

Rochester Area Railfan Guide

Third Edition

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RAILFAN'S GUIDE TO THE ROCHESTER AREA

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Introduction

Some might know Western New York, and more specifically Rochester, as the 'Land of Alcos' one of the few remaining strongholds where classic examples of the American Locomotive Company still reign supreme. This is certainly true, but there's so much more to railfanning greater Rochester! Whether you're interested in that classic ALCO smoke show, gorgeous trestles, historic railroad structures, or busy Class 1 mainlines. The Greater Rochester railfan experience has something for everyone!



Finger Lakes Railway

The Finger Lakes region, an area in upstate New York comprising small villages and cities situated along a series of lakes whose shapes closely resemble the fingers on a human hand, is well known for its spectacular scenery. The region is also home to one of the most widely recognized short line railroads in New York: The Finger Lakes Railway (FGLK). In a region that is notably rich with short lines powered by high horsepower Alcos, the Finger Lakes Railway is famous for providing railroad services to its namesake region using EMD GP38-2s and General Electric B23-7s dressed in the colors of the New York Central Railroad. The New York Central Livery, along with their mixed roster, gives railroad enthusiasts the rare and unique opportunity to shoot the vintage fallen flag paint scheme on home rails. The same can be said for their sole Lehigh Valley painted unit: FGLK U23B no. 2201. Based out of Geneva, New York, in the heart of its namesake region, the Finger Lakes Railway operates 167 miles of former New York Central, Lehigh Valley, and Pennsylvania Railroad track between Geneva, Auburn, Solvay, Himrod, Watkins Glen, Victor, Penn Yan, and Canandaigua. The Finger Lakes Railway was founded in 1995 when the railroad purchased Conrail's Geneva Cluster. The Geneva Cluster consisted of the remains of the New York Central's Auburn Road, sections of the Pennsylvania Railroad's Elmira Branch, and sections of the Lehigh Valley's Buffalo Division mainline. Between the railroad's predecessors and its chosen primary paint scheme, the Finger Lakes Railway can be considered as the railroad that revived a fallen flag. If one wants to get the most out of railfanning FGLK, a majority of their jobs go on duty in the very early morning. All trains listed below are based on most up to date railfan knowledge from in the field observations. Times and days listed are to be considered as ballpark estimates and results may vary.

FGLK Trains

GS2	Sun-Fri	Geneva to Solvay Turn, OD 11:00AM (Sunday 08:00AM)
HG2	Tues, Thurs	Himrod to Geneva Turn, OD 06:00AM
HW2	Mon, Wed, Fri	Himrod to Watkins Glen/Penn Yan Turn, OD 07:00AM
GC2	Mon, Thurs	Geneva to Canandaigua Turn, OD 08:00AM
GK2	Wed	Geneva to Kendaia Turn, OD 08:00AM
GY1/GY2	Weekdays	Geneva Yard Jobs/Local(s)
AY1	Weekdays	Auburn Yard Job/Local
SH1	Weekdays	Solvay Yard Job/Local
NS H06	Sun-Fri	NS Gang Mills to Geneva Turn/Local

Rochester & Southern

Extending from urban Rochester, New York, to the rural landscapes of Western New York State under Genesee & Wyoming Incorporated ownership, the Rochester and Southern Railroad is considered to be the line that launched the big short line conglomerate. Operating between the cities of Rochester, Danville, and Silver Springs, this short line railroad interchanges with CSX at CP-373 on the Rochester Subdivision and at Genesee Junction on the West Shore Subdivision. The R&S also interchanges with the Livonia, Avon & Lakeville Railroad at Brooks Avenue Yard in Rochester as well as Norfolk Southern via their Southern Tier Line in Silver Springs. The R&S schedule is rather fluid in recent times so railfans should be mindful when attempting to catch them running. Although getting to Brooks Avenue Yard in the mid morning on weekdays is typically a good bet to see them running. Motive power consists of G&W painted EMD diesels from the Buffalo & Pittsburgh, Rochester & Southern, and occasionally other GWI related properties.



Livonia Avon & Lakeville

Headquartered in its namesake city, Lakeville, New York, the Livonia, Avon & Lakeville Railroad has been serving the communities along its 27-mile network since 1964. The railroad traces the heritage of their tracks back to the Erie Lackawanna as well as Conrail when the railroad industry was suffering immensely from new government regulations, economic changes, and financial struggles during the 1960s and 1970s. The LA&L also operates three subsidiary

railroad companies: the B&H Rail Corporation, the Ontario Midland Railroad, and the Western New York & Pennsylvania Railroad. While most of their right of way is former Erie Lackawanna, the railroad also operates a small former Lehigh Valley branch line to Henrietta, New York. The LA&L also maintains interchange connections with CSX at Genesee Junction just south of the city of Rochester, and at Brooks Avenue Yard with the Rochester & Southern. The LA&L mainline also runs directly past the Rochester & Genesee Valley Railroad Museum, where various pieces of historic railroad equipment, some of which hailing from the LA&L, are preserved. In terms of catching the LA&L running, they run primarily most weekdays. The road train to Rochester typically leaves Lakeville in the early afternoon between 12:00PM and 1:00PM and departs Rochester at Genesee Junction in the late afternoon or early evening. On the weekend, particularly on Sunday in the early morning hours, LA&L will run a job out of Lakeville to the Barilla facility in Avon at around 7:00AM.



