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Effect Of Railroads' Merger Draws Comment, Speculation Over Section

The long-planned merger of the Seaboard Air Line Railroad with the Atlantic Coast Line, which has now been approved by the Interstate Commerce Commission, may mean some changes in this area served by the Seaboard—but just what they will be no one seems to know as yet. It is likely that, in Moore

county, the only change will be in the name of the railroad, since none of the SAL facilities here are duplicated by the ACL.

The system will be known as the Seaboard Coastline Railroad, the ICC said, with the Seaboard as the surviving corporation and the ACL as the holding company. The new line will be the nation's second largest in length of track, with 12,390 miles of it, serving the Southeast from Virginia to Florida, and exceeded only by the Atchafalaya, Topeka and Santa Fe with 13,000 miles.

The Seaboard Air Line has been a lifeline of this area for many years, antedating most of the towns which lie along it. Most of them, in fact, grew up as railroad crossings.

Southern Pines was founded as a direct result of the Seaboard's immigration activities in the 1870's and 1880's. So impressed by the area was John T. Patrick, SAL immigration agent who laid out Southern Pines, that he resigned his job in order to settle in Pinebluff and work on various development projects.

Aberdeen was once known as Blue's Crossing. Cameron and Vass, the other two Moore County towns on the Seaboard main line, are also historically tied in with the railroad. Manly just north of Southern Pines, and Ad-dor, south of Pinebluff—known until World War I as "Kaiser," once were thriving commercial centers as a result of railroad traffic in lumber and naval stores.

Employees of the railroad live in practically all the towns it serves, and it pays taxes to all of them, as well as to the counties. Some apprehension is being felt as to how the merger will affect the employees since it was reported in the ICC hearings that it will mean some 4,000 jobs lost over the next five years.

Hamlet, site of the Seaboard shops and transfer terminal, in neighboring Richmond County, is reported by the Richmond County Journal of Rockingham to be in a very apprehensive frame of mind, despite the fact that SAL president John Smith, recently speaking there, told his audience of the plans and added that "Hamlet will not be hurt."

While many of the Hamlet facilities are not duplicated by the ACL in this area, it is expected that some of the switch engine work could go to the larger ACL centers at Wilmington and Columbia, S. C.

In addition to the job loss over

the next five years, a report of the merger hearings said 117 diesel locomotives and 41 passenger cars would be eliminated. An engineer's report also proposed consolidation of 67 stations and terminals, seven of them in North Carolina.

An indication of the types of jobs to be lost, or of changes to be made, is the shutting down of the Rockingham Railroad, a small line owned by the Atlantic Coast Line. Since it is a competing facility with the Seaboard, it will be eliminated, the Richmond County Journal said.

In the ICC official decision it was written that the merger "will result in significant reductions in internal costs and enable the merger company to effectively meet the ever-increasing competition from other modes of transport." The Seaboard currently runs over

4,100 miles of track from Richmond and Portsmouth, Va., to Jacksonville, St. Petersburg, Miami and Homestead, Fla. Most of the duplication of the two lines is in Virginia and Florida.

Both cooperate with other railroads to give direct service—including streamliner accommodations—to persons traveling the New York-Florida run.

In general, the better this can be done, and the greater economic health of the railroad while doing it, the greater will be the benefits eventually accruing to all the communities which it serves, say business observers.

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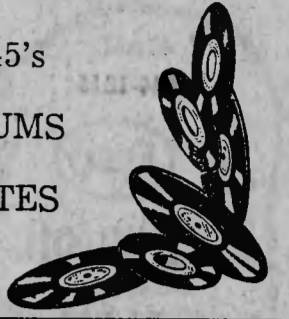
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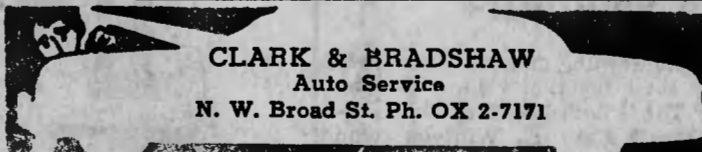
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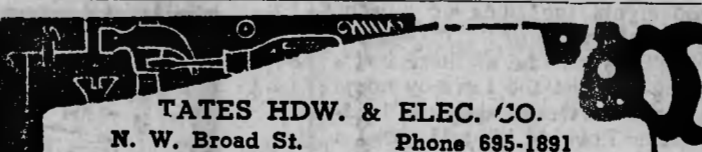
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