

Epilogue

Operating subsidies for passenger rail came too late to save the last of the interurban industry as it lay dying in the 1950s and early 1960s. The first demonstration grants for passenger rail came through the Urban Mass Transit Administration (UMTA) in 1964, first used to resume service on the innermost five miles of another Chicago interurban – the North Shore Line – today the Chicago Transit Authority’s Yellow Line. Operating assistance was expected to be available to the South Shore Line in 1971, but the Indiana General Assembly failed to act on the necessary legislation.

The State of Illinois began providing passenger operating subsidies to the South Shore Line in 1973 to be used to cover losses incurred for that portion of the South Shore Line service operated in Illinois, but action on legislation aimed at operating losses sustained in Indiana was not forthcoming. During 1976, subsidy operating funds from the Regional Transportation Authority of Northeast Illinois were cut by \$226,835, and there had yet to be any funding from any agency of the State of Indiana.

Frustrated by the loss of 25% of the Illinois operating grant money and inaction on the part of Indiana’s political leaders, on 27 October 1976, the Eaton management retaliated by petitioning the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) for a discontinuance of service of all South Shore Line passenger trains. As the discontinuance of service proposal loomed over at the ICC, the South Shore Line became an unintentional museum. South Shore Line employees spoke of folks who came from around the nation and around the globe for what they were certain was going to be their last ride on the last interurban. I remember my last rides well.

Late one autumn evening in 1977, I boarded a South Shore Line box smoker in South Bend headed to Chicago. My fiancée and I were riding through the darkened Indiana farm and lake country in the privacy of the mahogany-paneled smoking room. The conductor collected the few tickets and then joined us. With no scheduled stops in the thirty miles to Michigan City, the two-car train was hustling ever faster through the glacial moraine country, racing down grade on the Tee Lake Steps toward the Lake Michigan shoreline communities, the wheels banging endlessly on every worn rail joint at nearly 90 miles per hour while the three of us enjoyed the multi-sensory experience of interurban railroading of nearly a half century before.

Efforts to ensure that these were not the last rides on the South Shore Line came from Northern Indiana and Northeastern Illinois. Citizens of Indiana formed Save Our South Shore (SOSS) to protect their access to employment in Chicago. Ironically, only one of the founding members of SOSS worked in Chicago, Pat Moody, of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Community leaders in

Illinois formed South Shore Recreation to protect their access to beach homes in Indiana.

Knowing that the end was near for the largest South Shore Line artifacts – the railcars – NPS staff at the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore planned for preservation of the South Shore Line cars and expressed a preference for preserving the interurban experience by operating the vintage cars that NPS hoped to acquire. In May 1981, NPS took the first steps to acquire four vintage South Shore Line cars that although stripped of their mechanical gear and much of their interior fittings, were original and restorable nonetheless.

The South Shore Line had been trying to sell the four vintage cars for scrap metal for several years but found no takers. In testimony before the ICC in 1976, the South Shore Line recognized the historic interest in its vintage railcars and had indicated its willingness to donate the vintage cars to appropriate preservation agencies. But the folks who requested the cars in May 1981 received a letter from South Shore Line president Albert W. Dudley explaining that the cars were not to be sold for reuse, but must be scrapped. What changed?

In a telephone call with Mr. Dudley it was made clear that Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District's (NICTD) agreement to purchase new cars for the railroad required that all the vintage South Shore Line cars were to be scrapped; none were to go to preservation. A telephone call to NPS resulted in action on the part of the office of Congressman Adam Benjamin. After five months of negotiations, the four vintage South Shore Line cars began to leave the Shops at Michigan City, the first equipment to leave the South Shore Line for preservation anywhere. Another forty cars went to museums and other agencies for preservation; nineteen went to NPS.

For NPS, the next three decades were filled with proposals aimed at putting what had become a fleet of twenty-six vintage South Shore Line cars to use in Northern Indiana. Phase 1 of three of the proposed projects received funding. Tough local politics made moving the projects forward difficult if not impossible. After thirty exasperating years, NPS bowed out of the South Shore Line preservation effort in 2010. Transportation preservation was left to more forward-thinking communities.

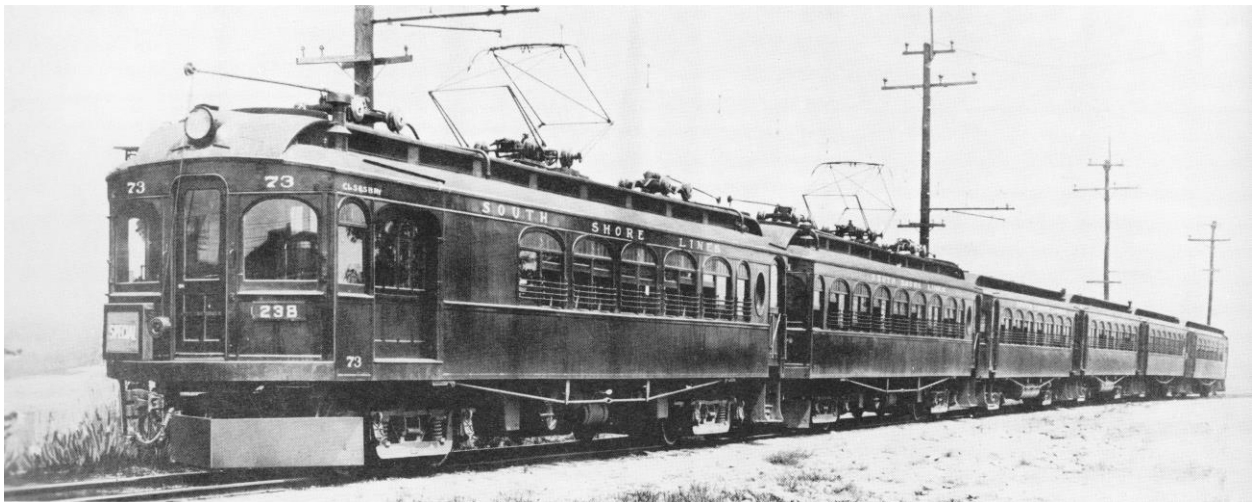
The end of what was left of the interurban era came on the morning of 31 December 1982. The short, unmodernized South Shore Line cars were announced to be out-of-service on New Year's Eve. Pat Moody and I took a final ride together from the Portchester stop in Indiana to Chicago, once more enjoying the mahogany paneled ride that she and others fought so hard to preserve. The year 1983 saw only lengthened and modernized vintage cars maintaining service alongside the

plastic and vinyl lined NICTD cars; mahogany no longer rode the rails between South Bend and Chicago.

It was only nine days after the last runs were made by the original Insull-era cars on the South Shore Line, that Samuel Insull, Jr., died at the age of 82. The man who was the first vice-president of the South Shore Line in 1925 and would have been heir to the utility company throne, was one of the last living connections to the interurban era in Indiana.



The South Shore Line's past is still present. The Chicago, Lake Shore and South Bend Railway coach-baggage car #73 in the restoration shop at Murphysboro, Illinois. The shop skills of 1908 meet the craftsmanship of the 21st Century through the restoration process. Once completed, car #73's passengers will be transported through time to experience interurban travel as it was known by their ancestors.



The Chicago, Lake Shore and South Bend Railway car #73, circa 1910.