



For Immediate Release

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Historic Pullman Foundation and Norfolk Southern Lay Foundation to Bring Rare Railcars to Pullman National Historical Park and State Historic Site

Planned exhibit would allow the public to experience historic railcars onsite for the first time

CHICAGO (September 1, 2023) – Today, Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and Historic Pullman Foundation (HPF) announced a commitment by Norfolk Southern to help create an interactive rail exhibit at the Pullman State Historic Site and Pullman National Historical Park where visitors will experience close up the historic railcars on display, including those once manufactured on the historic site.

The commitment, including a \$250,000 contribution from Norfolk Southern, coincides with the second anniversary of the Park’s grand opening over Labor Day and recognizes the significant historical contributions of Pullman’s impact on the American labor movement, civil rights movement, and railroad transportation.

“Displaying these railcars will truly bring to life the story of rail innovation celebrated at the national park and state historic site,” said **Joseph C. Szabo, HPF president emeritus and former administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration**. At the request of the National Park Service (NPS) and with the support of IDNR, Szabo is facilitating an extensive collaboration involving Norfolk Southern and a range of experts to explore exhibiting railcars at the site.

“The Illinois Department of Natural Resources is pleased to be part of this exciting announcement,” said **Natalie Phelps Finnie, director of the department**. “The cultural and historical significance of the Pullman site is unparalleled. This kind of collaboration among government, nonprofits, and private enterprise will help ensure the unique story of the Pullman site is brought to life and shared with future generations in a compelling, meaningful way.”

“Norfolk Southern’s pledge to help bring this exhibit to life underscores our long-term commitment to Chicago and will ensure Pullman’s story continues to evolve and inspire,” said **Herbert Smith, Regional Vice President Government Relations for Norfolk Southern**. “Rolling historic railcars from different eras directly onto the property will transform Park visitors’ experience. We couldn’t be more excited for the public to see first-hand our nation’s evolution in rail transportation from the beginning.”



Still in the planning phase, the exhibit is expected to restore about 1,000 feet of rail track and an accompanying rail support yard on the State Historic Site. It would also include a display structure over the support yard in front of the Rear Erecting Shop adjacent to 111th Street to protect the exhibit cars. "If this proposed project is approved, visitors would be able to get a first-hand view of what passenger train travel was like during its heyday," Szabo said.

"The iconic Pullman National Historical Park is a critical component of Chicago's history. After having worked to ensure that the Pullman area has the necessary resources and investment to teach Illinoisans and visitors nationwide about Pullman's story, I'm pleased to see Norfolk Southern commit to displaying historic railcars at the site," said **U.S. Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL)**. "The rail cars will add to visitors' experience and help tell the story of America's labor and civil rights movements."

"Making sure the stories of Pullman – the transformation of our country's rail travel and the history of the labor movement – are told was at the core of our efforts to preserve Pullman as a National Historic Park," **U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)** said. "With this commitment and future exhibit, I'm proud to see Pullman and Chicago's rich history will be on display for Americans from all over our nation for generations to come. Ensuring our national parks better reflect our nation's people and history is long overdue."

"Bringing historically significant railcars to Pullman's storied landscape is a major step in safeguarding the rich history of the South Side. These railcars symbolize the innovations that shaped our country's transportation infrastructure, spotlight the expert craftsmanship of Pullman workers, and are focal points of American labor history and struggle for civil rights," said **U.S. Representative Robin Kelly (D-02)**. "I am thrilled that we are able to enhance the accessibility of these invaluable lessons and enable a broader audience to engage, learn, and be inspired by Pullman's legacy."

"In connecting the rail car exhibit to an active rail network, the spur would help park visitors to visualize Pullman's historic role involving civil rights and fair labor while also demonstrating how the community is continuing to evolve as a center of investment for the Far South Side, the city and the region," said **Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson**.

Planning for the project began earlier this year with an engineering and operational feasibility study. The proposed project would include the restoration of a spur track off Norfolk Southern's Chicago Pullman Branch Line to directly serve the former Pullman railcar manufacturing plant by rail.

