



MAINE RAIL NEWS

MRG, Inc. (Maine Rail Group)
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*A volunteer group
working to enhance
rail services in Maine*

January / February 2026 Newsletter

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--- Ed Hanscom, newsletter editor

MRG President's Message

As we start a new year, it is good to remember our organization's goals and to review all the work that was accomplished with your help last year towards reaching those goals. MRG's goals are simple:

- Advocate for expanded passenger service in Maine.
- Protect the state-owned corridors by encouraging freight service to take advantage of the least destructive means to move products.

The result is to make Maine a better place to live and work. Spreading the message is the challenge, and it takes all of us talking to others to make our goals become a reality.

Getting the message out meant outreach to the public through our staffing of booths at Cumberland Fair, Common Ground Fair, the Maine Transportation Conference, and the Build Maine annual conference, as well as five train shows in Maine and one in Massachusetts. In addition, we held a forum with Thomas College on rail expansion. Through these efforts, we built coalitions with short lines and excursion rail services in Maine as well as several environmental and social groups around the state.

Collaborating with our national leaders, MRG traveled to Washington, D.C. in April to work in conjunction with the Rail Passenger Association. In Maine, we contracted with a media specialist and a publicist to help us in reaching out to state legislators, NNEPRA, Maine DOT and individual representatives. Our Facebook/Instagram accounts are active and get high visibility. Our website is kept up to date not just about our activities, but also transportation news and important research reports.

To back our goals with data, we collaboratively completed two major studies. First, a survey of Mainers showed over 60 percent both in favor of expanding rail service and a willingness to pass a bond issue. Secondly, we funded a benefit cost analysis showing that expanding rail service to Bangor would result in a \$61.7 million-dollar annual benefit to the state economy. The Rail Passengers Association (RPA) did the benefit cost analysis, and we were extremely grateful for the presence of Jim Matthews, president of the RPA, who came to Maine twice as we shared the information with Maine news services and representatives around the state.

Maine is a large state and distances are great. We are proud of our natural beauty and the strong work ethic of our population. New businesses and young people are attracted to the mix of opportunities to have a balance of activities surrounded by Maine's natural beauty. But without a balanced transportation system, we will not continue to attract young people. In quoting from Voices for Public Transit .org (12/16/25), "Public transit is more than a ride; it's a cornerstone of the neighborhoods. Strong transit systems create jobs, power local businesses, and keep people connected to work, school, and family."

Transit is not free and this is often pointed out to us. But when people look at rail transit and cite costs, they forget that roads do not pay for themselves. Add to this an average cost of \$12,000 a year for car ownership, and many Mainers find getting around beyond reach.

A report in *City Transport and Traffic Innovation* shows that: "In Maine, there is an expected 18% decline in gas tax revenue by 2030 from improvements in vehicle

efficiency and a further 10% decline due to EVs.” That means highway users will consume fewer gallons of gas and pay less gas tax to fund the construction and upkeep of highways. While for the past few years federal grant funds have paid for 45% of roads, State and Local revenue pays 54.4% --- far more than is collected by car registration and state gas tax. As per the non-profit Tax Foundation, “By diverting general funds to roadway spending, the burden of paying for the roads falls on all taxpayers, including people who drive little or may not drive at all. By relying on other revenue sources to fund roads, states effectively underprice road use. This can manifest in several forms, most notably traffic congestion, but can also distort the transportation market by subsidizing road use relative to alternatives, particularly freight rail.”

So, completing the circle – our efforts are essential. The state is shortchanging public needs to pay to maintain our roads and highways, and those expenditures only put us somewhere in the middle of the 50 states for well-maintained roads.

The answer is looking at a balanced transportation plan which offers alternatives and choices for getting around. We need more miles of passenger rail to allow young people to afford housing and transportation costs to live and prosper in our great state. To save general revenues from going to roads, we must use our state-owned corridors for freight service to decrease the numbers of heavy trucks on the roadways.

To emphasize the need for increased rail service, the recent Bangor Daily News article, “*The hottest Maine real estate markets of 2026*” (12/22/25), reports that the three hottest markets are Portland, midcoast (defined as Brunswick through Bath and up the Kennebec to Augusta), and the greater Bangor area. They specifically mention how Portland is attracting visits due to their medical services. When you look at a map, you realize that housing, car costs and medical services are all tied together and need the creation of a complete rail corridor from Wells to Bangor.

Thank you for being a part of our organization and supporting our efforts. Please do not hesitate to get involved as we continue to make progress through every one of your efforts.

