

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

A volunteer group working to enhance rail services in Maine

May / June 2023

Greetings,

MRG Annual Meeting, June 24, 2023

MRG, Inc.'s 2023 annual meeting will be held at Boothbay Railway Village in Boothbay, Maine on June 24. President Barber will call the meeting to order at 11 am with lunch at noon, followed by our guest speaker at 12:45pm.

Following reports by President Russ Barber, Treasurer Ed Hanscom and committees, members will vote on the following slate of directors for 2023/2024:

<u>Name</u>	<u>From</u>	<u>Position</u>
Russell Barber	Belfast, ME	President
Michael Byron	Hallowell, ME	Director
James Dinkle	Oakland, ME	To confirm
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	Portland, ME	Director
Andrew Sandweiss	Arlington, VA	Director
John Sutton	Belgrade, ME	Director

Clerk

Mark Walker Hallowell, ME Clerk

Other Business

Adjourn

Following adjournment, the newly elected directors will meet briefly to appoint or re-appoint the president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary for the coming year.

Lunch will be served at noon. Lunch cost is \$15, payment in advance, or at the door with advance reservations.

Passenger Rail Update (Richard Rudolph)

The latest word on LD860. By Richard Rudolph

Despite what you may have read in the **Bangor Daily News** last week, the Joint House/ Senate Transportation Committee has not held a work session on this matter yet. The BDN printed a story slamming Senator Joe Baldacci's bill - LD 860 - an Act to identify the Railroad Lines from Portland to Bangor as a Major Corridor and to fund a Feasibility Study. The reporter relied on the testimony provided by Nate Mouton and other officials at MEDOT who oppose any effort to restore passenger rail to Central Maine. MeDOT seems focused on what is called "Active Transportation" and converting state rail owned corridors into bicycle /walking paths.

At the LD 860 hearing, Nate Moulton of Maine DOT said MeDOT just followed directions in carrying out a propensity study to determine potential ridership in central Maine. The original proposal. bill LD227 before the 130th Maine legislature in 2021, however, called for a feasibility study to determine ridership on both rail routes to Bangor. Unfortunately, during the work session MeDOT convinced committee members to support converting the proposed feasibility study into a propensity study. The resulting study conducted by VHB consultants, relied on street light data gathered on drivers going from Bangor, Waterville and Augusta to Portland. It failed to consider folks traveling to Boston who have serious medical issues, those traveling elsewhere, nor travelers who would take the train if there were suitable last mile connections between home and destinations to the colleges and universities in central Maine. For example, to tourist attractions such as Acadia National Park with over 4 1/2 million visitors last year.

Proponents at the LD860 hearing offered a more positive assessment. Bob Holland, retired Norfolk and Southern manager with 50 years of direct involvement in the rail industry, stated there are "few true economic development opportunities that the state can pursue. Development of intra - and inter - state rail service beyond Brunswick to the north will - as in many other situations spur economic development. Saco/Biddeford is the most recent example." He believes support for LD860 is a no brainer. Service beyond Brunswick would make

better use of the Brunswick service facility and there are numerous colleges along the route. Holland has also contacted bus lines along the route and finds keen interest in passenger rail to Bangor, to connect with Acadia.

This writer also believes restoration of passenger service from Brunswick to Waterville and Bangor will contribute to an array of economic benefits. New jobs will be created from the construction, restoration and on-going operation of the service. Enhanced transportation options will also encourage young people to stay and grow the economy and attract families who cannot afford housing in Southern Maine. Passenger rail service with last mile connections will enable state legislators and others who are seeking to testify on bills to attend legislative sessions without using their cars. Thousands of students would have easy access to the nine colleges and universities in central Maine. Restoration of train service will also help reduce carbon emissions, alleviate congestion and reduce accidents on Rt. 95 / 295. The new service will produce more ridership for the Downeaster and Amtrak's NEC service.

