

**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 2022**

**Greetings,**

**Time to restore passenger rail service to central Maine** - Robert Holland, *Maine Compass*, 7-29-2002

*When it comes to maintaining and expanding passenger rail service, the state of Maine is at a turning point. Save the COVID 19 interlude, traffic on Amtrak's Downeaster has been showing positive growth and acceptance since its inception. It is well recognized that rail passenger service cannot exist without governmental subsidies. On the other hand, neither vehicular traffic (roads) nor air traffic (Federal Aviation Administration and airports) can exist without public subsidies.*

*Politicians like to avoid the use of the word "taxes". Instead, they use the word "Investment". So let's be candid. Federal and state tax monies will be required to maintain and expand rail passenger service. The state needs to have a documented plan to grow the service over the next decade and beyond.*

*Let's focus on "planned" passenger rail service. L.D. 227, which calls for a propensity study for the expansion of passenger service to Bangor, was passed last year. Ideally, the service would use the existing right of way: Brunswick, Augusta, Waterville, Bangor. This reaches a majority of the state population north of Portland. Included are the collages of Colby Thomas, Husson and a jumping off point for UMaine at Orono. Just ask the students at the University of New Hampshire at Dover or the University of Rhode Island at Kingston. They love the train. Additionally, Bangor serves as a hub for Canadian travelers wanting to travel south. Via shuttle bus, Acadia National Park is in striking distance. On top of all that, Bangor has become a great medical center.*

*While the propensity study is a good first step, the state of Maine really needs to upgrade the propensity study to a feasibility study.*

*Since L.D. 227 was passed, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Railroad Administration has established a new Corridor Identification and Development Program which will establish a pipeline of projects ready for funding – allowing them to be implemented faster and with greater coordination than before. The program will serve as a key vehicle for directing federal passenger investments and technical assistance toward new or improved intercity passenger rail services across the nation.*

*To tap these sources, three things are required. First, the state must have the need for the study as part of the state's rail plan. The state is currently updating its rail plan.*

*Second, the state must conduct a feasibility study. Maine legislators, in the next session, must pass a bill to underwrite the cost of conducting a feasibility study which would analyze the viability of restoring passenger rail service to central Maine. The study would include demand analysis and traffic forecasts, an engineering analysis and estimation of capital, operating and administrative costs to determine whether the project is likely to succeed. It is also designed to identify potential issues and problems that could arise from pursuing the project.*

*Finally, the state's governor and department of transportation must support the study.*

*It is time for the state of Maine to become serious about expanding rail passenger service. Regardless of the outcome in the fall elections, Maine cannot afford to pass up the development that will occur by expanding service. Done correctly, an increasing tax base will offset the state subsidies. It is time for the legislators to call for and fund a feasibility study to expand passenger rail in Maine*

*Robert Holland is a director of MRG, Inc. (Maine Rail Group).*

**Should Passenger Rail be extended to Bangor?**  
**A new state committee seeks to find out**

*By Susan Cover, Spectrum News, Aug. 22, 2022  
(italics)*

*A state committee will soon be tasked with studying whether there's enough demand to support passenger rail service between Portland and Bangor, something supporters say would be an economic boon to central and northern Maine.*

*Sen. Joe Baldacci (D-Bangor), who sponsored the legislation to call for the committee, hopes it doesn't take 50 years. He said once again extending passenger train service to Bangor – which ended in 1961 – would be an economic development tool and a way to help the state's older population and college students get to their destinations.*

*"I think there's broad public support," he said. I would like to have statewide service. I think that should be the goal eventually."*

*Baldacci said he's frustrated by what he feels has been a slow process to get the study off the ground. The legislation passed last year and was signed into law in June 2021. With a primary focus on roads and bridges, he's not sure the Maine Department of Transportation can give it the attention it deserves.*

*"We may need to set up a separate independent agency," Baldacci said. "I think DOT is going to lose this in its bureaucracy. There needs to be a focused public agency that is working on rail, unless we don't want to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."*

*Nathan Moulton, director of freight and passenger services at the Maine DOT, said the department has hired Boston-based consultant VHB to lead the study group and that the department will meet the Jan. 1, 2023 deadline to report its findings to the Legislature. He agrees with Baldacci that roads and bridges are the primary focus of the Maine DOT, but said they also have offices dedicated to ports, railroads and other transportation needs.*

*And, they partner with the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, which was created in 1995 to oversee train service. He compared it to the Maine Turnpike Authority, a separate entity that works collaboratively with Maine DOT.*

