

The BN

Expediter

Volume 22, Number 1

January 2014

BN Chicago Region in the early days 1970-72



The official publication of *The Friends of the Burlington Northern Railroad*, the historical society focused on the Burlington Northern Railroad, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad and the BNSF Railway

WHAT'S NEW...



BNSF Lincoln, NE to Kansas City, KS manifest train H-LINKCK1-14 approaches the A Street overpass on the St Joe Subdivision as it departs Lincoln. The EMD LNG Test Set trails in the locomotive consist. BNSF AC4400CW 5621, CREX ES44AC 1313, KCS AC4400CW 4586, BNSF LNG SD70ACe 9130, BNSF LNG Fuel Tender 933501, BNSF LNG SD70ACe 9131, 80 loads, 44 empties, 11822 tons, 7774 feet with power, and ETD BNQ 42815. Copyright Christopher Palmieri, used with permission.



BNSF485059 Tulsa, OK 17 Aug 2013. Copyright Erik Edmonds, used with permission.

Front Cover Photo: Naperville, IL 20 SEP 1970 by John Born.

**Friends of the
Burlington Northern
Railroad**
PO Box 271, West Bend, WI 53095-0271
www.fobnr.org

A Not-For-Profit Corporation
Registered in the State of Idaho

The Friends of the Burlington Northern Railroad (FOBNR) was formed to gather, preserve, and share information about the history, current operations, and future development of the Burlington Northern Railroad and its successors. It follows the evolution of the railroad from its inception in 1970 with the merger of the Great Northern; Northern Pacific; Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy; and the Spokane Portland and Seattle Railroads, along with the 1980 acquisition of the Frisco. We are a 501c (3) non-profit corporation. The purpose of the FOBNR is educational. We wish to perpetuate the history of the Burlington Northern Railroad and its successors. We seek to collect and preserve any materials which help establish or illustrate the life, conditions, events, and activities of the railroad. We will disseminate this information through the publication of a newsletter, establishment of a web site, by maintaining an archive, and by conducting an annual convention somewhere along the lines operated by the railroad. We may also publish information in other media and may restore and operate historical railway equipment.

Directors

John Adams, MD; John McKenzie; Larry Stephens;
David Poplawski; Gary Seymour

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Vice President.....Dave Poplawski
Secretary.....Gary Seymour
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Editor

Kent Charles

Regular membership is \$25.00/year; Sustaining membership is \$50.00/year; Junior membership (16 and under) is \$10.00/year. The Membership year is from January 1 to December 31. Send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the address above for more information.

The FOBNR is not supported by, nor affiliated in any way with, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Co., its subsidiaries or affiliates.

The BN Expediter

The BN Expediter is published four times a year and is included with membership in the Friends of the Burlington Northern Railroad. Manuscripts, photographs and information are welcome for publication. Materials are submitted with the understanding that no monetary compensation will be paid upon publication. Items will be returned only if requested. Otherwise they will go into the archives. Anything published in The BN Expediter (including the classifieds), must be focused on the Burlington Northern Railroad and its successors, from the 1970 merger on. Information and/or pictures that give historical perspective or context are acceptable (e.g., pre merger road numbers). The disposition of a locomotive, other piece of equipment or property is also acceptable. Further information is available from the Editor.

Send material for publication to:

The BN Expediter

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**2014 FOBNR
Convention and Membership
Meeting**
Tulsa, OK
June 18-21, 2014

We're Looking for a New Editor!

After several years of service to the Friends of the Burlington Northern Railroad, Kris Johnson has decided to move on and has resigned as editor of The BN Expediter. We thank Kris for all the hours he has put in so that the rest of us can enjoy our quarterly publication.

We are looking for someone with a basic knowledge of the BN and BNSF and some experience with collecting and organizing information for a newsletter. Experience with some modern desktop publishing software would be nice, but if none then the design and layout of each issue will be outsourced. The editor receives a financial honorarium for each issue, with the amount depending on whether the editor also does the layout. If you are interested and would like more information, please contact Dave Poplawski at pop@mtu.edu. The search for a new editor will continue until the job is filled.

Board of Directors Election - Request for Nominations

The current terms of office of Dave Poplawski, John McKenzie and Larry Stephens on the FOBNR Board of Directors will expire at the annual meeting this summer.

In accordance with the bylaws of the FOBNR and Board policy, nominations are hereby solicited by March 1, 2014, for candidates for these positions. All positions are for two years.

Any FOBNR member can nominate him or herself or be nominated by another person (the nominee will be contacted and must then accept the nomination). All nominees will be asked to write a short autobiography and a statement of why they should be elected.

