

WEEKLY RAIL REVIEW

FOR THE WEEK ENDING FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2010

BY DAVE MEARS

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

(SAT) The Middle Atlantic states were hit with back-to-back snowstorms, the first this date with regional totals of between 20 and 30 inches, the second on Wednesday with regional totals of between 10 and 20 inches. Rail and transit operations were notably impacted. Amtrak reduced train service much of the week on the Northeast Corridor Line, and on its Empire and Keystone Services, and also suspended most long-distance service west and south out of Washington, DC. In the New York City area, the Long Island Rail Road, Metro North and New Jersey Transit canceled some services during the storms, although Metro North ran some extras on Tuesday to get additional passengers out of the city in advance of Wednesday's storm. In the Philadelphia area, Septa halted commuter rail service during Saturday's storm, but was able to continue much of it during Wednesday's storm. In the Washington area, commuter rail operators MARC and VRE canceled or reduced service during the week, and Washington's Metro only operated the underground portions of its subway much of the week. On the freight side, both CSX and Norfolk Southern told their customers to expect shipment delays of 24 to 48 hours. CSX said that many of its lines were hampered "by the heavy snow, downed trees and power lines" and NS said that the weather had notably slowed its operations east of Harrisburg, PA. (ffd: Journal of Commerce, NARP, Progressive Railroading, Trains, wire services)

(SAT) A locomotive engineer on the Portland & Western Railroad was found shot to death alongside the locomotive he was operating. The shooting of Ronald Langlois, Age 44 with six years' railroad service, occurred in Eugene, OR in the early morning hours this date. Police are investigating the killing. (ffd: KMTR TV, wire services)

(SAT) A runaway CSX coal train derailed 113 cars near Meyersdale, PA. The train was descending the Sand Patch Grade, where CSX's former Baltimore & Ohio main line crests the Allegheny Mountains. Due to the derailment, as well as the heavy snowfall in the area which hampered cleanup, the line was closed for several days this week, which also resulted in the temporary cancellation of Amtrak's "Capitol Limited" train. (ffd: Cumberland Times-News, Trains)

(MON) The State of Connecticut noted its State Bond Commission having approved \$26 million the previous week to assist in the eventual double-tracking of the Amtrak line between New Haven, CT and Springfield, MA. A spokesperson said that the funding will go toward design, environmental documentation and construction costs. The spokesman added that the state hopes to eventually start commuter train service on the 62-mile line, which presently has some stretches of single track. (ffd: New Haven Register)

(MON) Texas officials said that they are negotiating with Union Pacific to temporarily operate passenger rail service on the UP line serving Arlington, TX. The officials said that they want to operate passenger trains on the line to take up to 10,000 persons to and from next year's Super Bowl, which is scheduled for February 6, 2011. The UP line is approximately one mile from Cowboys Stadium, where the 2011 Super Bowl will be held. (ffd: Dallas Morning News)

(MON) Amtrak said that they had discontinued use of disposal dinnerware on their "Coast Starlight" train and are now again using real china, table linens and glassware for diners on that train. Amtrak said that china, linens and glassware are now also used for dining on the "Empire Builder" train and on the Auto Train. (ffd: Amtrak)

(TUE) The U.S. Department of Energy withdrew 116 water applications related to the earlier proposed construction of a 319-mile rail line that would serve Yucca Mountain in Nevada. Media reports noted that this was possibly the strongest sign yet that the project to store the nation's nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain would be abandoned, a cause championed by U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV). Most of the water applications were to build temporary water wells along the line, which was to have run between Yucca Mountain and the existing rail line at Caliente, NV. (ffd: Las Vegas Review-Journal)

(TUE) Metro North Railroad began demonstrating its new "Train Time" online service at several of its commuter rail stations. The service allows computer and web-enabled smart phones to find out whether a Metro North train is on-time, late, canceled or delayed, including the number of minutes it is late, and also what track it will arrive or depart on. (ffd: RT&S)

