

MRG, Inc. (Maine Rail Group)
Box 5494, Augusta, Maine 04332
<http://mainerailgroup.org>

A volunteer group working to enhance rail services in Maine

July / August 2022

Greetings,

MRG, Inc. Annual Meeting & Train Ride

On June 11 MRG, Inc. held its 2022 Annual Meeting at the Belfast & Moosehead Lake railroad station in Unity, Maine, with directors Russ Barber, Ed Hanscom, Bob Holland, Stan Koski, Richard Rudolph, Andy Sandweiss and Jack Sutton present. The slate of directors approved Jack Madden for the coming year.

It was announced that James Dinkle, Executive Director of First Park in Oakland, Maine is nominated for and interested in a MRG, Inc. directorship, to be voted at a forthcoming board meeting. Here is Jim's background, as taken from First Park's web site:

Jim Dinkle became executive director of the Kennebec Regional Development Authority/First Park in November 2017. He brings with him vast experience in rail and intermodal logistics, commerce park development, brownfields redevelopment and international trade.

Jim was deputy chief of staff for a Kentucky governor, an aide and brownfields redeveloper for the Mayor of Chicago and he served the nation's second largest railroad as its Midwest manager of economic development covering five states. He is a past chairman of the Elmhurst, Illinois Chamber of Commerce and Industry Board of Directors, served four years on the International Association of Corporate Real Estate Executives (NACORE) Chicago Board of Directors and was on the University of Kentucky Board of Trustees one term.

Jim is a University of Kentucky Bowman Fellow, a member of the International Economic Development Council, and Rotary. His mantra, in the words of Dr. Jonas Salk, is, "The greatest reward for doing is the opportunity to do more."

Immediately following the annual meeting, the directors met to re-elect Russ Barber, president, Ed Hanscom, treasurer, Bob Holland, secretary and Mark Walker, corporation clerk.

Meeting participants then boarded a special Belfast & Moosehead Lake train for buffet luncheon served enroute by The Village at Depot Crossing shop and ride through the MOFGA fairgrounds to Thorndike, stopping for visits to the Farwell Store and Museum before returning to Unity.

After a brief stop at Unity the train proceeded westward to Burnham Junction, where B&ML interchanges with Pan Am Railways (PAR) – now CSXT. With one leg of the interchange wye out of service the train ran in reverse back to Unity. Fair weather encouraged passengers to ride the open-air car.

It was good to see long-time members Bill Hunter of Winterport, Jeff Holmes from St. Andrews, NB and David and Mrs. Bolduc of Waterville. We also welcomed the opportunity to meet in person Nate Shea who helps us with communications, and to meet new member Patricia Barber of Hiram, Maine and her friend after their valiant effort to be with us despite Patty's last-minute car problems.

We thank B&ML for the use of their facilities and the train ride, with a wave to Peter Reny, long-time friend of MRG, Inc. and our B&ML engineer that day. We also appreciate the good food, drinks and friendly service by folks from The Village at Depot Crossing.

Quoting president Russ Barber, "I am pleased that the annual meeting was enjoyed by all. It was good to celebrate the B&ML's expanding role in railroading, and good to meet in person again."

Members

We regret the news that long-time active member Bruce Bierce of Fayette, Maine passed away at Franklin Memorial Hospital in Farmington in June.

Bruce earned a Master of Arts degree in Audio Visual Education from Central Michigan University and became the first Director of Audio Visual Services at the University of Maine in Augusta.

Bruce was an active MRG, Inc. member who enjoyed trains and regularly participated in our meetings. Despite his physical limitations, he was always willing to help. Bruce was enthusiastic about our train rides and always accompanied by his wife, Judy Cown, with whom he traveled extensively. This June 2nd through June 4th Bruce's photographs, taken in Mexico, were displayed at the Harlow Gallery in Hallowell, Maine.

We'll miss Bruce, and we send our sympathies to Judy and her family.

CSX Comes to Maine

On June 1 CSX officially assumed ownership of Pan Am Railways (PAR), which passed into history. Daily operations are now controlled by CSX, although some major changes previously forecast will require time to materialize, for example: Shifting Norfolk Southern (NS) daily intermodal train from PAR's "northern" route across Massachusetts through the height-restricted Hoosac Tunnel to CSX's "southern" route via Springfield requires major track work by NS to connect with CSX at Voorheesville, NY. Clearance work by CSX is needed to reach Ayer Massachusetts. This will allow double stack containers to move to and from Ayer without the "fillet and toupee" operation now performed at Mechanicsville, NY.

