

THE SPOKANE, PORTLAND AND SEATTLE RAILROAD COMPANY*

The building of a railroad from Spokane to Portland by the route along the North Bank of the Columbia River did not result from a hastily conceived plan or sudden conclusion on the part of the Great Northern and Northern Pacific interests. The determination to carry out this project was reached after a long period of discussion and consideration.

For many years prior to the undertaking of actual construction the question in the councils of the Great Northern and Northern Pacific popularly known as the "Hill Lines," was not whether this line would be built, but when. The necessity of the Hill lines for such a railroad was obvious. The traffic of the rich Oregon country was completely controlled by the Union Pacific and Southern Pacific systems, generally known as the "Harriman Lines", between which and the Hill lines there was at that time the most intense rivalry. True, the Northern Pacific reached a portion of this territory, but only by a circuitous route via Puget Sound, while the Great Northern had no line or connection enabling it to participate in Oregon traffic.

Mr. James J. Hill was in control of the Great Northern and determined its policies, as well as being an influential factor in shaping the policies of the Northern Pacific. The heavily timbered areas of the Coast Range and of the Cascade Range in Oregon, the rich Willamette Valley, the enormous fisheries of the lower Columbia, all lay within striking distance of his completed lines. It goes without saying that this aggressive and sagacious pioneer railroad builder would not long brook a situation that shut out his lines from a field so important presently and so rich in promise for the future.

In 1904 it seemed that the time was ripe for the consummation of the plans that had been formed. The parent lines—the Great Northern and the Northern Pacific—were prosperous and amply able to finance an undertaking of this magnitude. The business of the West was expanding rapidly, and from 1904 to 1907 there was a very heavy traffic on these lines, amounting almost to a congestion. In order to handle the business that was being offered, the creation of additional facilities was necessary.

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Instead of double tracking the existing lines it was deemed better to build an alternate line which would not only give the necessary relief to the existing lines but would also reach new territory.

A line was, therefore, laid out from Spokane following the Marshall Canyon until it reached the undulating lava plateau of Central Washington, continuing thereon until it entered the narrow and rugged Devil's Canyon and through same to the Snake River, thence following the Snake River to Pasco. From Pasco the line crossed the Columbia River, and followed its right, or north bank, to Vancouver, Washington, thence across the Columbia and the Willamette to Portland. A considerable portion of the route laid out, especially along the Columbia, was a canyon route. If separate, lines had been built by the Great Northern and the Northern Pacific it would have been necessary over a considerable distance that they use the same rails. In the interest of public economy, as well as of railroad economy, it was, therefore, decided to build a joint line—one-half to be owned by the Great Northern Railway Company and one-half by the Northern Pacific Railway Company.

The first active step toward construction was the purchase at Portland of a considerable tract of land, which was regarded as the key tract for the Portland terminals, the purchase being made in such a manner as not to make public the purpose for which it was intended. It is interesting to note in passing that this property was later the subject of long continued litigation between the Hill interests and the Harriman interests, and that this litigation was only finally settled and disposed of in the year 1920 by a contract admitting the Great Northern and Spokane, Portland and Seattle, to the use of the Portland Union Station and passenger terminals.

In the spring and early summer of 1905 a considerable additional property was purchased for the Portland terminals. These purchases were so extensive that they tended to increase prices, and to obtain at a fair price property for terminal and right of way purposes it was essential to organize a corporation with the power of eminent domain. It was not considered prudent at this time to make public the plan—therefore, in organizing a corporation the personnel of the organizers was so chosen as not to reveal the interests that were behind the enterprise. The corporation was organized on August 22, 1905, and was given the name of

