

WEEKLY RAIL REVIEW

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SAT, JULY 2, 2005

BY DAVE MEARS

THE WEEK'S TOP RAIL AND TRANSIT NEWS (in chronological order):

(MON) BNSF confirmed that an on-duty employee fatality had occurred the previous Friday. Robert Chavez, Age 47, was struck and killed by the train he was switching. The accident occurred at a highway-rail grade crossing just east of Hereford, TX. (ffd: wire services)

(MON) BNSF and Union Pacific announced that they had jointly concluded an agreement with the California Air Resources Board to reduce locomotive emissions in and around rail yards in California. Included in the agreement are provisions for an idling-reduction program, risk assessments at all major yards, and "maximum use" of low-sulfur diesel fuel on all BNSF and UP locomotives operated in California. Industry observers noted that the agreement counters 3 bills recently introduced in the California state legislature dealing with railroad pollution. Later in the week, some environmental concerns voiced opposition to the agreement. "They cut a backroom deal with no input from the affected communities," commented Barry Wallerstein, Executive Officer of the South Coast Air Quality Management District. (ffd: BNSF Corp., Los Angeles Times)

(MON) The Wall Street Journal reported that cracks found last April in the brake rotors of Amtrak's Acela Express trainsets may have been caused by a change in rotor design to include longer and thinner spokes, and that these may have proven weaker than the original design. The trainsets have been out of service since the discovering of the cracks in mid-April. Amtrak and the trainset manufacturer, Bombardier, are working to replace the rotors with close to the original design. A spokesman for ORX Railway Corporation, which has been subcontracted to replace the rotors, commented that "the new brake design has spokes that appear to be significantly stronger than those which developed cracks." Amtrak has said that it hopes to restore the trainsets to service beginning this month. (ffd: Trains, Wall Street Journal)

(MON) New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority approved an interim capital plan to spend \$323.2 million in the July-September period. NYMTA is still waiting on state approval of its new 5-year capital plan. Later in the week, NYMTA announced that plans for the new Fulton Street Transit Center next to the World Trade Center site would be scaled back. A NYMTA spokesman said that revisions include making the glass dome atop the transit center smaller and canceling a link between the Cortland Street station on the R and W Lines and the World Trade Center E Line station. The spokesman added that the estimated cost of the transit center, to be paid for out of previously appropriated site recovery funds, had recently increased from \$750 million to \$825 million. (ffd: New York Times, Railway Age)

(MON) The Association of American Railroads confirmed plans to hold a customer service forum on September 21 in St. Louis, MO. An AAR spokesman said that the forum will include each Class 1 railroad presenting about their preparations for the fall peak shipping season and then answering any questions. The spokesman added that Surface Transportation Board Chairman Roger Nober will also speak at the forum. (ffd: Omaha World-Herald)

(MON) Amtrak adjusted the schedules of several trains on its Keystone Corridor Line operating between Philadelphia, PA and Harrisburg, PA. The changes accommodate rehabilitation work on the line, funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, which includes 80 miles of new concrete ties, more than 40 new switches, installation of a new signal system, and the upgrading of overhead electrical wires and electrical substations. A PennDOT spokesman said that, when complete, maximum speeds on the line will increase from 90 mph to 110 mph. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(TUE) 2 Kansas City Southern freight trains collided head-on near Dixon, MS. The accident, which occurred at 8:40AM, injured 5 crewpersons aboard the trains, 2 of them critically. The accident also resulted in the leakage and ignition of diesel fuel, which then caught fire, but was then extinguished. A KCS spokesman said that the root cause of the accident had not yet been determined. (ffd: Jackson Clarion-Ledger, wire services)

(TUE) The New York City Transit Authority issued new regulations prohibiting the consuming of food and beverages aboard subway trains, although eating and drinking on subway platforms will continue to be legal. The new regulations also prohibit passengers from walking between subway cars while subway trains are moving. A NYCTA spokesman said that walking between subway cars on a moving train had resulted in 13 deaths and 117 injuries over the past 10 years. The new regulations take effect October 1. (ffd: New York Times, wire services)

(WED) The full House of Representatives voted to increase Amtrak's Fiscal Year 2006 appropriation to \$1.176 billion, up from the \$550 million voted by the House Appropriation Committee. Industry observers noted that the new amount should allow Amtrak to continue current train services, but was less than the \$1.8 billion proposed by Amtrak and the \$1.4 billion recommended by the Department of Transportation Inspector General's office to start bringing Amtrak to a "state-of-good-repair." An Amtrak spokesman expressed gratitude to House members, while Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta, who had launched a controversial Amtrak reform plan coupled with zero FY2006 funding, said that the House's actions "encourage the wasteful spending and inefficient operations that have come to define Amtrak." The House appropriation bill now goes to the Senate for debate. (ffd: NARP, New York Times, wire services)

