

(As all are very likely aware, Hurricane Katrina, after crossing through Florida the previous week, strengthened in the Gulf of Mexico and made landfall as a Category 4 hurricane on Monday, August 29 on Alabama's, Mississippi's and Louisiana's Gulf Coast. The hurricane caused extensive damage and apparent great loss of life in these areas. In New Orleans, the storm's surge caused three levee sections to break, which in turn flooded approximately 80 percent of the city, most of which lies below sea level. As a result of the thousands of persons unaccounted for and damage estimates reaching into the tens of billions of dollars, Katrina may ultimately rank as the most terrible natural disaster ever to befall the U.S. - and the necessary albeit temporary abandonment of New Orleans and other Gulf Coast communities may rank as the country's largest extended evacuation since the fall of the Confederacy in 1864-65. For further information about what happened with the railroads in the path of Katrina, I have included below very good summaries from the Trains Magazine website for August 29 through September 1, and have added my own summary from various public news sources as of September 2.)

From Trains Newswire, Monday, August 29:

With the closure, in preparation for Hurricane Katrina, of the floodgates that protect New Orleans from high water at 6 a.m. Sunday, Aug. 28, all railroad service into or out of the Crescent City was suspended. It was none too soon - the Category 4 hurricane made landfall 60 miles south near Buras, La., at 6:10 a.m. today with winds clocked at up to 140 mph.

The railroads, however, were as prepared as they could be. Here is a synopsis:

Amtrak implemented a revised operating plan for its three long-distance trains serving New Orleans that basically involves shortening their routes back to other major cities. The trains are the Chicago-New Orleans City of New Orleans, trains 59-58, on Canadian National; the New York-New Orleans Crescent, trains 19-20, on Norfolk Southern; and the Orlando, Fla.-New Orleans-Los Angeles Sunset Limited, trains 1-2, which operates between Orlando and New Orleans on CSX, New Orleans and Lake Charles, La., on BNSF Railway, and Lake Charles and Los Angeles on Union Pacific.

Effective over this past weekend and through at least next Thursday, Sept. 1, the daily City of New Orleans will be only a Chicago-Memphis, Tenn., train with no alternate transportation provided south of Memphis.

Similarly, the Crescent, will be only a New York-Washington-Atlanta train, with no alternate transportation offered south of Atlanta.

The triweekly Sunset Limited will operate only between Los Angeles and San Antonio, Texas, where a through coach and sleeping car are interchanged with the daily Chicago-San Antonio Texas Eagle. The first truncated westbound Sunset will depart San Antonio tomorrow, Tuesday, Aug. 30. No alternate transportation is being provided on the Sunset's route east of San Antonio.

In a related Hurricane Katrina matter, Amtrak resumed full Silver Service between New York and Miami on Sunday. Owing to the initial landfall of Katrina in southeast Florida, Amtrak had cut back operations to a southern limit of Orlando, Fla. Also resuming Sunday or today were south Florida operations on CSX (which Amtrak uses), commuter trains of Florida Tri-Rail, and freights of Florida East Coast.

The freight railroads serving southern Louisiana and Mississippi implemented their own plans to deal with Katrina.

BNSF, which has owned track to New Orleans since it took over ownership from Union Pacific of the 207-mile Iowa Junction-New Orleans portion of the former Southern Pacific Sunset Route as part of the 1990s mega-merger maneuvers, runs two trains a day in each direction between New Orleans and Lafayette, La., 145 miles to the west. (Iowa Junction is 13 miles east of Lake Charles, La.; BNSF trains continue to the west, toward Houston, Texas, on UP trackage rights). BNSF shut down all operations east of Lafayette on Sunday after moving all equipment, locomotives, and rolling stock it could out of the New Orleans area. As of 10 p.m. Sunday, all 80 or so employees located east of Lafayette were instructed to go home and ride out the storm. Trains are being rerouted through other gateways, including St. Louis, Memphis, and Birmingham, Ala.

Canadian National halted all operations on its former Illinois Central routes south of McComb, Miss., by Sunday afternoon and issued an embargo restricting all carload and intermodal traffic south of Osyka, Miss., just north of the Louisiana state line. Locomotives and rolling stock in the path of the hurricane were moved to Baton Rouge. Equipment to rebuild affected right-of-way, including ballast cars, track panels, generators, and other heavy equipment, has been put on standby.

