

POTOMAC RAIL NEWS

POTOMAC CHAPTER, NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 235, KENSINGTON, MARYLAND 20895-0235

JANUARY 2024



RAILFANNING IN CANADA! On November 11, 2006, VIA #1 is shown here East of Jasper, British Columbia. Photo by: Jim Kleeman. See more from Jim's travels to Canada in this month's Chapter program.

PROGRAM. "40 years of Canadian Railfanning," Jim Kleeman will start in the Toronto area in the 1980s when VIA's roster was primarily EMD F9s, Alco FPA4s, and Budd RDCs, we will then head to the prairies where wooden grain elevators were served by SD40-2s in the 1990s. Kicking Horse Pass and Yellowhead Pass are next. SD40-2s are still in service but CP, CN, and VIA are modernizing their fleets and the Rocky Mountaineer is offering up some spectacular scenery. We'll finish with a trip through the Thompson and Fraser River canyons with the CP and CN mainlines on both sides of the river.

MEETING VIA ZOOM: January 16, 2024 at 8PM. ZOOM LOGIN LINK ON PAGE 2.

NEXT MEETING DATE: February 20, 2024

DEADLINE FOR FEBRUARY ISSUE: February 2, 2024. Send news items to Clay Moritz, Editor, Potomac Rail News, at c.moritz@comcast.net

INFO ON CHAPTER ACTIVITIES: <http://potomacnrhs.org/>

ADDRESS MEMBERSHIP INQUIRIES TO: Rick Davidson, Membership Agent, 2908 Breezy Terrace, Alexandria, VA 22303-2401 rdavidsonjr2908@gmail.com

THE CHAPTER FAMILY

If you know of a Chapter Member who is sick, has lost a loved one, or has a new birth in the family, please contact the editor at: c.moritz@comcast.net

UPCOMING MEETINGS SCHEDULE. During the December membership meeting, the Chapter's Board of Directors polled the attendees about the frequency of in-person meetings in 2024. A majority expressed support for increasing the number of in-person meetings from four to five. The January and February meetings will be held via Zoom. The Board will develop a schedule for the rest of the year.

ZOOM TOPIC: POTOMAC CHAPTER DECEMBER MEMBERSHIP MEETING:

Time: Jan 16, 2024 08:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81672625788?pwd=MHptaXJpL1RUalhEcDFwZk5vaGREdz09>

Meeting ID: 816 7262 5788

Passcode: 547873

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WITH SADNESS WE NOTE THE PASSING OF LONG-TIME POTOMAC CHAPTER MEMBER RICHARD

"DICK" FISHER. The Potomac Chapter extends its Deepest Sympathy to Dick's family and friends; Our Thoughts and Prayers are with you. The following appeared in an issue of the Southern Railway Historical Association's TIES Magazine: On July 24, 2021, Richard "Dick" Fisher passed away after several years of poor health. He was 91. Dick was a longtime supporter, member, and officer of the Southern Railway Historical Association (SRHA), and into the 2010s he could be found manning the SRHA's table at the annual Gaithersburg Railroadiana Show. He was a member of SRHA's Board from 2003 to 2016, serving as the organization's secretary for all except two of those years.

Dick was a native of southeastern Pennsylvania and went to work for the Westinghouse Air Brake Company (later WABCO) in Wilmerding, PA, in 1953. Three years later, he was promoted to the company's regional sales and service office in Washington, D.C., primarily servicing the accounts of the Southern, the N&W, the Virginian, and some smaller railroads. His job entailed much travel, most of it by train. Dick figured that in 1957, he spent 50 nights in a Pullman car. In the late 1950s, one of his frequent destinations was Southern's system locomotive air brake shop at Spencer, NC, until the shop closed in 1960. Southern was an early proponent of composition air brake shoes on its locomotives (replacing cast iron), which began to be applied in the late-1950s. Outfitting SOU's freight and passenger cars came later.

His airbrake expertise also figured into Southern's operation of mid-train remote controlled locomotive units in the early-1960s. Later in the decade, Dick was there to help Southern adopt composition brake shoes and load/empty brake systems on unit trains. His work led to the successful operation of loaded unit coal trains down the Blue Ridge loops and the infamous Saluda grade for many years as they hauled the black fuel from Appalachian mines to North Carolina power plants.

