

The Zephyr Project – We're Behind Schedule, BUT...

By Eugene Vicknair

Some big news since last time. Although the schedule has slipped, some serious work is shaping up on a completely invisible, yet vital aspect of the Silver Hostel: wiring.

Several things have conspired to get things behind. The biggest is the discovery that all of the internal wiring will need to be replaced. When the car was being refurbished for use as a restaurant, the folks doing the work removed much wiring and replaced some with house-style solid wire. Project co-lead Eric Stephens and his father, Steve, both experienced electricians, reviewed the car with Doug Morgan and all agreed that the wiring was unsalvageable. Thus the Hostel is being completely gutted of wiring and will be rewired from the ground up! Considering that the California Zephyr cars were among the most electrically complex of their day should say something about how massive an undertaking this is. However, Steve Stephens has signed on as the Silver Hostel's personal Chief Electrician and will be leading the way. Already, much of the wiring in the lounge end has been removed and the conduits charted. Replacement wire has already been purchased and is on hand.

Since the Silver Hostel was not going to be at the museum for the Labor Day weekend or the one following, there was no work scheduled, other than a lot of cleaning. The Hostel and the 805A are to be displayed at the Truckee Railroad Days, complete with new displays inside the car outlining their history and showing off their in service appearances. Donations will be taken and a fundraising dinner, sponsored by the Truckee folks, will be held for the Zephyr Project. I'm really excited to share the Hostel and the 805A with such a large gathering.

With the Truckee donations, hopefully about \$4000.00 in new donations will come in during the next month. Thanks to Andy and Gayle Anderson for their help in compiling the current donations. By the time the car will return to Portola the total donations should be somewhere over \$30,000.00. The shirts, hats, and certificates are being sent out as each donation is tabulated. I am still waiting for the commemorative models and the buttons to come in. The models in particular are really backordered. Also the CZ Life Membership cards are finished and will be sent shortly.

Two companies have been identified to make replacement lower window frames. They have submitted bids and the window frames should have been ordered by the first week of September. Also, we are trying to determine the best way to stabilize the areas around the lower window frames. A mismatch of metal in this area has caused corrosion of both some window frames and some of the sub-frames. This was a prob-

lem, to varying degrees, on many streamlined passenger cars of the time.

Still being sought is a company to make the dome window frames. Also, new interior lights are being ordered soon, along with other fixtures. There has been a great deal of clean up and removal recently, so the car is nearly empty of everything except ceiling, walls, and floor.

Thanks to everyone who has helped out since last time: Steve Bechtold, Kalinda Bechtold, Norman Holmes, Steve Stephens, Andy and Gayle, Frank Brehm and John Walker (who helped with the displays), and, as always, Eric Stephens and Doug Morgan. I know I'm forgetting two or three folks and I will make sure you get in next time. Its been a hectic month!

Zephyrette Anniversary

With the first eastbound departure of the then new "Zephyrette" on September 15, 1950 Western Pacific began operation of a 100 per cent streamlined passenger service. The first westbound "Zephyrette" left Salt Lake City on September 17, 1950. Thus began a triweekly operation that would last until October 2, 1960. Departing Oakland at 7:57 p.m. and Salt Lake City at 7:30 a.m. the trains ran on Sunday, Wednesday, and Friday. Running time was approximately 23 hours each way.

The two BUDD model RDC-2 cars were purchased new at a cost of \$130,000.00 each. Prior to placing the order for the cars WP had used the RDC-1 demonstrator from Portola to Salt Lake City in a trial revenue run from January 18-27, 1950. This gave WP the distinction of being one of the first railroads to use the RDC in revenue service.

This model of Rail Diesel Car seated 70 passengers and had a 17 foot baggage section. The order by WP was followed very quickly by C&NW, PRR, B&O, and the NYS&W. With their attractive appearance and stainless steel construction they made a fitting supplement to the California Zephyr. With two 275 horsepower diesel engines providing power through a torque converter smooth rapid acceleration was not a problem and the cost of operation was about half that of a similar conventional train.

Prior to being placed in service the cars were set up at the Sacramento Shops. Electric water coolers were installed as well as additional toilet and hot water facilities. Photo murals depicting scenes of the Feather River Canyon were placed in each car as were reclining seats in the center section for use by through passengers. One interesting addition was the installation of special fish racks in the baggage section for the handling of iced fish shipments.

After being declared surplus by the WP the cars were sold to the Northern Pacific who in turn sold them to Amtrak. Both cars have since been scrapped.

- Information taken from Mileposts, October 1950.