

A Typical Indiana Interurban: The Characteristics of Train Service on the South Shore Line

As the Nation's most complete interurban network, Indiana's interurbans served an incredible variety of destinations. Although the routes were anything but direct, in the 1920s, you could ride from Chicago across Indiana through Indianapolis to Louisville, Kentucky, or Dayton, Ohio. If you were taking the train back home again in Indiana, an interurban could take you to places like Martinsville or Gas City.

Interurban train services were as diverse as their destinations. There were small coaches running northeast out of Frankfort toward Marion. Sleeping car trains left Indianapolis at 11:30 pm for Louisville. Trains hauled fans of Knute Rockne and the Fighting Irish for Saturday football. Parlor seats were available from Indianapolis to all four directions on the compass. Minced ham and egg breakfasts, sandwich lunches, and steak dinners were served on limited trains to Duneland, the Wabash Valley, and Dixie.

The interurbans aspired to dispatch trains hourly and most did so. The convenience of hourly service was equated to speed. Henry A. Everett was among the first interurban promoters in the United States, having built the Akron, Bedford & Cleveland in 1895. Everett understood how convenience influenced speed:

There is, of course, a very material difference in the running time between the steam roads and the electrics, but we find that a number of our patrons prefer the trolley because of the frequency of the cars, which enables them in many cases to reach their destination more quickly than if they waited for the steam train.¹

In an auto-centric culture it is hard to imagine how this was an improvement over the transportation system that existed in the 1890s. Before the coming of the interurbans, a trip for a rural resident to a nearby city was often a two-day ordeal limited by the tyranny of the once-a-day service offered by the steam railroads. The interurbans generally offered hourly service. A farm couple headed to shopping on the interurban could ride to an urban downtown shopping area, shop for a couple of hours, and return home before dinner. Traveling salesmen could visit four or five towns in a day rather than the two that were possible previously.² On-line package delivery on the interurbans was much faster than anything offered before: one could order quickly needed items over the telephone from say, Sears, Roebuck & Co., and have them delivered the same day. In the 21st Century, you can call FedEx or order through Amazon Prime and the best you can do is have it delivered the *next*

¹ Henry A. Everett, The Development of the Elec. Interurban Ry., 24 St. Ry. J. 548 (1904).

² George Hilton & John Due, The Electric Interurban Railways in America 91 (1960).

day. The high-speed interurbans were so fast that milk was often safely shipped unrefrigerated.³

In developed places such as the Chicago – Milwaukee corridor, by the 1920s interurban train service was likely more frequent than streetcar service in remote places such as Grand Junction or Grand Forks. Interurban trains left the Chicago Loop for the northern suburbs and Milwaukee on average every nine minutes during the first four hours of every workday.⁴ Train service in the Chicago – Fox Valley corridor was even more intense. For four hours in the afternoon, interurbans departed for the Western suburbs an average of eight minutes apart.⁵ The significance of missing one's train is lost when the next train is as little as a three-minute wait. But in typical Indiana interurban fashion, South Shore Line trains departed for South Bend from Chicago once each hour.⁶

Train lengths varied across the Indiana interurbans. The best evidence of how train operations were conducted on the interurbans is from photographs as there is little in the literature as to how many cars most often constituted a train. Promotional photos made by studio photographers such as W.H. Bass Photo Company of Indianapolis and E.C. Calvert, Photographer, of Michigan City can be misleading because so many of the images were taken of staged events for publicity purposes. Images taken by itinerant post card photographers such as those by Brooks Photo are a better indicator of actual interurban operating conditions. Railfan photography was not common until the 1930s, but many photographs were taken by employees of railway operating men and their machines at work during the 1920s. What follows are images from all these sources.

³ *Id.* at 126-27.

