Twice-monthly trade newsletter dedicated to the preservation and extension of the rail network in New England, the Maritimes, and Eastern Quebec.

Operating railroads + ports, intermodal facilities, and government environment

Regional Issues

**PW**: Traffic details, locomotive repair.

**CONNECTICUT**

**PW**: Power company customer.

**FTR**: PW, HRRC grants.

**MAINE**

**B&A**: Loss of Limestone customer.

**GRS**: Winslow mill space.

**MASSACHUSETTS**

**EOTC**: Doublestack study slowed.

**GRS**: Ayer auto facility, intermodal embargo, Bemis abandonment.

**MBTA**: Maintenance contract dispute over 13C.

**PW**: Worcester looks to the railroad.

**FTR**: Bond bill, PVRR abandonment, North-South rail link, Berkshire Scenic.

**NEW HAMPSHIRE**

**GRS**: Ciment Québec coming. Salem abandonment.

**West Lebanon**: CCRR agreement.

**RHODE ISLAND**

[No report.]

**VERMONT**

**VTA**: Starting work on commuter.

**Amtrak**: Finally a contract. ABRB this winter?

**Commuter**: to Charlotte in autumn. Essex Junction further study.

**FTR**: Capital budget in conference. Wells River branch first freight; VAOT meeting on operator 2 May.

**MARITIMES/QUÉBEC**

**NBDOT**: No money for rail.

**NSDOT**: Budget cut ends APTC and HDPDC.

**B&A**: Sherbrooke ‘takes’ the train.

**Halifax**: CN says start commuter or lose track.

**VIA**: Restoration of Saint John and Sydney service?

**ATLANTIC NORTHEAST PORTS**

**Halifax**: Halterm update. Port Commission to close.

**PEOPLE, POSITIONS, EVENTS**

Sad goodbyes

Farewell to the Atlantic Provinces Transportation Commission! Its news updates on the website were of immense assistance in following rails and ports in Atlantic Canada. If any reader can point me toward a similar summary of news, please tell me.

Farewell also to the Halifax-Dartmouth Port Development Commission. Its staff was always helpful, and I hope Port Days and *Port of Halifax* will continue.

Favorite story

Commuter is gaining! Charlotte, Essex Junction, Nashua, and now possibly Halifax.

Next issue: 12 May.

FROM THE PUBLISHER

Chop Hardenbergh

PROVIDENCE AND WORCESTER
30 March, Brewster MA. “WITH SCHEDULED SERVICE, IT’S AMAZING WHAT YOU CAN SELL TO THE CUSTOMER,” according to PW’s director of marketing, Frank Rogers. Speaking at the spring meeting of the Northeast Association of Rail Shippers (NEARS), he said railroads should start with consistent service, and then whittle down the transit time. He pointed to three examples:

Interline short move
PW has initiated a move out of Canada handling about 450 cars a year a distance under 400 miles. The cars originate on a short line, move 80 miles on CN, then 200 miles on another short line [presumably NECR to New London], and finally 40 miles with PW over Amtrak trackage [either to Providence or to New Haven]. Due to the operating discipline, the railroads can turn the equipment three times a month.

“We’re doing this four-railroad move in four days with a one-day variability. This shows that a single seamless line is not necessary,” to provide scheduled service, even though others cite the need for seamless service as a reason for mergers.

Pre-blocking with Guilford
PW, working with GRS, is now blocking out east-bound cars and west-bound cars for interchange at Gardner MA. “That means east-bound, the next stop is Waterville, and west-bound, Mohawk Yard (NY) and beyond.” Preblocking has secured more business for both lines.

Steel traffic
Rogers explained that carloads of steel to and from Canada had dramatically improved. In 1999, PW moved 650 cars; in 2000 he expects to move 1000. {ANR&P coverage}

26 April, Worcester MA. THE RAILROAD ANNOUNCED THE OPENING OF A NEW ADDITION TO ITS PRIMARY LOCOMOTIVE REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE FACILITY here. The $1.8 million project, a 9,000SF state of the art facility, includes a maintenance bay and inspection bay. Combined with its existing building, the Locomotive Maintenance and Repair Facility now encompasses some 18,200 SF making PW the only regional railroad in the Northeast with repair and maintenance facilities of this caliber.

The addition was designed and constructed by Cutler Associates of Worcester. PW acquired the original facility in 1973, a 7,000SF combined maintenance facility and administrative headquarters, when it commenced independent operations. In 1980 PW made a $1 million addition for the repair and maintenance of all its rolling stock as well as other railroads. The railroad owns and operates a fleet of thirty locomotives and thirty-seven 100-ton and forty 110-ton open top gondolas.

Contract repair
PW has provided locomotive and rail car repair services to Conrail, Amtrak, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, and certain of its freight customers. Unlike many other regional and short line railroads, the Company maintains multiple maintenance and engine house facilities, including the primary facility in Worcester and a facility in Plainfield CT. {PW press release}

CONNECTICUT RR

PW
30 April, Killingly CT. A NEW CONNECTICUT CUSTOMER IS RECEIVING BY RAIL. Lake Road Generating Company power plant took delivery of a gas turbine by rail, following earlier deliveries of two 350-ton generators by rail. Jim Carleton, the general manager, is overseeing the construction of an 800MW gas-fired power plant, which will use natural gas from a pipeline running about 1.5 miles north of the site.

ABB-Alstom has the contract to engineer, procure, and construct the facility for the PG&E Corporation’s Natural Energy Corporation, headquartered in Bethesda MD. Carleton expected it to come on line in May 2001.

