



MAINE RAIL NEWS

MRG, Inc. (Maine Rail Group)

P.O. Box 5494

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<https://mainerailgroup.org>

*A volunteer group
working to enhance
rail services in Maine*

November / December 2024 Newsletter

In This Issue

- A message from MRG president Peter Cole
- \$53M CRISI Grant for northern Maine railroads
- FRA Classes of Track
- News briefs from around the region
- MRG membership renewal time

---- Ed Hanscom, newsletter editor

MRG President's Message

At MRG, we are dependent on our members. We are a non-profit organization that believes that rail is an integral part of our state's infrastructure. Whether rail is used for freight, passengers, or both, it is of long-term importance to keeping Maine a wonderful place to live or visit.

MRG advocates for realistic solutions to Maine's greatest challenges. Whether it be affordable housing, combating climate change, or sustainable and accessible transportation, MRG is eager to collaborate with individuals and other like-minded organizations in seeking positive solutions.

Over the past few months, we had booths at fairs large and small across the state. We discovered and documented that a vast majority of people want to expand rail services. They want to get trucks off the road and to serve those who cannot afford to drive, those who are aging out of driving, and those who are unable to drive.

An overreliance on cars, trucks and the roads that support them has led us on a path of growth that is unsustainable. A recent Portland Press Herald opinion article estimated that the state's annual road transportation shortfall is \$232 million. This reveals the fallacy of the argument that roads pay for

themselves while public transportation needs to be subsidized.

Maine has a shortage of workers, not because young people do not want to come to Maine, but rather because they cannot afford to live in Maine. Car ownership nationally costs over \$12,500 yearly. Housing in Maine is short 38,500 homes right now, and will be short another 38,500 by 2030, meaning that we need 77,000 new homes. However, since construction workers cannot afford to live here, it creates a major quandary.

Meanwhile, the current transportation sector is estimated to create between 49 and 56 per cent of the greenhouse gas emissions in Maine. The state is pushing for electric vehicles and a decrease in vehicle miles traveled (VMT). But with no transportation alternatives and the fear of not being able to recharge an EV battery when traveling long distances in Maine, neither possibility is the solution.

Medical facilities are having staffing problems. As a result, older residents are having difficulty accessing services that are increasingly distant due to the need to centralize services.

On a recent AARP video broadcast (<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/about/info-2024/design-workshop.html>) Mariia Zimmerman (Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, Office of the Secretary of Transportation) spoke regarding the interconnectedness of transportation, housing, and public space. She focused on the importance of housing that accesses and supports transit, both in urban and rural areas. She stressed that resources are available through the "Thriving Communities Network" to help communities and individuals overcome transit insecurity which affects all ages

and can keep working age individuals from getting employment.

Building real transit for Maine will take time, but by working together we can achieve a real change. The major first step will be to expand the backbone of service in Maine, building on the success of the Downeaster. The mainline service extension will link the cities of Portland and the next two largest cities, Lewiston/Auburn, and Bangor. This will connect northern and central Maine with southern Maine. The second step will be rebuilding the State-owned rail branch lines. For rural extension and last mile service, there will need to be coordinated bus service and bicycle trails.

Creating a non-car centric transit system, Maine will start to be ready to face the future that will be here sooner than later. Taking advantage of the benefits of passenger and freight rail will keep land open for agriculture and outdoor adventures. Reliable rail connections will allow livable communities with affordable housing and opportunities for active transportation. By creating a network of efficient and clean rail services we will decrease travel greenhouse gas emissions, use less area than roads, and end the stress of driving.

The time for rail service is now. We hope you will continue to support us, and if you are not a member that you will join us. We are also always looking for new collaborative partners. **We need everyone's help to make a better Maine!**

--- Peter Cole, President of the Maine Rail Group

\$53 Million Federal Grant Awarded for Freight Rail Upgrades in Rural Maine

Sources: Sen. Collins Office, MaineDOT

On October 25, in Washington, D.C., U.S. Senator Susan Collins, Vice Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, announced that the Maine Department of Transportation has been awarded \$53,313,091 for freight rail upgrades to enhance safety, speed, and reliability along two Eastern Maine Railway mainlines in Penobscot, Aroostook, Washington, and Piscataquis counties. This funding will also be used to rehabilitate currently dormant tracks to provide a connection to the One North Bio-Industrial Park in Millinocket. This funding was awarded through the U.S. Department of

