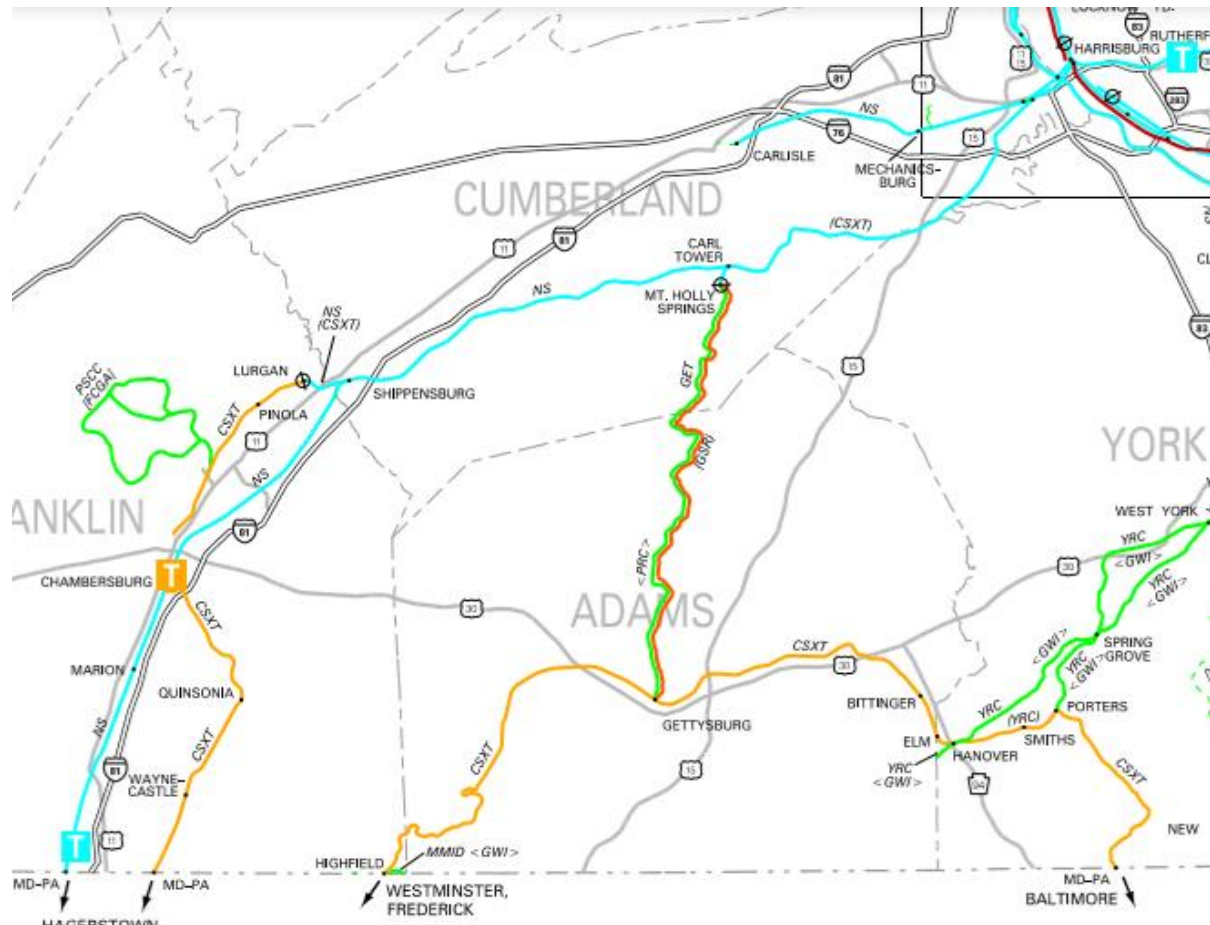


Lurgan Branch Cleversburg Jct

Lurgan Branch at 210 Airport Road Shippensburg, PA.

by Frank C. Mellott

Picture 1 PA 2019 Rail Map cutout.



The Norfolk Southern Lurgan Branch begins at CP Capital in Harrisburg, PA and proceeds down the ex-Conrail, nee Reading, trackage to Shippensburg, PA. At Shippensburg, the Reading ended and the Conrail line followed the ex-Pennsylvania Railroad, (PRR) ex-Cumberland Valley Railroad (CVR) to Hagerstown, Maryland. The line ends at Vardo Yard. South of this point the operation is on the former Norfolk & Western (NW) to Roanoke, Virginia.

