Watco's Decatur & Eastern Illinois Railroad expands line
by Tracie VanBecelaere
Managing Editor

At midnight on December 31, 2019, Watco's Decatur & Eastern Illinois Railroad (DREI) grew by 56 miles. The growth was a result of the purchase of the Eastern Illinois Railroad (EIRC) from Archer Daniels Midland (ADM). EIRC has been operating the line since April of 1991.

The 56-mile line has been dubbed the Charleston Sub and runs from Neoga, Illinois, to Metcalf, Ill., where it connects to the existing DREI.

The line primarily serves two grain customers, ADM and Total Grain Marketing (TGM). Upon taking over the line, the new team members were busy loading a unit grain train at Neoga for TGM.

There are four train and engine crew members and two maintenance of way team members providing service to the current grain customers. All of the team members serving the Charleston Sub are experienced in the rail industry. Team members include Ben Jackson, Branden Shirley, Matthew Davis, and Tim Allen.

"There some good opportunities for growth on this line," said Doug Story, vice president agricultural marketing. "The infrastructure is in good shape and the customers have the advantage of connecting to different Class I carriers on the north and south ends of the line."

DREI General Manager Denon Green agreed with Story on the potential for growth on the line and stated, "We have an experienced crew ready to serve our current customers and we are prepared to provide service for any new business opportunities that we bring in."

45G short line tax credit extended five years
by Tracie VanBecelaere
Managing Editor

Watco, along with the rest of the short line industry, received an early Christmas present when two appropriations bills were passed on December 20, 2019.

Included in the legislation (HR 1865) was a record five-year extension of the 45G short line tax credit, making it effective retroactively to 2018 and forward through 2022. The credit incentivizes short line railroads to make additional investments in their track infrastructure that ultimately connects customers and communities to the national freight network and beyond.

The tax credit allows for a credit of 50 cents for each dollar that railroads invest in track and bridge improvements and is capped at $3,500 per mile.

“After a record amount of cosponsors and tremendous support for 45G at the highest levels in Congress, we are thrilled with this outcome,” said Laura McNichol, Watco SVP of Government and Industry Relations. “This is the first time in the history of this credit that we have 45G for five years. We can now plan for its use on a go-forward basis.”

Chuck Baker, president of the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association, said, “This is a significant win for our industry, our employees, our suppliers, and the thousands of customers and communities that depend on us. Not since December of 2015 have we been able to go into a calendar year knowing we have the tax credit in place. Having a three year advance runway, I hope will provide assurance that we can begin and complete significant projects using the credit.”

In addition to the 45G tax credit, HR 1865 included several other priority items for the transportation appropriations section of the bill such as $325 million for the next round of CRISI grants, $1 billion for BUILD grants and $2.5 million for the Short Line Safety Institute.

Although this may sound like a large amount, it’s offset by the amount short lines save taxpayers in annual wear and tear on the highways. In addition, the industry and its suppliers support more than 61,000 jobs in the U.S., many in rural communities and adds $6.5 billion to the U.S. economy according to PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Idaho U.S. Senator Mike Crapo has been a long-time supporter and original sponsor of the 45G legislation. He said, “Short line rail is like economic bread and butter, working with Idaho farmers and industry.”

Thanks to the many supporters of the legislation, short line railroads will be able to plan projects in advance, secure materials, schedule contractors and more efficiently and economically tackle the projects needed to maintain their infrastructure in order to serve customers and provide the safest service possible.
Oklahoma railcar coordinator enjoys learning new skills

by Jay Benedict
Digital Communication and Social Media Specialist

In 2017, Cameron Reed didn’t really know anything about railroads or how to repair railcars, but he did know he wanted to find a new job. He was working in a warehouse, but they were getting ready to move him to the night shift, and that wasn’t something he wanted.

“I started looking for another job when I stumbled upon this one. It was a lot closer to my house too, but I didn’t know anything about railcars,” Cameron said. “It was just one of those things. I saw it was a day shift job. I got on, and it just took off. There’s something about this industry and this job. It wasn’t just a job anymore. It was something that I wanted to make a career of and go far with, and that’s what I’ve been trying to do since I got here.”

He joined the Watco team in April 2017 as a railcar repairman when Watco created the Mill Creek, Oklahoma, Mobile Mechanical Unit. It was originally a team of three, but since then, the team has expanded to five, including Cameron. He’s the last of the original team left, though. Now, two and a half years in, Cameron says there’s not much that he doesn’t know how to do on the railcars they service. He’s now the location’s railcar coordinator.

