MRG, Inc. (Maine Rail Group)

P.O. Box 5494, Augusta, Maine 04332

http://mainerailgroup.orgs

January / February 2021

Membership

Thanks to all who renewed their MRG, Inc. memberships for 2021, and especially to the many members who generously added gift contributions.

In Memory of Arthur (Art) Edmund Pew III

This article written by Tom Testa, president of Downeast Scenic Railroad memorializes Arthur Pew who was also a member of MRG, Inc. Art was very active with DSR and we thank Tom for his permission to print his tribute to a mutual friend and railroad supporter.

Art Pew, a member of the Board of Directors of Downeast Scenic Railroad (DSR) and of the Downeast Rail Heritage Preservation Trust (DRHPT), the railroad’s oversight organization, passed away in early October, 2020. He served as a dedicated board member for more than 12 years. All of DSR’s planning, building and restoration work is completed by a loyal and talented group of volunteers, and Art’s participation was highly regarded and valued by everyone.

In his professional life, Art had worked for many years as a systems analyst and purchasing director for major railroad companies. With his experience and specialized knowledge of trains, he was able to provide DSR with the counsel and expertise needed to tackle the many challenges that arose as the group evaluated, purchased, restored and operated the train.

In 2007, a group of train enthusiasts decided to build Downeast Scenic Railroad – an excursion train that would run from Ellsworth to Green Lake, Maine on the old Maine Central Railroad (MCR) line. Trains on that section of the rail line had ceased operation in the mid-1980’s; so by the time DSR began the project, shrubs and wooded growth had begun to reclaim large sections of the track, and hundreds of ties were damaged or missing. What had been the rail corridor, through which the trains had traveled, was overgrown with vegetation; and, scattered gravel from old rail-beds that lined both sides of the passageway.

DSR began organizing an ambitious plan to restore passenger cars, locomotives, flatbed cars and a caboose; build a boarding platform; repair and refurbish the rails; landscape the corridors; and, create an educational and recreational program for riders on the history of commercial and passenger rail travel in Maine.

Art Pew joined Downeast Scenic Railroad just as the renovation and restoration work started, two years before the train was launched. He was especially interested in DSR’s long-term plans, the scope of start-up work and the types of equipment needed to rehabilitate and operate the train. Tom Testa, the president of DSR and DRHPT, says that Art was particularly interested in learning details about how the train would operate after the early restoration work was completed.

With his expertise, Art was able to help DSR accumulate the equipment that was needed. Among other items that DSR obtained were: Locomotive – 54, a General Electric 70-tonner; Coach 123, a passenger car from Walled Lake, Michigan; an open-air car (which has been critical during the pandemic distancing restrictions); and various pieces of maintenance equipment, such as a ballast regulator.

Art and his family lived in Minnesota and in Northeast Harbor on Mt. Desert Island and visited DSR every fall. He also spent considerable time on the phone, checking the progress of projects, going over details and helping with board meetings. He and his wife, Judy, participated in every event and program that the railroad offered.

The challenges DSR faced were impressive: How to best cross the surrounding wetlands, repair eroding embankments and crumbling bridges, restore ties and re-lay rails? At every juncture, Art was there, helping to think through and solve the problems. With his knowledge of the larger world of railroads, he was able to help DSR make good decisions and build on every small and large success. Without the kind and generous help Art provided, Downeast Scenic Railroad would not be where it is today – successful, with more than 8,000 riders last year; increasing number of passengers every year; and with first-rate recreational and educational programs. Though DSR operated at 50% capacity this summer and fall, without the distancing required for the pandemic, the trains could have easily filled. With the tremendous support and guidance provided by Art Pew, DSR anticipates a bright future, and looks forward eagerly to completing the track repairs and reaching its final destination at Green Lake.

“Art Pew was a very kind, quiet man with a passion for railroads and their history, who helped DSR in immense ways realize the vision and dream of operating Downeast Scenic Railroad,” says Tom Testa. “We are grateful that we had the chance to know and work with him. We all miss him greatly.”

MRG, Inc. Bill – Augusta–Bangor Passenger Rail

Resolve: to conduct a Feasibility Study for Extending Passenger Rail Service From Brunswick Through Augusta to Waterville and Bangor

Sec. 1 Study, Resolved: That this study modifies the study proposal of LD1312 considered by the Committee on Transportation during the First Regular Session-2017.