When Conrail was formed from the bankrupt Penn Central and Reading Railroads (among others) in 1976, The Reading line was in better physical shape and newer. The original Cumberland Valley, one of the oldest railroads in Pennsylvania (they were operating sleeper cars on passenger trains a decade before the famous PRR Horse

Shoe Curve near Altoona, PA was built), connected Lemoyne, with Carlisle and Shippensburg by running through urban areas with many grade crossings. The Reading line was elevated and at the time largely double tracked. South of Shippensburg the PRR was rather bucolic and only became a "modern" railroad in Chambersburg. By 1976, much of the former PRR was reduced to 25 MPH or less while the Reading was in much better condition. Conrail demoted the PRR from Lemoyne to Carlisle to a stub end line and tore out the Carlisle to Shippensburg portion. The merger also made Pennroad Tower at the junction of the PRR and Reading in Shippensburg redundant. The newly formed Shippensburg Branch was a valuable part of the Conrail system conveying interchange traffic off the NW at Hagerstown to points north.

Picture 2 Reading C630 near Lee's Crossroads Frank C. Mellott collection



Through the 1990s the line was mostly nocturnal and very hard to railfan. The break-up of Conrail in 1999 when it was split between Norfolk Southern (created in 1982 by the merger of the Norfolk & Western and Southern Railways) led to increased train traffic and the first major improvements the line had seen since circa 1976. Curves were eased, newer rail installed and in 2013 the intermodal terminal in Greencastle, PA was opened. Unfortunately over the years all of the classic Reading and PRR stations except Marion and Greencastle, PA (both PRR) have been removed.



Railfanning the line is still difficult, but in 2014 a new park opened trackside in Shippensburg. The park consists of a pavilion and parking area. It is by the signal at milepost 38, approximately 2 miles from Lee's Cross Roads and 2 miles from CP SHIP.

Picture 3 Pavilion at Cleversburg Jct, May 2014 Frank C. Mellott .

Eastbound trains hold at MP38 if they are too long to fit between the grade crossings south of Lee's. Westbounds hold at Lee's. The junction between the Harrisburg Terminal and Shenandoah dispatchers used to be Vardo yard. But under NS ownership,

the Hagerstown dispatcher now controls the railroad from Lees Crossroads south to much of the old NW to Front Royal, VA. The radio frequency is 160.980 Mhz . There is a scanner with a base station antenna, but it is not always working so you may want to bring your own. Most trains call signals and all trains contact dispatch as they are approaching Lees Crossroads. It is about 45 minutes to an hour from there to Leidigh Park and 30-45 minutes or so to Hagerstown by rail. Much of the line is 45 MPH or more and they can stroll. Some trains use distributed power or DPU: Remote controlled units placed mid train or on the rear.

Cleversburg JCT was where a branch came off the Reading main and went to a small iron ore deposit near Cleversburg, PA. That activity ended prior to WWI. The Cumberland Valley National Railway Historical Society (NRHS) chapter has taken an interest and has posted a listing of the train symbols commonly seen there. While there is no schedule, many of the trains pass around the same time daily.

The hotshot intermodals: 203 and 202 can be seen often in the 1100 to 1400 window. 15T is often around supper time, allowing for good summer photos. the 16T tends to be a morning train. 11R and 12R and 11Z and 12Z seem to appear any time. Anything in the 200 series is an intermodal train. 11R etc are all mixed freight.

The 747 and 777 coal trains and the 746 and 776 empties can pass at any time.

The KH00 CSX local may appear Sunday afternoons and Wednesday evenings.

900 series trains are company service, usually ballast or maintenance of way equipment moves.

Depending on markets, there may be loaded grain trains to the Shenandoah Valley.

If you become bored or hungry, downtown Shippensburg has a variety of food sources. There is a small park towards the south end of town. There is a museum there in a box car that was stranded when the line through town was torn up. There is also a Baltimore and Ohio hopper car and plans are in the works to move an 86q former Conrail auto parts car there as well.

While travelling, watch traffic at the I-81 ramps and buggies. The area is popular with there is a sizeable community

Have fun and remember: expect a train on any direction and stay off the



out for truck and bicycles surrounding bikers and Mennonite

always track in any property!