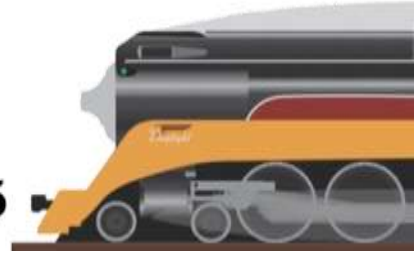
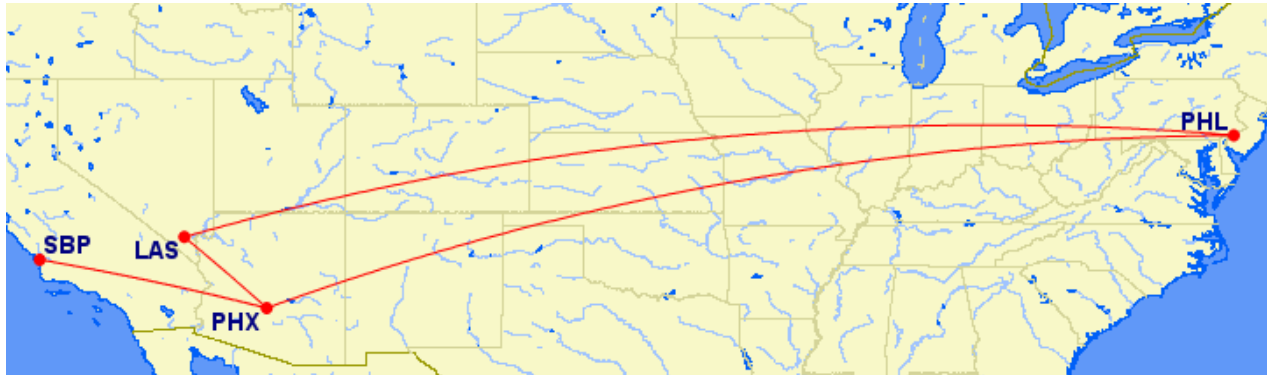


# Daylight Limited

## Pacific Coast Region Convention 2025



### San Luis Obispo, CA - March 26-31, 2025



This was a trip I never would have ever imagined making given the intended schedule of my knee replacement operation on 3/6. Well that was cancelled due to another issue with my right leg, which then caused me to cancel alternative train show trips to Odgen, UT [2/28 - 3/2] and STL [3/7 - 3/9] that were booked before the knee op was scheduled. It looked like I might have whole month without going anywhere. One benefit of basically being stuck in the house was that I got caught up with my reading. I actually read the March issue of the *NMRA Magazine* in March. Normally, it would sit around for a while or be saved to read while on a trip.

I paid close attention to the CLUB CAR column towards the back of the issue that listed coming events on parts of five pages. Thinking of the last weekend of March, where could I go? Given my interest in the IC, TP&W, IT & GM&O RRs, I looked at the events in the Midwest. I zeroed in on two train shows in Illinois on 3/29 & 3/30. One was in LaGrange [once the home of EMD] and the other was a bit south in Urbana. I attended the latter show several years ago on a similar Illinois trip when I actually made it to three train shows in one weekend.

This should have been an easy trip to put together. I could fly Chicago [ORD] early Saturday AM from PHL and then fly back on Sunday evening. However, it wasn't! I was stunned to see that the roundtrip flights on AA would have cost me 71,500 miles [+ \$11.20 in fees] or almost \$600 if paid. Sorry both amounts were way above my paygrade for a short weekend trip. I thought I wasn't going anywhere till I saw a small listing for the NMRA's Pacific Coast Region [PCR] 81<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention in San Luis Obispo, CA.

This was interesting on several levels. First, I have been to NMRA regional conventions in 13 of the 17 regions, but never one in the PCR. This is a bucket list item for me. I have attended two national conventions in the PCR: San Jose in 2000 and Sacramento in 2011. FYI - I have been to

35 national conventions, including a 27-year continuous run from 1985 -2011. Second, I recalled that my friend Paul Hobbs from New Zealand, whom I hosted back in January so he could attend the yuge show in Springfield Mass. was coming back to the States for the PCR convention. Perhaps I could share a room with him? Lastly, I could turn this into a travel adventure - flying across the USA and back. A quick email to Paul confirmed he would be there and I could share his hotel room.

