

ROCK ISLAND INTERVIEW NOTES:

PERSON: Former North Little Rock Mayor Patrick Henry Hays

DATE OF INTERVIEW: Nov. 23, 2017

LOCATION: Hays' law office — 5525 JFK Blvd., North Little Rock, Arkansas

INTERVIEWER: Michael Hibblen

DESCRIPTION: The former mayor and Arkansas state representative was interviewed about his involvement in a project to preserve the Rock Island Railroad bridge over the Arkansas River by negotiating with the Union Pacific Railroad to keep Union Pacific from tearing down the span when it was no longer in use. The bridge was eventually renovated into a pedestrian and cycling span as part of the Clinton Presidential Center and renamed the Clinton Presidential Park Bridge. Hays also discussed North Little Rock's railroad history and his five years working for the Missouri Pacific Railroad during summer and Christmas breaks while in college. Hays died six years after the interview on Oct. 4, 2023 from cancer, his family said. He was 76.

TECHNICAL NOTES: Two mics were used to record in two separate channels which were later mixed together. The interview was stopped and restarted at one point, with two separate digital files.

FILE NAME: 2017-11-23-Pat_Hayes-Interview-Part_1_of_2.wav

EDITED TRANSCRIPT INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS:

Hays spoke about how he came to work for the Missouri Pacific Railroad based out of North Little Rock, primarily during summers and holidays while attending college for his undergraduate and law degrees.

00:00 Back in 1965 when I graduated from high school, I started taking my student trips the next morning — graduated one night, and then I was up at 4 or 5 o'clock the next morning. And you had to take your student trips to Poplar Bluff, to Texarkana, to Memphis, which were the three freight runs that were on the Arkansas Division, and then you had the Valley Division, which basically went down to McGehee and then on into Alexandria, Louisiana, and then you had the Central Division, which went up to Fort Smith. So those were the three basic divisions, and if you held seniority on one, it didn't necessarily translate to the others. They needed folks to work during the summer because a lot of the folks would take vacations. We would work off of what they called the extra board and that was just simply a rotation of regular jobs that people had that they wanted off, and laying off was the term that they would use.

Hays shared details about memorable trips on a scenic stretch of the Missouri Pacific track that ran through northern Arkansas to Branson, Missouri.

01:25 One time I was on the route that goes from Memphis up to Cotter, and it was, I guess you could say, on the Arkansas Division, but it worked out of Memphis, and it was the longest single run on the road at the time. I think it was a little over 200 miles from Memphis to Cotter, Arkansas, and you'd come through Wynne and Bald Knob, then you would go up a little bit on the mainline to just past Newport and then you'd follow the White River all the way up to Cotter, then on up into Branson and into, I guess, Missouri and Kansas after it left Branson.

2:20 But I had always wanted — because I had worked that job one time and it was during the Christmas holiday and it was just really a pretty run. But most of the time going up to Cotter, you left Memphis about 8:30 at night and you got into Cotter about, I don't know, just before daylight, somewhere in that timeframe. Your schedule wasn't nearly as punctual as a passenger train, which unfortunately doesn't have really good schedules these days anyway.

02:57 You could almost reach out one side of the cab and strike a match on the side of the mountain when you were going along on the Cotter route, and it was along the White River — a lot of it — and on the other side, you could drop down into the White River. But you couldn't see much going up. Coming back, you left about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and you had some pretty interesting visuals and nice, nice views of the White River. And so I knew that from Cotter to Newport was really pretty.

03:30 I had never been from Cotter up to Branson and on past, but Jerry told me, “Well, tell you what, sometime I'll take a day-and-a-half, and I'll get a high rail car, and we'll go up to Branson and spend the night and then come back the next day. So, when he put that trip together, a guy by the name of Mike Adams, who — and I think Mike has written a book or two on the White River line — he was a yardmaster, I think here in Little Rock, no, North Little Rock. I keep giving credit to my sister city to the south, but they're not nearly as much of a geographic partner as we are.

04:24 So, Mike Adams, Jerry, and Richard Allen, who was a columnist with a newspaper, the four of us were on that trip. I have a little bit to add, but Richard and Mike and Jerry are probably the ones that — just to listen to them talk. I think Mike had been a part of the construction of the White River line, it seemed like, because he knew a lot of the history of what took place along the different towns that were on that route. I think we got off, and I forget what town, but we got off on the way and had lunch at a small town with a little deli. You go to the back of the grocery store and they'll make you sandwiches and stuff like that.

