

# POTOMAC RAIL NEWS

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

NOVEMBER 2023



**FALL FOLIAGE & STEAM!** N&W Class J 4-8-4 No 611 powers the Shenandoah Valley Limited as it departs the Goshen, Virginia, yard on November 3, 2023. Photo by: Alex Mayes (more on page 2)

**PROGRAM.** Of all the great streamliners of the 1940s and 1950s only one remains in service, the Canadian. The Canadian survived a recent scare concerning its mechanical viability and continues twice a week operation across Canada. Ira Silverman will present a brief history of its service and offer a selection of images he has taken over the past seven decades.

**MEETING VIA ZOOM:** November 21, 2023. 8PM. ZOOM LOGIN LINK ON PAGE 2.

**NEXT MEETING DATE:** MONDAY December 18, 2023 DECEMBER SOCIAL

**DEADLINE FOR DECEMBER ISSUE:** November 30, 2023. Send news items to Clay Moritz, Editor, Potomac Rail News, at [c.moritz@comcast.net](mailto: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 [rdavidsonjr2908@gmail.com](mailto:rdavidsonjr2908@gmail.com)

**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](mailto:c.moritz@comcast.net)

**ZOOM TOPIC: POTOMAC CHAPTER SEPTEMBER MEMBERSHIP MEETING:**

Time: Nov. 21, 2023 08:00PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

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

Meeting ID: 816 7262 5788

Passcode: 547873

One tap mobile

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POTOMAC CHAPTER DECEMBER SOCIAL will be held on MONDAY, December 18 in the Montgomery County Executive Office Building's Cafeteria.

**RAIL NEWS**

THIS MONTH'S COVER PHOTO OF THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY LIMITED. (From Alex Mayes)

With an unexpected last-minute change in the weather forecast I decided to head west to photograph the first series of excursions powered by ex-N&W 611 between Staunton and Goshen, Virginia. These trips ran on the Buckingham Branch's former CSX North Mountain Subdivision, and previous to this it was C&O's Mountain Subdivision.

These trips were jointly sponsored by The Virginia Museum of Transportation, Inc. (VMT) and the Virginia Scenic Railway. The first set of trips ran on October 6-8, four additional sets were scheduled every weekend through November 3-5, for a total of 30 steam excursions. Two trains ran each day, the first departing Goshen at 9:00AM and the second at 2:00PM. The 611 was on the lead heading eastbound with no diesels, a pair of Buckingham Branch diesels powered the trains back to Goshen with the 611 coupled to the rear since there are no turning facilities on this line. I chased all three days. The weather was mostly cloudy on Friday and Sunday, but clear most of the day on Saturday.

With a sunny forecast for last weekend I decided to head back to the Shenandoah Valley to chase the 611 trips on their last weekend. Due to time constraints I was able to chase only the Friday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, excursion, but with great lighting and cold temperatures the trip was worth the effort. (This month's cover photo is from Alex's November 3<sup>rd</sup> trip.)

During the series of weekend excursions there was this post on the 611 Facebook page: October 27, 2023, To Our Valued Guests and Rail Family: Due to an unforeseen mechanical issue, the Virginia Museum of Transportation, Inc. and Virginia Scenic Railway regrettably announce the necessary substitution of motive power for this weekend's remaining Shenandoah Valley Limited excursions.

Diesel locomotives will be utilized to operate Saturday and Sunday's excursions, which will continue to depart from Victoria Station on their planned

operating schedule. 611 will remain accessible to guests on static display throughout the weekend.

The Virginia Museum of Transportation, along with Virginia Scenic Railway, remains committed to offering you the best possible experience during your excursion. Please contact us with any questions or concerns at [611limited@gmail.com](mailto:611limited@gmail.com).

Following this was an update announcement. Updated this morning: It's with great honor and pleasure that we can announce that 611 has been repaired and will be back pulling the "Shenandoah Valley Limited" excursions on the Virginia Scenic Railway! We cannot thank our locomotive crew (repairing the 611 in less than 24 hours), volunteers, and staff enough for all of their hard work around the clock in getting the locomotive back in service.

