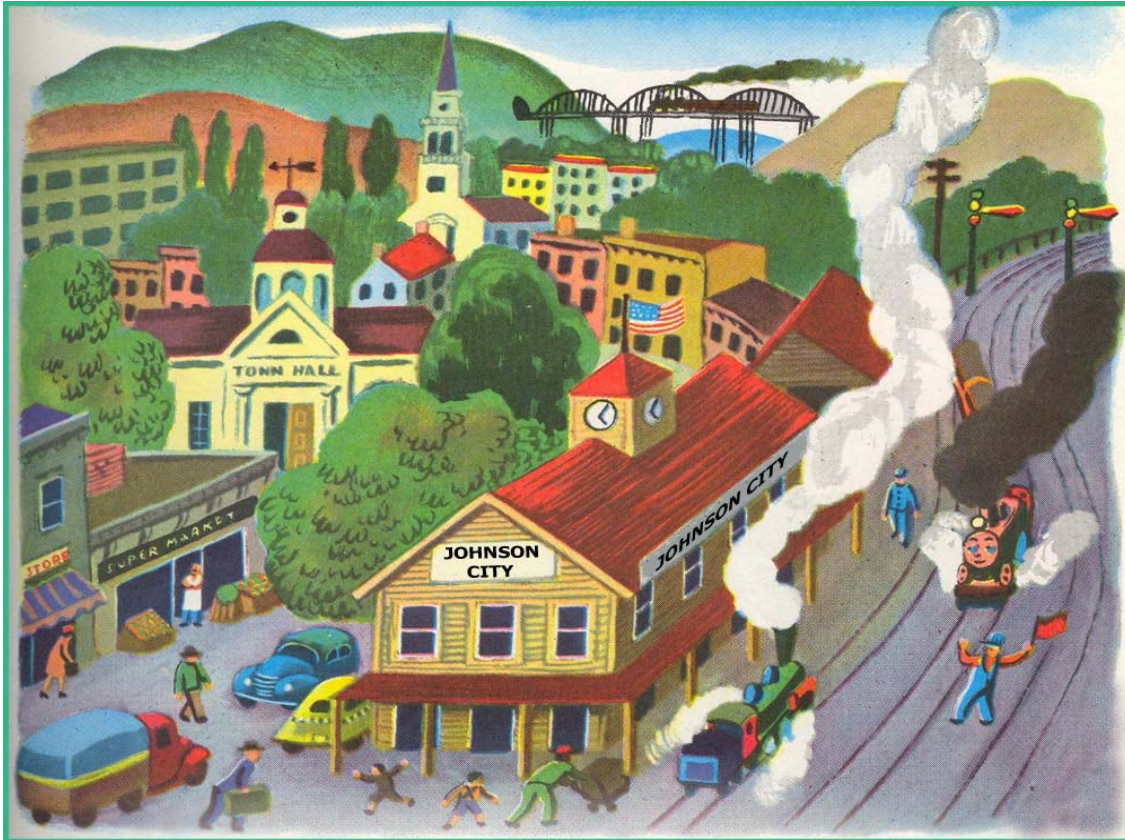


# The Train Tracks in Johnson City



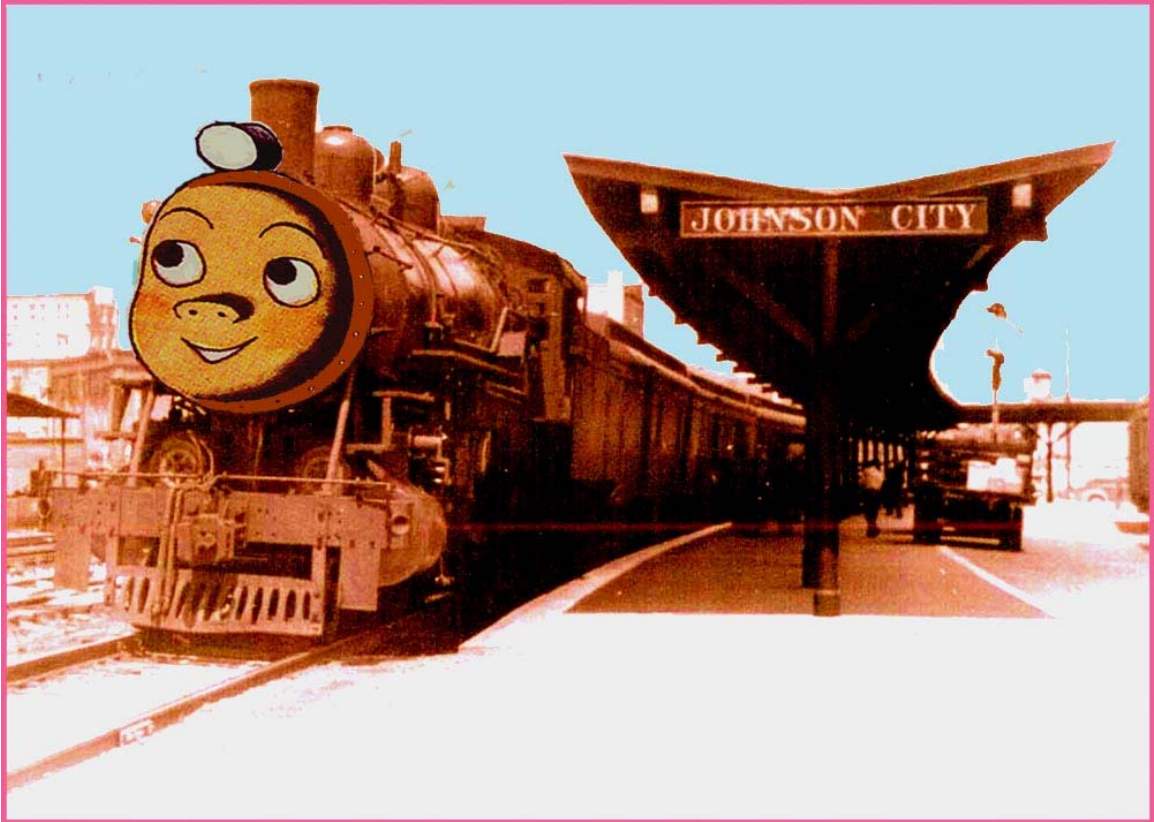
## A Short Picture Story



Far far to the East of everywhere is the Appalachian town of Johnson City. At one time Johnson City was a wonderful place for trains. The trains ran all through the town. The trains brought people and goods to Johnson City.

