

HISTORY: PULLMAN PORTERS' EQUITY FIGHT

September 2025

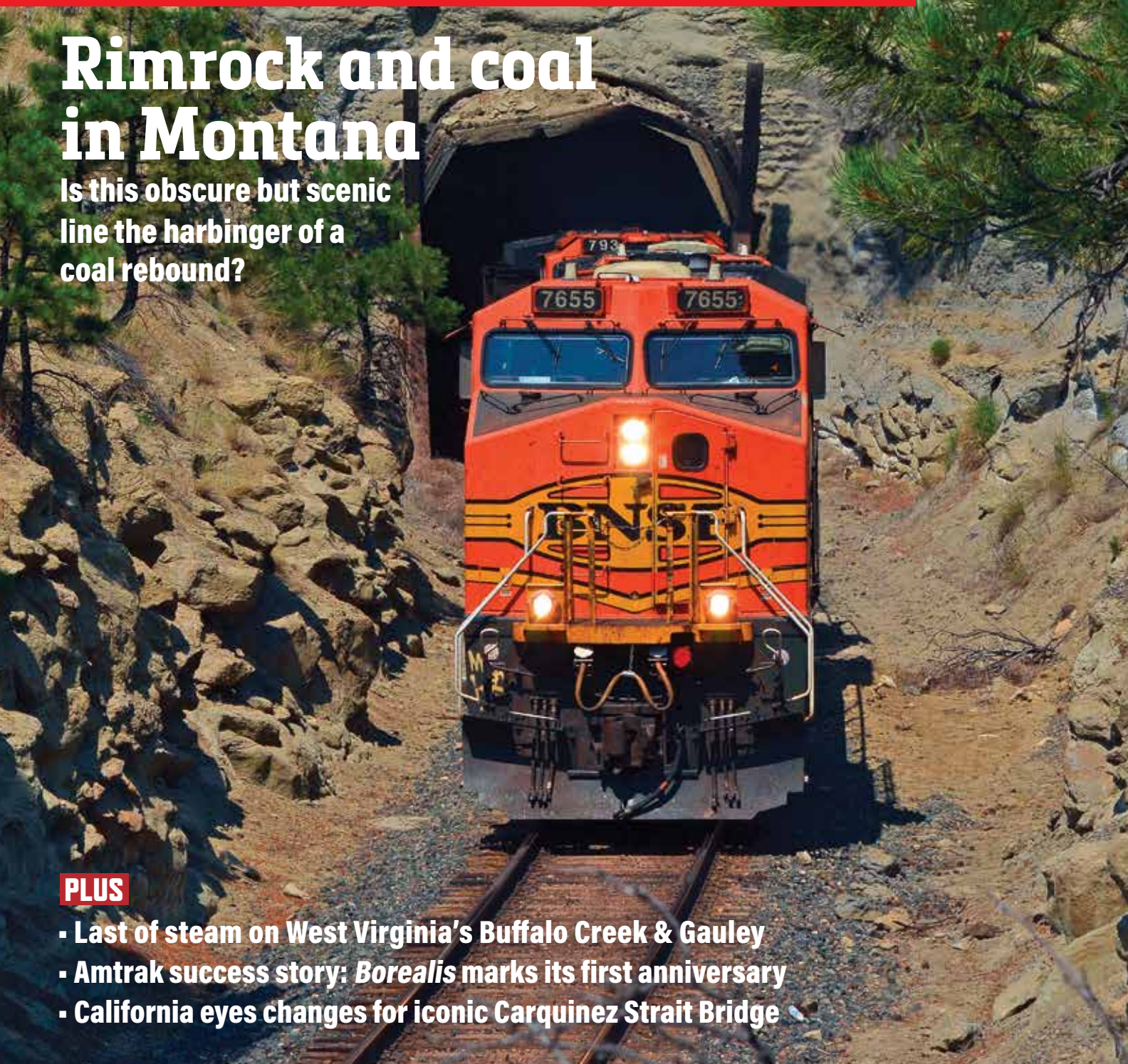
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Rimrock and coal in Montana

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From the Editor



Carl Swanson

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The Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad had a rough start to its 2025 season when equipment problems left the railroad scrambling to maintain early summer schedules.

A difficult situation for any heritage railroad becomes headline news when C&T's is involved. A preserved remnant of the Denver & Rio Grande Western's narrow gauge system, C&T operates 64 miles between Chama, N.M. and Antonito, Colo., climbing 10,015-foot Cumbres Pass in the process. The railroad is a designated National Historic Landmark and is one of the most-loved operations in the country.

There's good news: New leadership (see page 48) is in place and, we are told, problems are being resolved.

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CPKC faces service issues on former KCS

Computer cutover leads to problems, but railroad tells STB worst has passed

▲ A Kansas City Southern coal train led by a Canadian Pacific ES44AC rolls through Bunch, Okla., on a run from Martin Lake, Texas, to Kansas City, in 2021. A May computer cutover to CP's system on the former KCS led to operating issues. Craig Williams

THE MERGER of Canadian Pacific and Kansas City Southern went remarkably smoothly over the past two years — until a May 3 computer system cutover in former Kansas City Southern territory in the U.S.

The switch to CP's operating system quickly led to congestion, delays, and missed customer switches in Louisiana, eastern Texas, and Mississippi. CPKC lost track of freight cars, particularly at customer facilities with complex spurs. Cars moving to or from interchanges had to have their data tweaked manually. Shippers and train crews had trouble creating work orders.

A lack of local rail service prompted some customers to shift to trucks to keep their plants running. In mid-June,

Surface Transportation Board Chairman Patrick Fuchs asked CPKC to provide regulators with a service recovery plan.

CPKC said it had taken "extraordinary efforts" to fix its service, including sending cross-functional "SWAT-like" teams to Beaumont and Port Arthur, Texas; Mossville/Lake Charles and Shreveport, La.; Jackson, Miss.; and Wylie, Texas.

"For example, CPKC's Chief Operating Officer has been on location almost continuously at key points across the legacy-KCS network (including Shreveport Yard, KCS's major switching facility; Jackson Yard, KCS's second major switching facility; and Wylie Yard, KCS's largest intermodal ramp)," the railroad said. Two operating senior vice presidents similarly

have spent several weeks in the Southern Region.

The railway told regulators most customers would see service return to normal levels by the end of July. CPKC told the STB that it did not have underlying service problems before the cutover, and emphasized that its legacy CP operations in the U.S. have continued to run smoothly. Separately, CPKC officials said operations remained normal in Canada and Mexico.

Rick Paterson, an analyst with Loop Capital Markets, says technology system changes are inherently difficult. Data problems quickly become operational issues. "You can't stop the trains; they're still running 24/7 so any problems will have an immediate impact," he wrote in a note to clients. — *Bill Stephens*

Amtrak tells Congress it can reach 'operating profitability'

Company asks for same 2026 funding as Trump administration's proposal

AMTRAK HAS SET A GOAL of "operating profitability" by fiscal 2028 as part of its request for funding in fiscal 2026.

The goal and the company's annual grant request to Congress are part of a 137-page report. It also includes Amtrak's 2024 annual report, featuring operating data such as on-time performance, expense, and revenue data by route, as well as tables that show how various federal grants have been distributed across its Northeast Corridor, state-supported, and long-distance services.

The funding request mirrors figures included by the Trump administration in its proposed 2026 budget: a marginal overall decrease in operating funding, with Northeast Corridor funds cut by a quarter, from \$1.14 billion to \$850 million, and National Network funds increased by \$291 million, from \$1.286 billion to \$1.577 billion.

The Amtrak funding is part of the administration's overall request for the Federal Railroad Administration. FRA funding would increase slightly compared to 2025, from \$16.124 billion to \$16.439 billion. The Federal Transit Administration would also see a funding increase under that proposal, from \$20.937 billion to \$21.247 billion.

Amtrak's blueprint for what it needs and why is normally released earlier in the year, and in general does not duplicate the presidential budget proposal. The change this year is presumably based on the belief that getting funding from lawmakers would be less challenging if Amtrak's request mirrored what the administration is willing to provide. However, the final number will await an overall budget deal, which remains elusive.

The company is seeking about \$76 million of additional security funding outside of the appropriation for its police department and 2026 World Cup events. In the "Reauthorization" section, Amtrak again calls for the next surface transportation legislation, due to take effect in 2027, to include a rail title and guaranteed annual funding. Among its requests is "Improved



The southbound *City of New Orleans* arrives in Memphis, Tenn., on Nov. 26, 2023. Amtrak says it could reach "operating profitability" by 2028. Wilson B. Harkins III

partnerships with host railroads," facilitated by "sufficient funding ... such that capital improvements are made at a level consistent with the law to ensure the overall fluidity of the nation's rail network, both for the benefit of passengers and freight."

In recounting previous years' financial results and projecting how they are expected to change in the future, given recent revenue growth, management says it will reach operating profitability by dividing Amtrak's core functions into two business segments: passenger train operations and infrastructure/construction.

Why? The report says, "It makes more sense to subdivide consolidated operating loss into separate results for the business's two key segments: actual passenger train operations and infrastructure/construction activities."

In fiscal 2024, the company says, the overall \$705.2 million operating loss included a \$536.6 million loss on passenger operations and a \$168.6 million loss on infrastructure/construction activities. "New infrastructure/construction costs will continue to grow in the near term," the report says; "meanwhile, passenger

train service is projected to recover a growing share of operating costs." An appendix says the infrastructure/construction segment "manages Amtrak's physical rail network, stations/facilities, and other real estate assets."

Because most of the company's physical plant and construction activities are connected to Northeast Corridor assets, what this seems to do is off-load more expenses required to run Acela and Northeast Regional trains to a separate ledger item that won't adversely affect those services' "profitability." The NEC asset revenue stream includes payments from commuter operators, who are all under financial pressure because of projected federal funding shortfalls.

The implicit message is that Congress should not tinker with the vision of current management, because the company is on a path to eventual profitability. But inserting an "operational profitability" goal also potentially justifies a continuing focus on short-term expense reduction, rather than long-term National Network investments to improve frequencies, capacity, and relevance. — Bob Johnston



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A quick rebound for CSX

Railroad recovers from service problems despite ongoing detours

CSX HAS FULLY BOUNCED BACK

from a bout of operational challenges that began with hurricanes last fall and worsened after the Feb. 1 closure of the Howard Street Tunnel in Baltimore, CEO Joe Hinrichs told *Trains*.

The railroad's on-time performance in May, measured by trip plan compliance for intermodal and carload shipments, returned to December levels.

"I've learned enough from Mother Nature to never call the all-clear. But we feel really good about the state of our railroad right now," Hinrichs said in a June 4 interview. "The yards are in good shape. The network is performing back to where it was in '23. And so the team's done a great job ... quickly getting the network back."

CSX was already struggling operationally when it shut down the Howard Street Tunnel for a six- to eight-month double-stack clearance project [see "Digging deep in Baltimore," August 2025]. This forced the railroad to detour

more than 16 trains per day. The tunnel is a key link in both the north-south Interstate 95 Corridor, as well as the east-west corridor that connects Baltimore with the Midwest and with coal mines in West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

By the first week in April, the CSX network had slowed to levels not seen since the 2022 service crisis that was caused by widespread crew shortages at all four big U.S. railroads.

Performance metrics released June 5 show how CSX turned its operations around over the previous seven weeks:

- Terminal dwell has improved 20.2% compared to the worst week this year.

- Average train velocity is running 15.4% above the lowest level posted this year.

- The number of cars online, a key indication of congestion, has decreased 11.7% compared to this year's high point.

CSX is running faster than a year ago, with dwell 5.9% lower and velocity up by 3.4% during the last week of May. As a result, combined trip plan

compliance for intermodal and carload traffic stood at 82.5% in May — up from 68.1% in early April and in line with December 2024's 82.7%.

The recovery came faster than was initially expected. Executives had said service improvements wouldn't come overnight and that the Howard Street and Blue Ridge Sub detours would continue to weigh on the railroad until the projects are completed in the fall.

"I'm proud of the team, but I'm not surprised because I know the capability of this organization," Hinrichs says.

Hinrichs says he also wasn't surprised by the fragility of the network given a string of unusual events. Sixty miles of the Blue Ridge Sub — the former Clinchfield Railroad on the rugged North Carolina-Tennessee border — were wiped off the map in September. Hurricane Milton struck the Southeast right on the heels of Hurricane Helene. Midwestern yards were congested when CSX shut down the Howard Street Tunnel. And then recovery

efforts were complicated by spring flooding that hit Kentucky and Tennessee.

"In hindsight, we should have made sure that those yards were in better shape before we took the Howard Street Tunnel down," Hinrichs says.

What made CSX's 2025 meltdown unusual was that it was not accompanied by a wave of customer complaints.

Hinrichs credits this to proactive communication with shippers and close coordination between customer service and operations. The customer service team asked customers to prioritize their shipments.

The information was then passed along to operations, which put an emphasis on moving the hot cars. In some instances, CSX trucked containers and trailers around rail congestion so that they would arrive on time.

CSX took several steps to clear congestion. Among them: pulling 45 locomotives from storage, ordering 20 additional locomotive rebuilds, adjusting engineering work blocks to align with natural lulls in traffic, storing 2,000 cars, and collaborating with customers and short line railroads to pre-block traffic and increase the frequency of interchanges.

Rick Paterson, an analyst with Loop Capital Markets who closely follows railroad performance metrics, says CSX was able to get back on its feet faster than expected.

"Typically, when railroads get into trouble it takes longer to climb out of the operating hole than it took to fall into it. CSX bucked this trend, with an 11-week deterioration on the back of the Howard Street tunnel closure, followed by just a six-week recovery," Paterson says. "Obviously we would have preferred CSX not fall into the ditch in the first place, but at least the accelerated recovery was a welcome surprise." — *Bill Stephens*



CSX's Operation Lifesaver locomotive leads an intermodal train through Renfro, Ala., on Nov. 7, 2022. The railroad has rebounded from service issues more quickly than anticipated. Bradley Bates



Residents of Bay St. Louis, Miss., turned out on Feb. 18, 2016, to greet an Amtrak Gulf Coast inspection train. It has taken nearly 10 years for revenue service to begin, with the first regular Mobile-New Orleans *Mardi Gras Service* round trips set for Aug. 18. Bob Johnston

Start set for 'Mardi Gras Service'

Long-awaited return of New Orleans-Mobile trains announced for Aug. 18.

MORE THAN A DECADE of efforts by Amtrak and the Southern Rail Commission to restore passenger service along the Gulf Coast were set to be realized Aug. 18, 2025, when two daily *Mardi Gras Service* round trips are scheduled to begin operating between New Orleans and Mobile, Ala. The launch announcement came on July 1. That's when fares and schedules were loaded into Amtrak's ticketing system, after it became clear infrastructure and signal upgrades needed to start the service were nearing completion after months of construction and permitting delays.

Westbound train Nos. 23 and 25 will leave Mobile at 6:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. for the 144-mile, three-hour, 45-minute trip with four intermediate stops in Mississippi. Eastbound nos. 24 and 26 depart New Orleans at 7:35 a.m. and 5:31 p.m. This allows same-day connections with the *City of New Orleans* to and

from Chicago, but not with the *Sunset Limited* or *Crescent*. Two Amfleet I coaches and a café/business-class car will operate push-pull between New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal and a recently-constructed pocket track and platform in Mobile. The station at that site, once used by the triweekly *Sunset*, was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005.

Full-route "value" coach fares were initially set at \$24 Monday through Thursday and \$30 Friday through Sunday. Limited business-class, leg-rest seating prices ranged from \$59 to \$75; those passengers are entitled to a free non-alcoholic beverage in the café, which will feature locally sourced menu items. A limited number of pets and golf bags will be accepted for a fee, though the debut consists will apparently not have room for bicycles.

One launch incentive offers triple Amtrak Guest Rewards

points for passengers completing three trips through Nov. 18. The move will encourage repeat ridership and jump-start loyalty program interest in an area with limited exposure to Amtrak.

Promotion will be crucial to the new service, but communities along the Gulf Coast have been fired up over the prospect for years. A VIP excursion set for Aug. 16 was expected to reprise the excitement generated by a February 2016 "inspection train." That event was spearheaded by the Southern Rail Commission, a decades-old Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama interstate compact. Its long-serving members, along with Transportation for America Chairman John Robert Smith, have worked tirelessly with state and local politicians; the Federal Railroad Administration; Amtrak officials; host railroads CSX and Norfolk Southern; and the Port of Mobile to overcome ideological

and financial obstacles that consistently delayed the project.

SRC chairman Knox Ross tells *Trains* the idea first proposed to elected officials in the Gulf Coast states in 2014, was to extend the daily *City of New Orleans* to Florida and add a separate New Orleans-Mobile round trip.

Opposition led by CSX and the Port eventually derailed that plan — perhaps permanently. Though sweetened with a \$179 million federal grant, drawn-out litigation over New Orleans-Mobile service only ended when the Surface Transportation Board threatened to impose a settlement in 2022 that then-Chairman Martin Oberman claimed "no one would be happy with."

