

TRAINRIDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF **TRAINRIDERS/NORTHEAST**



Chairman's Update

TRAIN HOSTS NEEDED!

Prior to our annual meeting, we reviewed the host reports to find the hosts with the most round trips on the Downeaster since last year's annual meeting. That exercise revealed that Robert Rodman had made 31 round trips, winning the grand prize of two round-trip first class (sleeping car) tickets to anywhere that Amtrak operates. David Watkins with 22 round trips and Arthur Hussey with 21 round trips, won 2nd and 3rd prizes: two round trip tickets each on the Acela Express. Mitch Draper and Albert White—tied with 15 trips each—received engraved awards for their efforts. We congratulate these folks for their commitment to make at least one round trip per month as host on the Downeaster. Obviously, this year's winners far exceeded the requirement of 12 round trips. And by the way, overheard at one table at the meeting as awards were being given out: "It's a guy thing." Not so; Eve Reed from Boston made 14 round trips, also exceeding the required 12.

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ANNUAL MEETING A TREAT AND A PLEASURE

This year's meeting took place May 11 at Portland's Holiday Inn By The Bay and by the way the meeting had us greeting: MDOT Commissioner David Cole, in addition to Director of Passenger Services Ron Roy, senior planner Tracy Perez, and special projects coordinator Sue Moreau; NNEPRA Director John Englert; Transportation Director of the City of Portland Jeff Monroe; David Willauer of the Portland Council of Governments; John and Molly Melrose (John was MDOT Commissioner for eight years and remains a staunch ally); former Maine Governor Angus King (another terrific ally); Executive Director of the Joint Powers Authority which is responsible for operating the Capitol Corridor trains between San Jose and Sacramento, CA, Gene Skoropowski.

Also present were academics Stephen Pesci and Don Brieselden; business leaders Katherine Weare, Nancy Gray, Catherine Glover, and Mary Herman (Mary is married to Angus King); Amtrak's Director of

Maine Rail Services Victor Salemme, General Superintendent of the New England Division of Amtrak Michael De Cataldo, and many other extra-special guests. And then there was all of us.

ALL OF US: Members of TrainRiders/Northeast

are the smartest, most gorgeous, most clever, most hard-working, most clear-thinking, most interesting, funniest, liveliest, and best all-round people from coast to coast, although—your editors never exaggerate—it must be said that most of us live in Maine and New Hampshire.

Our counsel Bruce Sleeper managed the business of the election of board members so smoothly that not only was it over within seconds but everyone roared approval.

We gave a hearty hail and farewell to Herb Connell, who retired after serving on TNE's board of Directors for 13 years. The Downeaster "Host With Most" award was won by Robert Rodman, who received two round-trip cross-country first class Amtrak tickets, sleeper includ-

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Speaking at the meeting, **GENE SKOROPOWSKI**, Executive Director of the Joint Powers Authority which is responsible for operating California's Capitol Corridor trains, pointed out similarities between the Downeaster and the California trains.

DOWNEASTER TO INCREASE SPEED AUGUST 1

June 2, Portland Transportation Center—Travelers were surprised to see Governor John Baldacci speaking at the Portland station this morning. Members of TrainRiders/Northeast in attendance were anticipating important news from the governor. They got it.

"It's an honor to stand here today and announce the beginning of a new era of partnership with respect to passenger rail service in Maine," the gov-

ernor began.

With Guilford Transportation executive David Fink at his side, the governor announced that the state and Guilford had reached an agreement on increasing the Downeaster's speed.

"Today's agreements," the governor continued, "are just a few steps of many we will collectively be making in the next months and years to strengthen the viability of passenger rail service in Maine."

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U.S. SEEKS STATES' INPUT ON PRIVATE AMTRAK ROUTES

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION has sought information from states on how they would contract rail service to private companies if Amtrak were dismantled and some or all of its routes were open to competition. The Transportation Department also sought to determine which states would be interested in bidding out and overseeing privately run city-to-city service and which would be best positioned to move forward.

Frustrated by Amtrak's perennial losses and annual fights with Congress over funding, the Bush administration has proposed to overhaul the railroad's operations with a plan that would dismantle Amtrak's responsibilities as a federal corporation and give major oversight to the states, which could contract service to private companies or return the business to Amtrak.

Amtrak runs 250 trains in 46 states on an average weekday. Ridership topped a record 24 million in 2003 and current figures show Amtrak could carry more passengers this year. It has operated city-to-city routes without competition for 33 years.

A spokesman for the railroad had no comment, but Amtrak President David Gunn is skeptical of privatization efforts, especially any proposal to separate Amtrak from its responsibility for maintaining its infrastructure.