Further, CSX has announced that \$100 million will be spent to upgrade former PAR lines in New England. It's assumed that major tie replacement recently observed for CSX track through this writer's home town of Belgrade, Maine relates to this commitment.

It's also announced that Berkshire & Eastern Railroad (B&E), owned by Genesee & Wyoming (G&W), will assume control of Pan Am Southern (PAS), now owned equally by CSX and NS. This is intended to assure that future B&E operating and pricing decisions are independently based, thus fair to its owners and to other G&W railroads in New England.

It's interesting to speculate on other changes that CSX may have in mind, beyond those already

announced. For instance, it's assumed that the economics of moving intermodal containers by rail double stacked between points of origin and final destinations are intuitively favorable, as the announced "northern" to "southern" route shift suggests for NS intermodal trains across Massachusetts. Given ongoing expansion at the Port of St. John, NB, increased ship calls to that port, and competition for maritime container traffic between Canadian Pacific (CP) and Canadian National (CN) at Halifax, NS, what are the opportunities and economics for double stack clearance northeastward by CSX from Ayer, MA to Mattawamkeag ("Keag") Maine, continuing on Irving's Eastern Maine and New Brunswick Southern railways into St. John, NB?

MEDOT's Transit Propensity Study for Communities from Portland to Bangor

Richard Rudolph, MRG Rail Committee

MRG's Rail Committee continues to meet bi-weekly to discuss next steps for promoting passenger rail service to Bangor through the "Lower Road" from Brunswick to Augusta and beyond to Waterville and Bangor.

Last year Senator Joe Baldacci sponsored LD227 which originally called for a Feasibility Study to determine whether passenger rail should be restored to Bangor. While there was support for the original bill, during the legislative work session it was reduced to merely a propensity study. The request for a Propensity Study was then signed into law the last day of the 2021 legislative session.

Since then, the cities of Augusta, Bangor and Waterville have provided \$35,000 of the \$50,000 needed to cover their share of the cost of the study. The consulting firm, VHB, has been selected to conduct a transit propensity study using available data to determine the costs and desire for transit services which "captures the region beyond the immediate Bangor boundaries."

The study area will consider density and travel patterns to best represent the full potential draw for enhanced transit service to/from Bangor, including enhanced bus service and a passenger rail service extension to Bangor.

VHB will provide a kick-off meeting and hold monthly meetings to manage the project over the next six months, and MEDOT will identify participants for the project to serve on a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). According to Nate Moulton, the Director of MEDOT's Rail Program, the agency is reaching out to the communities that provided the matching funds as well as the Bangor MPO/Regional Planning Organization for this group. There will also be an industry representative each from a bus operator and a rail operator (likely AMTRAK). Additionally, NNEPRA and MaineDOT will both be involved in the TAC and overall management of the propensity study.

While MRG is pleased that the study is finally underway, we plan to continue building support for the return of passenger service to Augusta, and beyond to Waterville and Bangor. However, what is needed before Federal Money can be received is a full Propensity/Feasibility Study which includes the technical aspects of resuming service.

We are planning to have a table in one of the Social Action Tents at the Common Ground Fair which will be held September 23-25 to handout brochures and to collect signatures on our petition to restore passenger service to Bangor. We also plan to reach out to candidates who are running for seats in the 131st Legislature who are interested in serving on the Joint Transportation Committee which will decide what happens regarding our effort to restore passenger rail to Central Maine.

Boston Green & Orange Lines Shut Down

On June 24n the Boston Globe reported from an article by David L. Ryan/Globe Staff:

The MBTA abruptly shut down service on parts of the Green and Orange Lines near Haymarket Station Thursday night after support columns for the Government Center Garage were found to be "severely deteriorated" by engineers inspecting the subway tunnels, officials said. Shuttle buses will replace service on parts of the Green Line indefinitely, Orange line service is suspended between Back Bay and North Station, and several streets around the garage will also be closed to traffic, due to public safety concerns, according to the MBTA and Boston Police. ... Rail service beneath the garage will not resume until a team of structural engineers examines the infrastructure above and below ground, executes emergency repairs, and confirms that subway service can resume safely, the MBTA said. The T expects that service will be affected for several days.

This development is significant for Maine travelers who may use the Downeaster and Green or Orange trains in transit between Boston's North, South or Back Bay Stations, or to other points in the Boston region. Reports on June 27 confirmed that a weakened column was supported, the area was inspected and that Orange and Green T services had resumed.

