

THE SWITCHLIST

OLD NORTH STATE CHAPTER
NRHS

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February Meeting

Old North State chapter programs can always be counted upon to be times of great fellowship, whatever the entertainment. One of the regular benefits of our meetings is that we get to know one another better. This month will bring that benefit to a greater degree as we enjoy an open house at Richard Buchan's home on 8 February. We will enjoy pizza together; you may choose plain cheese, vegetarian with no mushrooms or meat. Please don't ask for onions and sausage or some other combination. Simply select one of the three listed or say "no preference", but do let him know that you are coming. Send an email to our host at trolley400@nc.rr.com or call him at 919-676-9207 by 8:00 PM on 7 February.

Our location will be Richard's home at 6221 Allsdale Drive. To get there take Exit 7 off I-540 and go north onto Leesville Road. Follow Leesville Road west past the Citgo gas station. At the next traffic light make a dogleg left and go past the water tank on the left. The next street is Dominion Park Blvd. Turn left and go one block to Allsdale Drive. The house is on the right across from the swim club. Park in the swim club parking lot. Arrive any time after 5:30 PM; we will eat around 6:30 PM. After dinner together, Dick will give us a grand tour.

January Meeting Report

The storm on 11 January led to a postponement of our regular meeting, and although we recognize that any other Tuesday than the second does not work for many of our members, we agreed that a postponed meeting was better than none. Thus our meeting proceeded even though attendance was down somewhat. It was to be a member's night, and members Art and Lynette did provide us with a look at the wide variety of critters and other locomotives at grain elevators and other agricultural facilities.

They enjoyed bringing the program and from the comments of all, it was obvious that our members enjoyed it, too.

OF INTEREST

Amtrak has been making progress in improving on-time performance on many of its routes. What is noteworthy is not only the performance in Fiscal Year 2010, but the profound improvement on many routes. The award for most improved surely must go to the *Sunset Limited*, which went from 27.2% on-time arrivals in Fiscal Year 2008 to 87.8% on-time in 2010.

The other best performing routes/trains were the *Capitol Corridor* at 93.2%, the *Missouri River Runner* at 91.1%, the *San Joaquin* at 90.7%, the *Pennsylvanian* at 90.7%, the *Coast Starlight* at 89.9%, the *Hiawatha Service* at 89.5%. Not surprisingly to many of us, the poorest performing train was the *Carolinian*, with a 48.9% on-time arrival record. That record, however, reflects an improvement over the 39.0% performance in Fiscal Year 2008. CSX's Richmond, Virginia – Selma, North Carolina A line is the delay culprit with this train.

It is recognized that passengers are entitled to reach their destinations when the schedule says they will, and Amtrak has committed to accomplishing that as much as possible. Apart from equipment failures, derailments and weather-related problems, which are less common than you might expect, the primary influence is typically the host railroad's dispatchers. One stellar example of good performance in this is Canadian Pacific dispatchers who make threading eight 79-mph *Hiawathas* and *Empire Builder* round trips around heavy freight traffic look effortless on the double-track Chicago-Milwaukee main line.

There are other factors that contribute significantly to improved performance. Recent infrastructure improvements, coupled with a "can do" attitude on the part of many employees have brought about significant progress. Amtrak is working with host railroads to work out more exact running and recovery times along entire routes, and all are working on congestion relief projects.

Unions are responding to Republican threats to cut funding for Amtrak and mass transit projects. Edward Wytkind, President of the Transportation Trades Department of the AFL-CIO stated the union's strong opposition to the proposed cuts. "Hundreds of thousands of jobs would be eliminated by the proposed cuts to transportation programs alone," he stated, noting that the cuts would come "at a time when nationwide unemployment struggles to stay below 10 percent."

Republican leaders in the House of Representatives have been studying various cuts to Amtrak and mass transit programs over the past few weeks as a method for balancing the federal budget. Proposed cuts include eliminating all federal subsidies to Amtrak and shutting down the Federal Transit Administration's New Starts program, which funds a significant portion of transit capital construction in the country.

The union statement points to recent studies that show high amounts of fuel and time are lost each year to congestion and wasteful methods of transportation. Said Wytkind: "You can't boost the economy and create jobs by bankrupting the programs that support our transportation system and infrastructure. And politicians will not solve federal and state budget challenges by destroying thousands of private and public sector jobs."

Station Bulletin Board

Kingman, Arizona has seen restoration work on its former Santa Fe station completed, and is awaiting staffing of the structure. In recent years Kingman has been served only by a platform with no shelter, so having a building will be welcomed by anyone boarding the *Southwest Chief* there. Both east and westbound Chiefs stop at Kingman in the middle of the night, when a building is especially welcome.

In addition to the Amtrak facility, the station building will host a museum. Details of who will occupy the museum are being worked out.

The 103-year-old station had been in limbo for nearly a decade while the city wrangled with various governmental agencies to get the proper clearance for the project. The rehabilitation was made possible through a \$600,000 grant from the Arizona Department of Transportation.

Los Angeles' Union Station and much of the surrounding area will be purchased jointly by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and California's High-Speed Rail Authority. The historic hub is slated to be a major stop on the 800-mile statewide bullet train system. Officials want control of the 38-acre site so that they can make improvements needed to handle an expected surge in passenger traffic from a proposed Westside subway extension and a new downtown rail connection, as well as high-speed rail. About 50,000 people use the station a day now, according to the MTA.

Announcement of the purchase was designed partly to bolster broader geographic support for the controversial \$43-billion high-speed train project. When and if funding will be available to begin high-speed service between the Bay Area and Southern California remains uncertain.

The funds will ensure that the state rail agency has access to Union Station, officials said. Some of the \$3 billion in federal stimulus grants will be used to improve track connections that will benefit Metrolink and Amtrak riders before the start of bullet train service.

Public ownership of the Art Deco/Spanish Revival station, which opened in 1939, will ensure its preservation, officials said. Millions of square feet of development rights around the station could be used to increase income, which now includes payments from train operators, restaurant concessions and film location fees.

Chelsea, Michigan has refurbished its former Michigan Central station. The building was purchased and restored 25 years ago, but time and the elements had brought it to the place where it was in need of help.

Two local organizations stepped forward to help: Chelsea Downtown Development Authority covered the \$17,000 cost of replacement windows and Chelsea Community Foundations provided \$12,000 for paint. Gingerbread trim was repaired and locals both worked on and contributed toward the makeover. Now the station once again looks like it did when it first entered service.