The railroad that stayed out of Amtrak

Don't look for TV sets, strolling minstrels, or psychedelic décor, but a train,

DON PHILLIPS

1 EACH Sunday, Tuesday, and Friday at 9:50 a.m. give or take a few minutes, an FP7 and several passenger cars pop into a tunnel at Ridgecrest, N.C., to enter a different world. For almost 30 minutes, passengers in a dome coach are treated to a twisting ride down the Blue Ridge, through tunnels, around reverse curves, and past a now dormant man-made geyser dedicated to the gentleman who surveyed this passage through the East's great mountain barrier. The passengers are surrounded by some of the East's best scenery.

If you haven't tried the ride, don't wait much longer. Sometime after January 1, 1975, Southern Railway trains 3 and 4 are likely to disappear forever from the Carolina mountains.

The same goes for a daylight ride over the fabled Southern main line between Washington and Atlanta — across the Piedmont and through the Appalachian foothills, over grades such as White Oak Mountain where Steve Broady rode to fame in the "Wreck of Old 97."

When the law creating Amtrak was passed in 1970, January 1, 1975, seemed far into the future. But that important legal deadline is now approaching, when the railroads that chose not to join Amtrak are legally free to petition the Interstate Commerce Commission and/or state regulatory bodies to discontinue their passenger trains.

Southern Railway, the biggest passenger operator not to join Amtrak, isn't yet saying officially what it plans to do about the three marginal trains it was forced by law to run until next January 1 (3 and 4 between Asheville and Salisbury, 5 and 6 between Washington and Atlanta, and 7 and 8 between Washington and Lynchburg), but the clear indication from Southern officials is that these trains aren't long for this world. The regulatory agencies may take months to reach a final decision, but they cannot help but conclude that the scant passenger loadings do not justify continued operation of these trains.

That's the bad news.

The good news is that every evening after 7:20 p.m. (depending on when a chronically late Amtrak connection arrives from New York), a stainless-steel streamliner pulled by three or four green-and-white E8's glides into...
another tunnel and emerges to roll past the U.S. Capitol, the Transportation Department building, Amtrak headquarters, the Washington Monument, and the Jefferson Memorial before the engineer notches out to accelerate across the Potomac River. Ahead is an overnight ride to Atlanta, a morning of twisting and turning over the grades of the Alabama Division to Birmingham, and (three days a week) a fast flat ride to New Orleans with a through sleeper to Los Angeles if you wish.

Inside is a full dining car with tablecloths and fresh flowers; sleeping cars with private rooms, including a master room with shower; and reclining-seat coaches that still look like coaches (none of those psychedelic colors or wall carpeting). None of the cars — except perhaps some of the Amtrak run-through cars — is more than three years from its last major overhaul.

For at least as long as W. Graham Claytor Jr. is President of the Southern Railway System (on March 14, 1977, he will reach the mandatory retirement age of 65) the Southern Crescent will continue to roll south from Washington Union Station ... as a Southern train.

In a lengthy interview for Trains, Claytor laid down his plans for passenger service, his feelings about Amtrak, his assessment of his original decision not to join Amtrak, and his philosophy of future passenger operations. More about these later, but let us dispose quickly of the answers to the two obvious questions regarding Southern passenger operations:

1. Southern is not even considering the possibility of cutting the Southern Crescent back to a Washington-Atlanta operation. “We intend to run Washington to New Orleans,” declared Claytor, although he said that the matter of whether to run the Atlanta-Birmingham portion triweekly rather than daily was “an open question.”

2. Southern will not join Amtrak under the existing statute, which provides that a carrier is relieved of any obligation to run its existing passenger service if it signs up before January 1, 1975. The existing law is vague on the point of whether non-Amtrak roads could join the corporation after that date and on what terms. “We have no interest in it (joining Amtrak), have not had, and will not have,” Claytor stated.

The winter and spring of 1971 was a time of soul-searching for W. Graham Claytor Jr. and his top management. As a proponent of free enterprise, Claytor wanted no Government agency running any of his trains. As a railfan, he wanted to continue running them himself. But it was Claytor the hard-nosed businessman who had to make the final decision between shelling out $3 million dollars to Amtrak and ridding SR of passenger losses, or continuing to pay mounting losses that certainly would amount to more than the Amtrak payment.

During those few months, a continuing series of studies and projections went forward in the offices on the 11th floor of Southern headquarters in Washington. At the same time, negotiations between Amtrak lawyers and railroad lawyers produced prospective contracts for passenger operation, including one for Southern.

Rumors began to circulate that Southern would reject Amtrak, but Claytor kept his silence. The first solid clue that Southern would go it alone came on April 1, 1971, when railroads had to post their 30-day notices that they intended to exit from the passenger business when Amtrak began operations on May 1. Southern didn’t post any notices. The official announcement came on April 21.

At the same time, however, Claytor decided to have the Southern’s 39-per-cent-owned subsidiary, Central of Georgia, join Amtrak. This allowed discontinuance of the Atlanta-Savannah Nancy Hanks II, which Southern unsuccessfully had petitioned the Georgia Public Service Commission to discontinue. It also allowed Southern to drop what would have been a costly isolated operation between Birmingham and Albany, Ga., a remnant of the City of Miami which Amtrak dropped in favor of the South Wind route between Chicago and Florida. In an interview with the Washington Star on May 18, 1971, Claytor said Southern had decided to have CoG join Amtrak because “the losses would have been colossal.” In his interview for Trains, Claytor refused to speculate on what he would have done if Amtrak had decided to run its Chicago-Florida train down the Central.