Now it is up to Amtrak, CSX, and the SRC to make the *Mardi Gras Service* a well-known, respected, and dependable transportation commodity. — Bob Johnston



STYLISH 1776: The Wheeling & Lake Erie has unveiled an SD40-2 painted to commemorate the 250th anniversary of U.S. independence in 2026. The former Union Pacific unit wears a design inspired by Norfolk & Western's bicentennial locomotive of 1976, but with W&LE flourishes including the railroad's trademark speed lettering. It also features vintage-style number boards, a restored Leslie air horn, and a brass bell. Wheeling & Lake Erie



D&H LIVES ON: Two very different locomotives have recently received the classic Delaware & Hudson "lightning stripe" paint scheme. Genesee Valley Transportation has repainted Delaware-Lackawanna No. 4068, an RS3 that previously wore a D&H-inspired GVT freight scheme, into the blue and gray as a tribute to the former D&H Penn Division, part of which is now operated by Delaware-Lackawanna on trackage owned by the Pennsylvania Northeast Regional Rail Authority. D&H paint also now adorns Norfolk Southern SD70ACe No. 1080, unveiled earlier in June. Genesee Valley Transportation/Sam Scanella



METRO-NORTH RAILROAD'S SEVENTH HERITAGE LOCOMOTIVE, wearing the "MTA Central" scheme worn by seven Conrail FL9s, made its revenue debut June 20, 2025, on a Hudson Line trip from Croton-Harmon to Grand Central Terminal. P32AC-DM No. 203 is the first of the heritage locomotives to be painted rather than wrapped. Adam Reich

NEWS BRIEFS

Court rejects request to review CPKC merger approval

A federal appeals court rejected the bid by a group of Chicago suburbs to force a review of approval of the **CANADIAN PACIFIC-KANSAS CITY SOUTHERN** merger. The U.S. Appeals Court for the District of Columbia denied the request of the **COALITION TO STOP CPKC**, saying the **SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD** "thoroughly considered the merger's potential environmental harms and reasonably concluded the merger was in the public interest."

Former **AMTRAK** CEO Richard Anderson was named chairman of the board for **NORFOLK SOUTHERN**, filling the vacancy created when former Canadian National CEO Claude Mongeau resigned earlier in June. Anderson also is former CEO at Northwest Airlines and Delta Air Lines.

The **B&O RAILROAD MUSEUM** and partners including **CSX**, **AMTRAK**, and the Smithsonian Institution launched a website, **AMERICANRAIL200.ORG**, to serve as a one-stop source of information on the bicentennial of American railroading in 2027. The site is intended as the central clearinghouse for events and news, with organizations and individuals invited to upload information.

NJ TRANSIT engineers ratified a new seven-year contract, retroactive to 2020, bringing to an end a five-year dispute that included a three-day strike in May. The **BROTHERHOOD OF LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS AND TRAINMEN** said 95% of those casting ballots voted in favor of the agreement. Neither side immediately released terms, but the BLET said it includes a pay increase that will raise wages to more than \$50 per hour.

VIA RAIL CANADA said its on-time performance plummeted to 30% in the first quarter of 2025, down from 72% in the same period a year earlier. VIA said the decline reflected speed restrictions **CANADIAN NATIONAL** has placed on its Venture trainsets in Ontario-Quebec corridor service; CN says the equipment can fail to trigger grade-crossing warning devices. The timekeeping issues may also explain a 2.7% drop in ridership in the quarter.

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CPKC's tech troubles cast doubt on new mergers

The CP-KCS integration went smoothly until a May 3 computer cutover



Bill Stephens

bybillstephens@gmail.com
Analysis: Trains.com

The odds of a transcontinental railroad merger gaining regulatory approval — which were already slim to begin with — got a whole lot smaller on May 3, 2025. That's when Canadian Pacific Kansas City pulled the plug on Kansas City Southern's information technology system. The cutover to the Canadian Pacific computer system in KCS territory in the U.S. did not go well.

Unforeseen data issues meant CPKC lost visibility into car locations, particularly at customer facilities. Cars bound to or from interchanges couldn't move until their data was massaged by hand. And shippers and train crews had trouble creating work orders. All this led to congestion, delays, and missed switches in Louisiana, eastern Texas, and Mississippi.

CPKC was still digging out eight weeks later, prompting Surface Transportation Board Chairman Patrick Fuchs to demand answers as some chemical shippers had to divert shipments to trucks to keep their plants running. An apologetic CPKC said it expected service to return to normal by late July.

If this sounds familiar, that's because it is: Computer glitches brought Norfolk Southern and eventually CSX to their knees when they split Conrail in 1999. Less publicized was the chaotic IT cutover at BNSF after the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe merger.

The Conrail boondoggle came on the heels of the 1997-98 operational meltdown that followed Union Pacific's 1996 acquisition of Southern Pacific. So when BNSF and Canadian National sought to merge in 2000, the STB said "Whoa!" The board imposed a merger moratorium while it drew up new review rules.

The 2001 rules put a much higher hurdle in front of a merger involving two giant systems — so high, in fact, that none of the Class I lines have sought to create a coast-to-coast railroad. (KCS had an exemption from the new rules, and CPKC was judged under the old, merger-friendly regulations.)

Which brings us to today.

A combination of lackluster stock performance and a lack of volume growth have prompted some of the Class I railroads to reconsider mergers. A transcontinental system, the thinking goes, would improve service, unlock new markets, and allow railroads to capture freight lost to trucks.

Thanks to Republican control of the White House, Congress, and the STB, merger proponents on Class I boards and in executive suites contend that the political climate may be right for the end-to-end combination of an Eastern and Western railroad.

Also in their favor: The fact that the CPKC merger had gone smoothly was viewed as proof that not all Class I mergers invariably lead into the operational ditch.

Until now. Give CPKC credit for taking a delayed, deliberate, and phased approach to its IT cutover two years into the merger. A flawless cutover is as rare as hen's teeth, and limiting the switch-over to KCS — without touching CPKC de Mexico — was wise.

But CPKC's tech-related operational problems in a three-state area raise the specter that a transcon merger could lead to trouble spanning the East, West, or both. CPKC Chief Operating Officer Mark Redd, speaking to an investor conference in June, lamented how the best-laid tech plans can go awry. "Imagine that on a larger scale," he says.

You can bet that regulators and shippers already are imaging just such a scenario, particularly since Redd's larger scale would include not one merger but two. A first transcon merger proposal inevitably would spark a second in short order.

Whether regulators and customers will take a broader view — that a pair of U.S. transcontinental systems could improve service and help railroads grow, despite the potential for short-term integration issues — is an open question.

In June, former STB Chairman Dan Elliott told investment firm TD Cowen that the odds of a transcon merger getting a regulatory green light were 20% to 25%. CPKC's stumble almost certainly diminishes those odds. And that makes you wonder if rail executives ultimately will conclude that a final round of mergers is simply not worth the risk. **I**



Will a transcon merger ever get a regulatory green light? With a Norfolk Southern unit in the consist, an eastbound BNSF Z-symbol intermodal train nears the summit of Cajon Pass in 2022. Bill Stephens

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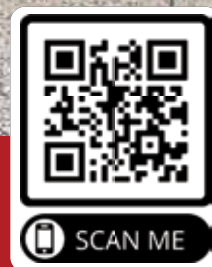
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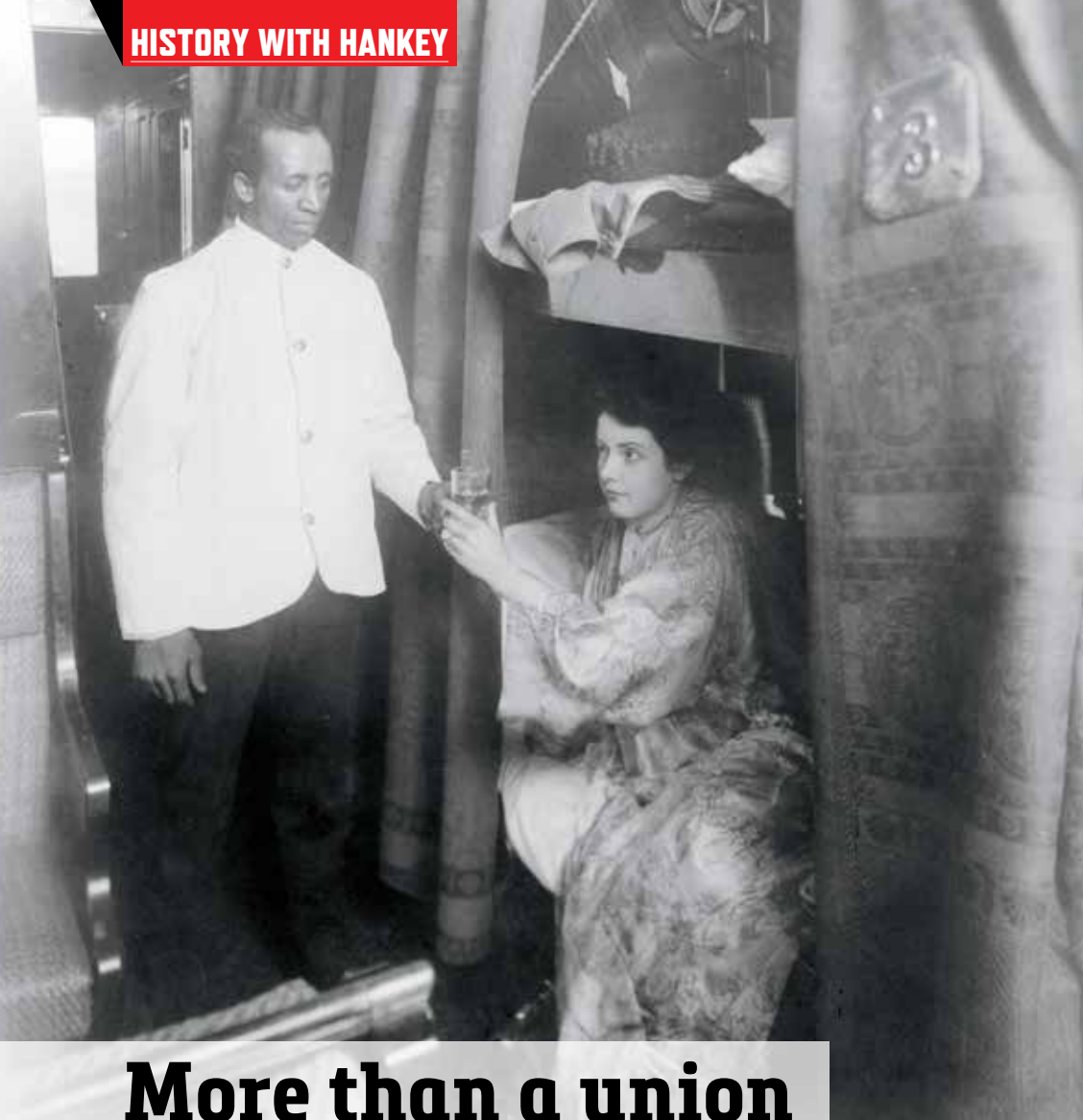
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More than a union

Pullman porters and the fight for equality

▲ A Pullman sleeping car porter hands a glass of water to one of the passengers in his charge in this 1905 photograph. Required to follow detailed rules of conduct and service, porters were poorly paid, worked long hours, and were away from home for days at a time. George R. Lawrence Co.; Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

A CENTURY CAN SEEM LIKE A LONG TIME, especially given the accelerating rate of change that oppresses all of us. At the same time, 100 years is one long lifetime. Almost 100,000 now-living Americans were on this Earth in 1925, the year a group of Black Pullman employees organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids in New York. That August, they selected a young labor activist named Asa Philip Randolph as their president.

The BSCP represented sleeping car porters and other on-train employees for only about 40 years, but it was much more than a smallish railroad labor organization. In a variety of ways, BSCP and its members played crucial roles in the modern civil rights movement. Just

as largely White railroad unions pioneered progress in issues such as collective bargaining, workplace safety, the eight-hour day, and social safety nets, in the mid-20th century Randolph's Brotherhood gave shape and substance to evolving principles of fairness and equality under law. It is just one example of how railroading helped shape America in ways we have not yet fully appreciated.

THE LONG STRUGGLE

African Americans worked on the railroad from its very beginnings, as employees, slaves, and casual labor seeking a toehold in a rapidly expanding economy. Unlike Irish, German, and other European migrants, African Americans continued to be restricted to more menial

and taxing jobs. They could be firemen but never engineers, track laborers but not roadmasters. In the South, that remained the pattern through much of the 20th century.

Railroad mobility was so central to American life in the 19th century that it was a railroad case before the Supreme Court — *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 — that interpreted the 14th Amendment to mean that discrimination against minorities was legal, so long as “separate but equal” accommodations were provided. In practice, facilities might be separate, but were rarely equal. None of this is “woke” or political correctness. It is basic American history.

Glossing over those realities obscures the remarkable and sustained struggle Pullman porters waged over a half-century merely to establish the right to form a union and collectively bargain with one of the most powerful (and openly racist) corporations in America. That was not an anomaly, as much of the United States embraced segregation. For many decades the restaurant in Union Station was the only fine dining establishment in Washington, D.C., serving Whites and Blacks without distinction.

George Pullman was a classic 19th century tycoon — a visionary and ruthless businessman with a highly contingent moral compass. One of his most effective tactics after the Civil War was to tap into three pervasive realities. One was the growing Middle Class and demand for more comfortable long-distance travel. Second was exploiting the pool of available African American labor who had few employment options in either the North or South.

Third was the perception — carefully cultivated — that Blacks were predisposed to servitude, and that the traveling public would be willing to pay for the kind of Old South charm and personal attention being romanticized in late 19th-century popular culture. A ride in a Pullman Parlor or Sleeping Car was a brief sample of “the good life” the top 10% enjoyed all the time. Keep in mind

that comforts like indoor plumbing, central heat, and private vehicles were luxuries beyond most people's reach.

THE GREAT EMANCIPATOR'S SON

There was irony in the fact that Chicago corporate attorney Robert Todd Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln's only surviving child, became the Pullman Co.'s general counsel, then assumed the presidency of the Pullman empire upon George's death in 1897. The son of "the Great Emancipator" was a principal architect of the business model that sought to replicate elements of unfree labor.

In the years between the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 and the Shopmen's Strike of 1922, many non-management railroad workers created effective collective bargaining organizations and voluntary associations such as insurance and savings institutions.

All railroad work could be harsh. Employment policies were often arbitrary and capricious, and there was no social safety net of any kind. At the turn of the 20th century, an average of 10 to 12 railroaders were killed on the job every day of the year.

Over time, the work of labor unions, Congress, and public pressure dramatically improved the lot of average White railroad employees. But the Pullman Co. was not a railroad, and remained virulently anti-union. Porters and maids had a tougher row to hoe.

ASA PHILIP RANDOLPH

Following the First World War, change was afoot. Black soldiers who had "seen Paree" brought a new kind of activism back to the states. The Harlem Renaissance in New York, the Black Diaspora of African Americans fleeing the Jim Crow South for Northern cities, and generally shifting attitudes about race intensified the sense of exploitation felt by Black Pullman employees. Even the American Federation of Labor, the country's largest grouping of craft unions and no one's idea of a progressive entity, expressed more willingness to

work with African American organizations.

For many years, porters and other Black Pullman employees had quietly, and sometimes surreptitiously, explored the idea of creating a union to bargain for better wages, reasonable working conditions, and some small measure of respect. The fact that the traveling public commonly referred to all porters as "George" suggests the low regard many people (and the Pullman Co. itself) had for them.

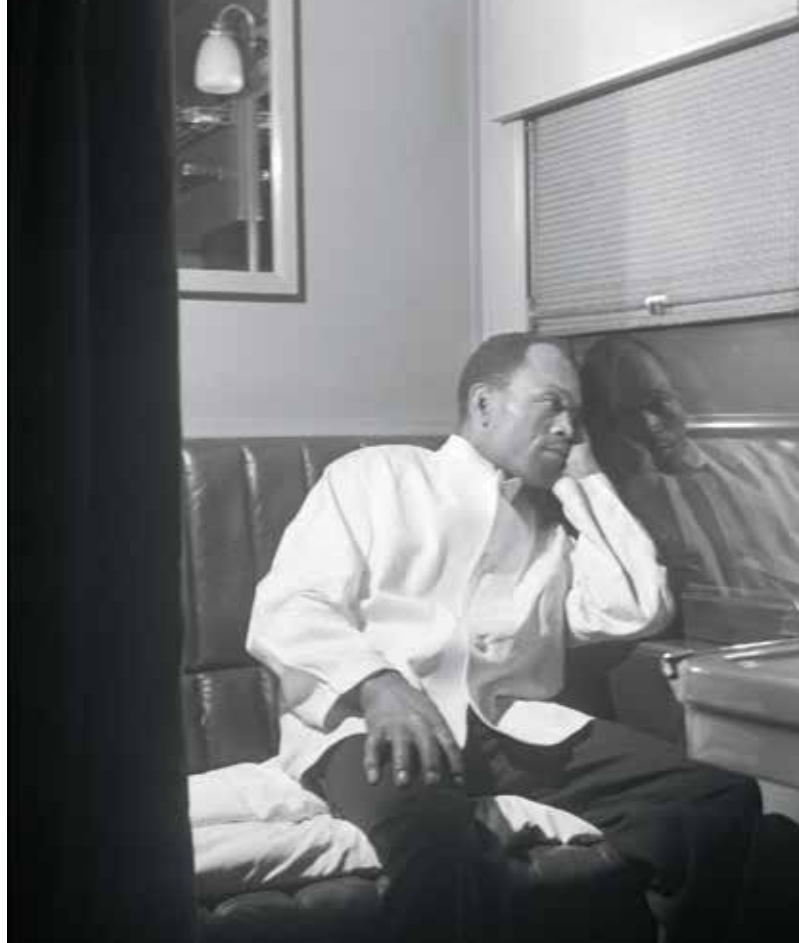
That began to change in 1925, when a group of porters gathered in New York City to create a labor organization strong enough to challenge the Pullman Co. Lincoln had retired as Pullman's chairman three years earlier, and would be dead by 1926. The organizing committee chose a charismatic Black labor organizer to lead the new Brotherhood. Asa Philip Randolph was educated, an eloquent speaker, and tenacious advocate. He also faced formidable opposition from the Pullman Co.

