



Editor's Comments

The next membership meeting will be Thursday, January 8, at the Newsreel Theatre at Cincinnati Union Terminal, at 7:30 p.m.

Josh Cohen Presents: *How I've Been Able to Photograph Two Small Railroads and Keep It Interesting*

This program, and many of our upcoming programs, will be simulcast live on the club's YouTube channel, so be sure to subscribe to our channel at <https://youtube.com/@cincinnatiroadclub>

Running low on articles for publication!
Perhaps you've thought of submitting an article or two --- now would be a great time to do so!

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PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

December 2025

Looking Down the Tracks to 2026: An 88th Year of Growth!

We are at the final stop of this year and already looking down the tracks to 2026. Thank you, everyone, for your support, from our volunteers to our members who took part in our many events throughout the year. As we enter into our 88th year, I hope we continue to grow our amazing community.

Winter Railfan Summit 2026

Our second annual Winter Railfan Summit will be **Saturday, January 17, 2026**. I'm excited to host two all-day workshops:

Morning Workshop: "Railfan Core Skills: Gear, Tracking, and Photography Foundations"

Afternoon Workshop: "Signal Savvy: Mastering Scanners and GMRS for Railfan Success"

The goal of this Winter Railfan Summit is to sharpen your skills and knowledge to ensure successful railfanning in 2026. These workshops are open to both our members and the general public. There is a small fee to help cover the cost of the day, including dinner and early access to Tower A for attendees. Be sure to reserve your spot now, as space is limited for this event. | [Order your ticket now!](#)

YouTube: The Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton, A Pioneering Railroad Series

Now available on YouTube is Jim Krause's mini-series, "The Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton, A Pioneering Railroad Series." These short videos are the essential visual companion to his explosive book, [*The Wreck of the Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton Railway – A Pioneer Road Undone By Greed and Fraud!*](#)

Watch the whole **5-part series** chronicling the dramatic history of the Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton Railroad! Produced by Club Member Jim Krause, these videos invite you to dive deep into a saga of innovation, ambition, and the scandalous downfall of a pioneer road—a history shattered by greed and deceit. Don't just read about the past—experience the thrilling wreck of a railway that changed the landscape of American transport!

Cincinnati's Rail Cams

While you're on YouTube, be sure to check out the club's rail cams. I'm happy to report that we have moved Camera 2 to a west-facing window, which gives a great view of the yard and intermodal yard. Camera 1 is still providing a view looking north.

Both cameras provide local scanner audio, so you can hear crews working in the yard and trains coming into and out of the area. These cameras offer a great bird's-eye view of everything inbound and outbound of Cincinnati. Viewers often spot heritage units making their way past the camera or even sitting somewhere in the yard. These cameras provide an amazing view of the yard, night or day. Enjoy railfanning from the comfort of your home; watch on your smartphone, tablet, or smart TV—all you need is the YouTube App!

Membership

If you haven't renewed your membership, don't forget to do it before the clock strikes midnight! Your membership helps with everything from rent to our day-to-day operation costs. So help us to keep the good times rolling down the tracks in our 88th year!

December 2025

Jonathan Higgins

Amtrak News

By W. Mike Weber

The Westbound CARDINAL schedule is about to get a bit worse for Cincinnati riders. The train will depart Cincinnati about 25 minutes later (2:06 AM). That connection to Milwaukee and the Twin Cities just got dicier. I will let you know next month if I made it January 15!! Amtrak will not sell that connection, so I purchased two separate transactions!! Wish me luck! The CARDINAL is still compressed to 2 coaches!! A crowded train is an unhappy train!

Since the failure of dozens of Horizon cars, Amtrak has been forced to shift equipment all around the system. The good news appears to be that 25 of the new Siemens CASCADE bi-directional trains will be headed to the Northwest, followed by other corridors. And Amfleet will also be replaced over 4 years. HOPEFULLY they will keep some of it for new services and longer trains. Amfleet saved Amtrak. Thank you Budd!!

The MARDI GRAS has exceeded all projections! One overlooked feature of the route is that it is SCENIC!! i.e, some places. Which makes it vulnerable to storms in the Gulf!! This is another train where demand for seats outstrips supply (for now).

North Carolina has seen a 55% increase in rail travel since 2019. Without a doubt that is one reason Siemens has chosen that state to build a new manufacturing facility. In about 12 months it should be producing coaches, business class, and food service cars!!

Speaking of rolling stock!! There seems to be a growing faction in the rail industry that supports single-level cars for new long distance replacement cars. Not as many ADA complications. Simpler. Maybe 2 to 4 car sets. Less wind, snow, and dirt between cars. No costly bulky elevator problems!! Wishfully, some designs will be ready by late spring for Amtrak to mull over.

The cities of Racine, Kenosha, and Milwaukee would like to run a new service on Union Pacific operated by Metra!! These trains would serve many burbs now enjoying service. This is in early stages. Like so many places, these were once all served by rail.

As far as I know, the Administration has still not restored Federal dollars to the Hudson River rail tunnel project. Work goes on with state funding. Until it is gone. The MOST IMPORTANT infrastructure project in America!

LATE NEWS!! The Gateway Tunnel boring machine is on its way to New Jersey, as of December 16! A very positive sign that the tunnel project is to continue. Trump complaints about DEI being “worked out”!! Cash on hand has allowed the state to continue to work during the “kurfful”.

