

Special Edition

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The Singing Wire Extra

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MEMBERSHIP NEWS:

This edition of the "*Extra*" is to inform our new members and volunteers and to remind our longtime members of the efforts the foundation has made to return operating streetcars to the streets of Colorado Springs.

A COLORADO SPRINGS STREETCAR SYSTEM A LOST QUARTER CENTURY

LOST QUARTER CENTURY?

It has been that long since our foundation announced it wished to put restored streetcars on City streets and applied for and received a 25-year franchise to do so. Since those early days in the mid-1990s, when enthusiasm was high, that wish hasn't yet come true. We can no longer raise the funds we used to, and many in our community have written us off or forgotten we still exist. It's not that we haven't tried. This special issue details our attempts to build a system and why we have not yet succeeded. One reason is the indifference of some of our City administrations since then - "Yes, we'd like to see a streetcar run again. We can give you verbal support, but we have no funds to help you." The last cash grant we received from the City was in the late 1990s - \$8,000 in support of the first State Historical Fund grant for our 1901 Laclede car. Even Manitou Springs has contributed more - twice as much to sponsor one of the cars we purchased from Philadelphia!

Our hope here is that with this issue of *The Singing Wire Extra*, we can re-ignite interest from the public and our City in pursuing our long-sought-after goal.

THE BEGINNING

The Pikes Peak Historical Street Railway Foundation, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization, was incorporated in 1982 to acquire, restore and operate an authentic Colorado Springs streetcar. A book co-authored by John Haney and Morris Cafky, *Pikes Peak Trolleys*, containing photos and a narrative about the system that operated in the Pikes Peak area from 1887 to 1932, became a major aid towards implementing our objective. Board meetings were held in the original Van Briggles Pottery building, now on the Colorado College campus. In October 1991, the foundation received a donation of a 1901 Colorado Springs streetcar that had been used as a workshop on a ranch south of town. It was stored at Ghost Town until a permanent place could be found for it. It had been stripped to a shell, but fortunately, its owner had built a shed over most of it, preserving it nicely. Discussion ensued about restoring it cosmetically, but at that time, the foundation had no funds to do that.

A CHANGE IN STRATEGY

In 1995, the foundation was given the opportunity to acquire a number of 1949-built PCC (Presidents' Conference Committee) cars from SEPTA (Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority) for \$2,000 each as that agency was modernizing its fleet. The cars had been overhauled only several years previously, and were operable, needing only sets of standard gauge trucks, which were available in a scrap yard in Beloit, Wisconsin. Nine were selected as the Foundation board began thinking in terms of reviving a system to operate again in town and in Manitou Springs. The cost of transporting the cars and trucks to Colorado Springs was determined to be \$16,000 each, and sponsors were solicited. KRDO, Lane Sales, Surplus City, Manitou Springs, Cowan Moving & Storage, and the Colorado Springs Sky Sox stepped up. The cars were delivered to the 1888 Chicago Rock Island & Pacific Railroad roundhouse, near Fillmore and 1-25, which the foundation had leased from El Paso Drywall, its owner. The track outside the 5-acre roundhouse site had been purchased by the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad from the bankrupt Rock Island, but the roundhouse was not needed and was excluded.

The foundation approached the City about a revived streetcar line, and Council agreed to put a referendum in the Spring 1997 ballot, giving the foundation a non-exclusive, 25-year franchise to build and operate a system, subject to Council approval of plans. Foundation members visited local retailers in both Old Colorado City and Downtown to

garner support for the ballot measure and received roughly a 90% positive response. The measure, which stipulated that no City funding was to be involved, passed with 57% approval.

DIGRESSION

It is outside the scope of this discussion about an in-street system, but between 1997 and the present, the foundation has acquired the following additional streetcars, with the intent of either restoring and operating them, or restoring them cosmetically: a second 1901 Colorado Springs convertible car, a 1919 Ft. Collins Birney car, two 1910 Denver Tramway Company (DTC) cars, a 1940 DTC trolley bus, a 1949 Pittsburgh interurban car, and two 1920s-era DTC work cars.

Over the years, a museum was built in two of the available four remaining bays of the original roundhouse - the other two housed the oldest of our streetcars where they could be worked on. The museum displays a number of historic photos plus other exhibits and artifacts from both railroads and streetcars, and several model train layouts. A separate Rock Island museum is housed in a baggage car owned by the foundation. In addition, a Boulder-based foundation has sited several rail cars, including a caboose and a dining car - now owned by our foundation - on rails outside the carbarn. Around 2000, the roundhouse was purchased by the City, which is now our landlord.

