

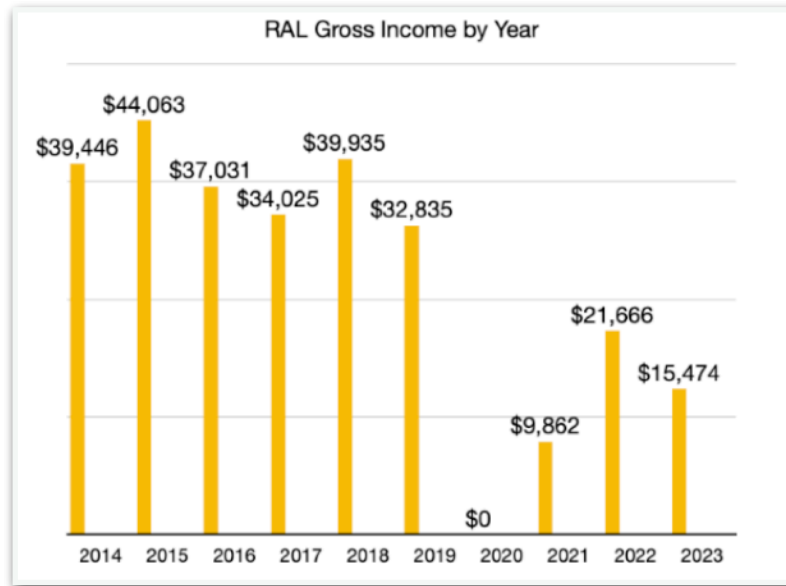
# **RUN A LOCOMOTIVE (RAL) PROGRAM**

## **COMMITTEE REPORT**

**March, 2024**

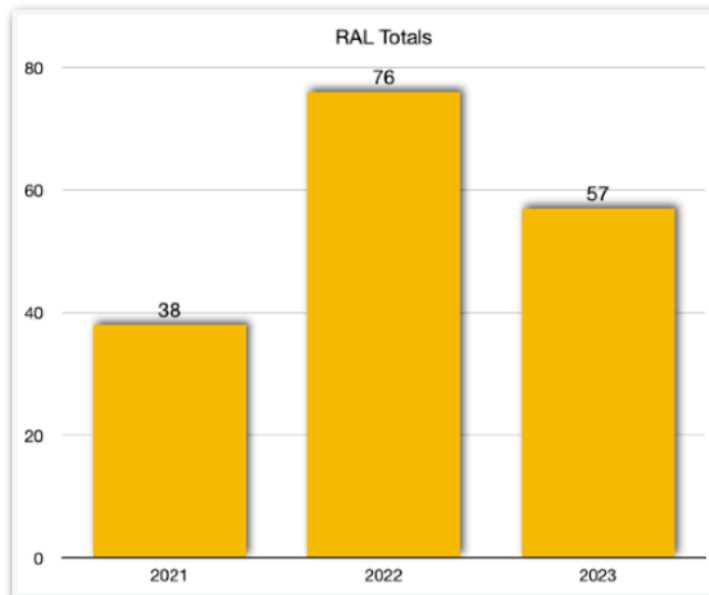
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The RAL program was severely impacted by the pandemic, and it isn't recovering.



2023 gross revenue was less than half its pre-pandemic level. The trend isn't favorable, either, as 2023 revenue was **30% less** than 2022.

The main reason for this is lack of program participation. Have a look at the total number of RALs performed over the last three years. The museum was only open for a partial season in 2021, followed by a full season beginning 2022. There was a mild increase in 2022 followed by a 25% drop in volume for 2023:



While no information on the number of RAL's performed prior to 2020 was available, a rough estimate is possible. Assuming an average of \$38,000 gross revenue and an average hourly rate of \$250, the RAL totals for prior years were somewhere in the neighborhood of 150 per year. This is twice the amount performed in 2022 and almost three times the amount performed in 2023.

It appears the customer base the RAL program enjoyed prior to the pandemic isn't coming back. We need to find new customers.

The objective of this committee is to outline changes to the RAL program designed to increase sales and revenue. The goal is not to restore revenue to previous levels, but to surpass those levels and deliver an annual gross revenue in excess of \$50,000 within the next two years. This will be accomplished through a combination of promotion, sales strategy, retail price changes and cost cutting measures.

The changes represent minimal risk given the current trend in RAL sales. Most of the measures within are low/no cost.

The success of the RAL program continues to be dependent on the restoration and maintenance of locomotives. This is and always will be a symbiotic relationship, as more locomotives will help drive sales and more sales will provide the revenue to invest in restoration and maintenance.

This report is a collection of the various suggestions I have had or heard regarding the RAL program as it exists today. Each section represents a logical collection of suggested changes that were discussed and accepted, modified or rejected by the committee. The first part of each section is the suggestion and argument as I presented it to the committee. The second part of each section, titled 'Committee Findings', represents the consensus response to the suggestion and details the actions that will result.

-Nicholas Manos  
RAL Committee Chair

**Committee Members**

Director Eugene Vicknair  
Director Kerry Cochran  
Director Greg Elems  
Chief Mechanical Officer David Elems

**Table Of Contents:**

**INTRODUCTION**

**PROMOTION - Web search results**

**PROMOTION - Museum web presence**

**PROMOTION - RAL web presence**

**PROMOTION - Social media Facebook**

**PROMOTION - Social media Twitter/X**

**PROMOTION - The Museum and the Locomotives**

**SALES - Incentives**

**SALES - Repeat Business**

**SCHEDULING - Program Availability**

**SCHEDULING - RAL Duration Discounts**

**SCHEDULING - Pricing**

**SCHEDULING - Membership Benefit**

**SCHEDULING - Customer Interaction**

**SCHEDULING - Payment**

**POST SALE - Data Gathering**

## INTRODUCTION

Before reading any further, put yourself in the average visitor's frame of reference.

*Assume you have no prior knowledge of the society, the museum, the Western Pacific or even railroading in general. You only have a desire to find a museum to visit on your vacation. Perhaps you do know you would like to visit a railroad museum and take a train ride, so you might start looking at what is available.*

Perhaps you are wondering why we begin by referencing the museum visitor's perspective...

The principal challenge to the RAL program is lack of sales. Observation of actual RAL participants shows no change in their excitement and satisfaction with the RAL experience.

We are not suffering a lack of sales due to the quality of the product.

Instead, the program appears to suffer a total lack of promotion, almost to the point of invisibility.

It is not an exaggeration to say a person could reference the museum website, visit the museum, purchase admission and wander the grounds without ever being exposed to the RAL program. For those few who do find the program, they will likely encounter multiple obstacles before they reach the right seat.

This proposal will show the various ways the current program falls short and identify methods of correction and improvement.

*To be able to see these problems clearly, we must reorient our perspective to that of the customer.*

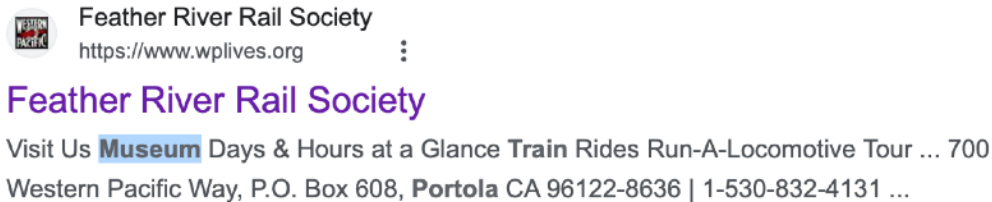
It does not matter whether we feel the current program is adequate, or that the customer 'should know' or 'should be able to find' this or that. The gross sales figures clearly show us that potential customers are not reacting to the program, not showing up and otherwise voting 'not adequate'. The program must change quickly.

RAL is the premier product offering of the museum. It differentiates the WPRM from other railroad museums. It has the power to make lifelong visitors and society members. Its health is a reflection on the health of the museum and the society.

## PROMOTION - Web Search Results

Take a moment to lookup 'Portola railroad museum' on your phone using the Google search engine. It is true that is no longer the actual name of the museum, but how many visitors know this? For this example and for many others, we must respond to what our visitors are actually doing, not what we would prefer them to do.

