



TRACKING THE BALTIMORE & OHIO

CSX Philly Sub

BY MICHAEL T. BURKHART/PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

TUNNELS. COLOR POSITION LIGHT signals. Fast intermodal freights. While these words often go hand-in-hand to describe hallowed locations on the old Baltimore & Ohio like Sand Patch and the Magnolia Cutoff, they also describe the Philadelphia Subdivision.

CSX's largely single-track Philly Sub runs 89 miles between Philadelphia and Baltimore. This stretch of track in Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland parallels the urban Northeast Corridor and Interstate 95, but there are stretches where the railroad runs through the countryside. It's also home to a large concentration of classic Baltimore & Ohio CPL signals.

The unique color position light (CPL) signal was developed by the B&O in the 1920s. The railroad's superinten-



dent of signaling, Frank Patenal, developed the system to improve upon the position light signals earlier developed

by the Pennsylvania Railroad. First installed on the B&O subsidiary Staten Island Railroad, they were soon deployed system wide after their initial success. Since 2008, successor CSX has been slowly replacing all of the remaining CPL's on its system with more contemporary hooded vertical targets. There are still a number of CPL's located along the Philly Sub, and most are not slated for immediate replacement, but time is no doubt getting short.

Let's take a brief look at the eastern three-quarters of the line, from Philadelphia to Aberdeen, Md. The original Philly Sub route dates back to 1886, running roughly parallel to the Pennsylvania Railroad main line (now the Northeast Corridor shared by Amtrak and SEPTA) varying only a few

OPPOSITE: Westbound CSX train Q373 is only a few miles out of Greenwich Yard in South Philadelphia and is about to enter Boone Tunnel between Darby and Sharon Hill, Pa. This commanding view of the Philadelphia skyline is from the Pine Street overpass on March 3, 2012. **ABOVE:** Light engine move Y103 enters the 1921 Art Museum Tunnel in Philadelphia on Feb. 26, 2012. This view, accessed from the Schuylkill River Trail, was shrouded in shadows until brush was cut back from the portal in fall 2011.



ABOVE: Many views of bridge over the Susquehanna River can be found on both the Perryville and Havre de Grace shores. This view of an eastbound mixed freight is from the Havre de Grace side. The present crossing dates from 1910, and replaced an earlier bridge made of wrought iron. The crossing of the Susquehanna remains the longest continuous bridge on the former B&O system. RIGHT: Train Q373 emerges from the short Boone Tunnel that straddles the Darby-Sharon Hill borough line. Chester Pike (Route 13) passes over the bore.



miles apart at times. Construction of this new line afforded the B&O access to Philadelphia, and trackage rights were negotiated with the connecting Reading for access to Jersey City and the New York area market. The B&O's D.C.-New York (Jersey City) *Royal Blue* used this route until 1958, when all passenger service north of Baltimore ended.

The Philadelphia Subdivision starts just west of the 1921 Art Museum Tunnel (connecting with the Trenton Subdivision) that burrows under the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Recent tree trimming has opened up late morning and early afternoon views of the stone and concrete portal, accessed from the adjacent Schuylkill River Trail. Nearby is CP Vine (MP .2), which hosts a pair of

mast-mounted CPL's. Over the last decade, Philadelphia has made strides to become pedestrian friendly, and many good views exist through Center City. The railroad follows the Schuylkill River and adjacent trail, which is crowded with people on nice days.

