

Conrail Passenger Service

by Elbert L. Simon

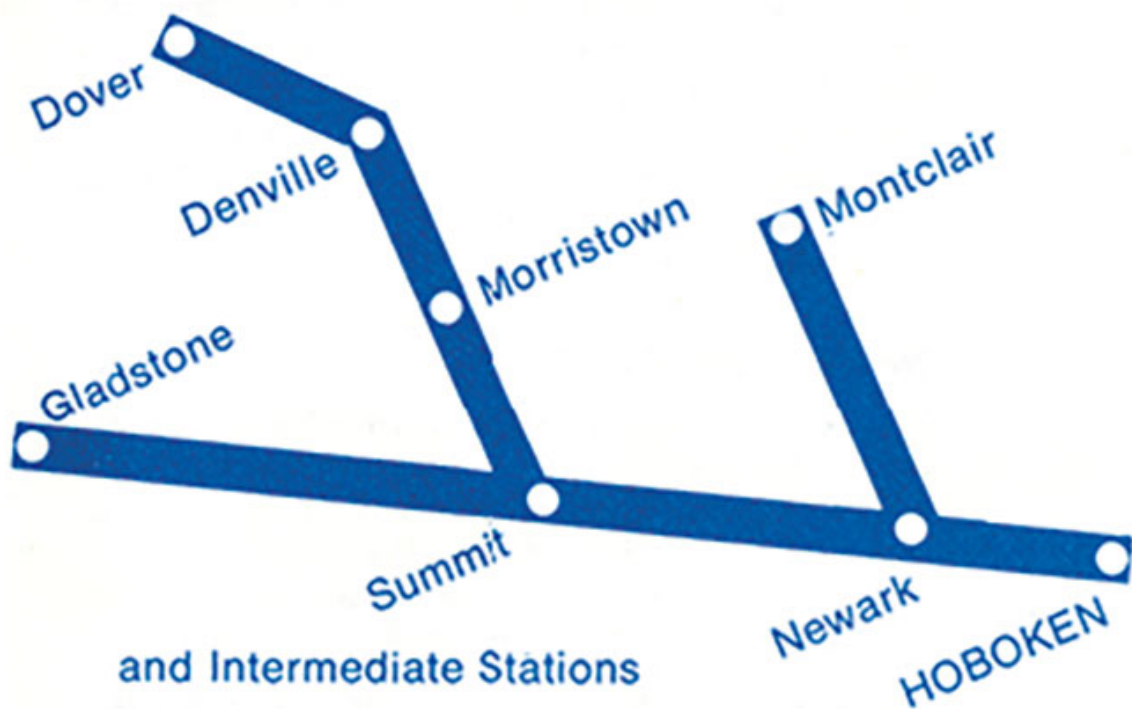


N.J. DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION

MORRISTOWN LINE

MONTCLAIR BRANCH

GLADSTONE BRANCH



CONRAIL IN ITS 1ST YEAR



AND THE NEW JERSEY DOT
SALUTE AMERICA IN ITS
200TH YEAR

TIMETABLE EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 1976



**N.J. DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION
PASCACK VALLEY LINE
(2 yellow lights at track gates)**

- Spring Valley
- Montvale
- Westwood
- Oradell
- Hackensack
- HOBOKEN
and Intermediate Stations



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The Consolidated Rail Corporation, also known as “ConRail” and later simply as “Conrail,” was formed in 1976 to deal with the continued operation of a number of Northeastern railroads that were experiencing financial difficulties.

Four of those insolvent railroads— Penn Central, Erie Lackawanna, Jersey Central and Reading—operated important yet unprofitable commuter services in several major Northeastern markets. Passenger trains were not considered part of Conrail’s primary mission, and it was expected that funding agencies would take on responsibility for those commuter services deemed worthy of continuing. Meanwhile, Conrail and the funding agencies would agree on amounts of subsidy, service levels, acquisition of equipment and other factors that would impact the quality of the service provided.

At the same time, Conrail could concentrate on rationalizing the network of freight-carrying lines it had inherited, determining which to save, which to improve, and which to shed. Moreover, great fleets of locomotives and freight cars, servicing facilities and shops, yards, and back offices had to be integrated. Mindful of the missteps experienced eight years earlier in the Penn Central merger, it was a daunting task.

Conrail, of course, also was a player in the intercity passenger business as it hosted Amtrak trains on a number of routes, including those that would be important pathways for hauling the freight that was seen as Conrail’s primary mission.

An early task was to apportion cars and locomotives among the various commuter operations that were to continue. In many cases, agencies had purchased equipment for their services, and it would remain on those services.

This included, for example, M-1 and M-2 electric MU (multiple-unit) cars in New York and Connecticut electric zones.

