When did the Norfolk&Western “Redbirds” replace the Class J’s?

Andy Sperandeo answered this question several years ago in Model Railroader. He explained the transition was two-fold. Diesel passenger service between Lynchburg, VA and Bristol, TN as well as leased diesels from Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac E began running in 1958. July 1958 marked the end of regular passenger service with the J class steam engines. By October 1958, the N&W's "redbird" passenger GP9s allowed N&W to begin operating passenger trains with its own diesels.

The 506-521 series of passenger GP9s arrived in October 1958. They had large fuel/water tanks. These locomotives also introduced the metallic Tuscan Red "redbird" passenger paint scheme. Using the Tuscan Red may have been a shout out to the beloved Class J-611!

http://cs.trains.com/mrrf/3b/194323.aspx
https://mrr.trains.com/news-reviews/new-products/2015/10/andy-sperandeo-has-passed-away