



# Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, Inc.

## Southeast Chapter

### Newsletter No. 134 – December 2012

[www.rlhssec.org](http://www.rlhssec.org)

# Southeast Limited

## GSMR partners with Swain County for revival of steam

Published October 17th in the Franklin Press, Franklin, NC

After much anticipation, Steam will be returning to the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad (GSMR) and Swain County. The Swain County Board of County Commissioners has committed, in unanimous agreement, to work with the railroad in this endeavor. In a vote by the commissioners, overnight lodging taxes were raised to 4 cents, allocating the one cent increase to be set aside for future funding.

These crucial steps set forth the plan of action to fund the return of Steam to the scenic railroad, in hopes to increase economic growth county wide.

A portion of the one cent increase will fund not only the renovation of steam locomotive #1702, but will fund the construction of a locomotive turntable.

Swain County will greatly benefit from the increase in tourism and job growth, even better this growth will not be funded at county tax payers' expense, but from visitors to the county staying hotels and lodging establishments.

The development agreement states that Swain County agrees to loan up to \$700,000 to GSMR, contingent upon certain terms and agreements. Terms include reinstating steam service operations within 36 months, installing a turn table in downtown Bryson City, and creating 6 new full time jobs. Once all the terms are met, the loan will become a grant. The agreement is also designed to insure that the railroad will remain an economic asset to Swain County, by allowing, should American Heritage Railways (AHR) choose to sell, the first opportunity to purchase the rail line.

It has been eight years since steam locomotive #1702 operated on the Murphy Branch Line and with this essential funding assistance provided by Swain County, it is expected to run again before the stated 24 months mark. GSMR carries upwards of 180,000 passengers annually, with over half of its ridership accruing from guests who ride for premier special events.

With the return of steam operations, ridership on a daily train service to either the Nantahala Gorge or the towns of Dillsboro, could increase as much as 20 percent. It is estimated that the overall economic impact, quickly followed by the "ripple effect" would result in the creation of a conservative number of 20 new jobs. These jobs would be additional personnel needed in shops, restaurants, lodging accommodations and other business.

The Murphy Branch Line of Western North Carolina was completed in the late 1800s tying the regions land locked mountains with the bustling industry of larger towns and developed cities. The mountainous and rugged landscape was well known and profitable for its logging, with many Shay locomotives operating on the line. The historical value of the railway and steam locomotive is a tremendous asset to our region.

Although #1702 operations did not originate on the historic Murphy Branch Line, it is the first scenic excursion steam engine to delight thousands of passengers since the creation of GSMR in 1991 continuing up to 2004.

Owner and CEO, Allen C. Harper is delighted by the announcement of this partnership saying, "Steam engine #1702 is part of the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad's history and its return to service is the rebirth of a great tradition of steam powered trains to the region. Enough cannot be said for Swain County's creative approach and strong dedication to do economic development for the entire community."

## 2013 Election Notice

At the November meeting a slate of officers was reviewed. It was agreed that the following slate would be installed at our January 10th banquet (SEE BELOW). We will be using the Acclamation by Proclamation process (if we have four people running for four offices, they will be inaugurated without a ballot vote). The officers will be the following for 2013. Chairman - Bill Howes, Vice-chairman - Art Towson, Secretary - Steve Vertescher, Treasurer - Robert Van Nest.

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## Chapter Banquet January 10th

Please call Ed Mueller at (904)-398-9687 to tell him how many will be in your party. This is our normal meeting night starting at 6:30 pm but held at the River City Brewing Co., 835 Museum Circle, between the Acosta and Main St. bridges.

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## Announcements

January 5-6 Florida Rail Fair, Volusia County Fairground, Deland, FL.

January 10-12 Prototype Rails Cocoa Beach

February 16 Golden Spike Enterprise - Jacksonville, FL train show. We have a R&LHS table.

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## Condensed Minutes

### Meeting on Sept 13, 2012

Joining us this evening was probable new member Ted Clark.