With Conrail's debut came a fully developed corporate identity featuring a stylized wheel on a rail, in white on a blue background. However, since most commuter equipment was owned by agencies, in passenger operation this livery was limited to a few locomotives and Conrail's own business-car fleet. (Blue paint on business cars was soon replaced by a somber dark green livery similar to that of the Southern Railway, from which Conrail's then-president, L. Stanley Crane, had come.)

Let's travel back to April 1976 and take a look at each of the Conrail passenger operations at the railroad's start-up, then follow some of the major developments until Conrail ended its commuter-rail responsibilities at the beginning of 1983.



Conrail E8A No. 4022 again, this time leading a train over former New York & Long Branch (a joint endeavor of the PRR and CNJ; see the 2009-3 PTJ) rails at Shark in October 1978. Mike Schafer

NEW ENGLAND DIVISION

Comprising the routes operating from Boston's South Station, this division was primarily of New Haven heritage, with the main trunk down the Shore Line Route through Attleboro, Mass., to Providence, R.I., and beyond. In the Boston area, there were branches to Needham, Franklin, and Stoughton. In addition, limited service was provided over the former Boston & Albany (a New York Central subsidiary) to Framingham, Mass.

As one might expect, locomotives and cars primarily reflected this New Haven heritage. There were 17 GP9s and eight former PC E8s as well as eight RDCs, including former NYC No. 55. Cars included almost 60 post-World War II New Haven coaches, 14 "American Flyer" coaches, and 13 Pennsy P70s.

A funding dispute led to the transfer of responsibility to the Boston & Maine in March 1977. There would be many twists and turns and ultimate improvement, but these are beyond the scope of Conrail operations.

NEW HAVEN DIVISION

This was the main line of the former New Haven Railroad, which had become part of Penn Central at the beginning of 1969. Commuter service was provided to points as far east as New Haven, Conn., as well as on branches to New Canaan, Danbury, and Waterbury.

Three RDCs provided shuttle service on the Waterbury and Danbury branches. Two rush-hour Danbury through trains from Grand Central were made up of former New Haven streamlined coaches, of which there were two dozen on the division, and one train carried tavern-lounge Watch Hill (a round-ended observation car converted to mid-train use). Each train drew a pair of dual-mode FL9s from the Metropolitan Division pool.

Most service was provided by a fleet of 244 M-2 dual-mode "Cosmopolitan" MU cars. These were delivered in two groups during the 1970s, and the

second group of 100 cars was largely completed at the beginning of the Conrail era. Ninety-five ex-NH “washboard” (fluted-side) MU cars were by then all in storage. Specialized dual-mode cars were needed because the trains ran from Grand Central Terminal on DC third rail before switching to AC overhead catenary.

METRO DIVISION

These were Penn Central (formerly New York Central) routes in the New York City area.

The Harlem Division was electrified up to North White Plains, N.Y., with diesel service continuing to Brewster and RDC shuttles on to Dover Plains. Electric service was on the horizon to a new station now called Southeast, but this would come after Conrail.

The Hudson Division was electrified from Grand Central Terminal to Croton-Harmon, N.Y., with diesel service beyond to Peekskill and Poughkeepsie, either as shuttles or a few rush-hour through trains. As on the Harlem Division, through trains used FL9s, drawn from a pool of about three dozen.



An ex-New York Central RDC-1, being operated by Conrail for MTA, cruises south from Poughkeepsie along the Hudson River past Pollepel Island in the fall of 1976. Mike Schafer

There were a number of MU cars built in two orders during the 1960s. Something like 54 cars were refurbished by Morrison-Knudsen for continued service. A group of 13 RDCs provided shuttle service beyond the electric zone to Poughkeepsie, Peekskill, and Dover Plains, as well as Port Jervis, N.Y., on the west side of the Hudson River.

Most passengers rode in trains made up of M-1 “Metropolitans,” a 178-car MU fleet similar to those on the Long Island Rail Road. Both New York and Connecticut acquired a small fleet of Budd SPVs (an imperfect successor to the RDC), but these did not live up to expectations.

A variety of coaches were assigned to the locomotive-hauled trains. There were 88 cars at the time of Conrail’s debut, including both ex-NYC veterans

and streamlined cars purchased from other railroads. There was also a small group of five tavern-lounges, seven bar coaches, and commuter club car No. 2179.

Over time, these cars were supplanted, and some replaced, by additional cars under lease. These included nine former Delaware & Hudson cars (including its two diners), six ex-Reading cars, and 29 Amtrak coaches. Near the end of Conrail's tenure, the Harlem Line was being electrified to Brewster North, and new M-3 MU cars were on order to replace most of these older cars.



