

WEEKLY RAIL REVIEW

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SAT, FEBRUARY 19, 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):

(MON) U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta held a news conference in Chicago, IL.'s Union Station to defend the Bush Administration's zero funding proposal for Amtrak for Fiscal Year 2006. Addressing critics' charges that the Bush Administration wanted to put Amtrak in bankruptcy, Mr. Mineta said, "I've got news for you. If I wanted to kill Amtrak, I wouldn't have to lift a finger. The system as it now stands is dying and everyone knows it." Mr. Mineta said that the Administration would again present to the U.S. Congress a passenger rail reform bill that Congress rejected in 2003 and whose provisions include opening passenger rail operations to competition and transferring responsibility for funding operating subsidies to the states. Responding to Mr. Mineta's news conference, which was not open to the public, U.S. Senator from Illinois Dick Durbin commented, "Secretary Mineta didn't come here with a plan. He came here with an excuse for this terrible budget decision." Mr. Mineta then traveled to another appearance, at Charlotte, NC.'s Amtrak station, on Tuesday. (ffd: Chicago Tribune, NARP, USDOT)

(MON) The Orange County Transportation Authority voted to table proposed construction of a 28-mile light rail line between Irvine, CA. and Fullerton, CA. An OCTA spokesman said that they had been unable to secure a federal funding commitment to cover one-half of the project's expected \$1 billion cost. The spokesman added that other alternatives would now be considered, including widening some roads and developing improved bus transit projects, with a final report expected this coming June. (ffd: Los Angeles Times, Trains)

(MON) A rail-highway crossing crash was captured on video. The accident occurred in Oxnard, CA. when an Amtrak train struck a truckload of strawberries that had proceeded onto a crossing and then stopped for a red traffic signal ahead of it. The truck's driver was not injured in the crash, however, 2 passengers aboard the Amtrak train were treated for minor injuries. The accident was captured by a bystander, Gaspar Medina, who said that he was videotaping as evidence in a lawsuit related to an accident near the crossing he was involved in last September. Mr. Medina's video may be seen at

<[http://cbs2.com/topstories/topstories\\_story\\_048081949.html](http://cbs2.com/topstories/topstories_story_048081949.html)>[http://cbs2.com/topstories/topstories\\_story\\_048081949.html](http://cbs2.com/topstories/topstories_story_048081949.html). (ffd: wire services)

(MON) Canadian National announced that had reached a tentative labor agreement with the United Transportation Union. A CN spokesman said that the agreement covered approximately 2,600 train service employees. The spokesman added that, while specific terms of the agreement were being withheld pending ratification, the new agreement provided for "wage, benefit and quality of work-life improvements" and would run for 3 years, retroactive to January 1, 2004. (ffd: CN Corp., Railpace)

(TUE) Union Pacific suffered an on-duty employee fatality at its Heritage Park Shops in Council Bluffs, IA. Daniel Weinert, Age 46, was killed by an explosion that occurred as he was grinding a metal tank. The explosion, which was of such force that it threw Mr. Weinert 30 feet across the shop room, also injured 3 other shop employees in the vicinity. Later in the week, a UP spokesman said that the railroad had determined that the tank's epoxylike liner had been improperly cured during its manufacturing process, which formed and trapped a gas that was ignited by sparks from Mr. Weinert's grinder. (ffd: Des Moines Register, Trains)

(TUE) Construction began on Phoenix, AZ.'s new light rail line. A city spokesman said that the line, which will total approximately 20 miles in length, "will start in North Phoenix, go into downtown, then head past the airport and through downtown Tempe, ending in suburban Mesa." The spokesman added that the line is expected to open in December, 2008. (ffd: wire services)

(TUE) The U.S. Department of Transportation announced creation of 2 new departmental agencies. In a prepared statement, USDOT said that one office, the Research and Innovative Technology Administration, will house the Office of Intermodalism and Bureau of Transportation Statistics, and would also oversee the USDOT's objectives for transportation technology innovation and research. The other office, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, will include the Office of Hazardous Materials Safety and Office of Pipeline Safety. (ffd: USDOT)

