CONRAIL
the railroad with two masters

NS and CSX units idle at a Conrail yard close to New York City.
Matt Van Hattem photo
Conrail lives!
(and boy, does it)

How it serves two masters in three big cities, while staying mostly out of sight

By Fred W. Frailey

There is no such thing as a Conrail-owned locomotive today. Or a Conrail boxcar or business car. In fact, you’re forgiven for thinking Conrail went out of business on June 1, 1999, when CSX Transportation and Norfolk Southern split Consolidated Rail Corp. into two. But the two buyers couldn’t agree on how to divide three little pieces of that big property: Conrail Shared Assets is their solution, a jointly owned terminal railroad that switches carload customers, owns and dispatches track, and makes up trains for its two parents in suburban New York City, plus the Philadelphia and Detroit areas. And what a track record it has achieved.

Compared to 2000, yard dwell time on Shared Assets fell by a third, and the locomotive fleet shrank 81 percent. Overtime was cut in half. The railroad has 36 percent fewer employees, and hours worked dropped nearly 55 percent. Yet Conrail today handles about the same number of cars as it did 12 years ago.

You ask Ron Batory, its president, what Conrail did to achieve these economies. Cut crew sizes? Nope. His explanation begins in Trenton, Mich., late one afternoon in 1999, and involves a silent locomotive and an empty yard office. You wonder: Where is this tale headed?
Conrail engineers work North Jersey transfer job. Fred W. Trayek

Conrail locals work Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor and several NJ Transit lines. But at Frankford Junction, Pa., Conrail’s own Delair Branch parallels the Corridor. Michael J. Murray

President Ron Batory joined Conrail in March 1998, 15 months before the big railroad was split between CSX and NS, to oversee the Shared Assets operation. Fred W. Trayek

Big and littlle Conrail
railroading has seen its share of corporate wars in recent years. Guns remain warm from the 2012 proxy battle over control of Canadian Pacific’s boardroom. The outsiders were Chief Executive Fred Green walked the plank. But before those events came the epic struggle between CSX and Norfolk Southern for ownership of Conrail, the dominant railroad east of Chicago, north of the Ohio River, and inside

Conrail letting shine through on two NS Geeps leading a Shared Assets local south through Vineyard, N.J., on Nov. 6, 2009. Scott Harris

Adrian College straight to a job in train service. His dad was fiberglasser. "Don’t waste a college education on a railroad," he said. Those were the days of derail cars. Penn Central wasn’t hiring, but the Detroit, Toledo & Ironton was, and Batory began switching freight cars. The job lasted only as long as it took him to save the down payment on a car before he was laid off. He then worked a series of progressively better clerical and managerial jobs at DT&I, ending as director of material procurement and planning.

When Grand Trunk Western bought DT&I in 1980, Batory’s star kept rising. Then in 1987 he jumped ship to become general manager of the bankrupt Chicago, Michigan & Western, formed from that part of Illinois Central Gulf connecting Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City. It was an ill-fated railroad, and Batory helped sell the pieces. The Chicago-St. Louis part went to Southern Pacific, and SP hired him to run it as general manager and assistant GM of its Central Region.

The Belt Railway of Chicago should commission a statue of Ron Batory. It was barely scraping by, switching a mere 200 cars a day, he maintains, when he brought it Southern Pacific’s traffic (including trains from Kansas City using Burlington Northern spurs). This never-lived SP from having to buy its own Chicago terminal. The Belt did better than build a statue: it hired Batory as its president in 1994. By 1995, 400 miles of freight cars rolled clearing Yard’s twin humps every day.

When CSX and NS came calling in 1997, asking if he’d become vice president of operations at Shared Assets, Batory briefly hesitated. "I could stay at the Belt — I knew Chicago like the back of my hand," he says. Yet the same itch to be part of something new and even untired that had lured him to CS&W also attracted him to Conrail. He started there in March 1998, more than a year prior to the split. "There was no Welcome Aboard awaiting me," he recalls. "I was the first evidence to people that big change was coming to the company. What I did was listen and watch. I learned how people thought. I learned the culture." But Batory (pronounced BOH-tree) didn’t know the half of it, as he later discovered.