So, I went to look at what flights were available for Thursday – Sunday. There were many different routes available and amazingly for as little as 25K miles roundtrip. However, the 25K routings all included three flights in each direction. To be curious, I looked at paid flights and saw I could get there with just two flights each way but the cost would be over \$800. I put this routing on hold – PHL CLT SAN SBP PHX LAS PHL [Philly Charlotte San Diego San Luis Phoenix Las Vegas Philly] w/ miles and emailed the confirmation to Paul. He responded quickly saying surely I could include either Miami or Anchorage in that trip! I had the flights and the hotel but up till this point had not actually looked at the convention schedule.

Turns out the convention starts on Wednesday evening and there will be things all day on Thursday. The flights on hold would have got me there in mid-afternoon on Thursday. So, I cancelled that reservation and put this routing on hold: PHL PHX LAS SBP PHX LAS PHL. The last flight leaves Vegas at 1115PM on Sunday and arrives PHL Monday 3/31 @ 723AM. This ticket cost me 25K miles + \$11.20 in fees. I would fly 5585 miles but since I used award miles it would NOT count towards the 2 Million Mile Award.

More than a week later, I had a problem. I was confirming my travel plans with Carol thinking she would be able to drive me to the train station. I went to the AA app to see what time my flight left on 3/26. However, there was NO flight. Bummer, I forgot to confirm the booking that was on hold and it automatically cancelled after five days. It would have been nice if AA had sent me a reminder. Immediately, I went to re-book the flights. While I was able to get the same flights out, the LAS – PHL flight was no longer available. There were three alternative routings available from PHX to CLT, MCO or TPA. The CLT flight arrived toooooo early; MCO [Orlando] is usually very crowded so I went with TPA [Tampa] and would fly some additional miles. All together the revised PHL PHX LAS SBP PHX TPA PHL routing will cover 5862 miles. I would arrive in PHL on 3/31 @ 942AM.

As of 3/24, I still had some concerns about going because I was scheduled to have an injection in my spine for the leg nerve issue on Tuesday 3/25. However, the doctor's office called that AM to say their robotic machine was broken and I needed to reschedule. So, now the trip was on! I don't recall why but I decided to check the connection in Las Vegas. I would arrive in T1 on AA but the connecting flight to SBP was on Alaska in T3. The LAS website said it could take 30-40 minutes to get from T1 to T3. Given I walk slowly because of my leg issue and I only had a 50 minute connection, I canceled the reservation and looked for an alternative routing. For slightly more miles [28.5K], I booked PHL PHX SBP PHX LAS PHL. This would cover 5524 miles and oddly included the LAS- PHL flight that I had when I first made the reservation for this trip but wasn't available when I made the change in the paragraph above. I tried to register online for the convention but the website said it was closed and to register in person.

## WEDNESDAY - 3/26

A 715AM flight to PHX meant I need to take a very early train [455AM]. I was up a 345AM and left the house by 425AM. I was surprised that the road I normally take to the station is still closed by the SPS factory that burned on 3/4. At that hour, I got a parking spot right by the platform. I paid \$8 to park for four days and awaited the train. It was on time and I was in PHL about an hour later. I went to the AA counter and checked my two suitcases that were full of RRiana and some models that I planned to sell at the convention's swap meet. The flight was full and I was # 5 for an upgrade. So, I was content with my exit row for the five hour + flight. I read some and then dozed off. Here are three views of the wing: normal flight, leading edge & trailing flaps extended for landing and spoilers deployed upon landing at PHX. The plane



had taken off a few minutes early and landed at 928AM or 9 minutes early at C26 that was at the far end of that concourse. With my connecting flight at far end of the next concourse, I asked for a lift. I was told to wait but no one came so I walked there very slowly, arriving at 950AM after boarding had started.

The flight to SBP was on a E-175 that is a regional jet with engines under the wings. It looks like a miniature version of a 737 or A320. The seating is xx-xx and I was in 12A and the seat next to me empty. The 1'42" flight flew west from PHX toward CA and then diagonally up



towards SBP passing over these mountains. The view changed markedly approaching SBP.



