroke of genius. Its leader, Daniel McCallum, was a civil engineer by training and a brilliant organizer. He was assisted by Herman Haupt, a Pennsylvania Railroad civil engineer especially effective in the field. At war's end, the USMRR's scale, scope, and complexity equaled that of a Class I railroad in the 1920s. Its methods and successes were not lost on the rest of the industry.

Perhaps the most noteworthy single artifact of the Civil War was the Transcontinental Railroad, conceived much earlier but only possible after the South seceded. Construction took off with the infusion of men and resources following war's end. Overall, it was the integration of so many systems, assets, talents, and missions that distinguishes the North's railroad's remarkable performance over the course of the war. It was an unrelenting trial for all involved. At the same time, it radically changed expectations as to what a railroad should, and could, be.

### THE AFTERMATH

The nation continued to reel after the trauma of the war and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. The immediate tasks for northern railroads were to address new commercial realities, repair and replace worn equipment, and generally create a different normal after years of extreme distortion. For southern railroads, it was a



**Late in the conflict, City Point in Virginia became one of the busiest ports on the East Coast. Located at the confluence of the James and Appomattox rivers, roughly 70 miles upriver from Norfolk and 10 miles from Petersburg, it was Ulysses Grant's headquarters during the siege of Petersburg. The United States Military Railroad turned what had been the east end of the South Side Railroad linking Petersburg and points west into a major intermodal facility handling supplies for a massive Federal force. Steamboats, sailing ships, and barges carrying boxcars loaded with ammunition and stores were handled briskly at all hours of the day or night. It was a display of logistical power and sophistication never seen before.**

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

matter of mere survival and trying to envision any stable future at all.

One consequence of the war is often mentioned, but rarely examined in depth. Almost overnight, hundreds of thousands of soldiers and sailors returned to civilian life in a country altered in almost every respect. Many of those veterans became railroaders because that was where the work was, but also because railroad work offered new challenges. Many had been farm boys or laborers. After seeing combat (or even in supporting roles), I can imagine it would have been difficult to return to subsistence agriculture or the vagaries of casual work.

These war-hardened men fundamentally changed the way railroading was imagined and executed. Almost every veteran brought military training and discipline, perhaps useful skill sets, and experience with rules-based operations to an industry that just a decade before had been struggling to instill those very qualities in its new hires.

What also changed following the war was a series of unprecedented convergences. To take advantage of these unfolding opportunities required the kinds of mobility only railroading could provide. Unlike the cautious, tentative Antebellum railroad industry, its postwar expression was confi-

dent, muscular, and mission-oriented.

The 1870s and 1880s comprised a bewildering wave of new science, technology, and social change. There were conflicts — the Panic of 1873 was precipitated in part by railroad financing irregularities, and the railroad strikes of 1877 and 1894 exposed deep divides in the social order. This was an age of *laissez-faire* economics, great wealth inequality, and levels of corruption and malfeasance that dazzled the world with its creativity and boldness.

Many tragedies and scandals — the Ashtabula train wreck of 1876 or the Union Pacific's Credit Mobilier financing scheme (a billion-dollar scam) — prompted massive reforms in the early 20th century. Nevertheless, railroading prospered, matured into its final form, and by 1900 had solidified its role as the continent's life-giving circulatory system.

Speculation is always risky. It is also a fine way to test our understandings of the past, and how we got here today. Anniversaries are an invitation to be skeptical and perhaps even contrarian.

Revisiting Civil War railroading is merely one opportunity. There are many more, if we have the wisdom to question established history. The past may look very different. — *John P. Hankey*





Story and photos by Scott A. Hartley

# Last trains from Grand Central

Intercity service from New York City  
landmark comes to an end in 1991

The *Lake Shore Limited* nears the end of its trip from Chicago on Feb. 23, 1991, passing under the Henry Hudson Parkway at Spuyten Duyvil. The Empire Connection bridge across the Harlem River is in the background.







N

ew York City's Grand Central Terminal may be America's best-known train station.

Located in midtown Manhattan, it offers just about everything: a magnificent Beaux-Arts exterior, a huge interior concourse seen in hundreds of movies and television shows, stores, restaurants of all sorts, a tennis club, and access to New York's subway system and all that the nation's largest city has to offer.

What it does not offer, however, are intercity and long-distance passenger trains. Since 1991, only commuter trains have operated in and out of Grand Central.

GCT, as railroaders and many residents call it, had been home to New York Central's and New Haven Railroad's finest trains from the time the station opened in 1913. The 1968 merger of NYC and competitor Pennsylvania Railroad formed the new Penn Central, which later included the New Haven. PC shifted New Haven's intercity trains to the former PRR Pennsylvania Station, just a mile southwest of Grand Central. But there was no connecting track to reroute the former New York Central trains from Chicago, upstate New York, Toronto, and Montreal into Penn.

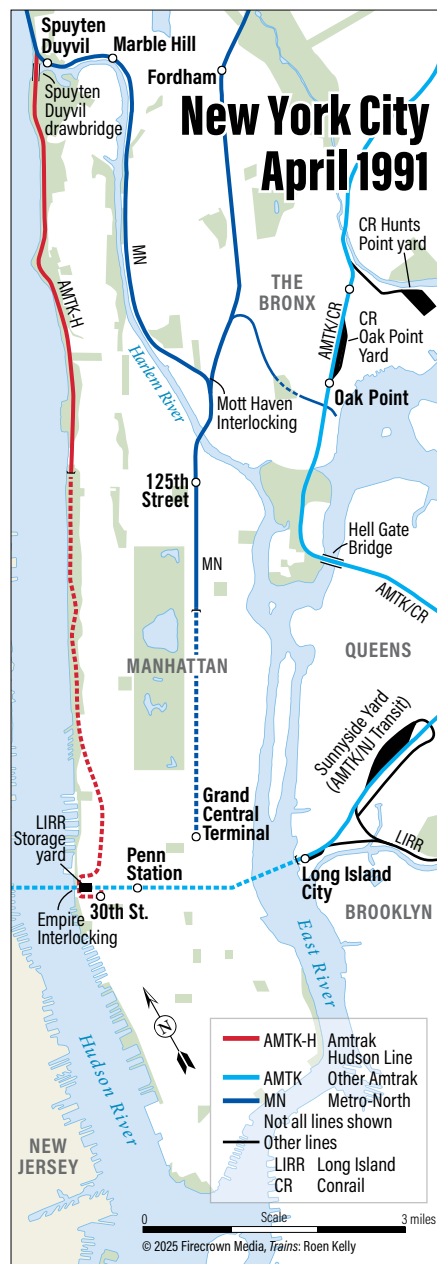
When Amtrak assumed responsibility for most of the

nation's intercity passenger trains in 1971, the company quickly moved to eliminate duplicate routes and facilities, but that could not be done in New York. At considerable expense, Amtrak continued to support operations at both Grand Central and Pennsylvania Station. Many of the route's 1.3 million annual passengers continued to be inconvenienced, as well — anyone wishing to make a connection between New York state and Northeast Corridor trains was required to take a taxi or ride the subway between the stations.

With few possible solutions, Amtrak soon focused on the former New York Central freight line that ran the length of the west side of Manhattan Island, which passed over the west end of Pennsylvania Station's tracks. Lightly used by Penn Central and later Conrail, it was mostly dormant by the late 1970s. Under the leadership of Amtrak's longest-serving president, W. Graham Claytor, Jr., the passenger railroad purchased the line from Conrail in 1986 for \$4 million. A 5-year, \$89 million project rebuilt the route from its connection with the ex-NYC Hudson Line at Spuyten Duyvil south 11 miles to a point near Penn Station. The work included double tracking, rebuilding a swing bridge at the north tip of Manhattan, and most important, a box tunnel connecting the West Side Line with Amtrak at







Top, Amtrak FL9 No. 489 leads the north-bound *Niagara Rainbow* along the Harlem River at Marble Hill, March 16, 1991.

Far left, Earlier the same day, the same locomotive is southbound with the *Bear Mountain* at Marble Hill, also on March 16, 1991.

Left, Grand Central's Solari board for the Metro-North Hudson and Harlem lines shows two Amtrak trains nearing departure in December 1989. Bob Johnston

Harlem-Hudson Lines				
DEPARTURES				
Scheduled Departure	Track	Destination	Remarks	
UPPER LEVEL	LOWER LEVEL			
7:30 PM	28	NO. WHITE PLAINS	DEPARTED	
7:35 PM	41	ALBANY- RENSSELAER	Amtrak	
7:45 PM	18	CHICAGO	Amtrak	
7:48 PM	33	BREWSTER NORTH	CONNECTION TO DOVER PLAINS	
7:55 PM	30	POUGHKEEPSIE	CONNECTION TO PUGHKEEPSIE	



the west throat of Penn Station. Named “the Empire Connection,” the route allowed trains from the former New York Central to operate in and out of the ex-PRR Manhattan hub. Eliminating GCT from Amtrak’s route map was expected to save the company \$2 million annually.

Amtrak passengers would benefit from the many conveniences of Penn Station, but would no longer be able to see the interesting cityscapes on the old route along the Harlem River and over the lengthy Park Avenue Viaduct. As might be expected, this change of routing brought out many railroad photographers, wanting to record on Kodachrome intercity passenger trains on the Grand Central route for the last time. It was in an era that Amtrak named all of its trains, even those running on the relatively short Albany-New York City route. Traditional New York Central names, such as the *Lake Shore Limited* and *Empire State Express*, shared tracks with trains with New York Central themes like the *Washington*







Opposite top, a train to mark the opening of the Empire Connection pauses under the George Washington Bridge on April 4, 1991.



Opposite below, Rohr Turboliner No. 154, on the southbound *Hudson Highlander*, traverses the Metro-North Mott Haven interlocking in the Bronx, March 16, 1991.

Above, the southbound *Niagara Rainbow* is about to enter the Park Avenue Tunnel, March 16, 1991.

Left, an *Empire Service* train is set to depart Grand Central with an HEP generator car behind the FL9 in March 1991. With the move to Penn Station, the FL9s were modified to operate with LIRR third-rail systems. Bob Johnston

*Irving*, the *Niagara Rainbow*, and the *Bear Mountain*. Two versions of Turboliner trains, built in France and California, shared assignments with aging New Haven dual-mode FL9s and Amfleet cars. All of this equipment would utilize Long

Island Rail Road-style third-rail power in Penn Station, and remain in New York service for a few more years. Only the route would change.

A special inaugural train with Amtrak officers and state and local elected officials made

a press run on Thursday, April 4, 1991, departing from Albany-Rensselaer and running down the new West Side route. Claytor, company president during the turbulent years from 1982 to 1993, was on board, and called the new line "the

most important passenger improvement Amtrak has made in the last decade."

The last Amtrak trains departed GCT on April 6, 1991. All arrivals and departures began using Penn Station the following day. **I**





**+** SWITZERLAND'S METER-GAUGE MARVEL: PART 1 **+**

# Through the Alps, not around them



A photograph of a snowy mountain landscape. In the foreground, a red and white striped safety fence runs across the frame. Behind it, a tall grey signal post stands with a red light illuminated. To the right of the signal post is a two-story building with a grey facade and brown window frames. The building has a sign that reads "EWB 1904". In the background, a steep, snow-covered mountain slope rises, dotted with evergreen trees. A train track is visible on the left side of the image.

A Rhätische Bahn train emerges from the new Albula tunnel on Sept. 14, 2024. The tall building at left was relocated by about 30 feet as part of the effort to preserve the area's original look.



