



R.J. CORMAN'S Cleveland Line

BY JOHN LEOPARD/PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

THE R.J. CORMAN RAILROAD GROUP consists of 11 shortline railroads operating in seven eastern states and totaling over 700 route miles. Carrying the name of founder Richard Jay Corman, the company began in 1973 when he started a small business handling railroad track construction and rehabilitation. During the next 40 years, the company grew into other facets of the wide-ranging railroad industry including derailment cleanup services, material sales and distribution, emergency storm response, bulk distribution centers, worker safety training, signal design and maintenance, and even genset locomotive building.

One of Corman's first rail operations started in December 1988 with the acquisition of 50 miles of former CSX track in eastern Ohio, which Corman named the Cleveland Line (RJCL). Corman entered the shortline rail operating business just a year prior by taking over another CSX line in his home state of Kentucky. While Mr. Corman passed away in 2013,

the company that bears his name continues to grow and prosper.

The Cleveland Line

The R.J. Corman Cleveland Line runs between Warwick and Uhrichsville, Ohio, passing through the towns of Massillon, Dover, and New Philadelphia. This track was part of a longer line built in the 1870s by predecessors of the Cleveland, Lorain & Wheeling Railroad. CSX predecessor Baltimore & Ohio gained partial interest in the CL&W in 1901, then gained full control in 1909. B&O used the line as a link to ship coal mined in West Virginia and southeastern Ohio to the steel-making city of Cleveland, and port facilities located on Lake Erie at Lorain. A pair of through freights operating between Cleveland and Wheeling were also marketed until service was downgraded by 1970. As coal mining in southeastern Ohio subsided, so did the coal trains, and the line was eventually abandoned between Uhrichsville and the Ohio River.



R.J. Corman GP20E 4119 starts across the tilt-board-protected diamond at North Beach City with a train of 47 cars of limestone out of the Wheeling & Lake Erie's Brewster Yard. Corman uses a short stretch of Ohio Central to reach Brewster and is actually crossing the Corman mainline that parallels the OC through here.



ABOVE: The morning of July 11, 2014, finds the Corman crew heading north under U.S. Highway 30 at Massillon. The train is destined for CSX at Warwick. The abandoned right-of-way of the Pennsy's M&C (Massillon & Cleveland) Branch is seen to the left.

RIGHT: The Ohio Central crew is pulling out of the east end of the CSX yard at Warwick, passing a B&O-era CPL signal in the process. The OC once used trackage rights over RJCL to reach the CSX at Warwick. However, in mid-2013 this movement ceased with the OC/CSX interchange moved to Columbus. Unfortunately, these signals were recently replaced with newer equipment.



Dover, Brewster, and Harmon
Corman's operations are based out of a small yard at Dover, on the near west side of town, parallel to Interstate 77. A small, two-stall engine house and office are located at the south end of the yard on West Third Street. Most of the line's customers are centered around Dover, including two chemical plants and a frac sand transloading facility. A short branch starts at the yard and runs east into town providing access to two customers, a plastics manufacturer and a plastic wall panel plant. Trains operate as far south as Midvale, where

a large National Limestone transloading yard is located. Unit trains of limestone interchanged from the Wheeling & Lake Erie at Brewster are unloaded here. To reach the outside world, trains operate north out of Dover accessing interchanges at Brewster with the W&LE, Massillon with Norfolk Southern, and the beginning of the line at Warwick where CSX's former B&O mainline is located. Access to the W&LE yard at Brewster is afforded by trackage rights over a parallel line of the Ohio Central between North Beach City and the Harmon connection switch just east

of Brewster Yard. Track warrants are secured from the Ohio Central dispatcher (transmitting on 160.215Mhz/AAR Channel 7) in Coshocton for these movements. A diamond crossing between RJCL and Ohio Central known as Justus is protected by a distinctive tilt-board signal that is manually operated by the train crews. Continuing north from Justus, the line crosses the Wheeling & Lake Erie mainline east out of Brewster Yard. Known as Harmon, this crossing is an automatic interlocking protected by B&O-era color position light signals on the Corman

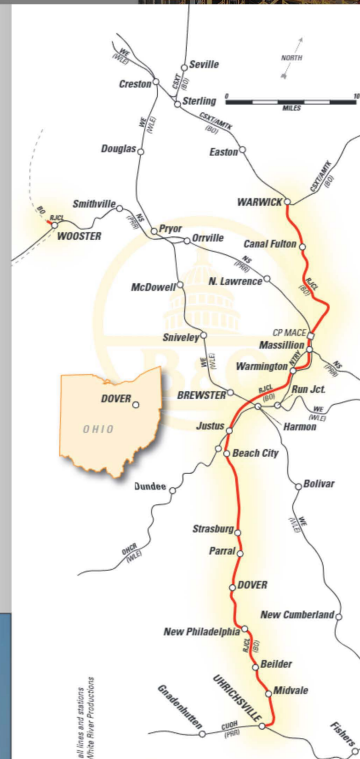


Illustration by Chris M. Lovelace. Note all lines and stations above. Note in official maps. ©2017 White River Productions

