



Exploring the lines between Cincinnati and Columbus on the

Indiana & Ohio

DAVID ROHDENBURG/PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

CONNECTING WITH TWO CLASS I RAILROADS and operating numerous local trains, the Indiana & Ohio Railway is a vital part of moving freight in the northern suburbs of Cincinnati, Ohio. With three different subdivisions and a variety of motive power, this busy railroad is a pleasant diversion from the countless mainline trains on nearby Norfolk Southern and CSX.

Founded in 1978 as an independent shortline to operate a former New York Central branchline between Valley Junction (Hooven), Ohio, and Brookville, Ind., the I&O has grown steadily ever since. Today, it operates more than 480 miles of track in Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan as part of Genesee & Wyoming's Midwest Region. G&W acquired the I&O in the 2012 purchase of RailAmerica, which had, in turn, acquired the railroad

from RailTex in 2000.

The focal point of I&O operations in Cincinnati is a former Conrail/Penn Central facility known as McCollugh Yard in the Cincinnati suburb of Norwood, which has connections to three different I&O lines — the Midland Subdivision mainline to Washington Court House and Columbus, Ohio; the Oasis Subdivision secondary line; and the Blue Ash Subdivision branchline.

The I&O's main locomotive shop and engine servicing facility are located at McCollugh Yard, and it is the primary Cincinnati yard for the I&O. A small satellite yard located at nearby Oakley on the Midland Sub (located about a mile from McCollugh) and a small piece of the former Pennsylvania Railroad Undercliff Yard on the Oasis Sub help support operations. G&W sister road Central Railroad

of Indiana (CIND) connects and pools power with the I&O in Cincinnati, but is considered a separate railroad.

The Midland Subdivision

The Midland Sub is the newest I&O line, having been acquired from CSX in a lease/purchase agreement in October 2004. At one time part of the Baltimore & Ohio's former Baltimore-Cincinnati-St. Louis mainline, CSX sold or abandoned the middle of the line between Greenfield, Ohio, and Parkersburg, W.Va., between 1987 and 1989. A branchline to Columbus via Washington Court House reconstituted the mainline. The line is named for the community of Midland, Ohio (known on the railroad as Midland City), which is where the mainline and the branchline to Columbus split. Today, the roles are reversed, with the line to



ABOVE: In fresh Genesee & Wyoming corporate paint, Indiana & Ohio GP38-2 2100 leads the interchange job approaching the junction with CSX at NA Tower in St. Bernard, Ohio, on October 20, 2017.

OPPOSITE: IORY SD40-2 4083, still wearing the RailTex/RailAmerica era red-and-gray paint scheme, leads an eastbound Melvin Rock Runner approaching the Kemper Road Crossing in Loveland, Ohio, on the Midland Sub on September 22, 2017.

line from CSX in 1988.

The Midland Sub runs generally east out of Cincinnati, beginning at the interlocking known as NA Tower (milepost 7.5) in the community of St. Bernard, the junction with the CSX Cincinnati Terminal Subdivision and Norfolk Southern's Dayton District. I&O has trackage rights over CSX from NA Tower to Queensgate Yard downtown, and also uses those rights to connect with G&W sister road CIND. The line is double-track with CTC control from NA Tower to East Norwood Interlocking at MP 10.9, and a CTC-controlled cross-over between the two points at Bond Hill (MP 8.6). The East Norwood Interlocking includes a connection to McCollugh Yard and a connection to the Oakley wye that connects the Midland with the I&O's Oasis Subdivision. The signals at

East Norwood and Bond Hill are still classic B&O color position lights, and they appear to be safe for the time being. From East Norwood to the CSX connection in Columbus at Russ (MP 114.3), the line is under Track Warrant Control (TWC). The line passes the small yard at Oakley (MP 11.8) and travels east through the communities of Madisonville (MP 13.5), Madeira (MP 17), Loveland (MP 24.5), and Blanchester (MP 39.5) before the line turns to the northeast at the junction with the Greenfield Sub in Midland City at MP 45.

Traffic on the Midland Sub generally amounts to two to four trains per day, with the main traffic being the Sunday-Friday Turn Job road freight to and from Washington Court House. Generally referred to over the radio as "The Turn," it typically departs the yard at Oakley in

the early morning hours headed east and returns to Oakley Yard overnight. The Turn usually carries all kinds of traffic, including cars destined for the north end of the system that will be "relayed" along by the I&O's different Turn Jobs as they meet and swap trains. When needed, an extra job will run the Turn traffic on a Saturday. A twice-weekly unit stone train, typically 60 cars long, also operates over the Midland Sub from East Norwood to the Melvin Stone Quarry at Melvin, Ohio (MP 61). The stone trains generally operate on Tuesday and Saturday, and unload at a facility in the former Undercliff Yard on the connecting Oasis Sub. The train will depart Undercliff in the morning with empties and will come around the Oakley Wye track to East Norwood. Since there is no eastbound connection at East Norwood, the crew typically runs around the train on the double-track between East Norwood and Bond Hill, and will then head east. The train will return in the late afternoon



RIGHT: The Washington Court House Turn passes the former Baltimore & Ohio freight house in Blanchester on the Midland Sub on June 19, 2017.

