

Acknowledgements

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SEDA-COG JOINT RAIL AUTHORITY:**25 Years of Rail Freight Preservation in Central Pennsylvania****ALLEN BUBB, Extern****McCann School of Business & Technology****SEDA-COG AND REGIONAL RAIL SERVICE**

SEDA-COG, created in the 1960's, was an early regional economic development entity, and today is one of six regional organizations in Pennsylvania involved with rural transportation-planning issues. Since the mid-1970's, SEDA-COG has been monitoring rail freight service in the central Pennsylvania region. The monitoring of rail freight service was accomplished by the establishment of a full-time staff position to address rail transportation issues. The primary issue at that time was the bankruptcy of the six major northeastern U.S. railroads—three of them operated trackage in this region: the Erie Lackawanna (EL,) the Penn Central (PC,) and the Reading (RDG.) The federal government dealt with the bankruptcy issue by forming the Consolidated Rail Corporation, or Conrail, system effective April 1, 1976, to replace the six bankrupt ones.

Billions of dollars in federal assistance were given to Conrail to rebuild its system, but the corporation remained largely

unprofitable. Conrail's inability to be profitable was a result of rigid Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) economic regulations that impeded effective competition with truck transportation. The Staggers Rail Act of 1980, and the Northeast Rail Service Act of 1981 (NERSA) significantly eased ICC economic regulations by allowing railroads flexibility to price their services. After June of 1981, Conrail no longer required federal assistance. The Staggers Act and NERSA made the abandonment of unprofitable rail lines easier, principally under the guise of "insufficient revenue," by expediting abandonment procedures.

REGIONAL RAIL ABANDONMENT INITIATIVES AND PRESERVATION ACTIVITIES

Anticipating that "insufficient revenue" could be used to abandon local rail lines, SEDA-COG applied for and received an Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) grant in 1982 to perform a feasibility study to identify those local lines having the best potential to become successful short-line operations. The study identified three candidates meeting the criteria:

- the Bloomsburg Branch line in Northumberland, Montour, and Columbia counties,
- the Milton Secondary, and the Montandon Industrial lines in Northumberland and Union counties, and
- the Bald Eagle Branch, the Bellefonte Secondary, and the

Pleasant Gap Industrial lines in Blair and Centre counties, (hereafter to be referred to collectively as the "Centre County Cluster" of lines.)

Of the three candidates, the ARC study was to conclude that the Bloomsburg Branch line offered sufficient potential profitability to become a short-line operation, while the Centre County Cluster would be only a possibly break-even operation.

Before the ARC study was completed, Conrail filed a "Notice of Insufficient Revenue" (NIR) for the Blair and Centre county lines, and applied later to abandon them. Conrail initially abandoned the Bald Eagle Branch line between Vail (Tyrone) and Unionville, 24.5 miles, but left the trackage in place and began to use this segment of line for excess railcar storage. In February of 1983, Conrail filed to abandon another segment of the Bald Eagle Branch line eastward to Milesburg, 4.5 miles, and as follows:

- the Bellefonte Secondary line between Milesburg and Lemont, 11.7 miles, and
- the Pleasant Gap Industrial line at Pleasant Gap, 3.0 miles.

Conrail continued to provide service over the Bellefonte Secondary and the Pleasant Gap Industrial lines because SEDA-COG had made an offer of financial assistance (OFA) to preserve them.

The usual tactics in the 1980's to preserve rail lines

threatened with abandonment were to generate public and political support to force Conrail to reverse its decision, but this strategy rarely, if ever, met with success. In March of 1983, the SEDA-COG Board of Directors approved unanimously a strategy to be known as the "SEDA-COG Rail Preservation Project." The following month, the Board endorsed the formation of a five-county municipal authority to consist of Centre, Columbia, Montour, Northumberland and Union¹counties, as the legal entity to accomplish this strategy because of SEDA-COG's concerns over the legal implications of owning rail lines. The municipal authority was to replace the rail line preservation activities of SEDA-COG, and the ad-hoc Bloomsburg Rail Users Advisory Committee and the Bellefonte Railroad Task Force.

SEDA-COG JOINT RAIL AUTHORITY

Each of the five counties held a public hearing before acting to form the "SEDA-COG Joint Rail Authority," so named because SEDA-COG was its initiator. The SEDA-COG Joint Rail Authority (JRA) was to retain public ownership of the rail lines rather than

¹Union County was included because of the Milton Secondary and the Montandon Industrial lines being potential abandonment candidates, however, Conrail retained the Milton Secondary line and purchase of the Montandon Industrial was being pursued using private monies.

²As requested by the ad-hoc rail users' advisory committees.

trust them to private ownership and have to re-acquire them at a later date,² but to contract with a private operator to provide the service. The JRA was in place by June 30, 1983. Each of the five counties was to have two representatives on the JRA's Board of Directors, ideally someone representing a rail user as requested by the ad-hoc committees, and someone else to represent the public. The JRA was to be independent of the SEDA-COG organization, but contracted with it to provide a convenient, and centrally-located meeting place, and to provide staff services to include:

- project administration,
- rail preservation implementation, and
- support services.

The JRA's first meeting was held on July 6, 1983, and was a get-acquainted meeting with handouts concerning the "project" and its status, and director and legal information.