--- Peter Cole, President of the Maine Rail Group

Maine-Canadian Legislative Advisory Commission Reports on Boston-Maine-Montreal Passenger Rail

Maine Legislature:

On December 3, 2025, the Maine-Canadian Legislative Advisory Commission (MCLAC) issued a final report as directed by LD472 (Resolve, Directing the Maine-Canadian Legislative Advisory Commission and the New

England and Eastern Canada Legislative Commission to Examine Restoring Passenger Service from Boston to Montreal), which was passed by the Maine Legislature in May 2025. The 25-page MCLAC report (titled “Report of the Maine-Canadian Legislative Advisory Commission to Examine Restoring Passenger Rail from Boston to Montreal”) consists of a 1-page executive summary, sections on background, commission process, and recommendations, and appendices. The following is a transcription of the Executive Summary:

The 132nd Maine Legislature directed the Maine-Canadian Legislative Advisory Commission (referred to in this report as the “Commission”) to examine restoring passenger rail from Boston, Massachusetts to Montreal, Quebec, Canada with the passage of Resolve 2025, chapter 30.

The resolve sets forth the following duties for the Commission:

- *Examine restoring passenger rail from Boston, Massachusetts to Montreal, Quebec, Canada.*
- *Submit a report with the Commission’s findings to the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation by December 3, 2025.*

Over the course of seven meetings, the Commission developed the following recommendations to further examine the potential to restore passenger rail between Boston and Montreal by way of Maine:

1. *Extend the remit to the Commission in the next session to continue examining public and private proposals to restore passenger rail between Boston and Montreal.*
2. *Request that the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation hold a hearing on the [Commission’s report], with Chairs Bennett & Sayre available to answer questions.*
3. *Consider the establishment of a single, multi-jurisdictional (i.e. Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Quebec) entity to focus on the project’s progress.*
4. *Engage with representatives of neighboring states and provinces to further the discussion and fact-finding moving forward, such as through the National Conference of State Legislatures (“NCSL”) or the Council of State Governments (“CSG”).*
5. *Engage with relevant stakeholders, including those entities listed above.*
6. *Authorize the Commission to work with public and private entities within Quebec and New England to develop proposals and analyze economic, environmental, and other impacts of such a project.*
7. *Hold a public hearing by the Commission to solicit feedback on proposals and ideas for restoration*

of passenger rail services between Canada and New England.

- Review NNEPRA's statutory authority to determine whether proposals under consideration may require amendment.

The Commission voted unanimously of those members present and voting to approve the final recommendations (Sen Richard Bennett, Rep Daniel Sayre, Rep. Mark Blier, Rep. Lucien Daigle, Hon. Jonathan Labonte, Ms. Lisa Scali).

Perhaps the most intriguing part of the report is Appendix C, the Train-Hotel Proposal, a white paper on passenger rail service between Boston and Montreal via Maine, which was the likely impetus for enacting LD472. Prepared by Francois Rebello of Train-Hotel Inc., the proposal would run an overnight train with dining and sleeping accommodations over CN, SLA, CSX, and MBTA trackage from Montreal to Boston's North Station. The suggested schedule would have a train departure from one city at 6:00 PM and an arrival at the other city around 2:43 PM the next day. Because most of the overnight travel would average 25 mph, no upgrades in existing track class are deemed necessary.

The Commission, in its report, recognizes that development of passenger rail between Boston and Montreal will involve many stakeholders and require considerable coordination among public and private operators and multiple government entities. But the proposal and legislative energy behind this proposal is another indication of an underlying demand for expanding passenger rail options. To view the entire report, use the following link [2025 MCLAC Passenger Rail Report](#)

Editor's note: Thanks to MRG member Patty Barber for suggesting this news item and sending the link.

Rail News Briefs

AMTRAK:

On November 18, 2025, **Amtrak released its ridership summary for Fiscal Year 2025** (FY25, from October 1, 2024 to September 30, 2025). Overall, Amtrak produced the highest annual ridership in its history --- over 34 million riders, over 5% higher than the previous record ridership in FY24. As the following table shows, all route types (Northeast Corridor, State Supported, and Long Distance) saw year-to-year increases in ridership.

FY25 Amtrak Ridership by Route Type	Ridership	% Change from FY24
Northeast Corridor	15,173,228	+8.1
State Supported	14,844,768	+2.4
Long Distance	4,449,602	+4.2
Total Ridership	34,467,598	+5.1

Editor's note: Amtrak ridership results for FY25 are further evidence of the continued broad-based growth in passenger rail use in the United States. With new

passenger rail equipment now beginning to find its way onto the growing number and frequency of Amtrak routes, the growth in passenger rail ridership can be expected to continue.

Railfan & Railroad:

The January 2026 issue of *Railfan & Railroad* magazine features a two-page article about the **Downeast Scenic Railroad**, based in Ellsworth, Maine. It includes a history of the line, including the Bar Harbor Express, a passenger train that carried "rusticators" and other travelers from America's large northeastern cities to the doorstep of Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park. It also provides background on the Downeast Scenic Railroad and what it offers for visitors. Besides the equipment and operations for the excursion trains, the article mentions the restoration, in progress on site, of the Maine Central 4-6-2 steam locomotive #470, which was the last steam locomotive operated by the Maine Central Railroad. Another notable development mentioned in the article is the lease of trackage between West Ellsworth and Green Lake to Rail Revolution, a national railbike tour company. For a copy of the magazine issue, the link is [Railfan & Railroad January 2026 | White River Productions](#).

