North Carolina Railroad

by Allen W. Trelease, 2006


The North Carolina Railroad (NCR), under lease since 1999 to the Norfolk Southern Corporation [5], was chartered in 1849 and completed in 1856 from Goldsboro through Raleigh [6], Greensboro [7], and Salisbury to Charlotte [8], a distance of 223 miles. The railroad was largely responsible for the Piedmont Urban Crescent [9] that developed along its route, contributing to the growth of its towns and bringing into existence others, including Durham [10], Burlington (originally Company Shops, the site of its repair shops from the 1850s to the 1870s), High Point [11] (at the road’s highest elevation), and Thomasville.

Leased for 30 years to the Richmond & Danville (itself under northern control by then), the NCR was leased again in 1895 to J. P. Morgan’s new Southern Railway (now the Norfolk Southern). In 1899 the road gained an additional 94 miles from Goldsboro to Morehead City by absorbing the similarly state-controlled Atlantic & North Carolina Railroad. In 1998 the state of North Carolina bought all remaining private shares of the company’s stock and the following year reached an agreement with the Norfolk Southern, allowing that line exclusive maintenance and freight operations on the NCR line, now totaling 317 miles, for 15 years. Millions of dollars continue to be spent upgrading the line; in 2001, $10 million worth of improvements to the corridor between Goldsboro and Morehead City were completed, followed by repair work on the Cape Fear River Bridge in Kinston. In addition to freight trains operated by the Norfolk Southern, in the early 2000s Amtrak ran two passenger trains, the Piedmont and the Carolinian, along the NCR corridor; CSX [12] used a small portion of the route. Plans also existed for regional mass transit operations along NCR’s rails in Charlotte, the Triangle area (Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill), and the Triad (Winston-Salem, Greensboro, and High Point). High-speed rail transit connecting the southeastern United States with Charlotte and Atlanta was also under consideration.

References:

Cecil K. Brown, A State Movement in Railroad Development: The Story of North Carolina’s First Effort to Establish an East and West Trunk Line Railroad (1928).


Additional Resources:


Subject: Antebellum (1820-1861)
Civil War (1861-1865)
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