

WEEKLY RAIL REVIEW

WEEK ENDING FRIDAY, MARCH 19, 2010

BY DAVE MEARS

(In case it is helpful to anyone who may not have received the previous edition due to it possibly having been caught in or deleted by a spam filter, please know that it was sent March 15, reporting about the week ending March 12.)

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

(MON) The U.S. Department of Transportation announced that, after consulting with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, it was narrowing the list of hazardous materials subject to security plan requirements. The USDOT Transportation Security Plan Requirement mandates that shippers and carriers of "placarded amounts" of hazardous materials develop plans and procedures to address personnel security, unauthorized access and security en route. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(TUE) The Union Railroad suffered an on-duty employee fatality. Andrew Monheim, Age 54 with 35 years' railroad service, was killed when the train he was operating collided in the early morning hours with another near U.S. Steel's Edgar Thomson Works in Braddock, PA. The Union Railroad is one of the Transtar family of railroads. (ffd: Pittsburgh Business Times)

(TUE) Canada's Transportation Safety Board identified grade crossing safety as one of nine areas that it said posed the greatest risk to Canadians. The board said that improved signage at crossings is needed as a first step and that Transport Canada, which oversees Canadian transportation matters, needed to do a thorough assessment of high-risk crossings. (ffd: Canadian Broadcasting Corp.)

(TUE) Wal-Mart's Canadian division named Canadian National "Innovator of the Year" in recognition of the railroad's efforts in developing solution chain solutions for the company. Wal-Mart especially recognized CN's use of new EcoTherm technology, which is designed to protect goods from freezing by employing a temperature-controlled, insulated 40-foot container that does not require a heating unit in transit. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(THU) Officials overseeing the conversion of Manhattan's Farley Post Office Building into Moynihan Rail Station announced that they had engaged the architecture firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill to start design work on the first phase of the project, which is now funded. Phase 1 includes extending Pennsylvania Station's west-end concourse to allow access to additional tracks, making related track and signal changes, and improving platform ventilation. The project will also add two entrances flanking Farley's grand stairs on the west side of Eighth Avenue, and add new escalators and elevators. (ffd: New York Times)

(THU) The new head of New Jersey Transit called for work rule changes to better its financial and operational situation. New NJT chief head Jim Simpson said that "archaic work rules," such as a requirement that NJT keep a worker at a station even if ticket sales are automated, deny managers the flexibility to deploy employees where needed. "We need reform on work rules and pension benefits...If today we need you to be a conductor on a train, that's fine. If we need you to be a station attendant, that's fine." NJT has recently proposed fare increases of up to 25 percent, service cuts and other measures to address a projected \$300 million deficit. (ffd: Bergen Record)

(FRI) The Chlorine Institute asked the Federal Railroad Administration to re-issue its final Positive Train Control (PTC) rule with a "corrected" cost-benefit analysis. "This faulty analysis could foster a situation that would allow railroads to impose on shippers of chlorine and other toxic inhalation hazard (TIH) chemicals an unfairly large share of the costs of applying PTC technology," CI said in a petition to FRA. However, a spokesperson for the Association of American Railroads said in rebuttal that, "The Chlorine Institute is attacking the FRA's cost-benefit analysis of PTC as a smoke screen to hide the fact that their shipments will raise the cost of rail transportation for all customers....Instead of bashing the FRA analysis, the Chlorine Institute should join the AAR in improving the safety and efficiency of rail transportation." (ffd: AAR, Progressive Railroading, Railway Age)

(FRI) Following well-attended public hearings, the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority modified slightly some planned service cuts. "While our budget deficit forces us to move ahead with most of the cuts, we were able to take a number of the most painful cuts off the table based on what we heard from our customers, said NYMTA Chair Jay Walder. The authority is undertaking selected bus, subway and commuter rail service reductions to help address a projected \$400 million deficit. (ffd: New York Times, Railway Age)

(FRI) The Eugene, Oregon Police Department has ruled the February 6 death by gunshot of Ronald Langlois, a locomotive engineer for the Portland & Western Railroad, to be a suicide. Mr. Langlois had been on-duty when he was found shot to death near the locomotive he had been operating that night. Police said that forensics, interviews with family and co-workers, and Mr. Langlois's actions proceeding his death were consistent with someone who commits suicide. (ffd: Register-Guard)