# Scenery defines the Rhätische Bahn, and makes operating a challenge

Story and photos by David Lassen

**W**e are walking — carefully — in a nearly 6-kilometer-long former railroad tunnel in the Swiss Alps, its floor an uneven layer of ballast following the removal of rail and ties. There are lights in the distance, but for the moment, flashlights are our only illumination.

Paul Loser shines a light on the tunnel wall. Loser (pronounced Low-ser) is manager of the project that has replaced this 5.8-kilometer (3.6-mile) bore, the Albula Tunnel. He is about to illustrate why the Rhätische Bahn — in English,

the Rhaetian Railway — built a new tunnel instead of rehabilitating this one. He pushes a finger between stones in the tunnel wall — and easily digs out the material between them.

“There was mortar,” he says. “These days, you only have

sand. All the mortar has disappeared.” A little farther along, he points out an opening in the floor: “Here is the old drainage system. It was covered by stones, but it has collapsed during the last 100 years.”

The tunnel project is one example of how geography, geology, and weather pose challenges for the Rhätische Bahn, the meter-gauge railway in the Swiss canton of Graubünden, in the country’s southeastern corner. Electrified like all Swiss railroads, save a handful of tourist operations, its relatively compact 385-kilometer (240-mile) system sees about 800 trains a day. But it is mostly known for two: the *Bernina Express*, a dazzling trip between St. Moritz and Tirano, Italy, and its part of the *Glacier Express*, the “World’s Slowest Express Train,” which takes almost 8 hours for the 180 miles between St. Moritz and Zermatt, the resort town at the foot of the Matterhorn.

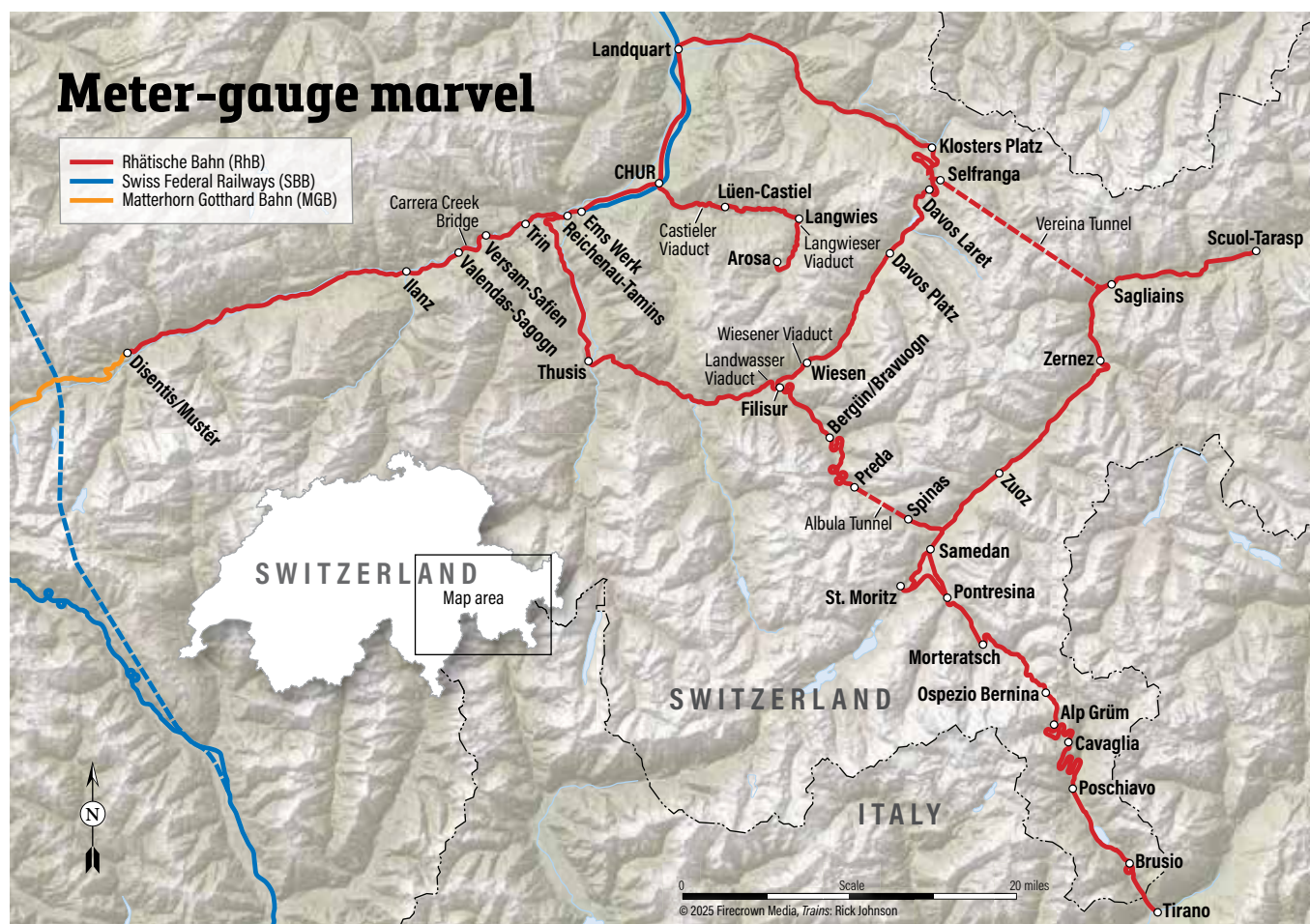
There is much more to the



**Tunnel project manager Paul Loser discusses a piece of lining that has fallen from the ceiling of the old Albula tunnel.**

RhB than those two trains. And the scenery that makes them bucket-list journeys also requires the Rhätische Bahn to be something of an engineering marvel. About a third of its route-miles are at 1,500 meters (4,900 feet) or higher; its alpine heights and valleys require some 115 tunnels and 606 bridges, accounting for about 19% of its mileage.

This first of a two-part article





on this remarkable railway examines three projects illustrating the infrastructure and operational challenges of railroading in the Alps:

- The Albula Tunnel. The new tunnel, replacing the crumbling bore from 1903, opened June 12, 2024. The old tunnel is being rehabilitated for use as an emergency access route.
- The Carrera Creek bridge. The modest structure on RhB's line between Chur and Disentis/Mustér replaces earlier bridges destroyed by flooding. It has an elaborate safety system to warn of and protect from future incidents.
- The Castieler Viaduct. On the short, steep Arosa branch, this replaces an older bridge in a geologically challenging location, with one end on a slowly sliding hillside. The creative solution: a bridge that can have its length adjusted as the hillside moves.

**Tunneling through 'liquid sand'**

The Albula Tunnel, which crests at 5,970 feet (1,820 meters), is the summit of the RhB line linking the headquarters city of Chur to the key southern junction at Samedan. From there, trains can go southwest to St. Moritz, south to Pontresina and the Bernina Line, or north-east to Scuol-Tarasp.

The Albula — the second highest of Switzerland's major tunnels — is crucial to operations. "If we have, say, an interruption there, it's a big mess," says Loser.

The tunnel, opened in 1903, began to deteriorate after a century of use; the railroad's head of fleet management, Markus Zaugg, recalls debris falling from the ceiling onto his locomotive during his days as a driver. The RhB was faced with the choice of restoring or replacing it. Replacement proved to be the better option. Not only was the cost nearly the same, but it allowed uninterrupted operations through the existing bore while the new one was built. Otherwise, "you could only work during the night and drive the train in the tunnels during the day," Loser says. "So that



Bridges and tunnels account for some 19% of the Rhätische Bahn's route-miles. The Arosa Line's Langwieser Viaduct over the Plessur River, at 932 feet long and 203 feet high, is not the railroad's longest or highest, but is certainly among the most spectacular.

RhB infrastructure facts			
	Route-miles	Route-km	
Total distance	240	385	
	No.	Length/height	Length/height (metric)
Tunnels	115	38.64 miles	58.696 km
Bridges	606	10.2 miles	16.411 km
Longest tunnel: Vereina		11.83 miles	19.042 km
Longest bridge: Landwasser Viaduct		985 feet	285 meters
Highest bridge: Wiesner Viaduct		292 feet	89 meters
Highest point: Ospizio Bernina		7,395 feet	2,254 meters
Lowest point: Tirano, Italy		1,440.3 feet	429 meters

would be a very long project."

A new tunnel can also meet modern Swiss safety requirements: the original bore will become an emergency escape route accessible through a series of cross passages between tubes.

In visits to three major Swiss tunnel projects — the Gotthard Base Tunnel ("The Hole Truth," February 2017), the Lötschberg Base Tunnel ("Finishing the job," April 2025), and the Albula — I have learned that while

the construction is largely similar, each tends to include at least one unique, difficult engineering challenge. Here, it was a short seam of highly pressurized, extremely unstable rock called cellular dolomite. This material extends for about 60 meters, and was "like liquid sand," Zaugg says. When reached by a test bore, "it came shooting out, like it was a fire hose." Clearly, normal tunneling procedures were out.

"We were thinking, how can we go through it without damaging the existing tunnel?" Loser says. "Because when you take out materials, it changes the stress in the rock. It could be damaging for the existing tunnel, and of course for people, too. One hundred years ago, 16 persons died during construction of the tunnel."

The solution was ingenious, and complicated. Freezing the rock made it stable enough to





**Top:** With tracks and catenary removed, the arrow-straight, 3.6-mile original Albula tunnel is now in the process of being turned into an emergency access road. **Below:** A portion of the tunnel's drainage system has collapsed, leaving a hole in the floor.

dig through; the resulting bore could then be lined with almost 4 feet of concrete. Since freezing rock in the middle of a mountain is hardly an everyday job, the solution created its own problems — like where to put the required cooling equipment.

The answer was to excavate one of the cross passages in very stable rock, then enlarge the space to house the freezing equipment. That equipment also required backup sources of electricity, to ensure the material remained frozen 24 hours a day, seven days a week, during excavation. (The enlarged space was filled in once the project was complete.)

“So we made the cavern, and then we were drilling these parallel holes, and we put some liquid in it,” Loser says. The liquefied rock was then chilled to about minus-30 degrees Celsius (minus-22 Fahrenheit).

This worked, although it was a slow process: “We and the experts had no experience in such challenging conditions, so it was a bit of trial and error.”

Addressing those 60 meters — slightly more than 1% of the 5,860-meter tunnel — took about two years, including excavation of the equipment cavern, equipment installation, freezing, meter-by-meter excavation, and installation of the lining. Yes, it was expensive. “More or less, it’s 10% of the entire cost,” Loser says. That would make it about 40 million Swiss francs, since the total cost was 407 million Swiss Francs (currently about \$450 million).

This helps explain why it took 10 years to build the new tunnel, compared to five years for the bore completed in 1903. Also a factor: modern construction and safety requirements. Whereas the original



**Top:** A 2017 view of the massive cavern built for the freezing equipment and other elements needed to tunnel through highly unstable rock in a short section of the Albula tunnel. **Below:** a closer look at excavation at the face of that segment. Two photos, Rhätische Bahn/Andrea Badrutt

tunnel was a year-round project employing about 1,300 workers, the new tunnel — excavated from each end, meeting in the middle — had only about 150 workers on each side. And it shut down for about 2½ months each year because of avalanche concerns. There also were restrictions because of the active rail line in the original tunnel. Blasting needed to be scheduled around train operation, and before trains could run again, the old tunnel was inspected to ensure there had been no damage.

The other great challenge was more administrative than technical. The Albula Line is a UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Site — a recognition of both its scenery and engineering. [It is one of just four rail routes so listed world-

wide.] This required extreme sensitivity to maintaining the existing characteristics.