05:22 So, we were originally just going to go up to spend the night at the Big Cedar Lodge — which was a first for me — and close to Branson. We all had enjoyed it so much that we decided to ride back rather than drive straight back, so we got on the line at Branson and rode the rails all the way back to Batesville and then got off and came back in; so it was a pretty

interesting trip. [It was the] second time I had taken the trip. The first time was on a train, and as a fireman, you're really sort of a traveling mechanic, and there are some things that you can do to, what we call, [to] get an engine back online and pulling. On a freight train, one [engine] is on a local, but usually you have two or more units connected together to have added pulling power. And so I think we had five units on that trip coming back when I was on as a fireman. Something had happened to a trailing unit and you've got to crawl back and cross from one unit to the next and it's a little bit risky, but if you're careful and do it right, it's not that bad, particularly as you go along that curve, that section of the railroad, you're not going more than 30 or 40 miles an hour. So I can remember crawling back and doing some things to bring it back online, but you could look back and see the train just weaving along the curve of that section. It was Christmastime, it had snowed — you talk about a Thomas Kinkade picture.

07:34 It was just really something that I think we as a country miss now in terms of rail transit. I was mayor of North Little Rock for 24 years. Amtrak has a Mayors' Advisory Board and I was chairman of that two different times during that 24-year period because two of my loves — probably the top one is transportation, and at the top of that list is rail transportation because of the history I've had with it.

FILE NAME: 2017-11-23-Pat_Hayes-Interview-Part_2_of_2.wav

EDITED TRANSCRIPT INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS:

Hays discussed the expansion of railroads in central Arkansas and how that led to multiple railroads building rail yards and shops in North Little Rock.

00:00 When the rails finally... They came over from Memphis and came down from St. Louis, and they obviously stopped initially in North Little Rock because there wasn't a rail bridge at the time, or any [Arkansas River] bridges at the time. Because they were ferried across the river, and that obviously was somewhat of a slow process, from what I understand from a historical standpoint, they would take that time and tinker with some of the maintenance issues that they had to do. One thing led to another, and that's in large measure why North Little Rock became somewhat of a railroad town. When the rails reached here, they paused in going across the river because they had to ferry them.

The Baring Cross Bridge became the first rail bridge built across the Arkansas River, opening in 1873. Within four years, a wagon and pedestrian deck was added on the top of the bridge, above the rails. Just to the east, the original Junction Bridge was constructed in 1884. At the easternmost end of the bridges between Little Rock and North Little Rock, the Choctaw, Oklahoma & Gulf Railroad constructed a 1,200-foot bridge that opened in 1899. In 1902, that

railroad was taken over by the Rock Island. Hays told me about his work for the Missouri Pacific, which primarily involved crossing the Junction Bridge.

02:08 I used that bridge when we were working on the Valley Division. There was a rail yard — I guess it's pretty much where the Clinton Library and the Heifer Project are now — and we would go over there when the job picked back up in terms of needing substitute folks. We had what we called the full crew law back in the 1960s, and perhaps before then, where you had to have an engineer, a fireman, a conductor and two brakemen. So you had to have five employees on each freight train. On the yard jobs, you had to have an engineer and a fireman. [The full crew law] was tied to public crossings. If you crossed a public crossing, that's what kicked the law into effect, in large measure for safety reasons. So I would go over there, and of course there's a lot of crossings that go up and down on the east side, along the right-of-way going out toward the airport. The Valley Division went through Pine Bluff and then down to McGehee and then on into Alexandria, Louisiana. So the Junction Bridge was the bridge we used primarily. I think at that time when I was working in the '60s, I'm trying to think whether the Rock Island Bridge was shut down at that time. It may very well have been.

03:46 MICHAEL HIBBLEN: They closed it for a while when they were adding the lift span. But in 1989, when you became mayor, at that time the Rock Island Bridge had been abandoned for, I guess about five years and the track by then was taken up. I was in my final year of high school, and I grew up in North Little Rock and witnessed the Rock Island shutting down in 2nd grade. I was bussed that year to Redwood Elementary — that was the fall of '79 — so I used to see a lot of switching in front of my school. Then in March was when the Rock Island was shut down. So that's kind of what started the interest for me because I suddenly saw grass growing between the rails and didn't have trains going in front of my school all the time.

04:35 HAYS: Right, now the Rock Island came in from Memphis, didn't it? And of course there's still some right-of-way that goes out in that direction.

