



## A Visit to the Madison Railroad in North Vernon, Indiana

by Richard W. Jahn

**MADISON RAILROAD** began operation in September 1978. The railroad operates the remaining segment of Indiana's first rail line, the Madison & Indianapolis Railroad, which dates back to 1836. The railroad was the oldest in the Pennsylvania Railroad system west of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Madison Railroad, with its headquarters at 1121 West JPG Woodfill Road, Bldg. 216, in Madison, Jefferson County, Indiana, has been owned and operated by the City of Madison Port Authority (CMPA) since 1981. The line was condemned from Penn Central in order to maintain rail service to the community. Since then, over \$18 million has been spent on track and bridge upgrades to ensure reliable and quality service to customers.

Madison Railroad operates a 25-mile main line extending from Madison northward to North Vernon, Indiana, strategically located between the three metropolitan areas of Louisville (Kentucky), Cincinnati (Ohio), and Indianapolis (Indiana). Commodities handled include polyethylene, coal by-products and steel.

In addition to the main line, the Madison Railroad owns and operates 14 miles of trackage within a 3,400-acre industrial park in the former Jefferson Proving Grounds north of Madison. The site offers extensive railcar and locomotive storage. Madison Railroad has partnered with First Flare, which flares tank cars prior to change of service, repair, cleaning, lease return, or scrapping. Madison Railroad has also entered into a partnership with Road & Rail Services to perform contract repairs on freight cars, including the autoracks shown in the photos.

The Madison Railroad operates on former Pennsylvania Railroad trackage, which was known for its astounding nearly 6% grade dropping down from the Madison bluffs to the Ohio River shore. Measuring 7,012 feet long and descending 413 feet on a 5.89% grade; 500,000 tons of rock and earth were moved in construction. Completed in 1841 and for a time operated as a rack railway, it is

still considered to be the steepest standard gauge main track ascended by wheel-adhesion locomotives in the U.S.

"Madison Hill" was plied by two specially designed EMD SD7s with additional ballasting and automatic sanding. These engines continued to serve on the hill under Penn Central, were subsequently acquired by Conrail (9998 and 9999) and saw their last days of operation as hump shove engines at Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Madison Hill is still intact and is owned by the City of Madison Port Authority. It was placed out

**ABOVE:** Madison Railroad SW1500 3, "Little Lady" and SW1200 4 leads outbound interchange north across the CSX diamonds en route to CSX's North Vernon Yard in this aerial view October 25, 2023. The former B&O passenger station is now used by CSX MofW crews. The operating crew for the CSX local is also based here. The Madison Railroad serves two customers north of the diamond on its former PRR trackage, Target Metal Blanking and Hilex, located along North Madison Avenue.

photography by the author







## THE INTERCHANGE DANCE AT NORTH VERNON

**ABOVE:** In this aerial view, the inbound Madison Railroad train has just crossed the diamonds with CSX and is pulling north on the now-stub end of the former PRR Madison Branch to clear the switch to the connecting track, where Madison Railroad GP10 3634 is waiting to assist with the reverse move. Terrestrial photographers aren't left out of the action, as the area is surrounded by public streets.

**RIGHT:** GP10 3634 has coupled to the south end of the inbound interchange cut and is pulling east around the connecting track in the center of downtown North Vernon. The CSX single main is at left. Due to the short length of the east end of the stub-ended interchange track at right, the "dance" may need to be repeated depending on train length. The crew of 3634 will subsequently shove west across the diamond on the interchange track about one mile into the CSX North Vernon Yard.



**BELOW RIGHT:** The Madison Railroad crew has shoved west across the diamond, paralleling the CSX single main in this aerial view, easing into CSX's North Vernon Yard, where interchange cars will be dropped, before making their outbound pickup.

of service following the demise of once-booming rail-to-water transloading. The last customers weren't river related; one was a scrap yard, and the other was the Clifty Creek power plant which was the final user and last move.

In 2022, Madison Railroad purchased 22-acres in Madison dedicated to expanding regional rail transloading capabilities. In 2024 it will begin serving a new scrap steel customer, Red Ball Recycling, in Madison's industrial park, and will make further transload improvements including the construction of nearly 3,000 feet of new track. The company has eight employees, totalling 84 years of experience.

