

DANVILLE FLYER

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The *DANVILLE FLYER* is published monthly by the **DANVILLE JUNCTION CHAPTER** of the **NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY** for its members and other interested persons.

The **DANVILLE JUNCTION CHAPTER, NRHS**, is a not-for-profit corporation organized to preserve the history of railroading in Eastern Illinois and Western Indiana and operates a museum located in the former Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railroad depot on East Benton Street in Rossville, Illinois. The museum is open weekends from Memorial Day to Labor Day and features many railroad displays plus a large operating HO model railroad.

Membership in the Chapter is open to anyone having an interest in any aspect of railroading. Dues per year are \$20.00 for Chapter membership in addition to \$37.00 for NRHS membership. Meetings are held on the third (3rd) Sunday of each month (except June, July, August and December) at the Jocko's Depot Restaurant, Gilbert Street (Illinois Route 1) and Williams Street, next to CSX, in Danville, IL with lunch beginning at 1:00 PM Central Time followed by meeting and program.

OFFICERS FOR 2009 - Our 41st Year

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Eastbound UP coal train headed by UP 6619 & 7113 pass below the Dow City Cemetery, Dow City, Iowa on September 16. Bruce Bird, Walt Baselt and the photographer found this nice view of the rolling hills of western Iowa to shoot a rail photo.

Photo by Rick Schroeder

Coming Events

October 18, 2009

Danville, IL - Monthly Chapter Meeting at Jocko's Depot Restaurant, 1:00 PM

Oct 17-18, 2009

Springfield - The Great Train Expo. Illinois State Fairgrounds, 801 E. Sangamon Ave. 10- 4. A national, traveling show that caters to the model railroad enthusiast.

Oct 23-25, 2009

Monticello - Ghost Train - October 23rd-25th, 30th-31st: ALL ages can enjoy a train ride through Camp Creek Hollow with a stop at Cemetery Road.

Nov 8, 2009

Bloomington - Central Illinois Great Train Show. Interstate Center, 2301 W. Market. 9-3.

Nov 22, 2009

East Peoria - Illinois Valley and River City Railroad Clubs' Peoria Train Fair. Illinois Central College, Rts 116 & 24. 10-3.

Nov 28-29, 2009

Monticello - The Polar Express™ - November 28th & 29th; December 4-5: Read along with the story as the train makes its round-trip journey to the North Pole.

Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be held Sunday, September 20 at Jocko's Depot Restaurant, Williams and Gilbert Street, beginning at 1:00 PM.

Add to your calendar that the Annual Dinner will be Sunday, December 6 starting at 1:00 PM.

We held our first operating session early this month. For the past several years we have used a switch list for locals and some partial lists for train set out and pickup (sometimes using the "sticky note" for the information). This year Bob and Rick discussed going back to car cards, a system that is used on many model railroads and Rick's in particular. For a couple of weeks prior to the session an inventory was made of cars on the layout (Rick still had the list file of all cars) and then new cards were printed for those in service. Next a session was setup to place all of the car cards on each freight car where it stood on the layout. The final work was the Sunday prior to the session when waybill cards were made and placed in the pockets of cars in industries, in the yard and on trains. Bob, Doug N. and Rick got the work completed and the session setup. Over the next few months the system will be refined and hopefully the system will begin to work like it should.

We welcome new member Rocky Hill, 1207 Sherman St, Danville. He attended his first meeting in September, is retired, a model railroader and rail fan.

Rossville Operating Sessions

The CI & ERR will operate on the first Saturday of each month, unless noted change below, starting in October and beginning around 1:00 PM.

Saturday, November 7

Saturday, December 5

Saturday, January 9, 2010 - note this is the second Saturday due to New Years Day

Saturday, February 6, 2010

Saturday, March 6, 2010

Saturday, April 3, 2010

Sessions on the Danville and Western are not set yet. Because of changes in schedule this year and next I will notify members via Email of planned sessions. Dates will not be published. If you have not been on my previous Email list contact me to get on the notification list at rickschro1@gmail.com.