Falls Road Railroad (Genesee Valley Transportation)

The Falls Road Railroad, a subsidiary company of Genesee Valley Transportation, is a small 41-mile short line railroad that operates between Lockport and Brockport, New York. The subsidiary of Genesee Valley Transportation got its name due to the tracks dating back to the days of the New York Central, when it was known as the New York Central's Falls Road. Under Conrail, this former New York Central mainline was known as the Falls Road Secondary.

The Falls Road began operations in October 1996 after the line was acquired from Conrail. Like many of the short line railroads in New York, the Falls Road employs Alco diesel locomotives to power the revenue freight trains and passenger excursions that the railroad operates on a regular basis. The route of the Falls Road runs somewhat parallel to the famed Erie Canal between Lockport and Brockport and passes through the cities of Gasport, Middlesport, Medina, Albion, Fancher, and Holley. As the tracks end at a small industrial junction in Brockport, all freight traffic is interchanged with CSX in Lockport. Freight traffic on the Falls Road consists of grain, fertilizer, chemicals, lumber, and food products. Occasionally, the railroad will operate passenger excursions with the Medina Railroad Museum as well. Scenic highlights along the route to Brockport include the deck truss bridge spanning over the Erie Canal in Lockport, the former New York Central freight depot in Albion, the railroad museum and passenger depot in Medina, the overpass and cold storage siding in Holley, the Bonduelle factory in Brockport, and various rural farm country scenes throughout the entirety of the Falls Road's route. Rich with history and still alive with industrial activity, the Falls Road is a railroad that is always kept busy. Falls Road typically operates on Wednesday and Friday with other weekdays as needed. Falls Road typically goes on duty around 07:30AM in Lockport and arrives in Brockport between 09:30AM to 11:00AM depending on which customers need to be switched out as they move east. Railfans should keep in mind that a Brockport run is not always a guarantee as there are days where they may only go as far as Knowlesville or Albion before returning west.



Ontario Midland Railroad

Operating on 47 miles of track in Monroe and Wayne counties of New York State since 1979, the Ontario Midland is another short line railroad that employs ALCO diesel locomotives to

service its customers and interchange with CSX. Interchanging with CSX in Newark, NY, the OMID transports freight on the former New York Central Hojack Line as well as the Pennsylvania Railroad's Elmira Branch. Like many of its neighboring short line railroads, the OMID maintains a small fleet of Alco diesel locomotives. The OMID can be a rather elusive for railfans to catch. However, the best bet to catch a train moving on OMID is to be in Sodus, NY in the early morning around 08:00AM on Monday, Wednesday, and/or Friday. Monday has typically been the best of the three options to catch an OMID run. What OMID does when they run will depend on what their customers need for service as well as what CSX has dropped off for them at the interchange in Newark, NY. While the railroad runs the north end of the Elmira Branch between Newark and Sodus, NY, the OMID also runs on the former New York Central Hojack Line between Sodus and Williamson, NY.



CSX - Water level Route

With the advent of Precision Scheduled Railroading, the CSX Water Level Route is not quite as active as it once was, however it's still incredibly busy. In a couple of hours spent track side one can still expect to see 6-10 trains.

There are multiple spots worth visiting on the line, first and foremost being the wonderful Train Viewing Platform in Fairport, NY (Full Address: 9 Liftbridge Ln E, Fairport, NY 14450.) At this

location, viewers are treated to a fully covered shelter, perfect for very warm or rainy days, along with a scanner that plays over the speakers in the shelter allowing for advance notice of any incoming trains. The shelter is also optimally situated to catch all traffic not just on the mainline, but also anything coming on or off the West Shore, which is the Downtown bypass that departs the mainline in Chili, and rejoins the main just west of the platform in Fairport.

