Berth 200 celebrates one year

Pacific Harbor Line celebrated Berth 200’s one-year anniversary. Harbor Rail Services joined in the April 7 celebration and cookout.

The 60-acre property previously served as an oil field and later a parking lot. It took 18 months and $125 million to construct PHL’s new home. After the land was elevated and the utility lines were moved and protected, the tracks were placed and an administrative building and roundhouse were built.

Berth 200 is an upgrade from PHL’s previous facility, occupied by the short line from 1998 to 2014. It situates PHL closer to the Alameda Corridor, Terminal Island and many customers. The former location is now home to TraPac, a new PHL customer.

PHL worked five years with the Port of LA to improve the design and manage construction issues. Important factors included office sizes and layout, as well as lighting and security around the property. Rail quality increased with the installation of 136-pound rail, which reduces the likelihood of incidents.

“This yard’s infrastructure is much easier for maintenance of way (MOW) to maintain,” said Robert Giannoble, chief engineer. “That helps us ensure crews can operate efficiently in a safe environment.”

Track geometry is ideal with two leads running in and out of the yard, which allows crews to run multiple jobs simultaneously. Efficiency also is enhanced by the ability to move locomotives to and from the roundhouse without affecting switching in the yard. With electrically operated turnouts on key routes, operations run smoothly.

Berth 200 includes a new locomotive facility that has many enhanced features including updated lighting, better tools and improved inspection pits, a $10 million structure. Guardrails and fall protection ensure a safe environment, and doors are locked with key access.

With summer approaching, air conditioning is another much appreciated upgrade.

“It’s a nice setup,” said Julien Perri, shop manager. “Locomotive fluids are easily accessible, and we’re able to simultaneously sand units on both ends.”

“...infrastructure is much easier for MOW to maintain.”
– Robert Giannoble, chief engineer
Keeping track

The new Pacific Harbor Line facility has proven more than satisfactory. The project included the construction of a state-of-the-art locomotive facility, which now contains a traveling overhead crane. The administrative building is properly lit and secured, and 136-pound rail is used in the yard. We are able to operate efficiently with leads on both east and west ends of the yard.

During an April 7 one-year anniversary celebration, employees were recognized for perfect attendance in 2014. Thank you for your reliability and dedication to PHL. Thanks to all PHL employees for your contribution to outstanding safety records. Maintenance of way marked a new milestone, surpassing nine years without an FRA reportable injury. We owe this accomplishment to our employees, who have shown a strong commitment to working safely. Your outstanding display of teamwork is key to ensuring we all return home to our families daily. I am confident we will continue our safety success.

While we have much to celebrate, we also have cause to mourn. PHL continues to grieve the loss of a great friend and co-worker, Larry Souter, road foreman of engines, who battled cancer several years before passing away Feb. 16. We could always count on Larry in times of need. He was admired by everyone he met for his railroad expertise and kind heart. His passion for safety and devotion to training made a strong impact on PHL. We miss his guidance and captivating stories. A plaque honoring him was placed in the garden behind the administrative building.

As we move forward, let’s commit to making 2015 another year of safe productivity and strong customer service.

– Otis Cliatt, PHL president

Moore prepares students

Stephen Moore, road foreman of engines, provides thorough training to ensure assistant locomotive engineers are fully prepared for their duties.

He includes eight weeks of classroom and field training before students enter the next phase of training — operating locomotives for 80 hours under the supervision of experienced locomotive engineers.

Moore will communicate with locomotive engineers to help determine students’ progress and ensure they are learning to work safely. Their final test is a check ride with him.

“Everyone is doing well,” he said about his current class of three. “This group seems to be mechanically inclined, and all three are adapting well to their new responsibilities.”

During training, Moore teaches safety rules and basic train handling. His goal is to familiarize students in the field so they are prepared and comfortable applying their knowledge hands-on.

He emphasizes safety during every task. “It’s important they take time to understand the move,” Moore said. “Always follow safety rules and don’t get in a hurry. There is no room for compromise.”

Cargill commends service

Attending to customers’ needs is a key principle for Pacific Harbor Line. Keeping that in mind has allowed Pacific Harbor Line to provide excellent service for Cargill Corn Milling Inc.

Located 10 miles north of Berth 200 in Lynwood, California, the privately owned company specializes in supplying a variety of corn-based sweeteners for food and beverage producers in the Los Angeles area.

PHL crews switch at Cargill Corn Milling Inc. six days a week, handling approximately 2,000 cars annually.

In July 2014, PHL assumed switching responsibility for the Reyes industrial lead on behalf of Union Pacific and is dedicated to meeting the needs of the new customer.

“Working with PHL has been wonderful,” said Chad Nelson, Cargill terminal manager. “They make switching a priority. I can’t remember a day they weren’t able to perform a switch. That’s what we need — cars coming in according to schedule.”

