The South's New R... of 1967

A decade after the Seaboard Coast Line was formed by merger, two GP40s and two U33Bs lead a freight south down the former ACL main line at Petersburg, Va., in November 1977.
J. C. Hopkins, Tom Hoffmann collection

ailroad

50 years ago, the merger of two longtime rivals formed the Seaboard Coast Line

By Larry Goolsby

Beginning in 1938–39, the SCL merger partners fronted their passenger trains with colorful diesels. In two February 1953 photos, Coast Line E units congregate at Richmond's Broad Street Station (top), and a Seaboard train is ready to depart the road's Miami station (above).
Two photos, R. R. Malinoski

Saturday, July 1, 1967, dawned muggy and overcast in my hometown of Woodland, Ga., and stayed that way — fairly common summer weather for west central Georgia. I had just spent much of June along the Atlantic Coast Line's Western Division main line that ran through town and at the yard and junction at Manchester, 7 miles north. I knew ACL was merging with the Seaboard Air Line on July 1 and that I had to finish getting my favorite railroad on film. The Seaboard Coast Line Railroad was finally happening, nine years after the two companies announced their intention to merge, surprising industry observers and making news for being a parallel combination of two reasonably healthy competitors.

My real interest that day, though, was the Atlanta NRHS chapter's annual *Peach Special* steam excursion from Atlanta into middle Georgia and return, this year behind Southern Railway 2-8-2 No. 4501. I had never seen the 4501, so spent much of the day chasing the *Special*. Back home that evening, I figured I better take a record shot of the now-former ACL on Merger Day, and caught the northbound local at dusk with a GP7 leading two F units and a train of hoppers from the nearby sand pits.

My rather nonchalant observance of SCL's opening day was fitting for the early weeks of "The New Railroad" (as SCL's ads styled it), as least from my limited Georgia vantage point. I saw my first relettered SCL diesel in mid-July (an ex-Seaboard E unit in Atlanta), the first repainted freight car later that month, and the first new cars (40-foot boxcars from Pullman-Standard) in September. For a while, everything from equipment to operations looked mostly the same.

The pace of change picked up soon. Locomotives were all relettered and renumbered by the end of the year. Fully repainted units appeared, dressed in a slight variation of the black, aluminum, and yellow scheme that ACL had used for a decade. A distinct SCL identity became clearer as new high-horsepower units began pulling longer and faster trains, and intermodal and bulk commodity unit trains became steadily more common. A holding company, Seaboard Coast Line Industries, was formed just two years into the merger to begin a corporate streamlining process that, less than two decades later, culminated in the southern half of CSX Transportation.

A merger 10 years in the making

This evolution from slow beginnings to a major force in southeastern railroading had its roots a full decade before the SCL merger itself. In August 1957, W. Thomas Rice became ACL's new president, replacing the venerable Champion McDowell Davis and bringing a distinctly more youthful and modern outlook to an industry whose troubles were beginning to mount. Railroad executives in the mid-to-late 1950s felt challenged at nearly every turn — disappearing passenger revenues, outmoded regulations, truck and pipeline competition. Most saw little immediate recourse except to seek merger with each other and reduce the duplication and overlap that were the legacy of railroading's better times.

"Champ" Davis had unsuccessfully pursued the Florida East Coast Railway for years, hoping to give ACL its own line into Miami, but if he had other merger ambitions he kept them to himself. Tom Rice took the throttle expecting that ACL would continue seeking an FEC merger, but in June 1958, facing a reluctant Interstate Commerce Commission and other ongoing obstacles, ACL dropped its quest. Still, a merger remained high on Rice's list of solutions for a clouded future — "the only one within our premise to initiate," as he put it in 1960.

Seaboard president John W. Smith no doubt had a similar outlook. Smith, who had been in office since 1952, had overseen significant modernization and financial stability since his company had emerged from bankruptcy in 1946. Nevertheless, SAL annual reports of the early 1960s often looked to the future with caution, and repeatedly expressed strong hopes that the proposed SCL merger would allow economies to improve the combined companies' outlook. Only in the mid-1960s did Seaboard admit to some real optimism about growth prospects in its southeastern territory.

Rice and Smith apparently began meeting about a possible merger not long after the FEC decision, if not before. Which one initiated the conversation is not known, but both men clearly felt that joining their companies was necessary and achievable. Following a final decision over lunch in Richmond, Va., in mid-1958, they announced on September 29 that preliminary indications pointed to substantial savings through merger. The news attracted wide notice; most prior mergers had been end-to-end and between relatively weak carriers, allowing the combined railroads to extend their territory and link new markets more effectively.

