

WEEKLY RAIL REVIEW

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SAT, MARCH 26, 2005

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):

(MON) The chairman of Amtrak's Board of Directors, David Laney, announced that the Amtrak board was in disagreement with elements of the reform plan for Amtrak being promoted by U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta. In an interview, Mr. Laney, who was appointed to the board by President Bush, said that the proposal to turn ownership of the Northeast Corridor over to a compact of states was "not the position of the board," with the exception of one its 4 members, Mr. Mineta. The board presently has 3 unfilled vacancies. Noting that the Bush Administration has not proposed any Fiscal Year 2006 operating funding for Amtrak, Mr. Laney said that the board wanted to avoid putting Amtrak in bankruptcy, saying that it "remains on the table as a last resort," but that "I don't think it's a resort anybody wants to default to." (ffd: New York Times)

(MON) Virginia Inland Port noted the ongoing expansion of its terminal located near Front Royal, VA. A spokesman for the terminal said that the expansion should allow it to handle between 32,000 and 34,000 containers this year, up from approximately 28,000 handled last year. The spokesman added that the terminal, which is served by Norfolk Southern, is operated as an "inland extension" of the Port of Hampton Roads, VA., which locates approximately 250 miles to the east. (ffd: Winchester Star)

(MON) Greenbrier Companies announced that its Gunderson Rail Services subsidiary had acquired 2 railcar repair shops from General Electric Rail Services. The 2 shops are located in Dothan, AL. and Hodge, LA. A Gunderson spokesman said that a working relationship with GE will continue, adding that the acquisition "strengthens our ties with GE in serving their railcar repair and maintenance needs." (ffd: Greenbrier Corp.)

(MON) The Toronto Transit Commission announced a new pilot project in which it will put unclaimed items from its lost-and-found on the online auction site, eBay. A TTC spokesman said that approximately 44,000 items are left each year on TTC-operated buses, trains and in stations, and that items will be posted for bid if unclaimed after 90 days. The spokesman added that the TTC has put a hyperlink on its website to take bidders directly to the items, which may be found at <http://www.ttc.ca/> and then clicking on "TTC Auctions." (ffd: Metro Magazine)

(MON) The State of Israel announced that it will begin passenger rail service on April 9 over its new line connecting Jerusalem with the Israeli state railway system. A government spokesman said that the new line has been built along the route of the original Jerusalem-Tel Aviv rail line that was constructed by the Ottoman Empire in 1892 and will connect with the Israeli system at Beit Shemesh. The spokesman added that 15 passenger trains are scheduled to operate daily between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. (ffd: Arutz Sheva)

(TUE) In a notable rail-highway crossing accident, a tractor-trailer struck a Canadian Pacific freight train, derailing 1 locomotive and 24 cars. The driver of the truck was injured, but there were no reported injuries among the train's crew. The accident occurred near Balgonie, SK. (ffd: Regina Leader-Post)

(TUE) BNSF announced an improved rate quotation feature on its website, <<http://www.bnsf.com/>><http://www.bnsf.com/>. The new feature allows quotes to be gained for most general merchandise shipments from any BNSF origin to any destination served by CSX and some its affiliated shortlines. "Our carload customers have long requested an easier and more efficient way to obtain prices for movements originating on our railroad and terminating on another," said BNSF VP Dennis Smith. (ffd: BNSF Corp.)

(TUE) The National Transportation Safety Board published the first issue of its new biannual publication, The Journal of Accident Investigation. An NTSB spokesman said that the publication "will contain published research and technical articles on accident investigations that may be of interest to professionals in safety, accident investigation, engineering and the behavioral sciences." The spokesman added that it would also include short reports of news, events and research efforts, as well as announcements of upcoming courses, forums, symposiums and public hearings conducted by the NTSB. (ffd: NTSB)

(WED) Continuing his efforts to promote the Bush Administration's Amtrak reform plan, Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta said that the plan would include rebuilding the Northeast Corridor rail infrastructure. "President Bush understands how vital the Northeast Corridor is and we are committed to doing what it takes to get these tracks back in shape," said Mr. Mineta. The Secretary made his comments at an appearance in Boston, MA. with Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney. Mr. Romney commented that he and Mr. Mineta were "working out of the same book, maybe a different page right now, but we are going to keep looking for ways to reform Amtrak...Clearly the federal government is going to look to the states to pick up a bigger share than we're going to want to pick up." (ffd: Trains, USDOT, wire services)

(WED) A federal judge reviewing Washington, DC.'s recently enacted ordinance banning hazardous material shipments requested that the Transportation Security Administration detail to him plans for preventing terrorist attacks on rail shipments. "How does anyone give the city council and the citizens [of Washington] any assurance that the federal government is doing anything about the problem?", said U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan. A spokesman for the Department of Justice said that TSA policy is not to release "security-sensitive" information to civil litigants. The judge is reviewing an appeal by CSX to overturn the ban and is expected to issue his ruling by April 8. (ffd: Washington Post)

(THU) Miami, FL.'s commuter rail service was disrupted by a rare atmospheric condition that scrambled its radio transmissions. A spokesman for commuter rail operator Tri-Rail said that the disruption was due to "the way the clouds line up" and had happened before. The disruption, which occurred between 4:15AM and 7:49AM, also affected Amtrak and CSX train operations. (ffd: Trains)

(THU) The Railway Association of Canada released a new brochure promoting rail's role in Canada's economy and environment. Entitled "On Track for the Future - Policy Priorities 2005," the brochure describes issues facing Canadian railroads and recommends actions the Canadian government should take to address these concerns. A RAC spokesman said that more information on the brochure was available through its website,

<<http://www.railcan.ca/>><http://www.railcan.ca/>. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(FRI) Canadian National and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers reached a last-minute agreement averting a threatened strike. The IBEW represents approximately 644 CN employees who maintain its communications and signal systems. A CN spokesman said that the agreement will run for 4 years, retroactive to January 1, 2004. (ffd: CN Corp.)

