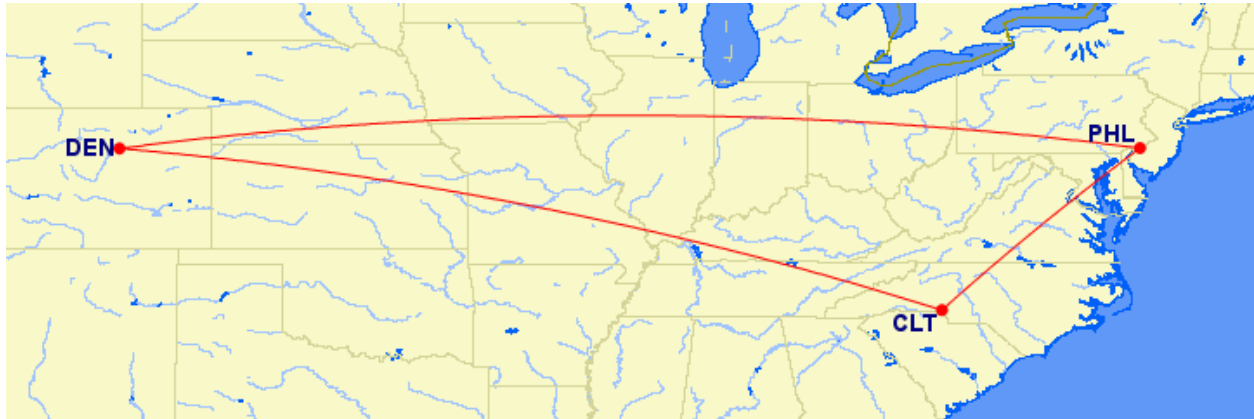


## ROCKY MTN TRAIN SHOW – DENVER CO, APRIL 5 -7, 2025



I am off again to this two-day show that is among the largest show west of the Mississippi. I went to it in 2020, just before the scandemic and again in 2023 and 2024. I actually made plane reservations to attend months ago, but cancelled them due to a conflict with a rescheduled meeting of my local NMRA division on 4/5.

However, when sitting around in SLO last week, I looked at the flights between PHL – DEN to see if I could go on Saturday evening and return late on Sunday. To my great surprise, I could do this for only 14K miles; my original reservation for Friday to Sunday would have used 41.5K miles. I immediately booked that but waited to book my hotel until after the rescheduled spinal injection on Friday 4/4. I immediately felt better after that so this trip was a go.

### **Saturday 4/5**

The day had an early start but not because of the trip. The Philly NMRA Division was meeting in Doylestown PA [a half hour away] and I needed to be there by 830AM. Carol came with me to help with sales at my swap table. After the meeting, we had a nice pizza for lunch in downtown Doylestown. We wished that Abington had a nice downtown like that. We were home just before 3PM and I quickly packed up for the trip. My suitcase was basically empty and it just had a change of clothes and some toiletries. However, it certainly would come home full. We left our house after 4PM to attend 430PM Mass at our church in Jenkintown. Afterwards, Carol drove me to the SEPTA station there so I could get the 556PM train to PHL. I was in the airport an hour later.

I had checked my flight several times that day and AA kept saying it was at gate B1 and later that afternoon saw I was upgraded. So, I planned my arrival at PHL to enter Terminal C to go thru TSA Pre✓ and then stop at the food court between C& B to eat the food that I brought with me for dinner. While doing that, I checked my flight and saw it was moved to A13. Now I had a long walk and unfortunately since the handle did not extend on the suitcase, I had to actually carry it.

My flight on a B737-800 was scheduled for 844PM but actually left the gate a few minutes early. However, the plane taxied to the southern end of the airport and took off to the NE that required



a long banking turn to head west. When we were up in the air, the flight attendant asked what I wanted for dinner. Dinner? It was 920PM.

[Nothing in my reservation said there was a meal service.]

There was chix parm or a vegan dish. The woman next to me went with the chix parm too.

