

POTOMAC RAIL NEWS

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

AUGUST 2024



LIKE NEW! Armco 709 made its debut on July 31, following a decades-long restoration effort. (Photo Courtesy of Whitewater Valley via Railfan & Railroad)

PROGRAM: Noted photographer and former Director of Advertising for Trains Magazine Mike Yuhás will present a ZOOM program titled "A Look at Mid-Atlantic Railroading in the Mid-1980s." The program will include many images of Conrail trains along the former PRR Middle Division, CSX in the Philadelphia area, and CSX on scenic Sand Patch grade west of Cumberland, MD.

MEETING: VIA ZOOM: August 20, 2024 at 8PM. ZOOM LOGIN LINK ON PAGE 2.

NEXT MEETING DATE: SEPTEMBER 17, 2024

DEADLINE FOR SEPTEMBER ISSUE: August 28, 2024. Send news items to Clay Moritz, Editor, Potomac Rail News, at c.moritz@comcast.net

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

ADDRESS MEMBERSHIP INQUIRIES TO: Rick Davidson, Membership Agent, 2908 Breezy Terrace, Alexandria, VA 22303-2401
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THE CHAPTER FAMILY

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

ZOOM TOPIC: POTOMAC CHAPTER JULY MEMBERSHIP MEETING:

Time: AUGUST 20, 2024 08:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

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

Meeting ID: 816 7262 5788

Passcode: 547873

One tap mobile

+19292056099,,81672625788#,,,,*547873# US (New York)

+13017158592,,86741529997#,,,,*653332# US (Washington DC)

WITH DEEP SADNESS, we note the passing of Long-Time Potomac Chapter Member Edward A. "Ted" Ackley on January 6, 2024, at the Embrace Hospice House in Conway, South Carolina, after a brief illness at the age of 96. He was born in Colchester, Vermont, on August 7, 1927, and served in the U.S. Navy on the USS Huntington during World War II. After receiving a degree in Business Administration from Clarkson University, he was employed by the Aluminum Company of America for 14 years in Massena, New York. He retired from Fairchild Space and Defense in Germantown, Maryland in 1991 as a Human Resources Manager after 23 years of service. Ted had a very active retirement focusing on golf, bowling, and community service. He served as President on the Myrtle Trace Home-owners Association for two and a half years and was a Starter/Ranger at the Burning Ridge Golf Course for over 19 years. At the time of his death, Ted was serving as Editor of the News & Views, the Myrtle Trace community newsletter and Secretary for three bowling leagues at Myrtle Beach Bowl. He was inducted into the Grand Strand Bowling Hall of Fame in 2009 and the South Carolina Bowling Hall of Fame in 2022 for Meritorious Service.

The Potomac Chapter sends its Deepest Sympathy to Ted's wife of 57 years, Betty H. Ackley and their family. Please remember them in your Thoughts and Prayers.

WITH DEEP SADNESS, we note the passing of Potomac Chapter Charter Member Bill Hopkins on July 14, 2024, at the age of 89. Bill joined and served several years in the Marines. He later worked at The Washington Terminal Company, a corporation created in Washington, D.C., to provide support to railroads using Washington's Union Station. It is now a nearly wholly-owned subsidiary of Amtrak. It was established in 1901 by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the Pennsylvania Railroad-controlled Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington Railroad. The Washington Terminal Company owned and operated Union Station (opened in 1907) and about 5 miles of track in the Washington area, providing switching services for passenger trains using the station or passing through the area: Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, Pennsylvania Railroad, Chesapeake and Ohio Railway, Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad, Southern Railway, Atlantic Coast Line Railroad, Seaboard Air Line Railroad.

Ultimately, Bill was appointed on August 18, 1963, to the DC Fire Department's Engine Company 4 and retired on December 31, 1988 from Engine Company 18 at the rank of Captain.

