

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

March / April 2021

Greetings,

Membership

Welcome aboard Andrew Sandweiss.

Andy is a current Transportation Planning Master's Student at the University of Pennsylvania, having received his Bachelor's in Architecture and Urban Studies at Yale University. With an upbringing that straddled between Bangor, Maine & Lima, Peru, Andrew is interested in the connections between intra and inter-city transportation, transit station design, and sustainability. His life-long goal (and one of the original reasons for his interest in urban planning) has been getting Amtrak service to Bangor. In his free time, Andrew is a casual cartographer, having made a map of all of Maine's historic trolley routes and one of all of the state's (former and current) passenger railroad stations. His work is visible at asandmaps.wordpress.com.

Welcome aboard to Dr. Robert Klose.

Dr. Klose lives and writes in Orono, Maine, where he raised his two adopted sons from Russia and Ukraine. He is a biology professor at the Bangor campus of the University of Maine at Augusta. Besides being a long-time contributor of essays to The Christian Science Monitor, he is the author of five books. His novel, "Long Live Grover Cleveland," published by Medallion Press, won both a USA BookNews Award and a Ben Franklin Literary Award. Previous titles are "Adopting Alyosha — A Single Man Finds a Son in Russia," "Small Worlds — Adopted Sons, Pet Piranhas & Other Mortal Concerns," "The Three-Legged Woman & Other Excursions in Teaching," and a children's book, "The Legend of the River Pumpkins." His work has also appeared in Newsweek. (website)

OP-Ed by Richard Rudolph, MRG Inc. Director, published by Bangor Daily News, February 14, 2021

The Joint Transportation Committee of the Maine Legislature will soon consider restoring passenger rail along the Portland corridor to Augusta, Waterville and Bangor. Passage of LD 227, which Sen. Joe Baldacci has sponsored along with seven co-sponsors, will provide \$300,000 for a feasibility study to determine the scope, costs and advantages of passenger rail along this corridor. It is the first step in a multi-year process to ultimately obtain federal funds to help underwrite the cost of construction and to purchase equipment to operate the service

While some may say it is not the most opportune time given the impact that the COVID has had on the state budget, the case for it is stronger than ever. There is new national leadership that is interested in investing in infrastructure programs in rural areas, as well rebuilding bridges, railways and other vital infrastructure. President Joe Biden supports passenger trains and Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg has a strong interest and "advocates for moving the U.S. transportation system away from the chokehold of car culture," as the High Speed Rail Alliance put it.

The money for the feasibility study would come from the state multimodal fund, which was originally set up to help cover the cost of passenger rail, but has been used to fund non-rail related activities. It is tax revenue collected on rental cars.

Extending passenger rail to central Maine is a strategic investment in Maine's future. It will not only promote new economic development in the communities and region that it serves, but will also support young people who wish to stay and succeed in the Maine economy who no longer can afford housing in the Portland area.

Rail service will also provide greater mobility for commuters working in Augusta, Bangor, Portland and Waterville and for many of the 47,000 college and university students who attend the University of Maine in Orono and the other colleges and universities in central Maine.

Expansion of passenger rail would provide greater mobility options for older Mainers. It will expand living-in-place options and reduce social isolation among older residents. People 65 years and older currently are entitled to a 50 percent discount off the regular one-way fare on most Downeaster trains.

Tourists who don't want the hassle of driving to visit Acadia National Park will more likely choose riding a train if there is a dedicated "last mile" connection. Existing bus service could be extended and expanded to Acadia. This undoubtedly will become a more attractive option as park authorities move to further restrict the use of cars in the park.

The extension of passenger rail will also connect Maine's largest healthcare systems, like Central Maine Medical Center, Northern Light Health and Maine Health for all who are within walking distance to a railway.

The extension of passenger rail will also be good for the environment. It will help reduce congestion, especially along interstates 95 and 295 during the morning and evening commutes, and reduce carbon emissions, especially if new equipment is utilized such as diesel multiple units, which are more energy efficient, or battery-operated equipment. It will also help reduce the need to further add additional lanes on interstates 95, 295 and 395, which can cost more than \$10 million dollars a mile to build.

Passenger trains are also a safe, year-round alternative for they are all-weather vehicles seldom slowed or stopped because of rain or snow.

With the expansion of rail service to Bangor, 90 percent of the state's population will be within one hour of passenger rail.