Dick briefly worked for Southern's research and test department in Alexandria, VA, as an air brake engineer before hiring on with the Federal

Railroad Administration in Washington. We believe he retired from the FRA sometime in the 1990s. In later years, he and his wife, Joanne, made their home in Bethesda, MD. While Dick was modest – so modest that he didn't want a funeral or obituary – he will be remembered as a good friend of the rail industry, of Southern Railway, and especially of the SRHA.

Over the years, Dick wrote several excellent articles for SRHA's TIES Magazine, explaining his role in helping Southern burnish its reputation as an innovator.

2000 March-April TIES: "Recollections of the Interstate Railroad," where Dick recounts adventures with composition brake shoes being applied to Southern and Interstate equipment in Andover/Appalachia from 1958 to 1972.

2001 July-August TIES, "Reminisces of Spencer," describes the numerous trips Dick made to Spencer for various air brake related issues. The article was prompted by SRHA's convention, which was held at the North Carolina Transportation Museum, which now occupies the Spencer Shops area.

2003 January-February TIES, "Empty/Load Breaking Systems on the Southern," covers Dick's involvement with testing and implementing braking systems that enabled Southern to operate larger, heavier cars and trains over its challenging topography. (Source: TIES MAGAZINE, First Quarter 2022 Vol. 36 No. 1)

WE ALSO NOTE THE PASSING OF GREG SCHOLL - RAILROAD VIDEOGRAPHER AND PRODUCER.

Greg Scholl, a skilled videographer who ran one of the last independent railroad video production companies, died on December 9, 2023. He was 72 years old.

In the 1980s, Greg Scholl Video Productions was one of a number of major railroad video producers to emerge as VCRs became common in homes, competing against other big names like Pentrex, Video Rails, and WB Video. But as other video producers folded or were taken over by other companies, Scholl soldiered on as one of the last independent producers. In the 1980s and 1990s, when railroad VHS tapes were big business, Scholl covered all of the big steam events and that drive continued into the 21st Century. Just this year, he was releasing new DVD titles about Reading 4-8-4 2102 and other main line steamers.

Scholl was born in 1950 and got his love of railroading after his father took him and his brother out train chasing. Scholl saw the final days of steam on the Norfolk & Western and that fueled a life-long fascination with steam locomotives, which would bring him to travel across North America and around the world. Besides producing videos on big steam events in the U.S., he did a number of videos on steam in Europe and South Africa. Scholl would eventually go on to produce more than 250 titles.

Greg is survived by his wife Kathi, daughter Heather and brother Randy. He will be buried in his hometown of Batavia, Ohio. (Railfan & Railroad Magazine)

The Potomac Chapter, NRHS, extends its Deepest Sympathy to Greg's family and friends; Our Thoughts and Prayers are with you.

RAIL NEWS

VIRGINIA WILL BREAK GROUND ON SEVERAL LONG-AWAITED RAIL PROJECTS AND HAS STARTED TO ANNOUNCE CONSTRUCTION PARTNERS. Virginia's investment in its passenger rail infrastructure aims to reduce chronic traffic, decrease its carbon footprint and catch up to states with a competitive state-run passenger rail service, such as New York and Illinois. The new focus on investment comes after decades of neglect. In late March at Alexandria Station in 2021, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg sat on stage as then-Governor Ralph Northam announced a \$3.7 billion investment in the state's passenger rail over a 10-year span. Fast-forward two years, and nine of the initial 15 projects overseen by the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority will soon leave the station. The VPRA

oversees all state-supported passenger rail services. The General Assembly created the agency in 2020 to keep up the momentum and shield public infrastructure projects from wavering political sentiment.

DJ Stadtler, VPRA Executive Director worked at Amtrak for 12 years in various executive roles prior to his work with the VPRA. He is the VPRA's first and only executive director. Amtrak is a partner in some VPRA efforts to transform rail service in Virginia. "When you're looking at adding infrastructure, Virginia is actually way ahead of the game," Stadtler said. "We've got the projects that are ready; they're being designed now."

COMING DOWN THE LINE - Nine projects are in different states of preliminary engineering. That includes projects to the under-served but growing regions in Southwest Virginia and along the heavily trafficked Interstate 95 corridor between Richmond and Washington, D.C. At least 1 million passengers and millions of tons of freight ride the rails there annually.