“We got on, stuck our heads in the AAR (Association of American Railroads) book, and learned as much as we could learn. Everyone that would come around that were the railcar gurus, we’d learn from them too,” Cameron said. “We did some training at the Cleburne (Texas) shop, and then went to the Dallas location to help them get started. Then, we came back here and hit the ground running.”

The Mill Creek location is dedicated to one customer, Martin Marietta. Martin Marietta is an aggregate producer and regularly runs unit trains on BNSF from two quarries in the area. One is for limestone, and the other is granite. The Mill Creek team inspects and repairs railcars for both locations.

“We just pretty much do whatever Martin Marietta needs us to do. We jack railcars that are bad ordered through BNSF, we do our inspection and mechanical work, making sure there are no defects on their outbound trains. There’s not really anything we don’t do here. All of us are jack-of-all-trades. We have to handle everything, unlike in a shop where you’ve got different departments. We pretty much do it all.”

Cameron’s position as railcar coordinator encompasses a whole host of responsibilities on-site.

railcar coordinator Cameron Reed was selected to participate in Watco University’s Leadership Development Program because of the potential he has shown as a leader while serving customer Martin Marietta at the Mill Creek, Oklahoma, mechanical shop.

“My job is to come in every day and have an open line of communication with Martin Marietta, figure out we’ve got to do for the day, and perform most of the operation manager tasks here,” he said. “My operations manager, Richard James Drummond, trusts me to do everything here since I’m on-site every day. I’m in the meetings with the customer, taking care of these guys and making sure they’ve got everything they need, and there’s pretty much nothing I don’t pitch in and help with.”

Cameron’s supervisors saw his potential and, selected him to participate in Watco University’s Leadership Development Program. He and his group completed Phase I with trips to the Pittsburg, Kansas, office and the Safety Center in Birmingham, Alabama, for training and presentations. He’s currently working through Phase II.

“It’s been a journey, a really good journey. I’ve enjoyed it. It’s strengthened me, and it’s strengthened the team members here because I bring everything back to them. I try to share with them to help them grow as well. It’s a really good program,” Cameron said. “The best part was going to Birmingham. I’ve never been more nervous in my life than to stand in front of Watco executives and give a presentation over our site here. It was definitely different and really enjoyable. I found out a lot about myself that I didn’t know.”

The opportunities for personal growth are the icing on the cake for Cameron, though, who already finds plenty to enjoy about his job.

“Working with these guys is the best part of the job. You get on here, and it’s not just, ‘Hey, I’ll see you in the morning’ and ‘I’ll see you tomorrow’ at the end of the day. We build a relationship with each other here, unlike anywhere I’ve ever worked. We’re not just coming in to get our money and go home. We’ve actually built a family atmosphere here, like a band of brothers,” Cameron said.

The Mill Creek team operates inside Martin Marietta’s facility, allowing them to interact closely with them and the Class I service provider, BNSF. That proximity is a crucial part of the team’s success.

“Having that relationship, seeing the customer every day, having the face-to-face meetings, you build that over time. The same goes with BNSF here. We talk with them about whatever issues may come. They trust me and I trust them,” Cameron said. “We’ve got a lot at stake when we go lock something out, and being here on their site with them is a lot better, especially when problems arise. We get all that handled face-to-face.”

Watco’s now international network of mechanical shops and the growth of mobile mechanical teams have played a key role in ensuring our sites have the resources they need when an issue arises as well.

“Any time I have a question or problem, I can pick up the phone can call someone or shoot off an email. The responses are always very fast. I always get the help I need, and I’m never left wondering. The amount of resources we have in this company is crazy compared to other places I’ve worked,” Cameron said.

As for his future, Cameron sees more growth, for himself and his team.

“I’d like to just keep growing. We’re trying to build something. We want to make Mill Creek the top of Watco Mechanical if we can,” said Cameron. “I’d like to take on a couple other locations eventually and do the same thing I’m doing here, and see where that takes me.”

Cameron also has a full life outside of work. He records music, hunts, fishes, and spends time with his seven-year-old son.

