

Inc. (Maine Rail Group)
Box 5494, Augusta, Maine 04332 <http://mainerailgroup.org>
A volunteer group working to enhance rail services in Maine

November / December 2023

Greetings,

MRG, Inc. Newsletter

President Russ Barber announces that Ed Hanscom, MRG, Inc. director and treasurer, has accepted the added role of newsletter editor, with this comment: “Ed, this is a generous offer to take over the MRG newsletter. You are already doing an excellent job with our finances, attending meetings, doing sales and outreach at hobby shows, attending the Common Ground fair political action table and more. You may not ‘advocate for concentrating the responsibilities of an organization into a few’, but you do live that role!”

This is my last MRG, Inc. newsletter as editor. The typical format has been news of membership matters, including annual meetings, dates and agendas, election of directors and clerk, train rides and other events, re-up reminders, etc. Recent news of passenger and freight rail-related events elsewhere is also included, as space allows in the four-page format.

A draft of each bi-monthly letter is circulated to MRG, Inc. board members before general circulation to ensure that their views are reflected. Board comments and corrections improve newsletter content and have been greatly appreciated by this former editor.

With my thanks and best regards to readers and friends, and my best wishes to Ed!

Jack Sutton.

Membership Re-up

Membership dues at \$40 for re-ups and \$20 for first-year new members are due in January 2024. A separate card and envelope are enclosed for your convenience.

MRG, Inc. Priorities

During 2023 MRG, Inc. has focused on Maine DOT’s explorations of converting certain State-owned railroad corridors in Maine from rail use to recreational trails. Such conversions are defined as “temporary until required for rail”, but we believe they will be permanent because of their entrenchment, loss of remaining railroad infrastructure, plus the cost and political resistance to reconversion from trail to rail.

MRG, Inc. does not oppose trails per se. We welcome recreational trails in railroad corridors where safe separation is designed and maintained, and where railroad and trail costs are funded separately.

The State-owned corridors of concern are as follows:

Berlin Subdivision: Danville Junction (Auburn to Portland, ME

This corridor is not currently recommended by Maine DOT for conversion to trail.

Future rail uses envisioned include:

- Passenger service between Lewiston and Portland,
- Downeaster connection at Yarmouth Jct.,
- Connection at Yarmouth Jct. for Lewiston and Lower Road points to Roux development and Portland (in town).

Lower Road: Brunswick to Augusta

This corridor is recommended for conversion to trail by a split vote of the Maine DOT RUAC (Rail Use Advisory Committee), and is now awaiting recommendation to the Maine Legislature’s Joint Standing Committee on Transportation.

MRG, Inc. considers this link of high strategic and economic value for future rail service to and through Augusta.

Future rail uses envisioned include:

- Passenger rail service to Maine’s State Capital;
- Initial passenger service between Augusta and Brunswick with self-powered coaches = connecting with existing Downeaster trains;
- Future through service to Waterville and Bangor for Downeaster extensions and for local services.

Mountain Division: Portland to Fryeburg

This corridor has been recommended for conversion to trail by a RUAC, received legislative and Governor approval for conversion to trail and awaits conversion funding and action by MaineDOT. A remaining hope to reverse these decisions is the proposal by Conway Scenic Railroad (CSRR) to upgrade and reopen its dormant connection with Maine’s Mountain Division for passenger and freight services between CSRR and Portland – subject to funding sources.

The original Maine Central Railroad (MEC) Mountain Division ran from Portland to St. Johnsbury, VT, with rail connections south, north and west from there.

Potential rail uses are freight and passenger services between CSRR and Portland. CSRR now operates for tourists seasonally on most of New Hampshire’s part of the former MEC’s Mountain Division. It still has a dormant track connection at Fryeburg with Maine’s Mountain Division.

Rockland Branch: Brunswick to Rockland

This corridor connects with the Lower Road just east of the Brunswick Station. It currently serves the Dragon Cement plant at South Thomaston. It also now hosts demonstration runs of MidCoast Rail Company’s “Coastliner” self-powered, modernized ex-DART (Dallas Area Rapid Transit) coaches.