Conrail people, then and now
"Without data, it’s just another opinion," reads a sign in Batory’s office. One of the first things he did at Conrail was begin building a "data warehouse" that would track Shared Assets’ progress, or lack thereof, of the split. Then in 1999, with the new company just under way, Batory noticed a strange trend in the numbers. Shared Assets yards were jammed with cars because of the post-takeover problems of its parent railroads. Then Hurricane Floyd blew through, making matters worse. Yet the payroll numbers, pre-split and post-split, were the same. Why weren’t they higher? Batory smelled a rat.

He went to Detroit and showed to Trenton late one afternoon. "I find a locomotive shut down and nobody in the freight house. Where is everyone? The computer says the crew is still on duty." Not until 8:15 p.m. did the conductor report the crew off duty, from a computer terminal near his home and 30 miles from Trenton. Batory dismissed the crew.

He continues: "I come back east. I get with two supervisors in New Jersey, who say this is not happening here. So on Thanksgiving week, I tell those supervisors to watch two crews, in Ridgefield Heights [N.J.] and Frankford Junction [Pa.], without being seen. Don’t do anything. Just observe. They do, and the next morning tell me they couldn’t believe their eyes.

In all, almost two dozen employees were fired for payroll falsification. "Then I woke up one night wondering what might evolve from what I did," Batory says. "So I go to the train crew locker rooms. After a while, the crews loosed up, I tell them exactly what happened. I ask, is there something wrong with honesty? They said it had always been this way. You pull and spot the plants, get the trains out, and go home, they said. They thought they should be paid for what they are worth, not for the hours they work."

And that, Batory says, is how those incredible efficiencies at Conrail Shared As sets began falling into place. Hell taken a chance confronting his employees, but he wasn’t finished. Batory became determined to change the company’s culture to see it with people that, like himself, are there because they want to be and who are willing to be accountable.

You do this by how you hire and train people. But cultures are also influenced by how you treat people, and Conrail supervisors really didn’t know the characteristics of its workforce that well. Remember the data warehouse? Out of it came a database called PASSES, which stands for "performance, attendance, compensation, education, safety." It’s a compendium of every thing Conrail Shared knows of every employee, and it is the driver of productivity for development. Says Batory of PASSES: "You can’t measure something you know nothing about. We’ll pay an employee $3 million over 30 years, which is the same as what you pay for a new locomotive. The employer and the locomotive are both assets we want to use effectively."

the coveted Northeast consumer market. In courts, before newspaper editorial boards, and on Wall Street, they fought for a draw, ultimately agreeing to divide Conrail, New Jersey getting lines with 58 percent of the pre-split revenues and CSX the rest. But what to do about the big terminals in northern New Jersey opposite Manhattan, in southern New Jersey around Philadelphia, and in Detroit? One-fifth of Conrail’s carload revenues came from those three locales. "CSX wasn’t going to stand by and see 90 percent of the Philadelphia market go to NS," says Jim McClellan, who negotiated the split for Norfolk Southerns. "In Detroit, neither railroad wanted to give up the opportunities."

The solution: the two railroads came upon an idea, with 50-50 voting rights, those three territories, and Conrail Shared Assets is the vehicle. It bears the playing field for its two parents, giving equal access to carload customers while shutting out other competitors. In Detroit, the Shared Assets model prevented Canadian National from going to regulators and demanding access to "Big Conrail" shippers, since NS and CSX could replace Conrail’s historic monopoly with competitive service.

At the commercial level, Conrail’s two owners duke it out for this business. Shared Assets impartially switches cars and builds the trains for both railroads, almost invisible to customers, who are billed by CSX or NS. (The two parents get a monthly handling invoice from Conrail proportionate to their share of the car count.) Terminal railroads exist across North America, but probably none quite like Conrail Shared Assets. And it’s unlikely any other terminal railroad is run by someone with the zeal of Ron Batory.

Those who know him best say Batory sprang from the womb catching a switch key. All he ever wanted to do is work for railroads. The Detroit raised son of a New York Central car checker and union leader, Batory took his degree from Michigan's
Adrian College straight to a job in train service. His dad was fiberglassed. "Don’t waste a college education on a railroad," he said. Those words fell on deaf ears. Even Central wasn’t hiring, but the Detroit, Toledo & Ironton was, and Batory began switching freight cars. The job lasted only as long as it took him to save the down payment on a car before he was laid off. He then worked a series of progressively better clerical and managerial jobs at DT&I, ending as director of material procurement and planning.

