

## Option 1: Drop the 4:00PM Train

**Description:** Drop the 4:00PM train from the schedule during regular ride days. Schedule would be as follows:

11:00AM Diesel

12:15PM Steam

1:30PM Diesel

2:45PM Steam

Due to their popularity and increased frequency, the 4:00PM train should remain on the schedule for Christmas and Halloween trains.

**Rationale:** The 4:00PM trip is historically our least popular train ride. During the Groupon promotion, no one contacted the NHV hoping to get tickets for the 4:00 train; all other train times were requested. Why run a train no one wants?

Five trains a day puts an enormous strain on our volunteers, many of whom leave early, putting additional strain on the remaining volunteers. Why run a train that you cannot staff? Removing the 4:00PM train would make volunteering at the NHV easier on its members, increasing volunteer satisfaction and morale.

**Challenges:** The 4:00PM train has been on our schedule for years, and our customer base is accustomed to it. It may take a few months before our customers get used to no train at that time. Also, 2:45 may seem 'too early in the day' to run the last train.

If a ride day is busy and there are enough passengers to justify the additional trip, an extra train can still be run at the 4:00PM time.

## Option 2: Add a Second Ride Day Each Month

**Description:** Add a second day of operations each month on the Third Saturday from May to September. This would increase the number of options available to our customers. Operate-a-Locos can be scheduled the same weekends on the other day.

**Rationale:** During the Groupon promotion, many customers complained that they did not have a Saturday option, as Sunday was not a good day for them to ride due to other obligations. Running on a Saturday would open up our railroad to a new rider base. Saturday is normally more of a 'get out and do things' day for families, as opposed to Sundays which is church day, getting ready for school the next day, etc.

Having additional rides each month gives our riders more opportunity to purchase tickets. The more choices a customer has, the more likely that customer will be able to fit a visit to our railroad into their schedule.

Combined with Option 1, this Option would allow the NHV to offer two more steam trips and 1 more diesel trip each month. More trips will mean more opportunity for revenue. It would allow increased equipment utilization and increased monthly capacity without straining the parking lot. The last Regular Ride day would be the first Sunday in October, as the middle of October has Halloween trains and November volunteers are out for Thanksgiving.

**Challenges:** Crew Scheduling. Although we have experimented with crew signup and scheduling this year, in order to provide enough crews for the new days the NHV will need additional discipline for scheduling crews. Many solutions have been discussed, including; Online signups, a dedicated crew scheduler; and pre-defined "sets" of crews (Crew A and Crew B, similar to Spencer). This will challenge our culture, as we are so accustomed to asking everyone to show up on a ride day, and feel personally guilty if we ourselves do not show up.

Marketing. Our customers are not accustomed to trips available on Saturdays or on days other than the first Sunday of the month. We will need to challenge our marketing dept. to increase awareness of this new operating day. We should expect light turnout the first few months until it catches on. Some have suggested doing a SMALLER Groupon promotion at the beginning of the year to publicize the new schedule.

Board of Directors meetings and Membership meetings currently scheduled for Third Saturdays will need to be rescheduled. If the BOD meetings are moved to another weekend, then we are right back and making some feel that the 'have to be there' now 3 weekends a month. We need to be careful about adding 'required days' to be there.

## Option 3: Add Easter Bunny Trains in April

**Description:** Add one or two additional ride days in April on the same pattern as Opportunities 1 and 2. Easter Bunny trains will be on the First Sunday and optionally Third Saturday of April. (With active marketing, we can tweak these each year as needed.) Pattern the special event after the Santa Trains; decorate the train and have an Easter Bunny and handler give treats to the kids.

2012 Easter Train Schedule:

April 1<sup>st</sup> @ 11:00AM, 12:15PM, 1:30AM, 2:45PM, 4:00PM

April 21<sup>st</sup> @ 11:00AM, 12:15PM, 1:30AM, 2:45PM, 4:00PM (Optional)

**Rationale:** Our online ticketing provider, Dynamic Ticket Solutions has told us that the top selling event/theme based train for all of its other customers is Easter Bunny trains. Not Halloween, not Christmas, Easter Bunny.

Our schedule is heavy at the end of the year, having a theme event at the beginning of the year would give us a big “kick off” event and provide something to market to our customers during the winter maintenance season. This will also increase our ridership and revenue in a part of the year in which we have traditionally been slow. Adding an Easter Bunny train will offset revenue lost by dropping the November Ride Day with a new special event day that has the potential of bringing more revenue than November.

