

POTOMAC RAIL NEWS

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

MARCH 2018



HEADING WEST TO A NEW HOME! On February 27, 2018, Amtrak's Capitol Limited has AEM7 945 dead in tow as it crosses the Potomac River and slows for the station stop at Harpers Ferry, WV. 945 is headed for the Illinois Railway Museum in Union, IL. Photo by: Jim Kleeman

PROGRAM: Contemporary Japan - Joel Shprentz will provide an interesting digital presentation from his Spring 2016 visit to Japan, which includes Shinkansen high-speed trains, local electric trains, inclined railways, subways, aerial ropeways, trolley buses, a visit to the Japan Railway Museum, and scenes of Japanese culture and people.

MEETING: March 20, 2018. 8PM. Lobby Level Auditorium of the Montgomery County Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street, Rockville, MD.

NEXT MEETING DATE: April 17, 2018

DEADLINE FOR MARCH ISSUE: March 23, 2018. Send news items to Clay Moritz, Editor, Potomac Rail News, at c.moritz@comcast.net

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

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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 call the Chapter on (301) 251-9461.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO OUR SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM. The Potomac Chapter has been operating a small grants program for over 20 years. The program allows the Chapter President to make grants of up to \$500 to railway preservation projects of non-profit organizations. The President is allowed to make up \$1,250 in grants each year. He cannot donate more than \$500 to any one organization.

Grants for 2017 were:

- * \$500 to the Nashville Steam Preservation Society to support its operational restoration of ex-Nashville, Chattanooga, & St. Louis Railway 4-8-4 steam locomotive No. 576. www.nashvillesteam.org
- \$500 to Roanoke's Commonwealth Coach and Trolley Museum to help them recover from a November 1 fire that destroyed their facility and about half of their collection. www.commonwealthcoachandtrolley.org
- \$250 to the Western Maryland Railway Historical Society for their capital campaign to repair the Union Bridge Western Maryland Railway station and office building that they use as their museum and headquarters. www.westernmarylandrhs.com

During the annual renewal cycle, many members have donated to the program, increasing the funds available. At the February board meeting the Chapter directors decided to propose that the Chapter update the structure of the grant program.

Directors recommend that the membership re-authorize the small grants program with the following guidelines.

- The President is empowered to make small grants to the rail-related non-profit organization.
- The annual limit for these grants is \$1500, plus any funds available from designated gifts for the small grants program.
- The President is limited in the amount he can give to one organization in a year. That limit is \$750 or half the funds disbursed that year, whichever is greater.

MEMBERS WILL VOTE ON THIS PROPOSAL AT THE MARCH MEETING.

President Gordy Bjoraker always welcomes suggestions for grant candidates. If you know of a worthy organization that would benefit from a small grant, please feel free to let Gordy know.

RAIL NEWS

RESTORATION OF C&O 1309 IMPACTED BY THEFT. On February 13, 2018, Western Maryland Scenic Railroad Executive Director John Garner announced that charges are being brought against a former Western Maryland Scenic Railroad employee who allegedly used his position to steal numerous historic artifacts and railroad equipment parts belonging to the Scenic Railroad and then selling them for scrap at local salvage yards. Garner's statement follows below.

"These irreplaceable artifacts are property that was entrusted to our care for preservation and for the education and enjoyment of the public." "Employees with access to the Western Maryland Scenic's collection of railroad equipment and parts are trusted guardians who must not abuse their positions for personal gain. We are working with local and state law enforcement officials in Maryland and West Virginia and will vigorously prosecute any allegation that an individual has stolen or misappropriated WMSR's property as their own."

Some of the items include rare light fixtures and brass hardware from Western Maryland Office Car 204, bronze bearings and wear plates from Chesapeake and Ohio Steam Locomotive 1309, currently undergoing restoration, and numerous miscellaneous locomotive and passenger car parts.

"This individual had access to a wide array of WMSR's collection of parts and artifacts," said Executive Director Garner. Western Maryland Scenic Railroad has cooperated fully in the investigation and the employer relationship WMSR had with this individual has ended. Executive Director Garner thanked Allegany County Sheriff Craig Robertson for his department's alertness and fast action, and thanked the West Virginia State Police for their assistance with the case in West Virginia.

