

FD 36137

Nickle Plate Corridor

244260

Stephen D. Roof  
233 S Green St  
Brownsburg, IN 46112-46112  
[steve\\_roof@hotmail.com](mailto:steve_roof@hotmail.com)

ENTERED  
Office of Proceedings  
September 1, 2017  
Part of  
Public Record

Angry Citizen/Save the Nickle Plate Railroad

As a citizen of Central Indiana I have to say in all of my 66 years I have never witnessed a case of corruption or disgust by any local government officials as I have seen with The Mayors of Fishers, Noblesville and the politicians of Hamilton County, Indiana. The Indiana Transportation Museum has provided SAFE excursion and event trains on the Nickle Plate Railroad for over 30 years. The so called public servants have elected to pull out the rails and build a walking path. The original purchase agreement from the Norfolk and Southern railroad to Hamilton County specifically states that it was purchased for the exclusive rights for the use of the Indiana Transportation Museum to run excursion trains and event trains. After the purchase and regular coal train service was stopped the Hoosier Heritage Port Authority elected to let the line be disconnected from the National Railway System. even though it land locked ITM and service to downtown Indianapolis was then not possible. The same situation happened on the northern part of the railroad. When the HHPA in 2015 removed ITM from the railroad it was reported as safety issues to the public. ITM then requested the FRA to do a thorough investigation of ITM, their equipment, training and crew certification records and the railroad. Upon investigation, NO VIOLATIONS were found. The HHPA hired a private consultant from a small railroad company who does nothing but store railroad cars in southern Indiana. This consultant also had an association with members of the HHPA. Their report was totally biased report that would be in favor of the HHPA. This was reported to the media and is still being currently reported to the public. The chairman of the HHPA, Mike Obergfell is the individual that made the decision to remove ITM from operating on the line. Ironically, he is Vice President of a firm that has been awarded construction contracts as well as the company chosen to pave the walking trail. The discussing behavior of these Politician's continue even though petitions have been signed with excess of 400 pages of signatures in favor of reinstating ITM and keeping the railway. In all honesty, I have not heard anyone in favor of the walking path. It is imperative that we keep this railroad and ITM as the operator to preserve the history and heritage of our country. If it wasn't of importance then the Smithsonian Institute, The museum of Science and Industry and many other museums and institutes wouldn't exist. Having been with Delta Air Lines for 30 years I had the honor of instituting the Delta Air Lines Museum in Atlanta, Ga. In closing, this is all about the citizens of central Indiana. the happiness and joy that the Indiana transportation Museum has provided in the Polar Bear Express, The on board weddings and anniversaries, the cancer survivor trains, the Pumpkin Trains, etc. We have a very unique commodity for our community and the revenue (over \$1,000,000.00) it brings to Hamilton County. In the petitions people, as far away as Sweden, Portugal and New Zealand have come to ride these trains have signed and ITM has put Hamilton and Marion Counties on the map of the world.

I sincerely hope that you will keep the Citizens, the Families, and the Children of central Indiana and the world as you review the information you have when you make your final decision and NOT ignore our plea as Hamilton County Indiana has requested.

Please see the article attached in the All Aboard Indiana about the Nickle Plate Railroad and ITM

I certify that these comments have been provided to the Applicants Attorney of records via e-mail

Stephen D. Roof

## Coxhead Urges Patience with CSX as “Heat” Turned Up on Railroad

By Donald Yehle

Here's a summary of the “train delay” situation as it affects the *Hoosier State* and *Cardinal* trains.

“CSX (Transportation) hosts the *Hoosier State* in Indiana, and the *Cardinal* in several states. With the new top management at CSX, many organizational changes are being implemented, very rapidly. This has led to severe operational problems at CSX, affecting their freight operations as well as Amtrak operations,” writes Steve Coxhead, president, Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA).