But ACL and Seaboard duplicated each other's territory almost exactly across their six states — Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Florida — with similar major endpoints of Richmond, Jacksonville, central and south Florida, Atlanta, and Birmingham. There were numerous parallel routes among ACL's 5,743 miles and SAL's 4,122, and their central Florida trackage could pass for the proverbial plate of spaghetti. Moreover, they had been fierce rivals for over a century, and observers had trouble believing the two were talking marriage. Both were also in satisfactory financial condition and benefiting from the growing Southeast economy. But both also knew they could do far better by eliminating unnecessary trackage, combining stations and yards, using faster routes between major points, and getting more productivity out of their labor forces and equipment fleets.

Two consulting companies tapped to evaluate the merger's potential, Coverdale & Colpitts and Wyer, Dick & Co., reported their results in April 1960. Within five years, they said, the combined railroads could be saving over $38 million annually and could operate with 11 percent fewer miles and 15 percent fewer employees. Both boards of directors gave their approval, and the necessary

Reflecting an industry trend, both roads adopted simpler liveries in the late '50s. ACL F7s at Birmingham in 1966 (top) display the utilitarian look that SCL would use. Even after going to off-white on passenger units, SAL remained more colorful, as seen at Richmond in '59 (above).

Top, J. David Ingles; above, Jim McClellan

applications were filed with the ICC. Rice and Smith signed letters dated July 1, 1960, "To our friends and patrons" that introduced an illustrated pamphlet appealing for public support. While the companies' attorneys began presenting testimony at the ICC, meetings for shippers were arranged in major cities to provide information and answer questions.

Planning for success

Planning also began among both railroads' managers to put in place the thousand details a combined system would require, ranging from organization charts to operational changes. Rice would later recall this process as one of practical cooperation and determination to succeed, without the kind of "team" hostility that would later plague Penn Central. Whether this description was overstated or not, the actual implementation of the merger certainly appeared to avoid any major difficulties.

Meanwhile, after numerous hearings through 1961, the ICC examiner handling the case recommended approval to the full Commission, but objections from the Southern, FEC, labor unions, and other parties delayed a final ruling. Southern had fought the merger from the beginning, saying the new company would hurt its competitive standing. SOU demanded one of the railroads' routes into central Florida to tap the Bone Valley phosphate region, and said ACL should divest its holdings in the Louisville & Nashville. FEC feared that a merged railroad would hurt the substantial Miami traffic ACL gave it at Jacksonville.

The full Commission ultimately agreed only to keep in place Southern's existing ACL trackage rights and to guarantee FEC full interchange rights at Jacksonville. It also let the merged company retain ACL's L&N stock and the leases ACL and L&N held of subsidiaries Clinchfield and the "Georgia group" — the Georgia Railroad, Atlanta & West Point, and Western Railway of Alabama. The ICC also mandated protections for other railroads to limit traffic diversion and maintain competition. While refus-