"Any theft of artifacts or equipment parts from the WMSR is an unconscionable act," said Garner. A salvage yard notified the Allegany County Sheriff's Office of suspicious salvage activity in early February and the Sheriff's Office contacted WMSR on Tuesday, February 6. WMSR subsequently conducted an initial inventory of artifacts and equipment to determine what, if anything may have been missing. We are now assembling respected experts in artifact preservation and security to examine current security and storage procedures and make recommendations to strengthen them. The Board of Directors and I will review their report and carry out their recommendations."

The charges in the case are merely accusations and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. Detailed information on the charges can be obtained from Allegany County Sheriff's Office and the West Virginia State Police. WMSR is working with experts in rail preservation and restoration to determine the full costs associated with the loss. The Allegany County Maryland State's Attorney is prosecuting the Maryland case. The investigation is ongoing and criminal charges are expected to be filed in West Virginia in the coming days.

Despite the setbacks from a funding shortfall and the alleged theft of parts, the restoration of former C&O #1309 is proceeding as funding becomes available. The initial letter writing campaign soliciting donations for the project has to date yielded over \$30,000 in contributions with more fundraising efforts underway, including a winter photo freight event planned for February 24, 2018, that will include a night photo session. All funds raised will directly benefit the restoration of 1309. For more information, visit WMSR's website at www.wmsr.com.

"While we had suspended full-time work on 1309 over the winter pending additional funding, the generosity of supporters has made it possible to fund a major item on the project's work list," said Executive Director Garner. "We are happy to report that all of the driving wheels are currently in Chattanooga, TN, with work scheduled to begin shortly. The work will include machining and quartering crank pins and machining the journal bearing surfaces on the axles which were pitted from years of exposure to the elements." The work will be performed under the direction of Diversified Rail Services utilizing specialized steam locomotive wheel machines located at Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum's Soule Shop.

"We are committed to returning 1309 to steam as soon as is financially possible," said Garner. "We have wasted no time in putting the dollars raised so far to work as quickly as possible. The preservation and local communities' continued support is vital to the locomotive's completion."

The Western Maryland Scenic Railroad Development Corporation is a quasi-public entity chartered by the State of Maryland and Allegany County to preserve the region's railroad heritage and offer classic railroad experiences along the former Western Maryland Railway mainline corridor between Cumberland and Frostburg, MD. It has been operating mainline steam and diesel excursions since

1991. Contact the railroad at trainmaster@wmsr.com for additional information or visit the Railroad's website at www.wmsr.com. (WMSR Press Release via Railway Preservation News www.rypn.org)

B&O RAILROAD MUSEUM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR STEPPING DOWN. In an email letter to Museum members, Courtney B. Wilson announced that after more than two decades at the helm of the B&O Railroad Museum, he intends to step down as Executive Director in the Fall of 2018. Until a successor is chosen, he will continue to lead the Museum.

After stepping down, Mr. Wilson is not retiring but plans to pursue consulting opportunities in the history, heritage and railway preservation fields both here and abroad. He goes on to state his belief that this decision comes at an ideal time in the Museum's history. With a new Master Plan in place that will guide the B&O's future development through the next decade, a new energetic and talented leader will be sought to take the next and vital steps toward the national celebration of the 200th Anniversary of railroading in America in 2027.

In closing, he states, "I have enjoyed the opportunities and challenges of this great job, working with a supportive and active Board, an incredibly talented staff, and wonderful volunteers to grow this wonderful Museum into what it is today. None of this could have been accomplished without all of you and your love for this institution. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."
Courtney B. Wilson, Executive Director

AMTRAK WARNED BEFORE DEADLY DERAILMENT. In the days before Amtrak 501 left the tracks on December 18, 2017, engineers and conductors warned their supervisors that they did not feel adequately trained on the new route, according to more than a dozen sources. Several train cars fell off an overpass, landing on Interstate 5, near DuPont, WA, which left three dead and more than 100 injured. At the time, Amtrak 501 was making its inaugural trip of a new Seattle-to-Portland run called the Point Defiance Bypass route.