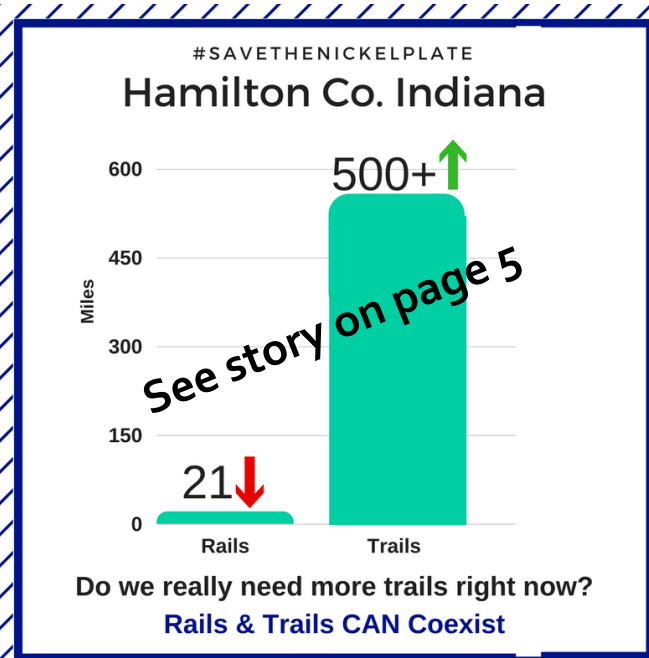
The Surface Transportation Board (STB) has become concerned and is asking CSX to explain why they are having problems, and when they will be resolved. They have specifically noted the effect CSX internal problems are having on Amtrak service (including the *Hoosier State* and *Cardinal*). Part of the reason for STB concern was the receipt of complaints from shippers’ groups from several industries, to the effect that CSX was not providing reliable freight service. These problems, as occurring across the CSX system, are most likely the cause of the poor performance many of you have been seeing, he continues.

“My understanding is that only pressure at the Federal/State level could have an influence on the course of events, because of the individuals involved at CSX,” Coxhead adds.

Amtrak and the states hosting state-supported trains are, or will be, working to come up with a resolution to the problem. The Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) is in the loop on this, the IPRA president says.

Depending on what happens, Coxhead is considering sending a letter to Indiana’s Congressional delegation requesting their assistance. This would probably be after the end of August.

“In the very short term, our best course is to remain calm, and make sure our public is aware that the present problems are due to self-inflicted CSX internal problems. What we can do, now, is provide clear and accurate information to those who need it,” Coxhead concludes.



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## USA TODAY Article Tells Readers: Feds Urging CSX To Fix Problems

A national newspaper is reporting it's time for CSX to "fix" operational issues that are affecting both passenger rail and freight trains. Within the *USA Today* story, are links to six other rail stories that might be of interest. To learn more, right click on [this link](#) and then left click on "open hyperlink".

An Indiana newspaper – the *Journal and Courier* of Lafayette – provides an update, including a quote from Arvid Olson, a board member of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance, who was speaking on behalf of Greater Lafayette Commerce. See [this link](#).

## Seven-Day *Cardinal* Push Taken to State Government

Key Indiana State government officials with rail transportation responsibilities have been alerted to the legislative effort started in West Virginia to provide a "mechanism for support of the seven-day *Cardinal*." That mechanism is to organize states along the *Cardinal* route into a multi-state coalition, similar to efforts in the southeast to restore train service between New Orleans and Jacksonville.

West Virginia has passed legislation authorizing the organization of states along the *Cardinal* route into a multi-state coalition to provide a mechanism for support of a seven-day *Cardinal*.

The Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance suggests that now would be an appropriate time for states served by the *Cardinal* to reach out to West Virginia to initiate this project.

Amtrak's *Cardinal* provides Indianapolis-Chicago-Cincinnati service, originating in Chicago or New York City. The *Cardinal* departs New York at 6:45 a.m. every Sunday, Wednesday, and Friday. It departs Chicago at 5:45 p.m. every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday.

The 28-hour train trip travels through the following states: New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois plus Washington, D.C.

## Cardinal On-Time Performance

Data via [Amtrak's website](#)

| Endpoint On-Time Performance                                                                                                                               |                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| July 2017                                                                                                                                                  | Last 12 Months |
| 23.1%                                                                                                                                                      | 56.4%          |
| Primary Cause of Delays<br>July 2017                                                                                                                       |                |
| <b>Train Interference: 35.4%</b>                                                                                                                           |                |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>69.0% on CSX Corporation</li> <li>11.3% on Buckingham Branch Railroad</li> <li>10.7% on Norfolk Southern</li> </ul> |                |
| <b>Track and Signals: 21.1%</b>                                                                                                                            |                |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>50.0% on CSX Corporation</li> <li>17.2% on Amtrak</li> <li>15.4% on Buckingham Branch Railroad</li> </ul>           |                |
| <b>Passenger: 12.2%</b>                                                                                                                                    |                |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>63.2% on CSX Corporation</li> <li>17.0% on Buckingham Branch Railroad</li> <li>11.2% on Amtrak</li> </ul>           |                |

Top three causes of delays, in % of delay minutes, may not add up to 100%.