The two CoG trains possibly were the dividing line between acceptable and unacceptable costs of Southern’s slaying out of Amtrak. The National Association of Railroad Passenger sued Southern and Amtrak to reverse the decision on the grounds that CoG was nothing more than an operating division of Southern, but the courts sided with Southern.

If Claytor could be dispassionate about CoG, why then did he not go the extra mile and dump all of his money-losing passenger trains? In another interview with the Star on April 21, 1971, the day he made the announcement, Claytor stated, “We are in a position not to be forced into a decision either way by the economies of it.” By main-
SR's wherewithal

LOCOMOTIVES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Read Nos.</th>
<th>Configuration</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baggage-express</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>501-507, 508, 518-520, 518-531, 534-542, 540-541, 540-546, 560-571, 640-644</td>
<td>Two 7' doors, two 6 doors</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baggage-expression</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1702-1703</td>
<td></td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baggage-expression</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1727-1728, 1728, 1738</td>
<td></td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baggage-dormitory</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>704-706</td>
<td>22 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baggage-dormitory</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>710-711</td>
<td>44 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>727</td>
<td>48 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>48 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach-lounge</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>950-965</td>
<td>30 seats, buffet bar</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1033-1046</td>
<td>52 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>815-833</td>
<td>52 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>834-840</td>
<td>52 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>841-846</td>
<td>52 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>664-665</td>
<td>54 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>660-662</td>
<td>56 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dome-coach</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1613</td>
<td>36 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dome-parlor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1002</td>
<td>23 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diner</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3305-3311</td>
<td>40 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeper-lounge</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2300-2301</td>
<td>11 double bedrooms</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2351-2353</td>
<td>2 drawing rooms, 1 master room, buffet-lounge</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CARS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Read Nos.</th>
<th>Configuration</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>815-833</td>
<td>52 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>834-840</td>
<td>52 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>841-846</td>
<td>52 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>664-665</td>
<td>54 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>660-662</td>
<td>56 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dome-coach</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1613</td>
<td>36 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dome-parlor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1002</td>
<td>23 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diner</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3305-3311</td>
<td>40 seats</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeper-lounge</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2300-2301</td>
<td>11 double bedrooms</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2351-2353</td>
<td>2 drawing rooms, 1 master room, buffet-lounge</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Cars 3400-3789 owned by CN&TP.

taining control of passenger trains, he said, the entire Southern system would remain in Southern's hands. Besides, he added, "We are able to maintain a better and closer contact with the communities we serve through our passenger service. It has developed in the last two years an enormous amount of good will."

In his interview for Trains three years later, Claytor was more direct about his decisions: "We made it because we could afford to.

Viewed from the perspective of three years, was the decision right? "It was a fine decision," Claytor said. "Look at the problems everybody else is having." He pointed to railroad contract problems with Amtrak, the difficulty of finding someone at Amtrak responsible for giving answers and the poor service and equipment of other trains in the East compared with Southern's well-maintained fleet of cars. From the standpoint of money, time, effort, public image, and the public interest, he declared, the decision was right.

Was it? Let's take a look at the results of that decision. First, its economic impact:

On May 1, 1971, Southern could have handed Amtrak 9.8 million dollars in cash or services and relieved itself of the out-of-pocket costs of running passenger trains. Instead, the road chose to continue absorbing its losses. During the Amtrak years, through the end of 1973, avoidable losses from passenger operations were 12.9 million dollars. In 1974, with skyrocketing passenger volumes and a 15 per cent fare increase, Southern should be able to cut its losses. Projecting the first-quarter-1974 loss of 1.1 million dollars through the whole year, Southern's avoidable loss would be cut from the 1973 high of 5.2 million down to the 1972 level—4.4 million.

Total losses through January 1, 1975, therefore, would be 17.3 million dollars—7.5 million more than the Amtrak payment would have been. After the loss is taken as a deduction against corporate income taxes, the after-tax difference between the Amtrak payment and actual losses is 3.9 million. This means that remaining out of Amtrak through the end of 1974 will cost the Southern stockholder 27 cents a share for the 5-year 8-month period ending December 31, 1974, or slightly less than $0.27 cents per share per year.

This is not the end of the losses, however. Since Southern does not plan to ask permission to discontinue the Southern Crescent and does not plan to join Amtrak, the railroad must continue to absorb the Crescent's losses for the foreseeable future. And Southern's most popular passenger train is its biggest money loser. Some 4.2 million dollars of the 5.2 million passenger loss in 1973 was attributable to the Southern Crescent.

There are a variety of reasons why the train that carries the most passengers loses the most money, including the fact that it requires more employees, more services, and more maintenance. Another major reason is that Southern converted its other two mainline trains into long-distance mixed trains. Nos. 3, 6, 7, and 8 regularly pause at the Southern piggyback terminal south of Alexandria to pick up or set off dozens of TTX cars loaded with trailers and containers. While Southern does not count the TTX revenue as passenger revenue, neither does the railroad include in its passenger losses most of the trains' expenses such as train-crew salaries and fuel. This means that the only expenses charged against passenger revenues are Washington terminal charges, the salary of the snack-bar attendant, and the expenses directly related to the passenger cars themselves. This also means that dropping these trains would not necessarily save Southern a tremendous amount of money if the freight trains continued to run.

