

# Conrail Leftovers

that with massive concessions from labor unions, by ending passenger service and by shedding thousands of miles of track, it can turn a profit in 1985. But an additional \$340 million federal subsidy is also necessary. The Reagan administration is debating whether to kill Conrail by ending subsidies and selling its best track to profitable, private railroads.

Instead of waiting to see what will happen, planners from several Southern Tier counties are working on ways to operate a regional rail system. County industrial development agencies and private operators have slated meetings in July on how to step in with a rail system if Conrail steps out.

"We're trying to come up with a plan on our own," said Tom Duro, Chautauqua County's representative. But enthusiastic operators like Dingman, he says, are the key.

Dingman could find his railroad at the hub of a network in southwestern New York. From Waterboro he can tap into the Southern Tier main line and provide local service to Jamestown and other points. And his train could provide a link between Jamestown and Buffalo.

He admits that he is working for access to the main line, but the route's

long term role, Dingman said, will be to provide a link for large scale operators to haul western Pennsylvania coal to New England homes.

"The line doesn't generate enough of its own traffic and needs that overhead traffic for long-term viability," he said.

New York & Lake Erie Railroad operations "have been a real bailing wire and bubble gum type thing, but we've proven we could do it," Dingman says boastfully.

The bailing wire and bubble gum, however, have been coupled with two other factors crucial to its operations. One is substantial state Department of Transportation subsidies — \$191,000 during the state's last fiscal year — and another is that his four employees — five if you count the vice president — are not bound by rigid organized labor guidelines.

Acquiring the Conrail line from Waterboro to South Dayton, Dingman says, is crucial so his company can climb off the state dole and make the railroad independently solvent.

With the line, the rail system's usage should climb from about 575 to 2,500 carloads a year. Dingman said that will allow the railroad to meet or exceed operating costs.