“I try to do whatever my son wants to do. He keeps me going and doing things,” Cameron said. “If it’s not doing that, it’s getting out in the woods and trying to fill the freezer or getting out on the water to reel in some fish. I also play guitar and drums. I listen to a lot of country, but for some reason, I can’t play it. I pretty much just do rock and heavy metal, and melodic guitar music and stuff like that.”

WATCO TEAM MEMBERS

Enter your Near Miss and Safety Suggestions using the link below for a chance to win $200. http://winterfreeze.watcocompanies.com

WINTER FREEZE
Ground breaking held for Palouse River and Coulee City Railroad’s Arlington depot

A ground breaking was held on December 20, 2019, for the new Palouse River and Coulee City Railroad (PCC) depot in Arlington, Oregon. The PCC operates the railroad for the Union Pacific, providing service from the Arlington rail siding to customer Waste Management’s railyard. The depot will serve as the PCC’s Arlington office.

The project is locally engineered by Pillar Consulting, the building was designed by Vernon Grey Designs, and will be built by China Creek Contractors, all local vendors.

The project is sited on the Port’s Railroad Avenue property and is slated to be completed in the spring of this year.

Everyone participating in the ground breaking signed three shovels used at the ceremony. One of the shovels will be displayed in the new depot once it is completed with a special depot sign. Michael Goss, PCC-Condon general manager said, “It has been a year of planning, and gathering permits. We are so happy to finally get this project moving. We will definitely have room for our much larger team. This is a great project for our community, as well as for Watco.”

A grand opening and ribbon cutting will be held once the depot is completed.

Brighton Transportation provides educational opportunity for Clearfield team members

by Jay Benedict
Digital Communication and Social Media Specialist

Getting intermodal shipments from origin to destination requires a lot of effort and coordination, and the Watco Supply Chain Services (WSCS) team in Clearfield, Utah, specializes in making this process as simple as possible for our customers. Roughly 60% of all WSCS intermodal volume is handled through the Clearfield office, so any knowledge they gain can benefit a large portion of our customers.

To help build the team’s knowledge base, Account Manager Jennifer Simpson asked one of the office’s local contractors, Brighton Transportation, to stop by the office to show our team how adjusting the rear axles on the trailer modifies the weight distribution. The axles on intermodal trailers can slide to adjust for the load. Moving the axles changes how much weight is sitting on them, and this variation can have legal, financial, and delivery time implications for our customers.

“A lot of our team hadn’t actually been up close with a truck and trailer, so not only did it give our team hands-on experience, they now have the knowledge of how moving the axles makes our shipments more efficient,” said Branch Manager Chad Schilleman.

This is especially the case when containers move between modes of transportation as they travel across the country. For example, a shipment starting in Utah by truck, then moving to rail, may be transloaded back to truck in Chicago. The weight limit regulations are different, so the driver picking up the container needs to know how to adjust the axles. Otherwise, they may face fines and delays.

“We can be a lot more intelligent when talk-
Ithaca Central Railroad celebrates anniversary with an injury-free record

The Ithaca Central Railroad (ITHR) began operations on December 8, 2018, and one year later, they not only celebrated their one year anniversary, they also celebrated being injury free for the entire year.

General Manager Michael Cooper purchased jackets for his team and the two locomotive mechanics that have helped keep the ITHR running safely throughout the year. He also took the team to lunch to thank them for their focus on safety.

“We have a small but great team here who work hard and take care of each other like family. I hope that we can continue to celebrate both our safety years and anniversary at the same time every year!”

The ITHR is Watco’s first and only short line in the state of New York. The 48.8 mile line runs north from Sayre, Pennsylvania, up to Ludlowville, New York.

Celebrating both their one year anniversary and their one year safety anniversary at the Ithaca Central Railroad are (l-r) Locomotive Mechanic Matt Inman, Diesel Mechanic Mike Lawver, Conductor Joe Battaglia, Operations Manager Tom Nicholson, General Manager Michael Cooper, and Track Inspector Jason Camann.

Photo by Joe Scaglione

QUARTERLY CONTEST WINNER

While the Ithaca Central team celebrated in the story above, another Ithaca Central victory is celebrated below. Krista Decker's photo of an Ithaca Central train passing Stewart Park in Ithaca, New York, won Watco's Quarterly Photo Contest by one vote. This was the closest contest to date with some very deserving entries. The Q1 contest is open now, so start sending your entries to photos@watcocompanies.com.