(FRI) Amtrak announced that it was now on Twitter as @Amtrak. It said that passengers will be able to use Twitter to learn the latest about service enhancements, promotions, special offers, and events. Amtrak also said that it hopes to be able to respond to passenger comments and service-related inquiries via Twitter, additional to asking questions and soliciting feedback. (ffd: Amtrak)

STATS – CLASS 1 RAIL TRAFFIC:

(THU) For the week ending March 13, 2010, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 31.3 billion ton-miles, up 4.3 percent from the comparable week last year. U.S. carload rail traffic was up 3.2 percent, up 2.9 percent in the East and up 3.4 percent in the West. Notable traffic increases include metals and metal products up 54.3 percent, waste and scrap materials up 31.8 percent, and grain up 21.9 percent; notable traffic decreases included pulp and paper products down 9.4 percent and coal down 5.1 percent. Also for the week, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 15.1 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 24.5 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 10.9 percent, Mexican intermodal rail traffic was up 10.4 percent, and Mexican intermodal rail traffic was up 63.3 percent.

For the period January 1 through March 13, 2010, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 295.8 billion ton-miles, up 0.8 percent from the comparable period last year. Also for this period, U.S. carload rail traffic was down 0.2 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 8.1 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 14.6 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 6.8 percent, Mexican carload rail traffic was up 3.2 percent, and Mexican intermodal rail traffic was up 8.6 percent. (ffd: AAR)

MORE STATS – SAFETY:

(MON) The U.S. Federal Railroad Administration released preliminary safety statistics for the Full Year 2009. For all railroads, reportable train accidents totaled 1,841 compared with 2,461 the previous year, a decline of 25.1 percent. Of these, 34.98 percent were due to track defects; 34.06 percent were due to human factors; 13.96 percent were due to equipment defects; 2.77 percent were due to signal defects; and 14.23 percent were due to miscellaneous causes.

Also, on-duty fatalities totaled 16 compared with 25 the previous year, a decline of 36 percent, and on-duty injurious conditions (non-fatal) totaled 4,259 compared with 4,934 the previous year, a decline of 13.7 percent. Highway-rail grade crossing fatalities totaled 248 compared with 289 the previous year, a decline of 14.2 percent, and trespasser fatalities totaled 434 compared with 458 the previous year, a decline of 5.2 percent. (ffd: FRA)

EXPANSIONS, CONTRACTIONS, AND ALIKE:

(MON) Rail product and service provider Wabtec announced that it had acquired Xorail LLC for \$40 million. Xorail, which designs and builds railroad signals, is based in Jacksonville, Florida and has at present approximately 275 employees. (ffd: Pittsburgh Post Gazette, wire services)

(TUE) Norfolk Southern filed to discontinue service over, but not yet abandon, approximately six miles of line in Hamilton County, OH, which includes the stations of Hyde Park, OH and Mariemont, OH. (ffd: STB)

(FRI) Denver, CO's Regional Transportation District filed to acquire, for future commuter rail and/or transit, approximately 10 miles of BNSF's Golden Subdivision between Utah Jct., CO and Golden, CO. (ffd: STB)

APPOINTMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND MILESTONES:

(TUE) Attendant with his recent appointment as head of the Alaska state university system, Pat Gamble resigned as president of the Alaska Railroad. A successor was not immediately named. (ffd: Fairbanks Daily News)

(WED) Albert Suozzo passed away suddenly at Age 66. Mr. Suozzo was the general chairperson of United Transportation Union Local 769, which represented UTU members on Amtrak; former Penn Central, Conrail and Pittsburgh & Lake Erie lines; Connex; Herzog; and the Massachusetts Bay Commuter Railroad. (ffd: UTU)

(THU) The Federal Railroad Administration appointed Robert Lauby its Deputy Associate Administrator for regulatory and legislative operations. Mr. Lauby succeeds Grady Cothen, who is retiring. Dr. Magdy El-Sibaie was earlier announced as Mr. Cothen's successor, but he instead took a position with the U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline & Hazardous Material Safety Administration (PHMSA). (ffd: FRA, USDOT)

ADDENDA:

In the edition for the week ending March 5, I reported that Union Pacific was "the longest-standing corporate name in U.S. history." However, Reader John Brandon reminds that the Long Island Rail Road, earlier private but now publicly operated, claims to be the oldest railroad in the U.S. still operating under its original name and charter, which was established April 24, 1834.

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BE SAFE AND PROSPER,

Dave Mears

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