Carleton expected another turbine and another generator to arrive by rail. Construction steel and transformers may also arrive by rail, but PW does not expect continuing inbound traffic.

To permit the loads to move from Worcester, PW and the company “cooperatively” raised the clearance on a bridge over the line in Webster MA, Deborah Sedares, PW general counsel, said on 7 January. {ANR&P discussions 7.Jan.00, 1.May.00}

FOR THE RECORD:
CONNECTICUT
MORE ON THE ConnDOT GRANTS. According to Ray Godcher of ConnDOT on 26 April, the department had not received a confirming letter back from PW on the special $1.3 million grant [see 14 April issue]. For HRRC, the department is still deciding how much it has left after the other grants. {ANR&P discussion}

MAINE RAILROADS

BANGOR & AROOSTOOK
28 April, Limestone. THE POTENTIAL RAIL CUSTOMER AT THE FORMER BASE fell through.

Background
On 8 March, the Loring Development Authority, which is
redeveloping the former Loring Air Force Base into the Loring Commerce Center, announced a deal with R&A Warehouse of Whittinsville MA to lease 119,000SF next to a rail line.

At its 60,000SF Whittinsville facility, the company stores, distributes, and repackages reground plastic material, as well as storing wood pallets, ceramic tiles, magnesium chloride, sodium hydrosulfite, wool, and yarn.

In Maine, R&A planned to store and redistribute materials for the papermaking industry, some imported via Saint John and Halifax. Previous to coming upon Loring, Ron Kollross, the owner and director of operations of R&A, had spent two years looking for a rail-served site for expansion in Massachusetts.

The denouement
On this day, per Kollross, his three base customers for the Loring facility called in the space of half an hour to bail out of the project. “All had given me letters of commitment, and my financing depended on those commitments,” he said. If the three had grown as projected, their product would have filled his Loring warehouse within two years.

One customer, a North Carolina-based paper-related company, was going to move 24-30 containers a month via Saint John. It dropped out because of poor sales.

A second was going to bring in calcium chloride from Pennsylvania via barge out of New Jersey—it currently moves to Massachusetts—to Saint John to be railed to Limestone. However, that customer’s supplier abruptly announced the CaCl\textsubscript{2} in-ground source was tapped out. The customer, in Franklin MA, lost the supplier of 80\% of his CaCl\textsubscript{2}, and CaCl\textsubscript{2} formed 60\% of his business.

The third customer generally was not developing enough business to keep his commitment.

Hence, said Kollross, he would have to call Loring to say he could not lease the facility. “We were going to start up in June or July,” and build up to 20 workers. {ANR&P discussions 1.May.00; Debra Sund in Bangor Daily News 9.Mar.00; Loring Commerce Center News winter.spring 2000}

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**Interest of the Madison Paper Company**

This paper company, 40\% owned by the New York Times, purchased about 30 acres just north of the Kimberly-Clark buildings. It will eventually purchase the hydropower dam which the 30 acres surrounds. Glenn Foss, the director of human services, explained that the company would not directly use the power from the dam, but would “wheel” it into the regional network. {ANR&P discussions 27-28.Apr.00}

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**UNION BRANCH**

1 May, Portland. THE STATE IS COMMITTED TO RESTORING RAIL VIA BAYSIDE, since the Maine Legislature passed the supplemental appropriations bill, LD. 2510. It contained an appropriation of $3.5 million in FY2000, and $7.5 million in FY2001. Of that, $10.55 million is allocated to pay for purchasing the Union Branch and constructing a new rail line to reach the SLR in East Deering (the balance of $500,000 goes to repairs on the Calais branch).

**Next steps**

Ron Roy, director of MDOT’s Office of Passenger Transportation, said MDOT has received an appraisal of the branch from GRS. “We’re getting our own appraisal, and the federally-required appraisal review. We could be acquiring the branch by June.”

At the closing, Roy hoped, the state would sell the major portion of the Union Branch to the City of Portland, which wants it for a trail [see 21 January issue].

In August, when the supplemental money becomes available, MDOT will begin the planning and engineering design for the work. John Melrose, MDOT commissioner, said his department has already started highway design because the rail line along I-295 will entail re-locating two sets of exit and entrance ramps. {ANR&P discussions}

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**FOR THE RECORD:**

MAINE

AMERICAN TISSUE WILL START its plant in Augusta [see 14 April issue] on 15 May, the scheduled sale date. Ken Newman, who works for current owner Tree-Free Fiber during the startup, said previous owner Scott Paper had always used rail, but Tree-Free used only truck. He could not say whether American Tissue would use rail. {ANR&P discussion 28.Apr.00}

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NO DOODLEBUG ON THE CALAIS BRANCH. MDOT Commissioner John Melrose explained that Bill McDonald, who wants to operate along 10 miles east of Ellsworth, has underestimated the cost to get the line in shape. And Melrose does not want to spend state dollars: “For every $1 I have, I can get $4 federal dollars toward the upgrade of the line from Brewer to Calais.” {ANR&P discussion 1.May.00; e-mail from McDonald}
**EOTC DOUBLESTACK**

2 May. **THE LACK OF AVAILABLE FUNDING** to pay for full clearance of the Commonwealth’s rail lines has become even clearer. Jim Molloy, the Northeastern University professor heading a re-examination of the cost and funding sources for the project [see 3 December 1999 issue], explained he had halted work on his re-examination because he was appointed to a panel studying how to fund the MBTA for the next five years.

The panel’s report, due out this week, indicates that “there’s no way the T can fund everything it has planned” even with a recommended fare increase. The Commonwealth is facing the overruns on the Big Dig plus the T expenses, and is looking at no funds for doublestack.