- AMTK - Amtrak
- BO - Baltimore & Ohio
- CSXT - CSX Transportation
- CUOH - Columbus & Ohio River
- NS - Norfolk Southern
- NTRY - Nimishillen & Tuscarawas Railway
- PRR - Pennsylvania Railroad
- RJCL - RJ Corman Cleveland Line
- WE - Wheeling & Lake Erie (1990-present)
- WLE - Wheeling & Lake Erie (1916-1988)

side, while traditional searchlight signals guard W&LE movements. Once out of Harmon, the line traverses rolling farm country for the next eight miles before reaching the next town of importance, Massillon. This large city of just over 30,000 is also served by the Norfolk Southern via its east-west Fort Wayne Line.

The RJCL line crosses NS at a location called Control Point Mace. The NS Pittsburgh West dispatcher controls movements through here with a Traffic Control System, a form of CTC signaling. Originally a diamond crossing, a pair of switches are now used to get Corman trains across. Former Pennsylvania Railroad position light signals govern movements on the Fort Wayne Line, while B&O CPL signals command RJCL trains. Corman trains call the NS Pittsburgh West dispatcher on the radio (161.070/AAR Channel 64) to get across. Interchange of cars takes place in a small yard north of the NS main.

Massillon

Massillon was once home to a large steel mill on the southwest side of town operated by Republic Steel. The mill

closed in 2002 and nary a trace of it remained. Then in late summer 2014, two Massillon brothers, Steven and Dave DiPietro, created a shortline railroad on the old steel mill property to provide service to a planned industrial park and transload operation. The company sits on more than 460 acres.

Much of the former Republic property is used to store 600 miles of pipe used for natural gas developments in Ohio, Michigan, and Canada. Delivery of the pipe began in February 2015 via unit trains coming off CSX at Warwick; run-through CSX power is utilized on these trains. The company has spent nearly \$4 million to update 3.5 miles of existing rail line and build three new one-mile stretches of storage tracks. The Republic Short Line connects with both RJCL and Norfolk Southern. Currently, Tiger Sand & Gravel operates a yard on the property, and the railroad is actively enticing other businesses to locate here. Plastics and petroleum companies have expressed interest in shipping commodities to be stored at the site. Presently, an EMD GP15-1 is being leased from Larry's Truck & Electric, No. 1435, originally built for Conrail.



TOP: With the crew done for the day, the power is parked at the office/shop complex on West Third Street at Dover.

ABOVE: The conductor has set the tilt-board to stop, and genset 5400 leads a loaded limestone train across the diamond at North Beach City.

LEFT: On a frigid January 13, 2016, a Wooster-bound crew is westbound passing under the Wheeling & Lake Erie's Brewster-to-Spencer mainline at Orrville.





ABOVE: The unusual one-piece windshield of RJC 4119, a former Southern Pacific GP20E, is plainly seen in this view of a train leaving the east end of the W&LE Brewster yard. The signal protects the diamond crossing of the W&LE and RJCL.

RIGHT: Southbound freight destined for customers at Dover rumbles through Beach City on a fine October 17 afternoon in 2011.



Warwick

Leaving Massillon behind, the line closely follows the west bank of the Tuscarawas River, passing through the small town of Canal Fulton en route to Warwick and a junction with the busy CSX New Castle Subdivision. This former B&O mainline between Baltimore and Chicago currently hosts up to 25 trains per day. Warwick is a railroad name and is on few road maps; the surrounding town is known as Clinton. The CSX IO dispatcher (160.320/AAR Channel 14) in Indianapolis handles trains through Warwick with CTC.

A two-story brick tower structure stands near the junction of the Corman line with the CSX. Known as WX Tower,

the building, constructed in 1948, ceased controlling train movements when dispatcher-controlled CTC was put in service in the early 1990s. It is still used as a base for the local signal and track maintenance crews.

Wooster Line

The Cleveland Line's operations expanded in July 2002 when Corman

acquired a short three-mile segment of CSX track at Wooster, Ohio. Known as the Wooster Industrial Track, this was once part of a CSX stub-end branch-line between the New Castle Sub mainline connection at Lodi and Wooster. Flooding damaged the line in 1974, so the Chessie System negotiated trackage rights over Penn Central's (now NS) Fort Wayne Line between Massillon and

Wooster. At that time, a weekly local out of Akron came down from Warwick to Massillon on RJCL, then west on NS 29 miles to Big Run interlocking on the west side of Wooster.