During this first meeting, a teleconference was held with Tony Pecone of the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA,) at which time he inquired of the Board members how much indebtedness was the JRA willing to incur to finance the project. John Brennan, a Northumberland County appointee, responded without hesitation and stated "...up to \$1,000,000." The JRA's willingness to incur debt was to be a deciding factor in the EDA application process. This was to be the Philadelphia Regional Office's first rail

acquisition- and rehabilitation-funding activity in its jurisdiction.³ There were few precedents or guidelines to assist the EDA to prepare funding documents—only established regulations which would require federal legislation to alter.

Other funding for the project would come from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA,) the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (Commonwealth,) county and local governmental entities, and the rail users. The rail users would contribute nearly \$400,000, or approximately 10 per cent of the project's cost. The project proceeded with the newly-formed JRA holding its organizational meeting on July 20, 1983, at which time the following Board members were elected to office:

- * John Brennan, Chairman (Northumberland County,)
- * Howard McKinnon,⁴ Vice Chairman (Columbia County—Berwick Forge & Fabricating,)
- * Mark Mitchell,⁵ Secretary (Centre County—Corning Glass,)
- * Mark Shuey, Assistant Secretary (Centre County—Clusters,)
- * Allen Bubb, Treasurer (Northumberland County,) and
- * Richard Wesner, Assistant Treasurer (Montour County—Kennedy Van Saun.)

³A previous EDA funded and failed rail preservation project elsewhere made the EDA apprehensive about becoming involved with another one.

⁴Howard McKinnon served on the Bloomsburg Rail Users Advisory Committee.

⁵Mark Mitchell served on the Bellefonte Railroad Task Force.

NEGOTIATIONS CONTINUE AND AUTHORITY'S ACQUISITION

With the JRA organized, the new entity continued negotiations to acquire the Bloomsburg Branch and the Centre County Cluster. Acquisition of the Bloomsburg Branch line was not only being pursued by the JRA, but by the Pocono Northeast Railway also. By law, Conrail had the option to negotiate with the entity of its choice, and chose the JRA because of the additional lines that would generate a greater sale revenue.

The JRA accepted Conrail's offer to sell the Bloomsburg Branch line and the Centre County Cluster as a "package" on July 29, 1983, at a considerable reduction from an earlier quote, the result of persuasion by Corning Glass,⁶ a rail user located on the Bellefonte Secondary line. This reduction meant that the JRA would not have to incur any long-term indebtedness to acquire and rehabilitate these lines. Between October and December, 1983, the JRA and Conrail negotiated terms of the sale and its language, with the JRA signing the agreement in January of 1984, and Conrail in February. In February, the JRA received authorization to inspect both properties prior to closure, and this was done via hi-rail vehicle provided and accompanied by Conrail representatives. William Flight, Allegheny Division Superintendent, represented

⁶Corning Glass had plants on other Conrail lines, and access to competing railroads at selected locations also.

Conrail on the Centre County Cluster inspection, and William Yetter, Track Supervisor, Northumberland, represented Conrail on the Bloomsburg Branch line's inspection.

The next order of business prior to closure was the selection of operators. A Request for Proposal (RFP) document was prepared with the assistance of a consultant for distribution to potential operators. Potential operators were given until mid-April of 1984 to submit completed bids and could bid on either the Bloomsburg Branch line, the Centre County Cluster, or both properties. Eight bids were received: four to operate the Bloomsburg Branch line only; one to operate the Centre County Cluster only; and three to operate both properties. Richard Robey was selected to be the operator of both properties—the only bidder whose proposal would not require any JRA subsidization.

With an operator selected, the JRA and Conrail proceeded to close on acquisition of the properties. The closing took place on July 27, 1984, at SEDA-COG's offices, to be effective on August 1st. As part of the closing, Conrail agreed to provide office car special (OCS) passenger trains for dedication ceremonies. The dedication ceremony for the Bloomsburg Branch line, renamed the North Shore Railroad (NSHR,) was held at Northumberland on August 14th, and included the OCS operating between Northumberland and Bloomsburg. The dedication ceremony for the Centre County Cluster, renamed the Nittany & Bald Eagle (NBER,) was held at Bellefonte the

next day, with the OCS operating between Bellefonte and Julian.

Regular operations of the NSHR and NBER had begun on the effective date. The NSHR began operating Mondays through Fridays normally, and the NBER operated two or three days per week, as needed, to provide service. With service established, the JRA solicited bids for the rehabilitation of the rail lines.

REHABILITATION

Rehabilitation of the rail lines began in December of 1984 with the removal of unneeded track materials from the NBER and transporting them to Northumberland to construct a siding on the NSHR to facilitate the switching of railcars. Railcars received in interchange from Conrail, or for those railcars being delivered back to them on NBER's trackage instead of an assigned, but leased, track in Conrail's Northumberland yards.

Rehabilitation of the NSHR and the NBER lines consisted of replacing crossties, bridge timbers, switch timbers, surfacing (leveling the track and tamping the ballast to maintain evenness,) brush cutting and controlling vegetation along with highway grade crossing repairs. All rehabilitation on both railroads was completed by September of 1985, and followed by a Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission final inspection. Approval of the work done closed out the JRA's original rail preservation project. Not only

was the project closed out to the satisfaction of the EDA, FRA and Commonwealth funding sources, but it was brought in on budget also.

CENTRE COUNTY EXPANSION

Earlier in 1985, the Bellefonte Historical Railroad Society (BHRS,) a non-profit rail passenger service for tourism operating over the NBER, advocated acquiring additional Centre County abandoned rail lines for preservation. These lines were:

- the Bellefonte Secondary at Lemont, its last .5 mile,⁷ and
- the Bald Eagle Branch between Milesburg and Curtin Village,⁸ 2.6 miles.

