



# NRHS



WISCONSIN CHAPTER

Volume 75 Number 4

EST **I** 1950

April 2025

# SPARKS AND CINDERS

*Our purpose as members of Wisconsin Chapter—National Railway Historical Society is to gather, preserve and disseminate information, both historic and current, pertaining to railroading in Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest.*

Preserving Wisconsin Railroad History for 75 Years

Visit the Chapter Webpage [www.nrhswis.org](http://www.nrhswis.org)



CSX train above a tow on the Monongahela River. Aerial Photo by Jeff Wojciechowski

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# Wisconsin Chapter Meeting Schedule

## Upcoming chapter events

April 4 2025 All Over the Place - And Some Other Stuff with Jeff Wojciechowski

May 2 2025 Look Back at Wisconsin Chapter Excursion with Dave Nelson, Older than 75 years with Keith Schmidt

Monthly meetings are held in the lower level of the North Shore Congregational Church at 7330 N Santa Monica Dr. in Fox Point. The church is handicap accessible. For more up to date information on meetings and speakers, and also any weather cancellations, check the chapter's webpage at [www.nrhswis.org](http://www.nrhswis.org).

Doors open by 7:00 pm, so arrive early to socialize. Meetings start at 7:30pm sharp. Please bring a friend! Our meetings are live-streamed on the Zoom platform. Connection details are shared with chapter members and other interested persons via email the day of the meeting, or before. To ensure you are made aware of this info, we must have a working email address on file - send yours to [president@nrhswis.org](mailto:president@nrhswis.org).

If you have a program idea please contact Program Chair Dave Nelson at [engine1385@aol.com](mailto:engine1385@aol.com)

## The Big Picture is your page!

We've changed the format of the Sparks & Cinders back page, giving us room to run a large photo. Member submissions are solicited. Please send one or two of your outstanding pictures to Keith Schmidt, [editor@nrhswis.org](mailto:editor@nrhswis.org).

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Sparks & Cinders is published by and for the members of the Wisconsin Chapter, Inc., National Railway Historical Society monthly except for July and August. The Chapter meets at the North Shore Congregational Church, 7330 N Santa Monica Blvd, Fox Point, Wisconsin, on the first Friday of each month, except June, July and August, at 7:30 p.m. The Wisconsin Chapter is a not-for-profit corporation, affiliated with the National Railway Historical Society and the Wisconsin Historical Society, organized to preserve the history of railroading in Wisconsin and the surrounding area. Additional information is available on the chapter's website, [www.nrhswis.org](http://www.nrhswis.org).

Membership in the Chapter is open to anyone having an interest in any aspect of railroading who is also a member of the NRHS. Paying \$20 annually to the Chapter will entitle you receive Sparks & Cinders. Paying the National dues of \$50 to the NRHS will entitle you to membership and subscriptions to the NRHS Bulletin and NRHS News. Full NRHS membership is required to participate in chapter business discussions and to vote in annual chapter elections. All address changes should be sent to Mike Yuhas [membership@nrhswis.org](mailto:membership@nrhswis.org) (or via USPS at PO Box 070758 Milwaukee, WI 53207).

Wisconsin Chapter officers are: Keith Schmidt President, Ward Wells Vice President, Tom Marcussen, Secretary; Tara Grudzielanek, Treasurer. Directors: Dan Grudzielanek, Mike Yuhas, Ward Wells and Neal Wegner. One Vacancy

Contributions to Sparks & Cinders should be sent to Editor Keith Schmidt at [editor@nrhswis.org](mailto:editor@nrhswis.org) (or USPS at PO Box 070758 Milwaukee, WI 53207) by the 15th of the month to be considered for the following month's publication.

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## Meeting Minutes for March 7 2025

### Introduction

President Keith Schmidt ran this meeting from our in-person meeting site in the basement of the North Shore Congregational Church in Fox Point. Recording started at 7:28 pm. Keith started the meeting at 7:32 pm. He welcomed all attendees to the March meeting of our 75th anniversary year. There were 24 in-person attendees in the physical meeting room. Keith noted that four of them were dressed in our 75th anniversary apparel.

### Announcements

Wisconsin Chapter Day at the East Troy Electric Railroad / Museum appears to be pretty well set up for Saturday, July 19. Steve Thomas, who is a dual member of both the East Troy Museum and the Wisconsin Chapter, and was in the meeting room, confirmed that date. It will be a regular operating day (open to the public, no other special events), operating with equipment that ran in Wisconsin. There may be a member discount on their standard fares (\$17.00 for adults, \$14.50 for age 65-up). One ticket is good for a full day of riding. We may have food, possibly from LD's Barbecue. We will probably offer a separate extra-fare daylight photo session, in the afternoon, with their newly restored North Shore Line merchandise car, and maybe an antique flat bed or stake truck.