We arrived at 1158AM or 20 minutes early and I was surprised by the size of the fairly new terminal. An AA 319 was boarding for DFW and the plane I arrived on would return to PHX. United and Alaska also flew there. Between the three carriers, there were multiple flights to these western and Pacific Coast cities. FYI: while San Luis Obispo is widely abbreviated as **SLO** and pronounced as *SLOW*, the SLO airport code is assigned to a public use airport in southern Illinois. My two

Departing To	Flight	Time	Gate	Status
Dallas/Fort Worth	American Airlines 3392	12:29 PM	5	On Time
Denver	UNITED 5279	12:45 PM	1	On Time
Phoenix	American Airlines 4175	12:51 PM	6	On Time
Portland	Alaska 3492	1:05 PM	2	On Time
San Diego	Alaska 3383	2:18 PM	2	On Time
Los Angeles	UNITED 5880	2:22 PM	8a	On Time
Las Vegas	Alaska 3381	3:22 PM	8a	On Time
San Francisco	UNITED 5323	4:15 PM	8a	On Time
Phoenix	American Airlines 4990	4:36 PM	8a	On Time
Phoenix	American Airlines 6434	7:09 PM	8a	On Time
Seattle	Alaska 1042	7:31 PM	8a	On Time

checked bags had made the short connection in PHX and came promptly. I walked to find the local bus to SLO. No one was at the info desk and I asked someone who didn't know where it boarded. Out of desperation, I called the bus company but an airport employee overheard my call and directed me to the stop that was down past the terminal.



The SLOTRANSIT bus came at 1240PM; I paid the 75¢ senior fare and got a transfer. I was at its Transit Center at 1PM. Fifteen minutes later, I was on a different bus that took me near the convention hotel, an Embassy Suites, in Madonna Plaza. I exited the bus at 130PM and it was time for lunch. Next to the bus stop was a **Sprouts**. While there is one near my house in PA, I had never been in that store before. Turns out Wednesday was sushi day so I bought

California rolls, a bakery roll and lemonade for my late lunch. While my watch said 140PM PDT, that was 440PM stomach time plus I had been up since before 4AM. I sat and ate my food outside the store and then walked to the hotel that was a few stores away. Turns out I arrived before Paul but he had added me to the reservation. In the room, I opened the suitcases to see how my stuff made the trip. The paper items were fine but there was minor damage to two HO freight cars.

I went downstairs to register but the convention desk did not open till 3PM. I looked at the handouts and a message board while I waited. There were two options for registration: full for \$225 that included two breakfasts or \$175. I went with the later as the Embassy Suites provided free breakfasts and drinks during its daily happy hour. The only event on Wednesday was a welcome reception at 630PM. In the mean time Paul arrived. He had flew from NZ to DFW and then to Burbank on AA the day before. This day he rode a *Pacific Surfliner* train to Santa Barbara and then an Amtrak bus to SLO. He had arranged for a convention attendee to pick him up at the train station. We joined others sitting by the bar and soon it was time for our free drinks. We also ordered food for dinner as we had learned the reception would be just snack food and beverages. However, it did have some VG cookies that I enjoyed while looking at the very large HO FREE-MO layout set up in the hotel ballroom.

## THURSDAY - 3/27

First, here is some info about SLO. The city has a population of about 49K and it is known for its vibrant downtown area with historic houses and buildings. The Central Coast area has a definite vibe with many wineries and orchards. The area is particularly known for the production of EVOO [extra virgin olive oil]. It is also the home of Cal Poly State University with over 22K students. The school is highly selective and somewhat unique in that incoming students must declare their major to apply and once a student, changing majors may require the student to transfer to another CSU campus.



A word about the PCR might also be helpful. Until 1982, it was a yuge region that included all of California, Hawaii, Arizona and Nevada. A new region, called PSR [Pacific Southwest Region], was then established to include Southern California, Arizona and the Vegas area. The PCR retained the rest of CA from SLO and Bakersfield north, Hawaii [not a lot modelers there for sure] and the Reno area. I was surprised by the low attendance of about 100 [plus about 40 spouses], but each day the clinics in one room were made available online and another 70 modelers signed up for that. What was even more surprising was the # of first time attendees [including me], each of which received a free Accurail box car.

The convention format differed from what I have seen in other regions. There were three rounds of clinics in the AM and then a long break for layout visits or excursions. There were additional clinics at 3PM and then another break till after dinner when there were three more rounds of clinics. There was a separate series of Modeling with the Masters, hosted by 2 MMRs, that ran from Thursday thru Saturday. On Thursday AM, I attended: *Establishing an Era*, *Timber Tunnel Portals* and *Hands-on Weathering* where I came away with an Athearn box car.

