

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

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

**November / December 2022**

**Greetings,**

**It's Re-Up Time**

It's that time of year again. Members are asked to re-up for the coming year, and we invite others who share our rail interests to join Maine Rail Group. Please complete the membership card and return and return it with your payment check in the envelope enclosed with this newsletter.

Thanks for your participation! Memberships, dues and contributions are vital to our efforts and credibility in support of passenger and freight rail in Maine.

**MRG, Inc. focus during 2022**

During the past year our focus has included:

- Passenger rail extension from Brunswick to Waterville and Bangor via Augusta;
- Coordination with parallel interests to restore passenger service between Portland, Lewiston and westward;
- Objections to potentially irreversible conversion of major Maine State owned railroad corridors to pedestrian trails – specifically ex-MCR Mountain Division, ex-MCR mainline segment between Gardiner and Topsham and the ex-SLR line between Portland and Danville Jct.
- Following the sale, STB approval and implementation of PAR system to CSXT.
- Annual meeting at Unity, Maine with B&ML train ride between Thorndyke and Burnham Junction.
- Tables at Maine's Common Ground Fair and several local model railroad shows. MRG, Inc. is registered for tables at the Maine Transportation Conference, Augusta Civic Center on Dec. 1, 2022, and

the 2023 Amherst Railway Society show in West Springfield, MA Jan. 27-29, 2023.

- Updates to our New England Railroad Map for publication in Jan. 2023.

**New England Railroad map 2023**

The 2023 version of MRG, Inc.'s New England Railroad map is nearly complete and will be released for printing shortly to be available at the Amherst Railway Society Show in January. The 2023 map reflects changes of PAR ownership to CSXT, Rockland Branch operator change to MCRI – (Midcoast Railservices) – associate of Finger Lakes Railway, removal of the ex-PAR Madison Branch between Oakland and North Anson, Maine for recreational trail and various passenger rail interests.

**MRG Rail Committee Report**

Members of the MRG Rail Committee who attended the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners' Common Ground Fair held in Thorndike and Unity, Maine from September 23-25 were successful in reaching out to fair goers who attended the three day event. Our booth which was located in one of the Social Action tents attracted a large number of fair goers who support extending passenger rail to Central Maine. The attendees were attracted to our table for we were able to display our large map which shows how extending passenger rail from Brunswick to Augusta, Waterville and Bangor would put 90 % of Maine's population within one hour of passenger rail.

Besides handing out hundreds of our brochures which make the case for extending

passenger rail service to Central Maine as a positive investment in Maine's future, we were able to collect over 380 signatures on our petition to show there is support to restore passenger rail service from Brunswick, Maine to Augusta, Waterville and Bangor and to support a bill during the upcoming 2023 legislative session to provide funding for a feasibility study which is the next step to be eligible for the state to apply for federal funding under the Federal Railroad Administration's new Corridor ID program which serves as a key vehicle for directing federal investments and technical assistance toward new or improved intercity passenger rail service across the nation.

Members of the MRG's rail committee are also planning to attend the Maine Better Transportation (MBTA) 71st Annual Transportation Conference which will be held on Thursday, December 1 at the Augusta Civic and will seek out additional petition signatures at this event as well as at the November 19 train show held at Jeff's Catering in Brewer, ME by the Eastern Maine Model Railroad Club. MRG has a non-profit table reserved with our usual offering of brochures, books and maps. For more information or to volunteer to help, drop us a line on our website [mainerail.org](http://mainerail.org).  
Richard Rudolph

### **National Railroad Strike Averted**

After 14 hours of negotiation, it was announced that the railroad strike scheduled for September 15 was averted by tentative agreement with BLET and SMART-TD (Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen & Sheet Metal, Air, Rail & Transport

Workers-Transport Division). Final ratification of the agreement depends on a simple majority vote of approximately 57,000 members of these two unions, which is expected later this year. Eight other unions have already agreed.

Amtrak and freight railroads shipment of hazardous materials have restored schedules previously interrupted by the impending strike.

Terms of the agreement reportedly include a 24 percent increase in wages and benefits and partial relief from onerous work scheduling practices. Unions claim such practices restrict members from seeking medical attention, severely limit family time and otherwise interrupt their lives.

The railroad industry counters that it has worked hard to remain profitable by adjusting labor requirements to changes in demand, such as the long term downward trend in coal shipments and the pandemic's more recent impacts.

In later news the agreement was rejected by two of the smaller rail unions, leaving its final status in doubt. Railroad operations continue while the agreement remains pending.

### **Freight returns to the Rockland Branch**

George Betke of MCRI and parent railroad FGLK outlined progress toward return of freight business to the 57-mile state-owned Rockland Branch connecting with CSXT in Brunswick, Maine. Since becoming lessee-operator on August 1, MCRI has conducted a full-court press with CSXT to develop new business from a base level that had dwindled to fewer than 100 annual carloads with a single remaining customer after principal shipper Dragon Products discontinued a short-haul plant-to-barge rail shuttle for marine shipments of outbound cement from its Thomaston plant to the Boston area in January.

