Pacific Coast Region
Convention 2023 Report

This is a summary report for the Pacific Coast Region Board of Directors. The Pacific Coast Region (PCR) Convention 2023 was held in Sacramento, CA at the Courtyard Marriott at Cal Expo. Attendance was slightly higher than the previous year, with 155 registrations. The convention resulted in a financial loss of approximately $2500, due mostly to the high cost of the hotel and their catering service. Other significant financial factors included lower than expected sales of the convention car and the low registrations for the virtual convention.

Reports from each functional area are included below. Detailed financial reports are available on request to the Convention Treasurer.

Respectfully submitted by:

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Chip Meriam, Co-Chair   Jim Collins, Co-Chair

2023 PCR Convention Committee

Name	Committee Position	Email
Co-Chairs	Chip Meriam Jim Collins	rbr23chair@pcrnmra.org
FRRS Co-Chairs	Kerry Cochran Eugene Vicknair	rbr23frrschair@pcrnmra.org
Registrar	Michael Eldridge	rbr23registrar@pcrnmra.org
Treasurer	Michael Eldridge	rbr23treasurer@pcrnmra.org
Facilities	Lou Anderson	rbr23facilities@pcrnmra.org
Publicity / Social Media	Dave Putnam	rbr23avcoord@pcrnmra.org
Webmaster	Jim Collins	rbr23webmaster@pcrnmra.org
Clinics	Dave Bayless	rbr23clinics@pcrnmra.org
FRRS Clinics	Kerry Cochran	rbr23frrsclinics@pcrnmra.org
Contests	Mike Hamlin	rbr23contests@pcrnmra.org
A/V Coordinator Virtual Convention Coord.	Dave Putnam	rbr23avcoord@pcrnmra.org
Excursions	Brian Witt	rbr23proto@pcrnmra.org
Layout Tours and Operating Sessions	Scott Inman and David Parks	rbr23layouts@pcrnmra.org
Non-Rail Activities	Mary Moore-Campagna	rbr23nonrail@pcrnmra.org
Volunteer Coordinator	Paul Paoli	rbr23volunteer@pcrnmra.org
SIG Activities	Seth Neumann	rbr23sig@pcrnmra.org
Timetable	Tom Campbell	—
Hobo-in-Charge	Lou Anderson	rbr23hobo@pcrnmra.org
Company Store	David Fryman	rbr23chair@pcrnmra.org

Vendors	Eugene Vicknair	rbr23vendors@pcrnmra.org
Banquet	Lou Anderson	rbr23banquet@pcrnmra.org
Convention Shirts	Chip Meriam	rbr23chair@pcrnmra.org
PCR Contest Department	Earl Girbovan	pcrContestDeptMgr@pcrnmra.org

We had two difficulties to overcome regarding the committee. The original Convention Chair moved away from the area. While he had made a significant start in the planning it was difficult for the new co-chairs to know exactly what had been done and what still needed to be done, especially in the early planning. Second, a committee member with significant responsibilities was struggling with health issues. A few of the committee members that already had their own responsibilities had to take up other responsibilities at the last minute. As was reported in last year's post-convention report, the PCR may need to work to encourage more people to volunteer their time for each convention. In the internet age we might consider that several positions do not necessarily need to be filled by people in the hosting division. In 2024 both the Treasurer and Registrar will not be in the hosting division.

Registration

We used the RegFox system again this year, and it has proven to be easy to manage and very effective. RegFox can generate reports quickly, and once the report form is set up, it is easy to generate reports that are helpful for the function chairs. Nearly all registrants submitted payment through RegFox registration using a credit card. Two registrants paid by check. If the Treasurer has access to RegFox it is very easy to accept the check and update the registration to show that it is paid.

We used Square to accept payments for walk-up registration and for store purchases. This worked well but does not collect some of the data that RegFox collects.

Lessons Learned

1. The Registrar was new this year and could not figure out how to handle walk-up registrations using RegFox. At the convention we simply charged people for the type of registration requested and took payment using Square. If we do this again, there must be a way to collect the address information for the registrant.
2. Some materials were missing at the registration desk when registration first opened. This caused many problems and put the Registrar in an uncomfortable position.
3. The plan was to stuff the registration "packets" in the early afternoon before registration opened. This should be completed the day before registration opens.
4. The new Registrar was simply not familiar with how several things work at the convention. The most problematic was the Hobo Breakfast. There was no sign-up sheet at the registration table until after 90% of the attendees had checked in. This likely affected attendance at the breakfast.