We would also like to extend enormous amounts of thanks to all of our passengers, donors, supporters and fans of the 611/Virginia Museum of Transportation for their cooperation and patience while the 611 was being repaired.

From Trains News Wire on October 31, 2023: Flexible staybolt repair made on N&W No. 611 during the weekend. J-class 4-8-4 sidelined for October 28 excursion, returns to service the following day. GOSHEN, VA, – Norfolk & Western steam locomotive No. 611 was sidelined during the Saturday, Oct. 28, Shenandoah Valley Limited with diesels of the Buckingham Branch Railroad serving as substitutes for the round trips between Goshen and Staunton, VA. The J-class 4-8-4 returned to service the following day to wrap up the fourth weekend of fall excursions along the short line, a partnership between Roanoke's Virginia Museum of Transportation and the Virginia Scenic Railway – the owner of the locomotive and excursion operator for the railroad, respectively.

In an Oct. 31 post on the Norfolk & Western Class J No. 611 Facebook page, the crew discovered a problem with a flexible staybolt inside the firebox when banking the locomotive late Friday night. "Some of the staybolts are flexible and some are not," as explained in the post. "One end is threaded and attached rigidly to the inside of the firebox, while the other end of the bolt contains a ball head, which fits into a bowl sleeve and welded to the other firebox sheet.

"When a fire is built in the firebox, the inner sheet tends to expand more than the outer sheet. The 'ball and socket' arrangement to the staybolts permits the bolts to move slightly, taking care of this expansion – and contraction when the firebox cools. And sometimes staybolts crack or break unexpectedly."

The initial plan was to sideline No. 611 for the remainder of the weekend to let it cool off before the crew could access the firebox. According to the post, the locomotive was cool enough by Saturday morning for Chief Mechanical Officer Scott Lindsay and his team to have a replacement at the ready. The fire was lit again in the evening, less than 24 hours after the discovery. "Many of the crew members were around for the restoration in the 1980s and in 2014-2015," the post states. "Others have worked on some of the most storied steam locomotives in the United States. "Their skills aren't miraculous; they are hard-earned."

No. 611 concluded the weekend on a strong note as it operated flawlessly on Sunday, as reported by Zac McGinnis, social media coordinator and member of the engine crew for the locomotive. The final [sold-out] Shenandoah Valley Limited excursions for the 2023 season took place Nov. 3-5, with the locomotive and train receiving routine inspections and servicing during the week.

The 611 arrived home to the Virginia Museum of Transportation in Roanoke the night of November 7<sup>th</sup>, according to WDBJ. VMT Museum officials say 20,000 passengers and spectators traveled to the Shenandoah Valley to see the train. The 611 will be on display in the Museum through winter.

WORLD'S LARGEST STEAM LOCOMOTIVE 'BIG BOY NO. 4014' PREPARING FOR 'FOUR CORNERS' 2024 TOUR. Union Pacific's Big Boy No. 4014 steam locomotive will return to the



rails in 2024 for a tour celebrating the railroad's deep history and connection to communities, and its employees. The tour is expected to reach all four corners of Union Pacific's 23-state system with anticipated stops in: •Chicago, Illinois •Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas •Houston, Texas •Nampa, Idaho •Portland, Oregon •Roseville, California •Salt Lake City, Utah

"As we move forward at Union Pacific, we remember where we came from; the Big Boy represents the history of Union Pacific and the United States," said Union Pacific CEO Jim Vena. "When No. 4014 comes to town, we will celebrate with the communities where we operate, our employees and their families. Together, we will marvel at how far technology has brought us."

No. 4014 is the only Big Boy in operation today. Weighing in at 1.1 million pounds, it was restored in 2019 to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the transcontinental railroad's completion. Twenty-five Big Boy locomotives were built for Union Pacific to haul heavy freight during World War II, but only eight still exist. The other seven are on display around the United States.

Tour dates and route information will be released in 2024. In addition to public stops, UP employees and their families will be invited along the route.

When the Big Boy goes on tour, many people race to find a prime spot to take photos or put coins on the track. Union Pacific reminds everyone to keep safety top of mind, always stay 25-feet back, and refrain from putting anything on the rails.