The trains brought the commerce that built the town. Many of the townspeople worked on the railroad that crisscrossed and ran around the town. The local songwriters even wrote songs about the trains.

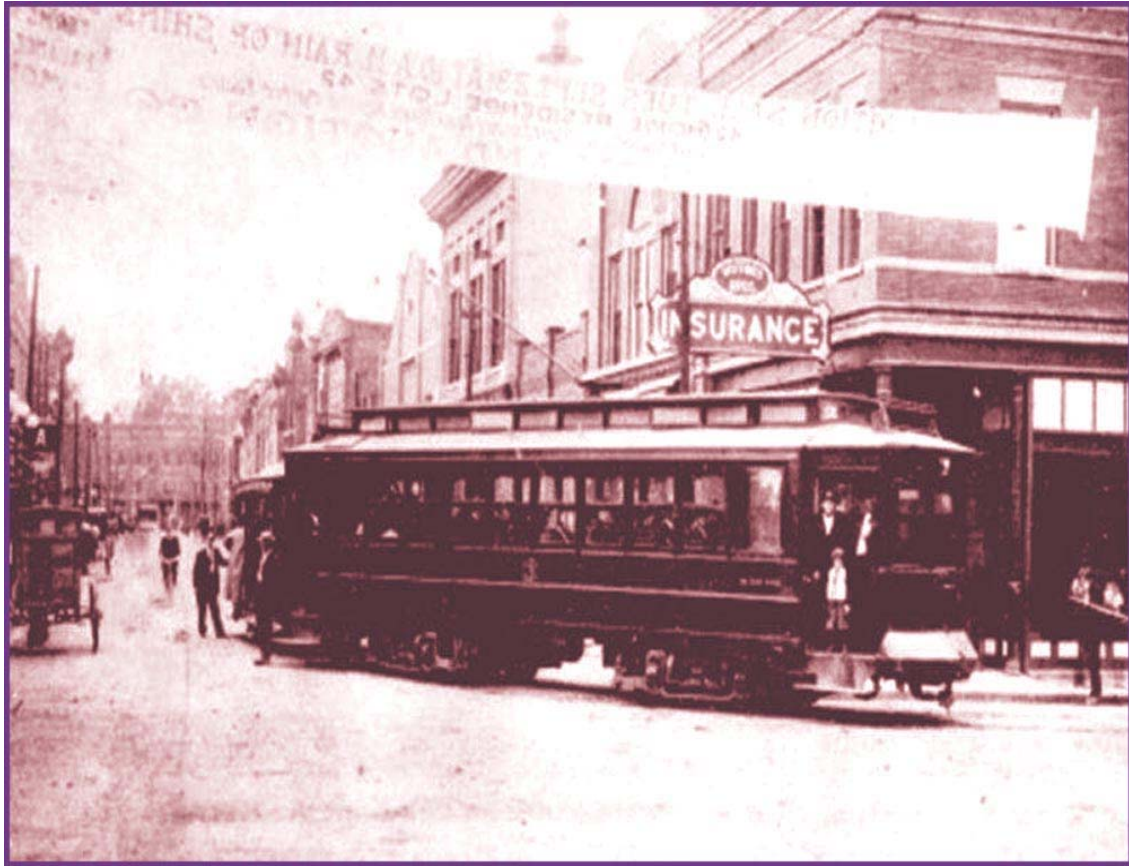
There were once three different train stations in the middle of Johnson City. Johnson City had more train stations than much bigger cities.



