

WEEKLY RAIL REVIEW

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SAT, DECEMBER 11, 2004

BY DAVE MEARS

(Editor's 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 Maryland Transit Administration resumed service to Linthicum, BWI Business District, BWI Airport, Ferndale and Cromwell stations on the south-end of its light-rail line. Service to those stations had been suspended since February to double-track the line. An MTA spokesman said that double-tracking will now begin on the line's north-end, with service between North Avenue in Baltimore and Timonium reopening by late Summer, 2005 and service between Timonium and Hunt Valley reopening by the end of 2005. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(MON) The U.S. Federal Railroad Administration reported initial rail safety statistics for the first 9 months of 2004. The FRA reported 350 trespasser fatalities, a decrease of 5.7 percent from the comparable period last year, but 285 highway-rail grade crossing fatalities, an increase of 18.8 percent from the comparable period last year. Also for the first 9 months of this year versus the first 9 months of last year, FRA reported 2,300 train accidents, up 1.8 percent, which included 1,658 derailments, up 3.9 percent, and 187 collisions, up 16.1 percent. (ffd: FRA, Railway Age)

(MON) Chicago, IL. commuter rail operator METRA announced the completion of the first phase of renovation of its Randolph St. Station. The station is the downtown terminus of METRA's former Illinois Central Lakefront Electric line and the Indiana Transportation District's South Shore line, and is used by 25,000 weekday commuters. "It will look a lot less like a basement with water damage, which was basically what it was," said METRA spokesman Judy Pardonnet. The spokesman added that the entire renovation project will be completed by Summer, 2005. (ffd: Chicago Tribune)

(MON) Canadian Pacific Railway announced that it had installed a Trackside Acoustic Detection System (TADS) on its main line approximately 47 miles east of Vancouver, BC. The system, which was developed by the Association of American Railroad's Transportation Technology Center, picks up early warning sounds from bearings before they begin to overheat. A CPR spokesman said that the installation is the first of its kind in Canada and only the ninth in the world. (ffd: CPR Corp., Railway Age)

(MON) METRA and Union Pacific announced they will test plant 300 barberry and rugosa bushes to deter trespassers along the UP North Line in Highland Park, IL. and Lake Forest, IL. A spokesman for the Illinois Commerce Commission, which is also participating in the test, said that the bushes were selected for their height, visual attractiveness and ability to survive winter weather, and because "the thorns on the plants are so sharp and dense that you can feel them through your pants." The test, which will be accompanied by trespasser warning signs and outreach programs, will be conducted over the next 12 to 24 months. (ffd: Railway Age)

(MON) Japan announced that it was working to develop a fuel cell-powered passenger train by 2010. A spokesman for Japan's Railway Technical Research Institute said the train would consist of 2 cars, one equipped with a set of 4 motors, a transformer and a battery, and the other equipped with fuel cells and a hydrogen cylinder. The spokesman added that a key challenge in development is to significantly reduce the size of fuel cells capable of the necessary electrical output. (ffd: Yomiuri Shimbun Newspaper)

(TUE) Fitch Ratings predicted continued growth of volume and revenue for U.S. freight railroads in 2005. A spokesman for the financial firm said that "shipments of raw materials and finished goods were expected to remain strong" and that coal volumes "were expected to be robust." However, the spokesman added that shipments of auto parts and finished vehicles would continue weak, as North American auto production would be flat or slightly down in 2005 versus 2004. (ffd: CBS Market Watch, Fitch Ratings)

(TUE) The U.S. Department of Transportation reported that surface freight transportation between the United States, Canada and Mexico had increased 81 percent in the 10 years since the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA.) A USDOT spokesman said that surface transportation, meaning truck, rail and pipeline, represented approximately 90 percent of all trade with Canada and Mexico. The spokesman added that U.S. exports to these countries had increased 57.3 percent and imports from these countries had increased 103.7 percent during the 10-year period. (ffd: USDOT)

(TUE) Galesburg, IL. dedicated its new Galesburg Railroad Museum. A spokesman said that the museum would open to the public next spring and was "now awaiting only the finishing touches and more museum pieces and memorabilia." The museum, which includes a 2,800 square foot building, has been under construction since May, 2000. (ffd: Galesburg Journal Star)

(WED) President Bush signed into law a \$388 billion legislative package covering FY2005 spending for every federal agency except the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security. Included in the package was \$1.2 billion for Amtrak, short of Amtrak's revised request of \$1.4 billion, but matching the previous fiscal year's appropriation. (ffd: wire services)

(WED) Philadelphia, PA. rail and transit operator SEPTA dismissed PKF-Mark III as the prime contractor for the reconstruction of the Cobbs Creek segment of its Market-Frankford subway/elevated transit line. The dismissal follows PKF-Mark III's own request, reported in last month's WRR, to be released from its contract commitment, after a series of severe disagreements between it and SEPTA over PKF-Mark III's work so far on that segment. The reconstruction project is approximately 2 years behind schedule. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(THU) U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta said that he would press on with the Bush Administration's controversial plan to reform Amtrak services and financing. The plan proposes notably decreased federal funding for Amtrak with increased state funding making up the difference. Said Mr. Mineta, "If a train goes through a state and that state is not willing to pony up the state's share, we would run the train through that state, not stopping and keeping the doors closed." Mr. Mineta conceded that he was "quite sure we'll find resistance" in Congress to the plan. (ffd: San Francisco Chronicle, wire services)