CSX, a seasoned hurricane fighter in the area with its former Louisville & Nashville main line hugging the Gulf Coast from the Crescent City eastward through Mobile, Ala., and into Florida's panhandle, ceased operations south of Montgomery, Ala. Freight trains normally using the New Orleans gateway are being rerouted through St. Louis rather than Memphis because there is concern the latter also may become unusable depending on the direction of the storm as it moves inland. CSX track along the bayfront in Pensacola, Fla., was reported to be under water already. As it has had to do too many times in the past, CSX has pre-positioned equipment, ballast trains, generators, and tie panels at Montgomery and Mobile, Ala., and Pensacola and Chattahoochee, Fla.

Kansas City Southern, whose main line to New Orleans from its hub at Shreveport passes through Baton Rouge, issued an embargo Sunday for traffic destined for New Orleans at Norco, Gramercy, and Reserve, La., on that main line as well as at Gulfport and De Lisle, Miss., on KCS's branch line from Hattiesburg (reached from Jackson, Miss., on CN trackage rights). All locomotives and rolling were removed from Gulfport and New Orleans over the weekend, and traffic was held on higher inland ground. All facilities including the intermodal ramp at New Orleans are closed. KCS is also anticipating heavy rains on its east-west "Meridian Speedway" across central Mississippi, which links Shreveport, La., with Vicksburg, Jackson, and Meridian, Miss., where a busy interchange with NS occurs. Hence, the NS Meridian interchange and KCS's intermodal ramp at Jackson, Miss., are closed until further notice.

Norfolk Southern, after embargoing all movements into New Orleans, as well as into Mobile, Ala., pulled out locomotives and rolling equipment on its lines near coastal and low-lying areas in southern Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama to higher inland ground. Operations south of Meridian, Miss., and Selma, Ala., on the New Orleans and Mobile routes, respectively, were halted early Sunday afternoon. Operations south of Birmingham, Ala., have been curtailed and were to be shut down later today. Interchange traffic is being rerouted to more northerly points.

Union Pacific set up command centers at Livonia, La., near Baton Rouge; Spring, Texas, north of Houston; Little Rock, Ark., and at the Harriman Center in Omaha, Neb., UP's systemwide dispatching center. Employees were instructed to evacuate the New Orleans area, and all possible equipment was moved to UP's Livonia yard complex about 100 miles northwest of "The Big Easy," west of Baton Rouge. Recovery equipment has been positioned in Houston, Fort Worth, Texas, and Little Rock, with ballast trains, supplies, generators and track panels ready to be moved to the affected area as soon as the storm passes.

From Trains Newswire, Tuesday, August 30:

Owing to the severe Gulf Coast damage caused by Hurricane Katrina, railroads in southern Louisiana and Mississippi are still in pretty much the same operating condition, or non-operating condition, as they were yesterday. All carriers are assessing their

respective properties.

Amtrak has revised its service plan by extending truncated service on its three Crescent City long-distance trains, the daily Chicago-New Orleans City of New Orleans, trains 59-58, on CN; the daily New York-New Orleans Crescent, trains 19-20, on NS; and the triweekly Orlando, Fla. - New Orleans-Los Angeles Sunset Limited, trains 1-2, on CSX between Orlando and New Orleans, BNSF between New Orleans and Iowa Jct., La., and UP between Iowa Jct. and Los Angeles.

The City of New Orleans will be only a Chicago-Memphis train until at least Saturday southbound and Sunday northbound, with no alternate transportation provided south of Memphis.

The Crescent will be only a New York-Atlanta train until at least Sunday southbound and Monday northbound, with no alternate transportation provided between Atlanta and New Orleans.

The Sunset Limited will be only a San Antonio-Los Angeles train until at least through the departure westbound from San Antonio on Thursday, Sept. 8, and the departure eastbound from L. A. on Wednesday, Sept. 7, again with no alternate transportation provided east of San Antonio.

BNSF Railway is still shut down east of Lafayette, La.

Canadian National is terminating trains in Mississippi just before reaching the Louisiana state line.

CSX is still not running trains south of Montgomery, Ala.

Kansas City Southern maintenance crews are in the Baton Rouge, Norco, and Reserve, La., areas and were soon to try to enter Gulfport, Miss.

Norfolk Southern is not operating south of Meridian, Miss. or Selma, Ala.

Union Pacific is using Livonia, La., 30 miles northwest of Baton Rouge, as a staging area for maintenance workers.

