



THE GATEWAY RAILLETTER

St. Louis Chapter NRHS --- www.stlouisnrhs.org

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BNSF ES44ACH 2026 at Topeka, Kansas with the Employee Appreciation Special on the evening of May 26, 2026. Along with BNSF 1776 (on the other end of the consist) it will depart the next afternoon with the 16 car train on the eleven stop, 8,000+ mile trip.

Photo by Rick Sprung

UPCOMING CHAPTER MEETING

Wednesday, August 5, 2026 7:00 pm
The National Museum of Transportation
Lindburg Automobile Center, 2nd Floor

President's Message

We are in need of 2-3 volunteers to serve on the Nominating Committee for Officer Elections. All officer positions are up for re-election every year. If anyone is interested in getting more involved in the Chapter, please consider running for an officer position. It is always good to have fresh ideas in the group.

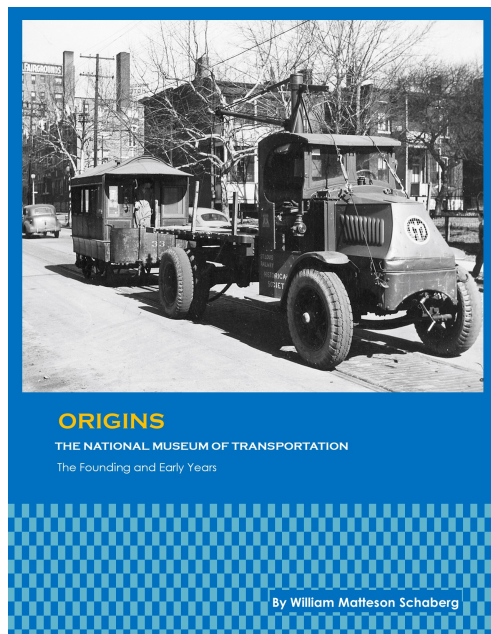
In Memoriam

Leo "Gary" Stoff, Jr., the attorney who provided much legal help with the St. Louis Chapter's sale of the coach *Silver Larch*, passed away at his home in South St. Louis on Saturday, July 11 after a two-year fight with cancer. Gary, a St. Louis native, was 81. He is survived by his wife Betsy, his three children, and numerous grandchildren.

Origins - The National Museum of Transportation

Longtime Chapter Member William Schaberg's new book on the Origins of the National Museum of Transportation which our Chapter helped fund is now available online and in the Museum's Gift Shop.

Proceeds benefit the Museum.

[Click Here to Order](#)

Union Pacific Big Boy 4014 Visits St. Louis

Union Pacific's 4-8-8-4 Big Boy steam locomotive 4014 paid a visit to St. Louis in July on its coast to coast tour. It arrived in town the afternoon of Saturday, July 18 and was on public display at the St. Louis Amtrak yard / St. Louis Union Station on Sunday the 19th. On Monday it continued on to overnight stops at Jefferson City, Kansas City and eventually Denver, including a short stop at the National Museum of Transportation in Kirkwood.



Union Pacific Big Boy 4014 is westbound leaving Pacific, Missouri on July 20 heading for Jefferson City, Kansas City and Denver. Photo by George Rees.



Above: 4014 on display behind St. Louis Union Station. The support cars were



parked on Amtrak / Union Station track while the diesel locos were on the Amtrak wye. Photo by Tony Marchiando

Left: UP Big Boy 4014 was posed beneath the Gateway Arch after arriving in St. Louis on July 18. Photo by Randy Allard.

26 Days on the BNSF Employee Appreciation Special

By Rick Sprung

All photos by the author

For almost 30 years the BNSF Railway has operated the Employee Appreciation Special – EAS for short. The train makes its way around the system, usually covering it all in about eight years. Covid-19, floods and other company decisions have altered that schedule, resulting in a few years being cancelled or shortened. The train travels between operations terminals and offers two-hour rides to employees, families and

their friends. There are usually two trips each day, and the train stays at a terminal anywhere from one to four days depending on how many employees are there.