November will be election month

As discussed by our President at the last meeting, we will have elections in November and thus we will announce the slate of candidates for offices at the October meeting.



Danville Chapter, NRHS - Minutes, 9/20/9

The meeting was called to order at 1357.

The Treasurer's report shows the following balances: Checking \$1622.25, Savings \$3872.43 for a Total of \$5493.68

Member Jim Hile was introduced. Rocky Hill turned in a member application and was introduced. He is retired and has a coffee table layout. The minutes were approved as printed.

Old Business

Summer at the museum was well staffed, with Jim Hile and Skylar Brown performing yeoman duty. Attendance was in line with recent years. Bill reported seeing a caboose on a CSX NB train.

New Business

The first operating session at Rossville will be Oct. 3.

Mark Ziebart mentioned a new record on track laying in the Powder River area by a female roadmaster on BNSF. He also bought a home.

Doug reminded members of elections in November.

The Meeting was adjourned at 1408.

Rick Schroeder presented the program, showing pictures he took the previous week on a trip to Iowa and Nebraska.

we will make transportation more sustainable and energy-efficient." "Historically, Pennsylvania has had a tremendous history in railroading, and it remains my belief that our state can still have a bright future in rail if we take advantage of dynamic partnerships between the private and public sectors like the one that produced this locomotive," said Congressman Bill Shuster, the Ranking Republican on the Railroads Subcommittee.

"What Norfolk Southern and Penn State are doing with Congress and Secretary LaHood's support is truly significant and will help usher in a new generation of green locomotives fueled by American ingenuity. Let's not forget about the great work done by the Juniata Locomotive Shop employees who did a superior job producing this engine. I am proud to have worked to secure funding for this project, and I look forward to seeing it working the rail lines soon."

Congressman Shuster secured \$1.3 million in federal funding for the NS 999 project. NS 999 is an entirely electric locomotive that uses a lead-acid energy storage system comprised of 1,080 12-volt batteries to operate in railroad switching applications without the use of a diesel engine and with zero exhaust emissions.

The plug-in locomotive also can regenerate dynamic braking energy through a system provided by Brookville Equipment Company. The recovered dynamic braking energy continually replenishes the energy storage system, and uses this re-

covered energy for tractive effort in rail operations. The batteries are carefully monitored and controlled through an elaborate battery management system to assure safety and maximum battery life, and when fully charged NS 999 is able to operate three shifts before recharging is required.

Norfolk Southern unveils Experimental Electric Locomotive

With U.S. Dept. of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and Congressman Bill Shuster in attendance, Norfolk Southern today unveiled the latest in alternative energy locomotive technology at its Juniata Locomotive Shop in Altoona, Pa. NS 999 is a prototype 1,500-horsepower switching locomotive that relies solely on rechargeable batteries for power.

"At Norfolk Southern we strongly subscribe to the view that sustainability and reducing our carbon footprint are solid business objectives that also provide enormous benefits to the communities we serve," said CEO Wick Moorman. "By utilizing regenerated kinetic energy of the train and with no diesel exhaust emissions, NS 999 achieves those goals."

This prototype locomotive was developed by Norfolk Southern, with the help of an incredibly creative partnership, including the U.S. Dept. of Energy, the Federal Railroad Administration, and The Pennsylvania State University, for which we are grateful. We must also recognize Congressman Bill Shuster, as without his active interest and participation in this project NS 999 would still be merely a concept." "Today, the transportation sector currently accounts for just under a third of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, more than half of nitrogen oxide emissions, and almost three-quarters of our petroleum consumption.

We need to change that," said Secretary LaHood. "By working together to develop alternative energy sources and innovative technologies like this electric locomotive,





The photo above was found in some archives recently. Taken at the BN's Clyde Yard in Cicero on May 11, 1973 we find that some of us have changed. Standing from left to right, Rick Schroeder, Herman Compton (BN), Henry Schmidt, Gary Lance (BN), Dave Sherrill, Paul Anuta, Doug Herrmann (deceased) with son Billy, Randy Rippey, Dick Stair (deceased), John Ellis and Jim Millikin. Kneeling in front is Paul DeFries, Jesse Bennett and Don McCarthy (deceased). As noted, we have all changed, Clyde Yard has changed and BN is now BNSF.