When dinner was served, her portion was yuge and she said to me why don't we trade. I picked up her plate and it was HOT. Normally, I don't talk much with others on the plane, but I had a nice discussion with this woman. She was a Brit who married someone in the US military 35 yrs ago. She lives east of Denver and had come east to find a retirement home on the DELMARVA peninsula. Her husband works for a defense contractor that deals with satellites and she works for the



Immigration Courts within the Department of Justice (DOJ). I asked her about what I had heard about the illegal alien gangs taking over apartments in Aurora and she told me everything I heard was all true and the situation was worse. She had nothing but bad things to say about the woke mayor of Denver.

This is a view of the ground south of Chicago, just after crossing the IL/IN border. The GPS in my phone knew the exact latitude and longitude of the location

even though the plane was flying at 30,000 feet.

Eventually, we landed at the yuge DEN airport and I arrived at a C Gate at 1051 PM MDT – 3 minutes early. At DEN, there are three parallel and very long, linear concourses that are connected to the main terminal by an underground people mover. AA is in C with SW. United and SW are the major carriers there. AA only flies to its major hubs [PHL CLT LAX ORD DFW PHX MIA]. I had my bag with me so I was able to get thru the airport quickly and find my way to where the hotel shuttles pick up. I could have rode the RTD A train to downtown and stayed near Union Station but the cost was almost \$200 or up to 40K points. Instead, I booked a Choice Hotel out by the airport that only cost \$89 with taxes and a \$1 airport fee. The shuttle took a while to come and then made several stops at other hotels, such that it was after midnight by the time I was in my room. However, since it was now Sunday, I was able to check in for my flight CLT at **1159PM MDT** on Sunday. Doing that I was pleasantly surprised to see I was upgraded

again. I had previously been upgraded on the connecting CLT- PHL flight on Monday AM. So that's 3 of 3 and on a mileage tix to boot - score!. I made some iced tea to take to the show as the cost of food and beverages there is absurd. I set the alarm for 605AM and went to sleep.

### Sunday 4/6/2025

I was up, dressed and down to the breakfast by 630AM. I was able to make waffles and saw this on the wall while doing so. Another sign said only one yoghurt per person. I finished eating, checked out and waited for the 7AM shuttle that went straight to the airport. I have written about the DEN airport in prior trip reports. It is now 30 years old and is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest airport by size in the world. The largest one is in Saudia Arabia. When it opened in 1995, there was nothing else near it. Now there was scores of hotels, restaurants and other businesses near bye. The original design provided for a rail link to downtown Denver that is 25 miles away. However, the rail link was long in coming and did not begin revenue operation until 4/22/16.



The A line station is located under the onsite Westin Hotel. This image is from the Westin's



website. I had looked into staying there but it was \$360 for the night. Who would pay that?

I bought this all-day Senior pass from a TVM and headed to the platform where a train was ready to leave. The RTA's A Line uses heavy electric MUs that are very similar to SEPTA's Silverliner V. In fact, both cars were assembled in Philadelphia in a ROTEM plant that closed after the Denver order was completed. The Denver line is all upper level platforms so there are no traps; the arrangement of the seating is different and the Denver cars have luggage racks



that are sorely missing on SEPTA's airport trains. The train was scheduled for 712AM but for



some reason was running a bit late. I would not have made it if it had left on time. When I finally sat down, I was surprised to see David from Seattle whom I had seen and talked to in the hotel both last night and again this AM. He was visiting Denver and hoped to go see the **Buc-ee's** that opened in March 2024 in Johnstown CO, north of Denver. I told him that he had to see its bathrooms and he said someone else had told him same thing.



By 805AM, I was outside Denver's historic UNION STATION that was built in 1881 and "reimagined" in 2014 into a hotel, restaurant & retail complex. I didn't go inside but when Carol and I were in Denver last summer, the lobby area was being remodeled yet again. The A train arrives on the track closest to the station. There were some AMTRAK SUPERLINER coaches sitting on another track that will be added to the eastbound *California Zephyr* [#6] but the

westbound [#5], scheduled for a 756AM arrival in Denver, was running 33 minutes late that day.

