



# 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*

## July / August 2024 Newsletter

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--- Ed Hanscom, newsletter editor

### MRG President's Message

I want to thank Russ Barber and Jack Sutton for organizing the MRG Annual Meeting on June 8. Everyone enjoyed their lunch and appreciated their train ride on the Downeast Scenic Railroad thanks to Tom Testa. Our guest speaker, Doug Rooks, spoke about his love of railroads, and tied Maine's future railroads into the political reality of Maine.

As a member of Maine Rail Group, you know we are all about supporting and educating the public on using rail technology. Maine has a rich history of railroading and has many outstanding museums celebrating the Two-Footers, heritage operations, railroad modelers and one museum focused on the trolley car era. Our challenge is to celebrate the past but remind the public that rail transit must play a major part in Maine's future economy.

Too often, the public thinks of trains as "yesterday's technology" while simultaneously complaining about

the changing climate and tax money going to try and maintain the road system. Environmental groups push for "active transportation" while seeming not to notice that countries that successfully have "active transportation" also have an "active rail" transit system. Housing advocates seem to forget that not only is housing expensive, but requirements for parking spaces and asking people to spend \$12,000 a year on a car makes the housing even more unaffordable.

Businesses want more workers but forget that workers need affordable housing and transit. Tourism as a business needs people to stop and spend time in a place that is not car dependent. Think of riding the Downeaster to Boston. One gets off the Downeaster, and one can walk around Boston, attending events at the TD Center, taking in a Baseball Game, going to the aquarium or the science museum and checking out unique stores and restaurants, all without worrying about driving and parking. And if you want to go a little farther, there is transit that leaves from North Station.

So, whether it is the environment, quality of life, or the cost of living, trains are a key component. We just need to get the message out there, and it takes time and effort.

On June 19, MRG worked with Tony Donovan and the Maine Rail Transit Coalition by assisting in an event Tony held for the leaders in Waterville over lunch. Waterville realizes that the return of passenger rail would be a great economic boon for the rapidly improving city. Colby students want to feel connected to the rest of the state, and Waterville holds events which could attract others from around the state.

While attending the NNEPRA board meeting on June 24, I heard how Cumberland wants to combine

affordable housing and a train station. The NNEPRA Board, cognizant of the possibility of having future service on the Mountain Division, is focusing on option 3 for the new Portland Station which would allow any service on the Mountain Division to use the new station. Also of interest is a gentleman who is working on an event “Full Speed Ahead” celebrating Train Day (May 7-11, 2025) by holding events across the state. Meanwhile, Patricia Quinn, the Director of NNEPRA, reported that both ridership and income for the Downeaster are record breaking.

On June 29, Patty Barber worked with both MRG and Train Riders Northeast at a booth at the Founders’ Day celebration at the Richville Library in Standish, Maine. We handed out Downeaster “swag,” sold MRG T-shirts and maps, but most importantly talked about the importance of keeping the railroad roadbed. We focused on “rails with trails” and found most people were very much in favor of that. We heard lots of stories of people remembering the train horns and wishing service would return. We heard young people wanting public transit, not cars. I distributed an MRG flier talking about “train cyclists,” people who would bicycle one way, and ride the train the other way with their bike. Contrary to the RUAC report, most of the people with whom we spoke were not in agreement with the concept of pulling out the rails (or “trails until rails”) and agreed that once the tracks were gone, trains could never return.

July 17 is our next board meeting. We are working to revitalize our website (<https://Mainerailgroup.org>) and to increase our presence in social media. We have a presentation on July 25 to the Augusta City Council, and then we are operating a booth at the Common Ground Fair September 20-22.

In conclusion, we have a great deal on our agenda. A major goal is to build coalitions with other train groups, with environmental groups, and with the business community. We need old members and new members to get involved. We need contributions to keep everything happening, but most importantly we need you to reach out to others and let them know what we are doing. When people hear our ideas, they are receptive and supportive. Our email is [trains@mainerailgroup.org](mailto:trains@mainerailgroup.org) and we hope you will be in touch with questions and ideas.

