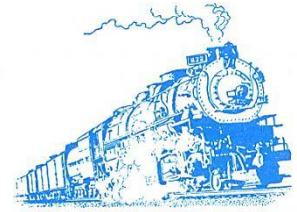


The Semaphore

South Shore Model Railway Club

NEWSLETTER

Home of the "East Coast Lines" since 1938



NOVEMBER 27, 2023 ■■■■■■■■■■ VOLUME 43 ■■■■■■■■■■ NUMBER 11



The Semaphore

David N. Clinton, Editor-in-Chief



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The Semaphore is the monthly (except July) newsletter of the South Shore Model Railway Club & Museum (SSMRC) and any opinions found herein are those of the authors thereof and of the Editors and do not necessarily reflect any policies of this organization. The SSMRC, as a non-profit organization, does not endorse any position. Your comments are welcome! Please address all correspondence regarding this publication to: *The Semaphore*, 11 Hancock Rd., Hingham, MA 02043. ©2023
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VOLUME 43 ■■■■■ NUMBER 11 ■■■■■ NOVEMBER 2023

CLUB OFFICERS

President.....	Jack Foley
Vice President.....	Ed Bulman
Treasurer.....	Will Baker
Secretary.....	Bryan Miller
Chief Engineer.....	Fred Lockhart
Directors.....	David Galbraith ('24)
	Bob England ('24)
	Roger St. Peter ('25)
	Gary Mangelinkx ('25)

ON THE COVER:

Photos of our recent Show and Open House from photographer Joe Dumas.



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FORM 19 ORDERS

NOVEMBER B.O.D. MEETING

Monday, November 27th 8 p.m.

DECEMBER BUSINESS MEETING

Monday, December 4th 8 p.m.

ANNUAL AUCTION

After Business Meeting

CHRISTMAS MODEL RR OPEN HOUSE

Sunday, December 10th 4 p.m. – 7 p.m.

TROLLEY COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, December 11th 8 p.m.

JUNK FOOD JOLLIES

Tuesday, December 12th 6 p.m.-

DCC & EQUIPMENT TUNE-UP CLINIC

No Clinic this month

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

Sunday, December 17th

DECEMBER B.O.D. MEETING

Thursday, January 4, 2024 8 p.m.

CONTESTS

Congratulations to **Donnie Pierce** on winning this month's "50/50" drawing!

↔
The following members entered correct answers for our matching contest this month of the "Whyte Steam Locomotive Classification":

Dan Peterson	Jim Ferris
Fred Lockhart	Al Munn
Ron Clough	Savery Moore
Bob Farrenkropf	Roger St. Peter
Doug Buchanan	

Congratulations to **Fred Lockhart** winning the drawing. He took home Eastern Seaboard Model's first HO car, the BAR "State of Maine" insulated/heated potato Box Car, in the attractive Red/White/Blue scheme.

↔
For January, we will have our annual, traditional "Calendar Contest", where those who enter the contest also supply a train calendar for the contest drawing...and everyone who entered the contest

goes home with a train calendar...a "win-win" time! (When you put your contest in my mailbox, please also put your name on the calendar you are donating. If the calendar won't fit in the mailbox, please place it on the table behind the candy counter.)

Here are a few "clues", as you will find some of the wheel arrangements in this contest from Al Taylor (3/20/17--one of the last he made) were not in this month's contest:

16 Across = GREENBRIER (the Southerners' name for the "Northern" type (part of the "still fighting the Civil War syndrome" in that part of the country.)

19 Across = FORNEY

3 Down = SOUTHERNPACIFIC

8 Down = UNIONPACIFIC

20 Down = COLUMBIA

Extra copies of the contest are available on the counter in the train room. Good luck!

CHIEF'S CORNER

Fred Lockhart



I hope all of you had a nice Thanksgiving with your family and friends; it's a great holiday to get together and enjoy your time with each other. Last week we had Official Operations at the club. The Operation Committee spends a lot of time setting up the trains for the two-night sessions, over a two-week period of Mondays and Thursdays and even finishing on the weekend before the ops. The group, I'm guestimating, puts in somewhere around forty or so man hours to make the ops happen. A lot of that time is taken up by searching the railroad for rolling stock that has been moved over time from the trains that were assembled in the last ops.

We have been using a Car Card following system for a while now, so each car needs to be in the same spot for the beginning of the next session. On a private model railroad, the trains would stop at the end of an ops session and would not be moved by the owner before the next session. However, in

the club-setting members are running their trains and some rolling stock gets moved. The Thursday night portion of our ops sessions no longer have mainline trains running; it is just locals and yard work. In Cedar Hill, for example, the Yardmaster makes up five locals and probably has enough cars to make two trains to Chicago (staging) and every car has its own car card. The destination Chicago cars would be placed in the departure yard, the locals are assigned tracks in the through yard and would stay there until the next ops session. But they don't--they get moved, which to me, we might as well annul the Thursday night work if it is just going to be destroyed and the yardmaster can go run a local.

I hope this gives members an understanding of what it takes to make an ops session happen, and to understand a new practice that I'm implementing to assist the Operations Committee and save them time preparing for an ops session. The trains made up in Cedar Hill for the next ops session will be stored in the stub ended yard and the tracks they are on will be "Blue Flagged". The committee will also use the staging yard to store trains from other yards that are ready for the next ops and there could also be *individual* tracks in Boston, Great Lakes or Middleton that may be "Blue Flagged" as well--only as needed. This should make setting up for the next ops session much easier and take a lot less time, so I hope members respect this practice going forward. This does not affect any other part of the railroad--this will not affect most members as most members are running their own equipment on the mainlines so this new practice should not be an inconvenience to anyone. As " for casual ops like "Trains 'n Turkey", and others, the yards are still open to be used except the tracks that are "Blue Flagged".

That's it for this month. As always, your questions and comments are always welcome.

Fred Lockhart
Chief Engineer

Semaphore Memories

NOVEMBER 2018 (5 years ago)

- Ballasting continues in Cedar Hill Yard.
- Benchwork and wiring begins for staging yard, now called "Chicago".
- Stan Rydell wires "Model Boards" in Middleton.
- Norfolk Southern adopts "Precision Scheduled RRdg.
- CT D.O.T. opens new station in Berlin.
- All five Downeaster trains begin operating between Brunswick and Boston, up from two until this time.
- First bodyshell completed for Amtrak's "Avelia Acela", 2nd-generation high-speed train.

- NS to build new headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, moving from Norfolk, Virginia.

- VIA Rail Canada celebrates 40th Anniversary.

- MBTA requests bids to replace two drawbridges outside of North Station.

NOVEMBER 2013 (10 years ago)

- Virginia Museum of Transportation carrying on "Fire-Up 611" campaign to return N&W loco to operations.

- CAF USA offers preview of new "Viewliner II" cars it is building in up-state NY. Phase III paint scheme to be used, much to the delight of many.

- MBTA's first new HSP-46 testing at Pueblo, CO.

- Waterville, ME city council considering selling MEC steamer #470 to New England Steam Co. for \$25,000.

- Group in California hope to restore Krauss Maffei SP loco #9010, the only diesel-hydraulic not scrapped of the 15 built for the SP in the 1960s.