(THU) In an interview, BNSF CEO Matt Rose noted that coal stockpiles across the U.S. were notably decreasing as a result of this winter's exceptional weather. Mr. Rose said that a previously large overhang of onsite stockpiles by coal-burning power plants "is truly being wiped out" due both to increased heating demand and the winter storms making it harder for replacement coal trains to reach these utilities. (ffd: CNBC)

(THU) A Canadian National freight train derailed 56 cars near Rivers, MB. A CN spokesman said that the potash train was headed eastbound to a destination in the U.S. There were no injuries in the derailment, the cause of which was being investigated. (ffd: Xinhau News Service)

(THU) New Jersey Transit said that it was set to spend \$36.6 million this year to begin work on the reconstruction of the ex-Erie Lackawanna main line between Port Morris, NJ and Andover, NJ, in support of the long-term goal to eventual rebuild the line for future passenger rail service operating between Northern New Jersey and Scranton, PA. The line was taken up by the former Conrail in the early 1980s. Last year, Pennsylvania had applied for \$401 million in federal stimulus funding to assist in rebuilding their portion of the line, but that application was recently turned down. The project's estimated total cost is \$551 million. (ffd: Morris County Daily Record, Trains)

(THU) The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority announced the start of real-time train arrival information on its commuter rail line operating between Fitchburg, MA and Boston, MA. An MBTA spokesman said that electronic message boards at stations on the line will provide riders with a six-minute countdown to the next train and that commuters can also tune to an AM radio station to hear the same six-minute countdown. The spokesman added that twelve of MBTA's 13 commuter rail lines now offer train arrival information via radio. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(THU) Google, the web search engine, announced a new feature that will allow the viewing of an entire Trans-Siberian Railway journey. A Google spokesman said that the site includes 150 hours of video through "seven time zones, 12 regions and 87 villages." The site, which was developed in partnership with Russian Railways, may be linked to at <<http://www.google.ru/transsib>>www.google.ru/transsib. (ffd: Google)

(FRI) BNSF became a privately held company, attendant with the vote the previous day by BNSF stockholders endorsing the purchase of outstanding BNSF stock by Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Company. Berkshire paid \$100 per share for the remaining 77.4 percent of BNSF stock it didn't already own. As part of the deal, Berkshire issued new shares and split its Class B shares 50-to-1. (ffd: Progressive Railroading, wire services)

(FRI) Grupo Mexico's Ferromex and Kansas City Southern de Mexico announced agreement on several long-standing disputes. The agreement sets rates the railroads must pay related to the use of each other's lines and terminals. KCSM also reached agreement with Ferrosur that increases KCSM's access in the central states of Puebla and Tlaxcala, and to the port of Veracruz; KCSM in return agreed to withdraw its objections to the merger of Ferrosur into Grupo Mexico's transport and infrastructure division, which includes Ferromex. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(FRI) The 2010 Wheel Rail Interaction Conference, which will be held this coming May 17-20 in Chicago, has announced that several scholarships will be awarded to deserving industry professionals for both the Conference's Rail Transit Seminar, to be held on May 17, and the Heavy Haul Seminar, to be held May 19 and 20. Both the Rail Transit and Heavy Haul scholarships include free attendance at the Principles Course, to be held on May 18. All events will be held at the Chicago Marriott O'Hare, and continuing education and professional development credits will be offered. Scholarship details are available at <<http://wheel-rail-seminars.com/scholarships.htm>><http://wheel-rail-seminars.com/scholarships.htm> and conference details are available at <<http://wheel-rail-seminars.com/>><http://wheel-rail-seminars.com>.

