



DANBURY RAILWAY MUSEUM

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HISTORIC CONRAIL RAILCAR PRESERVED

Non-Profits Partner to Save a Vintage Flexi-Flo Hopper Car

DANBURY, CT (April 16, 2021) – After nearly two years of volunteer efforts, a rare railcar representing a significant technological advance in railroad history has found a permanent home at a museum.

A 46-foot-long hopper car was delivered to the Danbury Railway Museum at 11:20 AM on Tuesday, March 30, 2021. Built in May of 1966 by ACF Industries in Milton, PA, the car was one of only 220 “Flexi-Flo” hopper cars produced for the New York Central, the first pressure differential cars ever constructed. By applying air pressure to the inside of the car, the contents (typically cement or other dry bulk goods) could be easily unloaded into a nearby truck or storage tank. This technology was revolutionary in the rail industry, and it helped railroads recapture some of the business that was being lost to trucks and the interstate highway system in the 1960s. The pressure differential technology first used on these cars has grown in popularity and is in use today on nearly all modern hopper car designs. This car represents the genesis of a technology in use around the world.

The new hopper car at Danbury started life as New York Central class 996H hopper car #885738, branded “Flexi-Flo” by the railroad. The New York Central merged with the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1968 to form Penn Central, and this hopper car was conveyed to its new owner. The following year, Penn Central converted the #885738 to a scale test car by filling it to a weight of 266,000 pounds. It was painted bright yellow, renumbered Penn Central #80019, and used throughout the Penn Central rail system to test the accuracy of railcar scales.

Following Penn Central’s 1970 bankruptcy (and the insolvency of several other northeastern railroads in the same time period), the federal government created the Consolidated Rail Corporation, better known as Conrail, to rescue the northeast's financially troubled rail system. From its inception in 1976 until it was acquired by CSX Transportation and Norfolk Southern in

1999, Conrail's success was one of the most significant developments in the American railroad industry. The former Penn Central #80019 was repainted into Conrail gray in the late 1970s and retained the same number, serving the entire 23 years of Conrail until it was conveyed to CSX Transportation in 1999. Nearly all of the original 220 Flexi-Flo hopper cars continued in service (some in their original configuration, others reconfigured like this car) into the mid-2010s, when most were scrapped at the end of their mandatory 50-year service lives.

Volunteers with The Conrail Historical Society, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, reached out to CSX in 2019 to inquire about the status and future of this rare car, which survived longer than any others in its class due to its conversion as a scale test car. After nearly two years of negotiations and planning, CSX agreed to donate the car to The Conrail Historical Society in January of 2021. The Conrail Historical Society's volunteers spent two months working closely with CSX Transportation, the Housatonic Railroad, and Metro-North to arrange and pay for the complicated shipment of the car to the Danbury Railway Museum in Danbury, Connecticut. Upon the car's arrival at the museum, The Conrail Historical Society transferred ownership to the Danbury Railway Museum, ensuring the car's long-term preservation and interpretation as a revolutionary concept in railcar design.

"We're pleased that this collaboration has resulted in saving a one-of-a-kind artifact," said Rudy Garbely, president of The Conrail Historical Society. "This hopper is an extremely rare and worthy candidate for long-term preservation, and the volunteers at both organizations have made an extraordinary commitment and effort to get it saved. There are many opportunities for cooperation and innovation in the preservation industry, and we look forward to a long and fruitful partnership with the skilled staff at the Danbury Railway Museum to tackle future projects of this magnitude."

"The pioneering technology behind the Flexi-Flo's design and its rarity made this car a prime candidate for preservation," said Danbury Railway Museum president Jose Alves. "While we can't save every piece of railroad rolling stock from the scrapper's torch, we were very excited to play a role in preserving this car. When The Conrail Historical Society made us aware of their efforts, we knew we had to help. Both of our organizations share a common goal when it comes to preserving America's railroad history, and with railroads regaining the public's interest, organizations like ours provide a necessary link to the past."

Many thanks are due to the capable staff at CSX Transportation, the Housatonic Railroad, and Metro-North, all of which went above and beyond to coordinate with The Conrail Historical Society's volunteers and ensure the safe transportation of this car to its permanent home. The car will be restored and maintained in Conrail paint by Danbury Railway Museum volunteers, representing the scheme that it wore for over 40 years of its 55-year career on the rails. To donate to the restoration project, please visit the Danbury Railway Museum's website at www.danburyrail.org/donate.

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The Conrail Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that preserves the history of the Consolidated Rail Corporation through education and publication, recognizing the creation of Conrail as one of the most significant developments in the American railroad industry. The Society's robust membership magazine and extensive archival and artifact collections are complemented by several restored pieces of railroad equipment. Support and consultation regarding Conrail operations and equipment are provided to railroad museums, model manufacturers, and researchers. For further information on The Conrail Historical Society, or to join as a member, please visit www.TheCRHS.org.

The Danbury Railway Museum is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization housing one of the most significant collections of railroad artifacts and rolling stock in the United States. Located in a fully restored 1903 train station and the adjoining railyard in Danbury, Connecticut, the museum features over 60 pieces of historic railroad equipment, an extensive research library, and train rides and events held within the sprawling railyard. With a focus on New England railroading, the museum is open year-round to the general public and to museum members. For further information on the Danbury Railway Museum, or to join as a member, please visit www.DanburyRail.org.



Photo by Jose Alves