The Railroading Heritage of Midwest America (RRHMA) (former Rock Island) steam restoration shop in Silvis, Illinois, just east of Rock Island in the Quad Cities area, will hold a public open house, with steam-powered train rides, the weekend of April 26-27. We are planning a separate charter-bus trip to visit them on a week day, probably on a Monday or Friday in the later part of the summer. No date has been picked yet. They are a working shop, and not a museum, and therefore usually closed on weekends. We will get our own private tour. Attendees would be required to ride (or at least pay their share of the cost for) the bus to be admitted to the shop. We may stop at other attractions in the area or on the way. The public viewing plat

Continued from Page 2

form at the busy UP-BNSF crossing in Rochelle, Illinois, is right on the way, and likely to be a stop. There will be (as yet undecided) provisions for food.

There may be an opportunity to share the cost of steaming up Soo Line 1913 2-8-2 #1003, at the Schlesinger Museum in Slinger, in conjunction with an Antique Tractor Show. We had thought that would be on June 21. We were just informed that will not be the date. We do not when that date is. It will probably be on a Saturday. This will not be a photo charter.

Our 75th anniversary banquet is set for Saturday, October 4, at the Polish Center of Wisconsin, at 6941 South 68th Street (north of Rawson) in Franklin. The menu and cost are still being worked out.

Our next regular monthly meeting will be held on Friday, April 4. Jeff Wojciechowski will be our presenter. His topic has not yet been announced. He usually has some good material.

The best way to participate in the above activities is to become a Wisconsin Chapter member. There are three options to join or renew Chapter membership. The first way is very easy. Dan Grudzielanek is here tonight, representing our treasurer Tara Grudzielanek. Go to the back of the room, and pay the 20.00 in annual dues (by cash or check) tonight. The second way is on-line payment via our website at nrhswis.org. That second option includes an extra \$1.00 fee for credit card processing costs. The third way is to send a \$20.00 check to Wisconsin Chapter NRHS, P. O. Box 070758, Milwaukee, WI 53207. Members and subscribers will receive 10 issues of our monthly newsletter Sparks & Cinders, plus admission to members-only events, and member discounts on other events and merchandise. If you see value in what we are doing here, please consider joining us as a Wisconsin Chapter member. Dues payments support Chapter meetings like this one, other activities and publications. Your support is much appreciated. Member Cathy Wegner had prepared a data sheet of popular music, entertainment, wages and salaries, prices and population data from our starting year of 1950. Keith read the information from it to set the scene for our presentation. Presentation

Keith Schmidt introduced our presenter Tom Hoffmann at 7:42 pm. Tom is a long-term member of our Wisconsin Chapter. His connections with us go back to the 1960s. That is almost the beginning of the NRHS in Wisconsin. Tom took over at 7:44pm. His first slide was of a blue and yellow Santa Fe freight diesel (covered wagon / cab units) set from 1949. He then showed at least one or two photos (sometimes more) of each subsequent year up to 2024. That lasted through 9:08 pm. There was a question and answer session at the end of the presentation. That session ended at 9:13 pm.

There were 24 in-person attendees in the church basement. Zoom records show that a total of 40 unique devices were connected at least during part of the meeting. Subtracting the two devices in the church basement tonight yielded a total peak attendance of 62.

The recording stopped at 9:14 pm. Mike Yugas hosted an informal on-line discussion group following the meeting. The discussion group ended, and the Zoom meeting room closed, at 9:31 pm.

Respectfully Submitted  
Thomas W. Marcussen  
Wisconsin Chapter Secretary

## From the President

It is March in southeast Wisconsin. Friday March 14th temperatures were near 70. I am writing on Sunday March 16 and I woke up to a snowstorm with close to 6 inches of snow at my house. Apparently there is another chance of snow this week. The joys of late winter in Wisconsin.

I must say that I really enjoyed Tom Hoffmann's 75th anniversary look back. Great photos and great memories. I look back at my own photos. I started shooting digital photos in 2000. Now that's 25 years ago. Time fly's when trains are running.

