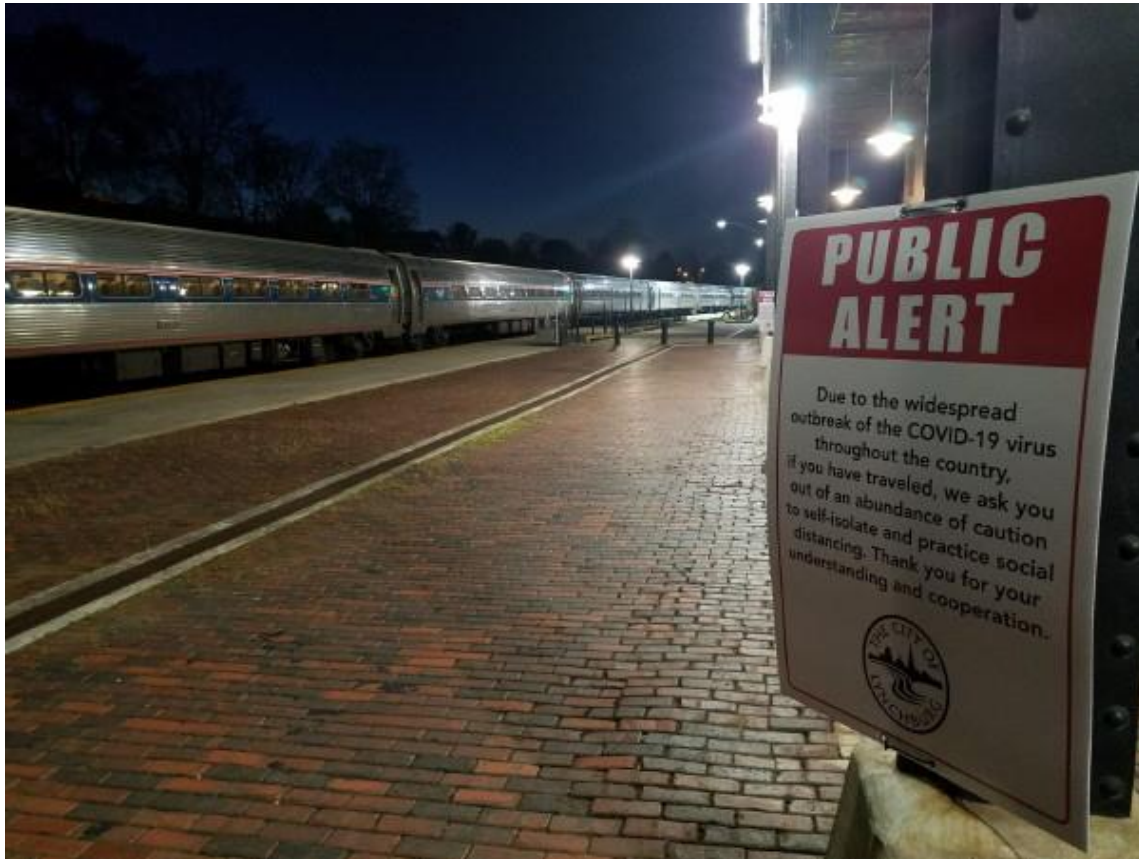


BLUE RIDGE DISPATCHER

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The COVID-19 bug is still with us wreaking havoc in normal day-to-day living, but, fortunately, Lynchburg's Amtrak service is still with us, too. Ridership is way down, but there is plenty of room to stretch out, as in distancing. Pictured above is the Regional on its way to Roanoke. It's still running with seven cars (the Crescent operates with only five: two coaches, café, sleeper, bag-dorm).

No meeting in May. No meeting in June. Details and other Chapter news inside. So, wash your hands, sneeze into the inside of your elbow disinfect your keyboard and take a mask along. Lot's of places now are demanding that you wear one.



