Hamilton County Citizens Oppose Conversion of Rails to Trails

By Phil Streby*

A meeting of the “Save the Nickel Plate” group was held at the Baptist Church on Pleasant Street in Noblesville, IN, on March 12. Tyler Mendenhall opened the meeting with a brief description of the situation with the former Nickel Plate Railroad line including its history as one of the oldest railroads in Indiana.

The cities of Fishers and Noblesville along with Hamilton County are each 1/3 owners of the approximate 39 miles of track running from Indianapolis to Tipton, Indiana.

Richard Vonnegut was introduced as president of the group, Indiana Trails Fund, who then provided information about the issues associated with the mayors of Noblesville and Fishers wanting to convert this railroad line into a trail. They (the owners) insist the two, rail and trail, cannot cohabitate on the existing right-of-way for several stated reasons, principally, width (said to be DOT mandated), which is being challenged, and safety, the proximity of the trail to the track, also being challenged.

No official “rail with trail study” has ever been done to document or substantiate either questions or answers.

Also speaking were several individuals running in local and state elections, and all appear to support leaving the former Nickel Plate railroad line intact.

Garen T. Bragg is seeking election as a State Representative for District 29. The Republican candidate, speaking on the platform as “A Fresh Conservative Voice,” says we can’t run issues like this by dictate.

Ms. Tracy Roberts, formerly of Valparaiso and also in the running for District 29’s seat, said she often rode the South Shore into Chicago and back and strongly supports rail.

Steve Schwartz, current president of the Hamilton County Council, and running for re-election, spoke up about supporting the many citizens who want to keep the railroad against the very few who want to rip it out and replace it with a trail.

Also speaking were candidates Mark Hall, running for Hamilton County Council District 3, who spoke at length about transparency in local government, and Matt Milam, in the (continued)
(“Hamilton County Citizens...” continued from page 1)
running for a Hamilton County Commissioner seat, with both stating their support for keeping the rail intact for possible future operation.

Mr. Hall believes most of the information concerning this rail issue is being kept from public view. He is actively seeking full disclosure. Also speaking briefly was a possible future mayoral candidate. There were many questions which led to some lively discussion.

I asked for clarification concerning converting rail routes to trails in Indiana and the potential to lose those routes to adjacent landowners. Mr. Vonnegut explained that this was a very real possibility in this situation, further explaining that a legal group has already been contacting landowners along the right-of-way about this possibility.

The cities appear to be trying to sidestep Federal law as it applies to rail abandonment and subsequent conversion to trail use. [See Surface Transportation Board (STB) under enhanced search for FD-36137-0]

It later became a point of discussion that the city mayors along with the Hamilton County Commissioners do not appear to be openly discussing this with their city and county councils. Requests for information via the Freedom of Information Act are being met with resistance, according to those speakers who said requested information was taking up to 90 days for disclosure.

I (Phil Streby) spoke about how this issue was very closely related to passenger rail, giving a brief history of how railroads came to be replaced by publicly-funded highways and airports, and then advised all present to support passenger rail efforts.

I further stated that had this always been done over the decades, it may have been probable that this issue would never have manifested itself.

More lively comments ensued, and time, too soon, came to pass the meeting to a close.

My thanks to Tyler Mendenhall, who is with the Save the Nickel Plate group, for conducting Monday’s meeting and for contributing to this paper.

*Phil Streby is treasurer of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance and serves on the board of directors of the Rail Passengers Association and the Rail Users’ Network.

Indy’s Airport Wins Another Honor, While Union Station Remains Sick

By Donald Yehle

In the wake of yet another disturbing photo of Indianapolis Union Station at 350 S. Illinois, a conference call was held March 14 by a six Indianapolis Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA) members. Participants agreed something must be done as the station is unwelcoming and is in stark contrast to Indianapolis International Airport, which for the fifth year in a row has been named the best airport in North America serving more than 2 million passengers annually.

Gaining attention to the problem is the first step. Members are considering asking for time before the City-County Council of Marion County and Indianapolis and the department of public works. Asking Visit Indy to help address this “image” issue was mentioned, as was requesting a management change. Let’s ask the Indianapolis Airport Authority to run the facility instead of Greyhound.

Discussion participants included Tod Bassler, Steve Coxhead, Bill Malcolm, Phil Streby, Doug Yerkeson, and Donald Yehle. Another phone meeting is scheduled for March 28.

Effective March 25

Track Work Affects Cardinal Trains 50 and 51

By Donald Yehle

To minimize congestion in New York Penn Station during upcoming track work, Amtrak’s Cardinal trains are being affected.

Cardinal Service
• Train 50 will operate from Chicago to Washington, D.C., beginning March 29 until further notice.
• Train 51 will operate from Washington, D.C., to Chicago beginning April 1 until further notice.
(continued)
Fact sheet: Amtrak in Indiana


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<th>2011</th>
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Also, 946,436 riders passed through Indiana in 2017 - boarding and detraining outside the state.