PARALLEL LINES

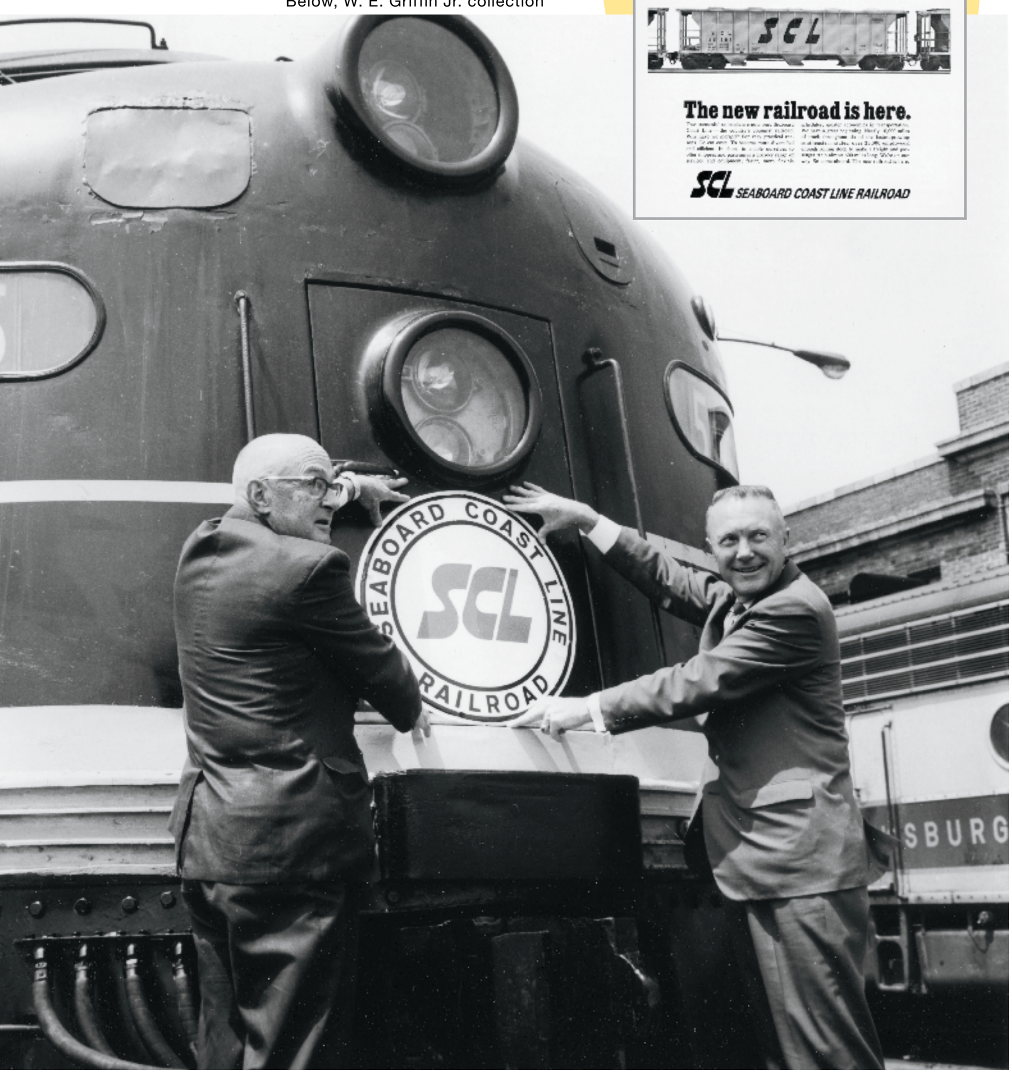
SCL was the first major "parallel" (as opposed to end-to-end) merger of two relatively healthy railroads.

ing Southern's wish for a line into central Florida, the ICC did allow SOU subsidiary Central of Georgia trackage rights over the ACL between Albany and Tifton, Ga., linking Central to an SOU line and forming a new through route between Birmingham and Jacksonville. Southern never took up the offer, instead opting in 1968 to create the new route using upgraded lines of the Georgia Northern and Georgia & Florida, two short lines also in its fold.

On December 2, 1963, the full Commission approved the SAL-ACL merger, effective April 10, 1964. But the objections and delays were far from over. Southern, FEC, the U.S. Justice Department, and the Railway Labor Executives' Association appealed the ICC ruling in federal court, which in May 1965 said the ICC had failed to satisfy certain provisions of the Clayton Antitrust Act. The ICC joined the Coast Line and Seaboard in appealing to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Merger at last

Two more years of legal wrangling followed, but on April 10, 1967, the Supreme Court dismissed all objections. A merger date of July 1 was set, and the two partners placed advertising in major newspapers across the Southeast urging readers to "say goodbye to . . . [two] successful railroad[s]" and welcome the new Seaboard Coast Line. Rice was named president with Smith as chairman of the board. Operational plans were dusted off, details for merging computer systems were tested, and new office letterhead and equipment stencils were readied. On June 30 Tom Rice and John Smith posed for photos in Richmond placing an SCL herald on the nose of an ACL E unit, and the next day SCL was a reality.



SAL's John Smith (below, left) and ACL's Tom Rice pose with an SCL herald on June 30, 1967, the day before their two companies merged. Magazine ads (right, from August 1967 Trains) touted the combination.
Below, W. E. Griffin Jr. collection

A new division structure was effective at once, although new employee timetables did not appear until September 1. Several division superintendents were shuffled around the system, a number of former Seaboard officials were moved from their Richmond offices to ACL's Jacksonville headquarters, and many employees at the more than 60 duplicate agency locations had to take positions elsewhere. Overall though, the number of employees who had to undergo significant dislocations was not that great.

Understandably, there was some bad feeling among those who had to move to keep their jobs, or become subordinate to a former peer from the other railroad, or found their seniority diminished in combined craft rosters. Some former Seaboard officials in particular felt aggrieved as their territory underwent more shrinkage and the SAL Richmond headquarters was downsized. The quip that SCL meant "Still Coast Line" wasn't very funny to many in these groups.

Negotiations for new labor agreements with operating employees lagged beyond the merger date, being completed in 1968. The terms mainly held reductions to attrition, and were governed by the so-called "Orange Book" after its bright covers. Through it all, even though many offices retained their former roads' memorabilia and reflected the attachment employees had for them, most SCL workers wanted the new company to succeed.