On December 27th, the VPRA announced the selection of three construction partners for two major projects. One is the northern part of the Long Bridge project. The current Long Bridge - a two-track, 119-year-old piece of infrastructure owned by CSX - has become a choke point for passenger and freight trains. It operates at 98% capacity during peak travel hours. A two-track railroad bridge dedicated to passenger rail will be constructed next to the old Long Bridge. CSX will retain ownership of the original bridge and use it for freight traffic exclusively.

Skanska USA and Flatiron Corp. were announced as the companies that will move the project from design to completion, with prep work starting in 2024 and full construction beginning in early 2025. Skanska worked on the Moynihan Train Hall at New York Penn Station. Flatiron worked on the completed sections of the California High-Speed Rail project. The new bridge will double rail capacity over the Potomac River and allow for almost hourly service between Washington, D.C., and Richmond when completed in 2030.

The south part of the Long Bridge project will create a two-track passenger rail bridge over the Potomac River, and an adjacent bicycle-pedestrian bridge that connects trails and parks in Arlington to those in Washington, D.C. The VPRA will consider requests for proposals in February.

The entire Long Bridge project is projected to cost \$2.3 billion. Flatiron and Herzog Contracting Corp. will work on the Franconia-Springfield bypass, the VPRA announced on December 27th. Herzog worked on the Brightline expansion of rail service in Orlando, Florida. Bypass work will create a dedicated passenger rail bridge under a mile long, south of the Franconia-Springfield Metro station. The area is one of the most congested points in Virginia, according to the VPRA. A \$100 million grant was awarded for this project in September. It is slated to cost approximately \$405 million. Full construction will start in March and last two years.

There are multiple phases of the work the VPRA will do along the I-95 corridor, with varied completion dates. The first two phases will add a combined 37 miles of additional track. Eventually, passengers will gain access to additional Amtrak round-trips along I-95, and additional round-trips and weekend service on the Virginia Railway Express Fredericksburg Line.

Other capital projects include increased service to Newport News and Norfolk, expansion of rail service to the New River Valley for the first time since 1979, and improved service between Richmond and Raleigh, North Carolina. Last month, North Carolina announced a \$1 billion U.S. Department of Transportation grant toward the Richmond-to-Raleigh project. That southern route will create a faster, more direct route between the cities.

In a broader sense, the Long Bridge connects Washington, D.C., to the entirety of the Southeast U.S. All northbound passenger trains from this region

terminate in the Nation's Capital. "We're strong partners with other states like North Carolina," Stadtler said. "They know that all of the infrastructure that they're investing in is useless unless we deliver the Long Bridge because that really opens the capacity for everybody."

VPRA-led work appears to have increased interest in passenger rail. A record 1.26 million people rode Amtrak or Virginia Railway Express in the last fiscal year. The all-time monthly ridership record of 119,280 passengers was set in August 2022.

Erika Olivo-Espinoza is a college student who regularly takes the train between her Northern Virginia home and school in Richmond. Amtrak has pretty good diversity among its Virginia ridership, she said. "I've seen a lot of students use Amtrak to go home as well," Olivo-Espinoza said. "I've also seen a lot of older people who can't drive, and also some families." Olivo-Espinoza prefers Amtrak to other methods of transportation, like the bus, due to its speed, frequency and amenities. "I took the train because I didn't have a car, it was just the most convenient thing for me, and it's not a long ride and they do have Wi-Fi," Olivo-Espinoza said. "They have good services."

THE FREIGHT PROBLEM - Countries overseas have, for the most part, dedicated railways for passenger travel, according to Stadtler. American passenger rail competes with freight railroads, which own the vast majority of trackage in the U.S. Freight trains stacked with cargo are long and slow-moving. Passenger trains need to go a lot faster. The two often get in each other's way.

"Historically in our country, whenever we've wanted to add passenger rail, the freight railroads have said, 'Well, it's our track; we're not going to do that,'" Stadtler said. The U.S. standard is to negotiate track-sharing agreements with freight railroads, but the VPRA knew a different approach was needed to expand passenger rail. "Let's go to the freight railroads," Stadtler said. "Let's find out where we need to add capacity so we can literally put passenger trains on a different track."

