

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

**Update on
the current
findings of
the governor's
task force.**

TRAINRIDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF TRAINRIDERS/NORTHEAST



PUBLIC SUPPORTS GREATER USE OF RAIL



ACCORDING TO A NATION-WIDE HARRIS POLL, the American public wants to see more freight and passenger traffic going by rail.

The poll, which was released February 8, shows that while 63% of Americans would like to see rail having an increasing share of freight transportation, 35% favored moving more by air and 24% by truck. Other options offered to respondents were coastal shipping, favored by 17%; pipelines, 13%; inland waterway, 8%. Because respondents could choose more than one mode, the totals add up to more than 100 percent.

COMMUTER AND LONG-DISTANCE TRAINS TOP THE LIST of nine modes of transportation that adults would like to see "have an increasing share of passenger transportation," with 44% selecting commuter trains and 35% long-distance ones.

Other options included local bus service, 23%; airlines 23%; local travel by car, 11%; travel by bicycle, 11%; long-distance travel by car, 10%; pedestrian travel, 8%, and long-distance bus service, 6%.

The poll was conducted online within the United States between December 8 and 14, 2005. ■

There is no chairman's report in this issue to allow space for the two views on last issue's editorial. (see page 8)

BICYCLISTS AND THE DOWNEASTER

Since early on, bicyclists and the Bicycle Coalition of Maine have advocated for the return of rail service to

BY JEFFREY MILLER
Bicycle Coalition of Maine

Maine. Why would bicyclists care about trains? One simple reason: The combined benefits of the independent travel and exploration of a bicycle combined with the long-distance travel of a train make an ideal marriage for any traveler.

Bicyclists in many other countries, especially Europe and Japan, know this.

In some countries as many as 40% of all train riders get to or from the station via bicycles, and many of the trains fully accommodate bicyclists with roll-on service that allows them to board with their bicycles as is—no packing, disassembly, or hassle.

Despite the convenience and ease of roll-on for bicyclists, it is more the exception than the rule in the United States. It is becoming more common in West Coast states, but until recently only the Vermonter was known to have roll-on service in the Northeast.

As soon as bicyclists caught wind of the Downeaster, the Bicycle Coalition of Maine began working closely with TrainRiders/Northeast and the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority to ensure that the train provides roll-on. And for this excellent service we are grateful. Roll-on provides additional riders with unique train and bike ride options.

With the Downeaster, bicyclists are allowed to roll their bikes on in Boston's North Station, Wells, and

Portland. Unfortunately, roll-on service is not available at other stations due to the fact that 1) bicycles are parked in the baggage car and 2) other train stations do not have long enough platforms to accommodate both the passenger cars and the baggage car.

Bicyclists buy tickets for themselves and their bikes (\$14 or \$13 for 62+) and are strongly advised to call ahead of time to confirm availability.

One of the great benefits for bicyclists on the Downeaster is that with three options to board and hop off, bicyclists have a wide variety of potential bike tours. A popular example includes a train ride from Portland to Wells and then pushing off on the Eastern Trail's interim on-road route back to Portland. The Eastern Trail is part of the East Coast Greenway, an envisioned trail connecting Calais, Maine, all the way to Key West, Florida, an urban shared-use trail counterpart to the Appalachian Trail that connects our cities and coastline.

The more options for bicyclists to roll-on and roll-off the Downeaster at other stops, the greater the appeal: more bicyclists will include the train in their bike rides. This is also the reason bicyclists



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...BICYCLISTS AND THE DOWNEASTER

(continued from page 1)

want to see the Downeaster's service extended northward. Ride options in, to, and from Freeport and Brunswick are fantastic.

Brunswick, the only nationally certified "Bicycle Friendly Community" in Maine (by the League of American



Bicyclists), features great trails and bike lanes. As a college town and with the connections possible with the Maine Eastern

Rail Road to Rockland (site of the BCM's Maine Lobster Ride & Roll each July), there are so many great options that will increase the popularity of this train and the services and connections it provides.