Rationalizing the physical plant

A high priority of the new SCL was to reduce track miles and duplicate facilities. The railroad took quick steps with some of the easier targets, such as closing several passenger stations in Florida and abandoning overlapping branches and parallel lines. For example, of the two roads' routes between Charleston, S.C., and Savannah, Ga., ACL's high-speed main was an easy choice over SAL's freight-only line with its many bridges through swampy terrain. New connecting tracks were built in places like Callahan, Fla., which enabled Seaboard-route passenger trains to access ACL's line to Jacksonville Terminal and avoid a long

"STILL COAST LINE"

To many, the dominance of the former ACL after the merger suggested an alternative meaning for the initials "SCL."

U18B 1848 and MATE 3221 with phosphate cars cross Six Mile Creek between Tampa and the Bone Valley mining region on a hot July 18, 1974.
Ralph W. Bostian

trek through Jacksonville's streets.

Another prompt change was combining duplicate agencies in the same locations, most of which was accomplished during 1967. Over the next several years this process, combined with declining branchline mileage, fewer loadings at local sidings, and the demise of the train-order system, contributed to widespread disappearance of depots. These iconic structures had once been vital to house operators copying train orders, handling local shipments, and selling tickets to passengers. As these functions faded, many of the buildings vanished too. Tasks still needing local attention were turned over to mobile agents who drove from town to town in specially outfitted vans.

A number of yard operations were combined or altered as well. Seaboard yards were closed or downgraded at Richmond and Jacksonville, while the ex-SAL Savannah yard was expanded and ACL's reduced. SAL yards were also retired in favor of L&N facilities that ACL was already using in Atlanta, Birmingham, and Montgomery. The ex-ACL yard at Waycross, Ga., was rebuilt and expanded, and a new intermodal facility was built west of Jacksonville where the consultants had originally proposed a super-yard to replace ex-ACL and SAL yards in Jacksonville and Baldwin. Several Florida diesel shops were consolidated into the ex-ACL Tampa facility, and a new phosphate ship loading operation replaced three outmoded ones in the Tampa Bay area.

Streamlining operations

As SCL trimmed its physical plant, the railroad also took prompt advantage of new route options. Most north-south freight traffic began favoring the former ACL from Richmond to Savannah and the ex-Seaboard in most of Florida. ACL also got the nod for most traffic going between Florida and the Midwest, using its Waycross–Manchester–Birmingham line rather than Seaboard's indirect trackage to Montgomery.

But even when track stayed in place, traffic shifts allowed some lines to be downgraded, saving on maintenance and signaling costs. As the 1970s progressed and individual carload business began to fade, more and more branches and lightly used routes began to disappear, especially where they had been thickest in the Carolinas and Florida. Nevertheless, during the '70s SCL did not undergo anything like the more radical line removals that dominated the early 1980s.

Passenger trains stayed largely on their pre-merger routes except for the winter-only *Florida Special*, which bypassed Jacksonville by moving over to ex-SAL rails south of Callahan. Two passenger-train route changes recommended by the consultants were never implemented; one was moving the *Silver Comet* from Atlanta's Terminal Station to Union Station via a belt line route, ending a long backup move. The other proposal would have rerouted the *South Wind* at Bainbridge, Ga. (on ACL's Montgomery–Waycross line), onto the Seaboard south to Tallahassee, Fla., then east to Jacksonville. The route would have been shorter but would have required several new high-speed connection tracks.

The trend toward unit trains and high-volume shippers, already under way before the merger with piggyback, auto-rack, and phosphate trains, accelerated in the late 1970s. Solid coal, grain, and chemical trains began to appear, and these long-distance, time-sensitive movements benefited from the more direct routings and single-line handling now available. Carload business was still significant, especially for forest products like pulpwood and wood chips, but even those commodities were now typically loaded at large corporate facilities rather than traditional small-town team tracks. SCL met shipper needs with a wide variety of new and rebuilt freight cars (including its specialized fleet of low-profile, high-density phosphate hoppers), all wearing ACL's old color schemes.

Merging motive power

The Coast Line and Seaboard may have been similar in size and geography, but their two motive power fleets had significant differences. ACL's roster was dominated by first-generation EMD units, although recently leavened by new, mostly C-C high-horsepower models from EMD, GE, and Alco. Seaboard's stable was majority-EMD but Alco and Baldwin were quite prominent — with a

In September 1974, Pinoca Yard near Charlotte, N.C., hosts a car of pulpwood and a set of five EMDs that includes a GP7 still in SAL paint.
Ralph W. Bostian

1936-vintage EMC/St. Louis Car Co. railcar for added spice. Long strings of F units were ubiquitous on the ACL, but SAL favored hood units for its road freights and had traded in its EMD and Alco freight cab units prior to the merger. Seaboard had some late-model high-horsepower units too, but most were B-Bs except for 20 SDP35s assigned to local and secondary passenger trains. The two fleets also had mostly different brake systems and multiple-unit connections, although their GP40s and E units quickly began appearing together.