## Lafayette Train Volunteer Speaks Out on Rail Issues

By Donald Yehle

Joe Krause, an Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA) board member and longtime station volunteer at Lafayette's Big 4 Depot, spoke out this month on seven matters of concern to passengers on the *Hoosier State* and the *Cardinal*.

**Question -- Build new intermodal stations in Indiana.**

Answer -- Lafayette was intermodal until Greyhound moved to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street (away from the Big 4 Depot) and the Greater Lafayette Transportation Corporation (City Bus) relocated its transfer center a block away. New train stations have been built in both Rensselaer and Dyer – neither is intermodal as Greyhound buses don't stop near those stations.

**Question -- Fund track improvements in Indiana.**

Answer -- This is an immense task requiring millions of dollars of investment by CSX Railroad. Current CSX management would best be advised to focus on operational (continued)

("Lafayette Train Volunteer Speaks Out..." continued from page 2) issues as internal changes are wreaking havoc on both freight shipments and Amtrak passenger operations. On a recent Friday morning, the **Hoosier State** arrived Lafayette nearly three hours late from Indianapolis due to freight train interference and questionable CSX dispatcher decisions.

**Question -- Find a route that does not go through maintenance yard.**

Answer -- The **Hoosier State** corridor goes through the Union Pacific Intermodal Yard, bypassing the intermodal yard of competitor Norfolk Southern. The best chance to shorten running time is through CREATE – Chicago Region Environment and Transportation Efficiency Program, particularly the 75<sup>th</sup> Street crossover.

Go to <http://www.createprogram.org> to learn more about what CREATE is doing to improve train movements in Chicago. The **Hoosier State** corridor deals with six railroads – Belt Railroad of Chicago, Canadian National, CSX, Metra, Norfolk Southern, and Union Pacific.

(The following, additional information is provided by Veteran Railroader Phil Streby: From Chicago Union Station, the **Hoosier State** corridor travels about three miles south where it goes onto Metra – once Chicago and Western Indiana – trackage at 40<sup>th</sup> Street for about five miles to an NS connecting track onto the Belt Railway of Chicago, and, at Mile 9 or 81st Street, onto the Union Pacific – once Chicago and Eastern Illinois.

Crossing two sets of freight main lines, the **Hoosier State** corridor travels further south through the Union Pacific Intermodal Yard on the west side of the main tracks and a flat switching yard on the east side.

Like Mr. Krause, Mr. Streby believes the best chance to shorten running time is through CREATE, which plans to rebuild, at over

a billion dollars, several junctions to include flyover tracks to eliminate the bottlenecks at 71st St., Forest Hill, Belt, and 80<sup>th</sup> St. Junctions.

The four locations are so close together that long freight trains must hold outside the area until released to proceed through. Because much trackage through the area had been removed decades before when traffic was down and railroads were faltering, there is literally no easy and fast way to deliver timeliness.

Speeds throughout the area are, at best, 25 mph. The **Hoosier State/Cardinal** can increase to 40 mph until Dolton where it reduces to 20 mph until arriving at Thornton Junction and then onto CSX tracks where, for our purposes, 59 mph prevails.

A previous route in the days of Conrail had the trains go toward Hammond, diverting onto the South Chicago and Southern (SC&S branch of Conrail) and going almost due south to Dyer, thus bypassing the traffic on the current route, and arriving Dyer about 35 minutes after departing Chicago Union Station.

**Question -- Find a route that does not involve crossing other rail lines or train them to expect us.**

Answer -- Simply impossible. Once again, though, go to <http://www.createprogram.org> for some hope.