Another important component for bicyclists is convenient, secure, and preferably sheltered bicycle parking. This is key for local bicyclists who can commute to the train station on their bikes but don't need to take their bikes with them. For example, someone can hop on the train from their local Downeaster stop to go to Boston for a meeting or conference and can walk or use the T in downtown Boston. Most (if not all) of the stations in Maine do include good bike parking. Marketing "Bike & Train" trips to passengers and potential passengers would be a worthwhile endeavor to help disperse parking pressures and increase ridership.

The other reasons bicyclists love the train include the friendly staff, ample leg room, and options to get up and walk the aisle (very important in stretching out those legs before or after a bike ride). For those doing combined bike & train loops, doing the train ride before is exciting because you anticipate biking back the countryside that's streaking past outside the windows. A train ride afterward can be rewarding as you recount that you just biked this distance under your own power (and it's nice to have an easier time getting back).

The best thing that can be done to improve the Downeaster for bicyclists would be to somehow accommodate roll-on access at every station. While platform or staffing issues may present chal-

lenges at most stations, perhaps the Downeaster could experiment with having a few bike hooks inside the carriage cars as is done on train systems out west and in other countries. These can be tucked in the end of the car out of the way of the door or aisle and allows two to four bikes to be hung vertically from their front wheel. This would be popular with bicyclists who are traveling shorter distances or boarding or disembarking at a stop without the baggage car access. And for stations like Durham or Old Orchard Beach (looking forward to this new station), roll-on service would be popular among university students and tourists.

IMPROVEMENTS BICYCLISTS WOULD LIKE TO SEE include:

- Roll-on service at every station
- Extended service to Freeport and Brunswick
- Covered bike parking at all stations
- Better marketing of combined bike and train commuting

The multimodal benefits, the long-distance travel combined with individual mobility, and the sustainable transportation options of bikes and trains working in tandem are ideal. That is why the Bicycle Coalition of Maine and bicyclists support the Downeaster. We invite all current riders of the Downeaster to think about the multimodal options with bikes and do a train/bike ride this season so you can see for yourself. Visit our website at www.BikeMaine.org for safety tips, places to ride and a full list of bike events statewide.

Jeffrey Miller has been the Executive Director of the Bicycle Coalition of Maine since 1996 and a fan and customer of the Downeaster since its inception. While Jeff is certainly in love with all things bicycle, his first love was trains and his mother reported his first statement as a baby was "Choo choo go boom!" The Bicycle Coalition of Maine advocates for bicycling for transportation, recreation, health, and fun. Contact them for details about their many programs, services, and events at 207-623-4511 or visit them on the web at www.BikeMaine.org

1 VIEW ON LAST MONTH'S EDITORIAL

(continued from page 8)

the Sensible Transportation Act called for the state to look at alternative transportation models—such as passenger rail—rather than try to build its way out of gridlock, there is no real mechanism to fund these alternatives. This is where the Governor's Task Force on Passenger Rail Funding comes in. It has been asked to look at ways to fund the Downeaster's operational costs. Meanwhile, the Downeaster continues to amaze its critics by having one of the best ratios in the country for fare box recovery—about \$16M in ticket revenue. In addition, the Downeaster is generating about \$6.8M in annual business sales in Maine. Those figures, coupled with the approximately \$3M in wages for Maine residents directly and indirectly employed in the day-to-day operation of the Downeaster and the nearly \$2M in goods and services that the Downeaster spends in Maine certainly shows the growing economic importance of the service.

Though I am as frustrated as anyone with all the ongoing delays in improving and extending the Downeaster, I am proud of our accomplishments and our continuing efforts to move forward. I recently shared a letter with Governor Baldacci that my father had written to Governor Longley in 1975 in which he spoke about the need to establish Amtrak service in Maine. Governor Baldacci was passionate as always about his own support for passenger rail service.

As a member of TrainRiders, I plan to spend the summer talking to candidates for state office. I hope you will do the same. Please put on your walking shoes and get out there and meet the candidates. Let them know you support passenger rail and that you expect them to do the same.

