

# Running out of steam?

• *3 locomotives chug toward homelessness, unless new site is OK'd*

BY JIM REDDEN

*The Portland Tribune, Dec 28, 2007*

---



Doyle McCormick, president of the Oregon Rail Heritage Foundation and engineer of the SP 4449, leans against his charge in the Brooklyn Roundhouse (left), where Union Pacific Corp. plans to expand operations.

JIM CLARK / TRIBUNE PHOTO

At first glance, the large, sheet metal-clad building in the rail yard just north of the Southeast Holgate Boulevard viaduct does not look remarkable — just one more aging remnant of the 1940s, a time when more freight train traffic was managed there.

But once the padlocked side door swings open, the sight is almost unbelievable.

The cavernous room — officially known as the Brooklyn Roundhouse — is almost completely filled with three huge steam locomotives, massive reminders of the golden age of rail travel that ended around 50 years ago with the introduction of diesel-powered haulers.

Even more amazing, two of the engines have been completely restored and still run. The Southern Pacific 4449 and the Spokane, Portland & Seattle 700 were both out over two weekends earlier this month, hauling passenger cars around Portland and Vancouver, Wash.

The third locomotive, the Oregon Railroad & Navigation 197, is undergoing a complete restoration, its massive boiler stripped to bare metal and its cab resting outside the building.

The three locomotives are owned by the city of Portland. They were donated to Portland Parks & Recreation by the railroad companies that owned them in the 1950s.

Perhaps most amazing of all, over the past half-century they have cost city taxpayers practically nothing. All of the work on the locomotives has been done by a small, dedicated group of volunteers that has raised its own funds from private sources. And the Union Pacific Corp., which owns the roundhouse, has been leasing it to the city for \$1 a month.

Now, however, the locomotives are at a crossroads. The Union Pacific wants the roundhouse property to expand its future freight operations, perhaps within a few months.

As a result, the volunteers are looking for a new home for the three mighty engines and their collection of replacement parts and tools.

“Ideally, we’d like to have a building for the operations that would also serve as a public museum,” said Doyle McCormick, president of the Oregon Rail Heritage

Foundation, an umbrella nonprofit organization that includes a number of rail-related nonprofits, including those supporting each locomotive.

Although no date has been set for the move, the foundation already is negotiating for property near the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry. The belief is it can be bought for around \$900,000, while a basic storage and work building can be built on it for about \$500,000.

McCormick hopes the city can help finance such a move with a low-interest loan. Portland agencies are not ready to commit to such an undertaking, however. The Portland Development Commission turned down a request to use urban renewal funds for the project last year.

Parks bureau officials are not planning to discuss the project with the rail buffs until later next month. One possible source of financing, a new parks levy, will not be offered to the voters for approval until 2010 — perhaps years after the money is needed.

“We hope we won’t have to store everything out in the open, where the elements and vandals can get to them,” McCormick said.

### **Museum proposed years ago**

Despite the city’s lack of involvement so far, the idea of building a rail museum to house and display the locomotives is not a new idea.

It was included in the Central City Plan, a comprehensive planning document developed for downtown and inner east-side neighborhoods in the 1980s. At the time, the preferred location was near Union Station, which the city also owns.

According to McCormick, the idea of moving near Union Station evaporated as redevelopment in the Pearl District took off and land values in the area began to soar.

“When they started pricing land by the square foot instead of the acre, we knew it was time to look elsewhere,” he said.

As McCormick and other foundation members see it, the parcel near OMSI makes sense for several reasons.

First, it already is owned by Union Pacific, which is familiar with their needs. It also is served by a rail line connected to the regional system, a must for moving the locomotives in and out of service. And McCormick believes the two museums would be a natural fit.

“The rail system has always been closely related to industry,” he said.

OMSI President Nancy Stueber believes the site is a good first step for the group.

“The locomotives are a wonderful example of industrial technology that should be preserved,” Stueber said.

Although Portland government does not maintain a city museum, it has supported a number of specialty museums over the years. The city helps fund the Regional Arts & Culture Council, which supports both the Portland Art Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Craft.

In November, the city gave OMSI \$300,000 to help retire a multimillion-dollar loan from the state. And the parks bureau supports the nonprofit Portland Children’s Museum by leasing it OMSI’s original home near the Oregon Zoo for a mere \$35 a year.

The city also covers routine and preventive maintenance, including a recent contribution of \$300,000 toward the cost of upgrading the building's heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system.

"We're not asking for a gift," McCormick said. "If we can just get a low-interest loan, we can make the payments."