INITIAL EFFORT

The foundation's initial thrust in the late 1990s and into the first years of the 21st century involved constructing a line from downtown west on Colorado Avenue through Old Colorado City to Columbia Road near the Manitou city limits where it could turn around and return in the eastbound lane. A feasibility study was ordered, essentially a boiler plate study that looked at various other cities' efforts and determined, without much evaluation of our immediate situation, that a streetcar system would be a good thing for Colorado Springs.

Using membership and donation funds from a number of local businesses and other individuals, the foundation commissioned a design and engineering study and held a due diligence session with every City department that would be involved in some way with a system, and with City Utilities. All questions and concerns were addressed. Interestingly, no downtown location for a carbarn and maintenance facility was ever identified or apparently asked about.

The initial estimate of tracklaying in the outside lane of the street in each direction was \$4 million per track mile.

The head of Colorado Springs Transit told us she would cede the bus route on Colorado Avenue to us when our line was completed - her most travelled route. The head of the Convention and Visitors Bureau indicated he would feature a streetcar on his brochures when our line was completed.

Concurrently, the Colorado Avenue bridge over the railroad tracks was being constructed, and City Engineering and the engineering consultants included steel channels under the concrete pavement for laying rails in at a later date, and specified the streetlights on the bridge be tall and strong enough to accommodate a trolley catenary and overhead wire.

An Advisory Board of about forty individuals, consisting of civic and community leaders as well as City employees, was formed. Chris Anderson, publisher of the Gazette, assumed the role of Chairman, and at the inaugural meeting held at the El Paso Club, committed to a mid-six figure donation from the paper, to commence the fund-raising efforts.

What happened? Two weeks after the initial Advisory Board meeting, Mr. Anderson was transferred to Southern California to the Orange County Register. It took several months for the foundation to find another individual to assume the chairmanship of the fund-raising effort, but an excellent choice was finally made - Bee Vradenberg of the Colorado Springs Symphony. Sadly, several months after her appointment, she passed away.

Colorado Springs Utilities informed us that it had been determined the natural gas lines under the street going west could easily be moved, but the foundation would have to bear the cost of relocating the over 100-year-old clay pipe sewer line under the eastbound lane. What remained of it would not bear the weight and vibration of streetcars continually passing over it. The added cost was estimated to double the original cost of \$4 million per mile.

Then the Colorado Department of Transportation, which we had not contacted previously, as we had no idea of any involvement on its part, let us know it would be reconstructing the 1-25 bridge over Colorado Avenue, and told us there would be an indefinite delay in our plans to put a line in the street under it. It did, however, tell us that it would move the bridge's underpass several feet south so the eastbound lane would not pass over a major telephone vault.

Our plans faded away as did our Advisory Board.

SECOND EFFORT

Around 2005, we were approached by a Design/Engineering firm that got wind of our interests, and offered for free, a cursory study of a route system from our carbarn south to the downtown area. Since our Rock Island roundhouse had been connected at one time by a rail line to the former Rio Grande rail station, charts were produced that generally followed that line. It involved crossing the south portion of the old Rock Island wye (our facility was in the middle of the original wye connecting the Rock Island line to the joint north-south line originally owned by the Denver & Rio Grande Western and the Colorado & Southern - now the Union Pacific and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe), which was still an active Union Pacific business spur serving several businesses on Fillmore Street. The proposed route continued south through City yards where track would have to be re-laid for roughly half a mile to where the original track still existed for another mile, crossing over Uintah Street. (you may know the track as where the circus train parked when it was in town). It had been torn up before it crossed over Monument Creek, and a new bridge would have to be built, before it ended in the current yard system opposite the old station – the former Giuseppe's restaurant.

The proposal was attractive to us in that we could use our existing yard for storage and maintenance. A disadvantage was that we would not attract many riders except tourists, as it would not connect any destination points.

The north-south passing track used by both the BNSF and the Union Pacific Railroads for coal and other trains lay only eight feet to the west of the original Rock Island line, which was our proposed route. The main line was immediately west of that passing track. Our initial efforts involved walking the proposed route, photographing it, and envisioning how the line might impact operations in the City yards, Monument Valley Park and on the south end, the existing Union Pacific (old Rio Grande) yards. We then involved the Union Pacific people headquartered in Denver, and for a while, thought they were amenable to what we were proposing, until the UP headquarters in Omaha got involved.