**Expenditures:** Southeast Limited mailing supplies: \$141.76 & Website/Domain Name for two yrs: \$380.00

**Trip Committee:** Committee Chairman Carl Corsi reports that he will pick a date in late October for the proposed railfan trip to Waycross GA. Various methods of obtaining the permissions needed to tour the yard were discussed.

**Program:** Vocal personal remembrances.

### Meeting on Oct 11, 2012

Joining us this evening was noted rail historian Larry Brennan and member Fred Brechler's wife Gretchen.

**Chapter project:** Larry Brennan indicates that he now has the time to work on the project and has given some thought to its content.

**Program:** Eric Peterson's photos of his trip on the Great Lakes as a passenger on an ore boat.

### Meeting on Nov 8, 2012

**Annual banquet: Thursday, January 10, 2013 at 06:30 pm to be held at The River City Brewing Co.**

**restaurant.** Member Ed Mueller will coordinate the event.

**Program:** Cliff Vander Yacht's presentation of Train Festival at Owosso in 2009

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### SOUTHEAST CHAPTER OFFICERS

William F. Howes Jr. Chairman

Arthur L. Towson Vice-Chairman

Stephen J. Vertescher Secretary

Robert L. Van Nest Treasurer

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The *Southeast Limited* Newsletter is edited by James A. Smith with layout by Clifford J. Vander Yacht.

## **Details Revealed on Florida Intrastate Passenger Service**

ORLANDO — All aboard Florida, the organization behind the restoration of high speed passenger service between Miami and Orlando, revealed a number of details of its plans in a filing with the Surface Transportation Board earlier in the month. The filing includes two parties under the All Aboard Florida banner, one for operations and one for stations.

The passenger train operator will rebuild a second track along the Florida East Coast Railway between Miami and Cocoa, Fla., and build entirely new track on right-of-way leased from the Florida Department of Transportation and Orlando-Orange County Expressway Authority. This would place about 40 miles of new rail line alongside or in the median of state Route 528, which runs between Cocoa and the Orlando airport and is operated by the OOCEA.

All Aboard Florida will not seek public operating subsidies for the project, but is exploring the possibility of obtaining construction financing through the Federal Railroad Administration's Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing Program. Through the program the railroad can apply for direct loans and loan guarantees through the FRA.

The filing stipulates the new passenger service will not be a part of the interstate passenger rail network and should be exempt from federal oversight. All Aboard Florida will not participate in any through ticketing program with Amtrak. It also says no freight service will be operated by All Aboard Florida, or over the new right-of-way to Orlando. It does say that, for flexibility in operations, FEC dispatchers will have the option of using either track on the shared right-of-way for freight and passenger traffic.

Construction of the project is expected to generate 6,000 new jobs in the state, 1,000 permanent jobs, and even more job opportunities from transit-oriented development around the stations.

All Aboard Florida expects to have trains running by Jan. 1, 2015, and plans to operate 16-19 daily trains, allowing for hourly service during peak times. The filing specifies the trains will be 900 feet long and be equipped with Wi-Fi and meal services. Trains will operate up to 79 mph on the share portion of the route and 110 mph on the newly built portion. Details on the type of equipment to be used are still unknown.

## **Bombardier to Operate MARC Trains**

Maryland's Board of Public Works has approved a third-party contract with Bombardier Transportation to operate and maintain MARC's Camden and Brunswick lines for the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA), Gov. Martin O'Malley announced yesterday. Bombardier bid \$204.7 million for the five-year, eight-month contract term. The contract also includes a five-year renewal option valued at \$205 million, according to a press release issued by O'Malley's office.

"We have identified a quality company with a wealth of experience in operating commuter rail service," said O'Malley. "Together with our recent MARC investments including new locomotives, new passenger cars, station improvements and safety enhancements, the MARC system is in better condition today than at any time in history."

The contract replaces one now in place with CSX Transportation. After 30 years of service, CSXT "expressed its desire to focus on its core business, the movement of freight, and end its involvement in passenger-rail operations," the press release states.

