

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, 2010

Dear Members and Friends:

Membership

Welcome aboard to new members Reta Hunter, Henry Morlock.

It's time to renew memberships for the coming year, so this letter is mailed to all with 2011 sign up cards and return envelopes. New memberships and those renewed since September 2010 are honored throughout 2011. Membership dues are \$25 per person as they have remained for the last 15 years. Your prompt return will enable us to update our records and financial standing as we approach the New Year. Please indicate your preference for receiving newsletters by email or post, and to note any changes in contact information.

We also want to learn of your personal interests in MRG, Inc. activities and your ideas for involvement. Our outreach in fields of rail-related advocacy, public education, shows, special events, trips, maps, scholarships and grants, along with the administrative details that inevitably accompany these activities, is governed by the reliable participation of members. Please use the back of your membership card for comments or contact up by email or phone to follow up.

Maine's Mountain Division

On Friday September 10 MRG, Inc. sponsored two trips with Conway Scenic Railroad's RDC "Budd Car" on behalf of Route 113 Corridor Committee's interest in reviving rail service on Maine's section of Maine Central Railroad's former Mountain Division between Westbrook and Fryeburg. Each two hour trip covered the nearest available Mountain Division track to Maine, from Redstone to Bartlett, NH. We boarded and returned to the platform and parking area at Depot Street in North Conway, site of MEC's former North Conway station.

Purposes of the trips were to familiarize participants with active Mountain Division track in close proximity to the Maine boarder at Fryeburg, to demonstrate the improved condition of track and roadbed between Intervale and Bartlett with 85 lb./yd. rail (as in Maine), and to illustrate the type of self-propelled, reversible passenger rail vehicle that was used. Roughly thirty passengers traveled on each of the morning and afternoon sections, with parts of the return trips devoted to presentations by

regional community leaders on visions for future use of Maine's Mountain Division.

Meanwhile, MaineDOT advanced plans to replace missing track between Westbrook and South Windham to reconnect the Mountain Division to the active rail system. Nate Moutlon reports that approximately three track miles of continuous welded rail (CWR), or one-half capacity of a rail train was purchased at a favorable rate to fill out the sixth train of 5-1/2 trains required for the Portland – Brunswick Downeaster extension. These rails are already delivered to a point near the end of available track in Westbrook. Moulton expects that requests for proposals to restore the missing track will be issued in November. He advises it's uncertain that the \$4.0 million authorized under the June bond approval is enough to close the six-mile gap and will depend on the bids received.

470 Railroad Club Trip – MRG, Inc. Participates

The 470 Club invited Maine Rail Group aboard their annual Conway Scenic Railroad trip on Saturday, October 16, covering their line from Redstone to Crawford Notch. Clearing weather marked the day following Friday's rain and wind storm, but strong gusts of wind after the morning patrol brought a large tree down across the track west of Bartlett. The train was delayed to arrange for a chain saw crew, backed to a road crossing to board them, returned to the site to clear the track and then drop off the crew. The whole incident went smoothly and offered some unexpected photo-ops; however, it consumed enough time to require the train to reverse direction at Crawford Notch rather than proceed to Fabyans or beyond as originally planned.

MRG, Inc. former dining car, now CSRX 492 "Hattie Evans" was in the consist, offering the opportunity to enjoy lunch in style with views of the spectacular mountain scenery approaching the Notch.

Downeaster Brunswick Extension

NNEPRA website entry dated 10/21/2010 reports the following progress as of Oct. 15th:

"The Pan Am Track crew completed another successful week of CWR installation. North and south rail has been installed through the Yarmouth Junction diamond ending about 700' east of the Royal River Bridge. Pan Am crews will begin preparations for the Deep Cut track project on October 25th by removing 500' track panels in that location to provide access so that the contractor can install a drainage system. K&K Excavation of Turner,

Maine will begin their portion of the work on Monday, November 1, 2010. Weather permitting, the Deep Cut portion of the project is expected to be complete by mid-December.”