Just an update on some of the 75th anniversary plans. The plan for a Chapter Day at East Troy Railroad is pretty set to happen on Saturday July 19th. The museum will feature Wisconsin equipment. We will need some chapter members to volunteer to help with various activities. We are hoping to have a photo event with the North Shore merchandise car. If you want to help out let me know at president@nrhswis.org.

It was decided to have a chapter private tour of the Silvis Steam Shops in Silvis IL. We are working on Friday dates to see what is available.

Discussions are on going to have the Soo #1003 steam locomotive out and running as part of the celebration. The chapter will be partnering with Schlesinger Museum in Slinger on this event. Date is still being worked on.

Get out and enjoy Spring in Wisconsin. Trains are running and the sun is setting later now. Get Busy Livin'

KX

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## Silvis Train Day and Classic Car Show April 25 and 26 2025

Admission to the event on Saturday, April 26, is just \$5 donation per entry, granting you access to an exciting lineup of activities and displays. With food trucks, vendors, and family-friendly entertainment, there's something for everyone to enjoy. Don't miss out on this unique experience—get your tickets today!

Tickets for the steam locomotive train rides are available at a discounted rate starting at \$13 (2 years old and under free with a paid adult ticket.) On the day of the event, ticket prices will increase to \$20 per person. Shop tours to get a behind-the-scenes look into the revitalization of railroad history will be available for \$75 per person if purchased prior to the day of the event and \$80 if purchased on the day of the event. Tickets will go on sale online starting February 17, 2025.

On the night of April 25, from 8 PM to 10 PM, don't miss an exclusive Night Photo Shoot featuring stunning vintage trains and classic cars under dramatic lighting. This unique after-hours experience offers photographers and enthusiasts the perfect opportunity to capture breathtaking shots of historic steam locomotives and beautifully restored automobiles in a nostalgic nighttime setting.

The photo session follows an insider-info dinner, from 6 PM to 8 PM, where guests will enjoy a delicious meal while gaining exclusive insights into ongoing restoration projects and the history behind these incredible machines. Tickets include food, beverages, and a complimentary 1-year membership to RRRMA, giving you access to exclusive updates and member benefits. Whether you're a seasoned photographer or just love the magic of classic railroading and automobiles, this is an event you won't want to miss!



## All Over the Place - And Some Other Stuff by Jeff Wojciechowski

Jeff talks about his presentation: "Set to music, All over the place....And some other stuff is the combination of several different video projects that I have put together over the past few years. Most of the content is aerial drone footage that I've taken dating back to 2018 with some other silliness mixed in. As I'm late to the game railfanning, I am attempting to capture modern-day railroading, freight and passenger, diesel and steam, in a cinematic and dramatic way before it fades into history. Recently, I've taken to the challenge of night drone videography of which some is included for your viewing pleasure.

Some of the highlights include racing BNSF helper sets in the Mojave Desert, trains over Techachapi Loop, Montana Rail Link before its demise, the bridges of Kansas City, some of the last street running for the South Shore, the very last Roadrailer trains, several derailments, and of course some local action around the Milwaukee area. Other locations include Pennsylvania, Illinois, Minnesota, Indiana, Kentucky, and the Dakotas. While this presentation is rail focused, an attempt was made to include the natural environment and surrounding scenery so you will also see a plethora of bridges... and a few towboats.

Jeff has been a railfan and drone photographer for years. Growing up near Milwaukee along the C&NW Old Line through Oak Creek and Cudahy, he developed an interest in trains early in life and had a model railroad as a kid. He began photographing trains later in life and he loves to produce cinematic videos which combine his love for railroads, electronic music, much of which he composes himself, and photography/videography. He's totally a computer geek by profession and as such has the opportunity to travel for work, so when not driving a keyboard in the office he's driving a rental car out along whatever railroads are nearby. He's also a motorman at the East Troy Railroad Museum. He took to drone photography quickly and has mastered the technical end of editing and composing videos. His favorite area to shoot is the American southwest, but he's also traveled east to the mid-Atlantic states to photograph urban and rural railroading.



## Back to Old School for Railfans in SE Wisconsin

I remember a number of years ago I starting hearing about ATCS and that you could actually see train locations just like a dispatcher. I checked it out and you had to join a certain Yahoo group. Then you would have to download a base program to run on the computer. Once you had the base program you could download divisions on most of the Class 1 railroads.

In order to monitor you there would need there to be someone in the area with a server setup in there house that would transmit the signals. The program could only be run on a computer with an internet connection it was not an app for a phone.