- Alvin Staufer, famous for the "Power" books, dies at 88

- UP Big Boy #4014 inched along panel track in California beginning its journey to restoration in Cheyenne, WY.

- Mass DOT begins rehabilitation of trackage into Fall River and New Bedford in preparation for South Coast rail service.

- P2 Steam Locomotive Co. in Darlington, England begins construction of 2-8-2 steam locomotive to be named "Prince of Wales".

NOVEMBER 2008 (15 years ago)

- FRA enacts order restricting on-duty operating employees from using cellular and other electronics.

- Restoration of Flying Yankee's trucks completed to Amtrak specifications.

- BNSF completes construction of 3rd main line through Cajon Pass in Southern California.

- Former CV roundhouse in White River Jct., VT destroyed by fire.

- Florida's Tri-Rail Commuter trains begin running on biodiesel.

- Valley RR in Essex, CT purchases ex-Knox & Kane 2-8-2 Chinese locomotive, with plans to rebuild as New Haven J-1.

- UNH, Durham, pays to restore historic RR station, originally built in 1896 as the Lynn, MA depot.

- Downeast Scenic RR in Ellsworth, ME acquires first loco, ex B&ML 70-tonner #54.

- "South Coast Rail Project" becomes official name of Fall River/New Bedford Commuter Rail project.

- Norfolk Southern orders its first AC locomotives—the ES44AC from GE.

NOVEMBER 2003 (20 years ago)

- Guilford becomes all-EMD; with two remaining GE U-18b's off the property at Danville Jct.

- Amtrak carries over 24 million passengers; the highest in its 32-year history.

- FRA proposes rule for reflective tape on sides of freight cars.

- MetroNorth's ex-New Haven "West Tower" closes; last in operation on the ex-New Haven line.

- Maine Eastern RR begins operation of ex-MEC Rockland Branch. Run by Morristown & Erie RR of Morristown, NJ.

NOVEMBER 1998 (25 Years Ago)

- "Control Task Group" formed to look into DCC possibilities for new SSMRC railroad.
- Track Plan of first section of new railroad posted on LDC bulletin board.
- Some ex-Amtrak F40PH locomotives re-gearred and bought by Bangor & Aroostook RR for freight trains.
- First of three Old Colony "Rolling Lift Bridges" in South Boston demolished.
- Grinding of Hoosac Tunnel ceiling for passage of double-stacks is completed.
- New Hampshire Northcoast RR operates longest train, with five locos and 112 hoppers.
- MBTA Commuter Rail extension to Newburyport opens for business.
- New gigantic pedestrian overpass opens at Canton Jct

NOVEMBER 1993 (30 Years Ago)

- Swedish X2000 returned after a year of testing by Amtrak.
- Amtrak orders 55 more "Superliners" to replace ex-Santa Fe "Hi-Level" equipment.
- *Flying Yankee* unloaded from trucks at Glen, NH; purchased by Bob Morrell of "Storyland" in Glen.
- Amtrak introduces "Senior Citizen discount".
- CN puts Central Vermont up for sale.
- Wells becomes first Maine community to commit to return of Boston-Portland Amtrak service, with promise of building a new RR station for the service.
- Original "Springfield Terminal RR" between Charlestown, NH and Springfield, VT torn up.

NOVEMBER 1988 (35 Years Ago)

- Guilford's unions in turmoil with the railroad.
- Voters in Quincy and Braintree endorse return of Commuter Rail by 2:1 margin.
- Dismantling of 3'-gauge Newfoundland Railway begins
- New "Type 7" trolleys introduced on Green Line, replacing the Boeing "LRV"s, which were a maintenance nightmare.
- Susquehanna RR orders another 20 of the B40-8 locos; nicknamed "Bumblebees".
- Guilford abandons lines from Wells River, VT to Whitefield, NH, and from there to Groveton and Berlin, NH.
- Grand Trunk moves headquarters from St. John St. in Portland, ME to Danville Jct.
- Dwight Smith puts Conway Scenic RR up for sale.
- CSX puts famous "Greenbriar Hotel" up for sale.
- MBTA increases parking fee from \$1 to \$2 at lots.
- Random drug testing begins for all transportation personnel.

NOVEMBER 1983 (40 Years Ago)

- New "two-way" radios introduced at Operations by John Governor.
- MBTA spends \$300,000 to replace defective third rail insulators on 3-year-old Red Line extension to Braintree.
- Vermont Railway purchases D&H line from Whitehall, NY to Rutland, VT
- Conway Scenic RR opens talks with Guilford for Mountain Division tracks through Crawford Notch.
- Last run of GG1 locomotives; 139 made from 1934-1943.

• First "Photo Contest" winner's picture (Ted Alexander) pasted on front of every newsletter—our first color "cover". (No personal color printers in those days.)

POTPOURRI

MBTA General Manager Phillip Eng says rail ties were placed "too close together" on its Green Line extension. Between Somerville and Medford, the rail ties were placed too close together, and it should have been fixed prior to carrying passengers. Eng said, "it appears the prefabricated plated rail ties for the Green Line extension were made to incorrect specifications and then installed," and that "the problem could have been caught in April 2021, more than a year before the Green Line extension opened, and again in November 2022, shortly before the Medford/Tufts branch of the line opened." In September and early October, repairs to the Green Line were ordered "to remove 3-mile-per-hour slow zones implemented because of narrow rails." Then, on October 11th, Eng stated that it had removed those speed restrictions on both Green Line extension branches. Now, 50% of rail ties on the Somerville Branch and 80% of rail ties on the Medford-Tufts branch need to be fixed via removing the plates and repositioning them. (RA)

•••••
NORFOLK SOUTHERN (NS) on Oct. 26 announced that it is deploying Digital Train Inspection Portals to enhance rail safety across the Class I railroad's 22-state network. According to NS, the portals feature cutting-edge Machine Vision Inspection technology developed in partnership with the Georgia Tech Research Institution (GTRI), which engineered the hardware, and NS's Data Science/Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Mechanical teams, who "built the brains behind the program." The project, the Class I railroad says, "aims to supercharge NS's safety infrastructure and inspection processes" with more than a dozen portals to be deployed by the end of 2024. NS leveraged GTRI's expertise in advanced technology solutions, which the railroad says, "has already helped further national security and economic development. We are a safe railroad, and we're going above and beyond to become even safer," said NS President and CEO Alan H. Shaw. "These new portals combine advanced technology with human expertise, giving our people and the public further confidence in Norfolk Southern's safe

operations. It's all part of our promise to become the gold standard of safety in the rail industry." (RA)



Amtrak has launched the simplified fare structure announced earlier this month, moving from three categories of fares to two. Under the new structure, "Flex" fares — the higher-priced tickets — are fully refundable if cancelled and can be changed before departure without a fee. Lower-priced "Value" tickets are non-changeable and receive a 75% refund if cancelled. Tickets purchased prior to the launch of the new fare structure remain subject to the rules and conditions at the time of purchase. (TN)