“The first approach of the heritage [organization] was: ‘It’s not allowed, so you cannot build a new one. It’s impossible!’” Loser says. “Then they had some ideas.” At first, they were willing only to permit a small emergency access tunnel; then they said a new tunnel could be built only if it used the existing tunnel portals.

“Let’s say it took about two years until we could explain, and make it clear for the heritage, that we need to construct a new tunnel for all of these reasons — safety and quality and durability and so on,” he says. “Ultimately, a high-quality design solution was evaluated in a competition, which paved the way for the new building.”

With conditions, of course. Buildings at each end that were



in the path of the new portals could not be torn down; they had to be moved and restored to their original condition. A historic structure known as a double keeper's house at Preda, on the tunnel's north end, was moved 10 meters; a smaller switch house was relocated by 6 meters. Stations at Preda and Spinas, on the south end, were also shifted. The new portals had to look like the old ones, and be placed as close as possible to the existing portals. (As a result, while the original Albula Tunnel is arrow straight, the new one curves away from those portals to achieve the 30-meter separation of the two bores for most of their length.)

The goal was to preserve the pre-project appearance. "You had to have an inventory of all the buildings and surroundings and every rock, where it was and how it looks," Zaugg says. "And it has to be exactly the same after the construction. ... Rocks had to be chiseled down to the shape of the old rocks."

"At first it sounds ridiculous, but afterward, when you see the results, it was totally good. It would take out the very soul of the line if you take off the buildings and make a new, fancy tunnel entrance."

Even within those constraints, the project made some improvements. Before, as Loser tells it, the Preda station was not particularly attractive, after a hodgepodge of additions over the years. The project restored it to its original, charming wood design. And to meet Swiss accessibility laws, the station and platforms now include ramps for the handicapped; the attractive use of natural wood in this new construction is in keeping with the surroundings.

Some construction equipment remains while the old tunnel is refurbished, but most everything else in Preda looks as if it has been there forever — which was the whole point.

### Walls of water — liquid or frozen

On a railroad with many spectacular bridges, the one at Carrera Creek is nondescript — a steel-and-concrete struc-



**A train from Disentis/Mustér to Chur crosses the Carrera Creek bridge. The relatively nondescript structure, over a stream feeding the Rhine, is notable for the monitoring and warning systems it offers to address a history of flash flooding that has destroyed two earlier bridges in the same spot.**

ture over a gravelly wash feeding into the Rhine River.

But this bridge — between the Versam-Safien and Valendas-Sagogn stations on the railroad's westernmost line — is a reminder that mountainous territory is subject to dramatic, dangerous changes in weather.

This is the third bridge to span Carrera Creek; two were wiped out by flash floods. Both times, derailments resulted, but without serious incident, explains Gilbert Zimmerman, head of maintenance for the northern portion of the railroad.

Zimmerman and I, along with a member of the RhB

communications department, have been dropped at the site by a track maintenance machine, which scurries off to clear the track for passenger movements. It will return for us in about an hour.

Low clouds on a drizzly day are apparently robbing us of quite a view. "There's a huge valley that looks like this" — we're in a gorge cut by the Rhine — "but is much bigger," Zimmerman says. All water from that valley funnels to this creek; a major thunderstorm can turn the flow from a trickle to a torrent in moments. "When you are down here in the creek,"

Zimmerman says, "you are not able to flee, it is coming so fast."

He says this as we stand in the creek bed. Fortunately, the rain this day is more annoying than substantial — and there is now a warning system that includes a monitor on a roadway bridge upstream, as well as monitors here.

As we stand under the bridge, he points out a monitoring device under the bridge walkway, and brings out his cellphone. A phone app shows a cross-section image of the creek, and the current water level. If that level suddenly rises to a set point, Zimmerman receives an alert, and trackside signals automatically switch to red. (The monitoring is sensitive enough that Zimmerman says we cannot stand where we are for too long, because the device will detect us — and interpret us as a rise in the water level, triggering an alert.)

With flash flooding, it's not just the water that poses a threat. The water flow can bring down "tons of rock," he says. This can clog the area under the bridge, increasing the risk.

"After these events, we have to clean up here. We have to make more space [under the bridge]," he says. "One digging costs about 80,000 francs. Ten years ago, we did something



**Monitoring for the Carrera Creek bridge includes a camera mounted on this pole on the creek's east side, as well as a device tucked under the bridge that tracks the water level through a cellphone app.**





**Weather is a constant source of concern for Rhätische Bahn operations. This significant early-season snowstorm brought down catenary on the line between Klosters Platz and Davos. This meet at Davos Laret came after service was restored following an outage of several hours.**

every two years, or every five years. Now we are doing this twice a year. It's an effect of climate change, and this raises the cost." His biggest concern is when storms come close together, before he has a chance to act. "These are the moments when I have bad sleep," he says.

Clearing the stream bed is not just a matter of bringing in heavy equipment as the need arises. This portion of the Rhine is a whitewater rafting destination and a nature reserve.

"When we have many rocks under the bridge," he says, "we have to bring [the material] down to the Rhine. But we are not allowed to do this all of the time because of the fishes and the birds that are nesting here. So we have to manage this with nature, and sometimes we have to say [to the government], now we need to move it down because it's too high."

Imagining a lengthy bureaucratic process, I ask how long it takes to get that permission.

"A phone call," he says. So there's that.

The current bridge has been in place for eight years; the monitoring system has existed for five. "With this whole man-

agement system, we expect that we can hold this bridge for 80 years," he says. "Because we know every time when an event happens, and immediately try to clean up here, so you have enough space for the next."

The system is unique to this bridge, but something similar is in place west of us, near Disentis, to deal with winter's answer to flash flooding: Avalanches. "We have, way up in the valley, a sensor that measures if something happens," Zimmerman says. If the sensor detects an avalanche, red signals are triggered on the rail line below.

The site near Disentis is hardly the only spot where avalanches are an issue. This is, after all, a country of mountains, and a railroad with close to a third of its mileage at 4,900 feet or higher.

"We have a huge control system of avalanche danger in Switzerland," Zimmerman says. "We work with the Swiss avalanche research center in Davos. They tell us when the dangerous times are, or the dangerous snow compositions ... we decide whether to keep [the line] open or not." He shows me an-

other phone app tracking snowfall. "I have like a radar that measures how much it snows; I know when this blue line goes up, the avalanche danger also rises." There are, he says, seven locations on the system where the railroad can call for explosions to trigger controlled avalanches. "In some spots, we do it with the local ski areas."

Weather is crucial for Zimmerman. He checks forecasts

daily, and a contract with the government's weather service requires him to be notified about certain levels of rain or snowfall. "They will call me in the night, every 10 minutes until I pick up the phone," he says, "so I know if my tracks are in danger or not."

"When I see a critical weather situation coming, I can take my employees and say, 'You have to stay here in this



**Having just left the station in Chur (in the background), an Arosa Line train enters the traffic circle that is, for operators uncertain what vehicles will do, a somewhat unnerving part of the 2 kilometers of street running that begin the climb out of town.**



spot and watch the Rhine.’ That’s allowed me to hold the line open until the last moment. If I don’t have these employees or these measurements, we would have to close the line much earlier.”

As the day progresses, it becomes clear significant snow will fall that night on the railroad’s highest parts, although it is only mid-September. This is a concern, he says, because trees that still have most of their leaves can collect more snow and be brought down by its weight — a recipe for blocked tracks or downed catenary. (Indeed, the next day, I will encounter a closure on the line between Klosters and Davos because of downed catenary.)

“We live with the weather,” he says. “The best weather is September or June. There’s no thunderstorm season, and it’s not too hot. So when I really want to go relax on vacation, I have to do it in June or September.” He laughs. “But I have a child [in school], and it’s not possible.”

## An adjustable bridge on a moving hillside

Hours later, Zimmerman and I are in the cab of a passenger train on the Arosa Line, the 25.7-kilometer (16-mile) branch climbing from the RhB headquarters city of Chur (584 meters/1,916 feet) to the resort town at 1,739 meters

(5,705 feet). The climb, with grades of up to 6%, begins with about 2 kilometers of street running in Chur, including a rather disconcerting path through the middle of a traffic circle (“one section where I always have fear,” Zimmerman says, concerned about the behavior of automobile drivers).

The route is highly scenic — the visual highlight is the Lang-

wieser Viaduct, 284 meters (932 feet) long and 62 meters (203 feet) high. For Zimmerman, its primary characteristic is that it’s a handful to maintain.

“The left side of the valley, where we travel for a long time before we switch to the other side [at the Langwieser Viaduct], is sliding down from 2 to 10 centimeters per year,” he says. “... They tried when they built these tracks to find the best way. The best way would be on the right side of the valley — but there are no villages.” So the tracks, like villages high above them, are on the opposite, less stable side, making this the RhB’s most expensive line to maintain.

At one point, he asks, “By the way, you’re not afraid of heights, are you?” I assure him I am not — but wonder why it matters.

The train stops to let us off near a temporary construction office dropped onto a remote hillside. This is the site for the project to replace the Castieler Viaduct, a 115-meter-long (377-foot), 53-meter-high (174-foot) structure at a location that has been a problem

practically since this line opened in 1914. Because of the unstable hillside, the original stone-and-concrete-arch viaduct soon was being pushed out of alignment; after an attempt at repairs in 1931, the bridge was rebuilt in 1942, with the stone arches replaced by an iron structure resting on stone and concrete piers. That also proved to be no match for the slowly moving hillside, leading to this new bridge.

The project is even more complicated than the unstable hillside would make it appear. While the bridge’s west end is anchored on that hillside, the east end rests on highly stable rock — and leads directly into a tunnel. The tunnel means that, unlike many major bridge projects, the new structure could not be completed next to the older bridge, with the tracks slightly realigned for the new location.

Instead, the new structure was built next to the old bridge, which was brought down with an explosion in May 2024. The new bridge was then slid into place “in about half a day,” Zimmerman says.



**Much of the railroad’s older equipment still features windows that open, a boon for photography that made possible this shot of an Arosa-bound train crossing the still-unfinished Castieler Viaduct on Sept. 10, 2024. The hillside on the tunnel end provides a stable anchor for the bridge, unlike the other end.**



**A view from the tunnel mouth of the Castieler Viaduct provides a look at the slowly sliding hillside. This side of the valley occupied by the rail line is sliding from 2 to 10 centimeters per year — as much as 4 inches — making the line the railway’s most expensive to maintain.**





The sections wrapped in gray plastic are the removable pieces that allow the Castieler bridge's length to be adjusted to allow for the moving hillside that forced replacement of the previous structure.



Another element of the design allowing the bridge to adjust to its changing environment: a section of the rail at the hillside end slides to accommodate movement.



Underneath the bridge deck, these supports allow the deck to "float" enough to move along with the gradually sliding hillside at the west end of the 377-foot structure.



As it turned out, explosive demolition of the old bridge proved to be a bit controversial.

"The government was not so amused," Zimmerman says. "We asked the local government; everyone said, 'Yeah, it's okay.' But not the federal government. They didn't know; they were a little bit upset." He gives a small, rueful laugh. "Now they have some charges, trying to decide if it's a fault or not."

"But we will not rebuild the old bridge," says the project manager, to laughter.

After a train passes, we walk onto the bridge. I look to the side and suddenly understand

the question about fear of heights. It's a long way down, and because the bridge is still under construction, our path at one point includes a walk across a narrow plank. We are here so Zimmerman can show why this bridge is unique among the more than 600 on the RhB. He mentions the cracks that occurred in the prior bridge.

"We don't want this to happen again," he says. "This happened after 15 years, and this bridge has to stay here at least 80 years. So we had a good idea."

That idea was to build the bridge with seven short removable sections at the west end,





where the hillside slides.