On the other side of the expense ledger, in all fairness, there is no guarantee that Amtrak would have paid Southern enough to cover all its costs even if Southern had joined Amtrak. But no conceivable Amtrak underpayment would have cost Southern as much as the extra cost of refusing to join.

Claytor knew from the beginning, of course, that staying out of Amtrak would cost more than joining. His concern was whether Southern could live with that excess cost. He avoids giving answers to specific questions about exactly what his early 1971 projections showed the cost would be, saying only that he figured the cost would be no more than "several million dollars" extra, and that actual losses are "in the ball park" of what he figured. However, considering the ballooning inflation of the past few years, it is safe to assume that his projections were at least somewhat low.

Southern's decision, viewed only in terms of hard cash, was a mistake.

WHAT, THEN, did Southern's stockholders get in return for losses which could have been avoided by joining Amtrak?

First of all, they got tremendous amounts of free advertising on television, on radio, and in newspapers in the towns where their shippers live. The amount of newspaper space alone allocated to Southern passenger trains in the last three years, if charged at advertising rates, would offset a good chunk of that 3.9 million-dollar excess loss.

Southern's image with the public, shippers, local governments, Congress, and even the financial community is several notches higher because of that 1971 decision. Hardly a Congressional hearing on Amtrak comes around that some Senator or House member does not hold up Southern as the shining example for which to strive. Putting a money value on this image is impossible, but ask any industrialist how much value he places on a good relationship with his surrounding community.

What about the public benefit? There can be little doubt that the public in the South benefited from Claytor's decision, for they were spared the growing pains that Amtrak imposed on the rest of the country.

The most important benefit to Southern, however, is simply: No Amtrak.

Claytor is careful to say that he has a good relationship with Amtrak, that he wants Amtrak to succeed almost as much as he does his own passenger trains, and that he is anxious to cooperate in any way with Amtrak.
Take a ride on the Southern

WHILE I was researching this Southern passenger-train story, I realized that I hadn't ridden on the Southern Crescent in more than a year. Had the Crescent changed? Was it better? Worse? There was one way to find out. So on Thursday night, May 23, 1974, I checked into roomette 8 in car 0133 (Flint River, Southern 205) for a trip from Washington to Toccoa in the mountains of North Georgia and return on the northbound Piedmont the next day.

No. 1 that night was led by ES-8's 6906, 6912, 6916, and 6911, and carried 11 cars: baggage-dorm 710; coaches 846, 837, 836, and 823; sleeper 2016; diner 3306; sleeper-lounge 2552; sleepers 2014 and 2005; and coach 844.

As I sat on the freight ramp at the well-kept Toccoa station the next morning, waiting for the Piedmont and remembering how nice a spring morning can be in North Georgia, I graded my experiences of the night before. Here is how the Crescent stacked up:

Personnel - A. Not one grouchy in the bunch. Everyone from the joking brakeman who took up tickets through the porters to the dining-car waiters was courteous, friendly, and easily given to laughing. The only reason I'm not awarding an A+ is that I don't believe everyone is always really that good.

Diner - A+. Unbelievably fine service on a railroad.

Food - A or B+. I had the $7.25 steak, the most expensive item on the dinner menu (the $4 omelette is the least expensive). Recommended. Large portions. Breakfast is fast, the food good. When I praised the bran muffins, the waiter wrapped some hot from the oven in foil for me to take - no charge.

Coffee - B. NW had better.

Lounge - C. Not enough space. Numerous passengers looked in and gave up. Full lounge car is needed. The seats need new upholstery. A large picture of 4501 on the bulkhead was framed incorrectly, and the print was sticking to the plastic covering.

Cleanliness - A. The cars that originated in Washington were spotless. Rest rooms, walls, ceilings, floors, and vestibules looked as if they had just been painted. I'm withholding an A+ because the three through cars from New York were not as clean.

Exterior cleanliness - B-. The cars that originated in Washington were gleaming, but the three cars from New York had dirty windows and the locomotives hadn't been washed since their last trip.

Interior appointments - B-. Southern cars are receiving new attractive bright interiors (neutral colors, no striking colors such as on Amtrak), but in the yet unrefurbished cars the old-style canovd upholstery and carpets were frayed.

Performance - B+. Four minutes late out of Washington, 12 minutes late at Toccoa after a delay at the end of one section of double track for a freight.

Ride - C-. The worst part of the trip. Too many curves - which Southern can't do much about - and too much bouncing. Not nearly as bad as on the Broadway in Ohio, but bad enough to cause a restless night. Southern should check into the new trucks being developed for new Amtrak cars.

The return trip on the Piedmont convinced me that Southern's friendly personnel are not limited to the Southern Crescent. I told the agent at Toccoa that I wanted to flag the Piedmont and that I already had my ticket. He came out immediately, pulled up the flag board, then said with a smile, "There, that oughta stop 'er." The conductor and the flagman from Toccoa to Salisbury were friendly and rather talkative after I finally indicated that I was a raflman. The flagman passed out "junior railroad" badges to the youngsters, and the young grill-car attendant seemed to consider himself a host as well as a cook and a bartender. When he wasn't busy, the grill-car attendant chatted with the passengers. When he delivered a sandwich to my table, he set me back by saying, "You know, fresh-made sandwiches are always better than premade." After he shut down the grill just before reaching Alexandria, he came back to the coaches and offered to help passengers with their baggage. My waiter on the Southern Crescent also was a young fellow - articulate, attentive, and ambitious. He wanted to move up into better railroad jobs.

When I had a chance to Toccoa there were 5 passengers counting myself, by the time we reached Alexandria, there were more than 30.

