

The Railway Museum of BC Newsletter

October - December 2025

**The North Pole Express
was a huge Success!**



RAILWAY MUSEUM
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

**Volume 65
Issue # 4**

FROM THE EDITOR

The fourth quarter commenced with some positive funding news. Heritage BC announced a grant to our Railway Museum to provide funds for our Historic Railcar Maintenance Shop Project (our Car Shop) and the grant will restore the five large barn-type entrance doors of the building, originally built in 1914 by the PGE.

And this year's North Pole Expresss became the most successful to date. Mainly due to adding an additonal coach (the Capilano) to the consist. And thanks go again to Rocky Mountaineer for 'lending' us two of their coaches and thanks also to CN to allow us to use their line to Squamish Terminals and for the first time to also go north to Thompson which allowed us a more scenic trip.

And once again our volunteers spent many hours on site, not only for the event itself but the hours and hours needed for set up. Unless you are directly involved, you really don't have any idea of how many days it takes to complete the massive set up.

Updates from WCRA

Reports from our major department heads from October to December

Bob Philip: President

As we near the end of 2025 we are looking at ways to address our continue cash flow problems, and to negotiate a long term affordable agreement with BCRP. In some ways, the two are linked, as one option may be to utilise some of our building and endowment assets to form a partnership with Heritage BC resulting in the elimination of the mortgage debt and a long term rental agreement on both sides of the road. There is also a potential rental at MP2 which would genetate signifcant revenue to the association.

And it is more important than ever that WCRA add board members with the skills and contacts to move WCRA forward taking advantage of opportunities that arise. Likewise we need to plan ahead for the governance of the association and develop a succession plan for top administrative roles. Fortunately we have started to move in that direction with reorganization and recent hires.

The WCRA serves an important role in the region with respect of tourism, preservation, entertainment, education, and more. We are well positioned to grow with our unique opportunity to operate trains , and with the capacity of the Roundhouse to serve the Sea to Sky area. We need to work together to make things happen

General Manager's Report - Gord Bell

CN Roundhouse & Conference Centre

The CN Roundhouse and Conference Centre business was steady in 2025 with several outside events taking place at the facility. The year broke down as follows :

Corporate Event Days: 12

Weddings: 2

Markets: 5

In House Events: 85 days (includes set up & tear down) NPX, Train Show, Children's Fest, Car Show and Dinner Train

For 2026, we already have 2 corporate events booked for January. We will be in contact with the marketing committee in mid January to begin an ad campaign for the Roundhouse, Station and Dinner trains.

Work continues on the Buddy and Friends animation project with January as the expected date for a completed 8 minute animated film that we will be able to show on youtube and our website.

Film & TV

R.M.B.C. had a bounce back year with Film & TV hosting several smaller budget films totalling around \$86,800 in revenue. In addition Patrick Doiron, our representative from IWL Film, came to the table with a \$5,000.00 sponsorship of our children's festival in 2025 and well as purchasing seven Alberta departures on the North Pole Express totalling \$10,500.00. Special thanks to Patrick for his continued support of the association!

Blacksheep Event Rentals

Blacksheep Event Rentals experienced a very busy year in 2025 with a gross revenue YTD of \$844,000.00. This is a 10.47% growth in gross revenue over 2024. Payroll is, and remains, a major challenge but was held to \$408,000 YTD, which is a slight decline from 2024 at \$410,000 on 10% less business.

Squamish now officially has the second highest cost of living in British Columbia, second only to Whistler. The District of Squamish recently posted the living wage for Squamish at \$28/hr. This combined with the cutbacks on temporary foreign workers and working student visas in Canada is shaping how we move forward in a way that supports and takes care of our employees while allowing us to generate a net profit between \$100 - \$200k annually.

Museum Manager's Report - Tom Arnott

Since we opened on April 19th we have recorded 9000 visitors. This is an increase of almost 3000 from our 2024 season. Adding the projected 15,000 NPX visitors we will, this year, have in the region of 24,000 visitors.

The museum is definitely seeing an increase in Family season tickets from 135 in 2024 to 172 in 2025. Another change is the number of local families we are seeing returning, in some cases on an almost weekly basis. This probably reflects the younger demographic and increased population over the past few years in the town and the limited amenities available for younger families.

