

WEEKLY RAIL REVIEW

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SAT, JANUARY 8, 2005

BY DAVE MEARS

(Editor's Note: The expression "ffd" at the end of a news item represents "for further details" and suggests a reference source for further related information.)

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

(SUN) Canadian National confirmed an on-duty employee fatality on its railroad the previous Thursday. A CN spokesman said that Conductor Cliff Green, Age 64, was fatally injured while switching cars in Taylor, BC. (ffd: UTU)

(SUN) The northern end of Baltimore, MD.'s light rail line was closed to begin work double-tracking the line. A spokesman for the line said that the closure affects all stops north of North Avenue to the end of the line in suburban Hunt Valley, MD. The spokesman said that the line segment would reopen in several months. (ffd: WJZ TV)

(MON) 7 rail unions announced the creation of a "rail labor bargaining coalition" to coordinate upcoming contract negotiations with rail carriers. A spokesman for the coalition said that they were developing a coordinated contract negotiating strategy and that each individual union will not sign off on any tentative agreements until all coalition members concur. The coalition totals the approximately 85,000 combined workers of the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, the National Conference of Firemen and Oilers, the Brotherhood of Railway Signalmen, the Sheet Metals Workers International Association, the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers and the American Train Dispatchers. (ffd: International Brotherhood of Teamsters)

(MON) The Federal Railroad Administration published a "final rule" requiring reflective material on the sides of locomotives and freight cars as a safety measure to make trains more visible at highway-rail grade crossings. The rule requires railroads to install yellow or white reflective materials on locomotives over a 5-year period and on freight cars over a 10-year period. (ffd: Railway Age, USDOT)

(MON) The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers approved environmental permits for work renovating the 18-mile rail line between suburban Boston, MA. and Greenbush, MA. The permits were the last significant hurdle remaining to work that will reconstruct the line for commuter rail service between Boston and Greenbush, which last saw such service in 1959. (ffd: Boston Globe, NARP)

(MON) Washington State's Sound Transit announced that they would extend the new light rail line planned for the Seattle, WA. area so that it also serves the city's Sea-Tac Airport. A Sound Transit spokesman said that the line will total approximately 16 miles in length and is expected to be finished by December, 2009. (ffd: Seattle Post-Intelligencer)

(TUE) A tunnel collapse derailed a CSX freight train near Glencoe, KY. A CSX spokesman said that the tunnel, known as Eagle Tunnel on CSX's Louisville Division, partially collapsed near its north portal and was then struck by the train, which derailed its locomotives and 10 of its 41 cars. The train's crew received minor injuries in the accident. The spokesman added that the collapse may have been caused by extremely saturated soil at the tunnel resulting from recent rains and snows in the area. (ffd: Trains)

(TUE) Texas Governor Rick Perry affirmed his support for the state's proposed Trans-Texas Corridor Project. The project proposes constructing a right-of-way paralleling Interstate 35 between Oklahoma and Mexico that would include multiple highway lanes for cars and trucks and multiple rail lines for passenger and freight trains, and would be one-quarter mile wide at some locations. A spokesman for the state's Department of Transportation said that the corridor, which is estimated to cost over \$175 billion and is far from securing necessary approvals, would be owned by the state, but built by private contractors, who in return would be able to charge tolls for its use for up to 50 years. (ffd: Los Angeles Times)

(WED) California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger recommending scrapping the state's High Speed Rail Authority, with its remnant responsibilities folded into the state's Transportation Commission. "Californians can't get from place to place on little fairy wings," the Governor said in his State of the State message. "This is a car-centered state. We need roads." The governor's proposal, which some legislators said threatened well-established passenger rail initiatives in the state, contrasts with the policies of California's 2 previous governors, one of whom declared at a highway opening that the state had "just built its last freeway." (ffd: NARP, wire services)

(WED) English Channel Tunnel passenger rail operator Eurostar announced that it had carried a record 7.27 million passengers in 2004, up 15 percent from 2003. A Eurostar spokesman said that on-time performance also increased in 2004 to 89 percent, up 10.9 percent from 2003. The spokesman said that the 2003 opening of a new high-speed rail line between the tunnel portal at Folkestone and suburban London, which allowed a reduction in Eurostar travel times between England, France and Belgium, had helped boost passenger counts and on-time performance. (ffd: wire services)

(THU) A Norfolk Southern freight train collided with an NS locomotive and cars standing on an adjacent siding in Graniteville, SC. The accident killed the train's engineer and injured its conductor, and derailed its 2 locomotives and 14 of its 42 cars. One of the derailed cars then leaked chlorine gas, which then asphyxiated 8 persons in businesses and residences surrounding the accident site. The number killed is the largest to die due to a train accident in North America since Amtrak's "City of New Orleans" crossing crash at Bourbonnais, IL. in March, 1999, in which 11 persons died. By week's end, more than 200 persons had been treated at nearby hospitals for chlorine gas poisoning and over 5,400 residents in the vicinity of the accident site were still evacuated. (ffd: wire services)

(THU) The National Transportation Safety Board issues a report critical of both CSX and Baltimore, MD. related to the July, 2001 derailment and fire in CSX's Howard Street Tunnel. The report criticized CSX for failing to keep adequate maintenance records and city officials for incomplete emergency planning. The report also found no "convincing evidence to provide a probable cause for the accident", but went on to suggest the cause as having "involved an obstruction between a car wheel and the rail, in combination with changes in track geometry." The accident derailed 11 cars, 1 of which ignited and continued burning for several days, forcing the evacuation of many businesses and residences in the vicinity of the tunnel. (ffd: Trains)

