

Amtrak's Most Exciting Decade



1971-1981

Amtrak locomotives line up for photographers attending the 1979 National Railway Historical Society convention in Washington, D.C. Amtrak and Washington Terminal Railroad (the latter a ward of Amtrak by this time, with Amtrak having acquired the Northeast Corridor in 1976) arranged for this photo op for a large group of attendees. The line-up included Conrail GG1 4935 sporting a heritage Pennsylvania Railroad scheme. MIKE SCHAFER, SPECIAL LIGHTING BY JIM BOYD



BY KEVIN MCKINNEY

PHOTOS BY MIKE SCHAFER UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

The 50 years from Amtrak's creation to its post-pandemic rebirth have been filled with ups and downs galore. Optimism has turned to despair, then hope, with the cycle repeating over and over. Critics who hate Amtrak say it shouldn't exist. Its boosters say there should be more trains to more places. Many who support it say, privately or publicly, it should be better—a lot better. Yet despite attempts by various administrations to cut or zero-out its budget, bipartisan congressional support always has managed to keep Amtrak going.

Although the story of Amtrak has been one

of change and uncertainty, the railroad has in the last two decades or so settled down to a pattern of predictability: much the same routes, the same trains, and consists that vary only slightly if at all.

So, what was Amtrak's most interesting and exciting decade? I would have to say Amtrak's first ten years—1971-1981—win, hands down. It started with a rush of emotions as more than half of America's remaining passenger trains vanished at the start of May 1971 (PTJ 2021-2). There was great sadness among passenger train supporters but also hope for the future that Amtrak would rise, Phoenix-like, from the ashes. Sadly, 25 years later Amtrak would not even serve the real Phoenix.

Let's take a look at all the activity that took



LEFT Wisconsin Governor Patrick Lucey addresses the crowd at Minneapolis' Great Northern Station on April 16, 1975, upon the launch of the new state-supported (Minnesota and Wisconsin) Twin Cities-Superior/Duluth Arrowhead.



ABOVE Amtrak E8 4316 rests in the former Pennsylvania Railroad engine terminal at Chicago between assignments on November 14, 1971. The 4316 is considered to be the first Amtrak locomotive and it sports a paint scheme not repeated on a locomotive until the 50th anniversary P42: the so-called "pointless-arrow" logo hastily applied to the existing black paint of a former Penn Central unit only hours before Amtrak was launched. Eventually, the 4316 would be repainted to Amtrak's Phase 1 scheme before being retired and scrapped. JOHN WILKIE, KEVIN ELDRED COLLECTION

RIGHT One of the first additions to Amtrak's initial route structure was what became known as the North Coast Hiawatha (left in photo), shown at Spokane, Wash., in September 1971. On the right is Amtrak's Chicago–Seattle Empire Builder, which made route connections here with the NCH.



BELOW On January 6, 1972, the final, original Lake Shore tied up for the last time at Chicago's Union Station. Operating on essentially the same route of today's Lake Shore Limited, the train had briefly returned service to Toledo and Cleveland, Ohio—the latter being the largest city not served on Amtrak's May 1, 1971, system. The Lake Shore would be the last intercity passenger train to use Cleveland Union Terminal.

place in those early years, with routes and trains added and subtracted, inherited equipment moved about the system, new equipment delivered, and old stations abandoned in favor of new ones.

Routes and services

At the very beginning, Amtrak was indeed a bare-bones system. However, it only took ten days to start expanding. Shocked at the loss of service west of Buffalo to Chicago, New York and Ohio became the first states to sponsor new service through the 403(b) mechanism that was part of the legislation that created Amtrak. A provision of 403(b) was that states could request a route by paying two-thirds of the cost. Although a train was launched promptly on May 10, a payment dispute arose and by January 6 the following year the former New York Central west of Buffalo was once again freight-service-only, and Cleveland was once again one of the largest American cities without intercity passenger service.

A week after Buffalo–Cleveland–Chicago was added to the map, Massachusetts funded an Boston Route train between Springfield and Boston, which created a New York–Boston service via Hartford, Springfield, and Worcester.

In addition to 403(b), another way to get service to have an influential senator or congressman demand it. Montana Senator Mike Mansfield, a strong supporter of the Railpax/Amtrak legislation, was extremely displeased when Amtrak's incorporators chose only the Empire Builder route, allowing the North Coast Limited route to expire. What to do?

Creative and politically sensitive minds decided it was time for an "experimental route" and thus was born a tri-weekly service on the former Northern Pacific line between Minneapolis and Spokane. The train proved to be popular, but was hampered by trying to make timely connections with the Empire Builder at the new train's end points. So by November, Amtrak's small staff was able to give the train its own schedule on the Chicago end, along with a name, North Coast Hiawatha. [See White Riv-



LEFT In April 1973, steam-generator-equipped GP7 6699 has a two-car Potomac Special in tow at Grafton, W. Va. Born originally to appease Rep. Harley Staggers, the train was slowly downgraded and its route cut back. Patronage was so low that on this day the photographer and his group of fellow railfans had the former B&O dome car all to themselves.

BELOW Prior to the Amtrak era, it would have been unthinkable to have Chicago & North Western F-units and long-distance bilevel cars on Burlington Northern's triple-track "Race Track" between Chicago Union Station and Aurora, Ill. However, in 1971 the State of Illinois exercised the 403(b) provision to establish the Illinois Zephyr between Chicago and West Quincy, Iowa, serving Quincy College, Western Illinois University, and Knox College. The train is shown eastbound at Hinsdale, Ill., in the spring of 1974.

er Productions's forthcoming PASSENGER TRAIN ANNUAL 2021 for a feature on this train.—ed.]. Eventually the train ran through on its own to Seattle as well, and performed nicely until it met its demise with the so-called Carter Cuts of 1979. More on that later.

Another politically inspired entry was a new service between Washington, D.C., and Parkersburg, W.Va.—an "experimental" route starting September 8—in order to please Harley Staggers, an Amtrak supporter who just happened to be the House Chairman on Interstate & Foreign Commerce. Most thought the experiment would fail, but the West Virginian took to the rails anyway and was quickly dubbed "Harley's Hornet." (In 1980, Staggers would be instrumental in passing the act that deregulated and helped save the railroad industry, with that important legislation named for him.)



