



Club News

We held a business meeting on November 4 at Obie's Trains. The Treasurer provided us with a financial report. Our first item of business was approval of the Club By-Laws. One amendment was moved, seconded, and approved to change annual dues for full members from \$60 to \$30. The By-Laws were then passed unanimously.

A motion was passed to narrow the selection of Club logos down to three which would be voted upon at the Christmas party. To give everyone a last chance to make up his mind, the logos are reprinted as an insert to the Newsletter. Monroe Stewart volunteered his home (and world class basement N-scale empire) for the Christmas party. It was decided to hold it from 8:00PM to 10:00PM on Friday, December 18. Anyone attending should call Monroe at 301-630-7565 to let him know. Spouses are invited. Members please contribute \$5 towards refreshments. Directions to Monroe's home are provided later in the Newsletter.

A motion was moved and seconded to purchase two more Maxxon headsets. This was passed unanimously. We also voted to buy two battery chargers and NiCad batteries for the sets. Brian Brendel will investigate the use of the Fire Academy for setups on Sundays from 2:00PM to 8:00PM rather than our usual 5-10. This would allow us to get home at a reasonable time.

The next Club setup will be held the third Sunday in January (unless it conflicts with the Super Bowl) at the Fairfax Fire Training Academy from 2:00PM to 8:00PM. Our first business meeting of 1993 will be held on 7 January from 7:00PM to 9:00PM at Obie's Trains in Alexandria. We will be electing four more members to the Board of Directors at that time.

Everyone is reminded that if you plan to attend the monthly setup, please call Club Superintendent Matt Schaefer (3-978-2946) by the Wednesday preceding the setup. Matt needs to know who will be there to plan the module arrangement. We need this information to speed up the assembly.

Future events include the Dixie Division of the NMRA Mini Convention in March 1993 and a proposed Tri-Division meet in Richmond late in April 1993.

NOTE! This is the last newsletter for 1992. 1993 dues must be paid by December 31, 1992. Check the mailing label on your Newsletter envelope. In the right hand corner is a code identifying your membership status and expiration date. An asterisk (*) followed by a number indicates you are on the mailing list only, and the number is the month and year you will be dropped unless you convert to an Associate or Full member. An (A) or an (F) indicates you are an Associate or a Full member. Your membership expires at the end of the month and year indicated. Please complete the membership form included and enclose a check for \$10 or \$30, as appropriate made payable to *Northern Virginia N-Trak*.

Other N-Trak News

For those of you who are not aware, there is a national NTRAK organization. A bi-monthly newsletter is published with lots of info on N-Scale activities. There are also NTRAK resource booklets covering everything from module construction to throttles. You can join by sending \$5.00 to: NTRAK Publishing, 2424 Alturas Rd., Atascadero, CA 93422, (805)466-1758. Jim FitzGerald runs the organization and handles the newsletter.

Meeting Reminders

Dec 18 Christmas party at Monroe Stewart's home. 4908 Woodland Blvd., Oxon Hill, MD. 301-630-7565. Take I495 to MD. Exit 4-B (St. Barnabas Rd), go right - east on St. Barnabas past Exxon and McDonalds, left at first light - Wheeler Road, left at first corner - Owens Rd, right at first corner - Woodland Blvd., proceed to 4908 on right, total distance from beltway is 1 mile. (call Monroe if you have not already signed up. Spouses are welcome.)

Jan 7 January business meeting at Obie's Trains in Alexandria (off Edsall Rd behind the Quality Inn) 7:00PM to 9:00PM.

Jan 17 Monthly setup at the Fairfax Fire Training Academy off West Ox Road near the Price Club. 2:00PM to 8:00PM.

Local History, The W&OD (II)

When we left our story last month, the W&OD had just taken over operation of the Bluemont Branch (as the road was known to the Southern) from the Southern Railroad. The W&OD was formed by the owners of the Great Falls and Old Dominion Railroad (GF&OD) to extend its profitable 14-mile tourist line which ran from Rosslyn to Great Falls.

When the W&OD took control of the Bluemont Branch, electrification of the line was started. Electrification was completed by December 1912. Passengers were carried in electric cars and freight was hauled by steam.

Passenger service peaked in 1919, but freight revenue continued to grow. In 1921, W&OD purchased a steel 0-ton freight motor. It was a Baldwin-Westinghouse steeple cab. A second was purchased in 1923. Steel passenger coaches were purchased in 1923. They were painted W&OD green.

Although freight service continued to do well, the growth of the automobile and public highway construction caused passenger use to decline. Coupled with the stock market crash in 1929, the situation sent the W&OD into receivership on January 29, 1932. The receivers discontinued passenger service between Alexandria and Bluemont Junction. They abandoned the Great Falls Division.

In 1936 a new corporation was formed to purchase the assets of the former W&OD Railway. The Washington and Old Dominion Railroad took over a declining business. By 1939, the passenger service was practically non-existent. The freight traffic from Bluemont to Purcellville was being handled by trucks. The W&OD abandoned the Bluemont to Purcellville track. On April 13, 1941, all passenger service was killed. To top off their problems, the overhead electrical system was in need of replacement. It was decided to convert to GE 44-ton diesel-

electrics and scrap the overhead system.

