

TODAY ON THE M&NJ

Regional Rail continued its program of improvements along the M&NJ as a hi-rail weed sprayer was seen at Slate Hill on Friday, June 12th. The GP9 was also in the area as it had to move the three or so covered hoppers that were sitting on the main around mile post 4 to accommodate the passage of the weed sprayer. On June 16th, there were reports of empty covered hoppers sitting on the Slate Hill run-around, on the main near milepost 4 and on the Coach track in DG yard. The cars seemed to carry the marks “PLCX” which is owned by GE Railcar but originally stood for Pullman Leasing Company. I believe we used to receive an occasional load of polystyrene for Genpak in a PLCX covered hopper. On July 1st, nine more covered hoppers were stored in Slate Hill with the result that cars were now stored on both sides of route 6. As of July 15th, empties stretched from route 6 to just south of the runaround and were stored on the runaround as well. North of route 6 they stretched into the trees beyond the “A” plant. The estimate was 25 cars stored with another 2 sitting just south of Hoops crossing.

The heavy rains of June resulted in the collapse of a 58-inch diameter culvert pipe under the entrance road to the Middletown passenger station on June 27th. The resultant sinkhole measured approximately 15 feet wide, 20 feet long and 12 feet deep. A new pipe was installed by day’s end and by early Sunday afternoon, one lane of the entrance road had been reopened. The station serves about 400 commuters on weekdays, about 100 on weekend days and is the third busiest on Metro-North’s Port Jervis line, trailing only Harriman and Salisbury Mills.

The Fallsburg O&W Rail-Trail Committee scheduled a “Ribbon Cutting and Trail Dedication” ceremony for August 30th to commemorate the opening of a newly completed two-mile section from Woodridge to the Neversink River. The trail also includes a 2.5-mile section from Mountindale to Woodridge and a three-mile segment from Hurleyville to South Fallsburg.

The Pocono Record reported on June 8th that the project to restore passenger service between Scranton and Hoboken via the former DL&W/EL main line had cleared a major hurdle as the Environmental Protection Agency had issued a “Finding of No Significant Impact”. After a 30-day public comment period, the project can begin to seek funding for the engineering and construction phases which will total about \$550 million with completion in four to five years. Pennsylvania stops would include Delaware Water Gap, East Stroudsburg, Analomink, Mount Pocono, Tobyhanna and Scranton. The project will be completed in phases with the Pennsylvania track segment last and so the entire \$550 million will not be needed initially.

On June 9th, a groundbreaking ceremony was held for a new railroad tunnel under the Hudson River between New Jersey and New York City. The entire \$8.7 billion project has been fully funded with the Federal Transit Administration contributing \$3 billion to the funds already raised by NJ Transit and the Port Authority of NY/NJ. The current tunnel capacity of 23 trains per hour will be increased to 48 trains per hour once the new tunnel is in operation. The tunnel is the centerpiece of the “Access to the Region’s Core” project commonly abbreviated as the “ARC” project which has multiple facets which will eliminate transfers at Secaucus Junction and provide commuters from Orange, Rockland, Bergen and Passaic counties with a one-seat ride to Penn Station. As part of the project,

NJT has ordered 26 new dual-mode locomotives that can operate off diesel engines or overhead catenary. The engines will be delivered in 2011-2012 and will be stored in a new yard to be built in Kearny. In 2011, construction will commence on a new \$1.3 billion bridge over the Hackensack River to replace the 100-year old Portal Bridge which cannot carry any additional tracks. Penn Station will not be able to handle the increased train volume and a new station will be built next door beneath 34th St. connecting to the New York City subway system at 6th, 7th and 8th avenues and to the PATH system.

The Times Herald-Record reported on August 11th on the contents of the preliminary five-year capital budget proposed by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Local projects include continued rail and tie replacement on the Port Jervis Line; rehabilitation of Moodna and Woodbury viaducts and expansion of the yard at Port Jervis which would support increased service as well as longer trains. The capital budget plan is to be considered by the MTA board in September before being submitted to the State in October for approval. Details of the MTA's plan are posted at www.mta.info.

Sources include the Pocono Record issues of June 8th and 9th and the Times Herald-Record issues of June 9th and 28th and August 11th and 30th. Thanks to Harold Rasmussen, Ed Horan, Dan Myers, Bruce Malone, Ron Vassallo and Randy Stone for providing information.