

TRAINRIDER

The Newsletter of TrainRiders/Northeast



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Submitted by Wayne Davis

FINALLY! On the 29th of May I stationed myself at our computer and called up the WEB page of the Surface Transportation Board in Washington. The STB publishes their rulings at 10:30 AM each day and I knew that ours had to be in there somewhere! Sure enough, 10:30 and there it was—"Surface Transportation Board Sets Terms And Conditions For AMTRAK's Use of Guilford Track Between Plaistow, NH, And Portland, Me." As page 8 of the 15-page document was cranking out of the printer the telephones began to ring and they haven't stopped since. The Press Releases began to appear within two hours of the ruling—"AMTRAK reacts positively to a STB ruling..."—"Guilford in agreement with ruling..."—"[Senator] Snowe announces AMTRAK prepared to sign rail agreement immediately." After ten years of hurry up and wait it was almost more than a body could stand! As we go to press, the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority is preparing to review the final agreements prior to a public signing. (I'll pinch myself AFTER the signing.)

Looking back, those of you who've stuck with us since 1988 are certainly to be commended. Though we've had bad news time and again, which discouraged some of you enough to let your membership dues with TrainRiders lapse, we've also received good news to temper things. Remember the "Passenger Rail Service Act"—the first citizen initiated bill ever adopted by the Maine State Legislature? Good News! Then there were the successive announcements of the congressional appropriations of \$25.5 million in 1992, \$9.5 million in 1993 and \$3.6 million in 1994 and the most recent Federal grant of \$23 million, \$11.5 million of which has already been received. Good news! In addition, the passage of several state bond issues, the Federal Railroad Administration's station planning grant of \$60,000 for design work for an intermodal terminal in Portland, delivered in person by the then FRA Administrator Gil Carmichael was certainly Good News! But enough history, what about tomorrow?

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NATIONAL RAIL NEWS

STB Rules!

THE SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD'S long-awaited decision concerning Amtrak service to Maine over Guilford Rail System's (GRS) tracks came on Friday, May 29, 1998. The fifteen page decision will provide GRS with \$2,050 per year per mile of track to maintain it for passenger train operation, reflecting the incremental increase in track maintenance standards above those needed for freight service. Amtrak will provide insurance coverage for GRS in excess of what it pays other railroads over which it operates, a possible precedent for upcoming settlements with those railroads which could lead to higher costs for Amtrak's non-Northeast Corridor services.

Governor King, pleased by the decision, said, "It will make Maine a more attractive place to do business and a more attractive place to live." Colin Pease, Guilford's Vice President, noted that, "We're delighted. Based on what's in the decision, we are prepared to sign an agreement with Amtrak governing the use of the tracks by the end of June." GRS will shut down its line between Plaistow, New Hampshire, and Portland for up to ten hours a day to allow track work to proceed.

The long delays should be behind us. Let's get those rails laid and get faster freight and renewed passenger services for Maine. We'll be reporting on events as they unfold.

On that same day, the STB ruled that Amtrak can significantly expand its carriage of express and time-sensitive freight shipments, a decision which should further improve Amtrak's operating revenues.

— *Portland Press Herald*, May 30, 1998; *The Boston Globe*, May 30, 1998.

TRAINRIDERS TENTH ANNUAL MEETING

THE TENTH ANNUAL MEETING of TrainRiders/Northeast was held Tuesday, May 5, 1998, at the Doubletree Hotel in Portland, Maine. The following members of the Board of Directors were elected by unanimous ballot: Elizabeth Buckley, Herbert Connell, Wayne Davis, George Terrien, Jeri Edgar, Robert Hall, Peter Verrill, Randy Perry, Benjamin Kirkland, Boyd Marley and James Friedlander.