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Manhattan's Empire State Building looms above Conrail's dense terminal trackage in Newark, N.J. Tracks on the far right lead to Garden Yard; center tracks form the west end of Oak Island Yard; and the P&H Line at far left still has ex-PRR catenary poles. Source: Matt Van Hatten

Demystifying North Jersey

On a map, Conrail Shared Assets in northern New Jersey looks like a cas of squirming worms — one route laid over another until, east of Newark, nothing makes much sense. Batty билет the district to a henneth. Whatever you call North Jersey, Big Conrail worked mightily to piece together through routes and create a coherent network from the crisscrossing

lines of the former Penn Central, Jersey Central, Erie Lackawanna, Lehigh Valley, and Reading railroads. Conrail Shared Assets continues that endeavor, most recently clearing two tunnels in Jersey City for double-stack trains, remote-controlling three of North Jersey's six movable bridges (a task that's not quite finished), and rebuilding the Port Reading Secondary as an alternate way for trains of both owners to reach the ethanol plants, trash facilities, and refineries along the "Chemical Coast" and the docks at Port Newark.

North Jersey seems a lot less convoluted if you'll trace the paths of just two of its arteries. The first starts at Port Reading Junction, near Bound Brook, N.J. It funnels about three dozen trains a day belonging to Norfolk Southern out of Pittsburgh and Harrisburg, Pa., and to CSX out of Florida, the Carolinas, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. (The line also hosts 57 weekday NJ Transit commuter trains east of Roselle Park, with two station stops and no freight curfews.) Freight trains end east on the Lehigh Line 25 miles to Oak Island. Conrail's big hump yard in Newark, Oak Island originates carload freight for CSX each day (one headed south, one north to CSX's Selkirk yard near Albany, N.Y.) and for NS (one to Allentown, Pa., plus Conrail's own local). Next door, the Dorothy Avenue auto ramp builds CSX train QT27 for Selkirk and NS 113, bound for Conrail's Sterling Yard near Detroit. In all, 11 Conrail yard crews and eight industry switch jobs work out of Oak Island on weekdays.

From CP (for control point) Valley, at the west doorkist of Oak Island, intermodal trains go two ways. A few NS trains veer right (south) to reach the Chemical Coast Secondary (which moves in a moment). But most intermodal trains head left a short distance to the Passaic & Harmsworth Line.

Bergen Tunnel, opened in 1861, is cleared for stacks in 2010. Source: Matt Van Hatten

The P&H takes them northeast through New- ask, past the CSX-run South Kearny intermodal yard, and then across the Hackensack River draw-bridge to Jersey City. The Kearny-Seaca- nuis-Jersey City triangle has perhaps the densest forest of railroad infra-structure in the Ameri- cans, as Conrail's consider- able trackage blends into that of its owners, plus Amtrak, NJ Transit, and Port Authority Trans-Hudson — much of it out of public view and off limits because of post-9/11 security. In Jersey City, the trains turn sharply north, running parallel to the Palisades ridge. This is the Northern Branch, which delivers trains to Norfolk Southern's Coven- ton intermodal and freight yard and takes CSX trains north to area intermodal terminals and ultimately Selkirk, NY. Conrail's ownership ends just north of Amtrak's Northeast Corri- dor overpass, at CP 1 in North Bergen, but its local freight use the CSX River Subdivision to reach the Ridgefield Heights auto-unloading ramp, along the way passing CSX intermodal yards in North Bergen and Little Ferry (the latter located on New York, Susquehanna & Western trackage adjacent to Ridgefield Heights).

The second arterial route begins near where the first one ended, on the CSX River Sub, which funnels about 16 trains on busy days to and from Selkirk Yard. Mont River Sub intermodal trains will yard at Little Fer- ri, North Bergen, or Selkirk Yard on the route just described. But CSX double-stack container trains destined for Port Newark, plus Oak Island-bound carload freight and automobile train QT68 from Louisville, Ky., exit the Northern Branch at CP Croton to enter the 7-mile National Dock Branch, which winds its way through the Bergen and Waldos tunnels in Jersey City and onto the Upper Bay drawbridge across Newark Bay.