LEFT Amtrak's short-lived Chicago–Los Angeles Chief is shown on the final leg of its eastbound trip to Chicago crossing a branch of the Chicago Sanitary & Ship Canal at Bridgeport, Ill., in the spring of 1972. The Chief was in part a project put forth by Jim McCallan, one of Amtrak's key people. Amtrak's Chief ran on a schedule very similar to Santa Fe's pre-Amtrak Chief—arguably Santa Fe's most popular train of the same name, discontinued after Santa Fe lost its mail contract in the late 1960s. Alas, Amtrak's version lasted only for 1972's three-month summer season before being dropped.

The Return of The MONTREALER



Despite cloudy skies, the tree-laden Vermont countryside made for a beautiful background for the first northbound Montrealer on September 30/October 1, 1972.

Having survived the bloodbath that cut U.S. passenger rail nearly in half effective May 1, 1971, readers might imagine my surprise—no, astonishment—when Amtrak announced it was going to revive the Washington–Montreal *Montrealer* Washingtonian via Boston & Maine and Central Vermont through the length of Vermont—a route that was cut well before Amtrak was even thought of. In 1968, I first stepped foot in the Green Mountain State and fell in love with New England in general and Vermont in particular (I still dream of retiring there, snow notwithstanding). Hearing the news that the *Montrealer* and its southbound counterpart *Washingtonian* (that name was eventually dropped) was being revived on September 20, 1972, I made certain I would be on hand for the first run.

Fast forward to the approaching evening hours of that day. Friend Tom Post and I had arrived at Brattleboro, Vt., from Chicagoland, met up with mutual friend Michael Caramanna at West Point, N.Y., and all headed north. We had heard that the inaugural train would arrive Brattleboro sometime around 1AM. Silly us. We were astonished to find a rather large crowd already milling about the B&M depot grounds. Somebody in the group announced the train wouldn't be in now until well after 1AM. Hmmm... time to hit Dunkin' Donuts.

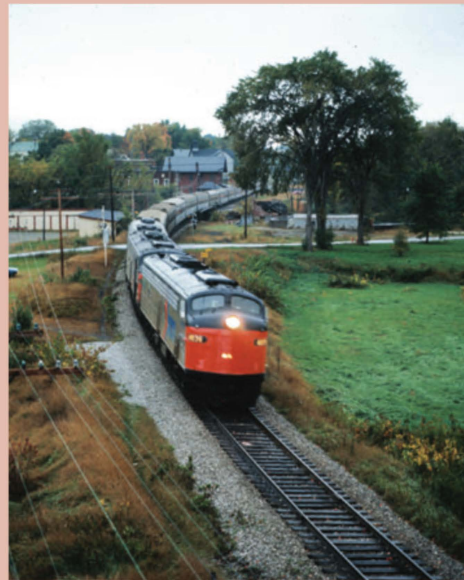


ABOVE The inaugural run of the Montrealer has just halted at Brattleboro, Vt., during the night of its first trip. Three E-units powered a freshly painted train that was running some three hours late due to trackside crowds, etc. This photo was taken about 3AM at the Brattleboro station.

In order to further please politicians, a high-speed, United Aircraft TurboTrain was placed on the mountainous route in February 1972. Jim McClellan and I rode the Potomac Turbo round-trip before the out-of-its-element Turbo was mercifully replaced by conventional equipment and renamed Potomac Special. Out of Washington in the rush hour it was a party train, with a number of Maryland and eastern West Virginia commuters celebrating the end

of the day with drinks. After Cumberland, well past the commuter zone, our train had only 14 passengers and upon arrival in Parkersburg around three in the morning it had four passengers, including us. The train was eventually cut back to Cumberland and renamed the Blue Ridge.

November 14, 1971, was a momentous date, producing the first "in house" Amtrak timetable, which contained a number of service im-



ABOVE The first Montrealer sees daylight at Northfield, Vt., on October 1, 1972. At this point, photographer Schafer and his cohorts diverted to northeast Vermont to photograph a special Canadian Pacific fan trip.

Ultimately, it was around 4AM when the inaugural train—which was indeed the scheduled train and not a promotional special—arrived behind a triple set of E-units, a rake of coaches, diner, lounge, and sleepers, most equipment freshly painted in Amtrak garb. Hopefully, passengers had been advised of the significance of the run. Although I didn't know him at the time, Doug Manson—future Amtrak engineer, *PTJ* correspondent, and friend—was aboard, serving at the last minute as a B&M fireman. It was an exciting moment, as few moments as there were before the tardy train shuffled off into the wooded darkness.

We took off in Tom's Toyota to catch up with the train, which we did at White River Junction, Vt., by dawn's early light. Another large crowd awaited the first Amtrak *Montrealer* along with a band no less, complete with cheerleaders from a local high school. With White River Junction as one of most important stations, serving not only White River Junction but nearby Lebanon, N.H., this was a particularly important celebratory stop. We continued the chase beyond and into the post-sunrise hour, leaving the train at Waterbury. We had an appointment with another special train—a Canadian Pacific fan trip out of Montreal, bound for Newport, Vt. But that's another story.—Mike Schafer

provements and name changes (including the National Limited, Floridian, Panama Limited, and St. Clair.) Another 403(b) train, the Chicago-West Quincy, Iowa, Illinois Zephyr joined the network. Separating the North Coast Hiawatha from the Empire Builder resulted in two Twin Cities–Chicago frequencies. By adding two innovative Milwaukee–St. Louis trains running through Chicago, Amtrak as a by-product increased Chicago-Milwaukee service from four

trains to seven. This corporate staff-inspired increase in service was not looked upon with favor by then Amtrak president Roger Lewis.

The last innovation of that abbreviated eight-month operating year was the introduction of the Florida Special, a popular seasonal train operated by Seaboard Coast Line prior to Amtrak. SCL actually supported its return, as did Amtrak marketing. When it took to the rails on December 17, it had the fastest schedule ever



ABOVE School cheerleaders from Woodstock, Vt., perform for the crowds out to see the first northbound Montrealer stop at White River Junction, Vt., in the fall of 1972. Train was running some three to four hours late due to trackside crowds and bad B&M track, so dawn came here at White River Junction.

And from retired Amtrak engineer Doug Manson...

I got called off the "spare board" for the first run of the *Montrealer*—a.k.a., "The Boot"—and went on duty at 12:05AM at Springfield (Mass.) Union Station. When I arrived, there was a lot of activity. People walking around all over the depot platforms; the local TV station was there, etc. B&M was short of engine-service employees at the time so there was no engineer available and I was not qualified yet. The engineer I served under as fireman for the first *Montrealer* was Road Foreman of Engines, Jim McCourt. A fine gentleman, it was the first time I met him. He later administered my two mechanical exams for promotion to engineer.