The BHRS provided funds for acquisition of the Bellefonte Secondary line's last half mile, and contributed funds for acquisition of the Bald Eagle Branch's Milesburg-Curtin Village segment of line. The JRA was interested in acquiring the remainder of the Bald Eagle Branch line between Curtin Village and Mill Hall, 16.9 miles, to effect an eastern interchange with Conrail's Buffalo

⁷This segment was to be included in the original Centre County Cluster acquisition, but was dropped to lower the purchase price and because there were no active rail users. The BHRS would retain ownership for use as an excursion destination.

⁸Curtin Village was a restored early iron production "plantation" and a Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission property and tourist attraction.

line—the Centre County Cluster's gateway before the JRA's acquisition. The Mill Hall interchange would eliminate a circuitous 255-miles between Tyrone on Conrail's Pittsburgh line and Mill Hall on its Buffalo line.

The eastern end of the Bald Eagle Branch line extended into Clinton County. The county, prompted by Centre County, expressed interest in joining the JRA, and was admitted on February 12, 1986. Prior to its admittance, Clinton County had committed to make a donation to assist in acquiring the Milesburg-Curtin Village segment of the Bald Eagle Branch line. Other funding from the Commonwealth enabled the JRA to close on July 18, 1986, for the Lemont and the Milesburg-Curtin Village trackage.

The Curtin Village-Mill Hall segment of the Bald Eagle Branch line was not included because Governor Richard Thornburgh "blue-lined" (vetoed) Commonwealth funds for its purchase. Failure to acquire the Curtin Village-Mill Hall segment was disappointing. Conrail sales management personnel, however, had indicated to the JRA that access to Mill Hall and the Buffalo line could potentially account for up to 3,000 carloads originating in south-central Pennsylvania moving across the Bald Eagle Branch line to western New York destinations. Funding would continue to be explored by the JRA for the Curtin Village-Mill Hall segment of line's preservation.

SOUTHERN NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY RAIL PRESERVATION PROJECT

With the latest Centre County line acquisitions completed, an urgent, and complicated, rail preservation scenario had developed in Northumberland County. Conrail had filed an NIR on February 10, 1984, for a segment of the Paxinos Industrial line between Paxinos, where connection was made with the Shamokin Area Industrial Corporation (SAIC) segment of ex-PC Shamokin Secondary line⁹ serving two industrial parks, and Weigh Scales, 1.73 miles. The ex-RDG Shamokin Secondary, (a segment of the Shamokin, Sunbury & Lewisburg Branch line,)¹⁰ between Shamokin and Sunbury, 16.6 miles, was included in this NIR also. Conrail filed to abandon these lines on July 2nd. The JRA made an OFA on October 3rd for these lines. The JRA was interested in preserving the ex-RDG Shamokin-Sunbury line in order to give rail users access at Sunbury to the Conrail Buffalo line. "Shamokin Cluster" rail users at that time were receiving service via Mount Carmel from Conrail's Gilberton yard, located east of Mahanoy City in the anthracite region on branch line trackage to the Reading gateway, which comprised the first compli-

⁹This segment of the ex-PC Shamokin Secondary line was not included in the final Conrail system.

¹⁰The RDG's only main line extended between Philadelphia and Pottsville. All other lines had "branch" status except for the New York Short Line in New Jersey between Trenton and Bound Brook. The RDG's Port Clinton-Newberry (Williamsport) through line, for example, consisted of the Mahanoy & Shamokin, the Shamokin, Sunbury & Lewisburg, and the Catawissa branch lines.

cation.

The first complication was Conrail's admitting to its study of the remaining Shamokin Cluster for rationalization. The Paxinos Industrial line was still receiving service, and though the ex-RDG Shamokin Secondary's Shamokin-Sunbury segment of line was inactive, it remained in place. This uncertainty of continued service caused SAIC to lose a prospective industrial customer that had an inflexible need to receive 500 carloads of inbound raw material per year.

Additionally, Conrail had an experimental 10-car train equipped with a unique conveyor unloading system and was looking for demonstration uses. Using this experimental train for the movement of coal over the ex-RDG Shamokin Secondary line between the anthracite region and the Pennsylvania Power & Light Company's (PP&L) Shamokin Dam power plant was under consideration. Nothing further came to pass. On October 31, 1985, Conrail filed an NIR that included:

- the Paxinos Industrial line between Weigh Scales and Shamokin, 3.4 miles,
- the ex-RDG Shamokin Secondary line between Shamokin and Mount Carmel, 8.6 miles,
- the Carbon Run Branch line at Shamokin, 1.46 miles, and
- the ex-PC Shamokin Secondary line in Mount Carmel Township, 1.86 miles.

Still wary of possible future rationalization of the network of branch lines that comprised the artery to the Reading gateway, the JRA began to address the second complication. The second complication was the presence of an antiquated iron and wooden highway overpass in the village of Cowl in Shamokin Township on the ex-RDG Shamokin Secondary's Shamokin-Sunbury segment of line. The overpass was due for replacement and roadway widening.

The solution being considered by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and the township supervisors was to replace the overpass with fill material, effectively blocking the ex-RDG Shamokin-Sunbury segment of line. The involvement of the JRA being in negotiations with Conrail to acquire this line prompted PennDOT to reconsider the overpass situation. Consideration was given to construction of a bridge using Pennsylvania hardwood timber, but instead a concrete structure was designed to replace the aged iron and wooden overpass. The overpass complication addressed, funding for acquisition of the Shamokin Cluster was thought to be forthcoming, however, Governor Thornburgh's July 1, 1986, blue-lining of Commonwealth funds for the project was a major disappointment, as was the proposed Bald Eagle segment of line purchase.