The most notable success so far is delivery of formerly imported inbound petroleum coke plant fuel (petcoke) from a source in Ohio. A recent MRG member video shows a 33-car train of covered hoppers including 21 loads of petcoke under a multi-year contract prompting Dragon investment in related on-site receiving facilities. Direct connection with major Eastern carrier CSXT has extended the plant's competitive reach for outbound

cement by rail beyond the practical trucking range of about 200 miles, creating more targeted product destinations.

As for new MCRI customers, the most unusual traffic gain has been carloads of refrigerated lobster bait from West Coast origins delivered to a Rockland siding built for that purpose many years ago that remained unused until recently.

“The most significant addition was triggered by October 26 delivery of the first carload of steel to American Steel & Aluminum’s new 52,000-square-foot distribution warehouse at West Bath following completion of a siding that permits indoor unloading. That train included receipt of a second locomotive assigned to MCRI to facilitate efficient switching at both ends of the line and provide sufficient power for longer and heavier trains interchanged with CSXT.

Rockland Branch passenger-service opportunities are also under consideration by MCRI and NNEPRA, but establishment of a viable freight presence is given priority.

### First lobster bait car in Rockland



Photo by Bob Holland

### Rails vs. Trails in Maine

Maine Rail Group welcomes recreational trails in rail corridor segments where parallel trail activities and

railroad operations can safely co-exist, as stated in this September / October newsletter.

We regret, but understand loss to trail of the Calais Branch between Washington Jct. and Ayers Jct., and the more recent removal of the Madison Branch track between North Anson and Oakland for conversion to recreational trails. Insufficient freight and/or passenger business potential was forecast to justify the costs of restoring and operating these deteriorated branches to modern standards of railroad service. However, we object to the logic of judging whether to keep or convert a railroad corridor by comparing the cost of trail conversion to the cost of restoring modern rail service.

We believe that three railroad corridors now under study by Maine DOT for conversion to trail should be preserved for rail use. Almost certainly it will cost less to replace tracks with a graveled or paved, fair weather, daylight-use, recreational trail than to restore the corridor as a modern, functional railroad.

The Maine Legislature has wisely preserved for future railroad use the state-owned corridors between Brunswick and Augusta, with connections to Waterville and Bangor; Portland and Auburn, with connections to Lewiston and Montreal; and Westbrook through Fryeburg, with connections through New Hampshire to Vermont. Each of these three corridors holds potential for regional economic development, new jobs, and reduced road congestion. Together, they represent new opportunities for the traveling public, and tourism, as well as for the Downeaster and Amtrak. Maine’s NNEPRA experience in administering and working with Amtrak to operate the Downeaster can be exploited for administrative and operating synergies to efficiently restore modern passenger rail transportation on any or all of these corridors.

**The forthcoming update of Maine’s State Rail Plan should recognize these corridors as important components of Maine’s future transportation system. We also suggest that major municipalities on each of a 3these routes recognize space and access in their mandated Comprehensive Plan revisions for rail passenger stations and related development, parking, electrical vehicle charging stations plus “last mile” connections**

### **CAF Type 10 “Supercars” for Green Line**

This news, reported by Mass Transit Daily (9/06/2022) may interest Downeaster travelers who arrive and depart from Boston’s North Station and use the MBTA Green Line in the Boston region.

*The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Board of Directors has approved a \$810.93 million contract with CAF USA to manufacture and deliver 102 Type 10 light-rail vehicles and supporting materials and equipment as part of the Green Line Transformation project.*

The article describes how each train of seven modules will be 40 feet longer than current units and will provide more capacity and roomier ride, plus the latest safety technology. Design features include low floors and elimination of all stairs, wide door openings, enhanced communications systems with audiovisual screens, a 32-inchwide aisle throughout, bridge plates at all double-leaf doors and four priority areas for passengers using wheeled mobility devices.

CAF USA was selected by an MBTA committee based on feedback from independent teams for technical and financial evaluations. The first production vehicle in the spring of 2026, with the final production vehicle delivered in the spring of 2031.

### **TRAINS Magazine (December, 2022) Articles**

These **TRAINS** articles are of regional interest::

- Addressing AMTRAK’s capacity crisis
- Photo: Amtrak’s first Ethan Allen Express train to Burlington, VT, at Vergennes VT July 29, 2022
- Short Line: Massachusetts Coastal Railroad

### **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](mailto:rustyrailsis@gmail.com))

Here's the tentative schedule for MRG, Inc. functions through January, 2024. Additional events will be added as they occur..

MRG, Inc. meeting: November. 17, 2022

**Maine Transportation Conference: Augusta Civic Center Dec.1, 2022**

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)

MRG, Inc. meeting January 17, 2024 (Zoom)

For the MRG, Inc,

**Wishing everyone Happy and safe Holidays!**

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.*