Google search results for a fresh browser (no search history) show the society's webpage as 'Feather River Rail Society':



Does this have the meaning we intend for the museum visitor? While we all know the Feather River Rail society is the organization that runs the rail museum, should we expect the average person to know this? The description snippet shown is taken from the menu selections available on the home page. Although it does include an RAL mention it isn't very useful. It would be better for us to specify the snippet contents to provide a more readable message.

### COMMITTEE FINDING:

Pursue the following changes with the Webmaster. I will coordinate meetings with Webmaster and General Superintendent to discuss.

**ACTION:** Update the home page title and search result snippet to promote the visit, train ride, cab ride and RAL

EXAMPLE:

#### **Run a Locomotive | Western Pacific Railroad Museum Home**

The WPRM at Portola, California is home to one of the largest museum collections of diesel locomotives in the country. The museum offers seasonal train rides on historic cabooses, cab rides in historic locomotives and even the opportunity to operate a locomotive in our Run a Locomotive (RAL) program

**ACTION:** Ensure search result snippet and sitelinks are as consistent as possible across Google, Bing, Yahoo and DuckDuckGo search engines (top 4)

**ACTION:** Ensure, to the extent practical, that [wplives.org](https://www.wplives.org) and [runalocomotive.com](https://www.runalocomotive.com) are the first two search results returned for: 'Portola railroad museum' 'Portola museum' 'western pacific' 'wp museum' 'western pacific museum' 'wprm' 'run a locomotive' 'rent locomotive' 'runalocomotive' 'drive a train' 'rent a train' etc. This applies to Google, Bing, Yahoo and DuckDuckGo search engines

## PROMOTION - Museum web presence

On your phone, go ahead and follow the link. Without digging for it specifically (a new visitor would not know about RAL), try to find any mention of the RAL program on the home page.

If the customer encounters the desktop version of the home page, they will still be hard pressed to find anything about RAL. This is what is seen on initial load:



If the customer decides to poke around a bit and scrolls down approximately *three* pages, they will see a set of tiles that are of particular relevance.



These should be the first things a site visitor and prospective customer sees, not the last.

An overall observation is the webpages are tailored to the membership, not the general public. This is appropriate for a private club, but not for a public museum. Without removing any of the member information or function, the home page should be reconfigured to place visitor information first and foremost. If the existing page layouts are considered sacrosanct, create an entirely new site or page designed for the customer and set that as the home page, with a 'members' link to the current pages.

Longer term, consider separate web presence for the society and the museum

### **COMMITTEE FINDING:**

There was general agreement with these recommendations. The committee is supportive of the concept that an additional web presence is needed to target museum visitors. This new 'retail' site effort is being led by Director Vicknair who is working with BigFish Creations.

The committee also feels the existing website should not be subject to substantial alteration outside of the scope of RAL promotion, as the current website serves the membership well. I will coordinate meetings with the Webmaster and General Superintendent to discuss the following minor changes to the home page(s):

**ACTION:** Move customer tiles to TOP of web home page (desktop and mobile), immediately below banner. Re-sort tiles to show RAL, Visit and then Calendar

**ACTION:** Move social media engagement web links from page bottom to the banner on the home page (desktop and mobile). We need to encourage social media engagement because those platforms are built to facilitate promotion. Obtaining more followers is the continuous goal...



## PROMOTION - RAL web presence

Let's assume our new customer has found the link to the RAL page. Here is what they are presented with:

The screenshot shows the website for the Western Pacific Railroad Museum (WPRM) in Portola, California, specifically the "Run-A-LOCOMOTIVE" program page. The page features a dark background with orange and white text. At the top left is the WPRM logo, and at the top right is the program name "RUN-A-LOCOMOTIVE". A navigation menu includes "Visit Us", "About Us", "News", "Museum", and "Members".

**Run-A-Locomotive Rates**

- Level A - \$225 for 1 hour
- Level B - \$275 for 1 hour
- Level C - \$325 for 1 hour
- Level D - \$400 for 1 hour

\$20 discount of hour price for walk in RAL using already running locomotive(s)  
½ hour option – 40% discount off hour price  
2 hour option – 14% discount off combined hour price  
3+ hour option – 20% discount off combined hour price

*\*Please note that while advanced reservations are strongly encouraged, walk-ins will be taken on a time available, first come first served basis, weather, personnel, and locomotive availability permitting.*

**Your Seat**

Our World Famous "Run-A-Locomotive" program allows you, our visiting public, to rent a vintage diesel locomotive and operate it on the museum grounds, under the close supervision of your own private instructor. Relive a childhood fantasy! No experience required, just an adventurous mind. Income from locomotive rentals helps fund the restoration of our historic equipment.

The "Run-A-Locomotive" program has four basic plans, all include private instruction from a qualified engineer.

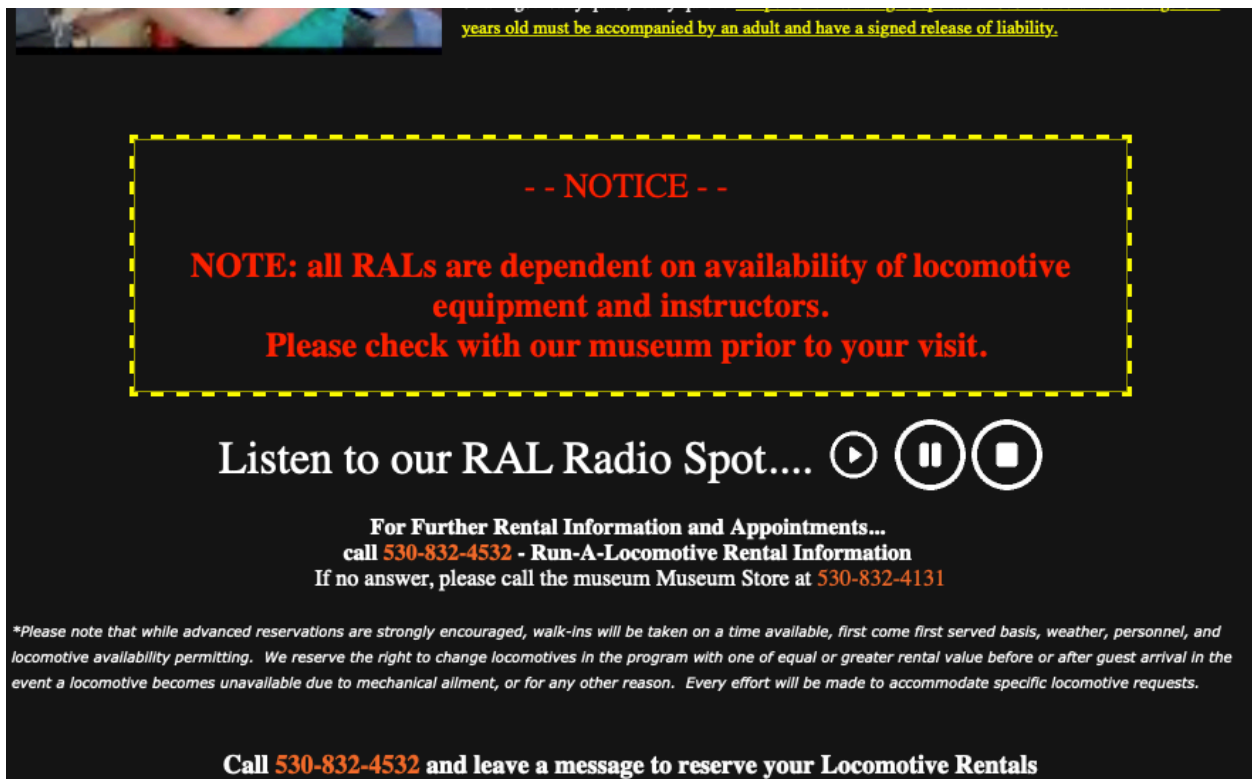
Do you have a friend or family member that loves to remind you how large *their* vehicle is? At the Western Pacific Railroad Museum in Portola, *you* and your family can take the throttle *YOURSELF* in one of our vintage diesel locomotives! (with a qualified engineer/instructor of course!) Upon completing your engineer experience, you will receive a certificate, suitable for framing so *YOU* can brag to all of your large vehicle driving friends and family. When they boast about the size of their vehicle, brandish your "Engineer's Certificate" and show them the pictures. They'll either be envious, or will get really quiet, really quick. All persons intending to operate a locomotive under the age of 18 years old must be accompanied by an adult and have a signed release of liability.