**Question -- Upgrade the tracks so we can go 110 mph like in Michigan (from Kalamazoo to Porter, Indiana).**

Answer -- This would require a major change in thinking – and financing – on the part of Indiana's state government and IN-DOT. Many communities are either completely or partially on board with the idea, including Beech Grove, Crawfordsville, Dyer, Indianapolis, Lafayette, Rensselaer, and West Lafayette. The Greater Lafayette Chamber of Commerce is supportive along with passenger rail advocate groups like the Northeast Indiana Passenger Rail Association and IPRA.

(Mr. Streby adds upgrading to 110 mph, while desirable, is very much more expensive than 79 mph or even 90 mph. 110 mph involves closing roads where possible or building bridges over or under the railway. It also requires four-quadrant crossing gates and flashers at each roadway not closed or bridged. In some cases, it may involve separation of rights-of-way.)

**Question -- Run the **Cardinal** 7 days a week so Indiana state funding is not needed.**

Answer -- I reluctantly favor a daily **Cardinal** but in no way as an excuse for Indiana state government from getting out of its newly-discovered role and responsibility in supporting inter-city passenger rail (the **Hoosier State**) in a meaningful and substantial way. (continued)



Thursday, November 2 through Sunday, November 5, 2017  
In Chicago, IL - NARP's Birthplace In 1967  
Host Hotel: Historic Millennium Knickerbocker

Click the image above for more information or to register!



Amtrak's *Cardinal* train. Photo by jpmeullergg via Wikimedia Commons.

("Lafayette Train Volunteer Speaks Out..." continued from page 3) Passengers, passenger rail advocates, newspaper reporters, the Great Lafayette Commerce, city councils, mayors, and county commissioners all pushed state decision-makers to fund the *Hoosier State*.

Indiana citizens want the *Hoosier State* along with the *Cardinal*. Many also favor both trains operating seven-days-a-week, starting in opposite directions.

Everyone should remember it took the efforts of local leaders in Rensselaer, Crawfordsville, Lafayette, West Lafayette, and Tippecanoe County to persuade key state legislators to get the State Legislature and the Indiana Department of Transportation to begin financial support of the *Hoosier State*.

An August 2013 summit arranged by Greater Lafayette Commerce provided the necessary "shock value" and momentum, but the groundwork was already being laid before by then-State Representative Randy Truitt and State Senator Brandt Hershman.

Rigorous investigative work done by Chris Morrissee Vizza, then of the *Journal and Courier*, helped, to "save" the train, as well.

#### On Time Performance

A lingering concern with the morning *Cardinal* is its "on time" performance. This train, which originates in New York City, is often late. The *Cardinal* passes through New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Washington, D.C., Virginia, West Virginia, and Ohio before crossing into Indiana.

The endpoint on time performance (meaning either Chicago or New York) for the *Cardinal* was 56.4 percent the last 12 months; 23.1 percent for July 2017. Endpoint on time performance (also Chicago or Indianapolis) for the *Hoosier State* was 77.4 percent the last 12 months; 54.3 percent for July 2017.

*Cardinal* eastbound from Chicago to New York (Train #50) was 7.7 percent on time in July and 37.8 percent on time over the last 12 months. *Cardinal* westbound from New York to Chicago (Train #51) was 38.5 percent on time in July and 74.7 percent on time over the last 12 months.

*Hoosier State* southbound from Chicago to Indianapolis (Train #850) was 38.9 percent on time in July and 68.9 percent on time over the last 12 months. *Hoosier State* northbound from Indianapolis to Chicago (Train #851) was 70.67 percent on time in July and 86 percent on time over the last 12 months.

For all Amtrak trains, right click on the following link and open hyperlink: [Amtrak Train Route On-Time Performance](#)

**Question -- Upgrade the equipment to avoid break downs.**

Answer -- Amtrak needs new locomotives and passenger cars. Cummins can help. Most break downs are on freight railroads, although occasionally Amtrak equipment fails. The newest Amtrak equipment on the *Cardinal* are baggage cars. Viewliners were originally built at Beech Grove – coaches, sleepers, and diners. Contracts for that equipment went elsewhere. Viewliner equipment is okay for the Eastern United States; Superliners are best – built by Pullman, which has since closed.

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## New Ridesharing Service Benefitting Indiana Rail Passengers on Four Trains

Passengers on four Amtrak trains that travel through Indiana can now use an Amtrak mobile app to get from your doorstep to an Amtrak station, says the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) and Amtrak.

