

WEEKLY RAIL REVIEW

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SAT, AUGUST 19, 2006

BY DAVE MEARS

(NOTE: "ffd" indicates a reference "for further details.")

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

(MON) The Environmental Protection Agency announced that it had earlier underestimated pollution caused by diesel locomotives. An EPA spokesman said that agency scientists had earlier used faulty estimates of the amount of fuel consumed by locomotives, which in turn caused them to "grossly understate" the amount of pollution they annually generate. The spokesman added that their new calculations indicated that the annual emissions from locomotives of nitrogen oxide, a key ingredient in smog, and fine particulate matter, or soot, would be by 2030 nearly twice what they had originally assumed. Another EPA spokesman said that the agency was intent on issuing draft regulations by the end of the year that would eventually reduce locomotive nitrogen oxide and particulate matter emissions "on the order of 80 to 90 percent." (ffd: Washington Post)

(MON) A loose tarp knocked down power lines, which then fell on Long Island Rail Road tracks, blocking service on LIRR's Babylon Line during the evening's rush hour. The tarp had been covering a nearby water tower that was being repaired when it blew off the tower. A LIRR spokesman said that service was suspended on the line into the evening and that normal service on the line resumed the following day. (ffd: wire services)

(TUE) Senior managers of the Massachusetts Bay Commuter Railroad personally took complaints from customers during the evening rush hour at Boston's North Station and South Station. The action was in response to deteriorating commuter train services operated by MBRCR, including a high number of rail car mechanical failures. A MBRCR spokesman noted that customer complaints had increased from 533 in May to 654 in June to about 1,000 in July, but said the agency had recently met its goal of having no more than one car per train without working air conditioning. (ffd: Boston Globe)

(WED) The Federal Railroad Administration announced a timetable for considering the \$2.3 billion RRIF loan proposed by the Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern to fund construction of its 280-mile expansion into the Powder River Basin coal fields. A FRA spokesman said that it will adopt the project's final environmental impact statements earlier issued by the Surface Transportation Board and was making its own draft findings "to address issues not fully covered in the STB review." After a record of decision is signed off on by the FRA, the agency will have 90 days to approve or deny the application, with a decision expected no later than early January. (ffd: Railway Age)

(WED) Union Pacific announced that it would no longer allow photography of trains from Chicago commuter rail stations on UP lines. A UP spokesman said, "This stuff about UP not liking railfans is not true. But we have to be as safe and secure as we can." The policy contrasts somewhat with that of Chicago commuter rail operator Metra, whose spokesman said that "as long as photographers are in areas accessible to the public, are acting in a safe manner, and

are willing to provide identification if asked by authorities, Metra has no problem with them taking photos." Legal experts suggested that UP might be on "shaky legal ground" if it attempts to enforce the ban. (ffd: Trains)

(WED) A survey of over 1,000 shippers indicated that North American rail service had improved in the second quarter and year over year. 28 percent of survey respondents said that they expected rail service to deteriorate during the upcoming peak season, down from 53 percent expecting deterioration a year ago. The survey, conducted by the Bears Stearns agency, also named CSX, Canadian National, and Canadian Pacific as having had the most improved service. (ffd: Journal of Commerce)

(THU) The Federal Railroad Administration announced that it would launch an effort to promote the installation and use of electronically controlled pneumatic (ECP) brakes on rail cars. A FRA spokesman noted that ECP brakes "are applied uniformly and virtually instantaneously on every rail car throughout a train, rather than sequentially from one rail car to the next, as is done with current air brake technology...The system provides improved train control when braking and can reduce stopping distances up to 60 percent." The spokesman added that the FRA intends to propose revising federal rail safety regulations to facilitate the installation of ECP brake systems. (ffd: FRA, Railway Age)

(THU) A news segment entitled "Toxic Trains," originally to be presented on ABC News's "Primetime" program, was rescheduled. An ABC News spokesman said that the segment, which reports on alleged risks taken by railroads in transporting hazardous material, was bumped from telecast for "a breaking news story," but would be rescheduled. "Primetime" normally airs Thursdays at 10PM ET on most ABC stations. (ffd: ABC News, wire services)

(THU) A study committee of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority recommended that police officers be allowed to ride MTA bus and light rail services for free. A MTA spokesman said that, under the recommendation, police officers would be allowed to ride even when off-duty, provided that they wore their full uniform with a gun at their waist. The spokesman added that "the benefits far outweigh any potential costs...by providing a heightened sense of security." A spokesman for the Los Angeles Police Department appreciated the recommendation, but noted that most officers travel to and from work in more comfortable civilian clothes and change into their uniforms at the start of their shifts. (ffd: Los Angeles Times)

(FRI) The State of Connecticut formally approved the purchase of up to 300 rail cars for use on Metro North's New Haven Line and Connecticut Department of Transportation's Shore Line East. The cost of the cars, which will be of Class M-8, will be shared between the states of Connecticut and New York, with the former providing 65 percent of the cost and the latter providing 35 percent. (ffd: Ridgefield Press)

(FRI) The National Association of Railroad Passengers reported that the New York State Senate's Task Force On High Speed Rail was looking to devise a plan to consolidate control of the rail corridor between Schenectady, NY and Poughkeepsie, NY. NARP reported that the task force is in the process of seeking bids for a study on the most practical way for the state to acquire the facilities and right-of-way between the two cities from CSX. South of Poughkeepsie, the corridor is owned by Metro North and, south of the Bronx, it is owned by Amtrak. In response to the report, a CSX spokesman told NARP that it is not interested in selling its facilities or right-of-way in the corridor. (ffd: NARP)

STATS – TRAFFIC:

(THU) For the week ending August 12, 2006, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 33.9 billion ton-miles, up 1.5 percent from the comparable week last year. U.S. carload rail traffic was down 0.2 percent, down 3.6 percent in the East, but up 2.7 percent in the West. Notable traffic increases included metals and metal products up 14.1 percent, petroleum products up 6.3 percent, and coal up 5.4 percent; notable traffic decreases included primary forest products down 19.6 percent, coke down 18.9 percent, and motor vehicles and equipment down 13.0 percent. Also for the week, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 6.6 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 2.7 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 1.8 percent, Mexico's Kansas City Southern de Mexico's carload rail traffic was up 3.2 percent, and KCSM's intermodal rail traffic was up 4.2 percent.