Rail News

APOLLO BEACH, Fla. — CSX has won a contract to supply Tampa Electric Co.'s Big Bend coal-fired power plant with fuel, traffic that formerly traveled over water, the *Tampa Tribune* has reported. The railroad will use a 110-car trainset to move Illinois Basin coal to the plant. "Coal delivery to the Big Bend plant has been exclusively delivered through the Mississippi River and across the Gulf of Mexico," said Rick Morera, a Tampa Electric spokesman. "Weather can be a factor. Train gives us another form of delivery that will improve our delivery system." The train is to begin running in December.

[Via TRAINS On-Line 9-25-09](#)

ALTOONA, Pa. — Norfolk Southern today released a 1,500-hp switch engine powered by rechargeable batteries. The engine, NS999, was unveiled with NS CEO "Wick" Moorman and U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood in attendance. The locomotive, built with \$1.3 million in federal funds, uses a lead-acid energy storage system comprised of 1,080 batteries. It's capable of regenerating energy produced during dynamic braking, energy that diesel-electric locomo-

tives are unable to capture. The locomotive will need to be plugged in and recharged before use; it's estimated the unit will be able to operate for three shifts before needing to be recharged

[Via TRAINS On-Line 9-28-09](#)

50 years ago Wabash ran its last passenger train into Des Moines Sept. 30, 1959, discontinuing Nos. 11 and 14 to and from Moberly, MO. Wabash still had an overnight train between Omaha and St. Louis but it was cut back to Council Bluffs and downgraded to a mixed in 1960. It lasted until 1968, into the Norfolk & Western era.

CSX granted Indiana Rail Road overhead trackage rights on a number of its subdivision lines in the areas of Cincinnati, OH and Indianapolis, IN. In its filing with the STB, CSX said that the purpose of the trackage rights included allowing INRD to handle haulage traffic over these lines

General Electric said that it is bracing for a "very tough and bleak" market for new locomotives through 2010. "North American, from the standpoint of purchasing locomotives, is not moving," said a GE spokesman. The spokesman said

Continued on Page 4

Museum volunteer stole CSX locomotive

MIAMI — Brandon Dowdy, a museum volunteer, railfan, and a bipolar man who'd stopped taking his medication, received three years of probation for stealing a CSX locomotive, the *Miami Sun-Sentinel* has reported. Dowdy, 22, climbed aboard an unattended locomotive, moved it across a dark territory main line, and abandoned it next to a bar where he went to hear a local band play.

CSX spokesman Gary Sease declined to comment on the sentence, but noted, "This was a very serious offense." Indeed, if another train had been moving on the line at the time, a collision likely would have ensued.

Dowdy and friend Alex Johnson-Self told police they were trying to get to the Redland Tavern to hear the house band play. Dowdy, a volunteer at the Gold Coast Railroad Museum, climbed aboard unattended GP38-2 No. 2617 and used the knowledge he'd acquired at the museum to start and move the engine. He ran it through switches and down seven miles of CSX's Homestead Subdivision before he and Johnson-Self abandoned the engine next to the tavern. Dowdy is bipolar, and his attorney said he wasn't taking medication to treat the disorder.

Dowdy will stay in prison until November. In addition to probation, he'll have to perform 100 hours of community service, and a restraining order will keep him away from railroads. In an e-mail to the newspaper, Dowdy wrote, "I think the [decision] was very fair ... It has affected my love of trains because I can no longer work around them or participate in any activities that deal with that form of transportation."