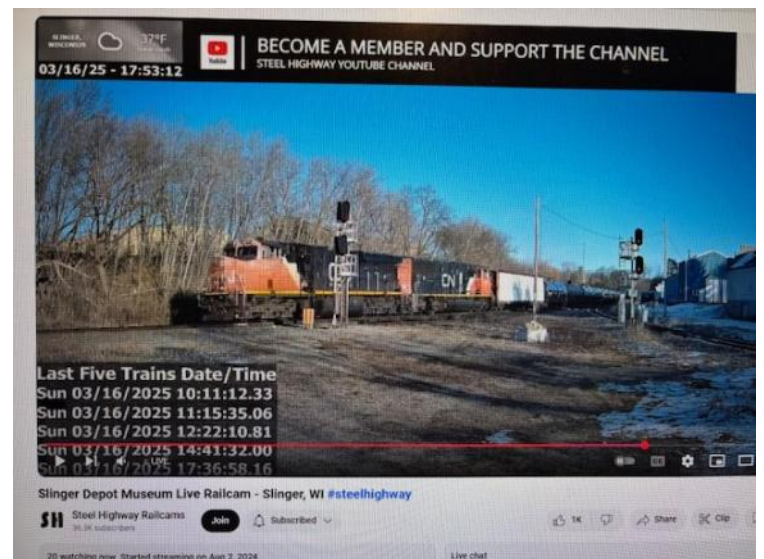
Well in the past several years the railroads have been switching over to a digital system which can not be monitored. This has been going on for some time now.

Just recently the CPKC has converted the line from Milwaukee to LaCrosse so there is no more seeing where the trains are. The Canadian National hasn't changed over yet but it is coming.

So it's back to listening to scanners and watching signals. However there may be another piece of technology that might help out. Railcams are becoming more popular. Virtual Railfan and Steel Highway both have numerous remote cameras at various locations through the US. Most of these camera are available on YouTube. Some of them do require a subscription fee. I know that there is a camera at Slinger WI. I believe there is also a camera at Oconomowoc, Columbus, Brookfield and also one near Butler Yard. I guess these cameras are the newest way to see where the trains are.



Screen shot of Canadian National Waukesha Subdivision ATCS screen. (its better in color).



Screenshot of Steel Highway camera at Slinger hosted by the Schlesinger Museum.



# Some Local Locals

Photos by Dan Grudzielanek



Wisconsin & Southern's Y201 job makes its way up the West Bend Subdivision at Jackson, WI on February 21, 2025. At one time this was part of the Chicago & North Western's Milwaukee-Green Bay route via Fond du Lac. Today the line exists as a branch line as the rails have been removed north of West Bend.



Wisconsin & Southern train L249 rolling into Ackerville, WI with its train from North Milwaukee on February 21, 2025.



Wisconsin & Southern train L599 arriving at Ackerville, WI as part of its round-trip from Horicon on February 21, 2025.



# Do You Know ?

by Dave Nelson

The caboose is a thing of the past, replaced by flashing End Of Train (EOT) devices attached to the rear coupler of the last car of a train. A few have been rebuilt into mere "shoving platforms" devoid of windows or any seating. Yet for over 125 years, until the 1980s, you'd see a caboose at the end of every freight train; we kids not only sang about the "Little Red Caboose" in elementary

school but waved at every caboose, with a friendly wave back from a brakeman. You'd waft the distinctive aroma of coal

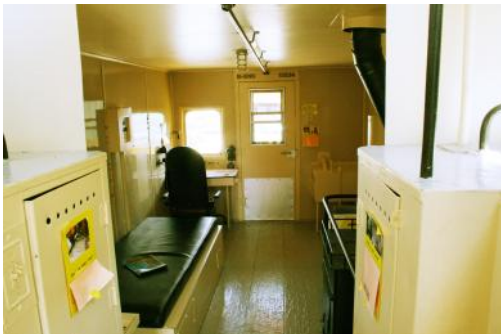


smoke from the caboose stove, or the smell of kerosene from marker lamps. Inside, the conductor would be busy at his desk working on that small mountain of paperwork -- now done by computers -- that even a short train involved. So, what killed the caboose? Changes to laws and regulations in the 1980s to be



sure, but they in turn were reflecting changes not just in technology but in the nature of railroading. Freight trains weren't stopping at cities and towns to switch cars. The EOT devices took over the brake-

man's task of monitoring airbrake pressure, and the EOT communicates by radio to the locomotive crew. Computers, radio, satellite communications and, in some cases, larger locomotive cabs with a desk for the conductor, mean that many reasons for a caboose were eliminated or changed. A true caboose is a rare sighting now, probably explained by something unusual about the train -- perhaps carrying hazardous, military, or oversized/valuable loads, or it's a long backing move where it is convenient to have a brakeman handle switches and monitor grade crossings. On the Soo Line a shrill whistle was attached to the caboose's air hose so the crew on a backing move could blow for crossings.