North Pole Express

We are now heading towards our third weekend of NPX and to date it has run smoothly and the new outside lighting and slightly different set up indoors has proved popular. The set up for this event started in September and over 1300 volunteer hours have been dedicated to creating this amazing show and many positive comments have been received from the visitors. I would like to thank Andy Rae, our new Volunteer coordinator, for his efforts in organising volunteers for this year's event. Approximately 80 people are involved in running this event for each of the 8 days and 40-50 of them are volunteers. Andy has certainly had a baptism of fire, but he has risen to the challenge.

I would also like to thank the Decorating Coordinator, Karen Schrieber, without whom the incredible décor in the train, the Roundhouse and the Car shop would not happen. She and her dedicated band of helpers have been hard at work for months, often working long hours in cold and uncomfortable conditions in the Car shop particularly.

And I mustn't forget Chrissy Stephen, our Event Manager. Her professionalism in the running and management of NPX is, as always, exceptional.

Rail Services Report: Singh Biln & Kirby Read

Rail Shuttle Buses – For the 2026 operating season, we plan to increase our opening days from 60 to 100 but without a major rebuild of the power train, our Budd Cars cannot operate reliably more than one day per week. We had considered reduced entry fee on days when the Budds didn't operate but in late October, we had an opportunity to purchase two rail shuttle cars to supplement our Budd Car operations. These two rail shuttles operated reliably on BCR/CN for 20 years between Seton & Lillooet but were replaced by a hi-rail school bus in 2022.

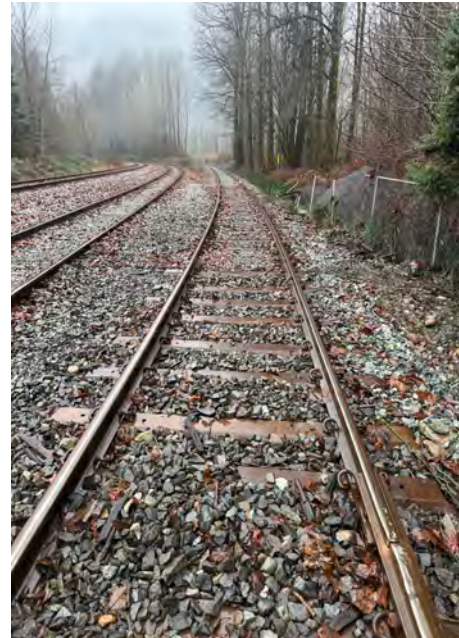


They need minimal work to get into operation and will provide push-pull service with 40 passengers. We expect to have them operating during the model train show in late March.

Motive Power, Speeders, Tracks

Last month, Kirby was able to repair the Track-mobile, which is a big help in switching around our yard, as it is a lot easier to start and operate than a locomotive.

Also in November, contractor B & B Heavy Construction replaced two dozen deteriorated ties with steel ties on our Station Lead approach to the CN lead, in preparation for our North Pole Express event. Units CN #6520 and CPR #4069 are operating reliably on the NPX trains while our remaining units have been winterized.



BCER #960 Move to Carshop

October 27 was a historic milestone, as the 960 was moved out of MP2 for the first time in 15 year! After some cajoling by several Executives, volunteers Mike McGaw & Bob Gordon completed the truck installation and the unit was moved out at 5pm by Engineer Dylan on CN #6520 and Conductor Kirby. Some remaining work will be done in the Carshop over the winter but the unit has been decorated for our North Pole Express.



Dylan Smith, Kirby Read, Mike McGaw, Tom Arnott, Annabelle Coward, Bob Gordon and Singh Biln



Coaches

Our contractor David Walmsley, helper Annabelle Coward and volunteers Greg Robertshaw & Richard Courage continued to work on some major repairs during the last quarter including re-upholster of 150 seats, repair of 10 fogged windows, repair of seat bases, sealing roof leaks and interior cosmetic repairs. A visit by Transport Canada inspectors in early December did not result in any safety or operational exceptions. Christian identified a few defects after his train trip on the first week in December and these have now been repaired. And a Transport Canada Security Inspector met with Kirby aboard the NPX on December 6th and confirmed that our train operation meets TC Security & Safety Guidelines. She was also pleased with our immediate response to her inquiry, which did not happen with the previous Rail Services manager.

