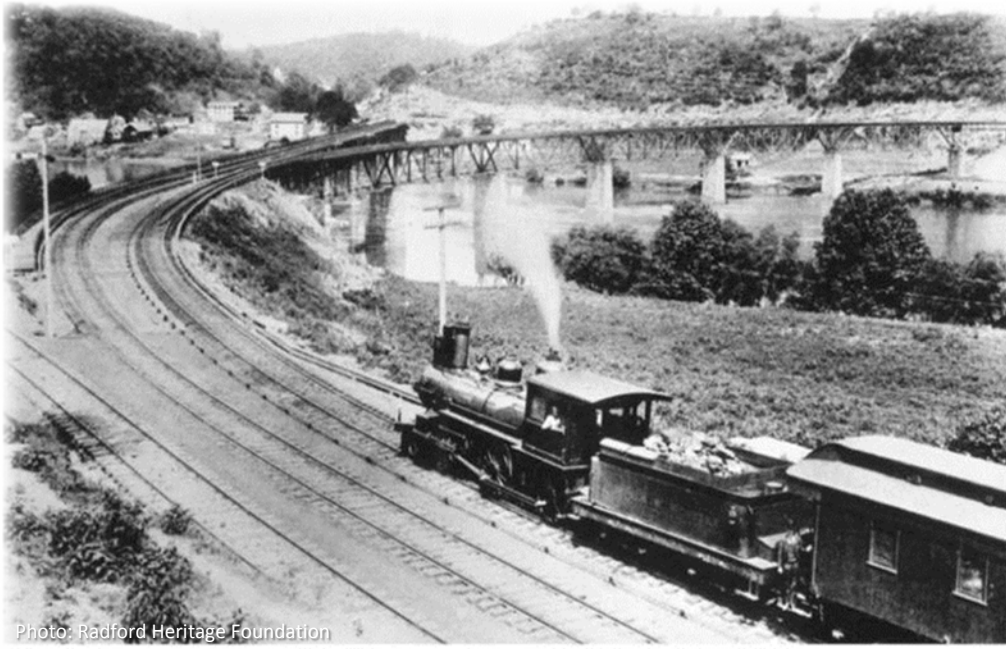




Appendix C

NRV Rail History

C1 BRIEF HISTORY OF PASSENGER RAIL IN THE NEW RIVER VALLEY



The New River Valley has a rich history of passenger rail service. The railroad reached what is now Radford in 1854, eventually providing a rail connection between Lynchburg and Bristol. Scheduled rail service on this line began in approximately 1856. The Norfolk & Western Railway's extension line from Radford west to the coalfields, along the south shore of the New River, reached the Town of Narrows in 1882. The Virginian Railway, along the north shore of the New River, began operation in 1909. The Norfolk & Western's passenger service offered a more fully developed menu of options, while the Virginian Railway offered limited passenger service.

To serve the coal mines at Merrimac, the Virginia Anthracite Coal and Railway Company, built a branch rail line in the early 1900s that connected with the Norfolk & Western at Cambria, which is now part of Christiansburg. This line was eventually extended to Blacksburg with passenger service between Cambria and Blacksburg commencing in the fall of 1904. The new passenger rail service was a significant improvement over the largely unimproved roads in existence at that time. Owing to the berries that grew along the route, the line was affectionately referred to by locals as the "Huckleberry". For many years, the Virginia Tech Corp of Cadets traveled to the annual VPI-VMI football game at Roanoke via passenger trains originating on the Huckleberry line. Norfolk & Western assumed ownership of the Huckleberry branch in 1912. Scheduled passenger service on the line ended in 1957. Special passenger trains operating over the Huckleberry line ceased after 1963.

At the height of World War II, there were approximately 12 passenger trains passing through Radford daily. Additional east-west passenger trains operated through Cambria/Christiansburg. In the mid-1960s, there were approximately a dozen passenger trains (6 each way) passing through Christiansburg on a daily basis. Named passenger trains such as the Birmingham Special, Pelican, and Tennessean operated north-south, while trains such as the Powhatan Arrow, Pocahontas, and Cavalier operated east-west.

In the era before the interstate highway system and widespread car ownership, passenger rail was a common means of intercity travel. New River Valley residents attending college in the 1960s note that college students were frequent users of passenger rail for travel between school and home. In the event of harsh winter weather conditions, passenger rail service often represented the only reliable means of transportation. Rail stations were important pieces of the community fabric. In communities such as Christiansburg, Pulaski, and Narrows, the rail stations which still exist are recognized as significant structures contributing to the architectural and historic character of designated historic districts.

Passenger rail travel declined through the late 1960s. Remaining passenger service operated by the Norfolk & Western Railway ended in 1971. Between 1975 and 1979, Amtrak offered limited passenger rail service operating east-west through the New River Valley on trains known as the Mountaineer (1975-1977) and the Hilltopper (1977-1979).

Interest in passenger rail service in the region was renewed in the mid-1990s when the Virginia General Assembly directed the Department of Rail and Public Transportation to study the feasibility of passenger rail service between Richmond and Bristol. Those studies indicated some promise among the findings and, over time, led to the extension of Amtrak Northeast Regional service to Lynchburg in 2009. This same service will be extended to Roanoke in 2017. Amtrak Northeast Regional service provides a connection to Washington Union Station via Norfolk Southern's Piedmont/Rt. 29 corridor.

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