The featured speaker was to have been George Warrington, Acting President of Amtrak. However, his plane was unable to land at Portland due to weather conditions and his speech was delivered by Kevin Scullin, Amtrak's General Manager at Boston's South Station. *(continued on page 3)*

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

(continued from the first page)

How about a Congress that increasingly seems to realize passenger trains aren't "yesterday"—they're for today and tomorrow. Recently, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-MS), upon receiving the American Passenger Rail Coalition's "Rail Leadership Award" at a reception in Union Station in Washington Thursday, June 4, 1998, made several comments of interest. "I've enjoyed being a part of this effort to enable AMTRAK to be run like a business, to survive, to provide service it is currently providing and — more importantly — the service it will provide in the future . . . I decided that this is something we should have. Just like good highways and airports. An important component of a good transportation system is the rail passenger system. We're going to need it more and more in the future . . ." Good news, wouldn't you say?

But now the work begins to assure success of the new service and the expanded service waiting in the wings. Stations, feeder buses, connections, scheduling, servicing, food service, equipment maintenance, layover facilities and countless other issues which have been addressed and well-documented over the years must now be updated. Service extensions to Freeport, Brunswick, Bath, Wiscasset and Rockland (the second of our original goals) will follow shortly after the Boston service begins. Lest-we-forget, after that there are three more goals. That's why your membership in TrainRiders/Northeast is critical. If we don't continue to promote alternatives to the automobile, and champion a balanced transportation system, who will? Remember (we tried to find the source of this statement to no avail)—*Widening roads to relieve traffic congestion is like loosening your belt to cure obesity.*

-W.D.

NATIONAL RAIL NEWS

Senator Snowe Delivers Amtrak Check to Maine

Senator Olympia J. Snowe (R-Maine) delivered a symbolic \$11,615,000 check to Maine DOT Commissioner John Melrose at a City Hall press conference in Portland on April 9, 1998. This represented one-half of the approximately \$23 million Maine will receive as part of the Taxpayer Relief Act. A second check will be delivered sometime in early 1999. The additional funds will be used to upgrade more track between the New Hampshire state line and Brunswick to 79 mph standards for passenger train operation. Approximately \$500,000 will be invested by the State to assist in the construction of stations.

Maine State Senator Phil Harriman, whose district includes Freeport and

Brunswick, noted that Freeport receives four million visitors annually and the former station site is within walking distance of Main Street. The Town of Brunswick, which supports construction of a station on Maine Street, is currently in negotiation with Bowdoin College concerning shared use of the site, which lies between its campus and the business district. John Melrose indicated that a highway connector will be constructed from I-295 to the Portland station site.

Senator Snowe has strongly supported the extension of Amtrak service to Maine since 1991.

—Olympia Snowe, News Release,
April 9, 1998;

Portland Press Herald, May 5, 1998.

REGIONAL RAIL NEWS

MBTA Newburyport Extension Construction Nears Completion

The MBTA's extension from Ipswich, MA, to Newburyport, MA, saw a Sperry Rail Service test car over the line on April 22, 1998. The first work train operated over the line on April 30th. MBTA acceptance inspections are to be done by the end of June, signal/grade crossing testing in June and July, and crew familiarization in August and September. Final station construction is to be done by August with service to start in October 1998. On May 30th, your editor observed that the station at Newburyport had its all high-level platform completed and both platform tracks in place, but only part of the supports for the canopy were installed. At Rowley, the one intermediate station between Newburyport and Ipswich, the all high-level platform had been completed and much of the framework for the platform canopy was in place. Grade crossing and track signals were

installed awaiting operations. The southbound traffic lanes on Route One overpass at the Newbury-Newburyport line were still unfinished. Much of the track for the layover facility, replacing the one now at Ipswich, appeared to be largely completed.

Until we have our Maine service running, Newburyport may offer an attractive alternative to driving those last few, heavily congested miles of I-95 and U.S. Route One into Boston. Extensive parking facilities will be installed and the location is only about a mile from I-95, much more convenient than the Ipswich station, at which parking was often unavailable to late comers.

In other "Northside" MBTA news, Gloucester station, after ten years of debate, will receive improvements to platforms and additional parking at a cost of \$1.5 million.