Railfan & Railroad posting by Justin Franz:

On December 4, 2025, the *Railfan & Railroad* website posted an article reporting that after building 3.5 miles of track on the original right-of-way of one of Maine's famed 2-foot gauge railroads, the **Wiscasset, Waterville & Farmington Railway Museum** is now planning to expand southward. In December, the museum announced its intention to build a quarter-mile of track extending south from its campus in Alna, Maine, in either 2027 or 2028. The new "Southern Gateway" will be part of a future two-mile extension that will bring the narrow-gauge railroad closer to Wiscasset, a popular tourist destination along the coast.

The original WW&F operated from 1895 until 1933. In the 1980s, Harry Percival started rebuilding a short section of track on his property at Sheepscot Station, which is located 4.8 miles north of the original railroad's southern terminus. In 1989, a nonprofit was established, and over the past 36 years, the museum has rebuilt 3.5 miles of main line, constructed a shop and roundhouse, four stations, a water tower, and restored two steam locomotives (with a third currently under construction from scratch).

Building south will require crossing a public road and entering a sensitive environmental area because it's near a waterway. As a result, the museum will need to obtain permits and permissions from the Town of Alna, the

Maine Department of Transportation, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Crossing the road will also make the museum subject to the regulations of the Federal Railroad Administration. Knowing that could be an eventuality, the museum has long maintained stringent operating and safety practices that comply with FRA regulations.

The museum plans to start fundraising in 2026 and hopes to begin construction in 2027 or 2028. The ultimate goal is to add two more miles of track and build a new station at the end. The museum has already begun acquiring property to achieve this goal. For more information, link to wwfry.org/southern-gateway/.

Editor's note: Harry Percival, founder of the Wiscasset, Waterville & Farmington Railway Museum, was also a founding member of MRG, Inc. (the Maine Rail Group).

The New 2026 Edition of the New England Rail Map!

MRG has just published the 2026 edition of the *New England Rail Lines and Regional Gateways* map which displays the railroads of New England, their operating status, ownership, operator, and their connections beyond the region. The map also lists and locates tourist-oriented railroad points of interest throughout New England. The map is offered in folded, rolled, or laminated formats. Copies may be purchased at train shows and fairs on MRG's calendar or by mail. The price schedule is listed below.

New England Rail Map 2026 (22"x29")			
Map Format	Folded	Rolled	Laminated
Price per Map	\$5	\$5	\$10
Shipping Cost	\$6 (1 to 5 maps)	\$12 (1 to 5 maps)	\$12 (1 or 2 maps)
Bulk order pricing available on request.			

Editor's Note: You can send an email to trains@mainerailgroup.org or a letter to MRG, Inc., P.O. Box 5494, Augusta, ME 04332.

It's Still MRG MRT!

What is MRG MRT?

Maine Rail Group Membership Renewal Time!

If you are reading this, you have an appreciation of railroads and what they mean for Maine. Be a supporter in 2026 by renewing your membership in MRG. If you are not currently a member, you can be a new member. Either way, you can use the form found on this page or go to our website at [Maine Rail Group](http://mainerailgroup.org).

Mark Your Calendar

Regular MRG, Inc. meetings are virtual by Zoom, starting at 7pm unless otherwise advised. Please check the [Maine Rail Group](http://mainerailgroup.org) website for changes or send an email to trains@mainerailgroup.org for a link to the meeting.

Amherst Railway Society Show, West Springfield, MA, January 24-25, 2026

Maine 3Railers Train Show, Augusta, ME, February 14, 2026

MRG, Inc. Board Meeting, February 18, 2026

MRG, Inc. Board Meeting, April 15, 2026

Maine Rail Group (MRG, Inc.)

A non-profit group working to
enhance rail service in Maine
www.mainerailgroup.org

2026 Membership:

Renewal (\$40) _____

New or Student (\$20) _____

Donation \$ _____

Total Enclosed \$ _____

Phone (____) ____ - _____.____

by U.S. Mail
Please mail check to: **MRG, Inc., P.O. Box 5494, Augusta, ME 04332**

THANKS for supporting the Maine Rail Group!



Name _____
Address _____
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E-mail _____
Volunteer Interests _____
Contact Preference: _____

MRG, Inc. is a non-profit corporation dedicated to railroad education and enhanced rail services in Maine and New England. Membership is open to all who share our goals and interests. Annual dues are \$40 (\$20 for students and first-year members). Inquiries are welcome.