

WHEEL CLICKS

Pacific Railroad Society Inc.

FEBRUARY 2009

FULLERTON \$26 MILLION RAIL MUSEUM FAILS

The Fullerton City Council spent a couple of hours on December 2 debating the proposal to create a rail museum at the Fullerton Depot. In the end the proposal lost by a tie vote of 2:2. The motion would have given the proponents six months to come up with \$10 million, and if they did that they would get only the land (worth \$4 million) and not the \$26 million plus that they wanted. It is highly unlikely that they could raise that amount of money in a recession, since they have not raised that much in 13 years. It was a difficult decision for the Council to make especially with the room largely filled by supporters.

The proposing group, Fullerton Rail Plaza Association (FRPA), has been in existence for at least 13 years but still has fewer than 300 members and has not raised significant funds either through private or government sources.

Although the proposal died, it is quite possible that some rail-themed elements will remain in the depot development, perhaps a locomotive on the plaza or even a scaled-down exhibit space and gift shop.

[Info. from the *Fullerton Observer* via Ken Ruben]

NEVADA DERAILMENT TO DISRUPT SERVICE

A freight train derailed in northern Nevada, triggering a bridge collapse and major disruptions in rail service on one of the country's main east-west lines, Union Pacific said. The derailment occurred December 27, 2008 in a remote area along the Humboldt River about 10 miles west of Carlin and 260 miles east of Reno, UP spokeswoman Zoe Richmond said.

She said 13 cars containing grain were involved in the derailment and she was unsure how many cars the westbound locomotives were hauling. No injuries were reported. The 102-year-old bridge spanning the river collapsed a couple of hours after the derailment, Richmond said. Railroad officials are unsure how long it will take to restore it.

The line across northern Nevada connects Oakland and Salt Lake City as well as other points east. With the line shut down, UP's closest alternate east-west lines are located well to the north and south, with one going through Portland, Ore., and the other passing through Las Vegas. UP officials hope to come up with a plan in a couple of days on how to deal with the bridge.

The locomotives had passed through an 875-foot tunnel when the derailment occurred. Three cars derailed inside the tunnel and at least a couple of cars ended up in the river, Richmond said.

The cause of the derailment is under investigation by UP experts. Among other things, investigators will examine a "black box" that recorded the engineer's actions. Most UP locomotives also are mounted with a camera.

[Info. from *Associated Press* via Margo Petros]



FRED KNOX

Fred Knox passed away on Wednesday night, December 31, 2008, at age 89. Fred had gone into the hospital on December 13. He was disoriented and suffered from internal loss of blood, for reasons that were not specified, and he received several transfusions, to no avail.

His wife, Mary Ann Knox, was hospitalized for dehydration. She has been stabilized, is out of the hospital, and now is in an assisted living facility. Fred's Memorial service was held at Mountain View Mortuary in Altadena on Wednesday, January 14, 2009, in the "Drawing Room."

Fred served PRS in several capacities, including Treasurer from 1974 to 1984. As a United States Postal Employee, he did much of the work of mailing our monthly *Wheel Clicks*. Membership meetings were more enjoyable with the coffee, soda, and doughnuts purchased and sold by Fred.



WHEEL CLICKS

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PRS NEWS — ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

Feb. 6 Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Valencia Room, Joslyn Fri. Center, 210 N. Chapel Ave., Alhambra.
 Feb. 7, 14, Pacific Railroad Museum work party, 10 a.m. to 4 21, 28 p.m., 210 W. Bonita Avenue, San Dimas.
 Sats. Committee meeting: February 28.
 Feb. 7, 14, Rolling Stock repair day, 8:30 to ?, Saunders Yard, 21, 28 Noakes & Herbert Sts., Commerce. Regular day:
 Sats. 7, 21; Extra day: 14, 28. Committee Mtg.; 21
 Feb. 13 Membership Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Alhambra Room, Fri. Joslyn Center, 210 N. Chapel Ave., Alhambra.
 Feb. 20 Slide Night at Saunders Yard, 7:30 p.m., Noakes & Fri. Herbert Sts., Commerce. Everyone welcome.
 Feb. 25 *Wheel Clicks* Mailing Party with Ballot Package at Wed. Dick Finley's residence. Telephone: 626-794-0783.
 Mar. 6 Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Valencia Room, Joslyn Fri. Center, 210 N. Chapel Ave., Alhambra.
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 Ballot opening for FY2009 PRS Elected Officers.