The contract covers the operation of service and maintenance of equipment, facilities and rights of way used in providing the service along the Camden and Brunswick lines. The company will extend employment offers to current CSX commuter employees to stay onboard. MTA will maintain ownership of the rail cars and locomotives, while CSXT will maintain ownership of the track. Amtrak will continue to operate MARC's Penn Line.

*Merry Christmas and a  
Happy New Year!*

# Running Trains on the CSX Mountain Subdivision

By Paul A. Reckley

This article was originally published in *The Automatic Block* newsletter for the Western Maryland Chapter of the NRHS. It starts with a note from the chapter's editor, Robert Bernier, stating "the author retired as a locomotive engineer in November, 2011, after working for the Chessie System Railroads and later CSX Transportation for more than 35 years. Much of his career was spent operating freight trains along a hundred miles of track over the rugged Allegheny Mountains between Cumberland, MD and Grafton, WV. This challenging section of track, now known as the CSX Mountain Subdivision, was originally built by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in 1850-52 at a time when no rail lines had previously been laid in mountainous terrain anywhere in the world."

Make no mistake about it! I LOVE RUNNING TRAINS! It's all about the challenge they offer you. While it is true that most trains of a similar configuration have similarities in the way they handle, it is also just as true that no two trains are alike. They are all different based on their makeup. What kind of power (engines) you have, where the loaded and empty cars are positioned in the train, its total length and tonnage, the terrain to be traversed; all these factors play a role in how a train handles. Even the weather plays a part! And don't forget that for each car in the train, there is one foot of "slack." If you are handling 130 cars, then you have 130 feet of slack in that train! It's controlling the slack that separates the "good engineers" from the "also ran's."

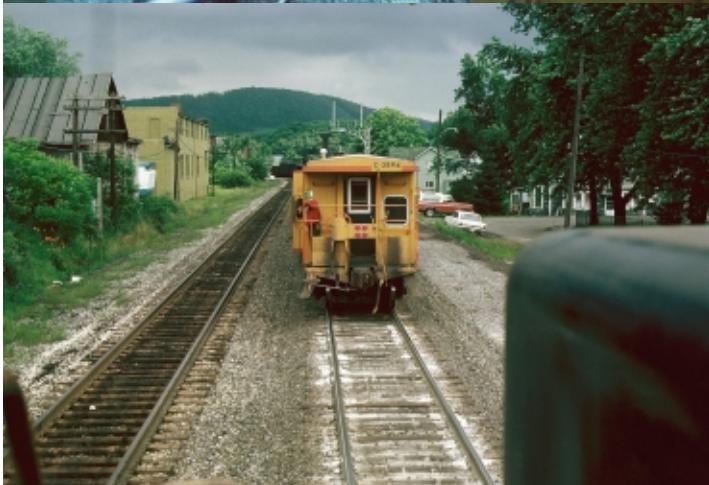
One year after transferring into engine service, I became a "newly minted engineer." I was proud of my chosen occupation ... and still am! I have always had to have a "job" where I felt like I was actually contributing. Bringing a coal train out of Grafton, WV, weighing between 10,000 and 11,500 tons and traversing the Allegheny Mountains with that train will have that effect. "Doubling up" that train with another and then rolling into Cumberland on the head end of 1160 loads of coal weighing between 20,000 and 23,000 tons WILL give you a sense of accomplishment. And it's the Mountain Subdivision that affords you these challenges and rewards.

