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ALL ABOARD?

Reading & Northern owner offers \$10M for Luzerne County rail lines



Passengers wait to board the Reading & Northern train at the new Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Regional Railroad Station in Pittston's Junction section in 2023. FILE PHOTO

By Bob Kalinowski
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After nearly two weeks of lobbying, the owner of Reading Blue Mountain and Northern Railroad has offered \$10 million to buy Luzerne County's rail line with a promise to deliver passenger rail service to Wilkes-Barre for trips to Jim Thorpe.

County officials said the move would boost tourism throughout the Wyoming Valley and the sale would be a potential financial windfall to the county, though ongoing litigation clouds any potential transaction.

Officials with the Luzerne County Redevelopment Authority, which owns the 60-mile network of rails and owes the county \$3.3 million for a loan repayment, have said they are considering a request-for-proposals for the sale or lease of the rail line.

Andy Muller Jr., CEO of the Reading Blue Mountain & Northern Railroad, recently penned an email and letter to the chairman of the authority board making the \$10 million offer.

"We have read in the local press that the Redevelopment Authority is considering putting its rail assets out for bid for long-term lease or sale," Muller wrote. "Reading & Northern is prepared to bring its award-winning passenger excursion service to Wilkes Barre, but only if we are able to reach an agreement to purchase the line."

Muller has said his railroad company



A Reading Blue Mountain & Northern train travels along its tracks during Mahanoy City Community Day on Sept. 13.

— which operates in nine Pennsylvania counties with 13 passenger stations from Tunkhannock to Reading — is best positioned to take over Luzerne County's aging tracks because of the network of rails it already owns.

He pledged to invest the estimated \$2 million needed to upgrade the 8-mile line between Pittston and Wilkes-Barre to accommodate excursions from Wilkes-Barre to Jim Thorpe. The company launched passenger service

from its Pittston station to Jim Thorpe in May 2023.

"R&N commits to providing passenger service from a new Wilkes Barre passenger station to be built by R&N on R&N property near East Market Street. The station will be built by R&N with R&N funds," Muller wrote.

The company also would build a new station in downtown Pittston, Muller

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PPL seeks nearly 7% rate hike

If approved, new rates would take effect July 1

By Bob Kalinowski
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Months after increasing electricity bills 16% on the generation end, PPL Electric Utilities is seeking an increase on the distribution end.

PPL Electric Utilities has asked the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) to increase distribution rates for residential customers by 6.98%, the company announced in a notice to customers on its website.

If approved, the new rates would become effective on July 1 next year, the company said in a news release.

On a power bill, generation charges cover the cost of producing the electricity, while distribution charges cover the cost of delivering electricity to homes and businesses through power lines and equipment.

If the increase is approved by the PUC, the average residential customer using 1,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity would see their bill increase from \$191.49 to \$204.86 per month, the company said.

PPL is also requesting to increase commercial user bills by 5.31% and industrial customers by 2.58%.

In order for the hikes to be approved, PPL "must prove that the requested rates are reasonable," the company's notice said. After examining the evidence, the PUC may grant all, some, or none of the request, or it may reduce existing rates.

PPL is making the request to make "necessary investments to build and maintain a

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Crestwood publishes list of candidates for school board seat

By Christopher Doyle
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The Crestwood School District issued a news release Wednesday identifying the applicants who submitted letters of interest to fill the Board of Education seat left vacant by the September resignation of John Webby.

There were seven candidates on the list and it included several people who appeared to have had applied to fill a past vacancy that emerged on the school board.

The candidates included C.K. Calhoun, Paul Day, Shawn Gallagher, Robert Mauro, Justin Mirilovich, Stephen Modrovsky, and Margo Serafini.

The most familiar name to Crestwood voters this cycle on the list is likely Mirilovich. In the May 20 primary for Crestwood

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Government shutdown takes hold with mass layoffs looming and no end in sight

By Lisa Mascaro, Mary Clare Jalonick and Stephen Groves
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The federal government was thrown into a shutdown Wednesday with no easy endgame in sight, as Democrats held firm to their demands to salvage health care subsidies that President Donald Trump and Republican in Congress

have dismissed as something to possibly discuss later.

The White House threatened mass layoffs of federal workers, rather than simply the normal furloughs, in a matter of days, seizing the chance to slash government. Blame was being cast on all sides. No new talks were scheduled after the president failed this week to secure a deal with congressional leaders.

"Let's be honest, if this thing

drags on," warned Vice President JD Vance during a visit to the White House briefing room, "we are going to have to lay people off."

Roughly 750,000 federal workers were expected to be furloughed, and some fired, by Trump's Republican administration. Many offices will be shuttered, perhaps permanently, as the president promises to zero in on programs Democrats like. Trump's

deportation agenda is likely to run full speed ahead, while education, environmental and other services sputter. The economic fallout could ripple across the nation.

Democrats believe their health care campaign is what House Leader Hakeem Jeffries called a "moral" issue, but cracks are emerging within the party. A Senate vote on the GOP

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People take photos with a sign announcing that the Library of Congress is closed, on the first day of a partial government shutdown Wednesday in Washington. JULIA DEMAREE NIKHINSON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

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