U.S. CONGRESSMAN PAUL RYAN TOURS

U.S. Congressman Paul Ryan (WI-1st District) joined Wisconsin & Southern Railroad (WSOR) and invited guests, for a tour of operations in the Congressman’s hometown of Janesville, WI.

The tour commenced at WSOR’s Janesville Roundhouse where the Congressman, WSOR personnel, and invited guests boarded our passenger theater car for a train ride to a track project that was made possible by the 45G tax credit, a federal income tax credit for track maintenance.

Representatives from the WSOR who organized the event included Road Foreman Justin Cox, Trainmaster Tim Nunley, Superintendent of Maintenance of Way Roger Schaalma, Executive Vice President/Chief Commercial Officer Ed McKechnie, Director of Government Affairs Ken Lucht, and representatives from the marketing and maintenance of way departments.

Invited guests included American Short Line & Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA) President Linda Bauer Darr, Chambers, Conlon & Hartwell, LLC Partner Adam Nordstrom, City of Janesville City Manager Mark Freitag, Rock County Board Member Al Sweeney, and City of Milton City Administrator Al Hulick.

Local WSOR customers were also in attendance including G.R. and Patrick Lyons from Janesville Sand & Gravel/LYCON, Inc., and Mike Meyers from Universal Forest Products.

During the train ride Mr. Nordstrom discussed the importance of the 45G tax credit to short line railroads such as WSOR. The Short Line Railroad Rehabilitation and Investment Act of 2015, also known as H.R. 721, was introduced in February and already has over 233 co-sponsors in the House.

When the tour arrived at the work site, Congressman Ryan met with the rail contractors working on the WSOR, including a once in a lifetime opportunity to operate a spike puller. For fifteen minutes, Congressman Ryan helped WSOR crews pull spikes preparing the site for upcoming continuous welded rail installation (see photo).

On the return trip, Congressman Ryan joined our crew in the cab of the locomotive. “I recently spent some time touring the Wisconsin and Southern Railroad, to learn more about our freight rail system. Wisconsin manufacturers and employees need access to a robust transportation system so they can seamlessly get their product to market” said the Congressman.

We appreciate Congressman Ryan (now Speaker of the House) visiting our railroad to witness the importance of the 45G tax credit.
The WSOR and our team members look for ways to give back and support local communities in southern Wisconsin. We decided to make a donation to the Ronald McDonald House with the few extra bears we had in inventory. At the time that Watco passed out the bears to each WSOR team member we also extended an option for team members to donate their bear to the Ronald McDonald House of Madison. We were pleased to see how many bears were collected at our Milwaukee, Horicon, Janesville and Madison terminals. The WSOR happily donated over 45 bears to be handed out to their young guests.

Director of Sales & Marketing Katie Sackett said, “There is no greater joy than to know that one of our fuzzy little bears may bring a smile to a child’s face when they are not feeling 100%. “Everyday there are children that come to Madison in search of hope, treatment, a cure and sometimes even a miracle. It is our hope that their new soft and cuddly bear can offer them some comfort through their treatments and along their road to recovery.”

WSOR WELCOMES PRESTON NELSON

WSOR is pleased to announce that Preston B. Nelson has joined our regional short line as Superintendent of Operations based out of Janesville, WI. Preston will be responsible for leading the transportation department, including the planning, directing and coordinating of the WSOR’s day to day operations.

Preston was formerly with Genesee & Wyoming where he most recently served as General Manager. Preston has led operations as General Manager at multiple locations since 2012. His additional operating positions have included Trainmaster, Asst. Trainmaster, and Conductor/Locomotive Engineer. Prior to joining the railroad, Preston served in the U.S. Navy for six years including two tours in Iraq as a non-commissioned officer.

Preston grew up in the Peoria, IL area. When he is not working, Preston enjoys time with his family and supporting his two sons, Preston II and Triston in all of their extracurricular activities. The family also enjoys traveling, camping, hunting and fishing.

As Superintendent of Operations, Preston will draw upon his railroad and military leadership experience as a leader of the WSOR team. Preston holds a B.A. from Eastern Illinois University and a M.S. in Transportation Management from the University of Denver.

Preston B. Nelson
Superintendent of Operations
Cedar Creek Lumber has found a new home in Madison, Wis. On August 15, 2015 the lumber distributor moved from their long time home in Sun Prairie to a new location on Lumberman’s Trail in Madison.