●●●●●

WORK HAS BEGUN on rebuilding of the Park Avenue Viaduct, the 130-year-old elevated route to Grand Central Terminal and Harlem-125th Street Station that is used by 98% of Metro-North Railroad trains — a project Metro-North President Catherine Rinaldi pointed to as the most important state-of-good repair project faced by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority commuter railroads. "Every train Metro-North operates east of the Hudson River — 750 passenger trains a day — either travels over the Park Avenue Viaduct or connects with a train that does," Rinaldi said. "So to call this 130-year-old infrastructure 'critical' seems like an understatement. Metro-North is extremely appreciative that MTA Construction & Development has prioritized replacement of the viaduct in a timely way that will allow the railroad to continue operations without significant disruption to schedules." (TN)

●●●●●

THE BERKSHIRE SCENIC RAILWAY Museum ran its first excursions with former New Haven Budd Rail Diesel Car the last weekend of October. No. 41 is one of five RDCs leased by the museum from the Budd RDC Foundation earlier this year and moved to the museum's two sites. No. 41 and RDC-2 No. 1960, built for the Baltimore & Ohio, are at the Hoosac Valley Service in Adams; a three-unit set of the remaining equipment from the Roger Williams, the all-RDC passenger train built for the New Haven,

is at the Lenox Station Museum in Lenox, Mass. (TN)



●●●●●

THE CALIFORNIA AIR RESOURCES Board has approved a grant that would allow the Napa Valley Wine Train to replace — and, under regulatory requirements, destroy — six vintage diesels with two Tier 4 compliant switchers. The approval, which occurred earlier this year, covers two of the Wine Train's signature ex-Canadian National, ex-VIA Rail Canada FPA4 locomotives; an ex-Southern Pacific RS11; a GP9R; an ex-U.S. Navy GE 65-ton switcher, and an ex-U.S. Air Force GE 80-ton switcher. All of the locomotives involved were built in 1959 or earlier. They would be replaced by two 1,560-hp Knoxville Locomotive Works locomotives. Napa Valley Wine Train has told the Bay Area Air



Quality Management District the two new units "will be able to perform the same scope of work as the six [replaced] units, despite the overall decrease in horsepower," according to the CARB's approval. (TN) Too bad.-Ed.

●●●●●

LOUISIANA GOV. JOHN BEL EDWARDS on Oct. 26 joined Department of Transportation and Development Sec. Eric Kalivoda, Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner and other officials to sign a development agreement that will advance the return of intercity passenger rail service between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, La. The agreement, signed at New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal, "is a breakthrough for a project

that has roots in 2008, when the idea was introduced through a concept study,” officials said. According to the agreement, passenger service could start as early as 2027. (TN)

●●●●●

GENESEE & WYOMING Inc. on Nov. 1 entered into a partnership with CN involving G&W’s Cape Breton & Central Nova Scotia Railway (CBNS). CN will acquire a stake in CBNS and manage interline customer movements on 145 route-miles, while a G&W subsidiary will continue to operate the CBNS line from Truro to Point Tupper, Nova Scotia. CBNS interchanges with CN’s main line on the Class I’s Springhill Subdivision at Truro. Terms of the transaction were not disclosed. (RA)

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VALLEY RR ANNOUNCEMENT:

We are excited to announce the newest addition to our steam fleet! The ALCO 2-8-2 will be coming to Essex soon, so keep your eye on our page for updates and details. We are proud to be a part of American railroad preservation steam restoration!

The 1352 was built in 1912 for the Frisco Railway and served them until retirement in 1956. Since then, the locomotive has been housed in the Midwest awaiting restoration under the ownership of the American Steam Locomotive Restoration Projects. ASR President Rob Gardner said, “We are very pleased to know that the Frisco 1352 is going to such an exceptional organization as the Valley RR and will be restored to operational condition much sooner than we could have hoped to accomplish. The funds generated from this sale will further expedite the restoration of Reading 2100 as the American Freedom Train 250. ASR would also like to extend our sincerest thanks and appreciation to the Genesee & Wyoming RR and the Illinois Midland RR for allowing the 1352 to be stored on their property for all of these years.” (Valley RR)



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THE STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE is looking to sell the *Flying Yankee*, the 1935 articulated New England streamliner built by Budd Co. for the Boston & Maine Railroad that is virtually identical to Burlington’s *Pioneer Zephyr*. The state has issued a Request for Proposals for sale of the three-car

trainset, which has long been at the Hobo Railroad in Lincoln, N.H., and has been the subject of failed restoration attempts both private and state-funded. Proposals are for “the relocation and encouraged restoration” of the trainset, and will be rated under a number of criteria addressing how they plan to handle preservation of the equipment. The buyer will have to sign “permanent restrictive covenants” regarding preservation and maintenance of the train at the time of closing; a document addressing those restrictions, along with other documents related to the potential sale, are available at the “Cultural Resources” page of the New Hampshire Department of Transportation website. Prospective buyers can view the train on Nov. 15 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., with components available for inspection from 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.



As described in the 2021 *Classic Trains* special issue, *Burlington’s Zephyrs*, the *Flying Yankee* was ordered just two months after the completion of the train that would come to be known as the *Pioneer Zephyr* in June 1934, and entered service as the Boston-Portland-Bangor, Maine, *Flying Yankee* on April 4, 1935. Unlike the Burlington streamliner, which included a Railway Post Office in the power car, the Boston & Maine trainset had coach seating in all three cars, as well as a baggage section, buffet, and solarium lounge. It operated on various New England routes until its retirement in 1957, after which it was displayed at the Edaville Railroad tourist line for 36 years. It was moved to New Hampshire in 1993 as part of a restoration effort, was acquired by the state three years later, and moved again in 1997.

But the restoration effort ran aground with the death of project leader Robert Morrell, and the train has been stored in Lincoln since 2005. A nonprofit group formed in 1996 to support the restoration effort, the Flying Yankee Association, said that it will apply to gain ownership of the train. “The Flying Yankee Association is in a unique position, with both a dedicated team and strong partnerships, to ensure this beloved treasure not only remains true to history, but to have it ride down the tracks under its own power once again,” Brian LaPlant, the association’s chairman, said. (TN)

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TWO HISTORIC NEW YORK CENTRAL electric locomotives, saved last year after long facing a threat of scrapping, have been moved from their site on an Island in the Hudson River after more than three decades, the Danbury Railway Museum has announced. The museum released a photo today of the locomotives on flatbed trucks, as well as a statement saying that after 36 years on Beacon Island, the Class S-1 and Class T-3a locomotives “have been moved off the site and are currently sitting on private property. They will be shipped to The Danbury Railway Museum soon, where upon arrival work will continue on returning them to an appearance that would make the New York Central Railroad proud. Thank you to everyone involved. Please consider making a donation to this project.