Veteran ex-Lackawanna MU cars were in the twilight of their careers when this set, running as train 554, passed a Conrail local freight led by GP38-2 No. 8164 on Feb. 23, 1979. Pete Scheckermann

HOBOKEN DIVISION

This comprised the Erie Lackawanna routes operating from Hoboken, N.J. All diesel-powered trains had been re-equipped during the period of EL operation with a fleet of 32 General Electric U34CH diesels and a group of Pullman-

Standard push-pull cars that would sire a long line of cars—including Amtrak’s Horizon Fleet—built by P-S and Bombardier.

Several cars had already been wrecked, but there were still 108 coaches, nine bar-coaches, and 32 cab coaches when Conrail appeared. These trains ran to Suffern, Spring Valley, Boonton, Netcong, and Port Jervis, with short turns on some routes. In 1978, Metro-North acquired six coaches and two cab cars to beef up the Port Jervis service.

In addition, four ex-Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Lines RDCs operated on a rush-hour Waldwick, N.J., train after they were freed from south Jersey.

The former Delaware, Lackawanna & Western electrified service to Dover, Gladstone and Montclair, N.J., was still being operated with 117 vintage “motors” and 110 trailers when Conrail debuted. This fleet, especially the three oldest club cars, were fan favorites, but they were living on borrowed time and were replaced in the summer of 1983 with new Arrow III MU cars running on AC power. NJ Transit experimented by painting some motor cars maroon and trailer cars orange, rather than the normal olive green.



Wearing temporary Bicentennial paint and number, Conrail's former-Erie Lackawanna U34CH No. 1776 pushes Hoboken Division train 70 over ex-Erie trackage at Newburgh Junction, N.Y., on July 2, 1977. Pete Scheckermann

NEW JERSEY DIVISION

These were the former Jersey Central Raritan Valley trains operating between Newark Penn Station, Raritan, and Phillipsburg, N.J., as well as CNJ's share of the former North Jersey Coast service to Asbury Park and Bay Head.

Most former Jersey Central trains either were pulled by that road's 13 GP40Ps or eight GP7s. Equipment on Bay Head trains was a mix of 35 former Great Northern coaches along with older coaches and several commuter club cars. During the Conrail period, most of these cars were repainted into NJ DOT's dark blue-and-gray scheme, and later began to receive the NJ Transit livery with three diagonal stripes at each end.

As the Conrail era ended, NJ Transit took delivery of new Comet cars from Bombardier, along with 13 new F40PH diesels to pull them. The GP40Ps then were converted to head-end power (HEP).

The Raritan Valley line started under Conrail with a mix of 38 open-window coaches equipped for push-pull service, along with a group of cars acquired from Midwestern railroads. Eventually, all were replaced by new Comet coaches and locomotives.

NJ Transit discontinued service between High Bridge and Phillipsburg and ended joint service over former Reading lines to Philadelphia in the summer of 1981. The well-maintained ex-Reading RDCs were replaced for about a year with a two-car non-air-conditioned train to West Trenton, until this was

discontinued due to lack of patronage. Likewise, the two-car Bayonne–Cranford shuttle came off in 1978.



GG1 No. 4873 leads an NJ DOT Long Branch commuter train over the Raritan River at Perth Amboy, N.J., in the summer of 1980. both, mike schaffer; conrail timetables, Mike Schafer collection



RDCs congregate on the former P-RSL at Atlantic City, N.J., in the same month. Mike Schafer

NEW JERSEY DIVISION

These trains operated over Amtrak's former Penn Central/PRR main line between New York and Trenton, plus the "Dinkey" linking Princeton and Princeton Junction. Eighteen state-owned MP54 MUs were on lease to SEPTA in Philadelphia and most trains on this route drew newer MUs. In fact, many Arrow I and Arrow II cars were temporarily stored or leased to Amtrak for a period when newer Arrow IIIs were available while awaiting the conversion of the Erie Lackawanna electrification.

The former Pennsy portion of the North Jersey Coast line linked Bay Head with New York City and so required an engine change at South Amboy, N.J. Initially, diesels were mostly E7 and E8 models from a number of sources and in a number of liveries, including Southern, EL, Conrail blue, and several NJ DOT and NJ Transit liveries as well as PC black. Ten E8s were rebuilt under contract at Paducah, Ky., and the GG1s were replaced by ten E60s acquired from Amtrak. Comet coaches replaced older cars, including a number of P70s. Thirty-one former Penn Central coaches rebuilt in the early 1960s from sleepers were acquired to beef up the coach fleet.