Bill was an avid railfan and working shifts at the Fire House enabled him to

do some weekday railfan photography. His photographs were selected by the Potomac Chapter Calendar Committee to appear in the Chapter's all-color annual railroad calendar, which we published for around 17 years. He also was a long-time member of the Western Maryland Railway Historical Society, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Historical Society, the Chessie Division of Railroad Enthusiasts and its succeeding Chesapeake Railway Association. His photos graced the pages of a number of railroad historical societies' annual calendars, and at least one of the Western Maryland Railway Historical Society's calendars featured all photos by Bill.

Bill also provided railroad slide programs for NRHS chapter meetings and for railroad historical societies' annual conventions. He also wrote articles and provided photos for a number of railroad books and magazines.

Over the years, your editor has traveled with Bill to cut brush for photo specials, ride railroad photo charters, and attend railroad field trips, conventions, and monthly meetings. I was in awe of Bill's knowledge of railroad history and operations and all his recollections of the many railroad workers he had met and who became lifelong friends. Bill was never too busy to share his time, memories, and wisdom.

The Potomac Chapter extends our Deepest Sympathy to Bill's wife, Carolyn, and their family. Please remember them in your Thoughts and Prayers.

From the August 1, 2024, Washington Post: The members of the Retired Firefighters Association of Washington, DC regret to announce the passing of Life Member William "Bill" E. Hopkins on July 14, 2024, Brother Hopkins was appointed August 18, 1963 to Engine Company 4 and retired on December 31, 1988 from Engine Company 18 at the rank of Captain.

WITH DEEP SADNESS, we note the passing of Potomac Chapter Charter Member Rudy Volin, who passed away on July 17, 2024, from complications due to Covid. He was born August 14, 1928, and passed away a few weeks before he would have turned 96.

Rudy was married to Ann Ruth for 68 years, they had a son and a daughter, several grandchildren and great grandchildren.

During our October 15, 2022, Potomac Chapter banquet Celebrating our 50th Anniversary (our 50th Anniversary was actually in 2022, but we did not have a banquet due to COVID), NRHS President Tony White presented Rudy with a certificate honoring his 75 Year Membership in the NRHS.

Rudy had a deep interest in trains and railroading and enjoyed traveling to distant places to observe and photograph interesting railroad operations. He liked presenting programs from his travels at NRHS meetings, which were most interesting and well received. He also submitted for publication in Potomac Rail



During the Potomac Chapter 50th Anniversary Banquet on October 15, 2022, Rudy Volin (seated) shook hands with Bill Hopkins while Wayne Sherwin looks on. (Photo by: Thomas A. Panfil)

News a number of articles that he wrote about his and Ann Ruth's trips abroad describing their train travels.

Rudy was a mechanical engineer, first earning his Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering at George Washington University, then a Master's Degree in the same field at Columbia University. He used his talents working on a wide variety of projects at several U.S. Navy research facilities for most of his career.

Rudy was also quite a joke teller and joined the Leisure World Comedy Club where he and Ann Ruth resided. He was a frequent performer at the club, and the audiences were reportedly pleased with his performances.

Graveside services were held on Tuesday, July 23 at Judean Memorial Gardens Olney, MD. Rudy's 75 Year Membership Pin was given to his family after his funeral service on July 23, 2024.

RAIL NEWS

INDIANA TOURIST RAILROAD RESTORES RARE LIMA-HAMILTON SWITCHER. The Whitewater Valley Railroad completed a decades-long restoration effort of a rare Lima-Hamilton LS-1000 locomotive this summer. Armco Steel Corporation 709 made its public debut on July 31, during a private photo charter, and then led excursions on August 3 and 4.

Armco 709 served a steel plant in Ohio for most of its working life before being donated to Whitewater Valley in 1987. The locomotive saw limited service until 1989 when it was sidelined with mechanical issues. Restoration efforts were sporadic over the next decade but began again in earnest in 2015. The newly-restored locomotive joins the former Cincinnati Union Terminal 25, as the only two operational Lima-Hamilton switchers. For more information, [visit the railroad's website](#). (Railfan & Railroad)

MARC AND VIRGINIA RAILWAY EXPRESS CROSS-HONOR PROGRAM ADVANCES REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY. On August 8th, The Maryland Department of Transportation Maryland Transit Administration and Virginia Railway Express celebrated a new collaborative agreement that will enhance commuter connectivity and efficiency across the region. Effective immediately, passengers with a weekly, monthly, or 10-trip ticket purchased on the MARC or VRE system to Union Station can utilize that ticket to transfer to the other system (MARC to VRE or VRE to MARC) to continue their trip at no additional cost.

