

WEEKLY RAIL REVIEW

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SAT, MARCH 4, 2006

BY DAVE MEARS

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

(MON) The governors of three Northeastern states criticized the Bush Administration for attempting to up the amount paid by their states' commuter rail agencies to use Amtrak tracks and stations. In a letter to Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta, the governors of Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania stated that he had not been "open and transparent" in explaining the need for more money. "The states feel their pocket is being picked," said an aide to Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell. The Administration's Fiscal Year 2006 budget proposes an additional \$59 million from commuter rail agencies to operate on Amtrak. (ffd: New York Times, wire services)

(MON) Union Pacific was named "most admired railroad" in Fortune Magazine's annual list of "America's Most Admired Companies," the only North American railroad to be so named. The company was the industry leader in all eight of the magazine's categories for evaluation. The rankings were determined by a survey of industry analysts, boards of directors, and corporate executives. Later in the week, UP observed the 70th anniversary of the ski lift, which was developed by UP mechanical engineers in 1936. This first ski lift was built for use at the railroad's ski resort in Sun Valley, ID, which UP operated until selling the resort in 1964. (ffd: UP Corp.)

(MON) The Southern California Regional Rail Authority announced that it would acquire 87 new cars for its Metrolink commuter rail services, 33 of which will be cab cars and 54 of which will be trailer cars. Noting questions raised about cab-car-in-the-lead train operation since Metrolink's crossing crash last year that killed 11 persons, a spokesman said that these cab cars "will be the first North American commuter rail cars to incorporate crash energy management technology designed to improve passenger and crew safety standards in collisions." Later in the week, Southern California's Metropolitan Transportation Authority said that it was considering installing turnstiles as an alternative to the buy-and-validate-ticket honor system presently in use in the Los Angeles subway system. A recent study determined that approximately 6,000 subway riders were riding the subway each day without paying. (ffd: Los Angeles Times)

(MON) VIA Rail Canada began wireless internet service in several stations and in the Panorama lounge cars on selected trains of its Quebec City-Windsor corridor. A VIA spokesman said that this was the first "wi-fi" service to be regularly operated on North American passenger trains and said that VIA was hopeful of extending this service to all trains operating in this corridor by the end of the year. (ffd: VIA Rail)

(MON) Maryland commuter rail operator MARC announced that it would leave open four train stations earlier slated for closure due to low patronage. The four stations are Boyd and Dickerson on the Brunswick Line and Jessup and St. Denis on the Camden Line. MARC's action supersedes a bill pending in the Maryland state legislature that would mandate that the stations remain open. (ffd: MARC)

(MON) The New York City Transit Authority said that it believed that an increase in free newspapers handed out in or near its subway stations was partially to blame for the increase in subway track fires. A NYCTA spokesman said that last year 366 trains were delayed due to such fires. The officials added that papers drifting or dropped onto subway tracks may be ignited by sparks from passing trains. (ffd: Newsday)

(TUE) The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission sued BNSF over a recent employee buyout offer. The EEOC alleges that 33 BNSF clerical employees who were eligible to retire did not receive the buyout offer because the deal would have given them 30 years with the company and full retirement benefits. Also named in the suit was the Transportation Communications International Union, which the EEOC said negotiated the buyout with BNSF. (ffd: Kansas City Star)

(TUE) Heavy snows in higher elevations and heavy rains in lower elevations temporarily closed both Union Pacific routes across the Sierras into Northern California. UP reported that a washout closed its Donner Pass route and that mudslides blocked its Feather River Canyon route. Freights were parked and Amtrak trains were turned short of their destinations while track repairs were made. Both routes were reopened over the next two days. (ffd: Trains)

(TUE) The Surface Transportation Board announced that it was instituting a rulemaking proceeding to address major issues of the existing "stand-alone" test in rail rate cases. The proposed rulemaking will also address proper calculations of the floor for any rail rate relief. Further information is available at the STB website, stb.dot.gov. Comments are due by May 1, 2006. (ffd: STB)