A list of nominees, their supporting information, and a ballot will be sent via a special mailing in early June. Voting will take place by mail.

All details of the election will be handled by John Bourgeois. Send nominations, or names, addresses and supporting information to him at:

2113 Robinwood Avenue

Schenectady, NY 12306-4217

John must receive all nominations by March 1, 2014.

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From the President...

By the time you see this we will be past the Holidays and I hope all of you had a safe, blessed and enjoyable Holiday season! Now on to 2014, and that has to mean those resolutions.

Well, as you plan those resolutions, please try to keep the FOBNR on your list. And I say this because the organization could really use every member's help this year. We recently had our December Board conference call, and I was struck by how much work is being done by a small number of people to keep this organization going. As examples, when we lost our Expediter editor, Dave Poplawski and Kent Charles stepped up to keep the magazine going. Gary Seymour as our secretary fields inquiries off the website and reports this has gone from 17 per year a few years ago to be on pace for over 70 this year. John McKenzie is our Archivist and maintains the Archives, which has gone from 5 boxes when I handed it off to him several years ago to 31 boxes (7 4-drawer file cabinets) at present. This year John built a new house and sold his previous home and the basement where the Archives were stored. During the transition we authorized him to rent a storage locker, but instead he worked out an agreement with an elderly neighbor to store the Archives in her basement in exchange for mowing her yard all last summer. And the list goes on with website maintenance etc., etc.

So, what can you do to help?

1. Recruit new members! Talk to your friends in the hobby and let them check out our website and all the information that is there. Show them the Expediter and encourage them to join us. Look at some of the other railroad historical groups and see what they do – if we had their kind of membership we could do the same level of things they accomplish. I would love to see The Expediter be the size of the publications of the Milwaukee Road or Union Pacific societies, and it could be if we could increase our membership each year.
2. Write an article for the Expediter. All of us have things we can share and you don't need fantastic writing skills. Get us the information and some pictures to go along with it and we can get it into a good article for publication,
3. Plan to join us in Tulsa this June for another great Convention (I won't be planning this one!). We are planning a number of activities and the camaraderie is tremendous. Tulsa is a busy area with lots of things to see. Bring your family as there are activities for everyone.
4. Consider running for the Board! Let's just say that with one exception all of us care more what is happening to Medicare than Obamacare. We always could use new ideas and new energy. We saw a lot of interest and great ideas at last year's Convention in Missoula, so let's translate that into activity.
5. Consider organizing a Convention. We always get great suggestions for Convention sites, but if we don't have somebody on site it is very difficult to organize from afar. All it takes is the ability to do some legwork and make some contacts. David and I have organized enough conventions that we can fill in the blanks and help you through the process.
6. In general, think about what you like to do, where your strengths lie. If you have website experience we could certainly use somebody to help with the website. If you do like to write, we would be glad to have you help with Expediter editing. Do you like to model something? Send us pictures and an explanation and we will turn it into an article to share with others.

All of this sums up to becoming involved. We have the possibility for a great organization. We follow the history of some great railroads, but we need to take the initiative to become better.

So, thanks to all of you for belonging to our organization and please give the above some thought. And we look forward to seeing you in Tulsa this June!

John

2014 Tulsa Convention Update

Planning continues for our annual convention and membership meeting in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on June 18-21. We will be staying at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in downtown Tulsa, 2 blocks from the BNSF mainline and within 3 miles of Cherokee Yard.

Tulsa lies at the intersection of the Arvard, Cherokee and Creek Subdivisions and is a busy place. Traffic between the transcon and points east passes through on the Arvard and Cherokee Subs, with traffic to the Dallas/Ft. Worth area on the Creek Sub. The major BNSF facility in town is the Cherokee yard. There are many good railfanning spots within a short distance. For those of you with Internet access, check out <http://condrenrails.com/Hot Spots/Tulsa-Hot-Spot.html> for lots of information and some great photos. For you modelers the convention will include a visit to and operating session at the HO gauge layout of the Claremore & Southern Railroad in nearby Claremore. Check out their website at: www.csrailclub.com The local BNSF special agent will be our convention speaker. We are still working on arranging one or more tours of rail-related facilities, including the Cherokee yard. If you're driving through Amarillo on the way to the convention, Fred Theiss offers his extensive HO gauge layout for a visit. Contact him at 806-673-4625 or ironhorse@midplains.coop.

Full convention information will be put on the FOBNR web site (www.fobnr.org) when planning is complete. A complete schedule along with a registration form will also be mailed along with the April issue of The BN Expediter.