The cross-honor program enables travelers to seamlessly transfer between MARC and VRE trains on one ticket, simplifying travel logistics and promoting greater accessibility and affordability for the region's commuters. It also underscores the commitment of Virginia, Washington D.C. and Maryland to prioritize the needs of commuters and shape the future of regional mobility.

"This lays the groundwork for future efforts to better align MARC and VRE operations, which is consistent with our long-range plan to grow VRE from a peak-period, commuter-focused rail service to an all-day, bi-directional transit system that can better meet the transportation needs of a growing region", said VRE CEO Rich Dalton. (Maryland DOT Maryland Transit Administration)

UNION PACIFIC STEAM CLUB UPDATE NO. 35 - AUGUST 12, 2024. "Heartland of America" Big Boy No. 4014 Tour Schedule Released. We know you're excited and so are we to announce more details for the upcoming "Heartland of America" Tour.

Big Boy No. 4014's tour will start Wednesday, August 28 in Cheyenne, Wyoming, and pass through nine states: Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Texas.

The eight-week tour concludes in late October. Scheduled Display Days: Sunday, Sept. 8: Rochelle, Illinois (Chicago metro area); Sunday, October 6: Houston, Texas, Thursday/Friday; October 10-11: Fort Worth, Texas.

More than three dozen additional whistle-stops in communities across our network are also scheduled. Due to the length of this tour, there is an extended servicing stop in late September lasting two weeks. You can view the entire steam schedule online at www.UPsteam.com.

Big Boy Cab Ride Auction! The Union Pacific Railroad Museum is thrilled to offer rail fans a rare opportunity to ride in the cab of the world's largest operating steam locomotive - Union Pacific's Big Boy No. 4014.

Four spots inside the locomotive will be placed up for auction August 12, with all proceeds benefiting two worthy causes: the Union Pacific Museum Association and Union Pacific's Friend-to-Friend Network, a nonprofit operated by current and retired employees that assists railroad families in times of need, such as medical or natural disaster hardships.

The lucky winners will ride in early September during Big Boy's planned Heartland of America tour: two riders in the cab on September 2 inbound into Omaha, Nebraska, and two riders in the cab September 4 in Iowa. The rides will be approximately 1.5 hours in duration and riders will have to be 18 years of age or older, among other requirements. Each spot will be auctioned separately. The auction will run for approximately 7 days, starting August 12 at 10 a.m. CT and ending August 19 in a live auction event at 7 p.m. CT. Details can be found at www.rarauctions.com/upm !

Order Your Big Boy Merchandise! Remember, order your t-shirts, hats and hoodies online so you are properly outfitted when the Big Boy comes to your town! You can check out the new 2024 merchandise exclusively at the Official www.UnionPacificStore.com website! If you are able to join us at our Rochelle, Houston or Fort Worth display days, you'll be able to purchase calendars with a special limited-edition poster on-site and pre-order your 2025 calendar. Can you guess which month will feature a Big Boy photo?

A Safety Reminder! Union Pacific reminds all rail fans to keep safety top of mind and stay 25 feet back from all railroad tracks when taking a picture or viewing this mammoth machine. That means never take a picture or video with the camera on the track or the ballast and never climb on the locomotive or equipment. Remember, railroad tracks, trestles, yards and right-of-way are private property - do not trespass. If you are following the Big Boy, be a safe and courteous driver - do not pace the train.

Drone Safety: Drones have the capability to take some amazing photos and videos of the Big Boy, capturing both the locomotive and the surrounding terrain. But if the drone is flying too close, the terrain doesn't get captured. Even more importantly, it's a safety issue. During the "Westward Bound" tour, a drone crash-landed on top of the train. Fortunately, no one was injured, but it's an important reminder that the 25-foot rule applies to ALL cameras, whether they are a drone or placed on the railroad right-of-way by an over-enthusiastic fan.