That the Department of Transportation, in consultation with all interested municipalities, planning organizations and the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, shall conduct a feasibility study for the implementation of passenger rail service including the present terminus at Brunswick along existing rail corridors, active and inactive between Brunswick, Augusta, Waterville and Bangor. The plan must include a process for public review and comment and must incorporate information from completed studies and new information, including, but not limited to:

1. An analysis of market demand and potential economic benefits associated with the implementation of passenger rail service to the regions centered on Augusta, Waterville and Bangor including forecasted ridership, estimated annual operating costs and the economic feasibility of expanding passenger rail service to the region served;
2. The development of a detailed service plan to meet travel demand and related economic opportunities, including frequency and schedule of service, station locations, equipment types and seating capacity, marketing management and operator goals;
3. Identification of routes, locations served, coordination with existing passenger rail service and connecting modes for seamless public transportation, recommended administrative and operating entities, relationships with existing railroad owners and operators and synergies with connecting passenger rail operations;
4. An inventory of infrastructure needed to support operations, including mechanical facilities, with an estimate of necessary capital investments.
5. An evaluation of potential financing mechanisms for capital and operating expenses, proposed sources of funds and recommended implementation approach and schedule, as justified by expected benefits; and
6. A review of potential alternatives and environmental impacts associated with the proposed service, including station locations and necessary investment; and be it further:

Sec. 3. Report. Resolved: That the Department of Transportation develop a report of results in a timely manner, considering uncertainties surrounding the pending sale of Pan Am Railway the present owner of railroad infrastructure between East Augusta and Bangor, and constraints on passenger rail service and related activities imposed by the CV-19 pandemic.

Sec, 4. Appropriations and allocations, Resolved: That the following appropriation and allocation are made:

TRANSPORTATION,

TRANSPORTATION, DEPARTMENT OF

Multimodal- Passenger Rail

Provide one-time funding to study and plan for the implementation of passenger rail service from Brunswick through Augusta to Waterville and Bangor.

FUNDING 2021-2022

State of Maine / Multi-Modal Fund $300,000

SUMMARY

 This resolve directs the Department of Transportation, in consultation with the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority and interested municipalities and planning organizations, to conduct a feasibility study and plan to implement passenger rail service from Brunswick through Augusta to Waterville and Bangor along existing railroad corridors. The resolve provides $300,000 in State funds to perform and complete the study for the total of $300,000 during the state fiscal year ending June 30, 2022.

Comment: Timing of the Bill

The timing of our bill submission for a passenger rail feasibility study may seem premature in view of pandemic and general budgetary issues – public and private. However, we believe it is a low-cost approach that’s appropriate now for these reasons:

* First – to emphasize the ongoing need to protect inactive and lightly used segments of the Brunswick – Augusta railroad corridor and its related infrastructure for railroad purposes. Loss of any portion of the state-owned railroad corridor between Brunswick and Waterville to an incompatible non-rail use would nullify any foreseeable potential for returning passenger rail service through Maine’s State Capital.

* Second – the Bill would authorize a state-sponsored professional feasibility study that describes passenger rail service extending from Brunswick through Augusta and Waterville to Bangor. It will describe and estimate the direct and indirect benefits of such service, its costs and potential funding sources. This is the first of a long, multi-step process toward the goal of federal participation for the funding of detailed planning, engineering and implementation of this service. A relatively low-cost feasibility study now allows time for public discussion and analysis of the economic and environmental opportunities that extended passenger rail service can create. For examples:

The City of Augusta’s Kennebec Locke property bounded by the Kennebec River and the railroad corridor offers the opportunity for major transportation oriented development (TOD) without adding traffic or parking congestion to Augusta’s city center.

Overhead electrification of passenger rail lines is viewed as economically and environmentally preferable to diesel powered trains, as electric motors are for automotive power. However, overhead electrification of proposed passenger rail service between Brunswick and Bangor may not be economically or technically justified before connecting lines north of Boston are also electrified. Meanwhile, battery and hydrogen alternatives to diesel power are being actively developed and demonstrated in the U.S.A. and elsewhere in the world. A feasibility study now provides time for these alternative technologies to mature and be evaluated, before related infrastructure and equipment decisions are needed for Maine.

Hydrogen / Battery Powered Train Activity

Publications during the past three months relating to hydrogen or battery powered trains include the following:

* Dec.17 Railway Age - RT&S and IRJ – Hydrogen Strategy for Canada’s Railways
* Dec.14 Trains – Development of hydrogen-powered trains continues, but battery-powered equipment making more inroads
* Dec.15 Hitachi and Eversholt Rail to trial battery – equipped class 802
* Nov.11 – New York Times –California is trying to Jump-Start the Hydrogen Economy
* Oct.26 – Reuters - Frankfurt starts building fuel station for world’s biggest zero-emissions trains fleet
* Oct.6 – IRJ – JR East, Hitachi and Toyota to develop hydrogen-electric train

New Hampshire OK’s Capitol Corridor Design

Published 12/22/2020 in NHBR, by Michael Kitch,(italics)

The prospect of bringing commuter rail service to the Capitol Corridor between Lowell, Mass., and Nashua and Manchester brightened last week after the governor and Executive Council authorized the New Hampshire Bureau of Rails and Transit to contract with AECOM Technical Services, Inc. of Manchester to undertake the development and engineering phases of the project.

The $5,448,607 contract, funded entirely with federal dollars, includes preliminary engineering and design work, environmental and public engagement services as well as the development of a plan to finance the project,, which would extend MBTA service to southern New Hampshire.

The project has been something of a political football since 2014, when the New Hampshire Department of Transportation completed the Capitol Corridor Rail Study. Then-Gov. Maggie Hassen added funding for the project in the state’s 10-year transportation plan, but it was removed by the Republican majority of the Legislature two years later.