**-- NOTICE --**

**NOTE: all RALs are dependent on availability of locomotive equipment and instructors.**  
**Please check with our museum prior to your visit**

The first text the customer sees is the pricing and discount structure. This is presented before the product has even been discussed or displayed.

The customer must then scan through multiple warnings and notices before seeing the locomotives. This should be moved in order to focus on the sale before we get into the rules and restrictions.



The screenshot shows a dark background with a yellow dashed border around the main notice. At the top left, there is a small image of a child. To the right of the image, the text reads: "years old must be accompanied by an adult and have a signed release of liability." Below this, the main notice is centered and reads: "-- NOTICE --" followed by "NOTE: all RALs are dependent on availability of locomotive equipment and instructors. Please check with our museum prior to your visit." Below the notice, there are three circular icons: a play button, a pause button, and a stop button. Underneath the icons, the text says: "Listen to our RAL Radio Spot...." followed by "For Further Rental Information and Appointments... call 530-832-4532 - Run-A-Locomotive Rental Information. If no answer, please call the museum Museum Store at 530-832-4131". At the bottom, there is a small italicized disclaimer: "\*Please note that while advanced reservations are strongly encouraged, walk-ins will be taken on a time available, first come first served basis, weather, personnel, and locomotive availability permitting. We reserve the right to change locomotives in the program with one of equal or greater rental value before or after guest arrival in the event a locomotive becomes unavailable due to mechanical ailment, or for any other reason. Every effort will be made to accommodate specific locomotive requests." At the very bottom, there is a call to action: "Call 530-832-4532 and leave a message to reserve your Locomotive Rentals".

years old must be accompanied by an adult and have a signed release of liability.

-- NOTICE --

**NOTE: all RALs are dependent on availability of locomotive equipment and instructors.  
Please check with our museum prior to your visit.**

Listen to our RAL Radio Spot....

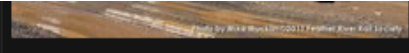

For Further Rental Information and Appointments...  
call 530-832-4532 - Run-A-Locomotive Rental Information  
If no answer, please call the museum Museum Store at 530-832-4131

*\*Please note that while advanced reservations are strongly encouraged, walk-ins will be taken on a time available, first come first served basis, weather, personnel, and locomotive availability permitting. We reserve the right to change locomotives in the program with one of equal or greater rental value before or after guest arrival in the event a locomotive becomes unavailable due to mechanical ailment, or for any other reason. Every effort will be made to accommodate specific locomotive requests.*

**Call 530-832-4532 and leave a message to reserve your Locomotive Rentals**

The customer is offered the opportunity to listen to a 'radio spot'. Do our younger customers even know what a 'radio' is?

Now the customer comes to the locomotive roster. It shows eight very interesting and historically significant locomotives to choose from - unfortunately 6 are out of service.

	<p>Currently out of service.</p>
<p><b>Level "B" \$275 per hour</b></p>	
	<p><b>US Army 1857</b>  Fairbanks Morse  Model H-12-44  Yard Switching Engine  Horsepower: 1200  Weight: 246,000 Pounds  (123 Tons)  <b>2 Seats for riders</b>  Out of service for maintenance and repairs.</p>
	<p><b>Southern Pacific #2873</b>  EMD/General Motors Model "GP-9E"  Road Freight Engine  Horsepower: 1750  Weight: 240,000 Pounds  (120 Tons)  Currently not available for RAL operable, undergoing testing and inspection  <b>5 Seats for riders</b></p>
<p><b>Level "C" \$325 per hour</b></p>	
	<p><b>Western Pacific #707</b>  EMD/General Motors Model "GP-7"  Road Freight Engine  Horsepower: 1500  Weight: 251,700 Pounds  (126 Tons)  <b>3 Seats for riders</b>  Currently out of service.</p>

This presents an immediate impression that the museum is a) incapable of keeping locomotives running and b) near failure and therefore a risky business to engage with.

There does not appear to be any good reason to be listing locomotives that are not available to rent. It wouldn't make sense if all eight locomotives were currently in operable condition, because there isn't enough maintenance resource to keep them that way so a subset would have to be chosen for the yearly RAL offering. Instead of listing every locomotive that might one day be offered for RAL, list only the locomotives that are presently offered for RAL. This list can be determined prior to RAL season and updated, as needed.

Updates will consist of adding the locomotive to the roster if it is in service and removing it from the roster if it is not in service. No updates of 'out of service because x'. Just don't show it. Don't even show a 'coming soon' as this will only act to discourage today's sale today on the hope for a sale tomorrow.

If there is a desire to keep the membership updated on locomotive status, we should do that by publishing regular updates in the Train Sheet and not with the product advertisement.



Let's continue by assuming the customer finds an operable locomotive they are interested in, such as the 1503 shown above. The only thing they can click on in this row is the photo. They click the locomotive photo and... are taken to its equipment roster page. So they go back and look again... and have to sort out the 'level' it is in to get a price, and then scroll around to figure out how to book.

This process has too much friction for the customer.

Each locomotive should show individual pricing information and have its own 'book now' button. There is no purpose in having the customer understand and sort through 'levels' - it provides no benefit to the customer and it introduces the possibility of confusion that would hinder the sale. The customer should only need to select a locomotive in order to begin the booking process.

#### **COMMITTEE FINDING:**

Pursue the following changes with the Webmaster. Some changes have already been implemented at direction of the General Superintendent. An additional change was adopted out of committee discussion, which was to have a 'purchase gift certificate' button added next to the 'book' button mentioned below. I will coordinate meetings with Webmaster and General Superintendent to discuss.

**ACTION:** Remove the pricing and discount box from the RAL page altogether. Keep the descriptive text about RAL with minor edits and the 'your seat' photo. Preserve the video, but center it up and discard all the discussion about 'size of vehicle' - it is not helpful to the sale (partially complete - pricing and discount box have been removed)

**ACTION:** On the RAL page, eliminate the display and all discussion of 'levels' and place the applicable hourly price information on each locomotive row. Add a 'book now' button to each locomotive row that takes the user to the relevant booking process. (partially complete - RAL page has removed most mentions of levels)

**ACTION:** Add a 'Purchase gift certificate' button adjacent the 'book now' button. This should link to the on-line store gift certificate item in the amount equal to the locomotive selection hourly rate

**ACTION:** Move all warnings, rules, notices etc to the end of the RAL page

**ACTION:** Eliminate or move 'listen to radio spot' to the end of the RAL page. Customers who want media will interact with the video, which is usually a far more effective tool than a radio spot. Keep the page clean until after the sale

**ACTION:** Remove all locomotive listings that are not currently active in the RAL program from the RAL page (Complete - RAL page updated)

**ACTION:** Incorporate video as an autoplay background (webmaster has already created a demonstration page with this feature)

## PROMOTION - Social media Facebook

The museum has a nice Facebook page that seems to get engagement and is updated fairly often. However, reviewing the last two years of posts reveals not a single mention of RAL was found. There is no mention of RAL or links to RAL in the museum Facebook home page. This is lost opportunity.

As an example of how effective Facebook advertising might be, please take note of the various posts made during the pumpkin trains. There were several posts made each day over the course of the event, all gathering ~50-100 likes. However, one post gathered nearly 900 likes, and it wasn't even specific:



Since there are only ~750 members of the society in total, this shows there are likely a good many non-member Facebook followers that respond favorably to at least one of the locomotives. Imagine some posts about the 2873's return to the RAL program.... Or 707. These are prime candidates for targeted advertisement and member recruitment.

This would be an excellent place to put some advertising funds toward.