While SCL adopted ACL's basic black scheme, rumor held that Seaboard's "Jolly Green Giant" color, the bright green used for its final groups of new power in 1966 and '67, was actually a proposed hue for the coming merged railroad. In any event, glossy black prevailed until the 1977 adoption of the L&N-inspired gray Family Lines colors, although the slogan "Pulling for You!" was added to engine cabs beginning in 1974. Meanwhile, it took until the mid-1970s for all former SAL units to be completely repainted.

Inherited units aside, SCL's main motive power focus was more new power for the growing traffic levels it was experiencing. The first new purchase was 15 GE U33Bs, similar to the U30Bs both railroads had bought just before the merger. They were soon joined by more U33Bs plus over 100 U36Bs as well as nearly 90 GP40s and GP40-2s. SCL did not buy any GE C-Cs at first but did take a group of EMD SD45s and SD45-2s. With its road freight needs covered, SCL also began renewing its lighter-duty road-switcher fleet, acquiring large numbers of EMD GP38-2s and GE U18Bs.

The 1970 delivery of one large block of U36Bs, SCL's favorite for fast intermodal duty, happened to include a unit numbered 1776. Knowing the nation would soon celebrate its 1776–1976 Bicentennial, SCL realized that a No. 1776 in special patriotic paint could both honor the event and garner a lot of publicity. This 1776 was already in service before the concept was finalized, so SCL had General Electric pull unit 1813 out of an early 1971 order and dress it in an unmistakable red, white, and blue scheme complete with a presidential seal, nighttime spotlights, a brass bell, and other adornments. The two units swapped numbers, and the second 1776 was dedicated in May 1971. It began a highly publicized tour around the SCL system, always leading when publicity events were involved but otherwise often tucked into consists to prevent damage from collisions or other mishaps.

The 1776 did most of its touring on home rails, but in 1972 it traveled to California to join similarly painted Santa Fe equipment. SCL kept

GP40 1550, at Richmond in January 1970, displays the "Jolly Green Giant" scheme that SAL adopted shortly before the merger.
Howard J. Wyat, Krambles-Peterson Archive

the mostly white unit spotless inside and out for years. It was the first Bicentennial unit, and spawned scores of imitators from former Southern Pacific 4-8-4 No. 4449 and the *American Freedom Train* to industrial switchers and cabooses.

Crew cabs and rebuilds

As SCL began coordinating its motive power with Louisville & Nashville under the late-1970s Family Lines alignment, the partner railroads began a new round of purchases in 1978. SCL's acquisitions were a mix of four- and six-axle power, including GE B23-7s and C30-7s plus 45 EMD MP15ACs — the only end-cab units SCL would buy new.

SCL turned heads with a group of ten B-Bs from GE in late 1978, the 2,250 h.p. BQ23-7 model. The units were standard

LAND OF BIG AND BABY U-BOATS

All 125 U36Bs were built for service on SCL (17 for Auto-Train), and SCL bought 105 of the 115 U18Bs built

On December 20, 1967, six months after the merger, all three E units on the southbound *Everglades* at Alexandria, Va. (on the RF&P), carry SCL lettering. The ex-ACL train was part of SCL's robust New York–Florida fleet.
C. G. Parsons, Tom Hoffmann collection

SCL was years ahead of the pack when in 1971 it had GE paint new U36B 1776 in a special scheme to honor America's Bicentennial. The celebrity is at Petersburg, Va., in February '76.
J. C. Hopkins, Tom Hoffmann collection

B23-7s but with a large "crew quarters" cab (hence the "Q") that could seat all five crew members then required on local runs. The BQs were a unique forebear of cabooseless trains, but crews disliked them and they were ultimately converted to cabless B units.

SCL's own diesel shops were not idle. Starting in 1971, the railroad rebuilt several locomotives into "slugs," or units with traction motors but no prime movers; SCL also bought a group from GE, which labeled them MATEs (Motors for Additional Tractive Effort). They were used for low-speed, high-tractive-effort assignments, and came in switcher and road versions. But the most notable home effort came in 1979 with the GP16 program, a ground-up rebuild of SCL's aging fleet of GP7s and 9s into essentially new locomotives.