—Rep. Boyd Marley, Portland, ME

AIRFARES BANK SHARPLY HIGHER

FOR MORE THAN A YEAR, the consultants at A.T. Kearney were accustomed to paying about \$100 for a round-trip ticket from Washington's Dulles International to such cities as Chicago, Atlanta and Orlando.

Those fares have increased to as much as \$300, and employees who take business trips must now look for cheaper fares out of alternative airports.

The fare increases are owed largely to the January demise of Independence Air. Experts predicted that the grounding of the discount carrier would send fares up, but few expected the increase to happen so quickly. Even some of the nation's so-called low-fare carriers are increasing ticket prices.

And even those airlines that have year-long, negotiated contracts with A.T. Kearney are now trying to change their contracts to raise rates.

It's been nearly two months since Independence Air closed its doors on January 5, and Washington-area travelers already are noticing that FARES HAVE DOUBLED TO SOME MARKETS. INDUSTRY OBSERVERS EXPECT FARES TO INCREASE EVEN MORE during the spring and summer travel periods when travel demand is stronger.

Here's a glimpse at published walk-up, round-trip fares from Dulles between January 6 and February 22, according to a review of airfares by fare expert Terry Trippler of Cheapseats.com:

Pittsburgh has increased to \$900 on United Airlines and US Airways, from \$228 on January 6.

Nashville has increased to \$458 from \$118 on United.

Charleston, SC, has increased to \$648 from \$198, also on United.

United, which has the most flights in and out of Dulles of any airline, has been the fare-increase leader. Its spokesman Jeff Green said the lower fares were "artificial" and not "sustainable" long-term. But Green argued that the airline has not increased its fares more than \$15 to \$20. The much-higher fares were found quicker because there are fewer discounted seats and those tickets sell out quicker, he said.

Reducing the number of cheaper seats on each flight is a common way many airlines are able to get higher revenue without having to raise their fares. JetBlue Airways, which flies out of Dulles, acknowledges it has done so as it tries to cover higher fuel costs.

—Excerpted from the Washington Post, written by Keith L. Alexander, February 28

PRESIDENT BUSH DEVOTED TWO MINUTES AND 15 SECONDS OF HIS STATE OF THE UNION SPEECH TO ENERGY INDEPENDENCE

His remarks were woefully insufficient. The country's future economic and national security will depend on whether Americans can control their enormous appetite for fossil fuels. This is not a matter to be lumped in a laundry list of other initiatives during a once-a-year speech to Congress.

AMERICAN OVERDEPENDENCE ON OIL HAS BEEN A DISASTER FOR OUR FOREIGN POLICY. IT EMPOWERS EXACTLY THE WRONG COUNTRIES. Iran ranks second in oil reserves only to Saudi Arabia, where members of the elite help finance Osama bin Laden and his ilk, and where the United States finds it has little power to stop them.

OPINION

*Excerpted
from the New
York Times,
February 1*

Oil is a seller's market, in part because of America's voracious consumption. (Bush's) own Energy Department predicts that with the rapid development of India and China, annual global consumption will rise from about 80 million barrels of oil a day to 119 million barrels by 2025. Absent efforts to reduce American consumption, these new demands will lead to soaring oil prices, inflation and a loss of America's trade advantage.

When it comes to cars, much of the research has already been done—Brazil got to energy independence by figuring out how to get its citizens home from work in cars run without much gasoline.

The president could call for higher fuel economy standards for car manufacturers. He could bring up the subject of a gas tax—the most effective way of getting Americans to buy fuel-efficient cars, and a market-based tax.

(But) Mr. Bush took the safe, easy and relatively meaningless route instead.

Simply calling for more innovation is painless. The hard part is calling for anything that smacks of sacrifice—on the part of consumers or special interests, and politicians who depend on their support.

After 9/11, the president had the perfect moment to put the nation on the road toward energy independence, when people were prepared to give up their own comforts in the name of a greater good. He passed it by, and he missed another opportunity January 31.

Of all the defects in Mr. Bush's energy presentation, the greatest was his unwillingness to address global warming—an energy-related emergency every bit as critical as our reliance on foreign oil. Except for a few academics on retainer at the more backward energy companies, virtually no educated scientist disputes that the earth has grown warmer over the last few decades—largely as a result of increasing atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide produced by the burning of fossil fuels.