If you are flying a drone, keep the drone at least 25 feet back from the railroad tracks at all times. Drone operators should also familiarize themselves with the FAA's rules on operating unmanned aircraft systems over people.

That's all for now. Until next time, stay safe! Union Pacific Steam Club

BNSF SUED FOR TRESPASSING ON TRIBAL LANDS. BNSF Railway must pay nearly \$400 million to a Native American tribe in Washington State after a Federal judge ruled that the railroad intentionally trespassed on tribal land when it repeatedly ran 100-car oil trains.

In 1991, an easement with the Swinomish Tribe north of Seattle stipulated that then-operator Burlington Northern not move more than 25 cars per day across tribal land. Then the oil train boom of the 2010s came and traffic skyrocketed in the area. The Tribe sued the railroad for trespassing and last year it won in court. In June, a judge ruled that the railroad owed the Tribe about \$400 million, an estimation of how much it made moving the oil across tribal land. The railroad has declined to comment on the case as this issue went to print. (Railfan & Railroad)

VIRGINIA PASSENGER EXPANSION. NS and the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA) have entered into preliminary discussions for VPRA to purchase the north end of NS's Washington District (former Southern main line) from Manassas to Alexandria. The purchase of the Manassas Line would allow for additional commuter train frequencies, including evening and weekend service, over the line between Washington Union Station and the current southern terminus in Broad Run. Farther west, NS and VPRA are discussing an option to extend passenger service from Roanoke to Christiansburg over the former N&W main line (NS' Christiansburg District or "N-Line"). In 2022, VPRA had entered into an agreement with NS to expand service into Christiansburg and the New River Valley using the former Virginian main line (NS' Whitethorne District or "V-Line"). After further examination and public feedback, VPRA now believes that the N-Line route would be a less costly and more quickly implemented option than the V-Line acquisition. The results of that evaluation and a recommended path forward will be presented to the VPRA Board at their August meeting. (Railfan & Railroad)

NORFOLK & WESTERN 611 WON'T RUN IN 2024. By Justin Franz Source: Railfan and Railroad Magazine. Months after a successful series of excursions on Virginia's Buckingham Branch Railroad, Norfolk & Western Class J 4-8-4 611 will not run in 2024 thanks to needed maintenance work on the locomotive and turmoil within the Virginia Museum of Transportation's Board of Directors.

In June, six board members, some of whom were involved with the operation of N&W 611, suddenly resigned. In-depth reporting by the Roanoke Rambler revealed that disagreement about how to operate and manage the steam locomotive was at the core of the dispute. The safety of the Museum's steam operations was also brought up by at least one member, Brian Barton.

"I do not feel that the VMT is in a financial position to continue to maintain and operate the 611 without very strict financial oversight and

compliance," Barton's resignation letter stated. "I also have serious concerns regarding safety within the 611 program, particularly in the areas of on-track safety, consistent locomotive airbrake tests, outline qualifications for certain positions, and background screening of all volunteers."

Another board member, Tom Cox, told the media that he was unaware of any safety issues regarding N&W 611. Cox also told the newspaper that the resignations that sparked the turmoil were a surprise to the rest of the board. "It appeared more like an ambush," he said.

In an emailed statement to Railfan & Railroad, Executive Director Mendy Flynn confirmed that N&W 611 would not run in 2024, but that the Museum was exploring opportunities in the future. "We do not have time to prepare for a 2024 season," she wrote. "We are always actively looking for opportunities to run the locomotive. We hope to have it operate in 2025."

Flynn attributed the decision to not run this year to the fact that N&W 611 needs "normal" maintenance. That work is expected to begin in September. While the locomotive will not repeat its successful visit to the Buckingham Branch this year, Flynn said it was still a possibility in the future.

The board members who resigned also raised concerns about the Museum's finances and how the non-profit kept its books. Among their complaints was how the Museum recorded losses and profits from last year's excursions, which brought in \$1 million in ticket sales. The Museum says they lost about \$9,000. But the outgoing board members said the trips actually netted the Museum about \$200,000. They allege that the Museum categorized an excess of merchandise expenses to the excursions. The outgoing board members have said an outside entity should come in and do a financial audit of the Museum.

