

Whistle Stop

Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum

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Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

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Great Smoky Mountains EMD F9A stands at the ready, prepared to lead our May 3rd excursion out of Bryson City, NC towards the Nantahala Gorge. (Mike Tilley photo.)

May 19th General Membership Meeting

The Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum will have our regular General Membership Meeting at 6:30 pm on Monday, May 19th, 2025 at the Chuckey Depot, 110 Spring Street, Jonesborough, TN. Our program this month is a video entitled *Fireman's First Run on the NC&STL Railroad*. Come out, bring a friend, and enjoy a great night of railroading with your fellow railfans.

Member Notes

Les Billings, Membership Chairperson

Concerns: Please keep the following members in your thoughts and prayers for various reasons: Bob Hand, Fred Phofl Gary Price, Lois Tilley, Jack Maloney, Art Devoe, Coy and Joann Edwards. Our hearts go out to Don Findley who lost his brother recently. To have one of our members or someone in their family reported for various concerns in the *Whistle Stop*, email a request to wataugavalley@gmail.com or wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com.

New member: Ray Poteat - Forest City, NC . **Welcome on board!**

ADDRESS CHANGES: If your address, phone number or email address has changed, please contact Les Billings at wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com for correction.

MEETING DATE CHANGE: Please note that the May meeting will be moved up one week to **May 19th** due to the Memorial Day holiday.

GSMR EXCURSIONS

Our May 3rd Spring Excursion over the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad was a big success. With over 825 people on the train, everyone had a great time on a spring day. We carried three bus loads out of Johnson City along with many who met us at the station.

The next GSMR excursion is scheduled for September 13th, 2025 and will be powered by a steam locomotive.

“DINNER ON THE DINER” RESCHEDULED DATE

The dates for our annual *“Dinner on the Diner”* have been rescheduled for July 11-12, 2025. We expect a large number of diners joining us for a fine meal on our *Moultrie* dining car.

“FALL FOLIAGE SPECIAL”

The *“Fall Foliage Special”* (previously reported as the *“Hiwassee Loop Excursion”*) has been planned for Saturday, October 11th, 2025 that will offer a scenic ride through the famous Hiwassee Loop and delight riders in a 50-mile roundtrip journey through the stunning lower Hiwassee River Gorge. This 4.5-hour adventure will take passengers to the apex of the renowned Hiwassee Loop with the tracks intriguingly crossing over themselves as they spiral up the mountain. Notably, there are only 6 such loops in North America, with this one being the sole example east of the Mississippi River. Note that there is no layover on this trip; passengers will enjoy the entire duration on the train. The rails over which this train travels were formerly part of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad's Atlanta Division stretching between Etowah, TN, and Marietta, GA. More information to follow.

PHOTOS FOR WHISTLE STOP

Several members are wanting to contribute photos for the Whistle Stop; please send your photos to our editors, Fred Waskiewicz or Les Billings, at whistlestop.editor@gmail.com.

PROGRAMS NEEDED FOR 2025

The WVRHS&M Program Committee is still looking for General Membership programs. Let us know at the June meeting or email wataugavalley@gmail.com if you can present a program. We are looking for speakers who would talk on a railroad-related topic. As always we're looking for DVD and slide shows.

Mechanical Report

Looks like summer is knocking on our door and we can finally get some work done; there have been a lot of excellent working days at the yard over the last several weeks. If you would like to help out on Tuesdays between 9 am to 5 pm or Saturdays 9 am to 12 noon, please call our Office at (423) 753-5797 or email wataugavalley@gmail.com.

Powhatan Arrow coach (WATX 539), **CLINCHFIELD 100**: in service at the NC Transportation Museum in Spencer, NC.

Moultrie diner (WATX 400): at the Coach Yard receiving upgrades and being readied for the "Dinner on the Diner" event.

St. Augustine coach (WATX 500): at the Coach Yard receiving upgrades.

Crescent Harbor sleeper/lounge (WATX 2351): at the Coach Yard ready for its next assignment.



While on the topic of equipment, at left we find a freshly painted ex-CRR hopper just out of the NCTM paint shop. The car, donated to NCTM by Watauga Valley RHS&M, was originally donated to us by CSXT.

Chuckey Depot / Museum

We have been seeing 50+ visitors at times at the Chuckey Depot/Museum as the warm weather has been bringing more people out. We are expecting another record visits this month.