**Indians near a station**

- Within 25 miles: 3,835,873 (38%)
- Within 50 miles: 5,296,905 (52%)

**Amtrak service in the state**

- Cardinal - 3 trains/wk
- Wolverine - Multiple trains daily
- Capital Limited - Daily service
- Lake Shore Limited - Daily service
- Hoosier Star - 4 trains/wk

**11 Amtrak stations**

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**2 Thruway stops**

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**Top city pairs by ridership, 2017**

1. Indianapolis - Chicago, IL  196 mi
2. Lafayette - Chicago, IL   122 mi
3. Waterloo - Chicago, IL    158 mi
4. Elkhart - Chicago, IL     101 mi
5. South Bend - Chicago, IL  101 mi
6. Crawfordsville - Chicago, IL  149 mi
7. South Bend - Washington, DC  680 mi
8. Elkhart - Washington, DC  680 mi
9. Michigan City - Chicago, IL  776 mi
10. Waterloo - Washington, DC  149 mi

**Top city pairs by revenue, 2017**

1. Indianapolis - Chicago, IL  196 mi
2. Waterloo - Chicago, IL      156 mi
3. Lafayette - Chicago, IL     122 mi
4. South Bend - Washington, DC 680 mi
5. Elkhart - Chicago, IL       101 mi
6. South Bend - Chicago, IL    101 mi
7. Waterloo - Washington, DC   680 mi
8. Elkhart - Washington, DC    680 mi
9. South Bend - New York, NY   680 mi
10. Crawfordsville - Chicago, IL  149 mi

The Cardinal continues to serve six Indiana cities – Connersville, Indianapolis, Crawfordsville, Lafayette, Rensselaer, and Dyer. “Equally important, Hoosiers who live within 25 to 50 miles of those stations will continue to be able to travel as far as Washington, D.C., to the east and Chicago to the west,” said Steve Coxhead, president, Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA).

The Cardinal travels eastbound Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. The train travels westbound Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.

For reservations and the most up-to-date schedules, the National Passenger Rail Association (Amtrak) said to visit Amtrak.com, use its free mobile apps, speak with station personnel or call 800-USA-RAIL (1-800-872-7245).

railpassengers.org

1200 O St NW, Ste 240
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 408-5362
railpassengers.org

The Cardinal traverses the country between New York and Chicago. (Photo by J. Mueller on Flickr.)
Five Hoosiers Participating April 17 in NARP’s “Day on the Hill” Event

By Donald Yehle

Five Hoosiers will be in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday, April 17, to participate in the annual “Day on the Hill” event sponsored by the Rail Passengers Association (RPA) formerly the National Association of Railroad Passengers. Participants are:
- Tod Bassler, Indianapolis
- Duane Chattin, Vincennes
- Andrea and Mike Ditto, Terre Haute
- Phil Streby, Peru

Bassler and Chattin represent Indiana on RPA’s council of representatives. Streby, a former council of representative member, now serves on RPA’s board of directors. The Ditto’s are working to bring 21st Century passenger rail to Indiana.

“We’re excited Indiana will be so well represented at this year’s meeting,” says IPRA President Steve Coxhead, who himself has served as a member on the National Association of Railroad Passengers’ council of representatives.

Streby is scheduling meetings for the entire group with Indiana’s Congressional delegation and the state’s two U.S. Senators – the Honorable Joe Donnelly (Indiana’s senior senator) and the Honorable Todd Young (the state’s junior senator). Meetings will last 20-30 minutes.

In most cases, meetings are with staff members. The goal is to educate and become ‘rail resources’ for Mr. Donnelly, Mr. Young, and the following House of Representatives members -- the Honorable Jim Banks, the Honorable Susan Brooks, the Honorable Larry Buschon, the Honorable Andre Carson, the Honorable Troy Hollingsworth, the Honorable Luke Messer, the Honorable Todd Rokita, the Honorable Peter Visclosky, and the Honorable Jackie Walorski.

In past meetings, Mr. Donnelly was most interested in helping to efforts to transition the Hoosier State to become Indiana’s state-supported railroad. Discussions can go many different directions, depending on individuals’ expertise on rail-related issues and the committees on which they serve, said Donald Yehle, All Aboard Indiana editor, a Rail Passengers Association member, and previous participant in the “Day on the Hill” event.

As rail advocates know, listening is critical during these meetings. There are certain topics that IPRA wants to emphasize with the nine House members and two U.S. Senators. (See next story.) RPA staff holds a day-long meeting on Monday, April 16, to help prepare rail advocates for the “Day on the Hill” event, as well.

One key to a successful meeting is asking open-ended questions to get the discussion going. “Is it possible to have high passenger rail ridership when there are a limited number of trains operating,” is a question Streby is considering asking this year.

In today’s world, one topic emphasized is millennials desire for public transportation, including rail and transit. Studies show that millennials often prefer to not purchase or own automobiles and sometimes, do not possess drivers’ licenses, Coxhead said.

IPRA’s Agenda Includes Seven-Day Hoosier State

By Steve Coxhead

In Progress

Twice Daily, 7-Day-A-Week, Hoosier State

Passengers traveling between Indianapolis and Chicago use two trains for daily roundtrip service – the Hoosier State and the Cardinal. Rail advocates want the Hoosier State to operate independently of the Cardinal on a different schedule and twice a day.