On the other side of the bridge is the east end of Oak Island Yard. Auto and inter- modal trains, however, head to Garden Yard, which runs parallel to Oak Island and serves the adjacent Dorothy Avenue auto facility. At the end of Gar- den Yard is one leg of a yule leading to the 15-mile Chemical Coast Secondary. (The other leg of the yule links back to the Lehigh Line from Port Reading Junction.) Near the north end of the Chemical Coast sits Port Newark, Conrail's second-biggest hub in North Jersey and home to five yards and eight industry or transfer jobs on weekdays. Conrail builds three intermodal trains a day there for CSX and two for NS, with cars retrieved from port facilities in Newark, Elizabeth, and on Staten Island. Norfolk Southern originates two other in- termodal trains at its nearby Eiall terminal in Elizabeth, using its own switch crew.

Continuing down the Chemical Coast, you pass the lead into CSX-run Elizabeth-

Oil and ethanol facilities line the Chemical Coast Secondary. Biggest is the ConocoPhillips refinery in Linden, N.J., supported by Conrail's Bayway Yards (bottom). Source: Matt Van Hatten

A Conrail crew uses CSX GP38-2 No. 2761 to switch Port Elizabeth, N.J., Joe Geoghegan

port Yard, which handles bulk commodities and garbage loading, and the junction to the Conrail-operated Staten Island Rail- road, which originates ocean containers at the Howland Hook marine terminal plus containerized waste destined for South Car-
Oil and ethanol facilities line the Chemical Coast Secondary. Biggest is the ConocoPhillips refinery in Linden, N.J., supported by Conrail’s Bayway Yard (bottom). Trains: Matt Van Hatten

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Continuing down the Chemical Coast, you pass the lead into CSX-run Elizabeth-
A GP38-2 is readyed for service at the Pavonia diesel shop. Photos: Matt Van Hatten

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In place of the hump are “switching kioks” for the conductors operating remote-control locomotives at both the class yard and the adjacent receiving yard. The kiosks are covered shelters containing a touch screen and track diagram for a conductor to switch program moves in proper order. “You load the sequence,” explains Chief Engineer Tim Tierney, “and as software installed in the switch lead senses that one movement has been kicked clear, it lines the power switches for the next one. Inside the kiosks are monitors showing the other end of each yard. We use GPS devices throughout, and the end result will be a monitor in the yard office that shows the yardmaster where all his assets are — the locomotives, the people, the vehicles, and maybe even the blue flags.”

Pavonia Yard gets its cars from CSX trains C795 and C759, running to and from the CSX yard across the river in Greenwich, and CSX Q417 and Q418 between Pavonia and Albany’s Selkirk Yard, which pass through the North Jersey District. Norfolk Southern trains 39G to Allentown, PA, and 38G back to Camden. Pavonia also houses Conrail’s locomotive shop. Each parent contributes to the 85-unit fleet (with one exception) Electric-Motive Diesel models. The three GP38-2s, these beats comprise half of Conrail’s herd, and all are 30 to 40 years old. But age doesn’t bother Eric Levin, director of motive power. “You could maintain these things out of a pickup truck. They are simple, rugged machines,” he says. Also well represented are GP40-2s (15) and SD40-2s (12). Once assigned to Conrail, locomotives tend to stick around, because of the specialized equipment installed at Pavonia, such as GPS. Batery says the decision to lease power from Conrail owners rather than buy and paint its own fleet was a financial one, but also provides “a reminder of who we work for and who we serve.”

Carloadings fell significantly on the South Jersey lines after the 2008 recession, yet you’d never guess it was the train switching WPAC11 rumble out of Camden with two of those GP38s and 100-plus cars for the Penns Grove Secondary, which follows the Delaware for 30 miles from a junction with the Vineland Secondary at Woodbury, N.J. The Penns Grove line passes through a rural area laced with industrial activity, and accounts for a hefty share of Conrail’s South Jersey business. Much of WPAC11 is left in Paulsboro, N.J., where yard jobs work around the clock to switch customers such as DuPont (chemicals), Mobil Oil (refining), Solvay Solexis (plastics), Nulstar Energy (crude oil), and Oxy Vinyls (resins). A new port there will open in about a year, adding to the rail activity. At the north end of South Jersey is Morrisville, PA, across the Delaware from Trenton. The amazing thing about this outpost is how it has been repurposed. The hump yard that once served U.S. Steel, Fairless Works and other industries is gone. The class tracks are now storage yard for NJ Transit freight, Fairless Works, which at its peak employed 7,000 people, is now just a finishing mill with a workforce of 75 to 100. USM demolished 5 million square feet of old buildings to turn its vast acreage into an industrial park, reared from Morrisville by a spur crossing over Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor. Instead of one custom er, Conrail now has a dozen. The most active is Kinder Morgan, whose port facility on the Delaware unloads steel slabs and windmill components and loads anhydrite coal and scrap metal, among other things.