—Railpace Newsmagazine, January, June 1998

TENTH ANNUAL MEETING

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TrainRiders/Northeast's tireless effort was praised by Mr. Warrington. He also indicated that Amtrak, despite chronic underfunding, has experienced a "bottom line" gain of \$300 million in the past five years, largely due to seeking new sources of revenue such as mail and express traffic (items that were routinely moved in passenger trains in the era of privately operated passenger services). He promised, "We will listen to Mainers just as closely as we have to Vermonters," a reference to the successful Amtrak/State of Vermont passenger train expansions. He promised Amtrak's support for the anticipated Boston-Brunswick service, stating, "I am with you in this fight. I hope we see the service real soon."

Following the speech, Kevin Scullin and Wayne Davis presented Maine DOT Commissioner John Melrose with a framed painting of an Amtrak electric locomotive in the snow, an image Wayne said was needed in MDOT's headquarters building in Augusta, where only freight railroading was currently represented among the artwork of all other modes of travel in the lobby of the building.

John Melrose then urged support for the upcoming June 9th Maine transportation bond issue being presented to voters in the primary election. In addition to the \$23 million in Amtrak

funding for the Boston-Brunswick service, the state proposes to spend \$11 to \$15 million upgrading the Rockland Branch for passenger service to connect with the new high-speed ferries. Funding in the bond issue will also assist in studies and/or improvements to the Calais Branch (to serve Acadia National Park), the Mountain Division (eventually linking Portland and Lake Champlain via North Conway, NH) and the Belfast & Moosehead Lake (operating seasonal passenger and year-round freight service between Burnham Jct. and Belfast). Maine DOT is working closely with the National Park Service and Federal Highway Administration to reduce vehicular congestion at Acadia National Park. He cited the successful and expanding use of rail and buses at Grand Canyon National Park and the continuing studies of re-introducing rail service to Yosemite National Park. He ended his remarks on passenger rail service with the slogan, "On To Bangor!"

Wayne Davis then presented a plaque to Mike Murray, MDOT Special Project Director and Executive Director of the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, who received a standing ovation for his unstinting devotion to the cause of rail passenger service in Maine.

The after dinner speaker was Eugene K. Skoropowski, Deputy Project Director of the

Florida Overland eXpress. The FOX network, being built with a combination of public and private funding, will be operated for 40 years by the private sector. The public will own the infrastructure, just as they now own airports and highways. The initial route, from Miami to Tampa via Orlando, will be operating by 2004 with 30 minute intervals between trains during most of the day and trains as often as five minutes apart at peak travel times. The electrically powered trains, using the successful TGV technology, will operate at speeds of up to 200 mph. The rail lines will be entirely grade-separated, stations will be fully air conditioned, and service levels will include luxury, business and tourist travel. Direct connections will be made at airports at all three major stations and services will include rental vehicles and vans to pick up and deliver FOX customers to/from local destinations, all as part of the same ticket.

Skoropowski also had some advice and equipment proposals for future Maine interstate rail passenger services. Priorities included: reliability, frequency of service, auto-competitive travel times, comfort, on-board conveniences, good access (stations) and value for fare paid. He offered brochures on the GEC Alsthom X-TER diesel-hydraulic railcars, designed for regional rail services in France. The two and three car units are capable of operation at up to 160 km/h (100 miles per hour) and two or three units can be coupled together for more capacity when needed. ■



The Annual Meeting in Pictures: Left photo: Keynote Speaker Kevin Scullin, Amtrak General Manager, Boston South Station. Middle photo: Mr. Scullin, John Melrose, Maine DOT Commissioner, and Wayne Davis. Right photo: Mike Murray, MDOT Special Project Director and Executive Director of NNEPRA, receiving a plaque.

REGIONAL RAIL NEWS

Worcester Station Rehab Underway

Historic Worcester Union Station, which received a \$30,000 grant from the Great American Station Foundation earlier this year, has entered its rebuilding phase. The station is intended as the southern

"anchor" to a downtown revitalization project for Worcester. The station was once served by overnight trains from Maine and Canadian Maritimes. The adjacent Amtrak station is currently served by Inland Route

trains between Boston and New Haven, the *Lake Shore Limited* between Boston and Chicago and MBTA commuter service from Boston via Framingham, MA.