The Amtrak mobile app allows rail passengers to access the Lyft app to request a ride.

Lyft operates in more than 360 communities across the US, covering 80 percent of the US population and reaching 97 percent of Amtrak riders, including passengers on the *Hoosier State*, the *Cardinal*, the *Capitol Limited*, and the *Lake Shore Limited*, Amtrak says.

"New users of Lyft will receive \$5 off each of their first four Lyft rides by using the promo code AMTRAKLYFT," officials continue.

"Ridesharing makes it more convenient than ever for passenger rail customers to reach their final destinations," INDOT Commissioner Joe McGuinness offers. (continued)

*("New Ridesharing Service..." continued from page 4)*  
 "Leveraging mobile technology to make trips easier elevates passenger rail as an even more attractive option for traveling," he continues.

**"This partnership reflects INDOT's goal of creating road, rail, air and water transportation options that complement each other to make sure Indiana remains the Crossroads of America," the Commissioner concludes.**

Jason Molfetas, executive vice president for marketing and business development for Amtrak, says "We (Amtrak) are focused on improving the customer experience, and this is one way we are working to make your entire journey as seamless and enjoyable as possible."

**The *Hoosier State* and the *Cardinal* combine to provide daily roundtrip passenger rail service between Indianapolis and Chicago (and beyond, three days a week). The *Capitol Limited* runs daily between Chicago and Washington, D.C. The *Lake Shore Limited* operates daily between Chicago and New York.**

Indiana cities with station stops provided by these four Amtrak trains are: Crawfordsville, Dyer, Elkhart, Lafayette, Rensselaer, South Bend, Waterloo, and West Lafayette.

## Where Goes the Nickel Plate Heritage Railroad?

By Logan Day

Citizens throughout Hamilton County, Central Indiana, and throughout the state and nation are asking about the Nickel Plate. Fishers, Noblesville, and other area residents want to know if the train will be saved, especially when driving by hundreds of "Save the Train" signs planted in area yards.

### Verdict Unclear

Politicians are wanting to pull up the tracks and build a trail for hikers and bikers. Rail traditionalists, who enjoy excursions like the Fair Train and the Polar Bear Express, have other ideas. Members of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA) want the Nickel Plate Heritage corridor to ultimately become a commuter rail line.

**On August 1, the federal Surface Transportation Board (STB) became involved. As previously reported by *All Aboard Indiana* (AAI), Fishers, Noblesville, and Hamil-**

**ton County filed with the STB to begin the process of obtaining approval to remove the existing rails.**

The STB public comment period has begun. The public is addressing four relevant points that many hope will result in a denial of permission to pull up the rails. They are:

- Concern about the lack of public input regarding the trail plan.
- Concern about the ultimate lack of rail service.
- Concern for the impediment to rail service caused by the Port Authority's suspension of rail operations.
- Concern for the process of selecting a new rail operator for only the northern portion of the railroad.

To bring clarity to the issue, here is a complete and ongoing history of how Central Indiana got to where it's at with this railroad that first arrived in Noblesville in 1851.

**A fledgling railroad – Peru & Indianapolis Railroad Co. – started laying tracks 168 years ago in Indianapolis. Within two years, the tracks reached Noblesville. Merging the two cities by rail was a highly-celebrated event. Noblesville merchants got their wish of tracks being laid down the middle of 8<sup>th</sup> Street to reduce drayage costs. The train would arrive from Indianapolis, it would be parked, and merchants would unload their goods.**

In time, the railroad expanded to Michigan City. Like with any business, there have been periods of financial successes and failures. Like with most railroads, the line has changed hands multiple times for multiple reasons. Owners and operators have included:

- Madison and Indianapolis
- Indianapolis, Peru, & Chicago
- Wabash, St. Louis, & Pacific
- Lake Erie & Western (*continued*)



*A pedestrian admires the much-loved Nickel Plate train.*

*("Where Goes the Nickel Plate Heritage Railroad?" continued from page 5)*

- New York Central
- Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago & St. Louis
- New York, Chicago, & St. Louis (Nickel Plate Road)
- Norfolk & Western

Presently, the railroad that runs between Tipton and 22<sup>nd</sup> Street in Indianapolis is called the Nickel Plate Heritage Railroad. Owners are the City of Noblesville, the City of Fishers, and Hamilton County. The Indiana Transportation Museum (ITM) is its most recent operator. The Hoosier Heritage Port Authority (HHPA) – a quasi-governmental body – manages the railroad.

