

# **FORT WAYNE RAILROAD**

**HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.**

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## **FIRST PASSENGER TRAIN EXCURSION IN 20 YEARS TO DEPART FORT WAYNE**

**FORT WAYNE, INDIANA** - For the first time in over twenty years, a passenger excursion train will depart Fort Wayne.

On October 26th and 27th, restored steam locomotive no. 765 will operate a round-trip excursion between Fort Wayne and West Lafayette, Indiana, retracing the route of the famous Wabash Cannonball passenger train. Tickets will go on sale at 6:00PM EST on September 1st, with boarding and parking locations yet to be determined.

Visitors to the Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society's Open House this weekend at 15808 Edgerton Road, New Haven can tour the locomotive up close.

Sponsored by the railroad historical society in cooperation with Norfolk Southern Corp, the excursion will feature economy and coach class seating aboard vintage passenger cars. Passengers will enjoy a day long trip behind steam locomotive no. 765, lunch and layover in downtown Lafayette along the Wabash River, onboard entertainment, and more.

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“This is an exciting opportunity to re-introduce Fort Wayne to the cultural asset it preserved, and to show the city what an incredible attraction the 765 has become since then,” said Kelly Lynch, Communications Director for the railroad historical society. “Few cities in the country can claim a famous train as its own.”

“We are the first all volunteer, non-profit organization to restore and operate a locomotive like the 765 for the benefit of the public. That dream was born over 41 years ago in Fort Wayne and it continues to this day,” explains Wayne York, one of the original founders and now excursion manager for the locomotive.

Built in 1944 for the Nickel Plate Railroad and preserved by the City of Fort Wayne as a monument to a major railroad elevation effort in the 1950s, the 765 has become an international attraction operating in excursion service and in public exhibition since originally being restored in 1979.

Recently, the 765 operated sold-out excursions in Ohio and Pennsylvania. Tickets for a majority of the 765's trips sold out in 48 hours, with passengers traveling from as far as Argentina, Canada, and Denmark.

The locomotive's last public trip out of Fort Wayne occurred in 1993. Designated an Indiana Historic Landmark in 1996, the engine later underwent an exhaustive rebuilding effort that was completed in 2005. Since then, the 765 has become a roving tourist attraction and ambassador for Fort Wayne, earning crowds of 3,000 people or more a day and has even inspired trackside communities to cancel school when it passes through.

“In Payne, Ohio, when word spread early one morning that a steam locomotive was coming through, nearby schools marched their classrooms down to the railroad tracks to meet the train. When the 765 arrived, it was greeted by hundreds of waving children. These are the types of inspiring sights that our volunteers work for every year,” explains Lynch.

Last year, the 765 operated over 3,700 miles for Norfolk Southern and carried over 7,000 of its employees. In recognition of its 40th Anniversary, the railroad historical society commissioned a film documentary due this winter, published an illustrated history on the 765, and released a dedicated smartphone app allowing the public to track the location and route of the 765 with a special GPS transmitter. The GPS app alone has been downloaded over 20,000 times.

## **LEGACY FORT WAYNE**

Headwaters Junction, a conceptual plan to include the vintage locomotive and the railroad historical society's operations in downtown riverfront development, has been included in the Legacy Fort Wayne riverfront study.

“We envision using the proven success and magnetism of the train to help make downtown a destination by combining the locomotive and our tourist operations with a variety of mixed uses along the river,” Lynch said.

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In late 2012, Headwaters Junction was endorsed by Legacy Fort Wayne as "big, bold, and transformational...It should not be overlooked when developing a vision for our riverfront."

### **UPCOMING EVENTS**

The excursion announcement comes before the railroad historical society's annual open house at its restoration facility at 15808 Edgerton Road, New Haven, Indiana.

**Open House** - August 17th, 18th 10AM-4pm  
**Indiana History Train** - October 3rd, 4th, 5th  
**Santa Trains** - December 7th, 14th, 21st

### **BACKGROUND AND LOCAL RELEVANCE**

Steam locomotive no. 765 was built for the New York, Chicago, & St. Louis Railroad (later known as the Nickel Plate Road) in 1944 by the Lima Locomotive Works and operated trains between Chicago and Fort Wayne, Indiana until 1958. In 1963, it was selected for display in Lawton Park as a "monument to a great era of development in our country - the age of steam" and in recognition for the massive "Elevate the Nickel Plate Project" which removed a dozen grade crossings from downtown Fort Wayne and spurred city development north of the St. Mary's river in the post war era.

Removed from the park in 1974, no. 765 was restored to operating condition through an all-volunteer effort and returned to service in 1979. After an involved 22 years of operating through sixteen years, the locomotive was completely rebuilt in an intense, five year effort that cost \$750,000 and exhausted 15,000 volunteer hours.

Since 1972, the Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society has dedicated itself to offering outstanding, hands-on educational experiences through railroad preservation and the operation of no. 765. An all volunteer, award winning non-profit corporation, the railroad historical society operates seasonal excursion trains throughout the country, an annual open house, and weekly work sessions at its restoration facility in New Haven, Indiana.

In 1958, the Fort Wayne News Sentinel remarked that the 765 and its engine class were "special pets of Fort Wayne...and carved an enviable reputation in railroad history [and were] the most colorful engines in this part of the country."

In the late 1970s, the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette heralded that the 765 is a "signal of the city's progressive energy and its foresight in serving national traditions."

No. 765 is the centerpiece to a popular downtown redevelopment plan called Headwaters Junction, a conceptual effort to create a cultural, recreational, and educational venue within a distinctive regional attraction near the riverfront.