MAINE RAIL NEWS

MRG, Inc. (Maine Rail Group)
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https://mainerailgroup.org

A volunteer group working to enhance rail services in Maine

November / December 2026 Newsletter

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---- Ed Hanscom, newsletter editor

MRG President's Message

How did all of us become part of the train community? For some of us it is the memory of riding a train when we were young or the model trains we grew up with. For others it is the pure mechanical love of a machine that can haul huge amounts of goods over great distances. Many others feel it stands for the freedom of getting on at one place and exiting at a different location with no hassle.

While traveling around representing our advocacy groups, I receive words of encouragement because people love the magic of trains. Many will tell me of wonderful journeys in Europe or Asia and sadly remark that we do not have enough trains here in the United States.

Why don't we? A lot has to do with the lack of imagination to see a world in which we are not prisoners of our own cars, and what that means for our fully lived lives.

Recently I attended the Maine Grow Smart Summit whose theme was: *Building Community Strength: connecting local vision to shared impacts*. There were many amazing stories of individuals stepping up in their community and building development by getting others involved on the local level. Two issues that really hit home for me were how everything is connected, and the conflict between the desire for conservation and the need for housing. As Kim Hamilton of the Island Institute described the situation, everything is tied together – housing, community, transportation, walkable neighborhoods.

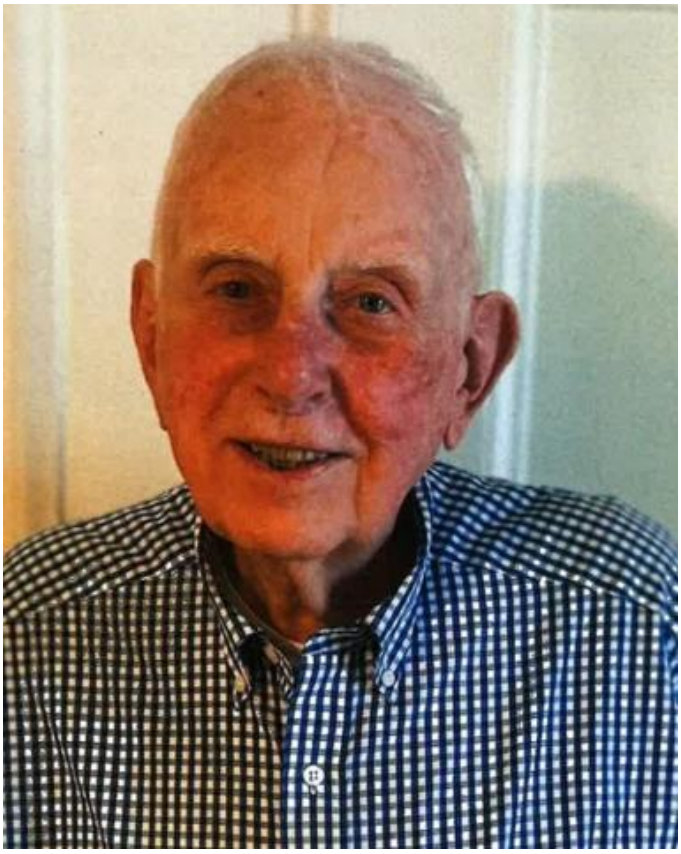
At the center there is transportation, and that means options and the freedom to choose. We can stay in the "just one more lane, bro" world which has been shown to never fix congestion but rather results in induced demand which only leads to increased costs for both the long-term and short term. Sadly, politics and Departments of Transportation are locked into that realm of antiquated thinking.

Our rail community must not be afraid to speak up and share a vision of a future that is better for our environment and better for our health. Our present mono-car transportation system results in:

- The US having the highest level of traffic accidents in advanced nations resulting in deaths and serious injuries.
- Air pollution damaging our lungs and hearts.
- Noise pollution leads to increased stress with resulting health effects.
- Inactivity due to forced driving leads to obesity and heart disease.

By working with others, our community can grow. Jack Sutton, Maine Rail Group's leader for many years, represented what we want to do for our community by reaching out to others beyond just the committed few. His passing this summer leaves us all with memories of a mentor who led by example, focused on the mission of keeping rail lines alive in Maine while expanding our numbers. Learn more about Jack's legacy in the following tribute to his time with the Maine Rail Group.

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



Jack Sutton, 1934-2026

On September 14, 2026, the Maine Rail Group lost a long-time member who did much to shape the organization we know today, A native of New Jersey, he was educated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and built a career in Maine with Keyes Fibre (now Huhtamaki). At the time of his passing, he was two weeks short of the age of 92. His name was John T. "Jack" Sutton.

