Report on 2022 annual meeting

Trips, speakers were highlights of R&LHS event in Rochester, N.Y.

By Dan Cupper

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — Seventy members of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society took part in the 2022 annual meeting here, with rail-industry speakers and three rides on passenger trains.

Highlights included a shop tour of American motive Power, (a locomotive and car rebuilders), a ride on a Rochester & Genesee Valley museum train, a tour of the entire line of the Arcade & Attica Railroad, and an 80-mile round-trip from Geneva, N.Y., to Martisco, N.Y., on the former New York Central “Auburn Road,” now the main line of the Finger Lakes Railway. The time-honored tradition of operating run-bys for the benefit of photographers was conducted on all three railroads.

The meeting was co-chaired by Paul Barnes of Rochester, who handled the area arrangements, and R&LHS board member John Atherton. As a result of recruiting in conjunction with the meeting, the society gained 11 new members, and one-year memberships were extended to the three banquet speakers (more on them below).

The first site visited by the group, on June 2, was the American motive Power, Inc., plant at Dansville, N.Y., a 652,000-square-foot facility with 20 overhead cranes. The firm overhauls, repairs (including welds), and paints locomotives and cars, and handles other non-railroad work as well, including for the highway and oil-and-gas industries. Employing 200 to 400 workers, AMP cycles 40 to 50 General Electric or Electro-Motive locomotives a year. Clients whose units have been overhauled here include Canadian National, Canadian Pacific, Central Maine & Quebec, CSX Transportation, Larry’s Truck Electric, Metra, and Norfolk Southern.

Later the same day, the group traveled to the Rochester & Genesee Valley Railroad Museum in Industry, N.Y., about 15 miles south of Rochester, where it was welcomed by museum president Otto Vondrak. He also provided a beautifully illustrated overview of the area’s rich railroad history, which encompassed these carriers: Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh (later, Baltimore & Ohio); Delaware, Lackawanna & Western, Erie, Lehigh Valley, New York Central, Pennsylvania, and the Rochester subway system (1927–1956).

Powered by a General Electric 44-ton center-cab switching locomotive, a shuttle train took passengers on the museum’s own railroad to visit shops and a storage yard. A Livonia, Avon & Lakeville freight passed the museum, powered by two vintage well-maintained Alco Century units, Nos. 433 (C-430, ex-New York Central) and 428 (C-425, ex-Spokane, Portland & Seattle).

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End of street-running era on America’s last interurban

CSS&SB to be double-tracked, grade-separated in Michigan City, Ind.

By Richard Koenig

Photos by the author except as noted

MICHIGAN CITY, Ind. — It was near the end of 2021 that I read, in a newspaper article, that the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District, the entity that has managed passenger operations for the Chicago South Shore & South Bend Railroad since 1977, was planning to double-track nearly all of the line through the heart of Michigan City. This significant rebuild would eliminate the distinctive street running there, so it set my mind to photograph it several times over the next six months or so. I scheduled a trip from my home in Michigan in January 2022 during a weekday, which would provide for more train movements, though it turned out to be a dreary day. As part of the project, a house on 11th Street near Cedar was being demolished. Nearby, I could see the terra cotta façade of the station being carefully removed to be reinstalled later in the new facility.

I recorded several NICTD passenger trains, along with some South Shore freight units, rolling amongst automobiles on the street-running segments. The non-passenger movements on this line are still handled by CSS&SB, which is now owned by Anacostia Rail Holdings Co. This first trip in January allowed me to get the lay of the land, as I believed that I would have more time to document the scene before it changed for good. Life got busy, but I was able to plan for another weekend near the end of the following month.

Suddenly, on Thursday, February 24, 2022, my Instagram feed lit up – the Railfan & Railroad account warned that that very weekend would be the last to see revenue passenger service rolling through the streets of Michigan City. A bus-bridge would be instituted between Carroll Avenue, on the east side of town, to Dune Park, west of Michigan City, which would allow for the line and streets to be torn up and transformed. This news made my planned trip de rigeur, and I looked forward to rubbing elbows with a few railfans while photographing the final revenue passenger trains running on the street.

As a teenager, just once, I was able to travel north from my home in Bloomington, Ind., to see some of CSS&SB’s classic orange cars rocket past me under the catenary. Even now, this is what I picture in my mind’s eye when I encounter the name of the railroad. The 1970s were difficult years for the road, and the railfans with whom I associated all had an awareness that we should get up to witness action on the line before things changed dramatically. The main attractions were the Pullman-built coach sets, dating from 1926, but another was the characteristic street running found in Michigan City.

A pocket history

The line began in 1901 as the Chicago & Indiana Air Line, which ran between East Chicago and Indiana Harbor, Ind. The line would become the Chicago Lake Shore & South Bend Railway in 1904. As such, it secured capitalization and improved the plant, building to steam-railroad standards. By September 1908, the company began regular service between South Bend and Hammond. That same year, the road leased the Kensington & Eastern to gain access to Chicago in combination with suburban trains of the Illinois Central, with limited through service being achieved by June 1912. The road increased revenue by hauling freight by the carload, beginning in 1916, but fell on hard times and was in receivership by early 1925.