(THU) The Federal Railway Administration issued new rules aimed at improving locomotive "black box" event recorders. Under the new rules, railroads must, over the next 4 years, replace magnetic-tape event recorders with those featuring electronic memory modules. The new rules also require railroads to store event data for 1 year instead of the current 30 days, so that accident investigators have more time to review recordings. An FRA spokesman said that the new rules were developed under the auspices of FRA's Railway Safety Advisory Committee. (ffd: FRA, Progressive Railroading)

(THU) The Railway Supply Institute reported on First Quarter, 2005 freight rail car orders. The report stated that 17,563 new freight cars were ordered during the first quarter, 43 percent more than the preceding quarter, but 2 percent less than the first quarter last year. The report also stated that 15,781 new cars were delivered in the first quarter, 9 percent more than the preceding quarter and 58 percent more than the first quarter last year. (ffd: AAR)

(THU) Union Pacific issues a special status report on its Sunset Route, which runs between New Orleans, LA and Los Angeles, CA. The report stated that less than one-quarter of the route was double-tracked at the time the line was

acquired as part of UP's acquisition of the Southern Pacific, but that since that time UP has double-tracked an additional 100 miles. The report also stated that UP is currently working to double-track another 69 miles of the line, and that its ultimate goal is to double-track the entire route. The report went on to note the importance of the route, as more than 24 percent of all UP traffic either originates or terminates in Southern California. (ffd: UP Corp.)

(THU) Northern California transportation officials noted that ridership on the recent extension of San Francisco's BART subway system has been approximately half the number of passengers originally expected. The extension runs approximately 9 miles between South San Francisco, CA and Millbrae, CA via San Francisco International Airport, and was opened in July, 2003. In recent interviews, some officials have commented that Caltrain's "Baby Bullet" express commuter rail services may be providing competition to the BART line, since travelers can get to many areas of downtown San Francisco slightly faster and for less money by staying on Caltrain's trains instead of switching to BART at Millbrae. (ffd: San Francisco Chronicle)

(FRI) Congress again extended the current Transportation Equity Act, now for the 8th time. The extension, through July 19, was then signed into law by President Bush. Also on Friday, House and Senate conferees reached tentative agreement on an overall framework and funding level for TEA reauthorization legislation: \$286.4 billion over 6 years, with \$52.6 million for transit programs. The conferees are now expected to complete the necessary details of the replacement legislation once Congress is again in session after July 11. (ffd: APTA)

(FRI) Amtrak discontinued food and beverage service on its Empire Service trains operating between New York, NY and Albany, NY, although service continues on trains operating beyond Albany. The discontinuance includes closing the new commissary at the Albany-Rensselaer passenger station. An Amtrak spokesman said that discontinuing food and beverage service on New York-Albany "short distance" runs would save approximately \$1 million annually. (ffd: Albany Business Review, NARP)

(FRI) Kansas City Southern announced that it would undertake a \$50 million expansion of Deramus Yard in North Shreveport, LA. A KCS spokesman said that the expansion "is designed to increase traffic flow through the yard" and would include grade-separating several crossings at the yard's north and south ends. The spokesman added that the planned improvements would take approximately 3 years to complete. (ffd: Progressive Railroading, The Shreveport Times)

(FRI) New York area transit agencies announced plans to develop a regional farecard collection system. A spokesman for the agencies, which include the Port of New York and New Jersey, the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority and New Jersey Transit, said that plans include developing farecard standards, evaluating payment methods, and exploring potential revenue opportunities. Commenting on the initiative, Port Authority Chairman Anthony Coscia said, "Our goal is to bring together all of our transit agencies to develop a regional smart-card program that would ultimately provide thousands of people with a more convenient way to travel." (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(FRI) Rescuers in India said that they had saved all 354 passengers who had been trapped for days in a train that had been slowly filling with flood water from raging monsoons. The train, the Indore-Gandhinagar Shanti Express, had been halted by flood waters in the Indian state of Gujarat. A railway spokesman said that some flood waters in the train were approaching neck height. (ffd: wire services)

(FRI) Japan's East Japan Railway debuted a new "Bullet Train" trainset that it said would reach normal operating speeds of up to 223 mph. A railway spokesman said that the new trainset would be put into service on the Tohoku Shinkansen Line by 2011. The spokesman added that the new trainset will top the speeds of France's TGV trainset, which reaches normal operating speeds of up to 186 mph. (ffd: Trains)

STATS – TRAFFIC:

(THU) For the week ending June 25, 2005, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 32.1 billion ton-miles, up 1.6 percent from the comparable week last year. U.S. carload rail traffic was up 0.6 percent, up 3.2 percent in the East, but down 1.6 percent in the West. Notable traffic increases included grain mill products up 14.2 percent, non-grain farm products up 12.4 percent, and nonmetallic minerals up 10.0 percent; notable traffic decreases included waste and scrap materials down 8.5 percent, coke down 8.4 percent, and motor vehicles and equipment down 8.3 percent. Also for the week, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 4.4 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 2.8 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 0.8 percent, Mexico's Transportation Ferroviaria Mexicana's carload rail traffic was down 13.3 percent, and TFM's intermodal rail traffic was up 2.9 percent.