The Mountain Subdivision is famous worldwide in railroad circles for its steep "grades." Seventeen Mile Grade, running from Piedmont, WV, to Altamont, MD, is one of the longest and steepest grades in the country, averaging 2.75 percent and close to 3 percent in some places. That's where I "cut my teeth" under the very critical eye of Engineer Carl Wolford, one of the very best "train handlers" to ever sit behind the throttle. He cut me NO slack, and though I was getting a 40-hour a week "training wage", I was putting in a lot of extra hours each week on the job. I figured that I was only going to have six months with the opportunity of riding with an "ace" engineer, and it was in my long term interest to take as much advantage of it as I could. It paid off! I remember the first time that this "greenhorn" was called to run his first "over the road" train. I had all the calmness and confidence in the world while I sat at the controls. And I attribute that feeling to the "extra hours" I put in training. It was a "Big Deal" but one I was ready and "chomping at the bit" for! I am unapologetically proud to say that my "home seniority district" is the Mountain Subdivision.

That's not to say that I didn't get an "itchy foot" and a desire to see what was in the "other places" along the railroad. I was in a friendly competition with another locomotive engineer, Bob Glegget, and it was our "mission" to see how much railroad we could get "qualified" on. Qualifying on a railroad subdivision is no small feat! You have to know the EXACT location of every signal, what type of signal it is (whether Absolute or Intermediate), the meaning of any of the dozen or so aspects any one signal may display as well as the location of "permanent speed restrictions" (such as a curve) or a "temporary speed restriction" (such as a section of track with problems,) and where to run at "maximum authorized speed" (such as straight and level track), or what to do when it's so foggy you can't see the rails in front of you! One subconsciously learns the railroad "through the seat of your pants" and recognizes every little movement of the engine on the rails and verify it by looking straight down out the side-view window and see a culvert or some other known feature flash by in the "ground lights." Before Bob died at a young age, he and I were "neck and neck" with each one being qualified on approximately 1100 miles of railroad. This allowed me to run out of Cumberland to places such as New Castle, PA, Hagerstown, MD, Harrisburg, PA, (where we interchanged with Conrail) as well as Baltimore and its seven to eight rail yards scattered all over the city. But my favorite "away from home" (i.e. Mountain Subdivision) run was Philadelphia. Running a 10,000 foot train of auto racks into "Philly" is a blast! But the alertness and concentration to run those 300 miles is extremely exhausting. (*Continued on page 6*)



#1



#3



#4



#5



#2

**#1 Shoving a coal train out of Rowlesburg, WV, while meeting a another train. Photo by Jim Smith**

**#2 Our coal train is shrouded in brake shoe smoke as we come down one of the mountain grades. You don't see this too much any more due to the significant use of dynamic braking. Photo by Jim Smith**

**#3 We've reached the Terra Alta, WV, summit and have cut off "on the fly." Photo by Jim Smith**

**#4 One of the early Chessie System engines - note the silver trucks - on a westbound train coming out of Cumberland, MD. Photo by Jim Smith**

**#5 A B&O/Chessie engine consist getting ready to couple onto it's train at Cumberland, note the Narrows slot in the background mountains. Photo by Stan Short.**

After “stretching my legs” and checking out the other “horizons,” I migrated back to my “roots,” the Mountain Subdivision. I missed and relished the challenges of railroading on the Mountain Subdivision, and will firmly state that a Mountain Subdivision engineer takes a “back seat” to NO other engineer on ANY territory in the country! If you can run the Mountain Subdivision, then you can run anywhere. Many “flat Landers” have come to the Mountain Subdivision to get that “Mountain Subdivision notch” in their belt. MOST don’t stay long enough to qualify! Of those that do, soon after they become qualified, they then scurry back east and pray that the next six months pass by at the speed of light. That way they are no longer “current.” While on the rest of the railroad you have to traverse each territory once a year as an engineer to stay “current,” on the Mountain Subdivision it is every six months.