(TN)

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THE SOUTH ATTLEBORO MBTA station has been demolished and now that rebuilding the station is on the agenda, the T is looking for funding to do that. (SC)

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THE MBTA WILL LAUNCH A MAJOR TRACK repair program with the goal of eliminating all speed restrictions on its transit lines by the end of 2024, a program that will require incremental, multi-day shutdowns of the Red, Orange, Green, and Blue lines over the next 14 months. The work involved will range from rail and tie replacement to re-ballasting

to other forms of spot repairs. The rail transit network includes some 190 speed restrictions covering 31.1 miles, or 23% of the system. The plan is modeled on the work done in October on the Red Line’s Ashmont Branch and Mattapan trolley line. A 16-day shutdown eliminated all speed restrictions on those lines, more than two dozen in all. (TN)

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MEXICAN PRESIDENT ANDRÉS MANUEL López Obrador said that he will issue a decree requiring the nation’s freight rail operators to offer passenger service or to allow government-operated passenger trains to run on their routes. A clause in the concession agreements for CPKC de Mexico and Grupo Mexico allow for the railways to be used for passenger service and give the concession holders preference to operate the service. Virtually no regular passenger service currently operates in Mexico. López Obrador also said the railway network would have to be electrified to accommodate passenger service. The cost of such an undertaking was not mentioned, nor was the prospect of government subsidies for the passenger service, or the operating issues to result from introducing passenger service to currently freight-only routes. (TN)

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DELAYS IN LAUNCHING AMTRAK’S next-generation Acela fleet have cost the passenger company \$140 million so far, and the figure continues to grow, the *Wall Street Journal* reported. The figure includes the growing maintenance costs of keeping the current Acela trainsets — the first of which entered service in December 2000 — operational beyond their intended service life, and with parts no longer being manufactured. The *Journal* reports Amtrak has spent \$48 million on parts, brake overhauls, and other work by private contractors to keep the current fleet in operation, and that four of the 20 trainsets built by Bombardier and Alstom between 1998 and 2001 never returned to service after being parked during the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, they are being cannibalized for parts. The figure also includes losses from having fewer Acelas in operation and having less capacity in those that are running, compared to the larger next-generation trains. The new Acelas were originally supposed to enter service in 2021 but now are projected to begin service sometime in 2024, eight years after they were ordered. The Inspector General’s report indicated ongoing issues include an inability to produce a computer model of the trains performance that matches predicted performance; such a model is part of the testing process required by the Federal Railroad Administration. The

Inspector General report said trainsets have also been built with defects that must still be corrected, and no schedule has been established for addressing those defects. (TN) Amazing how Europe, Japan and China can have high-speed trains running all over their countries...and we can't build 28 sets in eight years in this country! Something's terribly wrong here.-Ed.

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THE ALTOONA CAMPUS of Penn State University has donated a former Conrail SD60I road freight locomotive to the Railroaders Memorial Museum for continued use by undergraduate engineering students. Recently moved into the museum, the 3,800-horsepower unit is now available for public viewing in the Harry Bennett Memorial Roundhouse, near the restoration work on Pennsylvania Railroad K4s 4-6-2 steam locomotive No. 1361. Built by Electro-Motive Division in 1995, the 197-ton unit began life as Conrail 5582, then was renumbered Norfolk Southern 6721 when NS bought a 58% stake in Conrail in 1998-99. After retiring the unit in 2019, NS donated it to PSU for the Altoona Campus's Rail Transportation Engineering program. Penn State renumbered it 2020 for the year it was donated. Only Conrail purchased the SD60I (I signifying "Isolated") model, a variant of the SD60 that employed a vibration- and sound-reducing cushion or "donut" under the wide-nose cab in an effort to render the crew environment less noisy than those of a standard SD60M or a spartan-cab SD60. Dubbing the model the "Whispercab," EMD built 81 units (CR 5544, 5575-5654). Of these, Nos. 5595-5614 and 5630-5654 were assembled at Conrail's Juniata Locomotive Shop in Altoona. At first, crews reported that they were noticeably quieter but over time and with inadequate maintenance, the rubber gaskets deteriorated, giving the units a reputation as hard-riding. (TN)



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THE FRA HAS SELECTED 10 projects across the state of Connecticut to receive funding for "rehabilitation and modernization." Totalling almost \$2 billion, the federal funds would go to repairing bridges and infrastructure along the Northeast Corridor. Governor Ned Lamont has commented that the Northeast corridor is "the busiest rail line in the nation, and improvements here mean more jobs, continued economic growth, and improved quality of life. . . Many of our railroad bridges are more than 100 years old, and this major investment of funding ensures that trains can operate with higher speeds and fewer disruptions well into the future." Close to half of the \$2 billion, \$827 million to be exact, will go toward the Connecticut River Bridge. The bridge is 116 years old and is used by Amtrak and Connecticut Shore Line East and freight trains. It will be replaced with a moveable bridge "that connects Old Saybrook and Old Lyme." Construction on the new bridge is expected to begin in 2024. The current bridge is "structurally deficient" according to a Representative Joe Courtney, who has been pushing for funds to repair said bridge. (RA)

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CAPPING A SEVEN-YEAR CAMPAIGN that was delayed and made 40% more expensive by the pandemic, the Pennsylvania Trolley Museum in Washington, Pa. opened its \$15 million, 21,000-square-foot Welcome and Education Center last week. Featuring history exhibits, interactive kiosks, a theater, a classroom, a store, offices and event



rooms, the facility is the centerpiece of the museum's 36-acre East Campus, the organization's new public face, replacing a 1990s-era visitor building less than a mile away. As a novel highlight, solar panels are generating electricity for both general and trolley-propulsion use. With roots as far back as 1946, the museum was organized in 1953 with three cars. That same year, it acquired a 2,000-foot stretch of track, part of Pittsburgh Railways Co.'s Pittsburgh-Washington, Pa., interurban line that PRCO was abandoning. Under the name Arden Trolley Museum, the group began offering public rides in 1963. PTM (the corporate name changed in 1998) now owns 52 cars, all of them stored under

roof in five buildings, according to Executive Director and CEO Scott Becker. It offers a 4-mile round-trip ride over signaled broad-gauge track (Pennsylvania traction gauge is 5 feet, 2½ inches), and maintains a 66,000-square-foot building containing a workshop, parts storage, and archives center. In all, Becker said, the museum oversees 150,000 square feet of space on three campuses. (TN)

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THE BIG SKY PASSENGER RAIL Authority has received a \$150,000 grant to support its efforts to revive Amtrak service on Montana’s “southern tier” route, as well as other rail projects in a five-state region in the Pacific Northwest. “These funds will further our work both in southern Montana and also along the *Empire Builder* [route], to the benefit of both freight and passenger operations,” Dave Strohmaier, chairman of the rail authority, told the Current. “This is a great example of how working together at a regional scale, with the sweat equity and financial support of partners, is moving this train down the tracks.” The Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority was founded in 2020 by a group of 12 counties to promote efforts to return Amtrak service to communities including Billings, Bozeman, Butte, and Missoula, on the route once served by the *North Coast Hiawatha*. That train was discontinued in 1979. (TN)

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ALSTOM, THE WORLD’S second-largest rail rolling stock manufacturer is seeking to sell up to 1 billion euros in assets (about \$1.09 billion) and cut 1,500 jobs as it faces a negative cash flow and a massive drop in stock value. The company, with some 80,000 employees worldwide and rail interests including the troubled contract to manufacture Amtrak’s next-generation Acela trainsets in Hornell, N.Y., last month forecast a negative free cash flow of 500 million to 750 million euros. It has lost about \$4.5 billion in market value this year, almost half its capitalization. Many of the problems the company currently faces stem from the acquisition of Bombardier, a deal completed in 2021. The resulting deal created a rail manufacturer second only to China’s CRRC. Some of the contracts inherited from Bombardier were money-losers, and the expanded company has struggled with inventory and production. (TN)