Mike Weber



The new and the "experienced" at Union Station in Chicago



CARDINAL in Glendale last century. Note the dome!!

EXPLORING UNION TERMINAL

By Fr. Dale Peterka

Many of our members will recall the good old days – about twenty years ago—when the Cincinnati Railroad Club meeting room, library and gift shop was in Tower-A –upstairs from our present clubroom. We were very proud of our location, which boasted big picture-windows on three sides looking out into Queensgate Yard. In those days, it was common for guests visiting the Museum Center to climb the long flight of steps to visit our clubhouse and look out onto Railfan Heaven.

On most Sundays, volunteers from the club spent time in the tower welcoming guests and answering questions. The trains and movements in the yard, of course, were the big attraction. Most visitors knew that the Museum Center used to be the station for all the passenger trains that came to the city, and they certainly were aware that there was still a lot of rail traffic in Cincinnati, but Tower-A was the only location in the terminal where you could actually see the trains.

One afternoon, about 20 years ago, I was the only volunteer in Tower-A. As I recall, there had been other volunteers earlier in the day, but they had left early, together with the visitors. A huge storm was about to hit the city. It was, I think, the leftover front from a hurricane that had caused a lot of damage in Alabama, Tennessee and Kentucky.

I began closing the tower windows – including windows that no one knew about! These were small 2x4 ft. windows that were hidden above the regular 4x6 ft. windows. The upper windows were out of reach. They had been pushed shut long ago but they were not latched. As I ran to close the regular windows, these small windows –wham!— were blown open by the wind.

The ceiling lights were out. When I reached the elevator, it was dead. No electric power.

The only way out was the back staircase. Club members years before had been permitted to use these stairs as access to the rear parking lot. Since I knew where they went, I entered the back steps. The door closed behind me.

There were no lights in the rear stairway. I walked down three flights of stairs in total darkness. When I got to the bottom, the door to the rotunda was locked.

My last chance to escape was to climb the steps –in the darkness again—and try the door that led to the terminal offices. To my good luck, the second-floor hallway door was unlocked.

I found myself in a long curved hallway that circled the base of the great dome. There were windows that lit my path, and I finally found myself on the great balcony over the main entrance. I felt pretty good about this, as, years before, I had been on the balcony taking pictures of the rotunda, the shops and the visitors below. I walked across the front balcony and descended –in the darkness-- to the floor level. The door was locked!

The story ends quickly. I climbed back up to the balcony and called down to the people below. “Help me. I’m trapped up here!” Someone heard me through the echoes and found someone who knew how to get me down. Otherwise I would still be up there!

DISPATCHER'S LINE NEWS

By Bill Haines

--- On November 13, 2025, the **Ohio Rail Development Commission** approved eight projects at the bi-monthly meeting resulting in more than \$81 million in rail infrastructure investment in the State of Ohio. The projects included rail rehabilitation, rail expansion, rail bridge rehabilitations as well as two grade crossing elimination projects located in Columbiana and Butler Counties.

The Rail Commission approved a \$237,000 grant to **Ashland Railway** for the rehabilitation of four miles of mainline track in Richland County. The project, the first of three phases, will restore track conditions to maintain safe and efficient operations on the railroad's network, which serves industries across north central Ohio. The total project investment is estimated at \$475,000.

Cincinnati Eastern Railroad received approval for a \$300,000 grant to rehabilitate a bridge spanning State Routes 132 and 222 and the East Fork Little Miami River in Clermont County. The project will replace deteriorated open deck timber ties to maintain safe rail and highway operations. The total project investment is estimated at \$600,000.

Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad received approval for a \$900,000 loan to repower two locomotives with Tier 4 all-electric engines to reduce emissions in Cuyahoga Valley National Park and lower maintenance costs. The total project investment is estimated at \$3.5 million.

The Rail Commission approved an \$800,000 grant to **Zanesville-Muskingum County Port Authority** to expand transload capacity at Eastpointe Business Park in Zanesville by constructing two new transload tracks, relocating and resurfacing the existing track, and improving drainage. This project is being driven, in part, by Plaskolite, LLC's planned expansion. The current transload yard is operating at full capacity, supporting six businesses with over 2,500 employees in the park. The total project investment is estimated at \$2.8 million.

Washington Penn Plastic received approval for a \$600,000 grant to help rehabilitate 4000 feet of track on its industrial spur in Wapakoneta. The project includes upgrading the rail to safely accommodate modern railroad equipment and improving two roadway crossings. The project will ensure continued rail service to Washington Penn Plastic and AIP Logistics. The total project investment is estimated at \$3 million.

Tectum Inc – Armstrong World Industries was approved for a \$100,000 grant to assist with the rehabilitation of two rail spurs at the Tectum Inc facility located in Newark. The project will ensure continued rail service to the company, which will pledge to create 12 new jobs and retain 132 existing jobs, and to generate 55 carloads of rail traffic as a condition of the grant. The total project investment is estimated at \$2 million.

