

WEEKLY RAIL REVIEW

FOR THE WEEK ENDING FRIDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2009

BY DAVE MEARS

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

(SAT) The Walkway Over The Hudson was ceremonially opened to pedestrian traffic. The walkway is the former rail bridge over Poughkeepsie, NY that had been out of service since 1974. First-day walkers commented on the views available from the bridge. "You can see 20 miles in both directions," one walker said. (ffd: Epoch Times, Poughkeepsie Journal)

(MON) U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood encouraged Florida legislators to support proposed SunRail commuter rail service for the Greater Orlando area. In an interview with the Orlando Sentinel, Mr. LaHood challenged the Florida Senate to "...get [its] act together..." concerning SunRail. The legislators have twice turned down agreements necessary to start SunRail service due to financial and liability concerns. (ffd: Orlando Sentinel)

(MON) The Federal Railroad Administration and the Transportation Technology Center announced that they have renewed their partnership agreement. Under the agreement, the FRA and TTCI will maintain and improve the center's facilities to enhance transportation research and foster development, security, training and test activities. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(MON) The American Public Transportation Association held its annual meeting in Orlando, FL. The association presented its 2009 Outstanding Public Transportation System Achievement Awards, which went to San Diego's Metropolitan Transit System, Olympia, WA's Intercity Transit, and Virginia's Greater Lynchburg Transit. APTA also presented the Utah Transit Authority its 2009 Innovation Award for "innovative service concepts." (ffd: APTA, Progressive Railroading)

(MON) Philadelphia rail and transit operator SEPTA announced that it had closed bidding for its long-planned smart card fare system. A spokesman said that several firms presented proposals for smart card systems for use on SEPTA's bus, subway and light rail systems. The spokesman said that it will be several years before a system can be installed and activated. (ffd: Philadelphia Inquirer, Trains)

(TUE) The Federal Railroad Administration announced that it had received 45 applications from 24 states for high-speed rail development projects. The projects altogether total approximately \$50 billion, although only \$8 billion in federal funding has been allocated. The FRA said that, due to the number of applications received, it would likely not announce which projects will receive funding until later this year or early next. (ffd: NARP, wire services)

(WED) Surface Transportation Board Chair Daniel Elliott announced that the STB would begin holding public oral arguments in major cases. Mr. Elliott said that the oral arguments will give parties an opportunity to directly address the Board and allow Board members a chance to ask questions before making a decision. Mr. Elliott said that he planned to review other STB policies and procedures to make sure they are as inclusive and open as possible. (ffd: STB)

(WED) The Journal of Commerce reported that a rail regulatory reform bill by the Senate Commerce Committee was still being worked on with interested parties. "We've got a pretty good agreement...with the railroads, which is surprising...but we're having a little bit to work out still with the shippers," said Mr. Rockefeller. Last month, a rail research analyst with Morgan Stanley reported that the bill will primarily focus in three areas: provisions to strengthen the Surface Transportation Board to give it more authority, resources, and commissioners; provisions to help increase shipper access to rail networks; and reforming the review process on rail rates and service. (ffd: Journal of Commerce, Logistics Management)

(THU) The New York Times reported that it continues to be the case that virtually all age-plus-service retirees from the Long Island Rail Road additionally apply for and receive disability benefits from the Railroad Retirement Board. The Times, which sourced the information from a U.S. Government Accountability Office report, noted that this continues despite a well-publicized investigation last year that was followed by corrective measures to prevent disability claim abuse. The report also noted that, since Year 2000, approximately 97 percent of LIRR workers over Age 50 who retired with 20 or more years of service have received RRB disability payments, a rate that is three to four times the industry average. (ffd: New York Times)

(THU) The Brookings Institution released a report, "Expect Delays: An Analysis of Air Travel Trends in the United States." The report noted that half of all domestic air travel is for distances of 500 or less miles. The report suggested that improved passenger rail services would help reduce air travel congestion and delays, noting that other industrialized nations have high-speed passenger rail services that are as quick or quicker than air travel for trips of 300 to 500 miles. (ffd: Buffalo News)