Morrisville has nine weekday crews, working the Fairless park and industries along Amtrak’s Corridor. They also make up two NS intermodal trains, CSX C21E (210) and a freight for Conway Yard near Pittsburgh (176), and switch out their inbound counterparts. CSX local C794 makes a weekday turn to Morrisville from nearby Woodbourne, PA.
olina on CSX from a New York City loader. Two ethanol facilities along the Chemical Coast each receive a unit train a day — business that didn't exist 10 years ago. Twelve miles south of Newark is chemical-heavy Port Reading Yard, and the beginning of the Port Reading Secondary, a one-mile line that takes you back to the Leigh Line at Round Brook. Most NS trains with port traffic or auto racks for Doremens Avenue reach Newark via the Leigh Line, but the Port Reading Secondary is an alternative.

In all, Conrail Shared Assets crews rep- ort for duty at eight support yards in addi- tion to Oakland Island and Port Newark, but the bulk of its trains and those of its owners traverse those two corridors, which together form a wicked figure 8. Learn them, and you'll desn't forget North Jersey.

In the Delaware's shadow

The dominant landmark of the South Jersey Shared Assets area is not Philadel- phia but the Delaware River, which Conrail trains follow on the New Jersey side for 60 miles, from Trenton to Deepwater, across the river from Wilmington, Del. Much of Philadelphia's rail freight infrastructure was once located on the Delaware, where the Pennsylvania and Reading railroads built piers for transferring coal, grain, iron ore, and other commodities. Also, on a recent rainy morning there's little of that left to see. Just four customers remain in the Port Richmond area, northeast of downtown Philadelphia. The biggest of those, Kinder Morgan, brings in 20 to 25 cars of ethanol daily. Home Depot and Wal-Mart stores occupy what had been the wharfs and rail yards at Greenwich in South Philadelphia. A bulk transfer station is there for neighborhood's biggest rail user. Most Conrail activity today occurs on the east side of the Delaware, in New Jersey. The gateway to this part of the rail- road — the only practical way to reach Delaware and is the Delair Bridge, a massive, 4.45-foot-long structure over the Delaware near Frankford Junction in Philadelphia. The lift bridge, built in 1893, has two tracks, one owned by Conrail and the other by NJ Transit for its Atlantic City Line trains. (Conrail is in the midst of replacing the 60 deck girders on its side of the bridge.)

From the New Jersey side of the Delair, connecting tracks bring trains into Camden and Pavonia Yard, which in 2012 underwent a transformation. This summer Conrail removed the 45-year-old resorters leading to the 31 bowl tracks, knocked down the hump tower, and took out must of the hump elevation. These symbols of big-time railroading had become too expensive to use and main- tain in a yard that classifies only about 300 cars a day.

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Carloadings fell significantly on the South Jersey lines after the 2008 recession, yet you'd never guess it watching train WPC011 rumble out of Camden with two of those GP38s and 100 plus cars for the Pen- nes Grove Secondary, which follows the Delaware for 30 miles from a junction with the Vineland Secondary at Woodbury, N.J. The Penes Grove line passes through a ru- ral area laced with industrial activity, and accounts for a hefty share of Conrail's South Jersey business. Much of WPC011 is left in Paulsboro, N.J., where yard workers account for the clock to switch customers such as DuPont (chemicals), Mobil Oil (re- fining), Solvay Sollexis (plastics), NuStar Energy (crude oil), and Oxy Vinyls (resins). A new port there will open in about a year, adding to the rail activity.