(TUE) Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell proposed his new state budget for Fiscal Year 2006-2007. The budget includes \$10.5 million in state funding for freight rail projects, an increase of \$2 million compared with the current budget. The new budget will next be considered by initial committees of the Pennsylvania state legislature. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(TUE) The Chicago Transit Authority announced that it was sponsoring a contest for children to rename the recently renovated Cermack Branch of its "Blue" subway-elevated line. The new name must be a color not already in use by the CTA and the winner will be based on a submitted essay. Contest entries are due by March 17. The winner will receive a \$1,000 savings bond and be allowed to be the first passenger on the line following its renaming. (ffd: Chicago Tribune)

(WED) Illinois colleges and universities announced that they were joining forces to lobby for additional state funding for Amtrak passenger trains operating in the state. The worth of these trains was noted by Southern Illinois University President Glenn Poshard, who said that college students made up nearly a third of riders boarding Amtrak trains in the state. The proposed state budget funds \$12.1 million for Amtrak, but Mr. Poshard noted that an additional \$18 million would allow for an additional train between Chicago and Quincy and Chicago and Carbondale, and two additional trains between Chicago and St. Louis, MO. (ffd: Springfield News-Gazette)

(THU) The Federal Railroad Administration said that it would propose a new rule to address human error. A FRA spokesman said that the new rule, which will be proposed later this year, would focus on reducing such errors as improperly lined track switches. The spokesman added that human error was the primary cause of 38 percent of train

accidents last year (see below.) The spokesman also noted that the FRA is at work on a pilot project to study "close calls" and was also working on railroad worker fatigue problems. (ffd: FRA, Railway Age)

(THU) New Jersey Transit President George Warrington suggested that regular fare increases tied to inflation would help stabilize funding for NJT's rail and bus operations. Mr. Warrington said that predictable fare increases based on inflation and the consumer price index would eliminate the need for the large, one-shot increases that he said have characterized NJT in recent years. NJT last raised fares by an average of 9.9 percent last July, but prior to that, had raised fares only once since the early 1990s. (ffd: Newark Star-Ledger)

(FRI) A spokesman for the Artrain said that it would have its first show of 2006 March 11-15 in Cheyenne, WY. The vintage rail cars full of art will then move to other locations in Wyoming, Michigan, Colorado, New Mexico, Washington and Oregon. Featured this year is an exhibition of Native American art entitled, "Native Views: Influences of Modern Culture." The full schedule of 2006 exhibitions is available at artrainusa.org. (ffd: BNSF Today)

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 February 25, 2006, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 32.2 billion ton-miles, down 3.3 percent from the comparable week last year. Also for the week, U.S. carload rail traffic was down 4.3 percent, down 3.2 percent in the East and down 5.3 percent in the West, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was down 4.0 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 5.7 percent, and Canadian intermodal rail traffic was down 5.6 percent.

For the month of February, 2006, U.S. carload rail traffic was down 2.0 percent from February, 2005. Notable traffic increases included crushed stone, sand and gravel up 5.7 percent and metals and metal products up 2.7 percent; notable traffic decreases included nonmetallic minerals down 30.9 percent, coke down 16.8 percent, and motor vehicles and equipment down 7.4 percent. Also for February, 2006, U.S. intermodal traffic was up 2.2 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 5.3 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 2.3 percent, Mexico's Kansas City Southern de Mexico's carload rail traffic was down 10.3 percent, and KCSM's intermodal rail traffic was down 6.5 percent.

For the period January 1 through February 28, 2006, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 261.5 billion ton-miles, up 2.3 percent from the same period in 2005. Also for this period in 2006, U.S. carload rail traffic was up 1.0 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 4.2 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 1.6 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 4.1 percent, KCSM's carload rail traffic was down 6.4 percent, and KCSM's intermodal rail traffic was down 9.7 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 February 24, 2006, average total cars on line was as follows: BNSF, 221,533 cars versus 221,766 last week; Canadian Pacific, 80,550 cars versus 79,487 last week; CSX, 225,099 cars versus 225,358 last week; Kansas City Southern, 27,725 cars versus 27,763 last week; Norfolk Southern, 205,300 cars versus 205,356 last week; and Union Pacific, 328,610 cars versus 329,965 last week. (Comparative totals from last year are not yet available.)

