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Storied steamers back on tracks

Restored locomotives to pull passenger train through town Saturday

BY JEANIE SENIOR

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Portlanders might want to take an extra good look when two city-owned steam locomotives Southern Pacific No. 4449 and Spokane, Portland & Seattle No. 700 strut their stuff Saturday: It's the only time this year they will be pulling a line of passenger cars.

And because of exploding insurance costs, it could be some time before either of the locomotives pulls another excursion train.

Doyle McCormack, who's been engineer of No. 4449 since it pulled the American Bicentennial Freedom Train around the country in 1976, says the annual insurance premium that would enable one of the locomotives to operate an excursion on a mainline railroad would be almost \$300,000.

In addition, the trains cost about \$100 a mile to run, which doesn't include labor because the excursions are operated by volunteers.

That adds up to grim news for the two locomotives' vast circle of admirers, some of whom travel from distant spots on the globe to see them running.

Despite the fans' allegiance, "you don't want to commit to a trip with a ticket that's so costly you're not going to get enough ridership," McCormack says.

McCormack, who estimates he's been at No. 4449's throttle over more than 75,000 miles of track, allows that "it's really nice to get her out on the mainline and run her where she wants to run."

On Saturday, the locomotives will be pulling a special passenger train from 9:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m., embarking from stations at Southeast Fourth Avenue and Division Place on the north end, and Sellwood Riverfront Park at the south end.

One-way tickets for the three-mile trip cost \$5 for adults and \$2 for children under 12. Tickets for specific trips will be sold at both ends of the line. Each train will carry about 250 passengers.

The event will promote the completion of Springwater on the Willamette Trail, a newly opened segment of the trail that runs from OMSI to Sellwood Riverfront Park.

Ticket proceeds will go to the Oregon Rail Heritage Foundation, a nonprofit volunteer organization that wants to find a permanent home for Portland's three city-owned steam locomotives, preserve the Brooklyn Roundhouse in Southeast Portland where they're now housed, and establish a Rail and Industrial Heritage Museum.

Laurel Lyon, president of the Heritage group, says the insurance cost for Saturday's event is far lower because the trains will be operating on the tracks of the Oregon Pacific, a short-line railroad that requires a smaller premium than the amount set by mainline railroads.

"The city in general has overlooked the significance probably doesn't know the significance of these treasures," Lyon says, referring to the city's stable of steamers. "That's one reason we're doing this event."

The third of the city's steam locomotives, Oregon Railway & Navigation Co. No. 197, is older and smaller and still being restored. Built in 1905 for passenger service along the Columbia River, the locomotive eventually went to work for the Union Pacific Railroad.

The steamers running on Saturday are two of the largest operating steam locomotives in the United States. This is the first time they've been together on public display since 1996, when an estimated

30,000 people came to see them at the centennial of Portland's Union Station.

The railroads that owned the three locomotives gave them to the city after they were retired in the mid-1950s. Sometimes festooned with blackberry vines, they were at the park on what's called static display, attracting little attention until the early 1970s, when No. 4449 was hauled out and restored to pull the Freedom Train. Restoration on Nos. 700 and 197 started after that.

Bringing the locomotives back to life and keeping them running is an all-volunteer effort, McCormack says. "You've got to remember, this is not a city program. The city has granted us permission to work on and maintain the engines."

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