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"During the Gulf War when I was at the Central Vermont we flew American Flags from the brackets on our locomotives. Seems appropriate at this time too". – Chris Burger

The bombing of NY's World Trade Center Tuesday has, I think, galvanized the country like no other event in its history. We talk about Pearl Harbor comps but that was not on the mainland nor was it live and in color in our homes and offices. And the railroads have risen to the occasion.

Matt Rose in a Sep 11 open letter to BNSF employees, writes, "Like all of you, we are aware of and concerned about the attacks that have taken place today, and we recognize the gravity of the situation for all Americans. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims of this terrible tragedy and their families.

"Although there is no information to indicate that railroads will be targeted in any kind of terrorist attack, BNSF has put its police services team on heightened alert. We have increased security at critical locations across our system, and we are in continuous contact with appropriate national, state and local agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Federal Railroad Administration and police.

"No BNSF facilities are closed at this time, and freight train operations are continuing. BNSF is taking appropriate operating and inspection measures to provide for the continued safety and security of its operation. It's clearly in our national interest to make sure that the logistical capabilities that our railroad provides the country are available and working at this critical time. Our job now is to keep the railroad running, and it's more important than it ever has been before."

Amtrak on Wed said passenger loads continue to mount as disruptions to airports nationwide remain in effect. Responding to the needs of travelers from coast-to-coast, Amtrak is operating regular weekday service to locations throughout the country. "Amtrak ridership to New York City and Washington D.C. has been building throughout the day," said Stan Bagley, Amtrak's Vice President of Operations. "In addition to Amtrak's regular weekday service, the railroad is prepared to add capacity to trains to meet the needs of guests as may be necessary."

Two additional trains, one northbound and one southbound, will start running out of New York. The number of passengers departing Washington D.C. to New York at mid-day Wednesday was more than twice that of an average weekday. A train traveling between Richmond, Va., and Boston earlier in the day ran with 200 more passengers than normal for weekday service. A mid-day Boston to Washington train was sold out, which is unusual for mid-day. Other trains across the country are experiencing significant increases in ridership as well.

By Thursday Amtrak had more than 200 seats on virtually every unreserved train operating between Washington, New York and Boston, increasing this capacity by nearly 30 percent. One additional round trip was added today between Boston and New York. Additional capacity is also being added to Amtrak services on the West Coast and on long distance trains serving other parts of the country. By Wednesday, almost all of Amtrak's long-distance trains were sold out. The railroad will continue to adjust capacity as needed. Airline tickets are being accepted.

Union Pacific said on Wed that within hours of Tuesday's terrorist attacks its employees inspected every major bridge and structure on its 33,000- mile system, including oil and fuel tanks, buildings and rolling stock. Union Pacific special agents continue to coordinate security and law enforcement procedures with the FBI, local police and sheriffs' offices. U.S. flags are flying at half staff on all UP properties.

Traffic across the railroad experienced minimal delays despite the track and structure inspections. UP is also working with eastern carriers experiencing delays so they are not flooded with traffic at eastern connections. Rail traffic at UP's Mexico and Canada border crossings moved without issue. Crews in Chicago went the extra mile to operate 20 additional Metra trains in an effort to help move workers out of the city after several businesses closed early yesterday.

Norfolk Southern temporarily suspended operations in the North Jersey shared asset area and suspended or severely limited service along most of the northeastern corridor, including Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Newark and the Delmarva Peninsula. Delays will be inevitable.

By Thursday NS stepped up to the plate telling New York City and state officials that it is offering free transportation service for removing non-hazardous construction and demolition debris from the World Trade Center site. The railroad will position as many as 1,000 heavy-duty freight cars in the North Jersey shared area. NS will haul the debris to sites served by NS.

Stepping back, if we may, from the slaughter of the innocents Tuesday morning, my WIR 9/8 commentary on operating systems drew some helpful reader observations. This note from a shortline operator connecting with NS is very much to the point. He writes, "TYES and every other Class 1 transportation system depends on the AAR TRAINII messages reporting movements and car status. If the messages are not reported in a timely or complete manner then the dreaded black hole becomes a problem.

"This is both a Class 1 and short line problem. With the advent of switching and handling lines the Class 1 has tried to take most of the responsibility for a car off of a short line's back, but in the mix the responsibility for TRAINII reporting has been lost. The Class 1 will report the interchange to a short line, but the short line, who is now technically delivering to a Class 1 station on their line (In switching and Handling lines the short line stations become Class 1 stations), may not report TRAINII.

"Yes, everyone is supposed to do this, but with RMI the TRAINII module is a separate cost, and now no Class 1 is willing to foot the bill for it. When we can get all railroads, big and small, to report the TRAINII, then the systems like TYES gain the data to make all of the bells and whistles work correctly, and the trickle down effect to the customers is the result." Reader comment is, as always, invited.

The chips are definitely down. Time to get serious.

Roy Blanchard