04:43 HIBBLEN: Yeah, a little bit, but not much. Missouri Pacific ended up acquiring part of it — largely to keep another railroad from coming in and having competition. And there was talk about the state buying the right-of-way and then leasing it [to another railroad], as other states have done, but that didn't end up happening. By '89, the bridge was abandoned — had been for a few years — the track had been taken up and the Union Pacific by then... that was the first time I wrote them when I was working on a high school research paper about the bridge and they wrote back. They sent me all these blueprints for the bridge, but also wrote that they were planning to tear it down and send the lift span up for a bridge in Washington State. How did you come to be part of the effort to preserve the bridge and keep it from being torn down.

Hays spoke about what he, Little Rock Mayor Jim Dailey and Pulaski County Judge Buddy Villines envisioned for the unused Rock Island and Junction bridges.

05:41 In the early '90s, I was part of a program called the Mayor's Institute of Urban Design. There's several of them around the country and the one that I was a part of spent two or three days in Atlanta, then we spent two or three days in Chattanooga. While we were in Chattanooga, they have what they call the Walnut Street Bridge, and they had converted that bridge to a pedestrian bridge — totally pedestrian — and so I saw what they had done with that bridge. And I took a trip to Portland, and I think they converted a rail bridge and/or road bridge to a pedestrian — partly-pedestrian bridge. I'm not sure what the name of it is. So the concept of turning a bridge into a modern public use was not a foreign concept to me in recognizing what other communities had done and how they did it. Obviously, there are all sorts of different ways for them to do it.

07:23 We had a pretty unique opportunity here in central Arkansas. Buddy and Jim and I worked on a variety of things that jointly could make central Arkansas a much better place — we felt — to live. And the unique opportunity we had were the six bridges that joined Little Rock and North Little Rock. We thought a lot alike about creating an urban environment, trying to redo a downtown environment, how if the core of the community was unhealthy that the entire community was unhealthy. We started learning about different things, about why you wanted to revive an urban lifestyle.

08:28 Transportation — the interstate system started in the '50s, and really, to me in many respects, destroyed the urban vitality of areas all over the country. So, you were having challenges in trying to provide a healthy and livable place in the urban core for people to live and work and learn and play and do all the things that really made a community much better. And North Little Rock was particularly challenged in many respects because we were surrounded by other jurisdictions: Little Rock in the south across the river; Maumelle out west; Camp Robinson to the north; Sherwood to the north-northeast; and then, in some respects, a lot of improvements have been made, but the flat Delta land had some flood-prone issues. If there are large mosquitoes as there are on the eastern side of our city, the Delta kind of land was more challenging to grow. So we were pretty well surrounded. Fort Smith, maybe, was the only other city in Arkansas, perhaps a little bit in Texarkana, but they still had areas to grow. They weren't hemmed in by other cities, and then had some geographic challenges or topographical challenges.

09:52 So it was real important for me to try to develop the kind of urban environment that would cause people to want to live in that environment. North Little Rock, we had a census one year after I arrived at City Hall in 1989, and we grew a little bit, but for the first time in the city's history, I think it was the census of 2000, we lost population. We'd been pretty flat since the 1960s. We'd grown by 8,000 to 10,000 people up until the 1960s, but then we pretty well flattened out, and a large reason was because we didn't have areas to grow by annexation. So I saw my responsibility was to try to create it because we were probably one of the more urban cities because of what I just mentioned.

10:53 So [I was] trying to do anything that I could, and the city of North Little Rock could do, to create the kind of an environment that would fertilize growth. And quality growth to me was what other areas were then starting to do to try to revive their urban cores. So, the heart of our urban core and the major asset that we neglected for 50 years or more, maybe 100 years or more, was the Arkansas River. Water has historically... that was our first highway. The rails obviously were second, and then the highways were basically our third — the interstate system particularly.

Hays, Dailey and Villines worked together to negotiate with Union Pacific to address liability concerns to keep the Rock Island and Junction bridges from being torn down so that they could eventually be utilized in a new way.

12:20 It was a natural for me to want to encourage the city to be a part of the effort to preserve those bridges because once they're down, they never would come back. And the Corps of Engineers, because of hazards to navigation, mandates that after a certain period of time — with some exceptions, which I think were granted in the cases of the Junction Bridge and the Rock Island Bridge — are mandated to be taken down. So that hammer was hanging over us and the cost was also hanging over Union Pacific; so there was some opportunity to negotiate with them because of trying to utilize those bridges, and then once they're utilized again, then they're no longer a hazard of navigation and there's not a mandate to tear them down. So we obviously became quick allies.