Mr. Bush said he would look for cleaner ways to power our homes and offices, and provide more money for the Energy Department's search for

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THE LITTLE AMTRAK THAT SHOULD

HERE WE GO AGAIN.

Just weeks after aiming his State of the Union speech to end America's "addiction" to foreign oil, President Bush was trying to shortchange one of the nation's best ways of saving energy: rail.

As it has every year since taking office, the administration proposed steep cuts for Amtrak, the national passenger rail

*Excerpted
from an article by
Christopher Ott,
Progressive Media
Project, March
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service. For fiscal year 2007, Bush proposed \$900 million—about 30% less than Amtrak received this year, and less than 1 percent of total 2006 federal

transportation outlay.

Believe it or not, this year's lowball opening bid from the White House is actually an improvement. Last year, Bush proposed zero dollars for Amtrak. Fortunately, Congress refused to go along and restored funding to \$1.31 billion—around the same level Amtrak has been scraping by on for years.

These repeated attempts to shrink or kill Amtrak are off-track.

Critics like to portray Amtrak as a wasteful agency that sops up government subsidies. But the reality is the national passenger rail system has managed to do a lot with a little throughout its 35 years of existence.

First, there is fuel efficiency. According to Department of Energy studies, trains use less energy for each mile a passenger travels than cars, and about half what planes do.

Second, it's ironic that Amtrak is under constant pressure to turn a profit when its competitors are not. No one thinks of highways in terms of profitability, and in recent years many of the largest airlines have been able to keep flying only because of bankruptcy protections.

Third, Amtrak has responded to criticism with positive changes. Ridership has been steadily climbing, including on many of the cross-country routes that critics love to hate.

Critics should stop singling out Amtrak

for criticism and recognize that the country needs to keep all its transportation options open: air, sea, road and rail.

Other countries have already figured out what the Bush administration still needs to learn: If you provide high-quality, convenient rail service, it will be popular and well used.

Israel is building a high-speed rail connection between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Mexico has opened bidding on a \$12 billion project to build high-speed rail between its two largest cities. Even Canada, with long-distance routes that rival those in the United States, has improved service and seen the benefits that come when good local rail service feeds into a national long-distance system.

If the president is truly serious about energy efficiency, he should stop trying to railroad Amtrak. Instead, we should think big. We should invest money and ingenuity into the high-quality passenger rail service that our country deserves. ■

... ENERGY INDEPENDENCE

(continued from the preceding page)

a 'zero emission' coal-fired plant whose carbon is injected harmlessly into the ground without adding to the greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere. But once again he chose to substitute long-range research—and a single, government-sponsored research program at that—for the immediate investments that have to be made across the entire industrial sector.

The State of the Union speech is usually a feel-good event, and no one could fail to applaud his call for replacing more than 75% of the nation's oil imports from the Middle East within the next two decades. But while the goal was grand, the means were miniscule.

The president has never been serious about energy independence. Like so many of our leaders, he is content to acknowledge the problem and then offer up answers that do little to disturb the status quo. If the war on terror must include a war on oil dependence, Mr. Bush is in retreat. ■

MAINERS WANT RAIL

People Who Live Beyond the Perimeters of Downeaster Service Speak Up

Letters to the Editor of the Bangor Daily News

RAIL REMOVAL CONCERNS

In 1989, the state passed the State Railroad Preservation Act with a mission to "promote rail transportation" (Title 23, Section 7102).

Yet, the MDOT will present before the Legislature their plan to remove 85 miles of rails on the Calais Branch Rail Line.

No legislative vote is required to change from the stated 1989 goal of promoting rail transportation to a goal of promoting a recreational trail. No vote is required by the voters to remove a historically important rail corridor. The MDOT plans to sell the rails for salvage and use the money to support ATV and snowmobile use.