It's time to provide an alternative to our total dependence on central Maine's road system to get to work, attend colleges and universities, seek medical attention, to shop or to attend cultural attractions in Portland or Boston. Please let your state representative or senator know it is time to take the first step to restore passenger rail to central Maine.

Why Passenger Service Through Augusta?

We're frequently asked why restore passenger service through Augusta when the "Back Line" via Lewiston is now available between Portland, Waterville and Bangor for freight? Here are some answers:

- Augusta is Maine's State Capitol and a statewide destination that should be connected to the national passenger rail system;
- Municipal resolutions by the City of Augusta (12/18/2014) and City of Waterville (4/17/15) support studying passenger rail in the Brunswick – Augusta – Waterville corridor.
- Augusta is reachable by passenger rail only via Brunswick, where Amtrak's Downeaster already operates from a terminal point;
- A development plan discussed with Augusta city officials envisions adding two floors to the existing city garage to accommodate parking displaced from the rail corridor through the city center. Central Augusta will have a boarding platform, shelter and drop-off / pick-up point served by all passenger trains;
- A main station for the Augusta region, with parking, auto battery charging facilities, and rail-related residential and commercial development, is focused on the city's Kennebec Locke property in East Augusta - to minimize rail-related parking and traffic in central Augusta;

- Options for service include passenger trains with coaches and locomotives such as extensions of Downeaster service for longer distances, and self-propelled coaches in single or multiple units for local service, balancing capacity with demand;
- Passenger rail service via Augusta would operate between Brunswick and Augusta within an existing state-owned corridor, with limited interference from freight operations. Passenger standards for track would enhance freight operations throughout the corridor.

TOURISM: Northern New England – Use the Train!
Ed. Note:

How will business demand stabilize for business-related passenger rail travel when the worst of the CV-19 pandemic is over? This is an important question for the proposed feasibility study. Will commuting habits return to and grow from pre-pandemic levels, or will positive experiences with virtual meetings and conferences permanently suppress business travel for those who can work remotely? Future demand for passenger train service can't be predicted reliably without this answer; which will take time to become clear.

Meanwhile we should look for passenger growth in another area of potential demand – namely tourism, where opportunities abound. **Amtrak Vacations** lists upwards of 20 point-to-point tours and getaway destinations. Just one of these, Amtrak's New England Fall Foliage trip now includes our region, with its references to Boston and Portland.

The Amtrak Downeaster already extends to Brunswick. If passenger service is restored through Augusta and Waterville to Bangor opportunities will increase to promote tourist destinations and activities throughout much of southern and coastal Maine. With passenger service restored as also proposed on the Rockland Branch from Brunswick to Rockland, coordinated with "last mile" and car rentals, most of central and coastal Maine's attractions can be conveniently reached by Amtrak services, and worthy of national **Amtrak Vacations** promotion throughout the entire Amtrak system.

A decade ago, the Maine Department of Transportation promoted vacationing in Maine without personal cars. This is worthy goal is achievable with convenient, dependable passenger rail transportation, coordinated with reliable rental car pickup and drop-off

points, and with "last-mile" transport to final destinations at train arrival and boarding points.

Electric Power – Where will it come from?

Recent reports of wide-spread black-outs, freezing and suffering in Texas remind us of society's dependence on electric power, and that supplies of this essential energy source are finite and not always available where and when needed. As society proceeds toward electric autos, trains and home heating during the next few decades, let's not neglect the parallel increases in electrical generation capacity, distribution and 24/7 reliability that will be needed to run or charge the batteries that support these visions reliably. –

Neither can we neglect the related infrastructures of charging stations, recycling facilities, education, skills, law, finance, and habits that must evolve in parallel with near-universal electrification of transportation to make the system work.

NEARS Spring Virtual Conference April 27th-29th

North East Association of Rail Shippers (NEARS) spring 2021 conference will be virtual instead of in-person at Saratoga Springs, NY due to CV-19 concerns. The conference theme is "Preparing your Supply Chain for the 2021 Recovery! Registration for the three-day conference is \$99, open at NEARS.ORG.

A summarized conference agenda follows:

Tuesday April 27th

9:00 AM INTRODUCTION – Dennis Wilmot, President, Iron Horse logistics Group

9:30 AM POST-COVID RAILROADING – WHAT TO EXPECT

Michael Miller, President North America, Genesee & Wyoming, Inc.