As President Bill Clinton neared the end of his second term in office, the Arkansas native began working to decide where to build his presidential library. Hays said the cities proposed potential locations. They included the area along the Arkansas River in Little Rock where the Rock Island's passenger station, freight station and southern division headquarters had been located. Another potential location was along the river in North Little Rock where, after being turned down for the presidential library, a minor league baseball park was eventually built for the Arkansas Travelers. Hays was among the group pitching potential locations for the library.

13:47 I was a part of that on behalf of central Arkansas. We formed a competition to try to put our best foot forward for the president to pick his site for the presidential library. We proposed a site that now is where the [Dickey-Stephens] ballpark is for the Clinton Library, and [former President Clinton] only physically visited two sites. There were probably six or seven that were proposed, maybe eight. Once he settled on the Little Rock/North Little Rock area, there were six or seven within that area that were proposed. The only two he visited were the one obviously picked on the Little Rock side and then the ballpark area on our side of the river. I actually was told by a staffer that he was going to come over and look at the North Little Rock site, so I just happened to be there when he showed up with his motorcade. He and Hillary actually came over and looked at the North Little Rock site. I think they were probably, and I

don't know whether torpedoed would be the proper phrase, but [there was] a great deal of concern that because that area was below the floodplain — the levee system protected it though — that there was some concern for flooding. That area has not flooded since the 1920s. I think there was the great flood of '27, '28, that we were underwater down there, but we haven't had any flooding issues in that area since because it's protected by levees. Now, we had some flooding issues down river when I first got to City Hall. In fact, down river, south of the Rock Island Bridge.

15:37 Preserving those bridges was a no-brainer, if you want to put it that way, and so the three of us started working together when the site was picked for the [presidential] library. Part of the appeal of that site was because there was an abandoned rail bridge that could be used to be a part of the campus. And they had hoped to raise enough money, the [Clinton] Foundation did, to open the bridge at the same time they dedicated the library, [but] they weren't able to do that. So they took on the primary fundraising, the foundation did, to try to do the rehabbing of the bridge. I know that they had, I think, a \$1 million contribution from Little Rock. I'm not sure exactly how the ownership issues were at the time, whether Little Rock owned it. I don't think the foundation ever owned it. So when the foundation sort of took the lead in saving it, I took the city council a request for \$750,000.

With plans underway to raise money and eventually renovate the Rock Island Bridge, Mayor Hays began working to prepare the North Little Rock side of the bridge for what it would become.

17:15 At the time, the city's ownership of the land came to the seawall, and then it was in private hands for about two blocks until it got to Riverfront Drive. I didn't want something to be built there at the end of the bridge that would block public access to our end of the bridge, so when I went to the city council and asked for \$750,000, I put two conditions on our donation. One: that we would be able to use some of those funds to acquire the land that was at the north end of the bridge up to Riverfront Drive, and I think we acquired that for somewhere in the \$300,000 range. The second condition that I wanted, because I had been familiar with the landings of the Big Dam Bridge, and they were pretty well straight — and because I'm a bicyclist at heart and in many respects, in reality, bicyclists and pedestrians don't mix real well unless they each respect each other. Bicyclists sometimes would go pretty fast down the Big Dam Bridge on both sides of the river. North Little Rock, we have one [ramp], in Little Rock [there are] two, but they're pretty well straight shots. So I wanted to try to do something that would minimize that kind of a conflict — to be able to curve [the ramp off the Rock Island Bridge] so that it would have some natural tendency to slow people down and provide a little bit more of an aesthetic kind of an ending to our side of the bridge. And so both [conditions] were agreed to.

20:22 The change of design probably was somewhere between \$100,000 and \$150,000 in additional cost. So, for our \$750,000, we'll say somewhere between \$450,000 and \$500,000 was because of those two requirements, and then the other \$250,000 to \$300,000 was to help

fund some of the remaining obligations of rehabilitation of the bridge for pedestrian use. So we put some of our money where our mouth was to — in my mind — enhance the north side of the bridge.

21:01 There were a couple other things that I did which I thought were appropriate. Just before the bridge was dedicated, there was a little two-block stretch that runs parallel to our end of the landing on the bridge. It had a name, but it wasn't a name that had a whole lot of history to it, maybe a tree designation. So I went to the city council and got them to agree and the landowners, made sure nobody objected to naming that Virginia Kelly Drive, which was Bill Clinton's mother.

21:44 When we dedicated the bridge, I told him, “Mr. President, any time that you're telling anybody directions to come to the north end of the bridge, it'll be easy to remember.” And I had a street sign made up that had his mother's name on it. And I said, “Just tell them to come along Riverfront Drive until they get to Virginia Kelly Drive,” and there's your end of the bridge.

