

THE SWITCHLIST

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NRHS

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March Meeting

One of the definite benefits of being an Old North State chapter member is that you get to travel not only to other times but to other countries, and even to places that many of us could scarcely dream of visiting. Member Vincent Reh is pleased to share his extensive and amazing travels with us. This month he'll take us back to Cuba, where we'll view operations on the railroad system. Vince always brings most interesting programs, so do plan to be with us for a delightful evening on Tuesday 8 March.

Our meeting will be at our usual 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 much easier to turn right onto Sandy Forks Road, the second road after Millbrook, then left into the Falls Village parking lot. Our meeting room is reserved from 6:00 PM, but is typically available around 5:30 PM. After dinner together, the program will begin at 7:00 PM.

February Meeting Report

Those of us who journeyed to Richard Buchan's home for our February meeting not only got to view several amazing model railroads that he and friends are building, we got some first hand knowledge of Richard's chosen area of work in the iron and steel industry. His skill at modeling the integration of railroad and steel mill facilitated our learning. And, undoubtedly most important, we got to know Richard much better on his home turf. That was a real joy!

One unexpected lesson was that people, even ONS members, do not always read and follow directions. Only a few of us provided our choice of pizza information with Richard; fortunately he did order enough pizza so that the miscreants did not starve. Thank you for that kindness, Richard!

OF INTEREST

Amtrak funding for the remainder of the 2011 fiscal year is secure after a Republican-sponsored budget-cutting amendment was soundly defeated in the House of Representatives. The final tally was 250-176; obviously many Republicans saw the cuts as job-killing and supported Amtrak.

In other news, which in this instance has not made headlines, a chronic shortage of General Electric built P42 diesels over the past three months has often wreaked havoc with Amtrak service. Amtrak locomotives typically run more miles per month than those of any other railroad, but that is only one contributor to the shortage. Failures in a cast metal transition piece in the turbocharger assembly and traction motor ground failures have been the primary culprits. Problems have also arisen from cab car failures; these have necessitated the use of a second locomotive for push-pull Midwest corridor operations where wyes have frequently been snowed in.

There has also been an outbreak of fuel leaks and locomotive fires. These are apparently the result of insufficient torque being applied to each of the 14 fittings in each locomotive's fuel line, fuel pump, and injector.

As of 15 February, almost 25% of Amtrak's 199 active P42s were idled, as compared with less than 15% of the fleet normally scheduled for routine maintenance or overhauls at any one time.

Eleven turbocharger failures have sidelined P42s in the past three months. According to Amtrak, a shortage of spare parts owing to a holiday shutdown at General Electric delayed returning those units to service. GE personnel are still trying to determine the root cause of the failures, but are honoring warranties for repair. The traction motor ground fault problems were exacerbated by a software change that GE thought would reduce malfunctions. In actuality, failure rates increased 30%.

Despite below-zero temperatures and heavy snows that blanketed much of the country, Amtrak has so far been able to operate more service than it did in the winter of 2008-2009, when air-dryer problems in the P42s' air brake systems caused massive brake-line freeze-ups. The carrier notched up a 15th consecutive month of increasing ridership and had its best January ever, carrying 2.1 million passengers nationwide.

Florida lawmakers are scrambling to save \$2.4 billion in high-speed rail funds that Governor Rick Scott rejected. U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood offered them one week to put together a deal to save the Tampa-Orlando project.

Strong bipartisan opposition has erupted following Scott's rejection. The Republican controlled state Senate rebuked his action with a veto-proof majority. Its letter said "Politics should have no place in the future of Florida's transportation, as evidenced by this letter of bipartisan support."

Senator Paula Dockett, R-Lakeland, said she believed Florida Rail Enterprise (FRE) could act independently based on the blessing of the previous governor, Charlie Crist. The money could be routed through the state to FRE, which would then assume the risks of any costs not covered by the grant.

Station Bulletin Board

San Bernardino, California lost its Carpenter Gothic wooden station in 1916. A fire that had started in a coach shed on the north side of the tracks spread to the station on the south side when an errant ember sparked flames on the roof of the structure. It took five minutes for crews to reach the station, but by then it was too late for the 1886 building. It took an hour and twenty minutes for the large building to be turned into a pile of ruins. "The crashing of sections of the walls and roof of the building were spectacular," the newspaper said the next day, "and were punctuated by the bursting of steam pipes and the snapping of electric wires which gave out spurts of blue flame."

The loss was estimated at \$50,000. Two years later, when the Mission Revival style depot was christened as its replacement, the price tag was \$800,000. The Santa Fe's western shops arose at the same time.

That station had ceased to be used by the Santa Fe or its successors by 2001, and the railroad deeded the building to the San Bernardino Associated Governments (SANBAG). They set about restoring the structure with funding from a Federal Transit Administration grant of \$417,000, adding their own funds to complete the job. Fortunately, the state office of Historic Preservation brought forth requirements that had to be met for the National Register of Historic Places listing. Old photographs and the appearance of the building led many to assume that the building's original color had been gray. But sampling of areas that had not been exposed to weathering showed that it was actually a light tan color. A special aggregate had to be used to match the original stucco surface. When this work is completed, the station will look as close to its original appearance as possible.

Los Angeles was one among many cities both throughout the United States that had inclined railways. Today it is one of a handful that still do. While most are primarily tourist attractions, some do serve the very real needs of people who live atop a hill and work in the city below. Over the course of this year we will, from time to time, take a look at these inclines and the stations associated with them. Let's start with Los Angeles.

Of the several surviving inclines in southern California, Los Angeles' Angels' Flight Railway is undoubtedly the best known. Built in 1901, the Angels' Flight was a funicular, that is, a line where ascending and descending cars were linked together by a rope, thus counterbalancing one another. The line is not a long one at 315 feet, but it provided easy access to the residential area atop Bunker Hill.

The engine house for powering the railway was naturally at the top of the incline, and the primary station, a simple but elegant 1900's structure, was there as well. Angelinos worried about their funicular as the Bunker Hill area changed over the years and redevelopment came. But the city of the angels without the railway of the angels was unimaginable and celebrities and ordinary folks joined in a campaign to save it. They succeeded and the line was carefully dismantled and stored pending relocation and restoration. Thanks to the persistence and support of many, in 1996 the line was restored a few blocks from its original location and can be enjoyed today for 25 cents. Art & Lynette Peterson anticipate riding the line this June and will share their slides and experiences after their trip.