

# TRAIN RIDER

*The Newsletter of TrainRiders/Northeast*



## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

*Submitted by Wayne Davis*

### AND JUST HOW MANY PEOPLE DOES IT TAKE TO SCREW IN THAT LIGHT BULB?

Three, to be precise, or at least that's what the Surface Transportation Board thinks. As you all recall, last August a petition was submitted requesting that the STB (the replacement for the old ICC) set terms for the use of Guilford Transportation's rail line as part of the Portland to Boston service. The full complement of STB board members is three. However, only two members are now serving because Congress has not confirmed President Clinton's nominee, submitted last August. THAT'S RIGHT, LAST AUGUST! When I was in Washington last week attending the annual Congressional Breakfast of the Maine State Society, I heard that the two current board members cannot agree upon one or more issues facing them in that petition. Therefore, no final decision can be rendered until the third board member is confirmed and deals with the matter.

It appears that the nominee's confirmation is being held up because of political considerations. It is truly unfortunate that the various boards and committees set up to handle the day-to-day business of government seem to be more involved in politics than the business at hand. This inaction on the part of the Administration and Congress costs us between \$6 - 8,000,000 per year in potential lost tourism revenues. Please contact your Senators and Representatives to move the matter from the Twilight Zone into the sunlight.

Don't give up hope. We continue to work hard on all of these issues and thanks to ten years of effort by our members, there's enough federal and state money to make the rail service a reality.

It is frustrating, but with continued work by all of us, we can pull it off. Remember—Portland/Dover/Boston is but the first of our goals and objectives. Stick with us and we truly will "Change The Way New England Travels." —WD

## NATIONAL RAIL NEWS

### Amtrak Loses Its Head

AMTRAK PRESIDENT THOMAS M. DOWNS resigned December 10, 1997. This was apparently related to the recent settlement with some of Amtrak's unions, a settlement reached after the Amtrak Board of Directors took over negotiations in October. Downs' commitment to hold Amtrak together in the face of continuing Congressional dithering and lack-luster support from succeeding Administrations forced him into many untenable positions, including the goal of Amtrak operating without operational subsidies after 2002. While many of the reforms made during Downs' tenure were beneficial and helped move Amtrak to more businesslike operating methods, the idea that any single mode of transportation can "compete" without subsidies when all other modes are subsidized to one degree or another defies reality.

Downs' resignation removed a great supporter of the service to Maine, which he saw as a logical extension of the Northeast Corridor now linking Newport News, VA, with Boston. Without him, we would not have seen the Talgo train (similar equipment is now operating very successfully on the West Coast), the German Intercity Express (ICE) train or the special train which Senator Snowe sponsored.

The train to Maine survived even as cutbacks were made to other areas which already had Amtrak service! He also supported the Rail Link between Boston's South and North Stations, a link just as vital to the complete Corridor as New York's Penn Station is to the present Corridor.

George Warrington, former president of the Northeast Corridor Business Unit, was named as acting president of Amtrak. We have worked closely with Mr. Warrington and look forward to continuing progress in our quest for Amtrak service to and within Maine. ■



## MBTA Expands Old Colony Service

**T**he MBTA Old Colony Service carried 4,908 passengers on its first day, September 29, 1997, with 2,931 on the Plymouth/Kingston Line and 1,977 on the Middleborough/Lakeville Line. The second day total was 5,088. The third day, the first on which fares were collected was 3,430 passengers with 3,461 on the fourth day. The initial service was four peak hour round trips on weekdays on each line. Unfortunately, Amtrak, which has the contract to operate the MBTA commuter services, dropped the ball on October 3 and October 9, when crew callers failed to have crews available for one morning run from Kingston! Ridership has continued to build, with just over 2,100 riders on the Plymouth/Kingston Line by early October and 1,500 riders on the Middleborough/Lakeville Line.