Sustaining Members

The Board of Directors would like to take this opportunity to thank our Sustaining Members for 2012. Their extra contributions to the finances of the FOBNR has helped us to continue bringing you the quality and quantity of the BN/BNSF related information.

John G Adams, MD.; Doug Andreason, Jim Archer; Joseph Beasley; Tom Bentley; James Bradley; Jay Burkgart; Bill Chapple; Kent Charles; Gayle Christen; Craig Connell; Charles Davis; Mark Dennis;

Rodney Dunshea; Peter Ferch; Roger Field; ; John Flodin; Wade Griffis; Gerad Grossman; Bill Harvey; Richard Heggen; Mark Herrick; Alfred Holck; Kristopher Johnson; Jesper Kaae; James Kreger; Mark Lembersky; Joe Lewis; Alan Matchett; John McPhee; Alan Meyer; William Miotek; David Obetz; Dave Poplawski; Emery Rahm; Anthony Raimondi; Richard Rehn; Kim Saign; Gary Seymour;

Dennis Shogren; Patrick Slater; David Smith; Joe Snider; Lawrence Stephens; Burr Stewart; Thomas Synovec; John Tenerowicz; Frederick Theiss; Aric Van de Vord; Dick Worth; Duane Durr; Allen Moore; T Michael Power; Jorg Willer; Gary Wlodarczyk; Steve Koberstein; Dry River Specialists Ltd.

Needed

Photos of BNSF equipment on display for National Train Day, May 11, 2013, for a photo spread in the April 2014 issue. Please include location, event, and any other interesting information about the photo(s). Send to pop@mtu.edu.

BN Chicago Region in the Early Days 1970-72 by Dave Burns

When I arrived in Chicago in July 1970 as Operations Manager of the Chicago Region, BN was only 4 months old. I had but a vague idea of what the duties and responsibilities of that position would be. I was sorry to leave my job as Division Superintendent of the Dakota Division that had become so meaningful to me. But I was also curious about what, for the "Northern Lines Guys", was foreign territory, because I was one of the first transferred in. I found, both in terms of culture and job content, life was quite different from what I had envisioned!

The Chicago Region, as did most of the 6 BN regions, had 3 operating divisions: Chicago (Cicero, IL), Hannibal (Hannibal, MO), and Ottumwa (Ottumwa, IA.) The region spanned what had been Lines East of the CBQ between Chicago and St. Paul, St Louis, Kansas City, Omaha and Paducah. It carried a vast array of commodities, including coal from the mines in southern Illinois. It also had a lot of bridge traffic; as well as freight forwarder and even some intermodal. The Chicago Region even had its own coal train operation in St. Louis area. My first week on the job, starting Monday, July 20, 1970, was memorable from a number of discoveries and altered perceptions.

First Week Discoveries

I quickly sensed a deep seated resentment among many former CB&Q supervisors. For some time, the pressure from the owner roads (GN and NP) for dividends had denied the Q the funds to maintain - let alone improve the operating property to the degree desired (even required in some instances.) As a result, one of the skill sets the Q leadership brought to BN was experience in making do with far less than I was used to on the GN. The first inspection trip of the

Chicago Region by system level BN Maintenance leaders quickly led to many main line slow orders and some massive tie renewal projects, a belated form of recognition and acknowledgement that showed the resentment was justified.

Many of the officers I encountered were of the first rank, such as Ivan Ethington (Region VP);

Dick Johnson, AVPO; (my immediate, boss) Wayne Arntzen (Chicago Division Superintendent); Earl Currie (his Asst. Superintendent); and Bob Jabens (Region Transportation Manager). While there were many others, each of these five would go on to greater responsibilities with the BN. And the operational capabilities of Jabens quickly made me aware I would be more valuable helping both region and divisions "get stuff" and "do stuff" so that they could focus on running trains. This region did not need an "operations manager" as such.

A skill set on the old Q was a passion for departing trains on time. When I look back on my perceptions of what each of the three major partners contributed to BN, it seems to me their combined contributions elevated Burlington Northern above just another big railroad. The GN had a passion for sound track, ever improving line and grade.

The NP had a passion for innovative equipment (like the double deck Pig Palace stock cars) and locomotives. And from the Q, a passion for running trains. While some may disagree with my perceptions, most will agree all three are essential components of a first class operation. And BN was fortunate to possess all three from day one and continues to give all three attention.