Dragon Cement has announced its South Thomaston plant will close in 2025, challenging MidCoast and MaineDOT to find another operator for the plant and/or other local customers to justify continuing operation of the rail line.

Meanwhile, Coastliner operations will test and demonstrate the suitability of self-powered coaches for use on the Rockland Branch and for other modest density rail passenger operations in Maine.

MRG, Inc. will do all it can to save any or all of these Maine State -owned corridors but we can’t do it alone. The Maine municipalities involved have most

to gain from the return of passenger service through public transportation, related economic development, tourism and environmental benefits. We urge Maine residents to tell their local, state and federal representatives of their interest in keeping viable rail corridors for rail, and for restoring the advantages of rail services as soon as possible.

Whatever the future holds for these corridors, MRG, Inc. looks forward to focusing its railroad efforts and resources in Maine toward education, expansion of freight and passenger services, rail excursions, railroad history and rail-related projects of like-minded non-profit groups. We applaud success of the Amtrak Downeaster and recognize the efforts of NNEPRA, TrainRiders Northeast, and the federal, state and local officials who created the service and have supported its growth throughout the past twenty-plus years.

Boston Green Line Extension must be fixed

Edited from Boston Globe article October 19, 2023, by Taylor Dolven, Laura Crimaldi, Sean P. Murphy and Hanna Krueger, Globe Staff

The Green Line extension is riddled with so many defects – far more than previously disclosed - that workers will have to reposition the rails along much of the 4.7mile stretch, MBTA general manager Phillip Eng announced Thursday, marking the most stunning setback yet for the multibillion-dollar project that fully opened less than one year ago.

The fundamental problem with the \$2.3 billion expansion which stretches to Medford on one branch and to Union Square in Somerville on the other is the track itself, Eng said in an interview. Before the project opened, when the ribbons were cut, and ever since, it’s been too narrow, a grave error that Eng said was known within the agency, but neither fixed nor shared with him until last month. ...

Now Eng said the T is working with the construction companies that built the extension to reposition the plates on the ties throughout the project. That process involves unscrewing bolts from the tie plates, filling the holes with epoxy or wooden dowels, and the drilling new holes and then securing the plates at the correct gauge Eng did not say how long the work will take to complete, but indicated it could take weeks.

T spokesperson Joe Pesaturo said 50 percent of the Union Square branch track and 80 percent of the Medford branch track will have to be regauged. ... Pesaturo said two people with senior roles on the Green Line extension project are no longer employed by the T as of Thursday.

FY 2022 Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (Crisi) Selections: Project Summaries Relating to New England

From the national list of 70 released by U.S. DOT, Federal Railroad Administration, September 25, 2023.

Connecticut – Housatonic Railroad Service Restoration and Safety Investment Project (Up to \$5,372,500)

Housatonic Railroad Company (HRRC)

The proposed project involves final design and construction activities for various track-related improvements and upgrades to multiple bridges. The project aligns with the selection criteria by improving system and service performance and ability to meet existing and anticipated demand as it will restore a portion of HRRC's rail line that is out of service and improve approximately 18 miles of rail line to increase freight rail capacity and improve operational safety. Also, the project will help HRRC maintain its connection with Pan Am Southern/CSX Transportation and Metro-North. A combination of funds from HRRC and two customers (Oak Ridge Waste and Interstate and Lakeland Lumber) will provide a 30 percent non-Federal match.