The JRA had competition for acquisition of the Shamokin Cluster. The Blue Mountain & Reading Railroad (BMRG) was interested in acquiring portions of the Shamokin Cluster, but was disinterested

in purchasing the ex-RDG Shamokin-Sunbury segment of line. Upon learning of the amount of potential revenue available, the BMRG deferred to the JRA to acquire the Shamokin Cluster, but retained an interest to be its contract operator.

With Conrail having previously accepted the JRA's offer for the Bald Eagle Branch's Curtin Village-Mill Hall segment of line, stalling tactics were used September of 1987 when Conrail accepted the JRA's offer for the Shamokin Cluster of lines. An RFP to provide service on the Shamokin Cluster's 33.35 miles was prepared and distributed to potential operators. Andy Muller of the BMRG and Robey were the only bidders. Robey was selected as the operator, and the Shamokin Cluster was to be renamed the Shamokin Valley Railroad (SVRR.) Conrail continued to provide service over the lines, but stated this would continue only until December 31, 1988. Closure on this line, and the Bald Eagle Branch line's Curtin Village-Mill Hall segment occurred at PennDOT's executive offices in Harrisburg on December 7th. The Bald Eagle Branch line's Curtin Village-Mill Hall segment would be given to Robey to operate as an extension of his NBER service. Rehabilitation of the NBER's newly acquired trackage began almost immediately and was made operational during January of 1989.

The SVRR began operations several days after closure. Interchange was made at Conrail's Locust Summit facilities located past the Shamokin Cluster's eastern end. With the SVRR's startup occur-

ring during wintertime, only immediate repairs were made to "hold the track together. Its train crews operated very carefully at slow speeds to prevent derailments until rehabilitation could begin in the springtime.

At the JRA's work session held on July 22, 1987, a suggestion was made to construct a connecting track just east of Cowl between the ex-RDG and SAIC (ex-PC) lines by this author¹¹ in the vicinity of SAIC's Reed Industrial Park. This connection would make unnecessary the acquisition of the ex-RDG Shamokin Secondary's Cowl-Shamokin segment of line. This segment of line was, however, included in the Shamokin Cluster purchase. This trackage was later sold for salvage.

In late 1988, SAIC commenced negotiations with the JRA for the latter to acquire SAIC's 1.56-mile line and an additional 1.5 miles of industrial park trackage. This was highly desirable by the JRA, particularly in view of the Reed Connection's construction. An alternate connection was suggested at Paxinos, 1.3 miles eastward of the Cowl one, but eliminated from consideration because of the loss of salvage income that would be realized from those 1.3 miles that could be applied toward the Reed Connection's construction. The JRA closed on the SAIC lines in June of 1989,

¹¹This author was a Northumberland County appointee to the JRA Board of Directors from its beginning and served until January of 1988.

and then owned nearly 137 miles of rail lines. Rehabilitation of the ex-RDG Shamokin Secondary Sunbury-Crowl segment of line and the SAIC lines included the cutting of brush and the replacement of over 4,000 crossties.

With closure on the SAIC properties, construction of the Reed Connection began and was completed by Thanksgiving of November, 1989. Prior to the Reed Connection's completion, SVRR train crews had to become qualified under Conrail rules in order to operate over the Conrail Buffalo line between the NSHR at Northumberland and the SVRR at Sunbury. SVRR train crews were qualified by mid-December and operations from Northumberland commenced, with Conrail having previously been directed to route all SVRR-destined railcars there.

The first SVRR run from Northumberland was to retrieve two railcars left at the Locust Summit interchange. These railcars were needed promptly by the Sealed Air Corporation at Paxinos who was anxiously awaiting them. This run occurred at night with the train crew working overtime, (but not exceeding the FRA-imposed 12 hours maximum of time on duty,) to deliver them.

Continued rehabilitation of the SVRR began on June 4, 1990, and was completed by October 18th, when a dedication ceremony was held to include a passenger excursion over the line. The dedication ceremony brought the Southern Northumberland County Rail Preservation Project to a successful conclusion.

EXPANSION INTO MIFFLIN AND LYCOMING COUNTIES

As early as mid-1988, the Mifflin County Industrial Development Corporation (MCIDC) began to inquire if the JRA would be interested in accepting ownership of the 1.5-mile rail line at its industrial park in Granville Township near Lewistown. Being involved with the Southern Northumberland County Rail Preservation Project, and expanding the NBER toward Lock Haven at that time, the JRA was not overly enthusiastic about the MCIDC inquiry, principally because of the following issues:

- Would there be sufficient income available to the JRA to cover all track maintenance expenses.
- Would the industrial park's tenets continue with their commitment to pay the 20 per cent local share of Accelerated Maintenance Grant monies.
- Conrail would operate the line for an indefinite period of time.

Another issue at that time was the location of two nearby lines, the Maitland Industrial and the Milroy Industrial line. These lines were acknowledged to be possible subjects of abandonment proceedings in the future. The JRA continued to monitor the situation and kept a line of communication open, particularly because of Mifflin County's expressing an interest to become a JRA member.

Continued monitoring of the Lewistown Cluster situation culminated in January of 1996, when Conrail put the Lewistown and the Williamsport clusters up for sale. The Lewistown Cluster included:

- the Maitland Industrial line between Lewistown and Maitland, 8.3 miles, and
- the Milroy Industrial line between Lewistown and Burnham, 4.0 miles.