MEETING PROGRAMS

by RUSS DAVIES

February 13: **The Santa Fe Ice Plants – Part 2.** **Charlie**

Schultz will present the second part of his presentation on the Santa Fe ice plants. It will include slides and information on the mechanical icing machines, precooling operations at San Bernardino, use and production of clear ice, an overview of each of the nine Santa Fe ice plants, and the closing of the plants. If you found his first presentation interesting, you are sure to like this one. **Be there, and bring news briefs!**

March 13: **Re-visit the wonderful Sacramento Railfairs with**

Joe Bonino! In this slide presentation Joe will cover the 1981, 1991, and 1999 events. As a bonus, we'll see the former SP Shop grounds as they are today in slides Joe shot in November while attending the recent Lexington Group meeting. The images will include steam and diesel power, both live and static, as well as live power arriving and departing the events. **Be there, and bring rail slide briefs!** (No digital facilities this night.)

PRS CELEBRATES WITH HOLIDAY PARTY

PRS members assembled on December 12, 2008, at Joslyn Center in Alhambra, to celebrate the holidays with an old-fashioned gathering reminiscent of the family parties held 50 years ago at the old Roger Young Auditorium.

Most Americans found that 2008 was a financially difficult time, and PRS members were no exception. Although PRS traditionally has held holiday banquets at Southland restaurants, the difficulty in finding a suitable place on short notice and the expense to our members of attending such an event caused the board to re-think our plans for 2008. Our holiday party was held at no cost to participants, with only a request that hor d'oeuvres, desserts, and munchies be contributed. The result was a delicious spread of colorful and enticing finger foods. During dinner, we were treated to an excellent live program of Christmas favorites on the piano by our own Greg Smith.

Holiday party chair, Pam Keyes, supervised the arrangements, including the decorations, obtaining of ice, and setting up and filling the coffee makers. After dinner, she introduced Vic D'Agostino, who works as a diesel mechanic with Pam at Amtrak, a post he has held since AT&SF days at Redondo Roundhouse. Vic presented and narrated movies his club made in 1965 along the Santa Fe and Denver and Rio Grande, including action shots of the unique RDC car 191 which is now part of our museum collection.

We are all thankful to the members who made this event possible, including Pam; Will Walters, who participated in every aspect of the event, from its inception to providing much of the food; Thomas Grose and each of the participants who "fed the kitty," whose generous cash donations paid the rental for the hall for the night, as well as other expenses; Debby Johnson, who shopped for and prepared many of the food and beverage items;

Mark Reyes, who transported supplies, decorations, and food to the Center; Marti Ann Draper, who designed and provided the flyers announcing the party, and contributed the poinsettias for the tables; Dave Abbott, Vince Cammarano, Bob and Helen Alexander, and each and every one of you who brought goodies to share or who helped to set up and clean up afterward. We left that evening with feelings of good fellowship and hopes that the new year would indeed be happy!

RECEIPTS AVAILABLE FOR TAX PURPOSES

PRS thanks all who made cash donations during the calendar year 2008. If you have not already received a receipt and need one to document your tax deductible contribution, please write to Pacific Railroad Society at 210 W. Bonita Avenue, San Dimas, CA 91773, or leave us a message at (909) 394-0616.

SAN PEDRO WATERFRONT PROJECT

In October the San Pedro Waterfront Project was visualized by Bob Henry of the Port of Los Angeles in having an ambitious plan with the Board of Harbor Commissioners determined to move forward. However, the economy may cause some of the more ambitious elements to be dropped.

The Cabrillo Beach extension was looked at as the first step. It was thought that the loop to the ocean shore would not only be helpful in equalizing flange wear, but over the past five years that the interurbans have been running, the sun has been doing more damage to the paint on the west side of the cars and the wear needs to be equalized. In the next few weeks the Pacific Harbor Lines (PHL) might pull the cars over to the Wilmington wye to be turned around.

The Waterfront Project is looking at an expansion up north Gaffey Street. The Port of Los Angeles received permission from the FRA to have PHL tow car 501 up to a spot immediately east of the new Target store for its VIP opening on October 7. [Info. from Jack Whitmeyer]

LRT STARTS IN PHOENIX by TOM NELSON

Add Phoenix, Arizona, to cities with light rail transit. After four years of construction, the 20-mile, \$1.4 billion startup-line was inaugurated on Dec. 28, 2008, and offered free rides through Dec. 31. The route takes riders between north-central Phoenix and Tempe.

[Info. from *L. A. Daily News*]

LOS ANGELES COUNTY RIDERS

During the month of November 2008, the average number of weekday riders traveling on trains going to, from, or within Los Angeles County, other than on Amtrak, was 271,687. This was an average decrease per day from October of 71,201 riders or about 21 percent. The large decrease from October to November is unexplained by any information available to *Wheel Clicks*.