[Via TRAINS On-Line 9-28-09](#)





WB BNSF 6058 CEFX 1013 YORK, NE 9-15-09

Westbound empty coal train headed by BNSF 6058 and CEFX 1013 roll through York, Nebraska on their way back to the Wyoming coal fields. A pedestrian overpass in York provides a great location for trains in the otherwise flatland of central Nebraska. Photo by Rick Schroeder, 9-15-09

BNSF begins to replace Iowa bridge, CN caps off Tennessee yard reconstruction

Earlier this week, BNSF announced it's launching a major bridge replacement project in Iowa while CN announced yesterday it completed a major classification yard reconfiguration project in Tennessee.

CN's \$100 million, multi-year project at the Memphis facility — the Class I's second-largest classification yard — called for essentially building a new yard on top of an existing one built in the early 1900s, rebuilding old locomotive repair and car shops, and upgrading a locomotive fueling station. The yard now can handle more than 3,100 freight cars and more than 35 trains daily, and features 45 classification tracks and 12 receiving and departure tracks ranging in length from 5,000 to 10,000 feet.

At a ceremony held yesterday at the yard, CN announced it will rename the facility Harrison Yard in honor of President and Chief Executive E. Hunter Harrison, who will retire at year's end and be succeeded by Executive Vice President Claude Mongeau.

"This project transformed an aged, inefficient rail yard into a state-of-the-art, effectively designed major terminal," said Mongeau in a prepared statement. "Today's yard can handle nearly double the traffic the old facility could in a 24-hour period."

Meanwhile, prime contractor Ames Construction Inc. has begun to replace BNSF's 118-year-old swing span over the Mississippi River in Burlington, Iowa, with a modern lift span designed to increase river channel width from 150 feet to more than 307 feet. The \$70 million project is scheduled for completion in summer 2011.

Lift span construction is being partially financed through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. In addition, the state of Iowa is seeking a \$25 million Transportation Investment Generating

Economic Recovery grant for the Burlington Bridge project. The bridge is used by about 30 trains daily, including two Amtrak trains.

Via Progressive Railroading 9-25-09



Rail News - continued from Page 3

that production at its Erie, PA facility would fall by 44 percent this year, to 485 locomotives.

Dow Jones reported that several Wall Street firms are predicting a "sector recovery" of rail traffic and urging investors to buy rail stocks. Dow Jones reported that these firms included BMO Capital Markets, which recently raised its rating of CSX and Norfolk Southern to "outperform."

Missouri officials noted significant improvement in the performance of its state-supported passenger trains operated by Amtrak between St. Louis and Kansas City. Whereas these trains had in the past nearly always operated late, officials noted that they had been on time 97 percent of the time in June and 90 percent of the time in July. Officials credited the decline in "freight train interference," a result of the recessionary decline in freight rail traffic, with having helped passenger train performance on the line.

The Federal Railroad Administration reported that rail accidents and incidents generally declined, the first half of 2009 versus the first half of 2008. Total accidents and incidents declined 20.8 percent to 5,035; train accidents declined 30.3 percent to 892; trespasser fatalities declined 8.6 percent to 202; grade crossing fatalities declined 16.0 percent to 110; and on-duty employee fatalities declined 23.1 percent to 10.



On October 3 & 4 Amtrak detoured two of the Chicago to St. Louis trains via Villa Grove due to trackwork between Joliet and Chicago. On October 4, about 11:00 AM, Walt and Rick caught #22, with 7 cars headed by Amtrak #181, leaving Villa Grove after a crew change. This detour move was expected early this summer but did not occur. Quite a site to see a passenger train in Villa Grove. Photo by Rick Schroeder (Check out Bruce Bird's story on the next page)

Passenger rail in Iowa: Worth the expense?

Gov. Chet Culver will conduct a whistle-stop train tour of southern Iowa today (9-25), part of an ongoing campaign to promote the use of federal stimulus money to upgrade Iowa's passenger lines.