Congress is weighing the administration's plan and has permitted the FRA to gauge interest from the states even though many lawmakers whose states benefit from Amtrak service are not convinced that breaking up the railroad is wise. State governments have also expressed some skepticism, particularly over cost, at a time of severe budget restraints.

The railroad has taken steps on its own to stem red ink by cutting nearly 3,000 jobs and other costs over the past two years and by eliminating unprofitable and inefficient businesses. It has also boosted its high-speed Acela service and is addressing some pressing repairs and updates to track, train cars and tunnels.

—Excerpted from Reuters, by John Crowley, April 13

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NORTHEAST BUSINESS GROUPS GET ON TRACK BEHIND AMTRAK

AMTRAK HAS A NEW BOOSTER CLUB. More than 50 chambers of commerce and other business groups on the East Coast, including some in Maine, have joined together to lobby Congress to fully fund the railroad's \$1.8 billion budget request.

The Bush administration has sent Congress a \$900 million request for Amtrak. Amtrak President David Gunn said that amount eventually would force a shutdown of the system. The railroad urgently needs capital investments, he said—warning that “time is running out” for some of its aging infrastructure.

The newly formed Amtrak Business Coalition has sent a letter to congressional appropriations leaders urging them to meet Amtrak's full funding request for fiscal year 2005.

The group announced its efforts at a boarding gate in Union Station in Washington, DC, as passengers filed off trains in the background. Union Station was the third-busiest station in the Amtrak system last year, behind Penn Station in New York and 30th Street Station in Philadelphia.

John D. Porcari, a member of the transportation committee of the Greater Washington Board of Trade—and a former Maryland transportation secretary—called Amtrak the “lifeblood” of the northeast's economy. He said the railroad served more than 6 million riders and employed nearly 4,000 people in Washington, Maryland and Virginia.

The Amtrak Business Coalition has members in Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Virginia.

—By Craig Mauro, the Associated Press, May 7

ACELA EXPRESS UPDATE

Amtrak has cut Acela Express business class fares Boston/NYC to \$99 or less daily. Ridership has increased significantly ever since, up to nearly 29% in the first four months of FY04 versus the same period a year ago.

Low fares are not the only reason six million passengers have boarded Amtrak's high-speed trains since their introduction. For the business traveler there's the ability to actually work—or not—aboard the train. All Acela Express trains provide the option of a Quiet Car, which is a sanctuary from the beeps, tones and rings of modern life, where passengers can relax or work without distractions.

Amtrak offers 10 round-trip Boston/NYC trips and 13 round-trip NYC/DC trips each weekday.

—With thanks to *The 470* newsletter of the 470 Railroad Club



DOWNEASTER TO SHUT DOWN DURING DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION

Security measures imposed on the rail line during the convention in Boston from July 26 to 29 were burdensome, said John Englert, executive director of NNEPRA. Workers will use the down time to make rail improvements in preparation for the speed increase in August.

BY THE WAY: Despite the incorrect information being given space in some newspapers, the overall results of Amtrak FY to date show that the Downeaster carried a total of 11,163 more riders than last year and earned \$37,702 more in profits. This is hardly the “dismal flop” that the Manchester Union Leader quoted in its dubious report on 5/24/04.

AMTRAK RAIL SALE: Check out Amtrak's website for rail travel bargains. Amtrak's sale fares are located at <http://tickets.amtrak.com/Amtrak/railsale>

AMTRAK'S EBAY STORE: More bargains are available on Amtrak's ebay store site: <http://www.store.ebay.com/amtrakauctions>

ROMANCE ON THE 682: THEY MEET ON THE DOWNEASTER, HE PROPOSES ON TOP OF THE EIFFEL TOWER

When Pascale Delsol took a new job in the fall of 2002, she eschewed a driving commute from Freeport, Maine, to Dover, NH, for a train one. "The train was more cost effective, and anyway I had a subscription to the *New Yorker*, and taking the train meant I could read it," she said in a phone interview. She added that her "little old car," a VW Golf, was not doing well.

Conductor Mike Shaw noticed that the beautiful passenger liked to read, also that she didn't wear a wedding ring. "We chatted," he said. "'Hi, how ya doing,' that sort of thing. We talked about skiing." He had never noticed any other female passengers on the Downeaster. "It was just her."

