

RAILROAD WEEK IN REVIEW

April 5, 2024

“The new Trace platform gives all customers one place to see all their trains, carloads/containers, and Customer Support cases using one app. The ability to schedule updates related to their moves, including specific events, supplements all the information that resides in Trace.” — Carrie Whitman, BNSF General Director of Marketing Systems

“Shippers, railroads, and car owners must convert more boxcar loads from truck to rail. The boxcar market shows lower loadings and the car hire system remains an issue. The low car hire national boxcar fleet (TTX) enhances utilization but at the expense of the higher car hire railroad-owned car fleet.” — Railway Equipment Finance Panel, March 3-6, 2024

BNSF on March 14 launched its new web-based “Customer Portal” with the goal of enhancing customers’ self-service and self-help capabilities for efficient day-to-day activity. “We want customers to value using our website because they can readily take care of their tasks at hand,” says BNSF General Director of Marketing Carrie Whitman.

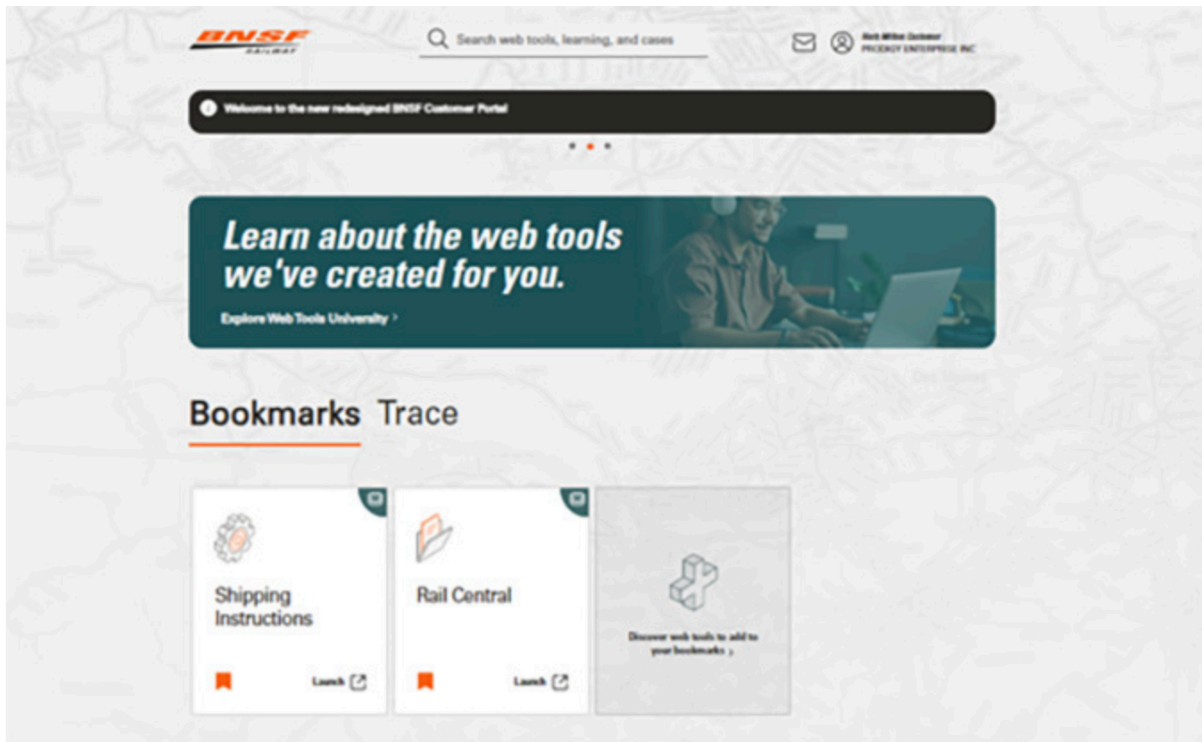
To understand what was most needed in such a tool, the BNSF Customer Portal team engaged users through surveys, field symposia, and proactive calls. In the process, they interviewed potential users across a broad customer cross-section both initially and throughout development to ensure that the end result actually benefitted customers. By bringing action items to the portal’s front page, efficiencies are improved for both BNSF and the customer.

After testing and a running a pilot that received a 94 percent positive response, the new portal launched March 14. There are already some 63,000 active web tool users —about 10,000 use it daily. Says one customer, “Nothing was that hard to find. In the past, I would have had to hunt many places for something until I found it, so it’s especially nice to be able to easily search for things. The search bar really helps.”

