

# **Bangor Daily News – August 25, 2009**

## **August 25 Letters to the Editor**

### **Railroad consequences**

The unsurprising decision of the Montreal, Maine & Atlantic Railway to pursue abandonment of nearly half its tracks in Maine is another harbinger of the need for public sector involvement in ownership and maintenance of uneconomic light-density lines judged to have socioeconomic value. An already downsized New England rail network faces further contraction as freight traffic from a declining industrial base dwindles. Insufficient revenues to maintain costly infrastructure inevitably lead to a downward spiral of reduced train speeds and reliability of service.

Growing public and political sentiment for shifting more traffic from highway to rail to ease vehicular congestion, reduce road maintenance, improve fuel efficiency and alleviate air and noise pollution therefore will require a commensurate commitment from state budgets. The reality is that all remaining routes in northern New England are economically fragile, and MM&A should be commended for calling attention to its 241-mile problem before the cost of constructive intervention becomes prohibitive.

It's no coincidence that this action follows a special exemption from federal engineering standards obtained by Maine's congressional delegation for the northern portion of I-95, thereby undercutting the rail option by allowing overweight trucks on a route roughly paralleling MM&A's threatened corridor. Will that decision have unintended consequences?

Politicians should stop hallucinating about expanded passenger services and "high-speed rail" (both requiring heavy subsidies) until they decide which active segments of the existing system merit preservation assistance. A pending independent update of the State Rail Plan should help to establish coherent legislative priorities.

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