Bev Fitzpatrick, long-time Executive Director of VMT, said he was sad to see what was happening to the Museum he led for 11 years.

"It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that there's a lot of issues right now that shouldn't be there. And they need to get them fixed," he said.

According to VMT, 13 people remain on the board of directors, including Ted Krumreich who joined in June. Krumreich is a member of 611's crew.

NEW VIRGINIA-NORTH CAROLINA INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL LINE STARTS CONSTRUCTION.

U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper and other officials broke ground the first week in July in Raleigh, North Carolina, on construction of a new passenger rail line along an existing freight rail corridor between Raleigh and Richmond, Virginia.

Virginia purchased 75 miles of the right-of-way from CSX in 2020. North Carolina is in the final stages of completing the acquisition of its portion of the corridor, known as the S-Line. The states have not set a date for when trains could begin running along the line.

Portions of the route will allow train speeds of up to 110 mph, potentially saving more than an hour of travel time between the two cities, according to the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

Richmond and Raleigh are among the five busiest train stations in the Southeast, the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority said in a February 28 press release. The S-Line project is among the two states' ambitious plans to expand intercity passenger rail. Last December, the U.S. Department of Transportation

awarded grants to the North Carolina DOT from the Federal Corridor Identification and Development Program for seven corridors. Three radiate out from Charlotte, three from Raleigh, and one would connect Asheville and Salisbury, North Carolina. Portions of the S-Line will need to be rebuilt where track has been removed.

Virginia's agreement with CSX allows higher-speed passenger trains where freight operations are not currently running, McLaughlin said. That would primarily be in the Petersburg, Virginia, area and across the state line to Ridgeway, North Carolina, he said. Once Amtrak's new Airo train sets go into service, which is scheduled for 2026, McLaughlin said the trains could run faster and cleaner and save time compared with older Amtrak trains.

VPRA is also looking at where it could straighten portions of the route to allow higher speeds without impacting local homeowners. "If we can straighten and go faster, we will," McLaughlin said.

The North Carolina DOT received a nearly \$1.1 billion grant for the S-Line project. Amtrak and NC DOT will contribute an additional 20% in matching funds. (Smartcities)

AMTRAK'S NEW ORLEANS-TO-MOBILE RAIL LINE CLEARS FINAL CONSTRUCTION HURDLE.

Construction of a key Amtrak station in downtown Mobile, Alabama, will begin after the project received its final stamp of approval from city council members on August 5th, marking a major step forward for the return of passenger rail along the Gulf Coast.

Mobile council members approved a three-year, \$3 million funding agreement to construct and operate a new Amtrak platform downtown. The deal includes funding from the city and the Alabama Port Authority and sets the stage for utility relocation work to immediately begin.

Other cities along the route, including New Orleans, have already agreed to host the line, which has been offline since Hurricane Katrina. Mobile's decision is the final piece in a puzzle for the route's revamp, said Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson. "We believe it's a win-win, win-win situation," Stimpson said. "We look forward to the day that Mobilians can go to New Orleans on the train and that New Orleans can come to Mobile." Once it's up and running, Amtrak will operate twice-daily service between the two cities. It will include stops in Biloxi, Gulfport, Pascagoula and Bay St. Louis.

Amtrak hopes to have the route online in time for the Super Bowl in February 2025, but that's dependent on city permitting and construction schedules, said Knox Ross, Chairman of the Southern Rail Commission.

"There are still unknowns as far as the construction part of it goes," Ross said. "But this opens up a whole new tourism market for New Orleans and the Mississippi Coast."

Proponents believe the train will bring hundreds of millions of dollars in new tourism spending annually, and will create 45 full-time train operating jobs in Louisiana. But critics, including several Mobile city council members, have voiced concerns about the rail line's long-term financial sustainability.

As part of the August 5th agreement, the city put an expiration date on its financial support. That means rail proponents will still need to find a long-term funding source after the initial three years. "The city accepts no

responsibility for funding the line after the first three years," said Mobile Councilman Joel Daves. "If the proponents of the rail service want it to continue after that time, they're going to have to go to someone else for the money."