Perhaps the highlight of the convention was a guided tour on Amtrak over **Cuesta Pass**, which crosses the southern Santa Lucia Range at an altitude of 1,522 feet and connects SLO with Salinas Valley to the north. The UP [ex-SP] railroad line thru the pass includes a segment with a 2.2% grade, the steepest point of the coast line between Los Angeles and San Francisco. It traverses six tunnels, including one at an altitude of 1,380 feet bypassing the summit of the pass. SLO [the AMTRAK code for the city] is served daily by two *Coast Starlight* trains that run btwn. LA & Seattle and two *Pacific Surfliner* trains that run btwn. SLO & San Diego. The plan was for attendees to ride the northbound *Coast Starlight* [#14] at 305pm to Paso Robles arriving at 415PM where a bus would bring them back to the convention hotel.

I got a ride over to the train station with the head of the convention. The station was built in mission style in 1943 as traffic in the area boomed during WWII. There it was learned that #14 was running about an hour late. Unfortunate for the trip but this set up a unique opportunity for

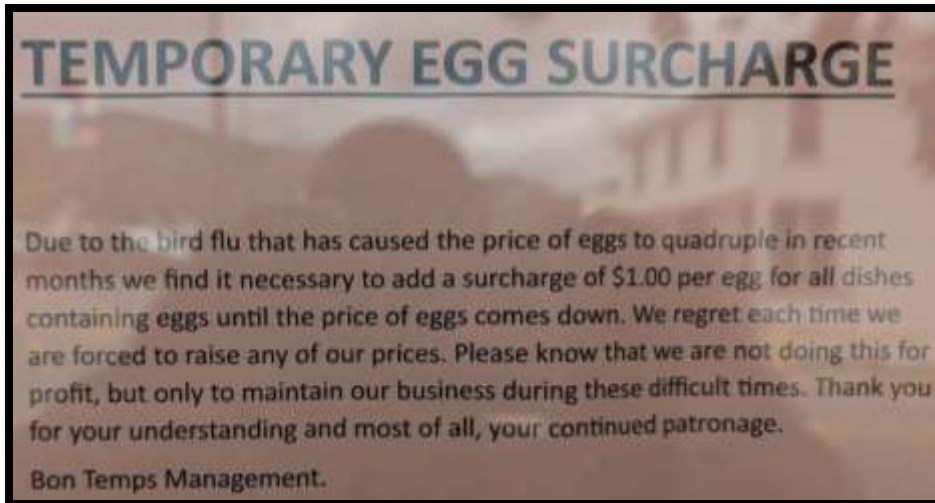
those on the excursion to see both the northbound *Coast Starlights* and the southbound *Pacific Surfliner* [scheduled to leave SLO at 4:12PM] at almost the same time.



This was the consist for the *Pacific Surfliner* laying over till later that afternoon.



I walked around what is called the **Railroad District** and came to this statute dedicated to the Chinese workers who largely built the railroads in California and elsewhere in the West.



I had a po-boy sandwich for lunch at a Cajun café that had this sign posted on the front door. It is good thing that I don't eat eggs. After lunch, I walked over to the local RR museum but it was closed – just open on Saturday. This car was used to haul sugar beets that were once grown extensively in this area.



I was able to ride a bus back to the convention but first stopped at a Ralph's to buy some toiletries as I forgot to pack mine,. At 3PM, I attended a clinic on using the drawing feature in PowerPoint. I had seen this clinic last summer in Long Beach and wanted to understand more.

I sat around talking with Paul and other attendees until it was time for Happy Hour. Then it was time for the Swap Meet. My table was free because I was staying at the hotel. I brought UP, SP



and other western items from an estate I have been selling for three years plus some things acquired for resale at other shows. Over the course of two nights, I sold \$248 of stuff [a whole suitcase full] and remarkably only spent \$1 at the other tables.

### Friday - 3/28

I attended three clinics in the AM: *Freight car tune-up tips*, *North over Cuesta* and *Streamlined CA Passenger Cars*. The 2<sup>nd</sup> one explained how the pass was built and showed many historical photos. The one on passenger cars was given by Paul Hobbs as was the 3PM one on TTX. He

bought two TTX annual reports from me that he can include in future versions of that clinic. Without a car, I spent



the whole day at the convention. This is a model of the SLO station on the modular layout set-up in the ballroom.

This was a well-done diorama in the contest room.