In addition to the rail rehabilitation projects, the Rail Commission approved funds and agreed to sponsor the following two projects for Federal Railroad Administration grants:

The Rail Commission approved a grant to Columbiana County/City of Salem of up to \$7.7 million from the **Ohio Grade Crossing Elimination Program** to replace the existing at-grade crossing at Lincoln Avenue with a grade separation. The Rail Commission will sponsor the grant application to the Federal Railroad Administration. Lincoln Avenue is an important thoroughfare in northern Columbiana County, and the crossing sees more than 40 Norfolk Southern trains and two Amtrak trains per day. The total project investment is estimated at \$27 million.

DISPATCHER'S LINE NEWS, *Continued from Page 6*

Ohio Rail Development Commission, *Continued*

The Rail Commission approved a grant of up to \$7.5 million from the **Ohio Grade Crossing Elimination Program** to assist the Butler County Transportation Improvement District /City of Fairfield with the replacement of an at-grade crossing at **Symmes Road** in the City of Fairfield with a grade separation. The City of Fairfield previously secured a planning grant from the Federal Railroad Administration for the project. The Rail Commission will sponsor the federal grant for the upcoming application. The approximately 30 trains per day that use this crossing result in delays for emergency responders. The project, which includes the closure of Gilmore Avenue, will result in fluidity benefits for the CSX and Amtrak trains using the rail line. The total project investment is estimated at \$42 million. **Ohio Rail Development Corp**

--- **WASHINGTON Amtrak** logged its highest ever ridership and revenue in fiscal year 2025. Amtrak ridership grew 5% in the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 2025, and revenue surged 11%, as robust Northeast Regional gains offset fewer Acela frequencies on the Northeast Corridor. The railroad carried nearly 34.5 million passengers, while ticket revenue was \$2.764 billion. **Trains Newswire**

--- **Norfolk Southern, Georgia Tech** develop AI-powered wheel defect detector. After a derailment traced to a broken wheel, NS built its own high-speed imaging system to spot cracks before they cause trouble. When a broken wheel caused a derailment on Norfolk Southern — just a mile after NS received the train through interchange — it prompted the railroad to begin tinkering with new ways to detect wheel defects.

“We as a leadership team said there’s got to be a better way,” Chief Operating Officer John Orr said on the railroad’s earnings call in October. What emerged is the railroad’s wheel integrity detection system, which NS built in conjunction with the Georgia Tech Research Institute.

The first wheel integrity detector was installed recently on the Chicago Line at Burns Harbor, Ind., part of the railroad’s busiest route. “The location allows NS to inspect trains coming onto its network as soon as possible,” spokeswoman Heather Garcia says. The technology builds on NS’s homebuilt Digital Train Inspection portals, which use AI-powered imaging systems to scan trains at track speed and identify a range of mechanical defects. Since early 2025, these portals have flagged more than 40 wheel integrity issues that could have led to derailments.

The new detector system takes inspection a step further. Focused solely on wheels, it uses six synchronized cameras (three per side) to capture up to 14 ultra-high-resolution images per wheel as trains pass at up to 70 mph. Advanced AI algorithms then analyze those images. **Trains Newswire**

--- **Norfolk Southern Launches Landmark Series:** Honoring America’s Historic Rail Cities. Norfolk Southern is proud to launch the Landmark Series — a new lineup of locomotives that will operate in revenue freight service as well lead the company’s inspection trains. Each locomotive proudly carries the name of a city that has shaped America’s story and our railroad’s heritage. “These locomotives aren’t just machines — they’re growth engines for the U.S. economy,” said Norfolk Southern Chief Operating Officer John Orr. “Each city we highlight is a center of economic activity that strengthens our network and drives commerce across the nation.”

From the craftsmanship of our Juniata team in Altoona, Pa. that produced the engines to every stripe and coat of paint, these locomotives are more than equipment, they’re rolling tributes to the communities that keep America moving forward. The first two in the series, Birmingham and Atlanta, are now traveling our network, marking the start of a journey that celebrates connection, progress and the people who make it possible. **www.norfolksouthern.com**

DISPATCHER'S LINE NEWS, *Continued from Page 7*

--- **STB** approves Fortress Investment's purchase of Wheeling & Lake Erie, Akron-area short line. The Surface Transportation Board has approved Fortress Investment Group's acquisition of the Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway and Akron Barberton Cluster Railway. The acquisition will be effective Dec. 26. **Trains Newswire**

--- **Union Pacific** plans to send **Big Boy No. 4014** on a transcontinental trip next year as part of the nation's 250th anniversary celebrations. "I want to run Big Boy across the country," CEO Jim Vena told Trains on Thursday.

Vena says that he's had discussions with Norfolk Southern CEO Mark George about hosting what would be the Big Boy's first trip in the East since the 4-8-8-4 rolled out of the Alco plant in Schenectady, N.Y., in 1941.

