

WHISTLE STOP

Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum

P. O. Box 432, Jonesborough, TN. 37659

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www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org



Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

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NORFOLK SOUTHERN photo

A NORFOLK SOUTHERN Geometry train is seen here in the process of track inspection prior to the reopening of rail service through Western North Carolina. Story on page 6.

April 27th General Membership Meeting

The Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum will have our next General Membership Meeting at 6:30 pm on Monday, April 27th, 2026 at the Chuckey Depot, 110 South Second Ave., Jonesborough, TN. The program is entitled "2025 Train Wrecks." Join us for an exciting evening of railfanning.

MEMBER NOTES

Please keep the following folk in your thoughts and prayers: Jim Calhoun, Fred Pfohl, Lois Tilley, and Jim Sutterlin. 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.membership@gmail.com.

NEW MEMBERS: John and Gayle Crabtree, Mountain City, TN; Steve Linder and Marat Moore, Jonesborough; and Hurbert Winebarger, Castlewood, VA. **WELCOME ABOARD!**

MEMBERSHIP RECRUITING. From Les Billings, Membership Chairman. One of our best recruiting tools are the Chuckey Depot and our membership. We would like to encourage all our members to make a special effort to recruit new members with folk you know or meet in everyday life. Not everyone that you encounter is a potential member. Most of the time you can tell who the good candidates may be. Give them a brochure/application and tell them the activities and advantages of being a club member. Working Excursion, Volunteering at the Chuckey Depot Museum, Mechanical / Coach Yard work, monthly newsletter and most important, their membership helps preserve Railroad History. Please mention that it is not a requirement to come to the meetings, but we would sure like to see them there. Folk do not have to live in our area as we have several out of state members. We have had a few new members lately that became members after visiting the Museum. So, let us begin trying to get new members through this technique as we think we could have good success doing so. Brochures will be available at the membership meeting.

HIWASSEE GORGE RIVER TRIP IS SOLD OUT. The Watauga Valley Hiwassee River Gorge trip on May 16th, 2026 is sold out; we have a full passenger load on this trip.

WVRHS&M Uniforms. If you would like to order a Watauga Valley uniform, email wataugavalley@gmail.com; an order form will be sent to you.

PROGRAMS STILL NEEDED FOR 2026. Howard Orfield & Brad McCroskey, WVRHS&M program directors, continue to ask for Membership Meeting programs for 2026. We are looking for speakers on a railroad-related subject. And as always, we're looking for DVD and slide shows. Please email wataugavalley@gmail.com if you have an interest in offering a program this year.

WHISTLE TRUCK RENTAL. The Watauga Valley's Whistle Truck is now available for rental. Call (423) 753-5797 for details.

CHUCKEY DEPOT

Attendance at the Chuckey Depot continues to improve each week as the weather is getting better. We still are in need of volunteers to host at the Chuckey Depot. If you would like to get trained as a host, please email wataugavalley@gmail.com. Rick Chinouth will hold a 45-minute training class and you will be ready to start hosting. All our hosts enjoy volunteering at the depot.

Visit the virtual rail fan camera at the Depot by visiting [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and entering Jonesborough Rail Cam or entering www.wataugavalley.org in your browser.

MECHANICAL REPORT

BY ART DEVOE

All work sessions at the Spring St Coach Yard, 210 Spring St., Jonesborough, are held each Tuesday and Saturday every month. Please show up at 9:00 am if you can help. As you can tell from the amount of work on our plates, **we need volunteers!**

Rolling Stock

St. Augustine coach (WATX 500) and **Clinchfield 100**: both in service at the NC Transportation Museum in Spencer, NC.

Powhatan Arrow coach (WATX 539), **Moultrie** diner (WATX 400), and **Crescent Harbor** sleeper/lounge (WATX 2351): these cars are at the Coach Yard receiving repairs and upgrades.