The porters and maids had few allies, unlike White railroad workers seeking to form (or join) unions. The railroad industry itself was largely silent — it wasn't their fight. Mostly Southern railroads and their largely White craft unions had already made labor agreements restricting promotion opportunities for Black employees. Even the American Federation of Labor (AFL) refused to rec-



A. Philip Randolph, leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, photographed in 1942.

Gordon Parks; Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division



Pullman Porter Alfred MacMillan rests for a moment in the men's washroom aboard the *Capitol Limited*, bound for Chicago in March 1942.

Jack Delano; Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

ognize the nascent BSCP as a legitimate craft union.

The Pullman Co. deployed the customary coercive measures to stymie any union organizing activity. Porters or others known to be actively working to organize were summarily dismissed, which was perfectly legal. In turn, the porters used their mobility and national networks to quietly pursue the work of strengthening the BSCP, aided famously by their wives. In its first decade, the Brotherhood did not thrive — but it survived.

The onset of the Great Depression around 1930 made things worse for just about everyone, but paved the way for the vast program of reforms we know as "The New Deal." Some of the ideas seemed radical, like Social Security. While relief of suffering was the initial New Deal objective, structural reforms addressing inequalities and emphasizing economic fairness followed closely, and the BSCP saw an opportunity.

The idea that workers had

rights at all was still anathema to many employers. Roosevelt's various fair labor laws, and shifting public sentiment, finally compelled the Pullman Co. in 1935 to begin collectively bargaining with BSCP regarding wages and working conditions. The issues at stake were both large — a more reasonable living wage — and smaller, such as the company paying for porter's uniforms and reducing harassment of union activities.

By 1937, porters and maids finally achieved the kinds of rights many White railroad craft unions had won 40 years earlier. Pullman scholar David Duncan notes that the Pullman Co. had followed society in general, improving relations with all of its employees and treating porters and maids with greater respect. They had a greater presence in the company's publication *Pullman News*, and even began working as porter trainers — a small, but symbolic, advancement.

There is further irony in that just as the Brotherhood

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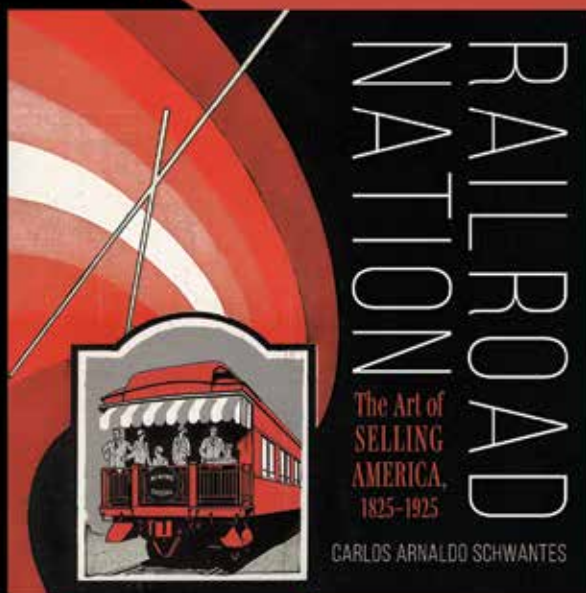


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**An unparalleled look at the ephemera
of the railroad industry and its vibrant
history in America.**



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was coming into its own in the mid-1930s, rail passenger travel began its quarter-century secular decline in earnest. There were upticks during and after World War II, and occasional signs that Pullman travel had a stable future, but in hindsight the writing was on the wall. The demise of the Pullman Co. as a national institution was remarkably swift. By 1969, even before Amtrak was created, it ceased operations altogether.

The work of A.P. Randolph and his BSCP colleagues Milton Webster, C.L. Dellums, and a dozen more, had not been confined solely to Pullman labor issues. It was rooted in evolving notions of fairness and equality in times of great social and cultural flux. As the first major national African American labor organization, it was natural that BSCP would play a leading role in the modern Civil Rights movement. They did not think of themselves solely as railroaders so much as advocates for a better, more fair American society. That had also been true of the railroad labor leaders a half-century before.

A.P. Randolph was a young man growing up in Florida in 1896 when the Supreme Court decided the Plessy case. In 1925, the year he helped found the BSCP, Homer Plessy died in New Orleans. Randolph was still active in 1953, when the Supreme Court effectively overturned that decision, and he lived to see landmark legislation such as the 1965 Voting Rights Act that further protected Americans from insidious discrimination.

Randolph retired as president of the BSCP in 1968, after leading the organization for 43 years. In 1978, the by-now vastly smaller BSCP merged into the Brotherhood of Railway & Airline Clerks, which through the Amtrak Service Workers Council continues to represent on-board Amtrak employees.

Randolph died in New York City in 1979, not long after his 90th birthday. That same year, Amtrak introduced its Superliner I bilevel cars, with George M. Pullman's name on sleeping car No. 32009. A version of the Pullman Co. survived until 1981, largely to resolve longstanding disputes with the BSCP. For many of us, that is well within living memory.

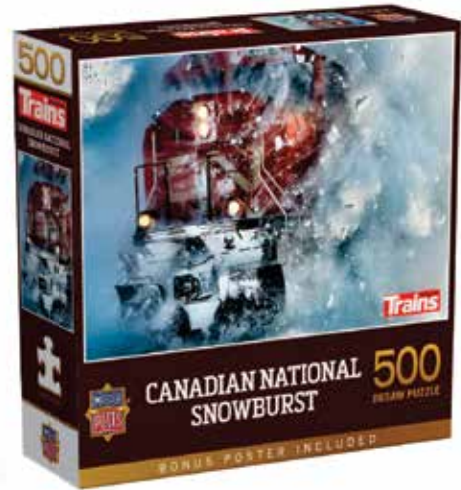
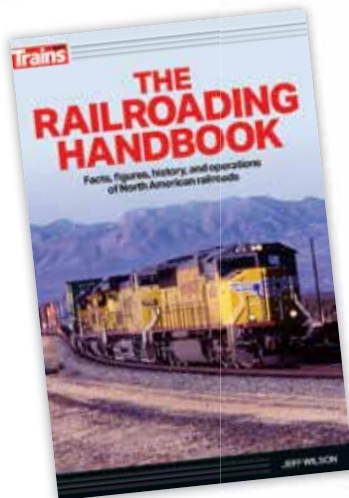
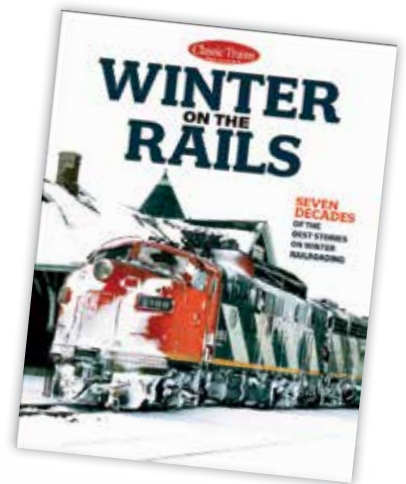
It wasn't until Superliner II No. 32503 rolled out of the factory 15 years later that A. Philip Randolph's name graced the side of a sleeping car. Bombardier built the car to Pullman Co. patents at its Barre, Vt. plant — a hundred miles from Robert Todd Lincoln's summer estate at Hilsmere, near Manchester.

One last irony: Have the 32009 and the 32503 ever run coupled together in the same train? Did anyone notice? Did anyone care? — *John P. Hankey*

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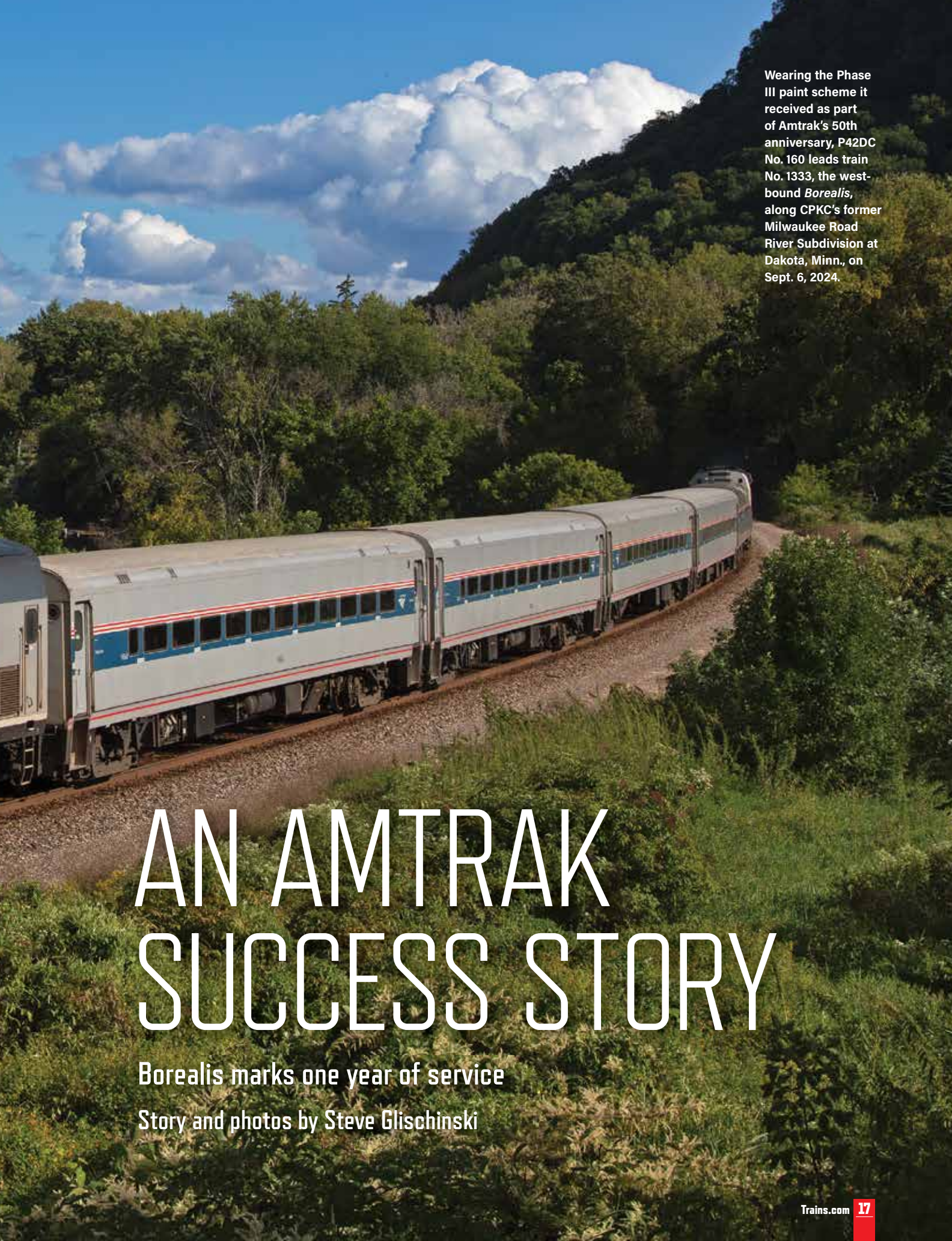
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A photograph of an Amtrak Borealis train, a double-decker passenger train, traveling along a track through a lush, green forest. The train is white with blue and red stripes. The background features a steep, forested hillside under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

Wearing the Phase III paint scheme it received as part of Amtrak's 50th anniversary, P42DC No. 160 leads train No. 1333, the west-bound *Borealis*, along CPKC's former Milwaukee Road River Subdivision at Dakota, Minn., on Sept. 6, 2024.

AN AMTRAK SUCCESS STORY

Borealis marks one year of service

Story and photos by Steve Glischinski

Being a passenger train advocate can be a grim business. Advocates often battle just to retain what should be normal services like dining cars and lounges, push back against politicians who see cutting trains as an easy mark, and try to convince Amtrak to maintain service and, hopefully, expand. However, every once in a while their efforts pay off when a new service or train proves to be a clear winner. For the last year, that winner has been the Chicago-St. Paul *Borealis*.

When Amtrak took over passenger service on the Chicago-Twin Cities corridor in 1971, there were three trains on Milwaukee Road and four on Burlington Northern (plus an extra westbound train on Fridays and Sundays). Amtrak cut service to one train, the *Empire Builder*, running Chicago to Minneapolis on the Milwaukee Road as part of a Chicago-Seattle operation. However, Amtrak quickly saw the potential on the route, operating a first section of the *Empire Builder* (with Milwaukee Road equipment) during the summer of 1971 to handle overflow business during the 4th of July holiday weekend. Amtrak added a second train in November 1971, offering twice-daily service.



Engineer Riley Richmond and Conductor Roy Gentry, the crew of the first *Borealis*, pose in front of P42DC No. 174 at St. Paul Union Depot before departing for Chicago on May 21, 2024.

That remained roughly the status quo (with some changes in frequency and service) until Oct. 25, 1981, when the overnight *North Star* was discontinued due to budget cuts. It would be 43 years until a second train came back.

That day finally arrived May 21, 2024, when the Chicago-St. Paul *Borealis* entered service. The train is sponsored by the states of Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. The *Borealis* operates eastbound three hours after the *Empire Builder* and departs Chicago three hours before the *Builder*. It makes all the *Empire Builder's* stops plus two others (Milwaukee Airport and Sturtevant, Wis.). The train launched with a normal consist of four Horizon fleet coaches and an Amfleet café car that also had business class seating.

In late spring 2025, Horizon fleet coaches were removed from service after corrosion was discovered in some cars. The consist was changed to two Superliner coaches and a Superliner café coach. With the change, no business class service is offered.

YEARS IN THE MAKING

Efforts to bring a second train to the route had been ongoing for years, but really gained speed about a decade ago, with lobbying from backers such as Minnesota's Great River Rail Commission, All Aboard Minnesota, and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. Jack Barbier, a founding member of All



Aboard Minnesota, recalled that one of their first steps was establishing a relationship with the Minnesota Department of Transportation. "We put together a White Paper discussing how we thought a second train to Milwaukee and Chicago could be put together successfully," Barbier said. "One thing led to another and we worked up to the legislative level, getting legislators to become supporters who helped get legislation passed to fund this train. All Aboard Minnesota became a grass roots organization that has been a driving force behind increased passenger rail in the Midwest."

According to Amtrak, in its first month, the *Borealis* averaged about 300 passengers each way daily for a total of more

than 18,500 people. In October 2024, the train passed the 100,000-passenger mark: through Oct. 31, it had carried 109,826 passengers, while Amtrak spokesman Marc Magliari said the *Empire Builder* had not seen any drop in ridership. Officials from Amtrak and the states funding the service rode the train that month and marked the occasion by providing passengers with certificates for 500 bonus Amtrak Guest Rewards points and complimentary refreshments, along with Nestlé 100 Grand candy bars.

"We've been pleasantly surprised by the excitement and ridership that the new service has created and couldn't be prouder of our partnership," Amtrak President Roger Harris



ABOVE: On Feb. 8, 2025, the eastbound *Borealis* is making good time at Cottage Grove, Minn. Winter weather and equipment issues caused several cancellations in early 2025.



LEFT: The first eastbound *Borealis*, train No. 1340, departs St. Paul bound for Chicago on May 21, 2024.



ABOVE: The former Milwaukee Road's run along the Mississippi River is the scenic highlight for *Borealis* passengers. The westbound *Borealis* is passing Lake City, Minn., on May 22, 2024.



RIGHT: The *Borealis* launched with a normal consist of four Horizon fleet coaches and an Amfleet café car, which also had business-class seating.



said in autumn 2024. “The number of full trains, even at mid-week on the Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago corridor, is leading Amtrak and our state partners to look at how we can add capacity.”

A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

CPKC is one reason behind the train’s success. Inauguration of the new train was accelerated thanks to Canadian Pacific, which asked Amtrak to back CP’s acquisition of Kansas City Southern Railway in 2021.

Significantly, according to *Trains* passenger correspondent Bob Johnston, Canadian Pacific only sought improvements at key chokepoints and did not insist all upgrades be completed before the second passenger train could begin.

The biggest project is the addition of controlled switches and signaling in Winona, Minn., to convert a siding used primarily in switching industries into a second main track through the station.

While that’s part of the story, so was the symbiotic relationship CP had cultivated with Wisconsin’s DOT for Chicago-Milwaukee *Hiawatha* service expansion, says Johnston. Wisconsin has received a \$72.8 million Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements grant to fund a signaled track next to CPKC’s Muskego Yard in Milwaukee that will permit freight trains to bypass the downtown station. Once completed by 2026, another Chicago-Milwaukee round trip can be added, allowing the *Borealis* to operate

as a separate train rather than taking up a *Hiawatha* slot, as it does today.

Still, there have been bumps in the road. The biggest has been cancellations caused by harsh winter weather. Amtrak’s Horizon fleet cars are notoriously poor performers in cold weather. The train was cancelled several times in early 2025, as was the *Empire Builder*, due to equipment and weather issues. Amfleet and Superliner cars were brought in to substitute. And in the ultimate insult for alleged “all-weather” transportation, Amtrak substituted buses for the *Borealis* several times when the train was cancelled. It was not a good look for the national passenger railroad.