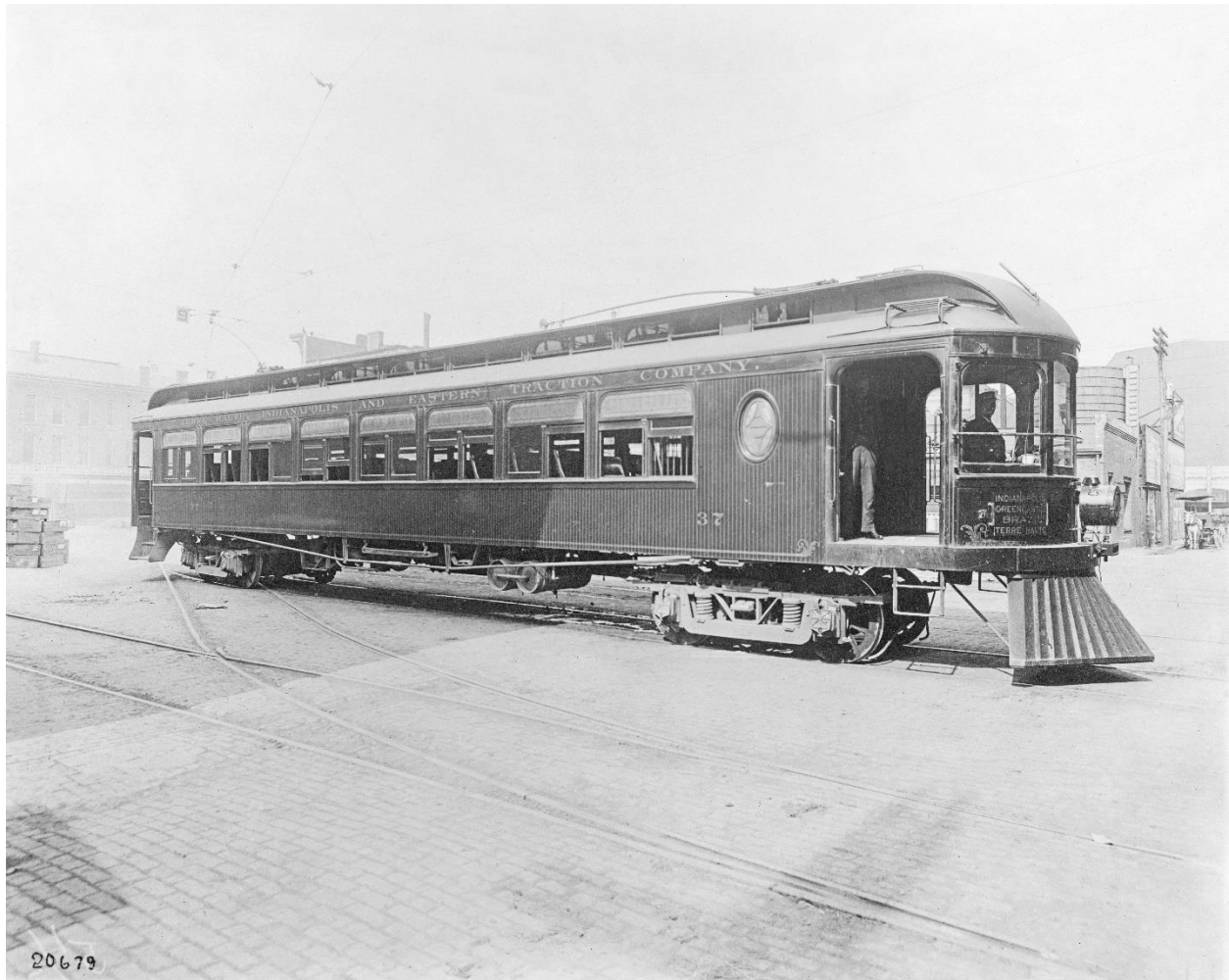
⁴ Chi., North, Shore & Milwaukee R.R., public timetable, Apr. 29, 1928.

⁵ Chi., Aurora & Elgin R.R., public timetable, May 12, 1929.

⁶ Chi., S. Shore & S. Bend R.R., public timetable, June 22, 1929.