The traditional caboose had many functions in addition to being the conductor's office: the caboose served as sleeping quarters with long bunks covered with simple leather cushions, a coal stove for heat on which meals and coffee could be prepared, and a crude "dry hopper" toilet. The conductor and brakemen ob-



served the train from the cupola above, or bay windows to the side, and they had the means to apply the train brakes. Eventually caboose crews had full radio contact with the engineer.

Until around 1960 a caboose was assigned to a particular crew, and when they went off duty due to miles or hours worked, their caboose had to be removed from the train so the new crew's caboose could be attached before the train could continue. Labor contracts had to

change before this time-consuming practice was ended. The Federal Railroad Administration mandated bullet-proof glass for cabooses built or rebuilt after 1980; railroads



reacted by retiring their wood cabooses and welding steel plate over almost all caboose windows.

Many caboose injuries -- even fatalities -- were caused by slack action (and emergency braking). A 100-car train starting out would involve so much slack action being taken up car after car that by the time the caboose actually started to move it might be abruptly going 10 mph or more,

and unless the crew was prepared, they could be violently thrown to the floor or against steel railings or panels. But many railroaders argue that cabooseless trains are less safe.

Many cabooses were scrapped; some were donated as local displays or to museums or tourist railroads. A relative handful have become what are called "shoving platforms." A "shoving platform" is basically a place to stand with minimal features, designed solely for crew members to safely ride on during long "pushing" maneuvers where the locomotive is at the rear of the train, essentially acting as a mobile observation



point or rear-end control of the train. There is no heat, no seating, no toilet, and minimal weather protection. A photo of a UP/CNW shoving platform in Ft. Dodge, Iowa, shows the totally empty interior, but at least the doors were not welded shut, as some railroads did so that only the platforms themselves could be occupied.

# From the Archives

## April 1955—70 Years Ago

Soo Steam for Waukesha Park — At the April 1 special meeting Milwaukee Chapter voted unanimously to go on record as favoring the tentative project of placing a Soo steam locomotive on permanent exhibition in the park adjacent to the Waukesha depot. (After over 30 years in Waukesha, Soo No. 2645 was moved to North Freedom in the Spring of 1989. See S&C, February, 1989, for details of its stay in Waukesha — Chuck Porter)....The Transport Company has extended its Stadium siding from 680 ft. to 1,380 ft., increasing capacity from 14 to 28 cars. This could well be the last streetcar track laid in the state of Wisconsin. (That honor now belongs to Kenosha. — ed.)

## April 1960 - 65 Years Ago

The roster of Wisconsin Chapter — NRHS, March 1960, listed 37 members.

## April 1965 - 60 Years Ago

Seldom do we hear anything about the Madison District of the Illinois Central. The Capital Times for Friday, March 19, reports that the IC train leaving from Madison on Thursday afternoon, March 18, for Freeport became stuck in a snow drift about three miles south of Monticello about 8:30 that night. The crew hiked through the drifts to a nearby farmhouse to stay overnight. A plow was sent from Freeport the next morning to free the train and “rescue” the crew....The Frisco has requested permission to abandon all passenger service effective April 19.

## April 1970—55 Years Ago

Chapter members are awaiting the 20th Anniversary Chapter Banquet scheduled for April 24. The speaker will be Chappie Fox, Director of the Circus World Museum in Baraboo.... Jim Harper recounted the history of the TMER&L “10” series cars (the last new cars purchased).... On March 10, Penn Central filed a request to discontinue trains 48 and 49, the Broadway Limited.

## April 1975—50 Years Ago

The speaker at the annual Chapter Banquet on April 18 will be Linn Westcott, editor of Model Railroader magazine....The IC’s freshly-painted Bicentennial loco “American Eagle” hit a tank truck in Mississippi on its first run and burned....The Chessie System has filed a request to discontinue the Lake Michigan car ferries operating between Milwaukee and Ludington and Manitowoc and Ludington.