Although SCL had acquired some 160 new B-B road-switchers earlier in the 1970s, that group replaced Seaboard's many Alco RS and RSC models, and more new power was still needed for local and yard jobs. The GP16s were designed to fill that gap, and were based on six similar locomotives rebuilt for the Clinchfield in 1978 by Illinois Central Gulf's Paducah shops. SCL's units, rebuilt at the former ACL shop in Tampa, were given a 1,600 h.p. 645 prime mover, remanufactured trucks and traction motors, modern control and braking systems, low noses, and Family Lines paint with the owning railroad's initials on the cab. The program turned out 155 units before ending in 1982, with all assigned to SCL minus a handful for Clinchfield and the Georgia group. The rebuilds worked another 15 years for SCL and its successors, and many still run on short lines.

Passengers remain a priority

SCL was blessed with a strong passenger market between the Northeast and Florida, one that held its own year-round despite new Interstate highways and jet airliners. Both ACL and SAL (with partners Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac and Pennsylvania) had served this route with well-equipped streamliners, and SCL continued nearly all of them. These trains reached Miami and Tampa/St. Petersburg directly, and connecting trains carried through cars to Sarasota, Venice, and Naples along Florida's west coast. Other trains connecting with the eastern runs served Portsmouth (Norfolk), Va.; Wilmington, N.C.; Augusta, Ga.; and Montgomery, Ala.

SCL also operated the New York–Atlanta/Birmingham *Silver Comet*, the Jacksonville–Tallahassee–New Orleans *Gulf Wind* (with L&N), and the alternating *City of Miami* and *South Wind* via different routes between Chicago and Florida. While the *City of Miami* held its own through the SCL years, the *South Wind* suffered when Penn Central converted its portion to a coach-only Chicago–Louisville train in 1969. South of Louisville, the *Wind*'s new version carried just one sleeper (Louisville–Miami) and only a café-lounge on the SCL segment for food service.

The staying power of SCL's east coast streamliners didn't extend to its conventional passenger trains; there were 10 such runs at the merger, supported mostly by mail and express revenues, but just three remained by the May 1, 1971, Amtrak takeover. Head-end business had largely vanished by the late 1960s, and the remaining conventional trains typically ran with perhaps a baggage car or two and a couple of coaches — and no amenities beyond snack service. Even one of the long-distance streamliners, the *Silver Comet*, succumbed in 1969.

Meanwhile, SCL kept a positive focus on its east coast flagship trains. Tom Rice made clear he would continue supporting passenger service as long as patronage warranted. The railroad kept upgrading the streamliners' services and equipment, including domes and Slumbercoach sleepers from Baltimore & Ohio and 11-double-bedroom sleepers from Chesapeake & Ohio. SCL also leased 11-double-bedroom cars from Union Pacific, mostly for use on the seasonal *Florida Special*. With the demise of the Pullman Company in 1969, SCL sold its sleeping cars to Hamburg Industries of North Augusta, S.C., then leased them back for operation.

SCL promoted these trains with substantial advertising, especially in the Northeast. SCL particularly emphasized the *Florida Special* with its candlelight dinners, fashion shows, and other recreation activities. One publicity highlight came during the spate of airplane hijackings to Cuba, which had occurred prior to the late 1960s but intensified beginning in 1968 to dozens of frequently successful attempts. SCL capitalized on air passengers' anxiety with this memorable line: "If you want to go to Miami without a stopover in Havana, call us."

Amtrak gets the streamliners

Amtrak assumed operation of SCL's remaining long-distance streamliners — the *Champion, Silver Meteor, Silver Star,* and winter-only *Florida Special* on the east coast, and a now-daily *South Wind* between Chicago and Florida. While SCL still believed in quality passenger service, the railroad decided it couldn't afford replacing a car fleet that was mostly 20 to 30 years old. In a final goodwill gesture, on May 1 SCL issued one more public timetable of its own, looking just like previous issues to help minimize passenger confusion.

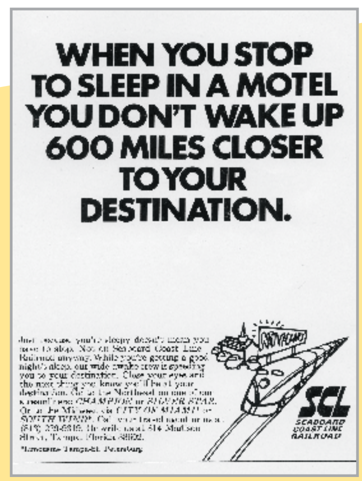
Amtrak surprised observers by eliminating the still-handsome and well-equipped *City of Miami* but keeping the *South Wind* — which served more populous cities — as a single daily Chicago–Miami train. The *Wind* (soon renamed the *Floridian*) thus regained its through Chicago–Florida standing and much of its former consist. But the *Floridian* was frequently plagued with bad track and bad winter weather on its north end, and was discontinued altogether during the 1979 Amtrak cutbacks.