There were two issues. Crossing an active line (the business spur) was not permitted, and any separation of our proposed line from any active railroad track would have to be a minimum of 50 feet, with a chain link fence separating the two. There was no way we could meet the separation requirement.

The only thing we can say about this two-year wasted effort is that very little money was spent.

THIRD EFFORT

Building on a line out of our carbarn, we looked east. The original track east of our carbarn had been removed except the portion from the joint line to Templeton Gap Road, which the Union Pacific used to serve several businesses on Fillmore, and east of that, an extension to Powers Boulevard. The railroad still owned the track on that stretch, though it had sold the right-of-way to the City for a bike/pedestrian trail. There was roughly four miles of rail involved that crossed a number of north-south thoroughfares that still had railroad signaling in place.

About the time of the Union Pacific's rejection of our line adjacent to the joint line, we received a call from the City Public Works Director. He indicated he had received notice from the UP that it planned to remove the rail from Templeton Gap to Powers. If the City wished to retain it, the asking price would be \$16,000. We were asked if the City should purchase the rail, and told them, "Yes, by all means." That Director then asked us when we could take a test run on the line. Because there was vegetation growing between the rails and because the line had no trolley wire, we deferred, but set up a meeting with residents along Constitution to gauge their reaction. A sizeable group showed up, with many expressing support for a trolley line. Several individuals, however, thought kids might climb the poles supporting the wire and electrocute themselves, or that dogs might chase the cars and be run over.

Since a line east on Constitution did not connect with any destination points, the foundation deferred any action on improving it but did contact the Union Pacific about using its active line from our carbarn to Templeton Gap to connect to it on the days the railroad did not run trains. The answer came months later: No, but we could purchase a slice of its right-of-way separated by at least 50 feet from its active line, fenced off, at \$2/square foot.

Over the years, the City had removed the signaling and eventually decided to remove the rail. We discovered what was occurring early in that process, and when we mentioned to the salvage contractor the fact the City had bought it for our use, he immediately uprooted it along its full length so we could not stop the removal. So, the City netted \$150,000 from a contractor who lied about the deleterious effects of the creosote on the environment (which had

only been true for several years after 1887) and the non-suitability of the rail weight for our streetcars (also false). Four miles of rail and ties that we would have had to spend several million dollars to replace, were gone.

A year or so earlier, when the bike trail was tunneled under North Circle Drive, the tunnel was moved away from the rail right-of-way in order that we could use it at some future point in time. We are of the opinion our advocates in the City were not made aware of the salvage contract let by the Purchasing Department.

FOURTH EFFORT

Around 2008 or 2009, an article appeared in the Gazette to the effect that Colorado College proposed shutting down one lane of Cascade Avenue through the campus, from Uintah to Cache La Poudre. We contacted the school's Director of Facilities and asked if they would entertain the idea of a streetcar on the closed lane. The suggestion was enthusiastically supported, meetings involving school, business, civic and City officials were held, and a Federal grant for a feasibility study was submitted and approved, with the \$62,500 twenty percent local match contributed by Colorado College, the University of Colorado Colorado Springs, the Downtown Development Authority, the Old North End Neighborhood, and Mountain Metro Transit. MMT was the lead, as the Federal grant required funds be given to a municipal entity. A national design, engineering and consulting firm was retained, and a local task force of roughly 15 people was formed to guide the study, headed by a member of City Council.

There were problems from the start. It became clear the consultants had prepared previous similar reports and the one ultimately submitted to the task force dealt with a minimum number of local issues; e.g. existing commuting and traffic statistics, the number of annual tourists, etc. It ignored the fact our foundation could supply vehicles and a place to house them and assumed new facilities and streetcars would be used. It did get one thing right - the proposed initial route connected downtown with the University (UCCS) about five miles north but chose only to suggest a broad corridor on how to get there. The most damaging part of the report was the estimated cost to build and outfit the line. The first mile was pegged at \$17 million and included a car storage/maintenance facility, the cost of cars, and the cost of acquiring a right-of-way - not needed here as the cars would use the streets. Incredibly, the second, third and every other mile was projected to cost \$17 million as well. The costs were based on receiving Federal funding, which as everyone knows, is larded up with Congressional mandates such as Davis-Bacon wages, Buy America costs, environmental studies, and more.

The \$102 million price tag was an unpleasant surprise and a turn-off for virtually everyone who read the report. Despite that, the task force proceeded to apply for the second of four grants required for Federal funding, one called an Alternative Analysis, which was intended to narrow the corridor to specific streets and set run schedules. The Feds turned down the grant request and the task force dissolved, leaving the foundation as the sole entity promoting a streetcar system.