*The passenger rail authority oversees the Amtrak Downeaster, which runs from Boston to Brunswick with stops in Wells, Saco, Old Orchard, Portland and Freeport. In 2019, the last full year before the coronavirus pandemic, more than 500,000 people rode the Downeaster, a record setting year that was 8% higher than 2018, according to the rail authority.*

*"We love our cars in this country," Moulton said. "What is the propensity to use enhanced transit if we put it in place?"*

*Augusta, Waterville and Bangor all contributed funds to help pay for the study in addition to state funding. The study will cost \$200,000. The public will have a chance to weigh in this fall when the committee is partway through the process and again when the report is final, Moulton said.*

*"For us at DOT, it's more about how do we by fostering move people efficiently," he said. It's a whole system. We look at these things mode-agnostic."*

### **Maine Rail Group Opinion**

While Maine DOT conducts the propensity study described in Susan Cover's article above, DOT advisory councils explore trail interests to acquire all, or parts of idle State-owned rail corridors now reserved by state law for railroad use.

The notion that a corridor will be returned to rail use if and when the need arises is doubtful. A trail once established in place of rail will be difficult to remove, due political pressure, cost and general inertia. Almost no national experience can be cited for re-conversions from trails back to rails.

Maine Rail Group welcomes recreational trails in rail corridor segments where parallel trail activities and railroad operations can safely co-exist.

This includes Maine-owned corridors between Brunswick and Augusta; between Danville Jct. and Portland (India Street) via Yarmouth Jct.; and the former MEC Mountain Division from Westbrook to the New Hampshire border at Fryeburg - extending through Vermont as Conway Scenic Railroad.

Reasons to support modern railroad expansion in Maine include these:

- Freight rail catalyzes and attracts economic development and jobs;
- Freight and passenger rail users cooperate for joint uses and maintenance of track in Maine and jobs by fostering public-private partnerships.
- Maine has rail-served seaports at Portland, Searsport, with access to St. John, NB;
- Maine's proven assets in NNEPRA and the Downeaster can be effectively expanded;

- Amtrak, operator of the *Downeaster* is the logical choice for expanded passenger operations;
- Maine's Downeaster extends Amtrak's North East Corridor;
- Passenger rail provides opportunities for travelers to shift from private autos to trains;
- Passenger rail in Maine supports tourism in Maine and elsewhere in New England.
- Maine railroads can choose favorable environmental and climate responses when alternative energy sources as batteries, hydrogen fuel, or overhead electric are proven, economically, and linked with connections.
- Maine Transportation Infrastructure Durability Center (TIDC) at Orono evaluates advances emerging technologies applicable to railroads.

### **Common Ground Fair 2022**

Come meet us in person at Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners' (MOFGA) Common Ground Fair on September 23-25, from 9 am – 5 pm.

Maine Rail Group (MRG, Inc.) members will greet fair attendees in one of the Social Action tents at the MOCGF's Education Center in Unity Maine. Their annual celebration of rural living features 1000-plus exhibitors and speakers and emphasizes vibrant communities, sustainable living and local economies, while highlighting organic agriculture. Please stop by our table to say hello and to pick up our brochure describing the ongoing effort to build public support for the return of passenger rail service from Brunswick to Augusta, Waterville and Bangor. Also, consider signing our petition urging the next Legislature to fund a feasibility study as the next critical step toward applying for federal funds under the FRA's new Corridor I.D. Program – "as a key vehicle for directing federal investments and technical assistance toward new or improved intercity passenger rail services across the nation." Also available are free copies of our 2020 New England Railroad maps, while the supply lasts.

For more MOFGA information and to purchase tickets on line please see the MOFGA website. Attendees can park free at the fairgrounds, or avoid the long walk to the exhibits by taking the Belfast & Moosehead Lake train directly to Fair Ground Station from off-site parking lots in Unity and Thorndike.