22:22 Then the last thing I did — in fact, the last day I was in office — I was working on this on December 31, 2012. There's another street that's three or four blocks. It was named Brother Paul Drive. Paul Holderfield was pretty much an institution, had the Friendly Chapel Soup Kitchen and Church of the Nazarene down there. So his name was on that street — it still is on part of it — but I'd gone to his son, Paul [Holderfield] Jr., and told him what I wanted to do about that two or three block stretch that runs east and west. I thought it'd be nice to name that after Hillary [Clinton's] mother Dorothy Rodham. So the city council, everybody went along with it, and shortly after I left office — all of the nods had been put in place, so the city council renamed that street Dorothy Rodham. So now we have Virginia Kelly and Dorothy Rodham that meet together right at the north end of the Clinton Bridge, a la the Rock Island Bridge. And I went ahead and put a little bench there — or my successor Joe Smith did — but it was something I wanted to do, and I call that my Forrest Gump bench. So there's a little bench there that is at the north end of our bridge. So that's part of the success.

Hays expressed great satisfaction with the project to preserve the former railroad bridges.

24:07 I don't know if when we started the efforts that we felt like we would be able to do it — the cost was pretty significant. It was a dream and a goal and a desire, but certainly some of the things that helped make that happen, probably one of the largest of which was the president selecting that site for his presidential library. Now on the Junction Bridge, we were much more of a financial player, the two cities and the county — still are, for that matter, in terms of the operation and maintenance of it. But the Rock Island Bridge, the partnerships of the Clinton Foundation and the two cities and the county, the asset is, I won't say greater than the Junction Bridge, but because of the design [with a ramp not requiring people to take stairs or an elevator up to the lift span like on the Junction Bridge] makes it a whole lot more pedestrian friendly in

many respects. So that's a no brainer, you know, a goal, a desire, a hope that because of a variety of circumstances, the reality happened and the public is, I'm sure, very enjoyable in having those two structures available and can be used.

Hays was also instrumental in the placement of an RV park next to the Rock Island Bridge.

26:09 Because of the flood stage issues, the flood zone, we had some challenges in developing some of the property on the river side of the levee system, the seawall, because you're not supposed to build permanent structures there that would impede the flow of the river in a floodway. At one point that land was considered for the Witt Stephens Nature Center, and obviously with certain construction techniques, building is possible, just a little bit more challenging. And so that property was considered at one time for the Witt Stephens Nature Center that now is in the Little Rock River Market District, and so that didn't work out. But we figured that an urban RV park would be something that could be used for and the cost to develop that wouldn't be significant.

27:22 There's been a pretty good investment there, concrete pads. We didn't start out that way. We wanted to do underground utilities for the sites, but that has been a real asset, I think. I call it my hotel without walls. The vast majority of RVs that come down there, I'd say the vast significant majority of them, are half-million dollar rolling suites on wheels and have added a lot to the restaurant business.

28:12 So when the president came over — and he had been, we'll say, teased in some serious nature about how the design of his library looks like a double wide [mobile home] on stilts — he said now it's much more at home with Mayor Hays' RV Park here. So now down there, it's terrific that it actually joins the RV park on the north end of the bridge. We had some stairs that were constructed that lead directly off the landing, off the bridge partly into the park, but also access to the public because there's some fencing there that folks might want to have direct access to get off the bridge.

29:00 Those are some of the design aspects of what we were involved with. But obviously the support for the construction, not only financial, but certainly from a general support standpoint was without question. And now that asset will be preserved forever, essentially for people who come and visit and live and recreate, if you want to put it that way. I pedal over that bridge all the time. Now we've got the Broadway Bridge and its pedestrian access on the eastern side of the bridge, and I just recently had a chance to get on my bicycle on a Sunday afternoon and 31 miles later had crossed literally every bridge on my bicycle, except for the interstate bridge.

30:31 So, we have some tremendous assets around here that both are unique and enjoyable, and I'm just happy to have had a chance to be around at the time that some of those decisions were made. I think from the north side of the perspective, those assets are

tremendously beneficial to our community. And the trolley that goes over the Main Street Bridge, some of those other icing on the cake things that we have are probably the envy of communities all around the country. And again, it comes back to the main recognition that one of the major assets — if not the most major asset that we have in central Arkansas with Little Rock and North Little Rock — is the Arkansas River. For the first 50 years of the 1900s, it continued to develop as the national sewer system. We had on the Little Rock side a concrete facility, we had the jail. On our side, we had a shanty town. We turned our backs to the river. Now we're doing what I think is a real major asset.

