

## **MRG, Inc. (Maine Rail Group)**

**Box 5494, Augusta, Maine 04332 <http://mainerailgroup.org>**

*A volunteer group working to enhance rail services in Maine*

**September / October 2023**

**Greetings,**

### **MRG, Inc. Report**

MRG, Inc. directors and representatives of other Maine rail groups meet regularly by Zoom in seeking to maintain future rail uses of certain inactive state-owned railroad corridors by conversion to recreational trails, as now threatened by Maine DOT's RUAC (Rail Use Advisory Committee) process. We are not 'anti-trail. We welcome trails with active railroads where terrain and safe separation allow.

However, we are convinced that modern passenger rail, with its potential to stimulate related economic development and serve much of Maine's population with year-around public transportation, holds greatest promise for Maine's future than sacrificing key corridors that, until now state law has wisely protected for rail.

### **NNEPRA reports return of Downeaster riders**

*According to Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority 516,723 passengers rode the Amtrak Downeaster in the last fiscal year 2023 ending June 30, compared with approximately 550,000 passengers in 2019 and 118,000 in 2021, at the height of the pandemic.*

### **Patriot Rail acquires NH Hobo and Winnepesaukee railroads**

Edited from *Trains*, August 22, 2023

*JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – Short line holding company Patriot Rail has acquired two New Hampshire tourist Railroads, Hobo Railroad and the Winnepesaukee Scenic Railroad.*

*The railroads operate a combined total of 54 miles of state-owned former Boston & Maine trackage. The Hobo Railroad is based in the White Mountains*

*tourist town of Lincoln, while the Winnepesaukee Scenic is based in Meredith in the Granite State's Lakes Region. Also included: Rail Bike Adventures, a Laconia-based operation which allows tourists to ride rail bikes alongside Lake Winnisquam.*

*Brenda Clark, Ben Clark, and Jennifer Franz, whose family has operated the railroads for 35 years, said in a joint statement, "It has been our passion to sustain the joy that Ed Clark first created in the late 1980's for the thousands of smiling faces who rode our historic trains and enjoyed the White Mountains and the beautiful Lakes Region. Now it is time to take this wonderful tourist operation to even greater heights,"*

*Patriot Rail also operates the Blue Ridge Scenic Railway in Blue Ridge, Ga. and operates 32 short lines in 23 states.*

*"It is a privilege to assume from the Clark family these tremendous Winnepesaukee and Hobo Railroad assets," Patriot Rail CEO John E. Fenton said in a statement announcing the deal today. "Working in close partnership with the State of New Hampshire, today's announcement ensures that we continue the long tradition of providing a superb tourist rail experience in the region. We welcome the Hobo, Winnepesaukee and Rail Bike Adventures employees to our Patriot team, and together we aim to further elevate the Clark family's commitment to take this tourist operation to even greater heights."*

### **NS sues CSX - claims PAR sales pact violation**

Edited from *Trains*, by Bil Stephens, August 3, 2023

*Norfolk Southern filed a lawsuit accusing CSX Transportation of hampering its access to New England by repeatedly violating the operating agreements related to CSX's 2022 acquisition of regional Pan Am Railways.*

*The agreements are conditions for the Surface Transportation Board's approval of the June 1 2022 Pan Am acquisition. They cover operations through a bottleneck around Ayer Yard in Massachusetts, designate Genesee & Wyoming subsidiary*

*Berkshire & Eastern as a neutral operator for the Pan Am Southern joint venture, and grant NS trackage rights over CSX's superior route between the Albany, N.Y., area and Ayer for intermodal and automotive trains.*

*NS says that CSX has been violating the agreements by:*

- *Exceeding train length and train count restrictions through Ayer, which has created congestion and blocked NS access to the yard and its nearby intermodal and auto ramps.*
- *Delaying the startup of the Berkshire & Eastern, which has contributed to a shortage of Pan Am Southern train crews. PAS had 84 train and engine employees in May 2022, but as of last month had just 66.*
- *Improperly using scarce Pan Am Southern crews to handle CSX trains rather than move freight for NS and Pan Am Southern customers.*
- *Dragging its feet on capacity projects in Ayer as well as clearance projects on Pan Am Railways between Worcester and Ayer in preparation for the start of intermodal service under the trackage-rights deal. "CSX knows that Norfolk Southern's competitive position in the market, and as such CSX is highly motivated to delay any work on these improvements for as long as it can," NS says.*

*"CSX and NS have been working together on a wide range of issues in an effort to benefit Pan Am Southern and its customers," CSX spokeswoman Sherlee Bowman says, "While we are surprised and disappointed that NS chose to file a lawsuit rather than continue our discussions, we remain focused on our efforts towards a smooth transition. CSX disagrees with NS's allegations and will vigorously defend itself." ...*

*"The concern expressed by Norfolk Southern – and the Department of Justice – that CSX would use its control over Pan Am Railways and hence Springfield Terminal to disadvantage Norfolk Southern – which CSX promised to Norfolk Southern and the STB that it would not do – has materialized," NS said in its lawsuit.*

## **Berkshire & Eastern assumes PAS Operations**

*Edited from Trains, by Bill Stephens, Sept. 1, 2023*

*New Genesee & Wyoming short line Berkshire & Eastern began operating Pan Am Southern Sept. 1 startup date had been pushed back several times due to delays in obtaining the necessary labor agreements. ... PAS is the joint venture that Pan Am Railways and Norfolk Southern launched in 2009 to provide NS with direct access to New England via the former Boston & Maine main line between Mechanicville, N.Y., and Ayer, Mass.*

*CSX Transportation became NS' partner in the joint venture when it acquired PAR last year. As a condition of the Surface Transportation Board's approval of the PAR acquisition, G&W was named the neutral operator of the PAS.*