"We think, after 10 or 15 years, we take this one out," he says, pointing to the first of those sections, nearest the hillside. "In another 10 years, this one." This process repeats until all seven sections are removed. "Then we pull the whole bridge up to the tunnel, and we have enough space to put these back. And then we can start again. We can do that twice. But it must be over 100, 120 years.

And after that ..."

"It's somebody else's problem," I suggest.

He points out another detail — along the removable sections, the west end includes track that can slide to accommodate the gradual movement. It's all quite ingenious, and I ask, "Who gets the credit for coming up with this design?"

"He's standing in front of you," Zimmerman says, and laughs. (Earlier, he mentioned he has degrees in both bridge and rail engineering.) He adds, "I was not alone. There are four of us, another bridge engineer and two other track engineers. ... We thought, at the end, we

have to design something which we can make shorter and shorter." The design is unique in Switzerland, he says: "I don't know if there is somewhere else in the world like this."

He points out one other detail, involving bearings that are part of the bridge's ability to move. They are not at a 90-degree angle to the rest of the bridge, which he says "the bridge engineers don't like."

"They are exactly on the axis of the tracks," Zimmerman says. "... When you have a really good bridge engineer on your team, you can build something like this. I'm happy, because now everything moves

**A climb up a hillside provides the view as an Arosa Line train bound for Chur crosses the Castieler Viaduct. The new bridge was built next to the one it replaced, then was slid into place after the earlier bridge was brought down with explosives — to the ongoing dismay of the federal government.**

on the axis of the tracks and not the axis of the bridge" — which will make for a smoother train ride. "But to calculate this and build it, this is really hard. ... I'm really proud that they made it like this.

"It's a nice piece of bridge engineering." I

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# Liquid light



Curving along the Bow River in Alberta, Canada, a mid-train set of locomotives illuminate the foreground's frozen landscape, while the lead locomotive a half-mile ahead casts a headlight glow on the forest beyond. Todd Halamka captured this 30-second exposure at Morant's Curve as a winter storm descended on the scene two hours before daybreak on Thursday, Feb. 8, 2024.







# The Chemin de fer

A successful short line born from the old Quebec Central

by Harrison Smith



**I**t's a lazy summer day in the small, quiet town of Scott, Quebec, Canada — the current headquarters of the Sartigan Railway. Residents are mowing their lawns and children are playing at the municipal park as company mechanic Maxim Tardif prepares Chemin de fer Sartigan No. 2044, a 1973 Montreal Locomotive Works M420W, to power an afternoon run to Saint-Lambert-de-Lauzon. A decade ago, the Sartigan owned a single locomotive, serving a lone customer that warranted



# Sartigan Railway



only sporadic runs from Scott to Canadian National's Joffre Yard in Charny. Today's Sartigan couldn't be more different, and the Tuesday afternoon run to Logi-bel in Saint-Lambert to reposition cars at the busy transload yard is just one example of the company's rapid growth and expansion.

The growl of MLW prime movers reverberates across the Quebec farmland as the Sartigan Railway shuffles cars between its Canadian National interchange and local customers. Part of the road's all-MLW fleet, M420W No. 2044 and RS23 No. 8033, have charge of this move. Dannick Fournier





The Sartigan Railway's Scott-to-Charny job is rolling south toward Saint-Lambert-de-Lauzon, Quebec, with cars from CN's Joffre Yard, passing through Breakeyville on June 23, 2024. CFS M420W No. 2047, which still had its British Columbia Railway paint at the time, is seen with CFS RS23 No. 8033. Two photos: Harrison Smith



The Tuesday afternoon switcher to Saint-Lambert passes CFS No. 8033, standing outside the Sartigan Railway temporary shop building in Scott, Quebec.

## The Quebec Central

The rural Chaudière-Appalaches and Eastern Townships regions of Quebec were like everywhere else in the 19th century: They needed a railway to grow their economy and remain connected to major cities and the United States. In 1869, two companies were incorporated, the Sherbrooke, Eastern Townships & Kennebec Railway to the south and the Lévis & Kennebec Railway to the north. Both companies decided to cut construction costs by using wooden rails. As expected, this method of construction didn't last long in the harsh Canadian climate, and iron rails replaced wooden planks within a few years. In 1875, financial troubles resulted in the Sherbrooke, Eastern Townships &

Kennebec being restructured as the Quebec Central Railway.

The Quebec Central built northeast towards Scott and Quebec City, planning to end construction west of Scott. The plan changed, however, with the 1877 discovery of asbestos near Thetford. The Quebec Central diverted its route to pass through Thetford, ending up across the river from the town of Beauce-Jonction, now known as Vallée-Jonction.

The Lévis & Kennebec, built south from its namesake city, arrived in Beauce-Jonction in 1879, filed for bankruptcy in 1881, and was purchased by Quebec Central just weeks later. Unified under a single owner, the railway constructed a bridge connecting the two sections.

By the early 20th century, the Quebec Central had become a respectable 300-mile system, with rails reaching Quebec City, Sherbrooke, Lac-Mégantic, Lac-Frontière, and Newport, Vt. Canadian Pacific Railway signed a 999-year lease for the Quebec Central in 1912, becoming operator of the company's lines for the foreseeable future.

Declining traffic levels and Canadian Pacific's movement to sell off or abandon its lines east of Montreal resulted in the abandonment of the Quebec Central in 1994. Fortunately for the communities along the Quebec Central, Canadian Pacific could not remove the track, as its ownership of the railway only amounted to 10%. This technicality preserved the Quebec Central right-of-way long enough for a handful of residents to save the railroad.

## Rising from the ashes

The Sartigan Railway, officially called the Chemin de fer Sartigan — "path of iron" in English — has an unlikely origin.

"I thought that there was a potential for a tourist train and freight trains in the region, so I wrote a letter of opinion in the newspaper and a few guys called me," said Martin Laflamme, Sartigan Railway president, when asked about his response to the abandonment of the Quebec Central. Laflamme, a resident of Vallée-Jonction, met Stephan Vachon (who would become Sartigan vice president), Carl Morissette, and François Cliche, and the four men set their sights on saving the Quebec Central as a tourist railroad.

The prospective tourist train operators met Jean-Marc Giguère, who was described in one news report as an "ecologically-bent trucking firm magnate." Giguère wanted to add freight service to the line in hopes of drawing loads back to the rails. He pumped \$16 million into the effort.

The new Quebec Central Railway began operation in early 2000, restoring freight service after a six-year hiatus. In June 2000, the Chaudière-Appalaches tourist train began operating out of Vallée-Jonction, running excursions across the entire existing Quebec Central system.

The tourist train, run by Laflamme, his three associates, and a dedicated team of local enthusiasts, found noteworthy success, attracting locals and visitors alike. Unfortunately, Giguère's Quebec Central freight operation didn't fare as well, and by 2005 the future of the railway was unclear. The tourist train ceased operations after the 2005 season, foreseeing the inevitable end of Giguère's freight service. The new Quebec Central ended operations in 2006, and the railway was again without an operator.

Laflamme and Vachon were disappointed that Quebec Central's rebirth had come to an end, but they weren't giving up





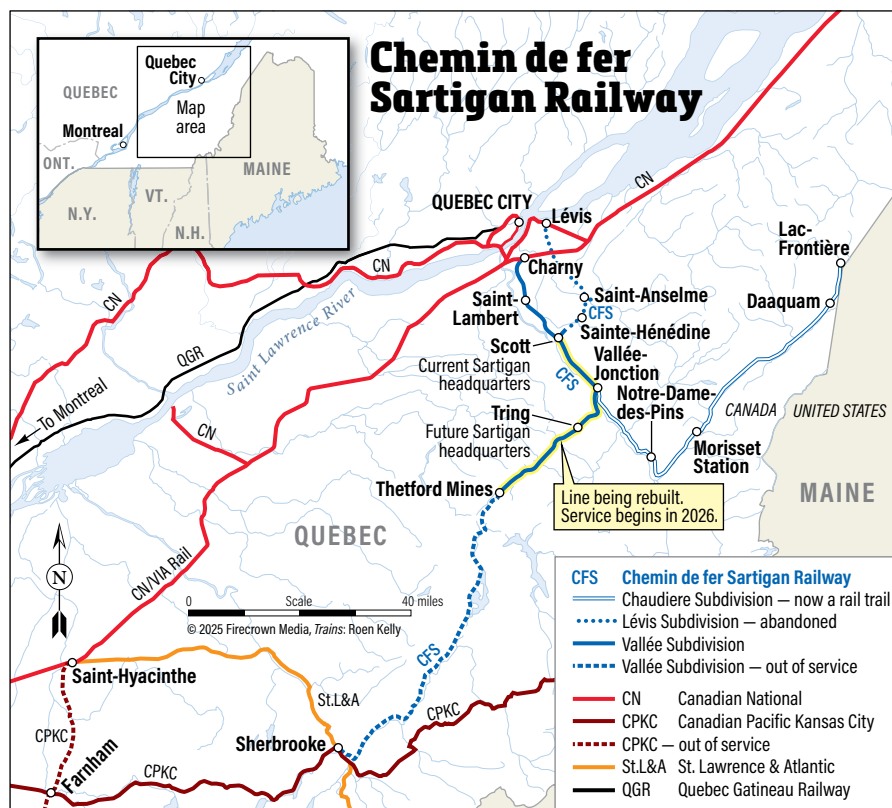
The Alexandre Côté lumber mill, the Sartigan's first customer, is still a key shipper. On Oct. 2, 2024, CFS locomotives rest on the tracks outside the mill: a pair of MLW M420Ws in British Columbia Railway paint, RS18u No. 1828 (top right) and RS23 No. 8033 (bottom right). Dannick Fournier

hope just yet. Laflamme recalls, “We decided to just wait and see what will happen to the railroad.” Shortly after the new Quebec Central ended operations, the Quebec government, which had loaned Giguère money to start his venture, fully acquired the Quebec Central right-of-way. This ownership change was essential for the startup of the Sartigan.

## Second attempt: success

Giguère's Quebec Central didn't lack customers, says Vachon. However, the company was under-capitalized, struggling to turn a profit and maintain the railway. Fortunately for the communities and industries along the Quebec Central, the Quebec provincial government saw the railway's importance and value. Instead of tearing up the rails to create a bike path (although this was the fate of the Chaudière branch), the province decided to rehabilitate the railway, with the idea that a new operator would again provide regional freight service.

Laflamme and Vachon were interested in operating the Quebec Central, but needed to gain the knowledge required to run a freight railway successfully. Freight-







**CFS and Logibel partnered in 2017, constructing a transload facility in Saint-Lambert-de-Lauzon. The facility brings rail service closer for offline customers. Here, with MLW M420W No. 2044, cars are shuffled on the transload yard's three stub-end tracks. Top photo: Dannick Fournier; three photos: Harrison Smith**

hauling expertise came in the form of Durbin & Greenbrier Valley (West Virginia Central) President and CEO John Smith. Laflamme and Vachon met Smith in 2008 when Smith was interested in purchasing the Chaudière-Appalaches FP7 No. 1301. When Smith asked the former tourist train operators what was going to happen to the Quebec Central, they explained that the government seemed to have an interest in restarting freight service, but lacked an operator.

Laflamme, Vachon, and other future Sartigan employees, like Daniel Fortin, had gained crucial experience from the tourist operation, but running a freight railway was uncharted territory. Smith, who ultimately purchased the FP7, encouraged Laflamme and associates to pursue a freight venture, promising his expertise as a consultant. Vachon recalls "They [the government] were supposed to choose a new operator through a competitive bid. They chose not to choose anyone ... so we chose for them."