CALTRAIN NEWS by MIKE GONDON

Caltrain finished off 2008 on a negative note when southbound Train No. 274 struck a trespasser on New Year's Eve, north of the Mountain View station. The incident stopped traffic in both directions while emergency personnel worked at the scene. The northbound track was opened after about a half hour,

but the southbound track wasn't opened for nearly two hours. The fatality was Caltrain's 16th for the year, double the eight fatalities recorded in 2007.

The incident did not disrupt Caltrain's extra New Year's Eve service which included three extra trains, departing San Francisco at 1:00 a.m., 1:45, and 2:15, New Year's morning. After 11:00 p.m. on New Year's Eve, all rides on Caltrain were free.

On December 22, Caltrain unveiled new boarding platforms and a new pedestrian underpass at the downtown Palo Alto station. The \$15-million improvement project also includes new shelters for disabled passengers, additional ticket vending machines, new visual message signs, and a new public address system.

The Palo Alto station is the second busiest in the Caltrain system, serving nearly 3,500 passengers each weekday. San Francisco's Fourth and Townsend terminal is the busiest.

The 2008 Toys for Tots Holiday Train, mentioned last month, collected a total of 5,309 donated toys and books for needy children in the Bay Area. This is a 27 percent increase from 2007, a pleasant surprise given the down economy. In addition, nearly \$2,250 in cash donations were received. The Holiday Train has received over 40,000 gifts since its inception in 2001.

On December 4, a computer glitch brought all Caltrain service to a standstill. Shortly after 9:00 a.m., both the main computer server and its backup broke down, causing signals to go red, and bringing trains to a halt. Switches had to be thrown manually, and trains ran at greatly reduced speeds.

Fortunately most of the morning commute was over by then and service was restored for the evening commute, but a few thousand people were still inconvenienced. As a gesture of apology, Caltrain offered free rides for the rest of the day.

S. CALIF. COMMUTER RAIL

Metrolink weekday, systemwide, average trips during November were 46,434, which was a decrease from the previous month of 221 or 0.5 percent. Average daily Metrolink monthly passholders on Amtrak were 1,743, which was a decrease from the previous month of 231 or 12 percent.

Metrolink weekday, systemwide, total schedule adherence (within 5 minutes) during November was 94 percent.

[Info. from Charles Varnes]

TRACK MAINTENANCE

Track maintenance is a continuing process crucial to the smooth, safe operation of trains. Metrolink tracks are maintained to prevent defects and conditions in accordance with federal regulations. Track maintenance begins with scheduled track inspections. Track inspectors look for items such as rail defects, wide gauge, deviations in surface and alignment, improperly operating switches, or defective ties.

Metrolink inspects its track three times a week, with one calendar day between inspections, and performs special inspections when required by extraordinary conditions such as heavy rains, high winds, or fires. Metrolink performs more weekly inspections than the Federal Railroad Administration requires.

In addition to undergoing regular visual inspections, tracks are mechanically tested for any deviation in track geometry three times per year and for internal rail defects twice per year.

Electromechanical sensors automatically detect and record track geometry over long distances. Ultrasonic sensors are used to detect and record internal flaws in the rails that cannot be spotted visually. Metrolink contracts with outside vendors to provide track geometry and rail flaw inspections. Currently, Metrolink has a track maintenance contract with Herzog Construction Corporation.

[Info. from *Metrolink Matters*]

SANTA PAULA BRANCH LINE

On Oct. 24, 2008, Metrolink approved the replacing of worn rail and ties, improving drainage areas and undergoing the improvement of two crossings on the Santa Paula Branch. These improvements will be on a 3.3-mile section located between Johnson Road in the City of Ventura to the Aliela Crossing in the Community of Saticoy in Ventura County. The Santa Paula Branch Line is owned by the Ventura County Transportation Commission. This project will connect to the previously completed widening project between Montalvo and Johnson Road. Much of the existing track within the project area has reached the end of its service life and should be replaced. In its current condition it is losing the ability to hold track gauge and safely carry trains, even at slow speeds. Eleven identified drainage areas that have deteriorated will be improved to comply with Southern California Regional Rail Authority's standards.

SCRRA issued an Invitation for Bid on June 16, 2008. Six bids were received and publicly opened on September 25, 2008. C.A. Rasmussen, Inc. was the lowest bidder at \$4, 097,051. A contingency of 10 percent was recommended by staff.

