



# MAINE RAIL NEWS

MRG, Inc. (Maine Rail Group)

P.O. Box 5494

Augusta, ME 04332

<https://mainerailgroup.org>

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

## March / April 2025 Newsletter

### In This Issue

- A message from MRG president Peter Cole
- MaineDOT's Latest 3-Year Work Plan
- News briefs from the region and beyond
  - Legislature's Transportation Committee gets NNEPRA tour
  - Rail corridor LDs get public hearings
  - VRS and St Johnsbury – Whitefield link
  - CSX speeds rising in Central Maine
- Mark your calendar

---- Ed Hanscom, newsletter editor

### MRG President's Message

It has been a real pleasure to see those of us who envision rail as a key part of the future really reaching out and working together in Maine.

- When the call went out to keep the rails and extend rail service, you and many other members of the public responded with support.
- When told train lines are not needed, freight operators stepped up and said we will serve the forgotten freight operations from lumber to aggregates as well as intermodal operations. Freight lines work to get trucks off the highway, and many of the State-owned lines that were mothballed are ready to serve the public again.
- CSX has done a wonderful job in improving their main line to class 3, allowing freight to move at 40 mph. This is attracting more freight shippers to desire to move by rail and encouraging our short-line operators to invest in improving their services. In March we are letting the legislature know that rail is real and deserves attention.
- By joining together, Maine rail advocacy groups are going to DC to hear from the Rail Passenger

Association to learn about other states' efforts to expand passenger rail, and to take advantage of the opportunity to visit our Congressional Delegation.

- When Thomas College students in Waterville realized they were not able to easily connect with other college students in Maine and in the northeast corridor like those at Bowdoin College, they acted. On April 23<sup>rd</sup> they will host an all-day program, open to the public, focusing on Maine's rail history and futuristic facets including environmental and economic factors, tourism and what it will take to bring passenger service back to Maine.
- When the rail coalition realized that the Maine Tourist bureau forgot the power of rail on tourism, our group responded by scheduling ourselves as exhibitors "en masse". Our desire is to remind conference attendees that whether it is the Downeaster, our beloved historic two footers, trolleys, or excursion trains in remote areas of Maine and New Hampshire, tourists flock to the trains.
- This year for the first time rail representatives will be exhibitors at the Build Maine Conference in Skowhegan. It is great to talk about improving downtown areas, but we will also be there to remind attendees that it is best to have people arrive downtown relaxed without parking concerns. It is great to see people in Maine visiting towns arriving by rail in places like Saco, Portland, Freeport and Brunswick.

When faced with the loss of open land and the costs of maintaining ever larger blacktopped surfaces, the answer cannot be that we need more roads and more sprawl. Even Texans are realizing that major road projects are impacting their quality of life, and that one can never outbuild congestion as predicted fifteen years ago in our Statewide Long-range transportation plan for "2008—2030." But there are those who choose to ignore reality by demanding more roads, but taxpayers cannot continue

to subsidize their fantasy world of trying to outbuild car congestion.

So, while others worry where the nation is going, Mainers are stepping up to say, “plan for the future.” We know which transportation mode is most energy efficient. We know which transportation system permits mobility for everyone, and not just cars. We know which transportation system can create the type of housing that many young people prefer, close to shopping and activities without acres of parking lots. We know that rail freight means fewer trucks on the road and saves tax dollars.

MRG members, we are glad you are with us and look forward to a better future for all.

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

**MaineDOT Publishes Latest 3-Year Work Plan**

Source: [maine.gov/mdot/](http://maine.gov/mdot/)

On February 20, 2025, the Maine Department of Transportation publicly released its annual Work Plan, which outlines the work that MaineDOT expects to do in the upcoming three years. In this latest edition of the Work Plan, activities in 2025, 2026, and 2027 are covered. The \$4.8 billion Work Plan covers all aspects of work including planning, project development (design and construction), maintenance, operations, and administration for all transportation modes. Of the \$4.5 billion in capital and operating activity, about 76% goes to highways, 6% to rail transportation (\$280 million), and 18% to other transportation modes (transit, airports, marine ports, and the State Ferry Service).

The following table shows a condensed listing of the rail transportation elements of the Work Plan. The major elements include track rehabilitation, bridge rehabilitation, spur track construction, operating revenue and assistance for the Downeaster, and railroad grade crossing improvements.

While most work items are focused on maintaining or improving railroad infrastructure, services, and safety, there are two items under the railroad category that would tend toward degradation of state-owned Mountain Division railroad assets: the \$400,000 in rail trail preconstruction engineering for 2025 (Standish to Fryeburg) and the \$11,000,000 rail trail construction funding for 2027 (Brownfield, Fryeburg, Hiram). Other rail trail funding items are \$60,000 in 2025 for rail trail planning in Bowdoinham, and \$250,000 in 2025 for state-owned rail trail evaluation.