—*Railpace Newsmagazine*, February, June 1998

Old Colony Service Exceeds Ridership Projections

Following the November 30, 1997, implementation of full weekday and weekend service on its Plymouth/Kingston and Middleboro/Lakeville lines, the Old Colony Service reported over 6,150 passengers on the former and over 5,000 on the latter by mid-December. Projected traffic had been 5,000 riders on each line by the year 2000! In March, local newspapers reported brisk home sales and rising prices in towns surrounding the Middleboro/Lakeville terminal as buyers sought homes with ready rail access to Boston.

Meanwhile, plans for re-instituting commuter service on the third Old Colony line to Greenbush remain stalled, this time by the Town of Scituate which has refused all MBTA offers concerning their proposed terminal in the town. The April 9th death of a trespasser on the MBTA Plymouth/Kingston line in Weymouth was used by a member of the anti-MBTA Coastal Coalition as the occasion to bash the proposed Greenbush line!

—*Railpace Newsmagazine*, February, June 1998; *The 470*, May 1998.

Other MBTA items

After consideration of other routes, the MBTA has chosen to extend Boston-based commuter service to New Bedford via Canton Jct. by rebuilding the line beyond Stoughton to Weir Jct. (Taunton). That line was abandoned in 1965 but offers the most direct route between Boston and New Bedford. The line between Weir Jct. remains in service as a Conrail freight route to New Bedford. Raynham and Easton officials are opposing the rebuilding of the line, citing environmental concerns while ignoring the nearby I-495 and State Routes 24 and 138 which traverse the same wetlands. Bus service between New Bedford and the Middleborough/Lakeville terminal has been proposed as an interim measure.

On Cape Cod, where summer gridlock on the two highway bridges across Cape Cod Canal is legendary, officials in Falmouth are supporting conversion of another segment of the former Woods Hole Branch to a trail. The portion beyond the junction with former

Otis AFB, site of a "trash train" transfer facility, would be converted to trail use.

The railroad from Falmouth to Woods Hole, site of the Steamship Authority ferry terminal, was converted to trail use years ago following the demise of commuter service to the Cape. The lack of parking in Woods Hole, a compact village easily congested by automobiles of local tourists and day trippers to Marthas Vineyard and Nantucket, has been somewhat relieved by shuttle buses from the Falmouth railroad station site. However, there have been articles in travel sections of various newspapers blaming lack of parking at Woods Hole for reductions in tourist spending on the islands.

At a time when Maine is developing a combined rail, air, bus and ferry network serving a geographic area much larger than Massachusetts, the lack of vision regarding the future potential of the former Woods Hole rail/ferry connection is regrettable.

—*Railpace Newsmagazine*, June 1998.

Vermont Rail News

The Vermont Agency of Transportation recently awarded the Town of Brattleboro a \$14,520 grant for studies leading to improvement of its railroad station. The 1915 building, now housing

a museum and art center in addition to the Amtrak station, has seen a tripling of passenger use since the *Vermont* began running in 1995.

—*Railpace Newsmagazine*, June 1998

MAINE RAILROAD NEWS

Guilford Rail System Intermodal Services Advance. On April 1st, Norfolk Southern and Guilford jointly announced an agreement to institute a competitive new intermodal service for New England. The service would link the GRS intermodal terminal at Waterville, ME, with 34 NS intermodal facilities. Interchange will be at Mechanicville, NY, near Albany, and would utilize the Hoosac Tunnel, now undergoing enlargement. Further east, GRS Halifax, Nova Scotia-Ayer, MA, intermodal service has begun. The rebuilding of the GRS main line south and west of Portland to accommodate Amtrak passenger trains will only enhance both of these freight services.