A small budget of \$100 could be allocated to see how effective 'boosting' posts can be. Boosting can be used to target user segments with specific demographics, so we can zero in on our vacation visitors.

### COMMITTEE FINDING:

Discussion revealed that Facebook promotion of RAL may have been restricted due to the limited RAL fleet offering. There was no objection to the suggested changes. I will work with Director Vicknair to implement the following during this year's operating season:

**ACTION:** Update the Facebook home page Intro to include RAL language in description and add [runalocomotive.com](http://runalocomotive.com) to the links list

**ACTION:** Investigate Facebook analytics to design a targeted ad campaign around boosting posts. Create a post for April that will announce the return of the 2873.

Design three different posts, all with the same objective but presented differently (different photos/video combos). It should include some nice photos and a video of it running (lots of noises). Must include links to RAL page (and ideally the RAL page is reconfigured prior to this). Post all three and monitor closely to determine which of the three has the most organic engagement. Boost the post with the highest engagement after 12-24 hours. See if we can selectively boost to target demographics - users in Reno, Carson, Tahoe, Truckee, Sacramento valley and bay area. Users with children, income levels likely to support disposable income for RAL, etc. Spend \$100 to boost the post and then take note of the results. An inexpensive experiment. If successful, consider repeating when additional locomotives return to RAL service

## **PROMOTION - Social media Twitter/X**

The museum has no twitter presence, which is a large opportunity loss. We could tweet out the locomotive in use for the caboose trains every weekend along with a reminder we are running trains and RALs for the weekend. Tweet out coupon codes for discounts on walk-in RAL, valid for that weekend only with the caboose train locomotive. Simple and low/no cost promotions.

Providing frequent and small updates helps to maintain vibrancy.

### **COMMITTEE FINDING:**

We will initiate museum X/Twitter usage. I have volunteered to post to the account this operating season to give us some data on engagement and develop a working set of procedures for posting, as follows:

- Develop a general idea of periodic posts regarding operations and mechanical for days he is at museum and will run this past the committee and/or board before beginning to post (prior to the season, not prior to each post)
- Work with Director Vicknair to setup access to the account
- Report all posts to the committee and/or board monthly to be sure there is alignment with other promotional efforts and no damage to brand

Further discussion will be had about automated posts and/or additional posts throughout the week utilizing recent photos once account is up and running

**ACTION:** Create/activate a Twitter account for the museum and grant access to personnel who will be at the museum often, especially operating days. Create template based messages regarding caboose train power, special events, coupons and RAL and pre-authorize the posting of those messages only



## **PROMOTION - The Museum and the Locomotives**

Our best opportunities for promotion are with those customers who visit the museum.

During admission, every museum visitor should be made aware of the RAL program. The museum has a full color brochure on the RAL program. This should be handed to every customer, in addition to a flyer with current availability and pricing. This will allow the brochure to remain high level and prevent it from being out of date due to pricing changes.

A single page flyer should include just the necessary information to inform the patron of the locomotives available, the days and times RAL is available, the current rates for each locomotive and the booking procedure. An appeal to be sure to ask the museum staff if they have any further questions should also be included.

The other side of the flyer should include a simple map of the museum grounds, specifically showing them where the locomotive displays and other significant objects are. This will encourage longer visits by our customers, which will hopefully lead to increased satisfaction with the museum. It will also give them a reason to hold on to the flyer.

Museum store personnel can be asked to provide the flyer with a brief explanation. Example: "Here is a brochure and flyer about our run a locomotive program where you can operate one of our historic locomotives. On the back side of the flyer is a map of the museum grounds which will direct you to our more popular exhibits"

Every locomotive that will pull the caboose train should be fitted with 'you can run this locomotive' signs with brochure/flyer pockets below. Some already have these signs, but they are a bit dated and could use a re-design to make them more conspicuous. The intent is to make sure every cab rider is further reminded they have an opportunity to run the locomotive, since cab riders are the best candidates for up-sell. Enginemen can also be encouraged to discuss RAL with cab riders.

The museum used to leave locomotives unlocked, encouraging customers to enter the cabs and explore the locomotives. This had to be discontinued due to vandalism and the customers have let us know they would like to see this return. In an effort to answer this demand as well as promote RAL, we should designate a few 'open cab days' each year where we bring in RAL engineers and/or mechanical personnel to staff two or three of the RAL engines for the day. This would provide the public the opportunity to enter the cab as before, but now they can also ask all the questions they like about the locomotive and its operation. Of course, there will be plenty of RAL brochures and flyers available for everyone, right along with a 'you can run this locomotive' sign.

The locomotives used for 'open cab' day would need to be placed in front of the museum, near the entrance. We can't expect good results if the customers have to hunt for the open locomotives.

### **COMMITTEE FINDING:**

The committee agreed that we should exploit all reasonable promotional opportunities at the museum itself. These opportunities are the lowest cost and highest impact, given the museum visitors are the natural audience for the RAL offering. (continued on next page)

On the topic of signage, the following actions are underway:

- Directors Elems and Vicknair are working on a one page RAL flyer to be distributed to store customers when purchasing tickets/gifts/etc
- Director Vicknair is having a new banner made using the existing 'Live Your Dream' convention display artwork. Once delivered, we can hang it in a prominent place at the museum such that it is clearly visible to all visitors. The door on the East end of the shop, above the public bench, is a location that should work well.
- Directors Elems and Vicknair are looking into creating a large banner to post in such a way as to be clearly visible from the parking lot and when approaching the museum. This banner will generate interest with 'ask how you can be an engineer for an hour' or similar. Banner material and placement will be made with respect to surviving the afternoon winds
- Director Vicknair has designed and ordered signs for the existing sandwich boards. These will be displayed prominently at sidewalk locations on operating days to help guide visitors and promote cab rides. An operations team member will set and remove signs on operating days. Four signs to be used on three sandwich boards are in process, as follows:
  - LOCOMOTIVE AND CABOOSE RIDES TODAY (sand. 1, side A)
  - TRAIN BOARDING (sand. 1, side B)
  - MUSEUM STORE (sand. 2)
  - ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT DISPLAYS (sand. 3)

The committee has also outlined a plan for an 'open cab days' event(s) to promote museum visitation and RAL, as follows:

- First event scheduled for June 8th and 9th
- Need to enlist as many volunteers as possible, aiming for a volunteer in every cab. Recruit by Train Sheet article and email blast in April. Recruit in-person during operating department training session. We'll need three people to run the caboose train in addition to as many people as we can get to staff the open locomotives. Locomotives do not need to be staffed by operations team, but volunteers should have some knowledge of the locomotive to discuss with visitors.
- Our first open cab event will function as a trial. Subsequent events will be dependent on success of the first and will incorporate changes as needed
- Caboose train operations during open cab days will be push-pull, allowing for a smaller train crew and for locomotive display on all track east of pedestrian crossing
- The East side of the shop will also be available for display, per CMO
- We will cluster all display locomotives together allowing for easy visitor access as well as effective monitoring
- Many locomotives are candidates for open cab display with emphasis on available RAL locomotives
  - Special consideration exists for some locomotives, as follows:
    - 165 and F units open only if we display them in the shop (level grade adjacent to the rail) and provide appropriate steps for cab access
    - 165 eligibility subject to approval by Director Stabler
    - 165 to have full time attendant if approved for open cab
- The event will be promoted with website news, mail blast to membership and social media posts
- RAL flyers to be ready prior to this event - placed in each locomotive for distribution
- Director Vicknair has some donation box/brochure holders in mind for each locomotive

## **SALES - Incentives**

Observation of the gift shop personnel this season revealed friendly responses to customer inquiries about cab rides and RAL, but only when the customer initiated the conversation. There was little to no promotion in the way of asking if the customer was interested in a cab ride or any mention of RAL. Granted, all interactions were not observed but there was enough to note we may be missing a significant opportunity.

