



NNEPRA Awaits FRA Decision

It is common knowledge that after 20 years the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) continues to maintain a first-rate business relationship with Amtrak. But the best is yet to come: NNEPRA and Amtrak now look forward to expanding service by adding up to five or even seven daily round-trips to Freeport and Brunswick. Ridership numbers demand it. (On some runs, commuter pass holders sit on the floor until seats open up, usually after a stop or two. Sounds awful to your editor, but by and large they are a cheerful group. As one young woman said, "We're so glad to have this train and the economy commuter fare that we don't mind having to sit on the floor once in a while." (Pass holders are familiar with the fine print on the back of the ticket that points out that passage is guaranteed, but not a seat.)

Less than a year after the startup of service between Boston, Portland, Freeport and Brunswick, ridership is more than double the projected numbers.

We positively itch to discuss expansion to Lewiston-Auburn and Augusta, Waterville, Bangor and through-service New York City/Brunswick. But we would be getting ahead of ourselves. For now the focus is Freeport and Brunswick.

NNEPRA AWAITS FEDERAL RAIL AUTHORITY (FRA) DECISION of the on the Environmental Assessment draft for the layover facility to be built in the Brunswick rail yard, a site that now serves as the freight interchange area for Pan Am Railways and the Maine Eastern Railroad. In the interim, the layover facility design is being updated.

Due to the recent government shutdown, the FRA, like all federal agencies, was shuttered while its In-boxes filled up to the ceiling. At this writing, the FRA copes

with such a heavy backlog of work that we cannot even guess at the time-frame needed to catch up. Had the shutdown not happened, we would have the decision by now.

In the interim, excellent management has meant that NNEPRA came in ONE MILLION DOLLARS UNDER BUDGET for the fiscal year. What other organization can you name that has accomplished such a feat? (A hug from your editor for anyone who can name a better national example. ■

Speak of That Economy

Since inauguration of the expanded Amtrak service in November of last year, six new businesses have contracted to build or move into existing buildings at Brunswick Landing on the site of the former US Naval Air Base. This brings the total number of businesses and schools to 24, added to which Brunswick Executive Airport realized 1,000 take-offs and landings of private aircraft since the first of this year – impressive numbers for an airport that until three years ago was strictly military.

One of the town's oldest and most successful bakery/cafes is soon to open a branch at Brunswick Landing, and other local restaurants have made inquiries. According to spokesperson Ben Sturdivant of the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority (MRRA), the only food currently available on the 3,200 acre site comes from two vending machines. "The students are starving," he quipped.

Is the burgeoning economy at Brunswick Landing, which also features a good amount of residential housing, due in part to the Downeaster's arrival in town? If development that sprang up along the train's NH and southern Maine corridor after 2001

can be used as a guide, YOU BET.

At a former off-base housing site three miles away, near the rail station in an enclave of leafy green trees and curving streets, houses are gradually being released to the market. A realtor told me they tend to go under contract within 24 hours of being marketed. Is this phenomenon also due to the Downeaster? "Without a doubt," said Sturdivant.

Real estate ads for other houses located in-town Brunswick cite "WALKING DISTANCE TO AMTRAK STATION" as part of the appeal, and several houses in my own neighborhood, which is a mile from the station, have sold in the past several months without reaching the open market. ■

THE DOWNEASTER AS ECONOMIC ENGINE FOR OTHER TOWNS

In Old Orchard Beach, \$22 million was invested within a few blocks of the station after the train began stopping in 2001. Saco-Biddeford has seen \$300 million in investment within walking distance of its station. FYI, the Saco-Biddeford station is a cool piece of architecture, so welcoming inside that community groups use it for meetings. High ceilings, handsome furniture — and thanks to volunteer station hosts, no vandalism — and huge windows for watching trains approach.

Freeport has a \$2.5 million project in the hopper, and even prior to the arrival of train service in Brunswick, private developers invested \$30 million in the station building — two restaurants, a primary care walk-in clinic, upstairs office space, and a new hotel. The adjacent UNH Dairy Bar (ice cream cones for eating while you watch the train arrive, also soups and sandwiches) and a bicycle rental shop (next to the station's parking lot) and have also, thanks to the Downeaster, boosted the local economy.

All the above is what happens when a train stops in town and people step off. ■

In August, NNEPRA Reported that FY2013 was the Downeaster's BEST YEAR EVER

Moreover, ticket revenue of \$8.1 million surpassed that of \$7.4 million, another record high in FY2012. By my count, 10 of the past 12 years, when the Downeaster began cruising up to Maine, have been record breakers for both ridership and revenue.

The Yuppie Train

Once upon a time (late 20th century, pre-train), pundits dismissively referred to our train as "The Yuppie Train" and "a novelty to ride once." THE DOWNEASTER HAS NOW PUMPED \$64 MILLION in ticket revenue into the economy.

Mad Mad Mad Success of Summer Train Service to Cape Cod

The CapeFlyer between Boston and Hyannis had passengers cheering as the intercom system not only flashed pictures of backed up vehicular traffic to the Cape but frequently announced that traffic on the infamously slow Bourne Bridge was backed up for two hours.

The train, operated by the Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority, ran weekends only and was slated to end on Labor Day. Demand by riders led to operations being continued through Columbus Day. In the beginning, the authority did not dare set its sights on a more expanded schedule for fear of failure. (The last direct train Boston/Hyannis ended a half-century ago; the last indirect one stopped 18 years ago.)