For the period January 1 through August 12, 2006, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 1.06 trillion ton-miles, up 2.7 percent from the comparable period last year. Also for this period, U.S. carload rail traffic was up 1.5 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 6.4 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 1.4 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 5.9 percent, KCSM's carload rail traffic was down 5.2 percent, and KCSM's intermodal rail traffic was down 6.6 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 August 11, 2006 and versus the previous week, average total cars on line was as follows: BNSF, 224,877 cars versus 224,106 cars; Canadian Pacific, 80,167 cars versus 80,550 cars; CSX, 225,137 cars versus 225,974 cars; Kansas City Southern, 26,917 cars versus 26,490 cars; Norfolk Southern, 202,795 cars versus 202,463 cars; and Union Pacific 319,197 cars versus 320,455 cars.

Also for the week ending August 11, 2006 and versus the comparable week last year, average train speed was as follows: BNSF, 22.1 mph versus 23.1 mph; Canadian Pacific Railway, 24.7 mph versus 22.3 mph; CSX, 19.6 mph versus 19.4 mph; Kansas City Southern, 24.3 mph versus 23.1 mph; Norfolk Southern, 22.2 mph versus 22.4 mph; and Union Pacific, 21.0 mph versus 21.4 mph.

Finally for the week ending August 11, 2006 and versus the comparable week last year, average terminal dwell time was as follows: BNSF, 23.8 hrs versus 24.8 hrs; Canadian Pacific Railway, 19.6 hrs versus 21.7 hrs; CSX, 25.3 hrs versus 28.3 hrs; Kansas City Southern, 21.8 hrs versus 23.1 hrs; Norfolk Southern, 21.0 hrs versus 21.9 hrs this week last year; and Union Pacific, 26.2 hrs versus 28.1 hrs. (ffd: AAR)

EXPANSIONS, CONTRACTIONS AND ALIKE:

(MON) Norfolk Southern announced that it would not now put up for sale its line in South Bend, IN accessing the University of Notre Dame. A NS spokesman said that "it's going to remain part of the Norfolk Southern portfolio for the foreseeable future," but declined to provide further details on the reasoning behind the decision or on the future of the line. The Chicago, Lake Shore & South Bend Railway earlier announced their intention to try to acquire the line and reactivate it for coal delivery to the university. (ffd: South Bend Tribune)

(TUE) The Surface Transportation Board denied CSX's earlier request to abandon approximately 13 miles of line between Belton, SC and Pelzer, SC. The board ruled that the line was profitable when overhead as well as local traffic was taken into account, and that CSX's estimate of the cost of essential repairs to the line was inflated. (ffd: STB, Railway Age)

(TUE) New Jersey Transit announced that it would expand its Morrisville, PA overnight train storage yard and light maintenance facility. The yard, which occupies part of a former Pennsylvania Railroad class yard, is used by NJT NEC trains operating to and from Trenton, NJ. A NJT spokesman said that the expansion project will add storage for another 130 commuter cars, as well as service and wheel truing facilities, and will allow NJT to consolidate storage and running repair functions now completed at two other facilities. (ffd: NJT, Progressive Railroading)

(TUE) Norfolk Southern filed to abandon approximately 13 miles of line between Blue Creek, WV and Sanderson, WV. (ffd: STB)

(WED) BNSF activated the second of three new sections of double track on its Transcon Line between Chicago, IL and Southern California. The new section activated this date, approximately 9 miles of line between Mulvane, KS and Cicero, KS, adds to a 9 mile section between Roland, KS and Millar, KS activated in the spring. A third section, approximately 15 miles between Attica, KS and Hazelton, KS, will be activated in the fall. A BNSF spokesman said that, by year's end, only 51 miles of the line will remain single track. (ffd: BNSF Corp.)

(WED) Hondo Railway filed to operate approximately 3 miles of line serving South Texas Liquid Terminal in Hondo, TX. (ffd: STB)

(THU) Rail car manufacturer FreightCar America announced that it would sell its Johnstown, PA "shell plant" to United Industrial Electro-Mechanical Services. A spokesman for United said that it would use the plant to increase its welding and fabrication facilities. FreightCar America said that it would continue to operate its other production facility in Johnstown, as well as plants in Danville, IL and Roanoke, VA. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

APPOINTMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND MILESTONES:

(FRI) BNSF announced that it was adjusting the boundaries of its Powder River and Montana divisions, and would

create a new Colorado Division. Concurrent with these changes, BNSF appointed Janssen Thompson GM of the new Colorado Division, which will be headquartered in Denver. BNSF also appointed Sam Sexhus GM of the Powder River Division, succeeding Mr. Thompson, and Frank Anderson General Director-Unit Trains, succeeding Mr. Sexhus. (ffd: BNSF Corp.)

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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.

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Dave Mears

Cherry Hill, New Jersey, USA