

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 2021

Greetings,

President's Message

Stan Koski is very glad to be home from the hospital and recovery from his stroke. He hopes to resume attending meetings shortly and he can be reached at (207)-622-5254.

MRG, Inc. will exhibit at a booth again at this year's Maine Transportation Conference at the Augusta Civic Center on Thursday, December 2.

Amherst Railway Society (ARS) will hold its annual show at the "Big E" in West Springfield, Massachusetts on January 29 & 30, 2022 and MRG, Inc. will participate in person at our usual table location. I will attend, along with Dave Potter, Richard Rudolph and Jack Sutton and we look forward to renewing old friendships, to making new friends and hopefully to sign up new members. Jack and I are also appointed to Maine DOT's Advisory Council to recommend future use of the dormant section of Maine's Mountain Division railroad between Westbrook and the New Hampshire border at Fryeburg. Two Zoom meetings have been held to date.

MRG, Inc. directors Mike Byron, Peter Cole, Bob Holland, Richard Rudolph and Andy Sandweiss continue our active outreach and support for a "propensity study" by Maine DOT to renew passenger rail service to Waterville and Bangor via Brunswick and Augusta.

Russ Barber

MRG, In.. Annual Meeting

President Russ Barber called the Zoom meeting to order at 7 PM October 13. After Russ's opening remarks and the Treasurer's report the following directors were elected:

Russell Barber (President)	Belfast, ME
Michael Byron	Hallowell, ME
Peter Cole	Topsham, ME

Edward Hanscom (Treas.)	Gardiner, ME
Robert Holland (Secretary)	Rockland, ME
Stanley Koski	Augusta, ME
Jack Madden*	Hudson, NH
Richard Rudolph	Portland, ME
David Potter	Northfield, MA
Andrew Sandweiss*	Washington DC
Jack Sutton	Belgrade, ME
Mark Walker (Clerk)	Hallowell, ME

* Jack Madden and Andy Sandweiss were appointed as directors during the past term and they are now elected for full terms.

** Apologies to Dave Potter for omission of his name in the proposed slate of directors posted in the Sept./ Oct. newsletter

Immediately following the Annual Meeting, the new Board meet to re-elect the current slate of officers as indicated above.

The Board established a finance and budget committee to be chaired by Treasurer Hanscom, with members Mike Byron, Peter Cole, Richard Rudolph and Jack Sutton; and a map committee consisting of Russ Barber, Bob Holland, Richard Rudolph, Andy Sandweiss and Jack Sutton.

President Barber requested that copies of the current by-laws be circulated to Board members and that has been done, for a draft dated Nov. 30, 2001.

Bob Holland suggested that the Board explore renting space on an outside server to collect and store certain MRG, Inc. records and archives that are now scattered at various locations because the group lacks a central filing system. Consensus of the Board favored exploring this approach.

Passenger Rail Through Augusta

MRG, Inc. Rail Subcommittee Update, by Richard Rudolph:

MRG, Inc.'s rail subcommittee continues to meet every other Wednesday night at 7 pm to discuss strategy going forward to insure LD227 is implemented. Maine Senator Joe Baldacci and seven other state legislators from Central Maine sponsored LD227, which was modified and approved by the Maine State Legislature and signed by Governor Janet Mills on June 14, 2021. Maine DOT will provide \$150,000 for a Transit Propensity Study if affected cities will provide an additional \$50,000 to cover the cost of the study.

The study will examine the needs and travel patterns of the people living in Central Maine. It is the first step to determine if there is enough potential ridership to restore passenger rail service either over the existing Pan Am freight line from Bangor to Lewiston-Auburn and Portland or over the route from Bangor through Waterville, Augusta, Brunswick and then Portland. We understand that MDOT will issue a request for proposals (RFP) once they receive letters of commitment for contributions (which can be split over the current and next fiscal year). Given that condition, we plan to reach out to the Augusta, Bangor and Waterville City Councils over the next several months to answer any questions they may have regarding LD227 and to offer to present a 10–15-minute virtual PowerPoint presentation regarding the benefits of restoring passenger rail to Central Maine.

Please contact us if you wish to help. Our meetings are held virtually using zoom. rudolph1022@gmail.com

New on Passenger Rail Through Augusta

Thanks to the arduous work of Board Member Mike Byron, MRG was able to present its PowerPoint on September 14 to the Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce. Our newest member, Joseph Leonard from Bangor, presented along with board members.