Repairing Operating Equipment Update: David Walmsley

A number of repairs were needed for the North Pole Express consist. One of the areas sorely needing refurbishment were 150 seat cushions in our coaches.

We outsourced the repairs to the most talented craftsman at United Upholstery to apply new red fabric to the seats. They did an outstanding job! And this year we did not receive a single complaint on the condition of our seats.



David and Kirby Read identified 9 defective fogged up windows on our 5 operational coaches. With the assistance of our new staff member Annabelle, each window had to be removed from the car, disassembled and the channel rubber replaced.



Once the window was apart, the glass was cleaned of any lime scale that formed between the two panes. Greg Robertshaw and Richard Courage assisted in the rebuilding of most of the defective windows. We were able to sell 32 extra seats per trip on this year's NPX!

Over the last 10 years, the condition of the roofs of our 5 operating coaches have been ignored by past management, this negligence has resulted in major water leaks to develop in some of our cars. To enable us to sell as many seats as possible for the North Pole Express, the focus this year was to commence repairs. With the assistance of our very ambitious and helpful Blacksheep staff, and later on, staff member Annabelle Coward, we have started a roof coating and repair program. Where required, proper metal cleaning and rust treatment was applied before the roof coating was applied. Three out of our five cars have had coating applied, more work to do in 2026.



Collection Committee Report: Greg Robertshaw

BCER 960 has been substantially completed and relocated to the Car Shop. The remaining work will be completed next year after NPX.

Work is being done on interpretive displays.

Restoration of CP 8000 continues. The CP8000 team has completed various tasks on operating equipment to support NPX.

Englewood Railway (Woss) Steam Hammer – Restoration is approximately 50% complete. Coach 3223 – This coach will be restored over a period of a few years.

Acquisitions

We acquired the two Kaoham Shuttle (Seaton Portage) rail cars which will be used to transport guests during our extended open season.

374 Pavilion Report: George Game

The city of Vancouver recently enforced their PCID records check for our volunteers at 374. PCID is the acronym for Police Criminal Identification check. And it refers to the Records Review Act (CRA) to check for those working with children and youth to ensure they have no criminal record.

Attendance statistics for 2025 (46,598) show a decent increase over 2024 (44,290), and closing in on pre COVID attendance of 53,132 in 2019.

Volunteer Highlight: Singh Biln

Editor's note: a great suggestion from Singh to start highlighting those volunteers that have served the WCRA for more than a decade.

This is the first of a regular feature column honouring our valued volunteers. Volunteers are important to all museums but for us, they are a necessity, not just a nicety. During 2025, nearly 150 volunteers expended over 6000 hours, two-thirds of it on the North Pole Express. Without their generosity, we could not stay open as we do not have the funds to pay for the contributed hours. It is impractical to name and acknowledge every volunteer so this column will recognize small groups. The first group is highlights two our equipment restoration teams.

There have been dozens of volunteers who have contributed so much towards the restoration but over the past few years, Mike McGaw, Bob Gordon and Bill Marchant have been the stalwarts.

Week after week, they have come to Squamish from Vancouver Island or the Lower Mainland, not only working hard physically, but also paying for parts or contributing funds. Their efforts are apparent in the quality of the restoration and greatly appreciated by all of us. October 27, 2025 was a monumental day as electric locomotive BCER #960 moved out of the restoration shop MP2 for display in the Carshop as a Center- piece for NPX. There is still more work to be done which will be completed in the Carshop.



Mike McGaw and Bob Gordon completing their years of restoration work (together with Bill Marchant) on #960, re-assembling the trucks and finally her finally 'rolling out into daylight' in over 16 years!



Greg Robertshaw and Richard Courage have made countless long trips from Abbotsford to work on the CPR Baldwin #8000 in recent years. They are as passionate as the 960 team, contributing not only hundreds of hours but many times paying for parts & services. Their work is well on its way towards a cosmetic restoration which is expected to be completed this year. All of us are grateful for their generous contribution.