Though she observed that the conductor was "very cute, hospitable, congenial, and extra personable," she decided not to be too friendly. "I can be a loner," she said, "and riding the train was my down time, my quiet time." But her interest picked up when Mike talked about his chickens and offered to show her a photo of one — Chimney Chicken, the escape artist hen that made a nest beside the chimney, laid eggs "all over the place," and frequently had to be chased down and returned to the pen.

"I felt that the chimney chicken was a loner, like me," said Pascale. She also told herself that single guys don't have chickens, and a single guy who *does* have chickens might be the right kind. After he showed her the picture, she was oddly touched that he had "gone home, turned on his computer and printer, printed out a photo, enlarged it, and brought it to work. He did that just for me."

She began feeling self-conscious because, leaving home at 7 AM to catch the train in Portland and returning around 8 PM after a day's work for a company that runs incentive programs for banks and credit unions, "He always saw me at my worst."

They decided to go skiing. Mike: "Neither one of us was sure if it was a date or not." Pascale: "The rest is history. We both knew right away."

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FROM THE MDOT COMMISSIONER'S CORNER

DAVID COLE, THE COMMISSIONER OF THE MAINE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, said in an interview that he is not a linear thinker but a person who likes to think both vertically and horizontally.

This is a trait he used to good advantage during the many years he spent in economic development, where he helped individuals and businesses develop their game plans. "I enjoyed supporting businesses, helping them get a solid foundation. I am a big believer in business plans. I like to help people, and I like to help enterprises get started."

He added that the Downeaster is such an enterprise, and that it has to work smartly and work to maximum profit and minimum subsidy. He has ridden the Bullet train as well as a train between Moscow and St. Petersburg. "I would love to see a train," he said, "but it takes time." By taking time he meant that work and decision-making "can go beyond our control. People give us way too much power and authority."

A railroad, he said, needs "constant care and feeding." At the current time, the MDOT wants to 1) stabilize the Portland-Boston service, 2) increase the speed, and 3) insure funding. To realize this goal, the state is now doing an environmental assessment and working on a capital plan. "The feds want to see how the train is going to operate and how much it is going to earn." After the federal government has given the go-ahead, the state is eligible to raise the capital.

The environmental assessment requires six months to complete. Cole mentioned that the state and Amtrak must also work with Guilford Transportation's freight operations that use the same tracks. "The game

plan is to stabilize the Portland-Boston service so we can get a fifth train running (Portland-Boston). We've spent over \$100 million on passenger rail projects so far."

However, Commissioner Cole was unable to set a date, even a ballpark one, for when the passenger train might reach Rockland on those tracks, which were upgraded several years ago with the intent of establishing a park-and-ride lot in Rockland for the hundreds of people whose highway commute takes as long as two hours in each direction to Bath Iron Works.

Passenger rail service from Portland north to Freeport and Brunswick will be more viable if our congressional delegation is able to earmark \$13 million for an additional train set to add to the fleet.

Commissioner Cole was upbeat on the subject of a seasonal excursion train that was announced at Governor Baldacci's June 2nd press conference in Portland where the major news was that the Downeaster may now begin traveling at up to 79 mph. Plans for the excursion train are currently being worked out (quickly, as the tourist season is already upon us), but the plan is for it to operate between Portland and Rockland.

Excursion trains have become a popular tourist draw in the state in recent years, and while some have worked out better than others, none have operated over as extensive a distance as that between Portland and Rockland, which amounts to 81 miles. It is hoped the excursions can be event-driven (Rockland's Lobster Festival, for example). The train would travel no faster than 35-50 mph owing to a lack of crossing

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NH SUPREME COURT RULES FOR TRUCKING INDUSTRY

CONCORD, NH— The state Supreme Court has ruled that New Hampshire can't use gasoline tax money to help pay for a commuter rail line.

The state Constitution says the money, 18 cents a gallon, must be used exclusively for highway construction and maintenance or supervising highway traffic. The state says that should include the proposed commuter railroad connecting Nashua with the commuter line that runs from Lowell to Boston. The cost of the project in New Hampshire is about \$12 million.

The state argues railroads are public highways and that the rail project would improve roads by reducing traffic, so it fits the constitutional restriction.

But the court sided with the New Hampshire Motor Transport Association, a trucking industry group that argues the money should go only to highways. The court noted that the Legislature has rejected numerous efforts to change the Constitution to include railroads.

—Associated Press, April 19

May 24 editorial in the *The Union Leader*, 100 William Loeb Drive, P. O. Box 9555, Manchester, NH 03108-9555

DOWN-(and-out)-EASTER: Fantasy Train Meets Reality

AT A DECEMBER 15, 2001 CEREMONY in Exeter marking the inaugural ride of the Downeaster, former Mass Governor Michael Dukakis lectured: "Today, at long last, rectifies a terrible mistake when we suspended rail service from Massachusetts."