The statements and information contained in the news releases provided by UP speak only as of the date issued. Such information by its nature may become outdated, and investors should not assume that the statements and information contained in UP's news releases remain current after the date issued. UP makes no commitment, and disclaims any duty, to update any of this information. More information about Union Pacific is available at [www.up.com](http://www.up.com). (UP Press Release)

READING T-1 NO. 2100 WILL DEBUT IN FREEDOM TRAIN PAINT SCHEME. The group restoring Reading Co. T-1 4-8-4 No. 2100 has announced the locomotive will wear an American Freedom Train paint scheme nearly identical to that worn by another T-1, No. 2101, during the 1975-76 Freedom Train tour.

"Our initial plan was to debut the 2100 in the original black Reading freight scheme, and then apply the AFT scheme as we drew closer to 2026 [and the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the U.S.]," Rob Gardner, President of the American Steam Railroad Preservation Association, or ASR, said in a November 1<sup>st</sup> press release group's Facebook page.

"However, with ASR working towards the goal of having the restoration completed by the end of 2024 and break-in running occurring in the spring of 2025, it didn't make sense to have the Reading scheme paint job applied for only one year, and then to completely redo it for America's 250<sup>th</sup> Celebration in 2026."

While No. 2100 was not part of the Freedom Train, T-1 No. 2101 was one of the three steam locomotives that powered the train during its two-year bicentennial tour. That locomotive, damaged in a 1979 fire, is now at the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum, which recently announced it would undergo cosmetic restoration to its appearance as Freedom Train locomotive No. 1 in time for the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration [see "B&O Railroad Museum schedules move of American Freedom Train locomotive," Oct. 19, 2023].

Gardner said the main changes planned by ASR as part of its adoption of the Freedom Train paint scheme is to have the locomotive carry No. 250 on its number plate and number boards. "We thought it fitting, especially given the announcement from the B&O Railroad Museum that AFT 1 will be receiving a full cosmetic restoration, that AFT 1 remain with ex-Reading T-1 Mo. 2101," Gardner said, "with the 2100 carrying on the T-1 AFT legacy as AFT 250 for 2025-2026 and possibly beyond."

ASR Treasurer Forrest Nance said the key to the nonprofit group's AFT No. 250 plan is raising the final necessary funding. "While we have achieved many significant milestones in 2023, \$170,000 is still needed so we can continue non-stop throughout 2024," Nance said. "We have our professional contractors and parts suppliers all waiting for us to say we have the funds on hand so they can begin the work and ship the items needed, with our volunteers continuing to perform tasks such as cleaning the tender's cistern and reinstalling the oil bunker to stay on schedule."

Those wishing to contribute to the project can make tax-deductible contributions at the ASR website, [www.americansteamrailroad.org](http://www.americansteamrailroad.org) or by mail to American Steam Railroad Preservation Association, 2800 W. 3rd St., Cleveland, OH 44113. (Trains News Wire)

**BLET ASKS FRA TO SET MAXIMUM TRAIN LENGTH FOR CLASS IS.** Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) National President Eddie Hall is calling on the Federal Railroad Administration to set a maximum train length of 7,500 feet for the nation's Class Is.

In an October 9<sup>th</sup> letter to FRA Administrator Amit Bose, Hall said that 5-mile-long trains recently have been put into operation. Hall wrote that the FRA's April 11 safety advisory, which instructed Class Is to reexamine train length, doesn't go far enough. Hall asked the FRA to implement a train-length maximum by emergency order. Train size and length have been cited in recent derailments in Alabama, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, he wrote. Carriers have lengthened trains "without training engineers to handle these monstrous trains properly," his letter stated.

Class Is have implemented longer trains without considering the impact on passing sidings, grade crossings, cross-over switches and proximity to schools and hospitals, Hall added. "This was never an issue with trains within the 7,500-foot length," Hall wrote. "Best practices and operating techniques have been developed over decades for train crews to rely on to operate the 'normal' sized trains safely. Now, very long trains are the 'new normal.'" (Progressive Railroading)

**FRA REQUIRING LOCOMOTIVE IMAGE AND AUDIO RECORDING DEVICES FOR PASSENGER TRAINS.** The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) on October 12<sup>th</sup> announced that it is requiring the installation of inward- and outward-facing locomotive image recording devices on all lead locomotives in passenger trains, as required by the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act.