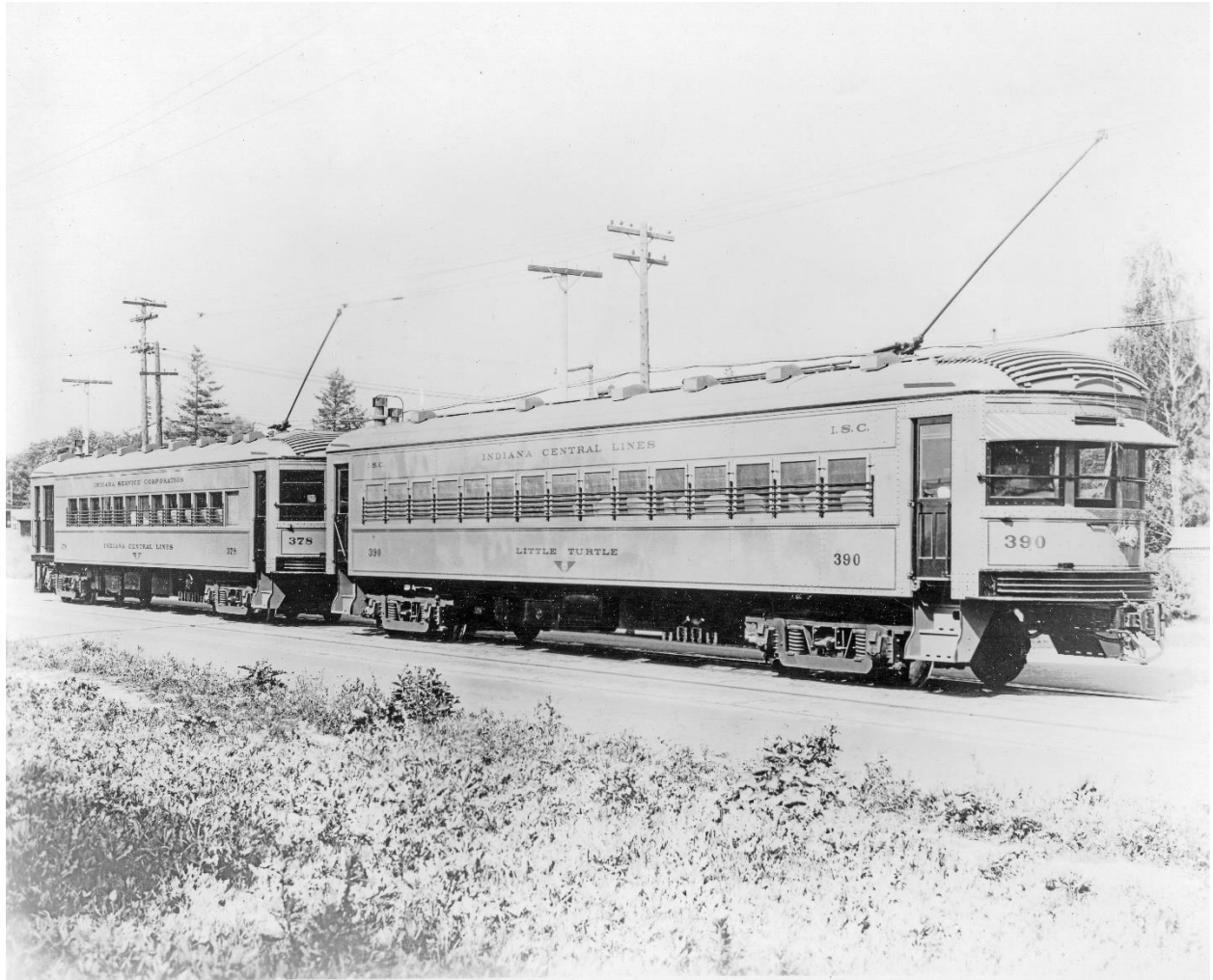


Postcard image of Indiana Railways and Light Company combination coach-baggage car #105 at Forest. This image may well be what most folks think of when they think Indiana interurban. But the reality of Indiana interurban operations is much more diverse than this photograph suggests.



Terre Haute Indianapolis & Eastern (THI&E) car #37 at Indianapolis. THI&E was the second largest interurban in Indiana with 402 miles of line.⁷ But having but one steel car and over ninety wooden cars, this was a typical THI&E train throughout the company's history as these cars were not capable of operating in multiple.

⁷ Hilton & Due, *supra* note 2, at 278.

