

Symbol Of Railroading May Fade Into History



(Monitor Photo By Ken Williams)

The faded B & M logo may soon fade entirely from sight in Concord's railroad yard

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The B & M logo, a symbol of railroading in Concord for more than 130 years, may soon disappear from the city's railroad yard.

The bankrupt Boston & Maine Railroad wants to save money by leasing its Concord yard to highway contractor Herbert W. Goodwin, president of the Goodwin Railroad. Goodwin operates the state-subsidized Concord-Lincoln line, which runs north from the yard.

Approval of the lease, with Goodwin paying the B & M \$3,600 a year to rent its Concord-Bow switching facilities, was granted March 1 by the Public Utilities Commission.

"The B & M will realize a saving beneficial to its reorganization and . . . the customers of the B & M will be assured of continuous service from the lessee," the commission's order said.

But B & M trustees have not signed the lease, which requires that Goodwin be insured to free the B & M from liability for injury or damages in the yard.

Goodwin has not taken over the yard, but the prospect that he will prompted comment at the March 13 City Council meeting, and two state

legislators have questioned the commission's action.

Also, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers petitioned the commission to reconsider its decision. Dom S. D'Ambruoso, commission secretary, said the commission would schedule a hearing, probably in early May, in response to the petition.

Concord lawyer John Gilbert Upton, who represents the union, says he feels the B & M, by leasing the Concord yard, is trying to sidestep obligations in its contract with the engineers' union. That contract says the railroad will maintain three positions for locomotive engineers at the Concord yard.

"I'm not a big featherbedding advocate, but I think the railroad ought to negotiate these problems," Upton said. "It seems to me totally high-handed. They should be facing these men and telling them there are fewer jobs or we'll put you somewhere else. But to contract it out to somebody else and leave these men with no job security seems wrong to me."

D'Ambruoso said the commission would decide after the hearing whether Goodwin must as-

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sume all of B & M's obligations to its employees.

"Simply, the question is: Does Goodwin have to do the same things that the Boston & Maine had to do?" D'Ambruoso said.

At the March 13 council meeting, Councilmen Robert N. Ehrenberg and Kenneth L. McDonnell asked City Manager John E. Henchey to report this month on the effect the transfer would have on rail service available to Concord businesses.

"This was done without a public hearing, without discussion with the users," Ehrenberg said of the commission's approval.

Ehrenberg is president of Rumford Press, which depends on the railroad for many supplies.

McDonnell said the B & M's departure would mean the loss of eight to 12 jobs in the city.

Two state legislators have asked the commission to take a second look at the lease. Sen. Mary Louise Hancock, D-Concord, and Rep. John Hoar Jr., R-Epping, wrote to commission Chairman Alexander J. Kalinski.

Hoar brought the matter up last week in the House Rules Committee. He submitted a bill for the special session that would require the commission to hold a hearing before approving the leasing of any railroad yard.

Hoar told the committee Concord's was the third B & M yard in the state to be leased with commission approval but without public comment.

"They need a hearing so that interested people can discuss this and, in the case of the unions, they can put forth their position," Hoar said.

The B & M owns seven major yards in New Hampshire. With commission approval, the railroad leased its Berlin yard in August 1977. In January, the commission approved leasing of the B & M yard in Keene.

In addition to Concord, the B & M still operates switching facilities in Manchester, Nashua, Portsmouth and Dover.

Spokeswoman Gloria Stone said the railroad was not planning to lease its yards in southern New Hampshire.

Mrs. Stone did not know how many B & M employees would be affected when Goodwin took over the Concord yard, but she said the change would not result in any union workers losing their jobs.

"No jobs will be lost. People will be placed elsewhere on the railroad. We'll probably have some reduction in the work force due to attrition, but not by layoffs," she said.

Arthur E. Lassonde, local chairman of the engineers' union, does not agree with Mrs. Stone.

Lassonde said the B & M had already abolished the jobs of two clerks at the Concord yard. He estimated that 40 to 50 union employees would be affected when Concord-based workers with seniority were reassigned, displacing workers at other B & M yards.

In response to a letter from Lassonde, Kalinski said state law required the commission to approve railroad leases but did not require a hearing.

Kalinski wrote: "The responsibility of the commission under the statutes is to see that adequate service is provided to the public, both the shippers and receivers of freight. From the information we have been able to obtain . . . the service will continue substantially as it has in the past with no change in rates or service to the public."

Lassonde takes the commission's action personally:

"Kalinski is using the Public Utilities Commission to break our union brotherhood in New Hampshire. That's not his job. His job is to protect every taxpayer. He's using that state agency to put men out of work and that's not his business."

Meanwhile, Goodwin, who had planned to take over the yard March 11, is waiting for the B & M trustees to sign his lease. He said the B & M "should be applauded for doing what they can to stabilize their costs."

The trustees have delayed signing the lease, Goodwin said, because of an Interstate Commerce Commission review of the B & M leasing policy.

But Mrs. Stone said the ICC had nothing to do with the delay. She said the trustees were waiting for completion of "negotiations between the parties."

Goodwin, who heads the Weaver Brothers Construction Co. in Bow, said the number of workers assigned there would depend on the amount of business.

He said the 35 to 40 businesses dependent on the yard would be served as they were now at the freight rates charged by the B & M.

When the lease is signed, the one locomotive Goodwin owns — painted dark green like his construction equipment — will begin moving freight cars in a yard B & M switching engines have crisscrossed since 1840.