

MRG, Inc. (Maine Rail Group)
P.O. Box 5494, Augusta, Maine 04332

<http://mainerailgroup.org>

A non-profit group working to enhance rail service in Maine

November / December 2020

Membership

As 2021 approaches it is time to ask for membership renewals. Re-up cards and return envelopes are included with this last newsletter of 2020.

Your membership support and contributions are essential to our work on behalf of railroading in Maine and New England and they are much appreciated. Members are also reminded that new, first year membership dues are only \$15 to encourage and welcome new members. Please pass that along to friends and associates who may be interested in our work.

We have a surplus of 2020 New England Railroad maps, printed in anticipation of sales at the 2021 Amherst Railway Society show next January, that is now cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Folded copies of these maps are available at the discounted price of \$6.00 each, including Maine sales tax and postage.

Rolled paper and laminated maps suitable for open display are also available at prices of \$8 and \$14, respectively, including mailing tubes, sales tax and postage.

Please send orders with payment by check to MRG, Inc., PO Box 5494, Augusta, ME 04332.

Herbert Connell - In Memory

Herbert Connell, of Cape Elizabeth, Maine, a long time member of Maine Rail Group, died on February 14, 2020, age 92 years. Herb served with the U.S. Navy during WW II and the Korean Conflict. He was employed as a chemical engineer with S.D. Warren Paper Co. in Westbrook, Maine, retiring in 1990. His career included national presidency of the Technical Association of the Pulp and Paper Industry (TAPPI). He was active with Amtrak's board of directors and instrumental in bringing Amtrak service to Portland. Herb also found time to serve as an engineer for trains of the Maine Narrow Gauge Railroad & Museum in Portland.

Update: Passenger Rail Through Augusta

During the past two months our group finalized and printed 500 copies of the enclosed brochure and distributed more than 70 copies to influential folks in Augusta, Waterville and Bangor.

These are our short term goals:

First: To assure Maine's state-owned railroad corridor from Brunswick to Augusta remains dedicated to future rail use as now preserved in federal and state law. We do not oppose sharing parts of this corridor with trail interests - where it can be done without compromise to Amtrak standards for separation and safety, and without added costs for railroad facilities or operations.

Second: To gain legislative approval and funding in 2021 for a professional feasibility study of passenger rail continuing from Brunswick through Augusta to Waterville and Bangor.

Editorial

Extend passenger rail service through Brunswick, Augusta and Waterville to Bangor- WHY STUDY THIS NOW?

Uncertainties with outcomes beyond our ability to predict face the future of passenger rail in Maine, New England and elsewhere. These include: the pandemic's impact and timing of future demand for public transportation; the pending sale of Pan Am Railways; questions surrounding Amtrak's future and the impacts of climate change on patterns of development and transportation.

Major avoidance of public transportation during 2020 is causing a proliferation of work-at-home employment, widespread job reductions and concerns for disease transmission. Covid-19 severely impacts the budgets of public transportation systems throughout the country.

Passenger rail's return through Augusta is a long-term goal. There is general confidence the pandemic will abate. The questions are how soon, and how long-lasting will be its effects? When will general acceptance return for the convenience, reliability and safety of public transportation, and the economic development it brings?

We believe that extended Downeaster service, perhaps augmented by more frequent local service with self-propelled passenger rail vehicles, can contribute significantly to the growth and prosperity of the east-central Maine region focused on Augusta, Waterville and Bangor, and the State of Maine in general.

Maine's State Capitol enjoys the notable opportunity of integrating passenger rail service with development of its city-owned Kennebec Locke property, while minimizing rail-related traffic and parking impacts in the city center.

Waterville is now undergoing major redevelopment spurred by Colby College. Waterville also hosts Pan Am Railways shop and yard facilities, suggesting interesting station and layover possibilities. Bangor, a commercial and industrial hub and gateway to northern Maine, is also a major transit point for tourists to Acadia National Park, the University of Maine at Orono and other local colleges.

It's anticipated that federal sources would provide the bulk of funding to implement this service, based on Maine's success in demonstrating a competitive benefit-to-cost ratio for the investment. A series of technical and economic evaluations will be needed to compete successfully for federal grant and matching funds. This state-sponsored feasibility study takes the first step in this progression.

Such feasibility study may cost in the range of \$300,000, suggesting \$200,000 from the State, matched by \$100,000 consisting of \$25,000 from each of the cities of Augusta, Waterville and Bangor with the remainder from private sources.

A qualified professional organization would be contracted for the study, subject to appropriate State RFP/BID processes and oversight. We believe it should cost less than the recently completed Portland – Lewiston/ Auburn passenger rail study because the route through Augusta is defined by a single corridor. L/A study involved multiple routes. Some of the L/A study experience may apply to the proposed Brunswick-Augusta-Bangor study.

It is recognized that separate funding is now approved to upgrade PAR track and bridges between Waterville through Bangor for higher speeds and 286,000 lb. freight cars. These improvements alone will not qualify the Waterville-Bangor track for passenger trains, but they include significant steps toward that goal. The relatively low cost feasibility study now proposed will effectively utilize available time to develop data and recommendations needed to move forward toward passenger rail through Augusta. We believe this is an essential goal for Maine's transportation future and for related economic development.