the "Portland and Seattle Railway Company." The original incorporators were Mr. James D. Hoge, of Seattle, and Mr. John S. Baker, of Tacoma. The first Board of Trustees was composed of James D. Hoge, of Seattle, John S. Baker, of Tacoma, S. B. Linthicum, C. F. Adams and J. C. Flanders, of Portland. The articles of incorporation took power to build a railroad from Seattle to Portland and from Portland to Spokane. As this was a time when new railroad enterprises were constantly being launched there was much speculation as to who might be behind this new undertaking, but the articles of incorporation and the personnel of the incorporators were such that the public was mystified, and the nature of the enterprise and the interests involved remained secret until September 26th, 1905, when Mr. C. M. Levey, Third Vice President of the Northern Pacific, was made a Trustee in the place of Mr. Linthicum, and the writer, then Western Counsel of the Great Northern, was made Trustee in the place of Mr. Hoge, and organization was perfected by the selection of C. M. Levey as President, L. C. Gilman, Vice President, M. P. Maetin, Secretary, C. A. Clark, Treasurer, and H. A. Gray, Comptroller, who were all officially connected with the parent lines—the Great Northern and Northern Pacific. The corporate name of the company "Portland and Seattle Railway Company," was retained until January 31st, 1908, when it was changed to "Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railway Company."

The acquisition of real property for terminal and right-of-way purposes continued during the months of September and October, 1905, and in November of that year the actual work of construction commenced. As soon as it became publicly known that the "Portland and Seattle Railway Company" was an enterprise of the Hill lines the Harriman interests interposed the most active opposition, using obstructive tactics of every character known to able and experienced railroad builders. Right-of-way necessary for the new line was purchased by the Harriman interests and held for ostensible public purposes. Wherever there was a strategic point every possible means were used to prevent the acquisition by the "Portland and Seattle" of property for right-of-way and terminals at such point. For the first year of construction the Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railway was literally compelled to "hew its way through." Nevertheless, every obstacle was met and overcome, and construction proceeded so rap-

idly that in December, 1907, a section 112 miles in length between Kennewick and Cliffs, Washington, was opened for operation. Track was laid from both ends, and the junction was made near the Cascade Locks on Washington's birthday, 1908, and operation formally opened for the entire length of the line between Portland and Spokane in November, 1908.

As this railroad was intended to furnish a low grade line, calculated to economically handle the highest class of traffic, the construction standards followed were of the most modern and approved engineering type. This railroad may be said to have been "built to order," and is regarded today as an example of the highest class of railroad construction. Between the stations of Vancouver and Snake River, a distance of 246 miles, a maximum grade line, with no adverse and compensated for curvature, of two-tenths of one per cent., or 10 feet to the mile, was established, and from Snake River to Spokane a maximum of four-tenths, or 20 feet to the mile, was adopted, except for a short distance in the Marshall Canyon, near Spokane, where it was necessary to increase the grade to eight-tenths westbound. Maximum curvature for the entire railroad between Vancouver and Spokane is three degrees.

The highest water on the Columbia of which there was any record was in the year 1894, and the line was laid at a minimum of 7 feet above the line of high water of that year. The structures are all of a permanent character, capable of carrying the heaviest present day loading. Very large steel bridges were built, of which the most important were four steel and concrete viaducts east of Pasco, one of these having a length of 1245 feet and a height of 233 feet, and the bridges between Vancouver and Portland crossing the Columbia River, Hayden Island, Oregon Slough and the Willamette River. These last named bridges are notable as to their type, permanence and cost of construction. The bridge across the Columbia River, Hayden Island and the Oregon Slough is a continuous double track steel structure approximately 6,400 feet long. The Columbia River crossing consists of ten truss spans, including a draw span 466 feet in length, operated with electric power and provided with an auxiliary gasoline engine. The piers are of concrete, faced with ashlar masonry, and were placed by the pneumatic, caisson method deep down into the bed of the river. The Hayden Island crossing comprises 26

deck plate spans, each 80 feet in length, resting on concrete piers erected on pile foundations. The Oregon Slough crossing consists of nine truss spans, including a draw span 332 feet in length, all carried on concrete piers resting on pile foundations. The Willamette River bridge has a total of seven truss spans, a total length of 1767 feet, including a draw span 521 feet between the centers of the end piers. This draw span is said to be the longest double track railroad draw span in the world. Five of the concrete piers of the Willamette River bridge were built by the pneumatic, caisson method, the remainder being on pile foundations.

