

WOW!

FYI 2014 TO DATE SHOWS DOWNEASTER GROWTH

The Downeaster has been such a stunning success from the get-go in regard to ridership and revenue that, going into its 13th year of providing service, it is hardly news. However, just to toot our horn:

Ridership in January of 2013 came to 34,134 with revenue of \$557,145. The same month this year realized 36,100 riders (mind you, in the awesome whammy of our Arctic Vortex Specialty Winter) and \$588,597 in revenue.

February of 2013 saw 32,246 riders and \$525,199 in revenue. February 2014, 36,114 riders and \$602,942. This amounts to an increase of 5,834 passengers and \$109,195 in revenue—in just two months, during an ongoing winter blast for the records.

ON TIME PERFORMANCE was 69.6% in January and 75% in February. To date, March shows 87%. OVERALL CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SCORE for the Downeaster in January was 92% as compared to Amtrak's 85%.

THANK YOU, TRAIN CREWS; you did hard labor all winter in BELOW ZERO and/or SINGLE DIGIT ABOVE zero temps in predawn darkness in the Portland railyard to clear train and unfreeze the doors of nor'easter-strength ice that blew into the crevices and solidified.

YOU SHOVELED deep banks of icy snow. And 15 minutes later, crisply dressed and ready to "begin" the workday, greeted passengers on the platform even though your fingers were numb. (But we know from our own frozen overhead garage doors and iced up house doors that passengers themselves had pretty numb fingers.)



University of New Hampshire students line up to board our Downeaster.

EDITOR'S SAME OLD COMPLAINT: Neither airplane pilots and other crew members nor intercity coach drivers are made to labor in below freezing temps in the dark before they start the day operating engines and serving passengers. Why? Buses and planes receive 20 to 30 times the amount of subsidies

that trains do. ■

Benjamin Kirkland

1931—2013

BENJAMIN KIRKLAND, 82, stellar TrainRiders/Northeast board member for 25 years and a generous benefactor, passed away on Christmas Day 2013 in Tarboro, NC, where he was born, educated, and to which he returned in his final years.

Benjamin lived in Wiscasset, Maine with Henry Ferne II at their home, Daybreak, for more than 35 years. It was Henry Ferne who provided seed money that allowed Wayne Davis to establish, with the help of the first board, the non-profit educational corporation that New England now recognizes as TrainRiders/Northeast.

Benjamin was a member of the National Garden Club and was one of the three founding members of the Mid-Mine Rose Society. He also worked on early plans for the Coastal Botanical Gardens in Boothbay, Maine. He was generously involved with the Maine State Police Scholarship Fund and the Wiscasset Public Library.

He is survived by his brother Virgil and wife Leah Jean Kirkland, sister-in-law Lillian Kirkland, and many nieces and nephews.

A memorial service will be held at the Daigle Funeral Home in Bath, Maine on May 21, followed by burial in the Greenlawn Cemetery in Wiscasset.

DERAILING DOWNEASTER SERVICE BY DELAY TACTICS

(Adapted from Times Record Op Ed, April 1, 2014, by Jeff Reynolds, Brunswick, Maine)

Something curious happened. The letter written to town council by Brunswick West Neighborhood Coalition (BWNC) is, word for word, about 70% identical to the one sent to them by Gov. Paul LePage.

Both letters urge the council to write to the FRA to tell it to create an Environmental Impact Statement for its layover/maintenance facility on the site of the historical railyard—the same part of town where I live.

The BWNC represents a tiny minority view within the state, but their next to the last line is identical to the governor's last line: the overnight facility will lead to "participation by all stakeholders, and responsible resolution of current divergence on location alternatives and consequences."

The Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) has bent over backwards to bring everyone into the discussion of where to locate and how to build the facility. For three years, public forums, special committees, notifications, media coverage, and presentations before town council have been carried out.

Members of the BWNC were invited to sit on the advisory committee. Along with public input, these meetings led to significant changes in plans for the facility.

When the Environmental Assessment was sent to FRA with feedback from the public, the BWNC submitted "thousands of pages of objections"

to the FRA. That material is currently being reviewed, delayed by several months due to last year's government shutdown. The fact remains that any claim by the BWNC that it has not been allowed to participate is bogus.

The neighborhood coalition and Gov. LePage letters' business about "current divergence on location" is also without merit. The only site where the layover facility can function as intended is the traditional center of freight and passenger train activity in Brunswick: the Church/Stamwood site, which as late as the 1970s had other buildings along the tracks.

