

MRG, Inc. (Maine Rail Group)
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<http://mainerailgroup.orgs>

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

September / October 2020

Greetings,

Membership

Our July / August newsletter omitted the names of Peter Cole and Paul Weiss, our newest directors, in the list of board members just elected. We apologize for this error.

Editorial

PASSENGER RAIL THROUGH AUGUSTA

Save the Corridor; Study the Feasibility; Plan and Implement Service

Maine Rail Group is drafting the enclosed brochure to outline a vision and reasons for modern passenger rail service through Augusta to Waterville and Bangor – generating future transportation opportunities for central Maine citizens and economic development throughout the region. Realizing this vision requires a series of steps, starting with preservation of the Brunswick - Augusta railroad corridor, and with a professional study to confirm the feasibility of passenger rail service from Brunswick to Bangor via Augusta. Detailed engineering, environmental review, financial planning, project approvals and funding commitments will follow the demonstration of feasibility and public benefit. Implementation will likely take several years of planning and development, throughout which public and legislative support will be essential.

SAVE THE CORRIDOR

The immediate need is to assure that the State-owned railroad corridor from Brunswick to Augusta remains intact for railroad purposes as originally intended, and not severed in any part by conversion to a recreational trail, as now proposed. This corridor provides the only feasible passenger rail connection between Augusta and the national railroad system at Brunswick.

If the railroad corridor is broken, experience teaches that reasonable hope will fade for modern passenger rail through Maine's Capital City.

STUDY PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

The next step will be a State-sponsored professional study to predict the passenger demand and development opportunities for passenger rail service through Augusta, and to outline its costs, funding requirements and benefit-to-cost ratios. Cost of this study is estimated at approximately \$300,000, to be shared by the state, major municipalities and possible private contributors.

The scope and timing of further steps toward implementation will be influenced by feasibility study results, and resolution of present uncertainties, including:

- Public support for service through Augusta;
- The Covid-19 epidemic, and its long-term impact on public transportation demands;
- Impending sale of Pan Am Railways and the attitudes of its successor(s);
- Coordination with other freight and passenger rail operations;
- Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) priorities and support;
- Future federal funding opportunities to expand passenger rail service in Maine;
- Amtrak's position re passenger rail operation beyond its current *Downeaster* service in Maine;
- Rail-related economic development and growth opportunities for regions to be served;
- Position of passenger rail in future Maine State Railroad plans, and in municipal planning.

Recent history

The Brunswick-Augusta corridor and its railroad infrastructure were acquired from Guilford Transportation Industries (GTI) by the State of Maine for railroad purposes after GTI ended all rail services on this corridor. GTI predecessor Maine Central Railroad had earlier discontinued passenger rail service. MRG, Inc. founded in 1989 has consistently advocated for retention and use of this corridor for passenger trains.

MRG, Inc. support highlights:

- TrainRiders Northeast goals for passenger rail service through Augusta to Waterville and Bangor;
- Introduction by NNEPRA of *Downeaster* passenger service between Portland and Boston, and its current extension to Brunswick – the jump-off point to Augusta;
- 2003-era resolutions initiated by the City of Bangor and followed by Cities of Augusta, Waterville and other municipalities between Brunswick and Bangor aimed to keep that corridor intact for future passenger rail service;
- Track replacement in Augusta after its removal for underground storm water containment;
- Safe separation of the Augusta – Gardiner Rail-Trail, leaving railroad infrastructure intact. The last passenger train to Augusta in May, 2008 was an MRG, Inc. charter for its annual meeting at the Hallowell City auditorium, when the parallel Augusta – Gardiner trail was active;
- Recent resolutions by the Cities of Augusta and Waterville to study the feasibility of extending passenger rail to both cities.
- The City of Augusta and MRG, Inc. discussed a concept whereby:
 - The existing Augusta City Garage adds two levels to provide parking space for cars now occupying gravel-covered tracks through central Augusta;
 - A platform in central Augusta serves all passenger trains, avoiding most traffic and parking associated with a full-service station in the central city;
 - The principal Augusta station is in East Augusta - coordinated with city plans for development of the City-owned Kennebec Locke site. That station, with convenient access from the highway hub east of the Rt. 3 Kennebec River bridge, will include parking and amenities to serve rail passengers from the entire surrounding region. Region-wide availability of passenger rail and parking will relieve central Augusta from related traffic and parking congestion.
- MRG, Inc. supported a study proposal to the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation of the 128th Legislature. It was tabled for lack of matching funds,

and to await results of the ongoing Lewiston-Auburn passenger rail study.

