

highlights

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MBTA ACCIDENT INVESTIGATED...An investigation was undertaken last week of a February 6 accident involving a fire on a Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) passenger train in Boston. One person died and approximately 100 passengers were treated for smoke inhalation. Office of Safety investigators were sent to the scene several times but MBTA officials refused to allow them on the property, claiming that FRA had no jurisdiction to investigate the accident. Subsequently, the Department asked the Department of Justice to initiate legal action asking injunctive relief under the Federal Railroad Safety Act of 1970. A suit was filed with the United States District Court in Boston and on March 27 a ruling was issued enjoining the MBTA from "refusing to admit to the property and premises of the said defendant authorized agents of the plaintiff who seek to enter thereon for the purpose of enforcing the provisions of the Federal Railroad Safety Act of 1970, ...and all valid rules and regulations issued thereunder, as they relate to the February 6, 1973, Red Line subway accident on defendant's premises." This is the first case to be brought testing the extent of the Act, and the "Memorandum of Decision" from the court found that the Safety Act was intended to cover "all those means of rail transportation as are commonly included within the term, ...and defendant's rail rapid transit service is rail transportation and thus within the jurisdiction of the Federal Railroad Administration."

CAR SHORTAGE RELIEF SOUGHT...A DOT task force has been formed to attempt to identify problem areas and bottlenecks connected with the movement of grain for export to the Soviet Union. The car shortage is critical and the task force is working closely with the Department of Agriculture, ICC, the AAR, shippers and individual railroads in an attempt to relieve the congestion and expedite the movement of grain. Several recommendations have been made and field representatives are working with local officials at both ports and inland terminals. Carloadings during the first eleven weeks of this year totaled 358,402, 41 percent higher than for the same period in 1972, but were down from a 47 percent higher margin three weeks ago. Car shortages for plain boxcars and covered hoppers total over 30,000 and the port situation remains a bottleneck with both rail cars and ships backed up in both directions. The most recent nationwide figures show about 10,000 cars held up at ports, with an average delay of about 4½ days.

UN CONFERENCE ATTENDED...Associate Administrator Rogers and a representative from the Hazardous Materials Branch attended a conference in Geneva, Switzerland, of the United Nations Group of Experts on Explosives and last week participated in a joint meeting of the European rail and highway groups connected with carriage of dangerous goods in Berne, Switzerland.

ADMINISTRATOR DISCUSSES RAIL PLAN..."The imaginative application of the private enterprise system can solve the problems of the railroads of the northeastern states," Administrator Ingram told a meeting of the Eastern Railroad Association in Boston March 29. He discussed the plan, which was delivered to Congress by Transportation Secretary Brinegar March 26, for the preservation of essential rail services of the six eastern bankrupt railroads, including the Penn Central, describing the DOT concept as "reasonable." Hitting hard at other proposals which depend upon massive Federal funding, Ingram said, "To nationalize the U. S. railroads would only change ownership--at an initial cost to the taxpayers of somewhere around \$40 billion. That would only be the camel's nose under the tent--then would come the costs of maintenance and operations." He noted that the alternatives that have been proposed thus far have "overlooked opportunities for careful and competent application of the private enterprise system--a system which, throughout our national history, has proven to be flexible, forceful and effective. At this critical point in transportation history," he said, "we have every confidence that the system can produce a low cost, equitable answer--that cooperative enterprise by reasonable men can solve our railroad problems in the northeast."

TRAIN-TRACK DYNAMICS PROGRAM PROGRESSES...OS representatives visited the AAR research center in Chicago to discuss progress in the AAR-RPI research program on train-track dynamics which is being carried out in cooperation with the FRA. Accomplishments to date include the completion of the track-train dynamics bibliography; preparation of interim guidelines on freight train makeup; and continuance of work on computer dynamic modeling. Validation of the computer models has begun through the field tests on cooperating railroads.

AMTRAK ASSESSED...The Department's annual report to Congress on AMTRAK was released last month and recommended continuing Federal support of AMTRAK's efforts to improve intercity rail passenger service. The report recommended continuing, with some modification, the Corporation's route structure and a Federal grant of \$93 million in FY 1974 to offset anticipated operating losses. "The first years of AMTRAK's operations are formative ones," the report stated. "Therefore, it is not possible at this time to assess with any finality the success of the effort to revitalize intercity rail service. There are some notable gains, which support the general assessment that AMTRAK has made progress toward improving intercity rail service."

CRYOGENIC PERMITS NOT RENEWABLE...A telegram has been sent to members of the Cryogenic industry informing them that no permits for cryogenic cars will be renewed upon their expiration, nor will any new permits be issued until it has been demonstrated that the existing cars will maintain temperature levels during their average trips from loading to destination. The cars are used to transport liquified ethylene.