After voting against commuter rail as executive councilor and dismissing the project as a “boondoggle” as candidate for governor, Gov. Chris Sununu changed his tune in 2017 as he pitched Amazon to build its second headquarters in New Hampshire, and in January 2018 he openly announced his support for investing $4 million in a feasibility study of commuter rail.

However, after Amazon snubbed New Hampshire, the momentum waned. Despite the apparent support of the governor, legislation authorizing the NHDOT to apply for federal funds to a development study and include the project in the 10-year plan, failed in 2018. When the proposal during a Democratic Legislature passed a year later, Sununu allowed the legislation to become law without his signature.

PAR Madison Maine Branch future looks like trail

This Public Notice appeared in the Waterville Sentinel on November 10, 2020:

Madison Branch Rail Trail 32.32 miles, 357 + acres

Oakland, Kennebec County Fairfield, Norridgewock, Madison, Anson, and Emden, Somerset County

In accordance with 5 M.R.S.A. 6200, et seq.,the Land for Maine’s Future Board will vote on a proposal to allocate funds for the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands’ purchase of 32.32+ miles of rail corridor and 357.03+ acres of land owned by Maine Central Railroad Company. This corridor is known as the Madison Branch and shown on the tax maps of the towns listed above. The Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands will own and manage these lands as a multi-use trail.

Public comment on this acquisition will be accepted at LMF’s Board meeting on December 1, 2020 at 9:00AM. The meeting will be virtual, public link to join https://www.maine.gov/dacf/lmf/agendas.shtml. Written comments on the proposal accepted until 4:30 PM November 30, 2020.

Submit comments to Jason Bulay, LMF Program, email: jason.bulay@maine.gov, mail: #22 SHS, Augusta, ME, or at the meeting. For more information, email the above or call 207-287-7532.

Canadian Pacific Rwy adds St. John service

CP announcement Dec. 2, 2020

Today Canadian Pacific and Hapag-Lloyd AG announced they have extended their long-term service agreement to the end of 2025. Additionally, after successful calls to the Port of St. John, N.B. this summer, Hapag-Lloyd will begin regular service via CP and this key Atlantic Canada port starting in 2021.

‘’It’s a special day when we get to announce the renewal of a contract with Hapag-Lloyd, our largest customer by volume and a world-class ocean carrier,” said CP President and CEO Keith Creel. “It’s through our network reach and disciplined execution of the precision scheduled railroading model that we can offer a caliber of service capable of winning our customers’ support in this way. With our expanded reach to the deep-water port at St. John, we are proud to offer Hapag-Lloyd another reason to use our services.”

CP regained access to the Port of St. John in June 2020 with the acquisition of the Central Maine & Quebec Railway and through connections with the Eastern Maine and New Brunswick Southern railways.

“The return of CP was a transformational development for our region,” said New Brunswick Premier Blaine Higgs. “This agreement with Hapag-Lloyd is another critical step for our province. Port St. John offers a competitive advantage, and this will lead to more jobs and more investment in New Brunswick.”

CP also serves Hapag-Lloyd through ports at Vancouver and Montreal.

“Having Hapag-Lloyd call the Port of St. John regularly is the first step in the port becoming a world-class gateway,” Creel said. “Through the Port of St. John, CP enjoys about a 200-mile advantage over our competition into Montreal, Toronto and Chicago. This East Coast advantage bodes well for businesses in Atlantic Canada, customers across our network and for the broader supply chain. We are only just starting to unlock the potential that exists at the Port of Saint John.”

In separate news, David Fink, President of Pan Am Southern Railways indicated earlier that the CRISI grant to rebuild the PAR line between Portland and Mattawaumkeag, Maine, where it connects with the Eastern Maine Railroad will create an opportunity for intermodal service from Atlantic Canada.

Grant means better freight lines to more Lawrence (Mass.) Companies

Article courtesy of Peter Griffin, NHRRA, Nov. 20, 2020

(edited)

Mayor Daniel Rivera and other local leaders are celebrating a grant oof $356,670 from the state - money that will help rebuild the Lowell Hill industrial railroad tracks that run from the rail yard in Lawrence to the city’s industrial park. Rivera said the project is critical to future industrial growth. The work will improve the condition of the track, resulting in more and better freight service to the industrial park, officials said.

The Whittemore company on Glenn Street – which distributes a variety of products including stone, clay, glass and concrete – is one of the businesses that will benefit from the project, which has a goal of reducing truck traffic by improving the rail line. Rivera said about 25 of the 35 businesses in the industrial park focus on manufacturing and distribution, and need the ability to ship products.

Stephanie Pollack, secretary of the state Department of Transportation, agreed. The rail line improvement, 60% of which will be paid for with state money as Lawrence covers 40% of the cost, shows the city is on the move, she said.

Mark Your Calendar

MRG, Inc. meetings for 2021:

Jan.20, 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 on request..

Best wishes for 2021!

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.