Having spent the last 10 weeks on the T study, Molloy can now get back to the doublestack report for EOTC. {ANR&P discussion}

**GRS - MASSACHUSETTS**

30 March, Boston. **MORE DETAIL ON GRS’ EFFORT TO BUILD ANOTHER AUTO FACILITY** in Ayer. The federal action, under which GRS argues that federal law pre-empts any state action to regulate railroad facilities [see 21 March issue], is proceeding to discovery, under the supervision of Judge Joseph Tauro.

GRS has hired a Washington attorney, a Boston attorney, and a Concord attorney. The defendants the Town of Ayer, the Ayer Board of Selectmen [I like the gender-neutral term ‘selectboard’], the Ayer Planning Board, the Ayer Board of Health, and the individuals on those boards, are represented by Boston attorney Jocelyn M. Sedney of the firm Brody, Hardoon, Perkins & Kesten. {USDistrictCourtwebsite, Case#: 99-CV-12606}

13 April, North Adams. **THE RAILROAD EMBARGOED INTERMODAL TRAFFIC OVER 18’0” ATR** (above the rail) via Mechanicville NY. According to GRS Executive Vice-president David Fink, the embargo permitted GRS to improve a bridge in North Adams for heavier loadings. That bridge carried the ‘clearance track’ so GRS had to embargo all the intermodal traffic on its main line until workers improved the bridge. The embargo should be lifted in a matter of weeks, Fink said. {Embar Go.2-00 on Consecutive Sheets #70 and 71 in Views and News 17.4.00; ANR&P discussion 1.May.00}

28 April, Chelmsford. **FLETCHER GRANITE IS STILL LOOKING AT USING RAIL**, according to Dave Psaledas, the company engineer. “We’re surveying the right of way, looking at what’s there, and what we need to do to get it in shape.” He did not expect a connection with the national rail network to occur for six to twelve months. [See 27 August 1999.]

This day contractor Acorn Railroad of Worcester MA completed doing the rail work to upgrade the rail crossing here. Fletcher Granite operates an internal line to move granite from its quarry north of Route 40 to its fabricating plant south of Route 40. The company has had to flag the crossing; it recently got federal crossing funds via the Massachusetts Highway Department to install signals.

Psaledas said ABC [now ABC-NACO] would install the signals on 1 May, and the system should be operating “by the end of the month.” {ANR&P discussion 1.May.00}

**Opposition**

Neighbors of the line remain opposed. Thomas Price, who lives at 49 Brookside Road, wrote a letter to selectmen early this month, urging the board to “support the neighborhood in opposing the reintroduction of trains” to the area. Price, who moved into his home 21 years ago, estimated that the tracks had been dormant since the late 1960s.

Price noted that titles to properties in the area refer to the tracks as an "abandoned rail line." And, while such documents are not legally binding, Price said that the clear belief among neighbors was that the rails were permanently inactive.

Fletcher Granite has pledged to meet with Nabnasset residents once the testing is done and before any work on the rails is begun. {Austin O’Connor in Lowell Sun 27.Apr.00}

24 April, Watertown. **A ‘NOTICE OF INTENT TO ABANDON’ THE BEMIS INDUSTRIAL TRACK** was published this day, covering the section in Waltham and Watertown from milepost 8.83 to milepost 10.94. The notice mentioned the decrease in service and the intent of a major customer to relocate. {The Boston Herald}

**History of the Watertown/Bemis branch**

The Watertown branch, between Waltham and West Cambridge, was built by the Fitchburg Railroad in 1849. In 1893 it carried so heavy a load of commuters that it was doubletracked. Passenger service was eliminated in 1938. In 1960 the B&M abandoned the 0.9 miles in the middle so that the grade crossing in busy Watertown Square (location of the town hall) could be eliminated. {Ronald Dale Karr in Lost Railroads of New England, 1996}

The split left GRS with two ‘industrial tracks’: one in West Cambridge leading to Newlywed Foods called the ‘Watertown Industrial Track,’ and one in Waltham/Watertown leading to Americold called the ‘Bemis Industrial Track.’ {GRS Timetable 1998}

**Track status**

According to managers at Sterritt Lumber, one of the two customers on the track, GRS wanted to discontinued the spur two months ago. Receivers got a 60-day extension, but on 26 April a rail turned over when the switcher was pushing a car into Sterritt Lumber’s yard on Waltham Street in Watertown. “The ties lie right on the ground and have rotted out,” according to one official. “That’s the end of the rail system.”

A concern to running this branch could be the two wooden trestles over the Charles River, which, according to one rail
observer, “local jerks try to burn down every so often.”

**AmeriCold**

The other customer on that branch is the AmeriCold (formerly Quincy Cold Storage) food warehouse at the end of the active track. (555 Pleasant Street). Rail observers report that the company was receiving about 10 refrigerated cars per month, some BNSF reefers apparently carrying apples from Washington. AmeriCold intends to close this facility, thus precipitating the abandonment.

**Sterritt Lumber**

Sterritt has offices at 110 Arlington Street on the Watertown branch, and a yard at 138 Waltham Street on the Bemis branch. According to Dave Daly, the company still would like to receive by rail. However, it receives only 24-30 carloads a year and he understood that the company could not do much about the abandonment with that volume.

He will probably turn to a transload operation; “I know a couple of guys” who would do transloading, said Daly.

**Balance of branch**

The abandonment does not apply to the Cambridge end of the branch, which still has a major customer in Newlywed-Foods.

**Who will buy the branch?**

Mark Boyle of the planning staff for the City of Watertown said it would not oppose the abandonment. “It’s not seen as a vital economic resource.”