More sober-headed officials expressed doubts. Transportation Commissioner Carol Murray warned that the ridership probably would be far less than proponents hoped. It should be no surprise to see, almost 3 1/2 years later that Murray was right.

Last week the NNEPRA, according to an AP report, "conceded that ridership expectations on the Portland-to-Boston route had been overly optimistic." The authority wants an additional \$2.9 million in federal subsidies to keep the little-demanded service running.

Even after acknowledging that the Downeaster is a flop, authority officials still said they hoped to expand the service from Portland to Montreal. There's nothing like an unlimited supply of federal handouts to keep the spirits up.

Self-sustaining passenger rail service in northern New England is a wonderful idea—one that we would love to see become reality. While we're at it, we'd also love to breakfast with some Hobbits tomorrow morning, and in the afternoon take tea with a band of wizards and fairies. Alas, such fantasies are consigned to fairy tales—and statute books.

A response to the editorial above . . .

Dear Sir or Madam:

Thank you for today's report on expanded use of trains at the Durham-UNH station on the Boston-Portland Downeaster line. The April-on-April ridership growth stems partly from the May, 2003, expansion of Durham service from four days a week to seven days. It is impressive that a 166% ridership increase followed a 75% service increase. This demonstrates the attractiveness of more frequent departures.

Moreover, while overall ridership on the line remains below two-years-ago levels, it is up a healthy 8.2% from one year ago. This is for October-April, the first seven months of federal fiscal 2004.

With gasoline prices expected to remain high, and oil refinery and transportation systems stretched to the limit, New Englanders are likely to become even more thankful for the rail choice in the future, and to find themselves in stronger disagreement with your editorial opposition to Boston-Portland passenger rail service (May 24).

Incidentally, the \$2.9 million in federal funds which you criticized will be used primarily to increase capacity on the Boston-Portland route, allowing operation of more trains and—as the Durham example demonstrates—setting the stage for even stronger ridership growth.

Please review your editorial position in light of the above information.

Sincerely,

Ross B. Capon
Executive Director
National Association of Railroad Passengers
Washington, DC

Wayne E. Davis
Chairman
TrainRiders Northeast
Portland, ME

TOWN OFFICIALS UPSET OVER TRAIN FUND DIVERSION:

Plan raises questions about proposed extension of rail service to Brunswick

The rail authority (NNEPRA) that operates Amtrak's Downeaster has called a meeting today (May 21) to seek permission to tap into nearly \$3 million in federal subsidies to make up for declining ridership and to make repairs to the track.

The plan, which would dip into money previously earmarked to extend passenger rail through Freeport to Brunswick, irked some officials in those towns.

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And yet another response to the editorial . . .

Dear Editor:

Success for Amtrak's Downeaster passenger rail service a fantasy you say? Sorry to disappoint you, but the only fantasy here is the one which assumes that all travel needs can be satisfied by spending ever more government billions on additional blacktop and on prop up "private" airlines.

Not only is your editorial of 5/24/04 wrong in concept, its facts are inaccurate. For the past seven months, Downeaster ridership has been up anywhere from 8% to 18%. Perhaps early ridership projections were overly optimistic—but come on, cut some slack here—projections are just that—projections made by humans based on data from previous periods. With no previous period to draw upon except the inaugural year, the Downeaster was too new to have any meaningful "ridership projections." The first year the service operated it shattered all ridership estimates provided by transportation consultants. Everyone familiar with rail advocacy knew that the first year of service would bring rail fans from everywhere in the world to experience the novelty of the train. We also knew it would take several years to establish any meaningful ridership trends. What we couldn't know was that fallout from 9/11 and a war in Iraq would drive down ridership on *all modes* of transportation, including, unsurprisingly, the Downeaster. Only now are we realizing the potential of the service as shown by the ridership figures over the last seven months.

Officials may have "guessed" too optimistically; it's their projections that are off, not the service. The actual ridership, growing at a significant rate over last year's figures, should be cause for celebration. You, on the other hand, state that "...the Downeaster is a flop." Tsk. Tsk. Tsk.

As for your thinking "self-sustaining passenger rail service...is a wonderful idea, this is simply more fantasy on your part. *No passenger train on the planet is self sustaining—any more than roads and airports are self sustaining.*

As for your loving "...to breakfast with some Hobbits tomorrow morning..." be advised that Hobbits wouldn't dream of breaking bread with Trolls.