The Williamsport Cluster, segments of which the JRA had expressed an interest in acquiring five years earlier, included:

- the Koppers Industrial line at Muncy, 0.2 mile,
- the Corning Secondary line between Muncy and Newberry, 18.5 miles,
- both segments of the Avis Industrial line between Newberry and Rich (McElhatten,) total of 14.7 miles,
- the Williamsport Industrial line at Williamsport, 3.8 miles,
- the Antlers Running line between Williamsport and Antlers, 0.3 mile, and
- the Linden North Wye line between Antlers and Linden, 0.5 mile.

About the same time as the Williamsport and the Lewistown clusters of lines became available, Conrail began to express serious interest in acquiring trackage rights over the NBER's Bald Eagle Branch line for unitized PP&L, or PPLX, coal trains. These

PPLX coal trains originated in southwestern Pennsylvania and were destined to the PP&L's Strawberry Ridge power plant at Washingtonville. Routing these PPLX coal trains over the NBER would save approximately 80 miles and would result in crew time savings also.¹² This routing issue was used to advantage in negotiating with Conrail for acquisition of the Williamsport and the Lewistown clusters.

Negotiations took the unique form of bartering, with Conrail agreeing to sell both clusters for \$1.00 in exchange for discounted trackage rights for overhead traffic, principally the PPLX coal trains, on the NBER's Bald Eagle Branch line. Additionally, the JRA would be responsible to rehabilitate this line to allow operating speeds of up to 40 miles per hour. Closure on these clusters of lines occurred at SEDA-COG's offices on August 15, 1996, with Robey as the contract operator for both clusters. The Williamsport Cluster was renamed the Lycoming Valley Railroad (LVRR,) and the Lewistown Cluster renamed the Juniata Valley Railroad (JVRR.)

Competition for ownership of the Lewistown Cluster was sought by Allen Levin and his "Lewistown Central Railroad," however, as was the case with the Bloomsburg Branch line sale 12 years earlier, Conrail preferred to negotiate with the JRA, and the area's

¹²Conrail had previously routed PPLX coal trains from southwestern Pennsylvania through Clearfield to its Keating gateway on the Buffalo line, but sold its Clearfield Cluster of lines to the R.J. Corman Railroad, necessitating a routing change.

rail users preferred the JRA/JVRR partnership also. Levin then initiated litigation against the JRA over Robey and the JVRR being named the operator of the Lewistown Cluster, but without success. The JVRR began operating on August 19, 1996, and the LVRR began operating three days earlier.

Rehabilitation of the NBER's Bald Eagle Branch line began shortly after the Williamsport and the Lewistown clusters' acquisition, and was to have been completed by December 31st, 1996. This was delayed with the JRA's closure with Conrail on November 6th for the Bald Eagle Branch line's western end at Tyrone, 3.0 miles, and the eastern end's Post Industrial line between Mill Hall and Lock Haven, 2.7 miles. Acquisition of these lines completed a JRA objective for 10 years to have a direct connection and interchange with both Conrail's Pittsburgh line at Tyrone, and its Buffalo line at Lock Haven. The Mill Hall Industrial line between Mill Hall and Castenea, 1.0 mile, and Lock Haven yard trackage were included in the purchase also.

Immediately after the JRA's acquisition of the remaining Bald Eagle Branch line, the entire line became known as the NBER's Nittany Main line. Responsibility to rehabilitate the latest Bald Eagle Branch line segments fell to the JRA also. Rehabilitation of the entire Nittany Main line was completed by January 17, 1997, and included the replacement of 51,000 crossties, the spreading of

35,000 tons of ballast, and the refurbishing of numerous highway grade crossings. After the rehabilitation's completion, Conrail conducted a track geometry inspection of the line at track speeds of up to 40 miles per hour and found only five minor deficiencies. The Conrail inspection crew expressed surprise at the few number of deficiencies which were corrected shortly after the inspection.

Clinton County, now the home of the NBER's eastern end of operations, was already a JRA member. The LVRR's presence in Lycoming County prompted that county to apply for admittance to the JRA. In June of 1997, Clinton County became the JRA's seventh member.

PPLX COAL TRAINS AND CONTINUOUS WELDED RAIL INSTALLATION

During the Nittany Main line's rehabilitation, PPLX coal trains traversed the LVRR between Linden and Muncy via trackage rights. With rehabilitation of Nittany Main line completed, the PPLX coal trains began to use the rehabilitated line on February 12, 1997. PPLX coal trains using the Nittany Main line, which consisted mostly of "stick," or jointed rail sections, connected with bars and bolts, were to create numerous maintenance problems. "Low joints" (soft, or poorly supported ones,) were the system's weakest and most problematic areas.

The most effective method to eliminate the majority of these

maintenance problems was by the installation of continuous welded rail (CWR.) The JRA had 22 miles of CWR installed in 2000, and another 21 miles three years later. A relocated segment of the Nit-tany Main line near Howard, (related to the 1968 Sayers Dam's construction,) was built new then and did not need CWR installation.

UNION COUNTY ACQUISITION

Union County was a JRA charter member, yet the Authority had the distinction of not owning any rail line in this county. In 1998, this situation changed when the Union County Industrial Development Corporation (UCIDC) desired to alleviate itself of the responsibility of ownership of a segment of the former Conrail ex-RDG Catawissa Branch line between Allenwood and White Deer, 2.4 miles. The 2.4-mile line connected with the Central Pennsylvania Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society's (CPA-NRHS) line at White Deer and included a lease to operate over the CPA-NRHS's 1.57-mile line, informally known as the "White Deer & Reading" (WD&R,) between White Deer and New Columbia.