As luck would have it, World War II was a boon for the W&OD freight traffic. In fact, the Federal Government ordered the W&OD to resume passenger service as a war emergency measure. Business began to improve. In March 1945, W&OD purchased the Bluemont Branch from the Southern Railway Company, saving thousands of dollars in annual rent.

The improvement was to be short-lived. Passenger traffic again dropped off. On May 31, 1951, passenger service was finally terminated. The principal cause of this failure was the loss of the Post Office Department mail contract to a trucking company.

Discontinuation of passenger service allowed the W&OD to reduce its employees and increase operating revenues. The business picture looked good enough that the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway purchased the W&OD on November 1, 1956. At the time, a proposed power plant near Sterling, Virginia along the Potomac River lured the C&O investment for the coal-hauling contract. But in a classic Northern Virginia move, the Loudoun County authorities rejected the proposed plant as an industrial intrusion. The plant was later built across the river in Dickerson, Maryland giving the B&O the hauling contract.

As a short aside, just this past month, Loudoun County and the State of Virginia approved most of the permits required for a gas- and oil-fired power plant near Ashburn in Loudoun County. The Patowmack Partners Power Plant will sell peak power generation to PEPCO in Maryland. Ironically, Northern Virginia's desire to avoid industrial intrusion in the 1950s led to the loss of a transportation facility which is now sorely needed. And we are still going to get a power plant! Growth is inevitable, and we lost a potential transit link because of our short-sightedness.

During the late fifties and early sixties, you could see C&O diesels pulling freight through the Northern Virginia towns of Herndon and Leesburg. A brief respite from the decline occurred in 1957 when construction of Dulles Airport in Chantilly commenced. The W&OD

hauled sand for runway concrete to Ashburn along the right of way. In 1959 operating revenues reached an all-time high. Unfortunately, the C&O did not want to build a spur to Dulles airport for the construction support. If they had approved this, we would probably already have heavy rail from Dulles to Alexandria.

In 1963, the W&OD was again faced with a reduction in its facilities as Virginia took more property for the construction of Highway 66 and urban renewal. Finally, on February 5, 1965 the W&OD filed a petition to abandon the entire railroad to the Interstate Commerce Commission and the State Corporation Commission of Virginia. A year later the ICC issued a favorable decision.

Some of the reasons cited for approval of the abandonment was the poor showing of the railroad in contrast to the trucking industry. For example, Dulles Airport, which was less than two miles from the railroad, received only 3400 carloads of sand by rail and the balance of the construction materials, including 800,00 tons of stone and 147,000 tons of cement, by truck. Reston, begun in 1961, received only 17 carloads of freight by rail in 1964 and 15 in 1965. The Examiner also found that the 112 grade crossings were an inconvenience and an inhibition to success. He also found that plans for rapid transit in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area were so indefinite that he could not compel the railroad to continue operating until the routes were determined.

As with the recent secret agreements between Virginia Governor Wilder and the Washington Redskins football team to build a stadium in Alexandria, there were similar activities relative to the W&OD. A Washington Post reporter discovered secret agreements between the Virginia Highway Department and VEPCO that would let the utility purchase the abandoned right-of-way giving the power company complete control of the former 100-foot wide 48-mile stretch of right of way from Potomac Yards to Purcellville.

These covert deals caused the Virginia Supreme Court to stay the decision in 1966, but eventually it was to

be upheld. A series of protests and stays continued until July 25, 1968 when a three-judge panel issued the final order. The last freight cars ran on August 27, 1968.

An illuminating note to this story comes from a quote from Judge Catterall's dissenting opinion when before the State Corporation Commission: "The abandonment of a railroad is a disaster not only to the businessmen who rely on rail transportation to make both ends meet but to the public generally. The present is a poor time to tear up railroad tracks just when the country is preparing for an heroic effort to take the pressure off the highways by encouraging movement by rail. The conditions around Washington are such that Congress has belatedly been moved to start plans for a rapid transit project designed to reduce the daily torrent of automobiles forcing their way inch by inch into and out of the city. If means can be found to reduce the need for additional expressways, the cost of these expressways will be saved by the public and the land to be covered by these expressways will remain on the tax rolls. The right of way of the Washington and Old Dominion Railroad forms an open passage that might conceivably be used ten or fifteen years from now as part of a rapid transit system. ...The immediate savings of money of the taxpayers of state and nation to be realized by the destruction of the right of way are a drop in the bucket compared to the savings that might conceivably be saved if the right of way is kept open for another ten years."

(Material for this article was taken from the book Washington & Old Dominion Railroad, 1847-1968, written by Ames W. Williams and published by the Arlington Historical Society in 1989.)

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Deadline for article and announcement submissions for newsletter is the 15th of the preceding month. Newsletter is mailed last week of the preceding month.