

# High speed funds granted. Great. Now what?

Consider the Chicago-Detroit corridor. Funds will help, but key priorities remain unfunded



A Michigan-bound Amtrak train diverges at Porter, Ind. West of here, trains face endless delay; to the east lie fast tracks. Two photos, Bob Johnston

Like a starter's pistol, the shot in late January from President Obama and the Federal Railroad Administration telling recipients that they will be receiving a piece of \$8 billion in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act high speed rail funds [see "News," TRAINS, April 2010] set off an immediate flurry of activity, speeches, conferences, and back-slapping. In fact, the announcements merely signaled the beginning of a long race to begin and complete meaningful projects as quickly as possible.

The goal for states, in reality, is to show tangible results for the dollars spent, even

though the money might cover only a fraction of total costs or what the finished product will eventually look like.

Take the \$244 million grant for the Detroit-Chicago high speed rail corridor. The Amtrak-owned tracks in Michigan along this line will soon host diesel-powered 110-mph trains, thanks to the installation of Incremental Train Control System signals, a form of positive train control that has been undergoing tests for the past 15 years. But more than half of the funds, \$133 million, are for a flyover at Englewood on Chicago's south side to separate Norfolk Southern and Me-



A Michigan crossing warns of fast trains.

tra tracks [see facing page].

The flyover is only the first step in a series of Chicago-area improvements that will eventually expedite passenger trains. When complete, the flyover will enable Metra to redirect its SouthWest Service trains from the at-capacity Union Station to La Salle Street Station. Only then can work begin on a new connection at the grade-separated Grand Crossing [see map, facing page], enabling Amtrak trains bound for Union Station to use NS rails into the city, avoiding a slow backup move over Canadian National.

Waiting in the wings is perhaps the most expensive project of all: creating separate high speed tracks for passenger trains on now-abandoned rights-of-way between Englewood and Porter, Ind. In announcing the grants, the White House called the Chicago-Porter stretch "the most congested and delay-prone corridor in the country." Pennsylvania Railroad's *Broadway Limited* and the New York Central's *20th Century Limited* once raced each other here, but today, NYC's right-of-way lies dormant, while freights and Amtrak trains fight for space on former Pennsy tracks.

This worthwhile project needs more study before it gets off the ground, but didn't get any funding this time. Yet the benefits of higher-speed trains and more frequencies on the Chicago-Detroit corridor won't be fully realized until the Englewood-Porter bottleneck is eliminated.

Still, the Englewood flyover is the first piece of this complicated puzzle to fall into place. Like other projects that received some of the \$8 billion of funding, it's a necessary building block that can lead to bigger investments assuming additional future funding sources can be identified. — Bob Johnston