No speed limits will be posted on the trail. Can walkers and ATVers use this trail at the same time with no posted speed limit? Law enforcement will fall

to local communities. In Washington County, only two towns along the route have local police departments, leaving 12 towns to the jurisdiction of the county sheriff, a department already underfunded and understaffed.

Headlines warn of gas reaching \$3 a gallon. Washington County roads are crumbling. Yet the MDOT is focused on removing the only rail link through it. Others who share these concerns only have until April 6 to share these concerns with their representatives before the 1 PM meeting in Room 126 at the State House. —Patricia Frappier, Jonesboro

April 4, 2006

Editor's note: The Maine Legislature sided with the MDOT—the tracks will be destroyed. It is a historic mistake that Maine will come to regret.

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Patricia Douglas, the Director of the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) is the best thing that's happened to the Downeaster.

As a veteran of the hotel management business, she was hired in 1992 by NNEPRA's original director Mike Murray, who needed a part-time marketing person to raise funds for the Downeaster's inaugural run, then scheduled for May 1993.

We all know it didn't happen in May of 1993 but December of 2001.

Douglas, a workaholic whose energy was already tethered by a part-time position, complained to Murray that she "had nothing to do." Murray, who recognized talent when he saw it, urged her to stay on.

Armed with a degree in business administration, Douglas's first job was on home territory in Connecticut, promoting the facilities of the US Navy's submarine base in Groton. She later went to work managing a Holiday Inn in Bangor, and when the management company bought a Portland hotel to renovate and make into a Doubletree, it called on Douglas. She became not only the manager of the Doubletree but oversaw the building's lengthy \$5 million renovation. "I wore a hard hat to work for months," she says.

The momentum in her career hit pause when the management company phased out the seven hotels it operated, leaving her unemployed.

Calls were made, networking done, and she learned that Mike Murray was looking for a marketing person.

If you wonder exactly what NNEPRA does, you are in good company. Eleven years after its creation by the Maine legislature, following the plans proposed by TrainRiders/Northeast and the MDOT, its responsibilities remain a mystery to many people in the transportation business. Until I met Douglas and she said, "One of the challenges for NNEPRA is helping people understand what we do," I thought I was the only person who didn't get it.

NNEPRA was created to administer contracts with Amtrak for equipment, main-

OUR LATEST, GREATEST PROFILE:

**Patricia Douglas,
Director of NNEPRA**

tenance, employment and other entities that go into making trains run. It holds the liability insurance and controls the tracks in cooperation with Guilford Transportation, which agreed to give Amtrak access.

To this end Douglas oversees a staff of five that looks for grants, manages budget concerns, does data analyzing, sees to passenger services, participates in safety programs, checks equipment (one staffer goes over to the station every day to inspect the train).

But its original work, in the years before the Downeaster began service, concerned the nuts and bolts of construction. (Douglas wore her hard hat again.)

In the interim, Douglas has more than fulfilled NNEPRA's need for a person who goes out in the field and talks with people. According to Wayne Davis, she has raised the image of the train everywhere. She has done this through giving presentations (dazzling slides of the Downeaster in action) to chambers of commerce, legislative groups and other organizations. "I'll talk to anyone who will listen to me," says Douglas.

Hundreds of Mainers are listening. This is borne out by the steady increase in ridership. For the last 10 months the Downeaster has experienced a monthly ridership growth of over 30%, with revenue increases as high as 42.5%. (Revenue figures rise according to the distances of trips taken. In dollar value, the 42.5% amounts to an additional \$100,000 monthly income.)

Douglas put together the Downeaster Deals booklet, a book of information for the traveler that is credited with being the best of its kind in the Amtrak system. It is distributed at visitor centers in Maine and Boston, chambers and trade shows in New York, Philadelphia, Washington, DC, and

other cities.

One of the initiatives she developed that she likes the most is the Downeaster Discovery Program. This provides travel packages that allow classrooms to go round-trip Portland/Boston at \$10 per child. It is inexpensive for schools and allows kids to "discover" a variety of cultural venues in Boston. They also "discover" passenger rail travel.

