



MAINE RAIL NEWS

MRG, Inc. (Maine Rail Group)

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*A volunteer group
working to enhance
rail services in Maine*

July / August 2026 Newsletter

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---- Ed Hanscom, newsletter editor

MRG President's Message

Our annual meeting this year was an example of how MRG is promoting for the expansion of rail service in the State of Maine. While we do not win every battle, it is good to celebrate movement in the right direction. Thanks to the efforts of our MRG treasurer and Secretary, and Finn Kelly of the Penobscot Scenic Railroad, our MRG Annual Meeting and train ride were successful.

Two years ago, a key part of the Maine infrastructure was in doubt with the abandonment by Finger Lake Railroad of the state-owned Rockland Branch from Brunswick to Rockland. Maine Switching Services (MSS), a feisty local corporation, stepped in and started the short line subsidiary railroad, the Cumberland and Knox Railroad (CKRR) for freight service. With local ownership, they soon resumed freight service to BIW, American Steels and Aluminum, Dicaperl, and Heidelberg Materials while seeking new business from other firms along the line.

However, wherever I go, I get asked the same question repeatedly, "what about passenger service on the Rockland Branch?" This year, the non-profit Brooks Preservation Society/Belfast & Moosehead Lake Railroad

came under the umbrella of Maine Heritage Railroads. As a result, they created a new non-profit entity, the Penobscot Coast Scenic Railroad, to run passenger service on the Rockland Branch.

After some equipment issues and vandalism, MRG donated some seed money to get the equipment repaired and decided to hold its Annual Meeting on the new service, thus showing continued support to get the new service up and running.

On June 27 we held what could be called a "dress rehearsal" for the Pen Bay Scenic Railroad scheduling a charter from Rockland to Waldoboro and back. Last year, MRG's annual meeting rode the *Downeaster* with a box lunch – and we only had 20 passengers. This year proving the enthusiasm for expanded service, we had a sold-out ride with 75 passengers. Facebook postings afterwards had many comments from people who wished they had gone. We look forward to the start of service on the new excursion railroad this summer, with service continuing through the Christmas season.

While we at MRG see the demand for rail service, this is still a challenging time for rail. The latest Federal Surface Transportation Bill, "Build 250" tends to ignore all transportation needs except for roads, forgetting that rail is the most energy efficient and the least harmful transportation mode for the environment. Having lived in Los Angeles, I can testify you cannot continue to build roads and expect to have the beauty we know as Maine.

The upcoming election is especially important for Maine. As MRG is a 503(C)3 organization and, thus, cannot get involved in political campaigns. Rail expansion is a long-term project, and to take advantage of opportunities support must come from top political offices. For Maine, that means the governor. So as individuals, please ask the candidates that are running where they stand on

passenger transportation. Do not accept that the only solution is more cars, more trucks and more roads.

In the meantime, MRG remains focused on the need to support expansion of the Downeaster service to Bangor, development of our shortline railroads, and rail use of Maine's state-owned rail infrastructure. It is vital that we protect the state-owned railroad rights of way, and support efforts to build up the freight infrastructure so that in the future, as our population grows, it will also allow for the expansion of passenger rail.

We acknowledge the efforts of Tom Testa on the Downeast Scenic Railroad in Elsworth, David Swirk on Conway Scenic Railroad working to extend down the Mountain Division, as well as the crew on the Belfast and Moosehead Railroad. They are all working to protect rail infrastructure in our state and, in addition, have gotten many people of all ages involved in building and supporting rail services.

The Downeaster was created and has become such a successful state-supported passenger rail route thanks to the efforts of Wayne Davis who went with us on our annual meeting/excursion. But while Wayne led, he had the help of many others, and so I ask you to stay actively involved. Our goal is to expand passenger rail north to benefit the whole state.

MRG will be working closely with Trainriders Northeast so that we are both speaking with one voice on the importance of rail for Maine's economy. But to protect and expand rail service, we need volunteers and involvement for our outreach efforts. We are fighting strong headwinds because we are working for long-term goals – not just the vision of a sunny summer day for an outing in the countryside. We are working for the future of a better Maine, economically robust with transportation alternatives for year-round travel and connections. This requires commitment from all of us.

So, thank you for your support and involvement.