An incentive program for the gift shop personnel is proposed. The exact incentive amounts are not as important as the concept, which is to provide a pay reward for sales with higher pay for more desirable sales. The following incentives are suggested:

- \$3 for each cab ride sold
- \$10 for each same day RAL sold on operating days
- \$15 for each same day RAL sold on operating days that uses the caboos train locomotive

Incentive program terms:

- 'Sold' means a transaction that results in the museum collecting the full retail amount due for the sale. Transactions that result in any type of refund are not eligible for incentive
- Incentives will not be due when payment is made by gift certificate, since the gift certificate would represent a previous sale
- RAL incentive will not be due when RAL customer uses a coupon, since the coupon represents a sale through promotional channels
- RAL incentive will not be due if the RAL is rescheduled
- Only one RAL incentive will be paid per eligible sale

Why focus on Saturday and Sunday during operating season? These days already have the museum open and staffed, with an engineer on duty for the caboos trains. These incentives could be extended to any other operating day, such as Memorial Day and/or Labor Day.

## **COMMITTEE FINDING:**

Discussion was favorable to the concept, but several conditions were determined to be appropriate:

- Incentives will be available to store personnel for cab ride sales
- Incentives will be available for same day RAL sales that use the same locomotive as the caboos train
  - No incentive for same day sales of locomotives other than the caboos train power, or for RAL sales for future dates
- Incentive program to be implemented quietly on a 'need to know' basis
- Incentive program to be described as 'provisional'. It may be discontinued after this season if we don't see a meaningful increase in sales

There was discussion about the need to improve communication between the operations department and the store personnel. To this end, we will implement a white board / bulletin board that is updated daily by the operations conductor to clearly show store personnel that caboos trains are running that day, which locomotive is in use and how many cab seats are available per run. (continued next page)

The committee reviewed the issues exposed with our incentive experiment on the Santa trains (too many tickets sold for too few seats). We need to specifically ticket cab rides for scheduled times so we do not oversell

- Existing tickets already allow for indication of cab ride purchase
- Create/review store procedures to track how many cab rides are available per run and to note on the customer's ticket which scheduled time and date the cab ride is valid for
- If customer misses assigned spot, they can return to the store and be booked on a later schedule that same day, space permitting (courtesy)
- Enginemen to be instructed to check time and date on cab ride tickets and to tear or punch ticket

I will work with Director Vicknair and Director Steeper to implement incentive program and ticketing procedure changes. I will work with the General Superintendent for operations training regarding tickets and daily communication with store personnel

**ACTION:** Implement a sales incentive program for gift shop personnel, focusing on operating days to promote cab rides and same day RAL sales of cabooses

**ACTION:** Document new cab ride sales and performance procedures for operations and store personnel

**ACTION:** Implement new conductor communication procedures for operating day postings

## **SALES - Repeat Business**

There is no evidence of repeat RAL business in the 2021-2023 reservation record. It appears the RAL customer experience is largely one and done. At present, there isn't much to offer from a 'what next' experience perspective. The museum needs to develop additional experiences to encourage repeat customers.

The first step is to bring more locomotives back into the program. For three years the RAL program has only been able to offer yard switchers, so the addition of road switchers and road locomotives will surely help. The mechanical department is working to get 2873 ready for the next season, along with a few other potentials.

Even with more locomotives, we would still be offering the same basic experience. We need to develop something more. The following three proposals are made for consideration and potential development:

**Hostler experience:** a one hour add-on before the actual RAL where the customer would perform the inspection and startup right along with the hostler/engineer. Of course, the hostler/engineer would be doing the work but could be describing the various systems under inspection, demonstrating various tests and allowing the customer to push this button and throw that switch. Customer gets to be involved and ask questions. This should appeal to the more technically inclined customer who would like to get a peak under the hood. We could charge a \$100 add-on for this experience while incurring no additional expense. Scheduling would be a challenge unless we only offered this on the first RAL spot of the day

**Consist experience:** This would be a special day or two set aside each year where we only provide this RAL experience. We would select two engines to put in consist for the entire day. We would charge the rate of both engines combined, plus \$150. We should be able to offer 6 in one day, assuming we schedule on a non-operating day. We could change out the engineer at midday so we don't need to stop the flow for a lunch break. Each run would generate the equivalent of 2.5 RALs in revenue. We can also offer the hostler experience on the first RAL of the day

**Switching Experience:** This would be another day or two set aside each year where we only provide this 2 hour RAL experience. It would need to occur on days the museum is not open to the public. The 1503 would be the only power offered. We would pre-position two cars, a flat and a caboose, on a siding. The first third of the RAL would be as normal, with the customer learning how to run the engine. For the second third, the customer would join a brakeman on the ground to learn hand signals, throw the switch and bring the 1503 in to get the caboose. The customer would then back it out, throw the switch and bring it clear. Finally, the customer would complete their ground work by setting the brake and cutting the caboose. For the final third of the RAL, the customer resume running the engine. Following the brakeman's signals, they would enter the siding and get the flat, leave the siding and get the caboose. The customer would take their 'train' around the balloon before reversing the procedure to replace the cars back on the siding, ending the RAL. This RAL would need a fireman and brakeman in addition to the engineer. Charge would be in the \$1250 range. We should be able to offer 3 or 4 per day. We can also offer the hostler experience on the first RAL of the day

## COMMITTEE FINDING:

The consensus direction is to develop additional RAL offerings.

Looking at the suggested offerings, the committee decided the 'switching experience' is too ambitious for the museum and cannot be pursued at this time. We will continue to develop the idea and monitor our progress in overall operations, perhaps allowing for a future offering.

The 'hostler' experience was noted to be similar to past informal demonstrations with various RAL engineers. This should be something that can be formalized and advertised, with the following caveats:

- The hostler experience presents several concerns related to what specific tasks we can allow the customer to safely participate in
- CMO Elems and I (recruiting operations team member Brian Waller, if available) will go through the complete startup procedures and determine appropriate and safe hands-on activities for the customer
- Formally document all procedures and safe boundaries (for RAL engineer use with customer)

The 'consist' experience is to be developed within the following parameters:

- May be offered monthly during the RAL season on a day the museum is closed (first Monday of the month, for instance.) It will be the only RAL offering for the day and the consist will be designated by the CMO (customer cannot choose locomotives). The same consist will run all day
- The first offering of the day can add the 'hostler' experience, including MU process
- Will require an RAL engineer and one additional operations team member to mind the rear of the consist (at minimum a qualified brakeman)
- Will include classroom theory and rules training, including ground work
  - Develop written orientation, safety and procedural training documentation for the customer
  - Director Elems has offered to perform initial classroom and ground training
- Once the hostler procedure mentioned above is ready, a full consist rehearsal must be run to determine time required to inspect, start, connect and test both engines. Tentative plan is to have this effort supervised by the CMO and Director Elems, with the work being performed by me (and operations team member Brian Waller, if available). The rehearsal will include instructor and student interaction, not just running through the procedure
- Using learned time requirements, we can then set a schedule for the first event and advertise availability. We expect to be able to get one RAL with hostler in before noon, then perhaps 3 consist events (without hostler) after lunch
- Conduct review after first event day, adjust program as warranted and schedule follow-on days if demand is present

General conditions that will apply to these and any additional RAL experience that may be developed:

