

WEEKLY RAIL REVIEW

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JULY 3, 2009

BY DAVE MEARS

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

(SAT) North Platte, NE officials noted the first anniversary of the Golden Spike Tower and Visitors Center, which opened its doors June 26, 2008. The tower looks out over Union Pacific's Bailey Yard, one of the world's largest class yards. Officials said that the tower and center's first year of operation saw more than 36,000 visitors. (ffd: North Platte Telegraph)

(MON) The five U.S.-based Class 1 railroads filed a complaint in federal court against the Brotherhood of Locomotives Engineers and Trainmen and the United Transportation Union. The complaint alleges that, related to changes in federal hours of service regulations that take effect July 16, the unions have refused to negotiate contract changes in pay the railroads want to make and have also refused to agree to arbitration on those issues. The railroads asked the court to find that the unions must negotiate the hours of service disputes and send any of them that are unresolved on July 16 to arbitration. (ffd: Journal of Commerce)

(MON) CSX announced their commitment to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions by 8 percent per revenue ton-mile by 2011. CSX said that it made the commitment as part of its participation in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Climate Leaders Program and that it was the first Class 1 railroad to do so. Concurrent with their announcement, CSX started four new low-emission GenSet switcher locomotives in service at its Oak Point Yard in the Bronx, NY. (ffd: CSX RR)

(MON) BNSF, in partnership with Vehicles Projects Inc. of Denver, debuted what it said was the nation's first hydrogen-fuel-cell switcher locomotive. A BNSF spokesman said that the locomotive was of experimental design. The spokesman added that the locomotive would next go to the Transportation Technology Center in Pueblo, CO for further testing and then into service at a BNSF terminal in Southern California. (ffd: BNSF RR, Topeka Journal)

(MON) New Jersey Transit announced that would begin service July 26 on a new 2.3-mile branch of its Pascack Valley Line serving the Meadowlands sports and entertainment complex. Initially, shuttle trains will be operated between the Meadowlands and NJT's Lautenberg Rail Station at Secaucus Junction. In a related story, Metro North announced that it would operate special through trains from its New Haven Line through Manhattan's Pennsylvania Station to Secaucus Junction, marking the first joint MNRN-NJT through service. The MNRN special trains will operate on all preseason and regular season New York Giants and New York Jets game days. (ffd: Metro North, NJ Transit)

(TUE) The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority announced that it may continue manual operation of its Metrorail subway trains for as long as a year or more while the system's automated traffic control system is checked. The manual operation follows the previous week's collision between two Metrorail subway trains in which nine persons were killed and 80 were injured, and in which the automated system may have failed, according to initial investigation reports. WMATA General Manager Joe Catoe said it was unclear how long trains would operate manually, but that "...it could be a month, a year or two years." (ffd: Washington Post, wire services)

(TUE) CSX extended the deadline for Florida to acquire a CSX line through the Orlando area targeted for commuter rail service. Supporters of the proposed SunRail commuter rail service said that they would continue to press the Florida state legislature to approve the transaction, which the legislature has twice rejected, mainly due to issues relating to liability responsibility. (ffd: Orlando Sentinel, RT&S)

(TUE) The Renewable Fuels Association noted that approximately 70 percent of all U.S. ethanol traffic moves via rail. An association spokesman said that, "Rail has access, control terminals, and is cheaper than anything else right now." The Association of American Railroads earlier reported that U.S. railroads transported approximately 120,000 carloads of ethanol in 2007. (ffd: RFA, Railway Age)

(WED) The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority said that SEPTA directions and information would now be available on Google Transit, Google's online transit trip-planning feature. SEPTA said that travel information will initially be available for its subway system, light rail system, and regional rail system, and that bus system information will be available by year's end. SEPTA also announced that, later in the week, information on service disruptions would be available on Twitter. (ffd: Philadelphia Examiner)

(THU) The Chlorine Institute and the American Chemistry Council filed suit in federal court against Union Pacific. The suit opposes changes recently made by UP in its tariff for chlorine shipments such that shippers are held responsible for all losses, damages, and liabilities arising from an accident. On June 11, the Surface Transportation Board directed UP to quote rates for chlorine shipments it had earlier said it did not want to quote, because chlorine for some requested origin-destination pairs could be obtained from nearer origins. A UP spokesman said that the railroad "was still evaluating the material and cannot comment on the lawsuit at this time." (ffd: Salt Lake Tribune)

(THU) The West Virginia Railroad Museum received a used locomotive turntable at its Elkins, WV location. The turntable, weighing 82 tons and 90 feet in length, was shipped via rail from the Belt Railway of Chicago, where it was formerly in use. (ffd: wire services)

(FRI) The National Association of Railroad Passengers debuted its new "American Passenger" publication. The new publication includes information and updates on passenger rail developments throughout the country. An online copy of it is available by linking to NARP's website, <<http://www.narprail.org/>>www.narprail.org, and then selecting the link for it in NARP's July 2 email newsletter. (ffd: NARP)