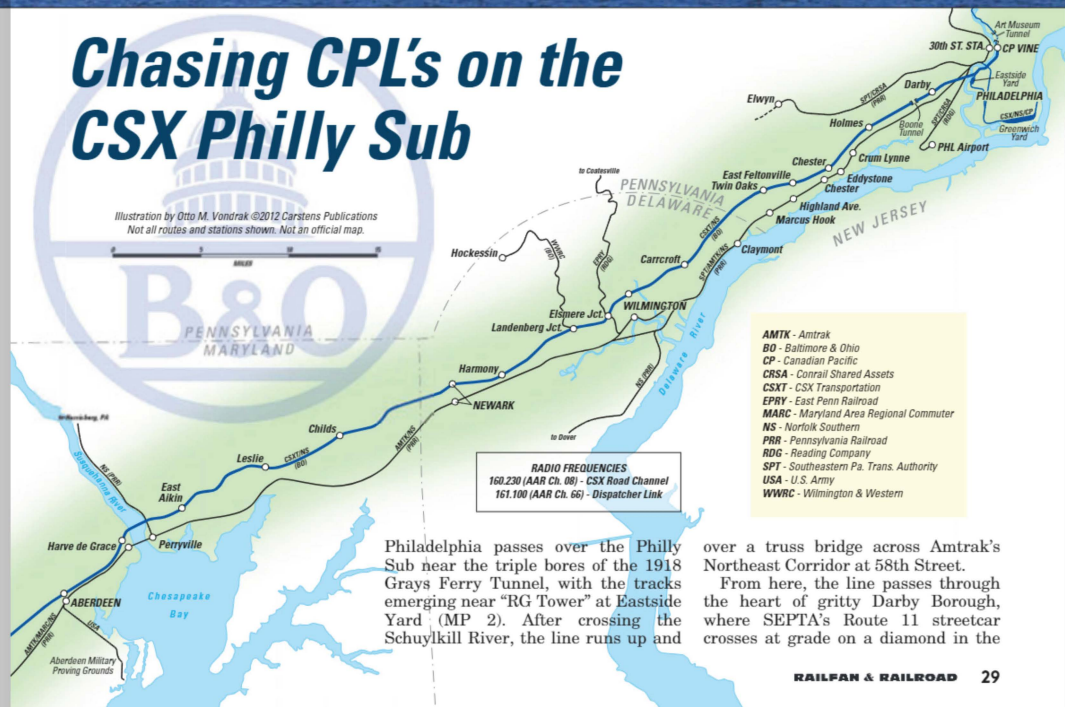
Several bridges cross the tracks with views of the skyline between Vine and CP

Gray (MP 1.5). A new pedestrian bridge to connect the trail with Spruce Street was underway in early 2012. The recently rebuilt South Street Bridge has wide sidewalks and low fences and offers a fantastic view of westbounds with the cityscape backdrop in late afternoons.

The connection to Greenwich Yard along the Delaware River in South

Chasing CPL's on the CSX Philly Sub

Illustration by Otto M. Vondrak ©2012 Carstens Publications
Not all routes and stations shown. Not an official map.



Philadelphia passes over the Philly Sub near the triple bores of the 1918 Grays Ferry Tunnel, with the tracks emerging near "RG Tower" at Eastside Yard (MP 2). After crossing the Schuylkill River, the line runs up and

over a truss bridge across Amtrak's Northeast Corridor at 58th Street.

From here, the line passes through the heart of gritty Darby Borough, where SEPTA's Route 11 streetcar crosses at grade on a diamond in the



ABOVE: Several overhead bridges span the Philly Sub and I-95 through Chester, Pa. The pedestrian overpass at Crosby Street affords this view of an eastbound passing a busy transload facility, one of the major spurs along the line. RIGHT: The SEPTA Route 11 streetcar crosses CSX on a diamond in the middle of Sixth Street in Darby. For many years it was the only streetcar diamond with a main line railroad in the U.S.

middle of 6th Street (at one time the only remaining crossing of a main line railroad and streetcar line in the country, although recent light rail construction in other cities has added more crossings). The short Boone Tunnel, which straddles the Darby and Sharon Hill town line, is visible just to the west. A side-by-side set of CPL signals stand guard a mile down the line in borough of Collingdale, accessed from Foster Avenue off Route 13.

The only significant gap in the chain of CPL signals is from Holmes (MP 8.7) to West Feltonville (MP 17.2). These signals were replaced a decade ago when the existing passing siding was extended to Chester. Several major customers are located along the siding, including a transload facility at Chester and a large automobile unloading yard at Twin Oaks, destination of CSX autorack train Q216, which runs daily. Views



are possible from a pair of pedestrian bridges that span I-95 off of Walnut Street (which connects Chester to Widener University) and also Crosby Street.

South of Chester the railroad enters the state of Delaware. Just north of Wilmington, the railroad crosses the Brandywine River on a seven-span stone arch viaduct, which was built in 1909-1910. It replaced an earlier 1888

iron truss bridge and can be viewed from a city park just off I-95. Photographic purists may be discouraged by walls on the side of the bridge that results in the trucks of trains being obscured when viewed from the park.

Wilmington, Del., hosts local freights, but its scope is much reduced with the closure of several vehicle manufactur-

ing plants in the area. The yard can be viewed from the aptly named "B&O Lane," where fans often gather on weekends. The east end of the yard at Elsmere Junction is home to dual CPL signals atop a mast. Freights Q370 (Cumberland, Md., to Philadelphia) and counterpart Q373 make daily setoffs and pickups here. Short lines connect with CSX on each side of the

yard. East Penn Railroad (operated as the Wilmington & Northern) enters the yard from the east end, at Elsmere Junction. The west end of the yard, known as Landenberg Junction, connects to the popular tourist hauler Wilmington & Western Railroad.