At the north end of South Jersey is Morrisville, Pa., across the Delaware from Trenton. The amazing thing about this outpost is how it has been repurposed. The dump yard that once served U.S. Steel, Fairless Works and other industries is gone. The class tracks are now a storage yard for NJ Transit's Fairless Works, which at its peak employed 7,000 people, is now

just a finishing mill with a workforce of 75 to 100. US三维 demolished 5 million square feet of old buildings to turn its vast acreage into an industrial park, reached from Mor- risville by a spur crossing over Amtrak's Northeast Corridor. Instead of one custom- er, Conrail now has a dozen. The most ac- tive is Kinder Morgan, whose port facility on the Delaware unloads steel slabs and windmill components and loads anheiric acid and scrap metal, among other things.

District handled more cars last year than it did in 2001, a year after Big Conrail split. Last summer the hardest thing to find in the city was a fenced empty lot. With auto racks in short supply, the carmakers parked thousands of new vehicles to await shipment.

To a certain extent, Detroit is an efficient terminal to operate. The Conrail served auto plants tend to be located toward the east of the Shared Assets area, and the main lines leave town from the southeast. But in between ties a tangle of yards and junctions. At the end of the line, three yard jobs in Sterling work Chrysler's nearby assembly plants and auto ramp to start four trains NS 121 to Toledo, NS 171 to Oakwood yard in Detroit, NS 31M to Gibson Yard 113 at Hammond, Ind., and CSX 233 to Houston (via Union Pacific from St. Eloys, Ill.) All four outbounds pause at North Yard to pick up more auto racks brought from Chrysler's Jefferson North assembly plant (making Jeep Grand Cherokees and Dodge Durangos) and its Warren assembly (Dodge Ram and Dakota) and Warren stamping plants. Chrysler ships 1,500 new cars and trucks a day on Conrail and has sent out 2,000 a day at times.

Still further south, at Livernois Yard, Conrail builds CSX container train Q131, with auto parts for Mexico via Union Pacific, and Q151 for the intermodal mixing center in North Baltimore, Ohio, plus NS intermodal train 21N for Chicago 47th Street; it also ramps inbound counterpart trains Q132, Q325, and 20N. Livernois-based switchers serve Detroit Salt (up to 40 cars a day from the nearby mine), several North America, Dearborn Steel Center, and yes, Ferrous Processing & Trading. CSX yard job Y122 ferries cars to and from Livernois each morning from that railroad's nearby Gingermeade Yard. Northland Southern train 331 pulls Livernois cars on its way from NS Oakwood Yard to Elkhart, Ind., and trains 38E from Elkhart sets out on route to Jackson, Mich.

In terms of leads handled, River Rouge Yard is Conrail's biggest in Detroit, but most of its volume is in unit trains for Detroit

Motor City is back in style

Senior Trainmaster Kory Johnson points toward a spur track as he drives down a Detroit street at dawn. "It goes to a scrap yard that I thought the recession had put out of business for good." Then one day, he says, Ferrous Processing & Trading began ordering freight cars again, as if nothing had happened.

The story serves as a metaphor for Detroit. In May 2009, car hudlings had dropped enough in 2008 that Conrail had to lay off nearly 40 percent of its 280 Detroit-area employees. It stopped staffing auto-dependent North and Sterling yards, leaving just 16 yard and industry jobs using only seven locomotives to do all the work in the area. It virtually shut down on weekends. Now, like the auto industry itself, Conrail has come roaring from the Great Recession. Also back, every last one of those laid-off employees. North Yard and Sterling are back in business. And the work-day crew stood at 27 in July and the locomotive count at 15. In fact, the Detroit

District handled more cars last year than it did in 2001, a year after Big Conrail split. Last summer the hottest thing to find in the city was a fenced empty lot. With auto racks in short supply, the carmakers parked thousands of new vehicles to avoid shipment.

To a certain extent, Detroit is an efficient terminal to operate. The Conrail served auto plants tend to be toward the north end of the Sterling Area, and the main lines leave town in the south end. But between lies a tangle of yards and junctions. At the end, three yard jobs in Sterling work Chrysler's nearby assembly plants and auto ramp to start four trains NS 121 to Toledo, NS 171 to Oakland Yard in Detroit, NS 314 to Gibson Yard in Hammond, Ind., and CSX Q233 to Houston (via Union Pacific from St. Elmo, Ill.). All four outbounds pause at North Yard to pick up more auto racks brought from Chrysler's Jefferson Assembly plant (making Jeep Grand Cherokees and Dodge Durangos) and Warren assembly (Dodge Ram and Dakota) and Warren stamping plants. Chrysler ships 1,500 new cars and trucks a day on Conrail and has sent out 2,000 a day at times.

