

The



Trainmaster

July, 1997

The Official Publication of the
Pacific Northwest Chapter,
National Railway Historical Society
Portland, Oregon

Astoria Line Changes Hands

by Glenn Laubaugh

The long-rumored short line purchase of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe's line between Portland and Astoria has finally come to pass. Transfer of control of the line is expected to occur at 12:01 am July 4, 1997. The ex-Spokane Portland and Seattle branch from Willbridge Junction in northwest Portland to Tongue Point (several miles outside Astoria) will be transferred to the Portland and Western.

The Astoria line has come full circle, having started its existence as a local railroad, later becoming part of the Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railway, and ultimately being absorbed by the Burlington Northern and thus into the BNSF.

The first section of this line to be completed was from Portland to Goble. This part of the line was built by the Northern Pacific as part of that railroad's line between Portland and the Seattle area. Boats were used to transfer passengers between the line at Goble and the Washington side of the Columbia River.

The Astoria end of the "A-line" was started with the incorporation in 1888 of the Astoria & South Coast Railway. The purpose of the line was to build a railroad from Astoria to Tillamook Bay and to Fort Stevens. Railroad construction started in 1889 near what is now Warrenton. The line into Seaside was completed in 1891, but did not serve Astoria directly by train. Instead, a dock was built to on the west side of Young's Bay so that ships could transfer passengers to the trains as quickly as possible. A proposed extension from Seaside to Hillsboro was never completed, though grading was performed in a few places.

In 1893 the Seashore Road Company took over the line, and in 1896 completed the bridge over Young's Bay.

Another ownership change occurred in 1897, when the line was purchased by the Astoria & Columbia River Railroad. This line had been incorporated in 1895 with the goal of constructing a connecting line between Goble and Astoria. The first train from Astoria to Portland ran on May 16th, 1898.

Access between Portland and Goble was provided with a 99 year lease of the Northern Pacific line between those points.

In 1907, James Hill purchased the Astoria & Columbia River. The line then started to be operated as part of Hill's Spokane, Portland & Seattle Railway. Actual transfer of the assets happened in 1911.

The SP&S, the Northern Pacific, the Great Northern, the Chicago Burlington and Quincy, and other railroads were merged in 1970 to form the Burlington Northern railroad.

In 1978 the line into Seaside was abandoned, and in the late 1980's all other trackage west of Astoria was abandoned due to the maintenance requirements of the Young's Bay Bridge.

In recent years the traffic on the "A-line" has fallen even further, as much of the business formerly passing through the Port of Astoria has been moved to larger port cities. With declines in revenue and passing of the line into branch line status, the "A-line" appeared to be a candidate for either abandonment or selling back into local ownership.

Although many various proposals were rumored to be on the horizon over the past few years, nothing concrete arrived until this

transaction between the Portland & Western and the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe. The sale agreement is that the Genesee & Wyoming, which is the parent company of the Portland & Western, will purchase the line-side structures and track between Willbridge and Tongue Point. The bridges and right of way under the track will be donated by BNSF to the Oregon Department of Transportation.

The line from Tongue Point to Astoria has already been sold to the city of Astoria.

In its initial state, the line will be isolated from the rest of the Portland & Western system. Trackage rights agreements to connect this operation to the rest of the Portland & Western system have not yet been completed, and the line does not connect with the existing Portland & Western lines at any point.

BNSF will allow trackage rights over its own track as far as its own property goes in northwest Portland. However, they do not have the authority to admit trains on the Portland & Western Astoria line to the Portland Terminal at Union Station, or beyond.

Initially, the BNSF and the P&W had hoped to be able to obtain trackage rights over the Portland Terminal and Union Pacific into Brooklyn Yard in Southeast Portland. This would allow the Portland & Western to operate as one system. However, these trackage rights could not be approved before the line was sold. Negotiations continue.

Perhaps the biggest limitations by the current arrangements are those on intraline traffic between Astoria and the rest of the Portland & Western and Willamette & Pacific properties.

Currently, the line is not open all the way to Astoria. There is a large landslide near Brownsmead that obstructs the line. Oregon Department of Transportation consultants estimated that removing this mound of earth from the line would cost approximately \$2.5 million. According to a recent article in the *Portland Oregonian*, there are some within the Port of Astoria and within the Portland & Western railroad that would like to see railroad service restored all the way to Astoria.

Bob Melbo, of the Portland & Western, had the following to say about restoring service to Astoria, in a letter to the *Trainmaster* about the issue:

"We would like to restore rail service to Astoria--in fact we believe that rail service can have a good future there. The trick will be to develop a reason to reopen the line; i.e., we need a commitment for some initial traffic in sufficient quantity to justify the expenditure of clearing the slide."

