# Railways of Tarsac

## Oudren Railway

Burton Massey incorporated the Oudren Railway Company to connect the cities of Tigny and Rauret to the port at Mercier, fast emerging as the economic and political center of not only Oudren but all of Tarsac as well.

Tiras Fabel, Duke of Oudren, purchased the Oudren Railway Company from Massey and reorganized it as the Oudren State Railway Company. Under his direction, the line extended south to Chemille and Vignelle and west into the cities of Voreppe and Gueltas in Gasney, connecting Mercier to two ice-free ports. The Oudren State Railway Company passed to Caiden Fabel when he succeeded Tiras as Duke of Oudren.

## Fall Valley Railway

## Eastern Portage Railway

Morton Wade incorporated the Eastern Portage Railway Company to connect Hinten and Rechau at the headwaters of the Fall River and the cities of Midcroft and Sallas in the interior of eastern Oudren with the ice-free port of Tersanne on the coast.

Raschelle Washburn, Baron Midcroft, acquired the company and orchestrated a merger with Hess’s Köthen and Western, with the Eastern Portage Railway as a subsidiary of the Köthen and Western Railway Company.

## Western Trunk Railway

## Talais and Northern Railway

## Gasney Northern Railway

Falk Wilton incorporated the Gasney Northern Railway Company to connect the upper Fall Valley to the port of Peyruzel and to access the copper mines at Murray. The Gasney Northern later expanded north to the summer ports of Motrich (via Kassel and Korde) and Voitsreuth.

The mines at Murray provided the Gasney Northern with plenty of cargo, but its lack of direct access to an ice-free port was a constant frustration to Wilton. During the summer, it was a simple enough matter to haul ore from Murray down the Fall River to Verthier and from there south through the mountains to Peyruzel for loading onto bulk ships. During the winter, however, when the port could be closed by ice, it was necessary to instead route ore trains upriver to Rieden, then to Oudren and Gasney using trackage rights over the Fall Valley Railway and Oudren State Railway (and later with TNAT). The considerable fee that the Gasney Northern paid as part of this agreement was a financial drain, and Wilton reasoned that it would be better in the long run if the Gasney Northern’s trains could reach an ice-free port without travelling on foreign tracks.

Wilton’s options were somewhat limited. His charter would not permit expansion farther up the Fall River valley into the Nordwald and thence to Oudren or into Bailley if he instead constructed track to the west. Worse, the number of railways already constructed in Tarsac made it unlikely that he would be able to acquire a new charter. This did not preclude him, however, from acquiring an existing charter or, better yet, an existing line through the purchase of an existing railway company and its assets. The most straightforward route to an ice-free port for Wilton was to expand the Gasney Northern down the Fall River valley from Verthier to Thiegen, then to use the Köthen and Western’s existing tracks to reach Vergons. But Hayes was well aware of the strategic value of his railway and the connection that it provided between Bailley and Melvern. Hayes refused to sell to Wilton under any circumstances, advised by his newly appointed VP Björn Hess that the long-term value of the K&W was far greater than any amount that Wilton could offer. Hess, of course, had his own plans for the railway.

Hayes’s best offer to Wilton was a haulage agreement that would have allowed Gasney Northern trains (behind K&W locomotives operated by K&W crews) to travel between Thiegen and Vergons, but the cost of additional rights between Gastein and Theigen or of constructing parallel track combined with the exorbitant rates Hayes would have charged made this option no less expensive than the Gasney Northern’s current expenses for rights in Oudren and the Nordwald. He met with no greater success when he attempted to purchase the Eastern Portage Railway and its charter to build through the Nordwald; Washburn had only just acquired the railway from Wade and was in no mood to sell her investment, recognizing, as Hess had done, that Wilton’s position at the negotiating table was not strong. Learning that Fabel was planning to renegotiate the agreement between TNAT and the Gasney Northern, a desperate Wilton suggested a merger between the Gasney Northern and the Eastern Portage Railway.

Hess, carefully monitoring the Gasney Northern, decided to intervene at this pivotal juncture.

