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The Northern Pacific Railway: President Lincoln had signed legislation establishing the building of a transcontinental railroad from the populated East to the fast-growing State of California. Railroad buffs know this effort culminated with the driving of a golden spike near Promontory, Utah, in 1869 that connected the first Overland Route. While the Central Pacific Railroad from San Francisco Bay and the Union Pacific from the Omaha area made this connection, many more railroads were involved. Railroad building in the U.S. was just getting in high gear.

In the Northwest, the Northern Pacific, built originally from Duluth on Lake Superior to Tacoma (WA) on Puget Sound, was completed in 1883. Shipment of Minnesota Ore and manufactured goods from the Great Lakes, plus colonization of the vast lands between, were solid economic reasons why the railroad made sense. A 7-mile-long tunnel was bored through the Cascades from both ends to complete the connection to Tacoma, with the bores meeting in the middle. The civil engineers' calculations were off by just over one inch!

Rail lines had already been built between Chicago and St. Paul, and it was desirable for Northern Pacific to have a passenger-train connection. A new line was built in the late 1880s through Minneapolis and Little Falls (later the boyhood home of Charles A. Lindbergh) to Staples, Minnesota, where it connected with the line from Duluth. Soon competition came in the northwest from the Great Northern Railway, which, for the most part, built its main line parallel to and to the north of Northern Pacific. Both railroads used the Burlington (C.B. & Q.) for their through trains from Chicago to the Pacific Northwest. Finally, just before World War I, the Milwaukee Road entered the competition, and while it already had its heavily traveled routes in Wisconsin and into Chicago, it was a poor third in volume on the long haul to Puget Sound.

The number one name train on the Northern Pacific (NP) was the *North Coast Limited*, with a second train about one hour slower called the *Mainstreeter*. It took roughly 48 hours from Chicago to Seattle (or Portland) in the days of steam. Railroads in that part of the country were mostly steam-powered until after World War II. Northern Pacific had pioneered several types of steam locomotives including the 2-8-2 Mikado for freight service and the high-drivered 4-8-4, which they called the "Northern" type. Most notable, however, was the all-Timken roller-bearing 4-8-4 built for the railroad in 1931. It was so successful that NP would not order a locomotive without roller bearings after 1933. All other railroads followed suit.

Upon the 100th anniversary of the Northern Pacific in 1983, stage and screen actor Raymond Massey was hired to narrate a history of the railroad, which was available on a 33 r.p.m. disc record. It told of the early years, and also the years of yeoman service during World War II, when heavy freights vied with over-loaded passenger trains and troop trains to tax the railroad, much of it single-tracked. At stops like Missoula, Montana, far from home for most servicemen, local USO girls on the station platform would distribute homemade cookies and ice cream to the passengers of a troop train, as it paused to change locomotives.

The city ticket offices of Northern Pacific in the East were actively involved with travel agents who might have passengers going west on summer tours. Our agency, Marshall and Burton in Wilmington, ran such a tour to Alaska in 1953, on which we had about 25 people. The NP office in Philadelphia, long familiar with trips of this kind, helped us with arrangements and with the detailed itinerary. We hired a private Pullman car, which members of our tour boarded in Wilmington, and they stayed in that car for four nights before arriving in Seattle. The car would be pulled on trains of the Pennsylvania Railroad (via Baltimore and Harrisburg), the Burlington to St. Paul, and the Northern Pacific to Seattle, where our tour group boarded a coastal steamer of the Alaska Steamship Line for the cruise up the Inland Waterway to Seward, and on by boat train to Anchorage. Return to Wilmington was basically by the same route. Northern Pacific was glad to do all this in return for 25 round-trip fares from St. Paul to Seattle.

In the late 1960s, most long-haul railroads petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission to allow them to discontinue passenger service as it had been a loser for several years, and it was getting worse. Mergers were also taking place. The Burlington, Northern Pacific, and Great Northern combined to become Burlington Northern. The U.S. Government took over control of most passenger service with the creation of Amtrak in 1969. In the case of Northern Pacific, the former North Coast Limited operated as an Amtrak train only two days per week during the summer months, and was totally discontinued the rest of the year. In 1972, where it passed through Livingston, Montana, northern gateway to Yellowstone National Park, the restaurant in the railway station was still the best place to eat in town. I spent the night there on July 2, 1972 with our Stanley Model 87 on my very first "Trans-Con" tour.