

POTOMAC RAIL NEWS

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

MAY 2023



CELEBRATING THE B&O MET BRANCH! An afternoon Maryland Department of Transportation train roars across the Monocacy River Bridge on the former B&O Metropolitan Branch, a mile west of Dickerson, MD, on May 12, 1983. This train originated at Washington Union Station and will terminate at Brunswick, MD. The four-car train is powered by MDOT F9PHA No. 7183, which was originally B&O F7A No. 369. In 1984 this service was renamed MARC (Maryland Area Rail Commuter). On May 29, 2023, a Special MARC Train will operate from Silver Spring to Brunswick, MD, and return to Celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Metropolitan Branch of the B&O Railroad. Photo by: Alex Mayes

PROGRAM: Noted photographer and former Director of Advertising for Trains Magazine Mike Yuhas will present a Zoom program featuring 50 Years of his photography. Mike took his first railroad photograph as a youngster in 1972. Growing up on Long Island, there was never a shortage of LIRR subjects to shoot. He left the area in the early 1980s, and after a few years in the Hudson Valley and the Philadelphia area, he eventually settled in southeastern Wisconsin. Over the next five decades and countless miles, his cameras have captured countless thousands of railroad images. Some of them are VERY GOOD! A sampling of them will be shown to us.

MEETING: May 16, 2023. 8PM via ZOOM technology. Zoom link on page 2.

NEXT MEETING DATE: June 20, 2023

DEADLINE FOR JUNE ISSUE: June 2, 2023. Send news items to Clay Moritz, Editor, Potomac Rail News, at c.moritz@comcast.net

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

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

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

ZOOM TOPIC: POTOMAC CHAPTER MAY MEMBERSHIP MEETING:

Time: Time: May 16, 2023 08:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83192607620?pwd=ZnVvcWpxT2FxMlQxa3YwRTFZV09Rdz09>

Meeting ID: 831 9260 7620

Passcode: 949431

One tap mobile +13017158592,,83192607620#,,,,*949431# US (Washington DC)

NRHS NEWS. By Bill Welk, National Representative, Philadelphia Chapter, NRHS, Cinders April 2023. On Friday, March 10, I attended the NRHS pre-Spring Conference, Advisory Council Meeting via ZOOM. This year's Spring Conference will take place in Sparks, NV, from May 16 to May 21. The NRHS' finances are being finalized since member dues and donations are still being received, through March 31.

The Society's Heritage Grants program has received 50 Grant Applications requesting in excess of \$300,000. The Committee's objective is to review and complete a list of finalists promptly in order to get grant money to recipients prior to Spring so the most work can be accomplished. Each successful applicant is responsible to provide updates of their projects periodically and complete a final report to be used in an article for the NRHS News.

In other news, both RailCamps will take place in 2023 and are expected to be filled. Membership Awards (pins, certificates, and letters) will be mailed during April. The Neon Membership database has been updated with the latest chapter and member information. Membership cards are currently being mailed. As of February 28, there are 3,675 members renewed, compared to 4,449 at this time last year.

The Film Library Committee reported that Tom Coughlin took some of the digitized films and put them in his YouTube channel. Additional financial and labor support will be obtained for the Film Library to expedite completion of at least one DVD to be placed on the NRHS website. As of this meeting, approximately 1,050 images have been added to the NRHS Photo Gallery, which can be accessed through the NRHS website.

The 2023 NRHS National Convention will take place in September in Fort Lauderdale, FL, from September 1 through September 6. The hotel will be the Doubletree at Deerfield Beach, at a rate of \$129.00 per night. It is anticipated that the 2024 Convention will be held in Harrisburg, PA, featuring the East Broad Top Railroad. Future conferences could be taking place in the Philadelphia or Wilmington areas.

NRHS President Tony White did say that the position of Assistant Treasurer had no volunteers and remains open. The April issue of NRHS News will be an online PDF. There will be no May issue due to the Spring Conference, and it was announced that the annual rail attractions guide should be out by June.