Still, there is much to cele-

brate. Already there are calls for another train to be added to the route. The state of Wisconsin has begun studying the possibility of adding a second daily round trip. The study is being funded using a \$500,000 grant under the Federal Railroad Administration’s Corridor Identification and Development Program awarded in December 2023. Among issues to be determined are what infrastructure improvements host railroad CPKC might require before allowing an additional round trip.

It remains to be seen what the Trump administration will do with passenger rail, but for now, the *Borealis* keeps rolling, offering Midwesterners a choice in a long-underserved corridor. **I**

Farewell to steam



Change on West Virginia's Buffalo Creek & Gauley

by Cody A. Burdette

I was born in the late 1930s and my father, Theodore Burdette, was a lifelong railroad man and locomotive engineer, so I got to see a lot of steam locomotives and ride in their cabs.

In the mid-1950s, railroads were doing away with steam power. As diesels appeared on the major railroads, my father followed steam to a short line in Clay County, W.Va., known as the Buffalo Creek & Gauley Railroad.

90,000 acres and a dream

J.G. Bradley, one of the last old-time timber and coal barons, owned a 90,000-acre wilderness that was rich with coal and timber in Clay County. This private empire was called the Elk River Coal & Lumber Co.

When I was a boy, I enjoyed listening to stories told by John Lanham and Pat Butler, the first employees of the company. Around 1898, they said, Bradley and his young bride came to this remote area from Boston.

They rode the old Coal & Coke Railway to Clay, W.Va. (that was the name of the railroad before the Baltimore & Ohio bought it in 1918), where they rented horses and rode into the wilderness to see firsthand what they owned. They saw miles and miles of virgin timber. They saw coal outcroppings all over the property. They saw the large, clear, cool Buffalo Creek with its many large forks leading off into the mountains, first left and then right. Bradley immediately set

◀ **Buffalo Creek & Gauley 2-8-0 Consolidation No. 14, with 55 empties in tow, highballs across the railroad's namesake creek at Cressmont in November 1961 in this dramatic image from the last stand of steam in the East.**

William E. Warden, Jr.



about building his empire.

After a trip back to Boston to raise money and formally establish the Elk River Coal & Lumber Co., Bradley returned a few months later, ready to begin construction on the company railroad, which he named the Buffalo Creek & Gauley.

The first few miles of his right-of-way clings to the steep sides of the mountain and had to be blasted out of solid rock. Then Buffalo Creek levels out and the railroad became easier to build.

In 1902, Bradley won permission to connect his railroad with the Coal & Coke Railway, thus linking the BC&G with the outside world.

Steam's last stand

The company town of Dundon, W.Va., where the Buffalo Creek & Gauley had its yards and repair shops, was established at the mouth of Buffalo Creek. This was the starting point of Bradley's empire.

The line extended 22 miles up Buffalo Creek with many miles of branch lines leading off of the main line in search of timber and coal. Three 2-8-0 Consolidation steam engines, Nos. 4, 13, and 14, were based

Hostler Robert Carrothers washes down Buffalo Creek & Gauley 2-8-0 No. 14 in a sylvan setting at Dundon before the big Consolidation takes a long train over to Widen, W.Va., on Nov. 9, 1951.

William E. Warden, Jr.

out of Dundon. They handled the heavy coal trains between the company mine at Widen, W.Va. and Dundon.

Ten miles up Buffalo Creek from Dundon was the company-owned sawmill town of Swandale, with its fleet of logging locomotives — Climax locomotives Nos. 2 and 3, and Shays Nos. 12, 18, and 19.

The company town of Widen was farther along Buffalo Creek. Here, a huge coal mine loaded 60 cars of coal a day and 60 cars each night. There were three 2-8-2 Mikados stationed here. Numbered 10, 16, and 17, they were assigned to work the yard and haul the waste rock, or gobb, as it was commonly called, away from the mine.

This set the stage, in the early 1950s, for steam's last stand east of the Mississippi River.

A log train engineer

My father was a log train engineer. At first, he ran

Climax No. 3 and Shay No. 12. He later ran Shay No. 19, formerly the No. 2 of the Cherry River Boom & Lumber Co. of Richwood, W.Va.

Many times I accompanied my father on the log train. By this time, all of Buffalo Creek above Swandale had been logged over and the company had decided to log Lilly Fork, two miles above Dundon and eight miles below Swandale.

The track gang began laying steel in Lilly Fork and it took 12 miles of track to reach the head at Lilly. Many more miles were laid in shorter hollows leading off the Lilly main.

There were 22 creek crossings without bridges. When the rails reached the creek, they went down the bank, across the creek bed, and up the other side. This kept Dad busy, first braking the train then releasing the brakes at just the right time to ford the sometimes-deep creek. He would then jerk the throttle wide open to get up the bank and out of the creek.

I remember on the climb out of the creek how the slack would run out on each heavily loaded log car and seem to jerk the old Shay back toward the creek until the engine would be down to a crawl and would almost stall before finally struggling out of the creek. Then Dad had to quickly close the throttle and start braking for the next creek.

There were a dozen miles of this roller coaster railroad on Lilly Fork. In the dead of winter the creeks froze and a section crew had to go ahead of the engine with picks and chop the ice away from the rails. Otherwise, the locomotives would skate away from the track on the solid ice.

In summer, the streams would occasionally flood, damaging some of the crossings. It



was quite a sight to see a crew of gandy dancers out in the middle of a creek crossing, driving spikes submerged under several inches of water.

A fan favorite

This was the last of big-time West Virginia logging operations using steam power, and hordes of railroad buffs and railroad historians flocked into the area with cameras and recording equipment. Dad let many of them ride the cab with him on the log train.

Being the son of a log train engineer, I heard all the stories

of what had happened each day on the railroad.

Dad told me about the time No. 12 derailed as it topped the grade coming up from one of the many creek crossings. In the process, the locomotive bounced up and down so violently it broke the big truss rod supporting the main frame on the engineer's side, thus letting the boiler and engines drop several inches through the frame. Every time a cylinder made a downward stroke, the main rod chopped the rail. This started all the pipes in the cab leaking.

My father and the fireman were lucky none of the pipes burst, for they surely would have been killed or badly scalded. No. 12 was towed to Dundon shop where she spent several weeks being repaired. Climax No. 3 was taken from the steel laying gang and put in the log train service.

This engine was a lot smaller than the Shay it replaced but was expected to handle the same train. In order to get the Climax out of the creek crossings, dad had to let the train gather more speed than usual leading to the creeks.

Consolidations Nos. 4 and 13 are ready for their next runs at the Buffalo Creek & Gauley's modest shop in Dundon, W.Va. The 2-8-0s routinely handled heavy coal trains between the company mine at Widen and Dundon.

Paul Larson

The Climax would hit the creek hard, spraying water in all directions. Coming out of the creek the Climax's stack talk would sound like a woodpecker on a dry limb. She would get down and paw the earth, shooting red hot cinders sky high.

Little No. 3 endured several

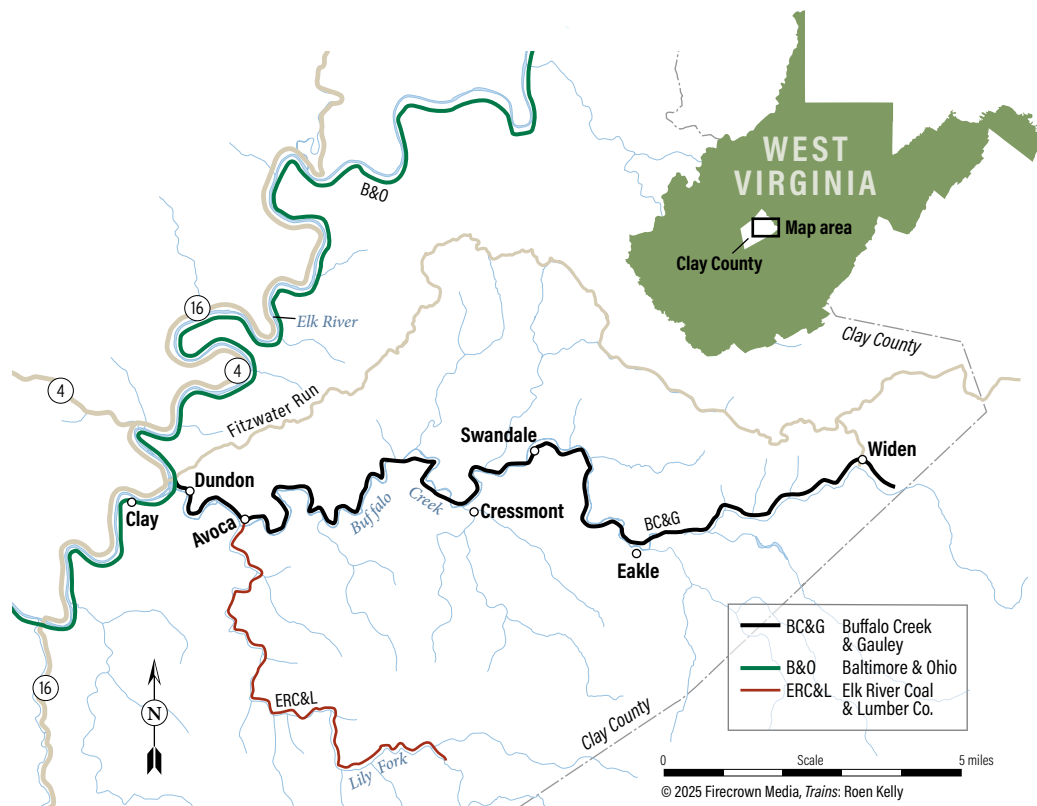
weeks of this before No. 12 returned to duty.

Another time No. 12 was nearing the head of the line when a car carrying a log loader broke away and started rolling back to Lilly, gathering speed with each creek crossing. Dad uncoupled from the remainder of his train and followed in hot pursuit, but he couldn't catch up to the runaway. So, before he tore the engine up or derailed, he slowed and ambled along for several miles, expecting at any moment to find an overturned car and a loader torn to pieces. Finally, rounding a sharp curve that led to a very long creek crossing, there was the car and its load, sitting on the rails in the middle of the stream in good shape.

On a different day, the fireman got the dump grate on No. 12 out of its socket while he was cleaning the fire before the return trip from the woods. No matter how hard they tried, they could not get the grate back in place. So they uncoupled from their train and went back to a big pile of dry driftwood that had piled up beside the creek. Here they shook the grates until the remaining fire dropped through the ash pan. After sliding boards through the firebox door, they crawled into the hot firebox and manhandled the dump grate back in place, the boards protecting them from the hot grates. Then they built a new fire using the driftwood and were ready to go in a short time.

I vividly remember sitting on the wye at the mouth of Lilly waiting for the BC&G coal train to go by. As the two trains passed each other, Dad and the BC&G engineer really "talked" to each other with their dueling whistles. After he got his log train out on the main, Dad stepped down from the engineer's seat and told me to take her for a while.

As I laid my hand on the throttle, it seemed like I could feel the heartbeat of the engine. It was dark by now and the headlight cast eerie shadows off the solid rock wall on the fireman's side. I blew the whistle



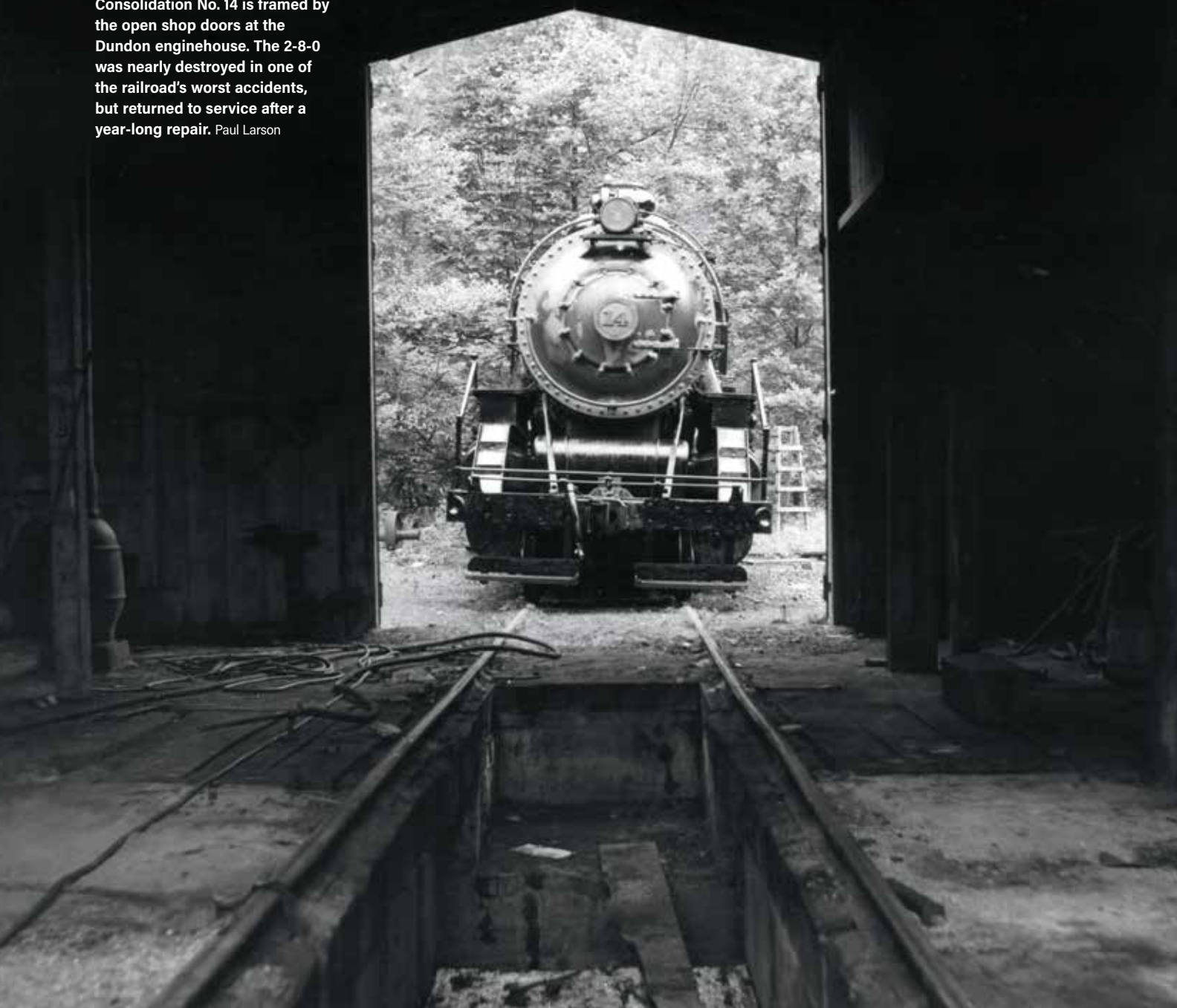
for road crossings and elsewhere just for fun. No. 12 was nearing the end of her many years of toil at this time. She had served her masters well, but she was worn out.

Years later, author Michael

Koch, gave me a copy of a book he had written, titled *The Shay Locomotive*. There, on the first page, was my father and No. 12 sitting in a creek crossing on Lilly Fork, with a trio of loaded log cars behind him.

Elk River Coal & Lumber Co. Shay No. 12 rounds a curve on the Lilly Fork branch south of Dundon. It's approaching the Buffalo Creek & Gauley main on its way to the company sawmill at Swandale. C.W. Jernstrom

Consolidation No. 14 is framed by the open shop doors at the Dundon enginehouse. The 2-8-0 was nearly destroyed in one of the railroad's worst accidents, but returned to service after a year-long repair. Paul Larson



The company bought two 70-ton Shays, Nos. 2 and 7, from the Cherry River Boom & Lumber Co. The No. 7 was re-numbered 18 and No. 2 became 19. As it happened, No. 18 had a broken frame and was never used at Swandale. No. 19 replaced No. 12 in log train service and began hauling logs out of Lilly Fork.

When No. 19 began to wade the waters of Lilly Fork, I went more and more with Dad to the woods. At this time there were several families living on Lilly

Fork. They worked laying railroad or taking it up and moving the rails to another hollow. Some of them worked cutting timber or driving the tractors that hauled logs to the log dumps. Their children walked to a one-room school, some of them a mile or two, to attend class. To get to the outside world, these people either had to walk, ride a horse, or hop the log train. The log train also hauled in supplies for the log camp and for the people who lived trackside. The train played

a very important part in the daily lives of these people, for it was their link to the outside world and a friend they could depend on that ran right by their door five days a week.

I remember one Christmas Eve, our church gathered up toys, clothing, and candy for these "children of the woods." The log train stopped at each house so the church members could deliver gifts. It was such a joy to see the tiny faces of the children light up as the train stopped right at their door-

steps and we strangers handed them presents.

The curtain falls

The BC&G kept its track and locomotives in top shape right until the end. As the last day of steam grew near, the railroad put on quite a show for the railroad enthusiasts standing at remote road crossings or driving along the road from Cressmont to Swandale. On this stretch of road you could almost reach out the car window and touch the train.

One of the worst wrecks on the BC&G occurred in September 1956. One dark night, No. 4 left Widen mines with 40 loaded coal cars and no caboose. The No. 14 followed a few miles behind with 60 loaded coal cars and a caboose.

