

THE SWITCHLIST

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December Meeting

As the end of the year rolls around again, we return once again to our practice of the past Decembers with a film that features trains in a story that has elements of mystery, romance, and perhaps a bit of comedy. The film for this year is TransSiberian, starring Woody Harrelson and Ben Kingsley with a supporting cast that especially includes the train and some noteworthy scenery en route from Beijing to Moscow. The story has twists and turns up to the very end, so do plan on being with us on 14 December for the 111 minute run. You'll be glad that you were.

Our location will be our regular venue, Red Hot and Blue at 6615 Falls of the Neuse Road in the Falls Village Shopping Center on the west side of the road. It is 2.4 miles southwest of I-540 and 3.5 miles northeast of I-440 (exit 8). If you are coming from I-440, you will find it easier and less congested to turn right onto Sandy Forks Road, the second right after Millbrook, then left into the Falls Village parking lot. Our meeting room has been reserved from 6:00 PM, but is typically available around 5:30 PM. After dinner together, the program will start at 7:00 PM.

November Meeting Report

As he has every year, Allan Paul brought us a thorough report on where and how the North Carolina Department of Transportation's Rail Division is investing in our state's future. The focus was on Charlotte, where both passenger and freight service will benefit for years to come from the improvements in physical plant that are in the works. As always, Allan had answers for the usual insightful questions from the ONS audience. Thanks so much, Allan!

If this issue of the Switchlist doesn't seem to have any new items beyond the first page, that is simply because it doesn't have any. A host of responsibilities beyond typical busyness have overwhelmed your editors, and this issue is the result. We regret the situation and beg your forgiveness.

OF INTEREST

Amtrak began an in-depth review of its long distance passenger trains, working from bottom to top in assessments of the various issues that impact upon each train and producing workable recommendations. While the final products cover many pages, the interest many of us have in Amtrak prompted us to provide an overview.

The prime candidate for improvement was, of course, the *Sunset Limited*. A logical course of improvement would be to make the train a daily operation. Amtrak plans doing so in conjunction with a profoundly different schedule. This will provide daylight service to many stations that currently have inconvenient hours of service. A further change would see the current long dwell times at San Antonio, TX, greatly reduced as a consequence of changing the service to a through Los Angeles to Chicago train by merging the *Sunset* with the *Texas Eagle*. The one possible impediment to beginning the new service soon is Union Pacific's questioning of costs involved in making the necessary changes.

Another tri-weekly train that would become daily is the *Cardinal*, which operates from New York to Chicago via Washington, DC, Charleston, WV, Cincinnati, OH and Indianapolis, IN. Currently, the percentage of passengers that travel the entire route is less than 2% of those riding the train. This is undoubtedly due to the confusion related to tri-weekly service. In addition to the improvement from going to daily service, Amtrak is looking at acquiring several dome lounge cars that would operate between Washington and Chicago. As at present, the most scenic portions of the route would be covered in daylight.

One other train scheduled for improvement is the *Capitol Limited*. One of the key changes to this train would be the addition of through single level coaches, an Amfleet food service car and a sleeper that would continue on the *Pennsylvanian* at Pittsburgh, PA, to (and from) New York. This would eliminate a late night/early morning change of trains for passengers to that route. Dining cars freed up from the changes in the *Sunset/Texas Eagle* would be used on the *Capitol*, improving that train's meal service.

Maine has reached a deal to buy 233 miles of rail line from the Montreal, Maine & Atlantic Railway to insure that rail service north of Millinocket. "Lifting this cloud of uncertainty not only helps stabilize these rail-dependent industries, but with improved services, lays the groundwork for future expansion and new business opportunities," said David Cole, the state's transportation commissioner. The line serves mostly lumber and paper-industry customers.

Under the agreement, the state will pay MM&A \$20.1 million for the rail line. It has received a \$10.5 million federal grant to help fund repairs and maintenance on the line.

Vauclain compound locomotive #4 of the Manitou & Pikes Peak Cog Railway made a rare operating appearance recently on that railroad. Built in 1897 by the Baldwin Locomotive Works in Philadelphia, PA, the unique locomotive uses a single piston valve to control both the high- and low-pressure cylinders on each side of the locomotive. It powered the last steam train to the summit of Pike's Peak on 3 September 1958.

Station Bulletin Board

Rutherford, NJ's former Erie Railway station has been restored to its Victorian grandeur, thanks to a \$1.9 million renovation. Wooden benches were repaired, stained and refinished. Workers stripped paint from oak-paneled ceiling and gave it the same treatment as the rest of the woodwork in the room.

"We have not only restored the building's century-old elegance, but we have made it useful again, preventing even costlier repairs down the road," said Representative Steve Rothman, D-Fair Lawn.

A federal grant, which officials credited Rothman with securing, covered the entire cost of the restoration. Work finished a month late, but it stayed on budget, NJ Transit officials said. The public will have access to the station and its bathrooms from 5 a.m. to noon each weekday.

When built in 1898, the Rutherford station was the first station west of the Jersey City terminal that offered ferry service to New York. One special detail that survives from then is a gazebo at the southern end of the station that provided passengers with a view of Manhattan. New Jersey Transit funded a \$1.3 million restoration of the exterior last summer, including the gazebo, red brick façade and copper-clad windows.

Rensselaer, NY has long been the passenger stop for both that community and Albany across the Hudson River. Prior to Amtrak's beginning, a station was built there by Penn Central in 1968; Amtrak supplanted that structure with a larger one in 1980. Both of these were replaced in recent years by a larger modern station that can better accommodate the 724,000 passengers that use the station annually.

The demolition will enable Amtrak to add a fourth track at the current station and to extend the platforms to about 1,000 feet from their current 500 foot length. All this will facilitate implementation of the Department of Transportation's high speed program.

Boston, MA will see the expansion of its South Station, a project that officials say is needed to relieve commuter rail congestion, to restore train service to New Bedford and Fall River, and to run additional trains on the Worcester line. A \$32.5 million grant to plan the expansion bodes well for future federal support to finance construction of the expansion, as well as to relocate a postal facility that sits on land that would be needed for the project.

South Station presently has 13 platform tracks that are crowded during morning and evening rush hours, when passenger trains arrive or depart every 60 to 90 seconds, making for what MBTA General Manager Richard A Davey called "a very tight choreography." Often those trains must sit idle, with passengers on board, while waiting for an opening.

The expansion would add seven to eleven new platform tracks and would improve the system for dispatching arriving and departing trains. The work would also facilitate the operation of higher speed Amtrak trains.