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History comes rolling down the tracks

• *Harold Vanderbilt's private car could be part of a railroad museum*

BY JEANIE SENIOR

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One of the most historic and opulent private railroad cars at the National Railway Historical Society convention held here last week could come to live in Portland if the city has a place for it.

The New York Central 3 was built in 1928 as a business car for Harold Vanderbilt, the last Vanderbilt to run the New York Central Railroad. The restored car now operates as a charter, available for trips behind Amtrak trains.

Lovett Smith III, the Connecticut businessman who has owned the NYC 3 since 1992, has a special link to Portland: It was his father, as division superintendent for the Southern Pacific Railroad, who gave steam locomotive No. 4449 to the city in 1959.

Smith says his will gives NYC 3 to the Friends of 4449, the volunteer group that maintains and operates the city-owned locomotive.

He could donate the car sooner, he says, "if Portland can get their act together." That's clearly the goal of the Oregon Rail Heritage Foundation, the nonprofit coalition working to find a permanent home for all three of the city of Portland's steam locomotives: No. 4449; Spokane, Portland & Seattle 700; and Oregon Railroad & Navigation 197.

The group has been negotiating with the Union Pacific Railroad, hoping the railroad will lease or donate a 1.6-acre parcel of land near the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry with access to the Oregon Pacific Railroad line where an operations and maintenance facility could be built for the locomotives. Eventually, it would be expanded into a full-blown transportation museum, a destination for visitors who also would spend time at OMSI.

Smith's car which he is offering to rename "the Portland" in honor of the Southern Pacific business car assigned to his father would be a centerpiece for the facility, says Doyle McCormack, president of the foundation and chief mechanical officer for No. 4449.

Smith also says he wants the car to stay in use, not just be on display.

McCormack, who has talked to Smith about the donation, added that "he wants to know that his passion is protected, and he's looking for a permanent home for it where he has a connection."

The necessary first step for a future railroad museum, McCormack said, is securing the land. Volunteer groups maintain and operate No. 4449 and No. 700; another group is restoring No. 197, which is older and smaller. The three locomotives have been housed since 1981 in the Union Pacific Railroad's Brooklyn Roundhouse, which the city leases from Union Pacific.

"We don't want to wait for the day (Union Pacific) has to knock on the door and say, 'You have to move someplace else,'" he said. "You can't move a 400-ton steam locomotive in a pickup truck, and there's no room for it in your garage."

The first phase of the plan calls for a long, narrow building, about 80 feet wide by 300 feet long, where the locomotives could be kept; after that, the complex could grow to include a restoration shop for a museum complex, where the accumulation of cars, locomotives and other rolling stock owned by the groups involved in the foundation could be kept.

The project's present price tag ranges from \$3 million to \$12 million, but acquiring the land is the key, according to McCormack, who said the group is working on a business plan. "There's a lot of money out there in the form of grants, foundations, but you can't start to raise money until you have something to

show.”

A transportation museum next to OMSI, which now registers about 685,000 visitors a year, could boost visitor numbers at both facilities.

Elaina Medina, public relations manager for OMSI, said further development near the science museum “would be good for the city, good for the central east side.”

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