31:50 You look there with Lisa Farrell and Jim Jackson's [residential development Rockwater Village] project just upriver from the Baring Cross Bridge, now those half-million dollar homes are right on the trail and looking at the river. So that gives you a concrete example of the psychology that has gone on over the last 50 years, and now we're deciding that we're going to look at what that major asset is and we're going to utilize it.

32:21 HIBBLIN: Yeah, you're right. The river was completely ignored. And I remember doing a half-hour special for KUAR, my first time working there, about the [proposal to create the] River Market when [there was] an election in 1995 [for a dedicated tax]. And I'd written a newspaper article in '95 too about the Rock Island Bridge, and at that time... Union Pacific just wanted to be assured there wouldn't be any liability on their part. Do you remember any details, what it took to finalize the deal?

32:54 HAYS: The liability was the big part, and if I remember right, both the North Little Rock city attorney, the Little Rock city attorney — perhaps a little bit more on the Little Rock side — were involved in assuming responsibility. I may be wrong, but because public entities have tort liability, I think there is a written agreement in terms of assumption of liability when we acquired the bridge that we would hold Union Pacific harmless for any activity that took place that might have them in any kind of a defendant posture for litigation. So I think there is a written agreement to that effect that in essence requires us to have insurance — either the cities or the [Clinton] Foundation or a combination. After the years have gone by, I don't have exact recollection as to who has title to it. I know at one point there was discussion of litigation because a private property owner claimed some interest in the landing on the north side of the river. The Glover family claimed some kind of ownership interest in the landing portion of the north side, so I couldn't tell you with absolute certainty who has title to the property now. It would be perhaps Little Rock, perhaps the foundation.

34:45 HIBBLIN: But to at least be able to keep it for another 15 years before a renovation [could be made to the bridge], to be able to keep it there and not have it torn down...

34:57 HAYS: Working with the legal department of Union Pacific, I remember, was an absolutely critical part of coming up with something that would hold them harmless in terms of

any kind of potential liability for their period of ownership. So, somewhere there's a document that reflects that.

35:15 HIBBLEN: You were a city attorney before you became mayor and before you served in the legislature. Do you recall anything — I don't know when that was — but do you recall anything when the Rock Island shut down or when that stretch of track was abandoned [in terms of] the impact to the city?

35:33 HAYS: In general nature, nothing really specific. I don't recall having any part as an assistant city attorney at that time other than just the general nature of what may have been in the news. I don't recall any specific legal actions that the city was involved in. I was an assistant city attorney in the early 1970s for about two years, then I went over to become the legal counsel for the Secretary of State of Arkansas. I left that position, ran for city attorney, wasn't successful, and then went into private practice as a member of the Constitutional Convention of '79, '80, then was elected to the [Arkansas] House [of Representatives], served the term '87, '88 and was elected in, I guess it was '86 was when I was elected to the House. So then I went over to City Hall in 1989 and left in 2012.

36:48 HIBBLEN: Any recollection of the restoration of the old Rock Island Argenta Depot? I know it was abandoned and decaying for a long time.

37:00 HAYS: I was very much involved in that effort. I think we had several grants that gave us the opportunity to rehabilitate that facility. I certainly remembered some of the history of that station because we used it, we rehabbed it, and tried to make it architecturally and historically compatible because that's part of the grant recipient [requirement]. I don't remember anything unique about that effort other than it was successful. And then we leased it to a community organization that was active down there. So we used it for several different purposes. I think we had to put a new roof on it after a certain period of time. [I'm] happy that we were successful because we had several stations [that were torn down]. I know one station that was right by the Main Street Bridge...

38:20 HIBBLEN: The Cotton Belt...

38:21 HAYS: The Cotton Belt. I couldn't even remember specifically which one it was, but I do remember growing up that you could crawl off the Main Street Bridge and get on the roof of the Cotton Belt station because I did that several times when the state fair parade with all the animals and the elephants and the circus and stuff like that would come to town. And several times I viewed that parade from the top of the roof portion of the Cotton Belt station because you could climb right off the Main Street Bridge onto the roof and just sit there and watch the parade go by. There was a radio station down there I remember at one time because we had at my home, where I grew up, mostly from age 5 on. It was on Magnolia Street in Park Hill, and we had a little rental house in the back that was rented to one of the disc jockeys down there. So I remember going down there and watching him spin records, and he gave me a bunch of sample

45s that were — I bet most young people don't know what a 45 RPM record is now — it's a big hole in the middle. But I was directly involved in that and the city was, the saving and the rehabilitating of that [Rock Island] station. And I assume it's still being used by some of our nonprofits in that area of our city.