Virginia bought hundreds of miles of track from private freight railroads such as CSX and Norfolk Southern at a total cost of \$563 million. This investment will give passenger trains the right-of-way, make improvements to neglected rail infrastructure and increase train frequency.

REDESIGNING RAIL SAFETY - New rail infrastructure projects, especially along the I-95 corridor, will increase safety through design. Railroads will be routed above roadways via bridges, and streets will be redesigned.

Virginia is ranked 13th in U.S. railroad crossing collisions, according to the Federal Railroad Administration. Almost all U.S. railroad fatalities are a result of either pedestrians trespassing or collisions at railroad crossings. "So when you close crossings, you eliminate entrances or, you know, passageways across a track," said Margaret Cannell, State Coordinator for North Carolina Operation Lifesaver.

Cannell pointed out that in Japan, there are very few instances of vehicles or pedestrians hit by trains. High-speed trains in Japan travel up to 200 mph. In Virginia, Amtrak trains move at speeds up to 79 mph, but on average at 50 mph. "It's because the train tracks are separated from vehicles and from people," she said. "They're elevated, or they're completely separated so that those paths don't cross." North Carolina engaged in a series of rail improvements in the late 2010s called the Piedmont Corridor project. It was similar to the improvements Virginia is undertaking now. Over 48 North Carolina crossings were closed, Cannell said.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation and the VPRA are working closely together on projects, according to Cannell. "They're fully invested in making sure that it's the safest that it can be and that the number of crossings that have to exist are minimal and they're as safe as they could be," she said.

Cannell saw how impactful the North Carolina improvements were and said Virginia's new focus is "a big deal" – a "legacy" program. "It's a big thing to be doing and the cooperation of CSX and VDOT has ... just completely made this a really great project – one that people will be talking about using for many, many years to come," she said. (Richmond Times-Dispatch)

FRA WANTS RAILROADS TO BOLSTER WINTER OPERATION PROCEDURES. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has issued a safety advisory on operational procedures amid bad weather conditions. U.S. railroads should beef up the procedures they use for responding to adverse weather conditions, including seeing how weather-related technologies can be integrated into positive train control and whether the railroads can collaborate on developing best practices.

The FRA hopes that by issuing the safety advisory, railroads can reduce the incident level of weather-related accidents. In this latest advisory, FRA pointed out that since the start of 2021, there have been 123 rail incidents in which severe weather conditions or weather-related events may have contributed in part or in whole to those accidents. Of these incidents, more than half of them were main-track derailments, but the advisory does not detail the severity level of the various incidents.

FRA gave six recommendations for the railroads to consider:

- Evaluate existing communication and training programs, rules, policies and procedures to make sure that railroads can adequately respond to weather-related incidents and that the information is up to date.
- Determine whether weather forecasting policies and procedures can be integrated with dispatching operations and even incorporated with positive train control systems.
- Evaluate areas where railroads' operating infrastructure is susceptible to severe weather events. Railroads can also use technology to monitor critical infrastructure in real time, and the industry and Federal, state, and local agencies can establish standardized interfaces for weather-related action plans.
- Look at whether existing weather-related action plans adequately address risks and whether railroads should develop an auditing program to ensure weather alert systems are working.
- Establish standard operating thresholds that can help railroads operate through severe weather events.
- Work with other railroads to develop best practices for utilizing weather forecasting technologies, predictive weather models and weather-related action plans. This could include determining how much deviation exists between railroads' operating procedures during severe weather events.

FRA's John Karl Alexy, Associate Administrator for Railroad Safety and Chief Safety Officer, signed the safety advisory.

This most recent advisory is the sixth one that FRA has issued in 2023. FRA released four other safety advisories following the February 3rd derailment of a Norfolk Southern train in East Palestine, Ohio. While the incident resulted in no injuries, the planned release of vinyl chloride days after the derailment rattled the local community.

The last time FRA issued six safety advisories in a calendar year was 2013. In 2016, the agency issued four advisories, and in 2015 issued three. FRA issued two safety advisories in 2014 and 2020, and in the years 2018, 2021 and 2022, just one safety advisory was issued. In 2017 and 2019, no safety advisories were issued.