Historical events often have a specific date attached to it. For the Nickel Plate Heritage Railroad, that date would be February 28, 2017. Those participating in the grassroots effort to Save the Nickel Plate rail corridor hope February 28, 2017, will be like December 7, 1941 – a date that mobilizes the hearts, minds, and actions of rail supporters everywhere.

### News Conference

A news conference was held on February 28, 2017, to an-

*A young train lover urges his community to save the Nickel Plate train.*



nounce plans to convert 9.2 miles of the 37-mile railroad to a "mixed use walking and biking trail." The plan is to remove the very center of the rail connection linking Indianapolis to the south and Tipton to the north.

**While these tracks once were connected to the national rail network, that is no longer the case. (Re-establishing such a connection could be accomplished with relative ease.)**

How Fishers, Noblesville, and Hamilton County became owners of a railroad is quite interesting. Norfolk & Western originally leased the unprofitable freight railroad to the Indiana Transportation Museum (ITM) in 1992. The lease came with an option to buy.

Cloudy paperwork shows the cities of Fishers and Noblesville exercised ITM's right to assign the lease and option to purchase by assigning it to themselves. It's unknown exactly when Hamilton County was added as an owner. Nor does any clear documentation exist showing how the railroad was wrangled away from the transportation museum.

ITM and the Hoosier Heritage Port Authority had signed a 10-year lease agreement in 1996 granting the museum rights to operate historic excursion trains (i.e. the Fair Train) along the route. This agreement provides the port authority with responsibility to maintain the railroad.

**Importantly, a 10-year lease extension, which was part of the 1992 agreement, was removed from the 1996 lease.**

### National Railroad

The CSX connection to the Nickel Plate line in Indianapolis was the last connection to the national railroad system. It was removed by CSX in April 2008. The ITM was ordered to "stand down" and take no action by the HHPA.

When the 10-year Nickel Plate Heritage Train lease expired, the transportation museum operated under a "policy of use" agreement to run its excursion trains. The main point of contention at this time was the disagreement over a one-year termination clause. The transportation museum asserted that no serious donors, grants, or funding could be secured without the protection of a long-term agreement.

**The last train to run along the line was in 2015.**

Various entities have sought to expand the line to downtown Indianapolis. Entities may have thought how nice it would be to ride a train to a Colts game? To NCAA basketball championships? To concerts? Once the short-term railroad usage rights became known, such conversations cease.

**The transportation museum was equally unsuccessful in renegotiating a long-term lease that doesn't** *(continued)*

In 2008, the interlocking diamonds at CP-DX, at 21st & Massachusetts Avenue near Dearborn Street were removed, permanently cutting off the Nickel Plate line from the national rail network. (Photo courtesy of Tom Nichols)



(*"Where Goes the Nickel Plate Heritage Railroad?" continued from page 6*) include a termination clause with the Port Authority.

## Boiling Point

Hamilton County Tourism became involved in 2008. Wanting to enhance the image and professionalism of the ITM, they sought to shift the organization and with it train operations to a self-perpetuating, board-driven model. (The ITM did go through a major reorganization resulting in multiple boards reporting to the main board. Ultimately, tensions rose to a boiling point between the main ITM board and the railroad operations board.)

The pot blew off the kettle in March 2016. Railroad owners (Fishers, Noblesville, and Hamilton County); the HHPA, and the Indiana Attorney General received a letter from one of the limited liability companies citing mismanagement by the transportation museum and demanding control of the museum and the railroad.

## Railroad Rebirth

- In 2013, the HHPA explored funding options to reconnect its railroad to Norfolk Southern tracks beyond Tipton.
- In 2013, a transportation survey in Fishers showed nearly 70 percent of its residents said they would use light rail if it were made available.
- That communities' master plan denoted a hiking/biking trail running alongside the Nickel Plate Heritage Railroad.

Hope turned to sadness a year later, when the City of Fishers razed its 18-year-old train station in favor of a high-rise apartment at the same site. An attractive station platform remains, but without indoor seating or suitable parking. Worse yet, an additional grade crossing near the platform

has been installed, creating logistical problems for station stops.