The region had some remarkable facilities I had never seen before, like the triple track main line between Chicago and Aurora and lots of double

BURLINGTON NORTHERN INC.		
CHICAGO REGION		
CHICAGO, OTTUMWA AND HANNIBAL DIVISIONS		
TIME TABLE		
No.		
1		
In Effect at 12:01 A.M. Central Standard Time.		
TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 1970		
To be used in conjunction with Special Instructions currently in effect.		
ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT— TRANSPORTATION H. E. SURLS	ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT— OPERATIONS R. G. JOHNSON	
SUPERINTENDENT CHICAGO DIVISION W. L. ARNTZEN	SUPERINTENDENT OTTUMWA DIVISION I. W. CRIST	SUPERINTENDENT HANNIBAL DIVISION I. G. TOLAND

track elsewhere. This was eye opening to a single track operation guy like me.

Another was the efficient hump yard in Cicero, a brand new one nearing completion in Kansas City, and an antiquated but effective “Double Hump” at Galesburg; which kept WB and EB traffic segregated in two yards, each with its own hump facility. Between both were shared support facilities, like car and engine maintenance.

But perhaps the most amazing operation to me, and certainly a crown jewel of the Q was the commuter service between Chicago Union Station and Aurora, 38 miles south west. This was managed by a small staff of devoted disciples and was by far the best in the Windy City. The On Time record was flawless. The equipment was well maintained bi-levels, push-pull for maximum flexibility and efficiency. The crews were mostly old heads, experienced and proud. Passengers would queue up at boarding stations in definite locations, and almost without fail that is precisely where the cars would stop and the doors open. The CTC triple track operation made it possible to leap frog one train around another, which in turn permitted express trains serving a limited number of stations, rather than just a series of “all stops” local trains. I assure you it was exciting to ride the cab of one of these as it weaved its way around other trains at 60 mph, or to sit in the dispatching Office watching the track circuits being lined up and lighting up. But there was an operational downside that caused real hardships. The pace of the “dinky parade,” as the commuter trains were called, dictated that few (if any) freight trains could be let WB out of Cicero or EB out of Aurora, for the 2 hour parade each AM and PM. This, as you can imagine, produced scheduling nightmares and daily tough decisions as short term windows became available in between the swarm of dinkies. This may have been a catalyst in the Q’s passion for having trains absolutely ready and primed for departure at the appointed time (and earlier if possible).

But I was also developing a suspicion that the initial BN regional organizational structure was top heavy, and would need future reworking to become leaner and more efficient. This observation is not a criticism of senior management but more a tribute to their

commitment to honoring the assurance that every supervisor would have a job on day one. A similar assurance was given union employees guaranteeing them no less than their current earnings even if their job changed. These generous assurances, in my opinion, were instrumental in BN’s early success. The emphasis could be on moving forward rather than worrying whether you would lose your paycheck. And another, I firmly believe, was the good job BN did in integrating supervisors at all levels, with all deliberate speed. It was instrumental in turning “them” into “us” sooner and better than other railroad mergers.

Finding My Niche, Becoming Useful

The Operations Manager I relieved was Charlie Bryan, 10 or so years my senior (who, after a stint at headquarters would go on to become AVPO of the Seattle Region).

Charlie had a keen eye for making do with less, tirelessly searching for cost reduction opportunities and endless searches for less costly alternatives to what appeared to me obvious needs. I thought him overly zealous in this regard, but then I’m sure I appeared to him to not be zealous enough. In any event, he had become proficient at shepherding dollars. Our paths, and different perspectives, would meet again in the summer of 1974 at Seattle.

I had not come to Chicago thinking my value would be more in Administration than Operations, but that turned out to be precisely where my skill sets best fit into region and division needs. There were 3 important programs being implemented system wide in which I had previous experience. The first was Capital Budgeting (AFE – Authority For Expenditure), the second Operational Budgeting (RESBU - RESponsibility BUDget) and the third Managerial Action Planning (MAP). While every road obviously had some sort of each, BN was now making each process more formal and far more rigorous. Fortunately, the basics were very familiar to me whereas to many on the Chicago region they appeared foreign, formidable and time consuming. Thus I found myself not just helping implement all three processes but often actually helping prepare them, track their progress, explain variances and devising corrective actions.

BN capital funds, while adequate, were obviously limited especially with the voracious demands of the coal explosion then becoming apparent. There was stiff competition for both capital upgrades and major basic maintenance dollars. Thus the RFA (Request For Authorization) - AFE process for both required tight, well-reasoned and well-worded cost/benefit analysis, including the cost of NOT doing the work. While my operational skills were not always up to standards, my pencil pushing and writing experience was of great value in our efforts to acquire needed major maintenance and betterment funds.