Since 2022, Transport Canada has been requiring Canadian Pacific Kansas City and Canadian National to submit plans about how they expect to conduct rail operations in winter. That mandate aligned with a recommendation from the Transportation Safety Board of Canada to compel the railways to submit such

winter plans following a February 2019 derailment in Field, British Columbia, in which a Canadian Pacific grain unit train derailed, killing three employees. (Freight Waves)

OHIO LANDS AMTRAK EXPANSION PLANNING MONEY. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) announced on December 5th that Ohio is in line for potential expansion of Amtrak passenger rail service through four key corridors, .

Routes selected for development plans are: (1) Cincinnati-Dayton-Columbus-Cleveland; (2) Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit; (3) Chicago-Fort Wayne-Columbus-Pittsburgh with connector service via Lima, Kenton, Marysville, Newark, Cochocton, Newcomerstown, Uhrichsville, and Steubenville. (4) Increasing Amtrak's current route frequency to Cincinnati from New York, Washington, D.C., and Chicago.

The FRA will provide \$500,000 in funding for planning in each of the four corridors. But don't pack your bags just yet. The announcement signals the planning stage only. Ohio can use the Federal planning money to work out what is needed to make the corridors happen. That includes information on everything from State funding to operating costs and track improvements. (Cincinnati Enquirer)

AMTRAK GETS GRANT TO HELP RESTORE DAILY CARDINAL SERVICE THROUGH WEST VIRGINIA.

Money is coming to help restore the daily Amtrak Cardinal Train route from Chicago to New York City by way of nine West Virginia communities. According to the City of Huntington, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) announced a \$500,000 grant to help restore the route. Huntington Mayor Steve Williams says the Corridor Identification & Development (ID) Program grant will help Amtrak and the City figure out how to get the daily service back up and running, get it funded and bring economic development and tourism on the line to "new levels."

"Amtrak and the U.S. DOT should be commended for making this key step to invest in better train service for West Virginia," said Williams. "This can boost our state's connectivity, economic development and tourism sector to new levels. I applaud my fellow mayors, the West Virginia Division of Tourism, the West Virginia Municipal League, Senator Joe Manchin and Senator Shelley Moore Capito for helping make this happen."

The route goes through nine towns in the Mountain State, which include Huntington, Charleston, Montgomery, Smithers, Thurmond, Prince, Hinton, Alderson, and White Sulphur Springs. It is the only Amtrak route in the country with stations inside a national park.

The 1,146-mile train route between Union Station in Chicago and Penn Station in NYC has been in place for more than 50 years, according to Huntington officials.

In 2021, the West Virginia Municipal League, Transportation for American and other leaders called for Federal law to help move Amtrak's Cardinal back to daily service. City officials say West Virginia's U.S. Senators, Shelley Moore Capito and Joe Manchin, helped to secure the language in the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act to create the FRA's Corridor ID program and authorize a study to look into ways to restore the daily service. (13 News Huntington, WV)

BNSF RAILWAY TAKES CONTROL OF MONTANA RAIL LINK. Montana Rail Link, the friendly regional railroad that built a dedicated following of railroad enthusiasts during its 36-year run, became a fallen flag at midnight on January 1, 2024. At that moment, BNSF Railway resumed control of more than 900 miles of former Northern Pacific track between Huntley, Montana, and Sandpoint, Idaho.

Almost two years ago, BNSF and MRL's owner, Washington Companies, announced

that an agreement had been made to end MRL's lease of the former NP main line 25 years earlier than expected. In 1987, BNSF predecessor Burlington Northern had made a deal to lease the NP main line to industrialist Dennis Washington for 60 years. In late 2022, MRL went to the U.S. Surface Transportation Board to receive a waiver from the normal transaction review process. Because MRL operated on trackage that it leased from BNSF, the regional railroad argued that a detailed review of the transaction was unnecessary and that neither customers nor employees would be negatively impacted. As part of the deal, all MRL employees were offered jobs. On March 8, 2023, the STB gave its approval for the takeover. BNSF and MRL set a transition date of January 1, 2024.

While BNSF still owned the main line, the branch lines MRL operated on are still owned by Washington Corp. Branches that still see regular service, including those to Whitehall and Harrison, have been leased to BNSF.

