

MRG, Inc. (Maine Rail Group)

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Working to enhance rail services in Maine and New England

TO: Honorable Chairs and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

PLEASE VOTE TO PASS LD 860 AND LD 406 IN SUPPORT OF PASSENGER RAIL IN MAINE; HERE'S WHY:

Passenger Rail for State-Owned Corridors

Amtrak's Downeaster came to Portland Maine in 2001. Later it reached Brunswick and served annually more than 550,000 pre-pandemic riders. Maine demonstrates expertise to administer and operate the Downeaster through NNEPRA, Amtrak, TrainRiders Northeast and the communities served. Maine can leverage this expertise to extend passenger services through Augusta and Lewiston to Waterville and Bangor, westward to Conway Scenic Railroad and from Portland to Montreal.

Under aegis of Maine Department of Transportation (MeDOT) Regional Transportation Advisory Committees (RTACs) in 2001-2003, and leadership of the Bangor City Council, municipalities along active rail lines and idle state-owned corridor between Augusta and Brunswick, adopted resolutions to identify and save the Portland-Brunswick-Augusta-Waterville-Bangor rail corridor as a future passenger route linking southern and northern Maine. Since then, passenger rail from Portland to Lewiston-Auburn was studied. The Augusta City Council resolved to study passenger service from Brunswick through Augusta to Waterville and Bangor. Public interest exists for both routes, which formerly operated in coordination.

State-owned rail corridors from Gardiner to Topsham, Portland to Auburn, and Portland to Fryeburg, are now eyed for recreational trails. Such conversions billed as temporary will be difficult to reclaim for rail once trails are established. Maine's State Capital will be isolated from future passenger rail service. Maine abounds with opportunities for recreational trails without destroying major corridors reserved for railroads. Trails can co-exist with railroads where safe separation is maintained. National attention has shifted towards passenger rail expansion. The transportation, environmental, economic development and tourism potentials offered by rail should not be foreclosed by myopic corridor conversion to trails.

Maine should act now to support expanded rail services:

- View passenger rail as an extension of Amtrak and Amtrak's Northeast Corridor;
- Maine rail must connect with the interstate rail system - not be myopically limited at state lines;
- Preserve key state-owned corridors for railroad use;
- Study and reactivate key corridors - prioritized according to transportation demand; environmental benefits, related economic development and tourism potentials;
- Pursue available federal funding for development and operation of key rail expansions;
- Follow, evaluate and apply new rail-related technologies that offer opportunities for Maine;
- Encourage TIDC involvement (Transportation Infrastructure Durability Center) at UMO;
- Apply administrative and operating experience derived from the Downeaster, NNEPRA and Amtrak;
- Include visions for an integrated passenger rail system in future Maine State Railroad Plans;
- Focus on the "Last Mile" connections that are important to passenger rail utilization.

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