

WEEKLY RAIL REVIEW

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SAT, AUGUST 27, 2005

BY DAVE MEARS

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

(MON) New Jersey Transit announced that it would hire a private investigation firm to act as so-called mystery shoppers and report on NJT train and bus service over the next year. An NJT spokesman said that it plans to have these individuals spend more than 41,000 total hours – the equivalent of 1,700 full days – on board NJT trains and buses to check up on employee performance. Adding that this program mirrors similar efforts undertaken by NJT in previous years, the spokesman also said that, “The mystery shopper program allows us to go deeper. For example, the typical NJT customer is not going to report to us if a bus driver isn’t wearing a seat belt or not making announcements to protocol.” (ffd: Newark Star Ledger)

(MON) Proclaiming it “one of the largest software agreements in railroad history,” Union Switch & Signal announced that it had entered into a contract with Union Pacific to implement US&S’s new Optimized Traffic Planner (OTP) and Next Generation Computer Aided Dispatching System (CAD) at UP’s Harriman Dispatching Center in Omaha, NE. A US&S spokesman referred to OTP as “a real-time software technology-based system for planning and optimizing the movement of rail traffic across a rail network...[It is] equipped with a ‘problem-solving engine’ capable of generating multiple optimized train movement plans continuously for all scheduled trains and selecting the best plan for execution.” The spokesman noted that OTP can also generate new and revised plans based on updated information received from the field and react to unexpected events, such as adverse weather conditions or grade crossing collisions. (ffd: Progressive Railroading, US&S Corp.)

(MON) In a nod to its intermodal partners, BNSF hosted receptions for truck drivers at its intermodal terminals in Chicago, IL; Oakland, CA; San Bernardino, CA; Los Angeles, CA; and Seattle, WA. The receptions included lunch and refreshments for nearly 6,000 truck drivers that were handed out by BNSF managers and managers from Gordon Trucking, Schneider National, Swift Transportation, U.S. Xpress, and other intermodal trucking companies. “These events are our way of saying thanks to our trucking company partners and their drivers,” said BNSF VP-Domestic Intermodal John Hickerson. (ffd: BNSF Corp.)

(MON) Police in South Africa continued to stand guard over a derailed train carrying 180,000 crates of beer. The train derailed the previous Friday near Waterval Boven, approximately 124 miles east of Johannesburg. By Saturday, police were battling up to 200 persons from nearby towns who were attempting to loot the train. “It was a lot of trouble from one train crash,” said a railway spokesman. “They [the police] were firing rubber bullets into the crowd...The issue was the beer.” (ffd: wire services)

(TUE) A CSX freight train derailed in Oak Point Yard in New York City’s South Bronx and onto the adjacent Amtrak main line. The derailment damaged catenary wires and poles for approximately a third of a mile, necessitating Amtrak Acela Express and Metroliner train services between New York and Boston to be suspended through Thursday. Regional train services between New York and Boston were continued, however, diesels were required to pull these trains through the damaged segment. Amtrak resumed normal New York-Boston train services on Friday, while final repairs were being completed. (ffd: Amtrak, wire services)

(WED) New York State's Metropolitan Transportation Authority awarded Lockheed Martin a \$212 million contract to implement security and surveillance systems in its subways, commuter railroads, bridges and tunnels. An MTA spokesman said that the contract includes installation of more than 1,000 cameras and more than 3,000 motion and intruder sensors, and that each of New York City's 468 subway stations will have at least one security camera by the time the project is completed in 2008. The spokesman added that the contract was awarded on an emergency basis without MTA board approval. (ffd: New York Post, New York Times)

(TUE) Officials in Charlotte, NC announced plans for a \$100 million intermodal transit terminal to be called the "Charlotte Gateway Station." A city spokesman said that the new terminal will open in 2009 to serve Amtrak, buses, and a future commuter rail service. The spokesman added that the State of North Carolina has already spent \$30 million on land acquisition for the new terminal and that the new federal SAFETEA-LU Act allocates an additional \$19.8 million for the project. (ffd: NARP)

(WED) A spokesman for the Nebraska Grain and Feed Association contradicted Surface Transportation Board Chairman Roger Nober's recent outlook for rail service to Nebraska grain shippers. Responding to Mr. Nober's pronouncement, made after a recent tour of Omaha-area agriculture facilities, that he expected no major problems during the coming peak shipping season, Association EVP Pat Ptacek commented, "If [he] wanted to be a little more accurate on placement of cars, he should have talked to the rank-and-file [Association] member who hasn't seen a train in 2 to 4 weeks." Mr. Ptacek added that "Union Pacific and BNSF railroads...are running behind in delivering ordered grain cars," which a UP spokesman later confirmed. Mr. Nober declined to respond to Mr. Ptacek's comments. (ffd: Omaha World-Herald)