—*The 470*, May 1998

Maine Coast Railroad. U.S. One overpass in Waldoboro, near Moody's Diner, was opened to traffic before Thanksgiving. Final paving has recently been completed.

NEW HAMPSHIRE RAIL NEWS AND COMMENTARY

The recent STB decision regarding Boston to Maine Amtrak passenger service has re-kindled interest in coastal New Hampshire. The Dover Station Committee will be reactivated and the regional planning agency will work closely with the city to assure that a successful intermodal facility is created. Connecting buses are anticipated to serve the station. Stations at Dover and Exeter are to be built by NH-DOT to locally determined designs.

Recent State acquisition of most of the former Boston & Maine line between Ossipee and Conway and interest in shipping by rail by a liquified petroleum gas distributor in Ossipee could lead to future freight and passenger service to North Conway. A Dover - North Conway shuttle train

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New Hampshire Rail News

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could connect with main line passenger trains at Dover. Guilford Rail Systems retains ownership of a portion of the line.

Local TV coverage of the proposed Exeter station has been very positive—now the public will have to become aware that the service will begin only after the rail line is brought up to passenger standards. It won't be tomorrow!

—Bill Hunt, Bob Hall,
TrainRiders Board Meeting, June 4, 1998.

RHODE ISLAND RAIL PROGRESS

Rhode Island has recently reaped the benefits of having its senior Senator, John H. Chaffee, serve as Chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. The recent Federal Transportation Bill included \$10 million for an MBTA layover facility to be built in Pawtucket, RI, replacing the present facility in South Attleboro, MA, where residents have complained of the noise from diesel locomotives idling through the night. This facility will serve the recently expanded MBTA service to Providence, providing three additional round trips daily between that city and Boston.

In Warwick, a station to be located at Hillsgrove, immediately adjacent to T.F.Green Airport (serving Greater Providence), will add two parking garages and a people mover connecting the station and the newly opened parking facilities at the recently expanded airport. The airport has a multi-level parking garage. Warwick will have the shortest link to Amtrak, 1200 feet, of any airport in the Northeast. Baltimore-Washington International Airport is served by Amtrak and the Baltimore light rail system. Newark's airport will be joined by a short monorail to a new station on the Northeast Corridor. The Warwick station will cost \$25 million, of which \$10 million is for the people mover. A private non-profit group, the Warwick Intermodal Station Corporation (WISC), sees

the federal funds as seed money for a major re-development of the station area featuring hotels, office space, restaurants, shops and entertainment. Plans have yet to be finalized. The station could open as early as September 1999, one month before Amtrak is scheduled to begin its high speed rail service between Boston and New York.

Wayne Davis, Chairman of TrainRiders/Northeast, was at Kingston station on May 31, 1998, to present the National Association of Railroad Passengers' Golden Spike Award to retired Senator Claiborne Pell. Senator Pell's 1966 book, *Megalopolis Unbound*, laid the foundation for the revival of passenger rail service in the United States through its advocacy for high speed rail.

The award to Senator Pell was part of dedication ceremonies for Kingston station. The historic 1875 structure constructed by the New York, Providence & Boston Railroad, known in Rhode Island as the "Stonington Line" for its southern terminus where it connected with steamboats for New York, has undergone extensive restoration following a fire in December



Senator Claiborne Pell receiving the Golden Spike award from NARP director Wayne Davis

1988. The dedication included a Civil War period band, one of the latest Amtrak locomotives, a new "Viewliner" sleeping car, and a steam locomotive from the Valley Railroad in Essex, CT. Hundreds of people attended the festivities and heard speeches by Governor Almond and Senator Chaffee, among others. Both parking lots were largely full for the occasion.

—Kingston Station Grand Celebration
(Program), May 31, 1998; *The Providence Journal-Bulletin*, April 22, 1998, May 28, 1998;
Warwick Beacon, May 28, 1998;
The Providence Sunday Journal, May 31, 1998.