With the Gasney Northern posting record low returns and unable to finance maintenance, Wilton took rival Björn Hess’s advice and petitioned the federal government for assistance, hoping for a loan to fund necessary repairs to the right-of-way. Instead, it provided Wilton not only with per-mile funding to renovate the existing line, but also with a subsidy for new construction on the basis of new track-miles laid, partial reimbursement for the development and acquisition of new motive power, and even an operating subsidy on based on total tonnage-miles. The Gasney Northern’s revenue, however, continued to plummet in the wake of Hayes’s smear campaign. Wilton was forced to declare bankruptcy and Hess easily acquired the company.

## Köthen and Western Railway

Wardell Hayes incorporated the Köthen and Western Railway Company to connect the city of Köthen with the ports of Meyesse, Illfurth, and Vergons, providing the lower Fall Valley access to an ice-free ocean port in Bailley.

Björn Hess

sabotaged Hayes’ reputation and seized sole ownership of the Köthen and Western. Hess quickly expanded the system by purchasing the assets of the defunct Talais and Northern Railway, orchestrating a merger with the Eastern Portage Railway under Washburn’s ownership, and acquiring longtime rival Gasney Northern Railway. Hess renamed the Köthen and Western Railway Company the Köthen and Northern Railway Company and organized the new Köthen and Northern, the Eastern Portage Railway Company, and the Talais and Northern Railway Company as subsidiaries of the Gasney Northern Railway Company, which he finally renamed the Köthen and Western Company. The name of the railway remained unchanged. The effect of this extensive reorganization was to allow Hess to renovate the entire K&W, construct its new main line through the Alpenreich, develop and acquire locomotives, and haul cargo with the benefit of the subsidies that Wilton had won from the federal government.

The K&W replaced the tracks along its line with the heaviest rail available, but abandoned the former Gasney Northern line between Gastein and Hesselte, which paralleled the Fall Valley Railway’s (now TNAT) main line. It replaced this line with a connection between Stillwater and Rieden that included a lengthy tunnel under the Copper Mountain massif. Hess submitted the financial records of this expensive project to the government of Tarsac for use in calculating the subsidy that the K&W would receive for each mile of track laid across its entire line. With the subsidy established (which turned out to be greater than the entire cost of a mile of track in most areas of Tarsac), the K&W acquired the abandoned Fall Valley Railway right-of-ways from TNAT and constructed a new main line between Hesselte and Köthen using the Gasney Northern and the original K&W’s charters. Hess then began doubling, tripling, and even quadrupling the line; although traffic density was insufficient to justify this expense, the K&W received the same inordinately large per-mile subsidy for each mile of redundant track laid and in many areas the low incremental cost of adding tracks after initial grading was completed meant that this construction was actually a source of revenue.

To further decrease construction costs, Hess contracted with the criminal justice system of Tarsac, offering payment to the prisons in exchange for the labor of the inmates. The payment worked out to be far less than competitive wages for the same number of workers. But the stipulation in the contract that only prisoners convicted of non-violent crimes could be employed as laborers and the small prison population limited the usefulness of this scheme. Undeterred, or as perhaps part of his plan all along, Hess organized his political allies to quietly reform existing (but rarely-employed) legislation criminalizing vagrancy to make provision for greater enforcement, essentially allowing law enforcement to round up and imprison anyone incapable of producing documents proving their tenancy. This was timely, as the expansion of the K&W was driving up property values in towns along its route because of the new rail connection. Resultant increases in rents drastically increased the frequency of evictions throughout Tarsac. In Köthen, Rieden, and Midcroft, the K&W itself evicted tenants from depressed neighborhoods; Hess promised yards in Köthen and Rieden and massive shop facilities in Midcroft in exchange for eminent domain rights. He offered both a major source of employment and an opportunity for the cities to rid themselves of what he presented as an eyesore. When lax enforcement of vagrancy laws prevented Hess from exploiting the evicted population, he again organized his political allies, this time to obtain legal authority for the K&W’s security detail to act as police, ostensibly to facilitate the protection of the railway following a “sabotage” attempt (which Hess himself had staged). Hess directed the K&W’s security to make arrests of anyone appearing to be a vagrant on or near the K&W’s property. These people were then forced to build the very railway that had, directly or indirectly, driven them from their homes.