Like many good ideas, the Downeaster Discovery Program began by accident—in this case, when one of her children's teachers asked about the potential for taking her class to the Boston aquarium. That trip, and the 3,000 kids per year who have participated in the program since then, have spurred Douglas to extend Downeaster Discovery to civic groups for educational purposes.

Her kids are now 14 and 11, respectively, and they love to take the train with their mom to trade shows. They like trade shows. "I have great kids," says Douglas. From the get-go she has made her jobs flexible so that she can "go to the ball game at school at 3 pm."

The big initiative for NNEPRA at this point is the finalization of a fifth round-trip between Boston and Portland. Douglas has already negotiated the contract with Guilford, "There are now eight passenger trains back and forth every day," she says, "plus Guilford freight trains. The tracks are crowded." To accommodate two more trains, a \$6 million upgrade for sidings and track improvements is now being built, and, says Douglas, being done on schedule.

"Guilford dispatches our trains, and we are number one in the country for on-time arrival. So they have provided us with excellent service. They have been good partners."

The fifth trip has been, like many other objectives that concern the Downeaster, a long-time coming. But under the same law that sees a new highway fill up with vehicles the minute it is opened, new train runs fill up with passengers as soon as they are opened.

After the importance of the fifth round-trip, says Douglas, the other criti-

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... Profile

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cal issue for the Downeaster is funding, an issue that is currently being discussed by the state's newly formed Governor's Task Force on Passenger Rail Funding. The group, comprised of Mainers, who represent a variety of businesses and civic services (and two TrainRiders/Northeast board members), will make recommendations for funding by this fall.

"Solving the funding problem will give us the stability we need," says NNEPRA's director. "Funding for the Downeaster is an investment. It is not just dumping money in. The economic benefits of the service far outweigh the costs of operation."

Douglas adds that in 2003 (latest year for which figures are available), the train brought \$15 million to Maine. This will be increased by \$7 million after the fifth round-trip goes into service, and increased a great deal more after the Downeaster arrives in Freeport, Brunswick, Rockland and Augusta. "Amtrak spends \$2 million a year on fuel, which it buys in Maine. The all-Maine crew is paid \$2.4 million in wages."

"The train is an economic engine," she reiterates. "It is an economic tool to tourism. It is an economic tool to get businesses here. And the key to the ridership, and we currently are seeing just the tip of the iceberg."

Douglas, who works long hours at an intense job, says she leaves for the office after the kids get on the bus at 7. She's at her desk by 7:30, and the flexibility that permits her to spend valued daytime hours with the children also sees her running 22 to 25 miles per week, right out of the office door and up the street. She runs four miles per day on weekdays and, if time allows, more on weekends. The habit keeps her in awesomely good health and good trim.

Other than running, Douglas unwinds by cooking. How does she manage the creative and administrative work, the speech making, the business trips, and two kids? She smiled and said, "I don't sleep." ■

... MAINERS WANT RAIL

(continued from page 4)

HIGHWAY WILL RUIN STATE

So, we have another promise of economic prosperity backed by a federally funded \$1 million (taxpayer) study ("Maine may be central to 'Atlantica', east-west corridor could secure economic region's growth, experts say," BDN, January 21-22).

Needless to say, the current administration strongly encourages oil-driven economy, big corporations, and it cuts funds for more sustainable means of transportation.

Who will actually benefit from a new highway through Maine? A new highway will create sprawl with fast food chains and gas stations, something we see all over the country and that makes huge areas so interchangeable.

For the most part these businesses will not be owned locally. Big national corporations will get the best of it and leave Mainers with a small share, a polluted environment and a negative impact on Maine's most unique and precious resource: its wildlife and its undisturbed wilderness.

In times of steadily rising gas prices and a predicted exhaustion of oil resources by 2050 it is irresponsible to waste public money to build a new highway. We need to realize that and act accordingly.

Highway transportation will not be competitive in the long run because customers will have to pay for the increased costs of gas prices. The money should be spent on more sustainable means of transportation: revive and extend the railroad network and encourage public transport. Maine used to have an extensive rail network that brought economic prosperity.

It would be relatively easy to build on

to this network, which would ensure that resources are spent reasonably and for the benefit of the public.