BIRTHS

Arlo Howard Hasheider

Robert and Brenda Hasheider are proud to announce the birth of their son, Arlo Howard Hasheider.

Arlo was born October 1, 2019. He weighed 9 lbs., 11 oz., and was 20 inches long.

Arlo joins his big sister, Celia, at home. Robert is an engineer for the Wisconsin & Southern Railroad out of Madison, Wisconsin.

Caison Jiannis V, Parpart

Christian J. Parpart and Jeannnie F. Vargas are proud to announce the birth of their son Caison Jiannis V.

Caison was born on November 17, 2019. He weighed 7 lbs., 14 oz., and was 19 1/2 inches long.

Christian is a locomotive mechanic at the Wisconsin & Southern Railroad’s Horicon, Wisconsin, location.

Adrienne Rose Ziesenis

Lois and Tim Ziesenis are proud to announce the birth of their granddaughter Adrienne Rose Ziesenis.

Adrienne is the daughter of Justin and Nicole Ziesenis. She was born on October 29, 2019. She weighed 6 lbs., 15 oz., and was 19 1/2 inches long.

Lois is the AR/Credit and Collections Administrator for the mechanical group and works out of the Pittsburg, Kansas, office.

WEDDING

Brian and Becky Warren

Brian and Becky Warren were united in marriage on December 5, 2019, in Pendleton, Oregon.

Brian serves as a car repair supervisor in Arlington, Oregon, for the Palouse River and Coulee City Railroad - Condon.
Congratulations to the following team members celebrating anniversaries this month

1 Year: Tyler Adams, Jarrod Austin, Brent Aycock, Joseph Battaglia, Eugene Beatty, Justin Becknell, Christopher Bernal, Lorenza Burris, Cory Burtman, Matthew Camacho, Jason Camann, Jesse Castro, Pablo Cota, Jason Crawford, Jalon Crowley, Dalton Davis-Thomas, Norman Dishman, Blake Ditter, Brandon Douglas, Terry Farish, Andrew Faulk, Curtis Frazier, Catina Freeman, Nicole Gonzalez, Danielle Gosch, Justice Hamner, Gregory Harris, Jasmine Harris, Robert Harting, Kayla Jensen, Russell Johnston, Terrell Jones, Devon Jurs, Jure Kauzljar, Derick Lakes, Daniel Lancaster, James Larson II, Justin Leggitt, Matthew Lemke, Paul Lewis, Carlos Lopez, Matthew Maddox, Kentrell Maxie, Ashley McDaniel, Raleigh Mejia, Davon Miller, Emmanuel Montes Deoca, Melissa Mortimer, Cecelia Palermo, Juan Palomares, Charles Peak, Steven Pounders, Dustin Ramos, James Raney, Ronald Ream, Alexander Rodriguez, Tyler Russell, Jody Sayson, Brian Schulte, Michael Schwartz, Larry Scott, Corey Seals, Mark Semm, Matthew Smithey, David Soendor, Sean Soukop, Robin Stark-Headden, Sami Taha, Tanner Tate, Donnie Taylor, William Taylor, John Thomas, Joseph Thomas, Joe Torres III, Menno Valkenborg, Kevin Vanhooser, David Ward, Kevin Webb, Lauren Williams, Anthony Woods

2 Years: Jonathan Audsley, Jamaar Benton, Mark Bonar, Donald Brayman, DeAnne Burdick, Jose Cardoza, Gabriel Chavez, Julio Diaz, Andrew Dill, Anthony Escobar, Darin Grundeman, Jody Hyndshaw, Aaron Jensen, Jordan Mason, Chelsy McQuarrie, William Melton, James Meshell, Marissa Miller, Henry Oroso, Larry Richardson, Coy Rumflet, Scottie Shafer, Teedra Thompson, Maxwell Tunison, Jaime Velasco, Micah Womack

3 Years: Jennifer Alons, Derek Batterton, Justin Cole, Cooper Cose, Stephen Dominguez, Kyle Gilchrist, Tyler Hamilton, Clyde Harris, Esteban Hernandez, Isaac Jaramillo, Shawna Mateo, Laura McNichol, Efrain Padilla, James Riggs, Timothy Stahlhut, Jake Thompson, Shaun Toopes, J Bonifacio Vieyra, Earl Walter, Shayne Wood


