

Whistle Stop

Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum

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www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org



Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

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Pictured above is the newest member of Watauga Valley's rolling stock. While currently showing signs of abuse, follow along in the months to come as our Mechanical Team performs their magic in transforming the car into a legacy beauty. Story on page 3.

June 23rd General Membership Meeting

The Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum will have our regular General Membership Meeting at 6:30 pm on Monday, June 23rd, 2025 at the Chuckey Depot, 110 Spring Street, Jonesborough, TN. Our program this month will be *"The Evolution of America's Railroad"*.

Bring a friend out and enjoy a great night of railroading.

Member Notes

Les Billings, Membership Chairperson

CONCERNS: Please keep the following members in your thoughts and prayers for various reasons: Gary Price, Fred Phofl, Tony King, Lois Tilley, Ed Fuller, and Jack Maloney. Also, we're sad to report the loss of Suzie Price's mother. If you wish for one of our members or family member to be reported for various concerns in the *Whistle Stop*, email a request to wataugavalley@gmail.com or wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com.

ADDRESS CHANGES: If your address, phone number or email address has changed, please contact Les Billings at wataugavalley.membership@gmail.com for correction.

FUTURE GSMR EXCURSION

The next GSMR excursion is scheduled for September 13th, 2025 and will be powered by a steam locomotive.

"DINNER ON THE DINER"

The dates for our annual "*Dinner on the Diner*" are scheduled for July 11-12, 2025. We expect a large number of diners joining us for a fine meal on our *Moultrie* dining car. Tickets are \$57.00 person, must be purchased in advance, and are available at the Jonesborough Visitors Center located at 117 Boone Street or by calling (423) 753-1010 between 9 am and 5 pm. Tickets may also be purchased online at www.jonesboroughtn.org. There are no refunds.

"FALL FOLIAGE SPECIAL"

The "*Fall Foliage Special*" (previously reported as the "*Hiwassee Loop Excursion*") has been planned for Saturday, October 11th, 2025 that will offer a scenic ride through the famous Hiwassee Loop and delight riders in a 50-mile roundtrip journey through the stunning lower Hiwassee River Gorge. This 4.5-hour adventure will take passengers to the apex of the renowned Hiwassee Loop with the tracks intriguingly crossing over themselves as they spiral up the mountain. Notably, there are only 6 such loops in North America, with this one being the sole example east of the Mississippi River. Note that there is no layover on this trip; passengers will enjoy the entire duration on the train. The rails over which this train travels were formerly part of the *Louisville and Nashville Railroad's* Atlanta Division stretching between Etowah, TN, and Marietta, GA. More information to follow.

JONSBOROUGH TRAIN SHOW

The Jonesborough Train Show has been scheduled for November 15th, 2025 and will be held at the Jonesborough Visitor Center at 117 Boone Street. Vendors wishing to participate should call (423) 753-5797 or email wataugavalley@gmail.com for more information.

PHOTOS FOR WHISTLE STOP

Several members are wanting to contribute photos for the Whistle Stop; please send your photos to our editors, Fred Waskiewicz or Les Billings, at whistlestop.editor@gmail.com.

PROGRAMS NEEDED FOR 2025

The WVRHS&M Program Committee is still looking for General Membership programs. Let us know at the June meeting or email wataugavalley@gmail.com if you can present a program. We are looking for speakers who would talk on a railroad-related topic. As always we're looking for DVD and slide shows.

Mechanical Report

WVRHS&M is thrilled to announce another addition to our passenger car fleet. Pictured on the front page is ex-*Seaboard Air Line* car 6019, built in June, 1947 as a 52-seat stainless steel coach, and operated on the line's *Silver Meteor*, *Star* and *Comet* trains. After the merger with the *Atlantic Coast Line*, it became SCL 5204. It was subsequently purchased by AMTRAK where it was renumbered AMTK 6017 and converted to a 60-seat coach.



As the photo at left shows, the interior of the car is in far better shape than the exterior. The fabric scheme on the seats appears to reflect AMTRAK ownership.

Watauga Valley plans to restore it to the original SAL period as a 60-seat coach. Vandalized graffiti received over the years will be removed easily; a new interior along with new replacement windows will be installed; restrooms will be remodeled; a new vinyl floor will be installed; and complete electrical and plumbing upgrades will be performed. Head End Power will be installed as well.