The next Host training session for volunteers will be conducted this summer. If you would like to get involved and volunteer at the depot/museum one day a month, please call our office at (423) 753-5797 or email wataugavalley@gmail.com to reserve a training spot. We are in need of more hosts as the hours of operation at the depot will be extended during the summer months

Scanner in Need of a New Home

[The following was posted on our Facebook page by Bobby L. Hand] Watauga Valley RHS&M group members and other rail fans. Many of you know that this group finances and maintains the equipment for the scanner on the Holston Mountain which many of us use on Broadcastify to track trains through our area. Due to geography and landscape we are having problems in maintaining signal power in the Bristol area being down to about 5 megahertz. We are in need of someone who has property in the Bristol area that has clear visual and signal access to the Holston Mountain where the signal originates. We need to place a receiver and antenna on a pole or building. We also need nearby internet source. If interested or have a suggestion call Mike Tilley at (423) 335-1100 or text me at (423) 646-3872. Thanks. We need this to keep the scanner in operations at a strong enough signal.

Helene Disaster Recovery



Blue Ridge Rebuild Update by Thomas Pittman

A few quick rebuild updates from 4/30/2025.

- **Forbes/Green Mountain.** Signal crews are in the process of reinstalling crossing gates and bungalows in this area. A new mast and crossbuck has been erected at the Forbes Crossing, and bungalows have been set out at several crossings (I don't think they've been plumbed in yet). A lot of platforms have been staged at Spruce Pine and some other items at Penland for what I believe to be signal and crossing equipment for the Green Mountain area.
- Another "major event" is that the "Big Tree" at Forbes has been rolled into the river. The last few times I've been by to check on it, it looked as if it had slid further down the bank. So, I'm not sure if Mother Nature or the contract crews or maybe a combination of both is why it's in the river now.
- **Poplar.** The main piers for the bridge over the Nolichucky River appear to be complete, with only the south abutment and new pier directly adjacent to it left to raise. It also appears that the crane mats are in place for the 1,000 ton crane that will be resetting the spans. Given this visual evidence, I'd say that the arrival of the big crane and resetting of the spans will be soon. Keep an eye out for that.

In the News



AMTRAK Begins New River Valley Extension

[Partial AMTRAK Press Release] Governor Glenn Youngkin today [April 24] broke ground on the highly-anticipated New River Valley Rail Project in Christiansburg, Va. As part of the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority's (VPRA) Transforming Rail in Virginia (TRV) initiative, the New River Valley Project encompasses railroad infrastructure upgrades that will allow VPRA to extend its Amtrak Virginia service from Roanoke to Christiansburg and return passenger rail service to the New River Valley for the first time since 1979.

"Today's groundbreaking represents a lot of hard work, determination and collaboration," Governor Glenn Youngkin said. "We are here today because people came to the table and worked together to execute a new and dramatically better deal—one that accelerates the return of passenger rail service to the New River Valley years earlier, on a better line, and at a much lower cost to Virginia's taxpayers—than the one I inherited. I look forward to all that this station will do to support and grow such an important region of the Commonwealth."

The New River Valley Project includes:

- A new station platform with canopy
- Parking lot and access roads
- Track improvements and updated signaling system
- An Amtrak layover facility in nearby Radford

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"I want to thank VPRA and Norfolk Southern for coming together last year to reach an all-around better deal for Virginians," Virginia Secretary of Transportation W. Sheppard Miller III said. "The new agreement between VPRA and Norfolk Southern is the reason we are here breaking ground on a project that will provide additional connectivity and promote economic growth in the New River Valley."

The extension of service to Christiansburg will be via Norfolk Southern's main line (N-Line), the result of an agreement between VPRA and Norfolk Southern completed last September through which VPRA purchased the Manassas Line and gained access to the N-Line. By expanding service from Roanoke to Christiansburg on the N-Line, VPRA will use existing infrastructure with a focus on developing a station stop at the Cambria site which previously served the community from 1904 to 1979. The project will also enhance Norfolk Southern's freight service through the area.

The New River Valley Passenger Rail Station Authority—created by the Virginia General Assembly in 2021—has the lead in the renovation of the historic Christiansburg station building at Cambria. It will be called the New River Valley Station and renovations are expected to begin in 2027.

The estimated cost of VPRA's New River Valley Project is \$264.5 million. Preliminary construction began in late February 2025 with full construction commencing this spring.

