

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

A volunteer group working to enhance rail services in Maine

September / October 2021

Greetings,

President's Report

Welcome to Andy Sandweiss and Jack Madden who will stand for election to our board at the annual meeting in October. Both candidates bring real contributions to our efforts to study the extension of passenger service to Bangor via Augusta and Waterville.

Director Richard Rudolph was hospitalized with the corona virus while vacationing in Oregon, despite being fully vaccinated. He feels on the mend and can be reached by phone. We wish him a speedy and full recovery.

Director Stan Koski is at River Edge Rehab in Maine while recovering from a stroke and related surgery. He can be called at (207) 467-4740.

Director and Vice-President Dave Potter will leave our board and his post as VP after the coming annual meeting. The board will fill the VP position after the annual meeting.

Please pass along news for future newsletters and visit our website for a New England Railroad map segment highlighting the proposed passenger route between Brunswick and Bangor.

Russ Barber.

Membership

Stanley Koski, a founding director of MRG, Inc. suffered a stroke recently that has affected his movement. After hospitalization in Portland and heart surgery, he is recovering at River Ridge Center in Kennebunk, Maine. Stan welcomes phone calls directly to his room at (207) 467-4740.

We appreciate Claudette, Stan's wife, and director Ed Hanscom stepping in to help cover Stan's mail and forwarding responsibilities.

Paul Weiss has resigned from MRG, Inc. director ship but he retains membership in the group. Paul's contributions are recognized and appreciated - especially in relation to rail vs. trail uses of railroad corridors and the expected benefits of proposed passenger rail service through Augusta to Waterville and Bangor.

MRG, Inc. Annual Meeting

The 2021 MRG, Inc. Annual meeting will be held on Zoom at October 13 (Wednesday), 7pm. The Zoom link will be available from Russ Barber [rustyrailsis@gmail.co, (207) 332-8360].

The agenda includes the following nominations for Board of Directors and Clerk:

	<u>Current Office</u>
Russell Barber	Belfast, Maine President
Michael Byron	Hallowell, Maine
Peter Cole*	Topsham, Maine
Stanley Koski	Augusta, Maine
Robert Holland	Rockland, Maine Secretary
Edward Hanscom	Gardiner, Maine Treasurer
Richard Rudolph	Portland, Maine
Andrew Sandweiss*,	Washington, D.C.
Jack Madden*	Hudson, N.H.
John Sutton (Jack)	Belgrade, Maine
Mark Walker, Esq.	Hallowell, Maine Clerk

*Peter Cole was appointed to the Board during 2021 and is hereby nominated to serve a full term.

* Andy Sandweiss is a young college graduate student with Maine connections whose perspectives and enthusiasm for passenger rail are recognized.

*Jack Madden is a long-term MRG, Inc. member who actively participates in group affairs.

Vice President David Potter, founding member of MRG, Inc, has moved to Massachusetts and will retire from the Board effective October 13th. Dave has been an outstanding contributor to all aspects of MRG, Inc's efforts throughout the years and we are grateful he continues as an active group member, advisor and valued friend. We wish Dave and his wife, Rusty, all the best for good health and fun in their retirement and their new home.

The new vice-president will be nominated and elected by the Board of Directors following close of the Annual Meeting on October 13.

MRG, Inc. membership dues have remained at \$25 per year since the group's founding, except for the \$15 first year-rate for new members that was recently adopted. As costs continue to increase, we believe an increase is overdue, so an increase of dues to \$35 per year for continuing memberships is proposed – effective January, 2022.

Other Annual Meeting Business:

- MRG, Inc. Bylaws review
- Financial report
- Budget status & outlook for 2022

New Website for MRG, Inc.

Thanks to previous efforts by members David Potter and Paul Weiss, MRG has had an ongoing web presence through our website www.mainerailgroup.org. Recently we have changed platforms to permit easier updates and a cleaner visual appeal. The goal of the website is to fulfill our mission of encouraging the growth of rail service in Maine, both freight and passenger.

The website has 7 sections, starting with the welcoming screen. The other 6 sections include:

- the history of MRG and present board members,
- Maine rail news and MRG organizational news,
- updates on the progress in extending passenger service to Bangor,
- the most recent newsletters,
- information on how to join or how to contact us,
- most importantly, a section on celebrating rail success in Maine including links to

Downeaster schedules, rail museums and freight railways serving Maine.