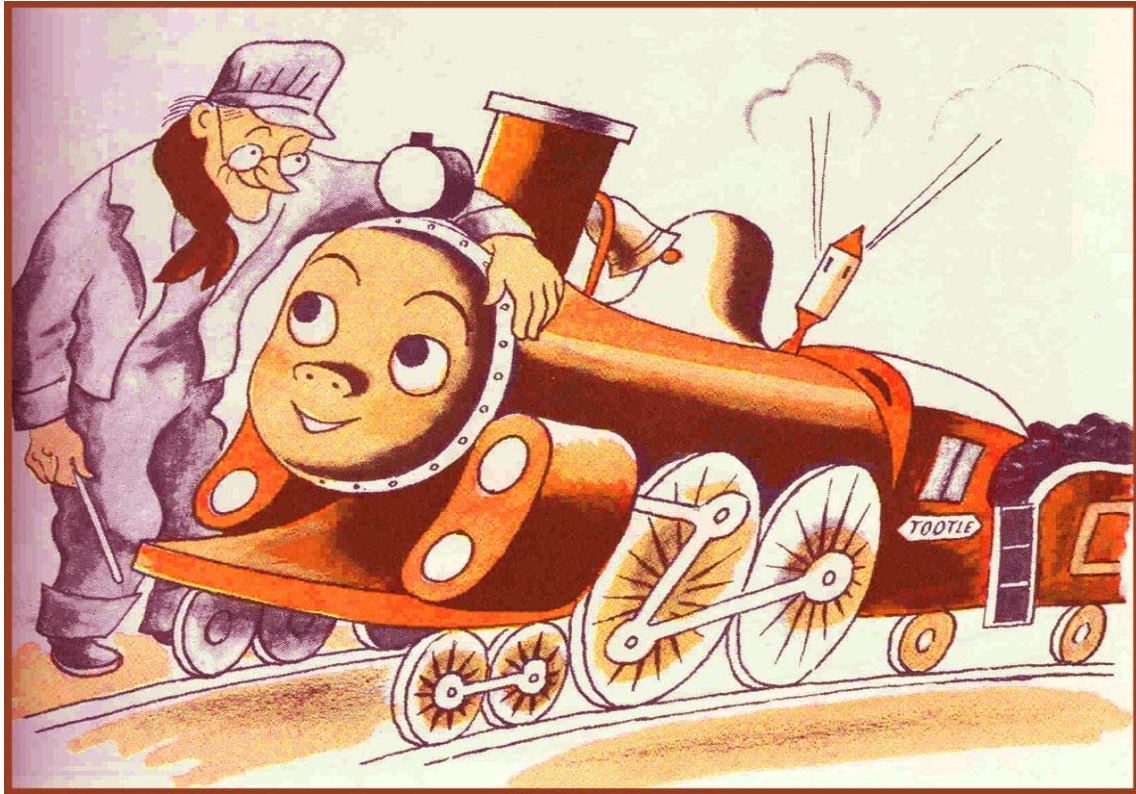
Johnson City used to be a wonderful place for trains.

And the townspeople liked their trains.

The Southern, the Clinchfield and the Tweetsie – the East Tennessee & Western North Carolina railroad all met in the middle of the town.



The wise townspeople of Johnson City liked trains so much that by the 1920's, Johnson City already had a completed rail trolley system.



