

Railway car gets new lease on life

Earth Day move set for proposed learning center

By Joe Napsha

TRIBUNE-REVIEW

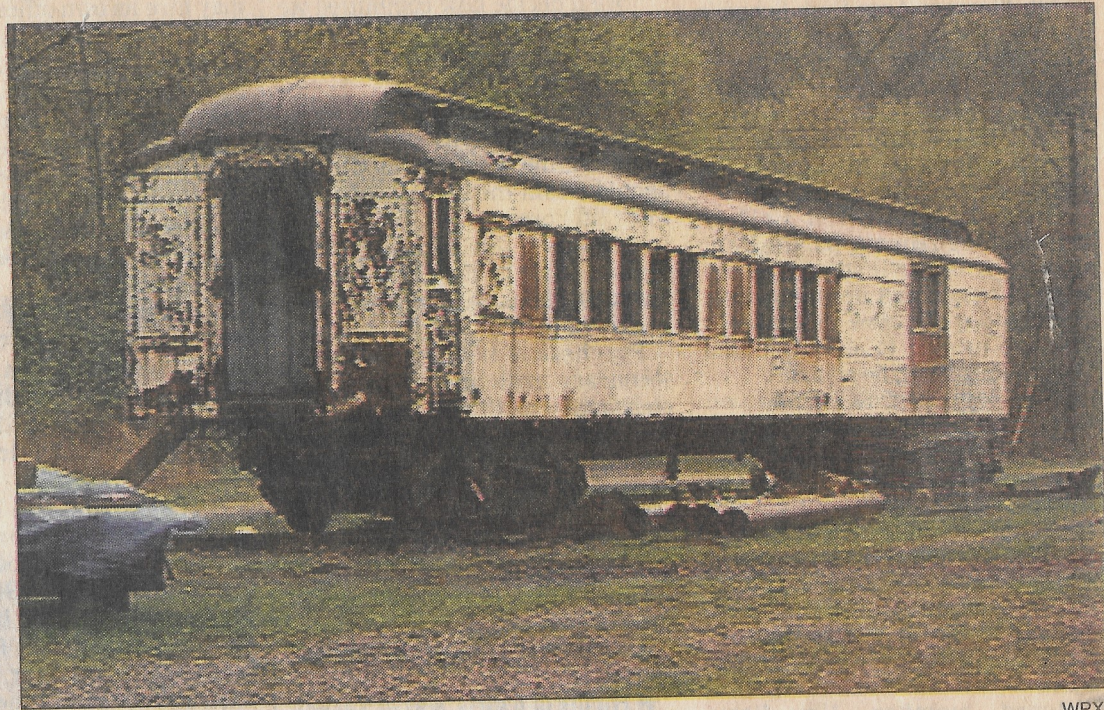
Earth Day will be moving day for the 70-year-old railway car that has been rotting away along the Youghiogheny River Trail between West Newton and Cedar Creek Park.

The Regional Trail Corp., which is overseeing the conversion of the old railroad right of way into a hiking and biking trail, wants to give the deteriorated railway car a new life as an environmental learning center for students of school districts along the trail from McKeesport to Connellsville.

To prepare for the April 22 move from Buddtown to a two-acre traiside site off Collinsburg Road in West Newton, a contractor yesterday morning laid down 100 tons of railroad ballast at the combination passenger/baggage car's future home, said Robert McKinley, RTC manager. After laying down the 3-foot-thick bed of ballast, David Yurkovich & Sons Inc. of Charleroi RD2 also laid down 2 1/2 sections of 33-foot-long track panels on which the railway car will sit atop the ballast.

The bed of ballast had to be three-feet thick because the site lies in a flood plain, just north of the Route 136 intersection with the trail, McKinley said.

The CSX Corp. donated both the railroad ballast and rails to the non-profit trail organization, McKinley said. The materials were brought to the West Newton train station by CSX, then trucked across the Youghiogheny River.



WPXI

The Regional Trail Corp. wants to turn this old railway car into an environmental learning center in West Newton.

To move the 70-foot-long railway car on Earth Day, McKinley said the contractor plans to take two 60-ton cranes to Buddtown to lift it onto a flatbed truck, then take it to its new home. The railway car's wheels will be moved separately.

The RTC wants to convert the 35-foot-long, 48-seat passenger section into a classroom, McKinley said. The 35-foot-long baggage compartment would become a laboratory where students could conduct environmental experiments, such as tests on river water samples.

Yough Middle School students who studied the railway car as part of an environmental education project last year found that the sheet metal siding and access ramps must be repaired and replaced. Seats also must be added.

To convert the combination passenger/baggage car into a usable educational facility, McKinley said they will rely heavily on volunteer labor, such as painters and welders, as well

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as donated supplies. Local labor unions and apprentice groups have offered to provide labor for a major portion of the renovation.

The project has received the support of the Mon Valley Education Consortium and the Local Involvement Network for Communities' Sake, a volunteer group in the Yough School District.

Raymond "Bud" Geissler, development director for the Mon Valley Education Consortium in McKeesport, said it is hoped the railway car's conversion into an environmental classroom can be complete for the beginning of the next school year.

Students already are involved in

the conversion, Geissler said. Students at the McKeesport Technology Center are restoring the car's windows and Yough High School graphic arts students are designing its interior.

Plans also call for a rail and transportation museum to be built on the site which once housed the West Newton's West Side train station.

The total cost of the project has been estimated at \$49,000. Of that amount, \$31,000 has been estimated for in-kind service and volunteer labor. The RTC and West Newton Area Business Association has raised another \$9,000. LINCS also helped to raise \$3,500 for the project.