Up Hoosier State Spending in Next Biennial Budget

Indiana taxpayers fund the Hoosier State, at $3 million a year. It’s currently a line item in the state budget. We’re asking the state to increase funding in the next biennial budget – beginning July 1, 2019 -- to accommodate two daily trips each direction.

7-Day-A-Week, Multi-State, Cardinal

Work with the multi-state Cardinal Coalition to bring 7-day-a-week train service to Cincinnati and rural areas in Indiana, Ohio, Virginia, and West Virginia. The Cardinal is a three-day-a-week train. It travels 1,147 miles, making 32 station stops in 11 states and the District of Columbia.

Restore Passenger Rail to Fort Wayne and NE Indiana

In 3 to 5 years, Hoosiers will once again be able to travel by rail west to Chicago and east to Columbus, Ohio. A stronger economy, enhanced security, a cleaner environment, and a better quality of life are the benefits. Passenger rail was last available in Fort Wayne in 1990.

Finish South Shore Rail Improvement Projects

Indiana’s current biennial budget also includes a $12 million allocation to double track the main line between (continued)
Bullets from the Board

By Steve Coxhead

The Board of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA) met on 2/1/18, at 11:11 am, in the Council Chamber of the Peru City Hall, in Peru Indiana. The following items were among those discussed.

Board member Phil Streby presented a draft version of a presentation that is being worked up to present to various rail stakeholders around the state. It consisted of a short video, “A Connected America”, produced by NARP, and an IPRA produced PowerPoint presentation.

The new president of the Northeastern Indiana Passenger Rail Association (NIPRA), Mr. Richard Juram, was introduced.

The CSX railroad situation continues to be a concern. INDOT is working to resolve the issues, which are responsible for recent poor on time performance of both the Hoosier State and the Cardinal. IPRA has expressed concern to both INDOT and Indiana’s Congressional delegation. The “precision railroading” approach pushed by the late Hunter Harrison is being continued by his successor, CSX CEO Foote.

The idea of IPRA developing high level proposals for passenger rail infrastructure projects was discussed. They could then be used as talking points with INDOT, and members of the legislature, in an attempt to have shovel-ready projects ready when Federal funds next become available for infrastructure projects.

There was a brief discussion concerning the usefulness and feasibility of hosting legislators and elected officials on trips to view existing passenger services, terminals and transit-oriented development, to raise awareness of what is possible with modern passenger rail.

An idea was floated for the consideration of promoting new Amtrak service linking Pittsburg, Indianapolis and St. Louis (possibly through Terre Haute). It was pointed out that this would begin to broaden the group’s advocacy to be of benefit to southern Indiana.

A strategic route planning committee was tentatively formed.

There was brief discussion on the desirability of developing specific lists of “asks” to put before both INDOT and the General Assembly, regarding improvement of passenger rail services, as well as the usefulness (continued)
A schedule of Board meetings for the balance of 2018 will be published soon. All members are welcome to attend! Please watch your e-mail and “All Aboard Indiana” for the schedule and meeting details.

Finally, don’t forget that it’s always a good time to make a tax-deductible donation to IPRA for the 2018 tax year! Suggested donation is $30. The simplest way to donate is through the website, at www.indianahighspeedrail.org/join.html. Otherwise, checks can be sent to Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance, Membership, 7032 Olcott Avenue, Hammond, Indiana 46323.

Don’t forget to include the Hoosier State (and other services of the Amtrak system) in your travel plans.

**Riding the Rails**

By Donald Yehle

**Good News for Toronto Transit** — Canadians are working together to improve its infrastructure, specifically Toronto transit. A “new deal” between federal and provincial governments is pledging $9 billion if the city can come up with matching funds. Read the article at The Globe and Mail for more details.

**Indiana Ranks 6th Nationally in Crossing Collisions** — Railroad crossing collisions in 2017 have Indiana ranked 6 th most nationally, an improvement from 4 th in 2016. Statistics show 101 crashes, 47 injuries, and 12 deaths, according to Indiana Operation Lifesaver, whose motto is “Look, Listen, and Live” when approaching train tracks while driving an automobile or truck.

**Light Rail Extension in Charlotte** — IPRA Board Member Bill Malcolm was privileged to be among the first to ride the new Charlotte, N.C., CATS Blue Line Light Rail Extension. The extension is nine miles long, connecting riders to the University of North Carolina – Charlotte campus. Two additional rail line extensions are planned by the Charlotte Area Transportation Authority. In North Carolina, transportation is seen as a business development tool well worth publicizing.

**Discounts**

Crowne Plaza Union Station Indianapolis: Ask for discount 100329414 and receive 12% off the best flexible rate.

AAA and NARP members save 10% off Amtrak tickets at www.amtrak.com if booked three or more days in advance.

**For More Information**

*All Aboard Indiana* is a monthly publication of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA), formerly the Indiana High Speed Rail Association (INHSRA).

To learn more about IPRA, visit www.indianahighspeedrail.org

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