



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*

November / December 2025 Newsletter

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---- Ed Hanscom, newsletter editor

MRG President's Message

Upon sharing the MRG "Extend Maine Rail" service handout, I always receive a positive response which is often followed by "what about an extension to...." and a list of various towns in the state of Maine.

Like all rail advocates, I look at a map and think of the wonderful places to reinstate train service. Unfortunately for Maine, while nothing is impossible for passenger service to become a reality, it takes time, money, commitment, and political compromises as demonstrated by the following challenges:

- Most of the train lines in Maine were built before 1925, far before the heavy equipment that is now used to break through our rocky soil, so the lines had to go around ledges and minimize the number of bridges to cross waterways. The result is that Maine train lines are usually not the straightest line between two locations.
- Train speeds are dependent upon the "class" or quality of track. The *Downeaster* presently runs on "class 4" track from Boston to Brunswick, which allows for a maximum passenger speed of 79 mph. The higher the "class" number, the higher the maximum speed allowed.

- Stations need to have high-level boarding to minimize time at the station and allow barrier-free boarding.
- Station stops need to be spaced out enough to allow for good access for the population in the area, but far enough apart to allow for higher speeds without frequent stops.
- Service of more than 5 round trips a day requires Positive Train Control (PTC), which the Downeaster route is acquiring, thanks to work by CSX and funded by federal grants.
- Passenger equipment, when running with freight traffic, needs to meet FRA regulations.
- Regularly scheduled passenger train service needs liability insurance of 75 million dollars. This amount is only possible for a government entity like Amtrak or in larger states which can purchase it through their DOT (think MBTA in Massachusetts).
- Nationally, there is a shortage of passenger rail equipment and equal federal funding such as that for roads and airports. That is why we need to work closely with Amtrak and the Rail Passenger Association.

After WW2, the Boston & Maine and Maine Central jointly operated three daily express passenger trains between Boston and Bangor, always stopping in Portland. One train used the "back road" (through Lewiston to Waterville), and two trains used the "lower road" (through Brunswick and Augusta before joining the "back road" in Waterville).

With the existing *Downeaster* service to Brunswick, it would make sense to continue through Augusta north, but at this moment there are two challenges: 1) the "lower road" track going north, while adequate with minimum work for freight, is not anywhere near class 4, and; 2) the recently upgraded "back road" track passes through the Lewiston area, which has a larger population base that is closer to Portland.

For those reasons, at the last legislative session, we put energy, time and money behind encouraging the State to take advantage of the Corridor ID program to extend

passenger service through Lewiston and Waterville to the Bangor area. This only involved an application from the State to start step 1, the scope, schedule, and budget for developing a service. The step 1 costs would have been covered 100% by federal money. Step 2 was to be the service development plan which would have looked at an alternatives analysis with the details of schedules, operation, and costs. Step 3 would then have been the preliminary engineering. All these steps would have been necessary before starting the actual construction work (track, signaling and buildings) and acquiring the equipment needed.

While we fell short in the final vote, many positive elements occurred. The rail community joined together in the effort, the Rail Passenger Association made two trips up from Washington, D.C. to speak on our behalf, and environmental groups in the state supported the effort as well. Thanks to contributions from members, we did a cost/analysis study which showed an annual benefit of 61.7 million dollars to the state's economy and had an extensive poll survey that showed the Maine public supported an extension of the rail service, extraordinarily strong data points for moving forward.

At this point in time, we need to continue to set realistic goals for public support while continuing to advocate for transit options for a state whose population continues to grow and for whom transit is a key to keeping housing affordable.

MRG remains committed to supporting rail freight service by major lines and extending the use of state-owned corridors by short-line operators. We also continue to support the historic and excursion rail systems in the state that attract tourist dollars.