I was surprised by what I saw on two other tracks. The *Rocky Mountaineer* train had just



completed boarding for its two-day run to Moab Utah. When Carol and I rode this train last summer, we boarded from a gravel lot a bit east of downtown. I learned later at its booth at the show that it had just begun boarding from Union Station. What I saw on the adjacent track was

even more amazing. It was the *Hawkeye*, the business car of the IAIS RR. I actually rode this car last May when I was in Iowa for the NRHS' Spring BOD meeting. I asked if Henry Psner III was on board; he is the head of the company that owns IAIS. I was told he was at the shortline conference. A quick google search found



American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association

that this org was holding its annual convention in Denver from

April 6-8 in the Convention Center. I needed to hurry so I could make the 826AM departure of a N Line train. The first 13 miles of this line to 124th Avenue

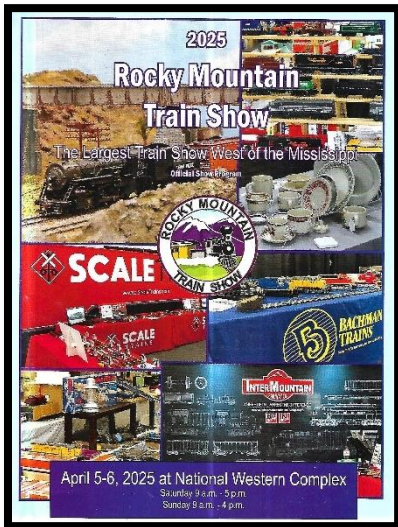
in Thornton opened in 2020. If completed to the plan, the line will eventually be 18.5 miles long. The N Line features Colorado's longest bridge, the Skyway Bridge, that is 1.8 miles long.



The bridge has a unique curvilinear structure with 64 prestressed concrete girder spans because the alignment of the line had to weave over several pretty well-developed industrial areas, just north of Denver. I rode the entire line on a prior trip to Denver. Today, I only rode a short distance [just 8 minutes] to the 48th & Brighton / National Western Center station. However, in



doing so the line passed BNSF's locomotive facility in Denver where there was a track inspection car. On the train, I met a man from the Galloping Goose Historical Society and walked and talked with him to the venue that also hosts **The National Western Stock Show**, the USA's premier livestock, rodeo & horse show, every January for 16 days. Once inside the show, it was different from LYR when I was here on Saturday and there was a crowd waiting. Today,



there were only a handful of folks waiting. I paid the \$15 admission with a card and was able to immediately walk in. My first stop was at the FREE TABLE where last year I could have filled my suitcase with books, mags, timetables and even HO kits. Today, there were fewer items but I still helped myself to several publications that I can read & resale plus some other items. Next, I looked at the 24 page, full-color program to see if there were any major changes at the show. The show was spread out over a number of interconnecting halls. Basically, it was divided into three parts. The front part was mostly manufacturers and RR Museums. The middle part was mostly dealers and the back part had the modular layouts in Z N T HO S O G scales. However, a few of the 30 modular layout where in the middle part. With this being CO, several of the layouts featured narrow gauge trackage and scenes. In the extermere rear, there was a very long, HO Free-mo layout that seemed to stretch almost to Wyoming!

I headed to the NMRA booth where I was able to store my suitcase again this year. I looked at the HO manufacturer booths [Intermountain, Walthers, Broadway LTD, Rapido, Atlas] to see their new products. Generally, there are very few new things for the RRs in Illinois in late 1960s - 1970s that are my modeling interest. I am much more interested in seeing older out-of-production kits and RRiana, and today I saw plenty of both.



I saw this 20' container at one of the first dealer booths I stopped at. I was at that convention whose name was carefully chosen such that the first letter of each word spelled an offensive word for a certain parts of the female anatomy. The guys running that convention were definitely pervets. Here are some of what I saw at the show.

This was a novel concept from the RR in Austria [OBB]. It proposes to haul tractor-trailer trucks



and their drivers across CO by rail vs. driving on I-70 thru the Rocky Mountains.