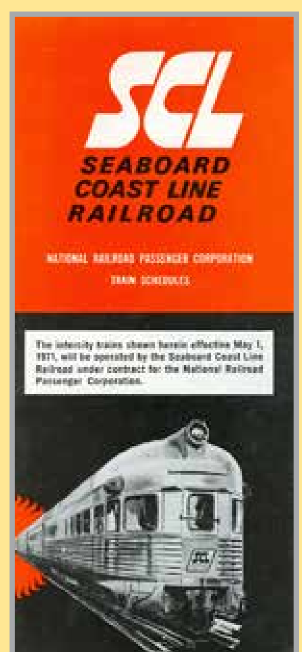
Amtrak's arrival did not mean the end of privately operated passenger service over the SCL. In December 1971, Auto-Train Corp. inaugurated service between Lorton, Va. (just south of Washington), and central Florida using passenger cars plus auto carriers for the riders' automobiles. The concept was popular but not well capitalized, and a series of derailments weakened *Auto-Train*'s capacity. An ill-conceived Louisville–Florida second route further hurt the company, and it ended operations in May 1981. Amtrak, of course, picked up the idea and continues to run full *Auto Trains* today.

Incidentally, passenger excursions and steam specials were not unknown on the SCL, even though they were only a shadow of Southern's vigorous steam program. The railroad fielded several runs of Clinchfield 4-6-0 No. 1, hosted part of the *American Freedom Train*'s tour, and helped run the *Chessie Safety Express* in 1981. Also through 1970, SCL operated the central Florida "Railroad Rambles" diesel-powered excursions that ACL had begun in the 1960s.

Becoming a real "Family"

Beyond the many external changes, SCL kept busy with internal overhauls that would have their own far-reaching effects. The Seaboard Coast Line Industries holding company formed in 1969 resulted from confidence that the merger was going well and that further corporate consolidation could yield even greater efficiencies. SCLI's immediate goal was to rationalize the relationship with L&N, which dated back to ACL's majority L&N stock purchase in 1902. ACL and L&N had a common board chairman and several joint yard operations, and ACL en-





A 1970 ad (top) reflects SCL's enduring commitment to its Florida passenger fleet. The road's final public timetable, dated May 1, 1971, listed the Amtrak trains on SCL lines.
Ad, ACL&SAL RRs Hist. Soc. coll.; timetable, CLASSIC TRAINS coll.

A C30-7 wearing Family Lines attire works with two EMDs in SCL black on a piggyback train just south of Petersburg, Va., in November 1979.
Curt Tillotson Jr.

SCL's GP16 program rebuilt 155 old GP7s and 9s into virtually new locomotives during 1979–82; GP16 4700 leads two other units at Atlanta in May 1981 (left). SCL was the only buyer of GE's "crew quarters" cab BQ23-7; "Q-boat" 5131 is at Lawrenceville, Ga., in June '82 (above).
Two photos, George Hamlin

joyed the steady dividends from L&N's coal revenues, but overall the companies were managed and operated separately. Nevertheless ACL had for decades referred to both the L&N and their jointly leased subsidiaries (Clinchfield and the Georgia group) as the "family lines."

In 1971 SCLI acquired nearly all of L&N's remaining stock, and in 1973 began formally using "The Family Lines System" marketing label for SCL along with the other five companies. A unified paint scheme for freight cars appeared in 1974, although a new image for locomotives and cabooses wasn't adopted until 1977. The equipment had a common logo and colors but with identifying initials for the owning company.

Formalizing the long-standing relationship with L&N resulted in transferring a number of L&N personnel from the Louisville headquarters to Jacksonville, combining more terminals, expanding run-through operations and locomotive pooling, and aligning other operations such as sales and marketing. The move was not technically a merger since the two corporate identities remained, but many of the changes looked like one in all but name.

While the L&N stock purchase was clearly SCL's most significant acquisition, along the way SCL also absorbed two Carolinas short lines that had long been important traffic feeders, Piedmont & Northern in 1969 and Durham & Southern in 1976. SCL also continued subsuming the operations and equipment of two more subsidiaries that remained technically separate, Gainesville Midland in Georgia and Columbia, Newberry & Laurens in South Carolina.

One other bit of merger news came in late 1977, when SCL and Southern Pacific announced they were holding "exploratory discussions" about affiliating their respective holding companies. SP began acquiring SCL stock, but in May 1978 SCL decided to end the talks. SP nevertheless kept buying more SCL stock until the ICC, at SCL's behest, put an end to the takeover attempt. Nothing further came of this brief prospect of a transcontinental system, but the two railroads did pool motive power for a while, and as early as mid-1977 an SCL U36B-MATE-U36B consist had tested over SP.