The WD&R rail line was severed at White Deer when the bridge over White Deer Creek suffered significant damage during a 1996 winter storm, necessitating the removal of two of its four spans and a damaged concrete pier. During the same storm, a culvert on the JRA's segment of line south of Allenwood washed out, exposing

the cut stone abutments of a former bridge. A third span and second concrete pier of the White Deer bridge were removed in 2007 in conjunction with the White Deer Creek's creekbed restoration. Federal and Commonwealth funds to repair the storm-damaged WD&R line were denied because no rail users existed north of the damage.

MIFFLIN COUNTY EXPANSION

With the JVRR's presence in Mifflin County, that county was encouraged to seek admittance, especially in view of the MCIDC requesting anew in August of 1996 to have the JRA acquire the rail lines in its industrial park and another Lewistown-area site. The preceding was tabled while Levin's litigation against the JRA was in progress. The litigation was finally resolved in mid-2001, and proceedings were begun to admit the county into the JRA, but nearly a year was to lapse until its admittance, the eighth and latest county to join. In 2003, the MCIDC conveyed its 1.5 miles of industrial park trackage to the JRA. The JVRR began to provide service from Lewistown via trackage rights over the Norfolk Southern Railroad's ex-Conrail Pittsburgh line to the industrial park.

LIMESTONE AND IMPROVED RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE

One of Centre County's prominent industries has been the produc-

tion of limestone aggregates and lime, from both deep mine and quarry sources. In 1987, Bellefonte Lime (BLC) was intending to close its Coleville deep mine, but keep the processing facilities open. BLC proposed to extend a rail spur from the NBER's Pleasant Gap Industrial line near Marblehead Lime, another deep mine, to reach its Gentzel quarry site. Marblehead Lime was purchased by Glenn O. Hawbaker (GOH) and others in 1988, and incorporated as Centre Lime and Stone (CL&S.) The corporation was dissolved six years later, with CL&S being acquired by BLC and providing an immediate limestone source, thus negating the need for the rail spur's construction.

In 1992, before the CL&S's dissolution, BLC had proposed to open the "Bald Eagle Mine" near the village of Fillmore, located in Benner Township. As part of the permitting process, the township's supervisors directed the BLC to pursue the construction of a rail line between the mine site and its Coleville processing plant to transport the limestone in lieu of using truck transportation. The proposed 5.7-mile rail line was to become the "Buffalo Run Track Project" and, additionally, would have provided service to Con-Lime, located midway between Coleville and the new mine site along abandoned former Bellefonte Central Railroad (BFC)¹³ right of-way (ROW.) The project would have utilized the BFC's former ROW

¹³The BFC ceased operating in June of 1982 when its last rail user shut down and was abandoned in April of 1984.

and local haul roads as far as Con-Lime before all new ROW would need to be constructed to reach the new mine site. The purchase of Con-Lime by BLC would shorten the proposed rail line to half the length of its original projection. Cultural and engineering studies were completed for the projected rail line, and construction of the roadbed was bid out but never awarded because of the evolving ownership of the lime companies. The project was subsequently aborted with BLC's acquisition of the former CL&S Pleasant Gap facilities.

Aggregate-laden and empty BLC trucks traveling between the Pleasant Gap mine and Coleville processing plant congested Bellefonte streets creating substantial problems. Some Commonwealth funds from the aborted Buffalo Run Track Project were able to be shifted to permit the construction of an aggregate unloading pit at BLC's Coleville processing plant to allow the use of a "shuttle train" between Pleasant Gap and Coleville. A shuttle train consisted of 12 railcars, and there were two trains, each one making one round trip per day (four trips total, counting the empty returns,) five days per week. Operation of the shuttle trains continued for eight years, however, 2005 saw the trains' demise because of the completion of processing facilities at the former BLC, now known as Graymont, Pleasant Gap mine site.

WHITEROCK QUARRY AND ADDITIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Although GOH's involvement with the former CL&S Pleasant Gap deep mine ended in 1995, the use of its railcar loadout there continued. GOH had established the Whiterock quarry and an aggregate processing plant in 1983 in the same vicinity, and after 1995, desired a direct rail connection to its Pleasant Gap facilities. The following year, GOH sought to reactivate a rail spur through Pleasant Gap that was in place but had not been used for many years. This was to become known as the "Whiterock Quarry Track Project," and the unused rail spur would provide the most direct route.

Pleasant Gap residents became aroused, as many homes along the unused rail spur would have been adversely impacted. Fortunately for everyone, a new route was found across a field, but required the crossing of Route 26 to reach the quarry site. A groundbreaking ceremony for the project was held on October 8, 2005. The crossing of Route 26 was accomplished by digging a cut for the new 1.65-mile rail spur and erecting a highway overpass.

With the rail spur and overpass completed, a ribbon-cutting ceremony was held almost exactly two years later. All remaining construction at the site is expected to be completed by September of 2008. A four-track yard and a locomotive "pocket," (track the length of a locomotive,) were constructed that may include an en-

ginehouse in the future. An aggregate loadout is presently being built, and this facility could be utilized to handle incoming asphalt, coal, and road salt.