Engineers and conductors had safety concerns, citing rushed and "totally inadequate" training that left them feeling dangerously unprepared for the new route, according to multiple sources, including several directly involved in the training. Some training runs were performed at night, with as many as six or more crew members stuffed into cars with just three seats, which meant some trainees rode backwards, in the dark, the sources said. Engineers felt they did not get enough practice runs at the controls and could not properly see to familiarize themselves with the route. Adding to the training concerns, the new locomotives for the maiden run were unfamiliar to many of the crew members up until the brief training runs, the sources said.

The bypass was the final piece of an \$800 million project under a Federal economic stimulus for high-speed rail. But the Federal money was due to run out, and the pressure to get the maiden voyage done and open the line resulted in sped-up training, sources told CNN.

The crash of Train 501 is again raising larger concerns about what many call a failing safety culture at Amtrak. The engineer for Amtrak 501 told investigators he took 7 to 10 observational training trips on the new route, but was only at the controls for three one-way trips, and only one of those was in the direction the train was traveling when it crashed, according to an interim report released around the end of January by the National Transportation Safety Board. The engineer did not respond to CNN's requests for comment, but according to the report he told the NTSB "he would not have gotten behind the throttle if he had any reservations about his readiness to operate the train."

Amtrak 501 was traveling at near 80 miles an hour while heading into a turn with a maximum speed of just 30 mph. The engineer told the NTSB he missed at

least two signs that would have warned him to slow down, then "as soon as he saw the 30 mph sign at the start of the curve, he applied brakes. Seconds later, the train derailed as it entered the curve," according to the NTSB report.

When asked about allegations of inadequate training, Amtrak referred CNN to the NTSB, which said in a statement, "NTSB investigators are aware of the issues that have been raised regarding training of the Amtrak 501 crewmembers." Amtrak also said in a statement to CNN, "Our highest priority is ensuring the safety of our passengers, our crew and the communities we serve. We are actively taking measures to strengthen the safety of our operations, from adopting a safety management system approach used by commercial aviation to advancing Positive Train Control across the network. We will continue to work with the NTSB to learn from this accident and improve." Amtrak employees who spoke to CNN insisted on remaining anonymous out of fear of losing their jobs.

More than a half dozen lawsuits have been filed so far in the crash, all alleging that inadequate crew training contributed to the accident. One of the lawsuits was filed by a conductor who was training in the lead locomotive when Amtrak 501 derailed. His attorney, Anthony Petru, told CNN that warnings to managers about the lack of training went unheeded.

In 2016, Amtrak train 89 crashed near Chester, Pennsylvania, killing two and injuring 35. After an 18 month investigation the NTSB released its findings on the Pennsylvania crash, stating that the wreck there showed "deficient safety management across many levels of Amtrak." NTSB chairman Robert Sumwalt concluded: "Amtrak's safety culture is failing, and is primed to fail again, until and unless Amtrak changes the way it practices safety management." He added, "investigators found a labor-management relationship so adversarial that safety programs became contentious at the bargaining table, with the unions ultimately refusing to participate." That NTSB warning and report were released on November 14, 2017. Little more than a month later, December 18, Amtrak 501 crashed.

In addition to questions about the training, questions have been raised about why the new line did not have Positive Train Control (PTC). The decision was made to open the line before PTC was installed. According to Washington State DOT, the Amtrak Cascades route will now not run on Point Defiance Bypass until PTC is activated. (CNN)

NTSB INVESTIGATES CAUSE OF THE GOP TRAIN CRASH. The train carrying members of Congress to a Republican retreat in West Virginia on January 31st struck a garbage truck that had entered a railroad crossing after safety gates had come down, according to the preliminary National Transportation Board report. The NTSB report said that witnesses told investigators the truck drove onto the crossing after the warning gates had lowered. The train, which was operated by Amtrak, also had a forward-facing camera that showed as the crossing came into view, "the gates were down and the refuse truck was on the grade crossing." One trash company employee was killed, while the truck driver, another employee and several others on the train were injured.