I was introduced to Jack by our president, Sylvanus Doughty, in the early 1990s, in one our three railcar restoration projects, gifted to MRG by the Hannaford Brothers grocery chain 1989 to clear a site in Lewiston for a future store. Jack committed his energy and talent into the railcars, still immobile on a siding next to a former station in Newcastle. His activism quickly earned him a position on MRG's Board of Directors.

When Sylvanus stepped down from the presidency, Jack stepped up, becoming MRG's third president. He managed the continued progress on the restoration of the three railcars, while molding MRG into a more mature organization, with a bi-monthly newsletter that he edited, improved bylaws, regular Board meetings, Annual Meetings with business and entertainment programs for the MRG membership, and a raised public profile in the Maine transportation scene.

Led by Jack's efforts, the restoration of the two coaches and one diner advanced to the points where they could be transported by rail to customers that would ready them for and place them into service. He found a home for the two coaches with the Finger Lakes Railroad in Upstate New York, and, later, a home for the diner (now the "Hattie Evans" of the Conway Scenic Railroad). The proceeds from the railcar sales became the cornerstone for establishing Jack's brainchild for a long-term sustainable resource for MRG, an endowment fund with the Maine Community Foundation.

Jack raised MRG's profile in the 1990s and 2000s by participating in MaineDOT's program of Regional Transportation Advisory Committees (RTACs) as the rail transportation representative on the RTAC for Kennebec and Somerset Counties. This led to MRG's membership in the Maine Better Transportation Association and active participation in the annual Maine Transportation Conference.

Jack led the creation of MRG's popular editions of the "New England Rail Lines and Regional Gateways" map, a unique resource for educating the public about the past, present, and potential of the region's railroads. Jack's son Richard donated his time and talent to produce the original map and perform the periodic updates for each new edition.

As Jack entered his 80s, he began to lighten his MRG workload, passing the presidency on to Russ Barber, and later turning over the newsletter over to me. Yet he remained a valued and vigorous member of the Board into 2026, managing the production of the New England rail map, continuing to participate in the Maine Transportation Conference, assisting in the planning of MRG's Annual Meeting, and sharing his abundant experience and wisdom with the Board. For over 30 years, he gave his all for our organization. For over 20 years, he led our organization as president. More than any other member, Jack Sutton shaped the Maine Rail Group into the organization it is today, and for that, we are forever grateful.

--- Ed Hanscom

More from the President on the Future of MRG

One of Jack Sutton's last comments at our May Board meeting was that he was glad we were working more closely with TrainRiders Northeast, the group that led to the creation of the Downeaster.

The good news is that we are working much more closely with TrainRiders, holding joint booths at the Cumberland Fair and the Senior Expo in Brunswick. We are jointly planning efforts to protect Maine state-owned rail corridors and working with short line railroad operators to make their efforts more successful.

At our last board meeting in October, we decided to keep Maine Rail Group working through 2027 as it has been in recent years, as we seek new ways to improve coordination with TrainRiders and other allied organizations. We will continue our statewide mission regarding freight and passenger issues. Ed Hanscom will continue our bi-monthly newsletter. We are also seeking ways to keep our Facebook page vibrant and alive while investigating other ways to reach the Gen Y and Gen Z who really want to see better transportation options in Maine.

Your continued membership, involvement and ideas are greatly appreciated as we move forward.

Rail News Brief

Rail Passenger Association:

Peter Cole attended the **Rail Passenger Association** (RPA) virtual **board meeting** following their 2026 Rail Nation (Toledo) conference, October 2-4, and wanted to share some important takeaways from the meeting.

1) After the election pay close attention to Build250 – the 5-year reauthorization from the Surface Transportation Board. The present bill now sitting in Congress severely cuts funding for all transit, and Amtrak in particular. It will also make Amtrak and transit reapply for funds yearly, as opposed to the 5-year appropriation. The one thing our country does not need is short-term thinking. Let our congressional delegation (both Senate and Congress) know you want full funding for Amtrak and rail service.
2) Jim Matthews, president of RPA has reported a major drop-off of contributions due to the elevated level of spending on campaigns. Please do not ignore the needs of our advocacy groups.
3) Shared was a Virginia Rail Policy Institute study on *Multiuse Rail Trails and the Protection of Virginia Rail Lines* – the summary being "VRPI recommends that all rail lines considered for State-Funded Multiuse trails in Virginia should be railbanked whenever possible. For trails to be developed on railbanked rail lines, due consideration should be given to the potential reuse of the line for future rail operations and to planning, designing, and constructing them in a manner consistent with Federal Highway Administration best practices for rails **WITH** trails to preserve the rail line for future reactivation." Something Maine's legislature needs to reconsider. The entire report can be accessed at: https://www.varpi.org/research-publications.