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MASSACHUSETTS GOV. Maura Healey has appointed Monica Tibbits-Nutt as state secretary of transportation, making permanent a position Tibbits-Nutt has held on an acting basis for two months. Healey cited Tibbits-Nutt’s role in dealing with ongoing issues with the MBTA in announcing the

appointment. “As acting secretary, she hit the ground running by working with the MBTA to prepare a first-of-its-kind plan to fix the tracks by the end of next year,” Healey said in a statement, “taking important steps to integrate climate planning across MassDOT, securing federal funding to support infrastructure needs, and stepping up for communities that were devastated by extreme weather.” Tibbits-Nutt became acting secretary when Giana Fiandaca resigned after less than nine months on the job. As acting secretary, she had been a member of the MBTA board. (TN)

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THE MBTA ON NOV. 15 RELEASED its Capital Needs Assessment and Inventory (CNAI), which estimated that approximately \$24.5 billion is needed to support the existing network’s state of good repair (SGR). Conducted every three-to-four years, the CNAI is an MBTA-led analysis to outline assets and overall system condition. According to MBTA, its assets—facilities, vehicles, infrastructure and more—have varying expected useful lives and eventually require rehabilitation or replacement on a rolling basis.(RA)

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THERE MAY BE “LIGHT at the end of the tunnel” in the state’s quest to expand jam-packed South Station. The reason for new found optimism? Amtrak is now a full partner in the hunt for a deal that would persuade the USPS to leave its spot next door to Boston’s busiest station, so it can get even busier. Governor Maura Healey’s administration hopes to pull off what previous administrations could not, by securing this valuable site overlooking Fort Point Channel to add more tracks. Without it, there’s no space to grow. Having Amtrak fully on board should help, considering the national railroad operator’s own ambitions for increasing service in the Northeast. Top officials at Amtrak, MassDOT, and the MBTA just wrote to the USPS to reopen negotiations for the 14-acre property. The \$2+ billion South Station expansion, which would add up to 10 tracks to the existing 13, had been sidelined in part because the postal service showed no sign of budging. The station is essentially at capacity now, putting the brakes on any plans to add more trains. (BG)

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THE BI-STATE AGENCY overseeing the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad has agreed to purchase a diesel locomotive from the White Pass & Yukon Route Railway, a first for the classic line preserving the former Denver & Rio Grande Western line between Chama and Antonito, Colo. The commission agreed to the purchase of Bombardier

DL535E No. 114 for \$120,000, as well as all related acquisition costs at its Nov. 11th meeting, saying that it “recognizes the need for additional motive power ... outside the confines of the existing locomotive fleet.” Funding will come from money received under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. Commissioners said the locomotive would be used for maintenance-of-way work and as a rescue locomotive, and would allow the railroad to save the \$1,000 or more per day in expense of keeping a steam locomotive hot as a rescue engine. The commission hopes the 1,200-hp C-C locomotive could be on hand by late spring or early summer 2024. The Cumbres & Toltec purchase follows a similar acquisition of four DL535Cs by the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad from the White Pass & Yukon in 2020. (TN)



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METRO-NORTH RAILROAD has unveiled the third in its series of wrapped heritage locomotives to mark its 40th anniversary, this one wearing the classic two-tone gray “lightning stripe” scheme of New York Central. The scheme has been applied to P32AC-DM No. 211. (TN)

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THE SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD is creating an advisory panel that will guide the board on passenger and commuter rail issues. The Passenger Rail Advisory Committee will have 18 voting members that will include representatives from Amtrak, commuter rail agencies, intercity operators other than Amtrak, a state that provides funding for Amtrak service, a state that’s only served by Amtrak long-distance trains, Class I railroads, short line railroads, passenger rail advocacy groups, a rail shipper, rail labor, and three at-large members.

The committee will provide advice and make recommendations to the board on improving efficiency on passenger rail routes; reducing disputes between passenger rail carriers and freight rail hosts regarding the use of freight rail carrier-owned facilities and infrastructure for passenger service, including passenger on-time performance issues; and improving regulatory processes related to intercity passenger rail to the benefit of the public, the communities served by passenger rail, and the environment. (TN)

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IN A CATEGORY 5 HURRICANE force stunning announcement, Surface Transportation Board (STB) Chairperson Martin J. Oberman announced late on Nov 16 that he will not seek renomination to a second term (his first term expires Dec. 31) and depart the agency in early 2024 during his statutory 12-month holdover period.

Oberman, now age 78, took office in January 2019 as the oldest rail regulator to have been sworn-in in the now more than 136-year history of the STB and its Interstate Commerce Commission predecessor. Until President Biden names a new permanent chairperson, the agency’s vice chairperson—who is determined internally—will become acting chairperson upon Oberman’s departure. (RA)

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CANADA’S VIA RAIL CONFIRMED Nov. 14th that it is engaged with Amtrak and other rail operators in discussions aimed at extending Amtrak’s existing Chicago-Detroit *Wolverine* service to Toronto’s downtown Union Station. Amtrak confirmed the same day that “We are in conversations with local, state and provincial officials about a proposed service.” The scheme would see passenger trains returning to the 113-year-old Detroit River Tunnel owned by CPKC. A little remarked condition of the CPKC merger approval was that the merged railroad would open the tunnel to Amtrak, after years of frustrated efforts by Amtrak to revive direct Detroit-Toronto service. Amtrak last served Windsor, Ontario, from New York and Buffalo with Trains 63 and 64, the *Niagara Rainbow*, through to Detroit, until the end of 1979. This state-sponsored service stopped at the Canadian Pacific station in Windsor, which has since been demolished following a fire.

The CPKC merger was backed by Amtrak, which said the two railroads had been positive partners and would advance opportunities for new passenger services. (RA)

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CSX's "Santa Train" is rolling along through the remote areas of Virginia and Kentucky. A wonderful holiday tradition!-Ed.



...and the CPKC's traditional Holiday Trains make their way through remote parts of Maine and



Canada, bringing the spirit of the season and joy to everyone.-Ed.

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I ENJOYED THESE ARTICLES in this month's RR magazines and can suggest them for your reading:

TRAINS

B&O's Magnolia Cutoff
Travel

The Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania

MODEL RAILROADER

Light Up the Night
How to Use Heat Shrink Tubing
Scenery From Start to Finish
DCC Currents
DCC Electrical Basics

MODEL RAILROAD CRAFTSMAN

GSC Depressed-Center Flatcar
Clinchfield Country
Diverging Points
Compression

News sources: [Boston Globe](#), [Boston Herald](#), [Trains](#) "Newswire", [Railway Age](#), [Railpace](#) Newsmagazine, RRE "Callboy", "The 470", [Patriot Ledger](#), Rail Passenger Assoc., Attleboro [Sun Chronicle](#).

DCC & EQUIPMENT TUNE-UP CLINIC

Dave Clinton

This month, **Dan Peterson** started off with an easy "fix"—replacing the crap couplers, that manufacturers insist on putting on today's expensive locomotives. His new EJ&E SD38-2 from Scale Trains came with such, ones that didn't even have a "brake hose" at all—how do you uncouple this? So, for \$300+ you get a locomotive that you have to replace the coupler, in order for it to work with anything else you have? Ridiculous and this also applies to Atlas, Walthers, Athearn, Bochmann and now Bowser. Only Intermountain and Rapido include proper metal couplers that, if not Kadee-made are Kadee-equivalent.