(FRI) Officials of Laguna Niguel, CA said that the city and the Orange County Sheriffs Department have taken steps to discourage attendance at the annual "Moon Amtrak Day" event, which this year is scheduled to take place in the city on July 11. The city said that the event, which has no sponsor, no organization, no permits, no insurance and no public facilities to accommodate large crowds, "will not resemble previous years...due to new ordinances enacted." In recent years, the Sheriff's Department was needed to disperse assembled crowds, which have numbered up to approximately 10,000 persons, after complaints were received regarding public nudity, intoxication and general unruliness. (ffd: City of Laguna Niguel)

STATS:

(THU) For the week ending June 27, 2009, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 27.1 billion ton-miles, down 21.4 percent from the comparable week last year. Also for the week, U.S. carload rail traffic was down 22.3 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was down 17.9 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 24.9 percent, and Canadian intermodal rail traffic was down 19.9 percent.

For the month of June, 2009 compared with June, 2008, U.S. carload rail traffic was down 19.7 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was down 18.2 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 25.7 percent, and Canadian intermodal rail traffic was down 19.2 percent.

For the Second Quarter, 2009 compared with the Second Quarter, 2008, U.S. carload rail traffic was down 22.4 percent. Notable traffic decreases included coal down 12.5 percent, grain down 25.7 percent, and motor vehicles and equipment down 49.4 percent. Also for the quarter, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 27.9 percent and Canadian intermodal rail traffic was down

18.5 percent.

For the First Half, 2009 compared with the First Half, 2008, U.S. carload rail traffic was down 19.5 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was down 17.0 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 24.1 percent, and Canadian intermodal rail traffic was down 15.5 percent. (ffd: AAR)

(NOTE: Canadian traffic totals include those of the U.S. operations of the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railways.)

STATS CONTINUED – SAFETY:

The Federal Railroad Administration released preliminary safety statistics for the first four months of 2009. Compared with the first four months of 2008, and possibly related to the drop in train operations attendant to the economic downturn, total accidents and incidents declined 20.2 percent. Of this, total train accidents declined 31.0 percent.

Also for the first four months, crossing accident fatalities decreased 5.6 percent, but trespasser fatalities increased 2.3 percent. Also, on-duty employee fatalities for this period totaled seven, compared with six in 2008 and three in 2006. (ffd: FRA)

EXPANSIONS, CONTRACTIONS AND ALIKE:

(MON) Protection Development Inc. (PDI) announced the launching of their new Rail and Transit Consulting Division. The group will be known as PDI Rail Solutions and will provide engineering, quality, inspection and related consulting services. (ffd: PDI Corp.)

(TUE) The Surface Transportation Board approved the Arizona & California Railroad's earlier request to abandon approximately 50 miles of line between Rice, CA and Ripley. (ffd: STB)

(WED) Denver's Regional Transportation District announced that it had purchased Union Pacific's Boulder Industrial Lead. The line is intended for future commuter rail service as part of the RTD's North Metro Corridor, which is intended to run from Denver Union Station into suburban Adams County. UP will retain freight service rights over eight miles of the 33-mile corridor. (ffd: Journal of Commerce, Trains)

(THU) BNSF and the Port of Seattle agreed to extend the deadline for the port's proposed acquisition of the 42-mile Eastside Rail Corridor, which a port spokesman said was due to "continued uncertainty in credit markets and the recession's effect on port finances." The port wants to acquire the line for lease to King County to develop a public access trail on its southern portion. Freight rail service would continue on the line between Woodinville and Snohomish. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(THU) Norfolk Southern filed to abandon approximately one mile of line in and around Maryville, TN. (ffd: STB)

(THU) Union Pacific filed to abandon approximately six miles of its McHenry Industrial Lead between Escalon, CA and McHenry. (ffd: STB)

APPOINTMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND MILESTONES:

(TUE) Tom White retired from the Association of American Railroads. Mr. White was a longtime director of public affairs for the AAR.

(WED) The National Mediation Board announced that Elizabeth Dougherty has been named to her second term as chairman. Ms. Dougherty has served on the NMB since December, 2006, and was earlier a special assistant to former president George W. Bush for domestic policy. (ffd: NMB)

CORRECTION:

In last week's edition, specifically, the item concerning a possible new subcontracted operator of Southern California's Metrolink commuter rail services, I reported about "...the current contractor, Metrolink, which has said that it no longer wants to operate Metrolink trains..." Correctly, the current operator of Metrolink trains is Connex.

///

Weekly Rail Review (WRR) is edited from public news sources and distributed weekly to those working in, or interested in, rail and transit. Recipients are welcome to forward it on, but if you do, please let me know to whom, so that I may note them in my total readership. Anyone not already on my distribution list may send me an email to receive it, with my compliments.

BE SAFE AND PROSPER,

Dave Mears

Cherry Hill, NJ