View Downeaster extension project updates at:

<http://www.amtrakdowneaster.com/expansion-project>

CWR is delivered along most of the line and is actually installed westward from Brunswick through Yarmouth. Ties replacement will follow later. Media announced on October 27 that CWR in 1,650 lengths will be unloaded from a rail train on Oct. 28th / 29th from Falmouth westward through Portland, with expected crossing delays

View the Downeaster extension project overview at:

<http://www.amtrakdowneaster.com/sites/default/files/DE-ExpansionHandout.pdf>

The US DOT announced an award of \$600,000 to the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority to study how the Downeaster passenger train route between Portland and Boston can be upgraded to expand service, cut travel time and increase the number of daily trips between those points. *Portland Press Herald, Oct.25*

Northern Maine Rail System To Be Saved

MMA tracks from Millinocket to Madawaska, with branches to Houlton, Presque Isle and Caribou will remain in service, thanks to agreement between Maine Montreal and Atlantic Railway, MaineDOT and a private investor for the State of Maine to buy these tracks for \$21.1 million, which includes an outside third party contribution of \$1.0 million and credit of a \$1.0 million against the purchase price by MMA to resolve a claim by the State under certain Rail Funding Agreements arising as a result of the abandonment. The transaction is scheduled to close by December 31, 2010, or as soon thereafter as the formal purchase and sale agreement is executed and formalities with the Surface Transportation Board and the FRA are concluded.

MaineDOT will invite bids and select a third party operator (Short Line) to take over operations on the State- acquired lines. MMA will continue to provide rail service on the lines until the later of December 31, 2010 or the date on which the Short Line rail carrier selected by the State is ready to provide such service.

The draft agreement grants to a future Short Line overhead trackage rights over retained MMA lines between Madawaska and Canadian National Railways at St.Leonard, N.B.; also, between Millinocket and the connection of the MMA line with Eastern Maine Railway at Brownville Junction. MMA will have overhead

trackage rights between Madawaska and Millinocket. The charge for exercise of overhead trackage rights, whether by MMA or the Short Line, shall be \$0.30 per car mile, loaded and empty. MMA will provide interchange tracks as necessary at connecting points. Trackage rights granted are for run-through traffic only and neither MMA nor the Short Line may access customers on tracks of the other.

The draft agreement recognizes the potential value of those rail lines to be sold as well as lines retained by MMA for utility uses (electricity, communications, etc.). It provides that any such applications will not interfere with railroad operations and that the State and MMA shall share net proceeds from utility uses pro-rated according to the utility mileage on lines of both parties.

Concurrently, an FRA TIGER II grant of \$10.5 million was approved to rehabilitate some of the track purchased by the State, aimed at improved train speeds and customer service.

Maine Governor Tours Rail Projects

Governor John Baldacci and officials of Maine, Pan Am Railways and major rail shippers were aboard Pan Am's train on October 22 as it toured rail projects in Maine. The day's events began at Pan Am's shops in Waterville where diesel locomotives are serviced and rebuilt for Pan Am and other railroads.

The train moved westward to Auburn where the Governor, Pan Am and St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railway officials celebrated the near completion of the new Danville Junction Gateway Project at the principal interchange point between those two railroads. The project, jointly financed by PAR, SL&A and State of Maine, eliminates a diamond crossing, 3,000 ft. of new shared main line track for faster train movements (from 5-10 mph to 30 mph through of junction) plus modern railroad signalization, adds 1,600 ft. of track for interchange of cars, 2,100 ft. of overflow tracks, rehabilitation of three yard tracks, eight switches and improvements to highway crossing signals and surface.

Following the dedication the train proceeded to Royal Junction in Yarmouth where Pan Am's line to Brunswick branches eastward and crews are installing new continuous welded rail for the Downeaster extension. The trip continued to Portland to view track work at the wye where Downeaster trains can be turned and ended at the Rigby Yard in South Portland.

This is an appropriate place to recognize and thank outgoing Governor Baldacci and his administration, MaineDOT Transportation Commissioner David Cole and staff, NNEPRA, the Maine Legislature and Maine's

Congressional delegation for their accomplishments in support of rail during the past eight years.