Ron Clough brought a nice Bochmann trolley, decorated for the St. Louis Street Railway. It, nicely, came DCC-equipped with working lights. So, we addressed it and it's now ready to join a friend on the "Beach Loop" !

Chris Wheeler brought a New Haven "Brick" (E-33) electric from Bochmann. It had an 8-pin plug on the light board, which took the DZ123P and away it went on it's merry way...ready to pull trains from New Haven to New York. His big project was a NYC E8 from P2K, a first-run model with no DCC plug. So, he had to hardwire the DZ123 and replace the

factory bulb, which had burned-out. A Miniaturics 16v bulb fit nicely and meant he didn't have to use a resistor in-line. There is almost nil room between the top of the lead weight and the bottom of the shell, so he had to carefully run the wires through the provided grooves, so he could get the shell back on. With the weight of these locos, they can pull a wall of a building down!

Tom Ross had a C&NW 0-4-0, with an open-frame motor which was sparking on the armature. We cleaned the armature with alcohol and a Q-tip, as best as possible. This helped but Tom decided that it would make a nice "Park Display"!

We will not have a clinic in December, with so many activities, so the next clinic will be Thursday, January 11th. Please contact me with any questions about the clinic.

LIBRARY CORNER

Donations of several new railroad books to our Library collection this month:

San Francisco's Magnificent Streetcars

By Kenneth C. Springirth

Great Northern Empire Builder

By Bill Yenne

New Library books are introduced on the Breakroom table for 30-days and then placed in the library. They may be checked-out (and back in) anytime by using the form on the return tray in the breakroom. Happy reading!

Dave Clinton, Librarian

EDITOR'S NOTES

1. Don't forget about our **Annual Auction**, which takes place after the December Business Meeting. It's never too early to go through your stuff and find goodies to sell on the auction block. Baked goods are always welcome, too!
2. Need a **Member Name Badge**? There is a sign-up sheet on the Bulletin Board (until January). Please put your name down for one at a minimal charge.

3. Please note that because of the Holidays, next month's *Semaphore* will be published **ONE WEEK EARLY**, on December 18th. All news and columns will be needed by Sunday, the 17th.
4. As noted in the schedule of events, "**Junk Food Jollies**" (JFJ) is returning next month, after a 4-year hiatus. All members and applicants are welcome to the festivities at the Editorial Office!

.....*David N. Clinton*

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others."
(Philippians 2:3-4)

MEMBER NEWS

Congratulations to our two newest members inducted at this month's business meeting:

Andrew Allen, from Middleboro, and **Dennis Hester**, from Dorchester. Both these young men have been learning about us and the hobby, as well as we have enjoyed their participation for the past several months. So nice to have you both on board!

(Note: For the "Health & Welfare Committee", Ye Ed, would like to hear of any member who is ill, hospitalized, or special occasion news, so we can keep the membership advised of these happenings.)

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

The following members have made it through another year and deserve congratulations on their special day next month:

- Jay Pease (H) December 2nd
- Paul Feeney December 13th
- Will Baker December 14th
- Ron Clough December 15th



From our member **Jesse Collins**, who's a mechanic at Amtrak's South Bay shops—an ACS-64 up in the air, changing its feet (wheels and traction motors)!



Whyte Steam Locomotive Classification System

This month's contest answers:

STEAM LOCOMOTIVE CLASSIFICATION BY WHEEL ARRANGEMENT

4-4-0 <i>American</i>	ALLEGHENY
4-4-2 ATLANTIC	PACIFIC
4-4-4 JUBILEE	MOUNTAIN
0-6-0 SIX-COUPLED	UNION
2-6-0 MOGUL	DECAPOD
2-6-2 PRAIRIE	MASTADON
4-6-0 10-WHEELER	SIX-COUPLED
4-6-2 PACIFIC	JUBILEE
4-6-4 HUDSON	HUDSON
0-8-0 8-COUPLED	MIKADO
2-8-0 CONSOLIDATION	PRAIRIE
2-8-2 MIKADO	EIGHT-COUPLED
2-8-4 BERKSHIRE	CONSOLIDATION
4-8-0 12-WHEELER	TEXAS
4-8-2 MOUNTAIN	BIG BOY
4-8-4 NORTHERN	TRIPLEX
0-10-2 UNION	MOGUL
2-10-0 DECAPOD	ATLANTIC
2-10-2 SANTA FE	AMERICAN
2-10-4 TEXAS	CHALLENGER
4-10-0 MASTADON	YELLOWSTONE
2-6-6-6 ALLEGHENY	12-WHEELER
4-6-6-4 CHALLENGER	NORTHERN
4-8-8-4 BIG BOY	10-WHEELER
2-8-8-4 YELLOWSTONE	SANTA FE
2-8-8-8-2 TRIPLEX	BERKSHIRE
2-8-8-8-4 TRIPLEX	

1. The first number is the number of pilot wheels; the middle number(s) are the number of drivers; the last number is the number of trailing wheels.
2. One name is used TWICE.
3. Write the name of the loco next to the wheel arrangement.

Running Extra

Commuter rail ridership at new 'post-pandemic peak'

By Travis Andersen

GLOBE STAFF

Ridership on the MBTA's commuter rail reached a new "post-pandemic peak" in October, officials said Friday, a sign that more workers have returned to public transportation as COVID-19 fears subside.

In a statement, the MBTA said ridership levels last month surpassed 90 percent of pre-pandemic levels. Ridership was high across the system and especially strong on three lines: Newburyport/Rockport, Fairmount, and Franklin.

"Seeing ridership on Commuter Rail return and grow consistently to reach this milestone

demonstrates that safe, reliable, and more frequent service can bring riders back to mass transportation," MBTA general manager Phil Eng said.

Eng credited rail operator Keolis Commuter Services for "providing more frequent and convenient train service, making it easier and more attractive to the public to choose this option."

"We look forward to continuing to build upon this success to identify new ways to improve service, get more people out of cars, and protect our environment by reducing our carbon footprint," he said.

The Franklin line, which

runs from Franklin to South Station, saw ridership increase 20 percent last month, which MBTA officials attributed to an increased service schedule.

Ridership on the Fairmount line, which runs from Readville to South Station, rose 35 percent from September, which MBTA officials linked to construction on the Red Line's Ashmont branch and Mattapan line.

The Newburyport/Rockport line, which runs to North Station, attained record ridership last month with some 400,000 passengers, many of whom were bound for Salem and its Haunted Happenings festivities, officials said.

During the height of the pandemic, when virtually all office employees worked at home, ridership on the commuter rail plummeted to roughly 10 percent of previous levels, officials said.

"Since the start of the pandemic, we have worked closely with the MBTA to adapt our service to meet the changing needs of our passengers," said Keolis CEO Abdellah Chajai. "These latest ridership trends are proof that the all-day service, and more flexible fare products are meeting our passenger's needs."

Travis Andersen can be reached at travis.andersen@globe.com.

Junk Food Jollies



When: Tuesday, December 12th

Where: Editorial Offices, 11 Hancock Rd., Hingham

Time: Any time after 6 pm

Who: *All members and applicants welcome*



Come and enjoy hot mulled cider, cookies, crackers, cheese and lots of other not-so-good-for-you food! A time for camaraderie with your fellow members away from the RR

Club...but still in a RR atmosphere!