The New Orleans-Mobile connection comes as advocates hope to expand passenger rail throughout the Gulf South region. Louisiana's Department of Transportation and Development is currently studying the feasibility of adding passenger rail between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. New Orleans' Louis Armstrong International Airport is also working with the Federal Railroad Administration to add an Amtrak stop. That route is still years away, said Ross, but the pieces are coming together. "That one is not as real as Mobile to New Orleans, but there's a lot of work being done," Ross said. (WWNO - New Orleans Public Radio)

GATEWAY DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION SECURES FULL FUNDING TO BUILD HUDSON RIVER TUNNEL AND REHABILITATE EXISTING NORTH RIVER TUNNEL. The Gateway Development Commission (GDC) has received \$12 billion in Federal funding to build the Hudson River Tunnel and rehabilitate the existing North River Tunnel. The \$12 billion in funding adds to the \$4 billion in funding GDC already had committed for the project, bringing the total amount of funding to \$16 billion.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has signed a Full Funding Grant Agreement through the Capital Investment Grants program with the GDC that will allow the FTA to invest close to \$6.9 billion in the project, representing the largest grant ever signed by FTA.

In addition to the \$6.9 billion from the FTA, U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) Secretary Pete Buttigieg also approved three Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing loans through USDOT's Build America Bureau, totaling \$4.1 billion, which will provide financial support at below-market interest rates.

Other sources of USDOT support for the project include:

- \$3.8 billion through the Federal Railroad Administration's Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Program for the Northeast Corridor Program.
- \$1 billion through Amtrak annual grant funding.
- \$25 million through USDOT's 2023 Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program for the Tonnelles Avenue Bridge Project.
- \$292.1 million through USDOT's 2022 MEGA Grant program for the Hudson Yard Concrete Casing Phase 3 project.

The total \$16 billion cost of the project will be split 70/30 between USDOT and the project's local partners, which include New York, New Jersey and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ). The arrangement saves the local partners billions of dollars compared to the original plan to split the project costs 50/50.

"For decades, Americans watched one of the most heavily-used train tunnels in the hemisphere deteriorate and become a bottleneck that affected travelers from New England to the Mid-Atlantic and beyond," Buttigieg said. Using funds from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), we are building a new tunnel that improves train travel for millions of Americans and revitalizes a rail corridor that is essential to so much of the nation's economy and as one of the cathedrals

that is essential to so much of the nation's economy and as one of the cathedrals of American infrastructure, this project can demonstrate America's capacity to build big things together in the 21st Century." "Today the Biden-Harris Administration and USDOT are delivering on a promise to the riders of New York, New Jersey and along the entire Northeast Corridor to invest \$11.7 billion in the Gateway Project, and an additional \$4.1 billion in Federal loans," said USDOT Deputy Secretary Polly Trottenberg. "Today represents a major milestone in a years-long effort to build a new Hudson River crossing that has included USDOT, Congress, two states, Amtrak, the Port Authority, local officials, labor partners and more. Together, we are investing in a project that will continue to move Americans forward and contribute to the economic vitality of the nation."

The Hudson Tunnel Project encompasses a range of components, including a new double-track tunnel between the Bergen Palisades in New Jersey and Manhattan in New York City, rehabilitating the North River Tunnel damaged by Superstorm Sandy in 2012 and creating a concrete casing at Hudson Yards to allow the new tunnel to connect to New York-Penn Station.

"It is important to realize that as we improve New Jersey Transit and Amtrak service in and out of Manhattan, we will improve train and transit service for a region that impacts more than 20% of the nation's economy," said FTA Acting Administrator Veronica Vanterpool.

With the funding secured, GDC can now move forward with heavy construction and tunnel boring activity. Heavy construction will begin in the coming weeks with the Hudson River Ground Stabilization Project, which will stabilize the riverbed on the Manhattan side of the Hudson River to enable the Tunnel Boring Machines (TBM) to excavate the new tunnel.