When No. 4 reached Dundon, its crew uncoupled from their train and left the cars standing on the BC&G mainline with no one guarding the rear of their train while they took their locomotive out on the B&O to gather empty coal cars off a siding. In the meantime, No. 14 with its 60 loads was drawing nearer and nearer.

The fireman on 14 that night told me, years later, about the wreck. Their first sign of trouble was their headlight reflecting the shining wheels of a coal car directly ahead. He jumped down from his seat and joined the "bird gang" by leaping out the gangway on the fireman's side. The engineer put the brake valve in emergency and leaped from the cab window. Both men scrambled to their feet and watched as their locomotive slammed into the stopped train. The force of the impact tossed coal cars around like they were toys, car after car derailling, turning crossways and flipping over — and in the middle of it all was No. 14.

After the screeching, groaning, and sounds of metal snapping under pressure, the night grew still, except for the steam escaping from the many broken pipes on No. 14, in the middle of the two trains. So many of its stay bolts had broken it was regarded as a miracle the boiler hadn't exploded.

The heavy duty "big hook" crane worked many days cleaning this wreck up. No. 14 was towed to the shop. The company talked about junking her, but finally decided to rebuild this, its most powerful locomotive. She came out of the shop about a year after the wreck, as good as new.

Silence on Buffalo Creek

I also remember my last ride on the old log train. I was working in Charleston, W.Va., but on weekend visits to my



Freshly watered at Swandale, Buffalo Creek & Gauley 2-8-0 Consolidation No. 14 lugs empty coal hoppers to the mine at Widen. H. Reid

parents' home, my father would tell me what was happening on the railroad.

The company had bought a small diesel locomotive and was trying to do away with steam on the log train, but the diesel was too light. Dad already had one derailment in the woods with it, in which several log cars were a total loss. The creek crossings were also taking a toll on the diesel's axle-mounted traction motors. Still, he told me, if I wanted to ride behind steam one more time, I had better do it soon.

At this time Dad did not know each day which engine he would have. It might be the diesel or it might be steam. So when I arrived at Swandale one morning way before daylight to take my last ride, I was delighted to see old No. 19 fired up and with my Dad busy getting her ready for the trip.

It was cold, so I got up in the cab to warm up. Soon we had our train together and received our orders to proceed



over the BC&G to Lilly Fork.

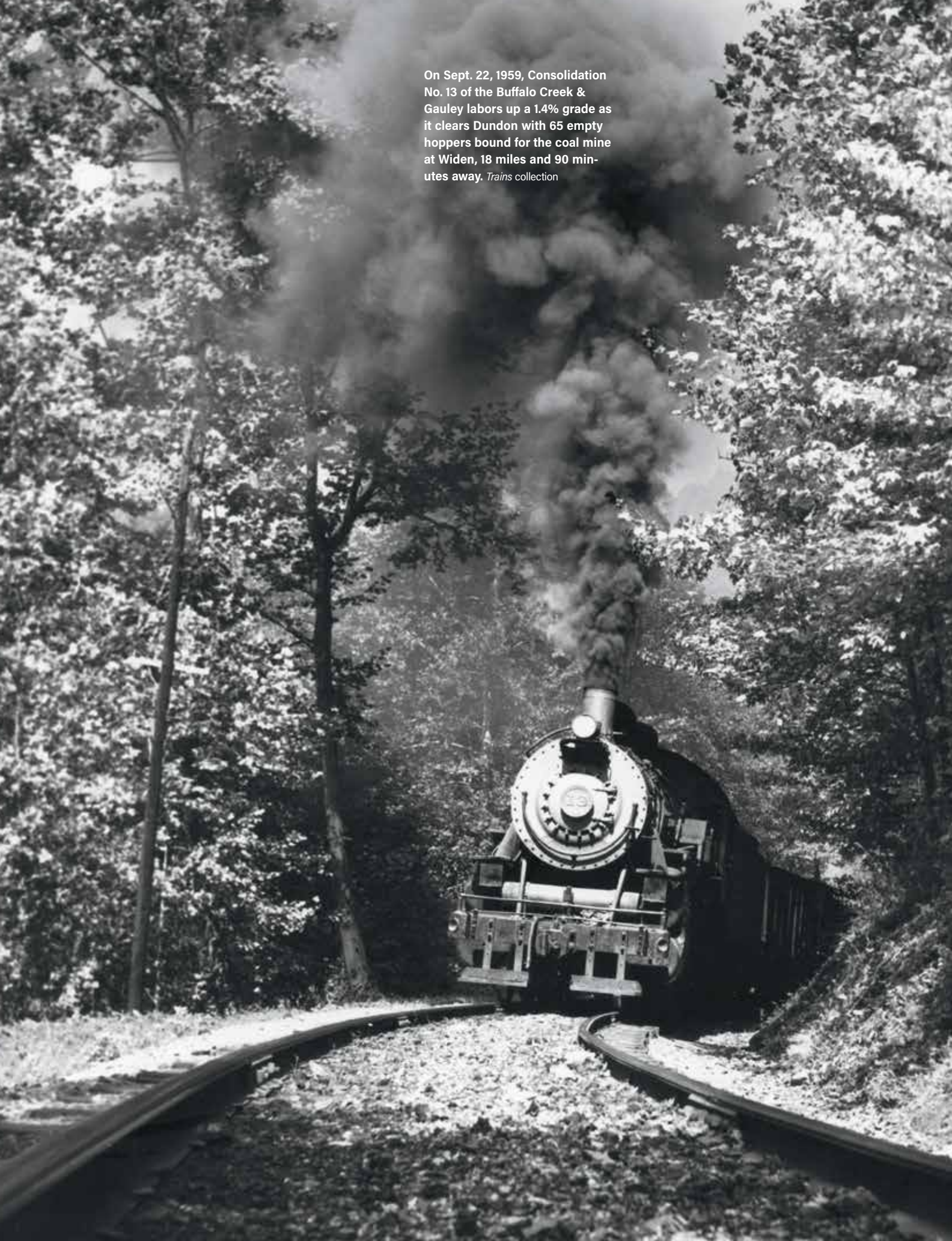
My father was an artist with a steam whistle and people who lived trackside knew by the whistle's moan that the man at the throttle was my father.

My father had not lost his touch, for this morning as we made our way down Buffalo Creek, through the majestic hills, the Shay's melodious old whistle echoed and re-echoed off the rock cliffs.

At Dundon, the Baltimore & Ohio curves to the right; the Buffalo Creek & Gauley track is at left. The BC&G's locomotive shop is behind the company store in the foreground. Paul Larson

One old man who lived at Cressmont told me years later that he always enjoyed the way my dad blew for the road crossing there. On a clear, cold winter night, he said the sound of

On Sept. 22, 1959, Consolidation
No. 13 of the Buffalo Creek &
Gauley labors up a 1.4% grade as
it clears Dundon with 65 empty
hoppers bound for the coal mine
at Widen, 18 miles and 90 min-
utes away. *Trains* collection



the lonesome whistle moaning in the night would make the hairs stand up on the back of his neck.

I knew what he was talking about. As we went up Lilly Fork this morning, the autumn colors were at their height, the stream was clear and cold. There were new faces in the woods crews and also on the train, for most of the old men I knew had either retired or, in some cases, been killed in logging accidents. As we passed through one logged-out area and then another, I knew the end was in sight and I was glad I had come this last time.

We got to the loading area without any trouble. I watched Dad do some work on No. 19 while the train was being loaded and then we began the return trip. Just like so many times before, when we reached the mainline of the BC&G railroad, Dad stepped down out of the engineer's seat and told me to take her for a while. That was the last time I ran a Shay locomotive pulling a log train.

The end came not too long after this, not just to steam but to the whole company.

An Elk River Coal & Lumber Co. Shay and three-car excursion train fords one of the numerous stream crossings on the railroad's Lilly Fork branch on May 3, 1958. Ed Wojtas



The mines at Widen shut down first, and they junked the three steam engines that were there. Swandale shut down next, and the company scrapped Shays 12 and 18 and Climax No. 2. Climax No. 3 went to a tourist railroad in California and Shay No. 19 to a tourist railroad in Virginia.

Now the BC&G had nothing to haul. They kept Nos. 2, 13, and 14 on the property for a time, hoping the company would reopen, but this did not happen.

Slowly, one by one, the locomotives were sold either for junk or to tourist railroads. Today, Buffalo Creek is silent, but it was here steam made its last stand east of the Mississippi River and won — for steam power actually outlasted the vast Elk River Coal & Lumber Co.

As I write this I am surrounded by locomotive whistles I've collected over the years. Some of them are whistles my dad used on engines he ran. If they could talk, they would tell of bad track, wrecks, runaway trains, ice, snow, high water, long hours, and hunger — all were part of a log train crew's way of life. These men of the log railroad, accepted it all in a day's work.

What an eerie feeling my dad must have had at night as he came down Lilly Fork, through a storm with lightning



flashing and a downpour of rain, as the headlight would shine on the raging stream, swollen out of its banks, with logs floating and tree tops and all kinds of trash from the logged over areas. As he looked across the muddy, swirling water, he hoped the rails were still there, for a wreck out in the creek would mean the mountain of logs that were following behind him would cover him and the engine.

Through the efforts of these brave men the big mill would run the next day.

Postscript

It has been 50 years since the last Elk River Coal & Lumber Co. log train came out of Lilly Fork to join the BC&G.

This past year, while deer hunting on a cold November day, I came upon the old railroad grade. As I walked along, I began to see bits and pieces of a bygone era — a spike here, a bolt there, a pile of ashes where long ago a fireman had cleaned

Buffalo Creek & Gauley 2-8-0 No. 13 roars out from under the Clinchfield Coal Co. tippie at Widen, W.Va., with the last loads of coal dug from the abandoned colliery. When the big Consolidation assembled its last 98-car train later that day, Dec. 30, 1963, and returned to Dundon, operations ended on the West Virginia short line that outlived every other steam railroad in the East. John P. Killoran

his fire before returning to Swandale. My mind wandered back to the days when I rode the log train on this very grade. Then, in the distance, I heard the cry of a steam whistle. This, I thought, cannot be. There are no rails. Was it just the breeze in the pines? Or do the winds of time still carry the echoes of my dad's whistle?

If you are ever walking the old grade, stop, stand still, and listen closely. You may hear the ghost train for yourself. The old timers around here call it "The Lilly Fork Special." I

Sunlight is fading fast at Phipps Park for a 135-car coal train descending the rimrock toward Mossmain on the west side of Billings, Mont., on Oct. 16, 2024.



RIMROCK AND COAL

A little-known outlet in America's energy frontier

Story and photos by Bruce Kelly



T

here's more than meets the eye as a 130-car coal train eases its way down a rocky slope on the outskirts of Billings, Mont.

It's a moment where past and present converge. Carloads that began their day traversing one of the Treasure State's newest rail lines are about to enter one of its oldest lines for a long journey westward. Destination: Roberts Bank Superport in Delta, British Columbia. There, more than a thousand miles away at North America's busiest coal terminal, the coal will be offloaded for delivery overseas.

The rocky slope the train is traversing is on its own collision course between past, present, and future. It's an obscure but scenic stretch of track near the south end of a former Great Northern branch from Great Falls, Mont., that connected with both the Northern Pacific and the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy. That branch is now BNSF's Laurel Subdivision,

conveying just a handful of trains each day, including coal loads and empties to and from the Signal Peak mine, about 34 miles north of Billings.

The line serving that mine might be America's last new railway built for coal. Depending on the outcome of a global tech boom now taking shape, Signal Peak is either the last meaningful expansion of a regional energy empire whose greatest days have passed, or a harbinger of a coal rebound few saw coming.

TRACKS ACROSS THE TREASURE STATE

Montana was still a territory when its soil first felt the pounding of spike mauls in 1880. The 3-foot gauge Utah & Northern Railway crossed Monida Pass on what is now the Idaho/Montana border, eventually reaching Butte City (now Butte) by 1881. It started as the Utah Northern near Brigham City, Utah, in 1871; was acquired and reorganized



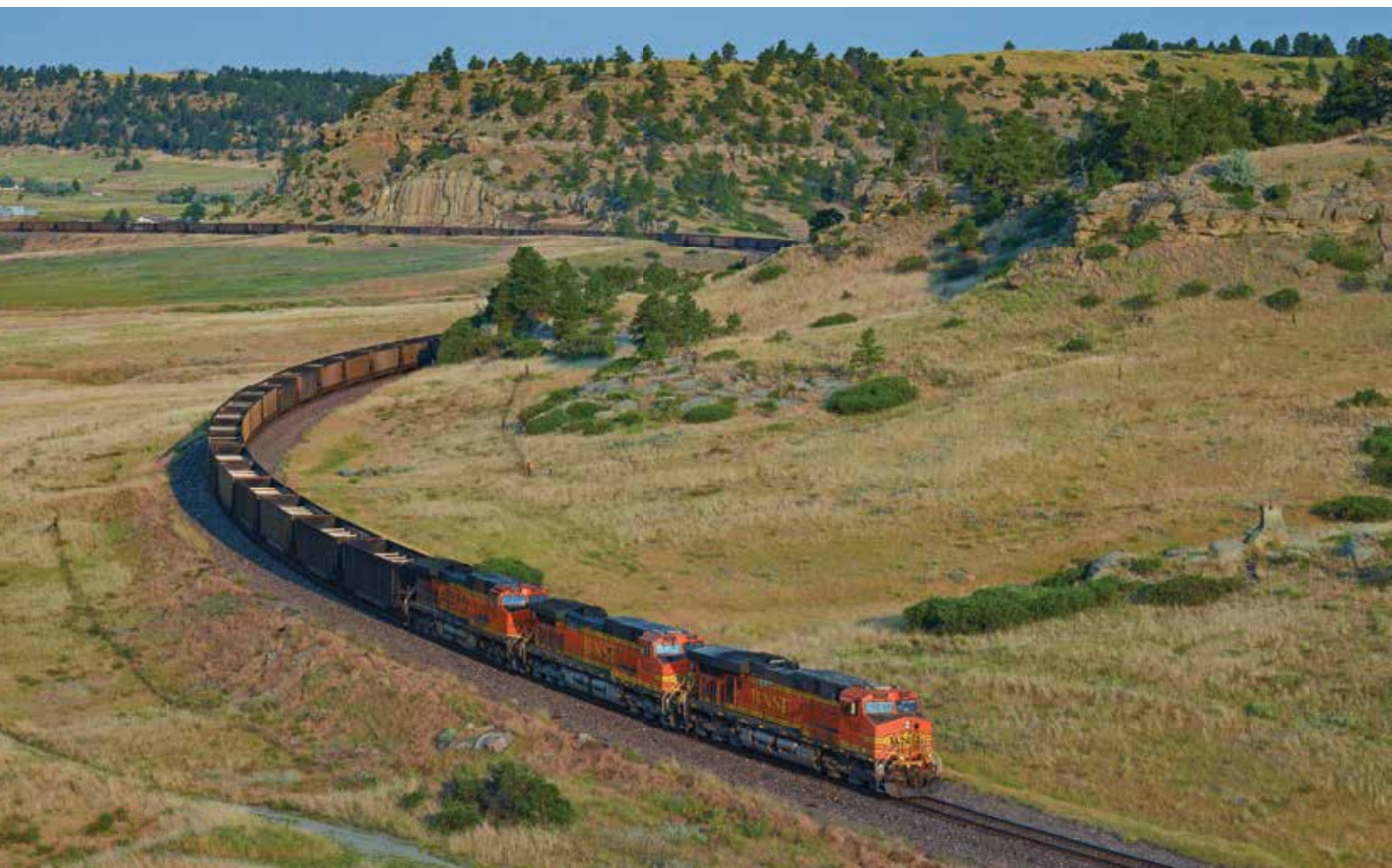
Great Northern had an extensive role in developing Montana's rail system. Circa 1949, GN train No. 235 passes the shops in Great Falls en route to Butte. Much of this route was removed from service in the 1980s. *Trains collection*

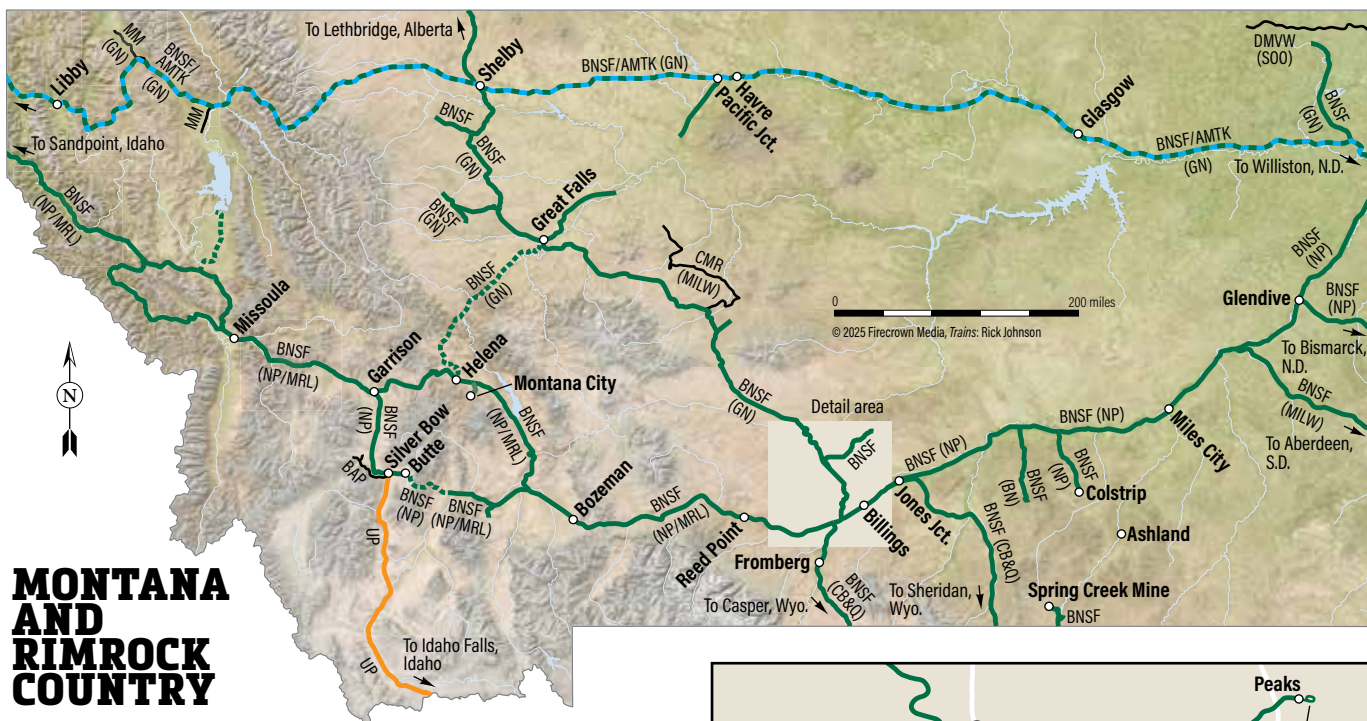
as the U&N by Union Pacific in 1878; and ultimately saw its 466 miles converted to standard gauge. UP continues operating to Silver Bow, on the outskirts of Butte, to this day.