To clarify part of the earlier conversation about Hays and his family working for Missouri Pacific, I asked for additional details.

40:12 HAYS: My grandfather was raised in the Greene County area up around Paragould and came down to central Arkansas in the early 1920s to go to work for Missouri Pacific. And then my father was cut off during the Depression and then was called back to work in the late 1930s when the war and the economy started picking up. My dad signed up to be a fireman for the railroad in the late 1930s, early '40s and left to go into the Navy. He fought in World War II but had been hired out for Missouri Pacific shortly before the war. He retained his seniority [with Missouri Pacific], and so when he came back from the Navy, he went back to work for the railroad; so my dad retired as an engineer for the railroad and my grandfather was an engineer for the railroad. I started working in the summer of 1965, so five years in the summers, and I think you can throw in at least two, maybe three Christmas holidays. I worked for the railroad mostly as a fireman, some as a brakeman. I don't think I ever worked in the yard as a switchman.

42:10 HIBBLEN: Amazing, the family connections, generations...

42:15 HAYS: That's not unusual.

42:17 HIBBLEN: Missouri Pacific, obviously, was the biggest railroad in the state, and I think Rock Island was number two. Do you recall anything about the competition between the railroads or anything in that respect?

42:38 HAYS: Obviously, their territories were a little bit different. I wasn't in management, I just knew the pay was great for a part-time employee. It certainly helped me go to undergraduate and some of law school. But the business part of it, I was never really much about it. I certainly was interested in receiving a paycheck, but I never got really that much into the business aspects of the competition between the railroads because I knew that Missouri Pacific was the big kid on the block. And then in terms of acquisitions, obviously it's the only survivor that came out of Cotton Belt, Rock Island, and all those.

Hays' personal experiences and travels helped him appreciate the value of public transportation, especially light rail. He felt it would be beneficial for central Arkansas to make use of the existing rail infrastructure and noted the former Rock Island main line today used by the Little Rock & Western Railway, which largely parallels Cantrell Road/Highway 10, would be particularly ideal to meet the growing population in west Little Rock.

44:20 HAYS: To me — in fact, I just had somebody talk to me about that two or three days ago — it'd be nice to make a little commuter stretch on that rail and go out in that direction.

44:32 HIBBLEN: Yeah. And you look at a map [of central Arkansas] and there are rail tracks, or there used to be rail tracks, going in every direction, every suburb of Little Rock. But I don't know if the population is there to support commuter rail, but it would be nice.

44:56 HAYS: Probably not at this point. But, you talk to anybody that lives out in that direction that works in the central downtown area, going and coming to work is a zoo. So, I think if not now, it wouldn't be long where a little commuter rail line along the river going out to Perry County would be good for all of us. I mean, you could have different nodes along there. The population increase, to me, the more that we can get away from single passenger automobiles and either walk to work. The announcement in downtown North Little Rock about Charlie Morgan, who used to be involved in Axiom, as a new company that's going to be coming to downtown North Little Rock. One of the people he hired is a fellow from Scotland, and I was talking to him after the announcement a week ago yesterday. [He] lives in Scotland, but now is leasing a home in downtown North Little Rock and said that he could walk to work in a minute-and-a-half and that he's negotiating to purchase that home he's leasing right now. And he said after our announcement, I'm sure the price has just gone up.

46:33 I think the quality of life, I know nationally young people are sometimes postponing both learning to drive as well as acquiring automobiles because they don't have to. That's a significant diversion of income — that if you live close to where you work and you play and you have recreational opportunities... I can remember when I talked to somebody that lived in downtown New York or Washington and I was asked, if you lived in an urban area like that, would you need a car? And I'd say, well, first of all, how are you going to get to work? Are you going to walk or are you going to take public transit? Secondly, what are you going to do on a weekend if you want to go somewhere? Well, car rentals are pretty economical and then they've got different rideshares, of course, Ubers. You know, you're not prohibited. Your choices are not where you have to have a car. Now here in the south, in areas that are not as urbanized, there's a bit more of a challenge, no question about it. But the day is coming where the mandatory utilization of four wheels is not is not absolute.

48:03 HIBBLEN: Yeah, I went to Washington for five months to do an internship in 1993 when I was 21 and it was my first time being in a place where I could take the Metro. I got there, and I didn't have any idea what I was going to do [for transportation], but they're like, no, you don't drive, let's get on a train, we're two blocks away. And that was great, that was an eye-opening experience for me.

