

WEEKLY RAIL REVIEW

FOR THE WEEK ENDING AUGUST 14, 2009

BY DAVE MEARS

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

(SUN) Washington, DC's Metro subway system suffered an on-duty fatality. Michael Nash, Age 63 with 19 years' service, was struck and killed by a ballast regulator while he was performing trackwork. The accident occurred on Metro's Orange Line between the West Falls Church and Vienna stations. (ffd: Washington Post)

(MON) The New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority announced a five-year capital plan totaling \$25.5 billion. The plan, details of which are posted on the MTA's website, includes purchase of 500 subway cars, 2,800 buses, and 410 commuter rail cars. The plan also includes continuing construction of the new Second Avenue subway line, extending the No. 7 subway line to Manhattan's West Side, and continuing construction of East Side Access into Manhattan for Long Island Rail Road trains. (ffd: NYMTA, Times Herald-Record)

(MON) Further earlier announced plans to discontinue the honor-with-fare-checker system for its Los Angeles subway line, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority announced that turnstile fare gates would be installed and in service in four subway stations by the end of August. The agency has stated that approximately 6 percent of its subway and light rail system riders evade payment and that the agency loses approximately \$5 million annually in fares as a result. (ffd: LACMTA)

(TUE) Amtrak announced that members of its Amtrak Guest Rewards frequent traveler program traveling on August 20 would have the opportunity to share in two million travel points being awarded to mark the two millionth enrollee in the program. Amtrak said that the share promotion requires advance registration. Also on Tuesday, Amtrak announced a partnership with Google Transit that will allow passengers to do Amtrak trip planning in conjunction with the many transit systems on Google Transit. Amtrak said that this service will be available on five routes initially, but will eventually be expanded to include all Amtrak routes. (ffd: Amtrak, NARP)

(TUE) The New York City Transit Authority announced that, in negotiated tradeoff, it was dropping its contract demand for one-person train crews on some subway lines. NYCTA is currently negotiating with unions representing subway workers. The one-person crews would first have been put in operation on the No. 7 and L lines, which already have new subway cars that permit one-person operation. (ffd: New York Times)

TUE) RailAmerica announced the startup of a new contract switching business, appropriately called RailAmerica Contract Switching Services. A RailAmerica spokesman said that the new subsidiary will also offer rack maintenance, rail car and locomotive repairs and rail car cleaning. The new company will be headed by RailAmerica VP Jeff Geary. (ffd: Jacksonville Business Journal)

(TUE) Law enforcement officials announced the seizure of 65 pounds of marijuana found in a covered hopper car at an ethanol plant near Lakota in northern Iowa. The marijuana, which has a street value of approximately \$160,000, was found in thirteen bundles in the car, which had come from Mexico. (ffd: wire services)

(WED) The Association of American Railroads testified at a public hearing for comment on proposed new Federal Railroad Administration rules and regulations concerning Positive Train Control (PTC) installation. The proposed rules, which stem from last year's passage of the Federal Railway Safety Improvement Act, require PTC on rail lines over which regularly scheduled intercity and commuter passenger trains are operated, and on Class 1 railroad main lines that carry over 5 million gross tons

annually and also carry poison-by-inhalation (PIH) traffic. An AAR spokesman suggested that the proposed rules “impose a financial burden above and beyond what Congress intended, potentially adding hundreds of millions of dollars in additional costs to the railroads as they face using private capital to pay for the federal mandate.” (ffd: AAR, Progressive Railroading)

(WED) The oversight board of the Chicago Transit Authority voted to extend three subway lines. The board voted to extend the Red Line approximately 5.3 miles from its end at 95th Street to 130th Street; the Orange Line approximately 2.3 miles from Midway Station to a point on Cicero Avenue; and the Yellow Line approximately 1.6 miles from Skokie Station to Old Orchard Road. (ffd: Chicago Tribune)

(WED) The New York City Transit Authority announced a new pilot program to install GPS-linked signs at several bus stops along 34th Street in Manhattan. The system will allow bus riders to check for when the next bus is due at their stop, and is similar to systems already in place in several other cities, including Washington, DC. (ffd: New York Daily News)

(THU) BNSF announced that it was continuing to test longer train lengths, progressing an initiative begun on the railroad in mid-2007. A BNSF spokesman noted that, on July 10, it operated an intermodal train between Los Angeles, CA and Clovis, NM that totaled 12,000 feet in length, was powered by 7 locomotives, and carried 458 container units, a new BNSF record. The previous record, set in January, 2009, was a train carrying 435 units and more than 10,000 feet in length. (ffd: BNSF Corp.)

(THU) Norfolk Southern announced that it would make a \$100,000 grant to Penn State University. The grant will support a new four-year railroad and transit engineering degree program that will start at Penn State in Fall, 2010. (ffd: Altoona Mirror, Norfolk Southern Corp.)