BELOW: CIND RP20BD 2001 drills a cut of cars in I&O's McCollough Yard on the bridge over the Oasis Subdivision in Norwood on January 3, 2018. The signal is part of the CP Ridge interlocking.



with loads and repeat the operation in reverse; occasionally, they will shove all the way to Undercliff. A local freight is based out of a former CSX maintenance-of-way office in Blanchester and typically parks the power (generally an I&O four-axle unit) on a spur behind the McDonald's restaurant in town. The Blanchester Local typically works Monday-Friday, serving industries on the mainline between Blanchester and Washington Court House on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and heading out to work the businesses on the Greenfield Sub on Tuesday and Thursday.

Some of the scenic highlights of the Midland Sub between Cincinnati and Midland City include the restored former B&O passenger stations at Madeira (now a restaurant) and Loveland (now a shoe store); the trestle over Sycamore Creek and Spooky Hollow Road in Remington (MP 19); the B&O freight station in Blanchester; and the combined passenger depot/tower at the junction in Midland City. The Midland City depot is in rough shape, having been the victim of attempted arson a few years ago, but is still standing as of this writing. The old B&O passenger



- AMTK - Amtrak
- BO - Baltimore & Ohio
- C&M - Camp Chase Railway
- CO - Chesapeake & Ohio
- CSXT - CSX Transportation
- DTI - Detroit, Toledo & Ironton
- ERIE - Erie Railroad
- IOVY - Indiana & Ohio
- NS - Norfolk Southern
- NW - Norfolk & Western
- NYC - New York Central
- PRR - Pennsylvania Railroad



Indiana & Ohio around Cincinnati and Columbus

Illustration by Otto M. Vondrak. Not all lines and stations shown. Not an official map. ©2018 White River Productions



ABOVE: CIND RP20BD 2001 leads the Blue Ash Local southbound past the replica CL&N Depot Museum in Silverton, Ohio, on November 28, 2017.

station also stands in St. Bernard near NA Tower, adjacent to Interstate 75, but is also in very rough shape.

The 1.5 percent grade of Madeira Hill, which begins just east of Oakley and crests just east of the Madeira depot, is steep enough to require pusher units on the heaviest trains. If you are following Midland Sub traffic on your scanner, the road channel is 181.220 and traffic around the yard may be heard on 181.385. The I&O's dispatcher at the Genesee & Wyoming dispatch center in St. Albans, Vt., issues track warrants that govern the line.

The Oasis Subdivision

The Oasis Subdivision is a 16.5-mile "belt" of former Pennsylvania Railroad trackage running from a connection with the NS Dayton District (former Conrail Cincinnati Line) and the NS New Castle District (former PRR Richmond Branch) at CP 248/Sharon Yard in Evendale (MP 16.5, formerly CP Mill) on the northeastern side of Cincinnati to the downtown Riverfront. The line was purchased jointly by the I&O and the Southern Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA) from Conrail in 1995 through a subsidiary called the Cincinnati Terminal

Railway (CTER). SORTA wanted a stake in the line for a potential commuter rail service that has yet to develop. While the CTER has since been absorbed into the I&O, SORTA maintains partial ownership should the commuter service ever come to pass. Norfolk Southern also maintains trackage rights over the line from Evendale to the railroad location known as Valley in Fairfax to access a large NS transload facility on the former N&W Cincinnati District at Clare Yard, as well as the Cincinnati East Terminal Railway interchange there.

Along the way from Evendale to Cincinnati the line passes through the communities of Reading (MP 15), Amberley Village (MP 13.7), Golf Manor (MP 12), Fairfax (MP 9), the junction with the NS Cincinnati District at Valley (MP 7.6), and Undercliff Yard (MP 5.4) on the way to downtown Cincinnati, where the line dead-ends at the Montgomery Inn Boathouse Restaurant (MP 0.0). At CP Ridge in Norwood (MP 10.6) is the connection to McCollough Yard and the east leg of the Oakley Wye track. CP Oakley (MP 10.1), and an entirely different Oakley than the one on the Midland Sub) is at the west leg of the wye. Until 2015, the segment from Evendale to Valley in Fairfax was controlled by CTC with classic PRR color position light signals. The I&O had petitioned to remove all CTC operations on the Oasis and Midland Subs, but this request was denied entirely for the Midland and partially for the Oasis Sub. I&O was allowed to remove the signals at Mill (Evendale), Amber (Amberley Village), and Valley (Fairfax). Ridge and Oakley were to be retained as CTC signals, so the PRR CPLs remain in operation at those locations, now with yellow searchlight approach signals installed one mile out each location. From MP 16.5 to CP Ridge is TWC; CP Ridge to CP Oakley is CTC; and CP Oakley to MP 8 in Fairfax is TWC. The remainder of the line, including the hand-throw switch to the NS at Valley, to MP 0 is under yard limits.