UP is working through the details of operating the 1.2-million pound locomotive off of home rails, including timing of the trip and whether the 4014 would head west from its Cheyenne, Wyo., base to Oakland, Calif., first or steam east. Either way, the goal would be to run the Big Boy from coast to coast. **Trains Newswire**

--- **Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern** today cleared their first merger hurdle as shareholders overwhelmingly backed their deal to create the first transcontinental railroad. In separate votes, nearly 99% of NS shareholders and 99.5% of UP shareholders approved UP's proposed \$85 billion acquisition of NS. NS investors will receive one Union Pacific common share and \$88.82 in cash for each share of Norfolk Southern owned. The railroads plan to file their merger application with the Surface Transportation Board in early December. **Trains Newswire**

--- **Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum** has received a \$50,000 grant from Norfolk Southern through its Thriving Communities Grant Program. This support helps us return Pullman sleeping car Maitland to operation for the education of the public regarding the Pullman car's importance in early 20th Century transportation. TVRM also received a \$100,000 grant from the State of Tennessee. The grant, administered by the Tennessee State Museum, is for capital maintenance and improvement projects. The museum will use the funds for additional improvements to its Grand Junction depot area. Specifically, the museum will fund three projects to enhance the depot: Additional windows will be replaced for greater energy efficiency; The electrical system will be improved to reduce locomotive idling while at the depot; and, Additional outside lighting will be added to facilitate night events. **TVRM Facebook page, Trains Newswire**

--- **Railroading Heritage of Midwest America** breaks ground on New Turntable and Roundhouse at Historic Silvis Shops. Railroading Heritage of Midwest America (RRHMA) announced the first steps of preparation on a new railroad turntable and roundhouse at its historic Silvis, Illinois, facility. Earlier in the month, contractors were present at the facility and began demolition of the original roundhouse foundation in preparation for the new foundation to take its place. This long-awaited project is a major milestone in RRHMA's mission to preserve and showcase Midwestern railroad history.

The new turntable and roundhouse will serve several key purposes:

- **Operational Use:** The fully functional turntable will allow RRHMA crews to easily reposition locomotives and railcars, just as railroads did in the steam era. This capability is crucial for servicing and operating large steam locomotives like Union Pacific Challenger No. 3985, which is currently under restoration at Silvis.
- **Public Exhibit:** The accompanying roundhouse-style building will serve as a living museum where visitors can experience historic railroad equipment in an authentic setting. During special events and open houses, guests will be able to see the massive turntable in action and tour the locomotives and railcars housed in the roundhouse.
- **Restoration Facility:** By constructing a multi-stall roundhouse, RRHMA gains much-needed covered space to protect and maintain its fleet of vintage locomotives and cars. The roundhouse will revive part of the Silvis site's original purpose, once again housing engines under a sheltering roof for upkeep and display, just as the Rock Island Railroad did decades ago.

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Railroading Heritage of Midwest America, *Continued*

RRHMA's new 135-foot turntable, donated by BNSF Railway, will be installed near the original turntable's location at the Silvis shops. Once completed, the fully operational turntable will be the largest preserved turntable in the United States. "This project takes our organization to a whole new level," said Steve Sandberg, President and Chief Operating Officer of RRHMA. "We are thrilled to break ground on the turntable and roundhouse ... Our vision is to make Silvis a national hub of living railroad history – a place where we can preserve and operate vintage trains and share that experience with the public for generations to come." **Railroading Heritage of Midwest America Facebook**

--- **B&O Railroad Museum** begins \$38 million expansion. This project will transform the museum and how patrons experience its collection and exhibits. The project will also act as a catalyst for additional development in Southwest Baltimore. The key features of the project include:

Transformation of the South Car Works building — the oldest, continuously operating U.S. railroad repair facility, operated from 1869 to 1990 — to house Innovation Hall, with exhibits on current and future railroad technology; the museum's archives, with more than 30 million documents and 200,000 photos; and two smart classrooms for educational programs.

"This is transformative for us," Kris Hoellen, museum executive director, said in a recent Baltimore Sun interview. "And it's transformative for Southwest Baltimore."

Installation of the CSX Bicentennial Garden, which will be an open public space and amphitheater adjacent to the South Car Works building. "... it will be just a place to eat lunch," Hoellen says. "We look for it to become a vibrant event space and provide a fresh, new location to welcome our visitors. It will also be free for community use." The entrance and patrons' path through the museum will be shifted away from the iconic, fully-enclosed roundhouse. With its collection of 19th century locomotives, the roundhouse will now become the finale of a museum visit. "The crown jewel will be saved for last," says Hoellen.

The museum has raised \$28 million of the \$38 million project goal. Of the funds raised, \$5 million was donated by CSX Transportation in support of the Bicentennial Garden. Hoellen is confident that the balance will be raised through the museum Tracks to the Future: Campus Transformation campaign. CSX CEO Steve Angel will co-chair the museum's \$38 million capital campaign to transform its campus in preparation for the 200th anniversary of American railroading in 2027. Angel replaces former CSX CEO Joe Hinrichs in this role. Hinrichs left CSX in September 2025.

--- **The Age of Steam Roundhouse Museum in Sugarcreek, OH** is excited to announce the acquisition of former Chesapeake & Ohio Railway (C&O) 2-6-6-2 steam locomotive #1308 from the Collis P. Huntington Railroad Historical Society (CPH) in Huntington, West Virginia. "The #1308 has been displayed unprotected outdoors in a Huntington city park since October 9, 1962," said Nathan Vance, Executive Director of Age of Steam Roundhouse Museum (AoSRM). "While CPH members regularly repainted their steamer, paint protected only #1308's exterior surfaces, and rusting of the locomotive's boiler and all the other steel parts has continued unabated from the inside out for 63 years. The Age of Steam Roundhouse Museum can end all of that." Added Vance. <https://ageofsteamroundhouse.org/>

--- **Amtrak's** multiyear effort to improve how it removes grime from train exteriors was on full display Oct. 23, when the railroad invited observers to view a new train-washing process now underway at the Chicago Terminal. In response to years of passenger complaints about dirty train exteriors, Amtrak drafted a plan in fiscal-year 2020 to upgrade and/or replace train-washing structures in multiple locations across the country. The railroad's cleaning equipment had become so dilapidated that all but one train-washing rack was out of service as of winter 2023-24, the Rail Passengers Association reported in a July 2024 newsletter.