The new *Montrealer* arrived late and left even later. General Road Foreman of the former New Haven, Bill Copeland, rode the head end as the B&M crews were not familiar with E-units nor their steam generators. We had three EEs: 4036, 4316, and 4038.

It was quite a sight as the train pulled into the station. I believe we had 16 to 18 cars. We backed out of the station onto the New Haven main line, reversed and proceeded north onto the B&M Connecticut River main line. The first stop was Brattleboro where there was quite a crowd; the next stop was Bellows Falls. We were late leaving Springfield and therefore late all the way to White River Junction. I got off duty at White River at 6:40AM. I remember a machinist from New Haven was riding the head end and took me through the units and gave me a crash course on EEs and also steam generators.

Pleasant memories keep flooding back into my mind about those days I was on that train, many times as fireman and engineer, working with E-units, F40s, P40s, and P42s—but the Es were my favorites. I finished my career as engineer of the *Vermonter*, which essentially replaced the *Montrealer* during the ensuing years of rail passenger service in Vermont.—Doug Manson

*During Prohibition early in the 20th century, the *Montrealer* Washingtonian was used to secretly move alcohol products from Canada into the U.S.

Departing from Chicago on May 1, 1972, Amtrak train 40, the Broadway Limited, looks markedly different than it did in Penn Central days, but not unlike the PRR version below. The Broadway was the first Amtrak train to be completely upgraded with freshly shopped equipment and launched as such on this day, photographed at 21st Street Junction in Chicago. Refurbished, its consist now includes mostly Budd-built cars in Amtrak paint. Seemingly in respect to the legacy of the 1948 Broadway, Amtrak assigned former Baltimore & Ohio sleeper-lounge-observation cars Dana and Metcalf to the train. It's the Dana doing the honor of returning observation cars to the Broadway on this day.



Above Pennsylvania Railroad's premier train was the New York-Chicago Broadway Limited, shown at 21st Street in Chicago as it heads for New York in late afternoon during the summer of 1966. Sleeper-observation car Mountain View—built for the 1948 edition of the Broadway Limited—trails the train's sparkling consist.

Right With the first in-house Amtrak timetable of November 14, 1971, came lots of new (or revived) train names, three of which are shown displayed at Washington Union Station. THREE PHOTOS, BILL ANDERSON

between New York and Miami at just under 24 hours. Sadly, after the season ended April 15, the popular train never returned.

Within two years of the May 1 start-up, several other services were added to the map by that third manner, Corporate Initiative. Most notable was the short-lived addition of the Chief, joining the Super Chief/El Capitan between Chicago and Los Angeles during the busy summer season. The train started June 11 and ended September 10, never to return again. Another innovation, a through sleeper between New York and Los Angeles, was carried by the Chief westbound from Kansas City and the Super Chief eastbound. After the demise of the Chief, it was carried by the Super Chief in both directions. (Another transcontinental sleeper, which started operation before Amtrak, continued via the non-Amtrak Southern Crescent and Amtrak's Sunset Limited.)

The addition of three international routes in just seven months, between July 1972 and January 1973, restored service to Canada via the Pacific International (Seattle-Vancouver) and the Montrealer (Washington-New York-Montreal) and to the Mexico border at Laredo, Texas, via the St. Louis-Laredo Inter-American.

The year 1974 hit a high-water mark for new 403(b) routes. Actually, the parade started in December 1973 with the Illini (ah-LIE-nie) between Chicago and Champaign, Ill., then added the Chicago-Rockford-Dubuque Black Hawk in February. The following month California initiated the first San Joaquin between the Bay

Area and Bakersfield, the first of many San Joaquin trains to come over the years, making it one of the most successful corridors in the country. Interestingly, the Southern Pacific route was preferred because it hit more population, but SP was not interested. Santa Fe agreed to handle the new train and received upgrading funds that could have gone to SP.

Santa Fe had other ideas, however, when it came to the two long-distance trains Amtrak operated over its rails, which by now had transitioned to on-board service provided by Amtrak. In what has to be one of the classiest moves in railroad history, Santa Fe said that a decline in service quality disqualified the Super Chief and Texas Chief from being worthy of Santa Fe's heritage names and withdrew permission



to use them. The trains were then renamed the Southwest Limited and Lone Star. Five years later the Lone Star was discontinued and the Southwest Limited was eventually able to call itself the Southwest Chief.

Expo 74 was held in Spokane in the summer of 1974, and Amtrak actually ran a special train of the same name from Seattle to the Fair between May and September.



Above The three photos on this page show marked evolution of services between Chicago and St. Louis via Gulf, Mobile & Ohio rails, Illinois Central Gulf after 1972. Above Considered to be the finest of the fleet under the GM&O banner, the Abraham Lincoln is shown northbound at Joliet (Ill.) Union Station in 1965. The train is operating with its former Baltimore & Ohio streamliner equipment dating from 1935. The round-end-parlor-observation car gives a hint to the grandeur of the consist. LOUIS A. MARRE COLLECTION

Left Check out Amtrak's version of the Milwaukee-bound Abraham Lincoln in this photo taken at Joliet in December 1971! Former Burlington Vista Dome parlor-observation car Silver Veranda brings up the end of Amtrak's northbound Abe along with a colorful mix of equipment that includes a Southern Pacific diner-lounge, a Northern Pacific dome coach, and a rake of Milwaukee Road coaches. With this consist, some might rightfully say that this was the Abraham Lincoln at its pinnacle. PHIL GOSNEY



Left Ultimately, Amtrak's St. Louis-Chicago-Milwaukee Abraham Lincoln and Prairie State gave up their full diners, domes, and parlor cars for the new (in 1973) French-built Turboliners, shown meeting at Bloomington, Ill., as both cross Norfolk & Western's former Nickel Plate main line along with Penn Central's former Peoria & Eastern main line in 1974. Had their names been kept, that would have been the Prairie State on the left and the Abe Lincoln on the right. The turbos served their time but faltered under the harsh winter conditions unknown to the French.



In August, a second train to Montreal, the Adirondack via Albany, was launched with support from New York and an enthusiastic Delaware & Hudson management headed by Bruce Sterzing. North of Albany the train featured vintage Alco PA locomotives and refurbished heritage equipment. Amtrak management never seemed comfortable with this semi-independent arrangement, although passengers and railfans loved it. Amtrak managed to replace the class D&H equipment with Turbo equipment by 1977.

