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# TRAINRIDER

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THE NEWSLETTER OF TRAINRIDERS/NORTHEAST



## Chairman's Update

We are taking this opportunity to remind you that our all volunteer organization, which has been working since 1989 to restore, improve and expand passenger rail service throughout northern New England, depends on you and our other members for operating support. As some of you may know, 3 major private benefactors who have generously provided rent and operating expenses for TNE over the years have passed away. Their passing in addition to the current economic conditions has created very difficult financial circumstances for this organization. As a result we are asking our members to dig deep and help provide for our modest needs. Whatever you can provide now will be more than helpful. Thank you.

Wayne E. Davis, Chairman

## The July 2009 figures are in!

47,441 Passengers rode our train!  
This reflects just a very small (2%) decrease from last year's record-breaking July ridership.

Our trains were 86% On-Time – a 6% increase over June.

93% customer satisfaction (June) – a 2% increase over the prior month.

## Governor Baldacci Tells It Like It Is!



I want to thank TrainRiders Northeast for this opportunity to present my vision for passenger rail service for the State of Maine. The importance of such service is well known, and, in Maine, has been demonstrated time and again, predominantly through the benefits that Mainers derive each and every day from the Downeaster service, run between Portland and Boston by Amtrak for our State's Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA).

TrainRiders was a critical force in the December 2001 commencement of the Downeaster service. In 1991, TrainRiders initiated and won enactment of the Passenger Rail Service Act, which required the State to return passenger rail service to Maine. In partnership with public officials and private parties, TrainRiders also worked hard to put together the nearly \$60 million required to upgrade the rail line in order to permit the service to run. These were all difficult matters, but TrainRiders did even more, making sure that all parties continued to pay attention to this project in order to move it forward, and also ensuring that the public remained aware of the need for this service. Without TrainRiders there would be no Downeaster, and passenger rail service in Maine might be a dead issue even today.

TrainRiders continues to work hard. Its station and on-board host programs have done much to make the Downeaster the best in the nation. Its on-going monitoring of the service, as well as other passenger rail issues, continue to ensure that passenger rail remains a focus of transportation plans throughout the State of Maine. I have met regularly with TrainRiders' executive committee on numerous occasions --most recently in July of this year -- and those meetings have provided me with important insights into passenger rail issues in Maine. I count on TrainRiders to be the voice of passenger rail in the State of Maine.

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I am an enthusiastic supporter of passenger rail service and have ridden the Downeaster on many occasions. Passenger rail service is an essential part of Maine's present, as well as its future. Millions of riders have used the Downeaster since 2001, and millions of dollars have flowed, and continue to flow, into this State as a result of that service. The Downeaster fits well with the concept of Maine, since it is safe, environmentally sound, comfortable and friendly. Overall, the Downeaster, as well as other passenger rail projects, are investments well worth making and keeping.

Passenger rail faces both challenges and unprecedented opportunities in the State of Maine. My administration is responding to these in the following ways:

1. At the urging of the Obama administration, Congress recently adopted a stimulus funding package which included \$8 billion for passenger rail service, a level of direct support for passengers which has never been approached in this country. In response, I have joined a coalition which consists of the governors of all six New England states in endorsing a vision for high speed and intercity rail service throughout this region, and submitting it to the Secretary of Transportation, Ray LaHood. This vision was submitted to support the applications that Maine and the other New England states are now making to Washington seeking a portion of the stimulus funds for passenger rail projects. Not only is this an important step in obtaining stimulus funding, it is also a vital step forward in approaching passenger rail on a regional basis, something which is necessary for its long term success.
2. My administration has aided NNEPRA in its recent submission of pre-applications for stimulus money to help fund both an expansion of the Downeaster service north through Freeport to Brunswick, as well as to upgrade track between Portland and Boston to increase the speed and to otherwise improve the Downeaster service. These submissions are the first steps in applying for these funds, with final awards to be made in the coming months.
3. My administration has aided NNEPRA in the process of applying for a Federal loan to fund the expansion of the Downeaster service north to Brunswick. This application is now on hold, but will be renewed if we do not obtain stimulus funds for this project. In either case, we hope to hear good news this fall about our request for \$35 million.
4. As many of you know, Federal funds that support ongoing operation of the Downeaster are scheduled to run out this coming September 30. I understand that all modes of transportation, including road, air and water travel, require government subsidies to continue in operation. Passenger rail is no different, and should be treated no differently. Thus, I and my administration continue to be in close contact with all members of Maine's Congressional delegation in working to obtain an extension of this so-called "CMAQ" funding. Our delegation is in the forefront of supporting Amtrak operations, and I am confident that this funding extension will be obtained prior to the September 30 deadline. If, however, this does not occur, then I have directed the Maine Department of Transportation to work with NNEPRA to be sure funds are available during the period of any delay in funding.
5. In 2008, I signed legislation that dedicated one-half of automobile rental tax revenues to Maine's STAR account, a fund which is used for non-highway transportation projects. Although not explicitly stated in that legislation, this portion of the STAR account was intended to be used to extend Downeaster passenger rail service to Brunswick, and I intend to see that it is used for that purpose.
6. Finally, other rail projects need to be dealt with as well. Maine DOT recently released a report describing my rail and port investment plan, entitled "Moving People and Goods." The report lays out ambitious plans for improvements to several rail lines and ports, in an integrated strategy to improve our economy and our transportation options. The report can be read or downloaded at the department's website.

