

WEEKLY RAIL REVIEW

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SAT, MARCH 11, 2006

BY DAVE MEARS

(NOTE: I'm playing catch-up again, but I hope to be current again by midweek.)

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

(MON) BNSF confirmed an on-duty employee fatality. Kathleen Talmage, a 40-year employee of BNSF and predecessor companies, was killed when she was struck by a sports utility vehicle that veered into the Berwyn, IL METRA station, where Ms. Talmage was the ticket agent. At the time of the accident, Ms. Talmage was opening up the station for the morning rush hour. Later in the week, BNSF posted a \$5,000 reward for information about the hit-and-run driver involved in the crash. (Update: The following week, the driver was identified and arrested.) (ffd: Chicago Sun-Times)

(MON) The American Trucking Association voted to support federal legislation that would allow heavier and longer truck-trailer combinations. The stance reverses a position taken in 2003 when the ATA entered into an agreement with the Association of American Railroads wherein ATA would not seek to increase size and weight limits in return for a pledge by the AAR to cease supporting legislation to ban existing double and triple trailers. In the past, railroads have cited a USDOT study which found that trucks weighing 50,000 to 100,000 pounds fail to pay their share of highway costs by 50 percent. (ffd: Railway Age)

(MON) Union Pacific announced that a new intermodal chassis pooling arrangement, known as Common Co-op Chassis Pool, had tested successfully at UP's Denver, CO intermodal terminal. Under the program, the staging of private chassis is no longer permitted for marine containers moving inbound over the railroad and destined for delivery over the highway. A UP spokesman said that, "One of the areas of delay on the intermodal side is a lack of available container chassis. Pooling them helps in their overall use across the system, as well as their general, inventory, inspection, maintenance and repair." The spokesman added that UP would likely expand the program to other intermodal terminals. (ffd: Traffic World)

(TUE) BNSF CEO Matt Rose said that he favored an investment tax credit that would encourage expansion of U.S. rail capacity to handle growth. Speaking at the Trans-Pacific Maritime Conference, Mr. Rose added that government incentives could help shipments flow more smoothly if they can be targeted to encourage investment that expands capacity. Elaborating on BNSF's efforts to increase capacity, Mr. Rose said that BNSF's Transcon Route is now all double-tracked except for some 60 miles that will be double-tracked soon, and that work will then begin on triple-tracking some of the route. (ffd: Journal of Commerce)

(TUE) BNSF and Union Pacific filed a federal lawsuit in California to block new rules adopted in February by the state's South Coast Air Quality Management District. The new rules are aimed at reducing polluting fumes and emissions from idling locomotives. In their filing, the two railroads argue that they have already reached an agreement for statewide

pollution controls with California's Air Resources Board. The SCAQMD's governing board said that they adopted the new rules after determining that a memo of understanding between the two railroads and the ARB was "not stringent enough." (ffd: Long Beach Press-Telegram)

(TUE) Southern California commuter rail operator Metrolink announced that it would make their Ventura County and Antelope Valley lines "sealed corridors." A Metrolink spokesman said that the "sealed corridor" program would provide significantly increased highway-rail crossing protections, including four-quadrant gates, longer gate arms, "Z" pedestrian crossings, median separators, locked gates, and other enhancements. The program is modeled on a similar effort undertaken by North Carolina for the line between Charlotte, NC and Raleigh, NC. (ffd: Railway Age)

(WED) Approximately 400 railroaders, rail industry association representatives, and lobbyists participated in the annual "Railroad Day On The Hill" event in Washington, DC. The event included more than 240 requests for appointments with congressmen by their railroad constituents. At a dinner later that evening, the Association of American Railroads and the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association debuted a new television commercial intended to publicize the worth and accomplishments of the nation's freight railroads. The commercial is planned for national broadcast. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(WED) The Utah Transit Authority announced that the new commuter rail line planned to serve Salt Lake City and nearby towns and cities would be known as "FrontRunner" service. Rehabilitation began last fall on the 44-mile first segment of the line, which will operate over tracks formerly owned by Union Pacific between Salt Lake City and near Ogden. This first segment is expected to begin operation in early 2008. Salt Lake City's Deseret News newspaper noted that the name "FrontRunner" was potentially controversial in this politically conservative area, as it is also the title of a popular gay-themed novel and of a Salt Lake City-based gay, bisexual and transgender running club. (ffd: Deseret News, Trains)