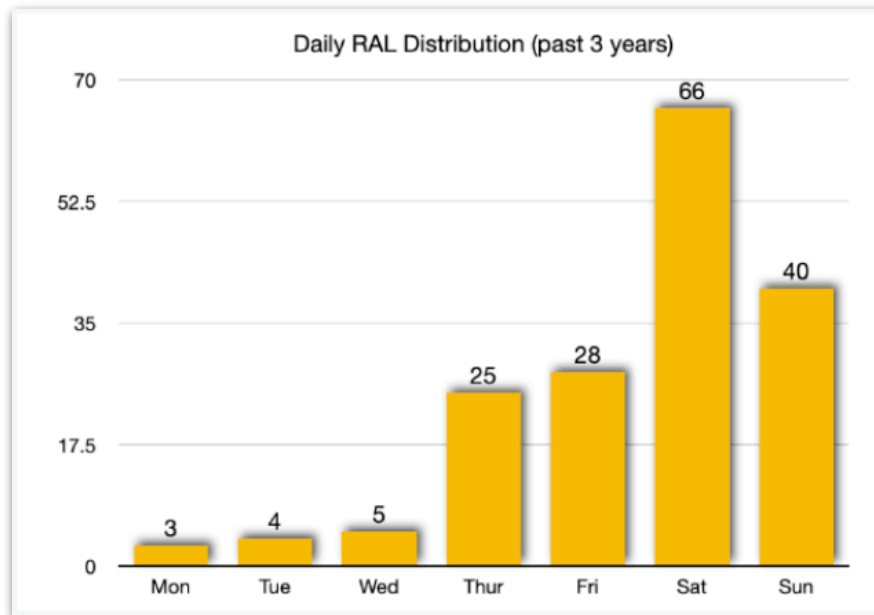
- Available only to existing members (active and above). Non-members must join before being able to book. Non-members continue to be able to book basic RALs.
- In addition to the basic RAL requirement of being able to climb steps and enter the cab unassisted, these new experiences will also require the ability to climb multiple steps, grasp objects, operate handles, stoop, bend, kneel, etc... We need to touch on all

physical actions required. A complete list will be included with the 'hostler experience' documentation described above

- A minimum age requirement of 18 years old will be set for these RALs. This is consistent with the published minimum age to enter the operations department. Children (with guardian) will still be allowed to participate in a basic RAL.

## SCHEDULING - Program Availability

If we look at data for RAL scheduling over the past 3 years, we notice very few RALs occur on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday:



Why not remove those days from the schedule? It is unlikely an RAL patron would choose to forgo an RAL instead of just scheduling Thursday-Sunday.

This change would clarify scheduling needs by indicating to engineers and gift shop personnel they will never be asked to work Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. During operating season, engineers would also be unlikely to have to meet a weekend scheduling as those are typically handled by the caboose train engineer. Personal schedules would only have to make room for Thursdays and Fridays to meet the RAL demand. This should help increase the RAL engineer acceptance rate for scheduled RALs.

This change would also reduce the amount of RALs that require locomotive warm-up and/or museum store payroll expense, increasing overall profitability.

This is not intended to argue against the scheduling of special event RALs (such as BSA Scout programs) Monday through Wednesday. This would only change the publicly advertised hours of the program.

### COMMITTEE FINDING:

The committee decided to discontinue advertising Monday and Tuesday for RAL scheduling, but to maintain Wednesday. This will allow for a full museum closure on Monday and Tuesday which will facilitate work that cannot be performed with visitors present. It will also allow some certainty to RAL staff regarding days off. While Monday and Tuesday will not be advertised as available to book, the committee's intent is that museum management (board appointed



positions) will be able to use these days to facilitate special requests and/or promotional events, as needed. Labor day and Memorial day will continue to be available for RAL.

The caboose train schedule and the RAL schedule will be updated to provide for compatible and consistent start times across all days. Caboose train departure times will be the same for every day the caboose train runs (Saturday, Sunday and Holiday) and the RAL start times will be consistent for every day RAL is available (Wednesday - Sunday).

**ACTION:** Work with General Superintendent to revise RAL program offering to remove Monday and Tuesday from scheduling (complete)

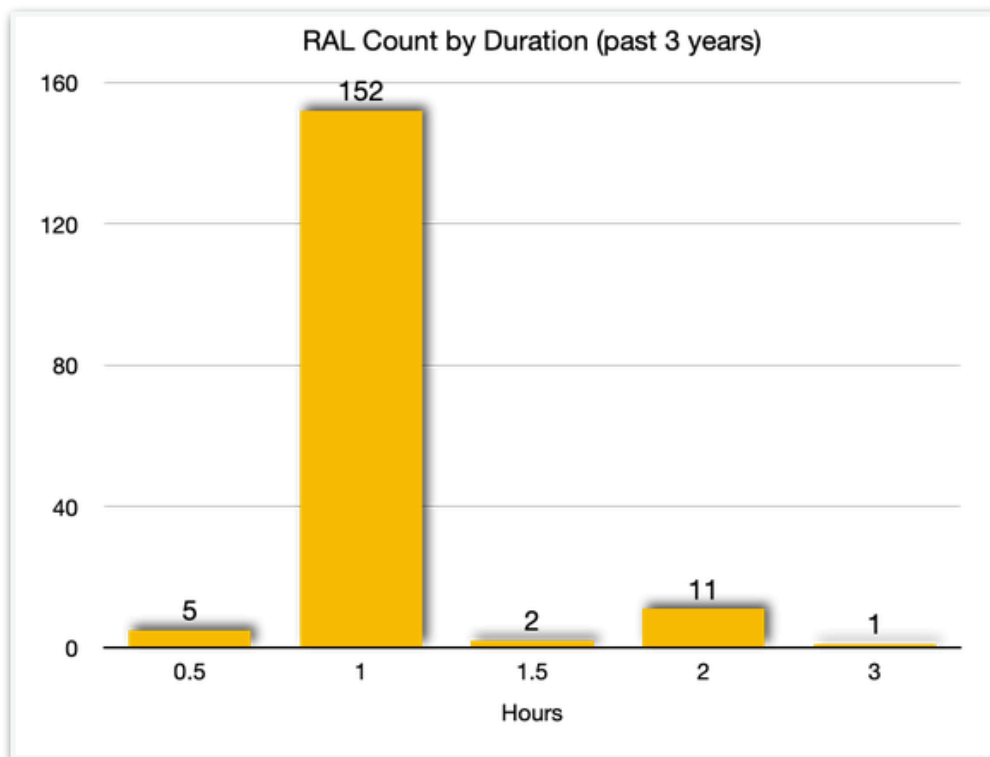
**ACTION:** Work with General Superintendent to revise caboose train schedule and RAL time slots (complete and posted in operations documents)

## SCHEDULING - RAL Duration Discounts

The current RAL program features four different discount levels that may apply to any given RAL.

\$20 discount of hour price for walk in RAL using already running locomotive(s)  
½ hour option – 40% discount off hour price  
2 hour option – 14% discount off combined hour price  
3+ hour option – 20% discount off combined hour price

This is an unnecessary complexity, especially considering the overwhelming majority our customers rent for a single hour. The next largest choice is the 2 hour rental, but most of those are scout events.



The multi-hour discounts are founded on an effort to average the startup costs of the locomotive over the total duration of the RAL. This is better done by averaging the startup costs over all RALs, as described in the pricing section of this proposal. Once appropriate prices are set, there is no need to build in multi-hour discounts. Also, promoting longer RAL sessions necessarily comes at the expense of reducing the number of customers we can serve. More customers should be our focus, as that drives museum visits, gift sales and membership.

The 1/2 hour discount option cannot recover the actual operating cost of the locomotive unless the locomotive is already running and warm. This distinction can be made in theory, but in practice it is not. Three of the four 1/2 hour rentals in 2023 appear to have been cold start and the only run of the day (for that locomotive).

It has also been argued to allow the 1/2 hour option as an add-on to a one hour rental. Given the difficulty in communicating the previous intentions for 1/2 hour rentals, it is doubtful this new policy could be implemented properly. Even if it was, the program would still be exposed to potential loss. Consider an operating day where there are only two consecutive RL slots available. If the first slot is allowed to reserve 1.5 hours, the second slot cannot be reserved or used. A two hour potential became 1.5.

We could allow for 1/2 hour add-on at the time of RAL only, assuming there is no scheduled RAL afterward. This still opens up the possibility of misunderstanding with the museum store that may result in just a half hour sale instead of a half hour extension. Eliminating this 1/2 hour option completely is the safest course .

### **COMMITTEE FINDING:**

The committee was supportive of the recommendations, but it is the intent to continue to allow museum management (board appointed positions) to negotiate special multi-hour packages, such as scouting events.

**ACTION:** Eliminate all multi-hour discounts. Continue to offer multi-hour rentals but do not promote them in order to keep the customer interface as clean as possible

**ACTION:** Eliminate 1/2 hour rental option. All rentals will be for a minimum of 1 hour

**ACTION:** Do not allow the advance reservation of a half hour increment (such as 1.5 hour). If the customer wants to reserve more time for an RAL, they will need to extend their reservation in full hour increments.