As we look towards the future, we seek ways to extend our message that a balanced transportation system, including rail, is the best way to serve all Mainers today and in the future. As Jim Matthews of the Rail Passenger Service reminded us, it took over ten years of effort to get both the Borealis service (Chicago to St. Paul, MN) and the Mardis Gras service (New Orleans to Mobile, AL) started this year. We need to remember it took over 10 years of effort to get our own *Downeaster* service started. So, while, in 2026, the *Downeaster* celebrates 25 years of service, the efforts to build it started 35 years ago.

While we all look forward to jumping on a train and leaving the driving, parking, and stress behind, getting there will take on-going efforts, and for that we thank our members and supporters who are willing to work with us in our future endeavors.

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

Cumberland & Knox Acquires Passenger Coaches

Trains.com

Two former Adirondack Railroad coaches equipped with heating and air conditioning have arrived at Cumberland & Knox Railroad's Rockland facility for excursion operations on the state-owned Rockland branch.



Newly acquired coaches at the C&K Rockland facilities in October 2025.

Finn Kelly, the line's government affairs manager, tells Trains.com., "We're still evaluating different options for excursions" on the 56-mile former Maine Central branch from Brunswick, Maine, to Rockland. "At this point we're looking into a limited Christmas schedule and mapping out our 2026 excursions. We will likely utilize portions of the branch for regular excursions, but also offer rides over the whole railroad for special events."

The service will run under "Pen Bay Scenic Railroad" auspices, the operating title of the Midcoast Rail Heritage Trust. This is the non-profit entity that also operates Belfast & Moosehead Lake Railroad passenger trips. "The excursions will run separately from Cumberland & Knox freight operations, but will utilize CKRR locomotives," Kelly says.

Maine's Department of Transportation awarded operating rights to Cumberland & Knox, a newly formed subsidiary of Maine Switching Services, after previous Rockland Branch operator Finger Lakes Railway relinquished its lease in 2024 following a precipitous drop in traffic by the line's principal freight customer, Dragon Cement.

Kelly says that, since Cumberland & Knox began revenue operations at the end of May, the railroad's freights have gone from operating approximately twice monthly to weekly departures. "Dragon Cement has increased their volumes and former customer Dicaperl Minerals of Thomaston, Me., has come back on line," he says, "Additionally, we expect Bath Iron Works to resume shipments of steel for new naval vessels being built." The company has also leased less than a mile of Maine

Central's former "Lower Road" at Brunswick to facilitate interchange with CSX as it increases carload volume.

The excursion operating model Cumberland & Knox has chosen precludes any immediate implementation of scheduled passenger service that would regularly connect with *Downeasters*. Liability insurance and Federal Railroad Administration reporting requirements would require substantial initial and ongoing investments. Maine's legislature had originally designated \$3 million for such a pilot program, but those DOT funds have since been reallocated.

At a recent NNEPRA board of directors meeting in which the topic of 2026 priorities came up, executive director Patricia Quinn said the organization would "explore opportunities to revisit the Rockland expansion and to monitor the ongoing rail activities on the line." In an email to Trains.com, she writes, "I have had no discussions with Cumberland & Knox, but am interested in learning what the plans are when they become available."

Rail News Briefs

Maine Legislature, Boston Uncovered:

LD 472 was the railroad bill that was passed by the Maine Legislature in 2025 to investigate the potential of a **Boston-Montreal passenger rail service** routed through Maine. Since the bill's passage, the Maine-Canadian Legislative Advisory Commission has met and received a proposal from Francois Rebello of Montreal to operate an overnight train between Montreal and Boston over Saint Lawrence & Atlantic, CSX, and MBTA commuter trackage. According to a Boston Uncovered 2023 internet article, the proposed train would include coach, sleeping, and dining accommodations and traverse the proposed route in 14 hours. A subgroup of the Commission that includes Senator Rick Bennett, Representative Mark Blier, and Jonathan LaBonte (Director of the Auburn-Lewiston Airport) met with Mr. Rebello on September 16 to discuss a first draft of a Commission report on its findings and how to proceed. A public hearing of the Commission is scheduled for November 7 at 2:00 PM in Room 220 of the Cross Building in Augusta. The final report may include recommendations regarding the Boston-Maine-Montreal passenger train service.

