



RAIL FREIGHT OVER Shellpot Bridge Swings into Action

Delaware's Department of Transportation (DelDOT), in partnership with Norfolk Southern Corp. (NS), has completed a \$13.9 million restoration project to put an historic railroad bridge back in service. The repaired 116-year-old Shellpot Bridge, which spans the Christina River, will improve rail freight transit times through Delaware.

“Reopening the Shellpot Bridge positions rail service in Delaware as a first class transportation option, especially for customers at the Port of Wilmington and at surrounding industrial parks,” said Nathan Hayward III, DelDOT Secretary and Chairman of the Board of the Diamond State Port Corporation. This bridge was taken out of service about 10 years ago due to concerns about its structural integrity.

The completion of the bridge was a key selection criteria used by Holmen Paper Inc, a new Port customer, in awarding a five-year contract to the Port of Wilmington as its Mid-Atlantic distribution hub. Holmen is already using the Shellpot Bridge to receive empty railcars into which it loads the newsprint and catalog paper stock it imports from Sweden through the Port of Wilmington. NS estimates that Holmen will generate more than 750 new carloads of traffic originating at the Port. Distribution of its products via rail to its

customers in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic and Midwest regions will result in shorter transit times, lowering distribution costs and providing greater flexibility due to better rail car availability and switching service at the Port.

The opening of the Shellpot Bridge reestablishes a link between the Port, NS's Edgemoor yard, and its extensive rail system. As a result, companies adjacent to the Port that transport newsprint and catalog paper stock, kraft linerboard, lumber, steel and various other bulk commodities will benefit too. It also permitted NS to introduce a new train service moving directly between its classification yard in Harrisburg, Pa and Edgemoor, De.

Dole and Chiquita, two of the Port's largest tenants, receive daily rail shipments of very large quantities of kraft linerboard (KLB) which is used to package their tropical fruit imports. This product

arrives by rail directly to on-site and off-dock storage facilities. With the newly established connection to the NS Edgemoor switching yard, Dole and Chiquita now have “just in time” access to their KLB boxcars, thereby improving the distribution chain.

Before the bridge reopening, NS used trackage belonging to Amtrak's Northeast Corridor through Wilmington during limited periods of time, when passenger trains were not using the main rail line. Consequently, delivery of freight cargo from Wilmington was not as efficient as often needed.

Improved rail service will also have a positive impact on business for Port Contractors, Inc., another neighbor and a partner-in-trade with the Port. Port Contractors, a bulk materials and lumber distributor, has recently built over 2,000 lineal feet of rail siding on its property close to the Port to


receive domestic and Canadian lumber shipments. It now can offer first class rail service as a viable and competitive distribution option.

“We expect all Port customers to benefit from this improved rail service,” said Hayward. “Downstate deliveries and pick-ups of rail cargo can also increase. Therefore, NS is looking at the entire Delmarva Peninsula to develop new, significant rail traffic,” he noted.

“As rail service increases through Delaware, truck traffic is expected to mitigate on I-95 and I-495. This is another a positive and indirect effect of the bridge reopening,” Hayward added.

NS and DelDOT have a unique financial arrangement for the multi-million dollar rehabilitation project. Over the next 20 years, DelDOT will recover its capital investment by receiving an annual minimum payment from NS and through use of a high-tech toll collection system that employs bar-code technology. An electronic scanner will count the railcars that cross the bridge by reading a bar coded placard attached to each piece of rolling stock. Although used extensively by railroads to track railcar movements across North America, DelDOT will be the first agency to collect a toll using this methodology.

To encourage rail freight traffic, DelDOT has adopted a sliding scale which progressively reduces the per car rate with increased volume.

“This innovative formula for funding a major capital project has enabled us to complete this reconstruction endeavor. This was truly an advantageous solution for both DelDOT and Norfolk Southern,” Hayward said. “This model may find additional value in handling similar public/private infrastructure improvement projects in the future,” he added. 



Gov. Ruth Ann Minner “operates” the first locomotive to cross the restored Shellpot Bridge.