MRG, Inc. advocates these actions now:

- **Preserve the existing state-owned rail corridor from Brunswick to Augusta intact and continuous for the prospect of passenger rail through Augusta to be viable.**
- **That the Maine Legislature approves a professional study to explore the feasibility, type of service, public demand, costs, finance, and the range of public, economic development and environmental benefits potentially available to central Maine with modern passenger rail service through Augusta to Waterville and Bangor.**

Please contact your legislators, city and town officials, friends and associates to express your interest in passenger rail from Brunswick through Augusta to Waterville and Bangor, and ask for their help to make it a reality by taking these steps.

Battery-Powered Trains

Ideally, passenger trains in Maine would be powered by electricity - generated by solar and wind sources and delivered to trains by overhead cables. Realistically, New England has no overhead electric rail infrastructure north of Boston's South Station. Its economic justification is constrained by the cost of electric infrastructure and compatible rolling stock, plus its impact on freight operations, and the relatively light passenger densities offered by most northern New England service targets beyond the Boston commuter market.

However, most trains now are electric powered with electricity supplied by onboard generators driven by diesel engines. Diesel train engines can be supplemented or replaced with batteries or clean burning hydrogen, with active development of both systems reported in the United States and Europe. Safety, reliability, battery recharge or routine change procedures, and overall costs versus diesel power are key parameters.

The following quotes edited from *Mass Transit* and *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, by Anya Litvak, Aug. 10th, 2020 (*italics*) offer an update on progress with batteries:

Wabtec Corp., the North Shore-based rail technology company, plans to pilot its new battery-powered locomotive on a 350-mile route along the hills of California's San Joaquin Valley.

There's no engine. No oil. No steel levers or red valve handles. Instead, it's a quiet air-conditioned room that looks like the inside of a computer data center. The guts are the batteries, some 20,000 of them. Wabtec Corp. plans to pilot its new battery-driven locomotive and the diesel engines on the train, when to recharge the batteries through braking, and when to run on battery power to reduce emissions and noise.

The hybrid freight train will be operated by the nation's largest railroad, BNSF, and is intended to be a demonstration of how the new technology improves the old. The pilot project will be the first to use a battery-powered locomotive as part of a heavy-haul train, which typically lugs thousands of tons.

If batteries now seem intrinsic, even unremarkable staples of everything we use in modern life, trains haven't really gotten the memo yet. That's not all that surprising, said Chris Rahn, co-director of the Battery and Energy Storage Technology Center at Penn State, who worked with Wabtec on the battery design. "The rail industry is much more traditional," he said. "Making the case for battery electric in particular is challenging, because you need a lot of batteries and you have to justify it on a cost basis." A locomotive is a decades-long investment that costs several million dollars. Convincing railroads to buy a new more expensive one is a heavy haul. Also, oil is cheap, and it's a bad time to ask lenders for capital.

But in other ways, the time is just right for battery-powered trains because, as Alan Hamilton, Wabtec's vice-president of engineering put it, "the locomotive needed to become smart enough" to demonstrate their value. "It's not that we woke up one day and said, "Let's try this," Mr. Hamilton said.

CPR News – Intermodal Containers Through Maine

Canadian Pacific, August 11, 2020 / Calgary (edited - italics)

Canadian Pacific launches first train of international containers from Port of St. John

Canadian Pacific today officially launched its international intermodal service through the Port of St. John, N.B. The inaugural train carries containers from

the Hapag-Lloyd vessel Detroit Express bound for intermodal terminals on the CP network in Canada and the U.S.

"The new Port of St John service offers CP's shippers a compelling value: a congestion free port with a world class operator, matched with CP's precision scheduled railroading model," said Keith Creel, CP President and Chief Executive Officer. "CP has been without access to a deep-water Atlantic Ocean port for a quarter-century, and today I'm pleased to deliver a simple message: We're back."

CP originated westbound train 251-11 this morning for the Montreal region at Brownville Junction, Maine, with the first Port of St. John containers on connection from the New Brunswick Southern (NBSR) and Eastern Maine (EMRY) railways. From Montreal, CP will move containers from the vessel Detroit Express on connecting trains to destinations that include Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver, Chicago and Minneapolis. The first eastbound train to the Port of St. John departed Montreal on Friday, Aug. 7.

CP gained access to the Port of St. John through connections with EMRY and NBSR with CP's purchase of the Central Maine and Quebec Railway (CMQ), completed in June. CP has committed to investing \$90 million over three years into the CMQ property to enhance safety and efficiency over the corridor. Complementing that investment is the port's \$205 million West Side Modernization project, which includes a new wharf, a terminal upgrade and a deeper shipping channel.