Its CNJ initials painted over, NJ DOT GP40P No. 4100 leads a short train of ex-Great Northern cars—with the first still wearing GN "Big Sky Blue"

PENNSYLVANIA-READING

SEASHORE LINES

Limited service linked the PATCO terminal in Lindenwold, N.J., with Atlantic City, Ocean City, and Cape May, N.J. Ten RDCs provided the service and were supplanted with former Jersey Central cars when six were sent to Reading Shops for refurbishing. The trains became a victim of deteriorating track and NJ Transit indifference and were gone in the early 1980s. The refurbished units were transferred to Hoboken.

SEPTA

Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority trains linked Reading Terminal or Suburban Station in Philadelphia with suburban points over former Reading and PC routes. Reading's electric zone extended to West Trenton, Warminster, Doylestown, Fox Chase, Chestnut Hill, and Norristown, while the Pennsy routes reached Trenton, Chestnut Hill, Ivy Ridge, Paoli and beyond, West Chester, and Wilmington.

While a major re-equipping of service with new Silverliner IV MUs was completed early in the Conrail era, a number of MP54s remained, with some receiving SEPTA livery. Likewise, 38 rebuilt Reading "Blueliners" and 11 green cars soldiered on and some "Blues" also received SEPTA colors. The Blues lived on to traverse the City Center tunnel when it opened in 1984.

A small fleet of 18 or so RDCs operated on ex-Reading routes to Newtown, Bethlehem, Pottsville, and Newark. Since most of these routes extended beyond SEPTA's territory, they were discontinued during the summer of 1981. America's newest RDCs went on to other properties and a single six-car push-

pull train's coaches went on to serve out of Grand Central Terminal while its three FP7s include two still-preserved examples.



Conrail operated a pair of rush-hour commuter trains between Baltimore and Washington Union Station for Maryland's Department of Transportation. This run was photographed in November 1981. Mike Schafer

MARYLAND DIVISION

Long before the operation's current renaissance, a pair of rush-hour trains was operated with MP54s between Baltimore and Washington. Seven Maryland and five borrowed SEPTA cars held on until replaced by leased NJ Transit cars and eventually MARC (Maryland Rail Commuter) coaches and locomotives.



On Jan. 14, 1977, Conrail's Mahoning Division commuter train—a former EL (ex-Erie Railroad) operation—arrived in Youngstown, Ohio, from Cleveland for the last time behind EL E8 No. 4014. Rich Behrendt

MAHONING DIVISION

One train each weekday linked Youngstown, Ohio, with Cleveland Union Terminal. The consist was usually an ex-EL E8 and several former ex-Lackawanna streamlined coaches. Lack of funding resulted in the ending of this service in January 1977, with the E8s turning up in several places and the coaches and at least one of the E8s moving to Chicago.



Pinch-hitting for Amtrak, Conrail E8A No. 4022 makes a rare appearance piloting the eastbound Broadway Limited out of Chicago Union Station on Good Friday 1977. In addition to hosting Amtrak trains, from its creation on April 1, 1976, until Jan. 1, 1983, Conrail operated a far-flung assortment of commuter trains for government agencies in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Mike Schafer; Conrail timetables, Mike Schafer collection



Still wearing its Erie Lackawanna paint, Conrail E8A 4014 again, having moved to the Chicago area and leading one of the westbound “Valpo Dummies” at Valparaiso, Ind., on a pre-dawn morning in late summer 1977. Mike Schafer

CHICAGO DIVISION

Two weekday commuter trains linked Valparaiso, Ind., with Chicago Union Station over this former Pennsy route. Fourteen P70 coaches were allocated, and power was usually a pair of GP7 or GP9 units, although E-units sometimes stood in. Again a victim of funding issues, these trains first received some Amtrak long-distance (ex-Chicago & North Western) bilevel equipment before passing to that agency in October 1979. Amtrak was compelled to remain in the commuter business for several years before discontinuing these trains.

MAIL & EXPRESS

Upon the inauguration of Conrail, Amtrak assumed the operation of overnight mail & express trains 3 and 4 between New York City and Washington on behalf of Conrail. By then, the consist of these trains was little more than one or two B60b baggage cars of PRR heritage, two RPOs, and a “cabin car” (PRRspeak for caboose) Nos. 23392–23394, also ex-Pennsy. The baggage cars retained their Penn Central numbers in most cases, as did the RPOs, however, Amtrak assigned numbers 1800–1807 to these cars. After these trains came off in June 1977, at least some of the RPOs went into Amtrak company service. Amtrak assigned numbers 193–194m to these trains, but most records still called them 3 and 4 to the end.

CONRAIL'S PASSENGER EXIT

Despite available government funding, Conrail's mission did not contemplate its remaining in the passenger business. Legislation was passed that mandated Conrail's exit from passenger operations as of Jan. 1, 1983, and New York, New Jersey, Maryland, and Pennsylvania set up their own operating agencies or arranged for other operators to assume the service.

Elbert L. Simon is a leading authority on rail passenger equipment.