By noon, my leg/knee needed a break so I sat down in the Road House Restaurant for lunch. I had a banana, a choc chip muffin plus two bottles of not so iced tea from the hotel and a loaf of raisin bread that I brought from home. There were signs saying no outside food as you entered the venue but no one really enforces this. LYR, a burger and soda here was almost \$25. I also wrote down my purchases and looked at some of the mags I got. Seated near me was a young man wearing a shirt saying ERIE Coal. Thinking he might be from PA, I started to talk with him. Turns out there is a Erie CO and he was there representing CO Railbikes Adventures. This a *4.2 Mile railbike adventure near Boulder* on Colorado's second oldest railroad tracks. Later at his booth, I told him the first time that I had seen railbikes was in 2012 when I lived in the ROK.

I was back on the show floor by 1245PM and spent the next two hours mostly looking at the HO



modular layouts. I got some good ideas for scenes on my layout like this one unloading trucks at a grain elevator. Given the terrible situation with illegal aliens in CO, this scene with ICE busses



was most appropriate. I wonder how many of my readers remember **Soylent Green**, a 1973 American *dystopian thriller* film, that was the inspiration for this scene.



This layout will surely make your head spin.



At the very back of the facility, you could go outside and railfan. The closest track is for RTD's N Line and the others are for BNSF. The brick building in the picture below was once the headquarters of the Denver Union Stockyard that closed in 1968. The National Western Stock Show began in 1906 in its current location because it was then adjacent to the stockyard.



I sat down about 245PM for another break but also to allow my phone to charge. About 3PM, I realized I had missed a row of tables along a wall as I had walked out thru the hall behind it. Two of the tables were selling old RR timetables at give-away prices. I bought six for \$10 at one table and did even better at the next table. That guy was selling old employee timetables for not so common RRs, dating back to the 1940s, for just \$2 each. I should have bought them all but only bought six plus some public TTs and two books, all for \$20. While waiting at the airport for my flight, I listed the employee timetables and ones for the Utah Railway and the Clinchfield sold within two days for \$30. The others have several watchers.

I spent my last hour at the show going thru the dealers on the east side of the middle area. Many of them were starting to pack up. Still I was able to buy some parts, used HO rolling stock and two older kits at very reasonable prices. This was a very unique scene at the very end of the show. Vendors were required to fill out a form for the sales tax collected at the show and pay it



on the spot. Only by showing the stamped receipt were vendors allowed to drive their vehicles into the facility after 430PM to load up. I have never seen this before at any other show though have seen revenue officials check for sales tax permits at a few shows. FYI – the total sales tax rate there is 8.81% including 1.1% for RTD, 2.9% for the State of CO and 4.81% for the City of Denver. Backwhen I lived in CT, two officials from the Dept of Revenue

Service came to a show and flashed their badges and demanded entry. The promoter refused to let them in. The revenue officials returned with the CT State Police and shut down the show.

I returned to the NMRA booth and while I packed up the suitcase, I talked with the official there about our convention in NOVI Michigan this July. It was 415PM when I left the show and by then some of the manufacturers' booths had already been disassembled. I headed to a bus stop, again carrying the suitcase because of the broken handle. It was a LOT heavier now with all of my purchases and the freebies, so I had to stop several times. I could see the snow-covered, front range mountains in the distance across the parking lot.



The bus stop was about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way to the N Line Station. I could have rode that line back to Union Station. However, the #48 bus would take me close to the Bubba Shrimp Restaurant where I have dinner each year. I had a leisurely dinner, rested my leg and was able to charge my phone up to 50%. From the restaurant, I walked a block to the Z stop on Denver's free Mall Shuttle. This line used to run down the middle of a long pedestrian and bus only Mall but that has been under construction for the several years and the busses have been detoured to adjacent streets. Finally construction has been completed on the western end of the Mall. I exited the bus