(WED) BNSF opened its latest Condition-Based Maintenance (CBM) locomotive facility adjacent to its Alliance, NE locomotive shop. A BNSF spokesman said that the difference between its locomotive shops and its CBM facilities is that the latter is designed to troubleshoot and diagnose the root cause of problems with so-called "bad actor" locomotives, whereas the shop's objective is to perform scheduled and unscheduled maintenance. The spokesman added that this is BNSF's fourth CBM facility, joining those already in operation in Glendive, MT, Northtown, MN, and Kansas City, MO. (ffd: Progressive Railroading, Trains)

(WED) Baltimore, MD's Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum announced that it had been selected as one of 3 worldwide finalists for the annual Sustainable Tourism Award for Preservation. The award, which honors members of the travel and tourism industry who are especially committed to protecting cultural and historic treasures, is presently annually by Smithsonian Magazine and the Tourism Cares for Tomorrow organization. A B&O Railroad Museum spokesman added that anyone interested in helping the museum earn the award may vote for it, once a day through October 31, 2005, at the award website, <<http://www.sustainabletourismawards.com/>><http://www.sustainabletourismawards.com/>. (ffd: B&O Railroad Museum)

(WED) BNSF moved its decommissioned locomotive demonstrator from Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, KS to Kansas City, MO Union Station. A spokesman for the National Academy of Railroad Sciences, which locates at JCCC, said that the decommissioned demonstrator, which was installed in 1988, had recently been replaced by more advanced demonstrators. The spokesman added that, once reinstalled at Kansas City Union Station, the demonstrator would be part of a new interactive exhibit, "The KC Rail Experience," which is scheduled to open there on September 23. (ffd: Johnson County Sun)

(THU) In preparation for Hurricane Katrina's Florida landfall, railroads operating in Southeast Florida began curtailing their operations. Amtrak turned its New York to Miami trains at Orlando and terminated its "Sunset Limited" train due from Los Angeles, CA at New Orleans, LA. CSX and Florida East Coast both curtailed freight operations to and from the Miami area. Miami area commuter rail operator Tri-Rail suspended operation Thursday and Friday. (Editor's Note: At press time, Hurricane Katrina had crossed through Florida, increased strength in the Gulf of Mexico to a dangerous Category 5 storm, and was expected to again make landfall Monday, August 29 somewhere between New Orleans, LA and Biloxi, MS.) (ffd: Amtrak, Trains, wire services)

(THU) BNSF announced that it had completed structural repairs to the line it jointly operates with Union Pacific accessing Wyoming's Powder River Basin coal fields. BNSF, who is responsible for maintaining the line, said that it was continuing to clean coal dust out of the line's ballast, which contributed to deteriorated track conditions that resulted in back-to-back derailments on the line last May. In a related story, a UP spokesman noted that, "Since the beginning of August, 70 percent of the missed trainloads [out of Powder River] are attributable to a variety of reasons, ranging from landslides in the pits, to no coal inventory, to no equipment upgrades...Union Pacific hopes the mines will resolve these problems by the beginning of September so that UP and BNSF can take advantage of all available track capacity." (ffd: Progressive Railroading, Railway Age)

(THU) Amtrak President David Gunn criticized the Department of Transportation for tactics he said could destroy Amtrak. "If Amtrak fails, intercity passenger rail will be gone in this country," Mr. Gunn said at a breakfast sponsored by the Downtown St. Louis (MO) Partnership. Mr. Gunn went on to suggest that "[USDOT's] goal is to destroy Amtrak...I think [USDOT] is viewing it as a budget-cutting exercise." Mr. Gunn also said that he sees passenger rail as a key national transportation alternative, noting soaring fuel prices and that several airlines have been or are teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. (ffd: St. Louis Post-Dispatch)

(FRI) Britain operated its last regularly scheduled passenger train utilizing slam-door coaches. The train was run by the passenger rail operator Southern Network between London's Victoria Station and the village of Seaford. The slam-door coaches, which famously feature side entry to individual passenger compartments, are being replaced by coaches of modern design with end-of-car doors. A railway spokesman said that, although Britain's Office of the Health And Safety Executive has banned slam-door coaches from regular service effective November 1, Southern Network will operate a special "farewell" excursion train using the coaches on November 19. (ffd: Eastbourne Herald)