RAIL NEWS

COUNTY-WIDE CELEBRATION OF THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE METROPOLITAN BRANCH OF B & O RAILROAD - TOURS, EXHIBITS, PERFORMANCES, LECTURES AT VARIOUS SITES THROUGHOUT MONTGOMERY COUNTY THROUGHOUT SPRING & SUMMER. Excursion Train on Memorial Day, May 29, 2023. Now the MARC Brunswick Line, the Metropolitan Branch of the B & O Railroad, after the first train made its way from Washington D.C. to Point of Rocks on May 25, 1873, changed the face of Montgomery County - bringing it into the industrial age with steam powered mills and factories located next to the tracks -- transforming agriculture from marketing wheat and corn to producing perishables such as milk, peaches, and apples. Railroad suburbs started sprouting upwards from the District line. Villages next to the tracks turned into cities, and sleepy country towns turned into summer resorts.

For more information, excursion train tickets and a Calendar of events go to: www.montgomerypreservation.org (MONTGOMERY PRESERVATION, PO Box 4661, Rockville, Maryland 20849-4661 301-495-4915 Email: mpi@montgomerypreservation.org)

N&W 611'S 'FAREWELL TOUR' AT STRASBURG, PA. Norfolk & Western 4-8-4 611 will return to Virginia following a "farewell tour" at the Strasburg Rail Road in May. N&W 611 has run at Strasburg since 2019 and recently underwent a Federally-mandated annual inspection at the railroad's shops. The locomotive will lead excursions on May 20-21 and May 27-29. There will also be "in-cab experiences," including the opportunity to run the big J Class, on May 19 and 26. The locomotive's owner, the Virginia Museum of Transportation, said the events in May will be the only time the locomotive runs in Pennsylvania this year. It did not provide details on when and where the locomotive might run again upon its return to Virginia. The 4-8-4 was built in 1950 for the N&W and has returned to service twice in the excursion era, once in the 1980s and again in the 2010s. Visit [Strasburg's website](#) for more information. (Railfan & Railroad)

DC TROLLEY BRIDGES TO BE TORN DOWN. The National Park Service, in conjunction with WMATA, is taking the first steps toward demolishing two trestle bridges on the northern end of the old trolley line from Georgetown to Glen Echo. The two trestles are Walhonding Road and Wilson Lane. In April, George Washington Memorial Parkway sent a letter to organizations, such as the Town of Glen Echo, that might be affected by the plan. The letter invited them to comment on the Park Service's intention to issue a special use permit to WMATA in order to demolish the bridges.

The trestle bridges were part of the electric rail line from Washington, DC, to Glen Echo, originally constructed circa 1895 by the Washington and Great Falls Electric Railway Company.

Last year, the Maryland Historical Trust determined that the two structures are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as rare examples in Maryland of the late 19th Century steel metal trestle type that carried trolleys. The Glen Echo trolley line was abandoned in 1960.

The Wilson Lane trestle bridge is located beyond the Glen Echo

Amusement Park, just before where the turning loop at the end of the line would have been. The Walhonding Road trestle bridge is about 1.3 miles south. Both are located near MacArthur Boulevard, but neither is easy to see from the road in summertime. The park service says the bridges have become unsafe through years of deterioration from weathering and neglected maintenance. (Bill Holdsworth)

MARC EYES TWO-STATE EXPANSION PROJECT. On April 13th, The Maryland Department of Transportation - Maryland Transit Administration (MDOT MTA) signed framework agreements with Delaware Transit Corp. and Virginia Passenger Rail Authority for the potential future expansion of MARC (Maryland Area Rail Commuter) Train service to Newark, DE, and Alexandria, VA.

The agreements outline the next steps to advance discussions and explore pilot service opportunities, according to the Office of Maryland Governor Wes Moore, which made the announcement. Creating seamless MARC Train service both north and south of Maryland "is a critical component to transforming MARC Train from a local, commuter rail to a regional rail provider," the Office said.