The Age of Steam Roundhouse in Sugarcreek, *Continued*

Using federal funding slated for capital improvements, Amtrak in FY2023 began construction on automated train-washing structures in several cities. So far, the railroad has completed structures in four cities, with the one in Chicago as the latest. Projects are underway in seven additional cities. Full replacements of train-washing facilities also have been completed in New Orleans for \$10.3 million and Seattle for \$6.7 million, and a \$2.3 million upgrade was finished in Boston. The remaining train-wash projects, at a cost of \$5 million to \$5.7 million each, are in various stages of development. Designs have been completed for structures in Washington, D.C.; Goleta, California; and Sanford, Florida. Projects in various stages of design are underway in Los Angeles; Albany, New York; New York City; and Miami.

All upgraded and new facilities will feature standardized components to ensure consistent washing results and ease of maintenance, according to Amtrak officials. Process pumps are installed to automatically maintain pH levels; water recycling equipment is added to reduce the need for fresh water; and above-ground chemical tanks are put in place to ensure containment, help prevent leakage and simplify maintenance. The railroad is committed to modernizing train-washing functions across the country as part of improving the overall passenger experience. But none of the train-washing machine installations is more crucial than the one in Chicago, where transcontinental connections occur daily, Amtrak officials say. www.progressiverailroading.com

--- Restoration work on former Chessie GP-30 6955 owned by the **Cincinnati Scenic Railway** is continuing. The GP-30 has been moved to the Wheeling & Lake Erie shop in Brewster, OH for traction motor installation and wheel work. Second stop will be at another indoor location in NE Ohio for main generator, turbo, and aux gen installation. After addressing those major items and a multitude of minor details, the focus will then be on the cosmetic restoration. <https://www.facebook.com/savethechessie>

--- **Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society** announces a major expansion of its New Haven, IN restoration shop. Expansion of New Haven restoration building will host the rebuilding of historic New York Central artifacts.

As the Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society closes out its fourth season of the Indiana Rail Experience, the organization is announcing a major expansion of its New Haven restoration shop — the first addition to the facility in more than 30 years. The expansion comes as the nonprofit prepares for the arrival of New York Central steam locomotive No. 3001 and accelerates its growing slate of passenger car restorations. Since launching operations on the Indiana Northeastern Railroad in 2022, the Indiana Rail Experience has welcomed over 70,000 passengers across 142 operating days, averaging approximately 500 guests per day. This rapid growth has driven the need for expanded facilities to support year-round railroad preservation, education, and excursion services. <https://fortwaynerailroad.org/>

REBUILDING THE OLD ROAD

By Charles H. Bogart

Between 1832 and 1835, the Lexington & Ohio Rail Road (L&O) laid track from Lexington, Kentucky, to Frankfort, Kentucky. In 1848, the L&O was reorganized as the Lexington & Frankfort Railroad (Lex&F). The Lex&F in 1849 built a new entrance into Frankfort from Jett, Kentucky. As early as 1848 Lex&F internal documents begin to refer to the rail line from Lexington to Jett as The Old Road and the track from Jett to Frankfort as The New Road.

In November 2024, R J Corman Railroad Central Kentucky Line, current operators of The Old Road, announced that it was going to build a Multimodal Freight Yard just east of Jett at the cost of \$12,300,000. The yard would have three tracks. To support the yard, the rail line between Lexington & Jett would be upgraded with every third tie being replaced, some 23 miles of track. To undertake the rail line work, Corman had received a \$7,400,000 Federal grant. Work on replacing the ties began on June 23, 2025. Instead of Corman using its own construction crew, the work was done by VORST. I understand the reason VORST did the work was due to the project being funded by Federal dollars.

VORST first went and dumped new ties along the 23 miles of rail line. Once the new ties were trackside, a VORST team came through with two pieces of equipment to pull the spikes holding down the rails at every third tie. The first piece of equipment pulled the spikes from the south rail and the other the north rail. A follow along piece of equipment lifted the rail and manpower pulled out the tie plates. The tie plates were left trackside.

On Wednesday, July 2, 2025, I caught up with the VORST Gandy Dancers at Buck's Cut on Old Frankfort Pike. Buck's Cut is deep and narrow and some 500 feet long. Unfortunately, vegetation restricts one's view of the track from the bridge spanning the rail at the Cut. First, VORST sent in two pieces of equipment into the Cut. The first piece of equipment pulled every other third tie out from under the rail, with the second machine pulling the other third tie. It was hard work maneuvering their machines' operating devices to pull and lift out the ties from within the confines of the Cut. I need to mention that drainage in the cut is poor, and there was at least a foot of standing water in the trackside ditches.

