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MISSING TRAIN

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Over the last 23 or 24 years that I have been involved with the transportation of Light Rail Vehicles for Kinkisharyo, from the first project in Boston for the MBTA to the present DART C-Cars and upcoming DART SLRV, I have experienced some very interesting events related to the transportation of these vehicles.

Due to the specialized nature of our LRV's, we prepare special lifting equipment to handle the shells for loading and unloading, require specialized rail transport trailers, of which there are only a handful of them here in the states, to move completed LRV's over the road and even modified TTX 89ft. flatcars to accommodate the transportation by rail.

If I remember correctly, during the original and possibly first option contracts that we did for DART we assembled the cars up in Elmira, N.Y. This is up in the northern part of New York state, nowhere near the transit authority in Dallas, Tx., so we had to come up with a transportation plan to accommodate these cars all the way down to Dallas.

Due to the size and weight of the completed DART LRV, somewhere around 94ft., coupler to coupler, and approx 110,000 lbs., it was not possible to transport this vehicle over such a long distance over the road by a rail transport trailer. Even if it were possible, turn around time and costs associated with bringing 'empty' equipment back up to Elmira, N.Y. was prohibitive. We looked at other options, and decided the best way to do this was by rail.....an idea that, unknown to us at the time, would cause us much stress and heartache over the course of the contract.

Back then, we had two major railroads serving the east coast, ConRail and CSX transportation. In addition to those two carriers, we also needed to connect to BNSF and a local railroad for delivery into DART's facility in Dallas. In order to transport these LRV's we had to use 89ft flatcars (ITTX) flatcars with 'idler' cars (smaller flatbed cars) on each end for clearance purposes. These 89ft flatcars required modification, we called them 'flower boxes', done in our Elmira FA site, to allow the completed LRV's to sit properly and be able to be secured properly on the flatcar.

We entered into a pool car agreement with the railroads in which they allotted us 3 or 4 of these 89ft flatcars and some smaller 'idler' cars to use for our shipments. The plan was that we would load cars up in Elmira, NY and rail down to Dallas. Once delivered to DART, the 'empty' equipment would return to Elmira, NY to be used again. While this plan looked good on paper, it sometimes became a

nightmare for us to keep track of our shipments.

Speaking of 'nightmares', sometimes the 'empty' 89ft flatcars would be routed elsewhere in the rail system, or a connecting railroad would use them for other loads and we would not see them back in Elmira for weeks at a time.

Another time, the railroad routed the flatcar with one of our LRV's from Kansas City north instead of south to Dallas. The railroad couldn't believe it was headed in that direction because in their system it showed it as sitting in their yard in Kansas City. After our many complaining phone calls to them they did a physical check of the rail yard and found it was not there after all. Once they found it, and corrected the routing, it added an additional 2-weeks to the total transit time. Another time an LRV went missing for 4-days after leaving the Elmira F/A site. It was finally found sitting behind a freight train in the railroads local yard not too far from Elmira.

I would guess that the nightmare of all nightmares for us was when the railroad 'lost' one LRV in transit down to Dallas. All in all, it took five or six weeks to get there and all the while we were frantically checking with railroads daily to find out it's whereabouts. Talk about stress !!!

As you can assume, this caused many 'heart-attacks' for all of us involved with moving these LRVs to Dallas. How do you explain a 'missing' LRV to the consignee. ??? At times, it appeared that we had more information that the railroads but were frustrated because of the lack of cooperation by these carriers.

Thankfully, for all future options with DART and more recently with other projects that we have handled, we now locate the FA's in close proximity to the transit authority. In some cases we deliver on rail at FA to the transit authority, such as NJT-Hudson Bergen and most recently at Phoenix. In other instances, we rely on special railcar transporters that allow to move completed cars by truck a short distance from the FA to the transit authority. This method affords us better control of the shipment and, more importantly, removes the risk of losing track of an LRV in transit.

We all have stress in our jobs. We don't need the added stress of missing trains in transit.