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



### MRG Has “I (heart) Maine Trains” T-Shirts

Maine Rail Group now has T-shirts available for sale to promote awareness and appreciation of railroading in Maine. The “I (heart) Maine Trains” message will appeal to the full spectrum of those with an interest in Maine railroads: Downeaster patrons, passenger and freight rail advocates, career people, historians, railroad tourists, rail photographers and videographers, “train chasers”, and railroad modelers. When you wear the T-shirt, you can spark a conversation and discover others who also share an interest in railroads. This is good for public awareness and good for our organization. MRG plans to offer these shirts for sale at the 2024 Common Ground Country Fair and at local railroad hobby shows this fall. These navy blue shirts are currently available in sizes L and XL at \$10 each (plus shipping and handling). Send an email or a letter to reserve your shirt! *Editor’s Note: You can send an email to [trains@mainerailgroup.org](mailto:trains@mainerailgroup.org) or a letter to MRG, Inc., P.O. Box 5494, Augusta, ME 04332.*

**Downeaster Record-Breaking Ridership Pace Continues in FY 2024**

Source: Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority

The Downeaster passenger rail service between Boston and Brunswick is continuing to show strong growth in ridership in NNEPRA’s Fiscal Year 2024 (which began in July 2023). In every month From July through April, monthly ridership has exceeded same-month ridership in the previous year by thousands of riders. (See the following chart.) Through the first ten months of FY24, total ridership stood at 501,161 passengers. Adding the 46,412 riders just reported in May puts the fiscal year-to-date total at 547,573, already an all-time FY record with another month still to report. This latest *Downeaster* ridership information is further proof that train travel in Maine has more than recovered from the Pandemic and is climbing to new heights.

RIDERSHIP	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
January	37,963	42,431	4,447	20,396	35,435	41,238
February	40,460	42,817	5,756	27,600	33,383	42,045
March	46,787	18,278	8,606	31,519	38,277	46,537
April	48,694	299	13,054	37,745	44,730	48,976
May	44,429	0	18,643	36,388	39,986	
June	48,234	768	25,668	42,580	45,027	
July	55,168	4,028	37,260	52,056	57,876	
August	60,944	8,099	38,534	51,736	61,769	
September	47,817	8,538	32,682	45,677	52,994	
October	50,363	10,383	37,383	47,822	54,816	
November	47,573	6,233	32,722	43,636	48,005	
December	46,260	4,408	28,966	39,649	46,905	

**North American Freight Rail Traffic Up in First Half of 2024**

Source: AAR, Railway Age

In the first 24 weeks of 2024, North American freight traffic, in carloads and intermodal units, is up 2.0% from the same period in 2023. The trend is led by total intermodal units (containers and trailers), which showed an increase of 8.0%. In contrast, total carloads showed a 3.6% decrease, led by a 17.1% decrease in coal shipments. Due to environmental reasons such as coal’s carbon footprint and the decreasing cost of renewable energy sources (solar

and wind), coal traffic has been on a long-term decline. Coal, which once accounted for 40% of total carloads, now represents less than 20% of the total. That said, coal is still the largest sector of carload traffic. Non-coal carload traffic showed a modest increase, overall.

**North American Rail Traffic**  
Week 24, 2024 – Ended June 15, 2024

	This Week		Year-To-Date	
	Cars	vs 2023	Cumulative	Avg/wk <sup>1</sup> vs 2023
<b>Total Carloads</b>	329,988	-1.1%	7,683,134	320,131 -3.6%
Chemicals	47,531	10.0%	1,130,145	47,089 4.0%
Coal	64,225	-13.9%	1,470,222	61,259 -17.1%
Farm Products excl. Grain, and Food	25,454	5.2%	611,965	25,499 -0.6%
Forest Products	14,667	-1.3%	362,057	15,086 -1.0%
Grain	31,678	16.6%	774,520	32,272 1.4%
Metallic Ores and Metals	40,357	-7.4%	977,743	40,739 -2.7%
Motor Vehicles and Parts	27,028	4.7%	592,138	24,672 2.4%
Nonmetallic Minerals	43,470	-6.5%	953,931	39,747 -5.8%
Petroleum and Petroleum Products	22,670	9.9%	526,466	21,936 8.0%
Other	12,908	-2.1%	283,947	11,831 -0.7%
<b>Total Intermodal Units</b>	357,355	6.7%	8,131,573	338,816 8.0%
<b>Total Traffic</b>	687,343	2.8%	15,814,707	658,946 2.0%