To advance MARC service to Newark, the MTA and Delaware Transit Corp. are slated to engage with regional stakeholders and agencies to help determine operational and infrastructure needs. These efforts are designed to ultimately close the commuter rail gap in Cecil County and provide a seamless connection between MARC and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) system, according to the Governor's Office.

To provide MARC run-through service enabling a direct, one-seat ride between Maryland and Northern Virginia, the MTA will continue to coordinate with the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority, Virginia Railway Express, Amtrak, and host CSX, the Office said. It noted that future service is dependent on completion of the Long Bridge project, which includes a new rail bridge spanning the Potomac River from the District of Columbia to Virginia, and other related fourth-track projects in the District and in Northern Virginia. In the short term, the Office said, Maryland will coordinate with Virginia Railway Express on improvements to existing connections at Washington Union Station.

"We must take a regional approach to create a fully connected transportation network, and these agreements will help us deliver seamless transit service across state lines," MTA Secretary Paul J. Wiedefeld said. "Maryland is working to create a transit network that expands opportunities and options for all customers. Collaboration with our partners in Virginia and Delaware is critical in that mission."

"This partnership on a framework agreement is an important first step forward for VPRR to further advance the Commonwealth's goal of reducing congestion on our roads and highways by providing more reliable, consistent, and accessible passenger rail transportation options," Virginia Passenger Rail Authority Executive Director DJ Stadtler said. "We look forward to continued coordination with the Maryland Transit Administration as we work to better connect people and communities across the region."

The agreements' signing follows the MTA's recent Memorandum of Understanding and funding agreement with Amtrak to replace the 150-year-old B&P Tunnel in Baltimore with the new Frederick Douglass Tunnel. The project is expected to improve speed, capacity, and reliability for MARC riders and will provide an updated West Baltimore MARC Station that is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Additionally, the MDOT - MTA earlier this month awarded Alstom a five-year O&M (operations and maintenance) contract with extensions for MARC that "builds on a long-standing collaboration in O&M dating back to 2012" and adds "digital innovations aiming at developing sustainable and smart mobility." (Railway Age)

NEW POTOMAC YARD METRO STATION TO OPEN MAY 19, A new Metro station that civic and business leaders say they are counting on as the economic centerpiece for Alexandria's future will open May 19, after nearly a year of delays caused by permitting, labor, and supply issues.

The Potomac Yard Station is on the site of the former Potomac Rail Yard south of Reagan National Airport next to several rising office buildings, including a new satellite campus for Virginia Tech. The \$370 million station will be Metro's 98th, serving the Yellow and Blue lines north of the Braddock Road Station. The opening will be the latest growth indicator for a transit system that has expanded its regional footprint and ridership levels in recent months while emerging from the pandemic and a train shortage. The station is also a key component of Alexandria's efforts to remake the 295-acre former railroad yard site into a busy urban center.

The station's initial planned opening date of April 2022 was pushed to the summer. In July, Metro announced the station's automatic train control system needed to be redesigned after it did not meet requirements. Then a planned fall opening was postponed after crews ran into problems with soil and other issues. The project also had a more complex permitting process than other stations, having to conform to the likings of the National Park Service, CSX, and a special architectural review because it lies in a historic district. The Park Service limits construction along the George Washington Memorial Parkway, so the agency wanted to hide the station as much as possible from the scenic roadway. Metro used balloons to test what heights could be visible from the parkway before construction. Paint that covers the beams on the station's exterior were found to match best with the surrounding trees during all four seasons.

Since railroad tracks run under the station's pedestrian walkway, Metro worked with CSX to ensure all types of trains and freight could pass. To help satisfy Alexandria's architectural review, Metro chose a station design inspired by the Thorncrown Chapel in Arkansas, a 48-foot gothic-like structure seemingly enclosed by glass. The Potomac Yard station includes roofs and walls of paneled glass in rectangles, loosely evoking the square-shaped concrete panels that line Metro's ceilings at many underground stations.