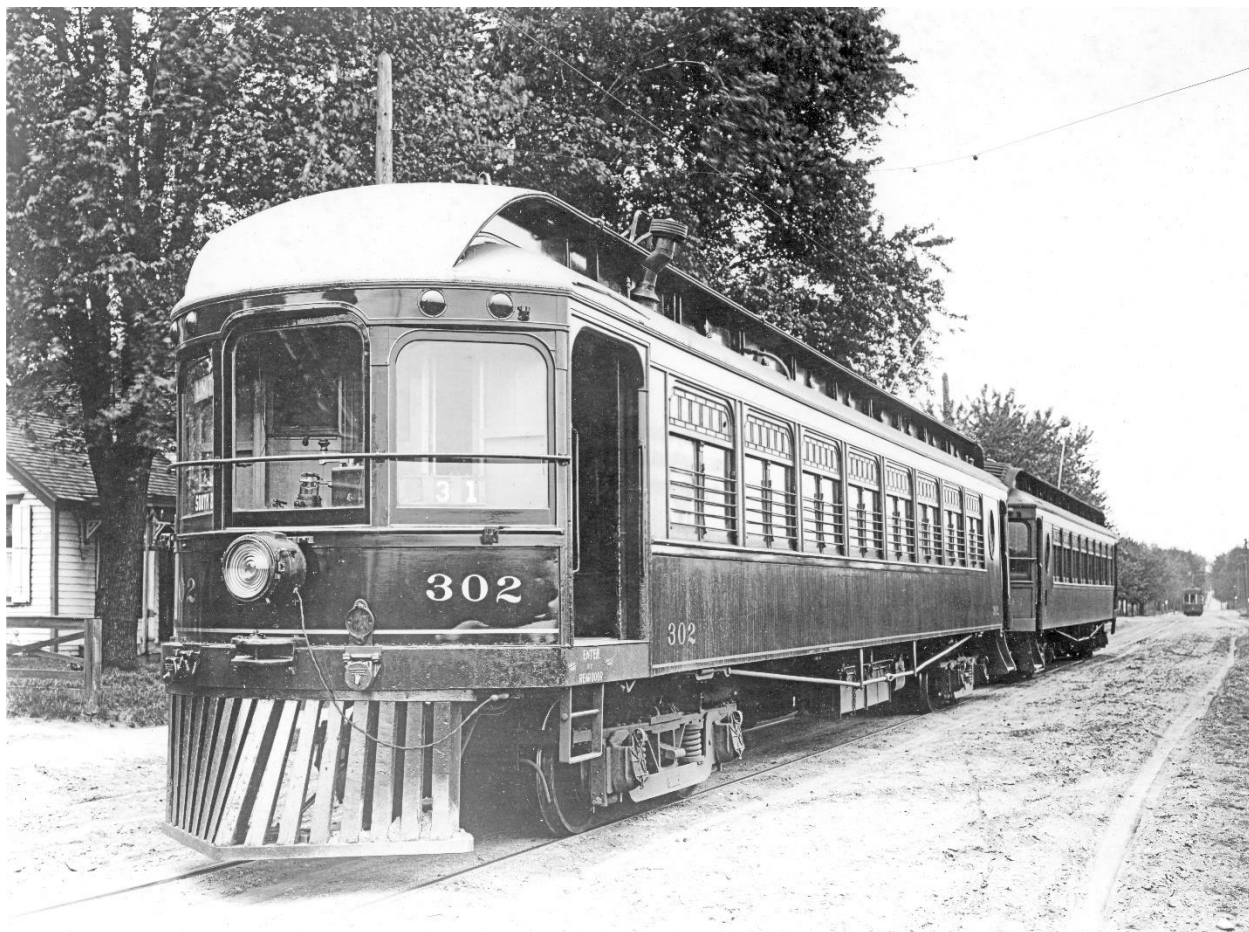


Promotional image of Indiana Service Corporation cars #390 and 378 at Fort Wayne, 1926. Parlor-buffet car Little Turtle was powered but with two motors; it was not intended to operate on its own except for turning the car and for shop moves. For Fort Wayne-Indianapolis service it always operated with a combination coach-baggage car. Union Traction supplied two two-car trains for the joint service.