Photographs by Russ Barber enliven the text and we hope that the site will prove to be a resource for people who, like us, want to encourage the growth of rail service in Maine. Suggestions, questions and comments are welcome, and can be left on the comment page of the webpage.

NEARS Conference in Portland

The North East Association of Rail Shippers holds its 2021 annual conference in Portland Sept. 24-26 at the Westin Hotel, as reported in our July-August newsletter. MRG, Inc. will attend and is invited to distribute our New England Railroad maps from a table sponsored by Atlantic Northeast Rails and Ports, thanks to Joshua Davidson.

2021 Common Ground Fair – CANCELLED!

Our group will man a table in a tent at Maine's Common Ground Fair in Unity September 24, 25 and 26. Plans are to discuss and distribute pro-passenger rail information to fairgoers and passengers on the Belfast & Moosehead Lake Railroad trains that transport folks between the fairgrounds and outlying parking lots.

CGF CANCELLED – Waterville Morning Sentinel, Sept.2.

Rockland Branch

Director Holland reports that the Finger Lakes Railway Corporation has formally filed with the STB on August 9, 2021 to assume the Rockland branch operations from the CM&Q. CP is the current operator. Based on timely approval by the STB, it is anticipated that FGLK will take over later in September this year. Details are available on the STB site under "Filings" – dockets 302834 and 302833. The name of the operation will be Midcoast Railservice, Inc. Current traffic on the line includes perlite, cement, and steel.

Separate sources suggest that the new Rockland Branch operator will investigate passenger service on that line and that self-powered coaches are a consideration. MRG, Inc. believes that self-powered coaches have a place in Maine's passenger rail

future as a step toward more economical and energy efficient operations – especially where more local stops, higher frequencies and service extensions beyond the Downeaster terminal at Brunswick are envisioned. The Rockland Branch seems the ideal place to pilot and demonstrate self-powered coaches in Maine, and to perfect coordinated schedules and cross-platform transfers with the Downeaster in Brunswick.

Passenger service on the Rockland Branch will also offer opportunities to evaluate and demonstrate battery or hydrogen powered coaches when either or both of those technologies now in development elsewhere are deemed appropriate for serious consideration in Maine.

In other Rockland Branch news, the *Courier-Gazette* on August 19th reports that Dragon Cement Company at Thomaston, Maine will cease barging cement from Rockland to Massachusetts, thereby eliminating the five-mile transfer by rail from the Thomaston plant to the Rockland pier. It remains to be seen if this is good or bad news for the Rockland Branch. Good news to the extent that more outbound cement revenue traffic moves by rail over most of the length of the Rockland Branch, bad news if the outbound barge traffic transfers moves to trucks.

NNEPRA Supports CSX Bid for PAR

With a letter of agreement between NNEPRA and CSX, those parties define conditions underlying NNEPRA's support for the proposed PAR/CSX sale to the Surface Transportation Board (STB). Here's a summary of the 8-page agreement that NNEPRA has now filed with STB in favor of that transaction.

The letter of agreement covers these 11 points:

1. Compliance with existing PAR agreements to operate Downeaster trains at current frequencies under the current mainline track Positive Train Control (PTC) exemption.
2. Minimize schedule disruptions with railroad maintenance activities.
3. Streamline the review process for semi-annual schedule changes.
4. Engage in good-faith discussions for improvements to Downeaster services.

5. Wells Project: Proceed according to the construction agreement of 2/17-2021 with PAR for a six-mile siding extension with signal and interlocking systems; a second high level boarding platform, stair-elevator towers and high-level pedestrian bridge.

The first \$1.5 million of railroad charges apply to the railroad's in-kind match.

The railroad commits to a 6th passenger trip per day pending mutual agreement on details.

CSX commits to cooperation with building the platform, stair & elevator towers and pedestrian foot bridge.

NNEPRA agrees to flagging protection.

