



OPPOSITE: It's a busy afternoon at West Trenton, N.J., with a Friends of Philadelphia Trolleys-sponsored "Farewell to the Silverliner II" trip on October 24, 2010. While earlier SEPTA Silverliners have been retired over the decades, the 50-year-old Silverliner IV electric multiple-units in the background soldier on.

LEFT: Wrapping up the second day in its Conrail scheme, SEPTA Silverliner IV 304 makes a stop at the former Reading station at Jenkintown, Pa., on an evening run between West Trenton and Malvern, Pa., on May 22, 2024.



MIDDLE LEFT: On home rails and running 15 minutes late, SEPTA Silverliner IV 280 honoring Reading Company leads an express train to Doylestown, Pa., at Fort Washington on May 20, 2024. Situated near the Pennsylvania Turnpike and Route 309, this station is popular with Montgomery County commuters.

BOTTOM LEFT: SEPTA 401 arrives in Bryn Mawr in June 2024. The Penn Central tribute logo is appropriate to Bryn Mawr where PC ran between 1968 and 1976. AL TILOTTSON PHOTO

SEPTA Silverliner Heritage

MICHAEL T. BURKHART/PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR EXCEPT AS NOTED

SEPTA branding again changed, and the cars were given blue and red wraparound bands that covered the stainless-steel ends as well as along the windows.

Heritage Rides the Rails

Throughout the years, SEPTA has celebrated its legacy with a few streetcars wrapped for various anniversaries, and recently restarted Route 15 with rebuilt PCC cars repainted in historic green and cream. During the winter, Kawasaki trolley number 9000 was restored at the Woodland shop into its as-delivered 1980 image. But on the railroad side, this heritage program is a first.

"Our Silverliner IV fleet — despite its age — has proven incredibly reliable and has formed the backbone of our Regional Rail system for over 50 years," SEPTA said when the program was announced. Information sheets are on display inside the cars to let riders know about the history.

Over the course of two months this spring, SEPTA's Frazer shops released five heritage Silverliners — two Reading and one each Penn Central, Conrail, and Pennsylvania. But the employees didn't just slap on the logos and call it done. The window banding was removed and the stainless steel polished to a mirror shine.



IN THE PHILADELPHIA REGION, the "Silverliner" electric multiple-unit (EMU) rail car is synonymous with Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority. These cars were featured on printed timetable covers and schedule adjustments and still grace road signs pointing drivers to Regional Rail stations.

Like Santa Fe and its warbonnet scheme or Chessie System and its sleeping kitten, SEPTA's public image is connected to the shiny stainless-steel Silverliner. Now 50 years old but still going strong, the Silverliner IV is being celebrated with the authority's own heritage program that backdated a handful of cars to honor predecessors Reading Company, Pennsylvania Railroad, Penn Central, and Conrail.

Created by the Pennsylvania

legislature in 1963, SEPTA commenced operation on February 18, 1964. In 1965, it absorbed the Passenger Service Improvement Corporation (PSIC) formed in 1960 to work with PRR and Reading to improve commuter rail service, and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Compact (SEPACT) created by the city of Philadelphia in 1961 to coordinate regional transit with neighboring Montgomery, Bucks, and Chester counties. Today, SEPTA operates commuter rail, rapid transit, light rail, and bus service throughout the region.

The term "Silverliner" traces its roots to a group of 55 cars built by the Budd Company in 1963 for Philadelphia-area commuter service. Additional equipment came from St. Louis Car Co. in 1967. The last of those cars — dubbed Silverliner II and III — were retired by late

June 2012, replaced by 120 Silverliner Vs built by Hyundai-Rotem. The EMU fleet is supplemented by coach push-pull sets hauled by ACS-64 units that are in service only during weekday rush hours.

Delivered by General Electric between 1973 and 1976, the 232 Silverliner IVs, configured in single and married pairs, allowed SEPTA to eventually replace aging legacy equipment including the last of the Reading "Blueliners" and PRR MP54 units.