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

MRG's 2026 Annual Meeting and Train Ride Held on the Rockland Branch

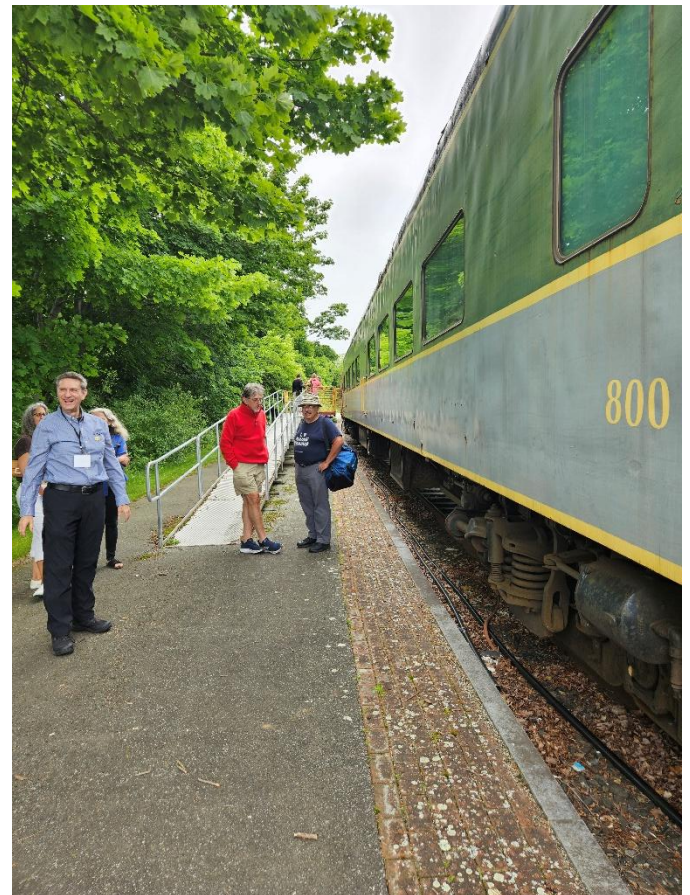
Sources: MRG

On Saturday, June 27, 2026, the Maine Rail Group held its Annual Meeting in Rockland, highlighted by a special excursion train from Rockland to Waldoboro and return. MRG members and their guests enjoyed lunch at the Trackside Station restaurant, located in the former Maine

Central train station in Rockland. At the restaurant, MRG members elected a slate of Directors to serve on MRG's Board for the next 12 months. The Board will include Peter Cole (current president), Russ Barber (vice-president), Bob Holland (secretary), Ed Hanscom (treasurer), Stan Koski, Mike Byron, Richard Rudolph, Joe Leonard, and Darrin Martone.

After the lunch and business meeting, members and guests joined other excursion passengers outside the station to board the first-ever chartered passenger train of the Pen Bay Scenic Railroad, the new excursion operator along the Rockland Branch. The train consisted of a GP-9u locomotive, a coach, and a café car. The train left Rockland and took its 75 passengers through scenic villages, countryside, and coastal estuaries on its way to Waldoboro, where the locomotive switched ends for the return trip to Rockland. The following photos by Elizabeth Hartung-Cole are scenes from the trip.

MRG president Peter Cole is ready to greet the last boarding passengers prior to the departure from Rockland.



Conductor Finn Kelly checks in on generations of Smalls enjoying the trip from their seats in the coach.