Although unstated in Mr. Melbo's letter, there is also a need for Astoria to develop a railroad customer base that is sufficient to provide base load traffic over that part of the line. Even before the slide, traffic to Astoria had decreased to the point where it was at best marginal.

With special thanks to chapter member Walter R. Grande, whose book on the Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railway provided much of the historical background for this article, and probably for many authors and articles yet to come. This book is a truly magnificent work, and for those seeking more information on the Astoria line are encouraged to get their hands on volume II, which describes the branch lines and subsidiaries of "The Northwest's Own Railway." Thanks also to Bob Melbo of the Portland & Western and Willamette & Pacific family of railroads for providing the information about the transfer the line.

Membership Notice

If you have paid your 1997 dues to the National Railway Historical Society and have not received your membership card please contact us.

**Membership Services
Pacific Northwest Chapter NRHS
P.O. Box 2384
Portland, Oregon 97208-2384**

or call Ralph Johnson at (503) 654-1930.

We will also still accept your membership for 1997.

PNWC- NRHS ANNUAL PICNIC

AUGUST 16TH AT

**WESTERN ANTIQUE POWERLAND
BROOKS, OREGON**

11:00 A.M. - 4:00 P.M.

**EAT AT 1:00 P.M. CHICKEN IS BEING BARBEQUED
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COST \$2.00 FOR A PIECE OF CHICKEN AND A SOFT
DRINK.**

**BRING YOUR FAVORITE SIDE DISH OR DESSERT
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**TRAIN RIDES
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**COME AND JOIN US FOR A DAY OF FUN AND FELLOWSHIP WITH
THE OTHER RAILROAD GROUPS WHO PLAN TO ATTEND. FOR
INFORMATION, CALL DAREL MACK AT 654-5017 OR BOB
TERKLESEN AT 399-1882.**

Editorial Notes

Format changes continue to be made to the *Trainmaster*. This issue marks the first time that the timetable and contact information, which usually appears on the inside front cover, has been placed in the inside rear cover of the publication. Although this will make this information slightly harder to find to those who are used to looking on the inside front cover, there are some advantages to this format.

First and foremost, this overcomes the inability of certain editing software to split articles into two sections, because it avoids splitting the article in the first place.

Your editorial staff hopes that this also improves the readability of articles. One of the biggest complaints that many people have with modern newspapers is the scattering of multiple article segments through the publication. Presumably, this type of complaint is also relevant to such publications as the *Trainmaster*. Because the address, postage, and officer information on the rear cover of the *Trainmaster* never changes much from month to month, it will never spill over into the main body of the rest of the publication. Therefore, as long as the timetable and contact information is placed on the rear cover, no articles in this publication will ever have to be split into segments ever again.

This publication is, however, for the benefit of members of this organization. Therefore, if there is a large amount of complaints received in the *Trainmaster* "in box" at Room 1, then the publication will go back to the way things were. However, due to the advantages of this current format, one experimental issue this way is worth a try.

Every attempt is being made to use the larger 12-point typeface. There has been much positive feedback on using the larger size printing. However, in some cases (such as the meeting minutes) it is difficult to use this larger print.

From The Wire

UP, BNSF Develop Joint Pricing from a press release provided by the Union Pacific Railroad

As part of the agreements associated with the UP/SP merger, UP/SP and the Burlington Northern/Santa Fe have agreed to a proportional rate arrangement which will allow the Union Pacific to quote single line rates in the I-5 corridor. This agreement will give shippers a new UP competitive option to BNSF on traffic moving north and south in this important corridor and to Canadian and Mexican interchanges. The remaining details of this arrangement are still being finalized. We will notify customers as soon it becomes available for use.

Geographic Scope:

UP/SP can quote rates to or from BNSF points in the following areas:

- Canadian interchanges in the Vancouver area and Sweet Grass, MT
 - Points north of Seattle and west of Cascades
 - Points north of Portland, including Seattle and west of Cascades
 - Washington points east of Cascades and west of and including Spokane
 - Points east of Spokane and west of Billings and Havre, Montana (includes MRL and other BNSF connections)
- Moving over the Portland Gateway from or to UP or SP points or connections in:
- Arizona (includes Mexico connections at Nogales)
 - California (includes Mexico connections at Calexico)
 - Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah
 - Texas west of Monahans and Sanderson (includes Mexico connections at El Paso)

"From the Wire" contains bits and pieces from various news sources. Contributions are welcome, but sources close to the point of origin are preferred to insure reliability and accuracy.