Francis W. Warren, Jr., a member from Stowe, MA, has traveled by Amtrak to Arizona for winter vacations for five years. He boards the *Lake Shore Limited* at Worcester, MA, changing to the *Southwest Chief* at Chicago. Return trips have been made on the *Texas Eagle* to Chicago then via the *Lake Shore Limited* to Worcester. He has enjoyed the new Viewliner sleeping cars which replaced the Heritage sleepers. He is very deaf and has to read lips, but has traveled by himself and never missed a train or a meal. Quotations from his recent letter follow:

Traveling by train gives one a great opportunity to meet people from all over the world, under a relaxing situation and a place where there is freedom to move around and get off at long stops for exercise. There is time to view the scenery along the way and a chance to read and then get a good night's sleep as the train moves along. Train travel sure beats traveling by airplane, with crowded airports and small seats. The train does cost more than flying, except in coach, but the sleeper rooms are most certainly worth the extra cost.

I can truthfully say that in all the years of traveling by train, since 1964, and now with Amtrak, that I have never had a real bad experience. Once I did get delayed leaving Denver due to snow in Wyoming and when I reached Chicago, Amtrak took care of me and booked me on the next day's *Lake Shore Limited*.

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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OTHER VOICES

What Are We Waiting For?

Members of TrainRiders/Northeast know the value of high speed rail and the role it will play in the next century. So I direct my thoughts to people who, with good intentions, still live in the mindset of the multiple lane highway.

The era has passed. It was glorious—the *speed*, the *freedom*. America is now ill with pollution, road rage and mounting highway deaths.

Last year Maine was the fourth most popular state Americans moved to. Some of them immigrated from other lands (in Portland's public schools, forty languages and dialects are spoken at the kindergarten level alone). Those arriving include working people and retirees who found the sunbelt's splendid sunshine not worth the sprawl it beams upon.

The population of the United States is expected to grow by 50% over the next 50 years. Maine's growth has been slower than much of the country, but we added 14,000 persons since 1990, for a total of 1,242,000. We can't stop an expanding population, but we can plan for it. (Every person who supports TrainRiders is already doing this.) Or, we can fail to plan and continue to live with sprawl and the highways that sprawl begets.

The Long Island Expressway east of New York City is called "the longest parking lot in the

world." In their quest for a faster commute some of its daily users long ago began driving secondary roads and residential streets. Now the homeowners have road rage! It's people like this who are moving to Maine. Can you blame them?

Shall we build more highways? Yeah. Sure. *Very Funny.* The proposed East-West Highway through Bangor would knock down towns right and left and we may be sure the megabucks study will address "economic impact" rather than the quality of human and other life.

Beginning eight years from now a maglev train in Germany will run 180 miles from Berlin to Hamburg in one hour. Now think of 180 miles you'd like to cover within or just beyond Maine in an hour. Smooth ride, seat cozy enough to nap in—or you can use your laptop or the computer terminal on board the train. On top of it all, the maglev leaves behind minimal toxic emissions and a landscape so intact that cows graze beneath the track. That thought leads me to the deliciousness of existing high tech transportation: the Eurostar that glides from center city

London to center city Paris in less than three hours, the ferry in Vancouver that flies across the bay and links with the Skytrain.

What a day it will be when we zip by high speed rail from Portland to Bangor, from Augusta to Boston, or from Bangor to the new high speed ferry in Bar Harbor. Our conveyance may be a two car self-propelled train that skims along at 60 mph or a longer conventional train capable of higher speeds. Both will serve terminals where we can change trains or shift to another mode: plane, ferry, bus or private automobile. Maine's network of rails and the potential for high speed ferries linking coastal locations gives us the opportunity to serve many places without adding to sprawl.

The recent decision of the Surface Transportation Board allows us to create a network that will see improved health, reduced commuting time, more leisure time, less impact on wildlife, woodlands and farmlands; more serene citizens, and stronger Main Streets for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren. With pieces of the new era beginning to fall into place, Maine is an exciting place to live these days. That every member of TrainRiders promoted the creative thinking that went into it is a testimony to our collective joy in living the good life

— Paula Boyer Rougny