There is great visitor demand for a railcar experience at Pullman, and this is reflected as a Desired Condition and Management Action in the Joint General Management Plan developed by NPS and IDNR. "There is still much work to be done, but the generous support of Norfolk Southern is a vital first step towards the long-term vision for Pullman," Szabo said.



Industrialist George M. Pullman built a model town to house workers at his luxury rail car factories in the late 19th Century. Although his goal was “to cure the social ills of the day, the tight control he exercised over his workers helped spark one of the nation's most widespread and consequential labor strikes and the journey of the Pullman porters toward the civil rights movement of the 20th Century,” according to a [report from Congress](#), which designated the site a National Park in December 2022. President Barack Obama first designated Pullman a National Monument in 2015.

“The Pullman factory is one of the most fascinating sites in the history of industry in Chicago and in the nation,” said **Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle**. “This exhibit showcases the region’s central role in railroading as well as the civil rights and labor movement. Bringing these historic rail cars to Pullman National Historic Park will teach visitors about the past, which is vital to understanding the future.”

“Pullman is a unique community with deep history that often gets overlooked. Norfolk Southern’s commitment to uplift its charm and historic past speaks volumes to Pullman’s legacy,” said **State Senator Elgie R. Sims, Jr. (D-17)**. “I am proud of the continued steps the Historic Pullman Foundation and Illinois Department of Natural Resources have taken to attract tourism to an area that played a pivotal role in labor history with a rich legacy of lifting up working families.”

"The Pullman National Historical Park and State Historic Site are an integral part of the community, and it is an honor to welcome this new development," said **State Representative Nicholas Smith (D-34)**. "With the support of Norfolk Southern and Pullman stakeholders, the expansion of the railcar exhibit will create a unique experience for visitors and continue to highlight the innovative history of Pullman."

“The pride of the Pullman neighborhood and South Side of Chicago is on full display with this remarkable railroad partnership. The revitalization and restoration of the community to bring it back to its former heyday as a cultural, social, and economic powerhouse has been many years in the making, but we have written a successful playbook for other neighborhoods throughout the country to replicate. On this Labor Day, I can emphatically state that the Pullman Progress Train has officially left the station,” **Ninth Ward Chicago Alderman Anthony Beale** said.

Illinois labor leaders applauded the Labor Day weekend announcement.

“Preserving the history of the labor movement is important for teaching our children and future generations about how far we have come, and how far we have left to go,” said **Chicago Federation of Labor President Bob Reiter**. “The Pullman strike in 1894 was crushed bitterly, but directly led to the creation of the Federal Labor Day holiday. Pullman Porters formed the first Black union, right here in Chicago in 1925, but had to fight for another 12 years to get a fair contract. No matter how you look at it, Pullman has a lot of labor history, good, bad, and ugly; that story needs to be told.”

"We are thrilled to celebrate the history of Illinois’ historic rail industry and its workers" stated **Illinois AFL-CIO President Tim Drea**. "At a time when investment in our nation's rail infrastructure and supporting its



operators is at a critical turning point, we look forward to helping the public access the important and historical contributions of the Pullman manufacturing site and all that rail workers do to keep our state moving."

"SMART-Transportation Division has long supported the Historic Pullman Foundation and its efforts to highlight the vital role workers played there," stated **SMART-TD Illinois Legislative Director Bob Guy**. "Rail labor history is incomplete without full recognition of the Pullman workforce and what they meant to our country's rail transportation. Investments like this will further enhance the Pullman experience, allowing current and future generations to truly appreciate the Pullman workers and their historical contributions to the American labor movement."

The estimated cost for the entire exhibit is still under study as part of the planning phase.

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Historic Pullman Foundation is the official philanthropic partner of Pullman National Historical Park. Since 1973, we have created opportunities for all people to experience and understand the continuing American story that is Pullman. Visit us at www.pullmanil.org.

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