In 2012, the Sartigan Railway began operating the Quebec Central between Scott and the Canadian National interchange at Joffre Yard in Charny, serving a lumber customer in Scott with a single locomotive, MLW RS18u No. 1828.

## Growing business

Returning to the action in Scott, CFS No. 2044 is now idling smoothly as Tardif and Vachon perform a brake test and disconnect No. 2047, also a 1973 MLW M420W, from the M.U. system. Vachon, in French, Quebec's native language, instructs Tardif to bring the units south to the lumberyard, where No. 2047 is left behind as the crew changes directions and begins heading north. Alexandre Côté, the Sartigan's first customer, is still a key shipper. Alexandre Côté and neighboring sawmill Services Boismax offered to share space in the yard with the Sartigan and logistics company Logibel to launch a pilot project that helped the Sartigan dramatically increase its traffic growth.

Logibel, a Lac-Mégantic-based compa-



ny, formed a partnership with the Sartigan in 2017, aiming to capture business using a tried-and-true method: a transload yard. In 2018, the two companies worked to begin serving offline customers in Scott, and business growth prompted construction of





Located in Saint-Lambert, the Comargo grain mill was the CFS's second customer. With the railroad providing reliable service, business at this and other customers has grown, necessitating extra switching to meet demand. On June 12, 2020, CFS uses RS18u No. 1828 and RS23 No. 8033 to switch the Comargo plant. Dannick Fournier

a dedicated location in Saint-Lambert-de-Lauzon. Vachon, when asked about the transload, says, "That helped us to get a lot of customers that were offline ... There are a lot of customers who use rail but have to go to Montreal to use it, so we just brought rail service closer to them."

Tardif and Vachon stop No. 2044 next to the Sartigan's current, temporary shop building. CFS MLW RS23 No. 8033 is blue-flagged, with the sign reading "ARRET HOMMES PASSIONNES AU TRAVAIL", translating to "Stop. Passionate men at work.". Tardif, the railroad's chief mechanical officer, is certainly passionate about his job. "I'm making the most beautiful work in the world," said Tardif during our conversation in the shop. A simple, temporary building, the shop is large enough for a single locomotive, allowing Tardif to safely maintain the active fleet of four locomotives until permanent shops can be built in Tring-Jonction. "The real plan is to build something ... in another city [Tring] ... This little shop was only to secure us from the winter."

After reviewing their track warrant — Scott to Saint-Lambert on the Quebec

## Chemin de fer Sartigan Locomotive Roster

Road Number	Model	Builder	Year Built	Built for	Notes
1828	RS18u	MLW	1956	CP	First CFS locomotive
2044	M420W	MLW	1973	BCR	
2047	M420W	MLW	1973	BCR	
8033	RS23	MLW	1960	CP	
71	M636	MLW (CAT)	1970	CP	CAT Engine. Out of service as of 3/2025.
641	M420W	MLW	1973	BCR	Parts unit
646	M420W	MLW	1973	BCR	Parts unit

Central Vallée Subdivision — Tardif gently eases No. 2044 northward, passing the municipal park where local children watch and wave. As we approach the wye at Scott, Vachon notices children playing under the Autoroute-73 overpass. Tardif stops the train, explaining to the children the dangers of playing near the railway, ensuring they understand before continuing north. According to Laflamme — who is director of security — coexisting safely and peacefully with the communities along the railway isn't always easy. The entire Sartigan team makes a significant effort to maintain strong community relationships, taking the time to educate residents on rail safety.

Heading north through the wye, we pass the DuBreton grain elevator, a customer that set up its operation in Scott after observing the Sartigan's reliable and personalized service. The following day, the train to Joffre Yard would stop and pick up

a car from the elevator, but today we roll past on our way to Saint-Lambert. The cab of CFS No. 2044 is impeccably clean and includes non-mandatory amenities such as a water-stocked refrigerator and a new toilet. Tardif, easing the locomotive up the slight grade to Saint-Lambert, offers a simple explanation: "I do not really accept things that are not in service."

Upon arriving in Saint-Lambert, Tardif and Vachon begin their work, shifting cars between three stub-ended sidings and a longer siding that also serves Comagro, a grain mill and the railway's second initial customer. The need for this additional rotation of cars is a good problem to have: The demand for rail service is starting to exceed capacity, thanks to the Sartigan's partnership with Logibel. Laflamme credits Sartigan's growth to the company's personalized service and close customer relationships, a common theme in the short line business.



# The Cat-powered MLW



Sartigan's newest locomotive, No. 71, rests in the sun just north of the company's shop in Scott on Aug. 6, 2024. The M636 was a unique rebuild project that resulted from a partnership between Canadian Pacific and Caterpillar. Harrison Smith

**THE SARTIGAN RAILWAY IS PROUD** of its Montreal Locomotive Works/Alco fleet, but the newest addition to the roster is unique. Alco purists might disregard CFS M636 No. 71, but Maxim Tardif, chief mechanical officer, sees the Caterpillar-powered MLW unit as the best of both worlds. "In 1986 Canadian Pacific was a little bit upset about ... Alco's prime mover," Tardif says, when asked how the rebuild came to be. Caterpillar offered to try to put together a solution, he says, "and Canadian Pacific was ... happy with this locomotive." Although CP found the Caterpillar engine to be much stronger and more reliable, the project wasn't reproduced. CP continued to operate its big MLWs until 1993, but in the meantime, purchased 25 new cowl-bodied SD40-2Fs from General Motors Diesel in 1988 and 1989.

Tardif became familiar with the unit when he visited the Minnesota Commercial Railway in Saint Paul to look at several locomotives that were for sale. "I checked those [the Alcos] and this one [the M636] was the locomotive that caught my attention first," says Tardif. After researching the rebuilt M636, his interest in the locomotive further increased, and the company purchased it in 2023. Besides the increased pulling power and improved reliability, another huge advantage of a Caterpillar prime mover, Tardif points out, is that parts are significantly easier to come by. " [About] 20 minutes from here there is a supplier of Caterpillar, and if I want an oil pump [for example] it is on the shelf." — Harrison Smith

## Big plans, big power

Logibel's Saint-Lambert transload yard will see more business as companies in Thetford Mines and Tring switch to rail service. This government-requested pilot program is the final step in Sartigan's case for reopening the Quebec Central as far as Thetford. "The government had traffic requirements, and we doubled them," says Vachon. While Sartigan continues to serve its growing customer base between Scott and Charny, the provincial government is rebuilding the rails from Vallée-Jonction to Black Lake, near Thetford Mines. Although projects of this nature typically encounter setbacks, Vachon is confident that trains will be running across the Chaudière River to KSM Inc. in Tring by January 2026. The fertilizer company has begun a year-long pro-

duction ramp-up, requiring direct-rail service by the end of 2025.

The whining of dynamic brakes drowns out the thoughts of the future as No. 2044 rolls downgrade towards Scott, the Saint-Lambert work complete. Tardif has devoted much of his time to reactivating the dynamic brake systems on the M420W units, important tools to combat the 3.5% downhill grade into Canadian National's Joffre Yard, as well as a long 1.5% grade between Vallée-Jonction and Tring-Jonction. As we pass the shops in Scott, Sartigan's newest project rests on the north side of the building. CFS No. 71 is an ex-Canadian Pacific M636 that, Tardif explains, will be a powerful puller thanks to its Caterpillar engine (see above).

Despite the challenges that come with

working on MLW (Alco) engines, Tardif firmly believes they're worth the investment. Tardif, who worked for the Quebec-Gatineau Railway before transitioning to a full-time position at Sartigan in 2020, says Electro-Motive locomotives are prone to frequent but minor failures. MLWs, on the other hand, are much more reliable, with fewer failures, but needing more repair time. "For a little short line like us ... you don't want a locomotive that will fail three or four times a year," Tardif says.

After picking up CFS No. 2047 from the lumberyard and returning to the shop, Tardif and Vachon tie down the locomotives and call it a day. The following day, Vachon will handle concerns in the office while Tardif and part-time employee Tommy Duval make the trip to Joffre Yard for the Canadian National interchange.

The Sartigan's traffic has increased significantly since 2012, growing from hundreds of cars annually to thousands, and business continues to expand. Once the Sartigan begins serving customers in the Tring and Thetford areas, carloads are expected to grow well beyond 10,000 annually.

Looking back to the Sartigan's roots, Vachon expressed interest in restarting a tourist train in partnership with their former associates, emphasizing that nothing is off the table. Unlike other companies that might see a tourist train as a revenue source or liability, Sartigan believes that restarting the venture is one way to connect with and give back to the community. Sartigan's proximity to the Railway Museum of Beauce in Vallée-Jonction is another relationship the company hopes to expand in the future. In the meantime, events such as the Sartigan's open house in August 2023 invite the community to safely interact with and learn about the railway and its impact.

The Chemin de fer Sartigan Railway has what it takes to succeed, from strategic partnerships to strong relationships with customers and communities. Perhaps the clearest indicator of the Sartigan's path to success is in Vallée-Jonction, where contractors have been steadily rebuilding the Chaudière River bridge from the ground up. The Quebec Central is returning, with a new name and a proven game that's become what I call the Sartigan success story. **I**

*Harrison Smith is an independent journalist, video documentary producer, and college student from northern New York. He thanks the Sartigan Railway for its interest and assistance.*

► **Two of Sartigan's MLW M420Ws run light near Saint-Jean-Chrysostomes, Quebec, on Oct. 29, 2023. The railroad's entire roster is composed of Montreal Locomotive Works products.** Dannick Fournier









# Riding Amtrak's *Palmetto*

This unusual train is the gateway to Savannah

Story and photos by David Kriso

**I**magine seeing the sun rise over the East Coast as you sip coffee and watch skyscrapers give way to rolling countryside over a relaxing 16-hour journey from New York City to Savannah, Ga. — called The Hostess City of the South for its hospitality.

This is the *Palmetto* experience, a long-distance train with a difference.

Amtrak operates 14 long-distance routes, defined as those over 750 miles. While each route has its own characteristics and appeal, the *Palmetto*, train Nos. 89 and 90, stands alone. Running an 829-mile dawn-to-dusk sprint between New York City's Penn Station and Savannah, the *Palmetto* is the only long-distance train to offer Coach and Business Class seats, but no dining car or sleeping accommodations.

The *Palmetto*'s first run was on June 15, 1976, which was also the first run of the then-new Amfleet I cars on a long-distance

train. The *Palmetto* and *Colonial*, Amtrak's first service from Northeast Corridor points and Washington to Newport News, Va., began operation on the same day and represented the first step in the development of today's highly successful Washington-Richmond corridor.

Prior to 1976, the Washington-Richmond service of Amtrak and its predecessors was provided by long-distance trains that were not conveniently scheduled to serve local markets. Amtrak operated today's *Palmetto* route as a portion of its *Silver Palm* train from 1996 to 2002.

## Deep roots

As a train name, the *Palmetto* has deep roots. It was first used by the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad in 1909 for the *Palmetto Limited*, which ran from New York City to Augusta and Savannah, Ga., with a connection to Atlanta via the Georgia Railroad.

(The train drew its name from the Sabal palmetto, the state tree of South Carolina.) The ACL train was discontinued in 1968.

When Amtrak introduced its *Palmetto* in 1976, it planned to run the train daily for the summer months only, with service ending in September. Ridership was better than expected and Amtrak extended the *Palmetto* to year-round service.

In October 1984, Amtrak began operating the *Carolinian*, a North Carolina-focused regional train, as a section of the *Palmetto*. The two trains ran combined between New York and Richmond, Va. At Richmond, the *Carolinian* continued separately to the North Carolina cities of Raleigh and Charlotte. It was discontinued in September 1985, after the state of North Carolina refused to increase state support for the train, and then revived in 1990.