By the end of 2024, GDC will have awarded contracts for more than \$5 billion in construction activity, including contracts to build sections of the tunnel passing through the Palisades in New Jersey and going through the Manhattan bulkhead under the Hudson River Park and will have ordered the first TBM.

As the main artery of our nation's economy continues to be pushed to its limits, we are now one step closer to transforming the 100-year-old infrastructure under the Hudson River." When the new tunnel and the rehabilitated tunnel open, which is estimated to happen by 2038, the project will provide four modern rail tunnels for Amtrak and New Jersey Transit trains. In addition, the project will provide the capability to significantly expand capacity in the future.

USDOT says additional project benefits include building resiliency and safeguarding rail operations against future extreme weather events, managing floods on both sides of the Hudson River and creating a safer environment for first responders, maintenance workers and the public, especially in the event of an evacuation. (Mass Transit Magazine)

ONLY A QUARTER OF THESE TRAINS ARE ON-TIME AND THE DOJ SAYS IT'S ILLEGAL. A private rail company is illegally holding up Amtrak trains on a line that runs from New York to New Orleans, according to a lawsuit filed by the U.S. Justice Department on July 30th in Federal court in D.C., the first of its kind in 55 years.

Norfolk Southern (NS) controls all but about 240 miles of the 1,377-mile line, called the Crescent Route, and is in charge of dispatching both freight and

passenger trains. Federal law requires the company to give Amtrak trains preference. But according to the lawsuit, NS has instead held up passengers, sometimes for hours, to allow its longer and slower-moving freight trains to pass. Only about 24% of Amtrak trains on the route arrive on-time, according to the lawsuit and audits conducted by the Amtrak Office of Inspector General.

Delays cost Amtrak millions of dollars; along with reducing ridership, they cause problems with crew and train car allocation. A 2019 audit found that only about 46% of long-distance Amtrak trains arrive on-time and that freight railroads were responsible for about 60% of the delays. Most of the track owned by Amtrak is on the Northeast Corridor, where performance is much better.

In a statement, Norfolk Southern spokesman Tom Crosson said the company is "committed to complying with the law, working together, and honoring our commitments," adding that delays have been reduced in recent months.

The Crescent runs twice daily, once north toward New York and once south toward New Orleans. The train passes through Maryland, D.C. and Virginia; it's south of Alexandria that NS takes over the rails.

About 272,000 passengers traveled on the Crescent Route in 2023, according to Amtrak, about average for a long-distance train.

When Amtrak was created in 1970, railroad companies were no longer required to provide passenger service around the United States. But in exchange, they had to contract with Amtrak and give its passenger trains priority on their rail lines. Amtrak has repeatedly accused the rail companies of flouting that law, saying violations lead to roughly 15,000 hours of delays per year.

Most of the delays occur south of Atlanta, the Justice Department said, where trains are running on a single track and NS chooses freight maintenance over passenger speed. NS, a Virginia corporation headquartered in Atlanta, runs freight trains that are too long to pull over and let Amtrak trains pass.

In January, an Amtrak train was forced to follow behind a slow-moving NS freight train for several miles just outside New Orleans, causing a nearly hour-long delay, the lawsuit said. In February, a Crescent train was delayed for 80 minutes outside Atlanta because a freight train was blocking access to the station platform, according to the suit. One delay last year was nearly two hours, with passengers waiting for a freight train to be refueled in Mississippi.

Amtrak customers have been "subjected to unacceptable, unnecessary, and unlawful delays," U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said in a statement, calling compliance with the 1973 law giving passenger trains priority "uneven at best."

Only once before has the Justice Department used a suit to enforce the law — in 1979, over the Sunset Limited route from New Orleans to Los Angeles. "This critical action by the DOJ will help ensure our customers arrive at their destinations on time," Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner said in a statement. Amtrak has gotten a major infusion of money under President Biden, who used to commute to Washington by train. But its ability to expand is limited because the vast majority of the country's rail tracks are owned by private freight railroads. NS was also sued by the Justice Department last year over the massive environmental damage caused by a derailment of one of its freight trains in East Palestine, OH. That suit was settled for roughly \$310 million. (Washington Post)

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

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FIRST CLASS