



Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, Inc.

Southeast Chapter

Newsletter No. 96 – August, 2006

The Streetcar No One Desired

June 3, 2006 Arden, PA



The streetcar no one desired arrives at Arden, Pa.
The Orlando Sentinel, by Mark Schlueb, reprinted with permission.

After years languishing in a warehouse, Orlando's first and only electric trolley -- dubbed Oscar for "Orlando Streetcar" -- has found a buyer. The sale to a Pennsylvania museum closes a chapter of Orlando history plenty of folks at City Hall would like to forget. Many taxpayers considered the streetcar a prime example of government waste.

The story started in 1990, when former Mayor Bill Frederick talked the City Council into buying it from a Sarasota toy store. Frederick's vision of a bustling streetcar system in the City Beautiful was so enticing the City Council overlooked a few small details: there were no rails for the streetcar to ride on; an open-air streetcar probably wasn't the best choice for commuters in a state prone to oppressive heat and afternoon thunderstorms; and it was the 1990s, not the 1890s.

The city bought the trolley for \$125,000, then spent \$80,000 to restore it and \$2.5 million on a plan for a streetcar system. But when federal transportation dollars failed to materialize, Oscar turned out to be the little engine that couldn't. Oscar has been mothballed ever since, costing Orlando taxpayers more than \$40,000 in storage costs over the years. "There aren't crowds of potential trolley buyers out there," said Frank Billingsley, head of the city's Downtown Development Board.

But there is at least one: the Pennsylvania Trolley Museum, which is paying \$187,800 to add Oscar to its collection of 46 other streetcars. At the museum about 30 minutes south of Pittsburgh, Oscar will find something he never had in Orlando -- passengers. He'll carry visitors around the museum's two-mile rail line. (Continued on Page 2)

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Streetcar Continued:

Built about 1907, the trolley spent most of its working life on the streets of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In 1966, it was sold to another museum in Pennsylvania. The museum closed a few years later after suffering damage from Hurricane Agnes. From there, the streetcar made its way to Florida.

After its journey back to Pennsylvania, who knows what the future holds? Someday maybe Oscar will end up back in Orlando. After all, museum director Scott Becker points out, streetcars are experiencing something of a resurgence. "A lot of places call them light-rail systems," he said.

Andy Kirk's Passenger Train News

Mother-and-Daughter Rescue Meteor: On Jul 29, Silver Meteor #98 made an unscheduled stop near the Savannah River (SC/GA line) due to P42 #63 stalling. The crew was not able to get the ailing porpoise going, so CSXT was kind enough to provide engines 6913-2343 (GP40-2/Road Slug) to haul the train up to Richmond, where it arrived about 9.5 hrs late (train lost about 4 hrs with the mother/daughter pulling). Train #67 brought an extra porpoise down to power #98 north from Richmond.

DMU "Rescues" Star: Well, not exactly. Three days after the Meteor incident in GA described above, P42 #40 suffered a failure at West Lake Wales, FL as it was pulling Silver Star 92. Fortunately P960-01, a special train that ferried DMU #703 to Orlando (for display in connection with an announcement by Gov. Bush concerning Orlando-area commuter service) was following. P960, powered by P42 #142, pulled ahead of #92 and the special backed onto the Star, giving the impression that the DMU was helping #142 pull the 11-car train. At Orlando, the DMU was set off and #92 continued north with #142 doing all the work. Reportedly, the DMU did run under its own power between the Amtrak Station and the LYNX station in Orlando as part of the festivities connected with the 8/1 commuter service announcement (viz: the State reaching agreement with CSXT to purchase 61 miles of Sanford Sub. (former ACL) track between DeBary and Kissimmee.)

Tri-Rail Double-Tracking Helps Amtrak: Although the Silver Service trains continue to have operating problems over CSXT, they're making great time over the recently double-tracked section between West Palm Beach and Miami that is owned by the State of Florida. The northbound *SILVER METEOR* and *SILVER STAR* are consistently getting into West Palm 15-20 minutes ahead of time and the south bounds are recovering up to 30 minutes. This track, which also handles Tri-Rail commuter trains, continues to be dispatched by CSXT in Jacksonville.; however, negotiations are taking place for a transfer of this responsibility to Tri-Rail. Since the track is no longer owned by CSXT, it is not subject to the "heat orders" (20 MPH below maximum speed during each afternoon that ambient temperature exceeds 85 degrees or changes by more than 30 degrees).