Roxanne Quimby might not have moved to North Carolina had there been a train station in Guilford that would have allowed her company (Bert's Bees) and others to use the railroad for their shipping.

—Anne Ehringhaus, Greenville Junction,
February 1

RE-INVEST IN RAILROADS

The photo of the derailed boxcars in your April 4 State section reminded me of the old adage, "A picture is worth a thousand words." I have walked a lot of

tracks in and around Bangor, and for the most part they are in hard shape.

Ties are rotting or missing, rails are uneven, and ballast (bed of gravel on which rails sit) is degraded or in some places sunk into muck. We have neglected our rail infrastructure and focused our energy instead on subsidizing an interstate highway system as a fast way to move freight and people.

Unfortunately, the interstate highway system is only useful in a world with unlimited amounts of cheap

oil. As oil inches toward \$70 a barrel, it becomes obvious that if there is a future in moving goods and passengers it will be one where trains, which are between five to 10 times more efficient at moving freight than tractor-trailers, play a central role.

Forget hybrid cars, the hydrogen economy, ethanol and other pie-in-the-sky "alternative" technologies to enable us to continue our car-centered culture. It is high time to invest heavily in the existing, proven technology of the railroad.

—Andrew Donaldson, Blue Hill, April 6

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View 2 (continued from page 8)

- As noted, we were initially told that service north of Portland would begin one year after the Downeaster started its runs. This was repeated in MDOT's booklet, *Maine Transportation Facts*, published in 2002 and given wide distribution.
- In his October 29, 2002 Rail Newsletter, owner/editor Chop Hardenbergh reported that a DOT official had told the Yarmouth Chamber of Commerce and the Yarmouth Historical Society that service could begin in late 2004.
- In his August 22, 2003 newsletter, Chop wrote that the DOT had changed this to a 2006 start-up date, with an environmental impact statement that was "almost complete."
- In his June 10, 2004 issue, Chop notes that DOT was then stating that the project was still in the environmental assessment stage and cautioning about how soon it would be before the service begins.
- Chop's July 2, 2005 edition quotes another DOT official as stating that the service will not begin for another 5 years.

Chop is not the only one with different dates:

- An April 2003 article in the Portsmouth Herald says that based on information provided by Maine DOT officials, service to Brunswick might begin in 2006.
- By December 2003, the same paper was reporting a 2007 start-up date.
- At a press conference (attended by about 20 TrainRiders/Northeast Directors) held in June 2004 at the Portland Transportation Center, Governor Baldacci and David Fink both indicated that a pilot excursion service from Portland through Brunswick to Rockland would begin that summer.
- On January 9, 2006, the Portland Press Herald quoted DOT officials as stating that service to Brunswick "could" start in 2010.
- On April 11, 2006, that paper quoted another DOT official as stating that she thought that the service would be extended to Brunswick "hopefully before I retire," but that the State was only then undertaking a \$1 million study to determine whether the extension would be feasible.

Commissioner, our editor lives in Bangor. The feelings that she expressed in her Opinion parallel those of many of our directors, members and the public at large. While there may be valid reasons for short extensions of time for commencement of the service, we have never been clear as to why it should take nine years from the beginning of the Downeaster service for service to Brunswick to begin. We understand that many MDOT personnel have worked and continue to work hard on this project, but continuing delays are frustrating. You can also understand that nearly 90,000 Maine voters who signed petitions in 1991 directing the State of Maine to restore passenger rail service between Boston and Portland, as a first step to restoring service to Freeport and Brunswick, feel a growing sense that their efforts were wasted and their legislatively endorsed bill is being ignored. The Passenger Rail Service Act, passed by the legislature clearly directed the DOT to financially support passenger rail in the same manner in which roads and airports are supported. There was never any expectation that the rail service would ever cover its operating and capital costs without state support. It was also never expected that expanded service would be subject to special FTA conditions since the State of Maine was to be the responsible party. We are also disturbed to hear

from some of today's legislators that they cannot be bound by a previous legislature's action.