Bill Johnson, General Manager of Cedar Creek Lumber, has been with the company since 1978 when it was owned by Roberts & Dybdahl Inc. The Roberts family announced the sale of Roberts & Dybdahl to Cedar Creek LLC in April of 2014. Johnson has seen many changes in his 35 years with the lumber operation, including railroad infrastructure upgrades, changes in ownership, and changes in railroad service providers. He noted, “This move to Madison is one of the most exciting changes I have been a part of. We went from a 1-acre lot for outside storage with 8,000 square feet of inside storage at our old location, to the current location that has 13 acres of outside storage and over 100,000 square feet of inside storage.”

With the additional storage capabilities, Cedar Creek plans to receive more railcars than they have in the recent past. The new facility and additional storage space will allow them to enter markets and partner with other lumber providers in the area that they were previously unable to due to storage capacity restrictions in Sun Prairie, Wisc. Cedar Creek plans to receive over 250 railcars in 2016, and Bill says that volume is forecasted to quadruple by 2021.

Cedar Creek evaluated many different locations when planning this recent expansion, but in the end, decided to select a facility that was served by the WSOR. Johnson noted that, “WSOR has been excellent to work with over the years we were in Sun Prairie, and we look forward to continuing that relationship as Cedar Creek continues to grow in Madison.”

Team Members Learn to Save Lives

Everyone involved with the Wisconsin & Southern Railroad (WSOR) and Watco Companies knows that safety is an integral part of our mission that strongly affects the way business is run. Railroading, if not done properly, can be a risky business for people involved. But the team understands that if the proper precautions are taken, everyone can work safely every day. This is why the WSOR hosted a CPR and First Aid training seminar with the help of the Watco University Team.

Over the last few months, the WSOR Team Safety & Improvement Committee (TS&IC) was busy planning these training events for the team members across the state. The team helped spread the word to all the different departments in an effort to promote the safety culture at the WSOR and Watco.

TS&IC committee leader Justin Hayes said: “I think the CPR Training Class was a great success. The members of the safety committee did a great job communicating with the different departments in all locations.”

The CPR/First Aid training events took place in our Madison, Horicon, and Janesville terminals. Over the course of the three days there were forty people certified in a series of interactive and informative classes. Matt Diestler, an engineer for the WSOR, said, “I felt the CPR class was well done. I was glad to have an opportunity to get a chance to get certified in CPR as it will benefit my co-workers and my family directly. Hopefully I will never have to use it, but it's nice to know I would be able to apply the training if needed. Thanks to the WSOR TS&IC committee and Watco for setting it up.”

“We were able to take advantage of some great resources at Watco U and accomplish a really great thing,” said Stacey Hurda, Assistant Roadmaster. Offering the CPR/First Aid training classes are just one way for our team members support our commitment to:

Safety First Safety Always!
Out of a total of 435 U.S. Congressional Districts, the 6th Congressional District of Wisconsin stands out amongst the rest – it contains the highest number of manufacturing jobs per capita across the entire nation. Congressman Glenn Grothman is proud of that distinction and was in Sheboygan Falls, WI to see how WSOR and local industries continue to make his district a great place to manufacture local products.

Congressman Grothman was welcomed by two local mayors - Sheboygan Falls Mayor Randy Meyer and City of Plymouth Mayor Don Pohlman. Also joining the group was Michael Stelter of Bemis Manufacturing and Jason Culotta of Wisconsin Manufacturer's and Commerce. From the WSOR team were Joe Via, Roger Schaalma, Brad Peot, Andy Laurent and Ken Lucht.

After a brief presentation on Watco Companies, the Congressman toured portions of the railroad corridor between Plymouth and Sheboygan Falls which is currently under construction and scheduled to be operational by November of 2015. As background, over half of this railroad line has been sitting idle for more than two decades, while a small section (Kohler to Sheboygan Falls) had been in service as recent as 2006. After service on the easterly section of this rail line was discontinued in 2006, the line was subsequently acquired by the State of Wisconsin and a public/private partnership was formed to bring this line “back to life”. The parties involved included: the State of Wisconsin, Sheboygan County, City of Plymouth, City of Sheboygan Falls, Bemis Manufacturing, Morrelle Warehouse & Transfer, Kettle Lakes Cooperative and the Wisconsin & Southern Railroad.