(TUE) Caltrain renewed Amtrak's contract to operate its commuter rail services between San Francisco, CA., San Jose, CA. and Gilroy, CA. An Amtrak spokesman said that the contract runs until June, 2009 and includes 2 one-year options. Caltrain runs 86 trains on weekdays and 62 trains on weekends between San Francisco and San Jose, with rush-hour service to and from Gilroy. (ffd: Amtrak)

(WED) The U.S. Department of Justice confirmed that it is investigating possible anti-competitive pricing practices by BNSF and Union Pacific. "The Department of Justice's Antitrust Division is looking at the possibility of anti-competitive practices involving the transportation of coal," said a USDOJ spokesman. Spokesmen for BNSF and UP said that they were cooperating with USDOJ, including having furnished requested documentation related to pricing and market conditions. (ffd: Dallas Morning News, Wall Street Journal)

(WED) Boston, MA.'s Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority announced that it had contracted with InSite Wireless to install, operate and maintain an underground neutral wireless communication network in MBTA's subway system. An MBTA spokesman said that this would allow subway passengers to use their wireless voice and data devices, including mobile telephones and handheld computers. The spokesman added that installation would be done in phases, with first service in the Park Street, Downtown Crossing, Government Center and State Street stations and the tunnels connecting those stations. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(WED) Metrolink announced that they would rename an interlocking control point in honor of Thomas Ormiston, the Amtrak conductor in Metrolink service who was one of 11 killed in the January 26 Metrolink train accident. A Metrolink spokesman said that CP Metro on its East Bank Line would be renamed CP Ormiston. The spokesman added that the change would be effective March 1. (ffd: SCRRRA)

(THU) In a rare note of discord, the National Association of Railroad Passengers criticized Amtrak for failing to specify

a grant request in a customary annual letter sent by Amtrak Board Chairman David Laney. NARP reported that, unlike past years, a specific grant request was replaced with the statement that a request would be sent "as soon as a planning process permits." NARP added that "it is unfortunate, to say the least, that the Amtrak Board, which should have known for months about the February 15 grant request deadline, is unwilling to say how much the company needs...not having a number on the Hill makes securing funding that much more difficult." (ffd: NARP)

(THU) California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger withdrew his earlier proposal to fold the responsibilities of the state's High-Speed Rail Authority into the state's existing transportation agencies. The withdrawal means that the High-Speed Rail Authority will continue as an independent entity. Also withdrawn are 87 other independent state boards and commissions earlier proposed for abolishment or absorption. (ffd: Los Angeles Times)

(FRI) CSX formally opened its new state-of-the-art training center in Atlanta, GA. The center will consolidate CSX training performed at several other system locations. "Our Atlanta facility will be a key part of our overall plan to recruit, train and qualify employees for fulfilling careers in our company," said Wayne Richards, CSX AVP-Contract Staffing and Training. A CSX spokesman said that the facility is expected to train more than 3,500 employees annually. (ffd: CSX Corp.)

(FRI) J. P. Morgan Chase Co. said that it had reached agreement to buy rail equipment supplier Progress Rail Services from Progress Energy. A Progress Energy spokesman said that it had sold Progress Rail for approximately \$402 million. With approximately 3,500 employees, Progress Rail provides railcar parts, m-of-w equipment, rail and other track material, as well as rail car repair and recycling facilities. (ffd: Railway Age)

(FRI) Metro North Commuter Railroad reported on the success of the program to rebuild its fleet of Class M2 commuter rail cars. An MNCR spokesman said that the rebuilt M2's, which at 30 years old are the oldest in MNCR's fleet, had achieved an average of 98,676 miles between failures, better than any other car class. The spokesman added that the "M2 Critical Systems Replacement Plan" includes installing moister-resistant power inverters, new housings for electrical components, new rubber gaskets on electric doors and new bathrooms. The spokesman added that all 241 M2's would be rebuilt in the next 5 years, at a total cost of approximately \$150 million. (ffd: Stamford Advocate)