Cementing another merger

The Southern Pacific episode perhaps cemented SCL's determination to seek its own next merger partner rather than wait for another outside attempt. In September 1978, just weeks after ICC halted SP's moves, SCLI and the Chessie System — the holding company for B&O, C&O, and Western Maryland — announced they were discussing a possible affiliation. What followed mirrored in many ways the course of the ACL-Seaboard merger nearly two decades earlier — applications to the ICC, objections by other railroads (led again by Southern Railway), and protective conditions as the price of regulatory approval. Incidentally, the 1978 announcement came in concert with a number of top management changes, notably the appointment of Prime E. Osborn as chairman and CEO of SCLI, replacing W. Thomas Rice. Rice was named chairman emeritus, having led his company to the verge of what appeared to be another successful merger.

The SCLI-Chessie merger proposal proceeded quickly, with regulatory approval announced in September 1980. The combined holding company was labeled CSX, derived from "C" for Chessie, "S" for SCLI, and "X" for planned additional transportation investments such as barge lines. For the moment the merger action stopped there, and SCLI and Chessie continued to operate separately. The combination coincided with the 1980 passage of the Staggers Rail Act, which significantly deregulated railroad operations. Freed from most of the ICC's minute oversight and slow responses, railroads began to negotiate rates freely with customers, pull up unprofitable lines with less delay, and advance more quickly toward additional mergers.

Staggers opened the way for an interim next step in SCL's Family Lines structure — a full merger of the FL members. Clues that this was afoot included repainted freight cars appearing with no Family Lines lettering — just reporting marks and numbers. In late 1982, SCL announced formation of the Seaboard System Railroad (SBD), which put all the Family Lines components into a true single company. SBD repainted locomotives and cars and moved in other ways to unify the sometimes-random Family Lines appearance of the late '70s, but in 1986 CSX formed CSX Transportation, which combined the Seaboard System and Chessie and began another image transformation. With motive power consists now mixing Chessie schemes with the many unrepainted SBD units, it would be years before the CSXT change resulted in much external uniformity.

Diesels at Wildwood, Fla., in mid-1986 wear SCL, Family Lines, and Seaboard System liveries. SBD's stylized "Double-S" logo, seen on ex-L&N U23B 2766 (at left), lasted only four years.
George Hamlin

Line abandonments were on the move again too in the SBD and early CSXT years, and went well beyond the branch-line cuts to which SCL had largely confined itself. In short order former SAL main lines were eliminated or severed between Petersburg and Norlina (N.C.), Savannah and Montgomery, Savannah and Jacksonville, Atlanta and Birmingham, and Wildwood and Auburndale, Fla. Former ACL through routes fell between Florence and Robbins, S.C. (near Augusta, Ga.), and between Thomasville, Ga., and Dunnellon, Fla. The rumor mill often reported that CSX wished it had some of those lines back when later traffic increases or detour needs arose.

Epilogue

The great majority of the Seaboard Coast Line still exists today and forms the core of CSX's service in SCL's six southeastern states. Indeed, SCL upholds the southern portion of the "Iron Triangle" (Chicago–New York–Jacksonville) CSX has identified for its core high-speed, high-volume routes. Short lines operate substantial ex-SCL mileage, including several state-owned segments, and Florida owns two ex-SCL lines out of Orlando and Miami for commuter trains. Amtrak continues to operate multiple trains, including the always-sold-out *Auto Train*, on the New York–Florida route.

Despite the loss of charming rural branches, the absence of cabooses and local depots, and the jarring sight of freights that look about the same in Georgia as in Ohio and Michigan, Seaboard Coast Line's core routes and traffic patterns firmly anchor CSX's presence across the South.

Back in Woodland, I moved away years ago but return often to watch and photograph its frequent trains. The rail, signals, equipment, and freight consists are all very different from 50 years ago but still are a vibrant and successful example of big-time railroading. Traffic on the line — part of CSX's Midwest–Florida corridor — is always straining track capacity, and just this spring the railroad began adding a second track between Manchester and Woodland. Tom Rice and John Smith might agree that in my hometown at least, "The New Railroad" label still fits. ■

FAMILY PATRIARCH

The first locomotive to carry Family Lines lettering was Clinchfield's fantrip 4-6-0 No. 1.

LARRY GOOLSBY has long been active in the Atlantic Coast Line and Seaboard Air Line Railroads Historical Society. His three previous CLASSIC TRAINS *bylines have been about ACL, SAL, and Piedmont & Northern subjects.*