Editor's note: Based on a viewing of the Legislature's archived video of the September 16 meeting, the subgroup of the commission is aware that involvement of numerous stakeholders (4+ railroads, 4 states, 1 province, and others), financial issues, and operating responsibilities will need to be resolved to the service a reality. Yet, maybe the proposal could be a catalyst for future legislation that broadens the horizons for extending passenger rail in other directions such as Lewiston, Waterville, and Bangor.

Trains.com

On October 7, 2025, a **new Administrator** was confirmed for the **Federal Railroad Administration**. In a 51-47 vote by the U.S. Senate, David Armstrong Fink was confirmed along party lines, Fink was confirmed as part of a block of 107 nominees for various posts in the federal government.

The new FRA Administrator is the son of the late David Andrew Fink, a career railroader who worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad and Penn Central before serving as president of Guilford Transportation, later rebranded as Pan Am Railways.

The younger Fink began his career with General Motors in the 1980s, and became Pan Am Railways president in 2006 after serving as executive vice president in 1998. He remained president through Pan Am's acquisition by CSX Transportation, a deal announced in 2020 and approved in April 2022.

Railroad trade associations welcomed Fink's confirmation. The Association of American Railroads said "David's unique experience as a fifth-generation railroader brings unmatched expertise to this role, enabling data-driven regulation and modernization that strengthens safety and performance across the network." Chuck Baker, president of the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association, noted that Fink is well-known in short line circles. "He was an active member of the Association, contributing to safety committees and supporting safety culture across the industry," Baker said in a statement.

Editor's note: While a leader in the Pan Am organization, David Armstrong Fink was a key contributor to the success of the Amtrak Downeaster, and helped MaineDOT obtain federal grants to rehabilitate many miles of Pan Am track. CSX used this grant funding, along with their own investments, to make the track improvements between Portland and Mattawamkeag in the years since Pan Am was acquired.

Greater Portland Council of Governments:

In October of this year, PACTS, a federally mandated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) released its draft **Long Range Plan**, titled "Connect 2050". PACTS stands for **Portland Area** Comprehensive Transportation System. It is integrated with the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG). As an MPO, PACTS is responsible for long-range and short-range transportation planning in the Portland metropolitan area and for prioritizing transportation projects funded with certain federal transportation funds. While funding priorities for the Downeaster, the Interstate Highway System, highway safety projects, and the Portland International Jetport are outside the purview of PACTS, funding priorities for urban

street improvements, transit, and active (bike/ped) transportation are within its purview. Although PACTS is not responsible for all project funding decisions, it is responsible for planning a comprehensive and coordinated transportation system for the Portland urban metro area, which extends north to Freeport, south to Biddeford, and west to Standish and Raymond. The draft Long Range Plan can be viewed at [Connect-2050-Draft](#). As you look at "Connect 2050", ask yourself if rail transportation, freight and passenger, are accurately portrayed in Chapter 2 and adequately considered in Chapters 3 and 4. A public forum on the draft plan will be held on Thursday, November 6. The public comment period will close on Saturday, November 15. Comments can be submitted to GPCOG by email or through the comment link [Connect 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan Public Comments Survey](#).

A Great Look and a Great Gift!

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 casual occasion. These were MRG's best-selling item at the this year's Common Ground Country Fair and Cumberland 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)! Look for them at upcoming train shows this fall and winter.

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 2026 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](#).

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.

EMMRC Train Show, Brewer, November 22, 2025

Maine Transportation Conference, Augusta Civic Center, December 4, 2025

MRG, Inc. Board Meeting, December 17, 2025

Amherst Railway Society Show, West Springfield, MA, January 24-25, 2026

MRG, Inc. Board Meeting, February 18, 2026

Maine Rail Group (MRG, Inc.)

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



2026 Membership:

Name	_____	Renewal (\$40)	_____
Address	_____	New or 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.