We have one of the best mechanical teams to maintain and restore passenger cars in the field. Working from our yard in Jonesborough, they know their business in keeping our passenger cars on the road. With six cars in our fleet now, it takes a lot of manpower to keep our cars operating; this is accomplished by an all-volunteer team. If you're interested in joining them and learning the trade of working with historical railroad passenger cars, the Watauga Valley Railroad Museum would like you to join our mechanical team. Whether you're young, old, working or retired, if you want to get involved in this unique and rewarding project, email us at wataugavalley@gmail.com and we will contact you. You do not have to be specialized in any field, we'll have a job for you!

Chuckey Depot / Museum

The next Host training session for volunteers will be conducted this summer. If you would like to get involved and volunteer at the depot/museum one day a month, please call our office at (423) 753-5797 or email wataugavalley@gmail.com to reserve a training spot. We are in need of more hosts as the hours of operation at the depot will be extended during the summer months



It's great to see WMSR 2-6-6-2 #1309 back in service after being sidelined in 2024 due to much-needed piston work.

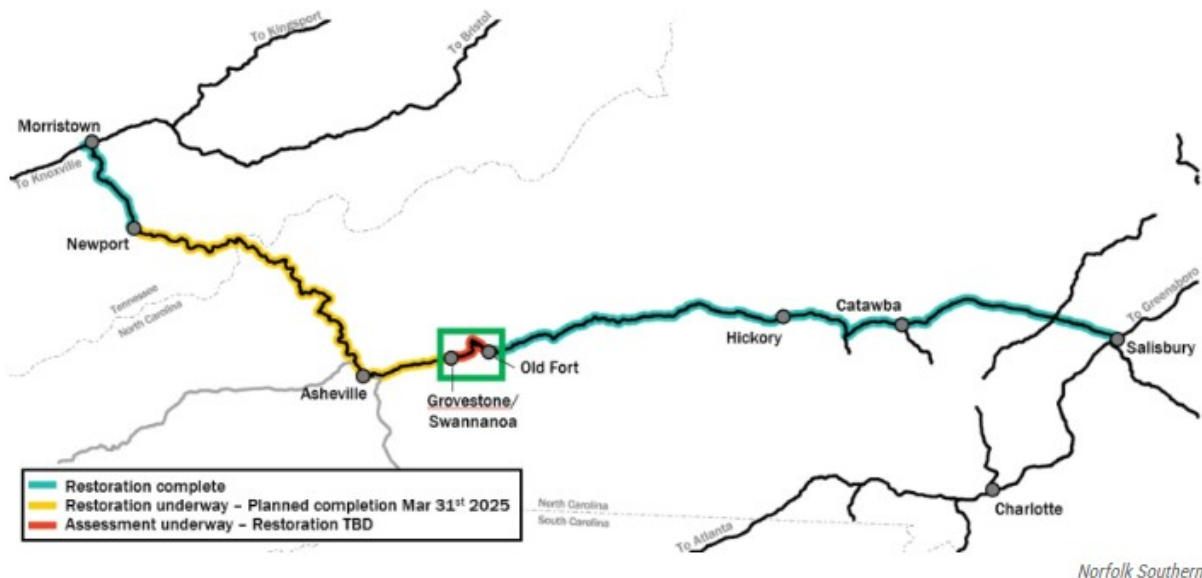
In the News



NS to Rebuild Old Fort Loops

[Blue Ridge Public Radio (BPR) News, Felicia Sonmez, May 20] Norfolk Southern will rebuild a key section of track east of Asheville, officials confirmed Tuesday. The plan may pave the way for the eventual return of passenger rail service to Western North Carolina.

The 16-mile stretch was severely damaged by Hurricane Helene. It includes the historic Old Fort Loops, one of the most scenic — and most treacherous — stretches of railway in the country. Twisting from the Piedmont through tunnels and along ridges up into the Blue Ridge Mountains, the line has long played an important role in connecting Western North Carolina to the rest of the state. The railway, though, hasn't seen passenger train service since 1975. And since Hurricane Helene hit in September 2024, freight rail service has disappeared, too. The storm's historic flooding devastated much of the rail line.



Norfolk Southern has already restored its tracks that run west of Asheville to East Tennessee. Late last month, the first freight train since Helene rolled into Asheville. But for months, the company was evaluating whether to proceed with rebuilding the Loops. On Tuesday [May 20], Norfolk Southern officials said they're moving ahead, with a target date of this winter for completing the project.

