

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 2023

Greetings,

MRG, Inc. 2023/2024 Annual Meeting

MRG, Inc. held its June 2023/2024 annual meeting at Railway Village and Museum, Boothbay, Maine on June 24, 2023, with President Russ Barber presiding. After opening remarks by Russ and reports by Treasurer Ed Hanscom and Secretary Bob Holland, Richard Rudolph retorted on the status of preserving Maine's state-owned railroad corridors from conversion to trails.

Acting in Clerk Mark Walker's absence, President Barber conducted the election for the slate of directors and clerk for 2023/2024, which was approved without objection as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>From</u>	<u>Position</u>
Russell Barber	Belfast, ME	President
Michael Byron	Hallowell, ME	Director
James Dinkle	Oakland, ME	Director
Edward Hanscom	Gardiner, ME	Treasurer
Robert Holland	Rockland, ME	Secretary
Stanley Koski	Augusta, ME	Director
Joseph Leonard	Bangor, ME	Director
Jack Madden	Hudson, NH	Director
Richard Rudolph	Hadley, MA *	Director
Andrew Sandweiss	Arlington, VA	Director
John Sutton	Belgrade, ME	Director
	*change	

Clerk

Mark Walker Hallowell, ME Clerk

Following box lunches, Russ Barker introduced guest speaker Bruce Sleeper, President TrainRiders Northeast (TRN). Bruce introduced TRN Chairman Wayne Davis, who was instrumental in forming TRN in 1989 and who played lead roles in bringing the

Downeaster to Maine and extending its reach to the five daily trains that now run between Boston, Portland, and Brunswick.

Bruce then reviewed TRN history from its original goals adopted in 1989 to the inaugural Downeaster train December, 15, 2001. These goals, now partially realized, continue to guide TRN and also align with Maine Rail Group's activities:

1. THE RETURN OF PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE TO MAINE from Boston to Haverhill, MA; Exeter, Durham and Dover, NH; Saco/Biddeford and Old Orchard Beach to Portland, Maine (extended later to Brunswick).
2. THE RETURN OF PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE TO THE MAINE COAST from Portland to Rockland via Freeport, Brunswick, Bath and Wiscasset.
3. THE RETURN OF PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE TO INLAND MAINE from Portland to Bangor via Lewiston and Waterville, also via Brunswick and Augusta.
4. THE RETURN OF PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE BETWEEN PORTLAND AND NEW YORK CITY via Worcester, MA.
5. THE UPGRADING AND IMPROVING OR INTRODUCTION OF PASSENGER & FREIGHT RAIL SERVICE TO OTHER COMMUTER AND TOURIST AREAS throughout New England, the northeast and the Canadian Provinces.

We recognize and appreciate the services of Railway Village Museum staff in making their facilities available and providing food and refreshments for the meeting. Thanks to:

- Paul Barcellos, Executive Director
- Lori Reynolds, Marketing & Events Consultant
- Hannah Edwards, Volunteer & Events Coordinator

Maine 131st Legislature Action Railroad Bills

Richard Rudolph, MRG, Inc. Director

In 2021 the Maine Legislature passed LD 2124 and became state law, which enabled the ME DOT commissioner to create Rail Use Advisory Councils (RUACs) for certain inactive state-owned railroad corridors.

LD 404 – Directs Maine DOT to Implement recommendations of the **Mountain Division (MD)** Rail Use Advisory Committee (RUAC) to convert the state-owned rail line to a walking / bicycle path, thus destroying the existing railroad infrastructure. The MRG, Inc. RUAC member was the sole dissenting RUAC vote from this recommendation. **LD 404 is now passed by the Legislature and signed into law by Governor Mills.**

TrainRiders Northeast and Maine Rail Transit Coalition joined MRG, Inc. in opposing this bill.

It is lately reported that Conway Scenic Railroad (CSRR) is interested in reopening its connection to Maine's MD and reestablishing freight and passenger between Portland and CSRR. We urge delay in removing any existing MD railroad infrastructure – at least pending a thorough understanding of CSRR's interest, costs and economic development and public transportation benefits its restoration that would result.

Town officials who formerly met as the Rt.113 Corridor Committee, staffed by the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG), identified rail interests from several activities along the MD, including cement, lumber, fuel pellets, aggregates, and other fuels. Passenger rail service may also be an asset for regional transportation between Portland and Saco River region towns, for Downeaster connections and for tourism in coordination with CSRR.