Sincerely,

Wayne E. Davis, Chairman,
TrainRiders/Northeast

LOTS AND BLOCKS IN BOSTON'S BIG DIG: Silver Line, Urban Ring don't excite Dukakis

SUPPORTERS OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION DON'T COME ANY MORE GENUINE THAN OUR FORMER GOVERNOR, MICHAEL DUKAKIS. So it was slightly surprising this week when, at a Harvard University panel discussion, he said he wasn't excited about the proposed Urban Ring transit line or the partly completed Silver Line. What the area requires, he said, is a "first-class modern rail system," one that would link Boston's mutually isolated North and South stations. It wasn't the first time Dukakis had endorsed the idea, but on Monday night at the Taubman Center for State and Local Government he was suggesting it could be the new objective of the Artery Business Committee. That's the group developer Norman Leventhal and property owner Robert Beal and a few pals put together in the late 1980s to make sure the Big Dig didn't bury business.

A scholarly 60-page paper by David Luberoff, associate director of the Taubman center, reviews the history, contributions, and occasional failure of the Artery Business Committee. That group was extraordinarily busy behind the scenes, making sure detours worked, antinoise and dust-control plans were effective, planned ramps were locally acceptable, and enough money streamed in to finish the \$14.6 billion task.

Committee chairman John Drew, president of the world Trade Center Boston and one of the panelists, said the group should not go out of business as the Big Dig rides into the sunset. But, he said, any new project it backs would have to be publicly supported, very specific, and "deliverable."

A first-class job for Boston's Artery Business Committee: Build a first-class rail system to link the mutually isolated North and South Stations

The Big Dig isn't quite done, of course. That last part—a park system and modest development along the corridor—is turning out to be the toughest. The park designs are coming along, but despite three years of intense work no one knows who will own, fund, maintain, and oversee the new public space.

A huge related issue—how many buildings, of what size and for what use—not only remains undecided, it has barely been mentioned in public. Representatives of EDAA, the design team for the central four blocks in the Wharf District, told us it's such a hot issue it's not the one they're going to deal with. So who is?

Artery Business Committee members have always wanted more "activation" of the land. They "believe the plan called for too much parkland in relation to the number of people who lived, worked, shopped, or visited the area," the report says. Clearly, if the leadership of the parks development wasn't split between the feuding City of Boston and the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, decisions on these matters might be forthcoming.

The committee has made clear what business wanted; as Luberoff noted, the project done right was good for its members and ultimately "very good for downtown Boston."

David Lee, a partner at Stull & Lee Inc. architecture, said, "They got things done without fuss and bother, but he added that others envied the business community's clout. And wish it would focus on other worthy projects. It won't be easy after the Big Dig experience. "It sucked all the air out of a lot of other things," Lee said.

—Excerpted from a report in the *Boston Globe*, May 8, by Thomas C. Palmer

We hope the Artery Business Committee will take on the Dukakis challenge to connect the missing link and, while they're at it, do what's most humane in the above-mentioned four block Wharf District, which we strolled through last week after arriving at South Station via Concord Trailways coach from Bangor.

Walking out of the station via the front doors, we were as surprised as Dorothy after her house blew into The Land of Oz. The new spaciousness and airiness of the district was palpable and became more so as we strolled up Atlantic Avenue, past a luxury hotel and the short bridge that leads to the children's museum, to the aquarium to commune with seals blissfully a-swim in the outdoor tank and, hunger pangs tickling, across the street and into the maze of narrow, crooked old streets to Faneuil Hall Marketplace.

Crossing the street we walked under skeletal steel trusses that once supported the overhead highway. It was like strolling through a contemporary exhibit of giant sculpture under a giant sky. The spatial dimensions were so different from what we have always known that we asked our Bostonian companions two questions: "Is this the last remnant of the Big Dig?" and "What happens now?" They said yes to the first question and drew a blank on the second. "It's the subject of lively discussion," we were told. We swept an arm toward the mega-width Atlantic Avenue and commented it could be divided in two and a new course of city blocks complete with high rises constructed. Better, it could also be designed into a greensward.

Eating take-out Indian food on a bench shaded by trees in the marketplace, instinct informed us we were not far from the DOWNEASTER'S own North Station. Now, it happens that we can step off the DOWNEASTER and walk briskly from North Station to Beacon Hill, Back Bay, or Filene's Basement. But the footpath from North Station to South Station has proved elusive. It's plain as day on street maps but so tangled up with the old overhead highway as to give the bravest man the willies. In any event, the process of the Big Dig has been changing the streetscape so consistently that city maps are obsolete. But munching on a samosa in the marketplace, we sensed North Station was nearby.

