

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

A volunteer group working to enhance rail services in Maine

March / April 2023

Greetings,

Amherst Railway Society Show– Jan. 28/29, 2023

MRG, Inc. occupied our usual two corner tables this year at the Young Building at the Eastern Exposition Center in West Springfield, Massachusetts. Manning these tables were Russ Barber, Dave Potter, Richard Rudolph and Jack Sutton.

MRG, Inc.'s focus this year was to introduce and offer newly updated New England Railroad maps in folded, rolled paper and laminated forms. Our laminated maps were in surprisingly high demand, with the limited supply exhausted before the show ended on Sunday. We also displayed and offered several donated railroad books, historical materials and model railroad components. Meanwhile, Richard Rudolph focused on explaining our mission to return passenger rail service from Brunswick through Augusta to Waterville and Bangor, Maine and to collect petition signatures supporting that service.

We are grateful for the many show-goers and friends who visited our tables throughout the show.

Assuming MRG, Inc. will sign up for ARS's 2024 show, we should design and plan next year's display for best results. Also, next year's participants are reminded that the West Springfield Hampden Inn specializes in hosting ARS guests and reserves a block of rooms for them at attractive rates. We understand that these rooms will be open for reservations far in advance of the late-January ARS show and that they are usually booked fast. The Hampton Inn front desk (1-413-732-1300) advises that rates and reservations for 2024 will be available by late March or early April of this year.

Passenger Rail Committee Report

Richard Rudolph

During the past two months MRG's rail committee has held several zoom meetings to keep members up to date regarding our efforts to restore passenger rail service from Brunswick, Maine to Augusta and beyond to Waterville and Bangor. Our focus is on how to build more business and public support for a proposed bill that Senator Joe Baldacci has submitted to the 131st Maine Legislative Session. LD 860 is an Act to Identify the rail lines from Portland to Bangor and to fund a Feasibility Study. Thanks to Joe Leonard, who serves on the Bangor City Council and is a MRG Board member we were able to meet with members of the Bangor Business Partnership and with Scott Perkins, Hermon's Economic Development Director and the interim Town Manager, Josh Berry. Both organizations expressed support regarding the restoration of passenger rail to Central Maine and indicated they would be willing to testify at the public hearing that the Joint Transportation Committee will hold during the current legislative session on LD 860. We're also planning to meet with the Bangor Chamber of Commerce next month as well. While it is too early to predict whether the Joint Transportation Committee will support our effort going forward, we are delighted that the new chairs of the committee, Senator Ben Chipman and Lynne Williams seem supportive of our efforts. Several members of our group actually attended a meet and greet session that the Joint Transportation Committee held last month.

We were also able to collect additional signatures on our petition at the Railroad Hobby Show which was held at the Eastern States Exposition grounds in West Springfield, Mass on January 28-29. We plan to submit the petition signatures to the Joint House /Senate Transportation Committee when the hearing on LD 860 is held. We also plan to meet with university students who attend events at the Wilson Center to see if they can help with our petition campaign going forward.

Several members of the MRG rail committee have attended the monthly meetings of the “Lower Road Rail Use Advisory Committee” which are being held virtually on the last Wednesday of the month from 10:30 am to Noon. Although objections have been raised regarding why no one was appointed to serve on the committee from either Waterville or Bangor, no action has been taken on this matter. Instead, the meetings have been used to present the findings of the VHB consultancy that MDOT selected last year to conduct a Propensity Study to determine potential ridership for either new bus or train service between Portland and cities in Central Maine. Relying mostly on street light data, the firm has low-balled potential ridership if train service was restored to Central Maine. The study does not examine the potential ridership coming up from Boston and other points along the northeast corridor. The next meeting of the Lower Road RUAC will be held on Wednesday, March 29th from 10:30 - 12 noon. Be sure to tune in. The last 15 minutes of the meetings are used to provide the public an opportunity to ask questions and to make comments.

Richard Rudolph

2023 TIDC New England Railroad Symposium

The Transportation Infrastructure Durability Center (TIDC) held its New England Railroad Symposium, by Zoom on February 16th.