I started working very part-time on the BNSF business cars in 2018, starting with the EAS and then picking up other business trips. The 2026 EAS was my sixth, and my 21st business car trip overall for BNSF. The EAS trips in 2020, 2021 and 2024 were canceled or altered to where they did not need part time workers.

The 2026 EAS started in Topeka, Kansas – home base to the BNSF business cars. Our schedule called for visits to eleven cities – Lincoln (2 days) and Alliance (2 days), Nebraska; Denver (1 day); Everett (1 day), Seattle (1 day), Auburn (2 days), Vancouver (2 days, 3 runs) and Pasco, Washington (1 day); Klamath Falls, Oregon (1 day of runs, 1 day off); and Stockton (1 day) and Fresno (1 day), California. After that it was a deadhead ride back to Topeka. We ran 29 individual EAS trips.

I arrived in Topeka the afternoon of Tuesday, May 26 and the 16-car train departed for Lincoln at 1:00 pm on Wednesday. Our power was two of BNSF's three specially painted ES44ACH locomotives honoring the country's 250th anniversary. Number 2026 was already on the consist at one end, while the 1776 was added to the other end that morning along with BNSF 8066 in the normal BNSF paint scheme. Since the two anniversary engines were new brand new, they wanted a backup locomotive at least for the first part of the trip. The funny part is that the 8066 had to be replaced by the 3336 as we were leaving Lincoln. Eventually we dropped the third locomotive in Auburn and went the rest of the way with the two commemorative engines.

Seven of the cars were used for the EAS trips - four "hightop" ex-bi-level commuter cars rebuilt to single level with large windows, one short and one full length dome, and a full lounge car. An eighth car, the business car *Missouri River*, was used when we needed its wheelchair lift. Additionally, we had two other business cars, a dining car, three crew sleepers and two power cars.

After 26 days and 8,171 miles we arrived back in Topeka at 8:30 am on Saturday, June 20th. I flew back to St. Louis that evening.

Below are photo highlights of the trip.



Our first stop was Lincoln, Nebraska where on our second day in town we had chapter member and former EAS crew member Judy Koepke on the train for lunch with the crew and to ride the afternoon trip. Here she joins me for a post trip photo.



Passengers enjoying the lounge car Valley View during a run out of Lincoln. This was the car that I worked on.



Crawford Hill was our destination for the four runs out of Alliance, Nebraska. The approximately 50 mile distance from the flat lands of Alliance to scenic Crawford meant a 3-hour 45-minute round trip.



Ready to board the afternoon run at Denver. The ramp is part of the wheelchair lift on the Missouri River.



Along the Clark Fork River at Perma, Idaho on the deadhead move to Auburn, Washington on June 3.



Entering the east portal of Cascade Tunnel on the way to Everett, Washington.



Engineer visors for everyone! We handed out these simple to assemble paper visors to passengers on every trip. Everett, Washington on June 5.



The EAS train parked at Stacy Yard in Seattle on June 6.



On the occasions when we would have a passenger in a wheelchair, or someone who could not get up the steps, we would use the wheelchair lift on the Missouri River. Usually the passenger and their party would ride in the lounge of the car, which had six chairs plus a table with eight seats, but most importantly it had a handicapped restroom. When that would happen I would work both my car, the Valley View, and this car. The two cars had adjoining vestibules. Here a family uses the lounge on June 7 during a trip out of Auburn, Washington.



Crossing the Columbia River at Pasco, Washington on the morning of June 12.



Meeting a northbound freight north of Klamath Falls on June 12.



BNSF rotary snow plow 972554 at Klamath Falls. The local BNSF people said it is rarely used, the last time probably eight or nine years ago.



Looking back at the train at Plumas, California on June 15, just a few miles north of the Keddie wye. We traveled through many, many miles of burned forest areas.



Traversing the Keddie wye trestle. A lengthy crew change made just north of the wye resulted in our train crossing the bridge while the sun was setting behind the mountain. As a result, half the bridge was in shadow for the flock of photographers that were waiting for us. Our arrival a few minutes earlier would have resulted in a perfect photo for them.