East Penn Railroad typically enters Wilsmere Yard on weekdays in late morning to early afternoon. The crew

will call the dispatcher or yardmaster for permission to work. East Penn's roster for the old Octoraro Branch consists of three former Susquehanna GP18s, still in Yellowjacket paint, as well as two former Belt Railway of Chicago GP38s, in snazzy yellow and blue paint, and a handful of GE units.

Wilmington & Western's lone customer is located right at the interchange point to CSX at Landenberg Junction. Tourist trains do not venture here, as the passenger trips begin up the line at Greenbank. The line's SW900 number 915 in new two-tone blue paint, or former Lehigh Valley SW1 number 114 will work the interchange as needed.

After passing through Newark, Del., home to the University of Delaware as well as a brick B&O station that still serves maintenance of way crews, the



LEFT: CSX westbound Train Q373 typically departs Greenwich Yard in South Philadelphia in early afternoon. The local crew usually pulls the train down to 58th Street, where a road crew takes over. The truss bridge carries the Philly Sub over Amtrak's Northeast Corridor. BELOW: On February 18, 2012, westbound empty autorack train Q217 passes the CPL mast at Elsmere Junction, Del. This train runs daily from Twin Oaks, near Chester, Pa., the site of a large vehicle distribution yard.



line enters Maryland and runs through some rural countryside. Dual CPL signals guard the passing siding at East Aiken. This spot on the map is also home to the Cecil County Holly Tree (still called the B&O Holly Tree by many). The tree was planted by a local farmer in 1870, several years before the railroad was built, and was owned, maintained and decorated for Christmas by railroad employees. By 1948, the lighting of the tree became an annual tradition, and passenger trains slowed down during the holiday season so riders could have a look. The B&O donated the tree to the county in 1972. It still stands today and remains the fo-



TOP: The west end of Elsmere Yard is Landenberg Junction, where the Wilmington & Western tourist line splits from the main. The traffic in this yard is much reduced since the closing of several area automobile manufacturing plants in the last decade. **RIGHT:** Several years ago, this surviving Chessie System pointed remote control unit was a fixture in Elsmere Yard. It was only used occasionally, and could usually be found parked dead near the yard office. It was one of the last CSX units to wear Chessie colors, and has since been converted into a road slug and repainted into modern CSX colors. **BELOW:** Eastbound Train Q370 splits the CPL signals at Collingdale, Pa. These signals are easily accessed off Route 13 and are located in a quiet residential neighborhood.



cus of holiday celebrations. Heading for Baltimore, the line crosses a massive bridge over the Susquehanna River and the ex-Pennsy Port Road Branch, where numerous views can be had from the Perryville and Havre de Grace shores. The 1910 bridge over the Susquehanna remains the longest continuous span on the former B&O system.

We'll end this tour at Aberdeen (MP 63.1), where the 1885 Frank Furness designed station awaits its fate. The Historical Society of Harford County is raising funds to move, preserve and restore the station, which was very close to being demolished in 2003 when it was condemned. It continues to deteriorate behind a chain link fence.

The Philly Sub hosts about ten trains in daylight hours during the longer days of summer. Traffic seems to be heaviest in the mornings, but there can be long waits between the action. The road channel is 160.230 (crews call signals) and the dispatcher link is 161.100. Power is often newer CSX ES44DC locomotives, but foreign power and leasers occasionally make a showing, especially on autorack trains Q216, Q217 and general freights Q370 and Q373. Ethanol, trash and grain trains are also regulars on the line, as well as daily Tropicana orange juice trains.

Tunnels? CPL's? Stations? This time we're not talking about wild West Virginia. It can all be found on the Philly Sub.

TOP: A westbound trash train passes under the line that heads to Greenwich Yard in South Philadelphia on March 17, 2012. **MIDDLE:** Trains Q216 and Q217 often have foreign power. A pair of BNSF locomotives in Santa Fe paint roll eastbound autorack Train Q216 past the old station in Aberdeen, Md. The Historic Society of Hanford County is currently raising funds to relocate and stabilize the old depot. **LEFT:** One of the last Conrail-painted SD40-2 locomotives on the CSX roster at the time, No. 8814, leads a short cut of trash cars past the signal at CP Vine in Philadelphia on April 11, 2010. The cyclists are waiting for the train to pass before crossing over to the Schuylkill River Trail.