Nonetheless, rail preservationists' emotions soared in 2015 when the Fair Train and Polar Bear Express experienced their highest ticket sales in history. The Indiana Transportation Museum similarly saw its highest revenue year.

Rail safety concerns with the tracks and concerns over museum record-keeping led to the cessation of further train excursions dictated by the Hoosier Heritage Port Authority.

This despite five subsequent, satisfactory Federal Railroad Authority (FRA) inspections of Nickel Plate Heritage Railroad tracks and ITM-owned engines and passenger coaches.

Jannotti Rail Consulting of Pennsylvania was subsequently commissioned to do a private track inspection and rehabilitation report. It concluded "never encountering a 37-mile length of track where there have been so little drainage issues ... for most of the trackage. The light rail, joints, and turnouts are in surprising good to fair condition overall."

## Deliberate Shutdown

Grassroots rail supporters are now asking why the Indiana Transportation Museum has been removed as official operator of the Nickel Plate Heritage Railroad despite high ticket revenue and favorable safety inspections by government and private rail safety experts?

The answer may lie with Hamilton County Tourism. In 2016, Hamilton County Tourism approached the City of Noblesville with the idea they and other interested parties operate historic trains on these tracks.

Three key points stand out in their written communications about this idea. They are:

- Acknowledgement of hiking and biking trail surfaces, long before the public at large was informed.
- The contention any historic train must run 37 miles (entire line from Indianapolis to Tipton) to be sustainable.
- The railroad operator has exclusive access to tailor its proposal for exactly what cities want – not to use the entire line, rather only the segment north of Fishers and Noblesville.

One could conclude that transportation museum operations were intentionally eased out to create an opportunity to facilitate a hiking/biking trail and implement pre-existing development plans – namely, a public road expansion with a roundabout planned at an (*continued*)

*("Where Goes the Nickel Plate Heritage Railroad?" continued from page 7)* intersection between the railroad and the soon-to-be-expanded roadway plus rumored city development along the tracks in Fishers.

This contention is supported by media reports about the above items. City of Noblesville emails obtained through freedom of information requests further reinforce this idea as trail supporters were being encouraged to show up early at public meetings, fill the front rows, and "work with community leaders to bring an end to the rail line."

The Save the Nickel Plate movement resulted from this history of inadequate public input favoring eliminating rails in favor of trails. Two Port Authority decisions affecting continuation of the Nickel Plate Heritage Railroad are under question, as well. Did the Port Authority deliberately suspend rail operations to pave the way for trails? Why was a group favoring the North segment historic rail selected as a potential rail operator when Iowa-Pacific's bid to operate the entire 37-mile rail received the top score by 200 points?

## New Operator

Five proposals were submitted to the port authority to operate the railroad – four of those to use the entire line. Final selection was made by the cities of Fishers, Noblesville, and Hamilton County. An attorney with the Port Authority acknowledged her organization did have authority to make the decision but opted to leave the choice to the three owners. Hamilton County Tourism's proposal to run a North-only train was selected.

Public input was essentially not allowed. First, the Port Authority stopped allowing public comment at its meetings. Second, owners voted in favor of the Tourism Proposal at 8:15 a.m. on Monday, July 31. Third, required posting of the meeting to take the vote was done over the



*Logan Day speaks at the first Nickel Plate community meeting.*



*The Nickel Plate train has long served Indiana State Fairgoers.*

weekend of July 29-30. Fourth, the legal notice requirement may have been met by placing the meeting document in city hall windows. Fifth, the 8:15 a.m. Monday meeting drew 10-15 observers rather than what would have been a standing-room only crowd.

## Public Input

Last March, Fishers and Noblesville did host public "listening" sessions regarding the Nickel Plate Trail proposal. Observers learned the first meeting in Fishers was intended to explain the trail idea, not to hear feedback. Noblesville's format was changed to allow for public comment. One could conclude both cities had made up their minds that the trail is a "done deal" and train advocates are in the minority and are a non-concern. A large response during the STB public comment will hopefully show otherwise.

Can planners accommodate trails while also enabling continuation of the Nickel Plate Heritage Railroad? The falsehood of a 120-foot minimum right-of-way requirement for a trail needs to be squelched. The falsehood of the need to spend \$5 million to restore the heritage railroad to a safe operating condition needs to be squelched.

