

Railroading in Streatorland

Chicago's little cousin offers excitement on both the high iron and a short line



A westbound BNSF container train crosses the NS diamond near Main Street in July 2016.

LOCATION: Just 80 miles southwest of Chicago is the Windy City's little cousin: Streatorland. Streator, population 13,422, sits in the middle of farm country in north-central Illinois. BNSF Railway and Norfolk Southern cross at a diamond downtown, near Main Street. Just north of the diamond is the former Santa Fe brick station, which now houses BNSF maintenance-of-way employees.

There are many different routes from Chicago to Streator; however, the fastest is Interstate 55 south to Interstate 80 west to state Route 23 south. This route roughly parallels shortline Illinois Railway into town.

TRAIN-WATCHING: BNSF's "Southern Transcon" runs through Streator in a roughly north-south direction. The Chillicothe Subdivision connects Chicago with BNSF's Galesburg, Ill., hub [see "Ground Zero in Galesburg," "Hot Spots," February 2017]. BNSF runs about 80 trains each day through Streator and run-through power is common. There are unit



An eastbound BNSF freight passes the former Santa Fe brick station in September 2016. Three photos, Bruce Stahl

coal, automotive, and general freight trains, along with intermodal — both container and piggyback varieties. BNSF trains often use distributed power, too. Union Pacific has trackage rights over BNSF from Kansas City, Mo., to Chicago.

Norfolk Southern's Kankakee Belt Line enters south Streator from the east. There is the connection with BNSF that enables interchange traffic between the two carriers. The connection runs along Livingston Road.

The Illinois Railway reaches Streator from the north with a former Chicago, Burlington & Quincy branch from Ottawa. The short line connects with NS near First Street north of downtown.

There are many photographic opportunities in Streator for the visiting railfan. The diamond, just south of Main Street, offers easy sight lines for both BNSF and NS trains.

Just a few blocks north is the Owens-Illinois Streator plant, a world leader in glass containers. The BNSF line makes a broad curve south near the plant, marking another fine photo spot. To the south is a 1930s riveted-steel, public pedestrian bridge, crossing BNSF main line and yard tracks. Parking is available at the foot of the bridge.

Further south, one can get nice shots of both Class I railroads at Lundy Street, James Street, and Livingston Road in south Streator. On the far south side of town, BNSF crosses both state Route 23 and the Vermilion River, which is a great spot for westbound trains. There is no designated walkway on the highway bridge, but visitors can park north of the bridge and walk to the top.

RADIO FREQUENCIES: BNSF Railway, 160.650; Norfolk Southern, 160.800; Illinois Railway, 161.355



A westbound BNSF intermodal curves through town, as seen from the footbridge north of Broadway Street.



FOR YOUR FAMILY: There are plenty of restaurants, both local and chain, in downtown Streator. Planet Pizza is just north of state Route 23 bridge in South Streator and good for a quick pit stop while pursuing trains in the area.

Starved Rock State Park, about 15 miles northwest of Streator, offers hiking, fishing, and boating along the Illinois River.

THIS MONTH: STREATOR, ILL.