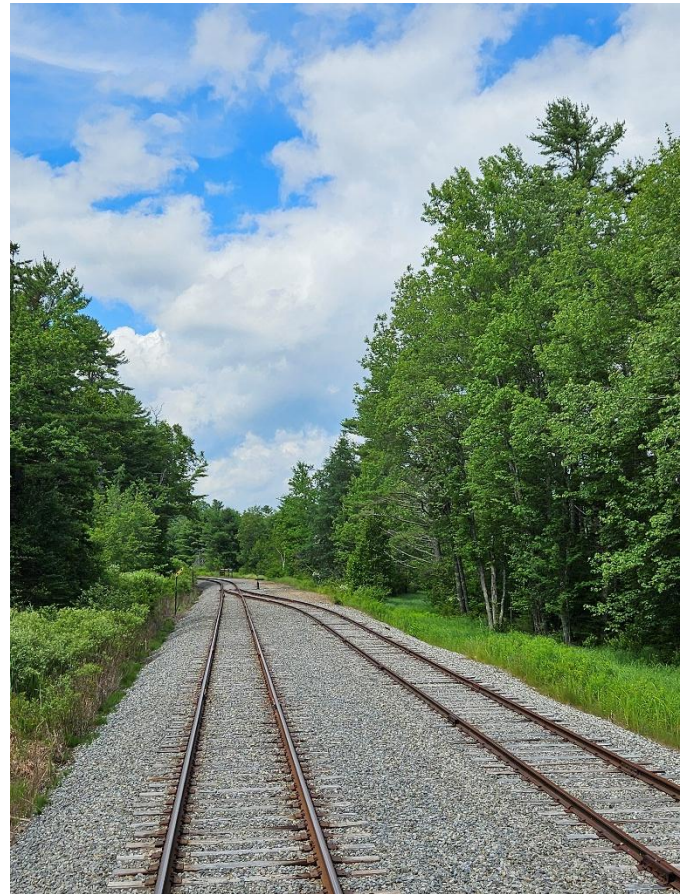
Rail New Brief

Bangor Daily News:

On June 30, 2026, the Bangor Daily News ran a story (written by Elizabeth Walztoni) that **rail companies are investing millions in Maine** as cross-border freight traffic grows. Major upgrades at Port Saint John in New Brunswick are bringing more container shipping to the region and two major railroads (CPKC and CSX) are now operating in Maine. Those companies have invested millions in infrastructure and brought expanded, more reliable connections. Maine's freight rail system connects markets and suppliers to the state's major industries. Improvements can bring more money into the state, make more fuel-efficient trips and lower costs for shipping through competition with trucking. "Operators are seeing opportunity here in Maine, and they're here to run trains and move product to make money," said Nate Moulton, director of MaineDOT's Office of Freight and Business Logistics. MaineDOT's 2022 State Rail Plan forecasts more than double the tonnage and quadruple the dollar value of rail freight moved in Maine by 2050.

Editor's note: Mass media can inform the public on rail.

The view from the vestibule of the coach shows the smooth well-ballasted track of the Rockland Branch as the locomotive is being positioned at the café car end for the return trip to Rockland.



Rail News Brief

NEPPRA:

On their website, the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority reports that the **Amtrak Downeaster carried 49,025 passengers in March of 2026**. This means that the *Downeaster* set a new ridership record for the month of March, easily topping the 46,787 passengers carried in March of 2019. The March 2019 figure was one of the last monthly ridership records from the pre-pandemic era.

Editor's note: Perhaps, the most remarkable aspect of the new March 2026 record is that it happened while the Downeaster is running only three coaches per train instead of the usual four coaches. With some trains sold out to capacity, the shortage of coaches is having the effect of stunting the Downeaster's ridership growth. Imagine the ridership records that would be broken if a fourth coach were restored to each Downeaster trainset!

The passengers head toward the station as they disembark in Rockland at the end of the MRG Annual Meeting trip.



Rail News Brief

Bangor Daily News:

On May 14, 2026, the Bangor Daily News reported on **issues delaying the CSX lease** to TransloadX to operate the **Bucksport Branch** and the CSX-owned portion of the **Lower Road** (Waterville to Augusta). Critics of the lease plan have submitted filings to the Surface Transportation Board to cite concerns with labor protections, cost-effectiveness of reactivating the lines, and whether CSX is upholding the terms of its 2022 acquisition of Pan Am. The article was written by Elizabeth Walztoni.

Editor's note: In the early 2020s, Bucksport Branch rail activity included temporary storage of boxcars in Bucksport and carloads of contaminated soil removed from a former chemical plant in Orrington. Inactivity on the Waterville-Augusta line has coincided with the Ticonic (Waterville-Winslow) Bridge replacement project. The rail line passes through the intersection on the Winslow end

MRG, Inc. is a 501(c)3 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.

of the bridge. The trackage in and around the intersection has remained in place during the project, which is nearing completion..

T-Shirt Weather is Back!

That's right! And the perfect T-shirt for Maine summers is the MRG limited edition "I ♥ Maine Trains" T-shirt. They are perfect for that Amtrak outing, train-chasing mission, volunteer work gang workout, or just about any other summer occasion. These beautiful navy-blue shirts are currently available in sizes L and XL at \$10 each (plus shipping and handling, fixed at \$10 for small quantities). Send an email or a letter to reserve your shirt, or show up at an upcoming MRG event (no shipping and handling charge!).

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.

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* and orders are coming in! 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.

Map Format	New England Rail Map 2026 (22"x29")		
	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.

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.

Sebago Days, Sebago, July 17-19, 2026

MRG, Inc. Board Meeting, September 16, 2026

Common Ground Fair, Unity, September 25-27, 2026

Cumberland Fair, Cumberland, Sept 27 – Oct 3, 2026

GFMRRRC Train Show, Auburn, October 17, 2026