PUBLIC TRANSIT BECOMES POPULAR RIDE

The nation's public transportation systems saw the largest quarterly ridership increase in 25 years as more Americans shunned their automobiles, according to industry figures released December 8, 2008. Subways, buses, commuter rail and light rail systems saw a 6.5 percent jump in ridership from July to September, according to the Washington-based American Public Transportation Association. During the same quarter, Americans drove 4.6 percent less on the nation's highways.

Riders made 2.85 billion trips on public transportation during the third quarter, up from 2.67 billion trips a year ago. There have been gains in every quarter this year from 2007. Last year's 10.3 billion trips were the most on public transportation in 50 years.

Amtrak also is seeing growth, with ridership across the country up 11 percent from July to September, according to spokeswoman Karina Romero.

Some of the largest third-quarter ridership gains came in the Southwest. Bus ridership in Phoenix climbed more than 15 percent. The Orange County Transportation Authority in California saw its bus ridership soar by nearly 24 percent. The agency has continued to see big gains in the fourth quarter, reporting 6.3 million bus boardings in October, the highest in its history.

Light rail, which includes modern streetcars and trolleys, saw the highest percentage increase with double-digit growth in nine regions, including Baltimore, Minneapolis and Dallas. To welcome thousands of new riders, Dallas Area Rapid Transit has launched a Web page that provides novices with "six easy steps"

to using the bus or rail, spokesman Morgan Lyons said. The transit agency also has launched a campaign to ease parking congestion, urging riders to car pool to rail stations or park at less popular stops.

[Info. from *The Oregonian* via Caroline Hobson]

**PASSENGER TRAIN UPDATES by CHARLES VARNES
AMTRAK**

Historical On-Time Performance

The December 2008 historical on-time performance percentages for selected routes were:

Route	December 2008	Last 12 Months
Sunset Limited	88.5%	42.7%
Texas Eagle	61.3%	22.9%
Southwest Chief	77.4%	65.3%
California Zephyr	37.1%	27.7%
Empire Builder	42.3%	68.3%
Coast Starlight	61.3%	64.0%
City of New Orleans	82.3%	60.5%
Pacific Surfliner	85.2%	76.1%
San Joaquin	87.9%	83.5%
Amtrak Cascades	47.5%	65.6%
Illinois Service	55.0%	53.3%
Missouri Routes	54.3%	23.3%
Acela Express	87.4%	85.4%
Northeast Regional	77.8%	75.4%

BNSF Amtrak On-Time Performance Percentages

The latest Amtrak On-Time Performance Percentages posted on the BNSF News web page before column deadline were:

Amtrak On-Time Performance	2009-01-12	
TRAINS	MTD OTP	YTD OTP
Long-Distance Trains	66%	66%
Short-Distance Trains	88%	88%
Pacific Surfliners	96%	96%

Weather Related Service Disruptions

From late December through Mid-January *Amtrak Cascades* service suffered numerous disruptions from severe winter weather in the Pacific Northwest. *Empire Builder* and *California Zephyr* service was affected, also.

LONG-DISTANCE TRAINS

California Zephyr

Effective Jan. 26 time will be removed from the *California Zephyr* Schedule. Westbound Tr. No. 5 will continue to operate on its current schedule from Chicago to Salt Lake City, then 20 minutes earlier at Elko, 29 minutes earlier from Winnemucca through Martinez, and arrive in Emeryville 30 minutes earlier. Eastbound Tr. No. 6 will operate 15 minutes later from Emeryville to Winnemucca, to keep its current arrival time at Salt Lake City, and depart five minutes earlier operating five minutes earlier at all stops to Denver, before resuming its current schedule.

Coast Starlight

Between Jan. 25 and 27 the Union Pacific Railroad performed bridge work near Santa Barbara. During that time the *Coast Starlight* operated between Los Angeles and Sacramento via the UP route through the San Joaquin Valley. As on previous detours no specific alternate transportation was offered from missed stations between Los Angeles and Sacramento.

WESTERN CORRIDORS

Pacific Surfliner

During the Jan. 25-27 Union Pacific Railroad bridge work project near Santa Barbara, Pacific Surfliner trains operated only as far as Oxnard. Motor coach transportation was offered to stations north of Oxnard, with the exception of Lompoc-Surf.

Amtrak Cascades

Amtrak Cascades Seattle-Vancouver Tr. Nos. 510/517 will continue to operate using *Superliner* equipment through April 15, 2009. While operating using *Superliner* equipment the train offers lower level seating, snack bar service, and checked baggage service. There is no business class, sit-down meal service, movies, and unboxed "BV" bicycle space.

