



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 2025 Newsletter

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---- Ed Hanscom, newsletter editor

MRG President's Message

Coming out of the Annual Meeting in June 2024, the Maine Rail Group started with two goals: first, protect existing rail corridors from rail removal for "interim" trail use; and second, to take advantage of the corridor ID program to get intercity service extended to serve the three largest cities in the Maine.

Twelve months later, after massive efforts and expenditures to educate Maine people and decisionmakers, we had some victories and some heart-breaking defeats. The greatest victory was that we increased coordination among the various advocacy groups around the state. I would add that our knowledge base has increased greatly both in our need for advocacy and the reality of what to prioritize.

Regarding our first goal of protecting existing rail corridors which are state-owned and by law required to prioritize rail use, we have had to let go of unrealistic dreams. It quickly became apparent that resuming scheduled passenger service on rail corridors that have been minimally maintained for thirty years is fiscally impossible. Instead, thanks to CSX taking over the freight mainline, the greatest hope is for short line freight operators to start service and attract local customers to these underused

rail lines. CSX provides the far-reaching link between the short line operators and markets across the nation.

The freight operators can use the lines with minimum upgrades to start service at low speeds and slowly improve the lines for excursion services in the future. Three of the lines in question have scenery that could support excursion service, and the fourth line can serve as a freight corridor with connections to two different carriers. One line already has been cleared by MaineDOT for service – the Rockland Branch which is now being used by Maine Switching Services under the operating name of Cumberland and Knox Railroad. They are also collaborating with MaineDOT on two of the other corridors. The fourth corridor is also under consideration to be operated as a freight line by Conway Scenic Railroad.

The second goal should not have been as difficult as it turned out to be. We advocated for legislation that would have required Maine's rail authority (NNEPRA) to apply for the corridor ID program to extend passenger service using the newly-upgraded Class 3 track of the CSX corridor from Portland to Bangor.

To boost our chances, MRG worked with business and academic communities funding a statewide public opinion survey which demonstrated that 60% of Maine registered voters would use the proposed service from occasionally to regularly, and 63% would support a bond issue to pay for needed upgrades. We assisted in creating a full-day rail symposium organized by college students at Thomas College in Waterville. We then funded an economic study (thank you everyone who donated) by the Rail Passenger Association which demonstrated a \$61.7 million annual benefit for Maine by creating the passenger rail extension to Bangor, bringing economic benefits to every county in the state. In addition, we took advantage of Facebook and email blasts to supporters and maintained an active website combined with our presence at community

events. At the hearings we had a great turnout of individuals representing all age groups. But in the end, we could not overcome the resistance of Maine DOT and NNEPRA who stated they were too busy to apply. We fought to educate every member in the Maine House of Representatives and the Maine Senate. While it won bipartisan support, the initiative could not overcome MaineDOT's efforts to kill the bill and, with a 17 to 18 vote, it was "tabled indefinitely."

Even though we were disappointed by the vote, we did have successes. We did great outreach and built bridges to state environmental groups and rural transportation advocates. The short-line and seasonal excursion railroads joined us in our efforts, as did colleges, notably Colby and Thomas College in Waterville. The bill sponsors in the Maine Legislature were more than supportive and argued our case. Another great supporter was the Rail Passenger Association. Jim Mathews and John Cristoph came up to Maine for the unveiling of the economic benefit analysis. Jim came up again when we were amid the battle for the Maine House of Representatives and the Maine Senate support. In addition, our part-time media consultant, Doug Rooks and our part-time social media coordinator, Jack Duffin, both did outstanding work for us. Doug is going to go back to full time writing next year but will continue to stay in touch.

In Maine, the Legislature will hold a "special session" in the fall of 2025 to focus on follow-up and emergency legislation. In 2026, there will be the Second Regular Session, which should be shorter than the session just ended and have fewer legislative issues. In the fall of 2026, Maine will elect a new governor as well as a new legislature. Thus, our efforts next year will be building up grassroots railroad education and support, and we look forward to getting our message regarding the need for passenger and freight rail service. While traveling around the state, I always thank people when they tell us they appreciate what we are doing. However, what we really need are more "doers"! We hope you will be able to become more involved; this will be a lengthy process but one necessary for Maine's economic future.

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

What the RPA Economic Analysis Shows About the Impact of Extending Passenger Rail Service in Maine

Source: Rail Passenger Association, Washington, D.C.

Extending the state-supported Amtrak Downeaster service northward to the Bangor area could generate nearly \$62 million in annual economic benefits for the state of Maine, according to a report released on May 15, 2025, by the Rail Passengers Association (RPA). The

research, conducted by RPA's in-house transportation analysis team, reveals that all Maine counties, even those without train stations, would see gains from improved mobility, higher visitor spending, job creation, and reduced vehicular traffic. The proposed twice-daily extension would bring new service to Lewiston, Winthrop, Waterville, Pittsfield, Bangor, and Orono.

"Our team's work shows that all the right economic preconditions are in place for an extension of the Downeaster to be successful," said Jim Mathews, President and CEO of the RPA. "As we've seen with other state-supported expansions, such as Amtrak services in Virginia and the new Borealis service between Minneapolis, St. Paul and Chicago, demand often outstrips initial estimates and generates jobs, business, and prosperity. Vermont, which has half Maine's population, extended Amtrak service to Middlebury, Vergennes and Burlington in 2022.

"This initial analysis does not pretend to have all the answers, but it does show conclusively that an extension is worth a formal study and assessment under the Federal Railway Administration's Corridor Identification Program."