### Saturday - 3/29

After breakfast, I attended a clinic on open car loads. This is something I really like as the loads on flat cars and in gondolas add considerable interest to a model railroad scene. At the end of the



clinic I asked if anyone was going over to the SLO RR Museum that opened at 10AM. Vince Cody from Bakersfield said he was so I rode over with him. The museum is located in the original freight house built by the SP when it arrived in SLO in 1894. Admission was free to convention attendees, but I supported them thru my purchases of several books and timetables at great prices. I often get the best bargains at RR museums selling donated items.

The first part of the building has several exhibits on the SP and the Pacific Coast Railway. The later was a narrow gauge line that started in 1871 as a horse railway between SLO and what became the port city of Avila. The line initially prospered and was extended southward to Santa Maria and Los Olivos, and eventually had over 75 miles of track. Unfortunately, ultimately it could not compete with the SP and the highways that were built in the area. The line folded just before WWII. At 11AM, there was a presentation on the PC in the museum. I said great, the Penn Central, but nobody laughed.

The rear part of the freight house has a large HO layout set locally in the 1950s but using modeler's license still includes the narrow gauge line to the piers in Avila Bay.



The last photo shows the large dock used to unload cars full of sugar beets.

I had signed up for the afternoon tour of Osburn Yard at the Santa Maria Valley RR and as luck would have it Vince was on that tour as well. We left about 1145AM for the 37 miles drive down CA 101 [the one-oh-one]. Leaving SLO and heading to the coast, the right lanes of the 101 were built on what had been the original right-of-way for the PC Railway



Once in Santa Maria, I treated Vince to a quick lunch before arriving at the SMVRR at 1PM. This is a 100 year old shortline with 14 miles of mainline track serving mainly agricultural businesses in the area. It interchanges with the UP in Guadalupe. Last summer at the Long Beach convention, I went on a tour to the GEMCO yard in Van Nuys where the train to Guadalupe originates. Oddly, there is NO freight service southbound to here from the Bay area.

The president and a current owner of the SMVRR, gave us a safety briefing and told about the history and current operations of the line. Then our group was split for a tour of their new yard. On one track was a string of these cars for maintenance on their door seals and the reefer units.



A nearby plant that processes spinach and other frozen vegetables is a major customer. On the adjacent track were its current and prior locomotives.



The last locomotive is a GP-35 that was once owned by the PRR. Also there was a former UP 10-6 sleeper, *Pacific Waves*, that is owned by a part-time employee who is converting it into a business car for the SMVRR.



After the tour, we were treated to snacks and given the opportunity to shop in its company store.

Vince asked if I wanted to see a layout – sure! So, we head north to Arroyo Grande passing thru extensive farm land.



The layout we saw was the Monarch & Sand RR. It was G scale and outdoors in what was probably larger than most CA backyards.



It was about a half hour drive from there back to the convention hotel.

After yet another dinner at the Embassy Suites with free drinks, I attended clinics for the rest of the evening. The first clinic was about making two O-scale buildings. In making the first one, parts of it were 3D printed. This worked so well that almost all of the 2<sup>nd</sup> building was 3D printed. The last clinic was a two parter and given by someone who builds scenery and models for the motion picture industry. The presenter explained how we can use cinematic production techniques on our layouts and had two modules from his layout to show us.



His work on these and several small dioramas was absolutely amazing. Back in the room, I packed up as I had to leave early the next morning.

### **Sunday - 3/30**

When I woke up and opened the curtains, I had a problem. It was raining! I had planned to take the bus to the downtown so I could attend the 11AM mass at the historic Mission there. However, it was several 00 yards from the hotel to the bus stop. So, I called for a LYFT ride and was at the Mission in about 15 minutes. However, the ride was \$12 instead of the 75¢ bus fare.

It was just after 10 when I arrived and the 9 AM mass was still going on. Masses at my parish usually last 35-40 minutes. Eventually folks walked out after that mass was over. I went in dragging my two suitcases and waited for the next Mass to start. The Mission dates back to 1776 though it has been extensively rebuilt over the years. There was a large courtyard. The church



filled up quickly perhaps because this was the last English Mass that day. There were more than a few hymns and the rituals were a bit different than what I was used too. It was 1150AM when it was time for communion. I left after that as I needed to be at the Transit Center, three blocks away, by 1215PM for the bus to the airport.

The 1A bus went a different way than the bus from the airport. It passed thru several streets

with craft houses like this. By 1240PM, I was at the airport that was surprisingly crowded with arriving students. Turns out that Spring term at Cal Poly started on April 1st.