The NTSB said the crash happened around 11:16 a.m., as the Congressional Special Amtrak Train 923 approached the crossing in Crozet, VA, at about 61 mph when "the engineer applied emergency braking." After striking the truck, an axle on the front locomotive on the train derailed but remained upright, according to the NTSB. Several people who live near the railroad crossing told The Associated Press that the safety gates were known to frequently malfunction, sometimes staying down for extended periods of time even when no trains were coming. "The track and operational characteristics of the crossing signals were also examined and documented," the NTSB said in its report and "NTSB investigators continue to examine issues related to the highway-railroad grade crossing." The agency said

the probable cause of the accident hasn't yet been determined. (FOX News)

CHARGES REINSTATED AGAINST AMTRAK ENGINEER. In the deadly May 13, 2015, Philadelphia, PA, crash, the Amtrak engineer was ordered on February 6th to stand trial for the deadly 2015 derailment as a judge reinstated involuntary manslaughter and reckless endangerment charges. Another judge had thrown out the charges against 34-year-old Brandon Bostian last year, ruling that the evidence pointed to an accident, not negligence. Pennsylvania prosecutors appealed and Judge Kathryn S. Lewis ruled that the earlier judge had erred and that there was sufficient evidence to send the case to trial.

Bostian has been on unpaid administrative leave from Amtrak since the crash. Eight people died when the Washington-to-New York train rounded a curve at more than twice the 50 mph speed limit and derailed, crumpling cars and catapulting passengers into the woods. In addition to the eight deaths, about 200 people were hurt. Federal safety investigators concluded Bostian was distracted by radio chatter and lost his bearings.

The previous judge, Thomas Gehret, echoed the thinking of City prosecutors in dismissing the case. This led a victim's family to seek charges on its own as a statute of limitations loomed. Bostian's lawyer, Brian McMonagle, said the engineer's speeding was a momentary lapse from a safety-conscious engineer who was briefly distracted. The National Transportation Safety Board investigation found no evidence that Bostian was impaired or using a cellphone.

Bostian is suing the government-owned railroad, alleging he was left disoriented or unconscious when something struck his train before it derailed. NTSB investigators have said nothing struck the locomotive. Amtrak has taken responsibility for the crash and agreed to pay \$265 million to settle claims filed by victims and their families. It has also installed speed controls on its track from Boston to Washington. (www.nbcnews.com)

TRYING TO SAVE MARC SERVICE IN WEST VIRGINIA. A fare increase of up to \$4 is being considered as part of a multi-prong effort to preserve commuter rail service in the Eastern Panhandle, West Virginia Department of Transportation Secretary Tom Smith told Berkeley and Jefferson county leaders on February 15th. Based on current ridership, a \$4 fare increase for MARC train passengers who board at Martinsburg, Duffields, and Harpers Ferry stations would generate about \$600,000 annually, but Smith said that the added revenue would still be far less than the \$3.2 million allocation that the State of Maryland has requested from West Virginia to continue to provide the service.

Currently, more than 290 people board at the three train stations in the Eastern Panhandle, down from about 525 people in 2008, when ridership peaked, according to Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) figures provided to the West Virginia State Rail Authority. Fares bought by West Virginia passengers include a surcharge to help offset the cost of running the train into West Virginia. A one-way ticket from Martinsburg to Washington currently costs \$13 and tickets from Duffields and Harpers Ferry cost \$12.

Smith said about \$500,000 in funding has been identified in ongoing State budget negotiations to help meet Maryland's \$3.2 million request, leaving a funding gap of about \$2.1 million that is based on the projected revenue from a \$4 fare increase and ridership remaining unchanged as a result of it. Smith told county and municipal leaders that the remaining \$2.1 million funding gap doesn't entirely have to be filled by local governments in the Eastern Panhandle, noting efforts to seek Federal funding and private sector support.