According to FRA, the final rule, which is effective November 13, 2023, "requires that these devices record while a lead locomotive is in motion and retain the data in a crash-worthy memory module; treats locomotive-mounted recording devices on passenger locomotives as 'safety devices' under existing Federal railroad safety regulations to prohibit tampering with or disabling them; governs the use of passenger locomotive recordings to conduct operational tests to determine passenger railroad operating employees' compliance with applicable railroad rules and Federal regulations; and requires Texas Central Railroad (TCRR) to install and maintain trainset image recording systems appropriate to TCRR's operation." FRA is publishing this final rule as mandated by section 11411 of the FAST Act, codified at 49 U.S.C. 20168 (the Statute), and under the Agency's general railroad safety rulemaking authority at 49 U.S.C. 20103. The Statute requires FRA (as the Secretary of Transportation's delegate) to "promulgate regulations requiring each railroad carrier that provides regularly scheduled intercity rail passenger or commuter rail passenger transportation to the public to install inward- and outward-facing image recording devices in all controlling locomotives of passenger trains."

This final rule, FRA says, implements the Statute's requirements regarding such recording devices on "controlling" locomotives, which will normally be "lead" locomotives consistent with FRA's existing regulations on locomotive event recorders. Before the Statute was enacted, the Railroad Safety Advisory Committee (RSAC) accepted a task from FRA in 2014 to address National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) Safety Recommendations R-10-01 & -02 concerning locomotive-mounted recording devices (RSAC Task No. 14-01). The RSAC established the Recording Devices Working Group (Working Group) to recommend specific actions regarding the installation and use of locomotive-mounted recording devices, such as inward- and outward-facing video and audio recorders.

The RSAC did not vote, or reach consensus, on any recommendations to FRA regarding the adoption of regulatory text addressing locomotive-mounted video or audio recording devices. Considering the Statute's mandate, relevant NTSB recommendations, the RSAC Working Group's discussions, accident history, and railroad safety violations that FRA had investigated, FRA issued a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) on July 24, 2019, proposing inward- and outward-facing image recording devices be required on all lead passenger train locomotives.

FRA received comments from fifteen different individuals or organizations in response to the NPRM. Having carefully considered the public comments in response to the NPRM, FRA has issued this final rule amending the regulatory requirements of Railroad Operating Rules (49 CFR part 217), Railroad Operating Practices (49 CFR part 218), Railroad Locomotive Safety Standards (49 CFR part 229), and Texas Central High-Speed Rail Safety Standards (49 CFR part 299).

This final rule, FRA says, "requires intercity passenger and commuter railroads to install compliant image recording systems on the lead locomotives of all their passenger trains by October 12, 2027, except for TCRR, which is required to have compliant image recording systems installed on its trainsets prior to commencing revenue service, as specified under part 299. Further, beginning October 12, 2024, any locomotive image recording system installed on new, re-manufactured, or existing passenger train lead locomotives must meet the specified requirements of this final rule, including the requirement that the last twelve hours of data recorded be stored in a memory module that meets the existing crash-worthiness requirements in part 229," according to FRA.

FRA notes that the image recording device requirements for passenger train locomotives in this final rule supplement FRA's existing locomotive event recorder regulation in part 229. Locomotive event recorders are required on the lead locomotives of trains traveling over 30 mph and already record numerous operational parameters that assist in accident/incident investigation and prevention (see 49 CFR 229.135). (Railway Age)

TROUBLED NEC BRIDGE OVER MARYLAND WATERS. Amtrak is working on a plan to replace the 117-year-old Howe deck truss bridge over the Susquehanna River between Perryville and Havre-de-Grace, Maryland, railroad west from Delaware and on the way to Baltimore along the Northeast Corridor (NEC). Perryville is located in Cecil County, which borders Newark, Delaware, and currently serves as the northeastern limit of the MARC Penn Line from Washington, D.C. through Baltimore. Amtrak trains do not stop there. No trains serve Havre-de-Grace, which is in Harford County, the county that contains Aberdeen, which has limited Amtrak service. Now there is also a competing proposal. It was recently unveiled by Scott R. Spencer, Chief Operating Officer of AmeriStarRail, which has also proposed a new operating plan for the NEC.