Outside the station, more than 550,000 square feet of commercial space already has been built, including a 100,000-square-foot center for the National Industries for the Blind and a \$70 million headquarters building for the American Physical Therapy Association.

Projects under construction include the \$1 billion Virginia Tech Innovation Campus, an Inova medical center that will include a full-service emergency room, a family medicine center and medical offices. Another project will include 577 apartments, 84 townhouses and 55,000 square feet of retail space, according to Liz Bolton, spokesperson for the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership. (Washington Post)

METRO FARE AND SERVICE CHANGES ARE COMING SOON. Fare changes and service improvements are coming to Metro this summer after the transit agency approved a fare increase on April 14th for the first time in five years. The cost increase also will help to pay for a fare discount that will benefit half of all Metrobus riders, which transit leaders approved as part of changes that attempt to bring Metro back to full service after three years of the pandemic and a lengthy train shortage.

The changes, which mostly will take effect July 1, include slashing fares in half for low-income riders and faster service at all times of the day. It's part of Metro's plan to lure back customers or find new riders by becoming the transportation option more people choose for shopping, leisure, and entertainment.

Transit officials say they are making fares easier to understand and more equitable across income levels, hours of the day, and even across modes of travel. Metrorail and Metrobus, for the first time, will charge the same \$2 fare for short trips, although distance-based fares on the rail system will increase. Longer rail trips will cost more. Metrorail's base fare will be reduced to \$2. Currently, Metrorail riders are charged \$2.25 during weekday peak periods. The extra 25 cents will be eliminated, and rides under three miles will be \$2. Beyond that is where the fare hike kicks in. Distance-based rates currently range between 21 and 33 cents per mile after three miles, depending on the time of day. That will jump to 40 cents per mile on weekdays before 9:30 p.m. The maximum Metro can charge will remain capped at \$6. Riders will avoid distance-based fees when riding late or on weekends. Weekday rides after 9:30 p.m. and rides all weekend will remain a flat \$2.

Metro is creating a low-income fare program that will cut fares in half for anyone who qualifies for the Federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Metro already offers half-price fares to seniors and disabled riders, while D.C. provides school-age children with free fare cards.

The discount would affect about 15% of Metrorail users, according to Metro estimates. Metro officials say the discount will make transit more equitable, pointing to the large numbers of transit users whose fare cards are subsidized by the Federal government or private companies.

Metro is set to approve the first fare hike in five years, discount for low-income riders. Riders who will be hardest hit are those who live in Northern Virginia and the Maryland suburbs who might pay up to \$2 more than they are paying now during weekday, off-peak periods. Transit leaders said the majority of long-distance riders have their transit cards subsidized by their employer. But the hike has not sat well with some elected officials in both states.

Faster service is coming. Over the past three years, Metro service has been hindered by the pandemic and a Federal derailment investigation that led to the suspension of about 60% of Metro's rail car fleet because of a wheel defect found on several 7000-series cars.

Initial waits of 20 minutes for trains were shortened when the cars were phased back in beginning last summer. Metro's regulator has allowed it to use the rail cars if their wheels are screened regularly for the defect. The required interval for inspections has increased repeatedly because no cars have shown signs of unsafe wheel movements.

Metro outlines plan to boost service levels. In April, the Washington Metrorail Safety Commission allowed Metro to move to 15-day inspection intervals, up from every seven days, which allows Metro to use considerably more rail cars because inspections take time and staffing. As a result, more trains are being added to the system.

Trains are arriving every eight minutes most of the time on the Green and Red lines. By summer, Metro hopes to increase rail frequencies to between three and six minutes in the downtown core and eight to 12 minutes systemwide, which is a pace not seen since March 2020.