6. CSX abides by work agreements subject to CSX collective bargaining agreements and federal funding conditions.
7. Parties agree to cooperate on future Downeaster projects, subject to conditions of safety, railroad efficiency and federal funding.
8. Positive Train Control (PTC): Parties agree to cooperate on installing, maintaining and operating PTC on track on which the Downeaster operates.

CSX indicates that all their locomotives that will operate on PAR tracks in the Downeaster corridor are already equipped for PTC. CSX will not seek to recover costs beyond the installation and maintenance of wayside detectors that may be required.

CSX will confer and cooperate on increasing maximum allowable speeds solely for Downeaster trains.

9. NNEPRA and CSX will cooperate on the proposed mainline station stop in Portland to eliminate reverse moves to and from the present Portland station.
10. NNEPRA and CSX will cooperate on planning for a new station stop on the PAR line in West Falmouth.
11. CSX will submit this agreement to STB on or before August 13 as a condition of NNEPRA's approval of the PAR sale to CSX. Following that submission NNEPRA will file with STB in support of CSX's application.

Agreed August 3, 2021:

Patricia Quinn, Executive Director, NNEPRA
Maurice O'Connell, Sr. Dir. State Relations, CSX
Transportation

Editor's Note

This letter of agreement between NNEPRA and CSX emphasizes NNEPRA's role as Maine's voice of passenger rail in relations with CSX. Extensions MRG, Inc. visualizes for passenger rail in Maine will be on tracks subject to future CSX ownership. Some of these tracks are now beyond those used by Amtrak's Downeaster. The letter notes NNEPRA's key role in providing Maine's passenger rail services, so NNEPRA's participation is essential to visualize, justify and implement proposals for expansion.

MRG, Inc.'s strategy should recognize and support NNEPRA's priorities to improve and strengthen the Downeaster mainstem operation between Boston, Portland and Brunswick as noted in the above agreement with CSX.

Beyond that support, participation by NNEPRA and other passenger rail interests should press Maine DOT to adopt an official passenger rail plan that considers credible passenger rail extensions, for example the following list. They should be prioritized according to depth of public interests and objective estimates of expected benefits versus costs.

- Brunswick-Augusta-Waterville-Bangor
- Portland-Lewiston via former SL&A
- Portland-Lewiston-Waterville-Bangor
- Brunswick-Rockland
- Portland-Fryeburg & beyond (Mountain Branch)

Justice Department balks at CSX/PAS proposal

In a late development the U.S. Justice Department filed an objection to CSX's proposal to place PAR's 50% ownership of Pan Am Southern in the operational hands of Berkshire & Eastern (BE), a subsidiary of Genessee & Wyoming (GW). In New England CSX would also connect with GW-owned Providence & Worcester (P&W), St. Lawrence &

Atlantic (SLR), New England Central Railway (NECR) and Connecticut Southern (CSO).

While B&E operation of former PAS territory would be nominally neutral, CSX would control 50% of PAS track and infrastructure. Failure to maintain B&E track and infrastructure could undermine its operational independence [think Hoosac Tunnel interruption—ed.], thereby forcing traffic to the parallel all-CSX east-west route.

In other CSX news, April 1, 2022 is the reported deadline set by the Surface Transportation Board for its decision on the sale of Pan Am Railways to CSX Transportation.

Shawmut Dam removal would impact Sappi Mill

As the Newsletter is being released, the issue of the recertification of the Shawmut dam is in question.

The impact to Sappi's Somerset mill would likely lead to its closure. This would have a devastating impact on rail carloads and likely lead to a domino effect on other mill closures in Maine and drastic impact on Maine freight traffic.

MRG, Inc. is hopeful economics dictate that the recertification will be completed expeditiously.

Bob Holland

Note: Maine Governor Janet Mills assures that Sappi mill operations will continue.

Mark Your Calendar

Sept.15, 6pm Zoom - Regular MRG, Inc. meeting

Sept. 24,25,26 – Common Ground Fair

October 13, 7pm Zoom – MRG, Inc. Annual Meeting.

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.

For the MRG, Inc. Board, Jack Sutton

MRG, Inc. is a volunteer, non-profit corporation dedicated to railroad education and enhanced rail services in Maine and New England. Membership is open to those sharing our goals and interests. Dues \$25 /yr. (through 12/31/2021). Meetings are bi-monthly. Inquiries welcome.