Middlebury Vermont Rail Tunnel - Downtown Project

In mid-September the replacement rail tunnel through downtown Middlebury, Vermont was complete to the stage where Vermont Railway freight rail traffic resumed through that town. During construction for the previous three months freight trains to and from Burlington had been re-routed through White River Junction via New England Central Railroad. A special passenger train ran through the re-opened tunnel to celebrate the event.

It remains to complete restoration of the streets and mid-town park that were temporarily closed for the project and to build the new Middlebury rail passenger platform. It is expected that Amtrak's Ethan Allen passenger train that now operates between Rutland, Vt. and New York City will continue through Middlebury to Burlington by late 2021 or in 2022.

Amtrak's Passenger Trains in Vermont Suspended

VPR (Vermont Public Radio) published a report by Henry Epp on September 28 that operation of both Amtrak trains that ran daily to Essex Junction, VT (near Burlington) and Rutland are suspended due to the pandemic. No start-up date is yet announced.

The Vermonter serves communities along the Connecticut River on New England Central Railway tracks northward to White River Junction, where it veers northwestward across the state toward Montpelier and Essex Jct. The Ethan Allen's route is along the Hudson River through Schenectady to Whitehall, NY, where it crosses into Vermont on the Clarendon & Pittsford Railroad to connect with the Vermont Railway at its present terminus in Rutland. From Rutland it is planned to continue to Burlington via Middlebury and Vergennes next year.

Sources cited explained that although 2020 funding is secure, pandemic-related visitor testing and quarantine requirements are difficult to enforce due to complexities of tracking passengers who may board and leave the train at the numerous stations served.

New Hampshire Loses 6+ Track Miles to Trail

Edited from Salmon Press, Sept. 3, by Angel Larcom

LITTLETON - On Aug,12, the New Hampshire Department of Natural and Cultural Resources began accepting bids to dismantle and remove approximately 70,000 linear feet of rail and ties from the abandoned Boston & Maine rail corridor in Littleton and Bethlehem. The bidding period closed on Sept. 1 and work was to be done by Dec. 11.

Bureau of Trails Chief Chris Gamache expected fewer bidders because NHDOT wants to save the joint bars. The rails can't be taken apart with blow torches and there will be less steel scrap for sale by the chosen bidder. He added "We are racing against the funding deadline for this project. The two grant programs that we're using both expire on Jan.1."

Boston's New Red and Orange Line Cars Delayed

The Boston Globe, in an article updated by Adam Vaccaro to October 25, reported on delays to deliveries of some 404 new cars for Boston's Red and Orange lines by the Chinese national rail manufacturer CRRC. That company operates a new plant built in 2017 at Springfield, Massachusetts.

CRRC emphasizes effects of the Covid-19 pandemic both in China and the U.S. to explain the delays. The article catalogs other contributing reasons, including: employee training for a new industry in the region; sub-contract issues; two full trainsets of new cars taken out of service to diagnose noise; and problems with replacement parts.

According to the article, when the plant opened in 2017 the factory's goal was to complete replacement and expansion of the entire Orange fleet in mid-2022, and the Red Line in fall of 2023. Now, the last set of trains is not forecast to arrive until late 2024.

AmeriStarRail – North East Corridor's Future?

AmeriStarRail (ASR) proposes to expand Amtrak's Northeast Corridor (NEC) capacity with new service patterns that eliminate inefficient terminal operations in New York and Washington, reducing train congestion and delays. Their proposal creates additional track and yard capacity without multi-billion dollar track, yard and station expansion projects.

ASR Principals

Neil B. Glassman, ASR co-founder and legal advisor, is chairman of the board of Bayard and a member of that firm's bankruptcy group. He is responsible for business and legal strategies for ASR's intellectual innovations to improve Amtrak's service.

Scott R. Spencer, ASR co-founder and Chief Operating Officer, is a rail industry consultant with plans to replace inefficient terminal operations – emphasizing high frequency operation, high speed and high performance.

Paul Reistrap, ASR mentor and senior advisor is focused on plans to substitute a passenger terminal in nearby Alexandria, VA instead of D.C.'s Union Station, providing run-through capacity for more trains in D.C. .

ASR Vision

- No need for more highways or airports in an expanded NEC region for the next 20 to 40 years;
- 160 mph top speed trains;
- Triple service classes: coach, business & first
- Affordable, equal access, available to all, including senior citizens, students & families;
- Taxpayer funded.