A note or two on scenery: Few experiences are more than dining as the sun sets over rolling Virginia horse country or breakfasting as the sun rises over the misty Georgia mountains. On the return trip, the passage through both the Carolinas is a bore, utterly uninteresting; but the scenery and the heavy grades begin at Danville, Va., and the ride from Lynchburg to Charlottesville comes close to being spectacular in places. Incidentally, on a train of 30 TTX cars and 5 passenger cars pulled by 4 FP7's, it is easy to tell where the grades are.

Keep in mind that during the entire trip I never told anyone I was a reporter writing a story, nor did I tell Southern's Public Relations Department I was taking the trip. I was just an everyday passenger, and I assume everyone is treated as well as I was. — D.P.
But one gets the feeling that Claytor would have beat Santa Fe President John Reed to the punch in removing his train's cherished name from the timetables if Amtrak were running the service now.

For all his protestations about wanting to cooperate with Amtrak — apparently sincere protestations — Claytor cannot hide his feelings for the way Amtrak is running its business. Sometimes his feelings spill over into personal protest, such as the time in Chicago when he pointed out to an Amtrak employee that the latter's slow, laborious method of checking in and loading passengers onto the Broadway left plenty to be desired.

The most frequent manifestation of Claytor's attitude comes at Washington Union Station, where Southern officials often refuse to accept Amtrak equipment, including the through New York-Los Angeles Amtrak sleeper. Refusals are not for minor reasons, but for such problems as no air conditioning and no lights. Southern replaces the Amtrak sleeper with one of its own spares for the entire trip to Los Angeles and then sometimes demands a suitable sleeper from Amtrak to hold in Washington as a spare until the Southern car returns.

"The corridor is a sloppy operation," says Claytor. "The equipment is poor. We frequently have to cut out their equipment in Washington. The crews I talk to north of Washington tell me they wish they had equipment like Southern's."

Northeast Corridor problems also affect Southern's operation south of Washington. For instance, Claytor says that Southern absorbs the higher maintenance costs of four E8's as far as Atlanta when two or three would do, partly because it assumes the Amtrak connection will be late, and the extra power will be needed to make up time on the up-and-down Southern main line. But he adds that the extra power is often needed in the reverse direction because No. 2's fast schedule south of Birmingham is hard to maintain, especially on days when the numerous flag stops are observed. Reservations also have been a problem, but the situation is expected to improve when SR plugs into the Amtrak computer; agreement on integration of the two reservation systems has been reached on all points but price, which is being negotiated.

One of the greatest differences between Claytor and Amtrak is the philosophy of running passenger trains. Commented Claytor, "We're trying to preserve the fine tradition of great service," keying on the old-fashioned elegance of the Old South. Freetopped meals and sandwiches may be fine in some sections of the country, but on the Southern Crescent there will always be "an old-fashioned, elegant, rather nice dining car" run by employees schooled in the traditional ways of giving service. Southern, like Amtrak, may hire enthusiastic young people for train service, but "we're going to train them in the old-fashioned way or they're out."

To be certain that its employees give service, Southern instituted its "Southern Hospitality" program of rewarding employees who are commended for good service by passengers. Various lapel pins are given to employees, depending on the number of commendations they receive, until they reach 20 commendations and are awarded a diamond pin. Claytor obviously is proud of his employees. "Most of our people like to work," he said. "Ninety per cent of our people who work in transportation are railroad fans. Ninety per cent are enthusiastic if you give them a chance to work."

Claytor has rejected many of the innovations brought to passenger service by Amtrak. "We're for innovation," Claytor asserted, "but we're not for an innovation that says change is automatically better."

One innovation you'll never see in a Southern passenger car as long as Claytor is around is bright Amtrak-style interior colors. "There'll be no psychedelic colors on Southern," he declared. "We just don't serve the big Florida crowd going off to make hoo-hoos." Claytor hasn't quite made up his mind about wall carpeting, another big Amtrak innovation; he points out that it is hard to keep clean and it causes a lot more friction when two people are trying to cross in a narrow hallway.

Don't look for movies, TV sets, strolling minstrels, or any other frills on the Southern. Claytor has probably gone too far by omitting these, because many of the colors and frills instilled by Amtrak have proved to be highly popular with passengers. A typical comment on entering an Amtrak-refreshed coach is, "Oh, this doesn't look like a train." Unfortunately, Amtrak trains don't always run like trains either, and this is perhaps the heart of the difference between Claytor and Amtrak. Claytor runs a train, a very good train, a mechanically good train. Amtrak puts its money on frills and furnishings to convince its passengers that they are on an "Amtrak," but so far Amtrak hasn't always mastered either the mechanics or the basics of running a train. Claytor summed up the situation in an interview with Fortune: "They came through with psychedelic decorations, but the toilets don't work and the air conditioners don't work." Still, one can't help thinking that Claytor's basics and Amtrak's frills combined would make one hell of a train... or whatever you want to call it.

One possible exception to the rule: Southern is experimentally re-equipping some sleepers with showers, one at each end of the car. Four cars to date have been so equipped to test passenger reaction. Passengers are given flyers telling them that they may make an appointment with the porter for a time to use the shower, and Southern provides a big fluffy bath towel. Installation began early this year when the cars went to Hayne Shop for a heavy overhaul. Incidentally, this means that Southern's 10&6 sleepers could become 9&6's because one roomette must be removed to make room for the shower. The all-bedroom cars lose no space.