EOTC could not comment by press date on whether the Commonwealth would purchase it. {ANR&P discussions 27 April 2000; NERAIL e-mail list}

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**MBTA - MAINTENANCE CONTRACT**

25 April, Boston. **WILL AMTRAK WIN BACK THE T MAINTENANCE CONTRACT?**

**Background**

In 1998, the MBTA was asked to reduce its costs by putting rail operations out to bid, rather than award the contract to Amtrak again. The T put the contract for maintenance of operating equipment out to bid.

Amtrak bid the highest: $292 million. The T awarded a five-year contract to the low bidder at $176 million, Bay State Transit, a joint venture of Boise Locomotive (a former subsidiary of MK Rail Systems which was recently merged with Westinghouse Air Brake to form WABCO) and Herzog Transit Services [see 24 September 1999 issue]. Both parents have long experience and strong records in the railroad industry.

Bay State planned to thin the work force from 550 to 400, promising union jobs at wage and benefit levels comparable to Amtrak’s. It also pledged to hire its workers from the pool of current Amtrak employees. Since Amtrak’s Boston-area service uses more workers per locomotive and per passenger car than any other commuter rail operation in America, not all the current employees would be hired immediately. The MBTA guaranteed that all displaced workers would have priority for comparable jobs at the T as they became available.

However, the rail unions and political allies are fighting back, and apparently have convinced the Clinton administration to re-examine the contract award, and particularly requirements for job security under the 13C clause [see 27 August 1999 issue]. The Amtrak workers refused to apply for the jobs, relying on federal labor protections that they claimed guarantee laid-off transit employees up to six years’ pay. Once workers are offered comparable jobs, those labor protections no longer apply.

In February, the T told Bay State to hold off on hiring any maintenance workers, declining to explain why.

**Deadlines looming**

Under its contract, Bay State must handle the maintenance work as of 7 May. Due to the T’s request, Bay State did not meet the deadline of having a workforce in place by 30 March, and will not meet the operating deadline.

Amtrak has received extensions on its current maintenance contract, but the last extension will expire in June. Hence, the T must either break its contract with Bay State, or give Bay State the green light very soon to begin hiring workers.

**US Senate examination**

On this day, at a US Senate Commerce Committee hearing, chair Phil Gramm (R, Texas) criticized federal transit agencies for postponing, and possibly derailing, the plan to shift maintenance of the transit project from Amtrak to a private contractor.

The prospect of losing millions in cost savings angered Gramm, who called for restructuring 13C which stymied competition at a cost to taxpayers. “We’re getting ready to keep Amtrak doing this work poorly and at a high cost,” he said. “I don’t understand it.”

Gramm’s comments, GOP congressional aides said, implied that the delays in federally funded transit projects may indicate the Clinton administration is courting labor in an election year. Democrats, including Senator John Kerry, defended the labor statute as necessary to protect the 550 workers maintaining the commuter rail, who have rejected Bay State’s job offers.

Kerry said he attacked Bay State for refusing to negotiate with transit unions, and for drawing up a contract that would fire workers and deny them severance packages. “It had a name then, and it has a name today: It’s called union-busting,” he said. “The residue of this hurts our system and hurts our state.”

US Representative Joseph Moakley (D, South Boston) also has fought against giving the contract to Bay State, saying the private company has no proven safety record. “Amtrak is the only one that’s got the track record to do the job at this point. ‘There’s nobody else out there.’”

Department of Labor and Federal Transit Authority officials testified that Bay State must abide by the labor statute. The federal government has threatened to withhold money for all state projects if Bay State doesn’t follow the law. “Whatever your views, this is going to end up as huge trouble for the citizens of Massachusetts,” said Senator Charles Schumer, a New York Democrat.

The MBTA still intends to maintain the contract with Bay State to save taxpayer money, and has some “real concerns” with
the federal government's interpretation of the labor law, a
spokesman said.

Bay State is not the only case of delays in federal funding
where unions were threatened, which aides said pointed to
election-year politics. The Labor Department has suspended
applications for transit contracts at a growing rate this year, said
John H. Anderson, director of transportation issues at the
General Accounting Office. Twenty percent of its applications
were suspended in the first four months of this year, up from 7
percent in 1998. {Alex Canizares of States News Service in The
Boston Globe 26 Apr. 00; Charles D. Cieppo, director of
the Center for Restructuring Government at the Pioneer Institute, a
Boston think-tank, in The Boston Herald 24 Apr. 00}

The 13C lawsuit
The MBTA has long believed that the US Department of Labor
(DOL) is inappropriately interpreting the 13C statute, and in 1998
filed a lawsuit asking Labor to employ a different interpretation
[see 27 August 1999 issue].

In August 1999, Federal Judge John Tauro denied the DOL’s
request to dismiss the case for lack of jurisdiction, leaning
somewhat toward the T’s position. The parties are now doing
discovery, and hence any decision will come far too late to help
the T with the current rail maintenance contract quandary. {text
of opinion in CA 98-11749-JLT; ANR&P analysis; case docket
from District Court website}

PW - ASSISTANCE
26 April, Worcester. THE CITY NEEDS TO CAPITALIZE ON
THE RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE P&W HAS PUT IN PLACE,
said Everett Shaw, the city’s chief development officer. To do
that, his office plans to undertake a study on how the city and
companies can better use the railroad.

The railroad has already put in $11 million to the city. “Every
investment of this nature is a very strong and very positive
signal to the rest of the business community of the success of
doing business in Worcester. Any continued growth by an
existing company ...says that Worcester is a good place to do
business and a good place to be.”

