

Southwest corner

by John Hathaway

Passenger service in the Southwest Corner has received a disappointing blow to its past history and a shot in the arm for its future possibilities.

In McCook, Illinois, the Piolet Brothers Scrap Company wrote finis to an era of passenger history in the Southwest Corner. In the latter part of 1970 Piolet Brothers scrapped every ex-Santa Fe PA passenger diesel on their property. With the exception of four ex-Santa Fe PAs still in service on the Delaware and Hudson the classic ALCe-built diesel is now extinct.

What is disappointing about this situation is the fact that a number of organizations appealed to Piolet Brothers to save at least one of the sleek locomotives. The Chesapeake Western Museum of Chesapeake, Virginia, even offered cash for an A-B-A set of PAs, but were refused by the scrapping company.

If nothing else, these developments should forewarn diesel fans that, like their steam brethren, the classic pieces of diesel motive power are just as susceptible to extinction as the steam engine.

For years, the PAs were the mainstay on the San Diags between here and Los Angeles, and Santa Fe fast mail trains #7 and #8 east out of Los Angeles.

Passenger service in and out of San Diego will be around past May 1 with the announcement by Secretary of Transportation John Volpe that the San Diego to Seattle corridor will be included in the Railpax plan.

In the original proposal of passenger service for Railpax this corridor was completely ignored. For a rail passenger to get from Los Angeles to San Francisco or Seattle he would have had to take a slight side trip via Chicago!

Nobody seems to be quite sure exactly how much Railpax will produce insofar as passenger service is concerned. One can hardly help but wonder what the \$40-million allocated by Washington for the federally funded plan can accomplish when the railroads are currently claiming they are losing many times that amount each year on passenger service.

The plan calls for a drastic reduction from some 360 intercity passenger trains currently operating. Approximately 150 trains are included in the Railpax plan, and they will feature vastly improved equipment and service...at least in theory.

But the least we here in San Diego can do is thank our various state and federal representatives for getting San Diego back onto the rail passenger map. Now we'll have a grandstand seat to see how railroad passenger service will fare in the future. It should be interesting....

Filling out the rest of this month's column with tidbits: San Diego state senator Jim Mills has introduced a bill to increase the state gasoline tax by one-half cent per gallon to help pay for a program to eliminate grade crossings. The bill calls for a four year life span for the extra tax and predicts \$45-dollars will be raised for the program.

Revenue from this bill would be matched by local communities on a two-to-one basis in the grade crossing eliminations. Railroads would also help foot the bill.

Mills argues that railroad operations could be drastically speeded up minus grade crossings and emphasizes the safety of eliminating automobiles and trains occupying the same space...too often at the same time.

SANTA FE has rebuilt some six old F-units into their own "GP8" and/or "CF7" model road units and hopes to make the switch on twelve more this year.

SANTA FE, SOUTHERN PACIFIC, and UNION PACIFIC are apparently satisfied with their motive power stables as they exist now and probably will not purchase any major blocks of new models in 1971. The last couple of years have been fun, watching all kinds of new power rolling through the Southwest Corner, but apparently the austerity program has caught up with the railroads and the coming year will be a slow one so far as motive power is concerned.

PSRMA GOES INTERNATIONAL

When the Association was founded, the idea was to have a museum containing artifacts representing the South Western US railroading industry. Well, with the present state of affairs regarding equipment availability, if such a restriction were held to, our collection would probably not grow much more. Equipment is still around in other parts of the US, but a larger source of untapped wealth is overseas. Today standard gauge American built locomotives are operating in France, Greece, Turkey, Iran and Mexico. Others are working on narrow and broad gauge pikes elsewhere too. Streetcars that saw original service in American cities now run around in South American cities. So, feelers are out for foreign service US built equipment. Also investigation into foreign built equipment isn't going to be overlooked. Right now, today, over 200 steam locomotives of several classes are in storage at a Welsh scrap dealers yard. Several have been rescued by a British Preservation Societies, why not PSRMA too? Shipment to the US from overseas will be very very expensive unless we can receive greatly reduced charges by the shipping lines. If any of our membership has information on overseas equipment and insight into the shipping industry, please contact: Chop Kerr.