11:00 AM INTERMODAL – DELIVERING TO YOUR DOORSTEP

Cara Costa, Sales Director, CSX Intermodal, Inc.

12:30 PM LUNCH BREAK

1:30 PM RAIL SHIPPERS PANEL

Wes Adams, CEO, US Rail & Logistics

Dwight Price, Category Manager, Rail & Equipment, DuPont

Moderated by Brian Smalley

4:00 PM VIRTUAL RECEPTION WITH VIRTUAL HOSPITALITY SUITES

Wednesday April 28th

9:00 AM INTRODUCTION – Dennis Wilmot

SHIPPING BY RAIL IN A POST-COVID WORLD

Denise Kopko, Senior Vice President Operations,
Veolia North America

11:00 AM HIGH SPEED RAIL – OUR FUTURE?

12:30 PM LUNCH BREAK

1:30 PM WOMEN IN LOGISTICS PANEL

Kristina Chambers, Chief Data Officer, TTX Company

Janine Oglesby, Intermodal Manager, Mode Logistics

Heather Sheehan, Owner & Managing Director, Crispy Concepts

Candace Palmarozzi, Vice President Finance Controller,
BNSF Railway

Moderated by Thomas Coleman

4:00 PM VIRTUAL RECEPTION WITH VIRTUAL
HOSPITALITY SUITES

Thursday, April 29TH

9:00 AM INTRODUCTION – Dennis Wilmot

9:30 AM RECOVER & THRIVE - CLASS 1
RAILROADING POST-COVID

Arthur Adams, Senior Vice-President Sales, CSX
Transportation

11:00 AM SHORT LINE RAILROAD PANEL

Eric Monger, Vice President KBX Rail, a Koch Industries
Company

12:30 PM LUNCH BREAK

1:30 PM THE TONY & JASON SHOW

Tony Hatch, Principal, ABH Consulting

Jason Seidl, Managing Director, Cowen & Company

4:00 PM VIRTUAL RECEPTION WITH VIRTUAL
HOSPITALITY SUITES

Additional pre-recorded presentations are available on-
demand at NEARS.

- STB/LEGAL
- RAIL TECHNOLOGY
- FLEET MANAGEMENT
- THE JOURNALIST CORNER
- SHIPPING CLEAN

North Atlantic Rail

Source: The Connecticut Mirror, 2/2/2021, Tom Condon

North Atlantic Rail is a phased vision for high speed passenger rail between New York City and Boston, proposed in phases over 20 years at an estimated cost of \$105 billion. The plan originated at the University of Pennsylvania, directed by Peter Yaro, former president of the Regional Plan Association with advisors including Christopher Bergstrom, former deputy commissioner of the state Department of Economic and Community Development and Emil Frankel, former commissioner of the state Department of Transportation.

The high-speed trunk line from NYC to Boston would run through Long Island to its north shore near Port Jefferson, then tunnel beneath Long Island sound to the vicinity of New Haven and follow existing tracks northward to Hartford, where it turns eastward on a new alignment to connect with upgraded NEC corridor tracks to Boston.

Phase 1 of the project would be further upgrades to existing Northeast Corridor (NEC) tracks and bridges Boston.

Phase 2 would provide the new tracks through Long Island, the 16-mile tunnel under Long Island Sound, new alignment and tracks between Hartford and Providence, and new stations and infrastructure needed. It would make a UConn stop in Tolland, Connecticut. Yaro is quoted as saying the high-speed trains could travel between Manhattan and Boston in 100 minutes, shaving two hours or more off current schedules.

Phase 3 would add or improve passenger railroad connections to Brunswick, Maine, Concord New Hampshire, Pittsfield to Danbury, Massachusetts and Brattleboro, Vermont.

Mark Your Calendar

MRG, Inc. meetings for 2021:

Mar. 17, May 26, July 21, Sept. 15, Nov. 10

Meetings will be virtual, by Zoom starting at 6pm unless otherwise advised. Always please check in advance for changes if you plan to participate. President Russ Barber (rustyrailsis@gmail.com) will send links to virtual meetings by request.

For the MRG, Inc. Board, 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 \$25. Regular meetings are bi-monthly. Inquiries are welcome.