TIDC consists of six member universities in New England: University of Maine, University of Connecticut, UMass, Lowell, University of Rhode Island, University of Vermont and Western New England University.

Keynote speaker, David A. Fink, President, Pan Am Group LLC, outlined the history of Guilford and Pan Am’s operation of the former Boston and Maine and Maine Central Railroads; including their merger, curtailment of unprofitable branch lines, investment focus, purchase by CSX and glimpses of the future under CSX management. Responding to a questioner, Fink suggested that solid waste, already handled by the former PAR and by CSX in other states, could be a future growth area for Maine.

Coincidentally, Maine newspapers have reported that the City of Augusta seeks to raise its tipping fee by 15 percent to compensate for dwindling capacity at its existing landfill. CSX serves nearby customers in East Augusta.

Session 1: moderated by Dale Peabody, P.E, MaineDOT Director of Research & Innovation, featured Dr. J. Riley Edwards, P.E. Research Associate Professor, RailTec, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Joseph Barr, Director of Network Development-East, Amtrak.

Session 2: moderated by Dr. Aaron Gallant, P.E. included Dr. Mochul Shin, Associate Professor Civil & Environmental Engineering, Western New England University, Dr. Ramesh Malla, Professor of Civil & Environmental Engineering, University of Connecticut; Dr. Roberto Lopez-Anido, P.E. Civil & Environmental Engineering, University of Maine and Dr. Sunil Bhandari, Postdoctoral Research Associate, University of Maine. Topics covered included design, testing and inspection of long-span bridges, concrete railroad tie design and testing, printed forms for concrete ballast retainers on railroad bridge approaches and for printed bridge girders.

Session 3: moderated by Nathan Moulton, Director, Office of Freight and Passenger Services, MaineDOT, included Yure Kuljis, Assistant Rail Administrator, Bureau of Public Transportation, office of Rail, ConnDOT, Michael Muller, Commuter Rail Team, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, Jay Neider, Chief of Capital Programs, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, and Ed Sparks, Chief Engineer, Bridges – Design & Construction, CSX.

Ed Note: It’s encouraging to observe the depth and breadth of railroad issues being addressed and mutually communicated by academic authorities, state DOTs and railroad operators in New England!

FRA adds \$2.2 billion for passenger rail grants

Progressive Railroading, 2/15/2023

The Federal Railroad Administration yesterday announced an additional \$2.2 billion in funding is being made available for the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Grant Program.

More than \$4.5 billion in funding will now be available for capital projects designed to reduce the state-of-good-repair backlog, improve performance and/or expand or establish new intercity passenger-rail service, FRA officials said in a press release. The projects that qualify for funding must be outside of the Northeast Corridor.

The FRA has extended the application deadline to April 21 from March 7 due to the increased funding levels. The dollar amount signifies one of the largest federal investments that will be made to expand intercity passenger rail service in the United States in decades, FRA officials said.

NS Train Wreck in East Palestine, Ohio

The recent Norfolk Southern train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, thankfully without deaths or serious injuries, continues to generate public attention.

Apart from political discussions, news reports suggest the incident was caused by an over-heated wheel bearing on one of the cars that was undetected by the train crew until too late to stop the train before bearing failure. The resulting derailment caused the pile up of many cars. Certain cars in the wreck contained loads of toxic chemicals, which were deliberately burned in place by responders to reduce chances for uncontrolled explosions. The resulting cloud of dense black smoke, plus uncontrolled releases of liquids into nearby surface waters, streams and ground remain controversial.

The New York Times article by Jacey Fortin, Feb. 28, 2023, (italics): “Ohio Train Derailment: Separating Fact From Fiction)” includes the following section: **“What chemicals were on the train, and what are the dangers?”**

About 20 of the roughly 150 train cars en route from Madison, Ill, to Conway, Pa. were carrying hazardous materials, according to a Feb. 10 letter from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

It said that the compounds released into the environment included:

- *Butyl acrylate, a clear liquid with a fruity odor that can cause breathing difficulties and skin irritation.*

