



# MAINE RAIL NEWS

MRG, Inc. (Maine Rail Group)  
P.O. Box 5494  
Augusta, ME 04332  
<https://mainerailgroup.org>

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

## January / February 2024 Newsletter

Greetings from the new editor of the MRG, Inc. newsletter!

When Jack Sutton announced to the Board of Directors that it was intent to complete his tenure as the Maine Rail Group newsletter editor at the end of 2023, we knew that the next editor had big shoes to fill. Jack has been the newsletter editor for most of MRG's existence, and he set a new higher standard for our newsletter and maintained that standard of excellence through his last issue, for November / December of 2023. It will be my job to carry on that standard into the future. There is plenty of news, challenge, and opportunity in Maine railroading, and the MRG newsletter is one of the tools needed to get the word out and keep our members and other interested people informed. One of the ways our readers can help is by sending MRG news items on the developments that can have an impact on Maine railroads. I am sure Jack appreciated the news contributions he received, and I am sure that I will, too! In fact, Jack and others are sending links to articles seen in the media. When the editor has ample, relevant news material, it allows the editor to choose the best and most timely items for the next newsletter issue.

May the new year be bright for all of us!

--- Ed Hanscom

### In This Issue

- Downeaster receives grants from FRA to improve passenger rail service.
- CRX runs first thru freight trains to Mattawamkeag after a year of track improvements.
- 72<sup>nd</sup> Maine Transportation Conference

- Development project in Limestone could generate new freight rail opportunities.

### 2024 Membership Re-up Reminder

Membership dues at \$20 for first-year new members and students and \$40 for the rest of us are due in January 2024. The form is reprinted below.

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

A non-profit group working to  
enhance rail service in Maine  
[www.mainerailgroup.org](http://www.mainerailgroup.org)



#### 2024 Membership:

Name	Renewal (\$40)	Phone ( ) - -
Address	New/Student (\$20)	
City	Donation \$	
E-mail	Total Enclosed \$	
Affiliation	State	
Volunteer Interests	Zip	
Contact Preference:		

by E-mail      by U.S. Mail

**Please mail check to: MRG, Inc., P.O. Box 5494, Augusta, ME 04332**

THANKS for supporting the Maine Rail Group!

**Maine’s Downeaster to Receive \$27 million in FRA Funding to Make Track Improvements**

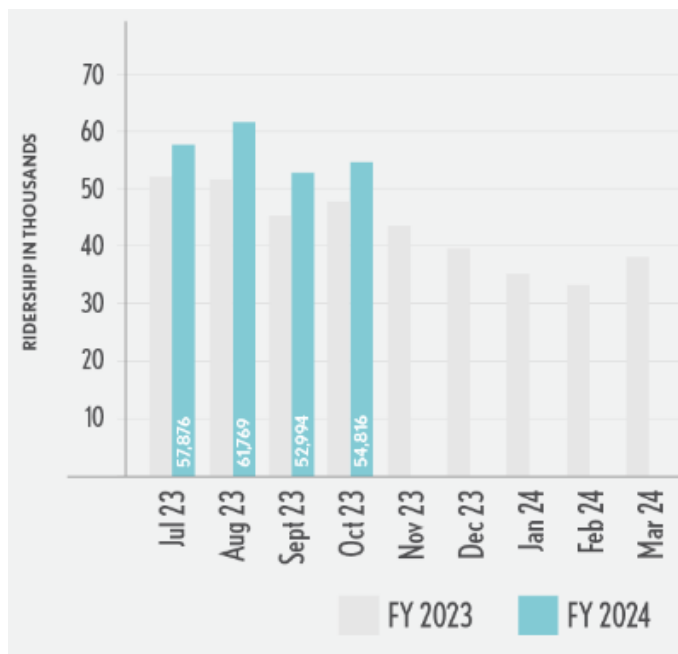
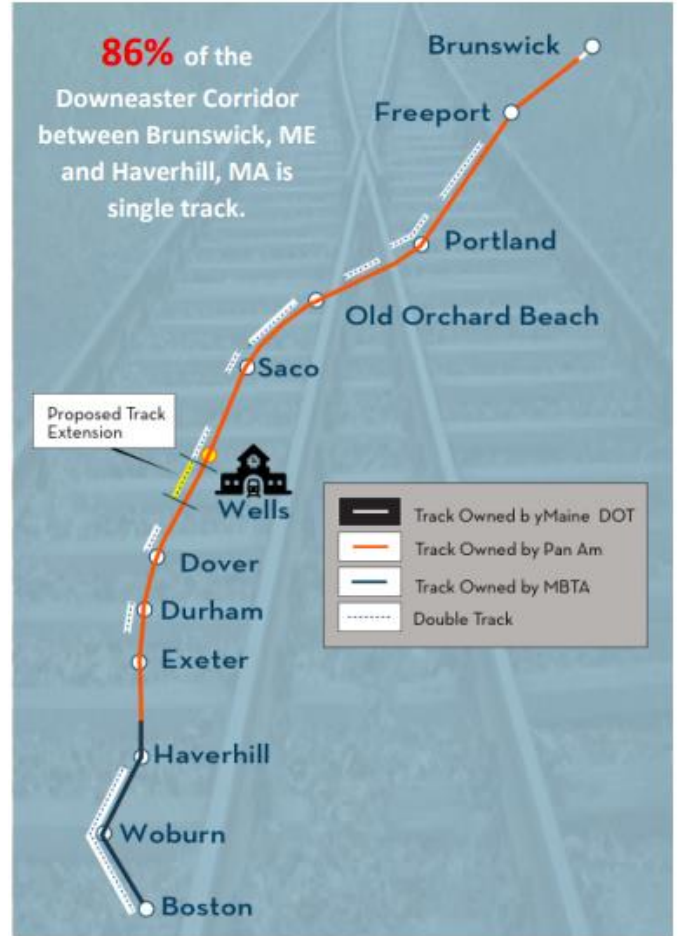
Sources: Amtrak, NNEPRA