Nelson commended PHL’s timely, reliable service.

“Their consistency helps us maintain a comfortable routine,” he said.

Strong communication also keeps operations running smoothly. If issues arise, trainmasters make it a priority to respond quickly. They check in regularly to ensure everyone is on the same page and ask questions if something appears unusual.

“I’m happy to be working with PHL and look forward to continuing to do so in the future,” Nelson said.

PHL serves Cargill Corn Milling Inc.
An Anacostia Company

#HappySackChallenge a success

Congratulations

Memorializing Souter

A memorial plaque for Larry Souter recently was mounted on a post behind the administration building. The former road foreman of engines passed away after battling cancer for several years.

“We wanted to do something to memorialize Larry and the work he did,” said Stephen Moore, road foreman of engines. “He left a big mark on Pacific Harbor Line.”

Souter was instrumental in employee training, passionate about rules compliance and safety adherence. Craft and management alike counted on his leadership in times of distress. His congenial personality and gift of storytelling could brighten anyone’s day.

PROMOTIONS

March and April promotions, from assistant locomotive engineer to locomotive engineer:

- Nicholas Gama — March 11
- Santiago Moya — March 12
- Oscar Ortega — March 11
- Art Ramirez — April 30
- Alberto Raya — March 11

Memorializing Souter

Kernel Lawrence, locomotive engineer, found a fun way to make a difference in the community. Inspired by the 2014 Ice Bucket Challenge, he organized the nationwide challenge #HappySackChallenge. Using social media, he challenges groups across the nation to help the homeless by distributing sack lunches in their local communities.

In April, Lawrence and a group of family and friends shopped for enough food to create 50 sack lunches, and hit the streets of Los Angeles to pass them out to those in need. In May, they raised enough money to donate 100 sack lunches.

“The idea is for groups to share their experiences via social media, and then challenge someone else,” Lawrence said. “Our goal is to continue the challenge every month and keep growing.”

A group in Atlanta, Georgia, took on the #HappySackChallenge in late April. They passed out 200 sacks and completed a second challenge in Miami in May.

Each month Lawrence includes a unique bonus item in addition to the sandwich, bag of chips, fruit and bottled water. In May it was a deck of cards. Other ideas include a new pair of socks, toothbrush and dental floss.

Their generosity brought many smiles and heartfelt thanks.

“We’ve had great feedback,” Lawrence said. “More and more people want to get involved with donating or preparation and distribution. Ideally, they will start their own challenge.”

For more information visit #HappySackChallenge Facebook and Instagram pages or contact Lawrence at lkernel@hotmail.com.
New crane enhances functionality

Pacific Harbor Line completed a major capital acquisition in March with a new traveling overhead crane installed in the Berth 200 locomotive shop.

The $72,000 machine makes it possible to lift heavy locomotive components without enlisting the services of outside crane support.

“It was inconvenient and costly to schedule a time for contractors to bring and operate cranes,” said James O’Kelley, chief mechanical officer of F&M Locomotive, PHL’s locomotive maintenance contractor. “It slowed down operations. The new crane increases this shop’s functionality.”

The shop was built with structural support for a crane, but the newly arrived equipment is a post-occupancy acquisition.

Lifts can be made safely and easily. F&M mechanics will participate in training and become certified to operate the crane.

Pacific Harbor Line attended the California Short Line Railroad Association’s annual meeting April 14 in Sacramento, California.

The event is an opportunity to update CSLRA member railroads on legislation and regulations pending at state level that may affect railroads and to visit with individual members of the state legislature and their staffs at the capitol building.

Small teams of CSLRA representatives and members of the legislature, or their legislative assistants, discussed items of interest surrounding pieces of legislation. This year’s topics included the role of short lines in California and their importance to the economy, the governor’s budget trailer bill and a state senate bill regarding railroad crew sizes.

PHL was represented at this year’s event by Don Norton, director of marketing and administration.

“My team’s visit lineup was an ambitious schedule with seven office visits completed in just 3 hours, 15 minutes, but it turned out to be efficient and productive,” he said.

The CSLRA supports the government and public relations efforts of 24 short line railroads operating in California and the vendors who support their operations.

Relief in the ports

Pacific Harbor Line stands ready to assist when called upon by the San Pedro Bay Port Complex. The area continues to recover from its buildup of container ships that accumulated during the port congestion.

PHL employees are among the safest in the short line industry. A fleet of clean-diesel locomotives are ready to transport containers from rail-served terminals throughout the port complex.

“Wherever we are needed, we’re there,” said Marlon Taylor, director of operations.

Although port circumstances may change work orders, PHL employees keep busy building trains for Class 1 partners.