Another Southern vs. Amtrak question: Did Southern's go-it-alone decision hurt Amtrak?

From a practical viewpoint, Southern saved Amtrak a lot of money. The Southern Crescent fits nicely into the national passenger-train network, but Amtrak must pay only a small portion of the costs. Of course, several good main lines are effectively closed to future Amtrak trains,
The other roads that stayed out

I  TWO RAILROADS with significant intercity passenger service besides Southern elected not to join Amtrak — Denver & Rio Grande Western and Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific. D&RGW runs the Rio Grande Zephyr, its triweekly remnant of the California Zephyr, between Denver and Salt Lake City with connecting bus between Salt Lake and the Amtrak depot in Ogden. The cars remaining from D&RGW's CZ pool contribute, minus the sleepers and plus a combine from the old Prospector, are utilized. Rock Island operates two trains daily into Chicago in the morning and west in the evening — the Peoria Rocket from its namesake city and the Quad Cities Rocket from Rock Island. The stainless-steel trains feature coaches, a diner, and a club-parlor.

To complement the accompanying Southern story, TRAINS contacted the presidents of these other major non-Amtrak roads, G. B. "Gus" Aydelott of the Rio Grande and William J. Dixon of the Rock Island, to ascertain the status of their passenger services.

Rio Grande would have liked to join Amtrak in 1971, but "Amtrak wouldn't sign the contract we wanted," said Aydelott. "Amtrak wanted the same contract with all roads, but we wanted one that would limit Amtrak's ability to expand service on our lines." D&RGW felt that it would lose its competitiveness with Union Pacific if the Grande allowed Amtrak carte blanche through the Rockies. D&RGW runs frequent short freights on its single-track mountainous line, competing with UP which has a double-track main over comparatively easy grades in Wyoming.

Amtrak in fact has increased service in the area — the San Francisco Zephyr via UP, formerly a triweekly train, now runs daily. Rio Grande operates a Saturday-only "Ski Special" from Denver to Winter Park during the winter, and Amtrak has taken advantage of this type of market elsewhere (e.g., Reno Fun Trains).

How is the RGZ doing? "Our loads are up, but mostly this is on the Denver—Glennwood Springs segment," Aydelott said. "People are leaving their cars at home to ride our train, but west of Grand Junction we're just providing an accommodation." Since the train does not run Wednesdays, the road took advantage of the off day to shop the cars and gradually refurbish their interiors. The train is considered well run and has an excellent reputation for performance and service.

Will the Grande ask to take off the Zephyr in 1975? Not necessarily. "Our loss is running about $950,000 annually; with increasing costs, even with our recent fare increase, this might reach $1 million," said Aydelott. "For now we can live with one triweekly train that is patronized if we can keep the loss figure in that range."

Rio Grande's seasonal narrow-gauge tourist attraction, the steam-powered Silverton between Durango and Silverton, is in the black and presumably will continue to run as long as the equipment holds together, regardless of any RGZ decision next year.

Rock Island stayed out of Amtrak because the alternative was the cheaper one. The purchase price of joining Amtrak was based on the amount of passenger-train losses in 1969," said Dixon, "and in our case this was too much because in the meantime we had been able to get a number of trains discontinued, enough to bring the loss level considerably below what it would have cost us to join Amtrak. The matter was thoroughly analyzed before we made the decision."

But despite heavy local promotion, patronage on the Rockets is not skyrocketing. "Our patronage on the Peoria train is declining, but the Rock Island train is holding fairly steady," said Dixon. "Illinois has approved a 15 per cent fare increase for us, which will help the situation." The trains' schedule-keeping is hampered by slow orders, but the Rockets enjoy a good tour and special-party business, largely thanks to the cooperation between the railroad and Butterworth Tours of Moline, Ill. The agency also operates under contract the club-parlor car on each Rocket.

The Rock Island also gets financial assistance from the State of Illinois for both intercity and commuter trains. The partial funding of the Rockets is in the manner of Illinois' participation in certain Amtrak trains under Section 403b of the Amtrak loan [see "Amtrak Subsidy," page 35, July 1974 TRAINS]. This does help our situation, but our losses are going up. The current figure for our intercity trains is about 2 million dollars annually, exclusive of the state assistance," Dixon said.

Rock Island, in a precarious financial position, cannot reasonably be expected to keep bearing the burden of its Rockets beyond 1974. So what about 1975? "The matter is still under study," Dixon said. "The situation regarding future state assistance will be a factor in any decision we make." Rock Island apparently would not be averse to Amtrak participation on RI's routes if it became necessary. — J.D.I.

Edward J. Weidas

Mel Patrick.
notably Cincinnati Crescent, alternate rails even if Southern was not in Amtrak. (That same law would allow Amtrak to petition the ICC to run over any other Southern line now, but Amtrak isn’t likely to do so.) Therefore, the long-term practical effect of keeping Southern out of Amtrak probably will be minimal. Rio Grande’s defection and hard-line attitude against cooperation probably hurt Amtrak more by denying the corporation its preferred route through the Rockies.

The psychological effect is another question. NARP President Anthony Haswell, who agrees that the Southern Crescent probably is the best train in the country, nevertheless says Southern struck a psychological blow at Amtrak. Southern created the impression that Amtrak was an “unsanitary animal” not worthy of Southern rails, declared Haswell in an interview, but Southern then did nothing to help Amtrak. “The riding public over Southern’s lines has definitely benefited, but overall it is more questionable,” said Haswell. “Claytor and that whole organization has not lifted one finger to help passengers elsewhere in the country. I don’t look on them as good corporate citizens. They’d rather see all passenger service discontinued than allow this creature on their tracks.”