PENN COLLEGE RATIONALIZATION / WILLIAMSPORT WIREROPE CONSTRUCTION

The JRA never seemed to lack for projects to address. The Whiterock Quarry Track Project beginning to be addressed, the rationalization of a segment of the LVRR's Williamsport Industrial line between Rose and Maynard streets in Williamsport surfaced in 1996 as a project of importance. Penn College was urging the JRA to remove the trackage through the heart of its campus, however, the trackage was needed to serve Bulkmatic, that line's only active rail user.

Williamsport Wirerope, another active rail user located in the same area, received service from a spur off the LVRR's Main line. A rail connection formerly existed between Williamsport Wirerope and Staiman Brothers Recycling but was partially removed and the remainder was unusable awaiting repairs. The trackage between the wirerope and the recycling companies was reconfigured to include an unique drawbridge over Williamsport Wirerope's pre-stretching apparatus. The pre-stretching apparatus was necessary to stretch possible 1,000-foot, or longer, lengths of cable before being wound onto a spool for transportation.

This reconfigured trackage allowed Staiman Brothers Recycling to become a rail user again, with the JRA giving it a land lease to remain in the immediate area, an example of going the "extra mile" that might not readily fit into a for-profit operation's business plan. Bulkmatic was able to continue receiving service from the reconfigured trackage, but much of its transloading operation was to be relocated in the LVRR's Newberry yards area. Additionally, a 300-foot long siding was constructed parallel to the LVRR's Main line to eliminate the need for a train crew to push railcars from the Newberry yards to serve the area's three industries. The three industries could now be served by one train crew on a more frequent basis. By mid-1999, the project was completed and Penn College was pleased that the trackage through its campus was gone. The proceeds from conveying the ROW to the college were put back into the project's construction.

During 2007, the rehabilitation of trackage within the Berwick Industrial Association (BIDA) complex was commenced and completed in the fall of that year. The rehabilitation included the reconstruction of 3,500 feet of trackage, some of which dated to the latter 1800's. A portion of trackage was reconfigured to provide access to an overhead crane that could be used for transloading purposes. Because of the rehabilitated trackage and access to the overhead crane, prospective rail users began to eye the BIDA complex for its transloading capabilities.

ADDITIONAL GOING THE "EXTRA MILE" EXAMPLES

In late 2006, Todd Hunter, Marketing Director for Robey's railroad companies, was meeting with UGI Energy Services (UGI) officials to discuss coal transportation when the subject of propane entered the discussion. The discussion caused UGI to become interested in the Newberry yards as a site for a peaking plant and liquid propane terminal for local suppliers because the site had railroad, highway, and utility access. Constructed on land leased from the JRA, the project, costing in excess of \$4,000,000, was developed and completed in an incredibly short 15 months of time. Construction of the plant and processing facilities included over 1,000 feet of new or rehabilitated trackage, three 90,000-gallon above-ground storage tanks capable of simultaneously unloading four railcars, and state-of-the-art safety and security measures.

Another Newberry-area industry, High Steel Structures (HSS,) manufacturer of bridge girders and other components used in highway construction, needed a long, narrow strip of land for test assembly purposes. Some of its customers required a test assembly, similar to putting a giant Erector™ set together, to ensure all components fit properly before shipment to a construction site. Four acres of land along the Williamsport Industrial line near the HSS plant were sold by the JRA to them to enable the accomplish-

ment of these test assemblies.

In Lewistown, the MCIDC, the JRA, and PennDOT partnered to provide funding for the construction of a rail spur to serve two First Quality Enterprises (FQE) diaper-manufacturing plants. In addition to FQE's \$600,000, the JRA gave \$100,000 toward the \$2,000,000 project, with the remainder being PennDOT monies. The first plant is being constructed now and the site for the second plant is under preparation. Another Lewistown firm, Sylco Service & Terminal (Sylco,) wanted to expand its fertilizer-blending operation. The JRA sold Sylco six acres of land, and lent the firm money at five per cent interest to be repaid in five years.

REAL ESTATE SALES AND PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Retaining the proceeds of real estate sales for future rail preservation and, or, infrastructure improvement activities was not entirely possible during the JRA's early years. The EDA funding documents were written stating that non-essential project real estate could not be sold without the EDA's permission and the return of 49.5 per cent of the sale—the percentage of their grant monies used to acquire the rail properties. Legislation needed to be introduced in the U.S. Congress to address this issue. In January of 1987, legislation was approved to allow the JRA to retain all proceeds from the sale of real estate, provided that a sale

would not affect the preservation of rail service.

In addition to requests for real estate sales, the JRA was to become involved with requests for licenses, easements, and leases. To deal with these requests, a property management committee was established to discuss the merits of a request, and then recommend to the Board a course of action to be taken. The JRA's expanding rail system made the appointment of a property manager necessary to oversee its properties, maintain a record of accounts, and initially review the particulars of a request for a license, easement, lease, or sale.

PENNDOT RAIL FREIGHT PROGRAMS AND JRA RAIL FREIGHT SUMMIT

On July 21, 1986, the JRA participated in PennDOT's "Rail Freight Awareness Program," one of five selected shortline railroads throughout Pennsylvania invited to participate. The event was used to explain how the "SEDA-COG Rail Preservation Project" got started and its benefits to local industries. The event included a rail excursion over the NSHR to showcase the project's achievements to its infrastructure.

Another PennDOT initiative was the establishment of a "Rail Freight Advisory Committee (RFAC.)" Jeff Stover, the JRA's Executive Director, was appointed by then Governor Tom Ridge to serve on the FRAC, was re-appointed by Ridge's successor, Mark

Schweiker, and continues to serve under the Ed Rendell administration. In April of 2003, Stover met with Governor Rendell to discuss rail freight issues. Several times in past years, the JRA has hosted Annual PennDOT Rail Freight Seminars. In November of 2007, the JRA sponsored a regional "Rail Freight Summit" to highlight the benefits and re-emerging importance of rail freight service during the conference.