After an eight-month absence, the Yellow Line will return May 7 after a bridge and tunnel reconstruction project is complete. Riders will once again be able to cross the Potomac River between Virginia and D.C. on more than one line. Since it closed last fall, transit riders have had to choose between a free shuttle bus service or take the Blue Line, which adds about 15 minutes to trips. Trains will run every eight minutes on weekdays and every 12 minutes after 9:30 p.m. and on weekends. The line's service area will be reduced. The Yellow Line will run between Huntington and Mount Vernon Square, skipping the line's northernmost stations, which will still have Green Line service.

Officials say stations served by the Green Line will not notice any

difference in train frequency. Trains will run every six minutes on the Green Line. Southbound transit users who are being skipped by the Yellow Line will have to transfer from the Green Line at any station between Mount Vernon Square and L'Enfant Plaza.

Automation lies ahead. Beginning this fall, Metro riders may begin to notice smoother rides and more punctual service on the Red Line, according to transit leaders, if Metro receives regulatory clearance to automate the entire Metrorail system.

Trains are currently operated manually by operators, but until 2009, the system was automated. That changed when a Red Line train collided into a stopped train near Fort Totten, killing nine people and injuring 80 others. Metro shut down the automatic system and turned over control to operators as investigators sought to figure out what went wrong.

Metro will return to automated train operation in the system for first time in 14 years. Ultimately, faulty parts in a separate train detection system and lax maintenance practices were found to be culpable. While the automatic train operations (ATO) system was not found to have played a role, Metro never returned to it. But over the past few years, transit engineers and technicians have prepared Metrorail for the switch back to ATO. Most major rail systems in the country use automation, which is widely considered to be safer, more reliable, punctual, and energy-efficient. Metro officials hope to begin operating trains on the Red Line in ATO this fall, followed by automation systemwide by December.

During the pandemic, fare evasion, by jumping over fare gates, has proliferated and grown into a top complaint of riders. In November, Metro launched a pilot program at the Fort Totten station, modifying fare gates to gauge their effectiveness at deterring evasion. When outfitted with 48-inch-tall saloon-style laminated plastic doors that were difficult to jump over, Metro officials saw a reduction in non-paid entries.

The transit agency is retrofitting the entire system's fare gates, a project Metro said will take about 15 months and cost between \$35 million and \$40 million. After Fort Totten, work is starting at another nine stations in a phased approach until the new barriers are installed systemwide next year. Metro estimates that it loses about \$40 million a year to evasion, or just under 2% of its annual operating budget. Transit officials said 13% of rail riders do not pay fares. (Washington Post)

TRAIN DERAILMENT IN WISCONSIN SENDS TWO CONTAINERS INTO THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER.

A train derailment in southwestern Wisconsin on April 27th sent two derailed containers into the Mississippi River, and at least four employees were injured, according to officials. The train derailed around 12:15 p.m. local time near the village of De Soto and all crew members have since been accounted for, according to BNSF Railway, the train's operator. They have been treated for minor injuries and released, BNSF spokeswoman Lena Kent told CNN via email on Friday.

Two of the three locomotives on the train were involved, along with 10 freight cars. The two cars in the Mississippi River contained non-hazardous materials, she said. Some of the derailed containers, which toppled on the shore above the waterline, contained lithium-ion batteries and paint, Kent added.

A boom was placed in the area as a precautionary measure, but the volumes involved do not pose a risk to the river or nearby communities. BNSF personnel are on the scene and working closely with local and State agencies," the statement said.

The cause of the incident is still being investigated. The main track is still blocked in both directions with no estimated time for reopening, the statement added.

Video taken by witness Caitlin Nolan and other images on social media show

some of the train cars in the river. "It was reported to us that there were hazardous materials on the train itself, but it is not believed to be a concern to the public or the responders at this time as those cars were contained," Marc Myhre, a Crawford County emergency management specialist, said during a news conference.

Hazardous materials crews remained on the site as a precaution since some of the cars not in the river contained lithium-ion batteries, which can have a chemical reaction if they come into contact with water, Vernon County Emergency Management Director Brandon Larson said. The train was also carrying oxygen containers, which can be explosive if not maintained properly.

