



PRESS RELEASE

For more information, contact:
Peg McGuire, director of marketing
Cell: 540-339-2753
pmcguire@vmt.org

The Virginia Museum of Transportation studying Norfolk & Western Class J 611 Restoration and Return to Excursion Service

The “Fire Up 611!” Study will research what it will take to restore, maintain and operate the iconic locomotive.

A Fire Up 611! committee has been formed to examine the costs and feasibility of restoring the locomotive so she can once again thunder across the landscape.

The Fire Up 611! committee will announce its findings within 90 days.

February 22, 2013 – ROANOKE, VIRGINIA – The Virginia Museum of Transportation announced today that it is studying the feasibility of returning the iconic Norfolk & Western Class J 611 Steam locomotive to operating condition.

“The Class J 611 locomotive embodies both beauty and power,” says Beverly T. Fitzpatrick, Jr., executive director of the Virginia Museum of Transportation. “Since her retirement from excursion service in 1994, fans have been clamoring, hoping and dreaming of a day when she once again blows her whistle and thunders across the landscape.”

The study – called Fire Up 611! – will determine what it will take to restore, maintain and operate the locomotive. A committee of experts has been formed to conduct the study.

The committee will consult with specialists in steam locomotives operations and restoration, engineers and experts on Federal Railroad Administration and safety.

Fitzpatrick says that a thorough study is needed if the Class J 611 Locomotive is to ever run again. “Before we can promise our 611 fans that she will indeed return to service, we need to know what it will take to fix and maintain her,” he says.

Fitzpatrick adds that rail fans will ultimately decide if the Class J 611 can run again. “We will need to raise the funds for the study and restoration,” he said. “We don’t have a third party to help us. Her restoration will ultimately depend on financial support from her fans around the world.”

About the Fire UP 611 Study

The Fire UP 611! Committee will determine what work is needed for the locomotive to be operationally restored, as well as identifying the experts and facilities that can handle the restoration work. The Study will also outline preliminary cost estimates. These estimates will be based on the 611’s past repair history, current Federal Railroad Administration guidelines and an external inspection. The Committee will also develop a business plan for the 611 Locomotive.

Within 90 days, the committee will present its findings to the Museum. Based on the estimated costs and feasibility of restoring this spirited locomotive, the Museum and committee will decide if she can be restored to her original glory.

611’s fans are invited to visit fireup611.org to learn more and to donate to the Fire UP 611 study. They can also visit the Fire Up 611 Facebook page and YouTube channel.

The Museum invites 611 fans to fill out a survey about the restoration of the 611 at fireup611.org.

About the N&W Class J 611 Steam Locomotive

The Norfolk & Western Class J Locomotives were a marriage of beauty and power. The teardrop nose, modern lines, graceful curves and deep-throated whistle combined with unbridled power to make the engine the iconic symbol of modern steam locomotives.

The Class J Locomotives came to life in the era of war by the steel and guts of our forefathers. Our No. 611, the last of her kind, is known as the *Spirit of Roanoke*. She holds the sweat and blood of the men and women who molded her, who created her low rumbling whistle and who stoked her fire.

The Norfolk & Western Class J Locomotives were designed, constructed and maintained in Roanoke, Virginia. These streamlined locomotives have captivated the hearts of rail fans worldwide since they first rolled out of the N&W Roanoke Shops, beginning in 1941.

The Class J 611 Steam Locomotive was built in 1950, a time when men wore hats and ladies wore gloves and smartly dressed porters served lunch on real china in the dining car. The 611 Locomotive pulled the *Powhatan Arrow*, the famed passenger train, from Norfolk to Cincinnati. Her whistle woke sleepy towns. The rumble of her wheels made people wonder what was around the next bend or over the next mountain. She helped unite families long separated by war, took freshly minted high school graduates out into the world and brought long lost sons home again.

The Class J 611 retired from passenger rail service in 1959. In 1962, she was moved to the Virginia Museum of Transportation in Roanoke, Virginia.

In 1981, Norfolk Southern pulled her out of retirement and restored her to her original glory. Once again, she blew her whistle to sleepy towns and thundered across the landscape.

She was retired from excursions in 1994 and moved back into the Virginia Museum of Transportation, where she sits today, greeting tens of thousands of her fans who visit from across the globe every year.

Since her retirement, rail fans have clamored, hoped and dreamed that she return to the rails, to blow her whistle and steam over the Blue Ridge and Appalachian mountains once again.

For many of us, the 611 doesn't rumble, she breathes.

We long to hear her breathe again. With your help, it may be possible to bring her back to life.

The Fire Up 611! Committee

Beverly T. Fitzpatrick, Jr., executive director of the Virginia Museum of Transportation.

Scott Lindsay: president of Steam Operations Corporation, a company that specializes in the restoration of historic rail equipment. Mr. Lindsay was also on the 611 locomotive crew during its last excursion runs.

Preston Claytor: railroad operations and safety consultant. Mr. Claytor was also on the 611 locomotive crew during its last excursion runs.

Cheri George: Owner of a software consulting company in Atlanta, Georgia. Ms. George was also a volunteer fireman for the 611 and was part of the crew during its last excursion runs.

Jim Wrinn: editor of *Trains* magazine, the premier railroad publication.

Jeff Sanders: President of the Roanoke Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society.

Ron Davis: President of the Norfolk & Western Historical Society.