

MRG, Inc. (Maine Rail pGroup)
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<http://mainerailgroup.org>

A volunteer group working to enhance rail services in Maine

January / February 2023

Greetings and Happy New Year,

New England Railroad Map for 2023 Available

The 2023 MRG, Inc. New England Railroad Map is now printed and available for distribution. Updates to the latest map include CSXT purchase of PAR, EMRY purchase of Brownville Jct. – Millinocket segment of former B&A line from CP, demise of former PAR Madison Branch, Amtrak Ethan Allen extension from Rutland to Burlington, VT and Maine's Rockland Branch operation by Midcoast Rail Service.

Bruce Sleeper Named TrainRiders Northeast

President

Wayne Davis, Chairman of TrainRiders Northeast (TRN) has named F. Bruce Sleeper, Esq., President of TRN. Sleeper remains legal counsel for TRN. TRN played pivotal roles in returning passenger rail service between Boston and Portland, Maine with the Amtrak Downeaster, later extending that service from Portland to Brunswick.

Congratulations to Bruce in his new role.

Maine to New York City By Train

Envisioned is a cross-platform transfer at Boston's North Station between the Amtrak Downeaster and connecting service via the Inland Route through Cambridge, MA, MBTA / CSXT through Worcester, to Springfield, MA where existing passenger services continue through Hartford and New Haven, CT to Amtrak's Northeast Corridor to New York City.

This scenario is evolving in Massachusetts as discussed in the following newsletter article. However, it will take at least a few years and cooperation with Amtrak and the States of Massachusetts and Connecticut to mature. Further, it cannot yet assured that the critical Grand Junction

connection through Cambridge, MA will be politically and technically viable for regular inter-city passenger train service.

Presumably, passenger rail service to and from NYC via the Inland Route will be time and cost competitive with existing multiple daily Amtrak services that now begin and terminate at Boston's South Station. The current problem for train travelers to and from Maine is the awkward transfer between those stations – particularly for those persons who are inexperienced, handicapped, older, or heavily burdened with luggage. Otherwise, nearly hourly daytime Acela service between Boston and NYC is already available to Downeaster passengers..

If sufficient Maine / NYC passenger rail business potential exists now and can be further developed, it should be possible now to make the North-South Station transfer an integral reserved and ticketed part of the trip. This might be done with a dedicated shuttle vehicle, or ride-haling services between North and South stations or a scheduled over-the-road service by vehicle running between Anderson and Rt..128 stations on Boston's outskirts.

Maine / NYC passenger rail experience developed now should be transferrable to North Station cross-platform trains if and when the Inland Route becomes available and proves cost and schedule competitive. The Inland Route may also offer station stops in central Massachusetts, with connections to New Hampshire, Vermont and potentially Montreal.

Massachusetts Seeks Grant for Worcester-Springfield Corridor Improvements:

<http://sierraclub-nh-transportation.org>; forwarded by Kenyon Karl and Peter Griffin

BOSTON – The Massachusetts Department of Transportation, in partnership with Amtrak and with support from CSX, is seeking a \$108 million federal grant to improve the rail corridor between Worcester and Springfield, a step toward a future passenger rail line that connects Boston to western Massachusetts.

“Springfield is home to a \$100 million newly renovated intermodal transportation center at Union Station,” U.S. Rep. Richard E. Neal, D-Springfield, said in written testimony to the Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission ahead of its first public hearing at the Berkshire Innovation Center earlier this month. “CT Rail now has 17 trains a day between New Haven and Hartford, 12 of those trains continuing to Springfield. Yet Amtrak’s Lake Shore Limited, the lone east-west train has only one stop in each direction per day. Neal said the success of these lines must be boosted to promote the viability of robust east-west travel in the very near future.

Neal, who grew up in Springfield, said that it’s crucial to ensure a steady stream of funding to western and central Massachusetts for the project. As a result of his work as chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, federal dollars have been made available through the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill, including \$9.4 billion to Massachusetts, with \$2.5 billion specifically going to public transit.

“As we look ahead. We should all be very much mindful of what the Big Dig did in the 1990s and 2000s. The behemoth project ended up costing \$22 billion, \$16 billion in principle and \$6 billion in interest,” Neal said. “For those of us in the central and western part of the state, we saw many of our initiatives take the backburner during those years or be compromised altogether. I don’t want that to happen this time around. It is time for regional equity in this state ...”

The Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission panel heard testimony from a dozen people in person and virtually about how the rail service is crucial to economic development and statewide accessibility for residents.

“This will transform western Massachusetts, and you will see immediate economic opportunities, said Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, D-Northampton. “We will see the jobs we have had here that are needed to be filled with engineers, doctors, nurses and lawyers across the spectrum of our economy, from

hospitality to hospitals. We will all come together for a greater good.”

The Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and SafeLy Improvements grant program seeks more than \$108 million, which will go toward the total cost of approximately \$135 million. MassDOT also plans to contribute more than \$18 million, and Amtrak \$9 million toward the total cost.

According to MassDOT, the project aims to:

- Facilitate two Amtrak Inland Route daily round trips and improve travel times as the first phase of corridor improvements that will enhance connections within Massachusetts between Boston, Worcester, and Springfield and to communities beyond the commonwealth In Connecticut and New York City.*
- Increase operational efficiency and flexibility by reducing passenger and freight conflicts and reducing travel times along the remaining single-track segments on the CSX-owned part between Worcester and Springfield.*
- Improve infrastructure directly impacting increased train speeds and additional corridor capacity along the 53-mile section of the CSX Boston & Albany Line between Worcester and Springfield.*

Neal said in his testimony that such an opportunity would not come again, and it is time to move on to an east-west rail project that will be transformative for all of Massachusetts. “To put it simply, we have the money, the support, and I have secured the commitment from both the outgoing Baker-Polito administration and the incoming Healey-Driscoll administration to keep this train literally and metaphorically moving forward,” said Neal.

“Let us continue to work together as elected leaders, An engaged business community, and an involved public. Together, we can create the transportation system that our entire state needs for its economy and people to thrive.”

Update - Passenger Rail Via Augusta

MRG's Rail Committee Report
Richard Rudolph

A lot has happened since our last report. The "Lower Road" Rail Use Advisory Council (RUAC) met for the very first time on November 30 from 10:30 - 12 Noon. This is one of three RUACs which have been established to determine what should be done regarding the three state owned rail lines which were purchased in the late 1980's /early 1990's.

During the 130th Legislative session, MeDOT submitted a bill , LD1133, to the Maine Legislature which was passed authorizing the Commissioner of Transportation to convene rail corridor use advisory councils to advise and make recommendations each time one or more governmental entities representing communities along a state-owned rail corridor request a review of non-rail recreational use or non-recreational transportation use of that rail corridor. While this bill was being considered and voted on last year, the state legislature modified a bill which called on the state to fund a feasibility study for restoring passenger rail service to Bangor either through Pan Am's "Back Road" from Lewiston /Auburn or the state "Lower Road" from Brunswick to Augusta and then on the former PanAm's rail line to Waterville and Bangor. The modified bill that was passed, however, provided \$150,000 in state funds and \$50,000 from the major cities in Central Maine to conduct a propensity study which examines where people travel to work, shop and seek medical care.

The RUACs which MeDOT has established appear to be stacked decks for only one person on each of the committees represent passenger rail interests. Even worse, the "Lower Road" RUAC has no representatives from either Waterville or Bangor which have provided funds for the Propensity Study. Although the law doesn't require representation from these communities, they should have a seat at the table especially regarding decisions about the use of the "Lower Road" rail corridor.

To make matters worse, the same consulting firm VHB which MeDOT hired to conduct the "Propensity Study" is also serving as the consultant for each of the RUACS. Already questions have been raised by Bruce Sleeper, TrainRiders Northeast legal council and MRG members regarding the data that has been presented to justify converting rail lines into a trail. In Appendix B to the draft study for the St. Lawrence Rail Line which is owned by the state, but not in active use, the VHB consultants assumed that 23% of the users would be non-local and would spend an average of \$118 for food, lodging and equipment during the day they use the trail resulting in

spending of \$3.5 million to \$5.3 million annually. For train riders, the calculation is based only on what rail passengers might spend on the train resulting in spending of \$114,000 to \$130,000 annually. Undoubtedly, some of these riders may be visitors who will also spend money on hotel accommodations and at area restaurants. Questions have also been raised regarding the economic impact on housing as a result of passenger rail service. VHB estimated at most 256 new housing units would be built near the proposed rail stations in Auburn, Pineland and in Yarmouth. This is clearly a low ball estimate. Since the startup of the Downeaster Service more than 850 new housing units have been built near railroad stations.