Continued expansion of the railroad can be the centerpiece
of the development of the south Worcester area, said U.S.
Representative James P. McGovern (D, Worcester). Worcester
should become the key manufacturing center for high-tech
companies along Route 128 and Interstate 495. “We must take
advantage of our proximity to 128 and 495 to reinvigorate
Worcester’s manufacturing base. Worcester can be the place
where the end products of Route 128 are made.”

Both were speaking at a ribbon-cutting for the expanded
maintenance facility [see Regional]. Worcester is the hub of the
railroad’s operations, with 90 of its 155 employees based here.
{Jim Bodor in Worcester Telegram & Gazette 27 Apr. 00}

FOR THE RECORD: MASSACHUSETTS

STILL LOOKING FOR THAT BOND BILL? An official at the
General Court’s Joint Transportation Committee said the
Committee of Conference is making slow progress on the two

parts: one covers highway, and the other the MBTA. She
expected the committee to complete work by 8 May. {ANR&P
discussion 1 May 00}

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ANOTHER EXTENSION FOR PVRR. On 20 April, the STB gave
the railroad another three months to consummate its
abandonment of the Westfield branch [see 4 February issue]
by selling it to the Town of Westfield, until 21 July. {STB Docket
No. AB-531X}

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ADVOCATES OF THE NORTH-SOUTH RAIL LINK called on
supporters to have input to the 2000-2005 Transportation Plan
for the Boston Region. This will define the guiding policies and
the key programs and projects for the region’s transportation
system for the next 25 years, including rail passenger services
such as the North/South Rail Link. {e-mail from
Nsraillink@aol.com 20 Apr. 00}

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POOR BERKSHIRE SCENIC! EOTC has just received bids
from engineering professionals to examine HRRC track in
western Massachusetts, determining the expense of
upgrading it. The contract will be awarded in a couple of
weeks, for under $10,000. So the project drags on [see 3
March issue]. {ANR&P discussion with source close to the
project 2 May 00}

NH RAILROADS

GRS - CIMENT QUÉBEC
27 April. THE MANCHESTER PLANNING BOARD
APPROVED FOUR CEMENT SILOS on a 5-3 vote, with some
opposed because of the visual impact [see 21 March issue].
{Mark Hayward in Manchester Union Leader 28 Apr. 00}

The rail impact
Jean Lebrun, an official at Ciment Québec, said later that the
company is currently shipping into northern New Hampshire
from Québec via truck. It views the Concord-Nashua-
Manchester area as a “good market for us” to be served by the
four silos, located on a site Ciment Québec will purchase.

Construction should take only two months; the company
will hire a local firm. Lebrun anticipated that GRS would bring the
facility 20-40 cars a week, during the construction season.
{ANR&P discussion 1 May 00}

GRS - SALEM ABANDONMENT
7 April, Salem. THE STB FOUND NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
to the environment would occur if GRS abandoned the 2.95 miles
of the Salem Industrial Track, also known as the Manchester and
Lawrence Branch [see 14 April issue]. The Board, in its decision
served this day, did place conditions on salvage activities
because of possible contaminated sites. {STB Docket No. AB-32
(Sub-No. 88X)}
WEST LEBANON BRANCH
28 April. THE NHDOT AND CCRR HAVE SIGNED AN AGREEMENT. Now, pointed out the railroad’s Jeff Albright, the governor and council must approve it. “Then we’ll start work, which could be mid-May.”

The gravel move
“We’re still working with NECR” on how to transload product for Twin State Sand and Gravel in Vermont for delivery to West Lebanon [see 4 February issue], said Albright. “I hope we will start this summer.” {ANR&P discussion}

VERMONT RAILROADS

VERMONT TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY
19 April. THE AUTHORITY HAS SELECTED A GENERAL RAIL MANAGER and held its first meeting with him this day. According to the Authority’s press release:

Jim Fitzgerald, a St. Albans native with a long professional career in the railroad industry was named [on 30 March] as the General Manager of the Vermont Transportation Authority, which will operate the commuter rail service between Burlington and Charlotte.....

Fitzgerald's rail experience includes managing the claims and safety departments, system-wide transportation issues, and governmental affairs for the Central Vermont Railway in St. Albans and in passenger service and external affairs for Amtrak.

In addition, Fitzgerald also has served in the Vermont Legislature, as St. Albans mayor, as a member of the St. Albans City Council, as Milton town manager and as a roving town manager with the Economic Development Council of Northern Vermont.....

As manager of the commuter rail, he will have his office, now under construction, in the Burlington Rail station at One Main Street.’ For the month of May he has his office in Montpelier at VAOT.

VTA has operating authority to manage both freight and passenger rail operations in Vermont. Although the Authority’s first task will be to operate the Burlington-Charlotte Commuter rail, other transportation operations could fit under its umbrella.

Members of the VTA Board of Directors include Chairman Charlie Miller of Brattleboro, Vice-Chair John Vincent of Waterbury, Paul Bruhn of South Burlington, John Murphy of Ludlow and Byron Hathorn of White River Junction. {VTA press release 30.Mar.00; ANR&P discussion with VAOT staff 1.May.00}

AMTRAK SERVICE
4 April. THE STATE HAS SIGNED A CONTRACT WITH AMTRAK FOR THREE YEARS OF SERVICE, from 1 July 1999 to 30 June 2001. In return for up to $1.2 million per year, the railroad will continue the level of passenger service it currently provides: two trains a day Rutland-NY, one train a day NY-Rutland, and one round trip a day DC-St.Albans.

Funding is covered in the current capital budget, and in the FY01 budget now in conference [see For the Record].

