General Commentary on the Milepost Studies

By Rick Tipton

To prepare for PRRT&H Society's 2011 book, *The Pennsylvania Railroad in Columbus Ohio,* mileages and milepost lists were collected from a large number of Employee Timetables, creating a "longitudinal" history of this data for each of PRR's five lines into Columbus. Similar data was added from PRR's 1923 and 1945 CT1000 lists, and also from a limited number of other lists as available. The data (which is usually expressed in tenths of a mile) was input to a Microsoft Access database; this allowed studies involving various manipulations and comparisons.

I should point out that mileposts are not always a completely sincere reporting of distance -- for example, a station list in a PRR Employee Timetable may head a column with "Distance from Columbus", but that column in fact reports mileposts, not the current distance.

Why? -- because every man on the line knows its locations intimately by milepost number. Records are kept using this number, and bridges may be marked with it. If a location was at milepost so-and-so in the past, it is much safer and more convenient for all concerned if its milepost doesn't change.

In actuality, generations of rebuildings, wreck repairs, and even normal operations will shift track alignments, and the distance between old mileposts doesn't stay at 5280 feet -- the accumulated "creep" of actual distance between mileposts can be seen in engineering track charts.. If mileposts had to reflect current actual distance, they'd have to be continually reset -- creating chaos and likely contributing to accidents. Thus, in most cases smart management lets mileposts "stay put". The few historic exceptions to this rule will be pointed out (below) in discussion of the specific tables.

Mileposts depart most from actual mileage when a line is rebuilt. For example, the Panhandle Division (see Section One below) had tunnels daylighted and bypassed, plus curves and grades eased, in major construction between 1943 and 1950. But even so the mileposts west to Columbus stayed at their 1923 numbers. Another clear example is the Sandusky line's bypass around Delaware Ohio. At Delaware, the Sandusky Short Line was originally built right up the east bank of the Olentangy River, but took heavy damage in the 1913 flood. Relocation raised the line onto higher ground east of downtown Delaware, but mileposts north and south of the project did not change -- instead, one "mile" in the new alignment shrank to 4400 feet.

On the other hand, the milepost of an individual named location CAN change. Some reasons for a milepost to "crawl" from one station list to the next can include:

1. A tower closes, and the milepost shifts to the location (or former location) of the nearby passenger station.

2. A siding is lengthened, or a tower's track arrangement is remodeled, shifting a key switch to a new "milepost".

3. Multiple locations are closed, and are replaced by a new control point (manned tower) in the vicinity.

In the tables below, you will see the "station" names listed in order on the left. Some effort has been made here to represent separate mileposts of towers and stations; this is difficult because most station lists included do not discriminate between the two entities. If the telegraphic call letters of a tower or station are known, they are included here.

Each table is made up of columns titled with MP and a year, each with the mileposts of a different source. In most of these cases, the mileposts are "as input" from that source. However (as noted in the sections below), some milepost lists can start from some other location; in those cases an accompanying "normalized" table will show these MP's AFTER the adding or subtracting of miles to make the data comparable. Normalized milepost series will be headed by "Calc" or "Recast" and a date, reflecting their recalculation.

The key (in fact, the sort key) for each table is its "PMP", or Presumed Mile Post. This is a number I have assigned to each location, estimating where it would be on the 1964-1967 railroad. This is obviously easy for places still named in late ETT's, but for long-gone locations it is more of a judgment call. Those who have access to old issues of *The Keystone* may notice that Jim Lynch's articles by division list mileposts in 1942; my late-PRR PMP will in some cases show a different number, reflecting 1964-1967 designations.

Those comparing these tables with the Columbus book will quickly see that, because we had a wealth of information and photographs in the Columbus area, the book was pruned to cover essentially only the Columbus terminal area. However, we collected much outside that area, and expect to create one or more articles on each of these five PRR lines, to appear in future issues of PRRT&HS' quarterly *The Keystone*. Thus, if you have questions, comments, or data you believe should be added here, please contact me at ricktipton@bellsouth.net. I will be routing my future questions and further discussion on these lines onto PennsyWest@Yahoo.com in preparation for those projected articles.