It is our wish that the Artery Business Committee take steps to enlighten the human spirit in the Wharf District (it was so upbeat to walk through, we even hope secretly the last steel girders are left in place and surrounded by trees and flowers) and, more importantly, that committee members heed the Dukakis advice to build a first-class rail system to link the two stations.

In the meantime, if any DOWNEASTER rider should blaze a foot trail between North and South stations, please let readers of this newsletter know how you did it. Despite the potential for a fantastic rail link, some of us may always prefer to walk.

... TRAIN FUND DIVERSION *(continued from page 4)*

Dale Olmstead, Freeport town manager, expressed disappointment that neither Freeport nor Brunswick was notified of this decision in advance. "Both towns were totally caught off guard," he said.

Stephanie Slocum, executive director of the Brunswick Downtown Association, was also disappointed by the move, which is expected to delay extension of the passenger line up the coast. "We feel strongly that train service to Brunswick would have a positive impact on the community," she said, speaking on behalf of the association.

Peter Robbins, owner of the Bohemian Coffee House in Brunswick and a member of TrainRiders/Northeast, was more sanguine. "I'd rather have the Boston-to-Portland route faster and better than have that fall into decline and abandon trains to Maine," he said.

In making the request to dip into the federal subsidies, the NNEPRA conceded that ridership expectations have been overly optimistic. It was believed ridership would continue to grow after exceeding projections in the first year. Instead, ridership has declined and estimates have been adjusted to reflect actual performance.

The cost of the expansion to Brunswick is \$60 million, according to Olmstead, citing figures he received from the State DOT. Only \$46 million has been identified, he said. If this measure passes, the gap would increase from \$14 million to \$17 million.

"What's the plan to fill the \$17 million gap?" he asked. "And when will the train come to Brunswick and stop in Freeport? I don't think they have the answers to those questions." This decision calls into doubt whether a Portland-to-Brunswick rail link will ever be added, he said. "The state's commitment is there but where's the funding or the plan?" Olmstead asked. By linking to Brunswick, Amtrak ridership would increase, he predicted.

The decision to draw the funds from those set aside for a link through Freeport to Brunswick will also have a negative impact on development in Freeport, Olmstead said. "We'll lose a golden opportunity in town if we can't get the state to give us a schedule and stick to it, he said in reference to long-standing plans for a train station and the economic development it would spur.

The rail authority hopes to tap the federal subsidies for \$1.7 million for operations and another \$1.2 million for track upgrades.

Ron Roy, the MDOT director of passenger transportation, didn't foresee any problems in tapping into the money set aside for expansion. He said the first priority was to stabilize the Portland-to-Boston service. If that fails, he explained, then any discussion of an expansion of service to Brunswick would be moot.

—By Leslie Talmadge and the AP,
excerpted from the *Times-Record*, May 21

...HOSTS *(continued from page 1)*

Despite our best efforts, there are still trains that go "hostless." We are planning new classes for host training this month and are looking for more candidates for the program. Please promote our program with friends and neighbors who might also be interested in helping to keep our Downeaster one of the most popular trains in the Amtrak system. Our host program is described on our website and the application form can be downloaded and sent to us to apply. Please consider becoming part of this most successful program.

Thank you for your continued support of our efforts.

—WD

GARY/CHICAGO AIRPORT COULD BRING WORLD CLASS TRAVEL TO THE MIDWEST

IN MARCH 1999, THE MIDWEST REGIONAL RAIL INITIATIVE AND THE FRA informed the Indiana High Speed Rail Association that an alignment for a federally designated high-speed rail corridor was approved from Chicago to Indianapolis.

After the association told the planners the line would have to be rerouted to include a stop at the Gary/Chicago Airport in Indiana, it lobbied for the designation, which was approved in January 2000.

The Indiana High Speed Rail Association has since had its sight set on the airport in Gary becoming a major transportation center, not only for northwest Indiana and the Chicago metropolitan area but the entire Midwest.

It is essential that transportation planners and decision makers recognize the importance of bringing transportation modes together to serve a diverse traveling public.

When I fly into Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris I can choose to take a convenient transit rail line into the heart of the city or board a high-speed passenger train to my destination near the Mediterranean Sea. If my choice is to ride the TGV train to Marseilles, I can purchase a "seamless ticket" for both flight and train ride.

The successful travel scenarios that exist in Europe can and should exist at the Gary/Chicago International Airport. Bringing high-speed trains from Chicago, Fort Wayne, and other communities into the airport means that passengers may fly to any of several distant destinations or take a commuter train to Valparaiso, Michigan City, Chicago or points in between.