(FRI) The U.S. Department of Transportation announced \$303 million in loans to fund upgrades to Denver Union Station, the planned centerpiece of Denver's Regional Transportation District's FasTracks program. The loans will be \$151.6 million from the Transportation Infrastructure Finance & Innovation Act and \$152.1 million from the Railroad Rehabilitation & Improvement Financing Act. The Denver Union Station project includes a new light rail and commuter rail station, a new underground bus terminal with 22 bays, and public plazas to integrate transit service. Construction is projected to take four years to complete. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(FRI) Making lemonade into lemons, so to speak, related to this winter's severe weather, a Norwood, NY artist has sculpted a life-size locomotive out of snow. The sculpture, which is now frozen solid, is 160 feet long and 16 feet tall, and is modeled on a steam locomotive and tender that used to operate through Norwood. A Norwood resident commented, "I thought it was going to be just a small thing, but it's big, it's big, it's remarkable." (ffd: News 10 Now TV)

STATS – CLASS 1 RAIL TRAFFIC:

(THU) For the week ending February 6, 2010, U.S. rail volume grant totaled 29.2 billion ton-miles, up 2.5 percent from the comparable period last year. U.S. carload rail traffic was up 1.4 percent, up 0.2 percent in the East and up 2.0 percent in the West. Notable traffic increases included metals and metal products up 50.8 percent and non-grain farm products up 32.0 percent; notable traffic decreases included crushed stone, sand and gravel down 12.7 percent and pulp and paper products down 10.3 percent. Also for the week, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 5.1 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 9.3 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 2.4 percent, Mexican carload rail traffic was up 11.4 percent, and Mexican intermodal rail traffic was up 19.5 percent.

For the period January 1 through February 6, 2010, U.S. rail volume grant totaled 143.9 billion ton-miles, up 0.5 percent from the comparable period last year. Also for this period, U.S. carload rail traffic was down 0.3 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 3.0 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 14.8 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 3.4 percent, Mexican carload rail traffic was up 3.2 percent, and Mexican intermodal rail traffic was up 3.8 percent. (ffd: AAR)

EXPANSIONS, CONTRACTIONS AND ALIKE:

(MON) Grenada Railway filed to discontinue the automatic block signal system over its entire line between the Tennessee state line and Davis, MS. In its filing, the GRYR said that ABS was no longer needed for their operations and that they will instead operate the line under Rule 520, "Other Than Main Track." (ffd: FRA)

(TUE) Alamanor Railroad filed to abandon approximately 12 miles of line between Chester, CA and Clear Creek, CA. (ffd: STB)

(TUE) Elkhart & Western Railroad said that it hoped to commence operation of 23 miles of former Norfolk Southern, ex-Nickel Plate line on or about March 6. The E&W, one of the Pioneer Railcorp family of railroads, has filed with the U.S. Surface Transportation Board to operate line between Argos, IN, and Walkerton, IN. (ffd: Trains)

(WED) Nebraska Northwestern Railroad filed to acquire, from Canadian Pacific, approximately 28 miles of former Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern line between Chardon, NE; Dakota Junction NE; and Crawford NE. (ffd: STB)

(THU) CSX filed to abandon approximately 4 miles of its Northern Region-Chicago Division-Toledo Terminal Subdivision line between

Temperance, OH and Vulcan, OH. (ffd: STB)

(FRI) Canadian National filed to grant CSX limited overhead trackage rights over approximately 22 miles of former Grand Trunk Western line between Munster, IN and Elsdon, IL. In their filing, CN states that the purpose of the granting of trackage rights "is to enable CSX to reduce congestion on its former Baltimore & Chicago Terminal [lines] and enhance the efficiency of its operation in the Chicago area." (ffd: STB)

(FRI) Stillwater Central Railroad filed to lease, from the Hollis & Eastern Railroad, and operate approximately 14 miles of line between Duke, OK and Altus, OK. (ffd: STB)

APPOINTMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND MILESTONES:

None of note this week.

CORRECTION:

In last week's edition, I noted, from media news reports, the January 30 death of an on-duty railroad employee who had fallen off a railroad bridge and into the freezing waters of the Hackensack River in Northern New Jersey. I identified that individual as being an employee of CSX, when in fact he was an employee of Conrail-Shared Assets. The employee was working as the bridge operator at the PATH Hack Bridge, which controls openings of both the PATH Hack Bridge and the nearby Conrail Hack Bridge. Thanks very much to those railroad employees familiar with the circumstances of this fatality for sending me the correct information.

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BE SAFE AND PROSPER,

Dave Mears

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