Mailbag



Subject: P&W/W&P News Items

In printing the names of W&P and P&W, use of the ampersand (&) is correct. The official names of all Genesee & Wyoming companies use the ampersand in lieu of the word "and," and that is the way the names of the Willamette & Pacific and Portland & Western are registered with Oregon's Secretary of State. We do, as a matter of style, spell out "and" when lettering passenger equipment, thus: WILLAMETTE AND PACIFIC will appear on letterboards. This is the only exception to use of the ampersand.

Regarding the FRED, rather than saying the device allows the engineer to "set the train air brake," it would be more appropriate to say that "allows the engineer to initiate an emergency application of the train air brakes from the rear car of the train." With this device it is emergency, or nothing. To say "set" sort of implies that the engineer has some control over the degree of brake application. But he doesn't. The FRA now requires these devices for all trains operating in moderate and heavy grade territories because of a rash of runaways throughout the country over the past two years. Some of them, like the BNSF Cajun Pass

wreck, have been horrific disasters. They have resulted from blockages of the air brake line which runs back from the locomotive, car-to-car for the entire length of the train. This pipe functions both as the supply and control line. When blocked, the engineer loses the ability to apply the brakes beyond the point of blockage. The new type FREDs allow the engineer to "dynamite" the train line from the rear car by sending a radio signal from the engine. It is the same as if there was a caboose on the rear end and the conductor opened the emergency brake valve in the caboose, thus exhausting all air in the line and applying the brakes in emergency.

Bob Melbo
P&W, W&P railroads

Mailbag contains a few of the interesting letters that we have received. Although some of these individuals may have already been given assistance, had questions answered, or otherwise been contacted by other chapter members, the nature of some of these requests begs for general assistance from any chapter member who may be able to assist them. Contact addresses or phone numbers are not printed unless specific permission from the letter author is given. Correspondence to the *Trainmaster* should be addressed as given on the inside rear cover of this issue (page 7).

Library Notes

In late May, the Library Committee applied for a grant from the National office. This grant program is part of the budget that comes out of the national dues that every chapter member, as well as every National Railway Historical Society member, pays. The library committee has for some time needed better storage containers and other hardware for improved storage of the various valuable documents owned by the Chapter. The grant was approved and the amount is sufficient to allow for significant improvements to take place. A special thanks should go to Bob Weaver of the Library Committee.

Meeting Minutes

General Business Meeting,
June 20, 1997

CTO: 7:40

Welcome Members & Guests. No guests

Minutes: Minutes of the May Chapter meeting were read and approved.

Treasurer's Report: provided to members present

Officer's Reports:

President:

There was an open house held by the West Side Transportation Committee. Very few of the public were there so it was possible to have a good detailed discussion with them. George pitched the idea of doing a demonstration project rather than other studies. Made them aware that we have RDC's and there are other RDC's in the area that could be used. There are many obstacles but none beyond solution.

We have continued to have vandalism problems at Beaverton. The 76 has had broken windows. Into the

1220 and 4461 but we think we've reinforced the doors to stop the break-ins.

Met with Bob Melbo during a hospital move from St Marys to Albany. 11:30 to 7:00pm. Talked about a number of issues. He's concerned about the fact that we haven't sold any equipment yet. George reassured him that no we haven't, but we're working on it.

OMSI is planning a rail transportation event in December. They are asking for specifics. Looking at the 700 and a OERHS streetcar. Other things too. Looking for member suggestions of things to be displayed.

The BOD has been wrestling with security for the Chapter. Locks have been changed today for Room 1, Room 1A, and Rolling Stock. New keys will be issued. Asking for a \$10 deposit, which will be refunded when the key is returned.

Question. Might we work with the Oregon Marine Museum to jointly display. Glenn has been in communication with them and their space is limited and being used to its fullest capacity.

National Director: Gerry Schuler. Seven Chapter members are going to the National Convention in Salt Lake City.

Committee Reports:

Rolling Stock. Our president is concerned because he can't seem to get help. Saturday, tomorrow, workers will meet at Hoodys to police the area and pick up broken glass. Then go down the Oregon Business Park and police up the area around the cars there. Will also work to seal up the Mt. Hood. W&P has stated in regard to the brush clearing that George had done at Wilsonville, "it's beautiful". Concern was raised about coordination of these workparties. This issue will be worked on to improve communication.

Membership. 248 members for 1997 so far. About 40 past members have not signed up for this year.

Excursions. Irv not present. Prineville seems to be going well. Some trouble getting the Port of Portland about being able to use their parking lot over that weekend. That has now been resolved. Staff will be kept to a bare minimum. Redding trip is still under development. Have had continuing discussions with AMTRAK but they haven't given us a price for the train yet. Their price will determine whether or not the trip is viable.