In December 1988 Amtrak extended the *Palmetto* south to Jacksonville, Fla. The





◀ The home stretch: The passengers and crew of Amtrak's southbound *Palmetto* have their last stretch stop in Florence, S.C., before the final 2½-hour run to Savannah.

▼ Bright and early, and right on time, Siemens ACS64 No. 640 leads the seven-car consist of Amtrak's *Palmetto*, train No. 89, into Newark Penn Station at 6:19 a.m.







train continued to be coach-only, without full dining service. Beginning on May 12, 1990, the *Palmetto* combined with a revived *Carolinian*, although this time the split occurred in Rocky Mount, N.C. The two trains began running independently to New York in April 1991.

The *Palmetto* added sleeper car accommodations and dining car service in October 1994, running through to Tampa, Fla. as a replacement for the *Silver Meteor*'s Tampa section. This extension proved short-lived. Budget cuts under the Clinton administration led to the *Palmetto*'s discontinuance on Feb. 1, 1995.

### The Palmetto returns

In November 1996, Amtrak added a third train from New York to Miami, known as the *Silver Palm* in line with the Silver Service brand for Amtrak's Florida trains. However, it used the same route as the former *Palmetto* and carried the same numbers (No. 89 southbound and No. 90 northbound). While the *Silver Star* and *Silver Meteor* ran straight from Jacksonville to Miami, at Jacksonville the *Silver Palm* turned west and continued over mostly former Seaboard Air Line main line via Waldo, Ocala, Wildwood, and Dade City to Tampa. At Tampa, the train passed through a wye before continuing south to Miami.

Amtrak restored the *Palmetto* name on May 1, 2002. Even though sleeping cars and the diner were removed, the train continued serving Florida. On Nov. 1, 2004,

► **Journey's end:** The remainder of the day's 198 passengers disembark in Savannah after the long journey from New York. The train will turn around in the CSX yard, preparing for its return trip the following morning. At daybreak, *Palmetto* train No. 90, will make the 829-mile journey back to the Big Apple.

Amtrak truncated the *Palmetto* to Savannah, Ga., operating a daytime schedule to and from New York. Today's *Floridian* serves Tampa on a dogleg from its Jacksonville-Orlando-Miami routing.

### Riding the Palmetto

The *Palmetto*'s journey begins at New York City's bustling Penn Station. For the first leg of the trip, the seven-car train is pulled by Amtrak's Northeast Corridor workhorse, the ACS64, which replaced the long-serving Swedish-designed and American-built AEM7s.

As is the case on all long-distance trains, passengers are seated in specific cars according to their destination. Those bound for Washington, D.C., and Richmond are seated toward the front of the train, while passengers destined for North Carolina, South Carolina, and Savannah are seated in the third car, and so on.

Business Class is assigned an Amfleet I coach, with the rest of the coaches Amfleet IIs. Most trains include an Amfleet club car

With sun putting on its morning show, the Savannah-bound *Palmetto* races across the century-old Bush River bridge, north of Baltimore, Md., on the Northeast Corridor. The train is 2 hours, 45 minutes out of New York City's Penn Station with 12 hours to go to reach its destination of Savannah.

that has a combination of Business Class seating, with a Café food service/lounge and four Coach Class cars. The train also carries a Viewliner baggage car for its checked bag service.

Rolling out of New York City in the early hours of the morning, the *Palmetto* makes station stops at Metropark (Iselin, N.J.); Trenton, N.J.; Philadelphia's 30th Street Station; Wilmington, Del.; and Baltimore's Penn Station.

At Washington, D.C., Union Station, the train stops for a crew change. The locomotive swap is a railroad enthusiast's favorite part about the stop in Washington.

The ACS64 is uncoupled and taken away to be readied for its next assignment. Soon, a General Electric Genesis diesel or







Siemens ALC42 Charger backs up for coupling. Successfully coupled, with power cables and brake lines reconnected, and passengers all on board, the *Palmetto* proceeds through the East Tunnel.

Emerging from the East Tunnel, the train merges onto the CSX main line. It then crosses the Potomac River, and passes Ronald Reagan National Airport on its way to a station stop in Alexandria, Va. The train continues on, passing through the railroad town of Ashland, Va., where train-spotting is an everyday ritual, and arrives at Richmond Staple Mills Station.

Staple Mills Station is Amtrak's main terminal in Richmond. The city's ornate Main Street Station, a National Historic Landmark a few miles to the south, currently serves the Northeast Corridor route to Williamsburg and Newport News.

Soon after its departure from Richmond, the train crosses over the James River, and continues to Petersburg, the last stop in Virginia.

Later, the train crosses the North Carolina state line, making station stops in Rocky Mount, Wilson, Selma-Smithfield, and Fayetteville. It then rolls through South Carolina, stopping in Dillon, Florence, Kingstree, Charleston, and Yemassee.

Half an hour later, the train makes its final station stop — Savannah, Ga., a city known for its beautiful architecture, historic squares, delicious food, and friendly people, all of which contribute to its reputation as a gracious host to visitors.

## The station and beyond

Savannah Station is located in the city's freight port area. Besides the *Palmetto*, Savannah is a station stop for the *Silver Meteor* (New York-Miami) and the *Floridian* (Chicago-Miami), which has been in revenue service since Nov. 10, 2024.

Located 4 miles from Savannah's historic district, Savannah Station is a time capsule all by itself. The mid-century modern style station was built by the Atlantic Coast Line in 1962 during the height of the civil rights movement. Inside the station, an eagle-eyed passenger can spot signage from the long-gone era of segregation.

What gives the station its true railroad flavor is the locomotive tile fresco on its front facade.

The Georgia State Railroad Museum, located on Louisville Road in the city's Tricentennial Park, near the Talmadge Memorial Bridge, adds to Savannah's rich history. The museum features locomotives and railcars from the Central of Georgia Railway. From photographing historic rolling stock, to witnessing a classic working turntable, the museum is well worth a visit. Seasonal train rides add the icing on this cake. Also worthwhile is Savannah's History Museum, located next door.

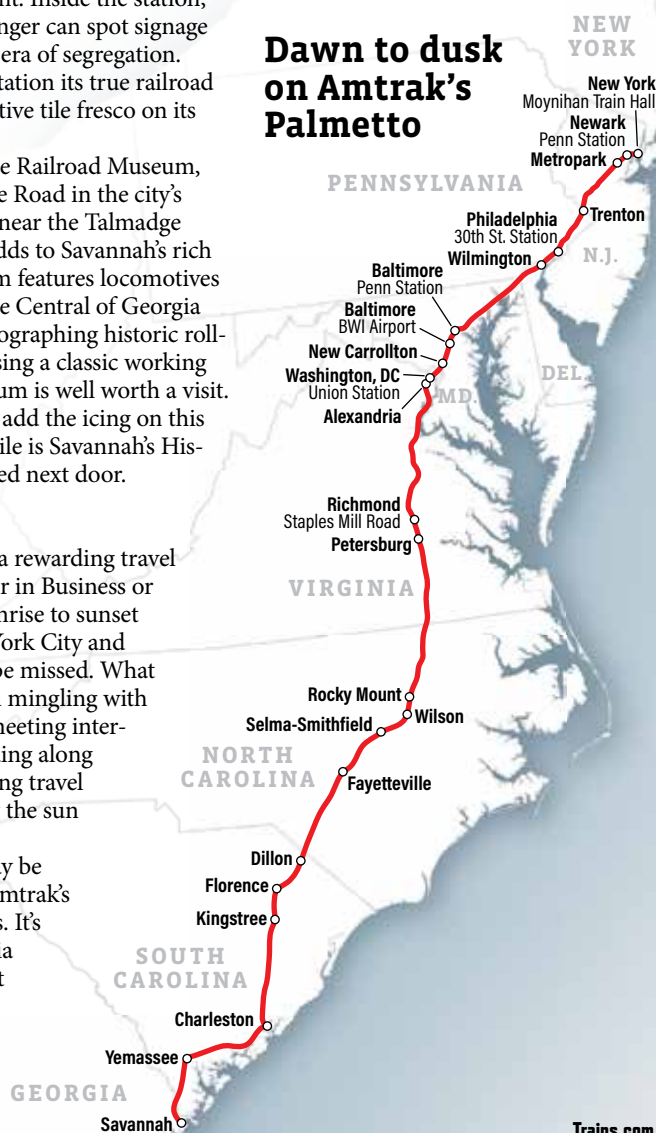
## Conclusions

The *Palmetto* is a rewarding travel experience. Whether in Business or Coach Class, the sunrise to sunset ride between New York City and Savannah is not to be missed. What could be better than mingling with fellow passengers, meeting interesting people, speeding along city to city, comparing travel notes, and watching the sun go down?

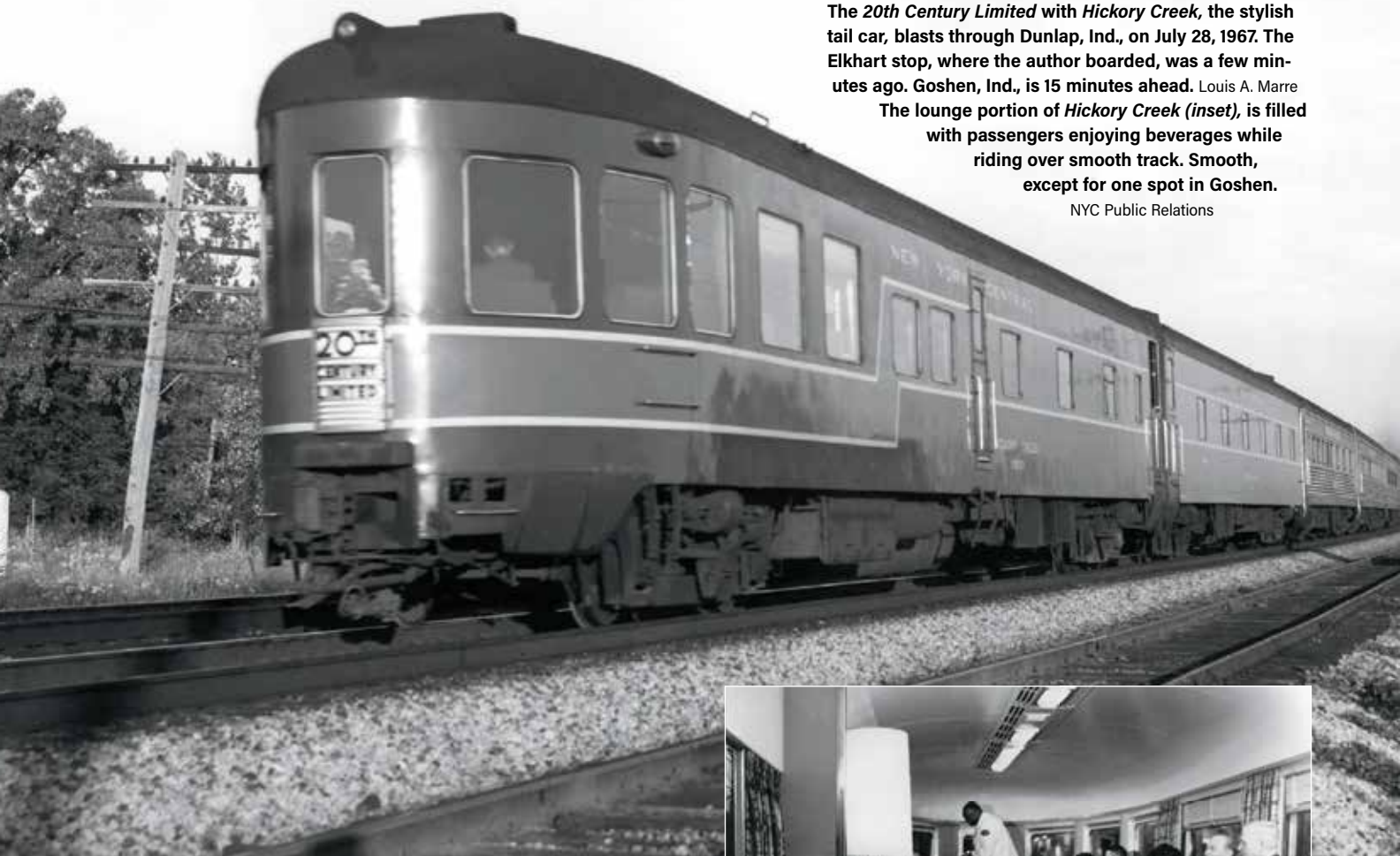
The *Palmetto* may be the sweetest of all Amtrak's long-distance routes. It's sweeter than Georgia peaches. It's as sweet as the people of the city of Savannah itself. **I**

For rail enthusiasts, the locomotive change is the highlight of the stop at Washington, D.C.'s Union Station. ACS64 No. 640, which brought the train from New York City, is replaced by General Electric P42 No. 202 for the remaining 609 miles of the southbound run.