Likewise with RESBU - Operational dollar budgeting – the funds with which to run trains, maintain basic track and equipment, operate terminals, stations, and repair facilities of all types. All the components and funding required to make a railroad run day to day had to be accounted for. The divisions had a handle on these of course, but not to the precision now expected.

Then there were the monthly reports in which both significant over runs and under runs fell under increasing scrutiny to explain. And finally, there were always emergencies that arose, demanding immediate attention, for which emergency funding could be requested, but for which extraordinary justification had to be provided. Obviously in all these areas those budget requests with the most compelling justifications got the least questioning and fastest approval. These were things I could help with.

But there were always worthwhile and valuable opportunities that came up that didn't merit an emergency which might be difficult to get through the normal budgeting process, but would go a long way to make things better for the field. These fell under the Jesuit principle of "Better to beg forgiveness than ask permission" — or the mantra of some of us activists, "Ask not what Management can do for you, ask what you can do for yourselves." And here both my bias for action, and previous training and experience, proved to be extremely helpful.

Both Division and Regional levels had separate budget accounts. Those of us more experienced in their development and operation could be more

successful in finding ways to "get stuff" and "do stuff" (creative accounting you might say.)

Since the Q was behind on what a lot of the northern lines took as givens (and took for granted) I was helpful in finding ways to fund minor but long overdue "stuff." Things like some portable radios for crews, some A/C window units here and there, decent office equipment, minor remodeling and fix-ups - a laundry list of small things that help the field look and perform better without having to do battle with the bureaucracy to "make something happen" and "Get'er Done." Obviously, a railroad has to have control of its costs, but there is also room for some degree of latitude to get done now some of the minor things that need to get done now. Usually the morale and productivity gain far exceed the relatively few dollars involved. I believe it also shows the employees that management has not lost sight of what it is like out there for the people, who really make the railroad run, helping to preserve that sense of "Loyalty up - Loyalty down" that has been a hallmark of the better run railroads.

The third biggest process was MAP - Managerial Action Planning. The GN had begun this process in 1966, and BN implemented one almost identical to it. Each of the component roads had some system of annual goals, to be sure, so goal setting was not new. What was, however, was the degree to which responsibility and time lines had to be clearly established for the numerous goals which required interdepartmental action. For example, freight agency consolidations and eliminations, once proposed by a division, required subsequent processing thru the legal, labor relations and accounting departments. Monthly reports were required to document progress. The concept was sound - to track and keep projects moving rather than getting lost and forgotten. While this process could be time consuming and frustrating to the un-initiated, I thought it to be quite efficient and productive at making things happen. My diary shows a lot of time spent out on line introducing MAP, often helping write the initial goals, developing who was responsible for what portion, reasonable time lines to progress, etc. In my estimation, this was another good effort at converting the traditional "vertical" department focus into a more "horizontal" perspective coordinating divisional

interests toward system performance rather than the more traditional perspective of each department looking out for its self-interest and benefits. The new system harnessed goals rather than creating mutually exclusive conflicting and competing efforts. More and more, the railroad ran as a cohesive system, with system teamwork, rather than individual departments battling each other about as much as they were battling the competition.

Finding Ways to Help My Boss

My immediate supervisor was Dick Johnson, the Regional AVPO. At that time, the Regional Vice Presidents were charged with both Operating and Marketing functions, which I thought was an idea worth trying. Thus each Regional VP had two AVPs reporting, the AVPO and AVPM. It seemed to me this was a good way to integrate efforts and bridge the "Us vs Them" sometimes adversarial relationship between those who produced the product and those trying to sell it.

Shortly after my arrival, Johnson was promoted to lead System Transportation in St. Paul, and was succeeded by Jack Hamer, who had been AVPO of the Omaha Region.

Both of these men were seasoned veterans, good operators, but for whom formal written and oral communications (outside of some colorful directives!) were not their forte'. Here my experience and practice at these qualities in Labor Relations and Staff Operations turned out to be helpful to both of

these bosses. I found myself representing them on industry committees such as the General Managers Association of Chicago, helping prepare (and often giving) presentations in their behalf, preparing staff meeting agendas, follow up reports, all sorts of correspondence, enquiries, "blasts" from above, you name it. While this was far from what I thought an Operations Manager might do, I was pleased to become the "Admin go to guy" for both of them. Plus it freed them up to focus on what they were most familiar with and did best. And it was rewarding to my efforts to be of real help to have Hamer write on a

Performance Evaluation
"The best Admin man he'd ever had."



Dave Burns in front of BN6375 on June 1, 1974. Dave began his railroad career as a Freight Handler with the Great Northern Railroad in 1959. After serving as an Officer in the US Navy, he returned to the GN in 1963 as a Management Trainee. He worked in many capacities with the Burlington Northern, retiring in 1995. Ron V. Nixon photo courtesy of the Museum of the Rockies, Montana State University - Bozeman. Used with permission.