All other possible sites were investigated rigorously and all had serious problems. The two other East Brunswick sites favored by the governor and the BWNC are awful. Period. When Amtrak expands from Brunswick, it will not be toward E. Brunswick but up the Kennebec River to Augusta, Waterville and Bangor.

The two letters mention nothing specific and nothing about the negatives of their own ideas for the site. Telling the FRA to call for an Environmental Impact Statement is a delaying tactic while the small neighborhood (three or four streets, three for four dozen houses) pursues its own ultimate goal: killing all railroad progress.

Should the BWNC get its way, we can paraphrase Winston Churchill, "Never have so few done so much harm to so many." ■

The sites favored by the BWNC and the governor are awful. Period. The Downeaster will expand from Brunswick up to the Kennebec River, not east to the ocean.

WASHINGTON RETAIL DISTRICT'S FUTURE RIDES ON STREETCARS

(Adapted from the New York Times, April 16, 2014, by Eugene L. Meyer)

Your editor regrets the exclusion from this story of the exhilarating urban scene in the color photo (red streetcar of the new sort that flexes in the middle for turning corners, orange striped traffic cones, psychedelic lime vests on workers, hazy blue sky) that accompanied this article. It is true that one picture is worth a thousand words, so here goes the 1,000 words:

The streetcars stopped running in 1949, replaced by buses. In the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King, the 1968 riots devastated the commercial corridor. Only in recent years has revitalization occurred.

The return of the trolleys is being hailed by city officials, businesses and developers as a new generation of economic wealth that will more than pay for the first of eight planned and heavily subsidized streetcar lines, eventually extending for 37 miles throughout the District of Columbia. Planners already project as much as \$8 million in new investment within 10 years of the lines' completion.

A developer whose high-end condos a few years ago marked an early catalyst for much of what has happened

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...Streetcars

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since said that light rail is a big multiplier for a retail corridor. Expectations are that the streetcars will accelerate the H Street renaissance.

Today, H Street residents, once predominantly low-income African Americans, are increasingly mixed racially and economically, as rowhouses within a block or two of the corridor undergo upscale renovations and property values rise and ethnic restaurants proliferate.

Along the route, a dozen raised platforms are in place for passengers to get on and off. Terry Bellamy, director of the District's transportation agency, said the initial line was projected to have over one million riders in its first year of operation. For a while at least, buses will continue to operate with the trolleys on the route.

A 2012 consultants study predicted the new system would encourage economic development including "additional retail spending of new households and workers attracted by the streetcar." The "visible presence" of the streetcar "can serve as a powerful attraction to private real estate investment," the study added. These economic benefits, the study said, "would exceed the projected cost of creating the system by 600% to 1,000%."

Editor's note: A similar investment—restaurants, condos, spending—has been created by the Downeaster service since 2001 in every town from Haverhill, MA north to Brunswick, ME, even though service to the latter did not go into operation until just a year and a half ago. To my knowledge no one has done a study on it, and the New York Times has not made a national report complete with enticing color photo.

USE OF PUBLIC TRANSIT IN U.S. REACHES HIGHEST LEVEL IN 58 YEARS

Adapted from the New York Times, March 10, 2014

Philadelphia—More Americans used buses, trains and subways in 2013 than in any year since 1956 as service improved, local economies grew and travelers sought alternatives to the automobile.

The American Public Transportation Association said in its annual report that 10.65 billion passenger trips were taken on transit systems during the year, surpassing the post-1950s peak of 10.59 billion in 2008, when gas prices rose \$4 to \$5 a gallon.

Ridership in 2013, when gas prices were lower than in 2008, undermines the conventional wisdom that transit use rises when those prices exceed a certain threshold, and suggests that other factors are bolstering enthusiasm for public transportation, said Michael Melaniphy, the president of the association.

"Now gas is averaging well under \$4 a gallon, the economy is coming back and people are riding transit in record numbers," Mr. Melaniphy. "We're seeing a fundamental shift in how people are moving about in their communities."

From 1995 to 2013, transit ridership rose 37%, well ahead of a 20% growth in population and a 23% increase in vehicle miles traveled.

"We're seeing that where cities have invested in transit, their unemployment rates have dropped and employment is going up because people can get there," Mr. Melaniphy said.

The biggest gains were in rail and bus service for smaller cities.

The system is also being increasingly used during off-peak times, especially by younger people, who are encouraged by promotions like free transfers between subways and buses and by a decline in crime.