(WED) A new website was debuted to help those interested in public transportation learn more about how they can save money on transit, commuter rail, bus and vanpool rides. The website, taxfreetransit.org, provides information on Section 132 of the Internal Revenue Code, which enables workers to allocate pre-tax earnings to cover certain commuting costs by using transportation flexible spending accounts (FSA's). The website also includes documents for company human resources departments to use in initiating company-wide FSA's. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(THU) U.S. Senator Joe Biden (D-DE) said that he would introduce legislation to create a "national rail police force" to protect Amtrak. Sen. Biden said that his bill would spend \$82 million annually for a 1,000-member "federal marshal" force for Amtrak. The senator noted that there are currently only 288 Amtrak officers to cover the entire country. (ffd: wire services)

(THU) The New Mexico state attorney general signed off on a \$75 million purchase by the state of a BNSF line to be used for commuter rail service. The purchase clears the way for the startup of "RailRunner Express" commuter trains serving Albuquerque, which state officials said could now start as early as late May or early June. The officials said that service would first operate over the 20 miles between Albuquerque and Bernalillo, be extended to serve Belen later this year, and later be extended to serve Santa Fe. (ffd: Albuquerque Journal)

(THU) In testimony before the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Stewart Baker said that it had put the development of a Transportation Worker Identification Credential on a "substantially accelerated" schedule. Mr. Baker added that proposed rules related to the TWIC should be issued "in a matter of weeks." The TWIC was initially proposed shortly after the 9-11 terrorist attacks in 2001. (ffd: Journal of Commerce)

(FRI) A federal court ruled that the United Transportation Union had no obligation to bargain nationally over crew consist. The freight railroads, bargaining as the National Carriers' Conference Committee, had earlier sought negotiate crew size to include the possibility of single-person crews. The court also ruled that the UTU had no obligation to bargain over the NCCC's desire to do away with the Federal Employers' Liability Act (FELA), which railroad employees injured on the job file suit under the provisions of. The rulings are seen as a victory to the UTU in ongoing national negotiations. (ffd: wire services)

(FRI) BNSF announced that it would spend over \$100 million for capital improvements to its lines and facilities in California in 2006. A BNSF spokesman said that improvements would include a \$26 million expansion of parking and stacking capacity at BNSF's Hobart intermodal terminal in Los Angeles, a \$16 million track expansion of the BNSF line through East Barstow, and a \$9 million expansion of parking capacity at the San Bernardino intermodal terminal. The spokesman also said that BNSF would also continue its \$50 million project to triple-track its line through the Cajon Pass. (ffd: BNSF Corp., Victor Valley Daily Press)

(FRI) The Federal Transit Administration approved the "Exposition" light rail line planned in Los Angeles, CA. The line will share trackage with the existing "Blue" light rail line and then turn left to serve Culver City. The line's total length will be approximately 9 miles and its cost approximately \$420 million. After FTA approval, \$208 million in state funding was secured for the project. (ffd: NARP)

(FRI) Commuter rail service was resumed on the Montreal-Delton-Candiac commuter rail line serving Montreal, PQ. Commuter train service had been partially suspended for nearly 3 weeks due to a Canadian Pacific freight train derailment having damaged a bridge on the line on February 17. The derailment was caused by high winds tipping over 6 rail cars. (ffd: Montreal Gazette)

(FRI) Officials in Germany said that Berlin's new main train station was expected to open in time for the World Cup soccer tournament to be held in the city in June. The new station, constructed over the last 10 years at a cost nearing \$850 million, is believed to be the only new central train station to be built "from scratch" in Europe in nearly a century. Once the new station is in operation, Berlin's two other large train stations – the Zoologistcher Garten Station in the former West Berlin and the Ostbahnhof in the former East Berlin – will close. (ffd: New York Times)

STATS – TRAFFIC:

(NOTE: The Canadian carload and intermodal rail traffic mentioned below includes both the Canadian and U.S. operations of Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railway.)