Needless to say, “speed” on the Mountain Subdivision is not one of our strong suites! Eleven thousand tons of coal, eight to nine thousand working horsepower on the head end, with a “helper” consist of nine thousand horsepower on the rear end moving these trains up the Allegheny Mountains a running speeds of only 9 to 10 MPH. It doesn’t sound like the most exciting “thing” … but throw in a rain show, heavy dew, or a snow squall causing wet rails, or other track contaminates such as a thin film of grease from wheel flange lubricators and it’s a whole new ball game! You can watch your speed die from 10 MPH down to 2.0, 1.9, 1.8, 1.7, 1.6, … even .2 or .1 MPH!. But these are AC powered diesel engines, and as long as you’re moving, you can keep moving without having to fear burning up a traction motor. And then again there are times when the speedometer reads “0.0!” That’s when you are “hung up”! There are several “tricks” I discovered that would minimize “hanging up” but they don’t work ALL the time! When the train stalls out, you know what’s in store for the next four hours … “doubling the hill.” It’s these times that caused a locomotive engineer to lose minutes off his life and his beard to grow prematurely gray. The “stress factor” goes up ten times! When you “hang up” and apply the air brakes, you just have to experience the feeling of gravity and the train taking control by trying to run back down the hill during the 15 to 20 seconds that go by until the brakes take hold.

In any event, this situation is not a desirable position to find yourself in. Imagine this: it’s January 13th, 3:30 AM, and we’re “hung up” on a steep grade of the Mountain Subdivision in the middle of nowhere! While I sit in the cab of my warm locomotive, the train conductor steps off the engine (in bear country!) and lands in snow above his knees. The wind is blowing 10 degree gusts of snow in his face at 20 to 30 MPH, and he has to walk back 20 to 25 cars (with a coal car being about 65 feet long), and then he has to set the hand brakes on the next 30 to 40 cars to hold the train there while he walks forward to the “cut” to separate the head end cars that will be taken up the hill and set in a siding to be picked up when you get the rest of the rest of the train up the grade. And once the locomotive has gone back down the hill and is coupled to the last part of the train, he then walks back along the train to the last brake he set, so when the engineer has sufficiently recharged the air pressure (90 psi) throughout the train, he then applies the air brakes to hold the train while the conductor knocks off (releases) the 30 to 40 hand brakes. By the time the conductor climbs back into the control cab, he is frozen to the bone, and he still has to recouple the 20 to 25 cars once we reach the top of the grade! In a situation like this, my sympathy is one hundred percent with the conductor! Of course, this is the “worst case” scenario, but it happens as described much more often than when it’s 80 degrees and clear. Recently seven coal trains in a row coming out of Grafton became “hung up” on Cranberry Grade. Running from Rowlesburg, WV, twelve miles uphill to Terra Alta, WV. Cranberry Grade is the steepest incline for trains coming east. This “hang up” happened because a “super tie unit” was replacing crossties on the grade and their machines had leaked hydraulic oil all over the rails. But, it’s all in a day’s work!

I have enjoyed being the “go-to-guy” on the Mountain Subdivision all these years. The President of CSX moves around the system on his own private train. I have had the honor, and Do mean honor, of being hand-selected to run the private train for every CSX president we’ve had during my tenure. I was also honored to run the Ringling Brothers Circus Train when it moved over Mountain Subdivision. This special train carries all their circus equipment in addition to the animals and about 450 people. I also was sitting at the throttle for the Autumn Glory and White Water Racing special trains, which carried passengers to Oakland, MD, and the Savage River respectively. Most recently I was held off my regular turn in Grafton to handle a rerouted grain train over the Mountain Subdivision. Grain trains, which are infamous for their lack of responding properly to the air brakes haven’t run over this territory for about 15 years. Because I was the only current engineer with grain train experience on the Mountain Subdivision, Trainmaster Steve Vinci selected me to bring it east to Cumberland.

I’m proud of my accomplishments and my reputation as a “good train handler” on CSX. It’s something I applied myself to and think that my instructor those many years ago achieved some pretty good results. It was easy for me — I liked my “job”! Having a love of machinery and all things mechanical, I’ve enjoyed working with engines. I love to hear a well-tuned diesel engine roar! Call me crazy; but I would get out of my seat and stand on the catwalk behind the rear cab door just to listen to the engines working to their maximum output … and I was getting paid to do it! What a life!