DEPOT DOINGS

VANCOUVER, Wash. The depot reopened on Jan. 13, 2008, following a six-month, \$650,000 renovation. During the renovation station services were provided from a single-wide trailer located adjacent to the depot. It is served by *Amtrak Cascades* trains and the Portland section of the *Empire Builder*.

DAYLIGHT TIME

Reminder: In 2009, daylight time begins on March 8 and ends on November 1.

[Info. from Ken Ruben, Ed Von Nordeck]

AMTRAK PONDERES RESTARTING PIONEER ROUTE

Amtrak is studying what it would take to reinstate the Pioneer train route that crossed eastern Oregon. Amtrak has been asked to comply with a 2007 law requiring studies of possibly reviving closed passenger train routes. Senator Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said Amtrak ridership has increased substantially this year, probably in response to spiking gasoline prices. [Info. from *The Oregonian* via Caroline Hobson]

PANAMA CANAL RAILWAY COMPANY

The Panama Canal Railway Company (PCRC) has completed an investment of \$25 million to increase intermodal rail capacity along the Panama Canal. Under the investment, PCRC has acquired seven locomotives, two RTG intermodal cranes, three Linde sideloaders and additional support equipment, including tampers and trucks. The railroad also extended its Atlantic and Pacific intermodal terminals from seven double-stack car lengths to 10 and added 16 double-stack cars to its fleet.

The expansion comes as more steamship lines use the PCRC to carry out transshipment operations rather than send ships through the canal itself. "Steamship lines are using PCRC to add value to the Panama Canal maritime route by carrying out transshipment operations on both coasts of Panama, and using our railroad to link the ports on both coasts," said PCRC Director of Marketing, Tom Kenna. The 47.6-mile PCRC, which has been moving about 8,000 containers per week, is jointly owned by Kansas City Southern (KCS) and Panama Holdings.

[Info. from *Pacific Maritime Magazine*]

PE SERVICE ON THE CATALINA SPECIAL

Since 1905, the Pacific Electric Railway had provided boat train service to bring passengers from inland cities to the dockside. The electric car service was so superior that both the

Southern Pacific and the Salt Lake Railroad eventually dropped their local service. As time passed, the service improved.

Special boat trains were operated, not only from Los Angeles (6th and Main Sts.), but from Pasadena and Long Beach direct to the new Catalina Terminal in Wilmington. In the summer season it was common to see a bright red, six car "Catalina Special," made up of Pacific Electric's finest steel equipment, running at high speed with a full load of happy passengers. This would be followed 30 minutes later by a second identical train which connected with the second sailing.

Some of the boat trains carried parlor cars where one might enjoy a deeply cushioned, reserved, wicker chair upon payment of 25¢ additional fare. There was nothing quite like the big red cars for getting to the harbor.

[From *An Informal Synopsis of Steamship Service to Santa Catalina Island* by Lester Glenn Arellanes via Jack Whitmeyer]

URBAN RAIL TRANSIT

LOS ANGELES METRO RAIL

RIDERSHIP

November 2008	Red Line	Blue Line	Green Line	Gold Line
Weekday Ave.	139,510	76,473	38,100	22,321
Saturday Ave.	98,151	56,472	20,856	15,511
Sunday Ave.	75,275	48,642	15,566	10,553
Monthly Total	3,593,091	2,027,203	921,581	564,971

TAP READY FOR REDUCED FARE CUSTOMERS

Metro riders with Senior, College/Vocational, or Student K-12 discount passes need to submit an application for a new reusable TAP card. Applications are available at Metro customer centers or online.

GOLD LINE EASTSIDE EXTENSION

Train testing is scheduled to begin mid-January on the Gold Line Eastside Extension. The six-mile extension linking downtown Los Angeles with Little Tokyo/Arts District, Boyle Heights and East L.A. opens in mid-2009.

GOLD LINE FOOTHILL EXTENSION

The Gold Line Foothill Extension is on a list of projects the county's main transit agency is recommending for inclusion in a promised federal stimulus package intended to create jobs throughout the nation. The proposed 24-mile extension of the line to Claremont already has a source of funding in the county sales-tax hike - Measure R. But federal stimulus money could mean the project will get underway a lot sooner, officials said January 14.

In a draft of the Metropolitan Transportation Agency's "Long Range Transportation Plan," the Gold Line is listed with construction beginning in 2015 and completion of the project projected for 2017. The Gold Line Foothill Extension Authority, the independent agency created to build the project, however, hopes to begin construction by the end of 2010 and finish the project by 2013.