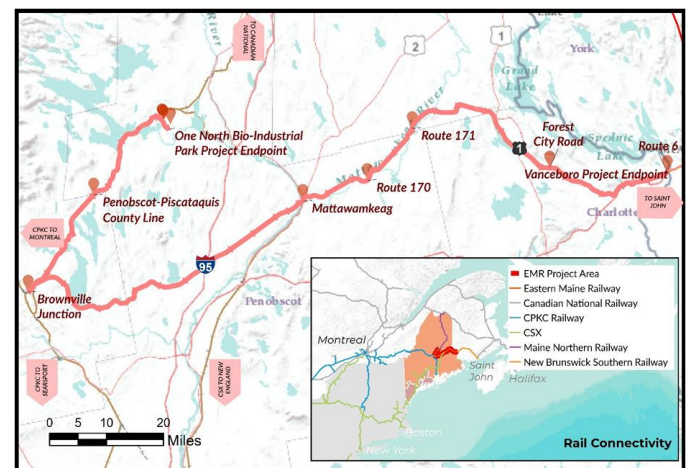
Transportation's Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) Fiscal Year 2024 Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program. Eastern Maine Railway and One North will contribute the 20 percent non-federal match required for this project, for a total project cost of more than \$66.6 million.

The grant will support substantial improvements across 140 miles of rail, including the installation of over 86,000 new crossties and more than 108,000 tons of ballast, replacement of jointed rail with continuously welded rail, installation of Equipment Defect Detectors, and upgrading seven highway grade crossings. By rehabilitating yard tracks and other improvements in the Industrial Park, this project will support the Maine forest products industry and new and sustainable industries in the Katahdin Region.

According to the FRA, the CRISI Program aims to invest in a wide range of projects within the United States to improve railroad safety, efficiency, and reliability, and to mitigate congestion at both intercity passenger and freight rail chokepoints to support the more efficient movement of both people and goods.

Since joining the Appropriations Committee in 2009, Senator Collins has helped secure over \$1 billion in competitive transportation grants for the State of Maine.

Routes to be Upgraded



The map shows the routes that will be upgraded by the project: the Maine Northern Railway (MNR) between Brownville Junction and Millinocket and the Eastern Maine Railway (EMR) between Brownville Junction and Vanceboro. The MNR section will be upgraded to FRA Class 2 (allowing 25 mph for

freight trains, and the EMR section will be upgraded to FRA Class 3 (allowing 40 mph freight trains).

Editor's Note: For more details on the scope of the rail upgrade project go to MaineDOT's "Statement of Work" from the CRISI grant application by using this link: <https://www.maine.gov/mdot/grants/crisi/>.

The project will make rail transportation more efficient, not only in the project area, but also for longer distance shipments to and from the northern reaches of the MNR (Aroostook County), New Brunswick (including the port in Saint John), and all areas served by and connected to the extensive rail networks of the CPKC and CSX. This means that the project will help grow rail freight traffic in Maine and increase the value of all Maine rail lines. And that means the strength of the freight system will more easily support passenger rail expansion.

FRA Classes of Track

When we hear that a stretch of track in FRA Class 3, many of us know what that means. For those of us who are less sure, here is a table that relates the FRA (Federal Railroad Administration) Class to the allowable speeds for freight and passenger trains.

Classes of Track	Maximum Speed (mph)*		Examples
	Freight Trains	Passenger Trains	
Class 1	10	15	BML, Burnham Jct to Thorndike
Class 2	25	30	EMR, Brownville Jct to Vanceboro
Class 3	40	60*	CSX, Old Town to Mattawamkeag
Class 4	60	80	CSX, Brunswick to S Berwick, ME
Class 5	80	90	UP, Clinton, IA to N Platte, NE
Class 6	only if certain freight train conditions are met	110	FEC/Brightline, Cocoa to Miami, FL
Class 7		125	Brightline, Cocoa to Orlando, FL
Class 8		160	none yet in North America
Class 9		220	none yet in North America

*In "dark" territory (without signals), maximum speeds are 49/59 mph (freight/passenger).
Sources: Federal Railway Administration, MaineDOT, Wikipedia

Note that, for a given Class, the maximum allowable speeds for passenger trains are generally higher than the maximum allowable speeds for freight trains. For example, Class 3 allows 40 mph freights and 60 mph passenger trains while Class 4 allows 60 mph freights and 80 mph passenger trains. There are nine Classes in all. The table provides examples of each Class that can be found in Maine and around the country. It should also be noted that, as indicated in the table footnote, rail lines without track signals also have maximum speed limitations.

