

Studies in contrast

One of four case studies that illustrate contracting's integral role in North American railroad infrastructure development and maintenance

BY ROBERT J. DEROCHE

Editor's note: Freight and passenger railroads continue to contract out for a broad range of infrastructure development needs. It's part and parcel, really, on the maintenance-of-way planning front.

This month, Progressive Railroading presents a collection of case studies covering the work of four contractors or contractor-led ventures: Colo Railroad Builders, Kiewit Corp., Michael Baker Corp. and RailWorks Inc. The projects detailed represent studies in contrast, ranging from a large-scale rail replacement to a light-rail line design-build venture to a historic station restoration to an intermodal terminal that featured a multi-faceted infrastructure development component.

One thing all four stories have in common: They reflect the vitality evident in the railroad construction and maintenance segment.

RailWorks:

Shining work at CenterPoint Intermodal Center, home to UP's Joliet Intermodal Terminal

Sometimes, the biggest and best projects can be right in your own backyard. Just ask Bill Dorris of RailWorks Track Services, whose Minooka, Ill., office is a five-minute drive from CenterPoint Intermodal Center, which includes Union Pacific Railroad's sprawling 785-acre Joliet Intermodal Terminal — a new yard featuring nearly \$10 million worth of RailWorks' track, turnout and grade-crossing panel construction.

"It was just a big, open field when we started," says Dorris, vice president and Chicago-area manager who oversaw the construction effort for RailWorks Track Services. "It was a perfect job for us. It involved just about every aspect of the work we do — and it was right here."

Less than four months after RailWorks — the project's track construction firm — wrapped up work at the facility, the terminal was running at 90 percent capacity, Dorris says.

"We were building a showcase project, the second-largest intermodal facility for the largest Class I railroad in the country," he adds. "We needed to shine on this — and we did."

Designed to handle an annual capacity of 500,000 trailers or containers, the facility features:

- four 8,000-foot tracks, with capacity to handle the loading or unloading of 104 double-stack rail cars;
- six 8,000-foot tracks to give train crews the ability to sort rail cars by destination;
- an additional six tracks to stage rail cars prior to unloading or loading;
- four cranes that straddle the rail cars and one rubber-tired mobile "packer" that lifts trailers and containers on and off the cars;
- more than 4,000 "staging," or parking, places for trailers and containers; and

- gate technology that decreases truck processing time at the terminal's entrance from several minutes to 90 seconds or fewer.

For RailWorks, the job required installing 242,000 feet (or about 45 miles) of continuous-welded rail, 130,000 ties (70,000 steel and 60,000 wood) and 380 feet of grade crossing panels, says Eric Goetschel, project manager. Work also included building 59 wood- and steel-tie turnouts with welded joints, and two double-point details.

Construction began in August 2008 with an ambitious two-year plan, as UP pushed to complete the project to handle the demand of heavy Chicago-area intermodal traffic. To stay on schedule, RailWorks crews — which peaked at about 50 in number — worked on track installation through the "brutal" winter of 2009-2010, Dorris says.

Weather issues aside, the installation of the rail, turnouts and crossing panels was pretty straightforward; the team encountered few problems, Goetschel says. Getting the supplies to the site, however, proved to be more of a challenge. RailWorks installed about 3,000 feet of temporary track that ran from the UP mainline to the construction site, enabling supplies to be shipped to the site by rail — and the railroad's mainline traffic to run without interruption.