Smith said Maryland officials have asked for a definitive answer concerning what West Virginia is willing to contribute within the next three or four weeks. The closer that West Virginia can get to contributing \$3.2 million, the better

chance that the train service can be preserved, Smith said. Otherwise, the MARC train service in the Eastern Panhandle could be shut down by year's. Smith said the amount of funding that Maryland has requested reflects proportional cost based on the track mileage in West Virginia and appears fairly accurate. Smith said it is his understanding that West Virginia has not contributed toward operation of the commuter train service, but readily acknowledged that he is aware that the City of Martinsburg spends about \$105,000 annually to maintain the train station building it owns. The stations in Harpers Ferry and Duffields in Jefferson County are maintained by the State.

The MTA's five-year contract with the State rail authority to provide MARC service to Martinsburg expired on Oct. 31st. CSX, which owns the tracks, has passed on additional costs to Maryland, where transportation officials are grappling with a 5% budget cut. In a recent survey of the MARC station in Brunswick, MD, Smith said he saw lots of West Virginia license plates on vehicles parked at Brunswick during a tour in February. (Herald-Mail, Hagerstown MD)

STEAM LOCOMOTIVE GOING TO OAKLAND. The Steam Railroading Institute in Owosso, MI, has announced the sale of Mississippian Railway 2-8-0 No. 76, which has been part of their collection since 2005, to the Oakland B&O Museum in Maryland. The locomotive will be leaving Owosso later this year and moved to its new home in Oakland. The Oakland Community Heritage Foundation has already engaged a specialist in steam locomotive repair to restore the 76 as a beautiful exhibit at their developing museum.

While it is sad to bid farewell to the 76, we at the Steam Railroading Institute are ecstatic to know that it'll receive a loving new home and continue to be preserved for many years to come thanks to our friends at the Oakland B&O Museum! Visit their website: www.oaklandbandmuseum.org

EVENTS

OLD DOMINION DIVISION RRE MONTHLY MEETING. March 15, 2018 8:00 PM. James Madison High School, 2500 James Madison Drive, Vienna, VA, in room 110. The closest entrance door to this room is Entrance No. 1. Pre-meeting dinner at 6:30 at the Amphora Restaurant, 377 West Maple Avenue Vienna. TO REACH THE SCHOOL: From Amphora Restaurant go south two blocks on West Maple Avenue to James Madison Drive and turn right. School is at the end of this street. PROGRAM: 2017 in Review Part 1 - A digital presentation will be shown by Alex Mayes covering several major rail events he attended plus other railfanning exploits during the first half of 2017. The program begins with a snowy trip to Eastern Canada in January for some winter photography and to ride VIA Rail's Ocean between Montreal and Halifax as well as Montreal-area commuter trains. The next segment is a February trip to Norfolk Southern's ex-PRR mainline in the Altoona, PA area for more winter photography. Scenes include trains on Horseshoe Curve, at Gallitzin Tunnel, and the Cresson area. The program concludes with scenes of April and May mainline steam excursions powered by Norfolk & Western Class J No. 611 in Virginia and North Carolina.

STAR CITY SPECIAL. May 25-28, 2018. Washington D.C. to Roanoke, VA, and return. The Washington D.C. Chapter, NRHS, is offering the STAR CITY SPECIAL, a Memorial Day Weekend rail trip from Washington, D.C., to Roanoke, Virginia, aboard the Chapter's classic Pullman, Dover Harbor. This is Dover Harbor's first trip to Roanoke since Amtrak service was extended there last fall. This 4-day package tour includes round trip rail transportation on the Dover Harbor with meals, snacks, and beverages while en route; lodging for 3 nights at the beautifully restored Hotel Roanoke; escorted tours of the Virginia Museum of Transportation, home of N&W J Class No. 611, A Class No. 1218, and Y Class No. 2156, and the O. Winston Link Museum; and a full day escorted scenic motor coach tour of Roanoke area sights including the National D-Day Memorial, lunch at the Peaks of Otter Lodge on the Blue Ridge Parkway, and a winery tour. Book by April 15th and receive an early bird discount of \$50 per person. For complete details on this trip, please see www.dcnrhs.org and click on the trip name in the upcoming trips area.

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

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