48:28 HAYS: I went through the ROTC and got my commission, and I was a transportation officer and I spent — this was in the early 70s — I spent three months at Fort Eustis, Virginia, and after that period of time, the first part of December, I left my car in

Washington and rode Amtrak up to Boston. I had some friends up there that I visited and, of course, didn't have a car, and I rode the bus in Boston. I rode the commuter subway in Boston. Then I spent a few days with some friends in New York, did the same. And it was amazing to me how mobile I was without having to lug an automobile around. I didn't have to worry about parking, didn't have to worry about tickets by overstaying in the meter.

49:29 HIBBLEN: It was a sense of freedom.

49:31 HAYS: It was sort of a unique experience for me being from the south [where] you couldn't go anywhere hardly without having access to a car. But I could get pretty much anywhere I wanted with a bus ticket or a commuter rail ticket, and I learned a little bit about how to ride the subways and you could do it. You can actually move from one part of an urban area to the other and not have to do it by automobile, and it's nice because you don't have to worry about finding a parking lot or a parking spot and worrying about your meter running out. It was a sort of a unique sense of freedom that I hadn't even thought about before. But it was very enjoyable, and that kind of experience to me was somewhat replicated here. And I think that's just going to be more and more of a choice rather than a necessity in the future.

50:31 HIBBLEN: Yeah. Well, my only hope is that maybe the streetcar becomes a viable public transit option at some point in the future.

50:40 HAYS: When we did that, Rodney Slater was Secretary of Transportation of the Clinton Administration. The streetcar started out, if you recall, it was about a five-mile, maybe three-to-four miles was the initial length of the trackage — basically half-and-half, Little Rock and North Little Rock. So we entered into an interlocal agreement that we would all be one-third partners, the county and the two cities. And that Little Rock would get the first extension in terms of the broadening of the trackage, their first extension, they picked going out to Heifer and the [Clinton Presidential] library. So that's about a mile-and-a-half extension. Under the interlocal agreement, we get the second choice, the north side does, and then I think it kind of goes back and forth. But always a strong part of our effort to bring river rail to the central part of Arkansas was expanding it to a commuter rail option because now it's pretty well limited to the urban core. I think there are some commuter aspects to it, but it's mostly benefiting from a tourist standpoint and from an economic development standpoint. But there was always the concept and remains that it's part of the urban rail system that hopefully we develop as we reach out further. We've got the planned extensions to bring it up to roughly H Street up here in Park Hill. And Little Rock, we studied very extensively to take it out to the airport, but because economic development is a big part of the benefit of an extension of the rail system, the land going east was more industrial. So, the utilizations for residential and urban didn't appear to jump out at us as much as the benefits of going in other directions, but that was one of the things we studied. So to be honest with you, the concept of river rail was always that it be the hub of the beginning of a much broader commuter rail system.

53:23 HIBBLEN: Well, great. I appreciate your time. Anything else you want to add?

53:27 HAYS: I've always had — part of my DNA growing up, as you might imagine — has been rail transportation. And I experienced in my early years, [my family would] go back and forth to Kansas. My mother was from the central part of Kansas and dad [because he was a railroad employee] had passes. So, rail transportation was a big part of my early days, and I've always retained a great deal of affection for it. I also experienced, whether it be corporate or business or whatever the decisions were, you can put a boxcar on the sidetrack and leave it for two or three days if you have to. You can't put a passenger car on the side of a track and leave it for two or three days. So, it was obvious that the passenger side of rail was not nearly as profitable as the freight side. And that was one of the reasons that the rail, and then the interstate system, there's a variety of forces that sort of caused the extinction of private — when I say private, I'm talking about the rail industry itself — voiding their activity in passenger rail and essentially turning it over to the government via Amtrak, who now leases track. They own some of their own in the northeast. But that to me has been a great loss. And in terms of the future, and I don't think there's a question in my mind that dollar for dollar, both for passenger and freight, that the rail industry is the best investment that we can put in terms of improving infrastructure for transportation. The exorbitant cost of additional traffic lanes via the interstate system is just out of sight. Plus, it reaches capacity — if not the day it opens, shortly thereafter. So we're going to have to find ways to depend less on single passenger automobiles. For the environment, there's just so many reasons, your own quality of life. You ride a commuter train and it's got wifi and you can work and you can relax and take a nap and you get into your node or whatever you need to do. But the basic improvements in transportation — public transportation — your investment in rail for both passenger as well as freight is just a no brainer in terms of what we need to do.