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Still, would you rather be successful and put up with the Delays of this world, or have wide-open tracks because you're starved for business? Detroit has had it both ways in recent years.

New trains and wayward cars

What's it like serving two masters? "Just do what's right, that's my motto," Batory says. "We are here to deliver a transportation product to them that's equal or better than what they could do." Easy to say, but oh, the messy details. Every Monday at noon a dozen or so operating and customer service people gather at Conrail's head-quarters in Mount Laurel, N.J., near Camden, and lunch on salads and sandwiches as they go over new and existing problems and opportunities. At 1 o'clock, folks from the three operating districts join the meeting by speakerphone. Then the customer service people at CSX and Norfolk Southern receive calls, separately. Today's agenda fills eight pages and includes a unit rock train in North Jersey that CSX plans to start and a carload customer in Philadelphia returning after a three-year hiatus. John Scullin, superintendent of service delivery support, gets the meeting under way. "Well, it wasn't a good week on the numbers." The key statistics — on-time departures of trains Conrail builds for its parent, dwell time of cars in yards, cycle times in and out of Conrail territory — are all shly of both the targets and year-to-date averages.

Joan Gardinelli, John Scullin, and Eric Lewis participate in a conference call. Fred W. Traley

Joan Gardinelli, director of service planning and performance, drills down on the issues. "In Detroit, NS 171 was supposed to change its schedule last week but it never took place, so we'll have to ask NS why." A chemical shipper is about to boost its shipments by 300 cars a month and wants a fifth day of service from Conrail each week to handle it. A switch job in Morrisville was rescheduled from midnights to 6:30 a.m., to even out the workloads how it's working out.

At 3:30 the Mount Laurel folks ring up the NS customer service office in Atlanta. Scullin notes the service degradation in South Jersey (a temporary situation while Parnoia Yard gets rebuilt) and says Conrail will work with the NS Harrirberg Division to get trains in and out of Camden on schedule. "What do you have for us?" he asks. The NS folks report the new schedule for train 171 will take effect the next day. There's also talk about a data exchange error that's sending cars to the wrong yard once they leave Shared Assets, and NS is a bit annoyed.

Then at 4:15 it's CSX's turn. Again, concerns over delays at Parnoia top the list. Scullin says the construction disruptions will last another six weeks or so. Then talk turns to those minuscule cars discussed earlier with NS. "So up to you to look at the class of the right data," Scullin reminds the CSX people, who discover that someone is inserting incorrect data into schedules. CSX reports that a second weekly trash train between South Kearny, N.J., and Columbus, Ohio, will start in two days.

Good service really comes down to having motivated people. Of course, they also need the right tools, training, and infrastructure. Batory is proud of all the people at Conrail; nationally, the number of newly promoted young supervisors, all of them college graduates. Conrail's people who become management trainees all start in the crafts and learn to do the jobs before they learn to supervise the work of others. "I get dirty every day," says Kirk Wunderlich, just promoted in the track department. "But you have a sense of accomplishment." Adds Jim Caruso, a car inspector in Morrisville and current trainer: "This railroad is a job that can last 30 years. There aren't a lot of jobs like this."

Batory says that more than half of Conrail's 1,100 employees were hired after the split. It's beyond the ability of a visitor to judge whether Conrail's new employees are any more motivated or any less cynical than the ones they replaced. Batory, for one, is convinced they are. "They do not bring with them preconceived ideas," he says. "They are very open-minded and adapt to our policies and practices. I want to develop people for Conrail and our industry. I really enjoy that part of the job. With a new cadre of talent, it's hard to tell where we'll take this place on behalf of CSX and NS." 1
Conrail's locomotive fleet

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A Livermore Yard job with NS GP38-2 No. 5239 builds Norfolk Southern train 21N on May 18, 2012. Conrail has separate CSX and NS intermodal ramps here. (Photo: Matt Van Houten)

Joan Gardinelli, John Scullin, and Eric Lewis participate in a conference call. (Photo: Fred M. Traylor)