Locations	Work	Funding
2025		
Brownville, Vanceboro, Stockton Springs & other locations	highway crossing improvements	\$ 1,519,000
Statewide, TBD	highway crossing impr	\$ 1,360,000
Statewide	highway crossing maint	\$ 700,000
Downeaster	oper revenue & assist	\$ 30,000,000
Bowdoinham	rail trail planning	\$ 60,000
Crystal, Mapleton, Oakfield, T14 R6, Brunswick	rr bridge preconstruction engineering	\$ 710,000
Statewide	st-owned cust maint	\$ 560,000
Statewide	st-owned rr bridge eval	\$ 450,000
Statewide, TBD	st-owned trail eval	\$ 250,000
SLR various locations	track improvements	\$ 1,900,000
Statewide, TBD	track improvements	\$ 2,910,000
Auburn	track new constr-IRAP	\$ 546,000
Hermon	track new constr-IRAP	\$ 4,160,000
Skowhegan	track new constr-IRAP	\$ 830,000
New Limerick	track new constr-IRAP	\$ 622,000
Madawaska	track reconstr-IRAP	\$ 514,000
CSX Yarmouth-Waterville	track rehabilitation	\$ 42,500,000
Baileyville	track rehab-IRAP	\$ 800,000
Houlton, Nashville	track rehab-IRAP	\$ 445,000
Rumford	track rehab-IRAP	\$ 689,000
Newport, Detroit	track rehab-IRAP	\$ 351,000
Standish-Fryeburg	rail trail preconstr engg	\$ 400,000
2026		
Frenchville, Ft Kent, Nashville, Dyer Brook Scarborough	5 bridge replacements	\$ 12,720,000
	highway crossing improvements	\$ 353,000
Statewide, TBD	highway crossing improvements	\$ 1,200,000
Statewide	highway crossing maint	\$ 700,000
Downeaster	oper revenue & assist	\$ 31,500,000
Statewide	st-owned cust maint	\$ 560,000
Statewide	st-owned rr bridge eval	\$ 450,000
Statewide, TBD	track impr-IRAP	\$ 4,000,000
Statewide, TBD	track improvements	\$ 2,910,000
2027		
Ft Kent, New Limerick	3 bridge rehabs	\$ 2,800,000
Statewide, TBD	highway crossing maint	\$ 700,000
Downeaster	oper revenue & assist	\$ 32,700,000
Brownfield, Fryeburg, Hiram	rail trail construction	\$ 11,000,000
Statewide	st-owned cust maint	\$ 560,000
Statewide	st-owned rr bridge eval	\$ 650,000
Statewide, TBD	track impr-IRAP	\$ 4,000,000
Statewide, TBD	track improvements	\$ 2,910,000
Statewide, TBD	track improvements-FRA grant match	\$ 12,000,000
Northern Maine EMR, CPKC various lines	track rehabilitation	\$ 66,600,000

The largest track improvement items in the Work Plan are \$42.5 million for track rehabilitation on CSX between Yarmouth and Waterville, which has been ongoing and allowing higher train speed (See page 4.) and the 2027 \$66.6 million for track rehabilitation on CPKC and EMR (Eastern Maine Railway) recently gaining funding from a federal CRISI grant in 2024.

In a departure from last year's Work Plan, the Downeaster operating item, which is shown for each of the three years, includes both revenue and operating assistance. In the Work Plan for 2024-25-26, the item included only operating assistance. This change results in a larger number that more closely represents an operating budget.

### Rail News Briefs from the Region and Beyond

Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority:

On Tuesday, February 4th, 2025, **NNEPRA** hosted the [Maine State Legislature Joint Committee on Transportation](#) for an informative Downeaster Orientation Tour. This tour gave the committee members an in-depth look at the operations, partnerships, and priority projects for the Amtrak Downeaster, including a focus on the important [Portland Station Relocation Project](#).

The tour started with a warm welcome from NNEPRA Board Member Alison Harris, who also serves as a volunteer at the Brunswick Station, along with staff from the Brunswick Downtown Association, which manages the visitor center at the Brunswick station. From there, the group embarked on an Amtrak Downeaster train ride to Portland, experiencing firsthand the service NNEPRA offers. The tour wrapped up with a visit to the Brunswick Layover Facility, giving the committee a behind-the-scenes understanding of Downeaster operations.

Throughout the day, the group was briefed on key partnerships and discussed projects that are shaping the future of passenger rail in Maine. *Editor's note: The Maine State Legislature Joint Committee on Transportation, the "Transportation Committee", is the legislative committee concerned with all Maine transportation issues, including railroads. The Transportation Committee will be considering proposed legislation that could have profound effects on the future of passenger and freight rail opportunities in Maine. Among these bills are LD29, LD30, LD511, and LD487 (see next news item).*

Maine State Legislature:

During the week of March 3, 2025, the **Joint Committee on Transportation** heard public testimony on four bills that could have major consequences for preservation of state-owned rail corridors and extension of passenger rail services in Maine.