Climbing Tehachapi Pass on our way home. Engine 1776 was turned and moved to the head end at Fresno for the trip back to Topeka, since Engine 2026 was having Positive Train Control (PTC) problems.



The EAS crew on the last day at Fresno. Missing are one chef and one mechanical person, as well as the five full time BNSF business car employees who worked the first half of the trip. We usually had 16 to 18 crew on the train, depending if there were public relations people from Ft. Worth headquarters along. They would rotate on and off the train.

Parting Shots...

In July the Union Pacific was conducting a large scale tie replacement project on the former Chicago & North Western Shoreline Subdivision between Milwaukee and Sheboygan, Wisconsin. On July 13, 2026 your editor caught the ballast regulator working the line through Belgium, Wisconsin where the tie crew had completed their work the day before. In the upper photo the machine is about to work a section between the north siding switch at Belgium and the road crossing. Afterwards it started working on the line north of the crossing. The tie crew was working about a mile and a half up the track. Since the Belgium siding is the only double ended one remaining on the line, all the equipment was parked overnight on either the siding or main at Belgium. *Photos by Rick Sprung*





Minutes for the St Louis Chapter NRHS July Meeting

The president called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM at the National Museum of Transport.

New members and guests: Joe Sander, Steve Eckert and Mark Thien

A motion to approve the June 3 meeting minutes was made by Al Weber and seconded by Eileen Weber. The motion was approved.

OFFICER REPORTS:

VP Program Director - Andy Sisk: Our program will be on the history of railroads in Columbia, Illinois by Joe Sander. Andy is still looking for an August program.

VP Trip Director – Rick Sprung: No report.

VP Membership - Eileen Weber: Still accepting memberships. She has forms.

Treasurer – Steve Siegerist: We have money. See the treasurer's report. There was no Investment Committee report

Secretary – Bill Heger: No report.

National Advisory Committee Representative - Cliff Kierstead: No report was given.

Gateway Railletter Editor – Rick Sprung: He needs content. Articles and photos/graphics.

Internet Media Administrator – Steve Binning:Not present. Al Weber gave short report.

Librarian - Taylor Hunt: See the back table for current library offerings.

Parliamentarian - Ron Zimmer: No action by parliamentarian.

President - David Huelsing: No report given.

Old Business: None

New Business: None.

News Items:

Rick Sprung: Spoke about working on the BNSF Employee Appreciation Special in June. Chapter member Judy Koepke rode one of the runs at Lincoln, Nebraska. Rick handed out BNSF I Love Trains stickers.

Bill Heger: Lionel Club has officially merged with the Big Bend Model Railroad Club.

Eileen Weber: The NRHS attractions guide is out.

Al Weber: The trolley pole project was approved to get the street car tracks to the auto building.

Andy Sisk; July 24 and 25 the Collinsville convention center will host the prototype model convention. The Big Boy on July 21st will stop at the Museum of Transport. It will be a 20 minute stop. It is due at 10:00 AM.

Ron Zimmer: The Big Boy will stop to drop off a part at the Museum of the Transportation. The 50/50 was held.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 PM

Submitted by: Bill Heger, Secretary, St. Louis Chapter, National Railway Historical Society

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN CONTRIBUTING TO **THE GATEWAY RAILLETTER**, THE DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING CONTENT IS THE 20TH OF THE MONTH TO BE INCLUDED IN THE FOLLOWING MONTH'S ISSUE. **THE GATEWAY RAILLETTER** IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY ON OR BEFORE THE 25TH OF THE MONTH. SEND YOUR ARTICLE OR PHOTOS TO

NEWSLETTER.EXCHANGE@STLOUISNRHS.ORG.

PHOTOS MUST HAVE A CAPTION OR GENERAL DESCRIPTION. IMAGE FILES SHOULD BE jpg, gif, png, bmp or tif FORMAT. DOCUMENT FILES CAN BE doc, docx, or pdf.

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