Michigan entered the picture in a big way, adding the Chicago-East Lansing-Port Huron Blue Water September 15, 1974, extending the New York-Buffalo Empire State Express to Detroit via Canada—renaming it the Niagara Rainbow—and then in January 1975 creating a corridor commuter train—the Michigan Executive—between Jackson, Mich., and Detroit.

ABOVE Among the more unique-looking trains from Amtrak's early years were the United Aircraft TurboTrains inherited from Penn Central and the U.S. Department of Transportation. Primarily assigned to the Northeast Corridor between New York and Boston (long before the completion of electrification), they met with limited success. Here at New London, Conn., on former New Haven rails, a three-car set led by power car 53 pulls into town in June 1974. This station looks different now, with high-level platforms, overhead electrification, and 150 mph ACeLAs! ROBERT A. LAMAY

BELOW In June 1972, nameless trains 328 and 325 serving the Chicago-Milwaukee corridor meet south of Milwaukee at speed. Train 328 has a GM&O E7 leading what had arrived at Milwaukee earlier in the day as the Abraham Lincoln consist and was now being handled back only to Chicago as a nameless corridor run. The northbound Chicago-Milwaukee train at right will turn at Milwaukee to become the next day's Milwaukee-St. Louis Prairie State.



ABOVE GM&O E7s number 101 and 100 would never have come out this side of Chicago Union Station just a year earlier, but by March 1972 they have become a regular sight on Milwaukee Road track between CUS and Milwaukee. Train 323, the Abraham Lincoln, accelerates past Wolf Point (the junction of the north and south branches of the Chicago River) as it heads north to Milwaukee late in 1971 after having run through the station enroute from St. Louis. A unique operation fostered by PTJ founder Kevin McKinney, who worked for Amtrak at the time, this was the first known regular through operation of intercity passenger trains at CUS. Today, a park and a building cover this stretch of track.



After the Minnesota-supported Arrowhead between the Twin Cities and Duluth was added in April 1975 (later becoming the Chicago-Duluth North Star), 403(b) activity dwindled, with only the short-lived Chicago-Peoria (East Peoria, actually) Prairie Marksman and a French-built Turboliner-equipped Detroit-Toledo extension of a Chicago-Detroit train, both added in 1980.

However, two major long-distance routes were added. The Salt Lake City-Seattle Pioneer took to the rails on June 7, 1977. Then on February 1, 1979, the Southern Crescent became Amtrak's Crescent following Southern Railway's decision to finally join Amtrak. The New York-New Orleans route had been part of the original designated basic network, but Southern decided at the last minute in April 1971 to retain and operate its own trains and did so for nearly eight years.

The first decade of Amtrak was ending with renewed budget pressure from the Carter Administration. As a result, the first major restruc-

BELOW The coming of Amtrak saw significant station changes for intercity trains serving Chicago. Nearly all of Amtrak's inherited trains already served Union Station, the exceptions being the Super Chief/El Capitan and Texas Chief (Dearborn Station), South Wind, James Whitcomb Riley, George Washington, City of New Orleans, and Shawnee (all at Central Station). The Super Chief/El Capitan and Texas Chief were moved to CUS on Amtrak's start-up weekend. But, it was almost a year before the trains using Central Station were moved to CUS, on March 6, 1972. The new routing to/from CUS required a reverse move (and still does) via either the St. Charles Air Line or the old PRR-IC connection at 21st Street. Shown at Central Station on the eve of March 5, 1972, is Amtrak train 391, the Chicago-Champaign Campus. This would be the last scheduled intercity passenger train to use Central Station, which was torn down in 1974.



ABOVE The only signs that this is an Amtrak train are the Chicago Union Station leads extending out from beneath the looming Chicago Post Office building in the background, and the Amtrak markings on the crew-dormitory car. This is indeed the Super Chief/El Capitan departing Chicago in June 1973. The Super Chief and mate El Capitan were the only trains kept by Amtrak that served Dearborn Station, but upon Amtrak's launch were moved to Chicago Union Station. EMD F45 5939 and a fellow unit along with steam-equipped F7Bs lead the outbound Super/El Cap about to duck under the Roosevelt Road overpass.

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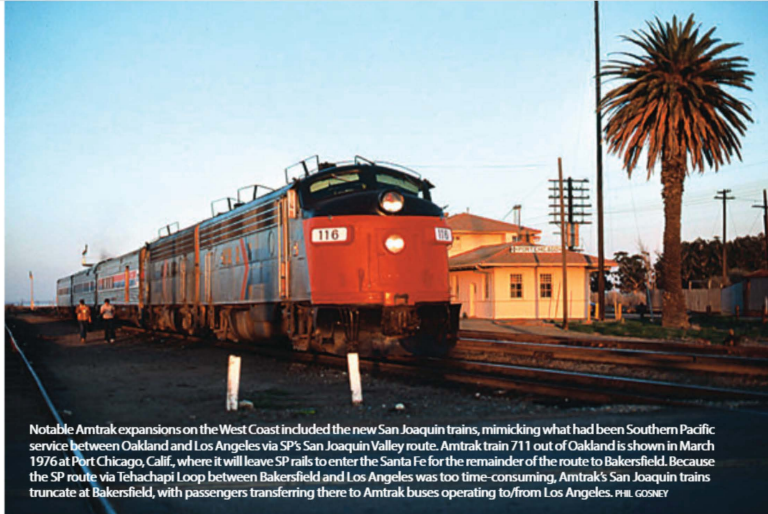
THE

San Joaquin



ABOVE: Longtime Amtrak marketing man Bruce Heard and Passenger Service Representative Sondra Mansour promote the new San Joaquin.

RIGHT: Resting at the rarely photographed Port Huron, Mich., station in the early morning hours, a Turboliner is ready to serve as the Blue Water Limited to Chicago in April 1979. Constructed in France, the Turboliners were Amtrak's second attempt with turbine-powered trains and fixed consists. Assigned to the Blue Water Limited from 1976 to 1981, they proved to be reliable and popular despite having capacity constraints.