**ACTION:** Allow for 1/2 hour extensions of existing RALs to be made at the time of the RAL only (assuming schedule allows). Stated differently, during sign-in for a scheduled RAL, a customer may purchase a 1/2 hour extension assuming the RAL slot immediately following is not already sold. No advance sale or promise of extension may be made. Publish this policy internal only.

**ACTION:** Update store procedure / booking policy to make clear the 50% deposit requirement applies to the entire charge of any multi-hour reservation, not just the first hour. Example: a locomotive with a per hour charge of \$300 is reserved for 3 hours - the deposit amount required is \$450  $((300 \times 3) \times .5 = 450)$

## SCHEDULING - Pricing

There are two methods discussed for estimating the expense to run an RAL for one hour. one method will be termed the 'Total Expense Method' which sets the expense for all rentals as if each rental would incur every possible expense. This method assures the museum never loses money on any one rental but it may result in an excessive retail price. The other method presented will be termed the 'Average Expense Method'. This method sets all expenses with a usage factor to account for the historic frequency of specific expenses, such as locomotive warm up. This method will result in a lower retail price per RAL, but the museum risks losing money if the usage factors change dramatically (A measure to push these trends in our favor is discussed [here](#).)

The challenge is to be certain all expenses are considered and accounted for as accurately as possible. RAL expenses and their usage factors include:

- Locomotive operating cost for one hour warmup (74% of RAL in both 2022 and 2023)
- Payroll costs for off hours gift shop, two hours (10% of RAL in both 2022 and 2023)
- Payroll cost for engineer, one hour (25% of RAL in 2023)
- Locomotive operating cost for RAL, one hour (100% of RAL)
- Track and facilities wear (100% of RAL)
- RAL customer pays by credit card (100% of RAL)
- Pro-rata insurance amount (100% of RAL)
  - Superintendent states RAL does not impact premium at this time\*
- RAL Advertising and promotional costs (100% of RAL)
  - No advertising or promotion at this time

We can arrive at an estimated overhead cost for both expense methods:

	Highest Expense	Usage Factor	Averaged Expense
Store payroll (2 hours)	\$40	10%	\$4
Engineer payroll (1 hour)	\$55	25%	\$14
Track/facility wear	\$19	100%	\$19
Insurance*	\$0	100%	\$0
Management (volunteer)	\$0	100%	\$0
Promotion / Advertising	\$0	100%	\$0
Transaction/Bank fee	\$6	100%	\$6
Estimated overhead	\$120		\$43

**NOTE:**

- Payroll costs have been requested but not received. Estimate using \$20 per hour
- Track costs are estimated using 70% of track budget over 150 RALs
- Transaction/Bank fees requested but not received. Estimate using 2% of \$300

Locomotive operating expenses will naturally vary by locomotive. At present, there does not appear to be sufficient information for specific ongoing maintenance and repair expenses for any locomotive in the fleet. To estimate the operating expense until better data is available, the fuel expense for each locomotive type will be taken from [this chart](#) and tripled to arrive at an estimated hourly operating expense (including fuel). This method of estimate is found satisfactory for watercraft, aircraft and automobiles, so it should be a reasonable place to begin

until better numbers are available. Idle and throttle notch 1 will be referenced for warmup and RAL, respectively.

Off road diesel is presently selling for about \$5 a gallon. Since we are setting prices for the entire year, we should select \$6 a gallon as our expected price to give us a bit of a cushion. This would yield fuel expense per hour and thus operating expense per hour, as follows:

Locomotive	Type	Throttle	Fuel Use/hr	Fuel Exp/hr	Operating Exp/hr
1100	SW8	Idle	3	\$18	\$54
1100	SW8	1	5	\$30	\$90
1503	SW1500	Idle	3.8	\$23	\$69
1503	SW1500	1	6.5	\$39	\$117
2873	GP9	Idle	3.5	\$21	\$63
2873	GP9	1	4.4	\$27	\$81

- All figures rounded to next whole dollar amount.
- Operating expense per hour includes fuel.

The following formulas are used to arrive at a one hour RAL expense estimate for each locomotive.

**Averaged Cost Method** = (Averaged Expense Overhead + (1 hour Operating Expense at Idle \* Usage Factor) + 1 hour Operating Expense at throttle 1)

**Highest Cost Method** = (Highest Expense Overhead + 1 hour Operating Expense at idle + 1 hour Operating Expense at throttle 1)

Locomotive	Type	Averaged Expense Method	Highest Expense Method
1100	SW8	\$173	\$264
1503	SW1500	\$212	\$306
2873	GP9	\$172	\$264

Retail price is then determined by applying a desired donation amount per locomotive. Donations represent the RAL earnings to be invested in additional equipment restoration.

Donation amount should be set to produce adequate revenue to restore additional locomotives to the program. Once a locomotive is in the program, it becomes 'self sufficient' by earning its keep through the operating expense component of the RAL price calculated above. Assuming a restoration fund goal of \$22,500 a year and an average goal of 150 RALs per year, a base donation of \$150 is suggested. This can be further adjusted to compensate for locomotive popularity, condition, rarity, etc. For example:

Locomotive	Type	Donation Amount	Adjustment Reason
1100	SW8	\$100	Continue to offer a low cost option?
1503	SW1500	\$175	Premium condition, newest locomotive
2873	GP9	\$150	

Which would yield the following retail prices for RAL, rounded up to the next \$5 increment:

Locomotive	Type	Averaged Expense Method	Highest Expense Method
1100	SW8	\$275	\$390
1503	SW1500	\$390	\$485
2873	GP9	\$325	\$415

**COMMITTEE FINDING:**

The committee determined the formula was quite suitable for future use, but noted many of the estimates will require more research and ongoing revision. In most cases, such as payroll, payment processing and promotional costs, accurate numbers can be found with little effort (It was noted the estimates for both were too low in this proposal.) Others, such as locomotive and track maintenance costs, will remain rough estimates as we work to understand actual maintenance costs of the fleet and facilities under the current maintenance programs.

The original formula considered only those costs that were incrementally incurred by providing an RAL. Director Vicknair advanced the suggestion we use a ‘four walls’ method of cost accounting, which would indicate we need to figure not only direct costs to provide the RAL, but also proportionate costs required for the infrastructure upon which the RAL builds. Director Elems used insurance as an example. While it may not add any *additional* charge for insurance to provide RAL, we can’t provide RAL without insurance and therefore a portion of the insurance charge should be allocated to the RAL cost. The committee agreed this was the proper way to proceed.

The formula and revised cost estimates were used to arrive at ballpark figures for locomotive rentals during the 2024 season. Rates were set with correlation between member price and averaged cost method calculation. Public prices correlate the highest cost method. With that said, it is the committee’s intent that pricing be flexible to incorporate the ability to discount and otherwise adjust any specific locomotive demand.

Prices for 2024 are set as follows:

Locomotive	Type	Member Price/hr	Public Price/hr
1100	SW8	\$320	\$400
1503	SW1500	\$400	\$500
2873	GP9	\$375	\$470

It is the committee’s intent that pricing be updated yearly before the beginning of each operating season. Updated costs can be plugged into the formula above to arrive at the base cost for each locomotive, which can then be adjusted by the General Superintendent and/or RAL coordinator to arrive at the hourly RAL rate, to be approved by the board.

**ACTION:** Update locomotive pricing to reflect new, individual prices showing both public and member prices. (complete - RAL page shows individual member/public price per locomotive)

## **SCHEDULING - Membership Benefit**

Given the RAL is a premier product of the museum, it is suggested we make the eligibility to schedule an RAL an exclusive membership benefit. In order to purchase an RAL, the purchasing customer must be a member. Membership at any level would qualify. This is an excellent way to increase the membership and overall museum revenue. This would also allow for subsequent promotional contact for every RAL customer.