RAIL-RELATED PRESENTATIONS

A "sort of" presentation was made by Stover when he was asked by WPSX television in State College in March of 2001 to co-host a pledge drive for public television. The video "Working on the Railroad," produced by WPSX in the 1980's, was shown. The JRA and NBER were mentioned during three 10-minute pledge breaks. Viewers pledged approximately \$1,500 during the breaks and showing of the video, which WPSX thought was good considering only \$300 was generated from the presentation of a Donny Osman Special show the night before!

On other occasions Stover has made presentations to governmental entities, such as an ARC conference in Kentucky in 1999, about the JRA and its rail preservation and infrastructure improvement activities. Most recently, Stover was invited to meet with the North Central Regional Planning and Development Commis-

sion (CRPDC) regarding rail preservation issues in Cameron and Elk counties. The CRPDC was interested in using the JRA as a model to organize its rail preservation activities.

25 YEARS LATER

Thanks to concerned, dedicated and talented personnel—from the SEDA-COG “Rail Preservation Project” of 1983’s initiators to the present JRA Directors and staff—the JRA has expanded from its original five-county membership to comprise eight counties. The original 80 miles preserved that are operated as the NSHR and the NBER lines has grown to nearly 200 miles including an extended NBER, and the SVRR, the LVRR, and the JVRR operations. The Blair and Centre county lines originally comprising the NBER were thought to have only a slim chance of break-even success, instead, they became profitable. The NBER’s Nittany Main line, (previously known as the Bald Eagle Branch line,) has been preserved intact and serves as a through line again.

In 2007, the JRA received the NS’s first ever “Industrial Development Award” in recognition of JRA projects that have resulted in new rail freight traffic over the past three years. SEEDCO, an industrial land developer, has expressed an interest in developing rail infrastructure at its Coal Township, Northumberland County, property in the future. The SEDA-COG Joint Rail Au-

thority's determination to preserve and improve this region's rail infrastructure has been cited by the National Association of Development Organizations as a dramatic success. And lastly, the JRA and the North Shore "family of lines" received national exposure in an article in *Trains Magazine's* June, 2008, issue about Pennsylvania's regional and shortline railroads.

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TRACK ACQUISITION RECAPITULATION

<u>Date Acquired</u>	<u>Line/Description</u>	<u>Miles</u>
07-84	Bloomsburg Branch, Northumberland-Berwick	36.48
	<u>Centre County Cluster:</u>	
	Bald Eagle Branch, Vail-Milesburg	29.00
	Bellefonte Secondary, Milesburg-Lemont	11.70
	Pleasant Gap Industrial at Pleasant Gap	<u>3.00</u>
	Sub-total	<u>80.18</u>
<u> </u> -85	Bellefonte Central, Bellefonte-Coleville	<u>1.00</u>
	Sub-total	<u>81.18</u>
07-86	Bald Eagle Branch, Milesburg-Curtin Village	<u>2.60</u>
	Sub-total	<u>83.78</u>
12-88	<u>Shamokin Cluster:</u>	
	Paxinos Industrial, Shamokin-Paxinos	5.13
	ex-RDG Shamokin Secondary, Mount Carmel- Sunbury	25.20
	Less rationalized trackage, Shamokin-Crowl	- 6.20
	Ex-PC Shamokin Secondary in Mount Carmel Township	1.56
	Carbon Run Branch at Shamokin	1.46
	Bald Eagle Branch, Curtin Village-Mill Hall	<u>16.90</u>
	Sub-total	<u>127.83</u>
06-89	SAIC ¹ ex-PC Shamokin Secondary, Paxinos-Reed	1.56
	SAIC industrial park spurs in Ralpho and Shamokin Townships	<u>1.60</u>
	Sub-total	<u>130.99</u>

¹Shamokin Area Industrial Corporation.

08-96	<u>Williamsport Cluster:</u>	
	Koppers Industrial at Muncy	0.20
	Corning Secondary, Muncy-Williamsport	18.50
	Linden North Wye, Linden-Antlers	0.50
	Antlers Running, Antlers-Williamsport	0.30
	Williamsport Industrial, Antlers-Williamsport	3.80
	Less rationalized trackage at Williamsport	- 2.65
	Avis Industrial, Williamsport-McElattan	14.70
	<u>Lewistown Cluster:</u>	
	Maitland Industrial, Lewistown-Maitland	8.30
	Milroy Industrial, Lewistown-Burnham	4.00
	Sub-total	<u>185.44</u>
11-96	Bald Eagle Branch, Tyrone-Vail	3.00
	Post Industrial, Lock Haven-Mill Hall	2.80
	Mill Hall Industrial at Mill Hall	1.00
	Mill Hall Industrial, ² Mill Hall-Castenea	1.90
	Sub-total	<u>194.14</u>
_____	BIDA ³ "Hill Track" at Berwick and industrial park spurs	1.50
	Sub-total	<u>195.64</u>
___-98	UCIDC ⁴ ex-RDG Catawissa Branch line	2.40
	Sub-total	<u>198.04</u>
___-03	MCIDC industrial park spurs in Granville Township	1.50
	Total	<u>199.54</u>

² Purchased from Clinton County Economic Partnership.

³ Berwick Industrial Development Association.

⁴ Union County Industrial Development Corporation.