The visit concluded with a tour of one of WSOR’s biggest Customers in Sheboygan County – Bemis Manufacturing where they manufacture customized plastic products for bathroom and health facilities, including shopping carts for large chain stores.
WSOR’s commitment to Customers and Community Partnerships was celebrated as over 150 community members, local and state officials, and representatives of private businesses officially “reactivated” the railroad corridor between Plymouth and Kohler, WI, now called WSOR’s Sheboygan Falls Subdivision. As part of the celebration, special remarks were made by Secretary Mark Gottlieb of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Mayor Don Pohlman of the City of Plymouth, Mayor Randy Meyer of the City of Sheboygan Falls, Vice-Chairman Tom Wegner of Sheboygan County and Michael Stelter representing Bemis Manufacturing. An official ribbon cutting and with our 35th anniversary commemorative locomotive WSOR 3928 in the or the maiden voyage to Sheboygan Falls. WI.

After the ceremony, the train headed to Sheboygan Falls to deliver the first load of plastic to Bemis Manufacturing in Sheboygan Falls in almost 10 years. Prior to that, Bemis Manufacturing received its inbound plastic from the Union Pacific Railroad routed through Milwaukee and Sheboygan. However, in 2006, Union Pacific embargoed the line and service was discontinued indefinitely.

After the western section of this railroad line had been sitting idle for more than two decades, the line was acquired by the State of Wisconsin in 2008. Due to the adverse socio-economic impacts of rail service cessation, a public/private partnership was formed including the State of Wisconsin, Sheboygan County, City of Plymouth, City of Sheboygan Falls, many local businesses, and the Wisconsin & Southern Railroad with the goal of reactivating the line.

After a number of years of planning, design, engineering and construction, the new Sheboygan Falls Subdivision is now part of WSOR’s network covering Sheboygan County communities and businesses with the national American rail system. “This project exhibited the true professionalism competency of the entire WSOR Maintenance and Engineering Team” said Roger Schaalma, Superintendent of Maintenance of Way. “I want to especially thank Brent Marsh, Dave Bierman, Todd Mulrooney and Matt Meekma for providing the leadership necessary for a project of this magnitude”, he added.

The primary commodities hauled on the Sheboygan Falls Subdivision will include inbound plastic and fertilizer, with service being provided 2 days per week based on Customer demand. The 10-mile line will operate at maximum track speed of 25 mph and is capable of hauling 268,000 gross weight on rail shipments.

The WSOR is honored to be part of the effort to meet the continuing demand of Wisconsin’s economy. We and look forward to providing transportation solutions throughout every county we serve.
Wisconsin & Southern Railroad transported a steam locomotive on the middle leg of its journey from the Mid-Continent Railway Museum at North Freedom, Wisconsin to its new home at the Age of Steam Roundhouse in Ohio. It was moved to WSOR tracks by heavy-duty truck, loaded on a flatcar on our main line utilizing two large cranes on December 2nd, and forwarded to Chicago by our train crews. The locomotive was built in 1928 as Alabama Tennessee & Northern #410 and is slated for restoration.

SAFETY: Winter Preparedness

Winter months increase the potential risk of derailments on private sidings. In most cases these derailments are caused by the accumulation of snow and ice on and around the tracks.

WSOR will be responsible to keep our main line switches operable during the winter months. There may be times when we have a “major” storm blow through and service may be altered until our MOW crews can clear out the obstructions. Our Customer Service Department will keep you advised as to any operational modifications as they may develop on a case by case basis.

On private or leased track it is our customer’s responsibility to keep all flange-ways along the rail, switches, private crossings and derails free and clear of ice, snow or any other hazard that may impede our service to you. This would include a cleared pathway along both sides of the track. We would recommend that a daily inspection of the track be monitored in order to assure safe delivery. It is essential that this action be taken around the clock as many of our scheduled deliveries happen during 2nd and 3rd shifts across the entire WSOR system.

The WSOR team met for our annual holiday party on December 6th at the Crowne Plaza in Madison. Celebrating WSOR’s 35th anniversary was the theme for this gathering. There was a video presentation with pictures of past and present team members, customer locations and railroad projects which was played throughout the event.

The WSOR team had a fundraiser which raised $1280 for the UW Children's Hospital.