It should also be pointed out that once these state rail owned lines are converted to hiking / bicycle paths it's unlikely they will ever be converted back for rail use. Although thousands of miles of rail line have been rail banked throughout the United States, less than 100 miles have ever been reconvered to rail use. Re-conversion would be very expensive once rail and ballast are removed, and the outcry from trail users and NIMBY's would make reconversion politically impossible.

In closing, we need all hands on deck to help save the "Lower Road" from being converted into a hiking/bicycle path. The next meeting of the "Lower Road" RUAC will be held on Wednesday, January 25 from 10:30 - 12:00. You can listen in since it will be held as a zoom meeting. The last 15 minutes are set aside for public comment. We will send out the zoom info needed to attend closer to the meeting date. You can also send written comments via email to Nathan.Howard@maine.gov. He is the Director of Rail Transportation at MEDOT, Office of Freight and Passenger Rail. You can also leave a message for him at (207) 624-3042.

Portland to Auburn/Berlin Subdivision/SLR Rail Use Advisory Council (RUAC)

Patty Barber

On 12/22/22 the Portland to Auburn RUAC met to vote: the voting options were Rail, Rail With Trail/RWT (keeps the tracks in place), or Trail Until Rail/Interim Trail/TUR (tears up the train tracks and replaces them with a bike/pedestrian trail.

The final vote was Rail Only (1), Rail with Trail (4) and Trail Until Rail (7), as follows:

Rail Only: Charles Hunter G+W Freight Railroad.

Rail With Trail Jonathan LaBonte- Auburn's Transportation Dept, Jeremiah Bartlett- Portland's Transportation Engineer, Bill Shane- the Council

Chair and Cumberland Town Manager, and Tony Donovan from Maine Rail Transit Coalition.

All of these people gave impassioned speeches about equity, the lack of inclusion of large parts of the populations affected, and that rail is a huge part of Maine's transportation future. I was surprised to know, as Mr. Hunter pointed out, that just in the last few years, 2 Class 1 RRs have returned to Maine. The future of rail is the present.

Trail Until Rail Dick Woodbury Casco Bay Trails, Angela King Bicycle Coalition of Maine, Diane Barns North Yarmouth Town Manager, Hope Cahan (by proxy) Falmouth Town Councilor, Scott Laflamme Yarmouth Director of Economic Development, Nate Wildes Live and Work in Maine Group, and the most disappointing of all, Chris Chop Transportation Director of Greater Portland Council of Governments. Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation (PACT). GPCG PACT in December came out with "Connect 2045", a Long Range Transportation Plan. In this plan, commuter rail was touted as necessary and anticipated. Why their director sided with the trail interests is unknown.

The majority opinion was to tear up the train tracks. This vote goes on to Maine DOT Commissioner for acceptance, then he submits a bill to be brought up in front of the Legislative Joint Transportation Committee, to be discussed and voted.

We need to band together and keep influencing those who can help stem the destruction of Maine's railroad infrastructure. We can all work together to encourage and expand commuter and freight train possibilities. Our voices are important. Reach out to Maine Rail Group to find out how you can help.

Patty Barber is a member of Maine Rail Group and of TrainRiders Northeast.

Stadler Announces Hydrogen-Powered Trains for California

By Keith Fender, September 21, 2022, edited (*Italics*)

Berlin- The first hydrogen-powered trainset for use in the U.S. has been presented to its owners at the InnoTrans trade fair by manufacturer Stadler – which also announced an option for up to 29 more for Caltrans. ...The first new zero-emission hydrogen-powered multiple-unit (ZEMU) trains will undergo extensive testing in Europe in 2023, before being shipped to the U.S to enter service in 2024.

The new trains are designed with a 500-mile operating range between refueling. Assuming the option is exercised, the equipment will replace existing diesel-powered, push-pull equipment used for Amtrak California service. ... California aims to make all its passenger rail 100% emissions free by 2035.

Mark Your Calendar

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. meeting: January 18, 2023

Amherst Railway Society show: W. Springfield, MA January 28 & 29, 2023

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

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

**MRG, Inc. Annual Meeting, June 24 2023 –
Details to be announced**

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

MRG, Inc. meeting September 13, 7pm (Zoom)

MRG, Inc. meeting November 15, 7pm Zoom)

Wishing everyone a Happy and safe 2023!

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.