Today, RJCL crews handle the traffic of the Wooster Line that consists of corn, corn oil, cottonseed, and soybean oils for its largest customer, Frito Lay, Inc. In addition, the line's other five customers ship or receive plastic, iron, steel pipe,

scrap, and phosphates.

Motive Power

Recent years found traffic being handled by a roster of three units — GP16 1804 (ex-Seaboard Air Line GP7 1727), GP20E 4119 (ex-Southern Pacific 7204), and RailPower genset RP20BD 5400. Early in 2015 Corman transferred SD40T-2 8336 from Corman's Pennsylvania Lines (RJCP) to the Cleveland



Line to handle an increase in limestone traffic. Acquired from Union Pacific in 2003, the 8336 was most recently used on Corman's West Virginia Line (RJCV). The 8336 was originally built for the Southern Pacific and sported a longer short hood nose that contained Locotrol radio equipment used for remote control mid-train helper service, much like today's distributed power unit feature. These "snoot" noses, as they became known, were 116-inch short hoods as opposed to 88 inches on a standard SD40. With the arrival of the tunnel motor, genset 5400 was sent to another Corman property.

Roads do not follow most of the lines and even train speeds no greater than 25 m.p.h. can make for a spirited chase. But with some advance scouting nice angles

LEFT: The former B&O line is in close proximity to the Tuscarawas River for much of the way. Genset 5400 and GP16 1804 cross the waterway, locally known as the Tusky River, at Dover with a loaded limestone train.

BELOW: As viewed from the Ohio State Highway 21 bridge, an Ohio Central crew is finishing an air test and is about to leave the CSX yard at Warwick. Both units started as Western Pacific U23Bs and were rebuilt by GE into Super-7s and sold to the Monongahela Railroad.





TOP: Summer mornings are best to shoot northbound trains. On a July 11, 2014, a northbound freight behind GP20E 4119 and genset 5400 pass through Strasburg.

ABOVE: Utilizing RJCL trackage rights, a southbound Ohio Central train from Warwick is crossing track owned by its employer at North Beach City. Ohio Central no longer runs over RJCL to Warwick, since in mid-2013 it stopped interchanging cars with the CSX at Warwick.

OPPOSITE: After exchanging cars with the Wheeling at Brewster, R.J. Corman heads down Ohio Central track that passes through some backyards at Justus. Two former Southern Pacific units are in charge on this May 6, 2015, morning.

can be found. The first notable location north from Dover is a large brick warehouse building at Strasburg that provides a nice backdrop for morning shots. Using Justus Avenue between Beach City and Justus allows access to the tilt-board-protected diamond crossing with the Ohio Central. Just south of this diamond is a crossover track that allows RJCL to use the OC track, allowing access to the W&LE Brewster Yard. Several angles of the Justus diamond can be photographed from Lawndell Avenue. Unfortunately, most Ohio Central train movements here take place at night.

Massillon offers multiple overhead shots west of the downtown area from overpasses — Finerock Road, Tremont Avenue, Lincoln Way, and Cherry Road



all are along Route 21 west of the downtown area. The aforementioned CP Mace crossing of the NS Fort Wayne Line is a must with its B&O and Pennsy-era signals. The interlocking at CP Mace allows Corman trains access to trackage rights to the west that enables access to the isolated track at Wooster. Most Wednesdays find the RJCL crew working the line to Wooster. Continuing north from Massillon, interesting angles at Canal Fulton can be had with trains to and from Warwick.

Just south of Warwick, a deck bridge over Tuscarawas River is a nice shot of southward trains. Once in Warwick, Corman trains operate on CSX track to reach the small interchange yard west of town. The Route 21 overpass provides

a nice vantage point to view the action, and while it has wide breakdown lanes, be aware this is a very busy road.

Cleveland Line operations (160.455/AAR 23) are conducted almost all weekday mornings out of Dover with normally one crew on duty by 7:00 a.m. Destinations vary with most days finding the crew going to the Wheeling at Brewster and NS at Massillon, and not as often to Warwick. Weekend operations are rare but not unheard of. The twin cities of Dover/New Philadelphia on I-77 offer most major motel chains, along with a wide selection of restaurants and gas stations. And if your visit to the Corman's Cleveland Line turns sour, northeast Ohio offers many photographic opportunities. Busy CSX and

NS mainlines are not far away, and nearby targets such as regional Wheeling & Lake Erie, along with shortlines Ohio Central and Ohi-Rail, are worthy subjects to explore.

The R.J. Corman Cleveland Line is the perfect example of a successful shortline operation, with its combination of classic signals, rural and city scenes, and colorful diesel power. ■

JOHN LEOPARD is a train dispatcher from Illinois who currently resides in Virginia. With just over 30 years on the job he can't wait until retirement!