Notable Amtrak expansions on the West Coast included the new San Joaquin trains, mimicking what had been Southern Pacific service between Oakland and Los Angeles via SP's San Joaquin Valley route. Amtrak train 711 out of Oakland is shown in March 1976 at Port Chicago, Calif., where it will leave SP rails to enter the Santa Fe for the remainder of the route to Bakersfield. Because the SP route via Tehachapi Loop between Bakersfield and Los Angeles was too time-consuming, Amtrak's San Joaquin trains truncate at Bakersfield, with passengers transferring there to Amtrak buses operating to/from Los Angeles. PHIL GOSNEY



BELOW: The Arrowhead was a state-supported train linking the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul with Superior, Wis., and later extended to nearby Duluth, Minn. The inaugural run on April 16, 1975, actually went into Duluth and is shown leaving Superior and crossing the St. Louis River into Duluth. Initially, regular service required a bus connection between Superior and Duluth. The train made connections with the Chicago–Seattle North Coast Hiawatha. In 1978, a significant change was made when the Arrowhead was transformed into an overnight Chicago–Duluth train named the North Star. The Arrowhead and North Star are now long gone, but there is a strong fight growing for restored service at least between St. Paul and Duluth.



ABOVE: The southbound St. Louis–Laredo, Texas, Inter-American pauses at the sprawling Texas & Pacific depot at Texarkana, Texas/Arkansas, during the dawn hours in the spring of 1975. Eventually this train morphed into today's Texas Eagle, reviving pre-Amtrak operation involving Missouri Pacific's Texas Eagle and GM&O's Chicago–St. Louis trains handling through sleepers to and from the Texas Eagle.

Cardinal service between Chicago, Cincinnati, and Washington.)

Only two years after the first reroute, the Logansport line had deteriorated to the point of FRA condemnation. For a time, the train then operated via the former Chicago & Eastern Illinois (L&N) via Evansville and less than a year later was shifted to the former Monon, also part of L&N.

Meanwhile, the train's schedule flipped back and forth between 1 day/2 nights and 2 days/1 night. No matter what, delays in Indiana and elsewhere on the route resulted in abysmal timekeeping. By 1979, sharp budget cuts ended a number of Amtrak routes and the Floridian was one of them, making its last run on October 1. One of America's largest travel markets—Midwest to Florida—has not had Amtrak service since.

Equipment and "The Rainbow Era"

There were fewer trains at the beginning, but many of those that remained became more interesting and colorful. Amtrak selected 1,200 of what it considered to be the best of the railroad industry's passenger cars (later referred to as the Heritage Fleet) and proceeded to spread them around the system, replacing, for example, aging cars of the Gulf, Mobile & Ohio and aging and deteriorating cars from Penn Central. Santa Fe, Burlington Northern, and Union Pacific cars—many among the newest equipment available—suddenly appeared on Midwest corridor trains and on Eastern and Southern long-distance trains.

Amtrak marketing also wanted enhancements, such as dome cars on trains where none existed before. Parlor cars were envisioned on as many corridor trains as possible, and food service, which was required on all trains operating more than two hours, was to ideally be of-

turing (i.e., train-offs) came just seven months after the Crescent joined the network, as the Floridian, Lone Star, North Coast Hiawatha, National Limited, Champion, and Hilltopper were eliminated on October 1. But on October 28, the Desert Wind was added between Ogden and Los Angeles. Optimism, despair, hope indeed.

The sad tale of the Floridian

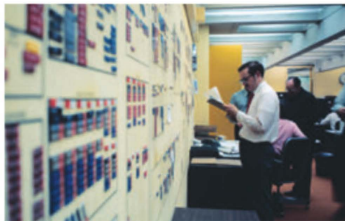
Perhaps no train captured the challenges of the first decade better than the Chicago–Florida train first known as the South Wind, a name inherited from the original Pennsylvania-Louisville & Nashville-Seaboard Coast Line service between the Midwest and the Sunshine State. By November 14, 1971, it was renamed the Floridian and became a train in search of suitable track in Indiana. Chosen over Illinois Central's more popular route because of the potential to serve larger intermediate markets, such as Indianapolis, Louisville, and Nashville, the now-daily train should have been a winner. But after less than three months in service, the deterioration of Penn Central's former New York Central Big Four route forced a reroute via the former Pennsylvania's line through Logansport. (At the same time, Indiana problems also affected the James Whitcomb Riley/George Washington/

INSET: Breakfast on board the northbound Inter-American in the spring of 1975. At that time, on-board dining was still a great American tradition, with full food and beverage service—and fresh flowers in the dining car.

By the mid-1970s, Amtrak had established a full-blown office of its own at L'Enfant Plaza in Washington, D.C. Much was accomplished here during Amtrak's first decade.



The Amtrak offices at L'Enfant Plaza in May 1975 show the state of the art operations of the railroad during its first decade of existence. In this scene, we see how magnetic tags were used to keep track of the whereabouts of Amtrak locomotives and rolling stock. Today, operations are located in Wilmington, Del., at the Consolidated National Operations Center (CNOC).



Initially, design for new Amtrak depot structures was done in-house, first rendered as models as this architectural engineer was doing. The model appears to be that of the proposed new Midway Station between Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minn.



Here at Amtrak's Operations Support Group office, we see two employees discussing new seating design. Longtime Amtrak riders reading this will certainly recognize the Disco-era purple paisley fabric that showed up all over the place in the 1970s, along with the new seating designs themselves. Paisley fabric may seem quite dated now, but back then it was a big thing and it made train travel a little more updated.



ferred by the best cars available.

But specific cars tended to appear at random, which of course added to the excitement. Kevin P. Keefe, former editor of PTJ and Trains Magazine recently commented on this in his weekly Classic Trains blog. Boarding Amtrak 354, the Chicago-Detroit St. Clair in the winter of 1973, and expecting a snack-bar lounge of some type, he said, "I was stunned to push through the vestibule door and find myself inside the so-called 'Lewis & Clark Lounge' of one of the former Northern Pacific 'Traveler's Rest' buffet-lounge cars." The North Coast Limited car "was just about the most exotic thing this Michigander had ever seen on rails."