5 Years: Melissa Amaya, Mike Berry, Jason Broadway, Nathaniel Burke, Jacquelin Chavis, Daniel Coiner, Michael Cooper, Corey Crutchfield, Edis Cruz, Alexander Cruz-Oyola, Jorge Dela Torre, Archie Fields, Patrick Forbes, David Fugge, Lelzi Hicks, Brittany Hodge, Jesus Ibarra, Amy Iori, John Johnson, Keith LaCaze, Timothy Shelley, Thomas Shilling, Jordan Vasquez, Solomon Watkins, Cameron Wiles, Marcus Wiley

6 Years: Luther Bootho, Robert Cefarelli, Nick Coomes, Joshua Drawdy, Richard-James Drummond, Lance Gates, Amanda Haggerty, Michael Hancock, Darvis Hicks, George Hutchinsson, Andrew Jones, Richard Lee, Casey Lorbieck, Laura McKinney, Juan Moreno, Jessica Nielson, Buddy Olvera, Brad Peot, Theodore Savage, Perry Thomas, Jose Torres

7 Years: Michael Barajas, Robert Campbell, John Dellingier, Alvaro Cruz, Gregory Ferguson, Matthew Hayes, Jaime Henry, Kenneth Hogarth, Trevor Johnson, Travis Luinstra, Kevin Martin, Tina Swallow, Todd Trammell, Joseph Whitaker, Cyle Windsor, Michael Yoger

8 Years: Kenneth Brown, Justin Haisch, Cristopher Hawley, Danielle Kenny, Russell Koczur, Preston McNew, Curtis Nobis, Lee Smith, Marcos Soto

9 Years: John Anderson, Daniel Caine, Nathan Champion, Angela Gilmer, Daniel Harkness, Miranda Kichler, James Lanier, Benjamin Murphy, Steve Rodriguez, Todd Vaughan

10 Years: Eric Bowlin, Seth Morris, Angel Vazquez

11 Years: James Carter, Jorge Gonzalez, Michael Kertz, Joe Martinez, James McCoy, Servando Mendez, Abram Silva, Raymond Warrington

12 Years: Ricky Carter, David Garce, John King, Charles Lambert, Jon Mihalic, Michael Ward, Robert Ward

133 Years: Jason Ankeny, Ronald Close, Melissa Faughn, Kevin Gonzales, Jean Guerrier, Steve Iseli, Herman Lewis, Amy Miori, Frank Nichols, Jason Wood

14 Years: Thomas Addison, Derek Brown, Johnny Fields, Michael Gray, Robert Gray, Anthony Kirkland, Eddie Lapine, Joshua Leslie, Donnell Rhone

15 Years: Matt Heeren, Jimmie Miller, Santos Polanco, Timothy Watson

16 Years: Gary Griswold, Brian Pflughoeft

17 Years: Fallyne Deao, James Goodyear, Patrick Peabody

18 Years: Jonathan Evans, Michael McGee, Leon Odom, Kenneth Schulze, Samuel Winegarner

19 Years: James Brewer, Kenneth Parkin

20 Years: Leon Abercumbria

23 Years: Roger Kelley

24 Years: Dennis Gaddis

25 Years: Paul Cain, Clarence Kinzeler, Shannon Knisley, Brady Rogers

26 Years: Gregory Hoffman

27 Years: Sherlyn Graham, Milburn Stewart

28 Years: Michael Beatty, John Falk, John Pond

29 Years: Kirk Hawley

30 Years: Juan Cordova, William Gast

31 Years: James Young

32 Years: Melvin Davis, Paul Swanson

35 Years: Dewayne Dockens

40 Years: Fredrick Burrell

43 Years: Tex Iman

55 Years: Earl Bowser
Austin Western team members coach customer on safety and operations

In December, before things got too busy with holiday celebrations, Austin Western Railroad (AWRR) Senior Trainmaster George Yanas Jr., CMO Daniel Martin, and Car Foreman Jonathan Key took an opportunity to put Watco’s Customer First Foundation Principles into action.

The AWRR’s largest customer, Texas Materials, formerly Oldcastle Materials, reached out to the team with questions about safety practices and other issues inside their industry, and the team jumped at the opportunity to educate our customer on safe practices and procedures.

The team explained the why behind our railroad rules and safety standards. They also coached multiple employees of Texas Materials on railcar components, locomotive inspections, operating procedures, point protection, red zone protection, and securing trains.

Their efforts will help ensure our customer will have a safer and more prosperous 2020.