

Koerner Promoted

David R. Koerner has been promoted to MRL Vice President Finance and Administration. Dave began his career with the Burlington Northern Railroad in 1976 at Laurel, Montana and has worked in the railroad industry most of his professional life. His career with the Washington Transportation Group of Companies began as MRL's Director of Revenue Accounting in 1990. In 1997 he was promoted to Controller of IMRL and 2002 became the MRL Controller.

Dave is a CPA and a graduate of Eastern Montana College (now MSU Billings) with a BS in Accounting. Please join me in congratulating Dave on his well deserved promotion.

Safety 2006

...Look What's Next?

by Pete Lawrenson

Montana Rail Link recently underwent a comprehensive safety audit by an independent safety consultant. The bottom-line objective of the audit was to identify ways to instill a renewed sense of energy, urgency, and enthusiasm into all aspects of safety. As a proactive employer that is committing our collective efforts toward safety, the goal is to continue to reduce personal injuries and accidents. As such, the quality of life of all MRL employees is enriched as we work toward our respective career accomplishments.

During the coming months, a new MRL Safety Vision Statement will be created to address the safety outcome established by the Safety Committees for the 2006 safety goal. The visibility of area safety committee members and company managers toward safety will be noticeable and productive while seeking your input and involvement. Safety-based activities with measurable outcomes are part of the objective as we work with synergy to achieve the highest standards of excellence in the field of safety.

WE, as employees, are what makes Montana Rail Link work and WE can do it for safety too! Get involved and we all benefit.

Senior Safety News

by Ted Hagemo

The MRL Senior Safety Council recently met in Missoula and discussed several topics, with extensive discussion about the Safety Audit that was recently performed across the system, review of 2005 injuries, recognition programs, and allocation of the \$100,000 safety fund.

Many great ideas were submitted for consideration. After much discussion the following projects were approved:

- › Paving projects at Laurel Yard from the county road to the Yard office, and in Missoula from the roundhouse to the pedestrian footbridge.
- › Electrical outlets for employees' vehicles at both ends of the Laurel Yard.
- › Forty-five degree switches at several locations in Billings.
- › Proximity switches for both ends of South Three in Billings.
- › Snow removal equipment for Helena Yard.
- › Shop garage doors and openers for the old wheel shop in Laurel and a door opener for the Livingston Signal shop.
- › Lighting projects at the Missoula Roundhouse and at the Pyramid Log Loading facility at Huntley.
- › Load indicators for the locomotive cranes.
- › Air conditioning units for six large trucks.
- › New pedestrian crossing at Plains.
- › Barbecue equipment to be based at Thompson Falls.
- › Track changes at locations yet to be determined.

The council is comprised of Safety Committee Chairmen and Vice Chairmen, Department Heads and their Assistants, Training Rules and Safety Director and Managers, Chief of Security/Safety, the Vice President Operations, and the President. This group of individuals work together to distribute the \$100,000 safety fund, which was increased this year to \$155,000 as a result of safety committee member requests.

SD70ACe Powering Up

by Claude Van Winkle

Since the arrival of our new locomotives, everyone involved has experienced a learning curve with the new technology, from the Machinists to Electricians and Road Foreman to Engineers. Below are some of the performance issues that have been a part of that learning curve:

Electrical control system malfunctions when operating through the Mullan Tunnel.

- Rapid temperature rise, humidity and soot contributing to issues.
- EMD developing alternative computer system ventilation methods. Initial testing of prototype modification began the week of December 19th.

Locomotives reported to switch from trail to lead/cut-in air brake set up.

- Problem potentially caused by electrical system spikes. EMD released wiring modification to address.
- Airbrake setup could also be inadvertently changed if employee performs quick loading check (throw reverser and performs throttle stall test) of a trail locomotive on service track.

Undesired penalty or emergency brake application reported.

- Problem may have been due to intermittent electrical control system grounds.
- One potential cause identified in airbrake software. Modifications released to correct both issues.

Heater failures.

- New heater control software has been released which will prevent additional failures.

Locomotives have shut down while idling and draining the cooling system.

- Battery-saver engaging with engine running if APC fault exists.

Other reliability issues we are looking into include:

- Freeze damage when draining in extremely low temperatures
- Fuses blowing
- Air starter pinion lubrication
- Chopper plus wiring

Initial problems are not uncommon when new power is introduced on a property. We are confident that we are gaining on the issues at hand and believe the problems will be minimized quickly. On the positive side of the operation, the new power is even more fuel efficient and more productive than originally projected.

With the help of EMD representatives who are on site in Livingston and Helena, all issues that arise are being evaluated with corrective measures being implemented to address those issues.