The CapeFlyer needed 315 passengers per weekend to break even, or roughly 50 on each run. How many passengers showed up? Give or take, 1,200 per run. Said administrator Thomas Cahir, "We're pretty confident we'll make it." They did. ■

Paul Theroux on Passenger Rail

Paul Theroux is one of those cranky, sometimes mean-spirited writers whose work I hate to admit I like. The habit began 30 years ago when I opened up one of his early books to read the opening line. I no longer remember the exact words, but they had the author standing on the crowded Boston subway during morning rush. Other riders, he noted were hurrying to work and to school but he — he was on the first leg of a rail trip to Patagonia. The book is the classic *The Old Patagonian Express*.

Following is a quote from one of Theroux's later books, *The Kingdom By The Sea*: "It was only seven miles from Dover to Folkestone, but the railway line had the magnificence that

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BEST EVER ANNUAL MEETING

The TrainRiders/Northeast Annual Meeting in October was the best ever. Never did so many people LAUGH AND SMILE AND APPLAUD with so much spirit and go home so pumped up.

The crowd gave keynote speaker John Robert Smith, who is Co-Chairman of Transportation for America, a formal standing ovation, but more later on this. Other strong presentations were made by the following: Gene Skoropowski, Senior Vice-President of All Aboard Florida; David Bernhardt, Maine Commissioner of Transportation; Patricia Quinn, Executive Director of the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority; and David Fink, President of Pan Am Railways.



Keynote Speaker John Robert Smith is a former member of the Amtrak Board of Directors, a former four-term mayor of Meridian, Mississippi, and now Co-Chair of Transportation of America (*Website: t4america.org*), which is a coalition that advocates for a better

future in which we spend dollars at the federal, state, and local levels to create a safer, cleaner and smarter transportation system that works for everyone.

Members of the group include individuals, organizations, public officials, government agencies, and businesses from all over America that work together to create a closer alignment between transportation investments and other issues at the top of the public agenda — climate change, energy security, economic competition, health, housing, and community development — as a way to improve and enrich sustainability and a better quality of life for all.

Go to t4america.org (the group is also on Facebook and Twitter) to see for yourself such specifics as the concern over our country's 66,000+ structurally deficient bridges (and photos of collapsed ones) and advocacy for making a safer environment for children who must walk on streets because no sidewalks exist.

Transportation for America is a dynamic organization (TNE was one of the first members to join some years back) and Smith was a dynamic speaker. ■

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

Three Hundred Adults and Children Rode the Downeaster for Five Bucks

That's because National Train Day, which usually selects major cities as the site of celebrations, not only chose Brunswick this year but, as it happened, picked one of those days last spring (we endured them with patience) when bridge repair in Shawshen, MA meant no trains could cross. Hence no through service existed Boston/Brunswick, just Haverhill/Brunswick or any stop along the way.



Have lemons, make lemonade: No matter where riders chose to go on that Saturday in May, long- or short-haul, it cost \$5 per ticket.

The lion's share of five buck passengers rode all the way up to Brunswick. They got off, joined the festivities at the station — most popular display, model train set-up in the waiting room — and dispersed on foot to the town's many shops and restaurants, the appealing Bowdoin College campus, and the mall, which is a mall in the original sense: large old trees, grass, walkways, food vendors, a twice weekly farmer's market, a bandstand and, in winter, an ice skating pond. Station stop communities along the line all had booth representation in the covered arcade of the Brunswick Station complex, and of course, TNE had a booth manned by our volunteers seeking new members and offering our B&M Railroad history books for sale.

The Downeaster remained parked, and free tours were the order of the day, complete with free munchies in the café car served by NNEPRA staff. Executive Director Patricia Quinn kept the folks moving from that car to the coaches where TNE's Chairman Wayne Davis kept them moving through the rest of the train after time allowed to sit and enjoy their food. Red, white and blue balloons floated in small hands, and a good time was had by all.

The 300 returned in time to settle into coach seats and begin the quiet but exciting moment of hearing the diesel horn, hooooo whoooooo, hooooo whoooooo, as the Downeaster began to slowly and smoothly pull out of the station, and by degrees go faster . . . and faster and faster and faster. ■

THE TRAINRIDER

Box 4869, Downtown Station
Portland, Maine 04112

(207) TRY-RAIL (879-7245)

Return Service
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Chairman's Update

Though we've communicated through our website (thanks to the ongoing efforts of our tireless Webmaster, Bill Lord, some may have missed that our Strategic Planning Committee has been busy preparing a recommendation to TNE's Board of Directors to ensure the continued success and longevity of TrainRiders/Northeast.

In addition, on the evening of our 25th Anniversary meeting, we submitted a letter to NNEPRA asking for a preliminary cost analysis for one of our original goals – through trains between Brunswick, Portland and New York City via Lowell Jct., Ayer, Worcester, Providence and New Haven. As we gear up for this effort, (more details in our next newsletter and on our website) let me list a few capital needs.

We need an angel or two.

- New Computer (current ones are 7 years old – and cranky)
- Replace our 25 year old Portable

Standup Display for public events.

- A portable DVD projector.
- We could also use some more clerical help in the Portland office and a bunch more of Station and Train Hosts. Those programs have become a popular feature and many current volunteers – after 13 years of volunteerism are ready to retire.

And as always, without your kind and generous donations – we can't survive so please – we're on a roll – help us continue.



www.trainridersne.org

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all lines do when they run beside the sea... the inevitable tunnel the roar of the engines and the crashing of waves, the surf just below the tracks, the flecks of salt water on the train windows. . . It was man's best machine traversing earth's best feature – the train tracking in the narrow angle between vertical rock and horizontal water."

www.trainridersne.org

On TrainRiders/Northeast's website, trainridersne.org, you can read policy statements from Chairman Wayne Davis and make comments on them. You will also see news feeds on other Amtrak activities; learn how to become a train host on the Downeaster; view videos, and much more. We are also now on [Facebook.com/TrainRidersNortheast](https://www.facebook.com/TrainRidersNortheast).

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