

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



<https://www.psrhs.org>

March 2024 Newsletter

In this issue:

MARCH MEETING PROGRAM. Page 2

February Board Meeting. Page 2

New on our Web Site. Page 2

PTC Tutorial. Page 2

Passing Scene. Page 3

From the Archives. Page 4

Positive Train Control News Article. Page 5



This circa 1905 postcard image shows the early track alignment through Colfax. See page 4 for details. PSRHS Collection

Scheduled Events & Notices



Mar 26 PSRHS Monthly Meeting and Program, 7PM - Program – Peter Hills – PTC for Steam Engine Operations

Apr 23 PSRHS Monthly Meeting and Program, 7PM - Program TBA

May 28 PSRHS Monthly Meeting and Program, 7PM - Program TBA

Reminder: Time to renew your PSRHS membership if you have not already done so. Renew by mail or on our web site using PayPal

Your annual PSRHS membership helps fund purchase of historic photos, publication of railroad history documents, field trips, and other historic preservation activities.

Preserving Railroad History on the Donner Pass Route

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



March 2024 Newsletter

PSRHS MONTHLY MEETING

MARCH 26, 7PM

March Program: Peter Hills will discuss **Positive Train Control (PTC) for Steam Engine Operations**. His talk will include methods for making steam excursion locomotives compliant to operate on Class 1 railroads under PTC control, and a specific campaign to make the Santa Fe 3751 PTC-compliant. Peter may also mention other projects he has participated in with the Santa Fe 3751 steam locomotive program.

Our meetings are open to all who are interested. See our web site for updates on future meeting topics and directions to the meeting location.

February Program Recap: Roger Staab discussed **How Southern Pacific and Lake Tahoe Railway Saved Lake Tahoe**. He included a brief look at the objectives and operation of the Bliss family's Lake Tahoe Railway, how the Tahoe Water Wars threatened to impose major impacts on Lake Tahoe and the railroad, the background role SP played in addition to broad-gauging the line, and how their combined efforts did indeed save Lake Tahoe and its tourism.

FEBRUARY PSRHS BOARD MEETING

The PSRHS board met prior to the February 27 meeting.

Vacant Board Position: There is one vacant position on the PSRHS Board of Directors. If you would like to help your organization by volunteering to participate in board meetings (usually held from 6-7pm prior to our monthly meetings), please contact any board member.

Colfax Depot WebCam: The City of Colfax requires evidence of insurance covering our volunteers and the City in order to gain access to the Colfax depot attic to install the camera. The board voted to continue to work with the city to pursue camera installation, and review progress and issues at future board meetings.

16mm Vintage Film Collection: Bill Yoder recently purchased a 16mm viewer/splicer that will allow us to

view the movies in our collection taken by Al Phelps and others to determine if they contain unique vintage footage of railroad operations in the region.

NEW ON OUR WEB SITE

We have recently added Southern Pacific's Right of Way and Track Maps for the Lake Tahoe Branch to our web site, www.psrhs.org. A link to the maps can be found on our home page.

POSITIVE TRAIN CONTROL (PTC) TUTORIAL

Ed. Note: Peter Hills' program for our March meeting is on adapting Positive Train Control (PTC) to steam locomotives. Peter will explain the significance of PTC for steam locomotive excursions. But for those not familiar with the technology perhaps a "tutorial" on the subject would be helpful. Excerpts from an article on the subject that appeared in the Sacramento Bee in 2017 can be found on page 5. The article provides some insight into the why and where of PTC technology that is now required on all class 1 railroads.

The page 5 article attributes the train collision in Southern California between a Metrolink commuter train and UP freight train as the push behind the PTC mandate. A more recent incident, the 2017 derailment of an Amtrak Cascades train near Olympia Washington due to excessive speed raised similar red flags. The Accidents/Incidents news item on page 4 of this newsletter describes the similarity of the 2017 Washington incident with an earlier close-call for a Capitol Corridor train near Davis, also caused by excessive speed, and adding to the call for PTC for passenger service.

You are invited to read the Accidents/Incidents article on page 4, the more general article about PTC on page 5, then join us at our March meeting for Peter's program on how to implement PTC in a vintage steam locomotive. rs

See page 4 (bottom) and page 5



Passing Scene - UP 1982 Mo-Pac Heritage Locomotive in Truckee

According to the UP Heritage Locomotive web site, “in 1982, a Union Pacific-Missouri Pacific-Western Pacific merger was approved by the Interstate Commerce Commission. On January 1, 1997, Missouri Pacific Railroad legally was merged into Union Pacific Railroad, with UPRR remaining as the surviving corporation. When designing the Missouri Pacific ("Mo-Pac") heritage locomotive, the team concentrated on two particular time periods: the 1940s, when Mo-Pac introduced a blue, gray and white color scheme with a thin yellow accent stripe, and the 1960s, when the paint scheme was altered to a solid dark blue with the MP buzz saw logo.”
“Metal Mike” Haire captured this image of UP 1982 in Truckee in September 2023.