'Berkshire Flyer' Weekend Service Begins

Amtrak announces that seasonal pilot service between Pittsfield, MA and New York City begins July 8. It will operate on weekends through the summer months this year and in 2023, presumably subject to continuation if the pilot proves successful.

The Amtrak Berkshire Flyer will depart from New York Penn Station at 3:16 p.m. on Fridays and arrive at Pittsfield Intermodal Transportation Center at 7:12 p.m., stopping enroute at Yonkers, NY, Croton-Harmon, NY, Poughkeepsie, NY, Rhinecliff, NY, Hudson, NY and Albany-Rensselaer Station. The Sunday return trip, making all the same station stops, will depart Pittsfield at 3:00 p.m. and arrive in NYC at 7:05 p.m.

Quoting Amtrak President & CEO Stephen Gardner: "Amtrak is excited to be able to provide this long-awaited service for our partners at MassDOT and NYSDOT. ... We're appreciative of the support and cooperation of CSX for the Berkshire Flyer service, which will offer a more comfortable and convenient transportation option, that's also more

environmentally friendly, for people traveling between New York City and Berkshire County, along with easy access to musical performances at Tanglewood.”

Further, the same announcement quotes CSX Andy Daly, Senior Director of Passenger Operations as follows: *“CSX will honor our commitment to pilot new passenger service, the Berkshire Flyer, that will run between New York City and Pittsfield, MA on our network this summer, ... CSX has a long history of working in partnership on projects that benefit both passenger and freight rail service and we are looking forward to soon bringing New England stakeholders a safer, more reliable freight network with our acquisition of Pan Am.”*

We applaud these expressions of cooperation and optimism for the Berkshire Flyer, and hope they will extend to Amtrak, CSX, NNEPRA, MaineDOT, Maine’s forthcoming Rail Plan and that they auger well for passenger rail initiatives in Maine.

MRG, Inc. New England Railroad Map Update

With the CSX / PAR purchase confirmed, interested directors will meet shortly to make necessary changes to our England Railroad Map. We expect to re-publish the revised map effective January, 2023.

Common Ground Fair – September 23-25, 2022

MRG, Inc. is again registered to participate in this year’s Common Ground Fair. We hope you will attend and we invite interested members to participate at our booth to encourage public interest in expanding passenger rail services in Maine. We also remind that Belfast & Moosehead Lake Railroad provides train service between the Fair Ground and parking lots in Thorndyke and Unity for the convenience of fair-goers. B&ML invites your ridership from and back to distant parking lots.

TRAINS’ Jim Wrinn Tribute

TRAINS, a monthly magazine, effectively bridges the gap between professional railroading and rail advocacy. Jim Wrinn, TRAINS editor for more than 17 years died in March after a 14-month battle with

pancreatic cancer. This writer was introduced to TRAINS by Syl Doughty, my predecessor as MRG, Inc. president and I’ve been a TRAINS subscriber and collector since. TRAINS issue for June, 2022 includes a full page (9) tribute to Wrinn, which is mentioned here in grateful recognition of his dedication to railroading, and the high quality of his publications during his long career as TRAINS’ editor.

Mass Bay Trip to Lincoln, NH

On Saturday, May 21, Mass Bay Railroad Enthusiasts sponsored the ‘Lincoln Limited’ trip from Meredith to Lincoln, NH and return, operated by Hobo Railroad on the former Boston & Maine “White Mountain Branch”. Seat capacity of the four-coach train was a comfortable 80 percent occupied, with ample sandwich lunches distributed aboard on the outbound run. MBRRE personnel displayed their usual professionalism in preparations for the trip, services aboard and the 10 page ‘Route Description and Guide’ given to passengers.

In earlier days the White Mountain Branch continued to Woodsville, NH with a link across the Connecticut River to connect with the then Canadian Pacific at Wells River, VT enroute to Montreal. The Plymouth-Wells River connection is long gone, but the large station at Plymouth remains as a regional senior center.

Mark Your Calendar

Regular meetings are virtual, by Zoom, starting at 7pm unless otherwise advised. Please check in advance for changes if you plan to participate. President Russ Barber (rustyrailsis@gmail.com) will send links to virtual meetings by request.

MRG, Inc. meetings:

July 6, July 20, Sept. 14, Jan. 18, 2023

For the MRG, Inc, Directors,

Jack Sutton

MRG, Inc. a volunteer non-profit corporation, is dedicated to railroad education and enhanced rail services in Maine and New England. Membership is open to those sharing our goals and interests. Dues \$40 /yr. (effective 1/1/2022). Meetings are bi-monthly. Inquiries welcome.