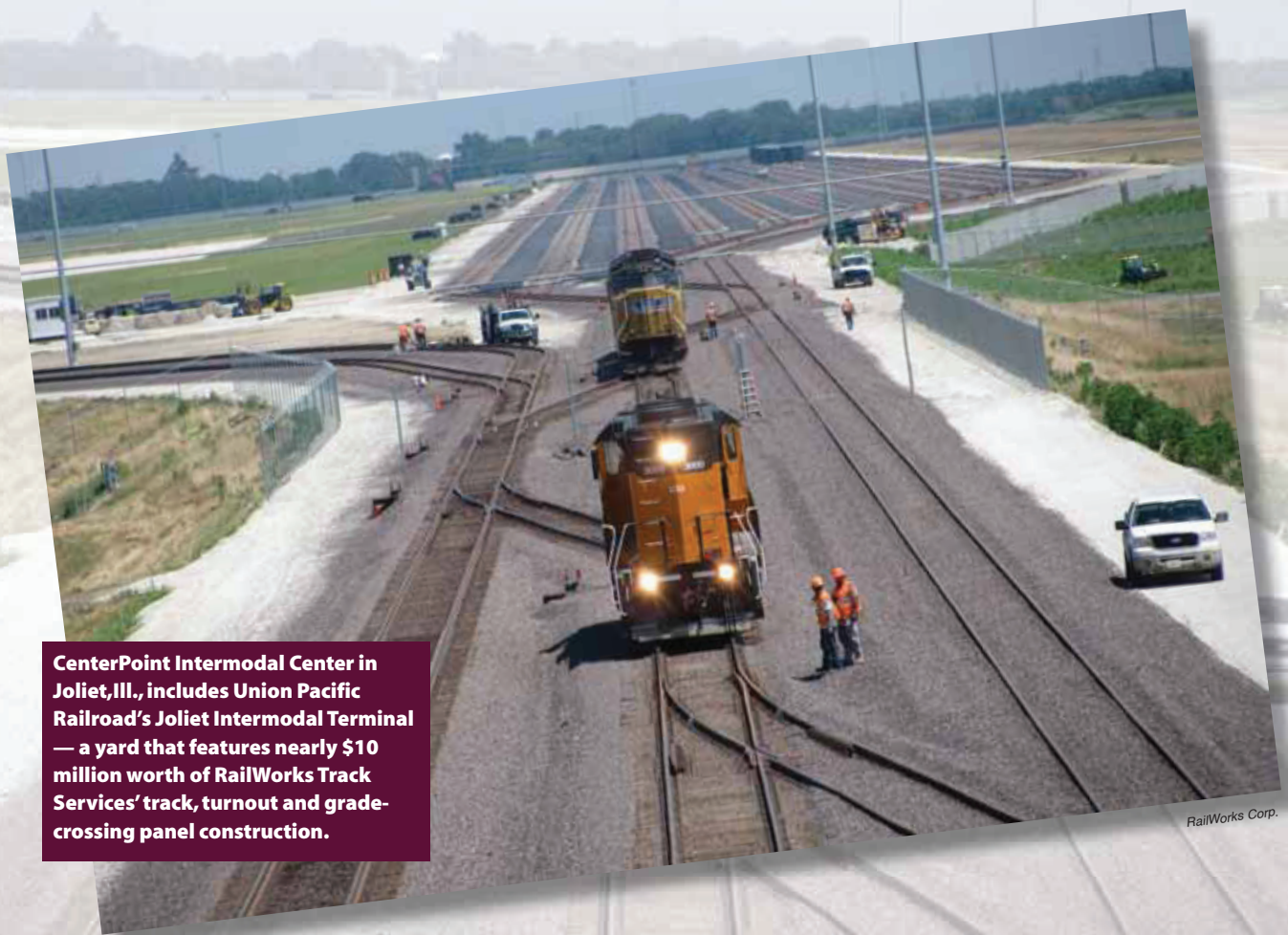
Careful planning before and contractor coordination during construction helped keep supplies on hand and the tight two-year timetable on track. "It was just incredible how it went," Dorris says. "It was a great team effort."

With the economy improving and the facility already running at close to capacity since opening Aug. 1, Dorris also hopes that RailWorks can get the team back together for more work at the UP terminal.

"They're already talking about expanding," he says. "We would be happy to help." **PR**

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CenterPoint Intermodal Center in Joliet, Ill., includes Union Pacific Railroad's Joliet Intermodal Terminal — a yard that features nearly \$10 million worth of RailWorks Track Services' track, turnout and grade-crossing panel construction.

RailWorks Corp.