At least, the preferred route had been set.

FIFTH EFFORT

The foundation determined to proceed alone and forgo public funding. In doing so, costs could be reduced by well over 50% using its tax exemptions as a Sec. 501(c)(3) organization and its El Paso County Enterprise Zone business with State tax credits as incentives.

The first task was to find a downtown site for the storage/maintenance facility. An ideal location existed - the long-abandoned Santa Fe Railroad yards, situated east of S. Wahsatch Street, with E. Cucharras Street on the north, Shooks Run Creek on the east, and E. Fountain Boulevard on the south. The property was about 20 acres in size with several tracks remaining on it, connected by a partial wye to the joint line below Fountain Boulevard. It was surrounded by industrial and commercial property. Near the north end, it crossed over a viaduct, constructed in the early part of the 1900s, with Costilla Street passing under it. The dirt from excavating Costilla had been used to level the property nearest the creek, but we noted during heavy rains, gulleys formed as the dirt was not well-packed. We figured there were about 12 usable acres.

The first of several issues surfaced quickly after we had contacted the BNSF about purchasing the property and the railroad had sent us details about it. The Costilla Street overpass had just over a 12-foot overhead clearance, not enough for high profile trucks to pass under it, and the City wanted it taken down. Further, it leaked and caused flooding during storms and icy conditions during winter. It turned out that the railroad thought the City owned it and the City thought the railroad owned it.

The second issue involved the railroad issuing permits to several businesses that operated near the creek bed on railroad property and whether or not they could be evicted. The third issue was whether or not the railroad owned

some, all, or none of the property the creek ran through, since the creek bed had shifted over the years, and who would bear responsibility for flooding.

Aside from those issues, which we had not addressed, the railyard was ideal for the foundation. It had connections to existing rail, two exits to downtown on Cucharras and Vermijo Streets, and a third possible exit to Rio Grande Street. We discussed leasing the unstable land adjacent to the creek to a group attempting to establish a public market in the downtown area, needing land for stalls and vegetable-growing areas. Obtaining data from the BNSF, combined with its need to obtain an appraisal on the property, took months. We met with City officials for their views on what they needed or wanted. We met with local business leaders and learned that a loop around the core downtown area was desired prior to any effort to begin building north to UCCS. A tentative route was mapped out, leaving the yard on Rio Grande, going west to Sahwatch (Sierra Madre was a more attractive choice but the number of buried utilities in that street dictated against it), north to Vermijo and back east to the yard. Turn radii for the streetcars were studied; Colorado Springs Utilities supplied us with data on buried utilities and concluded there were minimal issues to deal with.

The appraisal came back at \$1.12/square foot, a reasonable price. We were gearing up for a fundraising effort and final negotiations with the railroad on the usable land area, when a bombshell was dropped on us. The BNSF decided to reactivate the yard.

A 1922 compact between the D&RGW and the C&S railroads on track-sharing along the Front Range stipulated that the D&RGW would maintain the track north of downtown and the C&S south of downtown. By the 2000s, the BNSF ran far more trains through Colorado Springs than the UP, and the latter let the maintenance on its track deteriorate to where the BNSF grew dissatisfied with speeds through town. The result was the BNSF agreed to lease the UP track to Monument with an option to purchase it and needed somewhere to store track, ties and ballast to upgrade the leased line. The Santa Fe yard was that "somewhere." The foundation's three years of effort went down the drain.

SIXTH EFFORT

After the Santa Fe yard location was denied to us, the only viable location left to us along the hoped-for route connecting downtown with UCCS was an abandoned stretch of rail adjacent to N. Nevada Avenue, stretching from the U-Haul facility north of Fillmore Street to a self-storage operation north of Mt. View Lane. The property was 100 feet wide and 1.28 miles in length, crossing over Winters Drive and Mt. View Lane. It was flush against the east side of Nevada. There was an easement on the far south end involving auto parking for a wood truss plant, and the immediate area above it was a stretch in front of the power plant and associated buildings. Above that, there was a 0.2-mile stretch until Winters is reached with an overhead power line on the east side of the property. That was the piece of land suitable to us for a loop demonstration track and a pole building for our pit, maintenance and storage.

Between Winters and Mt. View was a 0.2-mile piece with the former dog racing track (now used for contractor storage), a propane station and a Transit Mix plant. All in all, those properties comprise almost 40 acres, reaching as far east as N. Prospect Street. We believe that stretch should not be kept vacant, pending a potential purchase by a developer, who would want direct access to Nevada.