It was Northern Pacific, with its main line across southern Montana completed in 1883, that became the state's first major railroad presence. Five years later, the Great

Northern — through various predecessors and affiliates — had track in place across northeastern Montana and down through Great Falls to Butte. In 1890, the Great Falls & Canada Railway completed a narrow-gauge line from the Canadian border at Sweetgrass, Mont., south through Shelby to Great Falls. GF&CR was rebuilt to standard gauge and purchased

At 7:12 a.m. on July 13, 2024, an empty coal train with 130 cars snakes it way up the 0.6% rimrock grade between Mossmain and Acton, Mont., on BNSF's Laurel Subdivision.





MONTANA AND RIMROCK COUNTRY

— AMTK	Amtrak
— BNSF	BNSF
— Out of service	
— UP Union Pacific	
— Other lines	
CMR	Central Montana
DMVW	Dakota, Missouri Valley & Western
MM	Mission Mountain
BAP	Butte, Anaconda & Pacific

Predecessor roads	
BN	Burlington Northern
CB&Q	Chicago, Burlington & Quincy
GN	Great Northern
MILW	Milwaukee Road
MRL	Montana Rail Link
NP	Northern Pacific
S00	Soo Line

by GN in the early 1900s.

By 1892, GN extended its northern corridor across western Montana and northern Idaho to reach Spokane, Wash. CB&Q completed a line across northeast Wyoming, connecting with the NP at Huntley, Mont., 13 miles east of Billings, in 1894. GN completed a branch from Great Falls southeast to the NP main at Mossmain, 12 miles west of Billings, in 1908. And in 1911, CB&Q established a second line into the Billings area, this time from Denver. It connected with an NP branch at Fromberg, Mont., 48 miles south of Laurel. Laurel, 14 miles west of Billings, was home to one of NP's largest freight yards and has remained critical to the operations of successors Burlington Northern, Montana Rail Link, and now BNSF.

In the early 1980s — a time of financial strain throughout the rail industry — BN decided the former NP main line through southern Montana

was burdensome to operate. It had multiple mountain grades requiring manned helpers on heavier trains and a generally less efficient alignment than the ex-GN main to the north. But the ex-NP line tied directly to BN's ex-CB&Q routes to Denver, the lower Midwest, and Texas. BN figured traffic between those areas and the Pacific Northwest could be diverted to the GN via the Mossmain-Great Falls-Shelby route. This would require upgrading the ex-GN branches on either side of Great Falls, including enhanced clearance or removal of several tunnels. Not least of these was 2,517-foot long Tunnel No. 1 through the rimrock west of Billings. (GN and BN track charts referred to this rock- and timber-lined bore as Cove Tunnel; BNSF calls it Rimrock Tunnel.)

Rather than rebuilding those branches, BN chose to lease its ex-NP main between



Sandpoint Junction, Idaho, and Jones Junction, Mont., near Huntley, to newly formed Montana Rail Link. MRL would be responsible for profitably managing the route, through which BN would continue channeling some of its traffic. MRL's launch in 1987 included outright purchase from BN of related branch lines.

SHIFTING TRAFFIC PATTERNS

Aside from various feeder lines and branches, Montana's railway map for decades fea-

tured the NP main arcing along the bottom, GN the main across the top, and GN branches or secondary routes forming a giant "X" centered on Great Falls.

BN cast off portions of that X during the 1980s. The right arm, Great Falls northeast to Pacific Junction, lost track from its midpoint. The left leg, from Great Falls southwest to Helena, is rusting, rotting, and used for car storage. The sole remnant of the segment from Helena southwest to Butte is a spur serving the cement plant at Montana City.



**MORE THAN \$2
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DURING THE
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OF MILES OF
EXISTING
TRACK**



What remains as a through route are the 220-mile Laurel Subdivision from Great Falls southeast to Mossmain, and the 100-mile Great Falls Sub northwest to Shelby. For many years, these lines have served as a colossal crossover between the former NP and GN mains. Recent traffic either side of Great Falls has been a mere manifest or two each day, plus locals, seasonal export grain trains, or trains carrying live-stock feed from Canada to California. Trains that normally traveled via MRL were occasionally rerouted via Great Falls when BNSF felt it had reached its contractual quota with MRL, or when MRL experienced congestion, heavy maintenance, or line blockages, like the collapse of its bridge near Reed Point in 2023.

During the late 1990s, BNSF made capacity improvements on the Laurel Sub that predecessor BN hadn't addressed. Several sidings were lengthened and new ones were added. The southernmost addition was the 1.8-mile long Acton siding, 24 miles north of Mossmain. Operationally, the Laurel and Great Falls subdivisions remain dark (unsignaled) territory, with train movement

OPPOSITE: The temperature is nearing 100 degrees in the rimrock outside of Billings on July 13, 2024, as coal train C-SXMRBG exits 2,517-foot, rock- and timber-lined Tunnel No. 1. BNSF calls this Rimrock Tunnel; to predecessors, it was Cove Tunnel.

governed by track warrant and a maximum authorized speed of 49 mph.

Coal trains bound for the Pacific Northwest from the Powder River Basin of eastern Wyoming and southeast Montana typically used MRL — which became part of BNSF in 2024 — for the bulk of their trip across Montana. But they have been known to detour via Great Falls and BNSF's Hi Line over Marias Pass. Some have continued to ports as far north as Prince Rupert, B.C. Most coal trains to the Northwest are destined for Roberts Bank, while others have served power plants in western Washington and northeast Oregon. The Oregon plant ceased operation in 2020; the one in Washington is slated to close this year.

BEYOND THE FINAL FRONTIER

The 1990s were a period of economic promise, particularly in the Powder River Basin. Freight ton-miles handled by U.S. railroads increased steadily each year, bolstered by growth in coal shipped from the PRB and other mining districts. More than \$2 billion had been spent during the 1970s and '80s laying hundreds of miles of new track — and upgrading thousands of miles of existing track — to connect the PRB's massive reserves of low-sulfur coal to an energy-hungry world. Eastern Wyoming's barren, windswept plains became



During the Burlington Northern era, GP39M No. 2894 handles a northbound Helena-Great Falls freight just south of Cascade on June 23, 1994. C. William Briggs

home to more than a dozen unit train coal-loading loops. Additional loadouts were established in southeast Montana. Some were served by a BN (now BNSF) branch reaching north from Dutch, Wyo.; others were at the ends of two branches dropping south from the ex-NP main between Billings and Miles City, Mont.

As the dust settled from building this new infrastructure, other projects were conceived.

During the early 1980s, the Tongue River Railroad received Interstate Commerce Commission approval to lay 81 miles of track from Miles City southwest to a proposed mine near Ashland. In 1989, the railroad applied for a 42-mile extension from Ashland southwest to the existing BN coal branch near Spring Creek Mine, north of Dutch. The 123-mile TRRC would have been a shortcut for PRB trains destined for the Upper Midwest, serving as

Laurel-to-Great Falls manifest freight H-LAUGRF rolls across the open range south of Acton on the Laurel Subdivision on July 17, 2024. Power is BNSF ES44C4 No. 6563 and Kansas City Southern SD70ACe No. 4000.





ABOVE: Empty coal E-RBGSM enters the spiraling approach to Signal Peak Mine on the late afternoon of July 19, 2024, with a Montana Rail Link SD70ACe trailing a BNSF ES44DC and ES44C4.

BELOW: Heat and haze obscure Signal Peak Mine's towers, 7.5 miles to the east, as C-SXMRBG climbs west up the nearly 1.2% grade at Milepost 22 of the 29-mile Broadview Subdivision on July 20, 2024. Grades on the route reach 1.4%

many as three potential coal mines along the Tongue River. It remains unbuilt.

In 1996, the Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern bought from UP 203 miles of ex-Chicago & North Western track that reached north from Rapid City, S.D., to Colony, Wyo., and south to Crawford, Neb. The following year, DM&E announced its desire to extend west into the PRB. A proposed \$1.4 billion project involved building 260-plus miles of new line, plus upgrad-

ing 240 miles of existing track to carry coal to Midwest and Eastern markets. That plan languished until Canadian Pacific's purchase of DM&E in 2007. By late 2012, construction costs had more than doubled, the long-term outlook for domestic coal was dimming, and CP pulled the plug.

In the interim, in 1991, a project was quietly developing in the Bull Mountains north of Billings. The State of Montana issued a mining permit to

Meridian Minerals, a subsidiary of Burlington Resources associated with Burlington Northern Railroad. Bull Mountain Mine became operational in 1995, was sold by BR that year, then had its permit revoked in 1998. Throughout that time, there was talk — but no action — of connecting the mine with BN's Laurel Sub, 30 miles to the west.

Bull Mountain Mine lies in the Bull Mountain Basin (BMB), where coal extraction has occurred since the 1880s. The Milwaukee Road once fueled its locomotives with BMB coal from a mine 3 miles south of Roundup, Mont. A USGS paper from 1999 said, "Even though the Bull Mountain Basin contains coal of higher apparent rank than Powder River Basin coal, it is unlikely to become a major coal producer in the Northern Rocky Mountains and Great Plains Region within the next 20-30 years. This is because the basin is small, about 750 square miles, and the coal is thinner, less than 17 ft. thick, than the major coal producers in the PRB." *Coal Age* magazine would later describe BMB coal as "superior in calorific value and mercury content to PRB coals (10,300 BTU/lb. vs. 8,000 to 9,400 BTU/lb. in the PRB) and without the sodium contamination of other coals mined in the region."

Ohio-based FirstEnergy Corp. and Boich Companies took notice and jointly pur-



chased Bull Mountain Mine in 2008, renamed it Signal Peak mine, and placed it in the care of newly formed Signal Peak Energy. That same year, construction began on a 29-mile, \$105 million rail spur with nearly 6 additional miles of coal-loading loop tracks. It would connect the mine with BNSF's Laurel Sub 4 miles south of Broadview at Walter Junction. The *Billings Gazette* reported the junction was named "in honor of the world's oldest man, 112-year old Walter Breuning of Great Falls," who worked some 50 years for GN.

The front cover of the November 1989 *Trains* proclaimed, "Powder River Country: America's Last Rail Frontier." Nothing since then has quite compared to the epic scale of new railway into virgin landscape developed for the PRB. During the height of the crude-by-rail boom of 2010-14, railroads and energy companies did invest billions on new spurs, unit train terminals, and main line capacity improvements. But the opening of BNSF's Broadview Sub to the Signal Peak mine in 2009 marked a significant build of new railway. Judging by recent trends, it may go down as the last branch line of such length to be built in the U.S. for coal.

AMERICA'S LAST NEW COAL BRANCH?

In 2011, Switzerland-based Gunvor Group Ltd. bought a one-third stake in Signal Peak for \$400 million. Further investments were made in the mine's productivity, and export markets were strengthened. At first, the bulk of Signal Peak's coal headed to Japan, but additional customers ultimately including South Korea, Chile, and China. Signal Peak, the state's only underground coal mine, produced 7.6 million

Eight miles east of Walter Junction on the Broadview Subdivision, deceptively steep, hilly terrain has empty coal E-RBGXMX weaving its way up a grade of more than 1%. On the point are ES44DC No. 7655, C44-9W No. 4301, and Dash 9-44CW No. 793.





ABOVE: A double coal empty of 260 cars starts the 0.6% climb near Rimrock Spur on July 19, 2024, with three units on the point, a DPU and the three lead units of the second train in the middle, and a rear DPU. It took nearly eight minutes to pass.

tons of coal in 2023.

Despite the general impression that coal is declining, it still accounts for more than a quarter of the nation's carloads, and many of those carloads are headed to port. The early weeks of 2023 witnessed another spate of PRB coal trains being routed north through Great Falls and Sweetgrass, which CP then took west over Crowsnest Pass toward export. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, coal exports have increased each year since the 2020 pandemic low of 5.8 million short tons, reaching 9 million short tons in 2024. A *Forbes Business* report in February 2025 said, "Construction of new coal-fired power plants in China reached a 10-year high in 2024."

Signal Peak can accommodate trains of up to 150 cars, but 122 to 130 cars have been the norm. In 2024, depending on crew availability, plant production, and shipping schedules, a typical 24-hour period saw two loaded trains (symbol C-SXMRBG) leave the mine and two empty trains (E-RBGsXM) arrive. There are no passing sidings on the

Broadview Sub, but the Peaks Loop Track allows an empty train to pull in behind another train while it's being loaded. And where the Broadview Sub connects with the Laurel Sub at Walter Junction, there's a 9,800-foot siding where empties can step aside for loads coming down the branch.

The western half of the Broadview Sub traverses deep cuts and massive fills, and makes broad, sweeping curves on rollercoaster grades of up to 1.4% across an open landscape of farm fields and prairie. The eastern half is more mountainous and forested, with cuts, fills, and two concrete bridges guiding loaded coal trains west up a 1.17% grade for the first 8 miles. Four to five locomotives handle loaded trains across the Broadview and Laurel subdivisions,

three or four units up front and the balance on the rear.

On June 6, 2025, the U.S. Department of the Interior gave approval for Signal Peak Energy to access additional coal reserves — 22.8 million tons located on federal land, 34.5 million tons on non-federal land. This will reportedly keep the mine operational for up to nine more years.

Signal Peak said as recently as May 2025 that failure to secure such an expansion might have brought its mining to a halt by the end of 2025, triggering the beginning of the end for coal trains out of the Bull Mountains. Barring any unforeseen changes, BNSF's Broadview Sub now appears to have at least another decade of life ahead of it.

UNEXPECTED ENCORE FOR COAL

America's coal industry might benefit further — if only for a few years — from a growing trend in the tech sector.

Data storage and processing centers already put heavy demand on power generated by hydroelectric, natural gas, nuclear, coal, wind, or solar. The new emphasis on artificial intelligence infrastructure has developers scrambling to maintain and expand those energy sources. One idea that emerged from a September 2024 meeting between tech executives and federal officials was using coal-fueled power

plants to house AI centers on site or support them elsewhere.

In late 2024, NorthWestern Energy Group announced it would increase power supply to an expanding data center in Butte and provide power to an unnamed data center slated for construction somewhere in Montana. Electricity will come from NWE's power plant in Colstrip, Mont. On the outskirts of Colstrip is the Rosebud Mine, which delivers coal to Colstrip via conveyor system and loads occasional unit trains handled by BNSF. Only time will tell if railways experience resurgence in coal business due to increased energy requirements of the AI era.

For now, keep an eye on BNSF's Broadview Sub. Thanks to an act of government, coal trains should continue rolling west from the Bull Mountains and descending gracefully through the rimrock toward the ex-NP main for years to come. But should the Broadview Sub's rails ever become idled and rusted, there still will be manifests and other movements snaking up and down that rock-strewn ramp west of Billings. **I**

Overcoming the last big hill on the Broadview Sub, a loaded coal train starts the final descent toward Walter Junction, 9 miles ahead. There, a coal empty waits to make the eastbound run on the single-track route to Signal Peak Mine.