Having the schedule consistent with the regular ride schedule for the remainder of the year will make it easy for our volunteers and customers to know when we are running. Easter falls on a different day every year, and considering we do not run Christmas trains on Christmas, or Halloween trains on Halloween (most of the time) , so long as we run Easter Bunny trains during the Easter “season” .

**Challenges:** Crew Scheduling. An additional month of operation will need crews of volunteers to man them.

Marketing. Our customers are not accustomed to trips in April. We will need to challenge our marketing dept. to increase awareness of this new event. We should expect light turnout the first year until it catches on. Some have suggested doing a SMALLER Groupon promotion at the beginning of the year to publicize the new event.

Winter Maintenance. Adding trains in April will severely cut into the winter maintenance season. The organization will need to have a serious discussion about how these trains will impact track work, diesel and railcar maintenance.

## Option 4: Drop All Operations in November

**Description:** Drop all Regular Ride Days, Group Ride Days and Operate-a-Locos from the Schedule in November.

**Rationale:** November is historically our least popular month in terms of ridership. The only time we get increased ridership is when we host a special event, like Double-headed Thunder. Why run trains our customers do not want?

Volunteer fatigue. The November ride day falls the weekend after Halloween trains. Our volunteers are worn out from all the work needed to run two weekends of Halloween trains. Removing all public operating days from the calendar in November will give our volunteers a chance to rest.

Maintenance Season. Having the month of November freed up will give our maintenance crews a chance to work on the equipment, offsetting the loss of April if Option 3 is selected. The track gang will have a mild weather month free from operations to start removing ties (the ties that get removed aren't holding up the track structure anyway) or do other track work that may be necessary, locomotives can be serviced, cars can be repaired, etc.

Special Events. Having November "off" will give our special events teams more opportunity to clean up Halloween and prepare for Christmas.

**Challenges:** Culture and Marketing. The "May through November" schedule is so firmly entrenched into the culture and marketing at NHV that this change will be very difficult to implement. We ought to be up front with ourselves and with our customers, we need November off in order to rest and recuperate.

## Option 5: Drop One Open Car from the Train

**Description:** Drop one open car from the train. The car can be added for Halloween and Christmas events due to demand.

**Rationale:** Wear and tear on Locomotives. Current train is very heavy, and is straining the locomotives, causing additional wear and tear. This wear and tear is expensive and requires more volunteer hours which puts additional strain on the volunteers.

We have an opportunity to rotate the car that is removed from service for heavy repair/maintenance. The car that is removed each year ought to be different from the car removed in previous years. OR it ought to be the car the needs the most attention/maintenance. This puts our cars on a steady maintenance rotation, so each one can get heavy work every four years. It allows more time for our volunteers to repair the car, no pressure to have the car done by opening day as there is almost an entire year to work on that one car.

Because the train is shorter, fewer volunteers will be needed on any one ride day. With the other opportunities identified, this will allow our volunteers to take breaks OR volunteer on the additional Saturday trains if they so desire.

Fewer seats means less people means less cars; the parking lot will be easier to manage.

**Challenges:** Reduced capacity may prevent sales; however, addition of Saturday ride day will give customers more opportunity to ride.

**ADDITIONAL OPTION:** This same rationale may be applied to our Diesel Locomotives, rotating 71, 399 and 1686 out of service for any needed maintenance or heavy repair.

## Option 6: Replace Charter Trains with Charter Caboose

**Description:** Stop offering Charter Trains and begin offering Charter Caboose on our regular schedule.

**Rationale:** Charter trains are a challenge to find crews for and do not pay well. We run a complete train regardless of the size of the party, and the entry fee is \$450. Why run a complete train that's difficult to crew if we only make \$450, when we make \$1500-\$2000 running the same train on a scheduled ride day?

The Caboose is already on the train, it already has crew, and is available whenever we operate a regular train.

The capability to sell a Charter Caboose is already built in to our online ticket system; no change necessary. If the Charter rate is not purchased for any given trip, the ticket office can sell regular tickets to walk-ups.

**Challenges:** Will need to determine a maximum capacity and a rate to charge that makes the Charter Caboose desirable yet profitable.

Need to set the policy for what the groups can bring. Food? Drinks? Coolers? Birthday Cakes?

In order for the event to be special, we must let the charter passengers have the caboose to themselves, even if it is just 2 people. They paid for the whole caboose.

Marketing: getting the word out that you can charter a caboose.

Caboose condition; will need to determine if existing cabooses can be used in their current condition, and if not, what it will take to bring them into a state of good repair. (See car rotation option in Option 5).