

WEEKLY RAIL REVIEW

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SAT, NOVEMBER 13, 2004

BY DAVE MEARS

(NOTE: The expression "ffd" at the end of a news item represents "for further details" and suggests a reference source for further related information.)

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

(SUN) The Sunday New York Times continued its recent series of front page articles on rail safety. This date's article reviewed the relationship between the largest U.S. railroads and the Federal Railroad Administration, including reporting that FRA Acting Chief Administrator Betty Monro had rebuked subordinates for being "overly aggressive" toward the Union Pacific, despite FRA inspectors having cited UP for numerous violations. The article scheduled for publication the following Sunday, November 14, reviews the tactics of the industry's Operation Lifesaver campaign, including reporting that judges trying crossing accident cases had been approached to ride OL trains operated by the larger railroads. The articles have been principally authored by Pulitzer Prize winner Walt Bogdanich. (ffd: New York Times)

(SUN) A high-speed passenger train operated by First Great Western struck a vehicle at a crossing near the English village of Ufton Nervet. The train then derailed, killing 6 persons on board and injuring scores of others. The train, which was enroute from London to Plymouth, was traveling approximately 85mph at the time of impact. (ffd: NARP, wire services).

(MON) A North Carolina court awarded a retired CSX employee \$7.5 million under the Federal Employees Liability Act, believed to be one of the highest FELA awards to date. The employee, Raymond Williams, Age 60, had been routinely exposed to asbestos during his 38 year career with CSX and its predecessor railroads. Mr. Williams suffers from malignant pleural mesothelioma, whose only known cause is asbestos exposure. The court said that CSX predecessor railroads were aware of the dangers of asbestos dust beginning in the 1930s and continued to use products containing asbestos into the 1980s. (ffd: The Press Trust, UTU)

(MON) The Chicago Transit Authority approved 2 budgets for FY2005, one assuming that it gains additional funding and one assuming it does not. CTA's \$1.02 billion budget continues current service levels with some service improvements and includes a reduction of 200 positions. But CTA's \$912 million budget eliminates up to one-fifth of bus and subway service and includes a reduction of 1,200 positions. CTA is currently seeking more funding from the State of Illinois through a revised funding structure for mass transit. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(MON) Boston's Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority announced plans to implement a new automated fare collection system. The new system will feature a fare card to be known as the "Charlie Card," whose name is taken from the folk song about a fabled MBTA rider who kept on riding because he did not have the necessary exit fare. The new system, which will eventually replace the present token, will first be offered in 2006 and be fully phased-in over the following 2 years. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(MON) The Association of American Railroads filed, on behalf of member railroads, to standardize air brake minimum piston travel at 6 inches, instead of the current 7 inches for 8-1/2 inch and 10 inch diameter brake cylinders. The AAR's filing noted that this will provide consistency with Canada, which allows the 6 inch minimum. (ffd: USDOT)

(TUE) The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that U.S. railroads handling steamship cargo inland may be covered by related maritime contracts limiting liability for damages. The case was originally filed by Kirby Engineering of Australia, who had sued Norfolk Southern for \$1.5 million over machinery shipped from overseas and damaged in a 1997 NS derailment. The court ruled that Kirby's contracts with the steamship companies limited damage payments to \$500 per container extended to NS's delivery of those containers. All 9 justices concurred with the decision. (ffd: AAR)

(TUE) The Washington, DC. city council rejected legislation that would have prohibited especially hazardous materials from being transported by rail through the city. Just before the vote, a spokesman for Mayor Anthony Williams said he would not sign the bill if it passed, although Mayor Williams had said 2 weeks ago that he would indeed sign such legislation. The spokesman cited concern that the measure would have not withstood a court challenge. CSX, whose main line skirts government, commercial and residential complexes in Southwest and Southeast Washington, was last week reported to have already been diverting especially hazardous shipments to routings bypassing the Washington area since earlier this year. (ffd: Washington Post)