**+
COAL
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THE 2020
PANDEMIC LOW
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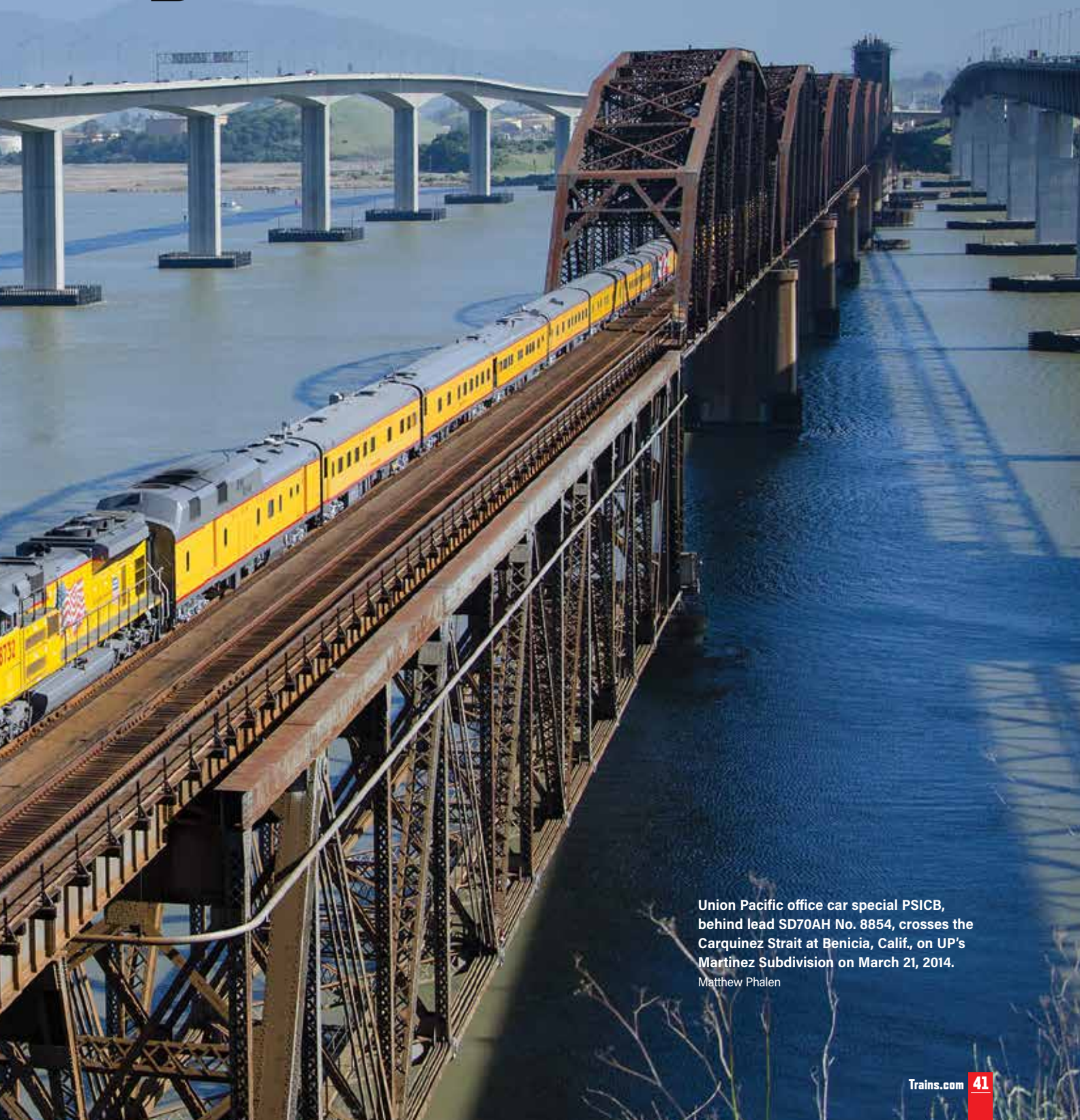
Faster requires



higher

California corridor eyes changes for the iconic Carquinez Strait bridge

By Bill Buchanan



Union Pacific office car special PSICB, behind lead SD70AH No. 8854, crosses the Carquinez Strait at Benicia, Calif., on UP's Martinez Subdivision on March 21, 2014.

Matthew Phalen

Southern Pacific No. 2485, a P10 class 4-6-2 Pacific built by Baldwin in the 1920s, leads train No. 223-248 west to the Bay Area over the Benicia-Martinez Bridge on Sept. 23, 1950. Today this bridge is surrounded by Interstate 680 spans. John C. Illman, Center for Railroad Photography & Art collection



Plans for faster, more frequent passenger trains in Northern California could bring major changes to an iconic railroad bridge and the segment of the Union Pacific Overland Route that uses it.

The span is the 5,603-foot Benicia-Martinez drawbridge, built by Southern Pacific in 1930 to cross the Carquinez Strait at the edge of the San Francisco Bay Area.

The Capitol Corridor regional passenger service runs up to 28 daily trains across the structure and wants to run more, but says the bridge is too low for the speed and frequency the corridor wants to achieve. Ship traffic gets in the way and has priority over trains.

The bridge's vertical lift span, 328 feet long, opens "several times each day ... interrupting rail traffic for 20 minutes or more," says a report by the Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority. These openings "represent the second most significant cause of delays to [corridor] trains."

"Doubling train frequency would exponentially increase these disruptions," says Capitol Corridor Managing Director Rob Padgett. The remedy is to build a higher bridge nearby, plus miles of new track to enable the higher crossing.

"This complex project, which also addresses sea level rise, will take years to complete," he says, "but it's essential for the future of the corridor."

Any construction is years away and would need approval from UP, which acquired the SP in 1996, as well as consent from various governments, agencies, and property owners, among others. The estimated cost in 2024 was \$10 billion to \$16 billion for the first phase, or \$23 billion for all work. The existing bridge may or may not remain, depending on what UP, the authority, and other participants decide.

"Union Pacific is aware of Capitol Corridor's long-term plans to replace the bridge and has had conversations with the agency on the proposed project," says UP spokesperson Robynn Tysver. "We look forward to hearing more details as the project continues to develop."

Planning for a megaregion

The Benicia-Martinez bridge, also called the Suisun Bay bridge, carries UP freights, Amtrak's *California Zephyr* and *Coast Starlight*, and the *Capitol Corridor* trains. BNSF has trackage rights.

The 171-mile San Jose-Auburn *Capitol*

Corridor, which started with three daily round trips in 1991, carried more than 1 million passengers in fiscal 2024. The authority has helped bring in money to add capacity over the years, including a project underway to add a third main track on the UP main line from Sacramento to Roseville.

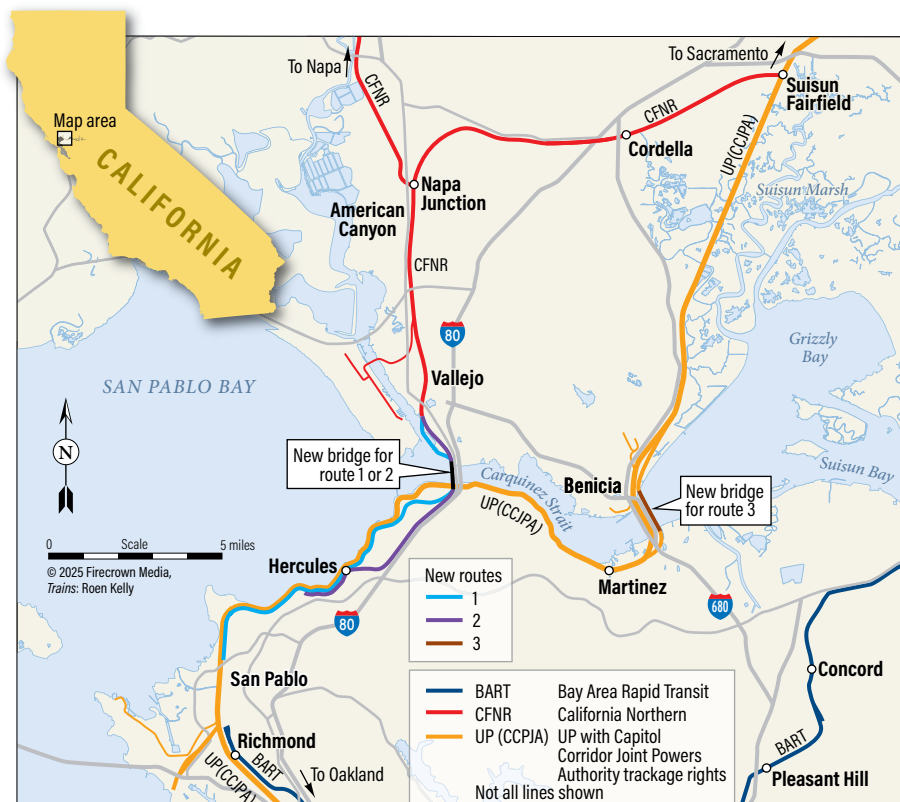
The corridor's 40-year vision document calls for trains operating on 30-minute headways from morning to evening. This would serve what Link21, an overarching project to create a regional rail network, calls the Northern California Megaregion: home to more than 12.2 million people living in the greater San Francisco Bay, Monterey Bay, and Sacramento areas, plus the northern San Joaquin Valley. It represents about 3.5% of the entire U.S. population.

Four options, two locations

Plans for a new crossing have crystallized into four options described in the "New Carquinez Crossing Study — Phase 2 Report" available at capitolcorridor.org. All four include miles of new or rebuilt railroad.

Conceptual options fall into two groups:

The Vallejo and Interstate 80 options (routes 1 and 2 on map). The report says these would "create an entirely new passen-



rials and potential alignments. The strait is wider at Martinez than at Crockett, and the choice of location influences the type of span possible. The document includes maps of possible routes and photos of existing conditions.

Grades are a concern, especially for freight. “Since the proposed bridge will be at least 153 feet above the water, these approach grades must be very long in order to gain appreciable elevation,” the report says. The current span is 70 feet above the water. Planners assume a maximum grade of 1.5% on the approaches, adding that “1.5% is considered quite steep for a freight railroad and actual operating considerations would affect the maximum feasible grade.”

Including elements needed for freight trains would support regional commerce as well as help raise money to pay for the work, the report says, particularly from state and federal sources that focus on moving goods and improving access to ports.

Some passenger-only route ideas contemplate grades of up to 3%.

Several questions remain unanswered, including whether Amtrak would move the *Zephyr* and *Starlight* to the new line, if or how UP would use the new bridge, and who would own what. Next steps include talks with UP, possibly BNSF, and many additional interested parties, plus further planning and analysis.

The corridor is among projects receiving money from the Federal Railroad Administration’s Corridor Identification and

Development program (railroads.dot.gov/corridor-ID-program), which offers a structured planning process. “As the Corridor ID process progresses, [the authority] will collaborate with the state, FRA, and consultants to integrate these planning steps,” corridor spokesperson Vernae Graham said earlier this year. “Once planning is complete, the project can move into state and federal project delivery processes, which will take several years. This project’s prioritization among others will depend on the Corridor ID process, which will address the complexities and interconnections of future service expansion projects, ensuring they are not planned in isolation.”

Former ferry territory

Building the Benicia-Martinez bridge cost \$12 million in 1930, the *Benicia Herald* newspaper reported 95 years ago, equal to about \$230 million today. SP trains previously crossed the Carquinez Strait on ferries between Port Costa and Benicia.

The only other railroad to cross the waterway was the Sacramento Northern and its predecessor Oakland, Antioch & Eastern, which ran a ferry from West Pittsburg to Chippis Island for 41 years until 1954.

The Western Railway Museum operates electric railcars under wire on about six miles of the vanished road’s former main line in Solano County north of the strait. The Solano right-of-way’s southern reaches peter out in the marshy northern shore of Suisun Bay, where decaying remnants of its Chippis ferry landing are still visible. **I**

ger rail corridor via Vallejo, leaving the existing rail corridor near Hercules or Rodeo, [and] traversing a new, high-level rail bridge near the existing I-80 freeway bridges between Crockett and Vallejo.” Then the route would pass through Vallejo on what is now a little-used California Northern branch and “extend onward via Jameson Canyon to Cordelia and Suisun City,” where it would join the existing route. The I-80 version puts part of the new rail right-of-way in a trench.

The Benicia-Martinez East and West options. The East version creates a new span just east of the present one, and anticipates a separate low bridge to raise the right-of-way for up to 8 miles north through the Suisun Marsh to get above rising sea levels. The West option is similar but closer to the shoreline and crosses the strait west of the current bridge. The West option “was deemed to be extremely complex and expensive,” the report says, and did not receive further consideration.

Higher bridge, longer approach

The report pores over several engineering and operating considerations, including grades, bridge options, construction mate-

CLEANER ENERGY

Union Pacific's one-of-a-kind locomotive tested emission technology

Story and photos by David Lustig



Union Pacific 9900 was a one-of-a-kind testbed equipped with experimental emissions reduction equipment.



Delivered to Union Pacific in 2012 by Progress Rail's EMD subsidiary, the No. 9900 testbed locomotive was equipped with three different experimental emission-reduction technologies. The distinctive hump midway along the roof provided the space needed to install the equipment inside the body of the locomotive. The results of the 18-month test program were encouraging.

IN 2011, NEEDING RELIABLE six-axle road-switchers for secondary freight service, Union Pacific turned to Progress Rail's EMD subsidiary to rebuild a batch of UP's out-of-service EMD SD60s.

EMD installed new control systems and replaced the 710G3A V16 prime movers with 710G3A-T2 turbocharged V12 engines that met U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Tier 2 emission standards.

Twenty-eight locomotives — Nos. 9900 to 9927 — were rebuilt and designated as SD59MXs by Union Pacific. Progress Rail later incorporated the model into its catalog, naming it the SD32ECO.

Progress Rail and Union Pacific then selected No. 9900 for conversion into a one-off testbed to prepare for the EPA's stringent Tier 4 locomotives emissions standards slated to take effect in 2015.

The EPA diesel engine emission standards, ranging from Tier 0 to Tier 4, progressively tightened limits for pollutants like nitrogen oxides, particulate matter, and carbon monoxide. The Tier 4 emission limits were significantly more restrictive than Tier 2, calling for particulate matter reductions of as much as 90% and nitrogen oxide cuts by as much as 80%.

On Aug. 22, 2012, at Roseville, Calif., just northeast of Sacramento, UP unveiled the new unit, which featured a distinctive hump in the middle of its long hood. Internally, the unit housed three emissions-reducing technologies: exhaust gas recirculation, diesel oxidation catalysts, and diesel particulate filters.

Union Pacific and EMD expected No. 9900 to move toward Tier 4 emissions with a 45% reduction in nitrogen oxide

emissions compared to the Tier 2 standard and an 85% reduction in particulate matter emissions. UP and the California Air Resources Board jointly analyzed the locomotive's emissions-reduction capability over the next 18 months.

Kept on a tight mechanical leash, No. 9900 rarely strayed more than 200 miles from Roseville, as environmental engineers poked, prodded, and looked at data accumulated on its many runs.

Did No. 9900 meet its Tier 4 objective? Almost. Testing revealed the unit regularly achieved Tier 3.5, a good first step and one that helped pave the way for future locomotives able to meet the Tier 4 standard.

When the testing was over, the unit was shipped back to Progress Rail to have its experimental equipment — and the distinctive rooftop hump — removed. **I**



Fathers, sons, and the love of trains

Highlights from decades of family rail travel

▲ On a memorable 10-day journey to Japan in 1997, the author and his father experienced several trains, including the single-track local service on the mountainous Minobe Line.

Brian Solomon

MY FATHER AND I have always shared a passion for riding and photographing trains. This spring, my father's health took a bad turn. To cheer him up, we chatted about his early experiences riding trains and our many travels together.

I mentioned how the New York, Ontario & Western seemed like a mythical railroad. It was abandoned a decade before I was born and, for me, is shrouded by the mists of time. Yet for Pop, the mention of the NYO&W brought back fond childhood memories. In the mid-1940s, he traveled with his parents to the Catskills where they would spend the summer months in a resort hotel to escape the city's heat. He recalled taking the ferry across the Hudson from Manhattan to New York Central's terminal at Weehawken, N.J.

"My mother would pack a huge trunk that my father delivered to 42nd Street (the ferry terminal) a week before we traveled," Dad recalled.

NYO&W used New York Central's West Shore route for 52 miles along the Hudson Valley to reach Cornwall, N.Y., where trains diverged on NYO&W's Southern District, and on this line they would continue into the mountains to Parkville, N.Y., 124 miles northwest of New York City.

"On our first trip," Pop recalled, "we rode behind a steam locomotive, but in later years we had diesels instead. We would stay for the whole summer but my father worked in Manhattan and would commute back and forth to stay with us on weekends. My mother and I would go down to the station to watch his train

come in. I was very impressed by the steam locomotive."

These experiences stayed with him for almost 80 years.

EXPLORING A DECAYING DEPOT

In June 1997, Pop and I spent a long weekend photographing Chesapeake & Ohio 4-8-4 No. 614, working excursions from Hoboken, N.J., over the former Erie Railroad to Port Jervis, N.Y. One morning before the train was due, we explored Middletown, N.Y. and inspected the decaying former NYO&W station. This three-story building was featured in a painting by Otto Kuhler on the cover of William F. Helmer's 1957 history of the railroad, *O&W: The Long Life and Slow Death of the New York, Ontario & Western Railway*. Pop recalled the station from his travels a half-century

earlier, “It seemed so much bigger then when I was a kid. It was a bustling, important place and I’d thought it was a pretty big deal.”

FAR FROM GLAMOROUS

Over the years Pop and I have taken countless train rides together. Our first trip was far from glamorous, but remains among my earliest memories.

I was about 2 years old when we ventured out on a Sunday trip on the New York City subway No. 7 train over the elevated Flushing Line across Queens. Pop held me up at the front window so I could see the line ahead.

In the 1980s and 1990s, our horizons broadened as we traveled far and wide. Among the big trips was a 10-day visit to Japan. We bought First Class Green Passes that allowed for easy and economical travel across the Japan Railways network. In addition to high-speed Shinkansen routes, we explored the extensive 1067 mm gauge network.

Pop had researched some obscure routes.