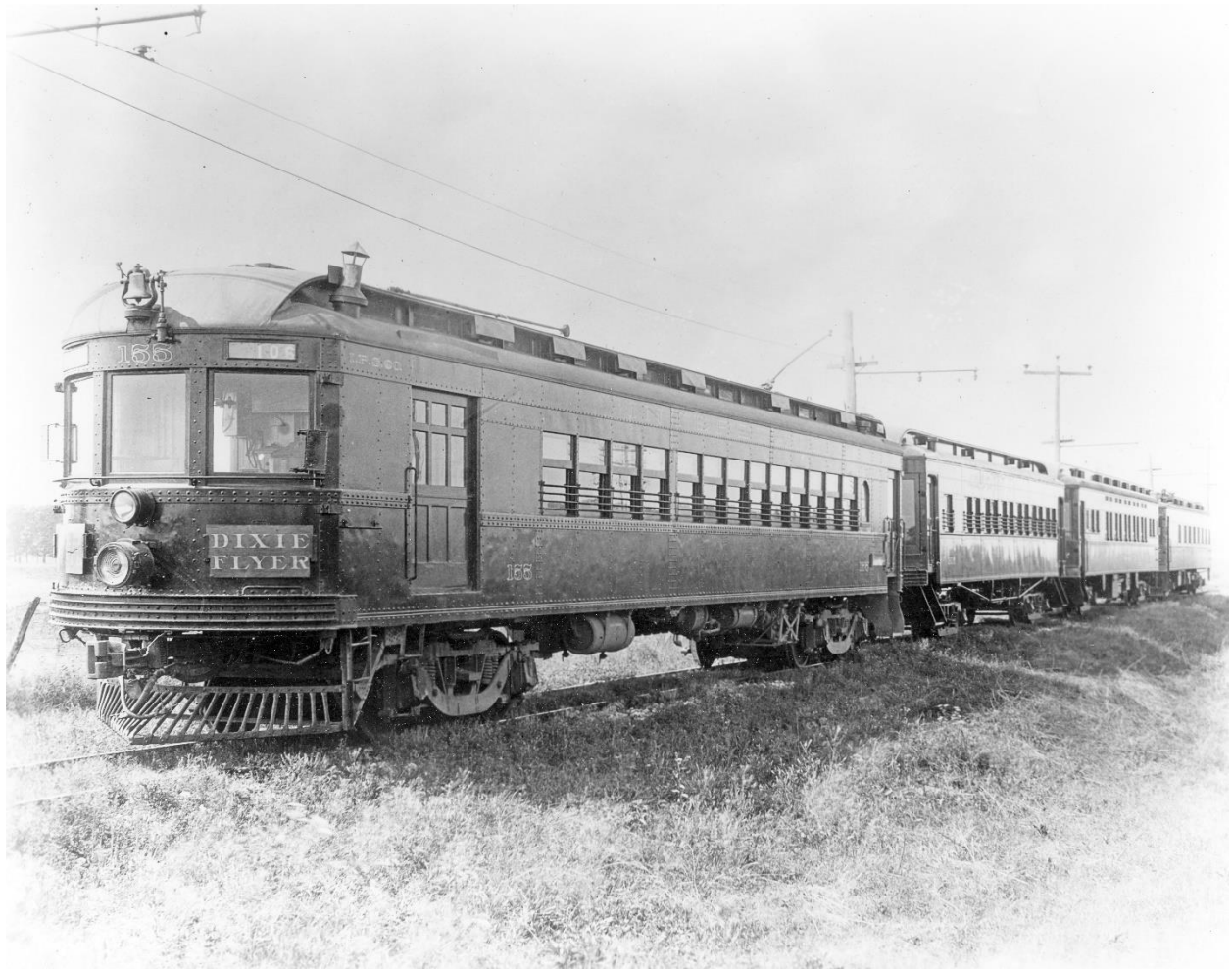


Postcard image of a Union Traction train at Hartford, City. Union Traction operations were most often single cars, but two and three car trains of a coach pulling one or more unpowered coach trailers were common. Car #276 and coach trailer at Hartford City.

Train service northwest from Indianapolis to Crawfordsville on the Indianapolis, Crawfordsville & Western also included two and three car trains.