Edward Hanscom, another MRG, Inc. member also testified on April 12 about MRG's effort to collect signatures on a petition to explore support for a feasibility study to extend passenger rail service from Brunswick to Augusta, Waterville, and Bangor. MRG, Inc. collected signatures from over 600 individuals at the 2022 Common Ground Fair and other events in favor of such a study as an important step toward the expansion of passenger rail service in Maine. He said over 500 of these folks live in Maine coming from all 16 counties. "Maine's support for passenger rail comes in equal amounts from men and women and cuts across all age groups, from seniors to students, who know that the future depends on making the most of our sustainable transportation options in the face of changing climates. The petition also found passenger rail support from more than 100 out-of-state citizens, showing that visitors to our state want the ability to reach more of Maine by rail. The Maine Rail Group's petition only scratches the surface. Maine's support for passenger rail, which is broad-based is on the rise." The LD 860 work session is not yet scheduled. However, the current MeDOT work plan includes funds to convert state-owned rail lines - including the "Lower Road", in 2023 into

recreational bicycle / walking paths. Large sums have been allocated: \$8,000,000 in 2023 and \$11,000,000 in 2024, yet there is minimal money allocated to expand passenger train services. Maine has an opportunity that other New England States have recognized and acted upon. Two prime examples are the new service from Rutland to Burlington, Vermont and the extension of service to Greenfield and Northampton, Massachusetts.

Passage of LD 860 will enable the state to analyze the viability of restoring passenger rail service to Bangor and the other major cities in central Maine and to apply for federal funds to restore passenger service to that area of the state. Imagine! This would put 90% of the state's population within one hour distance of a railroad station!

Angus King's Vision - 25 years later

U.S. Senator Angus King, some 25 years ago published his Transportation Policy for Maine as a candidate for Maine Governor. It includes this:

"Rail Maine. While Maine ports have reaped the rewards of investment, Maine's railroads have realized the disappointments if disinvestment. I plan to develop a rail strategy that at first secures from loss the current rail network, then builds through public-private investment the capacity of that network to deliver top-quality freight service. On a longer-term basis, I hope to develop the passenger rail option by building upon the Boston to Portland Amtrak service, assuming the service proves to be cost effective. We should also test the use of self-propelled passenger cars for handling commuters from Portland to Augusta, Rockland and Lewiston-Auburn."

Save Railroad Corridors for Rail!

Then Gubernatorial Candidate King's vision for passenger rail service was realized with the advent of the Downeaster Boston – Portland Amtrak train and by its later extension to Brunswick. We regret the loss of the Calais and Madison Branches where foreseeable business was not enough to sustain rail operations. Now, it's urged that certain key state-owned segments of Maine's railroad corridors be preserved for rail by exempting them from trail funding under the proposed State trail fund bond.

Once railroad infrastructure is removed and corridors are converted to trails, national examples and political logic suggest they will not be returned to rail use in the foreseeable future – however well-intended now. These are the corridors of concern and some of the reasons to exclude each from conversion to trail:

- **Brunswick-Augusta (Lower Road)**
 - Only feasible route to extend Downeaster through Maine's state capital;
 - Passenger rail feasibility study requested;
 - Economic development;
 - Tourism;
- **Portland–Danville Jct. (Ex-St. Lawrence & Atlantic segment)**
 - Access to Portland seaport;
 - Links to Lewiston-Auburn westward and to Lower Road;
 - Avoidance of passenger traffic on CSX line between L-A and Portland;
 - Economic development;
 - Tourism;
- **Westbrook-Fryeburg (Mountain Division)**
 - The Mountain Division served for many years as a rail link between Portland and Lake Ontario. Interests by New Hampshire and Vermont should be sought and respected before Maine unilaterally destroys its segment of the Mountain Division corridor by conversion to trail.
 - Decisions based on conversion vs. restoration costs may mislead, because economic and tourist development potentials are undervalued or overlooked;
 - The Mountain Division runs through some of the most scenic and attractive regions of northern New England. From the Atlantic Ocean at Portland and as Conway Scenic Railroad in New Hampshire the Mountain Division connects through St. Johnsbury, VT with active railroad through Vermont's Connecticut River valley to White River Junction (WRJ), VT. Portland and WRJ are active Amtrak-served stations, suggesting an Amtrak-connected tourist route between Portland and WRJ, served by local hotels,

stop-over attractions, accommodations and transit. National tourism to the region can be attracted through Amtrak, state DOT's, tourism authorities and local transit interests. Environmental goals suggest broadening and building on Maine DOT's earlier concept of visiting Maine without personal cars;