WATX 6219 coach: at the Coach Yard receiving a complete rebuild as the car will be restored to its original state as SEABOARD AIRLINE RAILROAD 6219. The following lists the progress that has been performed on the car to date as well as future work:

1. The Graffiti has been removed from the car. Thanks to Avon Guinn for his hard work.
2. 60 seats have been removed and stored.
3. Carpet has been removed.
4. Junk in the storage lockers has been removed.
5. Amtrak inspector will be coming to inspect the car in couple of weeks.
6. The car will get new upholstered seats, new floor, wall paper and paint along with new plumbing and many other items.



RAILROAD RADIO ON LINE NOW

Thanks to Thomas Pittman, Tanner Abernathy, Spencer Landis, and Bob Mushet, you can listen to railroad feeds on line.

Kermit VA to Nolichucky Gorge. www.broadcastify.com/listen/feed/41446 Feed off of Holston Mountain. You can also hear Norfolk Southern from Marion, VA to Morristown, TN.

Nolichucky Gorge to Kona, NC. Feed, located at Tocane NC, will be installed in the coming weeks.

Western North Carolina CSX Rail. www.broadcastify.com/listen/feed/42775. Lynn Gap to Little Switzerland, NC and Kona, NC to Spartanburg, SC.

Marion, NC Feed. www.broadcastify.com/listen/feed/32310

Bostic, NC Feed. www.broadcastify.com/listen/feed/33332

Spartanburg, SC Feed. www.broadcastify.com/listen/feed/41316

An additional feed, the **North Carolina Feed**, can be found at www.carolinarailfanning.com.

SPRING STREET YARD SECURITY CAMERA

Thanks to the efforts of Les Billings, the Spring Street Coach Yard is now protected by a security camera. It also provides a nice birds-eye view of the yard.



Attention: July 24-25 Train Show Vendors

A registration form is attached to the end of the newsletter for vendors wishing to reserve a table at the July 24-25, 2026 Train Show in Jonesborough.

IN THE NEWS ...



— *UP Announces First Details of 4014's Eastern Trip*

[trains.com] UNION PACIFIC's Big Boy will spend the Fourth of July in Philadelphia to mark the 250th anniversary of American independence, the railroad said today (March 20) in a message to its Steam Club members and a press release.

The locomotive's first trip to the Eastern U.S. will begin May 25 and conclude July 29, the railroad said, with display stops planned for Omaha, NE; Chicago; Buffalo, NY; Scranton, PA; Altoona, PA; St. Louis; and Kansas City, MO. A full schedule will be released at a later date.

On NORFOLK SOUTHERN, the Big Boy will run Chicago-Buffalo via the former *Nickel Plate*, then follow the Southern Tier route to Binghamton, NY, and the former DELAWARE & HUDSON / DELAWARE, LACKAWANNA & WESTERN main to Scranton. The return route from Philadelphia will follow the former PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD main line to Cleveland, and then to Chicago via the former NKP.

— *Asheville-to-Salisbury Passenger Rail*

[Emily Moosbrugger, extracted from *The Beacon Tribune*] At [March's] Western North Carolina Rail Committee conference, leaders from across the state came together to explore funding options to restore passenger rail from Asheville to Salisbury. Many say the project, which would involve upgrading WNC's existing freight corridor to support passenger trains, would bring economic benefits. A 2025 study commissioned by the North Carolina Department of Transportation estimates that construction alone could provide more than 5,200 jobs and net employees more than \$360 million in earnings.

Who's paying? While rail supporters say they are more optimistic about the project than they have been in years, a major question still stands — who's paying? Existing federal grants can cover 80% of the anticipated \$650 million in total costs. But local governments are on the hook for the remaining \$133 million. [It is estimated that] the project would take 7-12 years, provided funding is found.

Maintaining freight rail is key. Freight rail took a heavy hit in the region in 2023 with the closure of the Canton Mill. [WNC Rail Committee co-chair] Ray Rapp said this loss, along with the fizzling out of several other manufacturing sectors in the region, makes a rail system a harder sell. "If we lose the freight rail, don't worry — you're not going to see the passenger rail," he said. In response, his committee is working with NORFOLK SOUTHERN to develop programs for industrial expansion along the proposed route.