However, if the Long Range plan is passed as is, it would mean that the Measure R funding would be insufficient to start construction in 2010 as hoped, said Habib Balian of the Extension Authority.

Other rail projects, including the Exposition rail line that would run along Exposition Blvd in Los Angeles towards Venice, and the "subway to the sea" are also on the stimulus

wish list. MTA notes that the Gold Line would be more ready to go than those projects. It estimates the Gold Line could have a contract in place as soon as a year after receiving federal money, compared to two years for the other projects.

Right now the project had enough money to only get to the Azusa/Glendora border, but possibly as far as San Dimas, said Balian.

Adding federal money might not mean the line gets any further, since the MTA could then withdraw an equal amount of earmarked Measure R funds and use them on other projects. The line is slated to receive \$725 million in Measure R money. [Info. from *Pasadena Star-News*]

WESTSIDE EXPRESS SERVICE PROBLEMS

Colorado Railcar Manufacturing, the company Portland's TriMet kept alive the past year with more than \$5 million in public money, went out of business the last week of December, unable to attract new financing. TriMet still plans a February launch of the Westside Express Service, the new commuter rail line between Beaverton and Wilsonville, which will use self-propelled passenger railcars built by the Colorado company.

"They've got everything they need to operate," said Larry Salci, until recently president of Colorado Railcar. Salci said TriMet might need help from engineers who once worked for Colorado Railcar.

TriMet continues its legal battle to recover \$3 million paid to fund Colorado Railcar's operations. The commuter railcars were finished only after TriMet seized control of the private company earlier last year. Agency officials said they took the unprecedented action after discovering that contract payments meant for TriMet's cars had been diverted. Suppliers had stopped delivering parts, and the company had run out of cash. TriMet officials said they had no choice but to fund the company's operations long enough to finish the four railcars.

The agency contracted with Colorado Railcar in 2005, aware that the company was in financial peril. Agency executives said they also were aware that the company's owner, Tom Rader, had prior business troubles in the rail industry, including being forced to scrap a speciality train commissioned by cigarette maker Philip Morris. Philip Morris paid \$70 million before stopping the project.

TriMet board members said they were not told of Rader's business history when they approved the \$17 million contract. Internal agency records contain no reference to that past. All board members said that once TriMet encountered problems with Colorado Railcar, it couldn't turn back. The company was the only manufacturer of the DMU cars needed for the commuter service. "Was everybody happy? No. But it was the best alternative," said board member Sue Van Brocklin, a public relations executive.

George Passadore, board president and a retired banker, said he's not sure the board could have changed course regardless. He said the key problem with the rail project was that federal regulators mandated the type of car that could be used and required it be built in the United States. Only Colorado Railcar's self-propelled car fit the requirement.

But federal transit authorities told *The Oregonian* that the project wouldn't have been funded in the first place if normal regulations had been followed. Paul Griffo, senior public affairs

officer at the Federal Transit Administration, said the commuter project didn't have the efficiency to qualify for federal funding. Congressional legislators forced the agency to proceed anyway, he said. "The language exempted the project from the cost effectiveness threshold," Griffo said.

TriMet is known for bringing projects in on time and under budget, and its experience with the Westside Express Service is far from typical. But, in this case, TriMet failed to perform up to the standard Portland citizens have come to expect from the agency. Whether the agency was ignorant or knew the risks, the result is the same: it gambled with public funds.

Happily, it appears the gamble has paid off. TriMet says the commuter line will be up and running in February, and it's now testing the cars on the track. "We're still very convinced we've got a sound vehicle," said TriMet's Neil McFarlane. Getting the diesel cars built was a prerequisite for opening the line. Colorado Railcar is the only U.S. manufacturer that meets the federal requirements for "crash-worthiness" and for the cars to be "American-made," TriMet's Fred Hansen said.

[Info. from *The Oregonian* via Caroline Hobson, Ken Ruben]

FOAMERS ARE CRAZY ABOUT TRAINS

It's another Friday night at the Fullerton railroad station, which is full of the usual types: commuters with briefcases, people sprinting over a bridge because they found themselves on the wrong side of the tracks, families struggling with suitcases.

At one end a group of men has gathered. Few ever pay them much mind, but the longer you look, the more they stick out, because they have been at the station for a very long time, though they have nowhere to go. They are members of a network of railroad fanatics – hobbyists who study trains, photograph trains, videotape trains and ride trains, all with a fervor that makes birders, ham radio operators and the like seem like laggards.