At the state’s request, Amtrak has agreed to take input from customer focus groups to improve its service quality. Ridership has “really taken off,” said Amtrak spokesperson Rick Remington, during the first quarter of 2000. {AP in Valley News 6.Apr.00; ANR&P discussion with Sue Compton 1.May.00}

25 April. AMTRAK SERVICE TO MANCHESTER COULD START THIS WINTER, believed State Representative Dick Pembroke. “We have enough money to keep work going until October, when we can draw down more federal dollars.” He shrugged off the fact that both Amtrak and VAOT were “gun-shy” about the project: “Let’s get the work done and see where we stand.”

Construction details
Doug Zorzi, project manager for VAOT, said VRS will soon advertise for a company to install the welded rail on selected portions [see 14 April issue]. The railroad cannot do the work itself because it lacks the proper equipment. The agency is purchasing the rail and tie plates on a sole-source contract.

The Hoosick Branch needs $400,000 worth of bridge work, according to consulting firm Clough Harbor. When funds become available to do that, Zorzi said, the agency will bid the work. {ANR&P discussions 25.Apr.00 & 1.May.00}

COMMUTER SERVICE - CHARLOTTE
2 May, Montpelier. NO DATE IS SET FOR SERVICE STARTUP. VTA Chair Charlie Miller said on 2 May that the authority is looking forward to starting service in the autumn. No definite date is set because of the station and crossing details.

VAOT assistance
Sue Compton, acting director of VAOT’s Rail Division [see People], said the agency would help Jim Fitzgerald with his workload in getting the construction finished. Construction of the Charlotte Station remains, and smaller items. The agency is negotiating about an ownership interest in the site, ironically with the principals of VRS.

Progress toward startup
VTA must also select an operator. “The Authority is in the middle of looking at this,” Miller said. Though VTA is not required to do a bid process, Miller expected a decision on how to proceed in the next 30 to 60 days. {ANR&P discussions 1&2.May.00}
COMMUTER RAIL: ESSEX JUNCTION
28 April, Burlington. **FTA HAS RECEIVED AN APPLICATION TO FUND FURTHER PLANNING WORK** for this project, according to Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) staff [see 4 June 1998 issue].

**Background**
The US Congress earmarked $5 million for the project in October 1997 [see 23 October 1997 issue]. In autumn 1998, it appropriated another $2 million for the project [see 22 October 1998 issue].

In December 1997, the MPO agreed at VAOT’s request to do a feasibility study of the commuter service [see 18 December 1997 issue].

In August 1999, R.L. Banks completed the feasibility study [see 19 November 1998 issue], looking at an all-day service scenario ($37 million capital costs, $6.66 annual operating costs) and a peak-hour service scenario ($23 million capital costs, $3.09 million annual operating costs) [see 27 August 1999 issue]. Though technically feasible, the project will require a significant state and local financial commitment to proceed to initiation.

Based on this, the MPO voted in autumn 1999 to add the project to its three-year transportation improvement plan, which made the project eligible for federal funding [see 24 September 1999 issue].

The MPO has committed itself to covering 6% of travel in major corridors via transit, and the rail service could help. Right now, MPO staffers said, transit provides a far lower percentage. The board believed that the possibility of increasing that percentage with rail justified taking a closer look at the actual capital and operating costs.

**Submission to the FTA**
In March, the MPO submitted a draft application under the FTA’s New Starts program (section 5309 of TEA-21). The two agencies are now discussing how to make the application complete. According to the MPO, the application spells out how the MPO will look at alternatives to rail such as buses, and how it will examine the environmental implication of rail versus the other alternatives.

Once the FTA accepts the application, the agency will provide about $2.4 million for the next planning phase, which must also spell out how the region will pay for the commuter service for the life of the project, assumed at 20 years.

**Doing the planning**
The MPO is in the process of hiring a project manager to act as a general contractor, coordinating various studies to meet the FTA guide lines. MPO staff pointed out that the project manager will hire consultants to do the alternatives analysis, environmental impact, traffic modeling, and the effect of the low tunnel.

“The MPO chose to use the general contractor model,” rather than going the normal way of hiring a consultant to do much of the work who in turn would hire subcontractors. MPO staff explained that because of the interaction of the Essex Junction service with the Burlington-Charlotte service [presumably underway sometime this year—see above], the Essex Junction planning would need to remain fluid. The MPO did not want to lock in the planning by using the usual detailed RFP and scope of work.

**How this differs from the Charlotte service**
The MPO staffer pointed out that the Charlotte service got underway as a pilot project, under a less-rigid set of rules than apply to New Starts projects now. The Essex Junction service, as part of the MPO’s three-year TIP, must fold into the 20-year transportation plan the MPO is now devising.

Most important, because of the need to explain funding and whether the Chittenden County Transit Authority (CCTA) will operate the service, the MPO must address the fact that CCTA relies on federal funding and property taxes. “The funding for a train must compete with local needs such as police and sidewalks,” pointed out the staff.

The Charlotte service, on the other hand, is using federal CMAQ money for operating expenses for the first few years, because it is designed to relieve congestion as a result of the reconstruction of Vermont Route 7.