## Dawn to dusk on Amtrak's Palmetto







The 20th Century Limited with Hickory Creek, the stylish tail car, blasts through Dunlap, Ind., on July 28, 1967. The Elkhart stop, where the author boarded, was a few minutes ago. Goshen, Ind., is 15 minutes ahead. Louis A. Marre  
The lounge portion of Hickory Creek (inset), is filled with passengers enjoying beverages while riding over smooth track. Smooth, except for one spot in Goshen.

NYC Public Relations

# Bourbons on the 'Century'

by Bob McCulloch

**IN OCTOBER 1962**, I was a New York Central Transportation trainee, and had the opportunity to ride No. 26, the *20th Century Limited*, eastbound from Elkhart, Ind., to New York City.

I boarded the *Century* two sleeping cars ahead of observation car *Hickory Creek*, and stowed my suitcase. I then headed back to "my" seat, facing rearward in the observation lounge. The waiter approached and I placed an order for a bourbon and water, while settling in to enjoy the trip. My drink arrived on the waiter's

tray, as the train slowed for the curve with an 80 mph speed restriction at Goshen, Ind., about 12 miles southeast of Elkhart. Just as my drink was placed on the rear table and I paid for it, the *Hickory Creek* hit a low joint in the curve. The bump sent my untouched drink toppling to the floor with a splash, followed by droplets of bourbon and water soaking into the carpet. The waiter asked if I would like to have the drink replaced. Since I was looking forward to enjoying a bourbon and water in the *20th Century's* lounge, another drink

was ordered. I, of course, had to pay for it!

Upon reaching Grand Central Terminal Saturday morning, I went directly to the office of my boss, Leo M. Riley, General Transportation Superintendent for the New York Central System. His office was located on the 16th floor at 466 Lexington Ave., just a couple of blocks north of Grand Central. I told Mr. Riley that I had just arrived on No. 26 and would like to report a bad spot on track two at Goshen, Ind. Naturally, he wanted more details than I was will-

ing to disclose. Eventually I had to tell him the story about my lost bourbon and water.

After he settled down, the last thing he said as I walked out his door was: "I don't want to see that drink on your expense report."

He didn't "see" the drink expense on my report ...

*BOB MCCULLOCH'S railroad career spanned 22 years from 1955 to 1977. During this period he spent time with the New York Central, Penn Central, and Conrail.*





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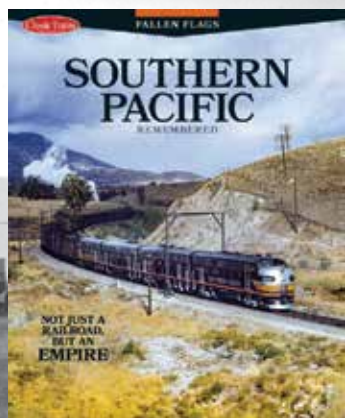
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# Trackside bed & breakfast

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▲ Norfolk Southern SD70ACU No. 7240 working as pusher at the rear of a heavy eastbound roars in Run-8 (full throttle) as it passes The Tunnel Inn in Gallitzin, Pa., where guests are treated to a front-row seat for one of the busiest freight railroads in the East.

Brian Solomon

**I'VE ALWAYS LIKED** being near the railroad overnight, and there's a certain satisfaction waking up in a comfortable bed trackside. Growing up atop a hill in Monson, Mass., a mile and half from the Central Vermont Railway's Palmer Subdivision, I'd listen to its freights ascending State Line Hill on the run south of Palmer, Mass., and count the crossings as a train climbed. Today, trackside bed & breakfasts offer similar memorable experiences.

## THE TUNNEL INN

My wife Kris plans most of our travel accommodations,

and I was delighted when she suggested a visit to The Tunnel Inn in Gallitzin, Pa. My father brought our family to Gallitzin in 1981 as part of a railroad-themed vacation centered on a visit to the Horseshoe Curve, and I've been making pilgrimages to this area ever since.

The Inn is situated in the village at milepost 248, 7 miles timetable west of the Curve, and immediately west of the Allegheny Tunnel, where Norfolk Southern's busy Pittsburgh Line — the former Pennsylvania Railroad main line — crosses the Allegheny Divide.

Accommodations at the Inn

consist of four suites, each with a railroad-themed name. Three offer views of the tracks and are appropriately decorated with railroad art and photographs. A comfortable common room has a selection of railroad books and literature. We met the proprietor, Bob Elder, and had enjoyable conversations about the railroad and our travels.

The Inn has bright LED lights for night train watching and a balcony overlooking the two main tracks that pass through the Allegheny Tunnel and carry the lion's share of railroad traffic through Gallitzin. Norfolk Southern also has a third main track, which follows a separate alignment via the New Portage Tunnel. This line is about a 10-minute walk from the Inn. Owing to its steep grade, it primarily handles eastward trains.

The Inn is central to other area railroad attractions. Across the tracks is The Tunnel Park and Museum where PRR N5C cabin car (caboose) No. 477852 has been nicely preserved. The nearby Iron Horse Bar & Grille is open Wednesday-Sunday and decorated with historic photos.

The Horseshoe Curve National Historic Landmark is an 11-minute drive. The Curve is administered by the Railroaders Memorial Museum, located in the city of Altoona (historically home to PRR's vast shops and extensive yards), about a 20-25 minute drive from the Inn.

Closer is the National Park Service's Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site at Blairs Run Gap, which interprets the historic Main Line of Public Works. This incredible precursor to the Pennsylvania Railroad was built in the 1830s to connect Philadelphia and Pittsburgh using a network of steam railroads, canals, and steeply graded portage railroads.

The Station Inn at Cresson, Pa., a popular trackside B&B, is a few miles to the west.

## THE TRAINMASTER'S INN

Another great railroad B&B, and one not far from where I grew up, is The Trainmaster's Inn in Palmer, Mass. It is man-





aged by the Lamothe family, who also run the Steaming Tender, a railroad-themed restaurant located in the old Palmer Union Station (a short walk or drive from the Inn).

The Inn itself is a quaint B&B, decorated with an excellent selection of railroad artifacts, art, and photographs, many relating to local history.

A beautiful Victorian style wrap-around covered porch faces South Main Street, and a classic upper quadrant semaphore is displayed out front.

While not as busy as Gallitzin, Palmer is a local railroad nexus and has long been a popular train watching location, so having a room near the tracks is a real pleasure.

Three railroad routes come together here. Immediately west of the old station, CSX's Boston Line (the former Boston & Albany route) crosses at grade with Genesee & Wyoming's New England Central (NECR) — the former Central Vermont. Massachusetts Central's former B&A Ware River Branch comes in from the north, running par-

allel to NECR and connecting with both routes via an interchange track leading to CSX's Palmer yard (east of the South Main Street overpass).

The back of the Inn abuts NECR's Palmer Yard, the hub for the railroad's freight service. Locomotives are often parked there between runs. The Boston Section of Amtrak's *Lake Shore Limited* operates daily over

CSX, passing Palmer before 3 p.m. westbound, and about 6:25 p.m. eastbound, when running on schedule.

CSX runs about a dozen freights every 24 hours, and serves Palmer with a local from its West Springfield yard.

Listening to freights roll though at night is one of pleasures of a Trainmaster's stay.  
— Brian Solomon

▲ Visitors to Palmer, Mass., can enjoy a stay at The Trainmaster's Inn, which is decorated with an excellent selection of period railroad art and artifacts, and features a selection of railroad books. Two photos, Brian Solomon



◀ The Tunnel Inn bed & breakfast is located on Jackson Street in Gallitzin, Pa.

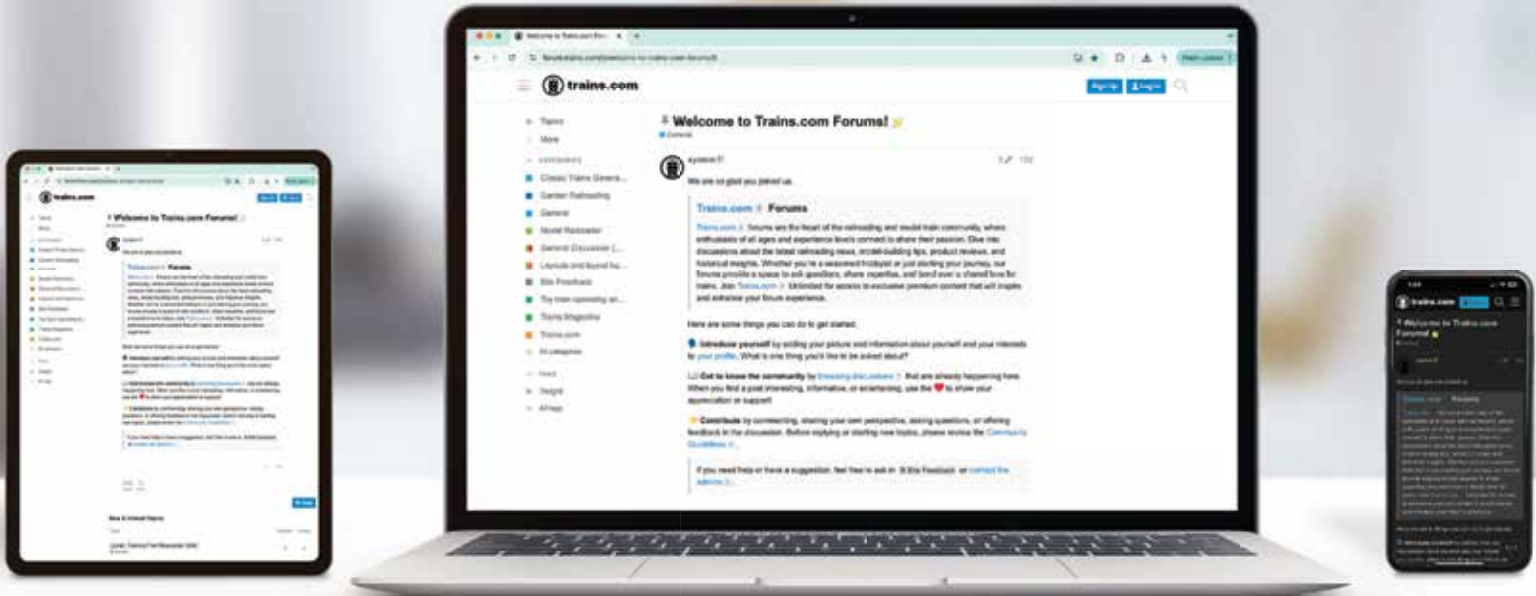




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# Found: NJ Merci Train boxcar

Historic car missing since 1958 discovered in Kansas City warehouse

▲ A Merci Train boxcar, which had been stored in a Kansas City warehouse, was recently identified as the car presented to New Jersey. The National World War I Museum and Memorial has donated the car to the United Railroad Historical Society of New Jersey, which plans to restore it at its Boonton, N.J., shop. The car, dating to the early 1890s, was one of 49 from the 1949 Merci Train. The French people filled the boxcars with gifts for the United States, offering thanks for assistance after World War II. URHS

**NEW JERSEY'S MERCI TRAIN BOXCAR** has been found. The car, recovered from a Tennessee field in 1993, was now in the collection of Kansas City's National World War I Museum and Memorial, according to the United Railroad Historical Society of New Jersey. The Museum donated the car to the URHS, which will return it to New Jersey for restoration and exhibit.