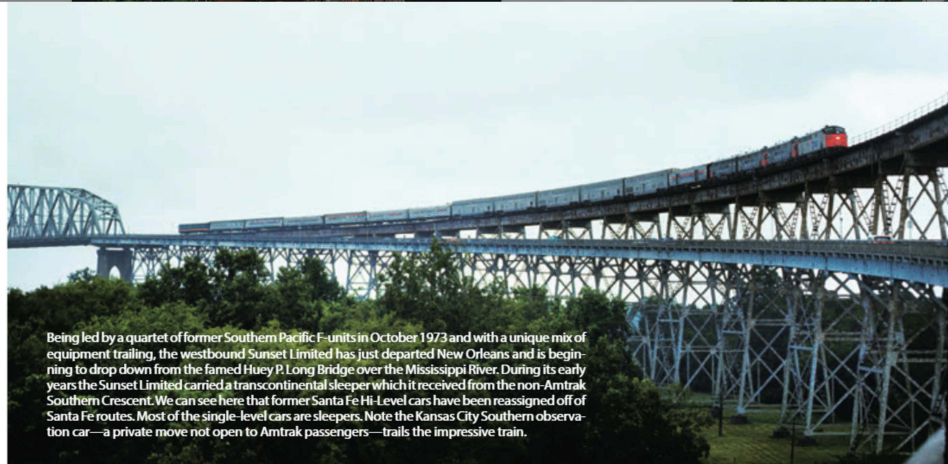
The colorful Milwaukee-Chicago-St. Louis run-through trains, introduced in November 1971, featured dome cars, parlor cars, and dining cars, something long gone from the Milwaukee-Chicago corridor.

The Rainbow Era even spilled into the dining car itself. I remember heading to Chicago on the Broadway Limited during the early days and discovering silverware and dinnerware with a mix of Pennsylvania, New York Central, and Penn Central logos. To top it off, coffee was served in a silver coffee pot with New York, New

Haven & Hartford engraved on its side.

All this excitement was too good to last. Aside from the self-propelled Metroliners and the United Aircraft TurboTrains, Amtrak had no new equipment. French Turbos appeared on the scene in October 1973 featuring comfort and big windows. Placed on the Chicago-St. Louis route initially, they unfortunately put an end to diners, parlors, and domes—and even the run-through service itself. In 1975, the French Turbos expanded to Michigan services.

Also in 1975, Budd-built Amfleet began appearing on the Northeast Corridor. Based on the Metroliner car design, Amfleet cars had curved sides (for added strength) and small windows. While criticized at the time, were it not for the



Being led by a quartet of former Southern Pacific F-units in October 1973 and with a unique mix of equipment trailing, the westbound Sunset Limited has just departed New Orleans and is beginning to drop down from the famed Huey P. Long Bridge over the Mississippi River. During its early years the Sunset Limited carried a transcontinental sleeper which it received from the non-Amtrak Southern Crescent. We can see here that former Santa Fe Hi-Level cars have been reassigned off of Santa Fe routes. Most of the single-level cars are sleepers. Note the Kansas City Southern observation car—a private move not open to Amtrak passengers—trails the impressive train.



Below the route described in the previous photo of the James Whitcomb Riley and Mountaineer involved a reverse move on the south side of Chicago to get to/from Chicago & Western Indiana trackage to from ex-Pennsylvania Railroad Penn Central trackage to access Chicago Union Station. As seen from the Riley/Mountaineer in the spring of 1975, the George Washington/Mountaineer (left) and the Riley/Mountaineer are at a stand-off while the two trains swap routes.

Above Before you read this caption any further, guess which trains these are. We are looking at the rarely photographed combined James Whitcomb Riley and Mountaineer entering Chicagoland on a summer midday in 1975. The Riley portion had originated in Washington, D.C., and Newport News, Va., combining at Charlottesville, Va. The Mountaineer originated in Norfolk, Va., and rode Norfolk & Western rails to Catlettsburg, W. Va., where it was combined with the Riley—and vice versa eastbound except that the George Washington name was used for the Washington/Newport News trains. In this scene, the combined train is riding on joint Erie Lackawanna and Chesapeake & Ohio trackage and is at State Line junction, about to leave Indiana and enter Illinois. At right is N&W's ex-Nickel Plate main line to Buffalo. At this time, this train was using Chesapeake & Ohio of Indiana Railroad trackage entirely through Indiana.



1974 Amtrak's Black Hawk with its originally assigned equipment—a pair of ex-New Haven RDCs—makes its station stop at the former Illinois Central depot in downtown Rockford, Ill., in late winter 1974. The Chicago–Rockford–Dubuque, Iowa, train was launched on St. Valentine's Day 1974, serving Illinois' then-second-largest city (Rockford) on a schedule that mimicked IC's Land O' Corn, a Chicago–Waterloo, Iowa, run that had been discontinued in 1967. The RDCs—among the few that Amtrak ever based in the Midwest—proved unreliable and, following a wreck involving a truck, were replaced with a wide variety of conventional equipment.



1981 For a short period of time between 1981 and 1983, Amtrak extended the state-supported Illini beyond Champaign to Decatur, Ill., over Norfolk & Western ex-Wabash trackage via a connection at Tolono, Ill. This rare view of the extension at Wabash Tower shows the bilevel-equipped train about to depart the former Wabash station at Decatur for Chicago. The use of ex-C&NW bilevels with a cab-control car at one end allowed the train to operate in push-mode. Due to a lack of ridership, the State of Illinois quickly cut this service back to Champaign.

Amfleet program and the high quality of the Budd Company, Amtrak might have little equipment today, as most of the Budd-built cars are still running four decades later. Sadly, Budd may have saved the modern passenger train, but not itself, ending more than 50 years of car-building in 1987. The TurboTrain and French Turbo equipment, beset with mechanical problems and high fuel-operating costs, was gradually replaced with Amfleet. When this happened on the Chicago–St. Louis route in 1976, it meant there had been four different equipment concepts on the line in just six years, starting with GM&O's red-and-maroon, late-1940s coaches and parlor cars and 1920s-era, heavyweight diner-lounge



1981 Streetwise! Amtrak's Floridian is about to stop in downtown Lafayette, Ind., on its way to Louisville and points south. SDP40F 549 leads the train down Louisville & Nashville's former Monon right-of-way, which at the time ran through downtown Lafayette in the middle of 5th Street. Interestingly, Amtrak elected not to use the original Monon station (north of the train but out of sight), but instead the lobby of the Lahr Hotel (at right) for the station. In 1994 the street-running was eliminated and trains rerouted on a new bypass (currently used by Amtrak's Cardinal). The 549 was part of Amtrak's first order of new locomotives that were delivered in 1973 and 1974. However, these proved short-lived, and the 549 was later traded into EMD for its parts to be used to build F40PH number 287.



cars, then the Rainbow fleet, followed by the French Turbos, and then Amfleet.

