



Moving towards the inevitable

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The year 1949 was important in the history of Canadian dieselization. At Canadian National, the Prince Edward Island dieselization project was awaiting new and acceptable locomotives. Canadian Pacific had retired steam from its Vancouver Island operation, and a second, more ambitious project to convert the Montreal to Wells River, Vt., main line was under way. The final locomotives for this latter CPR project arrived in December 1949.

Montreal Locomotive Works was in full diesel production by that same year. Coincidentally, 1949 marked the end of MLW's steam-locomotive production for domestic customers. Canadian Pacific 2-10-4 "Selkirk" locomotive No. 5935, out-shopped on March 14, 1949, and Newfoundland Railway narrow-gauge 2-8-2 "Mikado" No. 1029, delivered on April 13, 1949, share the distinction of being MLW's final domestic steam locomotives.⁷⁸

By 1949, General Motors had begun construction of a plant to build the Electro-Motive line of diesel locomotives in London, Ontario. This new facility, to be known as General Motors Diesel (GMD), would complete its first locomotive by August 1950. Concurrently, a two-unit set of dual-service passenger/freight cab

units, borrowed from parent EMD, was demonstrating on Canadian rails.

As Canada's railways moved into 1950, the steam locomotive was living on borrowed time. Although neither railway knew it at the time, steam's final hour would come but ten years later. By the end of the decade, Canada's railways would be fully dieselized and the steam locomotive a part of history.

At Canadian National, progress toward dieselization during the early postwar years was slow. The Prince Edward Island dieselization project, delayed by the unsuitability of the Whitcomb locomotives, was not completed until mid-1950. Attention then turned to a second territorial dieselization. However, in contrast to the Canadian Pacific experience, the CNR territory chosen was not an important mainline route, but instead a branch line. The route chosen was 202 route-miles of secondary track along the south shore of Quebec's Gaspé peninsula.

Canadian National was, and to a certain extent still is, saddled with many miles of inferior track, characterized by lightweight rail and poor roadbed unable to support heavy locomotives or cars. Much of this was the legacy of the failing or bankrupt Canadian railway ventures brought under government

A pair of 2000-hp PA-1 passenger-service cab units, built by ALCO and painted by subsidiary MLW in CNR colours for demonstration purposes, spans the Turcot turntable in early 1950. Numbered 9077 and 9078, the bronze-and-green duo was evaluated in several CNR passenger assignments east of Winnipeg, as were competing locomotive models from General Motors and Fairbanks-Morse/CLC. The CNR's emerging preference for a four-axle, 1500-hp diesel locomotive configuration weighed against the prospects of an order for the six-axle PA-1, and none were ever owned by the railway. CANADIAN NATIONAL, CSTM COLLECTION