Traffic on the Oasis Sub primarily consists of various I&O local and transfer jobs serving local industry and taking cars to the NS interchange at Sharon Yard, as well as the I&O Mason Local from the McCollough Yard connection at Ridge to NS' Sharon Yard in Evendale. From there, the Mason Local exercises trackage rights over the Dayton District to Reed Yard in Middletown, Ohio, where it will access the I&O's Mason Subdivision branchline. NS runs a local turn called T96 from Sharon Yard to Valley in Fairfax, where it breaks off onto the remnants of the NS Cincinnati District Sunday-Thursday. The Melvin Stone trains unload at their facility in Undercliff Yard, and Cincinnati Barge & Rail Terminal on the riverfront near



OPPOSITE TOP: IORY GP40-2 3043 (originally B&O GP40 3700), leads the Blanchester Local eastbound past the depot at Midland City on June 19, 2017. The trackage behind the depot is the I&O's Greenfield Subdivision branch, which is generally worked by the Blanchester Local on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

OPPOSITE BELOW: With IORY GP50 5011 in the lead, the CSX Interchange Job crosses Highland Avenue while picking up a cut of cars from McCollough Yard in Norwood on January 30, 2018.

LEFT: After picking up cars from West Rock and coupling back onto IORY 5013, CIND 2001 gets ready to lead the Blue Ash Local back from Blue Ash south toward McCollough Yard on September 29, 2017.

BELOW: SD40-2 4030 from sister G&W regional Ohio Central, which has been assigned to the Indiana & Ohio for the last several years, leads an Oakley Yard Job through the interlocking at East Norwood on the Midland Sub (still guarded by classic B&O color-position-light signals) on January 3, 2018.

the end of the line transloads gondolas loaded with pig iron from Delta Northstar Steel in Delta, Ohio, on the I&O's former Detroit, Toledo & Ironton mainline. Another bit of traffic on the Oasis Sub is the Cincinnati Dinner Train, which runs on Saturday evenings from March through December. The train uses the Oasis Sub from its boarding location near MP 12 in Golf Manor to the Boathouse and return. The CDT is operated by the Cincinnati Railway, which has perpetual trackage rights over the I&O from when its ownership group sold the I&O freight operations to RailTex in 1996.

Some of the interesting locations on the Oasis Sub include the McCollough Yard/Blue Ash Subdivision underpass at Lester Road in Norwood; the high bridge that carries the abandoned Norfolk & Western Hyde Park Branch over the junction and Red Bank Road at Valley in Fairfax; the still-standing interlocking tower at Rendcomb (MP 7); and the large curve at Airport Road just west of Undercliff. Radio traffic for the Oasis Sub can be heard on 161.385.

The Blue Ash Subdivision

The Blue Ash Subdivision is a ten-mile industrial branchline originally built by the Cincinnati, Lebanon & Northern narrow gauge in the late 1800s. The PRR later bought the CL&N in the early 1900s, and the line passed on to Penn Central and Conrail until it was purchased by the I&O in 1986. McCollough Yard, which originally supported a now-closed General Motors factory in Norwood, is now the I&O's main hub, and is located on the former CL&N at MP 50. Connections reach out from McCollough to the Midland Sub at East



Norwood and the Oasis Sub at CP Ridge. The Blue Ash Sub technically begins at MP 49.6, Lester Road, with MP 50 being within the yard limits.

The Blue Ash Sub runs generally north, with the mileposts, which still date from PRR days, counting down to the end-of-track at MP 39.8 in the small community of Brecon. At one time, the tracks continued on and connected to what's now the I&O Mason Sub in nearby Mason; Penn Central abandoned the segment between Brecon and Mason in 1974. I&O attempted to reconstruct this link between the two lines when it took control of both from Conrail in the late 1980s, but the local populace along the abandoned portion protested, and the bid for reconstruction was halted by the Interstate Commerce Commission, most likely forever separating the two segments of the CL&N. The line climbs a significant grade from Lester Road to Silverton (MP 47), then the line flattens

out to tabletop running as it passes through Deer Park (MP 46), the line's namesake town of Blue Ash (MP 43), and Brecon (MP 41) before ending just short of Fields Ertel Road at MP 39.8 in Brecon.

The Blue Ash Sub is served by the Sunday-Friday Blue Ash Local out of McCollough Yard. Power for the Blue Ash Local is always of the four-axle variety due to some sharp curves on the hill between Lester Road and Silverton that would be tough on the I&O's older six-axle power. Some of the local industries served include Meier's Winery in Silverton, which receives tank car loads of alcohol; West Rock in Blue Ash, a corrugated box manufacturer; H.B. Fuller, also in Blue Ash, which receives tank cars to make adhesives and sealants; and Combined Containerboard in Brecon, another box manufacturer.

Some of the more scenic highlights for the Blue Ash Sub are the replica CL&N



depot/museum in Silverton and trackage through suburban parks and neighborhoods in Silverton, Deer Park, and Blue Ash. Radio traffic for the Blue Ash Sub can be heard on 161.385 for all operations.

New Life for Old Lines

The I&O has done a fantastic job over the last 39 years bringing traffic back to lines that could have been facing abandonment. With the financial backing of a railroad giant like Genesee & Wyoming and an aggressive marketing

department one can only hope that good things continue to come to the I&O in the Queen City, and all over its system as well.

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