Short Line Railroads of Indiana

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During and since the war, impressive changes have taken place in the transportation system of the United States and of Indiana. New pipeline movements, the inception of long hauls of bulky commodities by motor truck, recently accelerated use of air freight, and the conception, at least, of conveyor belts as long-distance common carriers, suggest the emergence of a new era in inland transportation. As a result of evolutionary developments such as these, the relative importance of railways as agents of regional circulation has declined, although the actual volume of freight carried rose steadily between 1946 and 1951. This absolute traffic increment has served, at least for the present, to retard the rate of railway abandonment and other reductions in service.

Among the hardiest elements of the railway pattern in their resistance to curtailment, are the short lines. Despite the inroads of competition, absorption, and obsolescence, eight short line railroads, exclusive of switching and terminal roads, continue to function in the Indiana transportation establishment. These small railways range from two to forty-two miles in length. Three of the lines are located in the northern part of Indiana, one serves the central part of the state, and four are in the far south. Beyond their interest as unique elements in a vastly changing transportation system, these lines pose the geographic problem of assessing their role within the system.

Although there is overlapping of functions, three categories of services are performed by the Indiana short lines: (1) three of the lines link urban centers with by-passing main line railroads; (2) three others connect specific industries with by-passing main lines; (3) the two remaining roads, which also are the longest lines, perform general freight service for various communities and industries along their tracks.

The three Indiana cities which are in part linked to the outside world by short-line connections are South Bend, Corydon, and Ferdinand. From South Bend, the New Jersey, Indiana, and Illinois Railroad extends southward for eleven miles to a junction with the main Chicago-Toledo line of the Wabash Railroad at Pine. The name of this connecting road, which was built by the Singer Sewing Machine Company, refers to the location of that firm's headquarters in Elizabeth, New Jersey. The chief purpose of the line was to relieve the company's South Bend cabinet works from dependence upon the New York Central for freight movements. Although control of the line subsequently was transferred to the Wabash Railroad, it continues to be operated under the "New Jersey" name.

Unlike South Bend, where the N. J. I & I. is only one of several diverging railways, the communities of Corydon and Ferdinand are

each served by a solitary rail connection. The Louisville, New Albany, and Corydon Railroad extends from Corydon 7.7 miles north to the Southern Railway's Louisville-St. Louis line at Corydon Junction, 17 miles west of New Albany. Principal freight movement is inbound to Corydon, shipments consisting chiefly of coal, petroleum products, and less-than-carload freight. Grain is handled outbound. Service totals one round-trip daily, and the road's solidarity is attested by the recent installation of a new diesel locomotive.

The Ferdinand Railroad forms the link between Ferdinand, in southern Dubois County, and the Southern Railway at Huntingburg, 7.4 miles distant. Using as motive power a steam locomotive purchased from the L. N. A. & C. RR., the Ferdinand Railroad operates two round-trips daily. In addition to the usual coal, grain, and less-than-carload movement, the Ferdinand carries in particular the traffic of the local furniture plant. This short line forms an interesting example of municipal enterprise. Built during an era in which it was felt that the existence of a railway connection would assure the industrial stature of any community, the Ferdinand Railroad has been sustained chiefly through the loyalty of local citizens.

The second class of Indiana short lines embraces those which connect industrial establishments with nearby main lines. Two of these are in southern Indiana. The only short line railroad in the Indiana coal field is the Algers, Winslow, and Western, which operates 16 miles of line in Pike County. From Oakland City Junction, where it has connections with the New York Central and with the Southern Railway, the A. W. & W. extends northeast to Cato and southeast to Enosville, in districts of active strip mining. Exclusively a coal carrier, this line has the largest roster of motive power of any of the short lines, with four heavy steam locomotives actively in use.

Although the cement-manufacturing industry at Speed (nine miles north of Jeffersonville) is located on the line of the Pennsylvania Railroad, it is further served by the Southern Indiana Railway, which forms a connection at Watson with the Louisville-North Vernon line of the Baltimore and Ohio. The Southern Indiana Railway consists of a portion of the former electric interurban line between Jeffersonville and Scottsburg. The trolley poles still stand, but the road is now operated by a diesel locomotive, hauling carload freight in one round-trip per day over the five-mile run.

A third industrial short line is the Twin Branch Railroad, which reverses the function of the Algers, Winslow, and Western: the Twin Branch hauls coal two miles from a point on the New York Central main line three miles east of Mishawaka, to the Twin Branch generating plant of the Indiana-Michigan Utilities Company, on the St. Joseph River. In contrast to the nature of its cargo, the Twin Branch is the only electrically-operated short line in Indiana.

Of the two general-service lines, the Central Indiana Railway is the longer and more active. Formerly extending almost the width of the state—from Brazil to Muncie—the Central Indiana has been reduced at

both ends to its present function as an east-west link between Lebanon and Anderson. Although operated independently, this road is owned jointly by the New York Central and Pennsylvania systems, and interchanges freight almost exclusively with these roads. In addition to local handling of coal, grain, lumber, and miscellaneous freight, the Central Indiana directly serves a group of important industries, notably the bottle-manufacturing plant at Lapel and the rubber fabricating plant at Noblesville. Using a diesel road-switching locomotive, the company operates a round-trip daily over the 42-mile line.

The Winona Railroad, like the Southern Indiana Railway, is formed from a segment of an earlier interurban line, which ran from Indianapolis to Elkhart and South Bend. It operates at present between New Paris and Warsaw, paralleling State Highway No. 15. The Winona Railroad is unique among the short lines of Indiana in two respects: it is the only line which is paralleled throughout by a standard steam railway (a branch of the New York Central), and it is the only short line presently scheduled for abandonment. Unfortunately, this line lacks the industrial connections which favor the Central Indiana Railway, although a large gravel pit at Leesburg is served exclusively. Beyond this, with minor exceptions, the functions of the Winona are duplicated by the New York Central. One diesel-powered train is run daily from Warsaw to New Paris and return.

The position of the short line railroads may be summarized in the following terms: (1) under present circumstances, the majority of the short lines in Indiana are returning a reasonable profit; (2) only the two coal-hauling lines are performing services which could not reasonably be duplicated by existing railways or by motor transportation, i. e., except in the cases of the Twin Branch and the Algers, Winslow, and Western, short line abandonment would not work a hardship upon industries or communities; (3) Indiana interurban lines, paralleled almost mile for mile by steam railways, failed chiefly because of dependence upon passenger traffic. At present, only the Ferdinand Railroad has passenger accommodations, and only the Winona is paralleled by another railroad; (4) existing short lines are kept in operation by a threefold combination of conditions: (a) "industrial inertia," (b) performance of a certain class of transportation functions, even though not in every case essential, and (c) civic or entrepreneurial interest and support.