(THU) For the week ending March 4, 2006, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 33.5 billion ton-miles, up 1.2 percent from the comparable week last year. U.S. carload rail traffic was up 0.5 percent, up 1.0 percent in the East and up 0.1 percent in the West. Notable traffic increases included coke up 13.4 percent, crushed stone, sand and gravel up 12.0 percent, and lumber and wood products up 10.8 percent; notable traffic decreases included nonmetallic minerals down 40.9 percent and metallic ores down 9.1 percent. Also for the week, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 1.3 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 4.8 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 0.9 percent, Mexico's Kansas City Southern de Mexico's carload rail traffic was down 7.9 percent and KCSM's intermodal rail traffic was up 1.2 percent.

For the period January 1 through March 4, 2006, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 295.0 billion ton-miles, up 2.1 percent from the comparable period last year. Also for this period, U.S. carload rail traffic was up 0.9 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 3.9 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 2.0 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 3.7 percent, KCSM's carload rail traffic was down 6.6 percent, and KCSM's intermodal rail traffic was down 8.5 percent. (ffd: AAR)

MORE STATS – OPERATING PERFORMANCE:

(NOTE: Effective October 1, 2005, railroads that had been furnished operating performance statistics to the Association of American Railroads began applying a new standardized definitional framework, aimed at eliminating differences in calculation methodology. Concurrent with but unrelated to these changes, Canadian National elected to no longer furnish these statistics.)

(WED) For the week ending March 3, 2006, average total cars on line was as follows: BNSF, 222,576 cars versus 221,533 last week; Canadian Pacific, 81,545 cars versus 80,550 last week; CSX, 224,023 cars versus 225,099 last week; Kansas City Southern, 26,815 cars versus 27,725 last week; Norfolk Southern, 205,206 cars versus 205,300 last week; and Union Pacific, 328,544 cars versus 328,610 last week. (Comparative totals from last year are not yet available.)

Also for the week ending March 3, 2006, average train speed was as follows (statistics for the comparable week last year are not available): BNSF, 22.3 mph; Canadian Pacific Railway, 23.7 mph; CSX, 19.9 mph; Kansas City Southern, 23.1 mph; Norfolk Southern, 21.1 mph; and Union Pacific, 21.8 mph.

Finally for the week ending March 3, 2006, average terminal dwell time was as follows (statistics for the comparable week last year are not available): BNSF, 25.0 hrs; Canadian Pacific Railway, 21.4 hrs; CSX, 25.7 hrs; Kansas City Southern, 26.3 hrs; Norfolk Southern, 24.0 hrs; and Union Pacific, 29.3 hrs. (ffd: AAR)

EXPANSIONS, CONTRACTIONS AND ALIKE:

(MON) BNSF filed to abandon approximately 6 miles of line between Georgetown, MN and Perley, MN. (ffd: STB)

APPOINTMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND ALIKE:

None of note this week.

CORRECTION:

In the Weekly Rail Review for the week ending March 4, I referred to the Port of San Antonio, TX. I was reminded that San Antonio is a significant distance from the Gulf of Mexico! The port being mention is an "inland port" – an intermodal terminal with direct road and rail connections to a Gulf harbor – that is being developed on the sight of the former East Kelly Air Force Base. Thanks to WRR Readers Alan Hegler and Warren Smith for their sharp lookout here. Dave M.

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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

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