On December 8, 2023, Amtrak announced that the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) awarded a \$27 million grant from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to make track improvements on the Downeaster route between Brunswick, Maine and the Massachusetts state line. The aim of these improvements is to upgrade track to improve service reliability and avoid delays. The grant is part of \$8.2 billion in funding under the nationwide Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Program. Patricia Quinn, Executive Director of NNEPRA stated “We are grateful for this federal award which, in partnership with CSX Transportation, will fund track-related upgrades to maintain reliability and set the stage for future improvements to the Amtrak Downeaster service.”

An earlier federal grant, awarded in 2019 under the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI) program, funded improvements at and near the Wells passenger station. These included extension of the passing siding from 2 miles to 8 miles in length and construction of a second passenger platform with pedestrian access bridge at the Wells station. The map (not to scale) shows the Wells improvements in relation to the current Downeaster route. (Note that track shown as owned by Pan Am is now owned by CSX.) The \$23 million Wells project is expected to be completed in 2024.

Also on December 8, NNEPRA was awarded a \$500,000 grant from the Corridor Identification and Development (Corridor ID) Program for planning a future Downeaster station in West Falmouth and seasonal Downeaster service on the Rockland Branch, from Brunswick to Rockland.

The latest available ridership data from NNEPRA continues to show consistent growth in Downeaster ridership during the summer and fall of 2023, compared to a year earlier. The chart on this page shows the month-by-month trend.



## 72<sup>nd</sup> Annual Maine Transportation Conference

On December 7, 2023, the 72nd Annual Maine Transportation Conference was held at the Augusta Civic Center. NNEPRA, TrainRiders Northeast, and the Maine Rail Group all had booths in the exhibitors area to engage with Conference attendees. MRG Board Members Russ Barber, Jack Sutton, Stan Koski, and Ed Hanscom were on hand to operate the booth, which featured displays and information about potential intercity passenger rail expansion to Augusta, Waterville, Bangor, Lewiston, and Rockland. Among those stopping by the booth were Nate Moulton and Nate Howard of MaineDOT and Bruce Sleeper of TrainRiders Northeast. While this year's Conference was light on presentations for non-highway modes (rail, air, ports, and trails), one area of emphasis was on MaineDOT's Village Partnership Initiative, in which MaineDOT supports municipalities that want to make their communities more livable and pedestrian friendly.

*Editorial Note: There seems to be a growing movement toward creating more livable places by putting more emphasis on people and less on private automobiles. Passenger rail (and bus) transit could be part of this movement by serving as trunks and feeders of a car-free transportation network.*

## Thru Freights Return Between Old Town and Mattawamkeag

Source:Trains.com

On Monday, December 4, 2023, CSX reached a milestone on the former Pan Am Railways when it ran the first train in nearly five years between Old Town, Maine, and the New Brunswick Southern interchange at Mattawamkeag, Maine. (See map.)

The 45-mile stretch of the former Maine Central was out of service and previously had speeds restricted to 10 mph. CSX has upgraded the line to FRA Class II standards, permitting 25-mph operation, and 15 miles of the line is now up to FRA Class III track standards that permit 40-mph running. CSX also has upgraded trackage between Waterville and Old Town, which had been limited to 10-mph operation.

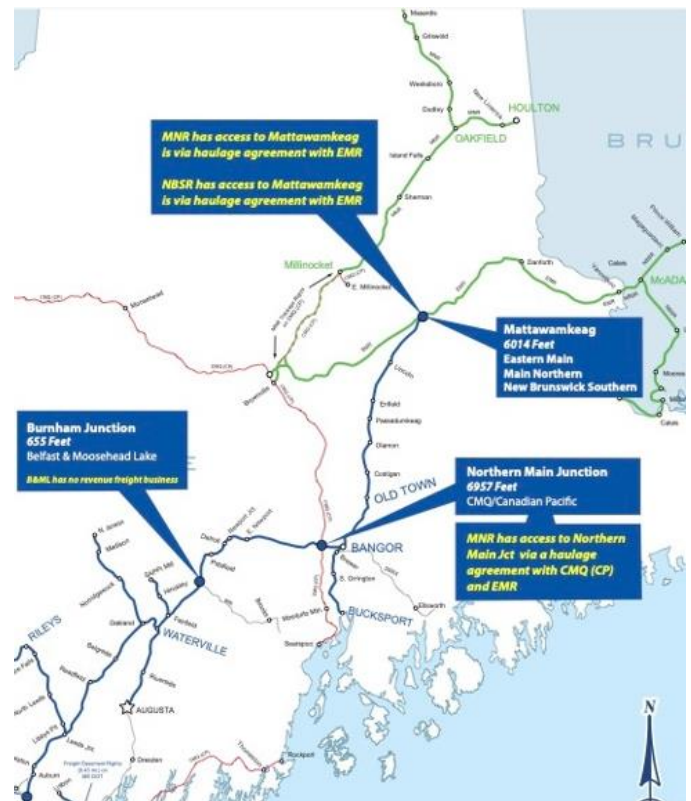
"With increased speeds and improved track, CSX will now be able to interchange with New Brunswick Southern Railway at Mattawamkeag, which will save