Promotional image of Chicago, South Bend & Northern Indiana (CSB&NI) cars #302 and 304 on Eddy Street in South Bend. Service on the CSB&NI was most often a single car. As was the norm in Indiana, these motorized combination coach-baggage cars had large wooden pilots at the front and no provision for couplers there. Unlike the cars of the THI&E, the CSB&NI cars were equipped to operate in multiple-car trains. But operation of two-car trains required operating two cars back-to-back by turning the second car in the train end-for-end.



The Interstate Public Service Company (IPS) Dixie Flyer promotional image. The promotional images of the IPS Flyers most often showed two to four cars, but IPS reported that it was capable of operating trains of three to five cars.⁸ One of the events served by IPS special trains was the Kentucky Derby but there is no literature indicating how many cars were carried on the special runs.

⁸ Interstate Pub. Serv. Co., *The Interstate: The Elec. Way* 21 (1924).



The South Shore Line was capable of training as many as fifteen cars for trains bound for special events at the University of Notre Dame. One such move was filmed by company photographer Charles E. Keevil. On 5 November 1927, at least five seven-car trains departed Chicago for South Bend for the football game against Minnesota. At least three of the trains carried steam railroad coaches; one carried a steam railroad observation car. The South Shore Line fleet was often incapable of providing for both regular train service and the football specials.⁹ South Shore Line 11-car football special at Lake Park, undated.

The football specials appear to be impressive trains of coupled cars, but consider that there are only six University of Notre Dame home games each year. Long football trains were not indicative of the usual daily interurban train operations across Northern Indiana.

⁹ The S. Shore Line Modernizes: 1927. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_scPl8CnNM (last visited Feb. 28, 2021).



Picnic trains of steam railroad cars were common on the South Shore Line even into the early 1950s. This is the Riley Company Picnic at Lake Park in 1926 prior to the new steel cars entering service. The single combination coach-baggage car did not pull the six Illinois Central coaches on its own – three motorized cars have been cut-off from the train and pulled ahead to clear the crossing. (Photographer credit: E.C. Calvert, Photographer, Michigan City, Indiana).

Northern Indiana was a popular destination for company picnics, but many could not be handled by rail. For example, Western Electric held annual picnics at Michigan City for as many as 7,000 employees, a number that would have overwhelmed the South Shore Line whose total seating capacity was at its best 3,114. Because the railroad lacked the capacity for an event as large as that of Western Electric, lake ships were chartered.

Most Lake Michigan excursions were likely pleasant affairs with the notorious exception of the capsizing of the steamship Eastland in the Chicago River. The Eastland disaster is infamous in maritime history as the American Titanic. Modifications made to the Eastland in the wake of maritime regulations passed after the sinking of the doomed White Star liner doomed the Eastland. The 844 dead were mostly immigrant workers of Western Electric headed to the 1915 picnic at Michigan City.¹⁰

¹⁰ George W. Hilton, *Eastland: Legacy of the Titanic*, 61, 74, 85, 134-37, 323 (1997).



Milk trains, locals, expresses, limited trains, and named limited trains with parlor and dining cars made up the South Shore Line's daily train operations. Local and express trains ran to Gary on the half hour between the hourly trains to South Bend. Local trains caught on camera were nearly uniformly two cars – one motorized car coupled to a trailer. Employee photograph taken at Industrial Highway in Gary, 1927.



Gary expresses were also most often photographed as two car trains. Gary Express at Hegewisch, Illinois, 10 April 1930. (Photographer credit: A.F. Scholz).



South Bend Limited train 17 at Tremont at the original entrance to the Indiana Dunes State Park. South Shore Line limited trains generally left Chicago on the hour every other hour. Three cars were the most common train length for the limiteds. (Photographer credit: Brooks Photo; postcard image, 1927).

But this is an unusual train – the second car is a wooden trailer. Based on photographic evidence, a wooden trailer is unusual for a limited train; three motorized steel cars were a more common train consist. The two wooden trailers were most often relegated to the Gary locals and expresses. At the Michigan City Shops, eleven miles to the east, it is likely that the two rear cars will be cut-off; most often only a single car operated to South Bend.

Named Limited Trains

The named limited trains filled in the on the hour gaps between the unnamed limited trains. There were two types of named limited trains – parlor car trains and dining car trains.