Amtrak's Fact Sheet for the project includes a history of the bridge that is currently in service that says: "The existing Susquehanna River Rail Bridge was constructed in 1906 by the Pennsylvania Railroad. The bridge is eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The multi-span

truss bridge was built to replace an original 1860s parallel structure to the south. The piers of the original 1860s bridge can still be seen above the water line in the Susquehanna River. Electrified rail service on the 4,154-foot-long bridge began in the 1930s when an overhead catenary system was installed on the bridge."

Amtrak's plan includes four tracks, outlined as Alternative 9A of the project study: a new two-track, 90-mph bridge to the west of the current bridge alignment, and demolition of the existing span, replacing it with a two-track, 160-mph bridge. Study documents and other materials can be found on the Amtrak website's Media Center section about the project. Spencer's proposal would build a different bridge, while re-purposing the existing one, instead of demolishing it, and that proposal is gaining traction among local officials.

ABOUT THE BRIDGE. The Susquehanna River Rail Bridge is a critical link along the Northeast Corridor (NEC), which is the busiest rail line in the United States. The existing bridge creates a bottleneck in train capacity and restricts speed along the NEC. The bridge is utilized daily by Amtrak Long Distance and regional trains, the Maryland Area Regional Commuter (MARC) Penn Line trains, and Norfolk Southern Railway (NS) freight trains to carry regional, commuter, and freight rail service across the Susquehanna River.

ABOUT THE PROJECT. The Susquehanna River Rail Bridge, built in 1906, is nearing the end of its useful life. The existing bridge has aging infrastructure, creates speed and rail capacity constraints, is operationally inflexible, poses maintenance difficulties, and creates conflicts with marine traffic. The Susquehanna River Rail Bridge Project will improve rail connectivity along the NEC by replacing the two-track bridge with four tracks over the Susquehanna River between the City of Havre de Grace in Harford County, Maryland, and the Town of Perryville in Cecil County, Maryland. The proposed Project will also replace the accompanying piers and abutments, along with redesigned approaches and interlockings, track realignment, modernized signals and power, and installation of new embankments and retaining walls. The new bridges will seamlessly serve passenger and freight train needs, allowing people and goods to get to their destinations quicker. The proposed design can also accommodate future expansion of passenger service and improve the navigation channel for marine users.

Spencer unveiled the AmeriStarRail plan at an event in Perryville, near the existing elevated railroad structure, on September 26<sup>th</sup>. He is a long-time railroader and currently Chief Operating Officer at AmeriStarRail. Project details, including the full proposal, can be found on the company's website. According to the site: "Unlike Amtrak's plan to replace its current bridge, built in 1906, with twin bridges by the Year 2036, AmeriStarRail, in collaboration with Kleinfelder and Toole Design, propose that Amtrak and Maryland DOT finance and build just one bi-level bridge to be completed by 2030 without demolishing the current bridge. This would allow the existing Amtrak bridge to be converted into the Trailway Across the Susquehanna." The Kleinfelder firm works in the field of railroad design, while Toole Design works in the field of city and town planning. (Railway Age)

CALIFORNIA STATE RAILROAD MUSEUM TO RESTORE 'DEATH VALLEY SCOTTY' LOCOMOTIVE TO OPERATING CONDITION. Santa Fe 2-6-2 will be used on museum's excursion railroad. The California State Railroad Museum and its support group, the California State Railroad Museum Foundation, have launched an effort to restore Santa Fe steam locomotive No. 1010, a 2-6-2 built by Baldwin in 1901, for use on the museum's Sacramento Southern excursion railroad.

The project, the largest steam restoration project undertaken by the museum since its opening in 1981, is described in the current edition of the Museum Foundation's "On Track" magazine. No. 1010, which was donated to the museum by

Santa Fe in 1984, is most notable for its role in the "Death Valley Scotty" excursion, in which prospector and performer Walter E. Scott contracted with the Santa Fe in 1905 to break the speed record for a cross-country train trip. No. 1010 was one of the 19 locomotives used in the 44-hour, 54-minute trip from Los Angeles to Chicago, which broke the old record by about 8 hours. The locomotive powered the three-car train between Needles, California, and Seligman, Arizona.