Weekend and off peak services began November 30, 1997, with 27 round trips per weekday. On the Plymouth/Kingston Line, which has 15 round trips on weekdays, all in and out-bound peak hour service originates and terminates at Kingston, with the first departure being at 5:37 AM. Non peak hour services alternate from Kingston and Plymouth, with the last train arriving at Plymouth at 4:00 PM, while the

last train returns to Kingston at 11:40 PM, having departed Boston at 10:40.

The Middleborough/Lakeville Line, which has 12 weekday round trips, operates all trips to and from its terminal in Lakeville. The earliest trip departs at 5:25 AM, with the last return trip arriving at 11:30 PM. Due to single track operation between Braintree and Quincy Center, most trains to and from the Plymouth/Kingston Line serve Braintree, while most Middleborough/Lakeville trains serve Quincy Center. (At the close of New Haven Railroad operations of the Old Colony lines in 1959, there were two tracks as far out as Braintree. If service resumes on the former Greenbush Line or service to Lakeville is extended to Cape Cod points, track capacity may become a serious problem north of Braintree.)

Weekend service features 8 round trips per day on the Plymouth/Kingston Line and 7 round trips per day on the Middleborough/Lakeville Line. Trip times on both lines are slightly shorter than for peak hour trips, due to faster loading at passenger stops and the use of flag stops on some weekend trips.

The MBTA has not been idle on other lines. In July 1997, service on the outer segment of the Haverhill/Reading

Line, portions of which will be used by the Amtrak service to Maine, were increased from 8 to 12 round trips daily. Your editor has seen signs on I-495 near Lawrence announcing the MBTA commuter rail improvements.

On the Worcester line, the second track was placed in service on September 15, 1997, completing the re-installation of double track all the way from Boston to Worcester. This should improve timekeeping for the MBTA's service to Worcester and for the New England section of Amtrak's *Lake Shore Limited* between Boston and Chicago.

MBTA's 1998 construction schedule includes changes in and near North Station, Boston, connected with the "Big Dig" and the North-South Rail Link, and modifications to its Eastern route between Salem and Beverly. Work is continuing on the Newburyport extension, scheduled to open in December 1998. On November 10, 1997, track was being ballasted south of the first grade crossing in Newbury, MA, and work was continuing on the U.S. Rte. 1 overpass at the Newburyport town line and the new MBTA terminal facilities.

—KKO Newsline, Fall 1997; MBTA Commuter Rail Schedules, November 30, 1997; *Railpace Newsmagazine*, November and December 1997.

## Vermont Rail News

**T**he Vermont Agency of Transportation is seeking to obtain full interchange rights from Guilford Rail System on its offer to sell the State the rail line from White River Junction to Wells River, VT. If full interchange rights are part of the sale package, the route from White River Jct. could again become part of a through route between Southern New England and Montreal. The former Canadian Pacific Railway line from Wells River to the Canadian border near Newport, VT, operated by the Iron Road subsidiary, Northern Vermont Railroad, was the scene of a successful 470 Club excursion September 27, 1997.

The citizens of Fair Haven, VT, on the route of Amtrak's *Ethan Allen Express*, a daily Amtrak train started last winter between New York City and Rutland, specifically to serve ski areas, obtained a stop in their town. The current Amtrak Timetable shows the stop, which did not add running time to the schedule.

On February 15, 1998, Amtrak will add a second New York-Rutland train. The new train will save Amtrak \$400,000 annually by eliminating a nightly crew stopover in Rutland, will give the public another choice of travel times, and will relieve overcrowding on the *Ethan Allen Express*, which has seen a 22% increase in

passengers in one year. Vermont Governor Howard Dean plans to establish passenger rail service between Albany, NY, and Bennington, VT, this year.

The planned commuter service between Charlotte, VT, and Burlington may be expanded eastward to Essex Jct. with the help of \$8 million in federal funding. R.J. Corman's crews were replacing track switches in the Burlington yard in October and were to have begun laying welded rail between Burlington and Charlotte in late October.

—The 470, November and December 1997; Amtrak Northeast Timetable, Fall/Winter 1997-98, effective October 26, 1997; *Railpace Newsmagazine*, December 1997; *Maine Sunday Telegram*, January 18, 1998.