Initial batches of Silverliner IV cars came with the SEPTA red and white circular "meatball" logo on the left, along with either Reading or Penn Central decals on the right-hand sides. By the early 1980s the old heralds were removed, and a few years later the cars sported a more modern red, white, and blue SEPTA logo. In an image refresh in the early 2000s,



ABOVE: SEPTA Silverliner IV 280 leads a Warminster-Philadelphia 30th Street Station train at the former Reading depot at Ardsley, Pa., on April 29, 2024. The train will continue to Thorndale, Pa.



ABOVE RIGHT: SEPTA's Conrail heritage Silverliner IV 304 makes an afternoon turn to Lansdale, Pa., on Train 6520 on June 12, 2024. AL TILLOTSON PHOTO



only train number, route, and schedule but also equipment in the lineup. There appeared to be some effort, at least initially, to keep the heritage cars on the ends of consists. Weekday peak service is the best time to see the most cars out and about, but there are usually one or two running around during midday and on weekends. There's no shortage of photo locations throughout the system, from the impressive four-track signal bridges of the Northeast Corridor between Newark, Del., and Trenton, N.J., to the sleepy Frank Furness-designed station at Gravers, Pa., to still-standing interlocking towers at busy Jenkintown and Overbrook, Pa.

The Silverliner IV has had a good run, and just about every one delivered remains on the roster. But at some point, the half-century-old cars will be replaced, and SEPTA is already in the market for the next-generation "Silverliner VI." ■

RIGHT: Passing under the four-track signal bridge in Prospect Park, Pa., SEPTA Silverliner IV 276, backdated for Pennsylvania Railroad, leads a Wilmington, Del.-bound train on June 15, 2024. The keystone emblem is right at home on the former Penns Northeast Corridor.



"We'd love to thank the team at Frazer Shops who lovingly and painstakingly restored each Silverliner to its like-new appearance," SEPTA said.

First out on April 19, 2024, was Silverliner IV 280 with the Reading Lines diamond. This car is the oldest of the fleet, unveiled for the media at Suburban Station in February 1974 and originally numbered 9018. On May 9 came 401, wearing the Penn Central "worms" logo (it was delivered as PC 270 in late 1974), followed by 304 on May 21 with the Conrail "can opener." Only a handful of cars ran for just a few weeks in the early 1980s with the blue and white logo before Conrail, which was operating the Philadelphia area commuter trains under contract, ordered the decals removed. SEPTA assumed direct operation of the regional rail lines in 1983.

Shops forces released 293, the second Reading car, in early June (it was originally delivered as Reading 9022). And while none of the Silverliner IVs ever wore the Pennsylvania "keystone," number 276 — the last in the series — emerged from the shop on June 12 to honor the "Standard Railroad of the World." It's a fitting tribute, as half of the SEPTA regional rail system is former Pennsylvania Railroad.

Tracking the heritage electrics across the 280-mile, 155-station system is straightforward. SEPTA's mobile app and its "Real-time System Map" are great resources to find them, showing not



TOP LEFT: Silverliner IV 293, the second SEPTA heritage EMU sporting the Reading diamond, is southbound at Bristol, Pa., on the Northeast Corridor on June 12, 2024.

MIDDLE LEFT: Honoring Pennsylvania Railroad, SEPTA Silverliner IV 276 is on former Reading rails at Norristown, Pa., preparing to depart the Elm Street Station for Philadelphia and eventually Wawa, Pa., on June 13, 2024.

LEFT: "Conrail" 304 leads a Warminster Line train into Hatboro, Pa., on May 24, 2024. The 304 was originally purchased in 1974 for Penn Central. AL TILLOTSON PHOTO



BELOW: Wearing the Conrail "can opener" logo, 304 lays over at Chestnut Hill East in the northern reaches of Philadelphia on June 14, 2024.