The presentation was both live in Waterville and sent out by the organization virtually. The PowerPoint continues to evolve with updated information on the progress of LD 227. This was the third presentation to groups in Mid-Maine, having been previously presented to both the Waterville and Bangor Rotary Clubs.

The September 14 presentation was especially impactful as the Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce has indicated their full support of resuming passenger service to Waterville and Bangor. Chamber members realize that passenger rail will bring economic development to an often-overlooked part of the State.

As cities continue to show their support, MRG is working hard to spread the word to the citizens in the Mid-Maine area. The benefits of resuming passenger service are quickly grasped by audiences when presented with the facts demonstrating the increased mobility and economic development it will provide.

Outreach to Potential New Members

Our newest Board Member, Andy Sandweiss and active new member Joseph Leonard have worked together to produce a plan to improve recognition of the importance of rail across a wider base.

MRG has a Facebook page that has been inactive, and we have never appeared on Instagram (used by college-age students). Being that this is an audience that, while supporting trains, is not aware of MRG's efforts to increase rail service in Maine.

As a test, the organization approved the expenditure of a small monthly stipend for a college student to activate our social media presence by posting at a minimum twice a week on Facebook and Instagram. We hope to inform young people of the effort to bring passenger rail to Waterville and Bangor, and especially to target the thousands of college students in the area. It is our desire to expand MRG's membership beyond its present narrow demographic.

After six months, the board will measure the success and either end the experiment, or hopefully gain new members that can voluntarily continue the effort.

"Hattie Evans" & Mt. Washington Cog Rwy. Trips

A Sutton group gathered at the Conway Scenic Railroad station in North Conway, NH at 11 am on September 15 to board CSRR's "Mountaineer" for the 4-1/2hour trip through Crawford Notch and back. Passengers now

reserve for choices between dome cars, "Hattie Evans" diner and coach accommodations for the trip. We chose the "Hattie Evans".

Tables were sold out for the trip. Ample bagged lunches were served at the tables, although the kitchen was staffed and responsive to individual requests. Passengers were requested to switch sides of the car for the return trip for everyone to enjoy the impressive mountain views from the east-facing side of the train. Weather cooperated with clear sky, a hint of fall in the air and foliage on the verge of color.

The following day our group reported at the Mt. Washington Cog Railway base station at 9:30 A.M. for the 3-hour trip up the mountain and back starting at 10 o'clock. The trip consists of about one hour travel in each direction with an hour to experience the views and visitor facilities at the top. Our cars were controlled by diesel locomotives up and back, although one older steam-powered locomotive was observed in operation.

Two brakemen manned the coach up and back, with narration throughout. It was interesting to note that cars are not coupled to the locomotives, but pushed ahead and held back by gravity. This is a safety feature since the passenger coach can be stopped independently with brakes continuously manned by on-board brakemen if the locomotive brakes fail.

The *Concord Monitor*, 10-10-2921 adds further information about "The Cog", featuring its owner Wayne Presby and shop foreman Johnny Suitor, the new maintenance facility named for Suitor and its fleet of nine diesel locomotives with computer-controlled engines and top train speeds of 4.76 mph. "The Cog" has partnered with White Mountain Community College in Berlin, NH and the college's heavy equipment technology program aimed at keeping students from leaving the region through commensurate salaries, benefits, good facilities, modern equipment and training.

Maine DOT Mountain Division Advisory Council

Russ Barber and Jack Sutton are appointed to represent Maine Rail Group on Maine DOT's Mountain Division Advisory Council to recommend future use(s) of the idle state-owned railroad corridor between Westbrook and the New Hampshire state line at Fryeburg. Other members of the Advisory Council include the Maine Legislature, municipal and recreational trail interests. This line segment in Maine has been out of service since its abandonment in the 1980's, followed by transfer to State ownership. It remains active to a freight customer in Westbrook, with idle track in place through Fryeburg, except for a mile or so in South

Windham where the previous owner removed rails that were not replaced.

Recreational trails are already established parallel with the track along parts of the idle rail line – in some cases too close to safely coexist with active railroad operations.

MRG, Inc. has actively participated with the Mountain Division Alliance (Alix Hopkins, Chair), the Route 113 Corridor Committee (GPCOG's Caroline Paras, Chair), municipal officials and railroad interests to identify passenger and freight opportunities for Maine's idle MD segment. We offered input to the HNTB study report of December, 2007. In 2010 we chartered Conway Scenic Railroad's self-powered RDC coach to demonstrate suitability of Mountain Division track with existing 85 #/yd rail, after extensive tie replacement and resurfacing by CSRR and NHDOT in the Bartlett, NH region upgraded the line there.

