

WEEKLY RAIL RECAP

For the week ending SAT, February 9, 2002

By Dave Mears

(NOTE: The expression "ffd" at the end of a news item means "for further details" and usually represents what I believe to be the most helpful news resource if a reader wants more information on a particular item.)

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

(SUN) 2 Norfolk Southern freight trains collided head-on at LaPorte, IN. The collision injured 4 crewpersons and derailed the trains' locomotives and a total of 25 cars. The collision resulted in the temporary closing of NS's line between Chicago, IL. and Elkhart, IN., which was partially reopened by Sunday night and completely reopened by Monday morning. (ffd: South Bend Tribune)

(MON) The proposed federal budget for Fiscal Year 2003 was released. In addition to \$7.7 billion for overall transportation safety funding, the budget further proposes \$716 million for the Federal Railroad Administration, which includes \$521 million as a "placeholder" for intercity rail passenger service. The budget also proposes \$1.1 billion for funding of approximately 30 urban transportation projects or initiatives. (ffd: wire services)

(MON) The Kansas City Southern began testing "beltpack" devices for remote control of switching locomotives by train personnel. The KCS pilot project is being conducted in Kansas City, MO. and includes the participation of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe and the Union Pacific. (ffd: Washington Times)

(MON) A Canadian grain company asked the Canadian Transportation Agency to allow a competing railway to take over its existing contract with Canadian National, due to the latter's alleged poor service. Naber Seed and Grain Co. told the CTA that poor service by CN allowed it to transport only two-thirds of last year's crop. Naber's plea is believed to be the first since the CTA's earlier ruling that it would permit other railways to take over contracts when service obligations aren't met. (ffd: Saskatoon Star Phoenix)

(TUE) The National Transportation Safety Board released its report on the March 15, 1999 crossing crash between a truck and an Amtrak train in Bourbonnais, IL. that resulted in the deaths of 11 persons aboard the train. The NTSB report said that the truck's driver, John Stokes, ignored the crossing's warning devices and had driven around lowering gates. The report also indicated that Mr. Stokes had exceeded his maximum hours of service and was likely fatigued by that and also lack of sleep. (ffd: NTSB)

(TUE) U.S. Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA.) petitioned a U.S. Court of Appeals to overturn a U.S. Surface Transportation Board decision allowing Norfolk Southern to proceed with its planned closing of the former Conrail's Hollidaysburg, PA. car repair shop. Senator Specter told the court that NS's action violated commitments the railroad made to him and others several years earlier when it was courting support for its co-takeover of Conrail. (ffd: CRTS)

(TUE) A commuter train rear-ended a freight train near the city of Durban in the nation of South Africa. The resulting crash killed 18 persons and injured over 100 others. Investigators at the crash site said that they were still working to determine the cause of the accident. (ffd: wire services)

(WED) 2 weeks after the French government said that it would oppose efforts by the European Commission to open up cross-border rail freight services to all operators by 2006, officials of the national railway systems of France and Germany announced agreement to further develop their own cross-border rail freight services. Officials of France's SNCF and Germany's Deutsche Bahn said that they hoped that the new agreement would allow them to double their cross-border traffic over the next 5 years. (ffd: wire services)

(THU) The Amtrak Reform Council formally delivered to the U.S. Congress their report recommending the restructuring of Amtrak. The report proposes splitting Amtrak into 3 new organizations: one to oversee key planning functions, one to own the Northeast Corridor Line infrastructure and one to conduct train operations that, after a 3 to 5 year transition period, would accept bids for franchises to run its routes. Criticizing the report, acting Amtrak chairman and former Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis called for the report to "be rejected out of hand." (ffd: wire services)

(THU) The Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen announced plans to submit to their memberships a proposed merger with the Sheet Metal Workers International Association. Under terms of the merger, BRS's approximately 9,400 members would remain autonomous within the SMWIA, enabling the BRS to continue representing them in collective bargaining and arbitration matters. (ffd: BRS, SMWIA)

(THU) Chicago, IL.'s Commission on Chicago Landmarks approved landmark designation for Chicago Union Station. The commission also approved addition of an 18 story multi-use structure to the building, which was part of the station's original plans but was never constructed. (ffd: Chicago Sun Times)

(THU) British Transport Minister Stephen Byers said that he would continue progressing plans to partially privatize the London Underground subway system. The plans, under which the system would remain publicly owned but gain private investment to fund system repairs, still face substantial opposition, including from London Mayor Ken Livingstone. (ffd: wire services)

(FRI) In conjunction with the start of the Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City, Utah., federal and state rail inspectors began increased checks of freight and passenger trains operating in and through the state. A Utah state spokesman said that the checks would include reviews of train paperwork and inspections to see that hazardous materials were properly loaded. (ffd: Reuters)

(FRI) CSX debuted a new paint scheme for its locomotive fleet. The new scheme features a solid, deep blue locomotive body with gold nose, tail and trim. The first locomotive to feature the new scheme is CSX 8503. (ffd: CSX Corp.)

(FRI) Toronto, ON. commuter rail operator GO Transit said that it was considering legal action against the distributor of a photo cd-rom entitled "Canadian Railbabes" that featured women posed topless in Toronto area rail yards, including alongside GO trains. A GO Transit spokesman said that the photos were either digitally doctored or taken on their property without permission. (ffd: Toronto Sun)

STATS:

(THU) For the week ending January 26, U.S. carload rail traffic was down 3.7 percent from the comparable week last year, down 5.7 percent in the East and down 2.0 percent in the West. Also for the week ending January 26, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was down 10.1 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 10.3 percent and Canadian intermodal rail traffic was down 7.6 percent, all when ranked with the comparable week last year.

For the month of January, 2002, U.S. carload rail traffic was down 3.1 percent, compared with January, 2001. Notable traffic increases included motor vehicles and equipment up 5.9 percent, grain mill products up 3.3 percent and crushed stone and gravel up 1.8 percent; notable traffic decreases included metallic ores down 21.0 percent, metals and metal products down 10.0 percent, chemicals down 4.0 percent and coal down 1.7 percent. Also for the month of January, 2002, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was down 4.1 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 7.3 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was down 3.5 percent, Mexico's Transportacion Ferroviaria Mexicana's carload rail traffic was up 7.1 percent and TFM's intermodal rail traffic was up 2.3 percent, all when ranked with January, 2001. (ffd: AAR)

ACQUISITIONS, ABANDONMENTS AND ALIKE:

(TUE) Canadian National/Illinois Central filed to abandon its Heyworth Spur, totaling approximately 3 miles of line in or near Heyworth, IL. (ffd: STB)

CHANGING PEOPLE AND PLACES:

(TUE) The American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association announced that its president, Frank Turner, would retire in May, 2002. An ASLRRA spokesman said that it would select a new president by early April. (ffd: ASLRRA)

(THU) Indiana Harbor Belt appointed Gary Gibson General Manager. Mr. Gibson replaces Chuck Allen, who retired in December. The IHB also appointed Derek Smith Comptroller. (ffd: IHB Corp.)

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Weekly Rail Recap is edited from news sources and published weekly, usually on Monday or Tuesday, to the rail and transit industries and those interested in them. Send an e-mail to djmservices@aol.com to receive it, with my compliments.

HAVE A SAFE AND PROSPEROUS WEEK,

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