Keeping Track

On the Move

Susan Twiford - now Human Resource System Specialist, from Executive Administrative Assistant effective November 16, 2005

Kent Kulesa - now Carmen Supervisor, from Carmen effective December 16, 2005

Look Who's New

Extra Board Clerk
Kyle Harsch

Retirements

Dave Frickle December 8th
Dale Bennett December 29th
John Grewell December 30th

Railroad Trivia

by Ted Hagemo

Recently I received a trade magazine with an interesting article about railroads. Many MRL employees know the distance between the rails is 4' 8.5" and is called the gauge. That is an exceedingly odd number. *Why was that gauge used?* That is the way they built them in England, and the US railroads were built by English expatriates. *Why did the English people build them like that?* The first rail lines were built by the same people who built the pre-railroad tramways, and that is the gauge they used.

Why did "they" use that gauge then? The people who built the tramways used the same jigs and tools that they used for building wagons, which used that wheel spacing. *Why did the wagons use that odd wheel spacing?* If they tried to use any other spacing the wagons would break on some of the old, long-distance roads, because that is the spacing of the old wheel ruts.

So who built these old rutted roads? The first long-distance roads in Europe were built by Imperial Rome for the benefit of their legions. The roads have been used ever since. *And the ruts?* The initial ruts, which everyone else had to match for fear of destroying their wagons, were first made by Roman war chariots. Since the chariots were made for or by imperial Rome, they were all alike in the matter of wheel spacing.

Thus, we have the answer to the original question. *The United State standard railroad gauge of 4' 8.5" derives from the original specifications for an Imperial Roman army war chariot. Because the Imperial Roman chariots were made to be just wide enough to accommodate the back ends of two war horses.*



Answer: 3,299,280 miles or the equivalent of driving around the world 122 times or 6.9 round trips from the earth to the moon. Congratulations to everyone for the minimal vehicle incidents MRL has each year.

Mr. and Mrs. Claus
Patty Seabugh - Payroll,
Gerald Marshall - Locomotive Engineer
Bitterroot Santa Express



On the Road Again

by Jim Bieber

During a recent trip from Missoula to Billings I passed 11 Montana Rail Link vehicles, which made me wonder just how many vehicles we have in our company fleet. The MRL fleet consists of 86 pickup trucks, 32 cars and SUVs, and 47 trucks over 10,000 G.W., for a total of 165 vehicles. From January 1 through November 30, MRL has spent \$725,253 on fuel and another \$959,670 for repairs and preventative maintenance on the entire fleet. This year we constructed a new super truck for the Plains Section at a cost of \$208,000 and we are planning on constructing another super truck in 2006 for the Helena Section.

Question: How many miles did Montana Rail Link employees drive in company vehicles for the year 2004?

Answer: Somewhere in this newsletter.

OPERATING UPDATE

by Mark Smith

The fourth quarter has been quite a challenge for the Operating Department, especially at Laurel. Year-to-date, the actual cars for the Laurel switch are 196,890 on a budget of 183,962. For November Laurel switch was 5,100 cars over budget. The increase in traffic flow definitely has presented us opportunities to think outside the box. With the increase in grain as well as the addition of the PASNTW, we are now inspecting trains at Livingston, which normally would inspect at Laurel. This greatly reduces congestion issues at Laurel.

We have also done some "creative" block swapping at the aforementioned locations with our merchandise trains creating less switching at Laurel. It has definitely been a team effort by everyone involved.

We have started a Switchforeman class the first part of December for those who hired out in January 2005. Training will be complete by the end of December.

Here are some numbers in case you were wondering:

October grain:	76 loads, 69 empties
October coal:	27 loads, 26 empties
November grain:	77 loads, 61 empties
November coal:	23 loads, 24 empties

We have also loaded three 125-car coal trains at Lockwood for the Tennessee Valley Authority as part of a test burn. The coal is headed towards the Paducah, KY area.

Interviews are complete for the ATM position in Laurel. Jerry Barnett will be retiring in January of 2006. Good luck Jerry and we wish you the best in your retirement!

Many thanks to all the people who have stepped up to the plate to make things happen during the cold weather and busy time.

MRL

A Letter of Thanks

To My Fellow Co-Workers,

I would like to thank my many fellow employees for your generous donations of flex time that allowed me to be with my wife during her chemotherapy treatments. A special thank you goes to everyone that has been involved in making this transition easier for my wife and me to go through. The cards, money, visits, concerns and prayers have all been so very greatly appreciated.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

John (Tom) Hart and Family

Happy Holiday's
to our MRL
Employees
Serving in the
Military

Chad Leishman

&

Scott Steppe



Dates to Remember

SAFE Days BBQ's
January 9-13
All Locations

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