

# The Bluemont Line

**T**he Alexandria, Loudoun & Hampshire Railroad was formed in 1847 to carry the agricultural produce of the Shenandoah Valley and western Virginia coal to the port of Alexandria. Financial difficulties, however, meant that the line never got farther west than Bluemont, Virginia, rendering it only marginally profitable throughout its existence. As a result, the line went through many changes of ownership, including operation by the Southern Railway from 1894 to 1912 and by the Washington & Old Dominion Railway (W&OD) until the track was abandoned in 1968.



*Under Southern Railway ownership, four to six passenger trains passed each direction daily between Washington and Bluemont via Alexandria Junction. Most of these operated on something approaching a commuter schedule, arriving in D.C. before 9 AM and leaving the city after 4:30 PM, giving the residents of St. Elmo and other suburbs an opportunity to commute into D.C.. In 1912, however, the new owners of the line diverted most of the passenger traffic to Rosslyn, bypassing the St. Elmo and Alexandria Junction stops. This photo shows the passenger shed that stood just north of Hume Avenue at Alexandria Junction about 1918.*

*Ames Williams Collection, Alexandria Library*



*The W&OD passed over the Washington-Virginia Electric Railway's right-of-way (now Commonwealth Avenue) using a raised embankment on the eastern side. Their St. Elmo stop sat at the top of this embankment, with stairs leading down to the electric railway's similarly named stop, enabling passengers to transfer from one line to the other.*

*Ames Williams Collection, Alexandria Library*



*Originally a steam railroad, the line added electrical power during 1912-1916, and then switched to diesel in 1942. Here electric motor car No.43 gingerly passes over the underpass being excavated for Russell Road (just south of Glebe Road) in 1916 en route to Alexandria Junction.*

*National Archives*



*In 1932, the last remaining passenger service at the Alexandria, Alexandria Junction and St. Elmo stops was discontinued. Alexandria Junction, which extended from Hume Avenue to Jefferson Davis Highway, remained in service for the few freight trains that moved between the main lines at Potomac Yard and the Bluemont line out to Parcellville. This photo faces north, with Raymond Avenue in the foreground, about 1960.*

*Ames Williams Collection, Alexandria Library*

**T**he Bluemont line of the W&OD was a sedate, low-volume carrier of produce, dairy products, mail and some passengers between Loudoun County, Alexandria and Washington, D.C. Consistently undercapitalized, the line was disparagingly referred to as the "Virginia Creeper" or the "Weary, Old & Dilapidated," but by the 1960s, it was beloved by rail enthusiasts for its wide variety of rather elderly equipment.



1908

**TOWN OF POTOMAC**

1929

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