Amfleet even found its way into long-distance services, first on the New York–Savannah Palmetto in 1976, then on the new Salt Lake City–Seattle Pioneer the following year. Fortunately there was plenty of Amfleet to go around because the winter of 1976–77 was the first of three brutal winters and outdated ex-Pennsylvania yard facilities and steam-heated equipment in Chicago were paralyzed. Many trains were canceled. To alleviate the crisis, the head-end powered (HEP) Amfleet equipment was assigned to the Panama Limited and the James

Whitcomb Riley (which was renamed the Cardinal later that year). Normal service that winter was not restored until March.

As the 492 Amfleet cars were being delivered, new Superliners, based on Santa Fe's 1950s Hi-Level design, were being built by Pullman-Standard. Although the program started in 1975, there were production delays and the first cars were not delivered until 1979, with the Empire Builder in October being the first train so equipped, though minus the still-forthcoming Sightseer Lounge cars. When deliveries were completed in 1981, Amtrak had 284 Superliner I cars along with the 492 Amfleet I cars. The age

1981 Amtrak's Chicago–Oakland San Francisco Zephyr was a combination of the pre-Amtrak California Zephyr (because it ran on Burlington rails between Chicago and Denver) and Union Pacific/Southern Pacific's pre-Amtrak City of San Francisco (using UP-SP rails Cheyenne–Ogden–Oakland). Photographed by a then-future Amtrak engineer, the train is shown eastbound on Sherman Hill in Wyoming in late summer 1975. By this time, SDP40Fs had become the locomotive of choice for long-distance trains. CRAIG WILLET



1981 Amtrak 4905, one of many famed GG1s the railroad used in electrified territory, displays the "bloody nose" paint scheme the railroad used on these locomotives. Flying down the Northeast Corridor with the Florida-bound Silver Meteor, the train is passing through Lane, N.J., in July 1980. Despite being among the oldest locomotives in the fleet, the GG1s were reliable workhorses. However, with the rise of head-end power (HEP) and the discovery of frame cracks, Amtrak worked quickly to retire these units. Built as PRR 4902 in 1940, it would later be renumbered 905 before being scrapped in 1981. JIM BOYD, KEVIN EADY COLLECTION



ABOVE: One of Amtrak's most important milestones during the carrier's first decade was the introduction of Amfleet equipment in the mid-1970s. The sturdy cars remain to this day as stalwarts in Amtrak's car fleet and in several configurations: coach, cafe-lounge, Business Class, dinettes, and, for a short time, even coach-sleepers. This rake of Amfleet cars—sporting a short-lived "Acela" scheme—is in Northeast Corridor service at Providence, R.I., in 1991.

LOWER RIGHT: Flying southbound down the Northeast Corridor, General Electric E60 964 leads six Amfleet cars through Metuchen, N.J., in June 1977. The E60 was the first new locomotive purchase Amtrak made in 1973 and the Amfleets among the first cars. To this day the Amfleets comprise the backbone of Amtrak's single-level fleet. The E60s, though, were less successful. Following a derailment and other issues, Amtrak divested all but 13 of these units, with the final ones being struck from the roster in 2004. JIM BOYD, KEVIN ELDALEY COLLECTION

RIGHT: Amtrak train 48, the Lake Shore Limited, is 12 hours late leaving Buffalo, N.Y., in January 1977. The original Amtrak Lake Shore (1971-1972) was a multi-state-supported New York-Chicago train that failed miserably. Revived in 1975 as an "experimental" Amtrak train, it remains to this day as the principal Chicago-New York/Boston train, though with a rocky record of reliability. KEN KRAEMER



of the steam-heated Heritage cars was over. So was Pullman-Standard. As Budd's last act for intercity cars was the Amfleet, Pullman-Standard's last act was the Superliner. We can thank them both for the fleets that soldier on as the mainstay of Amtrak.

Locomotives

Amtrak began life inheriting a fleet of aging diesel and electric locomotives. Trains outside the Northeast Corridor (NEC) were pulled primarily by E-units and F-units, many clearly showing their age and millions of miles of service. In the NEC, trains that were not self-propelled Metroliners were handled by GG1s, dependable machines that entered service between 1935 and 1943, an era when the near-

demise of the American passenger train would have been inconceivable.

Now the new company was being asked to "make the trains worth traveling again" with motive power that should

have been museum-bound. If Amtrak was an airline, it would have been the equivalent of inheriting DC3s and Constellations to compete in the jet age.

Obtaining new power was a priority, but funds were limited and so were new designs. In 1972, the decision was made to move forward with an order for 150 Electro-Motive (EMD) SDP40Fs. Amtrak was so uncertain about its future that one of the major appeals of the SDP40F was that it was readily convertible to freight service, should the Amtrak "experiment"

LEFT: On August 10, 1980, Amtrak and the Illinois Department of Transportation launched the Chicago-Joliet-Dwight-Peoria Prairie Marksman to serve the state's third-largest city. The train operated over Amtrak's Chicago-St. Louis corridor main line as far as Chenoa, Ill., where it gained Toledo, Peoria & Western rails west to East Peoria, the train's terminal. The operation sought to replace Rock Island's Peoria Rocket service that had ended in 1979. Budget concerns, anti-Amtrak editorials in the conservative Peoria Journal Star, and mediocre ridership doomed the train and it made its last run—shown about to leave East Peoria—on October 4, 1981. INSET: The private car on the end of the last train carried this drumhead.

BELOW: Metroliner quadruplets led by club car 889 flash past Amtrak GP9 780 (built as Chicago & Eastern Illinois 210) along with car 14508 of C&O heritage at Lane Tower, N.J., in 1979. The Metroliners were created as part of a collaboration between the Pennsylvania Railroad (later Penn Central), Budd, and the U.S. Department of Transportation. Despite reliability issues, these cars formed the templates for the future Amfleet order in 1975. Following their initial retirement, many were rebuilt without propulsion for a variety of uses. Number 889 would be converted to a coach in 1991. In 1997 it would be involved in a wreck and scrapped.