**CSX to Upgrade Maine Tracks in 2024-25**

Source: Progressive Railroading

CSX is continuing its program to repair and upgrade its tracks in Maine during 2024 and 2025. The primary focus area will be the CSX mainline between Portland and Waterville, for which the Maine Department of Transportation received a \$17.5 million federal CRISI grant to aid in improving the former Pan Am line. The work will include

- 400,000 feet of new continuous welded rail,
- 47 upgraded grade crossings,
- 25 mainline switch replacements,
- a 4800-foot passing siding extension,
- 3 modernized signalized interlockings,
- a 16-mile extension of the signal system, and
- 8 upgraded bridge decks.

Most of the trackwork should be completed in 2024, but signal system improvements are likely to be completed in 2025.

*Editor’s Note: In a separate project, NNEPRA and CSX are adding 6 miles to an existing 2-mile Wells passing siding in 2024 to improve train operations.*

## Midcoast Railservice Leaves Rockland Branch

Source: trains.com

On June 12, 2024, Midcoast Railservice, a subsidiary of the Finger Lakes Railroad in upstate New York, ceased operation on the state-owned 57-mile Rockland Branch, which follows the Maine coast between Brunswick and Rockland. Dragon Cement, the customer who had provided 95% of the freight revenue on the line has stopped producing and shipping cement. This development has cast doubt on plans of Amtrak, NNEPRA, and MaineDOT to develop a pilot passenger rail service on the line to connect and coordinate with existing Amtrak Downeaster service that connects Brunswick, Portland, and other New England communities to Boston.

## Here are the Directors for MRG Board

As it does each year, the Maine Rail Group elects its Board of Directors at the MRG Annual Meeting. At MRG's 2024 Annual Meeting on June 8 in Ellsworth, the members elected the following slate of eleven candidates to the Board:

- |                                |                 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| Russ Barber (vice-president)   | Joe Leonard     |
| Mike Byron                     | Jack Madden     |
| Peter Cole (president)         | Richard Rudolph |
| Edward Hanscom (treasurer)     | Andy Sandweiss  |
| Bob Holland (secretary, clerk) | Jack Sutton     |
| Stan Koski                     |                 |

The newly elected Board chose its officers (identified in parentheses). Notable changes include Peter Cole's return to the Board as president, Russ Barber filling the office of vice-president, and secretary Bob Holland adding the role of clerk to his responsibilities.

*Editor's Note: Peter is the 5<sup>th</sup> president in MRG's 35-year history, preceded by founder Bob Steele, Sylvanus Doughty, Jack Sutton, and Russ Barber. Stable, committed leadership has a source of the Maine Rail Group's success, and we appreciate the continuing interest and service of past presidents Jack Sutton and Russ Barber as MRG moves forward.*

*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.*

## Maine Rail Group (MRG, Inc.)

A non-profit group working to enhance rail service in Maine  
[www.mainerailgroup.org](http://www.mainerailgroup.org)



### 2024 Membership:

Renewal (\$40)  
New/Student (\$20)  
Donation \$  
Total Enclosed \$

Name  
Address  
City

State  
Zip

E-mail  
Affiliation  
Volunteer Interests  
Contact Preference:

Phone ( ) - .

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 <https://mainerailgroup.org> website for changes, or send an email to [trains@mainerailgroup.org](mailto:trains@mainerailgroup.org) for a link to the meeting.

**MRG, Inc. Board meeting, July 17, 2024**

**Sebago Days outreach, July 18-20, 2024**

**Common Ground Fair outreach,  
September 20-22, 2024**

**MRG, Inc. Board meeting, September 25, 2024**

**MRG, Inc. Board meeting, November 20, 2024**