CP's route is the shortest between Atlantic Canada and key North American markets. By year's end it will be able to offer 24-hour service between St. John and Montreal.

"The Port of St. John connection gives us the rare opportunity to offer shippers a new and extremely compelling service to reach North American markets," said Jonathan Wahba, CP vice-President Sales and Marketing Intermodal and Automotive. "With a world-class terminal operator in DP World and CP's investment in the CMQ, our customers will enjoy an unmatched value proposition that will benefit cargo owners for years to come."

Pan Am Railways (PAR) Sale

The New Hampshire Business Review, August 28, 2020 published the article Pan AM Railways sale: What's in it for New Hampshire tracks?, by Michael Kitch. <https://www.nhbr.com/author/michael-kitch/> (direct quotes italicized)

This article explains that PAR transports freight by rail in New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut and New York, and that it connects directly to Norfolk Southern Railway (NS), CSX and Canadian Pacific Railway (CP) plus 20 other regional and shortline railroads. It says that Canadian National Railway (CN), along with CP, CSX, and - are all named as potential buyers. Genesee & Wyoming (GNWR), with operations elsewhere in New England, is named as another possible buyer.

Peter Griffin, president of New Hampshire Railroad Revitalization Association (NHRRA) refers to the prospect of passenger as well as freight service on the NH Main Line, and extending service from Concord to Lincoln to stimulate tourist and industrial sectors of the North Country economy.

Further, the Boston-based advocacy group TransitMatters' calls for New England states to "take a strong role in determining the ultimate fate of the Pan Am system." Shelley Winters, administrator of the Division of Rails and Transit at the NH DOT is quoted, saying "the state is monitoring the situation. Pan Am's trackage is important to the state for current and future freight and passenger rail opportunities in the state and in the region."

Change in ownership of the NH Maine Line would play directly into the development of passenger rail service, including the trackage and signaling on the line. New Ownership is unlikely to have an appreciable impact on freight service in New Hampshire.... With sparse demand for freight services, the impact of a sale of Pan Am rails in New Hampshire will likely be limited to the Capitol Corridor, where new ownership will play a part in the effort to return passenger service to the Merrimack Valley.

Maine viewpoints

Nathan Moulton, MaineDOT Director of Freight and Passenger Services, Nate offered little insight on potential buyers, or combinations of buyers for PAR assets. He suggested it could be late this year or afterward before buyer(s) are disclosed.

Moulton spoke of the C.R.I.S.I. (Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements) back-to-back programs to upgrade PAR infrastructure between Yarmouth and Mattawamkeag, Maine. Phase 1 for track from Yarmouth to Waterville (\$35 million – shared equally by PAR and FRA) was announced in July, 2019.

Phase 2 for 111 miles from Waterville to Mattawamkeag (\$42 million – to be shared equally by PAR and FRA) was formally proposed in July 2020. Details of the Phase 2 proposal are published in the Atlantic Northeast Rails & Ports (ANR&P) newsletter of August 25, 2020.

ANR&P indicates completion of both projects would result in upgrade of whole the PAR main line to 286 # capacity, with FRA Class 2 track speeds (25 mph freight). Other benefits include:

- Access to Port of St. John via EMRY and NBSR;
- A shorter route to St. John, avoiding CP involvement with routing via Brownville Junction;
- Faster freight service to the expanding Port of St. John

Speculation holds that PAR's secure access to the developing Port of St. John would be an important factor in buyer interest and pricing and sale of that line. .

Work details for both phases do not include items specific to passenger train operations. However, major elements such as continuous welded rail (CWR), tie replacements, bridge and crossing upgrades could apply to future passenger service as well as freight trains, mitigating some of the future costs to add passenger trains to these lines.

South Coast Rail Line Construction moves ahead

CBS Boston, August 24, 2020, Boston News (*italics*)
The MBTA approved a \$403.5 million contract Monday to continue working on Phase 1 of the South Coast Rail. The project is designed to connect southeastern Massachusetts and Boston.

The MBTA said it has obtained all of the construction permits and will start construction this fall. This part of the project includes rebuilding the New Bedford Main Line, upgrading the Middleborough Secondary Line, and Building the Phase 1 signal and communication system. Phase 1 of the South Coast Rail is expected to be finished in late 2023. When it is complete, riders will be able to go from Taunton, Fall River, and New Bedford to Boston in just under 90 minutes.

Mark Your Calendars

- MRG, Inc. meeting, **Sept. 16 (Zoom)**
- MRG, Inc. meeting, **Nov. 11**

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.