(THU) Washington's Metro subway system said that service on its Red Line had returned to normal frequency. The return follows work on the line in and near the site of the rear-end collision last June 22 that killed 9 persons and injured scores of others. A Metro spokesman said that, as a result of concern that some part of the line's traffic control system may have contributed to the crash, trains will continue to manually operated until further notice. (ffd: RT&S)

(FRI) RailAmerica announced that it was making final preparations for a public stock offering on or about October 13. The company announced that it expected to sell about 21 million shares in the offering for \$16 to \$18 apiece. The stock will be traded on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol "RA". (ffd: wire services)

(FRI) The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum reminded that it has begun its own "B&O Television Network" of monthly programming. Programs are hosted by Actor Michael Gross, the museum's spokesperson. Additional to being shown on flat screens at the museum, the programs are also available on YouTube. (ffd: B&O Railroad Museum)

STATS:

(THU) For the week ending October 3, 2009, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 29.7 billion ton-miles, down 16.6 percent from the comparable week last year. U.S. carload rail traffic was down 17.2 percent, down 18.3 percent in the East and down 16.4 percent in the West; declines ranged from 2.7 percent for chemicals and 53.2 percent for metallic ores. Also for the week, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was down 15.7 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 7.3 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was down 15.6 percent, Mexican carload rail traffic was down 0.9 percent and Mexican intermodal rail traffic was down 3.4 percent.

For the period January 1 through October 3, 2009, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 1.11 trillion ton-miles, down 17.3 percent from the comparable period last year. Also for this period, U.S. carload rail traffic was down 18.1 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was down 16.8 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 22.2 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was down 16.2 percent, Mexican carload rail traffic was down 13.6 percent, and Mexican intermodal rail traffic was down 18.2 percent. (ffd: AAR)

(NOTE: Canadian traffic totals include those of the U.S. operations of Canadian Pacific Railway and Canadian National.)

EXPANSIONS, CONTRACTIONS AND ALIKE:

(TUE) Minnesota Northern was reported to have filed with the Surface Transportation Board to abandon approximately 20 miles of line between Roseau, MN and Warroad, MN. (ffd: Trains)

(TUE) Dakota Northern was reported to have filed to with the Surface Transportation Board to abandon approximately 18 miles of its Glasston Subdivision in North Dakota. (ffd: Trains)

(WED) Canadian Pacific said that it would put up for sale its 32-mile line between Armstrong, BC and Sicamous, BC. CPR said that it would discontinue service over the line if a buyer is not found by December 7. (ffd: wire services)

(WED) The Jacksonville Port Authority received a federal grant totaling approximately \$6 million to rebuilt approximately 14 miles of track at its Blount Island Marine Terminal. (ffd: Jacksonville Business Journal, Trains)

(FRI) CSX filed to abandon approximately one-quarter mile of line in Athens, TN. (ffd: STB)

APPOINTMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND MILESTONES:

(MON) The Obama Administration nominated two individuals to fill the final two vacancies on Amtrak's board of directors. Nominated are Anthony Coscia, the chairman of the board of commissioners of the Port of New York and New Jersey, and Bert DiClemente, a realtor of office and industrial space and who earlier was former the Delaware state director for former Senator, now Vice-President, Joe Biden. (ffd: NARP, wire services)

(MON) Kansas City Southern appointed Susan McVane Strong its AVP-National Accounts. Ms. Strong was most recently a general director of logistics with Union Pacific. (ffd: KCS RR)

(MON) The Obama Administration nominated Mark Rosekind as a member of the National Transportation Safety Board. Mr. Rosekind is a sleep scientist and a former fatigue consultant to Union Pacific. (ffd: wire services)

CORRECTION:

In the September 18 edition, I reported the death of John Moore, a Washington Metro communications and signal worker, as an on-duty employee injury. It was of course an on-duty employee fatality.

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Dave Mears

Cherry Hill, NJ