Again, I am very pleased to be able to present my views on passenger rail to TrainRiders' members and to once again thank TrainRiders for all you have done and for your continuing efforts to secure and improve the future of passenger rail in Maine and the Northeast.

## 300 Attend TrainRiders 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting

This year's annual meeting, held at the Harraseeket Inn in Freeport, welcomed Amtrak's Chairman of the Board Thomas Carper and returning Vice President of Government Affairs and Corporate Communications Joe McHugh. Mr. Carper's comments below focused on Amtrak's vision for the future and how it will address passenger needs, capacity issues and the proper expenditures of stimulus money.



From Buda, Illinois, Mr. Carper attended Macomb State University and subsequently ran for Mayor of Macomb, Illinois in 1991 with a host of campaign issues, none of which involved passenger rail. He was soon confronted with the possibility that this small town of 20,000 with no interstate highway connection, no air service, no bus service, but just one round-trip train (the Illinois Zephyr), might lose its passenger rail service. So he comes to this position in his advocacy for Amtrak from the practical economic development tourism aspect of which passenger rail can bring. He compared the enthusiasm he witnessed for the Downeaster to that which saved and subsequently expanded the Illinois service.

**President Obama's national vision for High Speed Rail:** A renewed commitment to the nation's travelers, to build a world-class network of high speed passenger rail corridors. The new set of transportation challenges: Creating a foundation for new economic growth in a more complex global economy promoting energy independence and efficiency, addressing global climate change and environmental quality and fostering livable communities connected by safe, efficient modes of travel.

When John Robert Smith joined the Board at Amtrak years ago, he quickly rallied the nation's mayors through the US Conference of Mayors as an advocacy group to promote passenger rail. One way to get the attention of mayors, state representatives and state senators is to take rail service out of strictly being a transportation issue and give it an economic development component. The end result is where we are today.

Another quote from the Administration: High speed passenger rail network of 100-600 mile intercity corridors that connect communities across America. That's exactly what [the Downeaster] is doing here. Developing a comprehensive high speed intercity passenger rail network that would require long-term commitment by both the federal and state levels to jump start the system with [the \$8 billion] as a down payment along with \$1 billion per year proposed in the 2010 budget. These are the first steps to create intermodal connections and this is what the whole ballgame is about. Strategic transportation goals to ensure safe and efficient transportation choices, build a foundation for economic competitiveness, promote energy efficiency and environmental quality and support interconnected livable communities. This is what the Board and management have been grappling with. It's gratifying to see the Administration lay this out and follow it up with a vision and funding. *It's an incredibly exciting time to be involved in the Downeaster and Amtrak is anxious to be a partner.*

**What is High Speed Rail?** On the Northeast Corridor it is characterized by 125-150 MPH. The Passenger Rail Investment Act sets the bar at 110 MPH. Dedicated high speed corridors have huge up front capital costs and therefore Amtrak considers it does well with the constant mixed-use traffic interference that exists on the NEC. Incremental investment and development of existing corridors up to 110 MPH makes the most sense going forward. Travelers are less interested in the ultimate speed, but rather wish to leave and arrive at the times shown on their schedules.

Amtrak has proven that they can compete and can get their market share and that people will ride trains, especially with good frequency and good reliability. If choke points exist on freight rail corridors where Amtrak operates, then perhaps Amtrak should invest in the necessary improvements if it can be there when Amtrak wants it and if they don't have to back and buy it back in five years. If these help the freight railroads, then it's even better.

**How do we go about this?** Under the Passenger Rail Investment Act, states can fund new services, rail plans are a must, operating funds are a state's responsibility, capital matching is authorized at 80/20 and as is \$1.9 billion through FY 2013. Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, there is \$8 billion for discretionary rail grants, high speed rail, congestion relief, intercity passenger development and frequency additions on existing routes through FY 2012. Under Surface Transportation Funds, another \$27 billion is authorized with some rail projects eligible.

There are no big announcements available at this time. Amtrak has had discussions with Massachusetts about improving the Downeaster route. They've had talks with

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the host railroad to determine the cost and locations of some much needed improvements. *Amtrak remains an interested and engaged partner.*

The citizens of this country are way ahead of their elected officials when it comes to passenger rail in nearly every state. Amtrak needs to look at its long distance service and discuss possible ways to extend into new areas. Finally, Amtrak needs to explore ways to find some level of a dedicated source of revenue to at least be able to logically and methodically buy equipment, particularly with the expectation that they will be buying American equipment.



*It was another very successful outing at the TrainRiders/Northeast 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting at the Harraseeket, Inn in Freeport!*

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### ***THE TRAINRIDER***

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*Contact TrainRiders/Northeast at [wedavis@trainridersne.org](mailto:wedavis@trainridersne.org) or (207)879-7245 to update your contact info, including your email address.*

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