Trains were happy in Johnson City; and one could go from Downtown Johnson City to Washington DC, to Memphis, to New Orleans, over the mountains to Boone, North Carolina or just down the road to Kingsport, Erwin or Elizabethton.

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Well, that was some time ago, and most of the trains are gone and most of the track have been pulled up to make way for highway interchanges and paved thoroughfares; places where Mac Donald's and Wendy's and Sonic Burger and Fuddruckers and Long John Silver, and Burger King and Kentucky Fried Chicken can do their business; because there is no room on the railroad right of way for fast food – and the fast freight and slow passenger trains have long ago ceased stopping in Johnson City.

But the Southern Railroad does still run through the middle of town without stopping, as it makes its way from the South to the North, passing through Morristown and Greenville making its way to Roanoke and places north – and some of the Clinchfield track, now CSX, and some of the ET&WNC track still remain in the heart of downtown.



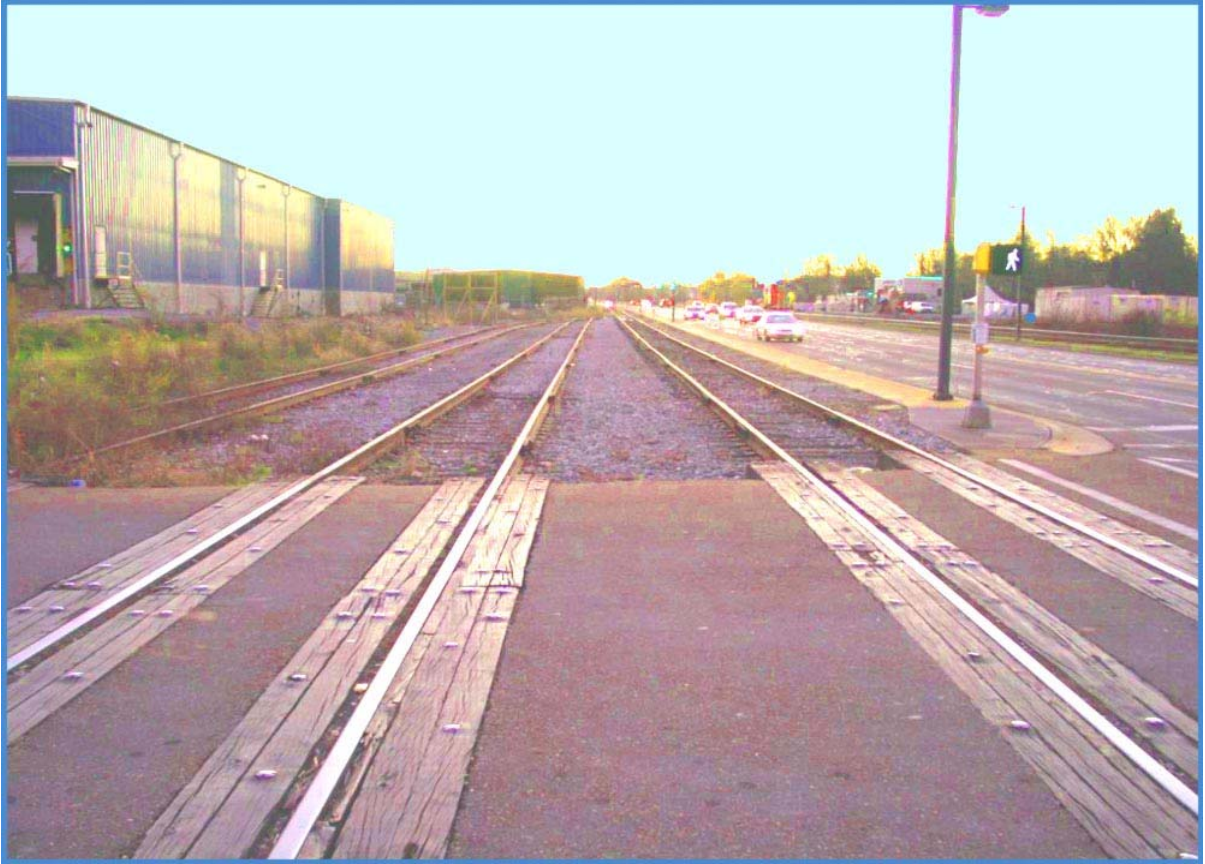
Well, recently a few of the town's people put together a plan to resurrect commuter service from downtown Elizabethton to the doorstep of East Tennessee State University - a distance of eleven miles - the typical distance for a short commuter railroad.

