



To Our Valued Riders and Friends:

Last April, President Obama announced that the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) would provide a historic \$8B in federal funding as a down payment on the development of a world class high speed passenger rail system in our country. The \$8B was to be awarded through the High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) Grant Program, a competitive process under the direction of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). When the application deadlines closed on October 2 of last year, a total 259 applications had been submitted by 37 states requesting a total of \$57B in funding, including applications submitted by the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) to expand Downeaster service to Brunswick and improve the Portland-Boston corridor.

This week, it was announced that NNEPRA was selected to receive a HSIPR Grant in the amount of \$35M to upgrade 30 miles of track north of Portland to support the operation of the Downeaster service to Freeport and Brunswick. This marks the end of a 5-year planning process and funding quest, and signals the beginning of progress toward the improvement and expansion of passenger rail service in Maine.

On behalf of NNEPRA and its Board of Directors, I'd like to thank the Obama Administration, the US Department of Transportation and the Federal Railroad Administration for including the Downeaster Portland North Corridor Program in this historic investment initiative.

The expansion of Downeaster service to Brunswick would not be possible without the support of our elected officials, partners and advocates. Governor John Baldacci made this project a priority of his administration and has provided continued leadership. The efforts of the Maine State Legislature and the endorsement of Maine's Congressional Delegation, including letters of support from Senator Olympia Snowe and Senator Susan Collins, were key to the success of the application as was the help received from the Maine Department of Transportation, TrainRiders Northeast, Amtrak, Pan Am Railways, the NNEPRA staff and so many others.

The expansion to Brunswick would not be possible if the Downeaster was not already such a success. For the past eight years, Amtrak in cooperation with Pan Am Railways and the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) has operated one of the fastest growing and best performing passenger rail services in the country. And of course, the continued patronage of our riders has established the Downeaster as a critical piece of northern New England's transportation network. However, the Downeaster Portland North Program was not selected for HSIPR funding just because of political support and past successes, but because it clearly meets the objectives of the HSIPR Grant Program and FRA's strategic passenger rail plan. While many of the other projects awarded funding are much larger in scale, there is no question that the expansion of Downeaster service to Freeport and Brunswick will have significant long term impacts on our state and our region.





Initially, the benefits will be realized in the creation of about 200 construction, manufacturing and related jobs associated with the replacement of 28 track miles of rail and 29,000 ties, upgrades to 36 grade crossings, signal and communication improvements, drainage corrections, culvert reinforcements and the construction of two passenger platforms.

Thanks to the cooperation of Pan Am Railways, the project is fully engineered and ready to go. Construction meetings have already begun, and actual work can begin as soon as materials (primarily rail and ties) are delivered and the snow has melted. A passenger station has been built in Brunswick and the Freeport Train Station Committee plans to build a station in cooperation with a private developer. It is estimated that the project will take two construction seasons to complete, so the sooner construction begins, the sooner trains will roll.

An operating agreement is already in place with Amtrak, who will operate the service using the same equipment currently used for Downeaster service. The initial operating plan includes two round trips daily between Brunswick and Boston. In Brunswick, passengers will be able to connect with the Maine Eastern Railroad and travel to Rockland and the mid-coast region.

The public benefits of this expansion project extend far beyond construction and transportation. This initiative will make Maine more livable, more accessible and more competitive. With a stop in Freeport, the service will have a positive impact on tourism, will support the redevelopment efforts at the Brunswick Naval Air Station, and will connect the students and faculty of Bowdoin with USM, UNE, UNH and the educational institutions of Boston. It will stimulate tens of millions of dollars in private investment, including a hotel in Brunswick, a station in Freeport and much more to follow. And, now that service to Brunswick is certain, NNEPRA will begin evaluating the potential for service to Auburn and Lewiston. The list goes on.

NNEPRA also submitted an application to make improvements to the Portland – Boston corridor which would reduce Downeaster travel time and provide enough capacity to support additional round trips. That project was not selected for funding in this first round, but it is the intention of NNEPRA and our railroad partners to resubmit this project in future rounds of funding. A strong Portland-Boston service is the foundation of any passenger rail service within the state, and will remain a priority. The HSIPR Grant Program is part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and is the first of a series of funding opportunities for investments in our nation's passenger rail system. Details associated with future grants and funding programs have not yet been released, but NNEPRA will pursue every opportunity to secure the funding necessary to sustain and grow thriving passenger rail service in Northern New England.

In the meantime, we thank you for your business and encourage you to keep riding. We'll stay hard at work keeping the Downeaster on track for success.

Patricia