"In addition to his meticulous work on the CPR #8000, Greg has devoted many design and consulting hours to upgrade the electrical and lighting systems at MP 2. His work on this has saved us tens of thousands of dollars. Similarly, Richard has taken on the maintenance and care of the CPR #2860 ensuring its preservation and safe movement when needed."

Bill Marchant has been a volunteer and staunch supporter of WCRA for decades. Not only has he donated countless hours on many projects, he has purchased oil, antifreeze and batteries for our operating locomotives and Budd Cars. In addition to his work on the BCER#960, Bill fully restored a rotary Converter that was used to supply power to the North Shore lines of the BC Electric street car operations. He is currently restoring a steam hammer that was donated to the WCRA from the Woss logging operations.



Thanks to our Volunteers and Staff that made our North Pole Express such a success this year!



Long time and cherished volunteer Barb Stover as our Greeter at the entrance to the North Pole



Rob Payette, CN volunteers Aline Triff & Greg Virgil, Christian Vazzaz, Dylan Smith & Kirby Read



Ihor & Carolyn aka 'The Claus's



Buddy 'all lit up' for NPX



Long time Volunteers Gordon Hall and Family



Ryan Kreschuk as our mini rail 'hogger'

CURRENT RAIL NEWS

UP and NS Merger

Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern filed their merger application with US federal regulators on Dec. 19th, 2025.

The document, that was filed with the Surface Transportation Board, will allow the railroads to show how their combination will deliver economic benefits, enhance competition, and protect union jobs, the railroads said.

It is the first major merger that will be judged under the tougher review rules the STB adopted in 2001 after rapid consolidation in the 1990s left the U.S. with a pair of Class I railroad duopolies, with BNSF Railway and Union Pacific serving the West and CSX and Norfolk Southern blanketing the East.

The twists in the new merger rules: Railroads must show their combination enhances, rather than merely preserves, competition; they must demonstrate that the deal is in the public interest; and address downstream impacts such as the potential for additional Class I mergers.

The UP-NS application provided fuller details how the railroads plan to mesh their operations and how much traffic growth they expect. And finally how the \$85 billion deal will affect the rest of the railroad industry.

The STB will have until Jan. 19th to accept it as complete or reject the application as incomplete.

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen and the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division will oppose the Union Pacific-Norfolk Southern merger despite UP's promises of lifetime job protection.

"This debt-ridden tie-up won't make rail more competitive with trucks as merger proponents claim," BLET National President Mark Wallace said. "We believe this transcontinental railroad will make shipping by rail less attractive as the merged carrier passes off rail lines that serve small towns, factories, and farms to short line railroads while running miles-long slow-moving trains on the main line. For rail customers it will be a choice between 'hell or the highway.'"

The two Teamsters unions which represent 53% of the combined UP and NS craft workforce are the largest to come out against the \$85 billion merger and the Transportation Workers Union, which represents carmen across Norfolk Southern's northern tier, signaled its opposition to the deal when it was first announced on July 29.

(TRNS)

BNSF

BNSF Railway will dramatically increase its track inspection capabilities early next year with the system wide deployment of locomotive-based sensors that analyze track geometry while pulling trains in revenue service.

BNSF developed its ODIN system, which stands for Onboard Defect Identification & Notification, entirely in-house in 2023. The system relies on a combination of sensors, including lasers, that measure track gauge, cross-level, alignment, and track surface. The data the system collects is processed in real time, allowing BNSF to respond quickly to defects and prevent derailments caused by track geometry problems.



With the two-year pilot program completed, BNSF put the first ODIN-equipped locomotive in service in September. The railroad said this week that it now has 30 locomotives equipped with the ODIN system. Four more will be installed by the end of the year. And by the end of the first quarter of 2026, another two dozen locomotives will be ODIN-equipped, which will allow BNSF to cover its entire network. (TRNS)



Every second year, the CPKC Holiday Train routes through the Kootenays on its way to the West Coast: Brilliant Dam near Castlegar - Dec. 15th - Photo: Ken Storey

WCRA Newsletter – December 2003

Association News (from the October Meeting)

There were 45 members present and Colin Dathan chaired the meeting. Don Evans gave a Heritage Park update and said the 'Rail Ale' was the most successful ever with over \$3000 raised in live auction items and also the start of the Hobgoblin Express Halloween event.