(THU) CG Rail announced that it would relocate its rail car float operation from Mobile, AL. to New Orleans, LA. effective May 1. A CG Rail spokesman said that it also planned to double the capacity of the ships it uses to provide the service by adding a second deck to each. The ships operate to Coatzacoalcos in Southeast Mexico, where they connect with the Ferrosur Railway, which serves the petrochemical-producing area south of Veracruz, MX. (ffd: AAR)

(THU) CSX announced that it had expanded its "A+B Pricing" program that provides web-accessible interline price quotes for general merchandise traffic. A CSX spokesman said that the program now provides quotes for many interline shipments from CSX origins to destinations on Canadian National and Burlington Northern Santa Fe. The spokesman added that the system would be expanded further in the next several months to also provide quotes to many destinations on Norfolk Southern, Union Pacific and Canadian Pacific. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(FRI) A passenger train and freight train collided head-on near Crevalcore, Italy. The accident, Italy's worst in nearly 25 years, killed 17 persons and injured more than 50 others. The cause of the accident, which occurred on a single track line, was still inconclusive at press time. (ffd: wire services)

(FRI) Japan announced that it would sell its remaining shares in the Central Japan Railway probably by the end of Fiscal Year 2005. A government spokesman noted that it had already sold its stakes in East Japan Railway and West Japan Railway, and so the upcoming sale will complete the privatization of the 3 rail carriers set up upon the dissolution of the former state-run Japan National Railway. (ffd: The Japan Times)

STATS:

(THU) For the week ending January 1, 2005, U.S. carload rail traffic was up 0.7 percent from the comparable week last year, up 2.2 percent in the East, but down 0.4 percent in the West. Also for the week ending January 1, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 17.4 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 6.9 percent and Canadian intermodal rail traffic was down 3.2 percent.

For the month of December, 2004, U.S. carload rail traffic was up 2.6 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 16.1 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 3.3 percent, Mexico's Transportation Ferroviaria Mexicana's carload rail traffic was up 12.5 percent and TFM's intermodal rail traffic was up 36.2 percent, all when ranked with December, 2003.

For the year 2004, U.S. rail volume totaled 1.61 trillion ton miles, the most ever. U.S. carload rail traffic was up 2.9 percent in 2004. Notable traffic increases for the year included chemicals up 4.3 percent and coal up 3.0 percent; notable traffic decreases included motor vehicles and equipment down 3.0 percent. Also for the year 2004, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 10.4 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 6.7 percent, TFM's carload rail traffic was up 4.4 percent and TFM's intermodal rail traffic was up 10.4 percent. (ffd: AAR)

ACQUISITIONS, ABANDONMENTS AND ALIKE:

(MON) The Carrizo Gorge Railway announced that it had operated a successful test train the previous week. The shortline, which has been out-of-service for several years, was acquired by new owners 5 years ago who have been renovating the line to resume freight service. The line's route mileage totals 150 miles, mainly out of San Diego, CA. (ffd: San Diego Union-Tribune)

(WED) Union Pacific filed to abandon approximately 1 mile of its Drive Valley Subdivision in Caribou County, ID. (ffd: STB)

(WED) Northern Lines Railway announced that it would lease, from Burlington Northern Santa Fe, and operate approximately 5 miles of line between St. Cloud, MN. and St. Joseph, MN. and, also, approximately 17 miles of line between St. Cloud, MN. and Cold Spring, MN. (ffd: STB)

(FRI) Pittsburg, KS.-based Watco Companies announced that it would lease, from CSX, and operate approximately 158 miles of line between Grafton, WV. and Cowen, WV. A CSX spokesman said that the lease and operation would be effective on March 25. (ffd: CSX Corp.)

PERSONNEL CHANGES AND ALIKE:

(MON) The Bush Administration appointed Robert Jamison Acting Chief Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration. Mr. Jamison was most recently the deputy administrator of the Federal Transit Administration. Mr. Jamison replaces Betty Monro, who retired as Acting Chief Administrator effective December 31. The FRA has been without a permanent Chief Administrator since Allan Rutter resigned in Spring, 2004. (ffd: Railway Age, wire services)

(MON) Kansas City Southern announced the following appointments: Arthur Shoener as EVP and COO; Jerry Heavin as SVP-International Engineering; and Owen Zidar as VP-Marketing. (ffd: KCS Corp., Railway Age)

(THU) The Association of American Railroads announced that its Transportation Technology Center, Inc. subsidiary had appointed Firdausi "Dose" Irani as Managing Director of its new London, England branch office. (ffd: AAR)

(THU) Burlington Northern Santa Fe announced the following appointments in its Marketing and Sales Department: John Hickerson as VP-Domestic Intermodal and Fred Malessa as VP-International Intermodal. (ffd: BNSF Corp.)

(THU) The Railroad Retirement Board appointed Terri Morgan CIO, who has been acting in that capacity for several months. (ffd: AAR)

(THU) U.S. Congressman Steve LaTourette was appointed chairman of the House of Representatives' Railroad Subcommittee. The appointment was made by Don Young, chairman of the House's Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. Mr. LaTourette's website describes him as a "fiscally conservative, moderate Republican." Mr. LaTourette represents Ohio's 14th Congressional District in Northeast Ohio. (ffd: AAR)

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: Thanks to WRR Reader Henry Frick for relaying on a news item this week. Also, congratulations to WRR Reader Mike Fitzgerald and his fellow railroaders at the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen Division 3 in Cleveland, OH., which celebrated its 125th consecutive year representing railroad employees on January 1, one of the longest serving rail union locals in the U.S.)

Weekly Rail Review is edited from public news sources and published weekly to those working in, or interested in, the entities of 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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