- Capture Canadian traffic;
- Potential on-line freight business exists with return of suitable service.
- **Rockland Branch –(Brunswick-Rockland)**
 - Increased freight business is now realized for Dragon Cement Co. and others;
 - MidcoastRailServices (Finger Lakes Railway) now proposes passenger service between Brunswick with self-powered rail coaches;
 - Watch this development as a model - for other uses of self-powered coaches in Maine.
- **General**
 - Broaden Maine's connection to the national railroad system;
 - Keep existing railroad infrastructure in place pending technical and economical reviews of its viability to upgrade for future railroad purposes;
 - Trails are acceptable in parallel with railroads where recognized standards for safe separation, maintenance and costs are designed and practiced;
 - Extend Maine's successful working relationships with NNEPRA, Amtrak and others in operating and administering Downeaster passenger operations between Brunswick, Portland and Boston.

CPKC Train Derails in Maine

A Canadian Pacific train traveling westward on the former Bangor & Aroostook line between Rockwood and Jackman, Maine derailed on the morning of Saturday, April 15 near Rockwood. As reported, three diesel locomotives and six train cars piled up off the tracks and fire originated with lumber carried by derailed cars. Fortunately, the train crew escaped

from the derailed head locomotives with no serious injuries.

The derailment was apparently caused by a washed-out section of track, with track structure in place without its underlying support. The train crew spotted the weakened track too late to stop the train in time to avoid it.

CPKC's track inspection schedule preceding the incident in this isolated territory during early spring thaw and runoff conditions will be of interest.

In *Trains.com* report April 22, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) expressed dissatisfaction with CPKC's clean-up efforts, warning it could step into the cleanup effort. Other claimed deficiencies include "failure to meet DEP expectations regarding timing and response of clean-up activities ..., failure to empty fuel tanks of derailed locomotives before they were moved to avoid further spillage, and a timely removal of tank cars containing hazardous material from a part of the train that did not derail.

Meanwhile, Norfolk Southern continues cleanup work in East Palestine, Ohio from the earlier NS train wreck, with resulting fire and chemical releases there. According to *Trains.com* on April 26, NS earnings dropped by \$387 million in first quarter 2023 due to the East Palestine incident... NS CEO Alan Shaw said two decisions hurt operations, service and capacity, but are the right things to do for the long term:

- *First was removing contaminated soil beneath the main line in East Palestine. One track was taken out of service beginning March 3. When back in service the second main track was taken out for completion in early June.*
- *The second was reviewing standards for long, heavy trains to reduce in-train forces that can cause derailments. This caused significant increases in terminal dwell, slowed merchandise and bulk networks, and clobbered on-time performance for merchandise shipments...As part of the new train makeup rules, NS increased its use of distributed power, which can help manage in-train forces.*

LNG Rail Move Permit Denied

Trains.com, April 27 reports that U.S. DOT's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration denied request by Energy Transport Solutions to move liquified and pressurized natural gas by rail from Wyalusing, Pa. to an export terminal at the Gibbstown Logistics Center in Greenwich Township, NJ, a distance of some 175 from northeastern Pennsylvania to a deep-water point on the Delaware River south of Camden, NJ.

LNG has become a significant commodity for rail shipment by rail to Maine and elsewhere.

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 yet available but expected soon. Those interested in attending the ARS show and staying the nights of Jan. 26 & 27 in W. Springfield may wish to contact the local Hampton Inn at 1011 Riverdale St. W. Springfield, MA 01089, phone 413-732-1300 for further information. Rooms reserved for exhibitor fill up fast, so early reservations are advised.

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 May 24, 7 pm

MRG, Inc. Annual Meeting, June 24 2023

MRG Inc. board meeting July 19, 7pm

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

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

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.