The push for more passenger train service has drawn support from Des Moines Mayor Frank Cownie, Iowa City Mayor Regina Bailey and chambers of commerce leaders in several Iowa cities. The plan would include new passenger routes between Dubuque and Chicago and between Iowa City and Chicago, with eventual service extending west to Des Moines and Council Bluffs. Culver is scheduled to start his tour at 7:30 a.m. in Creston, with a final stop planned at 3:35 p.m. in Burlington.

But not everybody supports the federal stimulus money train, which includes upgrading passenger rail corridors nationwide, starting with an \$8 billion com-

mitment from Congress.

Critics say rail speeds to be too slow in Iowa. Some critics view the plan as a waste of money that could eventually cost taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars for a full-fledged national high-speed passenger railroad system. They claim that what is described as high-speed rail will be a slow trip in Iowa.

"High-speed rail has become the 'hip' kind of pork this year," said Randal O'Toole of the Cato Institute in Washington, D.C. But too few people will ride trains for the money spent, he said.

Samuel Staley, director of urban growth and land-use policy at the Reason Foundation in Los Angeles, which promotes free markets, said, "This isn't the 1950s, when intercity rail made a tremendous amount of sense. You can't ignore the fiscal realities that these systems are operating on. "If you are in a state like Iowa with decent air service that will get you to Chicago within an hour, it doesn't make sense."

Gustave de Saint Victor of Iowa City, who has ridden high-speed trains in Europe as

a graduate student at England's Oxford University, questioned why anybody would want to ride the moderate-speed trains proposed for the new Iowa routes.

The proposed train between Iowa City and Chicago, via the Quad Cities, would take 4 hours 58 minutes over 222 miles. The train could reach a peak speed of 79 mph, Amtrak officials said, but its average would be 45 mph. Travelers could drive from Iowa City to Chicago via interstates in 3 hours 43 minutes, more than an hour faster than the train.

Its projected ridership for two daily round trips is estimated at 187,000 passengers annually, officials said. That is an average of 128 passengers per trip. "It just seems so bogus what they are saying," de Saint Victor said. "It seems like propaganda to call it a 79 mph train when it won't go that fast." An Amtrak spokesman in Chicago issued a statement in response to critics of the federal stimulus funding for high-speed rail projects nationally, noting that Amtrak already operates more than half of its daily trains at 100 mph or greater.

Rail improvements necessary in Iowa, - the Iowa City train would require \$32.5 million for Iowa track improvements on the Iowa Interstate Railroad, plus equipment costs of \$1.9 million and annual operating subsidies of \$1.6 million, state officials said. (*Editor - it would cost \$193,000 per passenger for the first year and does not include improvements in Illinois*). Upgrading tracks between Iowa City and Des Moines for passenger trains would cost an additional \$106 million.

The proposed route between Dubuque and Chicago on Canadian National tracks would be even slower than the Iowa City train, requiring 5 hours 10 minutes for a 178-mile trip. That's an average speed of 35 mph. That train, with one round trip daily, is projected to attract up to 74,500 passengers per year, or an average of 100 per trip.

Richard Harnish, director of the Midwest High-Speed Rail Coalition, a Chicago advocacy group, said the new rail service proposed for Iowa should be viewed as "quick-start" projects that can be running quickly. The passenger trains could even-

tually operate at much faster speeds “if Iowans make it clear to their legislators that they want it to be as good as it can be,” he said.

Tammy Nicholson, director of the Iowa Department of Transportation’s Office of Rail Transportation, said passenger rail service should be viewed as a key component of the state’s overall transportation system. “In order to deal with growing highway congestion for both freight and passengers, we have to utilize these other corridors that we have for transportation,” she said.

Rail upgrades eligible for federal money - Culver aide Troy Price said the governor believes the benefits of passenger rail outweigh the negatives. “Studies show that passenger rail increases mobility options, improves the economic viability of an area, leads to greater investment in communities, and reduces fuel use and carbon emissions,” Price said.

The Iowa Department of Transportation is seeking \$46 million from the Federal Railroad Administration to support three passenger rail applications for federal stimulus money.