Paul Roy updated the membership on the plans for Christmas at Canada Place and our trains will be called the 'Starbucks Express'. Track set up day is scheduled for Nov. 29th and the event opens on Dec. 6th. He also updated us on the mini rail which operated recently in Chilliwack with Doug May and Kurtis Taylor doing the volunteer work.

Bill Marchant updated us on our participation at the Lynden Model RR show.

Ron Anstey gave us a collection update, noting the priority tasks over the winter, including winterization all our motive power, the completion of the Marjatta roof and the continuing work on the car British Columbia.

Bernie Tully gave a tours update, closing off the 2003 season with a successful 'Queen of the North' tour and the 'Fall Foliage' tour.

Membership rates will increase in 2004: Individual and Family memberships will increase by \$10. Note that membership renewals done before Dec. 31st will honour the current year rate.

The WCRA will hold its annual Dinner and Awards night on Nov. 25th at the Best Western Kings Inn in Burnaby. Price \$25 for a hot buffet dinner, super prizes and our annual awards in six categories.

Henry Rees of Banman Publishing has donated a framed limited edition sold out Max Jacquard print in a raffle to raise funds to assist with our increased insurance costs. Tickets are \$10 each or 3 for \$25. Call our office at 604-524-1011.

Annual Christmas Lights at the Park

Park will open this year for our annual Christmas event on Fridays to Sundays starting Dec. 5th, 5:30 - 8:30PM. There will be more than 20,000 lights set up plus Christmas displays on the mini rail line and photos with Santa in the Lions Club car (but only on the first weekend).

Editorial

Without any doubt, 2003 has been one challenging year for the WCRA. While we have continued to make great strides as we do every year If there was ever a year that didn't go as planned, this was the year!

The first big hit was when we were advised that we would not be able to take our excursion train out under any terms on BC Rail this year.

(Look Back - cont'd)

They decided not to allow any private passenger trains on the line in 2003. Thus, our biggest money maker in tours was gone, in a tourism year that was already proving challenging to all operators. We made several adjustments and still carried out several successful tours, but in the end, expect a net in the range of only \$20,000 this year compared to a normal year of \$60,000.

Next came the insurance issue. While we had budgeted for an increase (as expected), we never expected the challenge of even finding an insurer willing to deal with us, nor the premium. Expect a 300% increase or around \$40,000 more than our initial budget.

Then came the floods. We expect to tally a loss at around \$10,000 or so in critical systems in the station, which have now been repaired. Following the floods, there were high winds which blew away most of our Halloween decorations. So the end result is we are roughly \$100,000 short of our fiscal plan, yet still in a year where we have met our fundraising targets and our park attendance is up.

Fortunately, there is still a month to go and hopefully our year end direct mail fundraising, our Christmas at Canada Place and also up at the park will generate more than than expected revenue to get us closer to our year end results.

The Giant Flood that hit the Park

On Oct. 17th, rainfall in that 24 hour period measured between 400-600 mm over that time span! This overwhelmed the Daisy Lake Dam forcing BC Hydro to open the gates and let the water rush down the Cheakamus River where the water flow met a unique two day high tide. The result was major flooding with many forced to leave their homes and major damage. At one point, the water was within inches of overflowing the dyke behind the park. The water level at the park rose to the top of the underside of our bridge at the entrance. The major issue at the park was the basement in our new station as water rose to 5 feet 10 inches submerging the furnace, hot water heater, electrical, alarm, telephone and sprinkler system controls. The water did not come in from the drain in the basement floor, but rather was pushed in by the high water table through the building drainage system to the crawl space, then cascading down into the basement. Our single pump could not even come close to the handle the volume of water. Dave Theti and Joe Kerr slept in the station overnight to keep the pump working. Fortunately, the remainder of the park stayed above water which was the result of the work we did to raise the site above the flood plain level for our infrastructure and exhibits. Many yards on the other side to the BC Rail tracks were flooded.

