

# Pulling hard to stay on track

by Jennifer Moody

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Mark Ylen/Democrat-Herald  
Workers prepare to move the 4449 over the drop table in the engine shop of the Portland & Western's Albany yard.

*Too-small bearing delays repair work, but as of Saturday evening, the plan still called for the engine to leave Albany this morning*

Southern Pacific 4449's main driver is off and binders have been installed in its place, to bear the weight of the massive steam engine while mechanics install a new bearing.

It's Saturday morning at the engine shop at Portland & Western's Albany yard, one of only two places in the state with a drop table large enough for the engine's 80-inch-diameter steel wheels.

The bearing isn't quite wide enough for the axle. This means a trip up to Portland to get it remachined. Chief engineer Doyle McCormack isn't happy about it, but there's no alternative. Metal expands when it gets hot, he explains, and if the bearing doesn't provide enough expansion room, the driver will seize up.

Saturday's repair job was expected to take a good eight hours, says Bruce Carswell, P&W president and general manager. Now, it looks like it will take longer and work was continuing through Saturday evening.

The plan, Carswell said, still is to head the engine back to Portland around 8 a.m. Sunday.

"This is why they got rid of steam engines," Carswell says wryly. "They're fairly maintenance-intense, as opposed to the diesel locomotives who replaced them."

It's nothing new to need more machining on a replacement bearing, Carswell says. In the 1940s, the heyday of the steam locomotive, mechanics would have been very familiar with the problem - but they would have had equipment right there to fix it.

Engine 4449 is 66 years old and has been in formal retirement since 1957. It was donated to the city of Portland in 1958, where it was placed on display in Oaks Park.

Restored in 1975, the engine was part of the American Freedom Train and toured 48 states for the nation's bicentennial celebration. It also traveled from Portland to New Orleans in 1984 to help publicize the World's Fair.

When it leaves Albany, 4449 will head back to Portland. It is scheduled to be coupled with a Union Pacific steam engine next month to pull a passenger train from Portland to Seattle as part of a fundraiser.

Interest in the 4449 continues to be strong worldwide, said Christopher Donhost, a board member with the Oregon Rail Heritage Foundation. It led the flagship passenger train for Southern Pacific, the last operating streamlined steam locomotive, and is considered the most photographed in the world.

Donhost's organization wants to preserve that legacy, and that of two other steam locomotives still being housed at Portland's Brooklyn Yard.

The foundation is negotiating for property across the street from the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry in Portland, in the hopes of building an interpretive center there for the three engines.

Information on the effort is available online at [www.orhf.org](http://www.orhf.org).

"Essentially we would have a facility that would be open to the public," Donhost said. "We would want to use that to not only continue restoration efforts and the maintenance that needs to be done, but most importantly we want to make them accessible to the public for educational purposes - letting the kids know about this heritage that we have here in the Portland area."

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