After the ties were pulled, the machines returned to place the new ties at a 45 degree angle from the Cut's wall toward the now vacant tie position. Next, tie insertion machines came on the scene, each working every other tie. At times it was a struggle to get the new tie inserted under the rail. There was just little space to work in. After the ties were in place, a piece of machinery came and lifted the rail and workers using medal rods picked up the tie plates and inserted them under the rail. Due to the water in the ditch, they often had to fish for a tie plate. Some tie plates could not be found, and plates were taken from a supply trailer and inserted.

Next came two spike inserters and drivers. One machine worked the north rail and the other the south rail. Following these two machines was a speeder pulling a flat holding spikes and clips. Two men using sledgehammers drove these clips into place by the new ties. Behind these two men came a truck with a grip crane pulling a trailer. The crane was used to pick up the old ties, which were loaded into the truck or on the trailer. Some distance behind this work crew was a ballasting crew that used high rail dump trucks to spread ballast along the right-of-way. The dump trucks were accompanied by a mechanical Jordan Spreader that evenly distributed the ballast along the track.

Below are some photos I took of the tie gang at work.

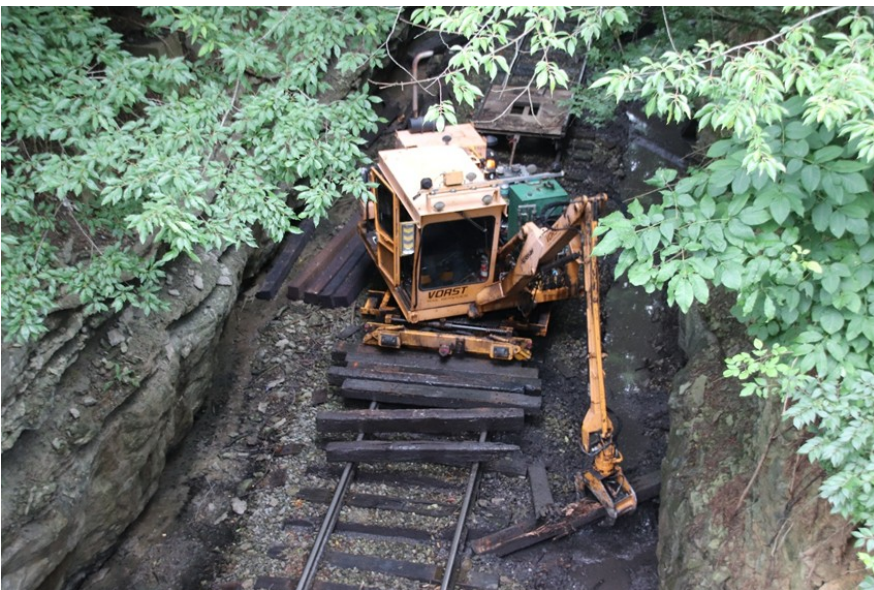
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REBUILDING THE OLD ROAD, *Continued from Page 11*



Stagging for work in the Cut

Moving to Buckner Cut



Pulling out an old tie

All photos by the Author

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New ties stacked for insertion

Inserting the new tie



REBUILDING THE OLD ROAD, *Continued from Page 13*



Close-up of inserting new tie

Fishing for tie plates



Bringing new tie plates; old are under the water and can't be found.

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Drilling spike holes



Driving Spikes

Spike driver hopper



REBUILDING THE OLD ROAD, *Continued from Page 15*



Driving in clips

Pulling a misdriven spike



Picking up old ties

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REBUILDING THE OLD ROAD, *Continued from Page 16*

Dumping new ballast



The mechanical Jorden Spreader at work.

Preliminary site preparations underway at the new Frankfort Multimodal Freight Yard. The Old Road rail line is this side of the trees.



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John Biehn's Steam News for December 2025

Courtesy of Jim Corbett

Nashville Steam Update...After years of dedicated restoration efforts and a continued fundraising drive, historic Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Railway steam locomotive No. 576 has successfully passed a major milestone in its return to steam: its hydrostatic test. This essential verification confirms that the boiler, after completion of major repairs, is sound under pressure, bringing the 4-8-4 steam locomotive one critical step closer to full operation.

“The hydrostatic test means that No. 576 is very close to reawakening, just in time to take part in a once-in-a-generation moments , as our country celebrates its 250th birthday next year, and also 200 years of American railroading in 2027. This locomotive represents not only Nashville’s proud past, but a living symbol of our nation’s resilience, ingenuity, and heritage on the move,” said Shane Meador, President of Nashville Steam Preservation Society.

With the hydrostatic test completed, the path is now cleared for a major flurry of reassembly work and additional tests. The next major milestone will be a stationary steam test, followed by final assembly and its first test runs in more than sixty years.

While preparing the locomotive for its first steam test, a new challenge emerged. Upon removal and inspection, unexpected repairs were discovered in the locomotive’s superheater units, which convert water into the high temperature steam that powers the engine. Several of these elements now require replacement through a custom mill run of new material-a specialized process estimated to cost approximately \$45,000.

To help meet this need and keep the project on schedule, Nashville Steam has launched an end-of-year Matching Campaign to raise funds toward the fabrication and installation of these critical components. All donations will be doubled up to \$25,000, thanks to the generosity of a supporting foundation. Donations can be made by going to <https://www.nashvillesteam.org/donate>

Alaska 557 News...On November 8, 2025, Alaska Railroad No. 557 was fired up for the first time in more than sixty years. “The locomotive’s rebuild is now 95% complete,” said Patrick Durand, 557 Restoration Company President.