## Continuing Rail Advocacy

Some TrainRiders/Northeast board members have reviewed the draft of "Maine's Strategic Passenger Transportation Plan," dated October 1997. Wayne Davis will be meeting with Maine Department of Transportation personnel to relate our concerns regarding some aspects of the plan.

We have also tried to educate the public that the recently announced \$23 million for rail improvements which Maine will receive as part of the Amtrak reauthorization funding was not a "windfall." These funds were provided for long ago in federal legislation to compensate states which did not have Amtrak service for the fact that their federal taxes were paying for a service from which they did not directly benefit. ■

## MDOT Supports Passenger Rail

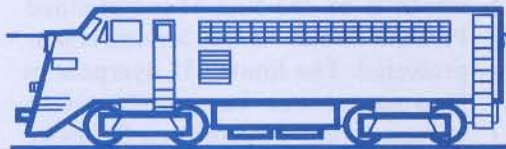
MDOT COMMISSIONER JOHN MELROSE spoke to the TrainRiders Board of Directors on January 22, 1998. He discussed Maine's Strategic Passenger Transportation Plan and replied to questions from the Board on various aspects of the plan. The plan is notably multi-modal, with rail connections proposed for airports, buses and ferry terminals. Trains would also serve bicyclists, hikers and canoeists. The primary emphasis is on tourism, soon to be the most important sector of Maine's economy, but intrastate rail service will also be of advantage to Maine residents and may include future commuter trains.

While funding will come from various federal sources, state transportation bond issues of \$10 to \$20 million per year are projected, with increasing portions for rail.

These would augment an anticipated \$2.8 million in highway enhancement funds and \$4.8 million in Congestion Mitigation/ Air Quality (CMAQ) funding annually for non-highway projects. The strong economy gives the State latitude in negotiating with Guilford Rail Systems regarding Amtrak and other passenger train operations over their rails.

In response to questions on a recent \$25 million proposal to study an East-West Highway across Northern New England, Melrose observed that the projected \$1.3 billion construction cost of the four-lane divided highway would "Fix all State roads in Maine." It was noted that east-west rail routes are already in place.

The Board suggested that Governor King become more visible in his support of passenger rail service in Maine. ■



### ALONG THE TRACK

## MAINE RAILROAD NEWS



### Brunswick to be Transportation Hub

John Melrose, Maine DOT Commissioner, unveiled the state's latest transportation plan to an audience in Brunswick on December 16, 1997. Brunswick was seen as a hub of revived passenger train services, with Freeport and Portland to the south; Augusta, Waterville, Bangor and Acadia National Park to the north; and Rockland, with its proposed high-speed ferry terminal, to the east.

Maine is seen as a destination of millions of new tourists if they can arrive and travel within Maine without their automobiles. This would include tourists from distances beyond easy reach of today's automobile tourists, and would include increased numbers of foreign visitors. In its first phases, an additional 87,000 tourists could create 1,400 new jobs and leave behind an additional \$3 million in annual sales taxes. With the additional money from federal and state sources, extension of the Boston-Port-

land service to Freeport and Brunswick is projected to be completed as part of this initial phase.

Local enthusiasm for the plan was tempered by the still unresolved positions taken by Guilford Transportation Industries, which owns the track from the Massachusetts line to Brunswick, and the state which wants Amtrak passenger service over that track. The issues are now before the federal Surface Transportation Board. "It's fair to say that the decision is overdue," noted state Sen. Phil Harriman (R-Yarmouth), speaking in support of the plan.

In an editorial headlined, "The same old roadblock," *The Times Record*, December 18, 1997, noted Guilford Transportation Industries continued lack of interest in reaching an agreement with Amtrak to run passenger trains over its rails and raised the question, "How long will this one small company stand in the way of progress?"

—*The Times Record*, (Brunswick, Maine) December 17, 18, 1997.

### Mountain Division Transportation Corridor

That part of the former Maine Central Railroad Mountain Division purchased by the Maine Department of Transportation late in 1995 has seen some clearing done by crews of Maine State Prison inmates. Clearing of the right of way is one of the preliminary steps to rehabilitation of the track.