Asheville's former passenger rail station [ED. NOTE: not the original] located in Biltmore Village was damaged by Helene, raising the question of whether a new location is needed.

— *First Freight Train Rolls Through Old Fort Loops*

[Felicia Sonmez, Blue Ridge Radio, April 16.] A key section of freight railway has been rebuilt after being devastated by Hurricane Helene. The railway, known as the Old Fort Loops, has been a life-line for many local businesses. The first train since Helene will roll through this weekend — and that has rail advocates excited. [ED. NOTE: successfully occurred on April 18.] The twisting, turning stretch of railway known as the Old Fort Loops runs about 13 miles between Old Fort and Swannanoa. Climbing more than 1,000 feet through the Blue Ridge Mountains, it's one of the most treacherous sections of rail in the country.



Photo: Norfolk Southern

The railway sustained heavy damage from Helene, and for months, it wasn't clear whether the owner, Norfolk Southern, would rebuild it. Finally, last May, the construction began. And now, less than a year later, the first freight train is about to roll through since the storm. Heather Garcia, a spokesperson for Norfolk Southern, said one key step in the process took place last week, when a special train called a geometry car performed final checks on the tracks. "Using advanced lasers, sensors and cameras, NS' geometry car inspects alignment, gauge, curvature and surface conditions while it travels over the rails, making sure the track is ready for the first train back," Garcia said in an email.

Marion [NC] mayor and rail historian Steve Little visited the Loops not long after Helene. Little, who co-chairs the Western North Carolina Rail Committee, said he was shocked by the scale of the damage to the tracks. I walked on some of them where there was a gap of — I'm estimating 20 feet of air below me," Little told BPR in an interview. "And it had previously been dirt. It was completely sickening and devastating to see it that way." Rail advocates like Little see the Old Fort Loops as crucial not just for local businesses dependent on freight rail, but also for the eventual goal of bringing passenger train service back to Western North Carolina. "This, once again, is life-changing — to have the prospect of passenger rail, giving us in Western North Carolina a level of freedom that we haven't enjoyed since 1975," Little said.

The Loops are also among the most historic sections of rail in the country: The rail line was built in the 1870s by thousands of incarcerated laborers, most of them African American. Little said he and others will be at the Old Fort Depot [April 18] to remember that history, look forward to the future and welcome the first train as it rolls through.

At right, the train makes it way up the Loops in its 1,100-foot climb, which requires 13 miles of track to cover a straight-line distance of 3 miles. [Joseph Navin photo via trains.com]



DISPLAY IN THE BLOCK

BY LES BILLINGS

As in last month's *Display in the Block*, I am sticking with an AI based feature. I am sharing some shots that I have been remixed into a soft water color painting. I have wanted to try something a little different. I have enjoyed working with these new features in Google Photos. These photos are from the Johnson City, Jonesborough area. Until Next Month, Happy Railfanning.



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Watauga Valley RHS & Museum

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TIME-SENSITIVE MATERIAL

WATAUGA VALLEY RAILROAD HS&M

— TRAIN SHOW —

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, JULY 24TH & 25TH, 2026

8:00AM—5:00PM

- New 2 Day Show & Larger Venue

- 90 Tables Available

- To be held at the Jonesborough Elementary School - 720 N. Cherokee St, Jonesborough, TN 37659

- Visit beautiful Jonesborough, (Tennessee oldest town)

- Show set-up 10am to 6pm Thursday, July 23rd, 2026

- Free parking

- Reserve your tables early, the vendors tables will fill up fast.



- Hotel information please call the Visitors Center [423] 753-1010

- Additional information concerning set-up will be emailed to you.

- Sorry no refunds on vendor tables.

TRAIN SHOW VENDORS



Please complete this form to register as a vendor for Train Show, July 24 & 25, 2026

Name _____

Address: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone _____ Email: _____

_____ Number of Tables Requested @ \$30 each [8ft] tables Total enclosed \$ _____

Completed applications and payments by checks should be mailed to Watauga Valley Railroad Museum, PO Box 432 Jonesborough, TN 37659

You also may reserve a table on our Website: www.wataugavalleynrhs.org