- LD29 would direct MaineDOT to replace the track on the Lower Road, between Brunswick and Gardiner, with a trail.
- LD30 would direct MaineDOT to replace the track on the Berlin Subdivision, between Portland and Yarmouth, with a trail.
- LD511 would direct MaineDOT to replace the track on the Berlin Subdivision, between Portland and Auburn, with a trail.
- LD487 would direct NNEPRA to apply for a federal grant to define an intercity passenger rail corridor between Portland, Auburn, Lewiston, Waterville, Bangor, and Orono.

On Tuesday, March 4, the hearings for LD29, LD30, and LD511 were held. In-person testimony in favor of the bills was voiced by fewer people than in-person testimony in opposition to the bills. Opponents included representatives of Maine Rail Group, TrainRiders Northeast, various railroad operators, and public individuals.

On Thursday, March 6, the hearing on LD487 was held. In-person testimony in support of the bill included representatives of Maine Rail Group, TrainRiders Northeast, Thomas College, other students and other individuals. Testimony in opposition came only from NNEPRA and MaineDOT. The bills will next be scheduled for Committee work sessions.

Written and in-person testimony on all four bills may be viewed by visiting the website for the [Maine State Legislature Joint Committee on Transportation](#). Click on "Committee Membership and Staff" and find information for the week of March 3 – March 10, 2025.

Railroad & Railfan Magazine, January 23, 2025:

**Vermont Rail System** is looking to reopen the west end of the famed Maine Central Mountain Division between St. Johnsbury, Vt., and Whitefield, N.H., to connect with the New Hampshire Central, a short line it acquired in 2024.

VRS presently operates NHC on state-owned track between North Stratford and Colebrook, N.H. (formally the North Stratford Railroad) and between Groveton and Littleton, N.H. (formally the Boston & Maine). It connects to the Twin State (former Maine Central) at Whitefield and the Conway Scenic at Hazens (operator of perhaps the most famous part of the former MEC Mountain Division).

VRS President Selden Houghton told the Caledonian Record that the railroad has already developed new traffic in Whitefield.

If VRS was able to reopen the line between Whitefield and St. Johnsbury, it would be able to connect with another of its operations, the Washington County Railroad. WACR operates the former Canadian Pacific and Boston & Maine between Newport and White River Jct., Vt. —*Justin Franz*

**CSX Transportation (CSXT):**

In January 2025, **CSX**, the Class I railroad that acquired Pan Am Railway in 2022, announced that it would be increasing train speeds on their mainline tracks in Maine extending from Auburn to Waterville in the coming months. In 2024, CSX completed a project to install new crossties and continuous welded rail on over 50 miles of track and improve numerous highway grade crossings along the route between the two cities. The upgrades will improve track classification for Class 1 and 2 to Class 3, allowing freight trains to operate at up to 40 mph, instead of the 10 mph (Class 1) and 25 mph (Class 2) allowed before. The completed project is part of an overall program to upgrade tracks on 481 miles of CSX track in Maine. The program of track upgrades have already increased allowable train speeds between Waterville and Mattawamkeag to the north. CSX stated that the process of increasing train speeds between Auburn and Waterville will be carried out over the next 30 to 90 days. The ultimate purpose of the track upgrades in Maine is to improve the efficiency and reliability of the railroad so that CSX can attract more freight business. *Editor's Note: While the freight train speeds on the former Pan Am mainline will be higher than they have been in recent decades, the CSX program will have the effect of restoring the track to the speeds allowed and maintained in the 1960s.*

**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, March 19, 2025**
- MRG, Inc. Board meeting, April 16, 2025**
- Passenger Rail Symposium, Thomas College, Waterville, April 23, 2025. Details to come.**
- GFMRRC train show, Topsham, April 26, 2025**
- MRG, Inc. Board meeting, May 21, 2025**
- Build Maine Conference, Skowhegan, June 3-4, 2025**
- MRG, Inc. Board meeting, June 18, 2025**
- MRG Annual Meeting, Seashore Trolley Museum, Kennebunkport, date TBD. Details to come.**

*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)



**2025 Membership:**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal (\$40) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_ New/Student (\$20) \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 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!

**SPECIAL EVENT COMING IN APRIL!** Hold the date of Wednesday, April 23 for an all-day live Train Symposium at Thomas College regarding the efforts to bring rail service to Waterville, Bangor, and Orono. The event is scheduled to run from 8 AM to 4 PM. Guest speakers are being lined up, and it promises to be an exciting day with speakers and moderated panelists from the rail and environmental communities and the leaders in Maine. It is great to have our young people involved in taking the lead in bringing about a better future!

More details will be posted on the MRG website as they become available.

--- President Peter Cole