On the passenger side we've seen TrainRiders Northeast's vision for the Downeaster become a reality under NNEPRA leadership, grow to five daily round trips and launch expansion to Brunswick. Maine Eastern Railroad operates seasonal passenger services between Brunswick and Rockland. The rebuilt Rockland branch is reconnected to the renovated Rockland station and the Bath station is restored. Downeast Scenic Railroad now operates westward from Washington Junction in Ellsworth on the west end of the former Calais Branch, despite loss of 86 miles of that line to trail. The Belfast & Moosehead Lake Railroad restored tourist operations under new management in 2009.

Focusing on freight, the northern Maine rail lines saved from the brink of abandonment and the Danville Junction Gateway project are major steps forward. The Lewiston Lower branch was reopened between Brunswick and Lisbon Falls and is now in service. Maine endorsed the Pan Am Southern joint venture between Pan Am Railways and Norfolk Southern to reduce freight transit times across Massachusetts.

An intangible, but important accomplishment of the past eight years is improved public recognition of rail's importance to Maine's economy and evolution of a more positive atmosphere for dialogue between private and public interests in addressing problems and pursuing rail-related opportunities.

Bethel, Maine Meeting to Explore Passenger Rail

Edited from an article by Aison Aloisio, Sun Media Wire, 9/17/2010

BETHEL – Fifty years to the week after passenger rail service ended in Bethel, people who want to see it returned gathered at the Bethel Inn to discuss how to make that happen. They predicted that European tourists, skiers, local retirees and businesspeople, as well as residents from all over western Maine would ride the rails on a Portland-Montreal route like the one which once ran through Bethel. About 70 people turned out for the Sept. 9 meeting, which was both a presentation and input session and was coordinated by the Maine Department of Transportation. As plans progress for expanding passenger service north of Portland, MDOT is doing a feasibility study for also extending train routes to Lewiston-Auburn and perhaps to Montreal. Sue Moreau, director of multi-modal planning for MDOT, said the most serious attention is being given to extending the route from Portland to Lewiston-Auburn "It's less of a serious look from Lewiston-Auburn to Montreal," she said. But Moreau added, "This piece right here to Bethel is different. You've already done some work here, there's a

train station, there was service here. We have that to look at." The train station was built in the early 1990s, and ski train service operated for two years until it was discontinued because of meager ridership. *[It anticipated connecting Downeaster service that was not realized. – Ed.]*

Federal funds go toward C&TS bridge fix

Source: TRAINS news wire article by Wayne Laepple, October 21, 2010. It's included here to illustrate the value of a tourist railroad to a rural economy. The Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad operates steam powered excursions on a 60 mile remnant between Antonito, Colorado and Chama, New Mexico of the former Denver & Rio Grande Western three-foot gauge empire in that region. C&TS is a regular exhibitor at the Amherst Railway Society show.

Chama, N.M. – New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson made \$1.1 million available to the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad today to restore the fire-damaged Lobato trestle. The iconic bridge burned in June, forcing the railroad to curtail operations and resulting in a 28 percent decline in patronage.

The grant of federal transportation enhancement funds for historic railroad bridges will cover construction work necessary to repair the structure in time for the railroad's May 28, 2011 season opening. "I am committed to helping the residents of Chama where the local economy depends on regular service of the historic railroad," Richardson said. New Mexico's congressional delegation assisted in securing the funds.

An example worth remembering for local railroad bridges in trouble? – Ed.

New Hampshire secures \$2.24 million rail grant

Edited from an article by Shira Schoenberg at <http://www.concordmonitor.com> 10/26/2010.

"New Hampshire will receive a \$2.24 million federal grant to study a passenger rail line between Concord and Boston. The grant will allow the state to go ahead with planning work for the Capital Corridor project, including an environmental study, an economic impact study and an analysis of alternative types of transportation.

U.S. Rep. Paul Hodes, who helped secure the grant, called it a 'critical step' in the project. 'It will allow for completion of all the preliminary work necessary as a basis for going forward and building a passenger rail system to serve our Capitol Corridor', he said.

The money comes from the Federal Railroad Administration's High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail funding program; it was funded by a transportation appropriations bill passed in 2009 and is not part of the

federal Recovery Act spending. But Hodes spokesman Matt House said the program was authorized by the Recovery Act.

New Hampshire previously got a \$1.9 million grant from the Federal Transit Authority for planning purposes. That money will be combined with the latest grant and used to hire a consultant to conduct the studies.