Parlor Car Train Operations:

The parlor car trains had limited meal service as a small buffet served light meals. But the parlor car trains operated from the Chicago and South Bend terminals at the sub-optimal time slots of 10:00 am and 3:00 pm; they were nearly uniformly two coaches and the parlor car from Chicago to Michigan City. A single coach and the parlor car were nearly always sufficient east from Michigan City to South Bend.



Employee image of parlor car train #12, the Grant Park Limited at Forsyth (now Tremont) siding, Autumn 1927. Named limited parlor car and dining car trains most often departed South Bend with a single coach and the deluxe car; a second coach was added at Michigan City. Eastbound named trains reversed the process departing from Chicago with two coaches with the head car cut-off at Michigan City.

An exception to this operating pattern was found in the timetables from April 1927 until September of 1928 and again in 1929 from April until June – one eastbound morning departure had a combination coach-baggage car either in addition to the two coaches or as a replacement for one of them. In the spring and summer of 1927, it was the 11:59 am departure from Randolph Street Station in Chicago. After that, the 10:00 am departure of the Duneland Limited carried the coach-baggage car. Curiously, there were no westbound parlor car trains scheduled to carry a combination coach-baggage car.

Dining Car Operations:

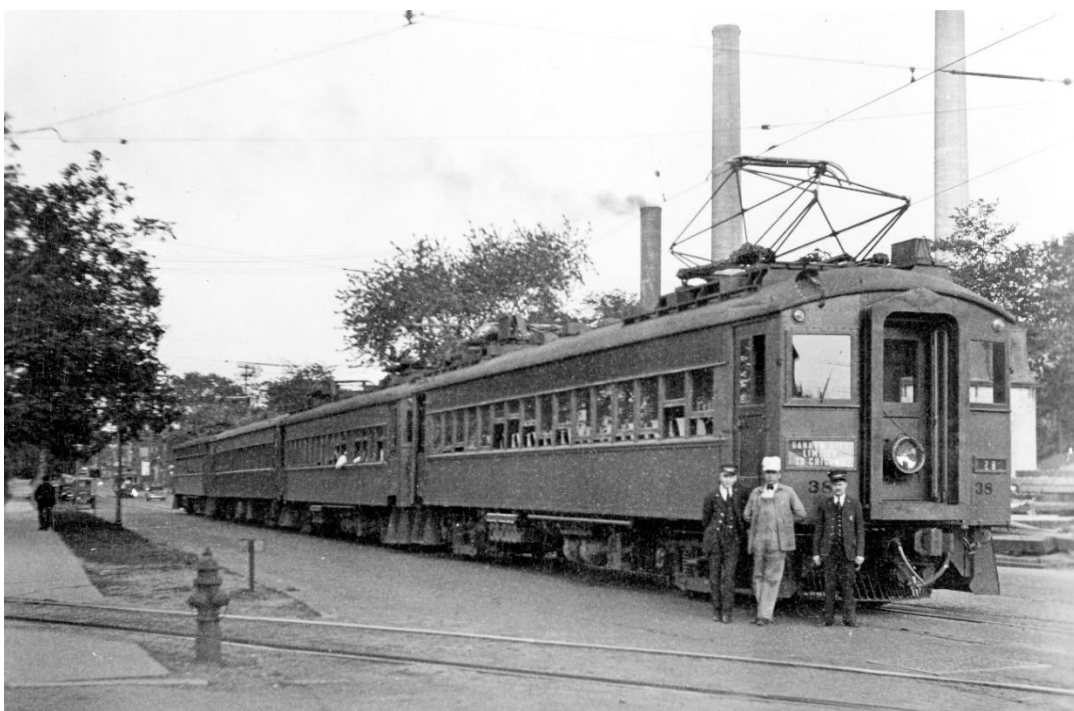
Dining car operations appear to be the least predictable on the South Shore Line. Train lengths were consistently inconsistent. Seasonality may be a variable

as seen below in two images taken by South Shore Line employees of the Garden City Limited at South Bend during the first half of 1929.



Employee photographs of the Garden City Limited at South Bend. Above, winter 1929. One coach and a dining car were most often sufficient for South Bend traffic east of Michigan City.

While the parlor car trains were consistent in length, there does not seem to be a pattern to the length of dining car trains. South Bend departures were occasionally longer; below is the Garden City Limited with a dining car and three coaches, summer 1929.