Facilities

Space was very limited at the hotel. We did not realize ahead of time that the hotel café was not open during lunch. The spaces for clinics and the contest room were adequate with good seating capacity. The vendors were limited to the space in the lobby area, which was shared with the registration desk and the

2024 Convention promotional area. There was no space allocated for a swap meet, and there was no swap meet scheduled.

The food was well prepared and the service was very good. The cost of food at this type of event is high. It is worth examining whether people want to have a nice meal, or if the attraction of the banquet is more social – that people want to meet together. Some ideas were suggested to keep the price a bit lower: to have the banquet as lunch instead of dinner, and to offer a "budget" and "premium" meal option at registration time. Buffet meals generally cost about the same as a plated dinner but often get better ratings from the attendees.

Lessons Learned

1. We did not get information in time from the catering company, so we were not able to get meal choice information to the caterer before the event. Same was true for the Hobo Breakfast. Meal choices should be available at registration time (not necessary if the meal is buffet style).
2. The vendors need a different arrangement (see below).
3. There were not enough rooms available at the group rate.
4. The person making arrangements with the hotel should have a list of minimum room sizes for vendors, clinics, model contest, etc.
5. Room labels for clinics etc. should match the labels that the hotel uses: If they have rooms A, B, C we should have clinic rooms A, B, C. The signs we created were too complex and thus difficult to read. We may want to make signs that only list the next two clinics in a room and change the sign more frequently.
6. Our setups (tables in registration area, contest room, etc.) should follow ADA guidelines and fire regulations, especially for aisle space.

Treasurer

RegFox works very well for collecting funds, and the funds are automatically transferred to the convention bank account. This year we got a debit card for the account. This made online transactions very easy. We also created an account with Square, which gave us the capability of accepting credit and debit card payments on site, which was used both for walk-up registrations and for store purchases (the convention car and decals). We used the magnetic stripe reader which is supplied by Square for free. This uses a cell phone as the POS terminal. They also have a proximity (tap) and chip reader for $50, but there was no problem or inconvenience using the magnetic stripe reader. We don't expect many of our attendees to use Apple Pay etc., so the magnetic stripe reader should be adequate for the near future.

Reimbursements were made after committee members paid from their own funds for several things. It would be much easier to do the accounting if these purchases could be made using the debit card.

Lessons Learned

1. At the beginning the fees collected with Square were not properly categorized. It is simple to set up items in Square. Each item that might be sold should be entered in the Square store, registrations by type, store items, banquet tickets, tour fees.
2. If the debit card is loaned to others, the Treasurer needs to also give the person a PIN. For that reason, the debit card should have a unique PIN not used for any other personal card.

Publicity

The convention was publicized via its own web page with links to that page from the PCR and Sierra websites, via Constant Contact to PCR members, the Sierra Division newsletter, and Facebook page.

Lessons Learned

1. The convention should be advertised in all the division newsletters and on the division websites.
2. Other places that we should have advertised: International Rail Fair, Great Train Show, local hobby shops, national publications such as Model Railroader, Railroad Model Craftsman, and the NMRA publications.
3. There should be a list of publicity channels, and the list should be made available to each convention committee, and updated or increased by each convention committee. That leads to another consideration, that there should be a standardized place to store information like this, most likely a cloud storage area, possibly managed by the PCR webmaster.

Website

Jim Collins set up the original website starting with a copy of the 2019 website. Because we had RegFox for registration the website was mainly for advertising and a way to disseminate information about the convention. There were occasional updates required, which took a significant amount of time.

Lessons Learned

1. In last year's post-convention report it was recommended that we move away from HTML/CSS/Scripting style of website. The 2024 Convention is already using WordPress, and this should make it easier for volunteers to update the website.
2. As with any group website, there should be at least two people with administrator access from the day the website is created.
3. If possible, people responsible for functional areas should have write access to the pages for their area, so that the website administrator does not have to handle all updates.
4. Looking forward there should be a discussion of what clinic recordings or even presentation slides should end up on the PCR website, and in what form.

Virtual Component

The convention included a professionally managed virtual component. Only a few people registered for this. In the planning stages the virtual component was treated as a sort of backup plan in case it became impossible to conduct the convention in person. All clinics in one of the clinic rooms were made available in real time, and then were made available to all convention attendees following the convention. A tour of the model contest room was streamed. Because the registrations were so few, in many ways the virtual component this year could be viewed as a test of process.

Lessons Learned

1. If we want significantly higher registrations to a virtual component it must be marketed differently, as an alternative way of attending the convention rather than as a backup plan. In whatever way the in-person convention is publicized, the virtual convention should be included as a way of attending.
2. The virtual component raised new questions about who is eligible to attend the convention. Is the convention a benefit of membership and designed exclusively for NMRA members? Is it part of the promotion of the NMRA to hobbyists that are not members? Is it a promotion of the hobby to the public? There are insurance considerations that need to be addressed by the National level NMRA.
3. It was suggested that the fee should be reduced.