The Customer Portal builds on past successes of popular tools, like *Trace*, which shows a customer’s entire BNSF freight portfolio, letting users drill down for additional information as needed. The focus is on transparency based on real-time and consistent information. For example, BNSF has pulled the Alert feature within *Trace* to the front portal page, enabling customers to retrieve notifications on exceptions without delay.

Another new feature is *Bookmarks*, which allows user to customize their own workspace based on the tools they use most often. This is especially helpful for the smaller

customers who wear many hats based on their individual needs — those who need to zero in on those three to four applications that they regularly use and always have those available. A customer observed, “Once I figured *Bookmarks* out, I could say, ‘Oh, I need this, this, this and this.’ It was super easy, and it was very elementary.”



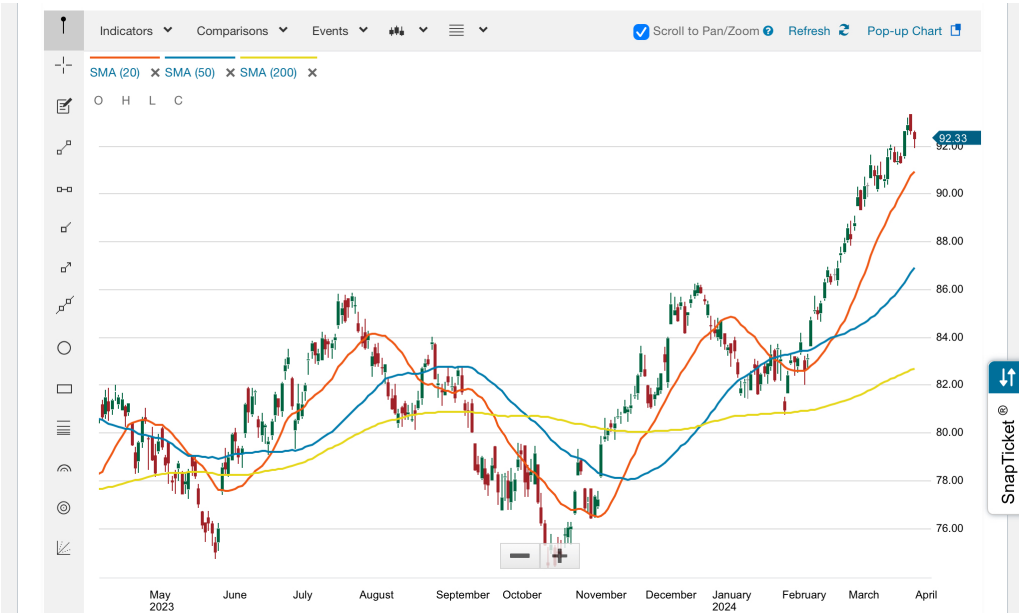
The API (Application Programming Interface) Center is also on the new portal and will continue to enhance BNSF customers’ shipping experience. The API provides a bridge between BNSF and customer systems, helping users exchange real-time data more efficiently. Customers can use their systems to pull data about their freight directly from the API without having to go elsewhere, such as other websites or applications.

Regarding *Trace* specifically, the tool shows everything the customer has moving on BNSF, with the added ability to drill down for additional information where needed. The platform complements BNSF’s “geofence,” or virtual geographic boundaries defined by GPS. Recent additions to *Trace* let customers see **all** their BNSF freight – waybills, trip plans and equipment condition – providing the most comprehensive view yet.

The above-linked BNSF Control Panel website does not provide access to the actual platform, for obvious reasons. But if you’re a current BNSF customer, there’s a place for you to log in for full access. To me, even though I can’t see the full site, it seems that just being able to see Trip Plan Compliance ought to be worth its weight in gold.

Trip plan compliance is increasingly important for the merchandise carload sector. As I've said before, share prices can be a leading indicator of volume changes by commodity. That's why increased business levels now and anticipated invariably show up as increased price levels for shares of the companies benefitting from same.

To track share price performance of companies in the industrial commodities sector, I use the materials sector ETF, the XLB. All our favorite carload commodities are included: chemicals, metals from steel and aluminum to copper, fertilizers, building materials, petroleum products like nat gas (and by extension frac sand and piping, e.g.), metallic ores, paper/packaging, non-consumer plastics, scrap steel, coking coal and anthracite.



Tony Greer’s *Morning Navigator* for April 2 said, “Through March share prices for natural resources and housing were in the lead. There were seven and eight percent rallies in home construction and home builders respectively, and industrial miners grew six percent. Gains in all of these outpaced the technology group, indicating a shift in investor sentiment.”

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