If you're not interested in the amenities offered at the Platform, or you're looking for something a little more scenic, there are plenty of other options along the CSX mainline as well. On the west side of the City, in the Small town of Bergen, NY there are two spots worth checking out. The hillside south of the Jericho Road crossing offers a wonderful location for afternoon broadside shots with a foreground of sweeping farmland. A little closer to downtown Bergen, Buffalo Street offers a long stretch of road that parallels the main line. As you work your way further east, in the Town of Chili, NY Attridge Road allows a safe place to park, and enjoy the action at the west end of the West Shore bypass. The gravel pull off on the west side of the road is a popular spot for railfans on the west side of the city. Perhaps the most picturesque scene in all of Rochester is that of the High Falls Bridge. The bridge can be viewed from a few different locations. If you're looking for a bite to eat, the patio seating at the Genesee Brew house is the way to go. If you're just looking to snap a few trains and move on, there is also a pedestrian bridge over the Genesee River, which is just north of the CSX bridge. Both locations are easily accessible from the Genesee Brew House Parking lot (25 Cataract St, Rochester, NY 14605.)

If yard operations are your jam, CSX Goodman Street yard is also relatively accessible, with public parking just off Circle St, on the south side of the yard. Just be sure to wear long pants and tall socks if you plan to stand on the unmowed hillside in order to take any pictures. Ticks have unfortunately become quite the problem in these sorts of areas in Western NY due to the string of mild winters that we've had in the past few years.

In addition to the Fairport Train watching Platform, the towns on the East Side of Rochester also offer some other interesting railfanning locations, especially for those that may also be interested in not just in railroads, but also boating along the Erie Canal. In the town of Macedon, Wayneport Rd. offers a safe place to pull off the road and view a set of intermediate signals. Additionally, just a bit further east, just off Ontario Center Road, you'll see Erie Canal Lock #30. One of the many locks on that allows boats to be raised and lowered to navigate changes in elevation around the Canal. You may be wondering why a Lock deserves a spot in a railfan guide, and that's certainly fair... while the lock itself is certainly pretty cool, there is lots of railroad activity happening just north of this area. While the CSX main crosses over Ontario Center Road on an overpass, there is a small siding for a local customer that crosses at grade just north of the Canal. Curiously, the siding seems to just simply stop in the middle of the woods, with no significant industry in close proximity. However, if you look east along the canal itself from Lock 30 you'll see a section of pipe crossing the body of water. This isn't a gas line, or even an electrical conduit as you might expect... It's actually a vacuum line moving plastic

pellets from the end of that CSX industry siding, across the canal, and into ABX Innovative Packaging Solutions. While you're likely not going to see the CSX Local that delivers to ABX while you're in town due to its irregular intervals/timing. The location could be worth checking out just to see the rather unique nature of the delivery system to the industry.



Norfolk Southern - Southern Tier Line

The Southern Tier line is arguably one of the most scenic lines in all of New York State. The former Erie RR line stretches from Buffalo to Binghamton, with a small portion of the line being within a reasonable driving distance from the Rochester area. If you're interested in taking on a full chase of the line while in town, it is recommended that you source copies of the Railpace Magazine from January and February of 2022 where Paul Stamp published a comprehensive chase guide for the line from Buffalo to Gang Mills. For the purposes of this railfan guide, we'll focus on the portion of the line from Attica, NY to Letchworth State Park. All of which is within an hour drive from the Convention site.

While not nearly as busy as in years past, "The Tier" still provides a strong chance at a morning eastbound in good light. While things can change very rapidly on Class 1s as of the writing of this guide in June of 2024, NS Train 264, an eastbound intermodal train offers your best chance to chase a train in good light. 264 has been departing Buffalo between 8:00am and 10:00am most days, meaning a majority of its travel over the area of coverage is in good light.

Starting in Attica, there are a number of great locations to shoot trains on The Tier. the first being Favor St, where you'll see CP Attica, the beginning of Attica siding. If you're lucky this can also

be a hotspot for activity in the morning depending on the timing of local train H52, and west bound manifest train 309. Directly outside of downtown Attica begins the ruling Grade of the Southern Tier Line. “Attica Hill” even properly powered trains are brought to their knees here. The climb up the hill is long and sometimes slow. Chasers will be treated to high horsepower locomotives in notch 8 along the stretch of track that parallels Spring Road, and at the crest of the grade; an overpass on Drybridge Rd.

As you continue further east, an opportunity to pace the train presents itself along Dale Rd. which runs parallel to the tracks for a few miles. Further south and east still is the town of Silver Springs which is the interchange point between Rochester & Southern, and Norfolk Southern. The Erie built depot still stands in Silver Springs and offers a very photogenic location.

The final location on The Tier, but certainly not the least... presents itself at Letchworth State Park, nicknamed the “Grand Canyon of the East”. The state park is frankly worth a visit whether you’re able to see a train or not. But it is here where the Southern Tier line soars over the Letchworth Gorge on the newly built “Genesee Arch”, a massive span which can be framed perfectly with the Genesee River’s “High Falls” area right below. You’ll have to be prepared to pay to enter the State Park on the weekend though; admission to the park on weekends is \$10.00, well worth the price if you’re interested in a visit. During the week the gates should be open and free of charge to enter.