Layout Tours

There were several layouts available, and people that visited them reported a good experience. Attendance was good, at least for the layouts nearby.

Lessons Learned

1. Some people did not realize the maps were in the registration packet. The layouts were listed in the convention timetable document, and it would be helpful to put a note there on where the maps are available.
2. This is the age of GPS navigation, so a QR code or easy to enter address should be available for people that will be using GPS navigation.
3. The layouts were not finalized until just before the convention. Layouts are part of the attraction of the convention, so information should be available in time for the publicity channels.
4. Web technology (including YouTube) would help potential visitors decide to visit a layout. Perhaps the PCR or the hosting division could assist layout owners to produce a short video introduction to their layout.

Operating Sessions

The operating sessions were handled through the SIG Activities with the coordinating efforts of David Parks. Most of these sessions meshed with the open houses and layout tours. A list of layout owners from the 2019 PCR convention was contained from the 2019 OP Session Chair, and this helped the SIG Activities personnel ion scheduling.

Lessons Learned

1. See the comments above relating to Layout Tours.

Excursions

Three excursions were offered: the Siemens Factory where light rail vehicles are built, the California State Railroad Museum which was to include a docent tour and special attention to the Model Railroading exhibit produced by the NMRA, and the California State Museum Collection. The Siemens tour had a fixed capacity and was filled quickly during the registration period. The CSRM tour was well attended. Four people signed up for the State Museum Collection tour.

Clinics

Clinics were offered throughout each day. There were three rooms for clinics. One of the rooms was set up for live streaming the clinics to the web.

Lessons Learned

1. A computer should be available in each room, regardless of whether or not presenters indicate they will bring their own. The computer only needs to be able to run a PowerPoint presentation on the projector. It should be made clear to presenters that they can use their own computer, but they must supply any adapters required to connect to a standard HDMI cable.
2. It has been proposed that clinics should be restricted to mornings with afternoons available for layout tours etc.
3. There was some concern that we were trying to have as many clinics as possible, and this led to some less-than-stellar clinics. We might consider limiting the total number of clinics and being a little more discriminating when selecting clinics for the convention.

Contest

The model contest went well. There were more entries than last year, but we would still like to encourage more entries.

Lessons Learned

1. There were members of the FRRS that would have liked to display models, even if they were not part of the contest. There was no obvious way to do this, so they did not display their models. If we have joint conventions we should find a way to allow non-NMRA members to display models.
2. The contest is something of a mystery to those who have never entered a model. We need to find ways to make it well known how the contest works, what are appropriate models and quality levels for entering, and other ways of encouraging participation.
3. At the national level it might be worth considering changes in the modeling culture and how these might prompt changes in the contest judging criteria. There are so many highly detailed models available commercially that people are not building as much as in past years. For example, models displayed at RPM's are typically not scratch-built and may have only a few detail modifications but masterfully weathered. These would not score very high under the current criteria.

Volunteer Coordination

There were enough volunteers for the required tasks, and the volunteers were flexible and willing to cover the tasks. The Volunteer Coordinator did a good job organizing the volunteers and staying on top of tasks.

Non-Rail Activities

The Non-Rail group had a dedicated room available for various activities – mostly crafts and conversation. Outside excursions were limited, but there was one special evening event that was extremely well received: The Friday evening play, "Young Frankenstein" at the Woodland Opera House.

Lessons Learned

1. If future PCR conventions occur in the Sacramento area, the Woodland Opera House would be an excellent inclusion in the list of outside excursions.

Company Store

The Company Store sold only the convention car and decals. The convention cars were a stock item, with data only printed. Custom made decals were sold with each car.

Lessons Learned

1. There were many cars left at the end of the convention. This seems to be the trend, with a significant number of cars typically left over at the end of the convention. There has not been any plan ahead of time for how to dispose of the remaining cars. Perhaps this should be considered part of convention planning. It may also be wise to track the sales history better, and better predict how many cars should be purchased by the convention.
2. Creating and using a Square Store worked very well for selling cars at the convention. The supplied card reader made it easy for people to buy with a credit or debit card. The card reader supplied free by Square was perfectly adequate for sales with the credit and debit cards.

Program/Timetable

The timetable was nicely done, and at the convention it was common to see people carrying with them at all times and referring to it often. Companies that donated door prizes were given ad space, which worked well.

Lessons Learned

1. If the layout tour and op session maps are not included in the timetable there should be a note on those sections that make it clear where the maps can be found.