(FRI) 2 Union Pacific freight trains collided head-on at reduced speed near Niland, CA. A UP spokesman said that 1 crew member was airlifted to a hospital with a broken leg and that 4 other crew members were treated for minor injuries. The accident also derailed 5 locomotives and 7 cars of the 2 trains. (ffd: wire services)

(FRI) New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority said that it would attempt to raise more than \$1 billion through the lease of MTA properties, including operating properties, for commercial development. An MTA spokesman said that development receipts would help fund MTA's 5-year, \$16 billion improvement plans. The spokesman added that the plan includes selling air rights over the LIRR's West Side Yard, where New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg hopes to build a new stadium, as well as pitching suburban train stations as retail sites, with stores built in space not needed for ticket booths, rest rooms and waiting areas. (ffd: New York Newsday)

(FRI) The Railway Association of Canada announced that its 12th edition of its "Railway Trends" publication would now be available online. An RAC spokesman said that the publication is a rolling 10-year overview of financial and statistical results, reflecting all aspects of the Canadian rail industry. The publication may be downloaded by going to RAC's website, railcan.ca. (ffd: AAR)

STATS:

(THU) For the week ending December 4, U.S. carload rail traffic was up 0.6 percent from the comparable week last year, up 3.7 percent in the East, but down 1.9 percent in the West. This week this year versus this week last year, notable traffic increases included metallic ores up 20.1 percent, lumber and wood products up 16.4 percent and metals up 16.4 percent; notable traffic decreases included non-grain farm products down 23.5 percent, grain down 16.2 percent and coke down 10.8 percent. Also for the week ending December 4, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 14.9 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 1.3 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 4.8 percent, Mexico's Transportacion Ferroviaria Mexicana's carloads rail traffic was down 15.8 percent and TFM's intermodal rail traffic was down 9.5 percent, all when ranked with the comparable week last year.

For the period January 1 through December 4, U.S. carloads rail traffic was up 2.9 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 10.0 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 6.9 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 0.3 percent, TFM's carload rail traffic was up 3.2 percent and TFM's intermodal rail traffic was up 8.0 percent, all when ranked with the comparable period last year. (ffd: AAR)

ACQUISITIONS, ABANDONMENTS AND ALIKE:

(WED) RailAmerica announced that it had completed the sale of its Arizona Eastern Railway and its West Texas & Lubbock Railroad to Permian Basin Railways. The Arizona Eastern totals 135 miles of line between Miami, AZ. and Bowie, AZ. and the West Texas & Lubbock totals 104 miles of line between Seagraves, TX. and Lubbock, TX. and between Lubbock, TX. and Whiteface, TX. (ffd: RailAmerica Corp.)

(THU) Burlington Northern Santa Fe granted temporary overhead trackage rights to Union Pacific over approximately 32 miles of BNSF line between Grand Ave. in St. Louis, MO. and Pacific, MO. The purpose of the trackage rights is to

allow UP to temporarily divert its trains to perform maintenance-of-way. (ffd: STB)

(THU) CSX announced that it had sold its foreign port operations, now run by CSX World Terminals, to Dubai Ports International of Hong Kong. A CSX spokesman said that the sale, for \$1.15 billion in cash, would allow it "to focus more on its U.S. railroad business." (ffd: CSX, wire services)

(THU) GATX Rail announced that it had acquired General Motors-EMD's interest in Locomotive Leasing Partners. A GATX Rail spokesman said that it had half-owned interest in LLP since 1995 and will now own LLP's entire fleet of 486 locomotives. (ffd: GATX Corp., Progressive Railroading)

(FRI) Ohio & Pennsylvania Railroad commenced operations over the Columbiana County Port Authority's owned line between Youngstown, OH. and Darlington, PA. (ffd: STB)

PERSONNEL CHANGES AND ALIKE:

(MON) Rail fleet provider GATX Rail appointed James Earl EVP-Rail of GATX Corporation. Mr. Earl replaces David Edwards, who is leaving the company and had held the position of President-GATX Rail. (ffd: GATX Corp.)

(MON) PB Consult appointed Mortimer Downey Chairman and Bruce Johnke President. PB Consult is a subsidiary of the rail and transit engineering consultancy Parsons Brinckerhoff. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(WED) Further Union Pacific's efforts to intensify its supervision of its West Texas operations, Tom Florence was appointed Superintendent-Transportation Services of its newly established El Paso Service Unit. (UP Corp.)

(FRI) The Bush Administration announced that Norman Mineta would continue as U.S. Secretary of Transportation into its second term. However, Deputy Transportation Secretary Kirk Van Tine has submitted his resignation effective December 31. (ffd: NARP)

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(CORRECTION: In last week's WRR, I reported that Norfolk Southern had filed to abandon its line between Virginia Beach, VA. and Tidewater Jct., VA. However, Jani Lipps of NS's Strategic Planning Dept. emailed to advise that NS did not file to abandon the line, but rather to discontinue service over the line. Thank you, Jani, for this update.)

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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 PROSPEROUS WEEK,

Dave Mears

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