approximately two to three days in transit time between Mattawamkeag and New Brunswick, Canada," CSX said in a December update to the Surface Transportation Board.

The interchange traffic previously moved under a haulage agreement with Canadian Pacific Kansas City's (CPKC's) former Central Maine & Quebec via Northern Maine Junction, near Bangor.

A pair of locomotives delivered 47 cars to the New Brunswick Southern interchange on Monday evening. The New Brunswick Southern has a haulage agreement with sister J. D. Irving short line Eastern Maine Railway, which operates the former Canadian Pacific trackage from the New Brunswick border to Mattawamkeag and on to Brownville Junction, the interchange with CPKC.

CSX, which acquired Pan Am Railways in 2022, also told the STB that by the end of the year, it will complete projects at the Pan Am Southern yard at Ayer, MA that "will allow for increased fluidity and capacity for the critical link between the CSX system and the PAR System, in addition to improving the PAS System. CSX anticipate that the increased reliability resulting from these projects will continue to encourage new customers to ship via rail rather than truck."



## **Loring Biofuels Project Could Generate Rail Freight on the Limestone Branch and Beyond**

Source: Sept. 7, 2023 DG Fuels press release

LIMESTONE, ME — DG Fuels, LLC, (DGF) Loring Development Authority of Maine (LDA) and Green 4 Maine, LLC, wish to acknowledge the results of a collaborative effort and progress made toward the 175 million gallon per year sustainable jet fuel project first announced in November 2022.

Michael Darcy, chief executive officer of DGF, stated that considerable progress has been made in various aspects of the project including identifying sources of large quantities of clean electricity needed to power the refining process, and engaging the engineering firms of Black and Veatch and Haley Ward to design the site layout and handle environmental issues and permitting. Efforts are also underway to secure wood waste and biomass needed for the plant's feedstock. The Maine Department of Transportation has been involved in identifying how [underutilized] rail lines in northern Maine can be returned to service and used to transport the raw biomass product to the plant site. Discussions are also underway with Loring Holdings to utilize a pipeline corridor to bring the finished Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) to Searsport where it would be loaded onto tankers for distribution at airports on the east coast of the United States.

"We are very pleased to be working with the LDA and Green 4 Maine, as well as other stakeholders such as Maine's Department of Economic and Community Development. Our project has been well received and DGF is committed to making the project a success" stated Mr. Darcy.

The project is estimated to create about 650 permanent full-time jobs and will run on a 24/7 schedule. The project will also create as many as 2,300 construction jobs. DGF is working with Green 4 Maine to renovate housing at Loring which will help to support the project during both the construction and operational phases. The project partners are

diligently working with the Maine Department of Transportation to identify project costs associated with rehabilitating the existing rail lines between Presque Isle and Loring. The reactivation of this freight rail line not only reduces transportation costs but represents a more environmentally-friendly transportation solution.

*Editorial Note: MaineDOT Rail Director Nate Howard has indicated to the MRG Editor that the Limestone Branch, which extends from Presque Isle to Limestone, was the subject of a recent municipal request for the formation of a Rail Use Advisory Council (RUAC). He said that MaineDOT turned down the request because of the ongoing development of the Loring biofuels project.*

### **Mark Your Calendar**

Regular MRG, Inc. meetings are virtual by Zoom, starting at 7pm unless otherwise advised. Please check the <https://mainerailgroup.org> website for changes, or contact President Russ Barber for links:

[<rustyrailsis@gmail.com>](mailto:rustyrailsis@gmail.com)

**MRG, Inc. Board meeting January 17, 2024**

**Amherst Railway Society Show, Jan. 27 & 28**

**"Big E" W. Springfield, Massachusetts**

**MRG, Inc. Board meeting March 27, 2024**

**MRG, Inc. Annual Meeting, May 11, 2024**

**Details to be announced**

**MRG, Inc. Board meeting, July 17, 2024**

**MRG, Inc. Board meeting, September 25, 2024**

**MRG, Inc. Board meeting, November 20, 2024**

Happy New Year to all!

For the MRG, Inc. Board of Directors

Ed Hanscom, Editor

*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 (\$20 for students and first-year members). Inquiries are welcome.*