

## RAILWORKS TRACK SYSTEMS: Coordinating with the competition in Vermont

A large-scale rail and tie replacement job in a remote part of Vermont can present challenges for any seasoned rail contractor. Toss in a wayward hurricane and working alongside one of your competitors, and you've got the potential for even bigger hurdles.

Not for RailWorks Track Systems.

Careful planning, quick reactions and professional teamwork enabled RailWorks to sidestep the pitfalls and turn a potentially troublesome project into a successful job that was completed on time, on budget and injury free, says Brian Bennett, vice president of RailWorks Track Systems.

"There was a lot of coordination that went into this," he says.

The project took shape last fall, when RailWorks and one of its main competitors, Atlas Railroad Construction, were jointly awarded a contract to install 1.5 million feet of continuous-welded rail (CWR) along 191 miles of track for the New England Central Railroad, which is owned by RailAmerica Inc. At the same time, RailWorks retained a contract to replace 140,000 wood ties for the NECR. The track upgrades were needed to accommodate higher-speed Amtrak trains on the Vermonter route between St. Albans, Vt., near the Canadian border, and the Massachusetts border.

Working on the NECR project was nothing new for RailWorks, which has completed rail and tie replacement and other work for the short line for more than a decade, according to Bennett. As for working alongside a rival contractor? That was unusual, he says.

"It was different, but we talked to Atlas and said, 'What do you think about working together?'" Bennett says. "We shared information and shared some spare equipment."

RailWorks managers kept in close contact with Atlas, NECR and Amtrak officials to develop a coordinated construction schedule that began in the spring, with RailWorks gangs working on the west side of the rail and Atlas employees working on the east as they headed south from St. Albans, about two to four

miles apart. Tie replacement work began about two months after the rail replacement.

Rail gangs comprising 30 to 40 workers — and sometimes as many as 70 — typically worked 15 straight days, followed by a seven-day span during which a separate five-person gang unloaded rail trains to position CWR on the track ahead of the rail gangs, according to Bennett. Add in a 25- to 30-person tie gang, crews from other contractors working on signaling and crossings, and the need to continue operating freight and passenger trains, and "logistics was the big hurdle," Bennett says. "We always had to be concerned about what was going on a week or two ahead."

One of those unforeseen hurdles: lodging. With two full rail gangs working in close proximity, as well as the tie gang, it became a planning challenge to make sure enough hotel rooms were available in a rural area more accustomed to bed-and-breakfast establishments, Bennett says. A full-time RailWorks project manager who coordinated the work of both companies was key to the success of the project, he adds.

But perhaps one of the biggest challenges was overcoming the floods caused by the remnants of Hurricane Irene in

late August. Record-setting rains washed out multiple sections of track, damaged bridges and brought down trees and utility wires, shutting down the railroad for nearly three weeks.

"We lost a van to the floodwaters," Bennett says. "Fortunately, nobody got hurt."

The CWR work had been completed just a few weeks before the flooding, but tie work was hampered by the delay in materials delivery. Still, RailWorks managed to install 75,000 ties before the project wrapped up for the year, putting the railroad slightly ahead of its two-year timetable, says Bennett. RailWorks will install the remaining 60,000 ties in 2012.

"This was a major job for us. It was a big feat that took a lot of manpower and a lot of planning," Bennett says. "I think everybody was happy with the way things turned out." ■



Kevin Burkholder

A RailWorks Track Systems rail gang installs new rail for the New England Central Railroad in White River Junction, Vt.