

WEEKLY RAIL REVIEW

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SAT, JANUARY 1, 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):

(SUN) A tsunami wave struck and derailed a crowded passenger train near Telwatta in the island nation of Sri Lanka, formerly Ceylon. The wave's impact crushed and drowned at least 802 passengers onboard, possibly more. The train was enroute from Sri Lanka's capital of Columbo to the coastal city of Galle at the time the wave struck. The number killed here is approximately the number that died in the other greatest single railway disaster of all time, which occurred June 6, 1981, when a passenger train ran off a bridge in Bihar, India, killing at least 800 passengers onboard. (ffd: wire services)

(MON) The U.S. Railroad Retirement Board announced that it would reduce its 2005 Tier 2 tax rate from 4.9 percent to 4.4 percent for railroad employees and from 13.1 percent to 12.6 percent for railroad employers. A RRB spokesman said that the tax rate reduction was the result of a gain in Tier 2 assets, which in turn resulted from having invested a portion of those assets in non-U.S. Treasury securities, as is allowed by the Railroad Retirement Act of 2001. The spokesman added that the Tier 1 tax rate which remain at 7.65 percent, matching the Social Security tax rate. (ffd: BNSF Today)

(MON) The National Mediation Board reminded that it was seeking public comment on proposed rule changes governing grievance arbitration in the railroad industry. An NMB spokesman said that the changes, originally proposed on August 12, 2004, relate to the possible establishment of a fee schedule for certain arbitration services. The spokesman added that public comment would be accepted through January 11 and that the full text of the proposed changes was available on the NMB's website. (ffd: BofLE, NMB)

(MON) Union Pacific announced that they and Sacramento County, CA. police had arrested an alleged prolific graffiti vandal. A spokesman said that the suspect, Jonathan Bushaw, is believed to be the graffiti vandal known as "Crooks." The spokesman added that a search of Mr. Bushaw's premises turned up a painter's mask, 6 cameras and more than 100 cans of spray paint. Graffiti on rail cars has been an increasing industry problem, because of the broad audience offered to graffiti "taggings" as the cars move across the country. "It's getting to be uncommon to find a rail car that doesn't have a [graffiti] tag on it," said UP Special Agent Blair Geddes. (ffd: Sacramento Bee)

(MON) Officials of Kansas City, MO.'s renovated Union Station announced that they were scaling back plans to operate a railroad museum at the station. A spokesman for the station's board of directors said that it had voted 6 months ago to acquire 11 antique rail cars and a vast collection of memorabilia packed inside them from a Milwaukee, WI.-based collector, but that they now planned to fix up only 5 of the cars and sell the other 6, along with some of the duplicate memorabilia. The spokesman added that the museum would likely open by the end of 2006, becoming one more of the

approximately 225 railroad museums in North America. (ffd: St. Louis Post-Dispatch)

(TUE) A report issued by a noted auto industry forecasting firm predicted that Toyota would unseat DaimlerChrysler as the third-leading U.S. seller of cars and trucks by the end of the decade. The report, issued by CSM Worldwide, stated that Toyota, including the Lexus and Scion brands, would account for 14.1 percent of U.S. market share by 2009, slightly ahead of the 14.0 percent predicted for DaimlerChrysler. The report added that GM and Ford would still remain Nos. 1 and 2 by 2009, with a U.S. market share of 25.0 percent and 19.2 percent respectively. (ffd: Philadelphia Inquirer)

(TUE) China announced that it had begun converting the 126-mile Shanghai-Hangzhou rail line, one of the world's last mainline steam operations, to electric operation. A government spokesman said that work to electrify the line was expected to be complete by mid-2006. The spokesman added that, when complete, the line would be the first double-track electrified railway in the Yangtze River Delta area. (ffd: Shanghai Daily)

(WED) The Wall Street Journal reported on the work by Burlington Northern Santa Fe and Union Pacific to complete the double-tracking of their respective lines between the Chicago, IL. gateway and Los Angeles, CA., whose ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are the nation's busiest freight entry point. Comparing it loosely to the race approximately 140 years ago to complete the first transcontinental rail line, the report noted that BNSF was way ahead of UP, with approximately 90 percent of BNSF's Transcon Line now double-tracked versus approximately 30 percent of UP's line, but that UP was working to narrow the gap, having acquired an additional track-laying machine system last spring that BNSF had planned to buy. (ffd: Wall Street Journal)