With the line under construction, the K&W began investing in new motive power to operate over it. With partial reimbursement of both the development and acquisition of new locomotives provisioned for in the Gasney Northern’s agreement with the government of Tarsac, the K&W invested heavily in Washburn Locomotive Works’ development of the 4-4-4-4 and 4-4-6-4. With little of their own resources staked in the project, Hess, Washburn, and their collaborators experimented boldly (and failed spectacularly) in the design and construction of the new locomotives. When Washburn was satisfied with the prototypes, the K&W sold or scrapped any of its motive power that could not be used for yard work, replaced them all with 4-4-4-4s and 4-4-6-4s, and sent the bill to the government. This proved presumptuous, as Washburn’s locomotives were somewhat less than reliable in service and did not live up to their promised performance. This unreliability was aggravated by the K&W’s grueling passenger schedule, which effectively required engineers to run the 4-4-4-4s as fast as (or faster than) the track and conditions would allow with no regard for the tendency of the valves to fail at sustained extreme high speed. Rather than correcting the problem with the locomotives or adjusting the schedule, however, the K&W simply ordered additional locomotives to ensure availability despite the amount of time that the 4-4-4-4s spent under repair.

The K&W located its yards along its new main line to enable a final exploitation of the Gasney Northern’s subsidies. Rather than operating locals across an entire subdivision, the K&W routinely operated turns out of major yards. A single freight car could be a part of at least three trains (a turn, a through freight, and another turn) as part of one movement, even if its journey began and ended on the same subdivision. This grossly inefficient backhauling, carefully avoided on TNAT and on the K&W’s predecessor railways, was regular practice because the K&W received a subsidy for operating its rolling stock and locomotives for the total distance rather than the cumulative distance travelled. As long as the trains were moving, they were making the railway money. This practice also artificially inflated traffic density on the railway, justifying the addition of more tracks and the acquisition of more locomotives.

The final K&W system connected Tersanne in Oudren to Talais in Bailley with a main line across the Alpenreich and additional districts in northern Bailley and eastern Melvern. Branches reached the summer ports of Voitsreuth and Motrich in the Alpenreich and Meyesse and Peyruzel in Gasney and to the mining center of Murray in Melvern.

## Tarsac National Railway

Caiden Fabel, Duke of Oudren, incorporated the Tarsac National Railway Company (TNAT) to acquire the assets of the defunct Fall Valley Railway and Western Trunk Railway and to join them to the Oudren State Railway he had inherited from Tiras Fabel. By Fabel’s arrangement with the Electors, the railway’s construction and operations were subsidized by the Federal Government of Tarsac.

TNAT abandoned the unprofitable former Fall Valley Railway branch lines between Hesselte and Motrich and between Hesburn and Köthen to reduce the route-miles that it needed to operate and maintain, reasoning that all of the cities along the abandoned lines were ports accessible by ships, which could more efficiently transport bulk cargo during the summer. Fabel supposed further that when the ice closed the ports in winter the snowfall would close the rail lines as well, as had historically been the case on the Fall Valley Railway. Nonetheless, the abandonment of the line from Köthen to Hesburn in particular was met with resentment by some Alpiners, who interpreted Köthen’s eclipse of Hesburn as the major port on the Fall River as part of a broader trend of the concentration of economic and political power in southern Tarsac. The expanding Köthen and Western acquired both rights-of-way following their abandonment by TNAT and incorporated them into its main line across the Alpenreich.

TNAT expanded the former Fall Valley Railway engine facilities at Köthen and Rieden, replaced rail throughout its system, and straightened the sharpest curves on its line to accommodate Thibault’s large articulated locomotives. Finally, it laid new rail between Köthen and Lauthiers to allow through freights to bypass the grade from Köthen south to Rouelle on the former Fall Valley Railway branch line to Bransles, which required doubleheading a 2-8-8-2 and a 2-6-6-4 with another 2-8-8-2 pushing from the rear on westbound trains.

The resulting TNAT system connected Cadix in Bailley to Vignelle in Oudren and Gueltas in Gasney via the Fall River valley in Melvern and the Nordwald, with branches to the summer ports of Göhner and Strenz in the Alpenreich and Peyruzel in Gasney.