Are planners giving the Indiana Transportation Museum a fair shake? How much of an asset is the museum and the railroad to Hamilton County? Eliminate the heritage railroad, and what is left of the museum? There are reports that the museum is to open a second location in the Northern part of the state. Will Greater Indianapolis ultimately lose the benefit of this vital rail link and piece of its heritage?

The Save the Nickel Plate grassroots supporters and leaders aren't going to go away. Supporters need to keep filing comments with the STB by referencing document docket# FD-36137-o. Instructions for filing online are *(continued)*



("Where Goes the Nickel Plate Heritage Railroad?" continued from page 8) found at: <https://goo.gl/h58M7h>

While speaking out for "your railroad," take the time to also contact any of the following public bodies, including:

- Mayor and city council, Noblesville
- Mayor and city council, Fishers
- County commissioners, Hamilton County
- Hoosier Heritage Port Authority
- Hamilton County Tourism Bureau

Contact information can be found on-line. Speak from both your heart and head. Use your own words. Be civil. Any communications tool will work – emails, face-to-face conversations, phone calls, or snail mail. Encourage leaders to find a way to accommodate walking/bike trail enthusiasts and those of us who favor historic rail and commuter rail.

We might just save a railroad!

#### Connect with Save the Nickel Plate

Website: [www.savethenickelplate.org](http://www.savethenickelplate.org)

Facebook: [www.fb.com/savethenickelplate](https://www.facebook.com/savethenickelplate)

Online Petition: [www.change.org](http://www.change.org)

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## Upcoming Story

*Next month* – Phil Streby, a veteran railroader and treasurer, Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance, reports on the Midwest Rail Conference held in Kalamazoo, August 16.

## Contributors

**Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance** – Steve Coxhead, Joe Krause, Phil Streby, Doug Yerkeson

**Save the Nickel Plate** -- Logan Day

## For More Information

*All Aboard Indiana* is a monthly publication of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA), formerly the Indiana High Speed Rail Association (INHSRA).

To learn more about IPRA, visit [www.indianahighspeedrail.org](http://www.indianahighspeedrail.org)

or contact us via USPS or email:

Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance  
3951 North Meridian Street, Suite 100  
Indianapolis, IN 46208

[info@indianahighspeedrail.org](mailto:info@indianahighspeedrail.org)

IPRA President: Steven Coxhead

Newsletter Editor: Donald Yehle

[djyehle@gmail.com](mailto:djyehle@gmail.com) or 765-418-4097

Newsletter Publisher: Shereen Vinke

## Discounts

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AAA and NARP members save 10% off Amtrak tickets at [www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com) if booked three or more days in advance.

## READER'S VIEW

### Public input completely ignored

Editor,

(In regard to the Aug. 25 cover story,) the potential loss of the railroad only partially explains why the city is so divided over the Nickel Plate Railroad issue. Yes, losing this historic and profitable asset would be devastating and a huge waste of resources. But a more important reason for the division is the way this whole affair has been conducted. The public has been completely ignored throughout as our city leaders pretended to listen to the citizens, then proceeded to pursue their own agenda. The mayor is simply feeling the effects of his exceedingly unpopular position on this issue. The people are talking but he doesn't want to hear them. To him, it just sounds like divisiveness.

And who knows where he gets his facts. It seems he just makes them up to fit what he thinks. The Indiana Transportation Museum has asserted from the start that it could have run the Fair Train this year had the Port Authority let it. The Federal Railroad Administration ruled the

tracks were safe. A few thousand dollars in track maintenance was all that was required, not the \$5-10 million the mayor cites. And that would have been ITM (private) money, not city (public) money. (The estimate of) \$2.5 million to fix the Eighth Street tracks sounds ridiculous. They only run for five or six blocks. Maybe the mayor needs to bid that out to find a better deal.

Finally, it's so tiring to hear the continued objections to building a trail next to the railroad. It is possible if we can only find the political will to do it, but it will be more expensive and more work. It sounds to me like our leaders just don't want to work that hard. If the mayor has any hope of uniting this divided city he better be willing to start listening and working harder to serve the people who elected him.

**Mike Corbett, Noblesville**

*To read the full letter, visit [currentnoblesville.com](http://currentnoblesville.com).*



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