Massachusetts- Connecting the Commonwealth: Early Actions for the Inland Route Project (Up to \$108,085,280)

Massachusetts Department of Transportation (Mass DOT)

The proposed project involves project development, final design and construction activities for various track, signal, grade crossing and bridge improvements on the Inland Route corridor, which is CSX Transportation owned and MassDOT-owned infrastructure. The project aligns with the selection criteria by improving system and service performance and ability to meet existing and anticipated demand as it will increase capacity to safely accommodate the addition of two round trip

Amtrak Lake Shore Limited intercity passenger trains per day at higher speeds, while maintaining current freight operations. The improvements will raise the track class in many locations from FRA Class tracks 2 and 3 currently, to Class 4 standard and address multiple areas of track alignment within curves that were not designed for 80-mph maximum speed allowed under Class 4 on railroads equipped with Positive Train Control. MassDOT and Amtrak will contribute funds totaling a 20 percent non-Federal match. This project qualifies for the statutory set-aside for new Intercity Passenger Rail projects.

New Hampshire- Portsmouth Bridge Replacement and Grade Crossing Improvements Project (Up to \$345,000)

City of Portsmouth, New Hampshire

The proposed project involves project development activities for the replacement of the Bartlett Street Bridge (Bridge), as well as various track improvements and upgrades to certain grade crossings. The Bridge is on CSX Transportation's Portsmouth Branch and has exceeded its service life; it is not capable of carrying industry standard freight cars of 286,000-pound gross weight and it has sub-standard highway vertical and horizontal clearance which creates a safety hazard. The project aligns with the selection criteria by improving ability to meet existing or anticipated demand as it will help CSX and the City of Portsmouth prepare for future project phases to improve railroad operations, safer grade crossings, and enhance economic viability to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, the NH Port Authority Market Street Marine Terminal and other rail served customers. The City of Portland will provide a 25 percent non-Federal match. This project qualifies for the statutory set-aside for projects in Rural Areas.

Vermont-Tri-State Regional Upgrade Project (Up to \$9,654,789)

State of Vermont Agency of Transportation)

The proposed project involves project development, final design, and construction activities for various track-related improvements and upgrades to certain grade crossings. The project aligns with the selection criteria by improving ability to meet existing and anticipated demand as it will improve sections of St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railroad's 162-mile corridor in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine,

resulting in increased safety and railcar load capacity from 263,000 pounds to the current industry capacity of 286,000 pounds. A combination of funding from the St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railroad, Maine Department of Transportation, and New Hampshire Department of Transportation will contribute a 50.5 percent non-Federal match. This project qualifies for the statutory set-aside for projects in Rural Areas.

Ed. Comment: It's encouraging that MaineDOT is participating in the non-Federal match for this multi-state project. It will be interesting to learn how the match of up to 49.5 percent of \$9,654,789 or \$4,779,120 will be shared between participants.

MASS TRANSIT Report: Metra to receive \$169.3 million CMAQ grant to buy zero-emission trainsets

Oct. 18, 2023

Metra is set to receive a \$169.3 million federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) grant to buy battery-powered, zero emission trainsets. The funding represents the largest discretionary grant in Metra's history and allows the agency to be among the first in the U.S. to operate the battery-powered, zero emission trainsets. The CMAQ funding was approved by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and the Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee. Trainsets powered by batteries are currently in use in Germany, France and Australia. The agency issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for battery-powered trainsets in September 2022 and is currently reviewing proposals it received in response.

"We think zero-emission trainsets could be an exciting and positive addition to Metra's fleet for a variety of reasons," said Metra CEO and Executive Director Jim Derwinski. "Beyond the environmental and noise reduction benefits, they also offer savings in energy consumption, as well as better efficiency, flexibility and reliability. Along with our other initiatives, they would continue to make Metra a

responsible and effective leader in green energy technology."

CMAQ funding will support the purchase of up to 16 trainsets, adding a new type of propulsion to Metra's fleet than its traditional trains. The lower-capacity trainsets could be a more economical and environmentally friendly way to provide the same level of service or better, particularly during off-peak times, and could play a significant role in helping Metra achieve its vision to provide more frequent all-day service. ...

Mark Your Calendar

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

<rustyrailsis@gmail.com>

MRG, Inc. meeting November 15, 2023

Maine Transportation Conference, Augusta Civic Center (all day) December 7, 2023

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 and safe Holidays to all!

For the MRG, Inc. 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 (\$20 for first year new members). Inquiries are welcome