Since the rail service will benefit the region, possibly state government could fund it via a line item in VAOT’s capital budget. {ANR&P discussion 28.Apr.00}

**FOR THE RECORD: VERMONT**

THE CAPITAL BUDGET REMAINS IN CONFERENCE in the General Assembly. Observers do not expect it to emerge before 8 May. {ANR&P discussion with Sue Compton 1.May.00} 

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THE WELLS RIVER BRANCH will get freight soon; On 26 April GMRC used four side-dump cars to fill in a washout at Ely. Two cars of fertilizer, brought to White River Junction by GRS train EDWJ, will soon be delivered to Twin State Fertilizer in Bradford. About 18 more cars will follow. {NERAIL e-mail list} 

*******

A VAOT SELECTION COMMITTEE will meet on 2 May to begin looking at the bids for a permanent operator for the Wells River branch. {ANR&P discussion with Compton 1.May.00}

**MARITIMES/QUÉBEC RRs**

**NB DOT**

25 April, Moncton. **NO FUNDS FOR RAIL WERE INCLUDED** in the NBDOT budget announced by Transportation Minister Margaret Ann Blaney. The government is calling for a $94.2 million capital account and $132.5 million ordinary account budget to reflect government’s emphasis on protecting and maintaining the current transportation infrastructure.

The minister said the current high level of economic activity being generated in the private sector makes this an appropriate time to reduce public sector capital investments in transportation.

"Capital investment in New Brunswick reached a record in
1999. We have seen and will continue to see near record-level investments in major capital projects across the province - the lion's share of which is from the private sector. Never before in the history of the province has the private sector generated so much activity in capital projects," Blaney said.

"About $300 million dollars will be injected into the New Brunswick transportation sector this year as the result of this department's capital expenditures and the expenditures anticipated on the Fredericton-Moncton Highway."

The minister said her department would see a reduction in its workforce of about 240 positions. However, 40 of these positions are currently vacant, she said, and about 125 employees may be able to be redeployed within the department. The remaining 75 employees will be redeployed outside DOT.

Management restructuring within a number of branches at head office will also take place, resulting in staff reductions and business process revisions. The announcement of this reduction and restructuring will take place later, but no one will lose a job this fiscal year. {government press release}

NSDOT

21 April. THE SUPPLEMENTAL DETAIL OF THE DEPARTMENTAL BUDGET showed some decrease in funding for the Policy and Planning division, which handles rail (thousands of dollars)

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Don Stonehouse, manager of the Policy Development section, said about $100,000 of the 1999-2000 grants consisted of the annual grant to the Atlantic Provinces Transportation Commission, and another $250,000 was a contribution to a one-time grant road and sidewalk project for Sydney Mines. {ANR&P discussion 2.May.00; NS website}

APTC & HDPDC - THE FALLOUT

1 May. TWO VENERABLE INSTITUTIONS WILL CLOSE BECAUSE OF BUDGET CUTS, according to Stonehouse. The Atlantic Provinces Transportation Commission, which provides information and coordination from its location in Moncton, lost the government contribution of both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and will close this month.

In addition, the Halifax-Dartmouth Port Development Commission, created in the early 1950s, will close [see Ports].

B&A - QUÉBEC

19 April, Sherbrooke PQ. THE TOWNSHIP ‘SEIZED’ ONE OF THE RAILROAD’S LOCOMOTIVES in a dispute over back taxes. Baillif Serge Proteau presented the company with legal documents which would have given the township title to one of the railroad’s locomotives as payment for $102,000. The result of this “seizure” was little more than media hype as the locomotive was leased. The court gave the railroad three weeks to come up with the money which includes $65,000 from the town of Magog, $35,000 for La Commission Scolaire des Sommets (the French-speaking school board) and $2000 to the Eastern Townships School Board.

Dan Sabin, B&A’s chief operating officer, said the dispute stems from the fact that BARS is owed several thousand dollars for grade crossing repairs made in the township. He also noted that the taxes are “extraordinary” and represent “gouging of the railroad”. Sabin did not know if similar taxes were levied against Canadian Pacific, the operator of the line prior to 1996. However Charles Bury, a columnist for the Sherbrooke Record, the town’s English newspaper, reported: “[B&A] has improved its relations with the town of Magog by providing a list of proposed changes to the railroad rights-of-way in town, which includes the $75,000 purchase of an old CN locomotive which the town's English newspaper, reported: "[B&A] has improved its relations with the town of Magog by providing a list of proposed changes to the railroad rights-of-way in town, which includes the $75,000 purchase of an old CN locomotive which..."

HALIFAX COMMUTER SERVICE

30 March. CN WILL PULL UP THE SECOND TRACK between Windsor Junction and Halifax beginning 1 September, unless the municipality commits to running a commuter rail service, according to a 30 March letter from the railroad. CN corporate development manager Francois Lemay said the company has delayed removing the tracks for two years while waiting for council to decide the future of a commuter rail train and can’t afford to wait any longer. ‘This track material is valuable, in good condition and is required for work programs elsewhere in our system. We continue to be interested in reaching a commercial transaction for the use of the line for commuter service. However, we will need to formalize a final agreement...by Sept. 1.’

If Halifax wanted to keep the tracks in place after that date, it would have to pay $13,700 per month for a minimum of eight months.

CN plans to lift about half the track, so the rental fee would apply only to the northern half.

Another study?

In 1996, a study by the IBI Group showed a commuter service would recoup only about 40% of the costs [see 19 April and 19 June 1997]. The Council decided against spending an estimated $2.7 million in startup costs.

Prior to the 30 March letter, the consulting firm CANAC (wholly owned by CN) forwarded an unsolicited proposal to study the feasibility of commuter service, and update ridership and cost figures.

The Council’s commuter rail committee recommended CANAC be engaged to do the study. The Council decided three weeks ago to have its own staff look at the issue. The staff review is expected 16 May. {ANR&P discussion 21.May.00}

City reaction

Councillor Peter Kelly (Bedford), to whom the letter was sent, called this Halifax’s last chance to approve a commuter train:
"We have 30 kilometres of rail bed that, if we had to rebuild on our own, would cost up to $30 million. There are other communities in North America that are kicking themselves because they're having to reinstate the track beds that have been removed. Before we make that mistake, let's make sure we maintain that infrastructure that may have potential."