- \$61.7 million in estimated annual statewide economic benefits.
- More than 260,000 new riders projected in the first year alone.
- \$15.5 million in new visitor and traveler spending, supporting 191 new jobs.
- \$12 million in annual savings to passengers over other travel modes.
- Nearly \$10 million in reduced road maintenance costs for Maine municipalities.
- \$2.4 million in new annual state and local tax revenue.
- Up to 5.9 million vehicle miles removed from Maine roads annually.

The report also estimates that construction of new station facilities in Bangor and other towns would add an additional \$11.2 million in one-time economic benefits over a three- to five-year period.

The Rail Passenger Association developed its findings using its proprietary economic benefits modelling and ridership modelling tools, co-developed with the University of Southern Mississippi's Trent Lott National Center for Excellence in Economic Development and Entrepreneurship. Further benefits were assessed using the IMPLAN input-output model, which is commonly used by Federal and state economic development agencies.

"This is not merely a transportation project; it is a statewide investment in mobility, tourism, education, healthcare access, and rural economic development." The report concludes. "Downeaster service offers a

modern connection that binds Maine’s communities, north and south, and ensures broader participation in its economic future.”

Editor’s Notes: The last paragraph says it well: extension of the Downeaster is a statewide investment to bind Maine’s communities and broaden participation in Maine’s economic future.

The 260,000 riders per year estimated by the RPA analysis is based on modelling that draws from data collected from nearly 400 Amtrak-served counties outside of major metropolitan areas. Similar ridership results have been seen in Bangor-like Amtrak corridors with two daily round trips. Corridors in Illinois and Virginia come to mind.

Rail News Briefs

Railway Age:

In the first 25 weeks of 2025, **North American rail freight volumes are up** compared to the same time period in 2024. Total traffic for the United States, Canada, and Mexico is up 2.8%, with intermodal traffic up 4.7% and carload traffic up 1.5%. Coal and chemicals remain the highest volume carload commodities, with coal and grain accounting for the most the carload growth. The table below shows the breakdown by the 10 commodity categories.

	Year-To-Date		
	Cumulative	Avg/wk ¹	vs 2024
Total Carloads	8,061,990	322,480	0.9%
Chemicals	1,189,195	47,568	1.0%
Coal	1,637,890	65,516	6.6%
Farm Products excl. Grain, and Food	651,108	26,044	2.0%
Forest Products	362,072	14,483	-3.8%
Grain	845,171	33,807	5.7%
Metallic Ores and Metals	957,278	38,291	-6.2%
Motor Vehicles and Parts	588,831	23,553	-1.8%
Nonmetallic Minerals	994,252	39,770	-0.5%
Petroleum and Petroleum Products	537,720	21,509	-1.8%
Other	298,473	11,939	1.5%
Total Intermodal Units	8,798,028	351,921	4.7%
Total Traffic	16,860,018	674,401	2.8%

¹ Average per week figures may not sum to totals as a result of independent rounding.

Multiple Sources:

On May 31, 2025, the **Cumberland & Knox Railroad** (CKRR) ran its **first train in freight revenue service** over the 56.6-mile Rockland Branch, which is under lease from the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT). The train included the shipment of 12 covered hoppers of cement from Pennsylvania to

Thomaston, ME. The loads were interchanged to CKRR from CSX at their interchange in Brunswick, ME. The destination was the former Dragon Cement facility, which was purchased by Heidelberg Materials North America earlier this year. The Thomaston facility is located approximately 3 miles west of Rockland.

Editor’s Note: Since May 31, CKRR has been running other revenue freight service on the Rockland Branch and is working to grow freight traffic. Excursion passenger service is also part of CKRR’s plans, but no date has yet been set.



Maine Legislature:

On May 20, 2025, a relatively low-profile piece of **railroad legislation became Maine law** (without the Governor’s signature). Its short name is **LD472**. It’s long name is “Resolve, Directing the Maine-Canadian Legislative Advisory Commission and the New England and Eastern Canada Legislative Commission to Examine Restoring Passenger Rail from Boston to Montreal”. Sponsored by Senator Rotundo of Lewiston, it’s purpose is exactly as written in its title. LD472 directs these commissions to submit a report of their findings to the Maine Legislature’s Transportation Committee by December 3, 2025. Approximately \$14,000 has been budgeted by the Legislature to pay for travel and per diem expenses for the Maine-Canadian Legislative Advisory Commission over Fiscal Years 2026 and 2027.

Editor’s Note: While this legislation is merely directing a discussion of a possibility of Boston-Montreal passenger rail service via Maine, and a tremendous amount of international and interstate commitment would be needed to make a reality, LD472 is further evidence of a strong

desire in Maine to have rail transportation play a larger role in the state's economic development.

Perfect for Summer!

That's right! We're talking about the MRG Limited Edition (I "heart") 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. As the male model shows, the MRG Maine Trains T-shirt can look good on just about anybody! These were MRG's best-selling item at the 2024 Common Ground Country Fair.

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.



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 for a link to the meeting.

MRG Annual Meeting on the Downeaster, July 19, 2025

MRG, Inc. Board Meeting, August 20, 2025

Common Ground Country Fair, MRG booth, September 19-21, 2025*

Cumberland Fair, September 21-28, 2025*

MRG, Inc. Board Meeting, October 15, 2025

**Help is needed to staff tables for both the Common Ground Fair and the Cumberland Fair. If you can help, email us at trains@mainerailgroup.org. No experience necessary, just a willingness to discuss railroads in Maine.*

Maine Rail Group (MRG, Inc.)

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



2025 Membership:

Name	_____	Renewal (\$40)	_____
Address	_____	New/Student (\$20)	_____
City	_____	Donation \$	_____
State	_____	Zip	_____
E-mail	_____	Total Enclosed \$	_____
Affiliation	_____	Phone () -	_____
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!

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.