

Responses to the Rusty Railfans

A few notes on the Rusty Railfans' questions in the November Newsletter concerning the CN/CP diamond and interlocker near Alliston, at the crossing of CN's Alliston spur and CP's MacTier subdivision. In the employees' timetables an installation such as this is referred to as an "interlocking" for operating purposes. In an engineering and legal sense an interlocking is comprised of the heavy trackwork for the intersection of two tracks (the "diamond") and the signal system that controls the train operation (the "interlocker" or "Interlocking Plant").

"Ownership" of interlockings in Canada is a bit of a misnomer since it could be said the owner is the senior party (the first railway at the site) and therefore pays nothing. The cost to construct and maintain the interlocking is normally paid for in full by the junior party (the latecomer, or the second railway to build at the site). So, the ownership is not really of the interlocking but of the crossing rights. At Alliston, since the rail line now owned by CN was constructed some 24 years before that of CP, then CP pays all the costs at this interlocking, including the diamonds and like their namesake they ain't cheap. It was CP that made application to remove the diamond.

The Rusty Railfans were wondering why the diamonds are still on site. This is a legal technicality under the Railway Act and R.T.C. regulations. CN's Alliston spur is not legally abandoned, so therefore could be required on short notice (a few days) to be put in service for rail movements. However, based on this being a remote possibility on the Alliston spur the R.T.C. will permit the diamond to be removed and stored on-site provided both railways agree and the junior railway will reinstall the diamond if needed.

CP Rail had a track program along this portion of their MacTier sub early in 1987, about the time this diamond was removed and I would expect that if the track was closely looked at it would be

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found that the CP MacTier is now a few centimetres higher than the Alliston spur and therefore the ballast along the sides of the track has probably been placed to permit the Alliston spur to be raised to match the CP at the diamond if the diamond had to be reinstalled.

On the bond wires (wiring that join the two sections of the spur, etc.). Since there are numerous rules and regulations concerning the interlocker or signals at a diamond crossing and since the Alliston spur is still legally a rail line then these regulations state that unless there is an automatic interlocker at this diamond to control rail traffic then all trains would need to stop at this diamond in accordance with the Uniform Code of Operating Rules, a scenario that would be unacceptable and costly to CP Rail and their mainline freights, so hence the wiring to keep these signals operating as seen by our Rusty Railfans.

While all this may appear puzzling to railfans, it does make business sense since not only are diamonds expensive to buy and maintain but the removal of the diamonds means a few less bangs for all the rail wheels rolling along the MacTier subdivision. (Just A Ferronut)