An economic feasibility study of the line and its transportation corridor in Maine is anticipated to begin sometime early in 1998.

### St. Lawrence & Atlantic

St. Lawrence & Atlantic held its second annual customer appreciation day at Lewiston Jct., ME, on September 6, 1997. Short train rides open to the public were part of the festivities.

—*Railpace Newsmagazine*, November 1997.

—Continued on the next page



## MAINE RAILROAD NEWS

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## Guilford Rail System

The December 1997 issue of *Railpace Newsmagazine* noted that the proposed Canadian National-New Brunswick Southern-Guilford *Yankee Clipper* intermodal service between Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Ayer, MA, had not yet begun.

Track improvements have been carried out by GRS in Pine Point, ME, on the former Boston & Maine and on the Bucksport Branch, formerly Maine Central. The Waterville *Morning Sentinel*, reporting on a recent improvement in operating speed in Waterville and Oakland, quoted GRS safety manager Walter Zaccadelli as saying, "The temporary speed has been 10 mph for the past seven or eight years and now we're going 25."

—*Railpace Newsmagazine*,  
November and December 1997,  
The 470, January 1998.

## Maine Coast Railroad

The finishing touches are still being installed in the Maine Coast Railroad's yard at Rockland. Work on the state-owned line is funded by the November 1995 \$525,000 bond issue. Cement traffic between Dragon Cement in Thomaston and the barge loading facility on Rockland Harbor remains active.

The U.S. Route One overpass in Waldoboro, near Moody's Diner, was opened to traffic by Thanksgiving. Final paving awaits the return of warmer weather in spring but two travel lanes plus both breakdown lanes are now in use. The new span assures that future commuter and long-distance passenger trains connecting with ferries at Rockland will not face delays and risks inherent in grade crossings on busy Route One. The new bridge, which cost about \$1 million, has a width of 40 feet in contrast to the 26-foot width of the 1932 span it replaced.

Further west, construction crews have assembled equipment for the replacement of the Carlton Bridge between Woolwich and Bath. The first pier, Pier Six, was begun in the Kennebec River just north of the Carlton Bridge on December 9, 1997. This will be a fixed, high-level bridge carrying four traffic lanes with an estimated cost of \$46.6 million. Above water clearance for vessels will be 75 feet. The spans, of pre-stressed concrete, will resemble those of the Davey Bridge carrying U.S. Route One between Wiscasset and Woolwich. The total project, including the repairs to the existing lift bridge, which will remain in place for railroad use, will cost about \$74 million. These projects should ensure the continuation of railroad service east of Bath for the foreseeable future.

—*The Courier-Gazette*, October 25, 1997,  
January 3, 1998;  
*Portland Press Herald*, December 16, 1997.

## Calais Branch Rebirth?

The state may lease the out-of-service Calais Branch to Maxx Robinson. The 126-mile line, extending from Brewer to Calais, would be rehabilitated for an initial investment of \$2.5 million to Class II standards, 25 mph for freight and 30 mph for passenger trains. A rail-bus shuttle is contemplated between Bangor International Airport and a bus connection at High Street in Ellsworth to take passengers to Bar Harbor. Robinson's proposed Bar Harbor and Downeast Railway, Ltd., would depend primarily on freight from Hancock and Washington Counties. This proposal, if adopted, could help implement the Maine DOT's plans to re-establish rail freight service to the Port of Eastport and to provide rail passenger service in addition to high-speed ferry service to Mt. Desert Island and Acadia National Park.

—*The 470*, January 1998.

NEW HAMPSHIRE  
RAIL NEWS AND  
COMMENTARY

Guilford Rail Systems (GRS) has offered to sell about three miles of the former Northern Railroad of New Hampshire to the state of New Hampshire, which previously purchased most of the line from Guilford. Like the Wells River Line offered to Vermont, the track in West Lebanon, NH, connects with other rail lines at White River Jct., across the Connecticut River. New Hampshire DOT indicated that, if the sale goes through, they would lease the line to a private operator.