(FRI) In a letter to the Philadelphia Inquirer newspaper, U.S. Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA.) said that he now supported continued federal funding for Amtrak. "It would be a grave mistake to cut the federal funds that keep Amtrak operating," said Mr. Santorum. The senator had voted with the majority the previous week against a Senate amendment to add \$1.04 billion to the Fiscal Year 2006 budget for Amtrak. In his letter, the senator praised Amtrak President David Gunn's efforts to control costs and improve efficiencies. "We must continue to provide federal assistance to Amtrak as it strives for self-sufficiency, while holding Amtrak accountable for its reform efforts," said Mr. Santorum. (ffd: Philadelphia Inquirer)

(FRI) The National Railway Historical Society announced that it would hold its 8th annual Railcamp July 17-23 at the Steamtown National Historic Site in Scranton, PA. An NRHS spokesman said that "as the Society ages, it is important to develop a new generation of leaders to continue the rail history preservation movement, and Railcamp does that, with seminars, field trips and hands-on exercises." Further details about Railcamp, which is intended for young adults between 14 and 18 years of age, may be found at the NRHS website, <<http://www.nrhs.com/>><http://www.nrhs.com/>. (ffd: NRHS)

STATS – TRAFFIC:

(THU) For the week ending March 19, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 32.3 billion ton-miles, up 4.2 percent from the comparable week last year. Also for the week, U.S. carload rail traffic was up 3.6 percent, up 2.8 percent in the East and up 4.3 percent in the West. Notable traffic increases included coke up 28.0 percent, coal up 6.5 percent and grain up 3.6 percent; notable traffic decreases included waste and scrap materials down 6.6 percent and motor vehicles and equipment down 4.4 percent. Also for the week, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 6.5 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 2.0 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 10.6 percent, Mexico's Transportacion Ferroviaria Mexicana's carload rail traffic was up 1.9 percent and TFM's intermodal rail traffic was down 12.5 percent.

For the period January 1 through March 19, U.S. rail volume totaled 344.5 billion ton-miles, up 3.7 percent from the comparable period last year. Also for January 1 through March 19, U.S. carload rail traffic was up 2.8 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 9.2 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 2.5 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 6.8 percent, TFM's carload rail traffic was up 6.0 percent and TFM's intermodal rail traffic was up 11.2 percent. (ffd: AAR)

MORE STATS – "BIG 6" OPERATING PERFORMANCE:

(FRI) For the week ending March 19, 2005 versus the comparable week last year, average train speed was as follows:

BNSF, 23.5 mph versus 26.4 mph; Canadian National, 24.8 mph versus 23.7 mph; Canadian Pacific, 24.4 mph versus 24.3 mph; CSX, 19.0 mph versus 20.7 mph; Norfolk Southern, 22.2 mph versus 23.3 mph; Union Pacific, 21.2 mph versus 21.5 mph.

Also for the week ending March 19, 2005 versus the comparable week last year, average terminal dwell time was as follows: BNSF, 9.8 hrs versus 9.6 hrs; Canadian National, 14.1 hrs versus 14.3 hrs; Canadian Pacific, 32.1 hrs versus 30.2 hrs; CSX, 29.6 hrs versus 27.1 hrs; Norfolk Southern, 23.7 hrs versus 22.1 hrs; Union Pacific, 28.7 hrs versus 31.1 hrs.

(Note: Concerning the above statistics, AAR comments that "one railroad's performance metrics cannot meaningfully be compared to another railroad's, due to differences in the carriers' calculation methodologies, operational strategies, network characteristics, terrain, traffic mix and volume, length of haul, extent of passenger operations, and other factors, such as weather.")

EXPANSIONS, CONTRACTIONS AND ALIKE:

(MON) Watco Companies of Pittsburg, KS. announced that its Appalachian & Ohio Railroad had begun operating approximately 117 miles of former CSX line between and near Grafton, WV. and Cowen, WV. (ffd: wire services)

(MON) The Sunset Railway filed to abandon, and the San Joaquin Valley Railroad filed to discontinue service over, approximately 1 mile of line in Levee, CA. (ffd: STB)

(WED) The Mount Vernon Terminal Railway filed to abandon approximately 1 mile of line in Mt. Vernon, WA. (ffd: STB)

(THU) Union Pacific filed to abandon approximately 3 miles of its Sugar House Branch, between Roper, UT. and Sugar House, UT. (ffd: STB)

APPOINTMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND ALIKE:

(MON) CSX announced the following appointments: Mike Pendergrass as VP-Southern Region Transportation; Bill Braman as Albany Division GM; Rod Workman as Atlanta Division GM; David Hamby as Atlanta Division Assistant GM; and Bob Frulla as Jacksonville Division GM. The appointments follow the resignations of Mike Peterson, Jim Decker, Gil Kovar, Craig Kephardt and Bob Downing in these positions. (ffd: CSX Corp.)

(TUE) The passing of Robert L. Banks was announced. Mr. Banks died March 15 in Washington, DC. at Age 87. A railroader since 1940, Mr. Banks founded R.L. Banks & Associates, Inc. in 1956, which has become one of the U.S.'s premiere transportation planning and transportation engineering consulting firms. (ffd: Progressive Railroadng,

Washington Post)

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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.

HAVE A SAFE AND PROSPEROUS WEEK,

Dave Mears

Cherry Hill, New Jersey, USA