That year, Samuel Insull bought the line and re-named it the Chicago South Shore & South Bend Railroad, ushering in another period of improvement and growth. In addition to adopting a distinctive orange and mahogany color scheme, the South Shore upgraded its right-of-way, bought new cars from Pullman, brought steeple-cab locomotives from Baldwin-Westinghouse, and switched to DC power to match that of the Illinois Central. Due to the latter development, in August 1926, cars of the CSS&SB could run all the way from South Bend, Ind., to Randolph Street in Chicago, 90 miles. In 1929, the road took the Electric Traction interurban speed trophy from the Chicago, North Shore & Milwaukee interurban and won the Charles A. Coffin Medal for service in the Midwest, the first such award. In 1930, service was extended to the Chicago Loop.

In the aftermath of the market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed, CSS&SB entered bankruptcy between 1933 and 1938. Things improved with the start of World War II, of course, for both passenger and freight business. During the conflict and immediately following, the road modernized and lengthened its 1926 Pullman-built cars. Into the 1950s, freight traffic remained strong, but passenger revenue began to slide. The building of the Indiana Toll Road brought a major line re-location, the East Chicago Bypass, which went into operation in 1956. That highway would soon be siphoning off more passengers from the railroad.

The financially solid Chesapeake & Ohio Railway took control of the line in 1967, but South Shore passenger losses soon outweighed freight profits. In 1972, the Interstate Commerce Commission allowed service cuts. The following year, the state of Illinois began to subsidize the line, but Indiana’s continuing reluctance to contribute led C&O in 1976 to seek permission to end all passenger service.

As the ICC appeared to be resigned to this plan, the Hoosier State finally budged, and in 1977, its legislature created NICTD to funnel public funding to the operation. In 1982, new cars from Nippon Sharyo Ltd. entered service, which finally forced the retirement of the vintage Pullmans. In 1984, C&O sold the line to Vamora Rail Corp., which became overextended (due to purchasing the former Gulf, Mobile & Ohio Railroad from Joliet, Ill., to East St. Louis, Ill., and Kansas City, Mo.) and went bankrupt in 1989. Anacostia & Pacific Co. purchased the railroad in 1990; a year later, NICTD acquired the passenger assets.

The current construction project will generate multiple benefits, including faster travel times with increased safety for passengers while boarding trains, as well as for the motorists of Michigan City. For fans of the road, the 110 foot train No. 101 rolls eastward on 10th Street near Hancock on Michigan City’s west side on December 22, 1976.

Eastbound Train 505 leaves 10th Street, approaching the former Michigan Central diamond on July 28, 2019. Photo by Dan Cooper

South Shore Line

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A westbound train negotiates the S-curve between 11th and 10th streets on December 22, 1976.
have to pass where the 11th Street Station (built in 1927) stood until recently. Of all the photographs I’ve seen of this passenger depot recently, I was most moved by one taken by Tom Gildersleeve in December 1962 (see cover). He made this image 14 years to the day before I would stand in the same spot gawking at a Pullman combine of the same class.

Not far beyond the station is one of my favorite areas, between Cedar and Lafayette streets, where the line curves sharply north and drops precipitously, akin to a gentle roller coaster. It then continues along a tangent, rising to crest a hill at Oak Street, and on to East Michigan Boulevard. In the current phase of the project, the new double track will end in this stretch, just east of Maple Street. Much like the “S” curve on the west side of town, this very distinctive alignment will be smoothed and grade-separated for the greater good.

On the other side of East Michigan Boulevard, one can stand and gaze back westward along 11th Street and watch trains advance or recede with the steeple of St. Paul Lutheran Church towering in the background. The modern, glass-fronted Carroll Avenue Station, as well as the road’s shops, can be found to the east not far from that spot.

Adieu to street running

During my second trip to Michigan City, which took place on the final Saturday in February 2022, I did indeed find like-minded railfans to talk with, and more than just a few of them. It was a sunny day and the atmosphere was festive for the final weekend of revenue passenger trains running in the street. Railfans, most with cameras, and one with a stepladder, stood in groups here and there along 11th Street. I noticed that several more structures had been razed in the six weeks since my last visit, and the station was now completely gone.

I jumped out of my car and hastened to one of my favorite spots, the roller-coaster S-curve, as an inbound train was due soon. In combination with the distinctive street running, it is the sharp curvature or elevation change, found here and there, that really brings to mind what William D. Middleton called “the last interurban.”

References

Chicago South Shore & South Bend Railroad: How the Medal Was Won.

Running as Train 7, these bi-level cars have made a stop at 11th Street Station and are proceeding east to Carroll Avenue Station on April 12, 2018. Photo by Dan Cusper.

The 164-foot-high steeple of St. Paul Lutheran Church towers over South Shore Freight GP38-2 unit No. 2006, which is making its way down 11th Street on February 26, 2022.

With Lake Michigan on the horizon, a six-car westbound South Shore Freight run makes the S-curve transition from 11th to 10th streets on April 12, 2022. Drone photo by Michael A. Polk.

Chicago, Central Electric Railfans’ Association, 1985
NICTD site on the double-track project: https://www.doubletrack.nwi.com

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Westbound Train 506 from South Bend, Ind., descends an incline on 11th Street during the last weekend of street running in Michigan City. February 26, 2022.