From Trains Newswire, Wednesday, August 31:

Railroads in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama have begun assessing the damage inflicted on them by Hurricane Katrina, now classified as a tropical depression moving upward through the Ohio Valley.

All operational Amtrak equipment - 7 locomotives and 20 cars - was deadheaded in a special move north on the Canadian National to McComb, Miss. just before the floodgates that protect New Orleans from the gulf waters closed Aug. 28. That equipment is now being used to house employees and their families.

As of today, Amtrak says the only equipment remaining in New Orleans includes GE P42DC No. 33, which was undergoing wreck damage repairs, GE P42DC No. 180, which for some reason had gas in its fuel tanks and GE B32-WH No. 511, which was being used for back-up power for the passenger station. Also left behind was Superliner No. 39044 which couldn't be moved due to running gear defects.

None of Amtrak's employees - about 350 - have been able gain access to the New Orleans station or yard facilities to assess damage. The Mobile, Ala. passenger station reportedly had its doors blown off and windows broken by the hurricane. At least six inches of water inside the station has receded, leaving about three inches of mud.

According to Amtrak, which operates over region's freight railroads, CSX signaling is up and running as far west as Pensacola, Fla., however the right-of-way needs ballast and cribbing. The condition of the railroad from Mobile west to New Orleans is still being

investigated. The Bayou Sara River bridge appears to have withstood the storm.

On the BNSF, the Bayou Boeuf Drawbridge 18 miles west of Schriever, La. was struck by a runaway barge and sustained excessive damage. One span is estimated to be restored in 3-5 days, the second span is estimated to be restored in 7-10 days.

Over on the Canadian National, the line between Memphis, Tenn. and Hammond, La. - the latter about 60 miles north of New Orleans - has been restored to service, however, extensive damage to the bridge over the west side of Lake Ponchartrain has been reported and several miles of railroad between the lake and New Orleans are said to be under water.

Norfolk Southern between Atlanta and Meridian, Miss. is clear, however between Meridian and Hattiesburg, Miss. there are hundreds of downed trees along the right-of-way. Using airplanes and helicopters, NS personnel surveying the line between Hattiesburg and New Orleans found miles of ballast completely washed away, numerous washouts and 4 1/2 miles of rail missing from a bridge over Lake Ponchartrain.

Amtrak says that neither it nor the other Class I railroads have been able to make contact with anyone from the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad.

From Trains Newswire, Thursday, September 1:

The freight railroads hit by Hurricane Katrina are making plans to rebuild their infrastructure as quickly as possible and to re-establish service.

BNSF might be the first class I railroad to get trains back into the New Orleans area. According to railway spokesman Pat Hiatte, the line east from Lafayette, La., part of the old Southern Pacific Sunset Route, should be open by tomorrow and available for customers. The railway's Avondale Yard just west of New Orleans Public Belt's Huey P. Long bridge over the Mississippi River was not affected by flooding.

Canadian National has lifted its embargoes at Baton Rouge, Geismar, and Hammond, La., and at Ferguson, Miss. By late Wednesday, CN was anticipating limited service from the Baton Rouge, La. area. Assessments are still being made on the work and time required to re-establish service from the north into Mobile, Ala., and Bogalusa, La., and to Reserve and Destrehan, La., as well as New Orleans. All CN lines in the area are former Illinois Central.

CSX service has been restored between Montgomery, Ala., and Pensacola, Fla., via the junction with the New Orleans route at Flomaton, Ala., which is situated just north of the Florida state line north of Pensacola. The railroad is working on its flooded right-of-way along Pensacola's bayfront. The line between Flomaton and Mobile, Ala., is open to within 14 miles of Mobile. High water in and around New Orleans has hampered CSX's ability to assess damage, and the company is continuing to reroute traffic through its Memphis and East St. Louis gateways. An embargo is still in force between New Orleans and Mobile, and likely will be for some time owing to major bridge damage. This line hugs the coast between Interstate 10 and U.S. 90, and was devastated in 1969 by Hurricane Camille. All CSX lines in this area are former Louisville & Nashville, later Seaboard System.