Haswell probably overstates his case, and he is the first to admit that his view is a minority one among railfans and passenger advocates. There can be little doubt, though, that Southern’s decision initially had a demoralizing effect on Amtrak, and that Southern’s success has been used as a club by those who want to smear Amtrak. Amtrak must look with envy on the good will and good publicity that flows from Southern passenger trains to Southern corporate headquarters.

Southern was not always that popular. In pre-Amtrak days, when D. W. Brosnan was the boss and Claytor, as Vice President—Law, was handling his legal strategy, the road was a master of the art of discouraging passengers from riding hopelessly money-losing trains. The trains were not necessarily run poorly or kept dirty. Less subtle methods were used.

Take the classic case of the Augusta Special, which northbound once ran from Augusta, Ga., to Charlotte, N. C., where it connected with the Crescent to Washington, D. C. It was a New York train though the Nickel Plate began its journey in Georgia and ended in North Carolina, almost its entire route was in South Carolina. This gave rise to a loophole in the law. If a train had only one stop in a state, it was not considered intrastate and was not subject to the jurisdiction of the State Public Service Commission. Therefore the train could be discontinued to that stop without anybody’s permission. When the South Carolina Public Service Commission refused to give permission to discontinue the train, Brosnan—with Claytor’s advice—decided to run it from the North Carolina border at Fort Mill, S. C. (17 miles from Charlotte) to the Georgia border at Warrenville, S. C. (12 miles from Augusta). Patronage dropped off, and eventually South Carolina approved discontinuation of this intrastate train.

Then there was the night that Brosnan abruptly halted the Royal Palm at the little settlement of Council, Ga., just short of Jacksonville, Fla. He provided buses and trucks to carry the passengers and mail into Jacksonville. Southern paid a fine to the U. S. Government for the technical violation of not giving the Post Office advance notice on the train’s abbreviation. With its new southern terminus of Valdosta, Ga., the train didn’t last long.

The process of trimming Southern’s once-huge fleet of passenger trains continued when Claytor assumed the presidency, and he followed a similar pattern with the

POWER from two sections of the Southern Crescent in Atlanta.

Pelican. Once the York, Ala.-New Orleans segment of this train had been discontinued under the regulatory procedures of Mississippi and Louisiana, the South Carolina Public Service Commission granted, only the Chattanooga-York segment remained, and this was discontinued under Section 33 of the Interstate Commerce Act without protest.

At the beginning of 1968, the first full year of Claytor’s presidency, Southern was running 10 passenger trains, some of them obviously not worth the trouble or the money (who needed two passenger trains between Asheville and Greensboro?). One by one they disappeared, some of them in style (Claytor took an office car with a Birmingham Special drumhead on a Washington-Birmingham last-run round trip). As the real money-losers fell by the wayside, the quality of the remaining trains improved.

By the time Amtrak rolled around in May of 1971, Claytor had managed to trim his passenger operations to four:● The Southern Crescent between Washington and New Orleans, on nearly the same schedule and with nearly the same equipment as today.
● The Piedmont between Washington and Atlanta, operating essentially as a day train between Atlanta and Salisbury and a night train north of there with overnight through sleeper and coach to New York. It had a diner between Greenville and Monroe.
● A Washington-Lynchburg coaches-only run which the N&W carried through to Bristol.
● A Salisbury-Asheville triweekly coaches-only run. These were the trains that Claytor would be forced to maintain through January 1, 1975.

The Southern Crescent is a success story unto itself, but what happened to those other three trains is a paradox. They were both downgraded and upgraded at the same time. The schedule of the Lynchburg train was lengthened by 25 minutes southbound and 35 minutes northbound to accommodate the pickup and setout of TTX cars at the Alexandria piggyback yard. At the same time, the Piedmont broke even with a 45-minute speedup southbound and a 45-minute slowdown northbound despite a rather heavy TTX load most days. This schedule is only 1 hour
40 minutes slower than the Southern Crescent's southbound and 2 hours slower northbound, an almost impressive performance considering the lower speed limit for TTX trains (70 mph vs. 79 mph for passenger) and the up-and-down profile of the Southern main line.

The Lynchburg train was rescheduled to run over lunchtime but was not given food service. The Piedmont lost its sleeper (which it really didn't need with its new daytime schedule) and lost its diner in favor of a grill-lounge. The grill actually is an improvement because its prices are more in line with the needs of the people who ride daytime coach trains, the food is good, the service good, and it provides a lounge that is open between lunch and dinner and beyond.

The Piedmont's change to a daylight schedule would appear on the surface to be an improvement; but in order to maintain connections with the Piedmont, the Asheville train was rescheduled to pass through the mountains at night on its westbound run. Ridership fell on both of these trains after the schedule changes.

The Asheville train, of course, gained an ex-Wabash, ex-N&W dome coach, an ideal vehicle from which to see the mountains on the eastbound run at least. But its main-line terminus in early 1971 had been switched from Greensboro to Salisbury, eliminating service to Winston-Salem.

Southern has done little to promote these trains, although the Asheville train has been mentioned in newspaper ads. But once on board, passengers find nothing to discourage them from returning for another ride. Equipment is well maintained and is almost spotlessly clean. On-time performance appears to be good.

The operation of the Piedmont and the Lynchburg train is of particular interest because of the TTX operation and the mountain territory that both trains cover by daylight on the northern end of the Southern main line.