(WED) In a freak accident, a bystander was killed when a freight car derailed into the warehouse in which he was working. The accident involved a Union Pacific freight train switching near the warehouse in San Antonio, TX. "It appears that the train was backing up to hook onto cars, but pushed them too far back and then went over the rail stop and into the [warehouse] wall," said San Antonio Police spokesman Sgt. Gabe Trevino. (ffd: wire services)

(WED) The National Transportation Safety Board released its annual list of most wanted safety improvements. For railroads, the list included positive train control systems, which the NTSB noted was being implemented "too slowly," and better event recorder survivability. The NTSB removed cab voice recorders, which had previously been on the list, noting that the Federal Railroad Administration had refused to endorse this enhancement. (ffd: NTSB, wire services)

(WED) Kansas City Southern opened its new fueling facility and tank car loading rack in Heavener, OK. The facility, which was financed and constructed in partnership with Magellan Midstream Partners LP, includes a 28-mile pipeline constructed from Spiro, OK. to Heavener. A KCS spokesman said that Heavener was chosen for the facility because of its ability to support KCS's top 3 fuel consumption sites. The spokesman added that over 3.2 million gallons of fuel will move through the facility each month, with half of that being transloaded into tank cars for systemwide distribution. (ffd: KCS Corp.)

(WED) CSX announced that it would operate its annual Santa Special from Shelby, KY. to Kingsport, TN. on November 20. A CSX spokesman said that this would be the 62nd year of operation of this special train, which will distribute more than 15 tons of gifts to children at 15 designated stops along its 110-mile route; the train was originated by the Clinchfield Railroad, a CSX predecessor. Also on Wednesday, Kansas City Southern announced that it would operate its annual Holiday Express, which will stop at 29 communities in 8 states served by KCS. (ffd: CSX Corp., KCS Corp.)

(THU) The California High-Speed Rail Authority issued recommendations for 4 high-speed rail corridors in that state. The recommended corridors are Sacramento to Bakersfield, San Francisco to San Jose, Oakland to San Jose and Los Angeles to San Diego. Industry analysts noted that the corridors are still in their early planning stages and do not as yet have a funding source. (ffd: CHSRA, wire services)

(THU) The Federal Railroad Administration released preliminary safety statistics for the first 8 months of 2004. The FRA reported 315 trespasser fatalities, down approximately 1 percent from the 318 in the same period last year, and 255 crossing accident fatalities, up 19.7 percent from the 213 in the same period last year. The FRA also noted 2,057 reportable-level train accidents in the first 8 months of 2004, an increase of 2.7 percent from the same period last year. (ffd: FRA, Railway Age)

(FRI) A passenger train derailed into a steep ravine near the village of Padre Burgos in the Philippines. The accident killed at least 12 persons and injured at least 158 others. Preliminary reports indicate that the train may have been operating significantly above the speed limit for the line. (ffd: UTU, wire services)

(SAT) The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority broke ground for its Anacostia Light Rail Demonstration Project. A WMATA spokesman said that a 2.7 mile light rail line will be constructed on CSX right-of-way between the former Bolling Air Force Base and Pennsylvania Avenue, and include 6 stations. The spokesman added that, once service begins, ridership will be evaluated for 3 years, after which WMATA will decide whether or not to continue its operation. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(SAT) The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum in Baltimore, MD. reopened to visitors. The museum, which contains one of the U.S.'s most esteemed collections of rail equipment and related artifacts, had been closed since a record snowfall in February 2003 collapsed the museum roundhouse's roof. A museum spokesman said that the roundhouse has been restored much as it was when it was opened in 1884, but that some of its collection is still awaiting repair and may be seen behind glass partitions. The spokesman added that a grand reopening celebration will be held Memorial Day Weekend 2005. (ffd: Baltimore Sun)

STATS:

(THU) For the week ending November 6, U.S. carload rail traffic was up 2.4 percent from the comparable week last year, up 0.8 percent in the East and up 3.7 percent in the West. Notable traffic increases included metallic ores up 15.2 percent, metals up 14.5 percent, nonmetallic minerals up 12.5 percent and coal up 3.7 percent; notable traffic decreases included motor vehicles and equipment down 13.8 percent, primary forest products down 11.5 percent and grain down 3.7 percent. Also for the week ending November 6, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 11.2 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 2.5 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was down 3.7 percent, Mexico's Transportacion Ferroviaria Mexicana's carload rail traffic was up 18.4 percent and TFM's intermodal rail traffic was up 18.6 percent.

For the period January 1 through November 6 and ranked with the comparable period last year, U.S. carload rail traffic was up 2.9 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 9.7 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 7.4 percent,

Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 0.2 percent, TFM's carload rail traffic was up 3.5 percent and TFM's intermodal rail traffic was up 7.3 percent. (ffd: AAR)

ACQUISITIONS, ABANDONMENTS AND ALIKE:

(MON) Canadian National, Canadian Pacific Railway and Norfolk Southern jointly announced a new haulage agreement. Under the agreement, CPR trains will haul CN traffic for NS over CPR's line between Rouses Point, NY. and Saratoga Springs, NY. NS trains will then haul that traffic over CPR's line between Saratoga Springs and Harrisburg, PA. Currently, CN traffic for NS is interchanged at Buffalo, NY. A railroad spokesman said that the new agreement will cut 330 miles and up to 2 days' transit time from this traffic. (ffd: Norfolk Virginian-Pilot)

(MON) CSX filed to downgrade a portion of the signal system on its LH&STL Subdivision in Kentucky. The filing specifically requests changes to the controlled sidings at Brandenburg, Rock Haven and Bishoff attendant to the needs of the line's current operation. (ffd: USDOT)

(WED) The Nebraska, Kansas & Colorado Railroad announced that it had acquired 2 rail lines from Burlington Northern Santa Fe, together totaling approximately 89 miles of line. The one line is between Oxford, NE. and Franklin, NE. and the other is between Culbertson, NE and Imperial, NE. (ffd: BNSF Corp.)

(WED) Canadian National/Soo Line filed to abandon approximately 5 miles of its West Allis Line between Milwaukee, WI. and Wauwatosa, WI. (ffd: STB)

(WED) Burlington Northern Santa Fe agreed to grant Union Pacific overhead trackage rights on its line between Tower 55 near Fort Worth, TX. and BNSF's new connection at MP 4.8 near Fort Worth, TX., totaling approximate 5 miles. The purpose of the trackage rights is to facilitate directional running by BNSF and UP in the Fort Worth area. (ffd: STB)

(FRI) Progressive Rail filed to lease, from Canadian National/Wisconsin Central, and operate the line between Almena, WI. and Cameron, WI. and, also, the line between Cameron, WI. and Rice Lake, WI., altogether totaling approximately 24 miles if line. (ffd: STB)

PERSONNEL CHANGES AND ALIKE:

(MON) Burlington Northern Santa Fe announced the following operating appointments: Steve Goodall to Regional VP-North Operations; Mark Kotter to Regional VP-Central Operations; and Chris Roberts to Regional VP-South Operations. BNSF also announced the following marketing and sales appointments: John Hickerson to VP-Domestic Intermodal and Fred Malesa to VP-International Intermodal. (ffd: BNSF Corp.)

(TUE) Kansas City Southern announced the retirement of its EVP and COO Gerald Davies effective December 31, 2004. Mr. Davies joined KCS in 1999 and had previously been a VP at CSX, at Burlington Northern Santa Fe and at Canadian National. A KCS spokesman said that a search is now underway to find a successor for Mr. Davies. (ffd: KCS Corp.)

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Weekly Rail Review is edited from public news sources and published weekly to those working in, or interested in, the entities of 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 INDUSTRIOUS WEEK,
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