For the period January 1 through June 25, 2005, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 793.4 billion ton-miles, up 2.5 percent from the comparable period last year. Also for this period, U.S. carload rail traffic was up 1.7 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 6.2 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 0.1 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 2.4 percent, TFM's carload rail traffic was up 0.7 percent, and TFM's intermodal rail traffic was up 7.8 percent. (ffd: AAR)

MORE STATS – "BIG 7" OPERATING PERFORMANCE:

(WED) For the week ending June 25, 2005 versus the comparable week last year, average train speed was as follows: BNSF, 23.0 mph versus 24.6 mph; Canadian National, 26.0 mph versus 24.6 mph; Canadian Pacific, 24.8 mph versus 24.6 mph; CSX, 19.3 mph versus 18.9 mph; Kansas City Southern, 22.6 mph versus 26.4 mph; Norfolk Southern, 21.8 mph versus 22.9 mph; and Union Pacific, 20.7 mph versus 21.3 mph.

Also for the week ending June 25, 2005 versus the comparable week last year, average terminal dwell time was as follows: BNSF, 10.0 hrs versus 10.5 hrs; Canadian National, 12.2 hrs versus 14.6 hrs; Canadian Pacific, 26.5 hrs versus 28.2 hrs; CSX, 29.5 hrs versus 31.7 hrs; Kansas City Southern, 23.2 hrs versus 22.5 hrs; Norfolk Southern, 23.0 hrs versus 21.7 hrs; and Union Pacific, 28.6 hrs versus 31.1 hrs.

(Note: Concerning the above statistics, AAR comments that "one railroad's performance metrics cannot meaningfully be compared to another railroad's, due to differences in the carriers' calculation methodologies, operational strategies, network characteristics, terrain, traffic mix and volume, length of haul, extent of passenger operations, and other factors, such as weather.")

EXPANSIONS, CONTRACTIONS AND ALIKE:

(WED) The Buffalo & Pittsburgh Railroad and the Pittsburg & Shawmut Railroad jointly filed to discontinue service and abandon approximately 40 miles of line between Brookville, PA and Mahoning, PA. (ffd: STB)

(WED) The Connecticut Southern Railroad filed to abandon approximately one-fifth of one mile of line in Manchester, CT. (ffd: STB)

(THU) The Grand Rapids Press reported that CSX is in discussions to lease or sell 3 former Pere Marquette lines, specifically: between Grand Rapids, MI and Manistee, MI, totaling approximately 100 miles; between West Olive, MI and Fremont, MI, totaling approximately 50 miles; and between Saginaw, MI and Mount Morris, MI, totaling approximately 30 miles. (ffd: Grand Rapids Press, Trains)

(FRI) CG Railway filed to lease, from the Port of New Orleans, LA, and operate approximately 4 miles of line in and near the port. This will enable CG Railway to interchange directly with CSX. (ffd: STB)

(SAT) The Maine Eastern Railroad resumed passenger excursion service on its 41-mile line between Brunswick, ME and Rockland, ME. A company spokesman said that this is the first passenger service between these points in 41 years. The spokesman added that the service will operate 4 days a week through September 2 and then weekends only through October 31. (ffd: Portland Press)

APPOINTMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND ALIKE:

(TUE) Thomas Sullivan passed away at Age 57. Mr. Sullivan was a noted railway engineer and consultant, and was president of Oakland, CA-based Transportation Systems Design. Mr. Sullivan was also a longtime contributing editor of Railway Age Magazine. (ffd: Railway Age)

(FRI) Los Angeles, CA's Mayor-elect Antonio Villaraigosa began serving as the chairman of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, a post to which he was also recently elected. Mr. Villaraigosa was previously a LAMTA board member. In a statement, Mr. Villaraigosa said that he was looking to implement "an ambitious transportation agenda." (ffd: Progressive Railroading, Trains)

(FRI) Read Van de Water was appointed chairman of the National Mediation Board. Ms. Van de Water was previously Assistant Secretary for Aviation and International Affairs at the Department of Transportation. (ffd: NMB, Trains)

(FRI) Kansas City Southern appointed Avery Grimes AVP-Business Development. Mr. Grimes began his transportation career in 1974 working for the Chicago Transit Authority. Additional to being a PE and PhD, Mr. Grimes is also a licensed locomotive engineer. (ffd: Progressive Railroading, Trains)

(CORRECTION: In the "Expansions, Contractions and Alike" section of last week's WRR, I referred to the "Canadian National/Soo Line." I should have referred to the Soo Line as part of the Canadian Pacific. Thanks to WRR Readers Pat Egan, Mark Owens, Tuch Santucci and Elly Wefel for their so noting to me.)

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Weekly Rail Review is edited from public news sources and published weekly to those working in, or interested in, rail and transit. Send an e-mail to <<mailto:weeklyrailreview@aol.com>>weeklyrailreview@aol.com to receive it, with my compliments.

HAVE A SAFE AND PROSPEROUS WEEK,

Dave Mears

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