On the eastern side of the state, the Route 108 grade crossing in Newmarket has been rebuilt as part of a major water and sewer line project. The crossing, which is on the line of the planned Portland-Boston Amtrak service, is now protected. The Route 152 overpass in Newmarket has been undercut to increase vertical clearance over the track.

GRS has also offered the state sections of the Conway Branch, Hampton Branch and Portsmouth Branch. However, Guilford proposes to retain about 3,500 feet of track in Ossipee on the Conway Branch, potentially barring its use for through traffic between Dover and North Conway, NH. The Hampton Branch includes the remnants of the old Eastern main line between Boston and Portland via Portsmouth. This line could be re-activated if the long out-of-service swing bridge over the Merrimack River between Newburyport and Salisbury, MA, were to be replaced, permitting rail service between Portsmouth and Boston. The Portsmouth Branch is the remnant of a line from Manchester to Portsmouth now extending only from Rockingham Jct. to Portsmouth. It serves Pease International Tradeport at Greenland, NH, and Portsmouth Naval Base in Kittery, ME.

—*The 470*, December 1997;  
*Railpace Newsmagazine*, December 1997



## Rhode Island Rail Progress

**W**hile Rhode Island has yet to achieve the anticipated expansion of present MBTA commuter service between Boston and Providence, design work is proceeding on proposed commuter rail stations in Warwick and Wickford Jct. The South County Commuter Rail Project will also serve existing stations at Kingston and Westerly, now Amtrak stops. Thought is also being given to linking the service with the Shoreline East commuter service between New Haven and New London, CT. New London, about 19 miles from Westerly, RI, once had an early morning, late afternoon commuter run to and from Boston, serving many additional stations in Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts at times no longer served by Amtrak trains between those points.

The station in Warwick, to be located at Hillsgrove, immediately adjacent to the T.F. Green Airport (serving Greater Providence), may share parking facilities with the recently expanded airport. The airport has a multi-level parking garage. The airport is about one city block away from the tracks. Wickford Junction, located adjacent to major highways, would be another station re-established for commuters.

Environmental studies for the dedicated freight track between Davisville and Boston Switch (Pawtucket) were to have been completed and published in June. The \$137 million project will create a 22-mile route between a major

container port and the junction with the Providence & Worcester's route to Worcester. Worcester is also served by Guilford Transportation Industries and Conrail. The track will be constructed to clearances permitting double-stack containers to and from the port of Davisville. Environmental impacts and costs will both have an influence on the final plans. Much of the route contained only double track, now in use for Amtrak's Northeast Corridor services, so a third track may present significant land acquisition costs in a heavily developed area of Rhode Island.

Electrification of the Amtrak Shoreline through Rhode Island now extends from Davisville westward to the Connecticut line. Catenary poles have also been installed in eastern Connecticut.

A visit to Kingston station on November 28, 1997, found the station on its new concrete foundation and major work completed on the expanded parking lots and bus lanes. Restoration of the historic station was nearing completion. Platforms around the building were being constructed and most final painting was done. Undercutting of the track beneath Route 138 and installation of the high-level platforms next to the tracks will be done in 1998.

Bids on the reconstruction of Westerly station and the Newport secondary between that city and Fall

River, MA, came in above estimates. Both projects will be reviewed for possible cost savings. Portions of the Newport Secondary track are in use by excursion and dinner trains out of Newport. On August 2, 1997, ceremonies marked the beginning of rehabilitation work on the Westerly station. Westerly station, like the signal tower which once stood nearby, was constructed of concrete in Spanish mission style. The 1912 drawings for the signal tower specified "Imperial Spanish Tile" for the roof covering.

The Rhode Island Association of Railroad Passengers protested to Amtrak for the re-scheduling of the former *Night Owl* as the new *Twilight Shoreliner*. The new departure from Boston at 8:00 PM instead of 10:00 PM leaves those attending evening shows in Boston with no return train to Rhode Island points. Similarly, the 6:00 AM Boston arrival of the eastbound services local points at an inconvenient hour compared with the old *Night Owl*. Some of the schedule changes were made to respond to needs of electrification work east of New Haven, CT, as well as serving a new southern endpoint of Newport News, VA. In contrast, the Virginia Association of Railway Patrons praised the new train for its convenient schedule, amenities and the high quality of on-board crew services.