On one memorable journey, we changed from the old Tokyo-Osaka main line at Fuji to a local train that followed the largely single track and mountainous Minobe Line.

At Shimobe, a resort town in a river gorge, we got off the train and enjoyed lunch before continuing onward aboard the *Fujikawa No. 5* — an upscale express train with interior decoration emulating the colors of blossoming cherry trees. At Kofu, the junction with a busy inland 1067 mm mainline, we changed to an Azusa streamlined express that whisked us back to Tokyo.

In spring 2000, I met Pop at London’s Waterloo International station (where he was arriving on the *Eurostar* from Paris). We spent the day in London, then traveled from Paddington Station to Penzance in Cornwall. Upon arrival in Cornwall, we rented a Fiat Punto and spent the next few days navigating narrow roads to reach remote locations to photograph and travel on Cornish branch

lines and heritage railways. This included a steam-hauled train on the Bodmin Railway, and a single-car diesel car from St. Erth to St. Ives. At the later point, we were inadvertently separated, when I’d hiked to photograph an incoming railcar and mistimed its departure.

Pop rode the train back to St. Erth. Although we both had cell phones, his was American-based, and mine was Irish. While we couldn’t call each other, we were able to leave messages. He waited for me at St. Erth, where classic semaphore made it a good place to photograph passing trains.

Recent trips have included a 2016 trip across France from Charles de Gaulle Airport TGV station to Bordeaux, where our TGV high-speed train touched 200 mph (that’s right); and an Amtrak journey in 2018 from Windsor Locks, Conn., to Houston, Texas, traveling the *Crescent* route via Atlanta to New Orleans, and by the *Sunset Limited* the rest of the way.

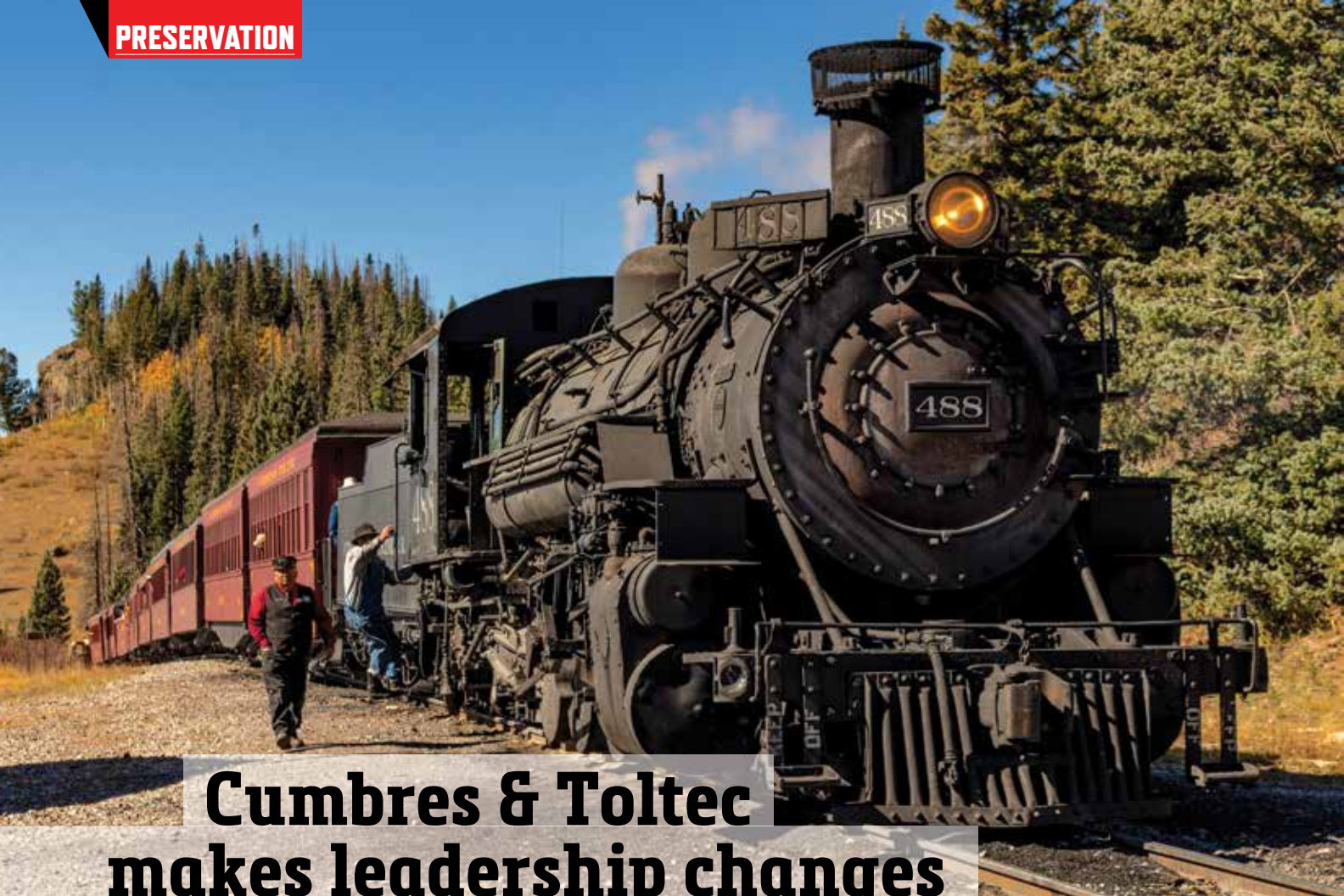
These memories and many others are preserved in our thousands of slides and digital images. — *Brian Solomon*



In April 2000, Richard Solomon put his time at St. Erth in Cornwall, England, to good use, photographing trains passing classic semaphore signals. Richard Jay Solomon



The author's father and frequent traveling companion, Richard Jay Solomon, photographed in the dining car of Amtrak's *Crescent* bound for New Orleans. Brian Solomon



Cumbres & Toltec makes leadership changes

Former officials Mason, Butler rejoin state-owned heritage railway

▲ With a long passenger train in tow, Cumbres & Toltec 2-8-2 Mikado No. 488 pauses at the top of Cumbres Pass on Oct. 24, 2023 before continuing its eastbound run. Carl Swanson

THE CUMBRES & TOLTEC SCENIC RAILROAD has made leadership changes in the wake of early-season issues that saw the heritage railway struggle to maintain scheduled operations.

Former CEO Eric Mason and former General Manager Steven Butler have rejoined the railroad, the C&TS said on June 19. Mason returns as interim general manager, a role he previously held in leading a restructuring of the organization in 2019. Butler, the general manager in 2023, returns in the newly created position of chief mechanical officer. Also, Merrill Gutierrez, who has been with the railroad for four years, has been named as Chama shop manager.

The railroad, which began its 54th season on May 31, was unable to fulfill its two-trains-per-day schedule over its first three weeks because of delays in repairs to some of its locomotives.

"It's a privilege to be entrusted to help ensure the legacy of this historic steam railroad," Mason said in a press release. "The Cumbres & Toltec team is committed to returning our operations to full capacity, and giving the care and commitment required to safeguard this treasure for generations to come. ... Despite the slow start, the Cumbres & Toltec is expected to have another exceptional year. Many trips, especially during the gorgeous fall season, are nearly sold out. People want to experience the railroad's authenticity, rich history, and absolute fun and are eager to get on board for this

bucket-list adventure."

Scott Gibbs is a member of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad Commission, which oversees the railway owned by the states of Colorado and New Mexico. He called the start of the season "disappointing," but said, "The good news is that the Cumbres & Toltec is going to be in a much better position as key repairs have been made. We'll be back to running two trains a day, six days a week, ensuring we can meet the demand from passengers who travel from all over the world to experience the thrill of historic steam railroading." — David Lassen

"IT'S A PRIVILEGE TO BE ENTRUSTED TO HELP ENSURE THE LEGACY OF THIS HISTORIC STEAM RAILROAD."

— ERIC MASON, INTERIM GENERAL MANAGER, CUMBRES & TOLTEC SCENIC RAILROAD

Age of Steam museum begins construction of new roundhouse

Ten-stall structure slated for completion in 2026

THE AGE OF STEAM ROUNDHOUSE MUSEUM in Sugarcreek, Ohio, began construction in June on a new 10-stall roundhouse to expand storage for its growing collection.

The new structure, known as the East Roundhouse, is a separate building, not connected to the existing 18-stall roundhouse displaying 24 steam locomotives. The East Roundhouse will contain an office and storeroom in addition to the 10 stalls for rolling stock.

The building was always included in the master plan of founder Jerry Jacobson, but is needed now because the museum's collection of locomotives and railcars is outgrowing available space. When com-

pleted, says Tim Sposato, the museum's chief mechanical officer, it will increase roundhouse track capacity by 58%.

The new building will feature steel framing rather than the timber framing of the current roundhouse. It will replicate a classic appearance, using composite materials with fewer and narrower windows, as well as a monitor roof with a cupola. Stalls will have a 112-foot interior track, and the floors will feature radiant heating through hot water tubes within the 14-inch concrete slab.

Completion is expected in 2026. The new building not intended for public display, but items kept there will be rotated into the main roundhouse. — *Trains staff*

PRESERVATION BRIEFS

Santa Fe No. 2926 gains more room to run

SANTA FE NO. 2926, the 4-8-4 limited to running on less than 3 miles of track in Albuquerque since its restoration, has gained approval to operate on a 40-mile stretch of track on the **RAIL RUNNER EXPRESS** corridor between Bernalillo and Los Lunas, N.M. The agreement between locomotive owner **NEW MEXICO HERITAGE RAIL**, the **NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**, and Rio Metro (the Rail Runner's parent organization), does not set the stage for excursions, since it only applies to non-revenue, deadhead moves. But it will allow expanded public outreach and educational events. The agreement does not require the 1944 Baldwin to run with a diesel or positive train control. For updates, visit the website 2926.us. Above right, No. 2926 at Albuquerque; New Mexico Heritage Rail



The **ROCHESTER & GENESEE VALLEY RAILROAD MUSEUM** in Rush, N.Y., faced an approximately six-week closure as a result of significant flood damage sustained on June 18. Storms brought more than 7 inches of rain in a three-hour period, causing widespread damage throughout Monroe County. Museum damage included significant washouts in areas supporting its railroad tracks, making excursion operations unsafe, the museum said. The museum was aiming to reopen on Aug. 2, and was issuing full refunds to those holding tickets for trips in late June and July. For updates, or to donate to support recovery efforts, visit the museum website: rgvrrm.org.

SIERRA RAILROAD NO. 3, a Rogers 4-6-0 built in 1891 and famed for its role in a wide range of movie and television productions, was slated to return to regular excursion action at California's **RAILTOWN 1897 STATE HISTORIC PARK** in July, following completion of its federally mandated 1,472-day boiler inspection. The locomotive was fired up for the first time for an April 30 ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Tuolumne Gateway project highlighting Tuolumne County's history and tourism attractions.

The **ABILENE & SMOKY VALLEY RAILROAD** has returned a GE 44-ton, center-cab switcher to service for the first time in more than 20 years — and dedicated the locomotive to President **DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER**, whose boyhood home is just across the tracks from the railroad's Abilene, Kan., depot. The locomotive, in a Rock Island-inspired, maroon-and-gold paint scheme, now carries the No. 34 in tribute to the 34th president, as well as decals with his campaign slogan, "I Like Ike." It will now share excursion duties.



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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: November 2025 closes Aug 20, December closes September 24, January 2026 closes October 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

SEPTEMBER 20-21, 2025: Wiregrass Steel Wheels Train Show, Westgate Recreation Complex (Large GYM), 501 Recreational Road, Dothan, AL. Saturday 9-5, Sunday 10-4. Vendor access Friday at Noon. Kids: 6 and under Free, 7-12 \$5, Over 12 \$7. Free parking & refreshments available. Table Rentals: \$35 each. For reservations call Wayne Baker 334-449-1365 OR baker.joseph@myyahoo.com OR go to Jerry Hughes 334-797-6697 OR Jhughes@jhughesonline.com

SEPTEMBER 27, 2025: 23rd Annual Fostoria Rail Festival, 1001 Park Avenue, Fostoria, OH 44830. 10:00am-4:00pm. Admission: \$6.00, children 10 and under free w/adult. Information: Fostoria Rail Preservation Society, 419-435-1781, EllenGatrell@gmail.com, www.FostoriaIronTriangle.com

OCTOBER 19, 2025: 34th Annual Chicago Railroadiana and Model Train Show and Sale. Kane County Fairgrounds, (Front Building), 525 South Randall Rd., St. Charles, IL 60174. Sunday, October 19, 2025, 10:00am-3:00pm. Admission: \$6.00 (includes tax). Children under 12 FREE. Tables starting at \$65.00. For information: 847-358-1185, RussFierce@aol.com or www.RRShows.com

ADVERTISERS

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MISCELLANEOUS

RAILROAD PATCHES: Engineer caps with insignia. 1,000 designs. Catalog \$5.00. Patch King, Box 145, York Harbor, ME 03911.

WANTED

ALL SLOT CARS WANTED. Any kind, any condition. Top dollar paid. PAUL at 248-760-6960. E-mail: slotcarguy@slotcarguy.com

ARE YOU GETTING THE BEST PRICE FOR YOUR TRAIN COLLECTION? Our list of discriminating buyers grows each day. They want bigger and better train collections to choose from! We specialize in O Gauge trains- Lionel, MTH, K-Line, Williams, Weaver, 3rd Rail, etc. as well as better trains in all scales. We also purchase store inventories. Plus, we can auction your trains with rates starting as low as 15%. We travel extensively all over the US. Give us a call today! Send us your list or contact us for more information at www.trainz.com/sell Trainz, 2740 Faith Industrial Dr., Buford, GA 30518, 866-285-5840, Scott@trainz.com Fax: 866-935-9504

WANTED: BUYING PRR LW PULLMAN CAR Cast-iron door nameplates, 1938-1950. J.H. STEVENSON, Rocky River, OH 440-333-1092 jhstevenson8445@gmail.com

LODGING

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

INN ON THE RIVER: Book your stay for a relaxing getaway overlooking the beautiful Mississippi! Guests are minutes from quaint restaurants, stores and many outdoor opportunities. Each room has a balcony for stunning views of the Mississippi River and the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe Rail Line. Reservations: 608-534-7784 www.innontheriverwi.com or email: innontheriverwi@gmail.com

STAY IN A CABOOSE! Visit the New River Gorge National Park in Fayetteville, WV. Stay in a caboose near town and the NP. www.redcaboose rentals.com

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

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

PHOTOS, PRINTS AND SLIDES

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

RAILROAD ART

GREAT NORTHERN RAILROAD/WINOLD REISS CALENDARS. Complete set from 1933 through 1958 in museum condition. Calendars in matching frames. 21 by 38 inches High. Seattle. Terry 360-638-0239

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In the October issue



Steam locomotive cab ride

A **BEHIND-THE-SCENES** look at steam railroading on Washington State's Mt. Rainier Scenic Railroad. **CHICAGO UNION STATION** marks a century of change and adaptation. A nighttime **PHOTO ESSAY** of railroading in the heart of West Virginia's New River Gorge National Park.

On sale September 9, 2025

Fall finery

Running long hood forward, Canadian Pacific SD60 No. 6256 leads a welded-rail train through the fall foliage on CP's Galt Subdivision near Campbellville, Ontario, on Sept. 29, 2020. Brandon Muir







Tennessee traveler

A Norfolk Southern train exercises trackage rights on CSX as it crosses the Lick Creek Trestle in Whiteside, Tenn., on Sept. 21, 2019, en route from Chattanooga to Stevenson, Ala. The dynamic brakes of AC44C6M No. 4195 and three other locomotives drown out the sound of Interstate 24. Jaxon Talbert





Time to reflect

The reflectorized lettering and stripes on Union Pacific units led by GP15AC No. Y730 catch a small amount of light as the Troy Grove Job delivers empty hoppers for frac sand service at Troy Grove, Ill., on Sept. 21, 2015. Steve Smedley

One step ahead

A step box gleams while a BNSF office-car train waits at the Grand Canyon, Ariz., station on Sept. 21, 2019. The special operated on the Grand Canyon Railway as part of National Park Service Railroad Appreciation Day.

David R. Busse



Dallas is a jewel

Songwriter Jimmy Dale Gilmore may have had the city lights in mind when he wrote that lyric. Here, those lights provide the backdrop for a westbound Union Pacific manifest freight on Sept. 6, 2019. David Ilzhoefer



Ride in '25!

Join the editors of *Trains* Magazine on an unforgettable rail adventure



Alaska by Rail **Sept. 4-13**

- Travel the entire length of the Alaskan RR, from Fairbanks to Seward.
- All inclusive (meals, hotels, train fares, museum entry)
- All segments in Goldstar Class dome car (except the *Hurricane Train*)
- Tour of Denali Park
- Boat Excursion through Kenai Fjords National Park

UK Celebration **of Steam**

Sept. 23- Oct. 2
with David Lassen

- Experience the 200th anniversary of steam railroading in Hopetown Darlington, the birthplace of railroading
- Visit the National Railway Museum in York
- Yorkshire Moors Ry.
- Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland railways

New England Fall Colors **by Rail**

Oct. 2-9

with Carl Swanson

- Fully private railcar experiences, including:
 - Mt. Washington Cog Ry.
 - Conway Scenic
- Hobo & Winnepesaukee
- Seashore Trolley Museum
- Wiscasset, Waterville & Farmington Ry.
- Belfast & Moosehead RR
- Maine narrow gauge

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