### **Locomotive did national tour**

It is not unusual for a city to own half-century-old steam locomotives.

Many obsolete ones were donated to municipal governments over the years. But, according to McCormick and other foundation members, few cities own a working one — let alone two and, eventually, three.

The three locomotives had been on display in Southeast Portland's Oaks Amusement Park for decades before the idea of restoring them took hold.

The first project was inspired by the nation's bicentennial celebration in 1976. Two years earlier, a group of local rail buffs came up with the idea of restoring the SP 4449 and having it tour the country.

They personally paid Union Pacific to haul it to a now-demolished rail maintenance building located near Union Station.

"We had no idea what we were getting into," said foundation Vice President Ed Immel. "It was a lot of work."

Nevertheless, by locating parts across the country and making those that could not be found, the newly formed American Freedom Train Foundation sent the locomotive around the country in a red, white and blue paint scheme as the 1976 Bicentennial Freedom Train, where it was seen by more than 30 million people.

It now is maintained by the nonprofit Friends of SP 4449.

The train moved to its current home in 1981, where it soon was joined by the SP&S 700 in 1986. After that locomotive was restored, the OR&N 197 was hauled over from Oaks Amusement Park in 1996. Its renovation is expected to take several more years — meaning it probably will be completed at a different location.

So far, all of the expenses have been paid by nonprofit organizations created to support each locomotive. Although the labor has been donated, the organizations have raised tens of thousands of dollars each year for replacement parts and fuel.

Fundraising events have included three annual Holiday Express runs, the most recent of which took place between Dec. 7 and Dec. 16.

Although no other excursions are scheduled, discussions are under way for additional runs in the coming year. For information — or to donate to the locomotive fund — contact the Oregon Rail Heritage Foundation at P.O. Box 42443, Portland, OR 97242, or visit the Web site [orhf.org](http://orhf.org).

[jimredde@portlandtribune.com](mailto:jimredde@portlandtribune.com)

---

- **Southern Pacific 4449**

The only remaining operable “Steamlined” locomotive of the art deco era, SP 4449 was built in 1941 and pulled the Coast Daylight train from Los Angeles to San Francisco until 1955.

It was retired in 1957 and donated to the city of Portland the next year for display at Oaks Amusement Park. It was removed from the park and rebuilt by the American Freedom Train Foundation to pull the Bicentennial Freedom Train throughout the country during 1975 and 1976, where it was seen by more than 30 million people.

Manufacturer: Lima Locomotive Works

Type: 4-8-4 GS-4 Northern

Dimensions: Approximately 110 feet long, 10 feet wide and 16 feet tall

Weight: 432 tons

Boiler pressure: 300 psi

Horsepower: 5,000

Driver wheels: 80 inches diameter

Top speed: In excess of 100 mph

Information: Friends of SP 4449 Inc., P.O. Box 42486, Portland, OR

97242, [www.sp4449.com](http://www.sp4449.com)

- **Spokane, Portland & Seattle 700**

One of the largest steam locomotives operable today, the SP&S 700 was built in 1938 and spent its entire life operating in the Columbia River Gorge to Pasco and Spokane, Wash., and connected Portland to Chicago with links to the Northern Pacific and Great Northern railroads.

After being retired to Oaks Amusement Park, it was restored to operating condition by the all-volunteer Pacific Railroad Preservation Association.

Manufacturer: Baldwin Locomotive Works

Type: 4-8-4 Northern Pacific

Dimensions: Approximately 111 feet long, 10 feet wide and 17 feet tall

Weight: 440 tons

Boiler pressure: 260 psi

Horsepower: 5,000

Drive wheels: 77 inches diameter

Top speed: In excess of 80 mph

Information: PRPA, P.O. Box 2851, Portland, OR 97208-2851 [www.sps700.org/prpa.html](http://www.sps700.org/prpa.html)

- **Oregon Railroad & Navigation 197**

Built in 1905, the OR&N 197 served Portland commerce for more than 50 years before being retired to Oaks Amusement Park in 1958. It was moved to the Brooklyn Roundhouse in 1996, where it is undergoing a complete restoration by the all-volunteer Friends of the OR&N 197.

Manufacturer: Baldwin Locomotive Works

Type: 4-6-2 Pacific

Dimensions: Approximately 79 feet long

Weight: 200 tons

Boiler pressure: 200 psi

Horsepower: 2,500

Drive wheels: 76 inches diameter

Information: FOR&N 197, c/o Oregon Rail Heritage Foundation, P.O. Box 42443, Portland, OR 97242, [orn197.org](http://orn197.org)