No. 557 was fired up for five hours with fuel supplied by Republic Services, who has agreed to donate fuel for the locomotive’s first two years of operation.

Alaska 557 was built by the Baldwin Locomotive Works for the U.S. Army Transportation Corps. During World War 2, twelve S-160s locomotives were transferred for service in Alaska to relieve an acute motive power shortage. The Alaskan twelve were modified for the northern climate with larger compound air compressors mounted on the front pilot, steam coils to heat the cab and snow plows. In 1954, when No. 557 became the final steam locomotive on the roster, it was converted from coal fired to oil burning.

The locomotive became the last Alaska Railroad steam engine due to a diesel shortcoming. The area around Nenana, Alaska suffers from regular flooding long the Tanana and Nenana Rivers. The railroad’s new diesel-electric locomotives had trouble navigating flooded tracks as their traction motors would short out. No. 557 was found to easily ford water up to two feet over the rails. Aside from flood duty, No. 557 pulled an occasional special event train. The last train it pulled before being retired was a run from Anchorage to the state fair in Palmer on September 5, 1959.

A few years later in 1964, a Washington scrap dealer and museum owner, Monte Holm purchased No. 557. Instead of scrapping the locomotive, Holm preserved it for school groups to witness steam engine history in action. Upon his passing, Holm’s museum at Moses Lake, Washington was closed and the 557 had no caretaker.

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Alaska 557, *Continued*

In 2011, Jim & Vic Jansen, owners of several Alaska-based transportation companies, purchased the locomotive from the Holm's estate, ensuring its return to Alaska. The Jansens then donated the locomotive to the Alaska Railroad, stipulating that it be relocated to Anchorage, rehabilitated, and put back in service. The Alaska Railroad arranged for No. 557 to be moved home, arriving at Whittier on January 3, 2012.

Since that time, the Engine 557 Restoration Company, a non-profit group established to restore, maintain, and operate the locomotive have been working on its rebuild.

The next steps in No. 557's rebuild include: Installing the brake rigging, which has been rebuilt. Relining the crosshead guides with new bearing bronze, leading to valve gear assembly and rod installation. Fitting and painting the new boiler jacket.

Reflecting on the test firing milestone, Mr. Durand could not emphasize enough the volunteer effort. "I really credit and recognize the all-volunteer 557 Mechanical Department crew that got us to this point," he said. For more information on this project, go to <https://557.alaskarails.org>

(Thanks to Bob Lettenberger, Trains.com)

Cosmetic Restoration in Delaware...The Lewes Junction Railroad & Bridge Association has announced that the historic steam locomotive No. 60, initially built for the Pennsylvania Railroad, is going to be restored for display in Lewes with the goal of it being ready for next summer.

Historic steam locomotive No. 60, a 0-6-0 PRR class B6sa, was built in 1913 and once operated the railroads in Lewes. The locomotive will be disassembled and prepared at the Wilmington & Western Railroad and then taken to Lewes for onsite cosmetic reassembly and painting. When restored, the goal is to make the locomotive look as close to the way it looked over 100 years ago.

David Ludlow is on the board of directors with the Lewes Junction Railroad & Bridge Association. He stated, "It happens to be the last known example of its particular wheel arrangement and boiler arrangement that still exists." "So we have the last of this configuration and it's very important that we protect it, preserve it, interpret it, and bring it into town for everybody to see."

Ludlow adds this project is a big step in preserving the town's railroading heritage, and it will also enhance public understanding of the country's industrial past.

"Our focus is now as part of the town of Lewes's 250th celebration next year, we hope to have locomotive No. 60 as one of the big crown jewels and big showpieces for that 250th celebration of the United State of America," said Ludlow.

For the restoration, LJRBA partnered with national railroad services provider FMW Solutions. FMW has a dedicated cosmetic restoration team and FMW has a reputation for quality work in heritage preservation.

(Thanks to Joe Irizarry, Delaware Public Media. via Tom Schultz)

Future Long Island Steam...Long Island Railroad No. 35 is a G5s 4-6-0 built by the Pennsylvania Railroad's Juniata Shops in 1928. For decades, this locomotive traveled across New York City and Long Island. Since the 1990s, the caretakers of locomotive No. 35 have been a small group of passionate volunteers making sure she's been saved from scrap and keeping her home on Long Island at the Oyster Bay Railroad Museum.

Here is an update on the locomotive's restoration. Contract work with Next Generation Rail Solutions in Kentucky continues with the conversion of the tender trucks from friction bearings to roller bearings. In the future months ahead, a lot of the larger components that are being worked on in Kentucky will be shipped back to Oyster Bay and workers can finally start a large scale reassembly of the locomotive.

Future Long Island Steam, *Continued*

In the coming weeks, the museum anticipates that the drive wheels will be heading to the Age of Steam in Ohio where specialized lathes are available for crank pin turning and work of that nature. The museum also anticipates that their contractor will be making a visit in the next couple of months to do some work on the locomotive's frame.