"... [T]his is like finding buried treasure," says Kevin Phalon, URHS executive director. "We would have never expected to see this car again, so we are incredibly grateful to the National World War I Museum and Memorial for saving it. We are honored to be entrusted with its restoration."

On Feb. 2, 1949, the S.S. *Magellan* docked at Pier H in Weehawken, N.J., with a gift to the United States from France — *The Train De La Reconnaissance Francaise* or Merci Train. This train consisted of 49 two-axle boxcars dating to the 1880s and 1890s. The cars were freshly painted, decorated with shields bearing French provincial coats of arms, and filled with more than 52,000 gifts from the French people. There was a boxcar for each state, with the

District of Columbia and Territory of Hawaii sharing a car.

After unloading, New Jersey's car was moved by rail to Trenton, where it was formally presented to Gov. Alfred E. Driscoll at the state house, with more than 20,000 people attending the ceremony. The car was then entrusted to the American Legion, but by 1958 it had disappeared with no record of its location.

The Merci Train was presented in response to the Friendship Train. In 1947, the U.S. launched the Friendship Train to collect relief supplies for war-torn Western Europe. The train began its eastward journey in Hollywood, Calif., on Nov. 7, 1947. Non-perishable food contributions were collected at stops through the center of the U.S. In the end, enough goods to fill more than 270 boxcars arrived in New York for shipment to France and Italy.

After the not-yet-identified Merci Train car turned up in Tennessee, the World War I Museum saved it from scrapping, storing it in a Kansas City warehouse as an object used during World War I.

In 2024, Chris Juergens, museum curator, and historian

David Knutson, investigating the car's origins, determined it was the New Jersey Merci Train boxcar. Numbers from a still-attached builder's plate matched with figures photographed on the car when it arrived in Trenton. Also, after the 1949 presentation ceremony, the car was fitted with truck tires so it could be displayed throughout the state. The gear from that conversion is still on the car.

The boxcar will be trucked to the URHS restoration facility in Boonton, N.J., for restoration, with plans to complete the project by Memorial Day 2027.

With the New Jersey boxcar discovery, only five Merci Train cars have not been preserved. Colorado's car is lost, with no clue as to its whereabouts. The Connecticut and Illinois cars were destroyed in fires. Massachusetts and Nebraska knowingly scrapped their cars.

"This boxcar is more than just a historic railroad artifact — it's a symbol of international friendship, gratitude, and the enduring connections forged through hardship," says Phalon. "We are excited to share its remarkable story with the people of New Jersey and beyond."

— Bob Lettenberger



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September-December: Thursday through Sunday  
Closed Mondays except Memorial Day, Labor Day, and during the Washington County Fair.

Adults \$20

Seniors (ages 62+) \$19

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Please visit our website for more information and special events pricing.

**www.patrolley.org 724-228-9256**

**WASHINGTON Othello**

**OTHELLO'S MILWAUKEE ROAD  
INTERPRETIVE CABOOSE**

Explore the history of the Milwaukee Road in an original caboose turned interpretive center. Photos, memorabilia, maps and more ignite your imagination. Bay window, rib side caboose is open year round, Tuesday through Saturday from 10am-5pm. Groups welcome. Various train items and artwork available for sale in adjacent historic Old Hotel Art Gallery, originally built as a train hotel.

**www.facebook.com/theoldhotelothello 509-488-5936**

**WISCONSIN East Troy**

**EAST TROY RAILROAD MUSEUM**  
2002 Church Street



MILWAUKEE DAY is Saturday, June 28th. Take 14-mile round trips from historic East Troy Depot and Museum to Indianhead Park in Mukwonago, WI, with a stop at the popular Elegant Farmer store and deli. Ride a 1920s Milwaukee streetcar and a North Shore Line interurban car. Regular trains Fri-Sat-Sun in June, July & August. Sat-Sun only in Sept. & Oct. See schedules and more at:

**www.easttroyrr.org 262.642.3263**

**WISCONSIN Green Bay**

**NATIONAL RAILROAD MUSEUM**  
2285 South Broadway



Explore dozens of historic trains and engaging exhibits at the National Railroad Museum, which is open year-round. Among our popular attractions are: the General Motors Aerotrain, Union Pacific "Big Boy" #4017, Pennsylvania Railroad GG-1 electric locomotive #4890, the Dwight D. Eisenhower A4 locomotive, and the world's largest collection of drumheads. Train rides are offered daily May-September (weekends in October).

**www.nationalrrmuseum.org 920-437-7623**

**WISCONSIN Osceola**

**OSCEOLA & ST. CROIX VALLEY RAILWAY**  
114 Depot Road, Osceola, WI 54020



Join us for a scenic and memorable trip through the St. Croix Valley. Come for the 1920's-1950's passenger rail experience, the awesome scenery, or special events such as pizza or wine tasting trains, fall color train rides and the popular Pumpkin Express.

Individual, family and group tickets available. Also, be sure to visit the Minnesota Transportation Museum in Saint Paul to experience railroading history.

**www.trainride.org 651-500-1822**

**WISCONSIN Trego**

**WISCONSIN GREAT NORTHERN RAILROAD**  
N6639 Dilly Lake Road



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**www.spoonertrainride.com 715-635-3200**

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**Word Rate:** per issue: 1 insertion — \$1.57 per word, 6 insertions — \$1.47 per word, 12 insertions — \$1.37 per word. \$35.00 MINIMUM per ad. Payment must accompany ad. To receive the discount you must order and prepay for all ads at one time. Count all initials, single numbers, groups of numbers, names, address number, street number or name, city, state, zip, phone numbers each as one word. Example: Paul P. Potter, 2102 Pacific St., Waukesha, WI 53202 would count as 9 words.

**All Copy:** Set in standard 6 point type. First several words only set in bold face. If possible, ads should be sent typewritten and categorized to ensure accuracy.

**CLOSING DATES:** August closes May 19, September closes June 23, October closes July 22, November closes Aug 20. For TRAINS' private records, please furnish: a telephone number and when using a P.O. Box in your ad, a street address.

**Send your ads to:** Trains magazine – Classified Advertising  
18650 W. Corporate Dr., Ste. 103, Brookfield, WI 53045  
Phone: 414-600-9285, E-mail: classads@firecrown.com

## RAIL SHOWS AND EVENTS

**JUNE 8, 2025:** 49th Annual Kane County Railroadiana and Model Train Show. Kane County Fairgrounds, 525 South Randall Rd., St. Charles, IL. Sunday, 10:00am-3:00pm. Admission: \$6.00 w/tax. Tables starting at \$65.00. Information: 847-358-1185, RussFierce@aol.com or www.RRShows.com

**JULY 19, 2025:** Rail Fair, Copeland Park, Rose & Clinton Streets, La Crosse, WI. 10am-4pm. Admission \$8.00, under 12 free w/adult. Railroad Show-Flea Market-Swap Meet. Model, Toy & Antique Trains, Memorabilia, Railroad Exhibits & Displays. 608-781-9383, 608-498-9522. www.4000foundation.org

All listed events were confirmed as active at the time of press.  
Please contact event sponsor for current status of the event.

## EXCURSIONS

**TWO VIA RAIL CANADA TICKET CREDITS:** I have two fully transferable Via Rail Canada ticket credits, good anywhere on the Via Rail system, each worth \$1,251.00 Canadian (\$878.00 US), valid until mid-October of this year, 2025. To make an offer, call or email Tom, (510) 816-7720, appelbaums@aol.com

## LODGING

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## BOOKS AND MAGAZINES

**CAN DAN AND HIS CLUB SAVE** their favorite engine from the scrap yard? Read the Deltic Disaster and Other Tales, and the sequel, That Which Was Lost, Deltic Disaster Part Two, available at Barnes & Noble, eBay, Amazon and Books-a-Million.

## COLLECTIBLES

**PULLMAN CHINA AND L&N 1910 BRASS LAMP** for sale at Kane County, IL RR Show in June & October. Telephone: 630-379-4424

**TOP DOLLAR PAID** for steam/diesel or electric builder plates. mr\_slides@hotmail.com Telephone: 216-321-8446

## PHOTOS, PRINTS AND SLIDES

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**TOP DOLLAR PAID:** for 35mm slide collections especially pre-1980. Mr. Slides, mr\_slides@hotmail.com Telephone: 216-321-8446

## RAILROAD ART

**ROBERT FULTON LOGAN 1889-1959** one of America's greatest architectural etcher's. Dining plate designs from ink over pencil drawings. Peter Cooper's Tom Thumb, the E-9, 4884 and the Aerotrain. Visit: robertfloganart.com

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## WANTED

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## In the July issue



## How to almost kill a short line

Revisiting the **BLACKLANDS RAILROAD**, a Texas shortline Cinderella story that went wrong. California eyes changes to Union Pacific's iconic **CARQUINEZ STRAITS** bridge. The inside story of Switzerland's 240-mile Rhätische Bahn, the **METER-GAUGE** marvel — and why it's more than passenger trains.

**On sale June 10, 2025**



## A prickly situation

The cacti around Cienega Creek at Vail, Ariz., are about to bloom as a Union Pacific stack train traverses the Lordsburg Subdivision on July 25, 2018. No. 5405, a C45ACCTE, leads a combination of GE and EMD power on this westbound.

Cayden T. Smith











## A spring evening

Amidst spring colors and a haze of brake shoe smoke, Norfolk Southern AC44C6M No. 4137 hauls black diamonds from the Pocahontas coal region. The train is easing down-grade near Ada, W. Va., on the evening of April 26, 2021. Michael Wilson





## A summer morning

The blissful Appalachian morning is interrupted by the rumble of a loaded Norfolk Southern coal train working through Keystone, W. Va., on Aug. 3, 2013. No. 8103, a GE ES44AC — NS' Norfolk & Western heritage unit — is pushing as the trailing DPU at the end of the train. Samuel Phillips





## Older and younger

BNSF Railway SD70MAC No. 9931, built in 1993, shows its age compared to SD70ACe No. 9055, a 2012 product. The pair guides an empty coal train through Tonville, Colo., traveling from Texas to Wyoming's Powder River Basin on July 20, 2013. John Crisanti

## Tanks for the flowers

Canadian National ET44AC No. 3178 leads empty tank cars through a siding and past a bloom of summer ditch flowers between Duplainville and Sussex, Wis., on June 1, 2019.

Drew Halverson







## Still standing tall

A Copper Basin Railway acid train passes through Kane Spring Canyon on its way to the Ray, Ariz., copper mine on Sept. 30, 2016. A trio of former Kennecott Copper GP39-2s, dating to the 1970s and 1980s, leads the train past a group of saguaro cacti, which could be 80 to 100 years old.

Matt Krause



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