

## Steaming back home

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Steam engine stopping in Minot on trip from train festival

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## Article Photos

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Onlookers check out the Southern Pacific 4449 "Daylight" steam engine during a stop on its trip from from Portland, Ore., to Owosso, Mich., for Train Festival 2009 this summer in this photo by Chris Fussell.

One of the most famous steam engines in the world will be making a return appearance in Minot this week on its journey back home from the largest railroad event of the past 10 years.

The Southern Pacific 4449 "Daylight" steam engine will roll into Minot from Fargo on Wednesday, have a layover day Thursday, and depart Friday for Havre, Mont.

The SP 4449 is returning home to Portland, Ore., after a tremendously successful appearance at Train Festival 2009 in Owosso, Mich., in late July. Originally expected to draw around 35,000 people, the train festival exceeded not only expectations, but the town's population as well.

"We got there and this town I think has got about 25,000 people and in four days they had 37,000 people at the train festival," said Ed Immel, vice president of the Oregon Rail Heritage Foundation. "I think it just overwhelmed the town, they just did not expect anything like that to happen."

Along with eight steam engines at the festival, there were also model trains, small trains visitors could ride on, and some historic diesels on display. Great weather except for one thunderstorm made the festival just about perfect, Immel said.

The SP 4449 was one of the most popular attractions at the festival, Immel said. He noted many of the other engines at the festival were from the area, while the SP 4449 was something new for festival-goers to see.

"We ran two days of trips out of Owosso, about a five-hour excursion, and then we were on display for two days, and it was just a steady parade of people," he said. "We had stairs that would go up one side to the cab and down the other (side). There were lines probably waiting 45 minutes to an hour."

Now that the festival is over, the train will begin its return trip today from Minneapolis, Minn., to its home in Portland, Ore., where it is owned by the City of Portland.

"We usually try to run two days and rest a day because we're all volunteer crew and we've only got so many people," Immel said. "Our other layover spot is gonna be in Whitefish, Mont."

Around 200 passengers will ride the train on its return trip, with tickets available for the entire journey as well as for individual day-trips between stops.

Immel encourages everyone who might be interested in seeing the SP 4449 to stop by Thursday during the layover to check the train out. He does ask that visitors not park in the Amtrak station on the south side of the tracks, as that would require people to walk over the main line to get to the train on the north. Instead, people can drive on North Broadway and turn west onto Third Avenue Northwest, turn south onto Fourth Street Southwest, and finally turn east onto First Avenue Northwest where there will be ample parking next to the tracks.

When the train returns to Portland the work will begin on its new home. Property near the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry is in the process of being purchased for a restoration facility for the SP 4449 and two other locomotives owned by the city.

"We're gonna be writing a check for 900-some thousand dollars, writing a check for the property, and we're starting our fundraiser for the building," Immel said. "So far we've been doing OK, we haven't pushed it hard. We will when we come back.

"We have to leave where we are right now because Union Pacific Railroad wants their property back for expanding their intermodal, their piggyback container facility. We've been there for 20 years at \$1 a year so we can't complain. They've given us two years in order to find a new home and they helped us find the new home."

While they are losing their old home and its very cheap rent, Immel said they are looking forward to the many opportunities the new property will give them.

"In some ways it's great that we're moving because we can kind of build the structure that we really want that allows people to see the locomotives. Right now we're in the middle of a freight yard and we can't have people just wandering in there," Immel said. "We're gonna make it so people really can come and see the locomotives. And there's other equipment we're gonna have that'll be on the same site."

The work Immel and all the other volunteers do to keep the SP 4449 running year after year plays an important part in keeping a unique piece of American history alive. While none of the current volunteers ever saw the engine run in its heyday in the 1940s and 1950s, they can make sure future generations will be able to see the steam-powered wonder run for years to come.

"None of us that worked on the engine ever saw it run. ... We're bringing up a new generation of people, showing them how these things work. It's a piece of American history, and we think that we can keep it going indefinitely," Immel said. "There's about 100 steam locomotives in the United States that are of various sizes, but there's only a handful that are actually as big as the 4449."