The derailed units were two of the train's three locomotives and "an unknown number of cars carrying freight of all kinds," BNSF said.

Heavy rain has recently brought parts of the Mississippi River to near flood stage, but the railroad tracks at the site of the derailment were above water, Myhre said.

US Representative Derrick Van Orden, who represents the area, said his office was coordinating with State officials, BNSF, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to "get answers on what occurred." The congressman's staff was traveling to the site of the derailment and will "continue to monitor the situation and determine next steps," his statement reads. (CNN)

RAILROADS ARE WARNED THAT LONG TRAINS COULD CONTRIBUTE TO DERAILMENTS. Federal regulators are warning railroads that the long trains they favor can cause all kinds of problems and contribute to derailments. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) wants railroads to ensure their training and operating procedures account for that. The FRA stopped short of recommending in its latest safety advisory issued on April 27th that railroads limit the size of their trains, which can routinely stretch more than 2 miles long. They did suggest, however, that a number of precautions including making sure engineers know how to handle them and that locomotives do not lose communication with devices at the end of trains that can help trigger the brakes in an emergency.

Currently, there are not any restrictions on train length but members of Congress and state lawmakers in at least six states have proposed establishing limits, particularly in the wake of the fiery February 3rd Norfolk Southern derailment in Ohio. The major freight railroads have pushed back against that idea because they have increasingly come to rely on longer trains to help them move cargo with fewer crews and mechanics as they overhauled their operations over the past six years.

Union Pacific CEO Lance Fritz said recently that he does not think accident data shows that long trains are riskier. But the FRA cited three derailments involving trains longer than 12,250 feet where train length was a factor in its advisory. That agency and the National Academies of Sciences are both in the middle of studying the impact of long trains, and they expect to issue reports next year on whether they are a problem.

"FRA believes these incidents demonstrate the need for railroads and railroad employees to be particularly mindful of the complexities of operating longer trains," the agency said. The derailments mentioned as examples of the problems that can accompany long trains were in Springfield, Ohio, in March; in Ravenna, Ohio, last November; and in Rockwell, Iowa, in March 2022. In each of those cases, the way cars in different parts of the train pulled and pushed against each other contributed to the derailments.

The fiery February derailment that prompted evacuations in East Palestine, Ohio, and sparked a nationwide focus on rail safety was not mentioned as an example. The National Transportation Safety Board has said that an overheated bearing that caused an axle to fail on one of the railcars likely caused that

derailment.

This latest advisory follows one earlier in April that directed railroads to re-examine the way they assemble their trains to minimize those kind of forces that often come into play as a train goes over hills and around corners. Parts of a train can be pulling forward going up a hill while the middle or back of the train pushes against the rest of the cars while going down a hill. Those forces make it challenging for engineers to control a train, so regulators said railroads need to adjust their training to make sure their engineers are prepared to handle the monster trains they are operating. The common practice of putting locomotives in the middle of long trains as well as in the front can help manage a long train, but having to control those additional locomotives also complicates the engineer's job. "A locomotive engineer cannot be expected to safely operate in a more demanding service without proper additional training that covers the unique challenges and complexities those trains present," the FRA said in the advisory.

A spokeswoman for the Association of American Railroads trade group said railroads are already working to manage the challenges associated with long trains and looking for ways to improve safety. "All stakeholders; the FRA, railroads, and elected officials; share the same goal of continuously enhancing rail safety, minimizing adverse impacts to surrounding communities and keeping the goods that power our economy flowing," AAR spokeswoman Jessica Kahanek said. "The recommendations within this advisory align closely with the prudent steps railroads already take to do just that."

The FRA said that, in addition to the concerns about derailments, long trains can block crossings for extended periods of time. When crossings are blocked, firefighters, police and ambulance drivers may be delayed in getting someone the help that they need, and pedestrians may risk their lives by crawling under or across stopped trains that could start moving without warning.