Funding for the project has begun with an initial matching grant of \$300,000 provided by three families: Jeff and Marsha Gibeling; Art and Linda Grix; and Craig Hoefer of the Hofer Family Foundation. That is approximately half the money needed for the restoration project. The locomotive was part of the pageant that opened the museum in 1981, powered by compressed air, and is still capable of moving short distances in that fashion. It is occasionally displayed in the museum's roundhouse. (Trains News Wire)

NATIONAL RAILROAD MUSEUM TO RECEIVE \$7 MILLION FOR EXPANSION PROJECT. The National Railroad Museum in Green Bay will receive \$7 million in funding for expansion of its facilities, Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers announced on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. The museum expansion is one of five projects, totaling \$36.6 million, selected for funding under the American Rescue Plan Act, 2021 legislation intended to provide economic stimulus in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Plans for a \$15 million expansion at the Green Bay museum were approved by local officials earlier this year. The more than 32,000-square-foot addition to the museum's Lenfestey Center would permit additional enclosed rolling stock exhibits and provide space for educational programming and events [see "National Railroad Museum submits expansion plans," Trains News Wire, Jan. 3, 2023]. (Trains News Wire)

AMTRAK BOARD SETS PUBLIC MEETING FOR DECEMBER 1 IN RICHMOND. Richmond, Virginia's, newly-rehabilitated Main Street Station will host Amtrak's once-yearly public Board of Directors meeting on Friday, Dec. 1<sup>st</sup>. Unlike last year's annual meeting at St. Louis Union Station, this year's gathering will be preceded by presentations from Virginia and North Carolina passenger rail operating agencies, as well as Amtrak officials.

The meeting will review fiscal year 2023 and provide an overview of Amtrak's strategic priorities and annual operating plan for fiscal 2024. The public can attend in person or remotely, but as was the case in 2022, the company says "participation is limited" and all attendees must register in advance. The deadline is November 27.

The session begins with display tables open at noon; presentations on new service and corridor expansion from Amtrak, Virginia, and North Carolina officials start at 1 p.m.

The public Board meeting will run from 2:30 to 4 p.m. Current Board Chairman Tony Coscia is expected to preside as he did at last year's St. Louis meeting. Coscia has been renominated by President Joe Biden, but his confirmation and that of two other nominees; Normal, Illinois, Mayor Chris Koos and Joel Szabat of Virginia; will not be considered by the Senate unless U.S. Senator Jerry Moran (R-Kansas) is satisfied that additional members from outside the Northeast Corridor are nominated. As a result, it is likely that only current Board members, who continue to serve even though their terms have expired, will participate in-person or virtually.

As to the Kansas Senator's places hold on Amtrak Board nominees: both parties have yet to advance non-Northeast Corridor candidates. U.S. Senator Jerry Moran, (R-Kan.) has placed a hold on the Amtrak Board of Directors nominees up for consideration by the full Senate, preventing their confirmation until Moran knows exactly all eight Board members President Joe



Biden intends to nominate.

"The Biden Administration has violated the law by failing to nominate a geographically diverse Amtrak Board of Directors," Moran said in a statement. "It is important that the members who craft and guide Amtrak policies represent all passengers from across the nation. I will place holds on the Senate Floor until the White House complies with the current law and appoints a nominee representative of the diverse geographic regions that Amtrak serves."

The confirmation of current Board Chairman Anthony Coscia; Normal, Illinois, Mayor Chris Koos; and former Undersecretary of Transportation Joel Szabat were advanced in October by the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee once Senator John Tester (D-Mont.) received assurances that one of the individuals Biden chose from the Northeast Corridor would be withdrawn.

The Biden administration has yet to publicly disclose which nomination among Northeast Corridor Democrats yet to have hearings would be rescinded (Szabat, a Republican nominee, resides in the Washington, D.C., area) or who the replacement will be.