"This is a day so many of us, both at Norfolk Southern and beyond, have been looking forward to, and I want to credit all of our NS teammates and our partners that played a role in getting this track back in service so quickly despite unprecedented damage," Ed Boyle, Norfolk Southern's vice president of engineering, said in a statement. "We know firsthand how critical rail service is for local communities, and we're proud to restore this vital link for businesses and mark this important step in the region's economic recovery."

In a statement, Gov. Josh Stein said the move will help Western North Carolina get "back on its feet and reconnected economically. "This development will help businesses regain their livelihoods and strengthen our supply chain so that Western North Carolina can build back stronger," he said. [continued on next page]

[continued from previous page] And while the return of passenger rail to the region remains uncertain, local rail advocates say this is a necessary and welcome first step.

Ray Rapp is co-chair of the Western North Carolina Rail Committee. He is also the former co-chair of the joint state House and Senate committee on improving and expanding rail service in the state. In a statement to BPR, he said the decision represents "a major \$60 million commitment on the part of Norfolk Southern and marks a significant economic reconnection of Western North Carolina to the outside world."

"It is a major economic development for the mountains in the short term — for freight rail service — and in the long run for the restoration of passenger rail service between Asheville and Salisbury, the main line connection for AMTRAK North to Richmond, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, New York and Boston and Southeast to Charlotte, Atlanta and New Orleans," Rapp said.



C&O 614 Restoration

[Extracted from C&O 614 web site, June 9, 2025] This past weekend marked a powerful and emotional milestone in American rail preservation: the legendary Chesapeake & Ohio steam locomotive 614 has officially arrived at the Strasburg Rail Road to begin a complete restoration. The 382-mile journey from Clifton Forge, Virginia, completed June 8, 2025, was not just a move; it was a handoff in a generational story.

In a striking moment captured on site, members of RJD America LLC and the Strasburg Rail Road stood united before two giants of American steam, C&O #614 and Great Western #90. These machines are more than iron and fire; they are living time machines, carrying the spirit of an era when steam drove a nation forward. But it takes more than metal to bring legends like 614 back to life. It takes a devoted team of volunteers, craftsmen, and dreamers who work through grease, grit, and long nights with nothing but passion and pride. These are the faces behind the fire—the people who refuse to let history fade. Restoring a steam locomotive is a monumental undertaking—gritty, complex, and intensely demanding. It's not just about making an old engine run again; it's about reversing decades of wear, corrosion, and fatigue. Every component must be carefully removed, inspected, and either restored or replaced to meet modern safety and operational standards. The work is physically demanding, often performed in tight spaces, under heavy equipment, and in various weather conditions. It requires a rare blend of historical knowledge, mechanical expertise, and sheer perseverance. From machining custom parts to hand-fitting staybolts and boiler tubes, every detail matters. This is craftsmanship at its highest level—where tradition meets engineering, and where the past is brought roaring back to life through the hands of those determined to keep it alive.

For over four decades, 614 stood as a symbol of American steam power. First preserved and operated under Ross Rowland and Iron Horse Enterprises, and later safeguarded by the Chesapeake and Ohio Historical Society, each chapter of her life has been rooted in respect, care, and an enduring commitment to legacy.

[ED. NOTE: The 614 had been slated to power the "Greenbrier Presidential Express", a luxury train planned on providing service between Washington, DC and the Greenbrier Hotel in White Sulphur Springs, WV. Ross Rowland, Jr. was brought in to direct the acquisition and refurbishment of locomotives and cars. Dorothy Draper & Co. was again commissioned to do interior design for this new project. Though construction of the train was well under way, in 2012 the decision was made to mothball the effort and re-evaluate the idea under current market conditions. The train project never restarted. The cars of the GBX were sold at auction in 2014. The current green livery of the 614 is from GBX ownership.]

Helene Disaster Recovery



These photos showing the replacing of the damaged CSX bridge near Poplar, NC are by Thomas Pittman and Howard Berry. Restored service is scheduled for this September.

Display in the Block

by Les Billings

The Lehigh Valley #8104 Heritage Unit will be the focus in this month's *Display In The Block*. The shots below are all the times that I was able to capture this unit. It is one of the more flashier Heritage units in the NS fleet. FYI: The 8104 was built in 2012 and later reworked to add the white strips and the diamond-shaped nose logo to look more authentic.

Happy Railfanning!



Passing MP 33 thru Jonesborough recently.



A Telford appearance, waiting on the siding.



Westbound in Bulls Gap .



The Salt House crossing in Jonesborough.



Jonesborough once again

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TIME-SENSITIVE MATERIAL