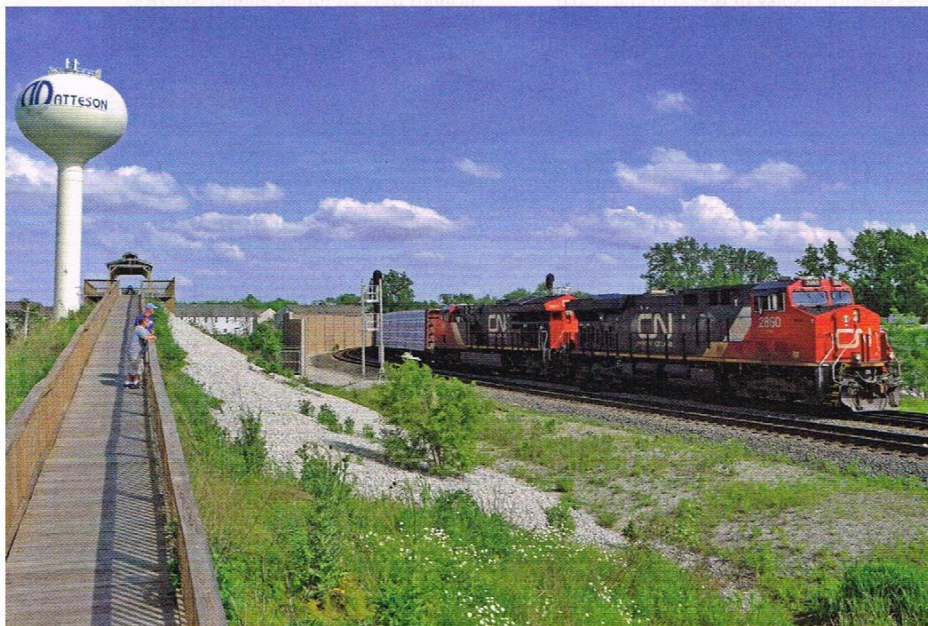


CN's Matteson connection

New railfan park offers an elevated view of Illinois mainline action



An elevated viewing platform provides the best sight of the action. Here, a CN freight comes off the former EJ&E and onto the Illinois Central. Three photos, Nolan Wallenkamp



A southbound CN intermodal train comes off the IC and on to the connection to head east on the former EJ&E.

provides the best views of the Matteson Sub as well as the southeast connection track.

In total, CN runs about 50 trains through the area in 24 hours. The traffic includes a mix of intermodal, ethanol, grain, and other unit trains. Manifest trains frequently operate to or from Kirk Yard, located at the eastern end of the former EJ&E main line in Gary, Ind.

Amtrak makes an appearance with its daily *City of New Orleans*, *Illini*, and *Saluki* on the elevated Illinois Central route. Two trains operate north and one train operates south in the morning, while one train operates north and two trains operate south in the evenings.

LOCATION: Chicago is still the U.S. railroad capital. With stations, interchanges, and yards all over, Chicagoland offers much for visiting railfans. Canadian National and the Village of Matteson, Ill., realized this tremendous railfan draw and have responded by building a railfan park with an elevated view of the action. Located about 30 miles south of the Loop, Matteson is host to the intersection of two busy Canadian National main lines, as well as the Metra Electric District commuter rail line.

Until CN purchased the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern in 2009, Matteson consisted of a grade-separated crossing of the east-to-west-running former EJ&E Matteson Subdivision and the north-to-south Illinois Central Chicago Subdivision and the Metra Electric District and one connection.

Following its acquisition of the EJ&E, CN invested in a \$30 million connection that enables trains to travel in any direction. Completed in 2010, this engineering marvel enables routing many of CN's trains on the former EJ&E belt line and around much of the city's rail congestion.

TRAIN-WATCHING: There are three key locations to view trains around the new Matteson connection.

The first is the new park that lies northeast of the connection. Opened in 2013, the park provides great views of train action on the connection tracks. The 35-foot-high elevated observation platform has several benches under its canopy and is a great place to hang out while waiting for the next train. Aside from the platform, a 500-foot-long boardwalk also offers unique photo angles. A retired EJ&E caboose and crossing gate are on display, marking the park entrance.

The second location is the Metra Matteson station. With service between Millennium Station in Downtown Chicago and University Park, the Metra Electric District is a busy corridor with several north/south movements every hour, and fewer on weekends. The station also provides the best views of the Chicago Subdivision and is great for afternoon photos of trains traversing the connection.

The third location is the grade crossing of the Matteson Sub and Main Street. This spot

RADIO FREQUENCIES: CN Matteson Sub, 160.920; CN Chicago Sub, 161.190; Metra Electric District, 161.025

FOR YOUR FAMILY: Passing through Matteson just north of the Metra station is the Old Plank Road Trail. This 22-mile paved bike trail connecting Joliet and Chicago Heights started out as the right-of-way for the Michigan Central Railroad in the late 1800s. For more information, go to www.oprt.org.



A former Elgin, Joliet & Eastern caboose marks the entrance to the boardwalk that leads to the elevated viewing platform.

THIS MONTH: MATTESON, ILL.