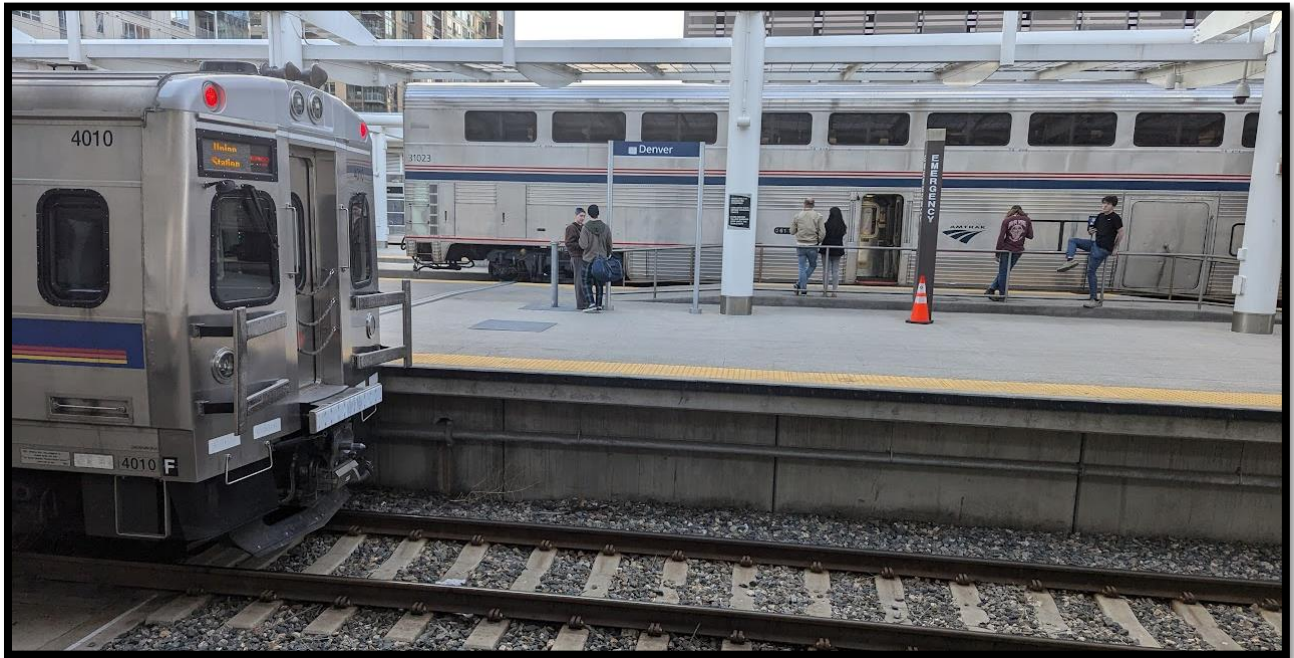


block from Union Station where I saw these execs from various shortline RRs were waiting to be entertained in the IAIS' business car.



Amazingly, AMTRAK's eastbound *California Zephyr* with its SUPERLINER consist had actually arrived in DEN at 627PM or on time. It was sitting on an adjacent track awaiting its scheduled 659PM departure. The train eventually arrived at Chicago's Union Station on Monday

afternoon at 137PM, or 42 minutes **ahead** of schedule.



I waited for the 7PM A Line train on an adjacent platform. Just east of the downtown, the A Line



runs parallel to the UP. On previous trips, I have gotten off at the first stop just to railfan. However, this day I stayed on the train and had this view of the mountains to the west at 723 PM MDT. I was in the airport at 737PM. Once in the terminal, I found a luggage chart that someone



had left by the entrance to the RTD. I happily put the suitcase and my backpack on it and wheeled it to the AA counter. I checked the suitcase and got my boarding passes for the flight to

CLT and then the connecting flight to PHL. To my surprise, the TSA Pre✓ was open till 845PM; last year it closed at like 730PM. Still there was a bit of a line given the # of folks that use DEN. Thru with no issues, I went down and rode the people mover over to C. My flight was scheduled for over three hours later so I parked myself at a long flat surface by an empty gate. As mentioned previously, I used the time to take pictures and listed the RRiana items and a group of narrow gauge magazines that were in my backpack. To kill more time, I speed read seven magazines.