The states proposing limits on train size this year include Arizona, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Nevada, and Washington. (Fox News)

BRIDGEPORT WEST VIRGINIA OFFICIALS WORKING WITH CSX TO LOWER TRAIN SPEEDS.

Bridgeport residents can breathe a little easier when it comes to speeding trains. Trains will now travel 20 mph during the week when traveling through the town. Officials have been working with CSX to get speeds lowered after a string of train derailments nationwide. including the East Palestine crash in Ohio.

Locomotives will still travel at speeds of 35 mph on the weekends, but City officials say they will continue to work with CSX to get speeds lowered to 20 mph seven days a week.

Bridgeport City Manager Brian Newton says a longer wait at the railroad tracks is a small price to pay for increased safety. "For a train going 20 miles per hour versus 35, your wait is three minutes longer for a two-mile train to clear," Newton said. "That's a small price to pay for a lot of increased safety." (WDTV News)

PASSENGER TRAINS IN THE TRI-CITIES? The Bristol, Tennessee City Council has offered a show of support for a 150-year-old landmark in downtown Bristol. Council members formally endorsed a fundraising campaign for the historic Bristol Train Station. "There's a lot of effort in this region to be welcoming and to encourage the rail service to come back, not just into Virginia but also through Tennessee and beyond," said Vice Mayor Mark Hutton.

The first Bristol train station was built by the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad in 1856. The station was burned on December 14, 1864, during the Civil War. Following the Civil War, a freight car was temporarily utilized as the town's freight depot until 1866 when construction of a new depot was completed.

By the 1880s, Bristol's flourishing and growth led to the need for a larger depot to serve the region. In 1881, a 326 feet long passenger shed was constructed, along with a temporary office building on one end, and the existing depot was subsequently destroyed. This third depot was completed in early 1882.

The current station was built in 1902-1903, by the Norfolk and Western Railway. This was the fourth station to exist on the lot, serving as a hub for passenger rail service through 1971, according to the City resolution.

Fast forward to now, the Bristol Train Station Foundation is raising money to make improvements at the station in anticipation of the return of rail service to Bristol. The Federal Railroad Administration recently approved Virginia's statewide rail plan that calls for passenger rail service from Washington D.C. to Bristol.

"This resolution is meant to really send a clear message to anybody and everybody involved in this whole decision-making that both sides of Bristol want this here," Hutton said. "And it's a great opportunity for our cities to work together on something that's really powerful that has great implications for the future of our City." (WJHL, Wikipedia)

AMTRAK COMPLETES UPGRADES AT GASTONIA STATION. Amtrak customers now have a more accessible journey with the completion of a \$3.2 million project at the Gastonia, North Carolina, station. The upgrades are part of Amtrak's overall commitment to improve the customer experience at stations and onboard trains across its national network. The Amtrak Crescent travels daily between New York and New Orleans, with a stop at the station at 350 Hancock Street.

"Making our stations accessible to all customers is a priority and we're actively performing construction, renovation, repair, and upgrade projects at stations across our national network," Dr. David Handera, Amtrak Vice President, Stations, Facilities, and Accessibility, said. "We want Gastonia and all of our stations to be a welcoming and comfortable environment to all of our customers." Amtrak, working with the City of Gastonia, North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and Norfolk Southern, advanced a series of accessibility improvements. This included the construction of a new concrete platform with all new lighting, guardrails, and signage. The platform provides a sturdy, uniform surface for customers to board the train or detrain.

Additional improvements included an accessible restroom, renovated waiting room, a power-operated door entrance in the station, and a newly paved parking lot with an entrance driveway and two accessible parking spaces for customers who use wheeled mobility devices.

Ensuring accessible paths of travel for passengers with disabilities was critical and made available between the platform, station, and parking by way of three new ramps with railings. Renovations also included new site lighting and replacement of the station building's heating and cooling system.

