

G-P's Chattahoochee Industrial Railroad fills niche in southern Georgia

Industry-owned shortline strives to give efficient, up-to-date service.

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EMD switchers of the Chattahoochee Industrial Railroad

Shortlines are often the connecting link between mills and the major rail lines. A number of the paper companies operate their own shortlines, including Georgia-Pacific, James River, International Paper, and Weyerhaeuser. An example is the Chattahoochee Industrial Railroad in southwestern Georgia. The CIRR was conceived as part of the overall plan for G-P's Cedar Springs paper mill complex. It was chartered Jan. 25, 1961, and made its first run July 11, 1963. With 15.4 miles of mainline, it runs from Hilton, GA, where it connects with Norfolk Southern, to Saffold, GA, where it links with CSXT and the GSWR.

Along with the paper mill, the shortline serves G-P's plywood mill, plus the Peridot Chemical Co., Georgia Tubing Corp., and Hilton Slasher, said Larry W. Smith, vice president and general manager for the CIRR.

The CIRR operates around the clock, seven days a week. In 1991 it had 42 employees and hauled 35,023 carloads. The shortline owns 12 locomotives and slugs (seven EMDs, two Alcos, and three slugs on Alco frames). Over the last three years it has replaced all but its first two Alco RS1s with EMDs. That has allowed for a decrease in fuel consumption and an increase in carrying capacity, Smith noted. (The shortline moved 434 carloads more in 1991 than in

1988, but used 45,100 fewer gallons of diesel fuel to do it.)

The railroad has 843 cars with CIRR reporting marks. Those cars include 541 boxcars; 112 coal hoppers; 142 pulpwood cars; and 48 chip hoppers, eight of which are inactive.

On any given day, the railroad might have 100 incoming cars and 100 outbound cars handled at its junctions. Each must be inspected to ensure it meets transportation safety regulations. About half the cars may actually belong to another rail line, such as CSX or Norfolk Southern. The CIRR must pay for using those cars, the amount varying with the distance travelled and other factors. Likewise, it gets paid for the use of its cars by other lines.

Various changes are in the works that would essentially deregulate rates and allow terms to be negotiated. Until then, the industry as a whole has held back on replacing worn boxcars, Smith noted. As the industry does move to upgrade its fleet, many of the larger carriers may opt for container on flatcars, he suggested. That could leave some shortlines at a disadvantage if they are not equipped to handle intermodal transport, he said.

Technological changes are also significantly improving customer billing and the ability of large and small carriers to keep track of their fleet and their cargo. In the future, each car may be

equipped with an electronic transponder that will signal its location, ownership, cargo, and other pertinent information to trackside sensors for relay to a national database.

The CIRR is one of the most highly computerized shortlines in the United States, Smith said. The computers are used for reports and billing and they link the CIRR to other rail lines throughout North America.

One advantage the CIRR has over the major carriers is the ability to respond quickly to customer equipment problems, according to Smith. If, for example, employees at the mill have trouble closing the door of a boxcar, a repairman from the CIRR can come over almost immediately to fix it. The railroad has a specially outfitted truck with welding equipment and spare parts that allows for on-the-spot repairs. In most cases the troublesome car doesn't even have to be moved or uncoupled. In contrast, a long-haul line might have to unload the car, uncouple it from the others, and transport it back to a shop for repairs, Smith explained.

The CIRR also runs a well-equipped shop for more extensive repairs and maintenance. A specially designed metal frame can support an engine, allowing wheel trucks to be removed for easier repair. The shop used to take in repair work from other rail lines, but mostly limits work to its own cars and engines these days.

Other shortlines serving G-P include the Ashley Drew and Northern (AD&N), the Fordyce and Princeton (F&P), the Gloster Southern (GLSR), the Amador Central, the Old Augusta Railroad, and the Arkansas & Louisiana Missouri Railroad (ALM). Each has its own board of directors and operates as a wholly owned subsidiary.

The AD&N, acquired in 1963, operates a 40-mile line between Crossett and Monticello, AR. It switches inbound cars and assembles outbound cars. Loads range from pulpwood and chips, to plywood and studs, to tissue and printing paper.

G-P bought the 57 miles of the F&P when the Rock Island Railroad went bankrupt in 1981. The line was expanded to serve G-P's wood products group in the area between Fordyce and Crossett, AR.

The GLSR began operations in 1986, carrying loads of plywood and wood chips between Monticello, MS, and Slaughter, LA. It also leases a 28-mile line serving the sawmill in Columbia, MS.

The Amador Central was acquired in 1988. Its 11.9 miles of track in the Sierra Nevada mountains connect the Martell, CA, sawmill with the Southern Pacific at Ione, CA, east of Sacramento.

The Old Augusta, the smallest of the lines at 2.5 miles, is located in New Augusta, MS. It was started up in 1984 in conjunction with G-P's Leaf River pulp mill and sawmill. It connects with the Illinois Central.

The ALM was started up in 1991. Its 53 miles of track serve industries from Monroe, LA, to Crossett, AR. ■

Top: CIRR Vice President and General Manager **Larry W. Smith** with Maintenance Superintendent **Rod Allums** and the shortline's specially equipped repair truck. **Middle:** Maintenance pit and support frame in the CIRR repair shop. **Bottom:** Stacked short logs being moved to G-P's Cedar Springs, GA, mill