Vendor Show/Swap Meet

The vendor show was small, with three venders, due to space limitations at the venue.

There was no swap meet, again due to space limitations. Some attendees were surprised and disappointed that there was no swap meet.

Lessons learned

1. The venders should have a space that can be locked up in the evenings and overnight.
2. Some potential vendors have indicated that there simply aren't enough customers to justify the cost in time and money of setting up a store at the convention. The main solution would seem to be to increase convention attendance and then communicate the new numbers to potential vendors. An idea has been suggested for next year's convention to have specific times that the vendor area would be open to the public.
3. If there is adequate space some portable layouts could be in the same area, and offer this as a mini-train show with a small entry fee for visitors. This would open issues of insurance and the contract with the hotel.

Door Prizes and Raffle

There were a few very nice items donated. Raffle tickets were sold for $1 each and winners were announced on the last day of the convention.

Lessons learned

1. There needs to be a way for the Treasurer to know how many raffle tickets are sold. Typically, the tickets are sequentially numbered, so a start and end ticket number would be a simple way to keep track. All raffle ticket sales were cash, so even keeping that in a separate envelope would make it easy to know how many tickets were sold.

Hobo Breakfast

The hobo breakfast was held at a local restaurant. The hobo breakfast has evolved from a small gathering to a significant event. The money collected for the breakfast was literally in a coffee can. It may be time to handle this like any other event in the convention, with registration and money handled through RegFox. Many people complained about how early the breakfast is held, but the other convention events started early in the day and we wanted to avoid schedule conflicts.

Lessons Learned

1. We need to make sure people know ahead of time where it will be held, what is the cost, and how and when to pay.

2. We underestimated the number of people that would attend. Several came without any advance registration or payment. It was suggested to plan on 20% more people than those that register.

Post-convention

Following the convention, a survey was sent to convention attendees which yielded a lot of helpful information.

Lessons Learned

1. It would help for strategic planning to add a question: Why did you attend the convention? What was the top attraction that helped you decide to attend?

Registration and sales data

There was a total of 155 registrations for the convention:

Early Bird First Class Registrations	45
First Class Registrations	40
First Time Registrations	7
Express Registrations	42
Day Fare Registrations	8
Virtual Convention Registrations	2
Non-Rail First Class Registrations	8
Non-Rail Express Registrations	3

There were 35 Convention Cars sold, plus one additional decal set. 14 people registered for the Siemens tour, 8 for the California State Railroad Museum, and 4 for the State Museum Collection tour.

A detailed registration report is available on request to the registrar.

Financial report

The 2023 PCR Convention operated at a loss. The Sierra Division subsidized the convention two ways: a cash loan and the purchase of unsold convention cars. The primary factor was the high cost of the facility and the meals.

Lessons Learned

1. The PCR advances $2000 to the hosting division for each convention. This is not adequate for making a deposit on the venue for two reasons: the required deposit is more than $2000, and it is due more than a year before the convention. Sierra division is able to make the deposit and get reimbursed later. The recommendation is that the PCR make the deposit for the venue directly.

PCR Convention	
Financial Statements	
Basis: Cash	
From 01 Apr 2022 To 01 May 2023	

INCOME STATEMENT	
Account	Total

Operating Income	
General Income	
Square Payment test	$0.97
Registrations	$22,056.87
Vendor tables	$180.00
Total for General Income	**$22,237.84**
Sales	$1,936.48
Note: sales include selling	
excess cars to Sierra Division	
Total for Operating Income	**$24,174.32**

Cost of Goods Sold	
Convention car	$1,705.30
Total for Cost of Goods Sold	**$1,705.30**

Gross Profit	**$22,469.02**

Operating Expense	
Bank Fees and Charges	$38.30
Office Supplies	$206.88
Other Expenses	$748.37
Registration supplies	$150.90
Staff expenses	$986.64
Awards	$427.48
Total for Other Expenses	**$2,313.39**
Postage	$28.75
Printing and Stationery	$417.54
Transportation (excursions)	$940.54
Registration refund	$358.48
Facilities	$0.00
Rent Expense	$20,520.10
Total for Facilities	**$20,520.10**

Total for Operating Expense	**$24,823.98**

Operating Profit	-$2,354.96

Non Operating Income	
Total for Non Operating Income	$0.00

Non Operating Expense	
Total for Non Operating Expense	$0.00

Net Profit/Loss	**-$2,354.96**

BALANCE SHEET

Assets

Cash	0
Car Inventory	0
Total	**0**

Liabilities

Sierra Loan	2354.96
Total	**2354.96**

Equity

Retained Earnings	-2354.96
Total	**-2354.96**

Total of Liabilities & Equity	**0**