If there is no desire to require membership to purchase RAL, then membership can be incentivized by having a 'member discount' on RAL. A 'member discount' percentage would not be published. Instead, all RAL price structures would specifically show a member price and a public price with the member price shown in first order. Example:

WP 1503 - EMD SW1500    Hourly Rate: \$400 Member / \$500 Non-member

The member price will be set by the pricing section of this proposal. To have the member price represent a 20% discount, the displayed public price will be calculated by adding 25% to the member price. For instance, if the calculated retail price for a locomotive is \$400, that would be shown as the 'member price'. The public price would then be set at \$500, a 25% increase of \$400.

This public pricing should make the benefit of membership obvious, given a membership can be purchased for \$25. This means the actual prices paid in most circumstances should be the member price. In fact, we shouldn't expect anyone to pay the public price. Most people will do the math but the RAL scheduler, booking software and/or promotional materials can highlight the membership savings, too.

This same concept should also be applied to locomotive cab rides. Current charges for cab rides are \$20 adult and \$10 for youth. Preserve these prices for members but raise public prices to \$25 adult and \$12.50 for youth. This will show a 20% discount for members.

### **COMMITTEE FINDING:**

The committee did not want to require membership for RAL scheduling, as that was seen to be 'forcing' membership on the customer. Instead, the customer should be allowed the option to book without membership. Introducing a rate structure for RAL that makes it advantageous to join the society is supported.

Cab rides will remain the same advertised price for all with a membership discount applied per membership level at time of purchase, as it is today.

**ACTION:** Create member and non-member prices for each locomotive in RAL. The member price is to be displayed in first order anywhere it is shown (website, Screenly, promotional materials). The RAL member price will be set as a separate deliverable of this proposal. The non-member price will be set to encourage membership, but need not reflect any specific or consistent discount.

## **SCHEDULING - Customer Interaction**

*There is no online booking available to the customer.*

The current RAL booking involves a phone call to an answering machine, which is returned later to get customer information and desired times/locomotives. The booking person then goes about securing an RAL engineer and then must call the customer back with confirmation or rejection. Reminders of a scheduled RAL to the customer, the gift shop staff, mechanical personnel and the RAL engineer are not automatic nor are they assured. The current process can result in a multi day delay of the actual sale depending on when the customer leaves a message and when they are next checked. The process is simply not up to present day customer expectations of point, click, buy.

**For Further Rental Information and Appointments...  
call 530-832-4532 - Run-A-Locomotive Rental Information  
If no answer, please call the museum Museum Store at 530-832-4131**

It is also my experience that a certain portion of the younger customer base abhors talking on the phone one on one. These customers are likely to just avoid any situation that does not offer online booking.

It is a safe bet that sales are being lost to this legacy phone-based booking process.

Why don't we offer online booking? The current store software should be able to handle a rudimentary but functional booking of RAL. To illustrate, consider that a T-shirt can be sold with options for color and size. It can be stocked per color or size. Sell a date, with options for time and locomotive. Eugene should be able to comment if this is possible with BigCommerce. Assuming it could be done this would allow the customer to select and pay for their RAL online. The order would go to fulfillment, which would be routed to the same gift shop personnel that do the shipping. At that time, the current back-end scheduling of an RAL engineer would take place along with locomotive verification and then the item would be marked 'ship' as confirmation. Phone calls to the customer would be needed only for exceptions/lack of engineer, or if the customer preferred to make the reservation via phone.

To be clear, I am not advocating for the elimination of phone booking, I just feel that process should be the rare exception. I am advocating for meeting all our customers where they are most comfortable and I feel the vast majority of new customers expect an online booking experience.

For the longer term, a sales platform tailored to the 'experience provider' market must be employed. This class of software handles the scheduling for the customer and for all the necessary resources (RAL engineer, locomotive/mechanical, gift shop personnel). It generally includes payment processing and email schedule reminders for the customer and all resources. One example is <https://bookeo.com>. This can be used exclusively for RAL and tied together with the existing commerce platform - it does not have to replace it or otherwise be involved with merchandise sales.



### **COMMITTEE FINDING:**

The committee agreed that online booking is needed to meet our prospective customer expectations. Director Vicknair is already evaluating software that will interface with the existing point of sale systems, so he will continue this effort and make a selection for extended evaluation. I will work with Director Vicknair to assist him as he may require in the implementation and evaluation of his selection. The intent is to have a fully functional and documented system online with all personnel trained in time for use in the 2025 RAL season.

**ACTION:** Implement an on-line booking experience for the customer, in addition to the traditional phone booking method.

## **SCHEDULING - Payment**

The RAL logs for 2022 and 2023 show cancellation and rescheduling of RALs. In some cases, these happened the day the RAL was to take place. In one instance, the locomotive was started and warming up prior to the call for cancellation. This was an off-hours reservation that brought in the gift shop personnel as well as the RAL engineer.

Late cancellations are encouraged by having a 'pay when you arrive' payment policy. Instead, a prepayment requirement should be formally adopted. This will allow more certainty in scheduling and provide a strong incentive for customers to meet their commitment.

The museum website does not mention a refund policy for RAL. The museum should adopt and/or publish a formal 'no refund' policy for RAL. This is in line with other railroad museums and experience vendors. The customer can be offered options such as credit in the museum store or the ability to reschedule the RAL.

The museum website does not mention a rescheduling policy. The museum should adopt and/or publish a formal rescheduling policy, as follows:

- Rescheduling at least two weeks before the original scheduled date - no charge
- Rescheduling less than two weeks but at least 48 hours before - 20% additional fee
- Rescheduling less than 48 hours before - 40% additional fee

If a reservation is held for a customer, the museum cannot offer that spot to others. If that reservation is subsequently moved by the customer, the museum is now in a situation where the reservation must be resold in a reduced amount of time. The amount of time remaining to sell the reservation is inversely related to the fee charged. The rescheduling fee is set to replace part of the revenue the museum may lose by allowing the schedule change.

### **COMMITTEE FINDING:**

Discussion was generally supportive of the need to create a formal deposit, reschedule and refund policy with the following revisions to the suggested content:

- 50% deposit required to book appointment
- Reschedules allowed up to 48 hours before appointment without charge
- Deposits and payments are non-refundable, except in the event the museum must cancel
- Any deposits and/or payments made on an RAL not completed will be converted to donation

**ACTION:** Adopt and/or publish a formal deposit, refund and reschedule policy for RAL (complete)

## **POST SALE - Data Gathering**

To better track the success of the RAL program and determine the impacts of any changes to it, more data is required. This data should be collected and reported to the board on a periodic basis, just as any business initiative should be monitored.

Most of the needed data would be implicitly collected and available once on-line scheduling is used. Some of the data is already recorded, but in a manual and sometimes haphazard manner, so the emphasis should be on accuracy and consistency.

Data needs include:

- Time and date RAL was placed on the schedule
- Name of museum employee who placed the RAL on the schedule
- Payment type and payment date
- If cancellation is received, date of cancellation request and any refund amount, including method of refund
- If reschedule is requested, date of reschedule request
- Number of participants in the RAL (number of releases filled out)
- All RALs, including walk-ins, should be formally scheduled (on-line booking if enabled, in the current schedule if no online booking).
- Caboose train power recorded for each day caboose train is running
- Gift certificate number, when applied to RAL payment
- Original locomotive requested, if the customer is ultimately scheduled for another locomotive due to availability
- Email address of purchasing customer
- Member ID of purchasing customer

In addition, we should be gathering data that can tell us about our engagement for train rides and cab rides, since these are likely 'feeder' programs for RAL. These are also key business metrics for the success of the operating department. These statistics should be available on demand and reported monthly to the board.

- Admissions sold, broken down by operating day and non-operating day (so we can determine how many bought admission but not train ride, even though train ride was available)
- Train ride tickets sold
- Cab rides sold

### **COMMITTEE FINDING:**

The committee is confident the majority of the desired data exists, it just needs to be purposefully captured and collected in a usable manner.

**ACTION:** I will work with all parties implementing changes mentioned throughout this document to identify opportunities to best collect relevant program information over the course of the operating season. It is expected the majority of information will be made readily available through the electronic booking process, but all other avenues will be explored. This will allow for manual data collection during the 2024 season to track the effectiveness of changes but set the foundation for more data collected automatically beginning with the 2025 operating season.