In the months before the transition, BNSF locomotives became more common than they already were on MRL rails (most road trains are led by BNSF locomotives already), making appearances in helper service or even on MRL's own road jobs, like the Missoula to Laurel way-freight. No trespassing signs declaring it BNSF property also began to appear across the railroad.

On Sunday, December 31, MRL began to wind down operations. Road trains were not called after 10 a.m. so that all trains would be stopped before midnight and crews would be marked-off. The Day Gas Local between Missoula and Thompson Falls and the Missoula to Laurel freight would become some of the last trains to operate under the MRL flag. At midnight, MRL officially became the "MRL Subdivision" of BNSF's Montana Division.

Just how long MRL's blue locomotives will last in service is unclear. Because none of them have Positive Train Control installed, it is unlikely that they will be spread to other parts of the BNSF system, unless they are trailing. It also seems unlikely that some of MRL's more unique locomotives; including a lone SD45, SDP40 and a handful of GP9s; will last long on BNSF. Even before BNSF took over, MRL was scrapping some older SD45s and GP9s that had not been in service for a number of years.

BNSF officials said they were optimistic about the future for the former NP across southern Montana. In many ways, the reacquisition of MRL had corrected a mistake made years earlier by BN; as traffic boomed in the 1990s, some say BN officials regretted the decision to lease the route to Washington. For Washington, a self-made billionaire on the Forbes 500 list, the lease was a great deal because BN and BNSF always provided MRL with traffic.

"We're excited about the years ahead working together as one team," said Luke Johnson, General Manager of BNSF's Montana Division. "Our combined forces will have a unique opportunity to build upon the best-in-class service our customers throughout the Montana region have come to expect."

For railfans, however, the loss of MRL was something to lament rather than celebrate. MRL's unique image, interesting motive power and classic infrastructure (including semaphore signals into the 2000s) were all great reasons to venture to Montana, especially in an era of growing conformity within railroading. Friendly employees were another longtime trademark of MRL. While the stunning scenery of Montana will still inspire enthusiasts to venture to Big Sky Country, it won't be the same without Montana Rail Link. (Justin Franz - Railfan & Railroad Magazine)

MAIN LINE STEAM RETURNS TO CANADA. A Class I railroad has revived Canada's long-dormant steam program and is bringing main line steam back to a country that hasn't seen it in more than a decade. The return of Canadian Pacific 4-6-4 2816 was a big steam preservation story in 2023.

Built in 1930, the 2816 was one of 65 H1 Hudsons built by Montreal

Locomotive Works, primarily for passenger service. In 1939, semi-streamlined Hudson 2850 led the royal train carrying King George VI and Queen Elizabeth across Canada. The King was so impressed with the locomotive's performance that he allowed the CP to designate the later-built 4-6-4s as "Royal Hudsons," the only locomotives outside the United Kingdom ever given such status. The CP's Hudsons were, as railroad historian and author Omer Lavallée once wrote, "destined to be a superior breed of locomotive."

At the end of the steam era, five CP Hudsons were preserved but 2816 was the only non-streamlined specimen saved. The locomotive was purchased by preservationist F. Nelson Blount and put on display at Steamtown U.S.A. Eventually, the locomotive was moved to Scranton, PA, and became the property of the National Park Service. In 1998, CP re-acquired the locomotive and sent it west to North Vancouver, B.C., for restoration. In 2001, the locomotive was pressed back in service and would spend the next decade touring the CP system as a rolling ambassador for the Class I. In 2012, not long after E. Hunter Harrison was appointed CEO (a railroader known for running frills-free operations), the locomotive was put into storage in Calgary.

Then in 2020, eight years after it was stored, the locomotive made a surprise appearance under steam in CP's Ogden Yard. The reason later became clear: In an era of social distancing due to the pandemic, CP wanted to do something extra special for its "Virtual" Holiday Train concert and decided to fire-up 2816 for the occasion. At the time, a CP spokesperson said the railroad had "no plans" to run the engine on the main line. But the seed of its return was planted inside the C-suite in Calgary. Nine months later, CP CEO Keith Creel said in an interview that if his planned merger with Kansas City Southern was approved by Federal regulators, locomotive 2816 would be restored to service for a celebratory run to Mexico City. With marching orders in hand, CP's steam crew was reassembled and quietly went to work on a full overhaul of the locomotive. In June 2023, the crew put the finishing touches on the restoration and fired it up for the first time since 2020.