At the museum, volunteers have been hard at work on the tender doing needle scaling work on the tender tank in preparation for eventual reassembly. This scaling has largely focused on the coal end of the tender. The museum anticipates that the tender components will be reassembled in advance of the actual locomotive, at least the trucks and the frame.

The museum is still actively fundraising for the locomotive. They operate off grant money from the town of Oyster Bay and Nassau County for most of the funding, but there are still lots of expenses that are not covered, mainly trucking and rigging.

Please consider a donation by going to <https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-the-reassembly-of-lirr-steam-locomotive-35>

(Thanks to Ronnie Schnepf)

C&NW1385 News...The Mid-Continent Railway Museum, after nearly thirty years of work, has completed a successful test firing of former Chicago & Northwestern 4-6-0 No. 1385. The test occurred on December 4. The locomotive now moves into the final phases of its restoration with plans to have the locomotive operational by summer 2026.

Locomotive No. 1385 was built by the American Locomotive Company in March, 1907. It was among 325 R1 class locomotives on the C&NW. No. 1385 and its sisters worked across the C&NW system. In addition to freight assignments, the R1s were tasked with moving secondary passenger trains, switching local industries from Michigan's Upper Peninsula to the Dakotas and working around Chicago. The C&NW retired the 1385 in 1956. The locomotive was acquired by the Mid-Continent Railway Museum in 1961 for its scrap value of \$2,600. No. 1385 powered trains during the museum's first operating season in 1963.

Before 1385 returns to lead the museum's trains, there is work yet to be completed. Pistons, rings, the remaining valve gear, and rods need to be installed. No. 1385 will receive new pistons. Insulation needs to be applied to the boiler along with a new boiler jacket, which will require painting. Having the new boiler jacket cut and fit to the locomotive is a significant expense in completing the project.

There is plumbing and electrical work to be finished as well. After these steps, test runs will be made along with seeking final certification from the Federal Railroad Administration.

The museum has set July 4, 2026 as its target date to have No. 1385 ready for operation. To complete the restoration, the museum indicates that it needs an additional \$300,000. As of November 26, 4% of that goal has been realized.

For more information on the Mid-Continent railway Museum or to make a donation to 1385's restoration, go to <https://www.midcontinent.org>

Pere Marquette 1225...A history lesson...Before it became a beloved and famous holiday train, the Pere Marquette 1225 spent many years parked near Spartan Stadium at Michigan State University. The imposing black steam engine captured the attention of countless passersby, including a young Chris Van Allsburg, who visited the campus as a child to attend MSU football games. Years later, those memories of the iconic locomotive inspired his award-winning children's book "The Polar Express."

Since 1988, the Steam Railroading Institute has operated the North Pole Express, offering seasonal train rides pulled by the original Pere Marquette 1225 steam engine, fired up each year to make the journey from Owosso to Ashley, Michigan.

JOHN BIEHN'S STEAM NEWS, *Continued from Page 20*

Pere Marquette 1225, *Continued*

The Pere Marquette 1225 was built by the Lima Locomotive Works in 1941. It shuttled wartime freight between Detroit, Saginaw and Flint and northern Indiana steel mills until its retirement in 1951. The steam engine ended up in a scrap yard in New Buffalo until Forest Akers, a MSU trustee, campaigned for the engine to be donated to the university as a monument to the Age of Steam and as a subject of study for engineering students. The locomotive then became a silent show piece on campus, standing near Spartan Stadium from 1957 to 1985.

During this time, the locomotive could be admired on campus and in 1969, a group of MSU students formed the university's railroad club to preserve and restore the steam engine.

When Aarne Frobom enrolled at MSU, he already knew about the locomotive. Frobom was a model railroading hobbyist fascinated by old machines of all sorts. That fall, he attended a MSU railroad club meeting and signed on to the project of reviving the 1225. He hasn't stopped working on the locomotive since. That day, he met Randy Paquette and Steve Reeves, two former MSU students who still work on the North Pole Express trips to this day.

In 1979, the Michigan State Trust for Railway Preservation was formed to raise money to make the train operational again. Frobom recalls a favorite memory from 1980, when the fence around the engine was demolished in order to reconnect the track to the railroad spur that entered the campus. "With an earth mover, we moved the 1225 for the first time since 1957," says Frobom. "That's when we knew the engine would really be leaving the campus and returning to the railroad system."

Restoration continued in Owosso. The revitalized steam engine returned to the rails transporting passengers in 1988, when it made its first 17-mile trip between Owosso and St. Charles, operated by the Steam Railroading Institute.

Today, train enthusiasts and those celebrating the holiday season can climb aboard the train each November and December.

Departing from the Steam Railroading Institute in Owosso, the Pere Marquette 1225-renamed the North Pole Express-makes a four and a half hour round trip to the village of Ashley's Country Christmas, where carnival rides, photo opportunities and Santa Claus await visitors young and old.

Coming in at a length of over 100 feet and 400 tons in weight, Pere Marquette 1225's coal-powered engine runs at 3,000 horsepower and takes eight hours to fire up with a team of 10 to 15 people. It's a real labor of love. The Pere Marquette 1225 is a much loved train ride and a unique opportunity to experience a World War 2 era feat of engineering while celebrating the holiday season with loved ones.

(Thanks to Siska Lyssens and Deon Foster, Michigan State University)