This history, coupled with knowledge that the Mountain Division was designed and built to connect Maine with the Great Lakes through northern New England, leads to today's vision for the line to connect the Amtrak served stations at Portland and White River Junction, VT. This "Crown of New England" concept is for private trains to run on active and reactivated Mountain Division segments between Portland and St. Johnsbury, VT, where they would connect with and continue over the Vermont Railway System (VTR) between St. Johnsbury and White River Junction, VT.

Hotels are located within easy walking distance of the Portland and White River Junction Amtrak stations. Seasonal connections could be coordinated with Amtrak schedules for Maine's *Downeaster* and the *Vermont*, with Amtrak's national advertising, and with stop-over attractions to bring people to this region without their cars – a long-time MaineDOT goal.

Under one scenario, two trains or multiples of self-powered coaches would leave simultaneously from Portland and White River Junction, meet at St. Johnsbury or Whitefield, VT to exchange crews (to be home at night), but equipment and passengers would proceed to the opposite terminal or to intermediate stop-over attractions,

Compatible trail interests are encouraged wherever they can safely co-exist within the corridor without impeding railroad operations. We respectfully

suggest that joint support by the Governors of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont for a coordinated study of the “Crown of New England” concept would enhance prospects for a successful tri-state initiatives and a mutually beneficial outcome.

NEARS Conference in Portland

The North East Association of Rail Shippers held its annual conference at Portland’s Westin Hotel on September 23 and 24 with MRG, Inc. represented. Of special interest, Kevin Boone, EVP Sales and Marketing, CSX spoke to the group about the proposed Pan Am & CSX merger. Boone discussed the broad national reach of the CSX system and the advantage that brings to New England rail shippers. He also touched on system changes contemplated, including track upgrades and speeds, and the re-routing of Pan Am Southern intermodal shipments across Massachusetts from Ayer to CSX track through Worcester and Springfield from PAS track via Hoosac Tunnel.

David Fink, PAR President commented separately that Hoosac Tunnel stability is not a factor in the re-routing decision given extensive repairs completed after the recent collapse at the tunnel’s west end. However, it’s impractical to increase tunnel clearance for double stack containers, but the CSX route is already clear for double stack trains.

The issue of a neutral operator for Norfolk Southern interest in the PAS system is now before the Surface Transportation Board.

Joshua Davidson, Publisher, Rails & Ports newsletter spoke as a member of The Journalists of Rail panel on Friday. Davidson also sponsored an exhibit table at the conference where MRG, Inc.’s New England Railroad maps were prominently displayed. About 50 maps were distributed to conference participants.

David Fink was honored with NEARS’ **Transportation Person of the Year 2021** award. He received to a standing ovation.

Maine Transportation Conference – December 2, 2021

The Maine Transportation Conference, sponsored by Maine Better Transportation Association (MBTA), Maine DOT and Maine Chapter, American Society of Civil Engineering (ASCE) will take place at the Augusta Civic Center on December 2, 2021. MRG, Inc. will participate and have a booth at this conference.

Amherst Railway Society Show – 2022

At this writing the 2022 Amherst Railway Society Show is scheduled for January 29 & 30, 2022 at the “Big E” in West Springfield, MA. MRG, Inc. is again signed up for tables. It’s late to make local hotel reservations in the West Springfield area since space fills up early - so good luck if you plan to attend and stay overnight Friday or Saturday. As always, we welcome donations of railroad-related books and paraphernalia that can be offered for sale at our table. Please contact Russ or Jack in advance about any easily transportable donated items. We won’t have 2022 maps for sale at this ARS show because map updates won’t be final until the STB rules on the PAR / CSX merger. That result is now set for the deadline of April 1, 2022, but we expect to have some 2020 maps to sell at the ARS show.

Mark Your Calendar

Nov.10, 6pm Zoom - Regular MRG, Inc. meeting

Regular meetings will be virtual, by Zoom, starting at 6pm unless otherwise advised. 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.

Dec .2 Maine Transportation Conference, All Day,
Augusta Civic Center

Jan. 29 & 30, 2022 – Amherst Society Show, W.
Springfield, Mass.

The MRG, Inc. Board wishes all the best the for the Holidays and for 2022!

MRG, Inc. a volunteer non-profit corporation, is dedicated to railroad education and enhanced rail services in Maine and New England. Membership is open to those sharing our goals and interests. Dues \$40 /yr. (effective 1/1/2022). Meetings are bi-monthly. Inquiries welcome.