North of Mt. View, the land slopes up to the east, all unsuitable for trolleys and most other uses.

The active line was abandoned in 1978 and the track torn up around 2012. On the south end things get interesting. Originally, the Santa Fe main line passed through it, over Fillmore Street, and continued south to the Santa Fe Depot on E. Pikes Peak Avenue. with an overpass over the Rock Island's incoming line. The Rock Island line, now owned by the Union Pacific, had a branch off to the north of its main line, crossing Fillmore Street and serving the wood truss plant. At some point in the past, those two parallel lines were merged so there would be only one line crossing Fillmore. The Santa Fe's successor, the BNSF, owns about 1/4 mile of track south of the abandoned property and crossing Fillmore for about 1/10 of a mile, where it curves and becomes Union Pacific track. Above Fillmore, the branch track off of the old Santa Fe track serving the plant is owned by the UP. I am convinced the BNSF retained ownership of that 1/4 mile so the UP would have to pay them to get to the plant they serve north of Fillmore.

We approached the BNSF about purchasing the full 1.28 miles of the abandoned right-of-way, and they again commissioned an appraisal and took our proposal to the four or five BNSF departments that might have some input into our buying the property. Two years went by and then the City approached us.

The Mayor and several of his staff visited our facility in May of 2016. A North Nevada Renewal Study had been announced involving everything from Lilac Lane south of Fillmore Street to Mt. View Lane on the north. Consultants were hired, public meetings were held, all with the idea of eliminating the industrial and ugly retail businesses along the street, replacing them with landscaped areas, multi-family housing and more attractive retail establishments. The hope was a developer would purchase the dog track and other adjacent properties and develop them tastefully; a research park, for example, as the City was hoping more cyber security operations would be attracted to locate there. That was the reason for the Mayor's visit: a streetcar system that would attract developers who would buy and improve the properties along Nevada.

Very shortly after that visit, the railroad approved our purchase, sent us a contract and told us two things: the property would be marketed to every adjacent landowner in total or in pieces, and every offer would be required to put down 10% of the purchase price as earnest money - \$62,000 for the whole, as the appraised price was again \$1.12/sf, just as in the BNSF yards. The contract was one the railroad used for purchases of land adjacent to an active rail line, with all sorts of lengthy approvals required by the railroad for any use, change of use, development or resale one could imagine, ignoring that the land was over a mile from the joint line where the BNSF operated.

Our thinking had not yet congealed to the point where we settled on a small portion of the property, that 0.2-mile stretch. Additionally, we didn't have anywhere near the earnest money, naively thinking we could contract to buy the property, then raise funds over a period of time, to complete the purchase. We called the City, told them our predicament and right away received an answer, "We'll buy it and give you an easement to use it."

The City's offer was submitted on 16 August 2016, and the City was designated the preferred buyer. The contract has not closed as of October 2020, as this is written. I believe funds for the down payment and purchase were contributed in part by Utilities and the Parks Department. Utilities desired the portion of the land in front of its power plant, to provide added security. Parks envisioned a bike/pedestrian trail.

The Nevada Renewal meetings continued and the whole stretch was designated a transportation corridor, with the artist's rendering showing a landscaped parkway for Nevada and buses or streetcars in the corridor. We disagree. The piece between Winters and Mt. View needs to remain open for a developer, as access to Nevada would be a must. The piece above Mt. View is not suitable for much except greenery due to its slope. The easement for the wood truss plant would remain just that, and the piece adjacent to the power plant will probably be fenced off. That leaves the 0.2-mile section for our loop and buildings and allows us to begin planning for track in the streets adjacent to that plot.

The railroad's real estate consultant, JLL America, told us recently the railroad took this property and others in other metro areas off the market, for reasons the consultant said it didn't know. The consultant further told me the foundation could under no circumstances purchase any of the land; the purchaser would now have to be the City. One suggestion he made: a letter from the City to the railroad indicating that the land was critical for the City to own (think urban renewal) and also stating the City was considering a condemnation process to obtain it. That threat, he said, had resulted in the railroad putting property back on the market in other cities. To date, we are not aware the City has acted on that suggestion.

This is where we are.

Ultimately, we hope to build our in-street system with private funding, and operate it using volunteers, as a public-private partnership with the City. We believe we can operate it at a profit with no need for tax dollars to support it. Stay tuned!

David Lippincott
PPHSRF President
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