About 8 pm, we'll enjoy movies, slides and DVD's made by the photographers in our group.

Come and have fun with your friends.



ALL ABOARD!
FOR OUR
ANNUAL HOLIDAY AUCTION!

DECEMBER 4, 2023

AFTER THE BUSINESS MEETING!

COME JOIN THE FUN!



THE SANDHOUSE

Sand for locomotives must be kept dry, so it will flow freely. In steam days, the sandhouse, with its hot stove for drying sand, was a place for railroaders to gather, particularly in bad weather. "Sandhouse" became slang for the talk and gossip that circulated among the crews. "The Sandhouse" carries opinions from the rail trade press, the Internet, general newspapers and readers. Reader contributions are welcome! Opinions in "The Sandhouse" are those of the authors only, not those of Mass Bay RRE!

EDITED FROM COMMONWEALTHMAGAZINE.ORG, JUNE 20, 2023

Expanding South Station track capacity is not necessary

By Jay Flynn

The South Station expansion plan once again is rearing its costly, business-as-usual head. The possible relocation of the Dorchester Avenue Postal Service facility presents an opportunity to drastically improve walkability, add mixed-use development, and enhance climate resiliency in downtown Boston. Using much of that land to expand the number of tracks at South Station would make such a transformation far harder and come at significant public expense at a time when we should be strategically spending our limited financial resources.

In 2020 dollars, the most recent cost estimate for the expansion sat at \$2.5 billion; even at high-end cost, this sum could complete the first phase of rail electrification (covering the Providence/Stoughton, Fairmount, and Framingham/Worcester lines) and electrifying the Newburyport/Rockport lines) and electrifying the Framingham/Worcester Line. But the Commonwealth has made no progress on modernizing the existing antiquated commuter rail system into the more reliable, more frequent, and more useful regional rail system that the MBTA committed to in 2019.

The MBTA has long argued that South Station expansion is the only way to increase frequency on the southern side of the commuter rail system. But several rail terminals accommodate more trains than South Station did as of 2019 with fewer tracks and platforms – because they operate according to a version of the operating philosophy often called "organization before electronics before concrete" and maximize the value of existing infrastructure with reliable trains and modern operating practices.

Given this real-world experience, we believe North and South stations can accommodate as much as a 50 percent increase in train throughput relative to pre-COVID peak levels, accounting for realistic Amtrak frequency increases, if it transforms the rail system into true regional rail, starting with Phase 1 of rail transformation. South Station contains 13 platform tracks, two of which are reserved for Amtrak, and six approach, or throat, tracks. Under a maximum build of regional rail as proposed by TransitMatters, 20 peak trains per hour would operate on the Framingham/Worcester, Providence/Stoughton, and Franklin lines combined. The single track on the Old Colony Main Line limits its frequency to six trains per hour total, or two for each branch. More frequent service on the Fairmount Line adds eight more trains.

That leaves us with 11 tracks to manage 34 MBTA trains, or an average of three trains per platform per hour or nearly 20 minutes per train. Many systems throughout the world, including several in the United States, regularly turn their trains around at large terminal stations in under 15 minutes, and in many cases as little as five minutes, often on fewer platform and throat tracks than what South Station has. Many systems can achieve these turnaround times; the MBTA routinely turns trains in 10 minutes at outlying terminals like Worcester.

Amtrak trains should not be an impediment to our plan. On average, each Amtrak train can discharge and load passengers

over a 40-minute time period (20 minutes on each end), with functions like cleaning and restocking performed off platform in Amtrak's yard. Amtrak currently operates a maximum of two trains per hour into South Station. Additional Northeast Corridor frequency is constrained by drawbridges in southeastern Connecticut; plans to replace or bypass them exist but are currently unfunded and don't even have a Bipartisan Infrastructure Legislation funding request. Hourly East-West Rail service, either as a Worcester Line express train or Amtrak service from New Haven and Hartford, will add a third intercity train per hour.

In the future, with the above constraints resolved, there may be four intercity trains per hour from the Northeast Corridor. In that case, they can still fit two platforms if they go in and out in less than 30 minutes, which is judged a limiting but possible arrangement in the California High-Speed Rail planning documents for the much more constrained Transbay Terminal in San Francisco.

With well-maintained new trains, better crew staging, and improvements to switches and tracks, South Station should be able to comfortably accommodate the increased frequency on its existing footprint. Modern electric multiple unit trains (EMUs) are drastically more reliable than the equipment the MBTA runs today – the least reliable EMUs are five times more reliable than the most reliable diesel locomotives in the MBTA's fleet – drastically reducing the frequency of equipment failures. Failures will become infrequent enough to the point that when flexibility between platforms is needed, it will represent a comparatively minor inconvenience. In short, it would be a bad investment to spend several billion dollars to expand South Station in part to accommodate our antiquated, slow, diesel locomotive fleet. That is no way to make such significant spending decisions, decisions that will crowd out many other worthy initiatives.

We have a limited number of years to save our planet. Let's not waste them perpetuating outdated operating models. The commuter rail network spans most of Eastern and Central Massachusetts, serving its largest and fastest growing cities. It's also core to a vision of statewide rail travel. By improving the reliability, potential frequency, and speed of commuter rail, electrification enables ridership, reducing vehicle miles traveled, and aiding immensely in meeting the Commonwealth's 2050 zero net carbon emissions goal. A parked train doesn't provide any benefit. The regional rail concept is one of frequent, reliable service, not frequent parking.

Building the rail network metro Boston needs to meet today's and tomorrow's needs won't happen as long as the T focuses on status quo operations at tremendous expense over spending that money on modernizing the system. Investing in our electric future, not our diesel past, is the way to go. Let's be leaders. We owe it to our children.

Jay Flynn is the TransitMatters East-West Rail campaign coordinator.

TRAIN TRIVIA

EDITED FROM THE GUARDIAN.COM, JUNE 25, 2023

The surprisingly popular world of online trainspotting: 'Some people keep it on 24 hours a day'

By Kari Paul

It was 4pm on a typical Tuesday in June, and hundreds of people sat waiting for the big moment: a train was passing through a rail station in La Plata, Missouri.

The viewers were not crowded around the platform, but in a chat room on an online stream. They consider themselves "virtual railfans" – a growing subculture that tunes into cameras affixed to stations across the United States and watches trains rolling through.

As the westbound boxcar locomotive [???? - ED.] powered through La Plata, the comments began to pour in: "That is FAST!" one viewer wrote. "He's haulin'!" another agreed. "This is 65mph," another said. Others breathlessly flooded the feed with fire emojis. As the last car disappeared from the camera, and the excitement dissipated one commenter summed up the experience: "And just like that," he said. "It's gone, and quiet."



Train Day in Ashland, Virginia, in 2023. (Virtual Railfan)

The world of railfans and trainspotters is hardly new. Since the advent of the railroad, hobbyists and professionals have taken photos of local trains, traveled to see their favorite railways, and simply passed the time sitting on platforms to enjoy the view.