Also for the week ending February 24, 2006 and ranked with the comparable week last year, average train speed was as follows: BNSF, 21.5 mph versus 24.6 mph; Canadian Pacific, 23.6 mph versus 22.2 mph; CSX, 19.6 mph versus 19.6 mph; Kansas City Southern, 21.9 mph versus 24.0 mph; Norfolk Southern, 21.1 mph versus 21.3 mph; and Union Pacific, 20.6 mph versus 21.5 mph.

Finally for the week ending February 24, 2006 and ranked with the comparable week last year, average terminal dwell time was follows: BNSF, 26.7 hrs versus 23.3 hrs; Canadian Pacific, 21.5 hrs versus 30.8 hrs; CSX, 26.6 hrs versus 29.4 hrs; Kansas City Southern, 28.1 hrs versus 23.3 hrs; Norfolk Southern, 24.6 hrs versus 25.9 hrs; and Union Pacific, 29.9 hrs versus 27.4 hrs. (ffd: AAR)

STILL MORE STATS:

(WED) The Federal Railroad Administration reported U.S. rail safety statistics for the Full Year 2005. In 2005, train accidents per million miles were 3.90, down from 4.34 the previous year. Human factors caused 37.99 percent of these accidents, down from 40.14 percent the previous year. The employee on-duty casualty rate per 200,000 man-hours was 2.27, down from 2.60 the previous year. There were 25 on-duty employee fatalities, the same number as the previous year. Highway-rail crossing accidents per million miles were 3.81, down from 3.98 the previous year. Highway-rail crossing fatalities were 355, down from 368 the previous year. Trespasser accidents per million miles were 1.10, down from 1.15 the previous year. And trespasser fatalities were 485, up from 482 the previous year. (ffd: FRA)

EXPANSIONS, CONTRACTIONS AND ALIKE:

(MON) Canadian Pacific Railway announced that it had agreed to donate its 139-mile Esquimalt and Nanaimo line on Vancouver Island in British Columbia to the Island's Corridor Foundation. The agreement, more than 3 years in negotiation, is valued at C\$236 million. "This started out as a dream of Vancouver Island residents," said Chief Judith Sayers of the Island's Hupacasath First Nation. (ffd: Canadian Press)

(MON) The United Transportation Union announced that it had rejoined the AFL-CIO. UTU International President Paul Thompson, who was at the same time elected to the AFL-CIO's Executive Council, said that "the recent peace negotiated with the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen made it possible for the UTU to rejoin the AFL-CIO." (ffd: UTU)

(WED) The Port of San Antonio, TX announced that it had contracted with Genesee & Wyoming's Rail Link to switch its port facility. Rail Link will interchange port traffic to and from BNSF and Union Pacific. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(WED) National Coal Corp., a Central Appalachian coal producer, announced that it had acquired, from Norfolk Southern, the 42-mile line between Oneida, TN and Devonia, TN. The line accesses National Coal's largest reserve, the New River Tract. (ffd: AAR)

(THU) Union Pacific granted BNSF overhead trackage rights over approximately 1 mile of line in Wichita, KS. The purpose of the trackage rights is to facilitate movement of BNSF cars between BNSF's yard in Wichita, KS and the Frisco Lead, BNSF's rail line severed by removal of the crossing diamonds at Washington Street in Wichita. (ffd: STB)

(THU) The Wyoming and Colorado Railroad filed to abandon approximately 24 miles of line between Walcott, WY and Saratoga, WY. (ffd: STB)

(FRI) Union Pacific filed to abandon its freight operating rights over 2 miles of line in Salt Lake City, UT. The line segment is owned by the City of Salt Lake, which owns the line to protect possible future commuter rail service. (ffd: STB)

APPOINTMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND ALIKE:

(MON) BNSF appointed Steve Bobb Group VP-Coal Business Unit, succeeding Tom Kraemer, who plans to retire May 14. BNSF also announced two other appointments: Ron Jackson as GM-Texas Division and Doug Jones as GM-Northwest Division. (ffd: BNSF Corp.)

(THU) The American Public Transportation Association appointed Howard Silver as its chairman. Mr. Silver is with the Golden Empire Transit District based in Bakersfield, CA. (ffd: Railway Age)

* * *

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