The days of putting a rail station in one part of town and a "stagecoach" in another are over. Planners must consolidate travel modes to create optimal sense for travel convenience and efficiency.

With the Gary/Chicago International Airport becoming a Midwest transportation center, everyone benefits.

The jobs created by this massive project will employ thousands of regional workers, and the ripple effect will give life and success to every business development dream in this area as well as greater efficiencies to all who travel.

Let us then work together—planners, business leaders and elected officials—to implement a transportation center that includes air, intercity and commuter rail, and bus services at the Gary/Chicago International Airport.

—W. Dennis Hodges, Executive Director Indiana High Speed Rail Association. The above op ed appeared in both the *Chicago Sun Times* and the *Gary Post Tribune*, April 27

...Annual Meeting

continued from page 1

ed. Hosts Dave Watkins and Art Hussey each won two round-trips on the Acela Express to Washington, DC.

Engraved awards were given to Mitch Draper and Albert White, a host who was the conductor on the last overnight run of the State of Maine Express. That train originated in Bangor, traveled to Waterville, Augusta and Brunswick before arriving in Portland, where it met seamlessly with trains from Rockland and Lewiston. The merged train, which carried four and five sleeper cars, a dining car, and "coaches as needed," left Portland at 9:30 PM to arrive in New York at 7:30 AM.

For the last run, Al was photographed as he padlocked the doors of Portland's Union Station (since demolished) and pulled out for the last trip to New York. Al still fits into his uniform, which he was last seen wearing on the Downeaster's inaugural run.

We held our breath as Governor King stuck his hand in the raffle jar, pulled out a ticket, announced the name of the winner of two tickets for a cruise. But no winner cheered, ran forward, or fell off his chair. And no one in the room recognized the name. Randy offered that the unknown person lives in New Harbor. No matter. Our organization can track anyone, even elusive Mainers in coastal villages.

Two speakers addressed our cause; each got right to the point and, in every other way, was altogether our type of guy. First up was ANGUS KING, who talked a little about the letdowns of being an ex governor and a lot about passenger rail in Maine. What he misses most about governorship, he said, is the parking. He gets up every morning, goes out to the car, sits in the passenger seat, and the car doesn't go anywhere. He noted ruefully that he and Mary had to walk across the street to get to the meeting.

He told us he recently turned 60 and noticed his Harley wasn't being used much and "a motorcycle that isn't used is a dangerous one." He sold it. The good news is he replaced it with a Porsche, complemented by vanity plates that read "four-wheel Harley." We know the message on the plate is abbreviated, but "four-wheel Harley" is how the

governor verbalized it.

In regard to Amtrak operations, he pointed out that people can now live and work anywhere. "The basis of the economy is talent; it's no longer natural resources," he said. "From that point of view, the Downeaster is very good. It's part of Maine's economic future. It's part of our continuing effort to maintain and create the Maine economy."

He mentioned one quantifying factor: The Downeaster has got to get its speed up. (TNE and Amtrak are working on the problem, which is still held up despite the now three judgments—two by the STB and one by an appellate court—in favor of a 79 mph speed. Our only response is to say that democracy is messy and its gears grind infinitely slowly despite one's best efforts.)

Governor King added that the Downeaster is part of Maine's future—although, "If a person moves to Maine partially because of the train, you can't put a dollar value on it. But if gas costs continue to go up, the train will be a psychological and emotional link as well as an economic one."

He closed by saying members of Train-Riders must continue to pass the word.

GENE SKOROPOWSKI, the Executive Director of the Joint Powers Authority which is responsible for operating California's Capitol Corridor trains, noted similarities between the Downeaster and the California trains: both concepts were introduced in 1989, "only in Maine the gestation period was 13 years." Gene's trains also started with four daily round-trips—but in California the runs soon jumped to 12 daily trips—and now the state wants 18. Eighteen round trips. Don't we wish.

The facts, which make sense to us, are as follows: the more trains Gene was able to add, the more the ridership increased. It increased despite 11 fare increases over the years.

Like Governor Angus King, Gene Skorpowski urged us to "keep up that incremental momentum (on the state). You've got to keep working. You've got to expand your in-state marketing. It counts."

He urged us toward a vision plan and a service plan, showing graphs, facts and figures on the screen.

Gene is such a dynamic, forward-looking guy, he stimulated the thinking of everyone in the room. He got us to brainstorming.

In conclusion, we can report that our 16th Annual Meeting was a rousing success. ■

...Commissioner Cole

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signals at grade crossings and other obstacles. The excursion train would be concerned with the trip more than the destination," said Cole.

