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History

For almost one hundred years the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad, better known as the New Haven Railroad, was the primary means of passenger and freight transportation in southern New England. Chartered in 1872, this merger between the New York & New Haven and Hartford & New Haven railroads later included the long desired rail link between Boston and New York. Approximately one hundred small independent railroads were built in southern New England between 1826 and the 1880s. By 1904, the majority were absorbed into the vast New Haven system. At its peak in 1929, the New Haven Railroad owned and operated 2,131 miles of track throughout eastern New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island.

The local railroad lines that eventually became part of the New Haven system developed in response to local business and transportation needs. Unlike the Western states, where railroads preceded and shaped settlement, in the Northeast they served primarily to link existing towns, businesses, and markets. The New Haven system thus developed as a result of numerous consolidations and mergers. The New Haven traced its founding to 1826, when one of its predecessor companies originated, but the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad was not chartered until 1872. The company followed the pattern of consolidation established by the Pennsylvania Railroad and other companies, particularly after 1889, when major lines in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and southern Massachusetts provided a strong network linking New York and Boston. By 1890, company revenue exceeded \$100,000,000 per year, and the New Haven employed 4,000 people to serve twelve million passengers annually.

This success led a wealthy group of New York investors, headed by J. P. Morgan, to seek and gain control of the New Haven's board. In 1903, Morgan installed Charles Mellen as president of the railroad. Together Morgan and Mellen set out to achieve a complete monopoly of transportation in New England. Substantial improvements to the system were made during the Mellen years, including electrification of rail lines between Woodlawn, New York, and New Haven, Connecticut, and construction of a power generating plant in Cos Cob, Connecticut. These accomplishments, however, were overshadowed by Morgan's ambitious schemes to dominate all modes of transportation in New England. Steamboat lines, trolley

New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad

companies, and other railroad lines were purchased regardless of price and incorporated into the New Haven system.

An investigation of the New Haven's activities by Louis Brandeis in 1907 revealed the overextended railroad was on the verge of financial collapse. Morgan's death in 1913 and Mellen's subsequent resignation brought to a close a stormy period in the New Haven's history.

During the First World War, all of the railroads in the United States, including the New Haven Railroad, were operated by the federal government. After the war, under Edward Pearson, President through 1928, the railroad was able to recover partially, despite increasing competition from automobiles, by sharing in the national economic growth of the 1920s. The company tried to meet this transportation competition by forming the New England Transportation Company, which operated a fleet of trucks and buses. Recovery of the New Haven, however, was cut short by the Depression of the 1930s, and in 1935 the New Haven plunged into bankruptcy. The company remained in trusteeship until 1947, when it returned to private ownership.

A series of struggles for control of the company in the post World War II period severely weakened the management of the company and its ability to adapt to changes in the transportation industry. The completion of the Connecticut Turnpike and other superhighways and the start of air shuttle service between Boston and New York intensified competition. The company's historic liability as a railroad overburdened with many short, costly branch lines further accelerated its decline.

On 7 July 1961, the New Haven Railroad once again went into receivership. A seven year trusteeship period followed, culminating in the absorption of the New Haven in the Penn Central system on 1 January 1969. Three years later the Penn Central itself collapsed into bankruptcy. The former components of the New Haven Railroad were divided among several entities. Freight service was assumed by Conrail when it was formed in 1976, although the Providence & Worcester also provided freight service on portions of the former New Haven, as did a few other operators. Passenger commuter service was funded by the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority and the Connecticut Department of Transportation. Long-haul passenger service was provided by Amtrak beginning in 1971. After 1976 passenger commuter service was operated by Conrail. In 1982, the United States Congress passed legislation that forced Conrail to divest itself of its commuter rail lines. On 1 January 1983, Metro-North Commuter Railroad, under joint ownership of the states of New York and Connecticut, took over

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all commuter passenger service. Amtrak continued to handle all long-haul passenger service.

The history of the New Haven Railroad reveals a company formed by one of the classic merger and consolidation patterns of the late 19th century, which was later unable to respond effectively to major changes in the transportation industry. The company's rapid growth, collapse, temporary recovery, and final dissolution offer a dramatic story, with government regulation, internal management decisions, and market competition playing important roles in the company's history.