



***NCDOT AND PATRIOT RAIL SIGN AGREEMENT TO OPERATE THE PIEDMONT AND NORTHERN RAILWAY LINE IN GASTON COUNTY***

**RALEIGH** – The N.C. Department of Transportation and Patriot Rail Corp. have executed a 20-year operating agreement to begin rail service on NCDOT's Piedmont & Northern (P&N) rail corridor in Gaston County. Under the agreement, Patriot will operate, maintain and market freight service on the line.

Located about 20 miles west of Charlotte, the P&N 13-mile corridor extends from Mount Holly to Gastonia with a spur line towards Belmont. The rail line has strategic interchanges with Class I railroads Norfolk Southern Railway at Gastonia and CSX Transportation at Mount Holly.

"We are pleased to welcome Patriot Rail to North Carolina, and look forward to their meeting freight customer's needs and helping create jobs in Gaston County," said Jim Westmoreland, NCDOT's deputy secretary for transit.

NCDOT has completed an upgrade of the westernmost four miles of the rail line from Gastonia to Ranlo, and anticipates upgrading the remainder of the line during the spring of 2011. Patriot expects to begin rail service on the westernmost four miles in the spring of 2011.

The P&N rail corridor was built in 1911, and its owner CSX proposed it for abandonment in the late 1980s along with a number of other corridors in North Carolina. NCDOT purchased the P&N right of way and track materials, along with several other rail corridors, to preserve for future transportation purposes. Though inactive, the P&N has been preserved with minimum maintenance since that time.

NCDOT and Patriot Rail have worked closely with Gaston County Board of Commissioners and the Gaston County Economic Development Commission to bring this project to fruition and in securing potential new customers. Gaston County Commissioners also contributed funds to assist with the upgrade of the rail line.

The Patriot Rail management team is led by Gary O. Marino, the co-founder and former chairman, president and CEO of RailAmerica Inc.

"We are pleased to add the 'new' P&N, our seventh railroad, to the Patriot family of railroads," said Marino. "We have commenced the job of building business on the railroad and have been encouraged by the business prospects. This railroad is in an ideal location for rail freight customers due to the dual Class I interchange and close proximity to a major transportation hub such as Charlotte."

Patriot Rail, a short line and regional freight railroad holding company based in Boca Raton, Fla., owns and operates seven short line freight railroads that comprise 344 total rail miles in nine states.

**\*\*\*NCDOT\*\*\***