STATS – TRAFFIC:

(THU) For the week ending August 20, 2005, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 33.5 billion ton-miles, up 2.8 percent from the comparable week last year. U.S. carload rail traffic was up 2.0 percent, up 2.5 percent in the East and up 1.5 percent in the West. Notable traffic increases included nonmetallic minerals up 41.3 percent, coke up 21.0 percent, and non-grain farm products up 19.8 percent; notable traffic decreases included metals down 5.6 percent and motor vehicles and equipment down 3.6 percent. Also for the week, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 9.0 percent, with container traffic totaling 179,472 units, a new U.S. weekly record. Also for the week, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 4.6 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 4.7 percent, Mexico's Transportacion Ferroviaria Mexicana's carload rail traffic was down 13.8 percent, and TFM's intermodal rail traffic was down 4.1 percent.

For the period January 1 through August 20, 2005, U.S. rail volume grand totaled 1.05 trillion ton-miles, up 2.3

percent from the comparable period last year. Also for this period, U.S. carload rail traffic was up 1.5 percent, U.S. intermodal rail traffic was up 6.2 percent, Canadian carload rail traffic was down 0.5 percent, Canadian intermodal rail traffic was up 2.4 percent, TFM's carload rail traffic was down 0.6 percent, and TFM's intermodal rail traffic was up 5.7 percent. (ffd: AAR)

MORE STATS – "BIG 7" OPERATING PERFORMANCE:

(WED) For the week ending August 20, 2005 versus the comparable week last year, average train speed was as follows: BNSF, 22.6 mph versus 23.9 mph; Canadian National, 26.3 mph versus 24.9 mph; Canadian Pacific, 24.0 mph versus 26.0 mph; CSX, 19.3 mph versus 20.9 mph; Kansas City Southern, 23.4 mph versus 25.1 mph; Norfolk Southern, 22.6 mph versus 22.6 mph; and Union Pacific, 21.6 mph versus 21.7 mph.

Also for the week ending August 20, 2005 versus the comparable week last year, average terminal dwell time was as follows: BNSF, 10.1 hrs versus 9.4 hrs; Canadian National, 12.3 hrs versus 13.9 hrs; Canadian Pacific, 24.0 hrs versus 26.9 hrs; CSX, 29.4 hrs versus 27.8 hrs; Kansas City Southern, 22.7 hrs versus 24.2 hrs; Norfolk Southern, 21.5 hrs versus 21.4 hrs; and Union Pacific, 27.2 hrs versus 29.6 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) Indiana Eastern Railroad announced that it would lease, from CSX, and operate approximately 43 miles of line between Richmond, IN and Fernald, OH. A CSX spokesman said that CSX will retain overhead trackage rights until December 31, 2005 between Cottage Grove, IN and Fernald in order to conclude a contract with the Department of Energy to transport contaminated dirt. (ffd: AAR)

(TUE) The Greenville, SC Economic Development Corporation filed to abandon approximately 12 miles of line between Greenville and Travelers Rest, SC and also filed to discontinue service over approximately 4 miles of line between Greenville and East Greenville, SC. (ffd: STB)

(WED) The Modoc Northern Railroad, a subsidiary of Utah Central Railway, announced that it would lease, from Union Pacific, and operate approximately 107 miles of line between Alturas, CA and Klamath Falls, OR. The Modoc Northern will assume operation of the line effective November 1. (ffd: Klamath Falls Herald and News)

(THU) CSX filed to abandon approximately 9 miles of its Georges Creek Subdivision between Morrison, MD and Carlos, MD. (ffd: STB)

(FRI) Union Pacific granted BNSF temporary overhead trackage rights over UP's line between Valley Jct., IL and Rockview Jct., MO, totaling approximately 132 miles. The purpose of the trackage rights is to allow BNSF to bridge its trains while it undertakes program maintenance on its nearby line. The temporary trackage rights will expire on October 16, 2005. (ffd: STB)

(FRI) McCloud Railway filed to abandon approximately 80 miles of line in California as follows: between McCloud, CA and Burney, CA; between Bartle, CA and Hambone, CA; between Berry, CA and Sierra, CA; and between Bear Flat, CA and Pondosa, CA. (ffd: STB)

APPOINTMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS 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, rail and transit. Send an e-mail to receive it, with my compliments.

HAVE A SAFE AND PROSPEROUS WEEK,

Dave Mears

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