There was no one at the AA counter when I arrived. Several minutes later, a woman wearing rain gear was there so I walked over. She told me that they were boarding flights to DFW & PHX and the check-in counter would open about 2PM. Bummer, I was hoping to have lunch there but the only food was past TSA. Had I know this I could have easily had lunch in town and come out on a later bus. I finished a bag of cookies and ate a packet of pretzels from the outbound flights and waited. Eventually I checked-in and went thru TSA. After TSA, you walked thru an open area to get to the actual

gates. The terminal was quite full. The UAL flight to SFO was delayed because of weather while an Alaskan flight was delayed due to a mechanical issues. My flight came in from PHX and arrived late. I was upgraded and helped myself to several bags of snacks enroute. We left late but made up some of the time. This is the area just to the west of PHX.



We landed on the south side of the airport at 619PM and then had to come all the way around to the north side at gate B1. That took almost 20 minutes. Once out of the plane, I walked to the adjacent A concourse and stopped for dinner at Zinburger by A4. I had ate there before but don't recall it being so expensive. A burger [not even a cheese burger] fries & a shake came to \$28! I walked back out to the head of the concourse and asked for a lift to A30 at the far end of the next concourse. The guy driving the cart was really moving as I felt a nice breeze. When I checked my upcoming flights, I saw that AA wanted folks to volunteer for a bump on the LAS- PHL flight so I signed up for that at \$300.

My next flight was to Vegas. Yes I was flying backwards to the west, but I picked the routing because of the low cost in award miles. For once, this wasn't a full flight. There were more than few crew returning home or deadheading. I had an exit row seat but asked to be reseatd because the bottom cushion was broken. It felt like I was sitting on a toilet seat. I was moved up and had an empty row all to myself. The flight left and arrived a few minutes early. It was a short flight and there was no beverage service. It was dark by then and there wasn't much to see so I read several of the items I bought at the SLO RR Museum. We circled past LAS to the west and landed to the east passing over the casinos at the very bottom of the STRIP.

The light pointing straight up is coming from the Luxor Casino.



This was the scene once in the terminal. I arrived at D10 & my next flight was near bye at D14.



The terminal was quite crowded with several red eye flights leaving shortly. For some reason, the flight to MIA was delayed till 225AM. UGH! I sat down and had a nice talk with a man living in Camden NJ. His stepson was a retired AA employee and he was trying to fly stand by to PHL as a family member. It was fascinating for me to hear him explain and show me on an

app how the AA system for that worked. There was a pecking order starting with deadheading employees, active employees, retired employee and lastly family members. These folks didn't fly totally free; there was like a \$30 fee for the PHL flight. It was certainly ironic that this man was trying to get on the flight while I was trying to be bumped. I said maybe he'll get my seat.

The incoming flight was late but eventually they started to board my flight. I asked if they needed any volunteers and was told NO. I went back and told the man I had been talking too. I was #5 for an upgrade and was stuck in what turned out to be a very bad seat [10E]. Since I only booked this trip two day before it started, all of the good seats were gone. This was in MCE [main cabin extra] meaning there was more leg room and the seat to my right was one that faced the exit row behind me. That was only occupied by a flight attendant during taking off or landing. A luck would have it, the guy in 10D was as big as me and there was no give to the flight attendant's seat. So, I was stuffed in the middle for a 4.5 hour flight. We left 26 minutes late and arrived in PHL 25 minutes late at 748AM. I managed to sleep a bit. There was no service during the flight and all the lights were off. Oh - the man I was talking to made the flight.

The A321EOW [extended over water] landed at the end of the A concourse. This was quite appropriate as the plane's next trip was to Jamaica. I hit the bathroom and bought a mediocre Danish to eat before walking over to baggage claim. My bags arrived at 811AM and I just took my time walking to the SEPTA station as the next train wasn't till 840AM. That train went to Jenkintown, but once there at 940AM I had a problem. My car was parked on the other side of the station that was only reachable by going down a long flight of steps under the tracks and then the up same thing on the other side. Between my leg and two heavy suitcases, I couldn't do that. So, I asked an older man waiting for a train to watch my bags while I went down over and up. By the time, I returned with the car, a MOW train was sitting on the inbound tracks such that an



inbound train had to use the outbound side of the station. I was home by 10AM. I talked with Carol for a while and then took a shower and went to bed. I didn't get up till 745PM that evening.

There is nothing to say about the miles, as this wasn't that kind of trip.