Amtrak Virginia service is expected to begin in 2027 with two daily roundtrips between Christiansburg and Washington, D.C., with stops in Roanoke, Lynchburg, Charlottesville, Culpeper, Manassas, Burke Centre, and Alexandria. Trip times are estimated to be 50 minutes between Christiansburg and Roanoke and just under six hours between Christiansburg and Washington, D.C. From Washington, D.C., the service will continue onto Amtrak's Northeast Corridor to Philadelphia, New York, Boston and points in-between.

"Passenger rail creates greater potential for sustained economic growth, facilitates job creation and provides an efficient, affordable travel alternative to riding on the crowded interstate highway system," Congressman Morgan Griffith said. "Today's groundbreaking announcement means that the New River Valley will reap tremendous benefits and more. Extension of passenger rail to the New River Valley is an encouraging sign of things to come."

"Extending passenger rail from Roanoke to Christiansburg will provide a much-needed transportation alternative along the increasingly busy I-81 Corridor," Virginia State Senator Travis Hackworth said. "I'm excited to see this region of Virginia benefit from the Transforming Rail in Virginia initiative. I want to thank all those involved for making this project a reality."

"I'm thrilled that for the first time in almost 50 years, Christiansburg and the New River Valley will be served by Amtrak once more," Virginia State Delegate Chris Obenshain said. "I've been a proud and vocal supporter of this effort to bring passenger rail back to the New River Valley. This project will open yet another door for tourists seeking a mountain getaway and will be a boon to economic growth and cooperation in this beautiful region of the Commonwealth. I'm so proud to be a part of this team that has worked tirelessly to make this day a reality."

"This groundbreaking is a critical milestone in the Transforming Rail in Virginia project that will ultimately increase rail service in the Commonwealth," Jennifer Mitchell, Amtrak Executive Vice President of Strategy & Planning, said. "The record ridership we're experiencing shows people in Virginia and throughout the U.S. want frequent, reliable, and convenient transportation. We are proud to partner with the Commonwealth of Virginia, VPRA, Norfolk Southern, and the Town of Christiansburg to transform travel to connect more people and communities like never before."

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One of VPRA's four corridors of service, the Roanoke corridor began with one daily roundtrip between Lynchburg and Washington, DC, in 2009. Since that time, the service was extended from Lynchburg to Roanoke and increased from one daily roundtrip to two daily roundtrips. Ridership along the corridor has grown from just over 100,000 between Lynchburg and Washington that first year to just over 343,000 between Roanoke and Washington last year.

VPRA was established in 2020 to promote, sustain, and expand the availability of passenger and commuter rail service in the Commonwealth. VPRA is committed to delivering and expanding

its state-supported Amtrak Virginia passenger rail service. The Commonwealth of Virginia first launched state-supported service in 2009 with one roundtrip between Lynchburg, Va., and Washington, DC. Since that time, the Commonwealth's service has grown to include eight roundtrips daily along four corridors with stops at 17 stations in Virginia and one in Washington, DC.

For more information about VPRA, please visit <https://vapassengerrailauthority.org/>.



CSX, Engineers and Trainmen Reach Agreement

[*Trains New Wire*] CSX on Friday [May 9] became the first Class I railroad to reach a tentative contract agreement with the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen in this round of bargaining. The five-year, single-system agreement, which must be ratified by the rank and file, covers the railroad's 3,400 locomotive engineers.

The agreement mirrors the general wage increases, and health and welfare improvements from CSX's agreements with 13 other unions. Locomotive engineers make up approximately 20% of CSX's frontline workforce. If ratified, nearly 75% of CSX unionized workers will be covered by new agreements reached within the last nine months. To date, CSX has ratified agreements covering 54% of its unionized workforce.

The only remaining major workgroup at CSX not covered by new agreements or a tentative agreement are trainmen/conductors represented by SMART-TD. CSX is currently engaged in bargaining with SMART-TD to consolidate separate territories, workforces, and execute a single-system collective agreement.



CSX has painted a locomotive to commemorate the railroad's "One CSX" initiative. [CSX photo]

Photo Gallery



These smiling volunteer faces reflect the enjoyment of serving on our recent GSMR rail excursion.

Our train winding along the shores of Fontana Lake during our GSMR



Mike Tilley found the NS SOUTHERN RWY Heritage Unit cruising through Johnson City.

Lady in Pink. Billy Gard posted a video on Facebook featuring pink-nosed AC44C6M NS 4364 in recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness.



For more terrific rail photos, visit our Facebook page.

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TIME-SENSITIVE MATERIAL