This includes \$2 million for planning along the entire Chicago-Omaha corridor, plus \$44 million to reduce congestion and delays on the Burlington Northern Santa Fe line through southern Iowa, which carries Amtrak’s California Zephyr passenger train between Chicago and northern California. Additional stimulus applications are due Oct. 2 for passenger rail service between Iowa City and Chicago and Dubuque and Chicago, Iowa officials said.

Des Moines Register, 9-23-09

Ski train to run again

Amtrak and Iowa Pacific got the go-ahead for Denver-to-Winter Park rail trips from Dec. 26 to March 28. The UP said that it has approved a request from Amtrak to operate a revived Ski Train for the upcoming ski season.

In April, a company operated by Denver billionaire Phil Anschutz said it would no longer run Ski Train excursions to Winter Park, potentially ending a 69-year tradition. Anschutz’s firm sold its Ski Train railcars to a Canadian railroad company.

Last month, Iowa Pacific Holdings LLC, which operates excursion railroads seasonally in southern Colorado and short-line freight railroads in Colorado and across the country, said it would like to take over the Denver-Winter Park operation. Iowa Pacific president Ed Ellis said “We’re pleased to hear that UP has approved that request. The new Ski Train operation is scheduled to run between Dec. 26 and March 28.

Ellis’ company operates the Rio Grande Scenic Railroad that runs summer passenger excursions serving Alamosa, La Veta, Antonito and Monte Vista. Using railcars from that service for a winter Ski Train will make for more efficient use of the equipment, Ellis said.

Amtrak and the renewed Ski Train are expected to use Union Station through the end of March. Beginning in April, Union Station officials expect to move Amtrak train service to a temporary station at 21st and Delgany streets to accommodate a 3-1/2 year proposed redevelopment of the Union Station area. It is likely that the Iowa Pacific’s Ski Train, if it operates during the 2010-2011 season, would use the temporary Amtrak facility as well.

Via Brass Switchkey Railnews, V.16, #41, September 30, 2009

Amtrak and UP - an almost tangle west of Villa Grove

Justin and I took off this afternoon to catch the southbound Amtrak Texas Eagle, train #21, on its weekend detour down the C&EI. From the excellent postings from Rick and Bruce S. we planned on catching it north of Royal and then trying to beat it south of Tuscola due to the crew change in Villa Grove. At about 5:20 21 appeared at Dailey, with Genesis #21 leading train 21. It looked good flying past us.

As we beat the hasty retreat to south of Tuscola we heard on the scanner that a SB was sitting at Tuscola and a NB and the VG local were sitting at Cadwell with NLCH sliding north past all of this to meet 21 at Villa Grove. A busy time on the UP in great light! Things were shaping up nicely.

As we were heading south of Pesotum on Rt. 45 we heard an ominous transmission over the radio:

“Dispatcher, this is Amtrak 21- we’ve slid past the red signal at the south end of Villa Grove”

“Where are you now?”

“Just past the signal at 147”

“SOUTH of the signal?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“QNLCH, where are you located?”

“We just passed mile 151.”

“NLCH bring your train to a safe stop immediately

What transpired next was the crews on Amtrak at first claiming that the signal dropped in their face, and then they admitted they blew past a red. Both trains were stopped about 3 miles apart facing each other and due to topography neither one could see the other’s head light.

Whew- that’s a bit too close for comfort! This happened at around 6:15 and when we left Tuscola the trains were still sitting there at 7:30. The DS was going to have

Amtrak back up into the siding but I would imagine that they would have to wait until both a UP and an Amtrak engineer arrived to relieve the boneheads on duty. Meanwhile the passengers on board got to enjoy a beautiful sunset while parked in a cornfield just outside of Villa Grove. And remember that the crews in the NLCH and the northbound and local at Cadwell were probably going to go dead in the meantime as well. If you see a lot of trains running on the UP tomorrow now you'll know why. And hopefully the passengers will never know just how close they came to being on the news.