(THU) New Jersey Transit announced that it was testing “DepartureVision,” a new service that displays train departure boards on mobile devices, such as iPhones, Blackberries or web-enabled devices. An NJT spokesman said that DepartureVision “will allow riders to view actual train departure screens, including arrival time track assignment and train status.” (ffd: NJ Transit)

(FRI) The U.S. Department of Transportation announced that its payouts of stimulus funding for public transportation projects had risen by \$347 million in the week ending August 7, compared with the previous week. A USDOT spokesman said that payouts of stimulus funding to date now totaled \$1.494 billion, nearly triple the \$523 million USDOT had paid out in stimulus funding as of the first week of July. (ffd: Journal of Commerce, USDOT)

(FRI) Trains resumed operating through Montana Rail Link’s Mullan Tunnel, which crosses under the Continental Divide near Blossburg, MT. A cave-in July 20 had closed the tunnel since that time, and a further cave-in occurred earlier this month. An MRL spokesman said that an \$18 million project to renovate the tunnel will continue. (ffd: Trains)

(FRI) Amtrak announced that an additional Amtrak “Cascades” round trip would start service on August 19. The additional round trip will operate between Seattle, WA and Vancouver, BC. Also on Friday, Amtrak announced that it would not ticket passengers for trips that begin or end in Pittsburgh, PA during the G-20 economic summit meeting scheduled in the city September 24-26. Amtrak trains will still pass through Pittsburgh during that time and passengers on those trains will be allowed to transfer to connecting trains, so long as they don’t leave the station platform. (ffd: Amtrak, wire services)

(FRI) The Smithsonian Institution announced that it would donate to its affiliate, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum in Baltimore, MD, a fireless steam locomotive. The “fireless cooker,” which stored steam for propulsion, was built in 1938 and was used through 1978 to switch rail cars at Potomac Electric (PEPCO) power plants near Washington, DC. PEPCO donated the locomotive to the Smithsonian in 1979. (ffd: B&O Railroad Museum)

STATS:

(THU) For the week ending August 8, 2009, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 29.3 billion ton-miles, down 14.8 percent from the comparable week last year. U.S. carload rail traffic was down 16.0 percent, down 18.8 percent in the East and down 14.1 percent in the West. Notable traffic decreases included chemicals down 6.1 percent and metals and metal products down 48.3 percent. Also for the week, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was down 16.6 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 27.2 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was down 20.1 percent, Mexican carload rail traffic was down 12.7 percent, and Mexican intermodal rail traffic was down 10.5 percent.

For the period January 1 through August 8, 2009, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 868.3 billion ton-miles, down 18.0 percent from the comparable period last year. Also for this period, U.S. carload rail traffic was down 18.9 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was down 17.1 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 23.9 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was down 16.3 percent, Mexican carload rail traffic was down 15.3 percent, and Mexican intermodal rail traffic was down 21.4 percent. (ffd: AAR)

(NOTE: Related to the above, and as has been the case, Canadian traffic totals include those of the U.S. operations of Canadian Pacific Railway and Canadian National, the latter now including EJE.)

EXPANSIONS, CONTRACTIONS AND ALIKE:

(TUE) Palouse River & Coulee City Railroad filed to abandon approximately two miles of line in and near Moscow, ID. (ffd: STB)

(WED) Commonwealth Railway granted CSX non-exclusive overhead trackage rights over approximately seven miles of CWRV line between Suffolk and Churchland, VA. The purpose of the trackage rights is "to improve CSX's access to the Maersk Terminal in the Port of Norfolk-Hampton Roads, and to provide competitive service for intermodal and other traffic originating at, and destined for, the port." (ffd: STB)

(WED) Norfolk Southern announced that it would build a new intermodal terminal in Greencastle, PA. The new terminal, expected to open in late 2011, will be built on a 200-acre site capable of handling more 85,000 trailers and containers annually. (ffd: NS Corp.)

(WED) Shortline conglomerate Watco Companies announced that the Alabama Warrior Railway was now part of its family of railroads. The ABWR, formerly known as the Jefferson Warrior Railroad, operates 15 miles of line in and around Birmingham, AL. (ffd: Progressive Railroading)

(THU) The Surface Transportation Board approved CSX's earlier filing to abandon approximately 7 miles of its Athens Branch between Athens, TN and Englewood, TN. (ffd: STB)

(FRI) CSX held groundbreaking ceremonies for a new intermodal terminal near North Baltimore, OH. Management of the construction of the new terminal, as well as its operation, will be handled by CSX subsidiary Evansville Western Railway. (ffd: Progressive Railroading, WFIN TV News)

(FRI) Montreal, Maine & Atlantic Railway announced through the media that it would file to abandon 241 miles of its line between Millinocket, ME and Madawaska, ME, including several branches of that line. In comments to the media, an MMA spokesman suggested that the State of Maine might consider purchasing and contributing to the maintenance of the line, and said that it

would work with the state toward that end. (ffd: Bangor Daily News, Progressive Railroading)

(FRI) The Virginia & Truckee Railroad resumed passenger excursion service over the line between Virginia City, NV and Carson City, NV. Passenger service over the line had been discontinued in 1938. The railroad said it planned round trips over the line on Saturdays through October. (ffd: Reno Gazette Journal)

APPOINTMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND MILESTONES:

(WED) Kansas City Southern announced the departure from its employ of Scott Arvidson, EVP and COO of Kansas City Southern. Mr. Arvidson will be succeeded by David Ebbrecht, who last month was appointed SVP-Operations of Kansas City Southern de Mexico. (ffd: Kansas City Star)

(WED) The National Transportation Safety Board announced that Christopher Hart had been sworn in as a board member. Mr. Hart was most recently a deputy director of the Federal Aviation Administration. (ffd: NTSB)

(FRI) The Massachusetts Governor's office announced that William Grabauskas would step down as general manager of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. Succeeding Mr. Grabauskas, in an acting capacity until a permanent successor can be found, will be William Mitchell, the MBTA's general counsel. (ffd: NARP)

///

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