The dining car trains operated in the peak period time slots with departures from Chicago and South Bend at 7:00 am, 11:59 am, and 5:00 pm. Because the dining car trains operated at the peak time slots, demand for dining car service was often beyond the capacity of the equipment either because one of the two dining cars needed to be shopped for repairs or passenger demand exceeded the table space in the diminutive 24 seat cars. The South Shore Line always seemed to be hunting for a usable steam railroad dining car. Pullman dining car #3 was borrowed when dining car #302 burned in 1927;¹¹ dining cars had twice been borrowed for football special trains during November 1925, one pair from the Chicago & Alton.¹²



South Shore Line dining car train 20 November 1925. Dining cars from the Chicago & Alton near the rear of the train were borrowed for the benefit of football fans headed to the University of Notre Dame to see the Fighting Irish beat Northwestern. The practice of borrowing dining cars continued when the South Shore Line was short of table space or short a dining car. Dining cars were also reported to have been borrowed from the Pullman Company, Chicago Great Western, and the Fort Worth & Denver City railroads. (Photographer credit: E.C. Calvert, Photographer, Michigan City, Indiana).

¹¹ L.J. Hile, *Along the S. Shore Line: Diners – Parlors*, The Pantagraph, July-Aug. 1927, at 7.

¹² *High Lights of History of the S. Shore Line Transp. Dep't*, at 19.

To meet peak demand for dining car service in the late summer of 1929, the South Shore Line leased steam railroad dining cars including Fort Worth & Denver dining car #263. On Monday mornings, the leased dining car was set out at Michigan City to await the dining car/parlor car train from South Bend. After the add at the double-track on 11th Street, the train would head to Chicago with two dining cars.



Fort Worth & Denver dining car #263 at the station on 11th Street in Michigan City. The Fort Dearborn Limited departed South Bend at 7:05 am with two coaches, a South Shore Line dining car, and a parlor-observation car. At 7:30 am, the Fort Worth & Denver dining car was set out at the station with breakfast ready to serve. Here, at 7:48 am, the train from South Bend has coupled on and the double-diner train is ready to depart for Chicago. (Photographer credit: E.C. Calvert, Photographer, Michigan City, Indiana).

Double-diner trains included the Monday Fort Dearborn Limited departing South Bend at 7:05 am, the Friday St. Joe Valley Limited leaving Chicago at 5:15 pm, and the Saturday Indiana Limited leaving Chicago at noon. The leased dining cars were used on two other Saturday trains: the dining cars were added at Michigan City to the westbound 1:48 pm and 6:48 pm departures. These two trains did not carry parlor-observation cars.^{13 14} The 1:48 pm departure also carried a coach-baggage car.

¹³ *Two-Diner Trains Set New Precedent*, S. Shore Lines Sept. 1929, at 1.

¹⁴ *Two-Diner Trains Set New Precedent*, The Pantagraph, Sept. 1929, at 1.

In the waning days of prosperity before the Great Depression, the South Shore Line bought two small parlor cars to operate at the rear of the dining car trains. With four coaches, two dining cars, and a small parlor car, seven-car double-diner trains were likely the longest regular service trains operated on the South Shore Line while the railroad was owned by the Insull Group.

Conclusion

After a review of the South Shore Line deluxe parlor and dining car services to Duneland and the long trains of football fans heading out for a Saturday afternoon to watch Knute Rockne and the Fighting Irish, it may be easy to forget that most South Shore Line passengers sat on walkover seats in a local car heading to the industrial centers of Hammond, East Chicago, or Gary. Of the 72 daily trains on the South Shore Line in 1927, three carried milk, one carried company mail, and thirty were trains that the railroad simply called Gary Plugs that made all or nearly all the stops between Gary and Chicago.¹⁵



Employee photograph of South Shore Line car #11 as a one-car train at Gary, 1927. This 2:00 pm Gary Plug will take an hour and five minutes to get to Chicago some 31 miles and fourteen stops away. Most interurban trains in Indiana were a single or two-car local train hauling folks to their daily lives in places like Forest and Hartford City – the South Shore Line was not an exception.

¹⁵ Chi., S. Shore and S. Bend R.R., employee timetable, Apr. 24, 1927.