Unhappily, there is also a growing public sense that the commitment to passenger rail that was so apparent in the last administration is lacking in the present administration. Whether or not you agree with the feelings expressed in the editorial piece, those feelings are very real and widespread.

Having said all that, please believe us when we say that we certainly look forward to doing everything we can to assist both state and federal officials in making sure that the commitments made in 1991 are honored by today's leaders. In that spirit, we would be very pleased if you submitted an article for inclusion in our next newsletter, one which could either be responsive to the Opinion or which otherwise deals with passenger rail issues. We would also invite you to address TrainRiders' Board. We appreciate your understanding of our concerns, and look forward to working together to accelerate this process.

Sincerely,

Wayne E. Davis, Chairman, TNE

cc: Governor John Baldacci

Won't you join us in the good fight?

Yes, I'd like to join TrainRiders/Northeast:

Name _____

Street or P.O. # _____

City or town _____

State _____ Zip _____

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2 VIEWS ON LAST MONTH'S EDITORIAL

—(1) From a State Representative to the editor and
(2) From Wayne Davis to MDOT Commissioner
David Cole, with a cc to Governor Baldacci

In our last newsletter, we published our Editors Opinion about expanding Downeaster service. That opinion generated sometimes heated discussion. Included in this issue are responses by (1) Rep. Boyd Marley, House Chair of the Transportation Committee for the Maine Legislature and (2) Wayne Davis, Chairman of TNE.

1 To the Editor:

I write as a member of TrainRiders' board and as the House Chairman of the Legislature's Transportation Committee. In the last newsletter it was stated that "...it has been more than four years since the inauguration of Downeaster service and the MDOT has done nothing to extend it. It is not a matter of being broke. The money is there, waiting." The newsletter also implied that the governor was unresponsive to the needs of TrainRiders members. I disagree.

There is money from previous referendums for the Portland North extension, but not enough to fund it completely. In addition, the FTA has told the state that despite the success of the Downeaster service, the state needs to identify funding for ongoing operational costs. Such costs currently are covered by federal dollars which are used for CMAQ (Congestion Mitigation Air Quality) projects. TrainRiders and MDOT have also asked that Portland-Boston service be enhanced—fifth round-trip, faster travel time, etc.—before extending service north. Some argue that the MDOT should divert money from other projects. However, the state is facing a shortfall in funding for its transportation infrastructure, a shortfall that continues to grow due to high fuel prices, inflation in construction materials, and more fuel efficient vehicles.

The State's Constitution limits the majority of funds that the MDOT collects. "Fuel tax dollars" can only be used for roadways and bridges. While

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2 Dear Commissioner Cole:

I regret that it has taken so long for me to respond to your concerns about the "Editor's Opinion" that appeared in the winter issue of our quarterly newsletter "The TrainRider." While we certainly understand your concerns, we believe that several points should be kept in mind.

Please remember that the article was clearly labeled as the opinion of the editor of our newsletter. As such, it does not necessarily reflect TrainRiders' formal position on this matter. From time to time we include articles in our newsletter that are independent of our formal position in order to provide a more complete picture of the status of passenger rail issues.

While the opinion is not necessarily reflective of TrainRiders' official position, it does mirror the feelings of many of TrainRiders' members and directors. While I certainly know that you and many people working at MDOT have put, and continue to put, tremendous time and energy into passenger rail issues, the fact is that there is no service north of Portland and no visible construction on that route. We remember that back when the Downeaster was put into service, we were told by then-Commissioner Melrose that it would take only one more year for the initiation of service north of Portland. Though there was no reason to be skeptical of that timetable, it is now four years later and we are being told that many more years will pass before service will begin. Everyone knows that it took longer to obtain the Downeaster service than it took to build the first trans-continental railroad and our members and directors do not want a repeat of that experience.

The trepidation of our members and directors is reflected in the feelings of the public at large. While the question that is asked most often of our train

hosts and directors is when additional trips will be added to the current service, a close second is when service will be extended to Freeport and Brunswick.

The messages received by our members as well as the public, have been, to put it mildly, confusing and frustrating, as shown by, for example, the following:

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