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NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Lynchburg, Virginia



Dear BRC Members & Friends,

It seems to have been so long since we last got together! I hope that all of you are doing well and staying safe. Do any of you know what day it is? I usually don't. Every day is the same, every evening is the same, every night...IS THE SAME!!! My life has turned into the movie "Groundhog's Day". Great movie! Check it out if you've never seen it. It's not like you don't have time! I spoke with the chapter "Groundhog", Skip Hansberry and he is experiencing the same confusion. Now I don't feel so bad.

When we last spoke a month ago, I was hopeful the pandemic was going to be over and things would be getting back to normal by now. Well, it isn't and they're not. The cases of COVID-19 are still on the rise in many states including Virginia and restrictions remain in place for an undetermined amount of time. Once restrictions are released, what the "new" normal will be is anyone's guess. But I can tell you, it will not be "normal".

I had previously cancelled our April 8th and May 13th BRC meetings and I am now cancelling our June 10th meeting due to the COVID-19 outbreak and restrictions. I spoke with management at Charley's Restaurant just before this writing, and due to those restrictions, no inside dining will be allowed by June 10th anyway. I have apologized to our April and May program presenters, Dale Diacont and George Hamlin and I now apologize to our June presenter, Robin Shavers. I will get their wonderful programs rescheduled when our monthly meetings resume.

Also, due to some form of COVID-19 restrictions, more than likely extending into August, the BRC's Lynchburg Railroad Day Committee decided it was in everyone's best interest and safety to cancel our Lynchburg Railroad Day event this year which was scheduled for August 8th.

After all the bad news, the good news is the virus infection rate has leveled off or has begun a slight decline in a few states and we're a month closer to this pandemic's end.

Until next time, listen to the experts, stay home when you can, wear a mask when you can't, wash your hands and STAY SAFE!

-Rick

NORFOLK, Va. — Norfolk Southern has idled the hump at Linwood Yard in North Carolina due to the steep traffic downturn related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Due to unforeseeable business circumstances, including volume declines due to the global pandemic and the abrupt economic downturn, Norfolk Southern is reducing operations at our Linwood Terminal by idling the hump yard,” the railroad said in a statement on Friday. “Linwood Terminal will continue to provide switching service to local customers.”

The reduction in operations at the yard will result in the elimination of 85 jobs this month.

NS traffic was down 30% in April due to the economic impact of the pandemic.

PERCENTAGE DECLINE IN APRIL CLASS I VOLUME		
Railroad	Overall Traffic	Intermodal
Canadian National	-16	-9
Canadian Pacific	-12	-3
CSX Transportation	-21	-14
Norfolk Southern	-30	-23
BNSF Railway	-20	-14
Union Pacific	-22	-22

On the railroad’s earnings call on Wednesday, executives said they were analyzing where they could close yards but they did not provide specifics.

“We are taking hard looks at our yard and terminal network, testing what we can live without,” Chief Operating Officer Mike Wheeler told investors and analysts on the earnings call.

NS has idled five other humps since the Great Recession, Wheeler noted, including two last year as part of its shift to Precision Scheduled Railroading. Those humps were in Sheffield, Ala., and Allentown, Pa., whose volume fell after the TOP21 operating plan reduced their switching volumes.

“We are continuing to look at that and those are long-term structural cost reductions and you will see more of that as we go forward,” Wheeler says.

Smaller outlying yards are also potential closure targets, he says.

The Southern Railway built Linwood Yard in 1979.

Amtrak Takes Active Measures to Maintain Safe Environment

Latest News & Updates

- **Service Updates:** While some services were reduced or suspended, Amtrak has and will continue to operate as an essential service as our nation recovers. In addition to the *Acela* and *Northeast Regional*, trains will be restored to service by monitoring demand, working with state partners and continuing to prioritize customer and employee safety. Visit the [Service Updates](#) page for the latest information.
- **Face Mask Policy:** To protect customers and employees, all customers in stations and on trains and thruway buses are required to wear a facial covering, beginning May 11. Facial coverings can be removed when customers are eating in designated areas, in their private rooms, or seated alone or with a travel companion in their own pair of seats. Small children who are not able to maintain a facial covering are exempt from this requirement. Customers must supply their own facial covering. Customers can go to [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) for detailed instructions on how to make their own mask. Service will be denied to customers not wearing facial coverings.