KEVIN HOLLAND COLLECTION



Amtrak Assumes Operation of Southern Railway's Southern Crescent



ABOVE: Southern Railway's legendary Southern Crescent rolls north on the main line at Clifton, Va., in March 1978. The four green-and-light gray EMD E8s and stainless-steel cars made for a classy sight. Southern was one of several U.S. railroads—others included Rio Grande, Rock Island, and Georgia Railroad—that were eligible to join Amtrak in 1971 but opted out, continuing to run their own passenger trains. Southern retained several trains after Amtrak start-up, but its flagship in the 1970s was the New York–New Orleans Southern Crescent. Southern continued to operate the train until February 1, 1979. ALEX MAYES

Southern Railway did not join Amtrak at its creation in 1971 and continued to operate its Washington–Atlanta *Piedmont*, Salisbury–Asheville, N.C., *Asheville Special*; Washington–New Orleans *Southern Crescent*; and Washington–Lynchburg, Va., local trains 17 and 18 independently. The *Piedmont*, which had been cut back to Charlotte, N.C., in its final days, was discontinued on November 23, 1976; however, since this was close to Thanksgiving Southern extended it to November 29 and called it the *Thanksgiving Special*. The *Southern Crescent* continued to run between New York Penn Station and New Orleans. The New York–Washington segment ran over Amtrak's Northeast Corridor.

With mounting operational losses as well as the loss of the cars and locomotives in the deadly December 3, 1978, wreck of the northbound *Southern Crescent* at Shipment, Va., Southern decided to join Amtrak and conveyed its *Southern Crescent* equipment to Amtrak. The first run under Amtrak control was on February 1, 1979, and the Amtrak version was called simply *The Crescent*. To this day, it remains an important link in Amtrak's long-distance operations in the Southeast.—Alex Mayes



ABOVE: A few weeks after Amtrak took control of the Southern Crescent, EMD F40s began showing up on the point. This scene of Amtrak's new Crescent shows the northbound train also at Clifton, in March 1979. ALEX MAYES

fail as many expected it to. The six-axle, 3,000-hp units were delivered in 1973 and 1974, initially relieving the motive-power problem but soon presenting problems of their own. It seems the units had a tendency to derail, resulting in 13 accidents between 1974 and 1976, none serious, but enough of a concern to impose speed restrictions in early 1977.

Supplementing the SDP40Fs in 1975 were 25 General Electric P30CHs, which unfortunately were soon found to have a poor truck design. To the rescue came the F40PH from EMD, a smaller, lighter unit, at first designed primarily for corridor trains nationwide, including the north end of the Northeast Corridor which

was not yet electrified northeast of New Haven. Entering service in 1976, their reliable performance soon had them replacing many of the heavier, problem-prone SDP40Fs and P30CHs. The SDP40F fleet quickly dwindled, and a number of those units were turned back to EMD and their components used in the production of new F40PHs, which became Amtrak's standard diesel locomotive for years to come.

For electric power, Amtrak chose GE E60s, with 26 ordered in March 1973, less than two years after Amtrak's start-up. However troubles soon began, including a derailment at Elkton, Md., on February 24, 1975. That led to 85 mph speed restrictions (down from a normal speed of

110 mph) and yet another search for replacement power. A Swedish four-axle design known as the Rc4 was successfully tested and Amtrak ordered 53 of the units, now designated AEM7s, from EMD and Sweden's ASEA starting in 1977. The AEM7s quickly took over nearly all assignments with the E60s relegated to handling longer, slower long-distance trains in electrified territory.

The progression of electric power is interesting. The queen of electrics, the GG1 was 79 feet long and weighed in at 193 tons, while its successor, the E60, was almost as long at 71 feet with a hefty weight of 237 tons, the distribution of which contributed to its track interface problems. Meanwhile, the nimble Swedish offspring AEM7 was a mere 51 feet long and 101 tons. Its boxy appearance gave the AEM7s the nickname "toasters."

Stations

Big, empty, costly stations were an early target of Amtrak planners and Amtrak itself. While Amtrak had consolidated most of its Chicago operations on Day 1, complete Chicago station consolidation was finally achieved on March 6, 1972, as Central Station's trains moved to Union Station.

In October, a modest new station was built under an overpass in Cincinnati, allowing the only train serving the city (the George Washington/James Whitcomb Riley—today's Cardinal) to move out of the glorious but hopelessly overwhelming Cincinnati Union Station. St. Louis Union Station lost its trains in October 1978, replaced by a "temporary" double-wide, derided as "St. Louis Union Trailer" which ended up lasting 30 years.

A new station in Jacksonville on the outskirts of town replaced the downtown Union Station in 1974. A new station in Richmond, Va., quite similar to Jacksonville's design, replaced Broad Street Station in 1975, allowing faster service through town.

Amtrak becomes a railroad, and fights for its existence

Amtrak started its first decade primarily as a contracting agency and by the end of the decade it had transitioned into a "real" railroad, with its own crews, new equipment, and even its own track as the massive Northeast Corridor infrastructure was foisted upon it on April 1, 1976, in an attempt to give Conrail a better chance of success. Amtrak survived its own early infancy when many thought it would die



after a few years. As it approached the age of 10, it was again under attack, this time by the Carter Administration, followed by the Reagan Administration.

Amtrak's first president, Roger Lewis, was a puzzle, presiding over some improvements but seemingly afraid of success. Was he told by the Nixon administration to keep Amtrak alive "just long enough"? We may never know. Fortunately, two able presidents followed Lewis. Paul H. Reistrup—an experienced railroader with a specific background running passenger trains for Baltimore & Ohio/Chesapeake & Ohio and Illinois Central—took the helm in 1974 and helped position Amtrak for the future with reliable new equipment, much of which was introduced to service during the administration of Alan S. Boyd, the first Secretary of Transportation and a former president of I.C. Boyd's political experience helped Amtrak navigate into its second decade and an 11-year "golden era" of sorts that existed during Graham Claytor's presidency starting in 1982.

In the midst of one of the budget battles during Boyd's term, when asked by a television reporter why Amtrak should continue to be supported by the government, Amtrak President Boyd said simply and directly, "Because our trains are full." 🗣️

ABOVE: In 1979, Amtrak formally introduced the Superliner cars, with a special press run on the Burlington Northern/Amtrak route between Chicago and Naperville, Ill. Amtrak President Alan S. Boyd presided aboard the special, which stopped along the route for photos. Aboard the train, media personnel could view the new coaches, diner, and sleeping-car rooms. Superliners changed everything for long-distance routes, largely in the West. Although Superliners spelled the end of dome cars, they brought a new level of travel experience. Gone were dusty, noisy, drafty vestibules between cars, replaced by a softer, quieter ride experience, and greater efficiency in that fewer cars were needed to handle passenger loads, air-conditioning equipment was more protected, and more restrooms were available.