Normally, No. 7 leaves Washington Union Station for Lynchburg with a single FP7 and one heavyweight coach at 11:45 a.m. It pauses south of Alexandria to pick up a set of freight units on the front and a train of TTX cars in the rear, sort of sandwiching the little passenger consist in the middle of a freight train. At Monroe, the sandwich is pulled apart with the FP7 and coach making the 7-mile hop to Lynchburg and the freight consist continuing south to Atlanta as TTX train No. 21. The same process is repeated in reverse, leaving Lynchburg at 9:40 a.m. and arriving in Washington at 2:30 p.m.

The Piedmont operates somewhat differently. Four FP7's normally take care of all motive-power needs, although freight units sometimes are ferried on this train to and from Peagram shops in Atlanta and various division points and yards. A train of TTX cars is picked up at the Alexandria piggyback terminal, and TTX cars regularly are set out and picked up along the way to Atlanta — but always from the rear. The average passenger would never know anything was happening.

The Asheville train carries no TTX cars. It normally consists of an FP7, a combine, and the dome coach.

Between Charlottesville and Danville — particularly between Charlottesville and Lynchburg — the mountain scenery and the up-and-down grades are well worth the ride. The next 285 miles from Danville to Clemson are tolerable if one likes a solid line of trees and small-town main streets, but south of Clemson the territory once again becomes interesting.

These three trains are clearly failures. They carry very few passengers, and those few are generally short-haul — the college crowd going from Charlottesville to Washington on Friday night, and the school group riding from Asheville to Old Fort to get a train ride and see the mountains. The worst performer by far is the westbound Asheville train. During the last three months of 1973 it carried an average of only 8 passengers per trip. But it carried 38

TRAIN 4 descends from Ridgecrest to Old Fort, N. C., in October 1973.
per trip eastbound. Most of that eastbound crowd probably was short-ride school groups and railfans who wanted to make the trip in daylight.

Although two of the Southern trains are essentially mixed trains, little has been sacrificed in terms of passenger operation. The Southern has standing orders that passengers are to be given priority over freight whenever the two conflict. A recent incident on the northbound \textit{Piedmont} is a good example. Because of slow orders and a broken air line on a TTX car, the train fell more than 1½ hours behind schedule. On its arrival at Lynchburg, the Southern placed in a cab the handful of passengers making the Amtrak connection to Chicago and drove them to Clifton Forge rather than risk their missing the connection at Charlottesville. At Monroe, the next division point, all the TTX cars were dropped and No. 6 continued at passenger train speeds into Washington, making up all but about 20 minutes of the lost time and making the connection with the \textit{Night Owl} north from Washington.

The queen of the fleet, the train which does get the promotion and the personal attention of every top officer from Claytor down, is the \textit{Southern Crescent}.

The \textit{Southern Crescent} is a throwback to the golden age of Southern passenger railroading when the green "Crescent" Ps4's were polished to a sheen before each run, and when passenger trains were the pride of the railroad. The \textit{Southern Crescent} is not a new train with new services and new Amtrak-style ideas. It is an old train run well.

Claytor couldn't bring back the Ps4's, but he could paint his fleet of 17 EB's green with \textit{southern crescent} in gold script on the noses. He couldn't buy new passenger cars, but he could clean and maintain the ones he had. Every Southern passenger car is put through a major overhaul at least every three years at a cost of $55,000 per car. Every car gets a thorough cleaning before each run (at least the cars that originate on Southern rails). Even the vestibules appear to have been polished with a buffing machine.

Claytor rides the \textit{Southern Crescent} an average of about twice a month, making a walking inspection each time. Company policy dictates that every other official traveling between Southern's two major headquarters cities (Washington and Atlanta) take the train. "Every day there's an officer on that train," said Louis G. Sak, Southern's general manager of passenger sales and services. "I'll regularly get calls from officers saying, 'I noticed so and so.'" This policy probably is a pain in the neck to some officials (although they wouldn't dare say so), but it gives the \textit{Southern Crescent} a degree of personal attention from management that Amtrak cannot hope to match.

The end result of these prepasenger policies — the personal attention, the spit and polish, the employee awards — appears to be a return of the pride that once marked passenger service. The atmosphere is different in the diner when the waiter brings your meal. The atmosphere is different when the crew lifts your ticket. The atmosphere is different when the lady complains to the porter that the air conditioning wasn't working in her coach out of New York ("Yes ma'am, don't you worry. We're in Washington now. It'll be fixed right away.").

"As long as we have that train [the \textit{Southern Crescent}], we'll give good service," Claytor says. He means it, and his employees know he means it.

The \textit{Southern Crescent}'s biggest problem is its load factor — only about 50 per cent. This is almost certain to have improved some since the last available figures before \textsc{trains} went to press, with huge increases in passenger loadings; but increased patronage will not change the basic characteristics of Southern's territory. Most of the population and most of the ridership are on the northern end of the line. As the train goes south, seats are emptied.
and are not refilled by new passengers. One of Southern's biggest markets, especially on weekends, is from Washington to the college towns of Charlottesville, Monroe, and Lynchburg, Va. Most long-distance traffic is between Washington and Atlanta.

Traffic on the Southern Crescent increased steadily after May 1971, but the gas crisis of late 1973 sent passengers flocking back to the railroads nationwide, and Southern's experience was no exception. The boom continued for a while after the crisis eased, and during the first three months of 1974 revenue passenger-miles shot up 57 per cent on Southern, most of them on the Southern Crescent. Latest figures show, however, that traffic growth may be falling back to its previous level of steady but small increases.