- **Station Staffing:** Due to service reductions, some stations may not be staffed. If the station is closed, please use the Amtrak app or call 1-800-USA-Rail to check train status while waiting in a personal vehicle. (Note Lynchburg's reduced open office hours. Photo by a caught-off-guard Lee Hawkins.)
- **Amtrak Guest Rewards:** [Learn more](#) about the important Amtrak Guest Rewards updates we have made in response to COVID-19.



Amtrak's Commitment to Customers and Employees During the COVID-19 Crisis

Amtrak wants to express its heartfelt appreciation for our frontline team members who work tirelessly to provide our service to those who need it most.

The safety of Amtrak's customers and employees is our top priority. To protect customers and employees, all customers in stations and on trains and thruway buses are required to wear a facial covering, beginning May 11. If you need to travel with us, know that we are taking extra steps to sanitize our stations and trains, including taking the following measures:

Enhancing Cleaning Protocols

We have increased the frequency of cleaning services onboard trains and at our stations and we continue to recommend that everyone follow CDC guidelines around physical distancing.

Taking Steps to Protect Yourself and Others

We are regularly sharing best practices with employees and customers on ways to protect against communicable diseases. As recommended by the CDC, we encourage everyone to use a facial covering, practice physical distancing, frequently wash hands, and please stay home if you are feeling ill.

Limiting Bookings

To help maintain CDC recommendations for social distancing onboard our trains, we are temporarily reducing sales of Coach, Business, and Acela First Class to 50% of available seating.

Cashless Service

As an added measure to ensure the health and safety of our customers and employees, we will temporarily be accepting only cashless payments in stations and on trains.

Posting Physical Distancing Posters and Floor Stickers

Signage will be displayed at a number of our busiest staffed stations six feet apart to indicate safe distances in high customer traffic areas such as waiting rooms, in front ticket offices, at the base/top of escalators, lounge entrances, etc. In addition, clear protective barriers are being retrofitted at staffed stations where there are no current glass barriers and where they can logistically fit. Lynchburg examples seen below.



Updating Food and Beverage Service for Customers

The California Zephyr, Coast Starlight, Empire Builder, Southwest Chief, Sunset Limited and Texas Eagle will offer [flexible dining service](#) in the Dining Car or via room service; Coach customers will be offered [Café service](#) in the Sightseeing Lounge. Traditional dining service will remain on the Auto Train as an exclusive amenity for Sleeping Car customers. This temporary change in service offers additional opportunities for onboard social distancing and will be effective through May 31, 2020.

Amtrak continues to evaluate current practices and pilot new opportunities to support personal safety.

Ticket Changes and/or Cancellations

- **Amtrak is waiving change fees:** For reservations made before May 31, 2020. This includes reservations booked with points. To modify a reservation, log in to your account, go to 'Modify Trip' on Amtrak.com, or find your reservation from your account on the home screen in the Amtrak app. A fare difference may apply to your new itinerary. If you want to cancel your reservation with no fee, you must call 1-800-USA-RAIL and speak with an agent (not available via Amtrak.com or the app).
- **Multi-Ride tickets:** Multi-ride train and city pair restrictions are removed on the Northeast Corridor through May 31, 2020



Despite the COVID-19 lockdown, which is affecting many people for better or for worse, or both, lots of essential activities are ongoing. Your Editor has been entertained for the past few months watching the progress of the Appalachian Power Reusens-Rivermont-Deerington transmission upgrade project – right outside his bedroom window. So, what is the focus of this picture? The train, the H74412 local enroute to work the Georgia-Pacific paper mill in Big Island, or the crane with the guys in the basket 100 feet up in the air stringing cable? So much activity despite the pandemic! (G. Harper)

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