Throughout the summer and fall, the locomotive made a series of test runs around Alberta, on what was now called "CPKC," cumulating in a four-day trip in October that went from Calgary to Edmonton and back before running on the original CP main line to Medicine Hat. For the 93-year-old Hudson, it was a homecoming, allowing it to run on the very line it was built for.

The trips were not just significant for CPKC but also steam railroading in general north of the 49th parallel: It marked the first time in more than a decade that a main line steam locomotive ran in Canada. And hopes are high that 2816 won't be alone in carrying that torch as the Rocky Mountain Rail Society continues to restore Canadian National 4-8-2 6060.

The 2816's test runs also provided the railroad's steam team a chance to test various systems, including the newly installed Positive Train Control technology. While other steam locomotives have the U.S.-mandated safety technology – most notably Union Pacific 4-8-8-4 "Big Boy" 4014 and Santa Fe 4-8-4s 2926 and 3751 – the system aboard 2816 allows the locomotive to operate on PTC territory without a diesel helper.

After the October run, the locomotive was put away for the winter but the steam crew is still busy making preparations for this year's ambitious trip to Mexico City. The "Final Spike Steam Tour" is set to depart Calgary in April. It is sure to be one of the steam events of the decade. (Justin Franz - Railfan & Railroad Magazine)

WATERLOO CENTRAL ACQUIRES CANADIAN PACIFIC 4-6-2. In July, the Waterloo Central and Southern Ontario Locomotive Restoration Society announced they needed to raise \$150,000 before the end of the year to buy the locomotive that is currently

in storage at Prairie Dog Central Railway in Winnipeg, Manitoba. According to Waterloo Central, the locomotive is a good candidate for restoration and if they are successful it will be the second-largest operating steam locomotive in Canada behind CP 4-6-4 2816.

Waterloo Central has one other steam locomotive, 0-6-0 9, built for the Essex Terminal Railway by Montreal Locomotive Works in 1923.

The CP's G5 Pacifics were among the most modern steam locomotives ever built in North America, the first emerged from CP's Angus Shops in early 1944, but they had an elegant style that looked as if they were built decades earlier. But the class was doomed from the start and by the time all 102 were built, diesel-electrics were already taking over some assignments. As historian F. H. Howard wrote in *Trains* in 1954, the G5s were "destined to die young." But the locomotives' youth and classic looks undoubtedly made them ideal candidates for preservation. In all, six G5s would be saved including 1201 (Canadian Science and Technology), 1246 (Railroad Museum of New England), 1278 (Age of Steam Roundhouse), 1286 (Privately owned and stored at Prairie Dog Central) and 1293 (Age of Steam Roundhouse).

Locomotive 1238, along with sister engine 1286, moved to the U.S. in the 1960s and was used on excursions up and down the eastern seaboard through the 1970s and 1980s. The locomotives were purchased by Jack Showalter in 1973, and used on his Alleghany Central tourist railroad out of Covington, VA. Locomotive 1238 was also loaned to the Southern Railway briefly for main line excursion service. In 1988, Showalter moved his locomotives to Maryland to operate on the former Western Maryland and Cumberland & Pennsylvania between Cumberland and Frostburg. The line's owner, Scenic Railroad Development Corporation, would eventually begin operating its own excursions under the name Western Maryland Scenic. Showalter's last tourist operation was the Virginia Central out of Gordonsville, VA. The Virginia Central would prove to be short-lived and by the mid-1990s, both locomotives were in storage. Showalter died in 2014, and the locomotives were sold the following year before being moved back to Canada.

The Waterloo Central is raising money for the move of 1238 and its operational restoration. For more information, visit their website www.waterloocentralrailway.com. (Justin Franz - Railfan & Railroad Magazine)

WABTEC TO CLOSE WILMERDING PENNSYLVANIA PLANT. Wabtec Corp. will close its plant in Wilmerding in 2024, with layoffs beginning in February or March, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reports. The plant is expected to close by July 1. The website Tube City Almanac reports the 13.1-acre facility was sold in December 2023 to Wilmerding Warehouse LLC of Zelienople, PA, for \$1.3 million. The plant covers some 365,000 square feet, but only a small portion was still in use. The planned shutdown, which will result in the layoff of 94 workers, became public on December 24th after the company filed a Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification, or WARN notice, with Pennsylvania's Department of Labor and Industry. The WARN act requires employers to provide at least a 60-day notice in advance of plant closing or layoffs of large numbers of workers.