From the President:

Is your railroad interest motive power, especially locomotives prior to 1950? Well, the R&LHS archives include comprehensive listings of the locomotives constructed by many of the leading builders in the United States, including the Baldwin Locomotive Works and the American Locomotive Company and related companies. In addition, we have steam locomotive rosters for most of the nation's railroads at various times in their history. Copies are available to members at a charge of 25 cents per page (minimum charge of \$5.00 per order). A list of available builder's records and railroad locomotive rosters may be obtained for \$2.00 from SE Chapter Chairman, Bill Howes.

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Editorial: Bush just keeps on ignoring railroads.

The Capital Times, By Dave Zweifel, July, 28, 2006, reprinted with permission.

The federal government's Transportation Department has just issued a "white paper" on reducing traffic congestion in the country and guess what? It doesn't include a word about how improvement of either passenger or freight rail in America might be able to help.

Once more, the powers-that-be in Washington are determined to put all the nation's transportation eggs essentially in one basket more and bigger highways with a small sop to improving some airport traffic control systems.

The oversight drew a letter of protest from the president of the National Association of Railroad Passengers, George Chilson. "While you are right to target congestion as a serious and growing national problem, we are dumbfounded that you failed even to mention rail in National Strategy to Reduce Congestion on America's Transportation Network," he wrote. "Neglect of rail both by federal policy and stage politics that it encourages is the primary reason that our nation continues to spend enormous amounts on transportation infrastructure without satisfactory results."

What's ironic particularly with this administration, which wants to privatize everything from Social Security to Homeland Security, is that the rail system's tracks and rights-of-way are virtually privately owned by the rail corporations.

But, as Chilson said, "private ownership of the nation's rail infrastructure does not render it less valuable to the American people, place it beyond the purview of federal transportation policy, or make it ineligible for public funding."

The rail passenger advocate pointed out that outgoing Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta has an example of how public and private interests can work together on rail improvements right in his home state of California. There, the state invested in track, signals, bridges, stations and passenger cars and it has since led to a popular and fast-growing network of 60 daily passenger trains that carry more than 4 million passengers a year on three routes.

"California has proven that a dollar spent developing a railroad will buy us as much freight- and passenger-hauling capacity as a dollar spent on airports or highways," Chilson insisted.

What California did was provide funding for new side-by-side tracks to be built so that passenger and freight service don't interfere with each other, a major problem that impedes the country's Amtrak service to this very day. Why leaders of this administration can't understand that to put 500 people on a train essentially removes 500 cars from the highway is nothing short of perplexing unless, of course, road builders just have better connections and more money.

Plagiarized from MEC Digest Number 430

A bum, who obviously has seen more than his share of hard times, approaches a well dressed gentleman on the street. "Hey, buddy, can you spare two dollars?" The well-dressed gentleman responds, "You're not going to spend it on liquor, are you?" "No, sir, I don't drink," retorts the bum. "You're not going to throw it away in some crap game, are you?" asks the gentleman. "No way, I don't gamble," answers the bum. "You wouldn't waste the money at a model train store to improve your railroad layout, would you?" asks the man. The bum says, "No, I don't play with trains."

The gentleman then asks the bum if he would like to come back to his house for a home cooked meal. The bum accepts eagerly. While they're heading for the man's house, the bum's curiosity gets the better of him. The bum asks: "Isn't your wife going to be angry when she sees a guy like me at your table?" "Probably," says the man, "but it will be worth it. I want her to see what happens to a guy who doesn't drink, gamble or play with trains!"

Announcements:

October 14th – Deland, FL 18th Florida Rail Fair at the Volusia Co. fairgrounds, \$6, 9 to 4

October 21-22nd - Palatka Rail Fest, Palatka RR station, free, 10 to 4 both days

November 14-15th - Ocala, FL, Silver Springs Lions Semi-annual Train Show, \$4

Railroad History – Publication Schedule: #194 - September, #195 - fall/winter 2006



Above: Southeast Chapter members attending the August meeting, left to right, include: Ed Rock, Robert Van Nest, Chairman Bill Howes, Secretary Art Towson, Bill Walker, and Richard Dickinson.

Below: Reviewing Bill Walker's photos of a recent railfan trip to the northeast were: Richard Dickinson, Art Towson, Larry Brennan, Bill Walker, Ed Rock and Bill Howes.