LD 209 - would authorize an interim use trail on the Berlin Subdivision Rail corridor between Portland and Danville Junction. **The Transportation Committee's vote of Ought Not to Pass was accepted and LD 209 is dead.**

LD 406 An act to Expand Passenger Rail Service, which is sponsored by Senator Chipman and co-sponsored by Representative Williams is carried over to the next legislative session. This bill, which three rail advocacy groups in Maine support,

would direct the state to provide a Vision Plan for use of Maine state owned railroads. It would enable ME DOT through a competitive bidding process and with an advisory committee to evaluate the reasonable potential uses, benefits, and costs of restoring the state-owned rail corridors. It would also study where new railroads could be built and how this would drive new economic activity.

LD 1156 - Maine Trails Bond will be decided by the Appropriation and Financial Affairs Committee during the week of July 5. This would require a 2/3 vote by the House and Senate to be placed on the November ballot, as the first significant funding for design, construction, and maintenance of trails. Senator Jim Libby is working on an amendment that removes 'active transportation funding'. **Hopefully that eliminates this bond from being used to fund rail-to-trail conversions and rail removals.**

LD 860 – An act to identify the railroad lines from Portland to Bangor as a Major Corridor and to Fund a Feasibility Study. **This bill sponsored by Senator Joe Baldacci will be carried over to the 2nd session of the current legislature next year.**

Amtrak Briefs

- June 5, 2023: Amtrak announced \$7.3 billion and \$713 million applications for Northeast Corridor and long-distance projects, respectively.
- May 27, 2023: Testing difficulties delay launch of faster Acela trains until 2024, Amtrak says. (Washington Post).

States clamp down on trains

*By Marc Levy and Josh Funk Associated Press
Kennebec Journal/Morning Sentinel 6/28/2023
(italics)*

Harrisburg, Pa.

Spurred on by train derailments, some states with busy crisscrossing freight railroads are pursuing their own safety remedies rather than wait for federal action amid industry opposition and questions about whether they even have the authority to make the changes.

The activity comes after a train carrying toxic chemicals derailed on Feb. 3 along the Ohio-Pennsylvania border, prompting new legislation and reviving long-stalled efforts as backers voice

skepticism that the federal government is capable of helping.

Legislatures in at least a dozen states have advanced measures in recent weeks, including some in states such as Minnesota that have witnessed disruptive derailments,

Some of the new requirements include provisions long resisted by the railroad industry. It contends it's capable of making improvements and that its growing efficiency – including significantly longer trains and a much smaller workforce – doesn't compromise safety.

In large part, states want limits on the length of trains that routinely stretch more than 2 miles long and on how much time trains can block road crossings – which can disrupt traffic and block emergency response vehicles.

They are also pursuing rules to maintain the current standard of two-person crews, bolster the trackside detectors used to identify equipment problems and require more notice to local emergency responders about hazardous freight.

The railroads argue that the industry's overall safety record has been improving even as trains have trains and crew sizes shrank over the decades. So Norfolk Southern CEO Alan Shaw said in an interview that he doesn't think it makes sense to regulate those areas.

"we're going to follow the science and we're going to follow the data," Shaw said. "we're looking for investments in safety that are going to drive favorable outcomes." And Congress and federal regulators are considering similar measures.

Ohio moved quickly with the Republican-controlled government enacting a new law within two months of the Norfolk Southern train derailment in East Palestine.

The evacuation from the fiery crash extended into Pennsylvania, where the state House of Representatives approved a wide-ranging safety bill in early June. The sponsor, Rep. Bob Matzie, whose western Pennsylvania district is home to a major freight handling hub, said he is satisfied with the state's legal standing.

He said he is sick of hearing that the East Palestine derailment is an isolated incident, that the rail companies are making improvements or that the federal government will order safety improvements.

"It's now time for this state to act," Matzie told colleagues during floor arguments. "We can't wait for federal regulations, which always seem to be in the works, but never quite get done. Or for federal laws that will never see the light of day."

Ed. Note:

Public reaction arising the Norfolk Southern train wreck in East Palestine, Ohio and other recent railroad incidents will spotlight rail safety issues such as crew size, train length and road blockage, early wheel bearing detection and action, etc.