Kansas City Southern said is still feeling the affects of the hurricane, but maintenance-of-way crews have cleared the line from Baton Rouge southeast to Frelsen, La. which is south of the embargoed stations of Gramercy, Reserve, and Norco and is about 10 miles outside New Orleans. The embargo will remain for Gramercy, Reserve, and Norco until electric utilities are restored to customers near those stations. All traffic bound for New Orleans remains under embargo. To the east, Mobile, Ala., and Waynesboro, Quitman, and Enterprise, Miss., have been added to the embargo list. Crews have still not been able to get close enough to Gulfport, Miss., by rail to assess the damage.

Norfolk Southern said its rail operations in Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi are returning to normal with the exception of the immediate New Orleans area. Freight

regularly traveling via its New Orleans gateway is being re-routed. Crews have inspected some 1,400 miles of railroad and removed 3,680 felled trees. The company is staging people, ballast, rail, and other equipment as close as possible to the affected area, and repairs are expected to get underway in the next several days to reinstall track on the 5.8-mile-long concrete ballast trestle across Lake Pontchartrain from Slidell, La., into New Orleans. NS's Oliver Yard in New Orleans was still under water as of this morning.

Union Pacific said it has completed the initial inspection of its mainline and terminal facilities in and around the New Orleans area and despite debris, crews have concluded that the right-of-way sustained no major damage. Structural inspections of bridges in the New Orleans area continue. Commercial electricity is still not available to most facilities. Telephone service is available to the yard in Avondale, La., on the west side of the Mississippi River. Embargoes remain in place for all traffic on the Livonia Subdivision from St. James, La., east to New Orleans, and on the Lafayette Subdivision to UP-served stations from New Iberia, La., east to New Orleans.

Amtrak's truncation of its service routes outside the affected area has not changed substantially since Wednesday, and its ability to provide service depends on when the freight railroads can get up and running again.

Friday, September 2 into the weekend:

Attendant with host railroads gradually returning their lines to service, Amtrak said that it would extend its "Crescent" to operate between New York, NY and Meridian, MS effective September 12 and 13. The "Crescent" had been turning at Atlanta, GA. Amtrak will also extend its "City of New Orleans" to operate between Chicago, IL and Jackson, MS. This train had been turning at Memphis, TN. No alternate transportation is available between these trains' temporary terminus and New Orleans, LA. Noting the considerable damage sustained to CSX's main line between Pensacola, FL and New Orleans (see below), Amtrak said that it would continue to operate its "Sunset Limited" only between Los Angeles, CA and San Antonio, TX until further notice.

Amtrak also began operating a special shuttle train, capable of carrying up to 600 passengers, to assist in the evacuation of New Orleans residents. The first train departed from New Orleans's Avondale Yard for Lafayette, LA, where passengers were transferred to shuttle buses destined for evacuation centers. Amtrak and assisting host railroads were planning to operate the train at least twice daily through the weekend. In a prepared statement, Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta, who had been promoting a controversial reform plan that critics have said would doom Amtrak, praised the company, saying that "Amtrak gives us yet another way to help move people so that we can get the job done as quickly, comfortably and reliably as possible."

BNSF confirmed that they had reopened their line into New Orleans, concurrent with repairs to its bridge over Bayou Boeuf at Morgan City, LA being completed. The bridge had been rammed by a barge during the hurricane. BNSF also pledged a corporate contribution of \$1 million to aid hurricane victims.

Canadian National announced that its route from Jackson, MS to Baton Rouge, LA via Hammond, LA had been returned to service and that its route from Baton Rouge into Mays Yard, New Orleans would reopen late Friday. CN said that its main line between Hammond and New Orleans continued out of service and that "considerable track restoration work is required." CN also said that it is facing "considerable issues [related to] commercial power and communications systems."

CSX said that its main line between Pensacola and New Orleans had suffered great damage, especially the section in and west of Pascagoula, MS. Photos circulating on the Internet showed the line's nearly 2-mile-long bridge over Bay St. Louis completely washed away except for its support piers. Other photos showed its Gentilly Yard in New Orleans completely flooded.

Kansas City Southern reopened its "Meridian Speedway" main line linking Meridian, MS and Shreveport, LA, and was continuing other line repairs.

Norfolk Southern reopened its main line as far south as Meridian. South of there, it continues to work to repair many washouts and clear extensive debris. Repairs also continue to its multi-mile bridge into New Orleans across Lake Ponchartrain, which was converted several years ago to a concrete deck bridge, but had nearly all of its track and ties blown off it.

- # -

THE SOUTH SHALL RISE AGAIN

Dave Mears

Cherry Hill, New Jersey, USA