Dropping in here helps one understand a confounding issue raised by the Sept. 12 Metrolink crash: why a group of teenagers had been exchanging text messages that day with engineer Robert M. Sanchez. It turns out that the teens were fledging members of the network, a world that is virtually unknown except among the enthusiasts themselves and the engineers who offer them a tired wave at the station. But there are hundreds of thousands of them – across the United States, in India, Australia, Zimbabwe – hobbyists who are known, variously, as railfans, cranks, trainspotters and gunzels.

The most die-hard are known as foamers – a term believed to have originated as an insult, used to describe people who get so excited at the sight of a train that they foam at the mouth. Some refuse to use the word "foamer." (These are sensitive people and not without reason; in England, "trainspotting" is a euphemism for useless activity.) Others have appropriated the word for themselves, an exercise in a kind of geek pride.

Whatever they call themselves, they seem to speak in a foreign language – of wigwags and hoggers, shooters and boomers, varnishes and highballs. Some speak elegantly of the rails' role in the development of the West. Many speak of trains with reverence, not as a means of transit but as a rolling metaphor. Train travel, they believe, fosters a sense of community and cooperation sorely missing in today's world – certainly on

the freeways of Southern California.

At its heart, the hobby has the simplest of foundations: the might and majesty of the machines themselves. The enthusiasts see what most do not: tons of steel ferrying business people, toys from China, huge tanks of natural gas, all sharing the same shape without incident – except for those rare, terrible moments when the whole thing falls apart. “The power is just so immense,” said Scott Zechiel, a software engineer, standing on the Fullerton platform.

Behind him, train after train rumbled in, each its own beautiful mess, all bellowing engines and hissing brakes. The largest of the trains, typically the freights, cast off enough of a breeze that everyone’s hair puffed up a bit as they passed. “We like it when the ground shakes under our feet,” Zecheil said. “We like the sounds, the screeches. We can’t get enough of it. So we keep coming back.”

In Southern California, Fullerton is foamer central. The station is friendly to railfans – which is not true of some others – and is pleasant and comfortable, with shade canopies and cafes. But mostly it’s about the traffic; some days 100 or more trains pass through, and it’s an unusual blend of passenger trains and freights.

Most of the teens who knew Sanchez were Fullerton fixtures. They were often seen racing down the platform, cameras and tripods over their shoulders, to get the best shots of an oncoming train. ~~Indeed, one of the first places several of the friends went after the crash was to the Fullerton station, where they could clear their heads and be with their own~~

Zechiel, 44, is another regular. He bought his home in nearby Yorba Linda because it overlooks the tracks. Since 1997, with an informal group that calls itself the Fullerton Foamers and Foto Society, Zechiel has spent every Friday and Saturday night watching the trains. He figures he misses about four weekends a year, when he’s sick or when he is traveling – “which is, of course, by rail,” he said.

On busy nights, there are five or six similar gatherings of railfans at the Fullerton station, sometimes as many as 50 railfans in all. Engineers have taken to calling it “Foamerton.” The FF&FS, as Zechiel’s group is known, is tight-knit and well-organized. Members bring scanners to listen to conversations between engineers and conductors and a laptop programmed to replicate what dispatchers see at their desks. Many members are published photographers; during lulls between trains, they show slides of trains set to the music of Moby and U2.

Together, they make regular trips to the Cajon Pass, a popular gathering place for train lovers because of dramatic backdrops and track assemblies considered to be engineering feats. One trip, each January, is called “The Big Cajona”; they camp out with a luau theme. “Basically, we sit around solving the world’s problems and complaining about our jobs. Then a train comes, and everything stops. We all watch the train. Then the train passes on and we get back to it,” said Jeffrey Bass, 48, who manages the parts department at a car dealership. “Everybody has their own interest. This is ours.”

Rail enthusiasts have long had a delicate relationship with the industry. “I kind of grew up with them,” said Tom Dinger, a Southern Pacific and Amtrak engineer for 41 years, based in Southern California, before he retired two winters ago. “I think

they’re harmless. They just have deep affection for trains. It’s kind of a strange phenomenon. But I never had a problem with them.”

But there have been some aggressive railfans who have crossed the line – trespassing to get a photo, for instance, even stealing pieces of equipment for souvenirs. Increasingly, railfans have become rail professionals themselves – engineers, conductors, dispatchers – which has become the source of considerable tension. “There’s been a kind of silent invasion,” one Amtrak engineer said in an interview. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he did not want to be “outed” as a railfan. “I stay in the closet,” he said. “I don’t advertise too much that I’m a train buff, because I’ll be lumped in with them, with the ones who aren’t quite extremists but can’t keep their interest sufficiently under wraps.”