Southern, unlike Amtrak, has enough extra equipment to handle peak holiday traffic at present ridership levels. If the road succeeds in removing some or all of its other trains, even more coaches will be released for Southern Crescent service.

With adequate well-maintained equipment, steadily increasing traffic, and the personal attention of Graham Claytor, the immediate outlook for the Southern Crescent is bright. Reasonable men may argue the point, but the Southern Crescent probably now is the best train in the country, and getting better.

Unfortunately, this situation can't last. Too many factors are working against the Crescent for it to survive as a railroad-run success story for too many more years.

Its first blow likely will be the retirement of Graham Claytor on or before March 14, 1977. Of course, no new president would dare downgrade the Southern Crescent or ask for its discontinuance immediately. Every transportation reporter in Washington will be watching him closely, not to mention the editor of every small-town paper from Alexandria to Slidell. But unless he gives the train the personal attention that Claytor has, the Southern Crescent would inevitably begin to slip.

Other storm clouds dot the railroad horizon. Expenses are rising faster than freight revenues, and no one knows what will grow out of the Northeastern railroad problem. Claytor can afford to run the Southern Crescent because his railroad makes money. But what would happen in some future year if earnings took a serious drop? Suppose some day (it may be sooner than some think) the Southern is fighting to remain a free-enterprise corporation in a sea of nationalization. The Southern Crescent then would become an unbearable burden.

Equipment is another problem. Re-equipping the Southern Crescent is an expense that even the Southern could not justify to its stockholders. Present equipment is mostly 20 to 25 years old. Claytor probably is correct when he says it can be maintained for many years to come ("I guess by the year 2000 it will be worn out"), but Southern's equipment in the next decade probably will become obsolete as Amtrak puts into service new "state-of-the-art" cars with new suspension systems, all-electric heating and air conditioning, and other big improvements. Southern's extra equipment costs will rise steadily as its cars get older, and someday it will be faced with the inevitable question: Is it worth the effort?

The temptation to give the service to Amtrak will grow.

That day probably is several years down the road, however. The immediate future is secure.

What is in the immediate future? The immediate future includes the Southern Crescent and steam excursions. There also is the possibility that regulatory agencies would not allow discontinuance of one or more of the other three passenger trains, and even the remote and unlikely possibility that Southern could decide that losses from one of the mainline TTX trains are not bad enough to warrant a train-off case.

Commuter service may be in Southern's future. Southern already has agreed to run a commuter train into Washington from Prince William County, Virginia, if the county will provide the cars and pay all expenses. The county now is trying to get a Government grant.

Definitely not in Southern's immediate future is any new Southern passenger route or any long-distance passenger train operated or owned by anybody other than Southern. Claytor actively discouraged both Auto-Train and Amtrak from any thoughts of operating down the CNO&TP. In his Transviews interview, he said it would be "chaotic" to superimpose a passenger train on a line with as much freight traffic as the CNO&TP has. That assertion was challenged by an official of the Transportation Department, who asked not to be named: "Any good operating department could work it out. Claytor's operating department certainly could." The CNO&TP does carry a great deal of freight traffic—about 38 million gross ton-miles per mile each year. (But the Southern Pacific handles more than 40 million GTM/M over the Sierra and handling the San Francisco Zephyr.) According to the Transportation Department's assumptions in its Northeast Corridor core report, 38 million GTM/M works out to about 24 average freight trains per day. According to the same report, under ideal circumstances a single-track CTC railroad should be able to handle 60 average trains per day. Of course, the CNO&TP is a mountain railroad, which could hardly be called ideal circumstances. Also since passenger service was dropped years ago, the track super-elevation has been eased, meaning that old passenger-train speeds could not be attained. In any case, it is obvious that Claytor could run a passenger train on the CNO&TP if he wanted to.

The point is that Claytor doesn't want to, for very practical reasons: A passenger train on the CNO&TP would cost more than it would be worth, even with a good service contract, because it would interfere with freight trains on the busiest and most profitable line in the Southern system. (In the afternoon and early evening [the hours when AT rolls south to Florida], southbound and northbound freight fleets on the CNO&TP converge, and the latter are running hard to Cincinnati to beat the midnight per diem deadline on foreign-line cars.) On the other hand, Claytor did offer to originate an Auto-Train in Chattanooga because south of that city freight density lessens sufficiently to accommodate such an operation. AT opted for a more northern terminal—Louisville on the L&N.)

This brings out another point, which is likely to escape the railfan who sees Graham Claytor only as the man with the movie camera standing beside the tracks as 4501 blasts past on a photo runby. Claytor is a railfan all right, but he is first a hard-nosed, practical, successful businessman. He would not run steam excursions, nor would he run his passenger trains well—much as he might want to—if he did not think that the overall value to his corporation was worth the cost.

Claytor is not starry-eyed about the future of the long-distance passenger train. "The experiment is still alive," he says noncommittally when asked what lies ahead for the overland passenger train.

Claytor does run steam, though. He does run his passenger trains well. He plans to run one of them indefinitely. And he also operates the most successful railroad in the country. It is probably a tribute to him that as a successful businessman he feels that vehicles which serve and entertain the general public are worth the cost. It is definitely a tribute that he runs them in such a way that they are worth more to his company than they cost. He gives his stockholders, his shippers, and his passengers what they deserve for their money; and he gives the public and the railfan better than they have a right to expect from a railroad.