(We would like to add that since eating lobsters in Rockland or any other Maine city is a serious summer activity, perhaps the destination *is* the goal; however, we get the point about the fun of riding excursion trains.)

Commissioner Cole concluded by reiterating that the MDOT must take a flexible approach to its planning, much of which depends on the level of federal funding, environmental assessments, and the will of the citizenry. "We're working through real people, in real communities," he said, alluding to the variety of interests for modes of transportation. "The bottom line is we have to share the tracks with Guilford and its freight needs, and we must do it right, because we'll have to live with it for a long time. But we're working with NNEPRA and Guilford, and right now we are in a technical problem-solving mode. And we feel positive." ■

...ROMANCE ON THE 682

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They went to France because she wanted him to meet members of her family who live there (his family has origins in Maine but lives in DC, New York City, upstate New York and Connecticut). On Friday the 13th they went to the top of the Eiffel Tower. He proposed. She said yes. As Pascale explained, the famous day is not the bad luck omen in France that it is here. To the contrary it is considered an extraordinary day. Sales of lottery tickets soar, and it is known that if there is something you want to take a chance on doing, you should do it on Friday the 13th.

Pascale now rides the Downeaster with a ring on her finger, and the wedding is set for July 3 in Wells, Maine. They will honeymoon in Iceland and France and, as Mike says, they hope to make it a yearly trip.

l'elicitations et bon voyage!

...A FASTER DOWNEASTER

continued from page 1

He noted that he considers passenger rail and the Downeaster service as essential tools for the future of Maine. He pointed to rising fuel prices as one reason, and noted that the Downeaster is an important new tool linked to the state's tourism marketing strategy and new economic opportunities. The train is a step toward environmentally sustainable growth and opportunity, and will help strengthen Maine's urban centers while building economic links with Boston.

"Passenger rail is just one piece in a network of feeder bus systems, excursion rail, transit connections, cruise ships, and more," he said. "None of these components work in isolation.

"First, Guilford Transportation Industries and the Maine Eastern Railroad are working together, business-to-business, to develop a passenger rail excursion pilot project this summer from Portland and Brunswick and Rockland along Guilford's lines and Maine DOT's Rockland Branch. This pilot project will introduce the first rail passengers to this rail line since the 1960s. Our objective is to begin to demonstrate the future for passenger rail service along this corridor—to Freeport and Brunswick and eventually Lewiston-Auburn. For this summer the excursions will likely be built around festivals, special events, and cruise ship dockings in Rockland and elsewhere. Guilford's willingness to give access to Maine Eastern for

these excursions is a pivotal first step.

"Second," the governor continued, "together we all today announce a mutual goal of adding a fifth round trip between Portland and Boston.

"Third, together we have a mutual goal of reducing travel time between Portland and Boston to 2 hours and 30 minutes by October 2005. These reductions will take many steps, but incrementally, working together, we can and will get there. Today's agreements get us moving in the right direction.

"Specifically, Maine DOT will be investing up to \$1.5 million this season between Portland and the Maine border to improve travel times and ride quality and capacity. An additional \$4.5 million in 2005 will allow even more speed and capacity.

"Importantly, Guilford has agreed to allow 79 mph by August 1st on some portions of the rail. The capital investments in 2004 and 2005 and ongoing discussions with Amtrak will allow incremental progress."

The governor congratulated Maine DOT, Amtrak, the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, Wayne Davis of TrainRiders/Northeast, Guilford Rail, and others who are working to finalize a strong and viable business plan to guide the state confidently as it strengthens and expands the new passenger rail service.

"Because of this business planning effort," the governor emphasized, "we know that each step we are taking is improving the effectiveness and efficiency of this service—benefiting both the riders and the taxpayers."



FREE SHUTTLE BUS EXTENDS TO MAINE MALL

The Portland Explorer now serves the Maine Mall as well as the Jetport, Transportation Center (Amtrak and Concord Trailways), Vermont Transit, Casco Bay Ferry Lines, four hotels and an Old Port restaurant. It is supported by the contributing businesses, which have provided \$40,000 toward matching federal funds. The bus has been in seasonal operation for two years and is modeled on the MDOT Explore Maine plan that encourages tourists to travel by air, rail, ferries and buses.

The air-conditioned bus, popular with guests at the respective hotels, operates from 11:30 AM to 6:45 PM Sunday through Friday and most holidays and from 9:10 AM to 9:05 PM Saturday. It will cease operations December 30 and begin anew May 1, 2005.

THE TRAINRIDER

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