The Chatsworth crash – and revelations that Sanchez was in contact with railfans while on the job – caused a surprisingly caustic backlash against the hobbyists. On one website that is considered a must-read among engineers, an entry titled “The End of Foamers” was posted after the crash. “This is a scary, high-stakes job where each and every one of us is at risk of being involved or up on a stage,” the post read. “If anything good is to come out of this awful week I hope it’s the complete eradication of foamers from railroad property. . . . If you want to foam out, go to a railroad museum.”

The rail companies have not figured out how to deal with railfans. At times they have shunned them, as when officials erected an 8,500-foot-long fence to keep railfans away from the tracks near the Cajon summit. On the other hand, Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway has begun a formal program that effectively deputizes railfans to keep an eye out for security threats. Some engineers have been encouraged to interact with younger railfans because they are seen as the future ranks of professionals, not to mention articulate lobbyists for the future of passenger rail – a future that has not always looked bright.

The trend lines are on the railfans’ side. The hobby has exploded in recent years. There are railfanning magazines. You can download freight train ring tones. There are rail “cruises” on refurbished antique locomotives. There are hundreds of websites, on which hobbyists dissect the angle of a particular engine’s exhaust flange or the letter that President Ford sent to Congress in 1974 while vetoing a federal railroad retirement benefits package.

Towns across the nation have discovered that although they are in the middle of nowhere – perhaps because they are – they have become popular railfanning destinations. Rochelle, Ill., a town of 9,000 with a renowned freight crossing, built a park on an elevated piece of land where railfans can watch trains, complete with speakers broadcasting the transmissions of engineers and conductors. This summer, North Platte, Neb., opened a \$4.5-million, 15-story-high platform where railfans can watch the action at the Bailey Yard, billed as the largest rail yard of its type in the world.

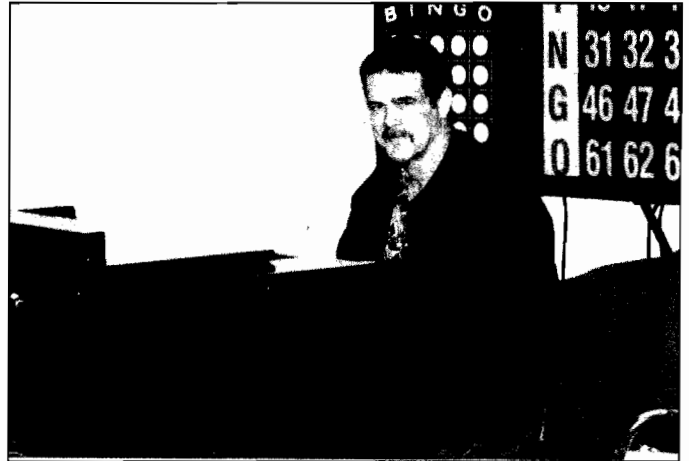
“We get people from every age group, from all walks of life. Everyone can make of it what they want,” said Todd DeFeo, the Atlanta-based editor of www.railfanning.org, one of the most popular hobby websites. “It’s a nice hobby.”

[Info. from *Los Angeles Times* via Ken Ruben]



Holiday Party Chairman Pam Keyes hands the microphone to Vic D'Agostino at the Holiday party at Joslyn Center. Pam and Vic knew one another from their work at Amtrak, where Pam is the material procurement supervisor for the Western Region of Amtrak, while Vic has spent the last 30 years as a diesel mechanic at the Redondo diesel servicing facility in Los Angeles, California.

Photo by Marti Ann Draper



Greg Smith's stellar performance at the piano "Helped to make the season bright."

Photo by Marti Ann Draper



Pam Keyes, Debby Johnson, and Mark Reyes enjoy the "eats" at the 2008 PRS Christmas Party.

Photo by Marti Ann Draper



Vic D'Agostino, Sr., Vic D'Agostino, Jr., and Rod Fishburn enjoy the PRS Holiday Party. Vic Sr., an Amtrak diesel mechanic, presented films shot in the mid-1960s as the evening's highlight. Vic Jr. is an Amtrak conductor. Rod was friends with Vic Sr. when their club made the films, and is now a PRS member, and owner with his wife, Ellen, of the ex-Pennsy Colonial Crafts.

Photo by Marti Ann Draper



Rolling Stock volunteers and their families enjoy a barbecue cook-out to celebrate the Holidays at Saunders Yard in Commerce on December 3, 2008.

Photo by Marti Ann Draper