Kelly argued the region's business environment has changed substantially in three years. "If we're going to make an informed decision on commuter rail, we need to make sure we have the proper information to do so. If we don't, we may lose the opportunity of a lifetime."

Kelly planned to ask council to approve the $75,000 feasibility study by CANAC, in hopes of convincing CN to leave the tracks in place a while longer. Councillor Steve Adams (Spryfield-Herring Cove) said he'll support the call for another study. "In the grand scheme of things, $75,000 isn't a lot of money when you consider the chance to alleviate traffic and parking problems in the city. The way things are going, people are afraid to drive downtown because they figure they'll never find a parking spot." {Halifax Herald 11.Apr.00}

2 May. **THE HALIFAX COUNCIL CONTINUES TO CONSIDER THE COMMUTER PROPOSAL.** On this day it will hear from Rebecca O’Brien on 2 May regarding the commuter service. She works for the Ecology Action Centres transportation committee under a grant from Environment Canada to promote use and development of alternative forms of transportation. Ecology Action is advocating immediate solutions such as carpooling and assistance to employees using bicycles and transit. Simultaneously, it is pushing for changes in government priorities and spending to improve transit system and bicycling routes. {ANR&P discussion}

**VIA RAIL CANADA**

12 April. **COLLENETTE WILL ASK VIA TO LOOK AT RESTORING THE ATLANTIC.** "I am going to ask VIA for a shopping list of services that they think we should restore, providing they are going to be viable, with a time frame." As for the Atlantic specifically, which ran through Maine between Saint John and Montréal, the federal transport minister said he would leave that determination up to the experts at VIA.

In announcing the $400 million infusion of federal dollars to VIA, Collenette also noted the seasonal start-up of the Bras D'Or to Sydney could be perhaps be restored permanently. And Halifax could get two trains a day instead of the one if the Atlantic ran through to Halifax. {Campbell Morrison in Saint John Times Globe 13.Apr.00}

**Caution**

The next day, a VIA spokesperson said restoring specific lines was "premature. The priority is going to be revitalizing the current system." {Bruce McFarlane in New Brunswick Telegraph-Journal 14.Apr.00}

**HALIFAX**

28 April. **AN UPDATE ON THE HALTERM/PORT AUTHORITY DISPUTE.** In its quarterly report, Halterm stated: ‘The Canadian Transportation Agency hearing into the lease renewal rates is now likely to get under way in Halifax on June 12, 2000. This follows Halterm's successful challenge of three formal requests by the HPA to stay the proceedings, two of which were rejected by the CTA itself, the third being dismissed by the Federal Court of Appeal, which also dismissed, with costs, the HPA's request for leave to appeal the CTA's decision to retain jurisdiction. The Federal Court (Trial Division) decision on the HPA's attack on its jurisdiction is still pending. On May 25, 2000, the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal will hear the HPA's appeal from the decision of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia staying the HPA's challenge to the renewal option.’

[See 14 April issue].

**Income and containers**

Halterm announced ‘net earnings for the first quarter ended March 31, 2000, of $1,660,000 compared to $1,206,000 in 1999. The terminal handled a total of 46,115 containers in the quarter up 13% over volume of 40,840 units in the same period last year. Quarterly earnings before depreciation, amortization and taxes increased to $2,631,000 from last year's first quarter result of $2,045,000. The earnings improvement was the result of Halterm's continued investment in its facilities, its efforts to build stronger customer relationships and its commitment to attracting new business to the Port of Halifax." {Halterm press release}

29 April. **THE HALIFAX-DARTMOUTH PORT DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION WILL CLOSE.** because the Nova Scotia Department of Economic Development is no longer contributing about $270,000 a year to its budget (the balance of $212,000 came from the Halifax Regional Municipality). The Commission, created in the 1950s, advocated for the port as a whole.

Laura Lee Langley, spokeswoman for the Economic Development Department, said the funding was not the main reason for eliminating the commission board. "I think the primary reason is to reconsider how we market the port and how we develop the port. I think the province feels that it would like to step back and take a second look on how best strategically to do it."

Pat Murphy, president of the Halifax Longshoremen's Association, said he is "totally disgusted and disappointed with whoever decided to make this move." The only voice that port users like longshoremen have is through the commission. "We will not have a voice in the port at all, so who will run the port now?" Murphy said."The users will have no say and that is very scary. This just baffles me and I don't understand it. It is a very bad move." {Tom Peters in Halifax Herald 28.Apr.00}
Halifax Port Days and the Port of Halifax magazine
As part of promoting the port, the commission is also responsible for the annual Halifax Port Days conference and the Port of Halifax magazine. These will not be affected, said Commission Chair Fred MacGillivray. "We will go through a transition period where they will probably continue to exist but be the responsibility of another body. Who that is I can't tell you at this point. But certainly there is no intention of closing Port Days or discontinuing the port magazine." {Tom Peters in Halifax Herald 29.Apr.00}

PEOPLE, POSITIONS, EVENTS

VAOT has begun advertising for the manager of its re-created Rail Division. Sue Compton, the interim manager, will apply. Jim Fitzgerald, formerly of Amtrak and Central Vermont, has become the general manager of the Vermont Transportation Authority.

As a result of budget cuts, Wade Elliott (director) and Donald Jeans (researcher) and others at the Halifax-Dartmouth Port Development Commission will be searching for new positions.


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