*Besides the B&M between Mechanicville and Ayer, the 414-mile PAS includes north-south trackage rights routes in the Connecticut River Valley in Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, plus isolated Pan Am trackage in Connecticut.*

*It remains unclear when the last piece of the Pan Am merger puzzle – the shift of NS's Chicago-New England intermodal trains to new trackage rights on CSX – will occur. A new connection between NS's former Delaware & Hudson and CSX Water Level Route at Voorheesville, N.Y. is scheduled for completion next month, but related signaling and positive train control work isn't expected to be finished until early next year.*

*From Voorheesville, the NS trackage rights trains will run to Ayer, Mass., via Selkirk, N.Y., and CSX's former Boston & Albany route to Worcester, Mass., and a combination of trackage rights on G&W's Providence & Worcester, PAR and PAS. In the law suit (above), NS said that CSX had yet to begin clearance work north of Worcester that would permit the operation of domestic double stacks. NS trains 264/265 to and from Ayer are currently single-stacked due to clearance restrictions in the 4.75-mile Hoosac Tunnel,*

*The new route via Worcester will be significantly faster than the current routing via Hoosac Tunnel.*

## **CT DOT orders 60 commuter coaches from Alstom**

Edited from Railway Age 8/09/2023

By Marybeth Luczak, Executive Editor

Alstom and the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) on Aug. 9 confirmed a \$315 million base order for 60 single-level commuter railcars, with options to build 313 more as part of the state's railcar renewal program. Delivery of the first cars is expected to begin in 2026.

Based on Alstom's Adessia EMU platform, the new railcars will be prioritized for use on the Hartford Line, as well as the branches of the New Haven Line, CTDOT reported. They will feature two-by-two seating configuration with foldable tables and access for riders using mobility aids; overhead luggage racks, workstation tables and a bicycle storage area; Wi-Fi access; real-time information on upcoming stops; power and USB access; panoramic balcony-style windows at wheeled mobility spaces and "the most current cybersecurity safety features," according to Alstom.

Additionally, each stainless steel 85-foot-long railcar will be designed for "continuous operation of up to 24 hours and 1,200 miles daily and will have at least a 40-year design life." Reported the state, which noted that the cars will be customized to meet Federal Railroad Administration requirements and tailored for CTDOT.

"The CTDOT Office of Rail is working hard to upgrade the trip for rail customers across Connecticut," said CTDOT Commissioner Garrett Eucalitto. "We know they want more comfortable seats, Wi-Fi access, bike storage and ADA accessibility and we're taking action on those needs with steps like this." ...

## **Coastliner self-powered coach(es) arrive for trials and planned service on Rockland Branch**

The first of an expected three diesel self-powered coaches arrived in Rockland for trial runs on the Rockland Branch in advance of projected revenue service between Rockland and Brunswick set to begin later in September.

These coaches and several others provided passenger service on DART (Dallas Area Rapid

Transit). Following their retirement from duty in Texas eleven of these coaches were acquired by an investor and preserved in operating condition. Finger Lakes Railroad, operating in Maine as Midcoast Rail Services has now acquired and modernized three of these coaches at their Geneva, New York headquarters.

On Saturday, August 26 three demonstration runs were held on the Rockland Branch between Bath and Wiscasset, during which the 76-seat coach capacity was nearly sold out, according to George Betke, co-founder and vice-president of Midcoast Railservice.

According to the Times Record, as reported by Jason Claffey, August 22, "Midcoast Railservice, Amtrak and the Maine Department of Transportation have discussed using the Coastliner to extend Amtrak service from the Brunswick Visitor Center to Rockland, possibly next year'.



Coastliner photo by Bill Crosby

### Ed. Comment:

Midcoast Rail Service, Amtrak and Maine DOT must solve the problem of passenger transfer between the Coastliner and the Downeaster at the Brunswick

Station platform. The solution would then apply to transfer between the Downeaster and envisioned Coastliner service to Augusta, since the Brunswick Station would serve both. Tracks to Augusta and Rockland diverge a short distance east of the Brunswick station.

Much existing railroad infrastructure still in place between Brunswick and Augusta should be suitable for relatively light Coastliner coaches, given necessary track work, crossing upgrades, replacement of truck-damaged bridge span over Rt. 24 in Richmond and safety features.

This option would reconnect Maine's Capital to the national passenger grid via the Downeaster. The possibility should be analyzed before Lower Road railroad infrastructure between Gardiner and Topsham is dismantled and destroyed according to the recent RUAC vote recommending a trail.



The Coastliner train on a section of the 57-mile Rockland Branch tracks at Thomaston, Maine. Courtesy of Midcoast RailService.

### **MRG, Inc. to be at the Common Ground Fair this September 22 - 24**

MRG, Inc. will again have a table this year at the Common Ground Fair in Unity, Maine on the weekend of September 22, 23 and 24, and we encourage visits by folks interested in Maine railroads. Please look us up there to discuss the future for railroading, its environmental advantages and its compatibility with recreational trails where possible.

We remind visitors that the Belfast & Moosehead Lake Railroad runs special trains at frequent intervals from parking lots in Unity and Thorndike to and from the Common Ground Station, and we encourage their use.

Questions? Contact Russ Barber, President  
[Rustyrailsis@gmail.com](mailto:Rustyrailsis@gmail.com) (207) 322-8360

We hope to see you at the Fair!

### **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. 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 board meetings by request. ([rustyrailsis@gmail.com](mailto:rustyrailsis@gmail.com))

- MRG, Inc. board meeting Sept. 13, 7pm (Zoom)
- MRG, Inc. board meeting Nov.15, 7pm (Zoom)
- 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

*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.*