Mike Pillsbury, deputy commissioner of the state Department of Transportation, said the new grant would pay for a detailed "service development plan", which is required to obtain federal grants for construction. It would answer questions about expected ridership, the capacity of the track, how many trains would be needed, expected travel time, where stations would be located and so on. It will take about 18 months to complete the work, such as refurbishing the rails and adding track.."

Vermont

Atlantic Northeast Rails & Ports, 25 October 2010 includes this Vermont news:

Reporting marks: "CLP", "GMRC". and "WACR" are merged into "VTR".The railroad found that "most cars [in our system] moved over two or three marks" within the system, and confused customers looking at a waybill. "With five marks, that's a lot of paper waybill processing between ourselves....We decided to consolidate under one mark " Vermont Rail System Ed Fitzgerald said, for the waybills only. The new system saved \$100,000.

ANR&P further reports that NECR (New England Central Railroad) ordered the first of four CWR trains for delivery via PAS at East Northfield, MA. Also, the *Vermont* showed ridership increase of 16.9% from October 2009 to October 2010. Revenue increased more than 19%.

Maine Standard Gauge Tourist Lines Report Maine Eastern Railroad

We had a good passenger excursion season, but our freight movements are expected to be very light through winter due to slow construction and reduced demands on our premier customer, Dragon Products," said Gordon Page, MERR vice-president. "It's too soon for us to talk about the Amtrak connection", Page added.

MERR will operate the Kiwanis Jingle Bell Express from the Rockland Station to the North Pole on Friday and Saturday, December 3 & 4. Three trains leave each night at 4:30 pm, 6:00 pm and 7:30 pm. Non-refundable advance tickets are \$18 pp + \$1 service fee through Wednesday, November 24th, after which the price is \$20 pp + \$1. Children under the age of two ride free. Reservations are strongly suggested (207) 596-6725.

Downeast Scenic Railroad

Tom Testa, DSR president reports: "We finished our first year selling out every train, carrying almost 5,000 passengers from August to mid-October. We will be increasing capacity next year by adding coach #155, an additional 88 seats. Our plans are to begin our first full summer/fall operation the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, operating weekends until the weekend after Columbus Day, along with already booked special event and school bus trains. Additionally, we hope to complete the tie replacement work on the wye, thus eliminating the need for a runaround at Washington Junction and adding an additional mile to the excursion. This portion becomes truly "rare" mileage as the wye was built in 1931 and used only until the late 50's to turn the Bar Harbor Express when it terminated in Ellsworth.

We are extremely pleased with the response to the Downeast Scenic Railroad project and our volunteers are already hard at work getting things ready for next year.

Belfast & Moosehead Lake Railroad

Reporting for B&ML, Bob Holland says: "The B&ML had a very successful year and improved over 2009. During the Common Ground Fair we handled some 1,500 passengers. People demanded the train rather than put up with parking lot grid at the fair. It is expected that traffic will increase at next year's fair. Several trains were run out of Belfast and we expect to build on that for 2010. The City of Belfast is including B&ML in the downtown development plans. Pizza trains remain our most popular activity. Our bicycle operations out of Thorndike proved very successful and it is expected that ridership will increase next year as word gets out. We even had a movie company use our line to film shots of moving trains. Maintaining 30+ miles of rails requires a dedicated team of volunteers. Locomotives 53 and 50 will be winterized next week until spring start up, following our Halloween spook-tacular."

Mark Your Calendars

Nov.18, New England Railroad Club Meeting – Executive Night, Copley Plaza, Boston
Nov.19, MRG, Inc. mtg.,7 pm, **GARDINER CITY HALL**
Dec. 2, Maine Transportation Conference, Augusta Civic Center, 8:00 am through dinner meeting
Jan. 29/30, 2011 Amherst Railway Society Show, "Big E", W. Springfield, MA.

Best wishes to all for the Holiday Season and for 2011!

Jack Sutton

MRG, Inc. is a non-profit corporation dedicated to railroad education and to enhanced rail services in Maine and New England.Membership is open to everyone who shares our goals and interests.

Annual dues are \$25. Regular meetings are bi-monthly and inquiries are welcome.