### **Hydrogen powered trains in Germany** From Fleet article, Simon Artymiuk, 8-1-22

(italics)

*The first train of what will soon become the world's largest hydrogen-powered fleet has arrived in Germany's Rhine-Main area for tests.*

*Alstom will carry out route and refueling process familiarization tests with the Coradia iLint 54 multiple-unit, with 27 such hydrogen trains due to run on the Taunus network operated for Rhine-Main Transport Authority (RMV). In late summer, the first new vehicles will be handed over to RMV and more than half of the trains are expected to be in service for the start of passenger operation in December. ...*

*"The 27 hydrogen trains make the Taunus a pioneering region in Germany and beyond," says Mr. Ulrich Krebs, deputy chairman of the RMV supervisory board and district administrator of the Hochtaunuskreis District.*

*"For passengers, this means more seats and free Wi-Fi," says RMV managing director, Professor Knut Ringat. "In addition, the hydrogen trains are locally emission-free. With hydrogen as a low-emission technology, we are investing in the future with climate-neutral public transport. Our ambitious goal is to do without diesel vehicles from 2030, with the right financing framework and availability". ... "Our goal is for all 27 vehicles to be delivered by the end of March 2023," says Mr. Muslum Yakisan,,president of Alstom in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.*

### **WW&F Railway Mountain Extension**

Wiscasset, Waterville & Farmington Railway Museum held its Mountain Extension Grand Opening on August 6. A double-headed steam-powered train of seven coaches traversed the entire line from Sheepscot to its new northern terminal near the former crossing of State Rte. 218. Russ Barber, Bob Holland and Bill Crosby of Maine Rail Group participated in the event.

Originally named the Wiscasset & Quebec Railroad, the two-foot gauge line reached the length of 58 miles between Wiscasset and Albion, with a branch extended from Week's Mills to Winslow. That branch was intended to reach across the Kennebec River through Waterville and over the Sandy River to

connect with the two-foot gauge railroad empire radiating from Farmington in the early 1900's – hence the present name. Grading begun east of Farmington and the Week's Mill's Branch were abandoned by 1915, when improving roads and the competitive limits of two-foot gauge railroads became apparent.

The present-day WW&F Railway Museum, founded over 30 years ago by Harry Percival, now has over 1,200 memberships and an annual budget of over \$1 million. They are currently building their own steam locomotive and a passenger coach, according to their Grand Opening brochure.

### **Interstate Passenger Rail Service returns to Western Vermont**

By Carl Fowler, Member, Vermont Rail Advisory Council, July 22, 2022, via Kenyon Karl, (*italics-edited*)

*The July 29, 2022 extension of the ETHAN ALLEN EXPRESS from Rutland to Burlington, along Vermont's Western Corridor, will restore an interstate passenger train service lost 69 years ago, in June 1953. This will be the longest time any major rail line in the US has been without interstate service and then regained it.*

*The Rutland Railroad, prior to a June 1953 strike, had operated passenger service the length and breadth of Vermont. Passenger trains ran from Ogdensburg, NY and Montreal, Quebec through Vermont via Burlington to a rail hub at Rutland. There most trains divided to serve both Boston (via Bellows Falls, VT and Keene, NH) and New York City (via Troy, NY and the New York Central's "Water Level Route" to Grand Central Terminal). Through passenger cars were exchanged by the Rutland RR daily with the New York Central, Boston and Maine and Canadian National Railways to reach those off-line terminals.*

*Demand for Rutland RR passenger trains had been strong throughout World War II, but after the war private cars, improved paved roads and competition from trucks for the milk, mail and express business deeply eroded Rutland RR income from these trains. Interim actions to stem a growing deficit included*

*cutting the crack daytime "Green Mountain Flyer" back from Montreal to originate in Burlington, plus eliminating many local trains and raising fares – but none of these measures were enough. Passenger losses threatened to bankrupt the line.*

*In June 1953 the Rutland Railroad responded to a strike by its operating unions by suspending passenger service. It was never restored, even though it was never properly OK'd by the ICC either. A second strike in 1960-61 killed the Rutland RR outright. Running no passenger service postponed bankruptcy for less than a decade.*

*But all was not lost. The State of Vermont purchased most of the Rutland's mainlines, including both the Hoosic Junction to Burlington (via Rutland) route (over which the ETHAN ALLEN EXPRESS will operate between Rutland, Middlebury, Vergennes and Burlington beginning July 29) and the Rutland to Bellows Falls line.*

*Sadly, the legendary "Island Line" with its better than three-mile-long causeway across Lake Champlain north of Burlington, did not survive. ... But hindsight is always perfect!*

### **TrainRiders/Northeast Annual Meeting**

TrainRiders/Northeast Annual Meeting returns to the Harraseekett Inn, Freeport, Maine on Tuesday, September 13, 2022, with early registration from 11:30 am, with luncheon and program from 12:30 pm to 3:15 pm. Reservation and luncheon is \$75 pp.

### **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. meetings: Sept. 14, Jan. 18, 2023

Maine Transportation Conference: Dec. 1, 2022

For the MRG, Inc, 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.**