### Operations

Business has grown to the point where a crew makes the trip from the Madison industrial park to North Vernon and return as often as once each weekday. The crew is on duty at the enginehouse in the park at 7:00 a.m. and after making up the outbound train, usually departs after 9:00 a.m. arriving North Vernon by noon. The "dance" at North Vernon can take several hours to complete, especially if it requires two moves. Train speed over the main line is generally less than 20 MPH, with the run between the two end points taking a little over one hour



**LEFT:** The Madison Railroad crew is making its second drop into CSX's North Vernon Yard, and is working west on the interchange track, paralleling the former B&O single main in this aerial view. The two SWs seen at top right will clear north switch and hold to the south until the GP10 returns and shoves the consist north from the stub east end of the interchange track around the curving connecting track. Then the switchers will couple to the south end of the inbound cars and depart south across the CSX diamonds en route to Madison. The stub east end of the interchange track is only about 1500 feet in length, and when interchange cuts exceed that, the "dance" may be repeated, offering trackside observers plenty of action, as was the case this day, October 25, 2023. Usually a second crew operates the assisting locomotive at North Vernon.





**TOP:** On August 9, 2023, Madison Railroad excitedly unveiled locomotive CMPA 3634 in its new paint scheme, a tribute to the Pennsylvania Railroad and all of the hard-working men and women who, for the past 182 years, have worked tirelessly on the rail line operated today. The railroad arranged a night photo shoot in North Vernon with its repainted GP10 3634 on October 24, 2023. This view with a short train and a red caboose is along Madison Avenue at Second Street, south of the CSX diamond.

**ABOVE LEFT:** A conveniently placed large pumpkin adds some Fall color to the downtown streetscape during the October 24 night shoot.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** Several rural grade crossings located south of North Vernon at Grayford, offer photographers some bucolic variety. This is the southerly crossing where county road 175E crosses the track.

**RIGHT:** This is the northerly crossing in Grayford, where county road 150S diverges east from CR 175E. There are also several open field vistas along the line farther south.





# Madison Railroad

## Diesel Locomotive Roster

### CMPA 3 EMD SW1500

In Service  
 Built as Toledo, Peoria & Western SW1500 306 in May 1970. Purchased by NASA July 24, 1984 and renumbered 3. Rebuilt and repainted in 2008. CMPA 3 was acquired from NASA in May 2015.

### CMPA 4 SW-1200

In Service  
 Built as a Baldwin VO-1000 for Atlantic Coast Line as #15 in October 1943. Later renumbered 104 and then 617 for the Seaboard Coast Line. It was sold by SCL to the US Navy as #4 and rebuilt 1985 to EMD SW1200 specs, then to NASA as #4.

### CMPA 5 SW-1200

In Service  
 Built as a Baldwin VO-1000 for the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis as #30 in August 1943. Later renumbered 50 and 2150 for the Louisville & Nashville. It was sold by L&N to the US Navy and rebuilt as #10 in 1985 to EMD SW1200 specs.

CMPA 4 and 5 were acquired in November 2015 from the Crane Naval Depot in Crane, Indiana. CMPA 5 was renumbered 5 by CMPA in 2018.

### CMPA 3634 EMD GP10

In Service  
 Built for Southern Pacific as 5793 in April 1957, renumbered to SP 3634, sold to Precision National as 3634. CMPA 3634 was the last locomotive to operate on the 5.89% Incline in Madison, Indiana. Paint scheme unveiled August 29, 2023.

*Roster courtesy Madison Railroad*



**TOP RIGHT:** The interchange “dance” at the diamond can be easily photographed from public streets in downtown North Vernon. The interchange is within CSX’s former B&O Whitcomb Yard.

**BOTTOM LEFT:** The bridge over the Muscatatuck River is accessed from the foot of Jackson Street in neighboring Vernon; the view is best from a drone.

**BOTTOM RIGHT:** The Madison Railroad shops are located in the sprawling industrial park, just north of Madison, Indiana. The facility is on the site of the former Jefferson Proving Grounds. Three of the railroad’s EMD SW-type locomotives can be seen in this aerial view