Bruce

Needless to say, the crew was removed from service and the cup's were probably ready when they arrived at Villa Grove.

The DM&E (CP Rail) trackwork begins

The Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern Railroad showed off a newly rebuilt, 30-mile stretch of line to Rochester, Minn. to area government officials invited aboard one of DM&E's Pullman-era passenger cars. But if DM&E, now a part of Canadian Pacific, perceived that by showing its new line, it could ease opposition to its plans for bypasses and coal trains, the plan apparently didn't work. Those "continue to be issues," said Rochester Mayor Ardele Brede. "To me, it (the ride) pointed out just how many cars do get stopped when a train comes through." DM&E's Graham brushed aside questions to do with Mayo Clinic's proposed Southern Rail Corridor or the railroad's potential plans to extend service to Wyoming coal fields, saying that the day was meant to focus on DM&E's roughly \$15-million investment here.

In his remarks, Graham said: "Work started 5 months ago and the ride over the new roadbed was smoother than taking an airplane. The railroad employed about 70

people, installed more than 7,000 tons of new rail that meets the top-of-the-line industry standard and is expected to last a century or longer. The old rail was installed around 1916. The new rail permits higher speeds -- 30 mph through Rochester, where trains used to go 10 mph. "Improvements in Rochester and elsewhere on the line have helped shave 24 to 36 hours off the length of the trip to Chicago and this time-saving means a lot to our customers on the line."

New freight line expected to ease delays

Helping freight trains move quicker and reducing the time motorists spend waiting for trains to pass are goals of a \$26 million federally funded project announced Monday. Plans were unveiled to add a third main rail line over about three miles in Blue Island and Alsip, easing congestion in the busy south suburban corridor. Local, state and railroad officials talked about improvements at a groundbreaking ceremony at tracks south of Wireton Road in Blue Island.

Work will start soon, said William Thompson, program manager for the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program. The program, a major effort to ease rail congestion in the Chicago area, has completed 43 of 78 rail and highway projects planned throughout northeastern Illinois.

About 1,200 freight trains travel through Chicago every day, Thompson said. Of those, about 160 run through Blue Island, Mayor Donald Peloquin said. The first part of the work is on the railroad bridge over 127th Street, Thompson said. The bridge is already wide enough for a third line, he said. The new third will run from Francisco Avenue northwest to about 123rd Street, Thompson said. The new line will be linked to an existing third line, east of Francisco Avenue, for about six miles in total, Blue Island Peloquin said. He compared the work to adding a lane to

a highway, with the third line allowing "through trains" to roll through the area without having to slow or stop, as is now often the case. "Now, those trains have to stop two or three times to get a free track. With the third line, they won't have to stop," Peloquin said.

A new signal system will also be installed, helping speed trains along, he said. Peloquin, whose city has 123 grade crossings, hopes more efficient freight train traffic could improve area truck traffic since a third rail line means trains won't be delayed as often as before. Alsip Mayor Patrick Kitching said he's "thought a lot about railroads in my lifetime, mostly while waiting at crossings for trains to clear." With seven industrial parks in Alsip, Kitching said truck drivers will appreciate spending less time watching trains crawl past.

Summer help at Museum

I have counted all the signatures on the sign-in sheet for the 2009 museum season. There were 34 "regular" days to be open, and because the 4th of July fell on a Saturday it looked like there wouldn't be any extra days. However, with the Sesqui-centennial in Rossville this year, they asked us to be open an extra day, Friday August 7th. That left us with 35 days to be open to the public.

Let me also say that if someone didn't sign in, they didn't get counted. There were also duplicate entries for a couple of days (Cooke and Cooke), and I don't know who the second one was without initials to go by! Anyway, Skylar Brown and Jim Hile have all-time nearly perfect attendance. Each only missed one day out of the 35. Here is the list from most days to least:

Brown, Hile, Gallippi, Ziebart, Sherrill, Cooke, Wright, Nipper, Brazda, McCoy, Schroeder, Pearson, Honn and Butzow

Doug Nipper