

WEEKLY RAIL REVIEW

FOR THE WEEK ENDING FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2009

BY DAVE MEARS

(Thanks to all of you who have recently sent me messages of encouragement. I've replied to most and will reply to all. I'm still shaking the last of what hit me, but am ready to resume Weekly Rail Review.)

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

(MON) CSX announced that it would raise clearances at 16 overhead bridges in the greater Philadelphia area. The projects will allow for improved routings for doublestack intermodal trains. The project is being funded by \$10 million from the State of Pennsylvania, \$12 million from CSX, and an additional \$10 million from two federal funding sources. (ffd: CSX RR)

(MON) Northstar commuter rail service began weekday operation. The service operates over BNSF approximately 40 miles between Big Lake, MN and Minneapolis. In this first weekday, Northstar transported 2,414 new rail commuters. (ffd: St. Cloud Times, Trains)

(TUE) A woman who was taking photographs at trackside when she was struck and injured by a BNSF train near Tupelo, MS in 2006, has now sued the railroad for \$6 million. In her suit, Helen Gable said that the railroad should have posted "no trespassing" signs to warn her away from the tracks. (ffd: wire services)

(WED) The Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) project recently modified its master plan to improve Chicago rail routings and infrastructure. The plan was modified to note that most of its Central Corridor is no longer required. However, major portions of the plan for that Corridor's southern half will be retained to provide freight trains an alternative route and, also, to free up capacity over the existing NS Chicago Line for Amtrak trains running from Carbondale, IL and New Orleans, LA into Chicago Union Station. (ffd: Progressive Railroadng)

(THU) The Federal Railroad Administration released a study showing that freight rail fuel efficiency increased 22 percent between 1990 and 2006. Entitled "Comparative Evaluation of Rail and Truck Fuel Efficiency on Competitive Corridors," the study determined that locomotive improvements, increased numbers of doublestack trains, track and signal upgrades, and longer trains were the primary fuel efficiency drivers. The study also found that rail fuel efficiency varies from 156 to 512 ton-miles per gallon while truck fuel efficiency ranges from 68 to 133 ton-miles per gallon. (ffd: FRA, Progressive Railroadng)

(THU) Union Pacific began operating doublestack trains over its former Southern Pacific line through Donner Pass. The change follows a 12-month tunnel line improvement project that includes improving clearances in more than 15 tunnels and snowsheds between Rocklin, CA and Truckee. UP's Donner Pass route is about 73 miles shorter across the mountain ranges between Nevada and California than its former Western Pacific Feather River Canyon route. (ffd: Plumas County News, Union Pacific RR)

(THU) New Jersey Transit began participating in the Federal Railroad Administration's Close Call Project. The safety pilot project allows employees to report "close call" safety incidents without fear of sanction or penalty from the railroad of the federal government. NJT is the third railroad – and the first passenger railroad – to join the program along with Canadian Pacific Railway and Union Pacific. (ffd: FRA)

(FRI) Symptomatic of the budget problems currently impacting many states, the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania laid off approximately half its employees. The state-owned museum locates in Strasburg, PA. An effect of the layoffs will be to reduce the museum's hours of operation. (ffd: Lancaster New Era, Intelligencer Journal)

STATS:

(THU) For the week ending November 14, 2009, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 31.6 billion ton-miles, down 7.9 percent from the comparable week last year. U.S. carload rail traffic was down 8.9 percent, down 10.0 percent in the East and down 8.2 percent in the West. 6 of 19 commodity groups increased, including nonmetallic minerals up 19.0 percent, grain up 16.1 percent, and chemicals up 8.5 percent. Also for the week, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was down 7.7 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 0.9 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was down 10.9 percent, Mexican carload rail traffic was down 1.3 percent, and Mexican intermodal rail traffic was down 2.8 percent.

For the period January 1 through November 14, 2009, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 1.29 trillion ton-miles, down 16.6 percent from the comparable period last year. Also for this period, U.S. carload rail traffic was down 17.6 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was down 15.9 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 20.3 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was down 15.6 percent, Mexican carload rail traffic was down 11.6 percent, and Mexican intermodal rail traffic was down 16.6 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) The Surface Transportation Board granted Lake County, OR's earlier request for an adverse discontinuance of Modoc Railway's operation of the line between Alturas, CA and Lakeville, OR, totaling approximately 56 miles of line. Lake County has since arranged for the operation of the line by the Lake Railway. (ffd: STB)

(FRI) Standard Railroad Corporation filed to acquire, from General Railway Corporation doing business as Iowa Northwestern Railway, and operate approximately one-half mile of line between Superior, IA and Mackenzie Jct., IA. (ffd: STB)

(FRI) McCloud Railroad President Jeff Forbis announced the discontinuance of the railroad's passenger operation, the Shasta Sunset Dinner Train, effective January, 2010. The railroad discontinued its freight operations approximately two years ago. (ffd: Redding Record Searchlight Newspaper, Trains Magazine)

APPOINTMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND MILESTONES:

(TUE) The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen appointed Paul Sorrow its new national president. Mr. Sorrow succeeds Edward Rodzicz, who was recently charged with bribery in connection with the designation of BLET legal counsel. Mr. Rodzicz has now resigned as BLET national president and intends to retire. The BLET, now a division of the Teamsters, is the second largest rail labor union, after the United Transportation Union. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

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BE SAFE AND PROSPER,

Dave Mears

Cherry Hill, NJ