Proposed Routes

- Boston – NYC (Penn Sta) – Washington, D.C. – Alexandria, VA
- Harrisburg, PA – NYC (Penn Sta) – Springfield, MA – Worcester – Boston (North Sta) – Portland / Brunswick, ME
- Richmond / D.C. – Philadelphia - Jenkintown – NYC (Hoboken Terminal, NJ)
- Alexandria, VA – Washington, D.C. - NYC (Penn Sta) – Ronkokoma, Long Island
- Albany, NY – NYC (Penn Sta) – Jamaica, NY (JFK) – Ronkokoma, Long Island

Some Questions from Maine Rail Group

- Does ASR's vision anticipate integration of these changes within the Amtrak system, or a full substitution of Amtrak? if so with what administrative and financing structures?
- Given daily, high frequency service to Brunswick via the route from Harrisburg, what, if any, would be the Downeaster's role between Brunswick and Boston?
- Would Brunswick become the transfer point between ASR and future local service in Maine north of Brunswick?
- The Harrisburg – Brunswick route assumes opening of the Grand Junction line through Cambridge, MA for frequent passenger trains to and from North Station. Is that realistic, given the physical constrictions and local negativity toward GJ trains through Cambridge?
- Will the entire system be electrified or change points be maintained?
- How would major infrastructure requirements be funded:
 - Hudson River tunnels?
 - Major bridge replacements?
 - Rolling stock for high frequency services?
 - Vermonter; Ethan Alan, NH Capitol Corridor, commuter lines' status?
 - Station responsibilities?
 - Tracks, crossings, signals, maintenance, PTC, etc?

Guest Article

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK, By Ken Miller

During MRG, Inc.'s years of restoring three former N & W passenger cars we subscribed to Norfolk Western Historical Society's publication The Arrow. Its latest edition includes the following article that puts today's pandemic in historical perspective. I was seven years old in December 1941. Exchanging Paterson, NJ for Roanoke, VA and Erie Railroad for N & W, Ken's

article invokes vivid personal memories of the home front then. Thanks, Ken for letting us share it. (Jack)

In 2020 many folks like to think they have been dramatically deprived resulting from Covid-19. But I'll be brutally honest; folks today do not know how lucky they are compared to the home front during WW II.

WW II is another favorite subject of mine, like the railroad. I've studied it since I was very young. I grew up around World War II veterans, and it was not until very much later did I truly appreciate what those folks did, or the folks on the home front.

Today, folks think not being able to go to restaurants or on vacations is such a sad state of affairs and discussions of wearing masks or not is tiresome.

Let's just step back in time to a much different world. If you were a young man in 1940-1941, your prospects were still pretty slim. While the economy was improving, jobs were still kind of tough to find, and if you were paying attention to the news, either the papers, or when you could afford to go to the theatre on the newsreels, you knew things were bad in Europe. If you really paid attention you knew things were bad in Asia as well. While both places were really far away, you probably thought your chances of going in the military would seem pretty likely as U.S. involvement, while opposed by many in America, was also likely. To give these folks credit, they served with honor and valor; it was a time of national pride.

But let's not forget, folks on the home front had a battle as well, it was not fun and games. On Sunday, December 7, 1941 Roanoke was a quiet southern town, war talk was all around, but most folks thought that war was too far away, not going to come this close to home. On that quiet Sunday, just before 3 PM, static crackled on the radio and programming was interrupted with CBS' John Daly reading a special news bulletin. The announcement was stunning; "the Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, by air, President Roosevelt just announced. The attack was also made on naval and military activities on the principal island of Oahu."

Probably on hearing that, more than a few Roanoke citizens might have looked back to the Roanoke Times that had arrived early that morning. Indeed, an article talked about defenses at Pearl Harbor that were ready for anything. If the readers looked a bit further in that paper, they may have noticed an article that the N & W was expecting a huge rush of passenger traffic in the coming weeks. With a war on, every military person was trying to get home for what they suspected might be their last Christmas at home in a long time.

The home front transitioned to a state of rationing, gasoline, sugar, fats, tires, etc. My mother, a student nurse at Lewis-Gale Hospital in Roanoke at the time said, "if you saw a line, you got in it, not knowing what it was for, but you knew somebody would need it." There were few places to eat, every restaurant had to deal with food rationing, travel was almost impossible. The average person had an "A" window sticker on their car and that gas coupon limited you to three gallons a week. Countless recipes were created to save on sugar or fat. Even the railroads had to deal with rationing on their dining cars.

Paper was rationed as well to be honest, the first period of recycling, as scrap drives were everywhere across the country. Blackouts and air raid drills were practiced frequently. Homes had blackout curtains in place, and there were air raid wardens patrolling the streets. War bond sales were encouraged to help finance the war effort. N & W folks were big participants in bond sales. However, some other folks seemed to forget, and frequently folks were reminded, "Don't you know there's a war on?"

So when Bud Jeffries proposed this article for me, I was all for it. It was a time of patriotism, "all for one, and one for all" and people worked together. It was surely not everyone for themselves! Don't forget to buy your war saving bonds!

Transition

MRG, Inc. directors Stan Koski and Peter Cole and I have teamed up on tasks involved with the composition and distribution of this bi-monthly newsletter. I'm delighted to have Stan and Peter sharing these duties. We all look forward to a smooth and better product, and we welcome your suggestions to improve it.

Mark Your Calendars

MRG, Inc. meeting (Zoom) Nov. 10, 2020
MRG, Inc. meetings for 2021:
Jan. 20, Mar. 17, May 26
July 21, Sept. 15, Nov. 10

As always, please check in advance for changes if you plan to attend and look for links to virtual meetings during these uncertain times.

Best wishes for the coming Holidays and 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.