Library. Library will be open regular hours tomorrow. National has acknowledged receipt of our grant application

Activities. Picnic, Saturday August 16 at Brooks. 11-4 with lunch at 1:00. \$2.00 for chicken and a can of pop. Potluck required for the rest of the meal. Live steamers will be providing rides. Our wigwag down there is in need of paint. Others: Yaquina Pacific Chapter, Willamette Valley MRC, CGMRC, PRPA, Aorta, Southern Oregon NRHS Chapter will all be invited. Want an estimate from the other groups on attendees by the end of July.

Concessions. The Chapter's table didn't do very well at the May 31 swapmeet. Probably won't do the May meet in the future. Announced the AMTRAK/OAAA RR museum rail tour in mid-September.

Bond Retirement/Relocation Committee. The committee has met a couple more times. In the process of putting together a one page broadside for each piece of equipment. We continue to talk to interested people. S12 at T4 continues to be under negotiation. [Potential buyer] has looked into storage location and crane service, but the deal isn't done yet. No change in the status of other equipment. Had long conversation with Al McCready and it was agreed that they will hold off until October, when we will take funds from the Emergency Fund as necessary. We have several people who are interested [in purchasing rolling stock] but we need our one pagers and an asking price for each piece of equipment. **Question:** How is pricing being set? We're doing broad research from a number of sources. Further evidence of a soft market is the news that other museums in the country seem to be thinning out their collections too.

Part of the frustration of dealing with this equipment is the lack of volunteers to work on the equipment. If this continues, then the membership would seem to be indicating that there is interest. **Question** from the audience. There has not been announced when the work parties are going to happen. We need some scheduling. Discussion of the hardships of working in these locations because of the lack of power and the fact that all the tools must be brought and taken home every time. Once we get a location with security, there should be more interest. (Work party will be near 217 & Allen Blvd.) **Question.** Might the Red River be moved to Albany? **Answer:** In order to do so, we would have to lay some track. There is a concern because of the distance.

Programs. Bad news. The video projector that had been used at Chapter meetings has disappeared under mysterious circumstances from its storage place at Intel and will not be available for Chapter meetings for the foreseeable future.

Old Business:

Insurance Claim on damage to 3300: UP has taken over these claims. But they are taking the position that they aren't paying. It's now been 7 years since the accident and our inaction in demanding payment is working against our position.

Leak in Room 1A: Committees are asking for a letter to be sent to PDC to solve the leak in the roof of Room 1A.

Good of the Order

Bob Terkelsen announced an article about OERHS operations at Brooks that appeared in the Kiezer newspaper.

Question: Do we still have accident insurance in case one of our workers is hurt? Yes, this is part of our insurance package.



The Trainmaster

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Membership
 in the Pacific Northwest Chapter, National Railway Historical Society is available as follows:

Regular: \$32 / year
Joint: \$40 / year

Membership prices include National Membership as well as membership in the local chapter. For more information, please contact the membership chair at the above address or phone number.

Trainmaster Contributions:

Contributions for the Trainmaster are most welcome. Deadlines for each issue is the 20th of the previous month. Last minute additions may be made after that time, but publication of such last minute additions can not be guaranteed. Contributions should be sent to the address, e-mail address, or fax at the top of this column. Typed double space contributions are preferred.

Regular Board of Directors Meetings:
 Thursday, July 10, 7:00pm, August 7th, 7:00pm. Room 208, Union Station. These meetings are scheduled on the Thursday evening prior to the monthly membership meeting.

Monthly Membership Meetings:
 Friday, July 18, 7:30 pm; Friday, August 15, 7:30 pm. St. David's Episcopal Church, 2800 S.E. Harrison. These meetings are conducted on the third Friday evening of every month. Most of the time, the programs follow the general business meeting.

Weekly No-Host Luncheon:
 every Saturday, 12:00 noon at the Semaphore Restaurant at S.E. 17th and Holgate Blvd. Our group meets in the back.

Library/Archives Work Session:
 Contact **Bob Weaver (654-4274)** for more information.

Chapter Library Open Hours:
 Saturday, July 19th & 26th, 1:00 to 4:00pm at Room 1, Union Station. Call Jim Loomis (253-3926) for appointments, if this is a difficult day and/or time for you.

Annual Chapter Picnic:
 Saturday, August 16, 1997 at Western Antique Powerland, Brooks, Oregon. Contact Darel Mack, Activities Chair at (503) 654-5017 for more information.

Upcoming Programs:

July: Roger White, *Covered Bridges*
August: Bruce Harmon of Gunderson, Inc.

If you have any programs of interest to the Chapter, Please contact Bob Terkelsen at (503) 399-1882.

Committee Chairs

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Equipment Advisory Group:**
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