One particular project that landed on my desk was a request from a local Catholic Church involving a block long vacant property BN owned adjacent to the triple track main line. The church wanted to have a 3-day fund raising project for the parochial school it operated staffed entirely by nuns. It was to be over the Labor Day weekends and was to be quite extensive, there would be a midway, carnival rides, a petting Zoo and pony rides - really quite an affair. Our property would make an ideal setting for it. Seemed like a good community relations, good neighbor idea to me, especially since the church was willing to indemnify and hold harmless BN from any accidents or injuries. Even so, the bureaucracy not

only balked, but for a time even refused to consider it. I and the division superintendent, Wayne Arntzer, spent a lot of time and network capital to wear down the opposition and get an agreement signed. The event opened to a

beautiful Chicago Labor Day weekend. Imagine my surprise to receive a phone call Saturday morning from the Mother Superior bitterly complaining that the animal pens were right below the non-air conditioned dormitory widows for the nuns, and that the smells and the flies were interfering with the sisters getting any rest. I'll never forget my call to the priest, with whom we had been dealing, asking him what in the world I was supposed to say or do. His reply was priceless: "That damn Nun -- I'll take care of her. Consider the matter closed." The carnival went on to great success. A lot of money was raised, and nice letters were written to BN and the local paper thanking us. But I've often wondered what the priest said to the mother superior, because I heard no more.

Industry Wide Activities

The early 1970's saw the implantation of ACI (Automated Car Identification) scanners at strategic locations, which electronically verified passing train consists, particularly in and out of terminals. This saved the time consuming and labor intensive requirement to otherwise walk the train and prepare lists manually. I was on the team studying where to best place the scanners.

Another was the industry wide requirement to reduce the maximum On Duty Time for Train Yard and Enginemen from the traditional 16 hours to 12. While this created scheduling headaches especially on long branch lines, most of us younger officers thought it long overdue. As a green Asst. Trainmaster in Shelby, MT. I had worked side by side with crews routinely used to 16 hour workdays, with only 8 hours in between for rest and food before returning to duty. I couldn't survive that punishing pace for long, still be safe and efficient, and I was amazed how well they generally stood up under it. To be sure, these were the high earnings jobs, and there was a certain amount of "work expanding to fill the time allotted." but these were long, long hours in an unforgiving atmosphere for inattentiveness.

Since Bob Jabens was so adroit at coordinating operations between divisions and other railroads, I became involved in seeking out opportunities for interchanging at least blocks of cars, if not entire trains, outside of the congested Chicago terminal. The complexity and congestion, the long

distances between connecting railroad yards, and the time eaten up for transfers between one another was jaw dropping for me. The Chicago Terminal was a whole 'nuther world, unlike anything I had ever seen or even imagined. Thus, other roads were similarly interested in finding alternatives to Chicago at which to interchange cars – and trains - if possible. My role was scouting out possible locations, investigating suggested sites as to realistic track connections including estimated costs, and overall feasibility. When a site really became of potential, the Transportation Dept. under Bob Jabens would then develop details of exactly what, how and when. My diary indicates we set up one with the L&N at Woodlawn, with the Southern at Centralia and with the EL, though I don't remember where. Now, of course, entire unit trains and power units operate between railroads without having to be broken up into blocks and laboriously transferred back and forth. Indeed, the few major rail systems remaining function as one system already in many regards. Further mergers may not be needed or even advisable.

While it has been said that the deregulation of the railroads in the early 1980's is what revitalized the industry, another that really helped the bottom line was the creation of Amtrak in 1970 to shoulder the appalling losses of passenger train operations. By the early 1960's passenger, mail and express had largely abandoned the railroads for commercial air and the interstate highway system. Passenger train reductions were subjected to lengthy, costly and sometimes unsuccessful review process by both state and federal authorities. Congress created Amtrak in October 1970 to essentially assume responsibility for all intercity passenger trains, including scheduling, personnel, equipment, and losses. It had 6 months to develop a comprehensive plan to do so. Some roads had virtually given up on even trying to offer good service on the remaining passenger trains. To its credit, BN had continued to operate the Empire Builder, the North Coast Limited and the California Zephyr to first rate standards right up to the official takeover by Amtrak, May 1, 1971.

That was on a Saturday, and I felt compelled to be at Chicago Union to say goodbye to the old and hello to the new. Of course nothing looked

any different on that date. Over time, there would be big changes, naturally, but I remain pleased that the Empire Builder and the California Zephyr remain among the very finest of all the trains in the Amtrak national fleet.