In Denver, the Regional Transit District topped 101 million passenger trips last year, its most ever, helped by an improving economy and an increasing acceptance that public transit is an attrac-

tive alternative to the automobile, said Scott Reed a spokesman for the district.

ONE OF THE CHALLENGES is simply getting people to try public transportation, Mr. Reed said, but when they do, "they find it is so much easier than they thought.

The 14-mile light rail W Line connecting Denver, Lakewood and Golden, Colorado, opened in April and by the end of the year was carrying about 15,000 passengers a day. The line is part of a FasTracks expansion program which will consist of 122 additional miles of light and commuter rail, 18 miles of a bus rapid transit system and a doubling of park-and-ride facilities, all scheduled for completion in 2016.

The estimated \$7 billion cost is being paid for in part with a 0.4% sales tax, which voters approved in 2004. Nationally, tax-payers are increasingly willing to finance public transportation improvements, Mr. Melaniphy said, adding that in the past two years, more than 70% of transit tax initiatives have succeeded.

Todd Litman, an analyst at the Victoria Transport Policy Institute in Victoria, BC, said the new data were the latest indication of changing consumer preferences as a result of increasing urbanization, an aging population, and environmental and health concerns.

From your editor: The Architect's Newspaper blog by Scott Kelly presented a slightly different but equally exciting angle on the above report on public transit use:

We have caught up to 1958. The American Public Transportation Administration released a report that reveals 10.7 billion trips were taken on public transportation in 2013. This involved 146 million of us.

The report also shows that in the past 20 years transit ridership is up 37%, a rate that outpaces population growth.

The systems in major cities such as NY and LA as well as the ones in smaller metro areas such as Yuma, AZ, Ann Arbor, MI and saw record levels of usage. ■

THE TRAINRIDER

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Chairman's Update

Even though we're tardy with this edition of the newsletter, you should know that we're all still at work — "Changing the Way the Northeast Travels."

The Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA), the quasi-state agency that superbly manages the Downeaster service, held a public meeting recently to allow comment on their in-progress Downeaster Service Plan. We asked that the plan include the following:

During the initial planning in 1988 for today's Downeaster, we recommended 8 daily round trips between Boston and Portland. Amtrak and State officials recommended 3 round trips — we negotiated 4 to start the service but within 2 years NNEPRA had to add a 5th round trip to handle the crowds. We ask now for an increase to 7 round trips per day.

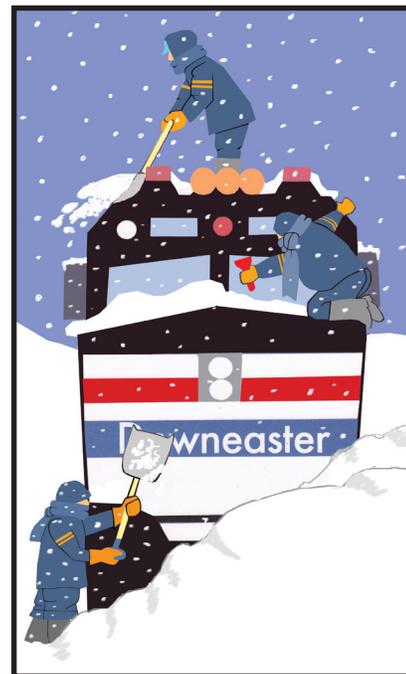
Originally, the ROW between Boston and Portland was double tracked. We recommended that the 2nd track be completely restored to permit higher speeds and to alleviate any congestion which might result by increasing the daily number of round trips.

In 1988, we advocated for 79 mph trains over most of the line. Currently only certain portions of the track can accommodate that speed. Since it was TNE that was instrumental in having Maine designated as one of the eleven high-speed corridors in the U.S. some years ago, we now recommend that speeds be raised to 90 and 110 mph on a phased program.

With increasing ridership (currently 6% higher than last year at this time) the Downeaster equipment needs upgrade and replacement. We recommend that the next class of equipment acquired by Amtrak be assigned to the Downeaster. NNEPRA should also evaluate the advantages of acquiring its own rolling stock.

Though TNE's original goals included expansion to Bangor, via Freeport, Brunswick, Augusta and Waterville and via Auburn/Lewiston and Waterville as well, such routes are presently being pursued by several private organizations. With this in mind, TNE's Board has voted to pursue its final original goal: through service to New York via Worcester, MA. We recommended that NNEPRA explore this service to New York cooperatively with affected state DOT's in the region. — *WD*

Thank you, train crews, for your hard labor all winter in below zero and/or single digit temps in pre-dawn darkness in the Portland railyard.



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