But the community saw a digital boost during the pandemic, when the act of watching livestreams of trains soared in popularity. Many say they were drawn in by the community around the feeds, the romantic lore and history of rail travel in the US, and the regularity of trains passing through at a time when the world felt chaotic.

"A lot of people said during lockdown the camera really saved their sanity, because it was a way to connect with people they weren't able to see in person at the time," said Robert Scott, a railfan who volunteers as a moderator for a live camera in Chehalis, Washington. "Some people keep the feed on 24 hours a day in the background because they like the familiarity of the regular passing of trains."

Today there are an increasing number of live rail-stream hubs, including RailwayCams, RailStream, and RailServe.com. One of the most popular is Virtual Railfan, founded in 2009 by a lifelong train obsessive named Michael Cyr. Cyr said he was sitting on the platform of a rail station in Folkston, Georgia – a small town with a big local railfan culture – when he realized his hobby could be brought online, allowing more people to engage. The following year, the first Virtual Railfan camera was set up in Folkston and

attracted a few dozen viewers, a crowd that eventually grew to several hundred.

The company advertises itself as offering one of the most realistic online trainspotting experiences, featuring live audio and 1080HD cameras – many of which can be moved to see different angles of the incoming locomotives. "We wanted to bring the whole experience," Cyr said. "If you can't be there, we're going to be the next best thing." Virtual Railfan takes in revenue from paid memberships that offer additional features like playbacks of older streams and advertisements from its YouTube channels.

The fandom took off when Virtual Railfan migrated the streams to YouTube in May 2017, and at the urging of his growing viewer base, Cyr installed more cameras across the United States. Like many online services, Virtual Railfan saw activity explode when the pandemic hit, with numbers rising to a steady average of more than 20 million viewers a month. With 108 cameras in 31 states, Virtual Railfan now sees an average of 12 million viewers a month, hailing from more than 200 countries, according to Cyr. It's largely an older crowd, with 60% of viewers over the age of 35.

Offline impacts
All this virtual trainspotting has created unexpected real-world impacts, bringing a much-needed boost of tourism to struggling railroad towns as fans journey to see their favorite locations in person.

Rail travel declined significantly after it peaked in the first two decades of the 20th century, with the rise of plane travel and private automobiles fueling a stunning 84% drop in passenger rail travel between 1945 and 1964. Passenger trains, like many transportation sectors, saw a huge decline in ridership during the Covid-19 pandemic but is reportedly experiencing a steady recovery. The changing landscape of rail travel over time has had major economic implications for the small towns that once dotted the railroad passageways of the United States.

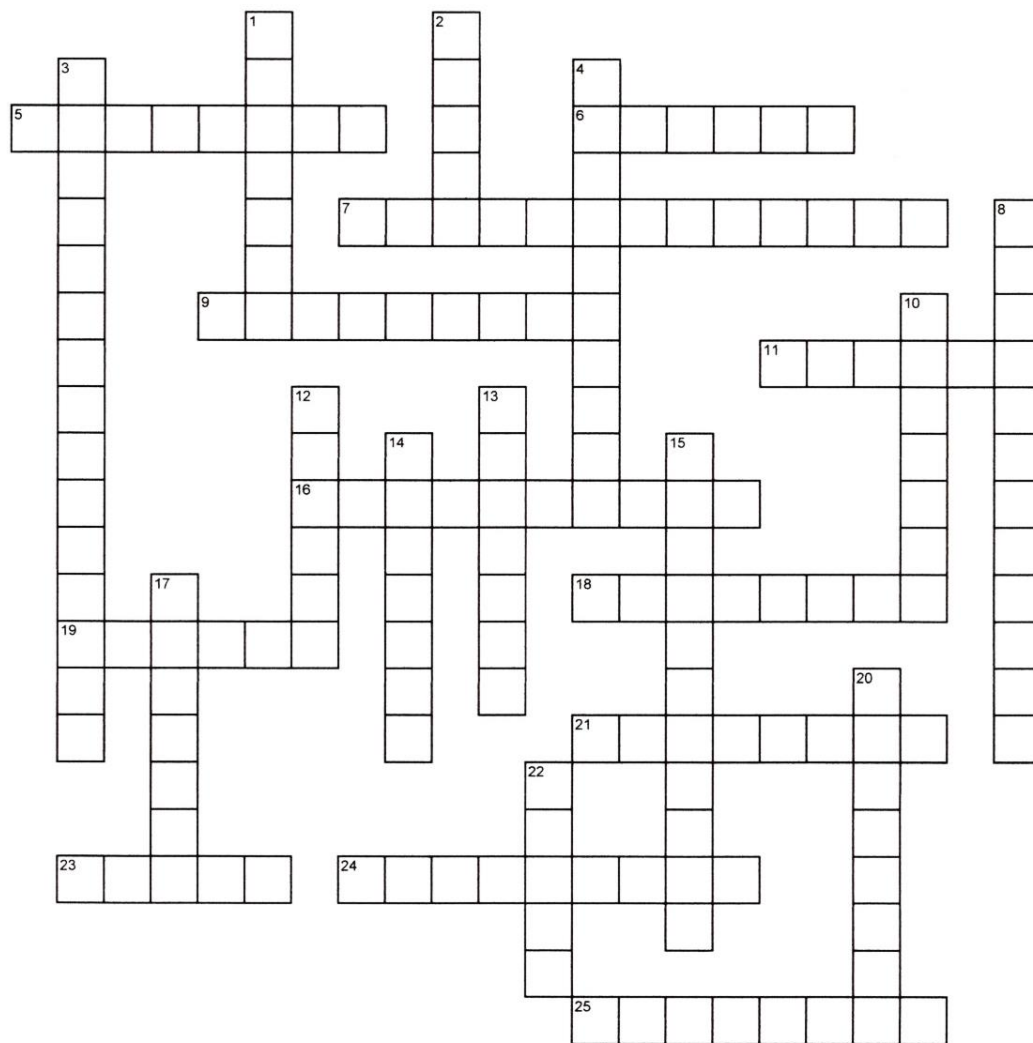
Kathy Abbott, a local councilmember, said Virtual Railfan had had "a huge economic impact" on Ashland, Virginia – a city developed in the 1840s by the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad as a stopping point on its 113-mile system. Abbott described the population-7,500 town as "charming" and "crazy quaint", explaining that if you happen to pass it on the nearby interstate, "you just might miss it".

After a popular stream set up at their local station, more than 500,000 viewers began to tune in each month. That interest has



The Virtual Railfan CEO and founder, Michael Cyr, with a train in LaPlata last year. (Virtual Railfan)

WHYTE'S LOCO CLASSIFICATION



www.CrosswordWeaver.com

ACROSS

- 5 4-8-2
- 6 4-6-4
- 7 2-8-0
- 9 2-8-4
- 11 2-8-2
- 16 4-8-4
- 18 4-4-2
- 19 2-4-4T
- 21 4-10-0
- 23 2-10-4
- 24 2-6-6-6
- 25 4-4-0

DOWN

- 1 2-6-2
- 2 0-10-2
- 3 4-10-2
- 4 4-6-6-4
- 8 4-12-2
- 10 4-6-2
- 12 4-8-8-4
- 13 2-10-2
- 14 2-10-0
- 15 2-8-8-4
- 17 2-8-8-8-2
- 20 2-4-2
- 22 2-6-0