(Look Back - cont'd)

Two days later, BC Rail loaned us two large gas powered pumps and we got the basement pumped out and start the drying process. Our staff and volunteers did a remarkable job, staying at the site 24 hours a day for three days while the pumps worked to get all the water out. Once the water was emptied, the damage assessment began. All of our Halloween and Christmas display stored in the crawl space were lost. We are now formulating a claim to the Provincial Emergency Plan to see if we can obtain some financial assistance. And then the winds came. On Oct. 20th in the middle of our Halloween event, high winds blew over many of the special displays and forced an early shut down of the event due flying debris on the mini rail tracks. Many ghosts, hung in the trees, flew off our property. Thanks again to the hard work of our staff and volunteers we re-opened the next night. Thanks to all our volunteers, IGA, Sears, Squamish Brownies, Mountain FM and the Chief for supporting the event!

Kids Kaboose

The caboose made its first debut as part fo the Hobgoblin Express Halloween event. The former McDonald's caboose (purchased from CP Rail), was restored thanks to Fred Dannells and the Canada Post Heritage group who volunteered 1680 hours to make it ready as a multi function facility for children's birthday parties etc.

Mother Nature's rampage resulted in fewer guests this October than last year with 2513 visiting the park during the month. However, we remain ahead of last year with the total to date with 27,493 vs 26,031 in 2002.

General News

BC Rail

The railway's motive power continues to shed surplus units. In favour of the standardization on the GE's for road power, 3 more SD40-2 units were noted leaving on BNSF at New Westminster lettered DME.

And on Nov. 4th, four GE B36-7 units were at BNSF with one already in BC Rail blue paint and one still in Santa Fe blue and yellow.

The railway was dramatically affected by the floods on Oct. 17 and 18. There were slides on the 17th at MP 135.5 and 148.5 and at 15:42, Squamish Search & Rescue advised they are evacuating the north end of the Squamish yard area and at Cheakamus as fear the dyke could be crested. At 18:13, Squamish RCMP advised that BC Hydro had gone on 'red alert' at Daisy Lake as the water was overflowing the dam and they have no ability to control it. At 22:02, Squamish RCMP have requested assistance from BC Rail to provide hi-rail vehicles to evacuate people from the Upper Cheakamus Valley if needed.

A Look Back (cont'd)

Myra Canyon Trestles Update

Fundraising and work is underway to look at the feasibility of rebuilding the Kettle Valley Railway trestles destroyed by the forest fires last summer. CPR has donated technical assistance and engineering expertise to assist and a number of government departments and agencies are involved.

BCSME hits 250,000 riders at Confederation Park

Congratulations to the BC Society of Model Engineers on this amazing milestone. This was achieved on Oct. 28th, 2003 since the park opened in the same month in 1993. The 2003 ridership reached 31,392!

Fort Steele

The future of the Fort Steele historic site near Cranbrook, and its steam railway operation, is up in the air as the Province is trying to privatize the operation. The deal will see funding from the Province cut by 50% and staff by 2/3rds with a private operator assuming operations. However, the Province would continue to own the assets, including the railway and its equipment.

LATE BREAKING NEWS AT 2025 YEAR END

VIA's First Stage of high speed Rail Announced

The first phase of Canada's proposed high-speed rail project will run between Ottawa and Montreal, federal Transport Minister Steven Mackinnon said at a press conference on Dec. 12th.

The 200-kilometre stretch of the Alto High-Speed Rail corridor is only the first phase of a line that will eventually connect Toronto and Quebec City.

"The most logical option is the relatively short and straight portion of the overall route," MacKinnon said.

The high-speed rail network will prioritize ensuring passengers are able to get to the high-speed rail using public transit, Mackinnon said.

Construction on the first phase is expected to begin in four years, MacKinnon said, adding that this was "twice as fast as the original eight-year schedule."

(TRNS)

CBC Television covers our NPX!

Board Members Rob Payette & Dylan Smith and Event Manager Chrissy Stephen become stars! On the late evening news on Dec. 20th.

Youtube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snEdrea1HGc> (CBC)

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TRNS (Trains Magazine)

Note: WCRA volunteers: **Do not forget to send your volunteer hours for 2025 and send to donna@wcra.org.**

Deadline is February 28th, 2026.

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Photo by: Ken Elias. Canadian Pacific RCP as a 'DPU set' in the Kicking Horse Pass - July 16th, 2025



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