A Memorably Derailment

We endured a higher number of derailments than I was used to until the property was better strengthened, but one derailment in particular stood out. I had just gotten home on Tuesday, August 17, 1971, when the Chief Dispatcher called with a 46 car pile-up 15 miles west of Ottumwa, IA. It had been made even worse by an ensuing fire

wasn't until Friday August 20 at 10 AM that we got all 46 cars in the clear or rerailed and track restoration completed --- a rather lengthy time for a derailment. But here again this Single Main Track guy was very impressed with the flexibility afforded by multiple main tracks such as the Q had engineered and built.

A Good Idea Gets Derailed

One of my most vivid memories was being the Ops representative on a team assembled to prepare a plan and then bid to haul sludge from the Chicago Sanitary Treatment Plant to strip coal mines in central and southern Illinois that were



BN2060 at Naperville September 22, 1970 by John Born

that was detonating cars of ordinance and explosives being shipped for the military.

The good news was that at this particular location the double track mains were over 700 feet apart (the second having been constructed on a lower gradient.) This fact permitted us to continue operating trains on the other main without fear of them getting caught up in the explosions. But clearing operations at the derailment site itself were a long time in commencing. That first night shells continued to cook off, meaning we could not get firefighting equipment into the scene until the next day. Even then, once we had the fires extinguished, a few shells would sporadically explode and people would duck for cover. It

being refilled. The idea was to then turn them into productive farm and ranchland. This, of course, would require effective fertilization. The sludge was the "solid waste" left over after the "water waste" had been treated and released. A number of independent tests had agreed the sludge, if liquefied, would create just what was needed. It would also solve the Sanitary District's dilemma what to do with the sludge as it continued to accumulate in the holding ponds. The sludge was to be liquefied enough to handle it in tank cars. Another advantage of liquefaction was that it could be applied through irrigation sprinklers similar to those used in dry land states where ground water was sufficient to do so. Tests

had further shown the liquefied sludge would cause no harmful health effects of any kind or concern. Additionally, there was talk that it would have further application on farmland beyond the immediate mine reclamation Projects.

We put together a plan starting with one 80-car unit tank train daily. While simple in concept, the operational requirements to make it work were daunting. Where and how to load and unload the tank cars, equipment that would be reliable, sub-contractors qualified and willing to undertake the non-rail haul aspects of an untried, unproven, but potentially highly profitable opportunity for all parties, including the receivers of the product. But another complicating factor was that the plan and bid had to be both compensatory and competitive, because a consortium of truck and barge lines was also bidding for the project. We submitted our bid on April 8, 1971. On April 22, late on a Friday afternoon, Region Vice President, Ivan Ethington, was summoned to the Chicago Sanitation Commission headquarters. We eagerly awaited his return with somewhat mixed emotions: a bit of apprehension; what if we really got the bid ---was our plan really up to the test --- but also excitement over the big new revenue potential represented here. Ethington came back ashen faced. He had been told the bid was ours, providing certain "commissions" were paid to certain commissioners. I was in his office when he called St. Paul to report this. He reached Bob Downing, the Executive VP. I will never forget the conversation. "Bob, we're in a crack. We need this new revenue, but we'll have to pay to get it. This is unfamiliar and dangerous territory, and we need some guidance here."

Since BN was desperate for additional revenue I was prepared to hear something like "Let's sleep on this," or "Let's see what the lawyers think," or any number of ways to postpone any quick decision. Imagine my pride in Downing's immediate reply: 'Oh my, my, my, we can't do that and we won't.'" In a subsequent conversation with Downing a number of years later, in my telling him how proud we were for this unwavering and immediate reply, he grinned and said: "Well, just to be certain I did report it to Lou Menk, who just as immediately and unhesitatingly concurred." I tell you this story, because it is illustrative of other instances in my BN days when

I witnessed similar first ethics from BN leadership. This was another hallmark that, in my estimation made BN No Ordinary Railroad, and one to be proud of.

The contract was awarded to the competitor who apparently paid the "Commissions" because some years later it and certain Sanitary Commission officers were indicted and convicted of corruption.

Do We Need Such Strong Regions

I was not surprised by a headquarters request in April 1971, one year after merger, to review the region organization and purpose, and be prepared to discuss at a May 10 high-level meeting with President Menk, after retorts had been assembled and reviewed. You might find our response from the Chicago region interesting:

"Chicago Regional Department heads and division superintendents are unanimous in a belief that the region concept was instrumental in effecting the merger. This region finds itself:

1. Providing day to day direction and coordination of effort.
2. Acting as a referee.
3. Making necessary decisions in situations where headquarters has not issued policy or guidelines.
4. Providing staff assistance to divisions including advice and counsel.