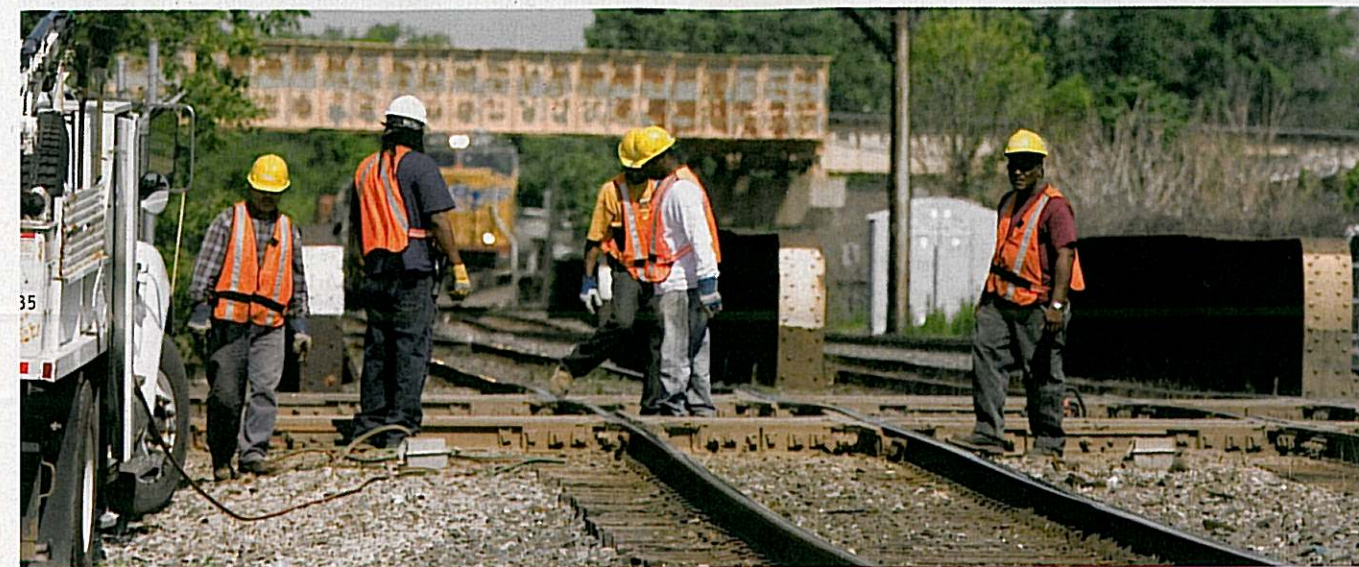
## >> Progressive Rail reopens branch



Progressive Rail has reactivated its ex-Chicago Great Western branch to Cannon Falls, Minn., after six years. The short line [see "Back to the future with Progressive Rail," TRAINS, June 2007] bought the Minnesota Malting Co. plant in Cannon Falls, and is using it for rail-to-truck transload of sand. Progressive bought the line in 2004. Steve Glischinski

# CREATE wins big with stimulus grants

Key Englewood flyover funded, major upgrades to Indiana Harbor Belt will add capacity



A freight train waits as workers maintain the NS-Metra crossing at Chicago's Englewood. A flyover will take its place. Marshall W. Beecher

A flurry of new funding sources has pushed the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency program forward since we last looked at it [see "News," TRAINS, October 2009]. Meanwhile, the CREATE partners nixed the proposed Central Corridor, a route Canadian National's January 2009 takeover of the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern Railway rendered redundant.

The most significant project to receive funding is a grade separation at Englewood, funded with \$133 million of stimulus money dedicated to high speed projects. The junction, where Metra's busy Rock Island District crosses Norfolk Southern's main line to the East Coast, got fast-train funds because it's part of a proposed high speed Chicago-Detroit link [see facing page].

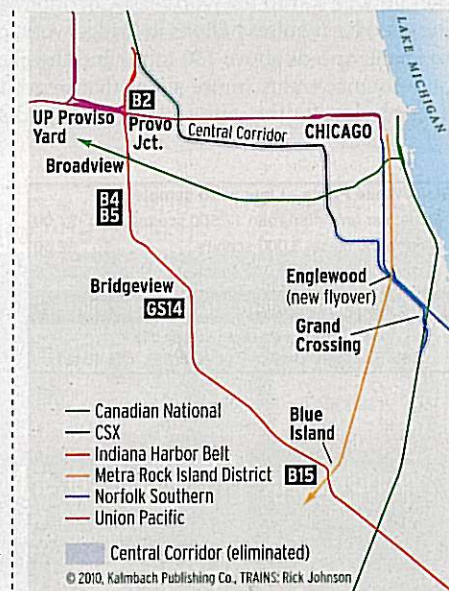
Under the terms of this grant, work must begin immediately. On Feb. 23, Metra awarded the final planning and design con-

tract for the flyover to TranSystems, the same company that designed the Argentine and Sheffield flyovers in Kansas City.

The program also received money from Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery grants announced Feb. 17 [see p. 10]. That money will fund Centralized Traffic Control installation at three sites on the Indiana Harbor Belt totaling more than 10 miles (B4, B5, and B15), plus new connections at Broadview and Provo Junction (B2, B4) for \$76.5 million. It'll also fund a grade crossing separation (GS14, \$20 million), and \$5 million in fixes to bridges in the city where railroads pass over roads and sidewalks.

The money represents real progress for the \$2.5 billion program. — Jim Giblin

JIM GIBLIN is a Chicago-based transportation consultant and a long-time observer of the railroad and trucking industries.



## >> ARRIVALS & DEPARTURES

### Berkshire closes on BNSF purchase

Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Inc. closed its purchase of Burlington Northern Santa Fe Corp. Feb. 12 following an OK from shareholders. The \$44 billion cash-and-stock deal makes BNSF the first privately held Class I railroad since 1996, when publicly held Union Pacific bought privately owned Southern Pacific.

The newly formed Badlands Railway has asked Canadian National to negotiate a

sale of part of its Drumheller and Oyen subdivisions in Alberta. CN diverted through trains from its Calgary, Alta., to Saskatoon, Sask., route last January, leaving the 178 miles between Lyalta and Oyen, Alta., dormant [see "News," TRAINS, May 2009.] Badlands would begin local operations over the entire route.

Genesee & Wyoming will operate a newly constructed 19-mile iron-ore hauler in Labrador. The Bloom Lake Railway will connect the Bloom Lake Mine to Wabush Railway; it's to open later this year.

## >> OBITUARY

David Salter, 1928-2010

David Salter, 81, of Lone Tree, Colo., died unexpectedly in January after a brief illness. Salter, an entrepreneur, was well known in the railfan hobby as a photographer and chronicler of Seaboard Air Line and other Southeast roads. A native of Pitts, Ga., on Seaboard's Savannah, Ga., to Montgomery, Ala., route, he contributed to many articles and books, and wrote several feature articles for TRAINS. — Larry Goolsby, secretary, Atlantic Coast Line & Seaboard Air Line Historical Society.