The facility is the historic home of Westinghouse Air Brake, which became Wabco and later Wabtec. The company, founded in 1869, moved to Wilmerding in 1889, and by 1905 employed 3,000 workers. (Trains News Wire)

VOTERS APPROVE CINCINNATI SOUTHERN SALE. During the November 7th general election, Cincinnati voters approved the proposed sale of the municipally-owned Cincinnati Southern Railway to Norfolk Southern. This 337-mile route connecting Cincinnati with Chattanooga, Tennessee, has been operated for more than a century by Cincinnati, New Orleans, & Texas Pacific Railway, an NS subsidiary. The vote

was the last hurdle for the \$1.6 billion transaction, which was announced in late 2022 and then approved by the U.S. Surface Transportation Board. NS is now working with city officials to finalize the sale, which is expected to be completed during the first quarter of 2024.

The ballot referendum for the sale passed with 52% approval by the voters, but the outcome was never certain. NS and the city had to fight-off opposition by various groups that believed on-going lease revenue was best for the community long-term versus the one-time windfall from the sale. NS had been pushing for the sale to avoid any uncertainty regarding future lease costs and related concerns. This line has some of the highest traffic density of any NS main line, handling more than 30 trains daily between the Midwest and Southeast. (Railfan & Railroad)

VIRGINIA BRANCH SOLD. NS has sold 58 miles of former Southern Railway branch line trackage in Virginia to Buckingham Branch Railroad operated as BBRR's Virginia Southern Division, one segment extends 20 miles from the NS Interchange in Burkeville southwest to Keysville, and then another 38 miles from Keysville to Clarksville, near the North Carolina state line. It is noteworthy that this trackage was the first such low-density line leased to a partner carrier under NS' innovative Thoroughbred Shortline Program on November 28, 1988. On that date, it began operating the Virginia Southern Railroad, a subsidiary of Railtex. It then went through a series of lease changes over the years before transfer to BBRR in 2009. (Railfan & Railroad)

CANADA WANTS TO GIVE VIA THE RIGHT-OF-WAY OVER FREIGHT. New legislation in Canada would give VIA Rail passenger trains priority over freight trains of Canadian National and CPKC Railway.

In December, the Rail Passenger Priority Act was introduced in Parliament to amend the Canada Transportation Act to state that any time a passenger train and a freight train need to use the same rail line, passengers get to go first. In order to promote the proposed legislation, one of its backers, MP Taylor Bachrach, rode VIA Rail from Toronto to his hometown of Smithers, B.C., in December, to show just how delayed Canada's passenger trains were due to freight. "Right now people are avoiding the train because they can't get to where they need to go with any sense of consistency," Bachrach told CBC News.

VIA Rail officials have praised the proposal and said it would be a major help to their operations. But representatives of the freight rail industry were less excited and urged the government to proceed with caution and not negatively impact the movement of freight that is critical to the economy. "Any passenger service proposal must demonstrate that freight capacity to handle current and future anticipated volumes can be preserved, which is essential to support Canada's economy," said Marc Brazeau, CEO of the Railway Association of Canada, in an emailed statement to The Canadian Press.

South of the border, Amtrak trains have priority over freight trains, although that doesn't always work out in practice, as seen by the current dispute between the passenger railroad and Union Pacific over its handling of the Sunset Limited. (Railfan & Railroad)

READING & NORTHERN SAW DOUBLE-DIGIT GROWTH IN BOTH FREIGHT AND PASSENGER TRAFFIC IN 2023, The Pennsylvania regional railroad handled more than 37,000 cars of freight, up from 33,000 in 2022. Growth was boosted in particular by the increase in coal & frac sand traffic. Excursion passenger counts grew from 250,000 to more than 320,000 in 2023, aided by the opening of the new Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Regional Station in Pittston, PA, and a larger collection of rolling stock and more train starts. (Trains News Wire)

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