Membership Information
Individual Members = \$25.00/yr
Each Additional Family Member = \$5.00/yr

- Monthly Meetings (4th Tuesday) and Newsletter
- Member Activities, History Pubs and Field Trips
- Display and Restoration Projects

PSRHS, P.O. Box 1776, Colfax, CA 95713
or join/renew online at <https://www.psrhs.org/>

Reader comments, additional details, etc., are invited on any newsletter items or photos. Please forward comments, suggestions or information for inclusion in future issues of the newsletter to:

roger.staab@psrhs.org





From the Archives - Colfax Track Alignment circa 1906

This postcard image taken shortly after 1905 clearly shows the early alignment of the tracks through Colfax looking eastbound. The 1905 Colfax passenger depot is to the right of the tracks. NCNG tracks were located between the depot and the hillside cut. Note the mainline tracks ran parallel to the depot prior to the track realignment and double-tracking completed prior to 1915. Also visible to the right of the depot is the Marvin Inn, located across Grass Valley St. The Gillen (later Colfax) Hotel is hidden by the hillside. The tracks in the foreground were on a small fill that was greatly expanded to make room for a larger railyard along with double-tracking. Main Street businesses are visible to the left of the cabooses. *PSRHS collection*



Accidents/Other Incidents. *Sacramento Bee, Dec. 17, 2017.* “Northwest catastrophe a reminder of train near Davis that almost jumped the tracks going 78 mph in a 40 mph zone. ... The spectacular crash near Olympia last week that left at least three dead and dozens injured is eerily reminiscent of a dramatic near derailment outside Davis last December that injured five people, prompted Amtrak to discipline several employees and caused passengers and local officials to criticize Amtrak for lack of transparency about safety procedures. In that case, an apparently distracted Amtrak engineer allowed a Capitol Corridor service train to run through a track switch at nearly double the allowable speed - 78 mph in a 40 mph zone - causing the train cars to lurch violently back and forth, sending people, coffees and laptops flying....Federal investigators last week said the Cascades passenger train in Washington also was going too fast... The accident ... also prompted questions about when Amtrak and other rail agencies finally will finish installing a long-delayed computerized train control system- called **Positive Train Control, or PTC** - that is designed to prevent such incidents...the (Davis) train engineer had missed a trackside signal alerting the engineer to slow down for an upcoming switch to a parallel track ...”



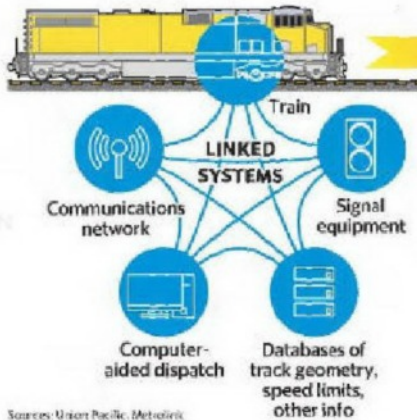


Positive Train Control (PTC) News Article

New tracking system to curb train crashes, *Sacramento Bee*, Mar. 6, 2017, by Tony Bizjak

Nine years ago, Union Pacific Railroad supervisor Ricky Durrant was called to a ghastly scene in Southern California. A Metrolink commuter train had run head-on into a freight train, killing 25 people. The UP train had just come out of a tunnel. “Our guys said, ‘We saw a flash of white and said, Ahh, s---’ and hit the brakes, two seconds before impact.” Federal investigators concluded the Metrolink engineer had been texting on his cellphone and failed to see a red track light. The Chatsworth crash sent shock waves through the industry. A month later, Congress passed a law requiring major passenger and freight railroads to install a computer-based crash avoidance system that will take over control of trains and bring them to an emergency stop if the engineer makes an error that could cause a crash.

The system, based on global positioning technology, tracks where trains are, constantly feeding the computers in the locomotive cab with information about how fast the train should be going and what is happening on the tracks ahead... Federal officials set an initial 2015 deadline for full rollout of the new navigation system, called **Positive Train Control, or commonly PTC**. However, industry representatives persuaded officials to extend the deadline to 2018, with the provision that it might be extended again – to 2020.



Sources: Union Pacific, Metrolink.

HOW POSITIVE TRAIN CONTROL (PTC) WORKS

- 1 Using GPS and its network of computers and data, the system evaluates the train’s location, direction and speed.
- 2 When the train approaches speed limits or stops, the system warns the engineer to slow or stop
- 3 If the engineer does not respond, the system applies the train brakes

Critics say the railroads are taking too long and federal officials are letting them get away with it. Railroads counter that PTC is hardly the “plug and play” technology that some critics want to believe. The system is both costly and complicated to design and install, they say. Durrant, a 46-year UP veteran, now finds himself at the center of UP’s modernization efforts. As general director of PTC implementation, he heads an Omaha-based team that is reaching 9,800 engineers from Roseville to Chicago to use the new system. Durrant has a mid-western twang and a laid-back air, but says he was put on the PTC team for a reason. “I will work my way through barriers even if I have to walk through people,” he said.

UP said it has spent more than \$2 billion on PTC since the mandate was issued, and ultimately will invest \$3 billion. That includes installing signal stations along 20,000 miles of tracks, wiring computers into 5,600 locomotive cabs, setting up communications offices, and training 40,000 employees. The safety effects could be notable in Northern California. UP, a freight giant with major railyard in Roseville, runs 10,000 freight trains a year through the Sacramento region, many of them sharing tracks with Amtrak, Capitol Corridor and San Joaquin service passenger trains. Its freight trains run through downtown Sacramento as well as rural areas designated high-risk for derailment, including the Dunsmuir site of an infamous chemical spill in 1991, the Feather River Canyon and Donner Pass.

Ed. Note. The Sacramento Bee 2017 article goes on to discuss the issues and delays in fully implementing PTC. Suffice it to say that all Class 1 railroads have been fully engaged in implementing PTC as mandated by law, with various problems and challenges encountered along the way.