But this was not planned to be a regular train. It was to be a very special train. Still, it was intended in part to emulate what the Triangle Transit Authority had done in Raleigh - Durham. It was going to do what has just been done outside of Nashville with the Music City Star, and what has recently been done in dozens of other locations across the country. It was going to bring commuter rail back to the people - to free them from their cars.

It was planned to ease highway congestion and eliminate the need for wider streets and even more highways. It was going to carry people the way they used to be carried, on train coaches, without the hassle of traffic and without the creation of unnecessary smog producing emissions; - because even in Johnson City the air is becoming noticeably worse because of auto emissions - because of the forced dependence on automobiles.

But this rail line, while short in distance, was planned to go far in another direction.

It was planned to help the economy, an economy sorely lacking in regional industrialization. To do this it was planning to be the first bio-fueled commuter rail train in the US - if not in the world.





There is enough track and sidings to operate a light service commuter line; to be able to park the trains and service them.





There are sidings and small buildings and space enough that could serve to fuel the trains; to collect the used cooking oils that are to be recycled. There is space enough to store the newly produced bio-diesel and ethanol that is to be produced locally from crops grown by the local farmers.

The farmers are happy because they will have a market for their soy bean crop, which is a deficit crop because they have no local outlet for their product, and must ship it far to sell it. The local blue collar worker is happy because it will mean new jobs; the start of new regional industry.



The National Historic Railroad Association people are happy because they will have a place from which to run their excursions - which also means more tourism and more money into the economy and the local businesses. Everyone seems happy.



There is even an old train station that could serve as the Johnson City downtown stop.

And this station is very close to the still operating Southern Rail line. And when the people of Johnson City once again become wise like their parents and grandparents, the station could eventually serve as the Johnson City stop for Amtrak, once that service is completed across Tennessee; which it will be in the not too distant future - because old rail is the future.

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The bio-fuel demonstration project that is planned around the tracks is intended to be a micro- experiment in the use of renewable fuels as a prime energy source. Even the trucks that collect the used cooking oils from the fast food restaurants and the trucks that deliver the freshly produced bio- diesel and ethanol are planned to run on 100% bio-fuels.

But for the moment there are unwise people in control of Johnson City who have other plans – plans for a new highway interchange in the middle of downtown, plans for a widened street, and plans to use the street frontage next to the tracks for retail development of all sorts. And to that end, a commercial developer who doesn't like the idea of the tracks being near his stores has been made a local hero. And this developer has lots of money – and along with his plans there is the spoken and unspoken promise of more than a little of that money being spread around to sundry select people and businesses, all those that will help sell out the city.

The children and grandchildren of the original townspeople and their new friends aren't visionaries. They are crooks. They are stealing the city's future. They are corrupt people who have used collusion, and aligned themselves with people who have a conflict of interest between the tracks being removed and their own personal gain.

These people control the city hall. They have friends who will say and vote the way they want in all the right organizations, the regional commissions and on the right boards. And some of these people themselves are, in fact, on these very boards, these very commissions, and on these very committees.



Trying to speak out against them is useless. The newspaper won't print the story. The TV won't air the story and most people who say they love trains just seem to be too busy to worry about some old tracks. But they say they do love trains, and are happy to hear that the City has proposed that if the tracks are removed there will be a plaque dedicated to show where the tracks were once located.



The city hall crooks have even told the public that they will construct a walking trail in place of the tracks – not mentioning that there are already plans for a walking and bike trail across the road, next to the local creek. But then again, who would want to walk next to a beautiful stream filled with ducks when you can walk in front of a brand new big box store or a one of the same as everywhere else fast food restaurant with large automobile parking lots?

So, the people who are planning to develop the commuter railroad have been shut out of the planning for the city's transportation future. A \$150,000.00 federally funded grant to study the future use of the existing rail has yet to be utilized. And CSX, who owns the tracks, has only heard city hall's story.



As far as the city is concerned there will be no train to the University. They say they want the street that runs from the downtown to the University to serve as a corridor that connects the downtown to the University; but really they don't want the University to be part of downtown. They want their friends to be able to develop the land under the railroad tracks. It would seem that for City hall, a mile is too far a distance to be without a fast food restaurant in Johnson City.



And so, the future of rail transportation in Upper East Tennessee is in grave danger. And without the rails, there is no bio-fuel demonstration project.

Whatever happens in Johnson City over the coming days will affect the future of East Tennessee for many years to come.