CSX Activity in Central Maine

Continuous welded rail (CWR – 136lb/yd) laid alongside Back Road track following substantial tie replacement as viewed from several road crossings in central Maine, offers evidence of CSX's program to upgrade its freight mainline across Maine, connecting with Eastern Maine Railway at Mattawamkeag, enroute to St. John, New Brunswick. Train watchers can anticipate more ocean-going container rail traffic that will move through the Port of St. John via CSX.

Rockland Branch Update

Rockland Branch operator, Mid Coast Rail Services, announced plans for excursion services with self-powered coaches this summer. If successful, this could lead to regular passenger service between Brunswick and Rockland.

It could also provide the template for local passenger rail services elsewhere in Maine.

The Rockland Branch now carries more on-line freight since the Dragon plant at Thomaston moved outgoing cement from barge to rail.

CPKC more than doubles refrigerated container fleet for Mexico Midwest Express service

By Bill Stevens, Trains.com, 5/30/2023 (italics)

With 1,000 boxes added to fleet, CPKC single-line cross-border intermodal service takes direct aim at trucks

CALGARY, Alberta – The cross-border interline intermodal perishables service that Canadian Pacific and Kansas City Southern tested before their merger must have worked. CPKC announced today

that it has more than doubled its container fleet with the purchase of 1,000 new reefers.

The 53-foot containers will be used on the railway's new Mexico Midwest Express service, which launched this month linking Chicago with Kansas City, Mo.; Laredo, Texas; and points in Mexico. Until MMX debuted, all cross-border perishables moves were handled by trucks, CPKC says.

"Since being launched on May 11, MMX has provided truck competitive service, delivering exactly what we promised and executing what many said could not be done," Jonathan Wahba, CPKC senior vice president of sales and marketing for bulk and intermodal, said in a statement. "We're providing customers with the fastest transit times in the rail industry and this expansion of our state-of-the-art reefer equipment gives more customers the solution they need to convert to rail."

The new refrigerated containers are part of CPKC's TempPro program. The MMX temperature-controlled service will move fresh and frozen produce, baked goods, candy, and other food products northbound, and handle beef, chicken and pork southbound.

The MMX Series debuted May 11 with trains now linking Chicago, Kansas City, Texas markets, Monterrey, and San Luis Potosi. MMX trains offer third day service to/from Laredo, fourth-day service to/from Monterrey, and 4.5 day service to/from San Luis Potosi. MMX provides transit time of 98 hours from Chicago to San Luis Potosi, which CPKC says is a day faster than the nearest competitor.

In March, CPKC CEO Keith Creel said the railways were encouraged by the success of the interline premium service test trains they had run with refrigerated and frozen goods between Mexico and Chicago. Hundreds of trucks cross the border at Laredo, Texas, every day carrying refrigerated and frozen cargo. Trucks can spend two to three days at the border while their cargo is unloaded, inspected, and reloaded Creel said at the time.

CPKC aims to create a smoother and faster border crossing for its premium trains. "We're on the verge of creating inland terminals with support of the 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. Regular meetings are bi-monthly. Inquiries are welcome.

Mexican regulator ... to allow those products, in this case beef or poultry, to be inspected inland and not stop at the border," Creel said. "It's transformational."

Ed. Note: The defunct Railex terminal near Albany, NY, received western produce delivered by rail with climate control in modern UP reefers and transfer, for final delivery to northeastern point by trucks. The CPKC venture described here seems an improvement on that model, with advantages of a single rail route, international border crossing simplification, with perhaps higher and less seasonal volumes hauled each way.

Amherst Railway Society Show– Jan. 27/28, 2024

The next Amherst Railway Society show takes place at the Eastern States Exposition Center ('Big E') in West Springfield, Massachusetts on the weekend of Jan.27 & 28, 2024. At this writing W. Springfield Hampton Inn reservations at their special rate for ARS exhibitors are not available. Those interested in attending the ARS show and staying the nights of Jan. 26 & 27 in the West Springfield region should seek overnight reservations early.

Mark Your Calendars

Regular meetings may be in person, or by Zoom, as otherwise advised. Please check ahead for changes. President Russ Barber will send announcements or links to virtual meetings by request. (rustyrailsis@gmail.com)

MRG Inc. board meeting July 19, 7pm

MRG, Inc. board meeting Sept. 13, 7pm

MRG, Inc. board meeting Nov.15, 7pm

Maine Transportation Conference, Dec. 7 all day

Amherst Railway Show Jan. 27&28 'Big E'

West Springfield, MA

For the Board of Directors,

Jack Sutton