(THU) The American Civil Liberties Union announced that it was in discussions with New Jersey Transit to ensure that homeless persons were not discriminated against at NJT train and bus stations. An ACLU spokesman said that they had undertaken the discussions following the arrest last January of a homeless woman at NJT's Hoboken, NJ. rail station on trespassing charges, later dismissed. An NJT spokesman noted that NJT regulations do not prohibit anyone from occupying a single seat in a station waiting room, adding that NJT would work to have its employees enforce its regulations and related policies uniformly to both its customers and the general public. (ffd: New York Newsday)

(THU) A Burlington Northern Santa Fe freight train derailed 32 cars near Casselton, ND. The derailment blocked BNSF's main line through North Dakota Thursday into Friday, with the line being reopened approximately 7PM on Friday. The train, mainly open-top hopper cars carrying coal, had been enroute from Wyoming's Powder River Basin to Superior, WI. when it derailed. (ffd: wire services)

STATS:

(THU) For the week ending December 25, U.S. carload rail traffic was up 7.0 percent from the comparable week last year (which also included the Christmas holiday), up 14.9 percent in the East and up 2.0 percent in the West. Notable traffic increases included crushed stone, sand and gravel up 32.7 percent, lumber and wood products up 29.5 percent and nonmetallic minerals up 26.8 percent; notable traffic decreases included non-grain farm products down 31.0 percent and metallic ores down 7.7 percent. Also for the week ending December 25, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 25.7 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 18.6 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 19.2 percent, Mexico's Transportacion Ferroviaria Mexicana's carload rail traffic was up 30.3 percent and TFM's intermodal rail

traffic was up 72.7 percent.

For the period January 1 through December 25, U.S. carload rail traffic was up 2.9 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 10.3 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was up 6.9 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 0.6 percent, TFM's carload rail traffic was up 4.3 percent and TFM's intermodal rail traffic was up 10.1 percent, all when ranked with the comparable period last year. (ffd: AAR)

ACQUISITIONS, ABANDONMENTS AND ALIKE:

(MON) The Indiana & Ohio Central Railroad granted the Indiana & Ohio Railway overhead trackage rights over approximately 28 miles of IOCR line between Springfield, OH. and Fayne, OH. According to the STB filing, the purpose of the trackage rights is to enable IORY to "provide more efficient and economical routings and service for traffic." (ffd: STB)

(MON) The Portland & Western Railroad filed to lease, from Union Pacific, and operate approximately 1 mile of line in the vicinity of Willsburg Jct., OR. (ffd: STB)

(TUE) Omni Trax's Kettle Falls International Railway filed to acquire, from Burlington Northern Santa Fe, and operate 1) approximately 30 miles of line between West Kettle Falls, WA. and the U.S.-Canadian border, and 2) approximately 29 miles of line between the U.S.-Canadian border and San Poil, WA. KFR also filed to lease, from BNSF, and operate 1) approximately 5 miles of line between Kettle Falls, WA. and West Kettle Falls, WA., and 2) approximately 79 miles of line between Chewelah, WA. and the U.S.-Canadian border. (ffd: AAR, STB)

(TUE) Watco's Mission Mountain Railroad began operation of 2 lines, 1) between Eureka, MT. and Stryker, MT., and 2) between Columbia Falls, MT. and Kalispell, MT. Both lines, which together total approximately 40 miles, are being leased from Burlington Northern Santa Fe. (ffd: Railway Track & Structures)

(WED) The State of South Dakota granted overhead trackage rights to the Dakota Southern Railway over the state-owned line between Mitchell, SD. and Sioux City, IA., totaling approximately 142 miles. According to the STB filing, the purpose of the trackage rights is to facilitate improved interchange of DSRC traffic. (ffd: STB)

(WED) Watco's Stillwater Central Railroad began operation of the line between Wheatland, OK. and Oklahoma City, OK. The line, which totals approximately 15 miles, is being leased from Burlington Northern Santa Fe. (ffd: Railway Track & Structures)

(FRI) The Central New York Railroad took over operations and maintenance of the former Erie main line between Binghamton, NY. and Port Jervis, NY. The line is being leased under a 20-year agreement with Norfolk Southern, which will retain overhead trackage rights over the line. The CNY is controlled by Delaware Otsego, the Cooperstown, NY.-based parent company of the New York, Susquehanna & Western Railway. (ffd: Trains)

PERSONNEL CHANGES AND ALIKE:

None of note this week.

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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.

HAPPY NEW YEAR,

AND BEST WISHES FOR A GREAT 2005,

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