In the construction of this double track system of bridges between Vancouver and Portland there were used 20,120 net tons of steel, 67,529 cubic yards of concrete and 10,811 cubic yards of ashlar masonry, and the cost thereof was approximately \$4,000,000.00. The entire rail traffic between California at the south and British Columbia at the north traverses these bridges, as there is no other rail crossing between them and the mouth of the Columbia on the west and a point 105 miles to the east, where the steel bridge of the Oregon Trunk Railway crosses the Columbia River between Fallbridge, Washington, and Celilo, Oregon.

The rugged character of the territory traversed by this railroad is indicated by the statement that between Spokane and Portland, approximately 28,000,000 cubic yards of material was excavated, of which approximately 12,000,000 cubic yards were solid rock, and that nineteen tunnels, having a total length of three miles, the longest being 2494 feet, were driven. Throughout the entire line between Portland and Spokane passing tracks were built at frequent intervals of sufficient length to handle 100-car freight trains, or, otherwise stated, trains approximately a mile in length. Block signals were installed between Portland and Vancouver, and at several stretches east of Vancouver where tunnels and large bridges make these traffic safeguards desirable.

Additional lines to serve as branches and traffic feeders were acquired and constructed as follows:

In March, 1907, there was acquired for the Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railway the properties of the Astoria & Columbia River Railroad, consisting of a line extending from Goble, on the Columbia River, about 40 miles from Portland to Seaside and to Fort Stevens via Astoria. From Goble to Portland the Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railway leased a line from the Northern Pacific Railway. This purchase and lease gave the Spokane,

Portland and Seattle Railway a continuous line from Spokane to the sea, and enabled it to reach the fish and timber resources of the Lower Columbia and the beach resorts on the seashore south of the Columbia.

In March, 1908, the Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railway purchased the property of the Columbia River and Northern Railway, extending from Lyle, a point on its line 85 miles east of Portland to Goldendale. This line is now known as the Goldendale Branch.

At the same time it purchased the properties of the Dalles, Portland and Astoria Navigation Company, consisting of three river steamers. These steamers were operated until 1915. Their operation was considered to be in contravention of the Panama Canal Act, which carries a provision forbidding the operation of railroad owned steamboats which do or may compete for traffic with the railroad owning them, and they were, therefore, disposed of.

In 1910 there was purchased a controlling interest in the Oregon Electric Railway, owning an electric line serving the Willamette Valley, extending from Portland to Salem and having branches to Forest Grove and Woodburn, and an extension was constructed from Salem to Eugene, with branch to Corvallis.

In 1910 there was also acquired the United Railways, an electric line extending from Portland to Wilkesboro. This line with extensions since made and acquired reaches the timber areas of the Coast Range.

In the year 1910 the Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railway commenced the construction of a line called the "Oregon Trunk Railway" from Fallbridge, 106 miles east of Portland, across the Columbia and into Central Oregon. This line was extended south as far as Bend, about 150 miles, and reaches the agricultural and stock raising sections of Central Oregon and the pine timber areas on the east slope of the Cascades.

The main line above described, together with these properties since constructed and acquired, constitute the Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railway system—all these properties being operated together and under one management, and having a main line mileage of approximately 850 miles with main line extending from Spokane to the sea, and branches reaching the grain fields of the Klickitat Valley, the agricultural, stock and timber regions of

Central Oregon, the highly productive Willamette Valley, and the timber resources of the Coast Range.

This railway system has proven a valuable asset to its owners and an important transportation link to the public. Its location and construction are such that it is not subject to wash-outs, snow blockades and other disabilities arising from climatic conditions as are the lines traversing the Cascade Range, and when these lines are blocked traffic is kept moving by detouring over this railroad. Many times during its history it has been for considerable periods the only means of rail communication between the East and Western Washington and Oregon. While the earnings of the system itself have not been large, it has furnished much valuable long haul traffic to its owners—the Great Northern and Northern Pacific—and to the affiliated Burlington, and established itself as an important adjunct to those lines. Both as a traffic producer and as a public convenience it has amply demonstrated the wisdom of those who conceived and carried out the enterprise.

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