Koos was first nominated in 2020 by former President Donald Trump along with ex-FRA Administrator Sarah Feinberg. The two nominees, both advanced as Democrats, were thoroughly vetted by the FBI before their confirmation hearings. At the time, Moran expressed satisfaction with Koos but reservations about Feinberg when Koos confirmed unconditional support for the long-distance network but Feinberg did not. The Senate took no action before the 2020 election.

It took Biden more than two years to advance the current slate of nominees, but Moran, Tester, and others expressed dissatisfaction with his choices.

Who calls the shots? Appointees are generally suggested and must pass muster with Senate leadership of each party before the vetting process begins. Thus, Majority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) are the current gatekeepers. Capitol Hill sources told News Wire earlier this year that staffers had no advance knowledge of Biden's nominees, although people in the office of Senator Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) were told Koos would be among them.

It is widely assumed Tester will be involved in selecting the new Democrat to be nominated. In a tight re-election bid in Montana, Tester has stressed the importance of the Empire Builder to mobility in his rural state.

On the Republican side, there has been no indication who will be suggested for two still-vacant GOP slots. If the Democratic replacement comes from Montana, both California and the Southeast will need Board representation, and it will be up to the Republicans to provide it. That would include Moran. His "hold" statement added, "During Surface Transportation Reauthorization of 2021, Senator Moran authored a provision requiring half of the Senate-confirmed Amtrak Board members, 'shall reside in or near regions of the United States that are geographically distributed outside of the Northeast Corridor.'"

The other concern by many, given the seemingly strictly political nature of current and past Board choices: what are the prospective Board members' qualifications in the railroad or hospitality industry? Are they experienced enough to make an independent judgement on the job current management is doing?

Moran's dissatisfaction with the way Amtrak attempted to truncate the Southwest Chief in 2018, and perhaps policies his constituents are telling him about today, have led to his skepticism. But until a full slate is nominated, it appears the current board, all with long-expired terms, will continue to oversee Amtrak. (Trains News Wire)

**PROBE OF FATAL BNSF COAL TRAIN WRECK TO FOCUS ON TRACK INSPECTION AND MAINTENANCE.** The National Transportation Safety Board's probe into the October 15<sup>th</sup> derailment of a BNSF Railway coal train near Pueblo, Colorado, will focus on

the railroad's track maintenance and inspection procedures, the Agency said on November 2<sup>nd</sup> in its preliminary report on the fatal wreck.

Some of the 30 loaded coal gondolas that derailed near a passing siding switch struck the railroad bridge over Interstate 25 at Pueblo West. A portion of the bridge collapsed onto the highway, and six gondolas dropped to the interstate, killing the driver of a northbound truck.

While on scene, the NTSB investigators said they believed the wreck likely was caused by a broken rail.

Train CNAMCRD0-31D departed Denver at 9:41 a.m. on the day of the derailment, bound for La Junta, Colorado, according to the NTSB's preliminary report. The train consisted of two locomotives at the head end, three distributed power units, and 124 cars loaded with coal. The conductor and engineer were not injured in the 3:24 p.m. derailment at Milepost 109.654 of the Pikes Peak Subdivision.

At the site of the wreck, the Pikes Peak Sub is single-track with an adjacent passing siding that begins just east of the bridge. The southbound train was moving at 32 mph, well below the maximum authorized speed of 45 mph.

"While on scene, National Transportation Safety Board investigators completed interviews; reviewed data from locomotive event recorders, forward-facing image recorders, and radio logs; inspected locomotives and railcars; tested and downloaded data from positive train control and signal systems; examined track near the derailment site; reviewed BNSF track maintenance and welding procedures; and recovered a section of rail for analysis at the NTSB Materials Laboratory," the preliminary report said.

Parties to the ongoing investigation include BNSF, the Federal Railroad Administration, the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen Division of the Transportation Communications Union/IAM; the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen; the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees; and the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers. (Trains News Wire)

NTSB CALLS FOR IMPROVEMENTS TO PTC TECHNOLOGY. In a new report, the National Transportation Safety Board calls on the Federal Railroad Administration to incorporate new technologies into existing positive train control systems and address issues with PTC in its current form. The 51-page report says safety issues remain in existing PTC systems in the form of:

- Insufficient information about train location during restricted-speed operations;
- Now-obsolete exceptions to PTC use in terminal environments;
- Over-reliance on administrative controls to prevent unsafe use of PTC's switching mode on main lines;
- And unsafe train incursions into established working limits.