Eventually, I moved closer to my actual gate and then things went downhill from there. I received a bunch of text messages from AA saying my flight was delayed, then on time and then delayed again. Seemingly part of the confusion, was that my flight was switched to a plane that had already arrived rather than an incoming flight from DFW. Well the schedule boarding time came and went. There was an announcement that we were awaiting the crew. Some flight attendants finally boarded so I got up and stood ready to do the same. Then a man wearing an orange vest saying MANAGER came up to the gate with a two level cart full of ice and sodas. He said something to the gate agent who ran to the next gate and came back with a normal beverage cart used in-air from another plane. Finally about 1220AM SUNDAY, we were allowed to board. The plane left the gate at 1246AM and seemingly taxied to downtown Denver before taking off to the north. Once there was inflight service, I asked for a Tito 'n tonic. It seems that AA no longer gives you two miniature bottles as the drink is served already made. I had lemon slices for it that I saved from dinner. I had my drink and small package of choc chip cookies and promptly feel asleep. However, I awoke less than three hours later as the A321 landed in CLT. We were at a B gate at 552 AM or 39 minutes late.

I did not see any folks sleeping on the ground or on the bench seats at CLT, meaning there were no storms or flight issues the night before. I have seen this several times in CLT, particularly after late evening summer thunderstorms. When I checked the connecting flight, the AA app said it was in A. I headed to the center food court and was surprised to see the construction there that wasn't there when I was in CLT back in February. Perhaps more significant is that the Chick-fil-a, the most popular eating place in CLT was closed for remodeling. I got an iced tea from Carolina BBQ and ate the rest of the loaf of raisin bread I had brought with me from PA. About 7AM, I walked to A6 only to find my flight had been moved to D1. Luckily, I did NOT have the suitcase with me.



My flight to PHL on a smaller A320 was scheduled to board at 813AM. Again, I was upgraded. The board did NOT go well. The man seated next to me called it a real shit show. The gate agent did not tell folks boarding in the higher level groups to gate check their bags. The result

was everyone boarded with their carry-on bags and then about 20 folks had to walk back off the plane to check their bags in the jetway. As a result, we left over 20 minutes late but seemingly made up some time, arriving only 12 minutes late at 956AM. I had a Dr. Pepper enroute and took several packs from the snack basket for Carol. The plane arrived at Gate A14 that is one of four gates located between A East and A West that are usually used for very large planes -777s, A350s or 747s when they flew to PHL. After a potty stop, I headed to baggage claim where my bag arrived at 1011AM. I was lucky again and was able to grab an unattended baggage cart to wheel my luggage up, over and down to the SEPTA station.



I was expecting to take the 1041AM train to Jenkintown. However, a few minutes after I was in the station, a train saying Temple Univ. pulled in. I got on and figured I would just change in Jefferson in Center City. However, once in Suburban, everyone was forced to detrain and then walk down the adjacent platform to board another train. That train arrived in Jefferson over 50 minutes late and I got off there. Turns out the catenary was partially down near Wayne Junction so the entire system was experiencing significant delays.

Eventually, I boarded a train to Warrington [pronounced WORRINGTON] about 1115AM. It sat for a while near Wayne Junction as one track was out of service. I had called Carol and kept her informed on my [lack of] progress. I finally got to Jenkintown just after noon. Since I had been up since about 6AM, I was hungry. So, on our way home, I stopped for lunch and bought a \$6 meatball hoagie from WAWA's new value menu.

### **Miles, points, etc.**

Since this trip was booked with award miles, I earned just 11 loyalty points for the \$11 fee in AA current year's reward program that started on 3/1. Ditto for my trip the week before to SLO. I did earn 760 Choice Reward points [10x the actual room rate]. The sales from my bargain purchases and the freebies will more than likely cover the cost of my hotel room and dinner. So, essentially this will be a free trip. However like the trip last week, the overnight red eye flight was a real killer. I ended up sleeping much of Monday and till noon on Tuesday. I think it is best that I avoid flights like that in the future.