- *Ethylhexyl acrylate, a clear liquid that is used to make paints and plastics and can irritate the skin.*
- *Ethylene glycol monobutyl ether, a colorless liquid that is used to make paints and varnish. In an experiment that exposed people to a high level of the chemical for several hours, some subjects reported irritation of the nose and eyes, headaches and vomiting.*
- *Vinyl chloride, a colorless gas used in making plastic products. The compound, which the E.P.A. has said was on five of the train cars, was of particular concern to authorities in the days following the derailment. The gas has what toxicologists describe as a “mild, sweet odor” and can cause dizziness, headaches and drowsiness when inhaled in the short term, and a rare form of liver cancer after chronic exposure.*

When burned, vinyl chloride decomposes into gases that include hydrogen chloride and phosgene. Hydrogen chloride has a strong, irritating odor and is corrosive to any tissue that comes in contact with it, according to the federal toxic-substances registry. Phosgene smells like freshly cut hay and can cause coughing and wheezing if inhaled.

“We’ve been testing for the most toxic chemicals that we knew of on the train,” Debra Shore, a regional administrator for the E.P.A., said at a news conference on Sunday. “And we have seen no exceedances inside the homes or in the local air.”

Still, some experts have said that the authorities have not tested in enough places or for a broad range of substances.

It’s evident that more news and political fall-out will come from this accident. Another NS derailment near Springfield, Ohio reported was reported on March 5th.

Tragic Railroad Collision in Greece

A head-on collision between freight and passenger trains traveling at high speeds on the same track of dual-track railroad between Athens and Thessaloniki, Greece resulted in a reported 57 deaths. The tragedy raises concerns about the

implementation status of standardized, modern train control procedures throughout Europe and in the United States.

The following excerpt (*italics*) from The New York Times, March 2, 2023 by Monika Pronczuk and Sarah Hurtes describes the situation:

The Greek Government was supposed to install a safety system nearly three years ago designed to prevent the kind of head-on train collision that resulted this week in the worst railway disaster in the nation's history.

As a freight train and a passenger train barreled toward each other at high speeds on the same track late Tuesday night, railway officials had to rely on a system that was far less sophisticated than those used in many other European countries, according to railroad and union officials and records.

But even that the rudimentary system was not fully operational, with lights and signals out of service, union and safety officials said on Thursday as Greek investigators searched for more bodies amid the wreckage.

That confluence of delays, warnings and mistakes left Greece's busiest rail corridor vulnerable to what every safety system is designed to prevent: human error.

Much of what happened leading up to the crash, which killed 57 people, remains unclear. But officials and experts agreed on one thing: If a modern safety system had been in place as planned, it would have been all but impossible for a freight train to end up on the same track as a crowded passenger train.

Warnings would have sounded, and automatic brakes would have kicked in. "Yes, certainly so," said Josef Doppelbauer, the head of the European Agency for Railways, which has warned for years of significant inadequacies in Greece's railway safety system. But putting it into effect has been inconsistent, as evidenced by this week's crash. ...

Positive Control Status on Downeaster Routes

Amtrak Downeaster trains currently operate under a federal exemption that allows for up to six daily round trips without a positive train control in operation. The Downeaster operates on MBTA tracks from Boston's North Station to Haverhill, Massachusetts and northward from there to Brunswick, Maine. MBTA reports final work will begin next month on its Automatic Train Control (ATC) system, according The Eagle-Tribune. CSX has committed to Positive Train Control (PTC) on the present Downeaster route to Brunswick, without known completion date.

Ex MEC 470 Locomotive Restoration Status

Please see TRAINS magazine, April, 2023 (p 44-45) that features an article on restoration "The 470", last passenger steam locomotive on the Maine Central Railroad in coordination with Downeast Scenic Railroad near Ellsworth, Maine.

Mark Your Calendars

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

MRG, Inc. board meeting March 15, 7pm (Zoom)

SMMRC train show April 22, 9 am (Westbrook)

MRG, Inc. board meeting May 24, 7 pm (Zoom)

MRG, Inc. Annual Meeting, June 24 2023 –

Details to be announced

MRG Inc. board meeting July 19, 7pm (Zoom)

MRG, Inc. board meeting Sept. 13, 7pm (Zoom)

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

For the Board of Directors,

Jack Sutton

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.