The improvements at Gastonia are part of a larger group of Amtrak's accessibility-related station projects, the Americans with Disabilities Act Stations Program, with 20 stations brought into compliance last fiscal year for \$96 million. Another 39 stations are targeted for completion this fiscal year at a forecasted investment of \$165 million. The program is advancing 129 station designs and 40 station construction projects as part of Amtrak's ongoing commitment to improving accessibility for our customers.

To date, Amtrak has completed work at 177 stations; 108 stations where Amtrak has responsibility are fully compliant and another 69 stations are compliant, excluding the platform.

"NCDOT is proud to be a partner with our communities and Amtrak in providing a great train station that will deliver greater accessibility for everyone," Jason Orthner, NCDOT's Rail Director said. (Amtrak Media News)

110-MPH SCHEDULES COMING FOR AMTRAK'S CHICAGO - ST. LOUIS CORRIDOR. Amtrak and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) have received Federal approval for maximum speeds up to 110-mph for most of the Chicago - St. Louis corridor, primarily between the Amtrak stations in Joliet and Alton.

This will help establish shorter schedules for the four Amtrak Lincoln Service round-trips and the Texas Eagle. There are no timetable changes at this time for the 10 daily Amtrak trains on the route.

"Trains will continue to operate at 110-mph for several weeks without a change in schedule to ensure everything on the system is running properly and to monitor the actual travel time between stations," said John Oimoen, IDOT Deputy Director, Rails. Until now, 90-mph has been the maximum authorized speed on the tracks owned by Union Pacific Railroad. Amtrak operates Lincoln Service and other trains under a contract with IDOT.

"Amtrak, IDOT, and the Illinois Commerce Commission work with Operation Lifesaver, an industry-sponsored campaign that educates persons of all ages on how to stay safe around railroad tracks," said Justin Meko, Amtrak Vice President, Operational Safety. "Now is a great time for schools, companies, and other groups to schedule safety presentations." Volunteers make the presentations and they can be requested by contacting the Illinois coordinator for Operation Lifesaver through the [oli.org website](http://oli.org).

Motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists should always use caution on this important rail corridor, as our trains are faster than they can appear and are quieter than ever. Only use designated public crossings. Never disregard flashing crossing signals or go around lowered gates or trespass on railroad property. If there is a problem or emergency on or near railroad tracks, the railroad company can be contacted immediately utilizing the telephone number on the blue [Emergency Notification Sign](#) (Emergency Notification Sign) located at every crossing. See www.StayOffTheTracks.org for more.

Special equipment, installed as part of IDOT's Chicago to St. Louis High Speed Rail Project, monitors the trains and traffic control systems, alerting the train crews of any potential problems. Additional warning signs and fencing have also been installed in select areas to encourage safety and deter trespassing. (Amtrak Media News)

DEVELOPMENT OF A LUXURY OVERNIGHT TRAIN CONNECTING SAN FRANCISCO AND LOS ANGELES IS UNDERWAY. Plans are underway to establish an overnight first-class passenger train service connecting San Francisco and Los Angeles. California startup company Dreamstar Lines is overseeing the privately-funded project of the heavily-traveled route. The train service plans to be operational as early as the summer of 2024.

According to SFGATE, Dreamstar is in discussions with Metrolink and Union Pacific Railroad to execute the plan. Substantial work still needs to be accomplished, however, in terms of securing funding, contracts, and agreements.

The company's plan is to design a luxurious train with five or six sleeper cars and a lounge area, adhering to the "Streamline Moderne" style, which encompasses Art Deco features and components from vintage streamliner railcars. The train will run from 10 p.m. to 8:30 a.m., with stops in Santa Barbara, San Jose, and San Luis Obispo. Ticket prices are estimated to range between \$300 and \$1,000. (Travel Noire)

POTOMAC RAIL NEWS is published monthly by the Potomac Chapter, National Railway Historical Society, Inc., P.O. Box 235, Kensington, Maryland 20895-0235 Website: www.potomacnrhs.org

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