Rail News Brief

NEPPRA:

On their website, the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority ridership numbers indicate that the **Amtrak *Downeaster* carried 579,619** passengers in Federal Fiscal Year 2026 (October 2025 through September 2026). This ridership figure for SFY 2026 is the second highest in any FFY in the *Downeaster's* history, only 2% less than the record-holding SFY 2024, and 5% more than fFY 2025. The strong SFY 2026 result was achieved despite the shortage of coaches available to the *Downeaster*. (See the following table for recent monthly and annual ridership numbers.) Also noteworthy is that the July 2026 ridership was the highest monthly *Downeaster* ridership ever --- 63,374.

***Downeaster* Ridership by Month and Year**

Month\Year	2023	2024	2025	2026
January	35435	41238	39431	38023
February	33383	42045	38894	34195
March	38277	46537	44131	**49025**
April	44730	**48976**	39909	48623
May	39986	**46412**	35176	46030
June	45027	**50853**	43033	50238
July	57876	57854	55074	**63374**
August	**61769**	56667	59386	59913
September	**52994**	51640	48735	51217
October	**54816**	52059	49539	
November	48005	46828	45515	
December	**46905**	**47027**	43927	
Calendar Yr	559203	**588136**	542750	
Fed Fisc Yr	540584	**591948**	549683	579619
St Fisc Yr	517414	**598426**	552649	568310

Bold numbers indicate record high ridership.

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Rail News Brief

MaineDOT:

On September 30, 2026, MaineDOT advertised for bids on a project for the "construction of a 10' wide paved share-use trail within the Mountain Division Corridor in the Towns of Fryeburg, Brownfield, and Hiram. Segment 1 begins at the existing Mountain Division Trail in Fryeburg at Portland Street (Route 113) and extends south 3.50 miles to Denmark Road (Route 160) in Brownfield. Segment 2 begins at Denmark Road (Route 160) and

extends south 6.50 miles to Mountain View Avenue in Hiram. These two segments for 10 miles are the first in a six-segment corridor of the full 31-mile trail from Freyburg to Standish." Bids were due November 4, 2026.

Editor's note: This bid advertisement has been expected, but it does not necessarily represent the final word on the Mountain Division in Maine. By the time the bids are opened on November 4, Maine will have elected a new governor and legislature. It will be important to see when and if the project contract is awarded and work is scheduled. Operator interest in rail freight service on the Mountain Division remains high, the transition to a new state administration and legislature has begun, and legal recourse is available, if necessary, to preserve tracks and restore the line for operation.

"I ♡ Maine Trains" T-Shirts Are Always in Style!

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 2026 Edition of the New England Rail Map!

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 MRG MRT!

What is this?

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 2027 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.

Maine Rail Group (MRG, Inc.)

A non-profit group working to enhance rail service in Maine

www.mainerailgroup.org

MAINE RAIL GROUP

2027 Membership: Renewal ($40) ____ New or Student ($20) ____ Donation $ ____ Total Enclosed $ ____

Name _____ Address _____ City _____ State ____ Zip ____ Phone (____) ____ - ____

E-mail _____ Affiliation _____

Volunteer Interests _____

Contact Preference: by E-mail ____ by U.S. Mail ____

Please mail check to: MRG, Inc., P.O. Box 5494, Augusta, ME 04332

THANKS for supporting the Maine Rail Group!

Mark Your Calendar!

Regular MRG, Inc. meetings are virtual by Zoom, starting at 7pm unless otherwise advised. Please check the Maine Rail Group website for changes or send an email to trains@mainerailgroup.org for a link to the meeting. You can also find Maine Rail Group on Facebook (1000 subscribers), Linked In, and Instagram.

MRG, Inc. Board Meeting, November 18, 2026

EMMRC Train Show, Brewer, November 21, 2026

Maine Transp. Conf., Augusta, December 3, 2026

MRG, Inc. Board Meeting, December 16, 2026

Amherst Railway Society Hobby Show, W. Springfield, MA, January 30-31, 2027

ME3Railers Train Show, Augusta, February 13, 2027

MRG, Inc. Board Meeting, February 17, 2027

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.