Department heads, and 2 of the 3 division superintendents believe that headquarters is too remote to effectively supply the above, and hence believe the region concept should continue, in a direct line relationship between headquarters and field.

The hold out for not needing regions was Wayne Arntzen, Chicago Division Superintendent, who soon thereafter was promoted to AVPO Billings, and whom I would often chide over his change of heart.

Our report went on to suggest efficiencies that seemed to us could be made at headquarters and also within the regions themselves:

“While essential today, it does not follow the regions will always be necessary, at least as presently constituted. The coordination requirement will always be present, but there may be ways to do it with fewer people. There is no compelling reason to perpetuate six regions. Four would be ample, three might suffice.

Whatever number of regions that remain, it would seem quite possible to combine headquarters and regional staffs in ways to remove the middle layer of paper processing we now have. And it might become possible that the coordination efforts of the regions become performed from joint offices in St. Paul as well as some on line. Such a system holds the possibility of less cumbersome communication at a greatly reduced cost and time.”

Not surprisingly, our report also recommended that the divisions should be strengthened, not diminished, by any future reorganization proposals:

“More and more responsibility is being placed in the field, from budgeting to goals and progress monitoring. The Division Superintendent, by whatever title, is still perhaps the key position in the entire organization. We have not yet found a satisfactory substitute for the knowledgeable man on the ground. More -- not less --emphasis should be placed on the field organization and its activities.”

Our report concluded with a bit of a zinger at some of what appeared to be “Knee Jerk” reactions and policies of headquarters a year into merger:

“To the extent possible, abrupt and somewhat impromptu decisions, and subsequent sudden reversal of same, should be avoided. We understand it is necessary to remain flexible, but fluctuations back and forth from day to day keeps field forces off balance and destroys their confidence in the ability of management to make decisions that appear to be based on some reasonably well thought out process.”

No earth shattering changed resulted immediately, but over time field forces were strengthened and regions were diminished, both as to number and size, primarily through attrition.

By the time of the BN-ATSF merger in 1995, BN could lay legitimate claim to our being “The Lean Green Machine.” There was a lot of pride in our “magnificent enterprise.”

Returning to the Field

On January 24, 1972, some 18 months after my arrival in Chicago and 22 months after M Day, I was transferred to Missoula, MT as superintendent of the Rocky Mountain Division. While I was glad to get back into line operations, and again be an “Operating guy” rather than an “Admin guy” I felt good about what the Chicago Region had accomplished in the critical first two years of merger. You perhaps have to be a railroader to fully sense the satisfaction of seeing a railroad running better and better in all respects. The Chicago Region Team had done a good job toward that goal. But, in any event, I was pleased that my skill sets in administrative support met a need on the old Q, whose skill sets in operations needed no help from me at that time.

I arrived in Missoula in the cab of Amtrak 7, the North Coast Hiawatha, on February 15, 1972, to begin one of the more rewarding portions of my BN days. But that’s another story.

Authors Note: While my previous article made mention of the explosion in unit coal train traffic in the 1970’s, I did not become exposed to big time operation of them until 1979. The reason for this note is to call attention to a book being finalized by FOBNR member Earl Carrie, memorializing that saga. It outlines the courage of BN senior management in jumping rather being pushed into an entirely new business line requiring Herculean efforts to finance. But the book also describes what the field forces lived through to literally reinvent and rebuild much of BN’s track structure, facilities and equipment, all while straggling to keep the railroad open. You had to see and experience it to believe it. Some have described it BN finest hour. But in any event Carrie’s forthcoming book concisely and movingly describes the courage, creativity, commitment and sacrifice required to give birth to this gigantic new business venture.

The following photos by J. R. (Jack) Keers show track work near Pipestone, MN and the construction of a new bridge and siding from July to November, 1997, to service the Cargill Elevator at Split Rock, MN. The elevator can now handle 110 car unit trains. Jack joined the Pipestone MN Fire Department in 1954 and served for 31 years; serving as fire chief from 1974 to 1977. He operated a painting business and also taught asbestos removal classes at Southwest Technical College in Pipestone. In 1992 he was elected as a Commissioner for Pipestone County and served in this capacity until his retirement in 2006. He also received an Outstanding Service Award for the improvement of county government in Minnesota. Jack passed away April 1, 2008 and his family donated his slide collection to the Friends of the Burlington Northern.