(SAT) In an apparent first, a British train operator designated a locomotive to honor a deceased rock music star. A spokesman for Cotswold Rail, which operates in Southwest England, said that it had named a locomotive in honor of the late Joe Strummer, who resided in Southwest England and died there in December, 2002 of a heart attack. Strummer and his bandmates made up The Clash, which had a hit single entitled "Train In Vain" on their 1980 album "London Calling", an album that many rock critics have hailed as one of the very greatest. (ffd: wire services)

#### STATS – TRAFFIC:

(THU) For the week ending February 12, U.S. rail volume totaled 31.8 billion ton-miles, up 7.1 percent from the comparable week last year. Also for the week, U.S. carload rail traffic was up 6.0 percent, up 4.0 percent in the East and up 7.7 percent in the West. Notable traffic increases included non-grain farm products up 22.5 percent, metallic ores up 20.9 percent, crushed stone, sand and gravel up 14.2 percent and coal up 11.2 percent; notable traffic decreases included primary forest products down 5.0 percent and motor vehicles and equipment down 4.9 percent. Also for the week, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 11.6 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 2.6 percent,

Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 6.5 percent, Mexico's Transportacion Ferroviaria Mexicana's carload rail traffic was up 11.5 percent and TFM's intermodal rail traffic was up 14.1 percent.

For the period January 1 through February 12, U.S. rail volume totaled 182.6 billion ton-miles, up 2.8 percent from the comparable period last year. Also for the period, U.S. carload rail traffic was up 1.9 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 8.5 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 2.7 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 2.6 percent, TFM's carload rail traffic was up 7.1 percent and TFM's intermodal rail traffic was up 22.9 percent. (ffd: AAR)

#### MORE STATS – "BIG 6" OPERATING PERFORMANCE:

(THU) For the week ending February 12, average train speed was 24.3 mph for BNSF, 23.8 mph for Canadian National, 24.2 mph for Canadian Pacific, 19.0 mph for CSX, 21.2 mph for Norfolk Southern and 21.3 mph for Union Pacific. Average train speed is calculated by dividing train miles by hours operated, excluding dwell time.

Also for the week ending February 12, average terminal dwell time was 10.3 hrs for BNSF, 15.1 hrs for Canadian National, 36.8 hrs for Canadian Pacific, 30.7 hrs for CSX, 25.7 hrs for Norfolk Southern and 30.3 hrs for Union Pacific. Average terminal dwell time is the average time a car is at specified terminal locations, expressed in hours. (ffd: AAR)

#### ACQUISITIONS, ABANDONMENTS AND ALIKE:

(MON) Union Pacific filed to abandon approximately 1 mile of its Dry Valley Subdivision in Caribou County, ID. (ffd: AAR)

(FRI) Buffalo & Pittsburgh Railroad granted South Buffalo Railway overhead trackage rights over approximately 2 miles of line in and near Buffalo, NY. The purpose of the trackage rights is to improve interchange between BPRR and SB. (ffd: STB)

#### PERSONNEL CHANGES AND ALIKE:

(MON) Solomon Williams died in Bradenton, FL. at Age 101. Mr. Williams is recognized as the first person of African-American descent to regularly operate a locomotive in Florida, having started in engine service in 1916. Mr. Williams worked for a switching railroad serving the Manatee Crate Company, which went out of business in 1951. (ffd: Sarasota Herald Tribune)

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(CORRECTION: In last week's WRR, under "Acquisitions, Abandonments and Alike," I referred to the trackage rights granted by CSX to the Finger Lakes Railway as being in and near Auburn, NY. In fact, the trackage rights are in Syracuse, NY. and Solvay, NY. Thanks to WRR Reader George Read for his update here.)

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

Cherry Hill, New Jersey, USA