Rail News Briefs from Around the Region

MaineDOT:

The Maine Department of Transportation issued a "request for proposal (RFP)" for the **Rockland Branch** on September 27. Proposals were due by October 25, and may be for freight only, freight with scheduled passenger service, or freight and excursion train service.

NNEPRA:

The Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, which manages the operation and development of the Downeaster passenger train service, reported that passenger ridership for the 2024 Federal Fiscal Year (October 2023 through September 2024) was the highest FFY ridership in the history of the service. The 12-month period recorded ridership of 591,948 passengers.

MRG's "I (heart) Maine Trains" T-shirt . . .
A Great Stocking Stuffer!



(photo by Peter Cole)

MRG Has "I (heart) Maine Trains" T-Shirts

Maine Rail Group has T-shirts available for sale to promote awareness and appreciation of railroading in Maine. The "I (heart) Maine Trains" message will appeal to the full spectrum of those with an interest in Maine railroads: Downeaster patrons, passenger and freight rail advocates, career people, historians, railroad tourists, rail photographers and videographers, "train chasers", and railroad modelers. When you wear the T-shirt, you can spark a conversation and discover others who also share an interest in railroads. This is good for public awareness and good for our organization. These were MRG's best selling item at the 2024 Common Ground Country Fair. These navy blue shirts are currently available in sizes L and XL at \$10 each (plus shipping and handling, fixed at \$10 for small quantities). Send an email or a letter to reserve your shirt, or show up at an upcoming train show (no shipping and handling charge)! *Editor's Note: You can send an email to trains@mainerailgroup.org or a letter to MRG, Inc., P.O. Box 5494, Augusta, ME 04332.*

MRG Memberships Can Be Renewed for 2025

Now that it's November, it's time to renew your membership in the Maine Rail Group. Stay informed on Maine railroads and support MRG's mission. All current members have been mailed a paper version of this newsletter, along with a membership renewal form/envelope to return with your renewal check. Membership rates are the same as they were last year: \$20 for students (and new members) and \$40 for other renewing members. If you can't find your renewal form, just use the form printed on this page and send it in!

Correction to the September/October Issue of the Maine Rail News:

In the top of the right-hand column on page 1, the correct town name is Brownfield, not Brownville.

Brownfield is one of the towns along the threatened Mountain Division line.

Brownville is located on the CPKC line south of Brownville Junction.

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 \$40 (\$20 for students and first-year members). Inquiries are welcome.

Maine Rail Group (MRG, Inc.)

A non-profit group working to
enhance rail service in Maine
www.mainerailgroup.org



2025 Membership:

Name	Renewal (\$40)	_____
Address	New/Student (\$20)	_____
City	Donation \$	_____
State	Total Enclosed \$	_____
Zip	Phone (____) ____-____	_____
E-mail	Affiliation	_____
Volunteer Interests	Contact Preference:	_____
	by E-mail	_____
	by U.S. Mail	_____

Please mail check to: MRG, Inc., P.O. Box 5494, Augusta, ME 04332

THANKS for supporting the Maine Rail Group!

Mark Your Calendar

Regular MRG, Inc. meetings are virtual by Zoom, starting at 7pm unless otherwise advised. Please check the <https://mainerailgroup.org> website for changes, or send an email to trains@mainerailgroup.org for a link to the meeting.

SMMRC Train Show, Westbrook, November 9, 2024

MRG, Inc. Board meeting, November 20, 2024

EMMRRC Train Show, Brewer, November 23, 2024

Maine Transportation Conference, Augusta, December 5, 2024

MRG, Inc. Board meeting, December 18, 2024

MRG, Inc. Board meeting, January 15, 2025

Amherst Railway Society show, W Springfield, MA, January 29-30, 2025