—All Aboard Rhode Island, July and Fall 1997;  
On Track, Autumn 1997; NHRHTA plan, 1977.

### ON FOREIGN RAILS

## Improvements to the High Speed Rail

**A**n article in *The New York Times*, cited in the *Maine Sunday Telegram* noted that Belgian National Railways has upgraded their tracks to allow the new Thalys train to operate at track speeds of 186 mph. The Thalys train is the latest generation of European high speed rail equipment

similar to that which Amtrak has ordered for the Northeast Corridor. This has cut 35 minutes from the journey between London and Brussels via the Channel Tunnel, which now takes about two hours and 40 minutes.

—*Maine Sunday Telegram*, January 11, 1998.

MEMBERS ARE INVITED TO SUBMIT ARTICLES ON THEIR TRAIN RIDES HERE OR ABROAD, TO SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH OTHERS. REMEMBER, THERE ARE MANY WHO HAVE NEVER RIDDEN A TRAIN, OTHER THAN AS A TOURIST ATTRACTION OR DINNER TRAIN, WHO HAVE LITTLE IDEA WHAT IT IS LIKE TO TRAVEL BY TRAIN.



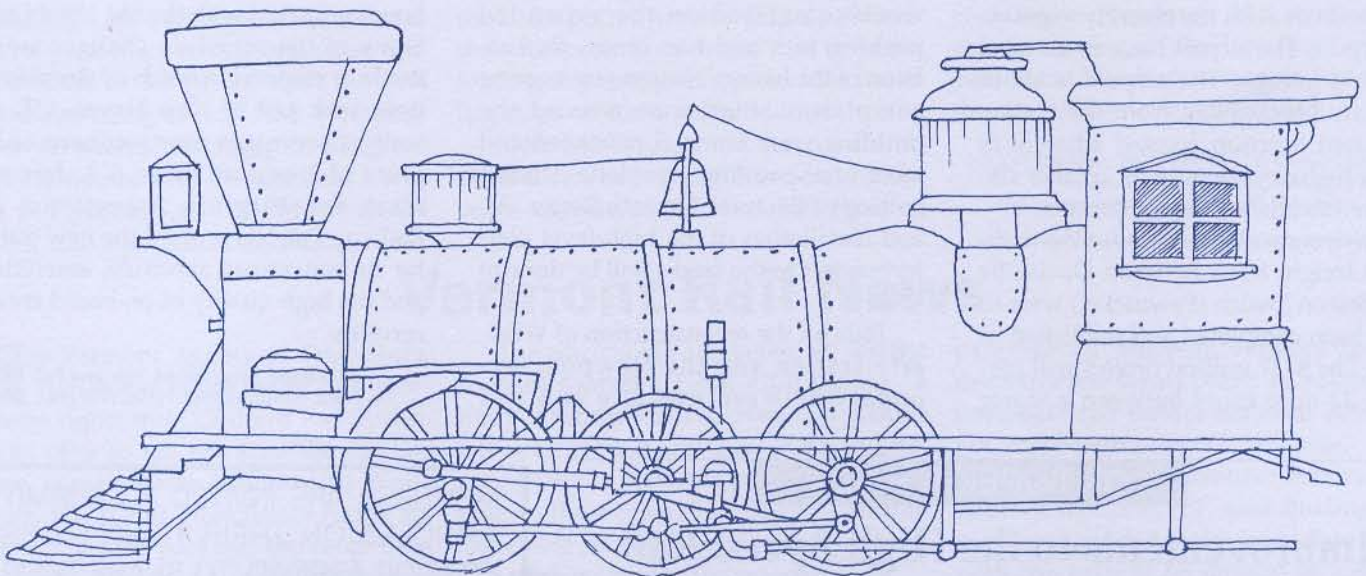
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