## April 1980 - 45 Years Ago

The saga of the Arizona DOT “Sardine Express” was recounted. It was a short-term shuttle train put into operation after a bridge on I-10 was closed due to flooding in the Phoenix-Mesa, Arizona, area....Efforts to pre-serve the C&NW downtown Chicago depot are being organized by the Friends of the North Western Station. Closer to home, the C&NW must cease use of County property on the lakefront, now being used to unload automobiles.

## April 1985 - 40 Years Ago

The third operator of the former MILW and IC lines which cross in Monroe has begun operation. The new operation is the WICT which replaces the failed CM&N and CW operations.... Butler Railroad Day is scheduled for July 28 and C&NW No. 1385 will again be in operation

## April 1990 —35 Years Ago

The C&NW engine house at Butler has been sold to a company who will use it for non-railroad purposes. It has been unused for approximately two years....The FRVR had a successful first year with revenues of \$30 million and movement of nearly 80,000 carloads. The FRVR Milwaukee-Fond du Lac line was rehabbed at a cost of \$1 million. Train speeds have moved from 10 mph to 25 mph....The U. S. DOT has committed \$10 million to study magnetic levitation as a way to modernize rail transportation.

## April 1995 —30 Years Ago

The Virginia Museum of Transportation, Inc., in Roanoke, Virginia, announced that it will construct a protective cover for ex-N&W No. 611, retired from excursion service by the N&W in November 1994....Amtrak increased Milwaukee-Chicago fares by 50% on March 12. The one-way fare is now \$25. Three round trips per day will be eliminated on April 1. The Chicago-area railroads are planning to test ties made of recycled plastic.

## April 2000—25 Years Ago

Gov. Tommy Thompson announced on February 28 that two new Amtrak routes in Wisconsin would begin operation at some time in the future. They are an extension of the Chicago-Milwaukee Hiawatha service with one trip each way extended to Fond du Lac and also a Chicago-Janesville service via WSOR. The Great Circus Train will make the trip from Baraboo to Milwaukee in three days this year, down from four days last year. It will not go into Janesville from Milton Jct. Overnight stops will be in Waukesha and Appleton.

## March 2005 — 20 Years Ago

Mayors and county executives from southeastern Wisconsin plus SEWRPC officials signed an agreement on February 25 to work together to expand the Metra UP North commuter service from Kenosha to Milwaukee. Greater Milwaukee Committee President Julia Taylor said she thought this was the first time so many Milwaukee-area leaders had agreed on a public transportation initiative....A UP rail-grinding machine working west through Rochelle on the north main line track struck an eastbound BNSF intermodal train at the Rochelle diamond on March 11. The collision tied up both UP’s Geneva Sub and BNSF’s Aurora Sub. No cars derailed but some containers on the BNSF train were ripped open, their contents spilling out along the right-of-way.

## April 2010 — 15 Years Ago

Spanish train manufacturer Talgo will assemble four trainsets at a closed Milwaukee automotive parts plant, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel re-ported on March 1. The four trainsets will be split evenly between the Wisconsin and Oregon departments of transportation. Wisconsin sup-ports Amtrak service between Chicago and Milwaukee, and work will begin this year to extend the route west to Madison. The state announced last summer it would buy two Talgo trainsets to upgrade the current service At the behest of state officials, Talgo agreed to conduct final assembly in Wisconsin. Earlier plans had called for components to be mostly manufactured in Spain, but Oregon’s contract specified that most parts be American-made. The plant site to be used manufactured automotive frames, and has rail service via the Wisconsin & Southern Railroad Co

## April 2015 — 10 Years Ago

Wisconsin Department of Transportation Secretary Mark Gottlieb will join other state and local officials to mark the reconstruction of a disused rail line between Plymouth and Kohler on March 24. The public event will take place at 3 p.m. at the Wisconsin & Southern yard, between Thayer and Reed streets in Plymouth. Wisconsin & Southern serves Plymouth on a former Milwaukee Road line from North Milwaukee. Once reopened, the new line will enable access to potential customers in Sheboygan Falls and Kohler, and open the possibility of a new interchange point with Union Pacific.

The former Chicago & North Western line once connected Fond du Lac and Sheboygan.

## March 2020— 5 Years Ago

The COVID 19 pandemic shut down most activities in Wisconsin and the nation. The April 2020 meeting was cancelled. A meeting was held virtually via Zoom in May which featured several presenters. The 2020 banquet was also cancelled. In person meetings weren’t held again until September 2021.



# The Big Picture



September 1998 BNSF Caboose still sporting BN paint is on the rear of a MOW train at Chillicothe IL Photo by Dave Nelson