"Implementation of positive train control across our nation's rail system is undoubtedly a safety win - one the NTSB supported for over five decades," NTSB Chair Jennifer Homendy said in a statement accompanying release of the report. "And yet, we haven't achieved zero deaths on our railroads, which means there's more we can and must do to strengthen safety."

The NTSB also called on the FRA to publish results of current research into new PTC technology and to develop a plan for implementation of new technologies; to require railroads adopt systems that automatically return PTC to the active mode following switching operations, and to eliminate the risk of miscommunication between dispatchers and track workers regarding PTC protection; and to work with railroads to remove terminal exceptions for PTC through the use of new technology. (Trains News Wire)

UNION PACIFIC ANNOUNCES MANAGEMENT LAYOFFS IN BID TO SPEED DECISION-MAKING. A round of layoffs are under way today (November 1<sup>st</sup>) at Union Pacific headquarters as new CEO Jim Vena aims to streamline management and speed up decision making at the sprawling railroad. "Union Pacific is changing its culture and announced organizational changes to reduce layers, expand spans of control and focus on empowering employees on the front lines to drive decision-making," spokeswoman Kristen South says. "These changes included some reductions, which represent less than 5% of the total management workforce. All employees whose roles were impacted were given the opportunity to apply for hard-to-hire craft professional roles in other parts of the railroad."

UP was unable to provide a precise number of layoffs because some people whose jobs are being eliminated will be assigned to special projects that may last several months, while others may move back to union jobs. On UP's October 19 third-quarter earnings call, Vena emphasized the need to reduce bureaucracy. "We need to make decisions quicker, we need to react quicker, we need to quit having so many layers that slow down the decision making," Vena said.

Vena, who served as Chief Operating Officer in 2019 and 2020, returned as CEO on August 14. "Last time I came with one goal: I came to work to drive operational efficiency. I didn't look at the rest of the company very much, and the rest of the company needs to be looked at. And that's what we're doing now," he said on the earnings call.

"You can't have nine levels from CEO to the people who actually do the work and expect that the message is clear, decisions are made clear ... I want to drive it so we have way less layers. And that means with less layers the people out in the field are empowered to make the right decisions."

Vena also said on that call that he had spoken with a Wyoming soda ash producer that is expanding production and wanted assurances that UP would be able to provide capacity as part of the build out.

"It was taking us over a year to give them a decision on whether we could do that. We need to change that," Vena said. "We were able to make the decision in four days. I got it: We can't make decisions in four days all the time, but we sure can make them in a few weeks instead of months. That's real important. That's a change in the way we want to do business."

During a May speech at the North American Rail Shippers conference, Surface Transportation Board Chairman Martin J. Oberman was critical of UP's sluggish response to soda ash customers that aim to increase production by as much as 65% over the next five years. "They have not been able to obtain from UP a concrete plan to increase rail capacity to handle the huge growth," Oberman says. "Only after I personally intervened in the last few days ... has UP even been willing to provide a written description of its plans for the line, which moves the Green River soda ash to market. But that response sent to me was labeled confidential. It was not sent to the miners who are the ones who need the information. And unfortunately, while referring to UP's capacity strategy, UP's letter was silent as to whether that strategy will enable them to actually move all additional 65,000 carloads."

Oberman said the lack of capacity assurances from UP has hurt the mining companies' ability to plan for expansions. "What kind of business needs a government official to lean on it in order to relate to its own customers in order to increase its own sales and make more money? Apparently, only a railroad," Oberman said.

Overall employment at UP has dropped by 25% since the railroad adopted a Precision Scheduled Railroading operating model in October 2018, according to STB data. The railroad's ranks of executive officials, staff, and assistants has fallen by 12.4%, while professional and administrative employment has dropped 24%, according to STB data. (Trains News Wire)

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