

**RIDING THE  
RAILS.**  
Maine  
Department of  
Transportation  
leads a Sept.  
12 tour of the  
Route 113 rail  
corridor in  
Brownfield.  
Rail line  
proponents are  
attempting to  
renovate and  
open these old  
tracks. The  
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traveling on  
the line. Dig-  
nitaries who  
took the trip  
included Maine  
State Sen.  
David Hast-  
ings and Rep.  
Roberta Muse.  
(JAMIE GEM-  
MITI PHOTOS)



*Railway renaissance?*



## Maine towns dream about restoration of Mountain Division

By DENA LIBNER  
THE CONWAY DAILY SUN

FRYEBURG — In 1984, the last Mountain Division Line freight train traveled the rickety northeastern railway. Passenger and freight trains had chugged industriously along the line since the mid-1800s; but by the mid-1900s, fewer and fewer cars ran on the privately owned Mountain

Division. It had become, according to Maine state documents, "redundant."

Now, just two decades after its owner decided the railway was useless, the resurrection of the Mountain Division Line is being considered as a means of boosting the flagging

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Maine Department of Transportation Manager of Rail Transportation Nathan Moulton clears some stray branches away from the train tracks in Brownfield during a Sept. 12 tour of the Route 113 rail corridor that proponents are attempting to renovate and open. The vehicles used for the tour were equipped with a narrow wheel base and the extra wheels for traveling on the track. (JAMIE GEMMATTI PHOTO)

Maine Department of Transportation Manager of Rail Transportation Nathan Moulton talks about the viability of opening the Route 113 rail corridor during a Sept. 12 tour in trucks equipped for rail travel. Also in the truck were Josh Mack, center, of the Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission, Marlee Turner, right, owner of the Admiral Perry House, and John Morris, back seat, owner of the Oxford House. (JAMIE GEMMATTI PHOTO)



Fall from page one

economies of western Maine.

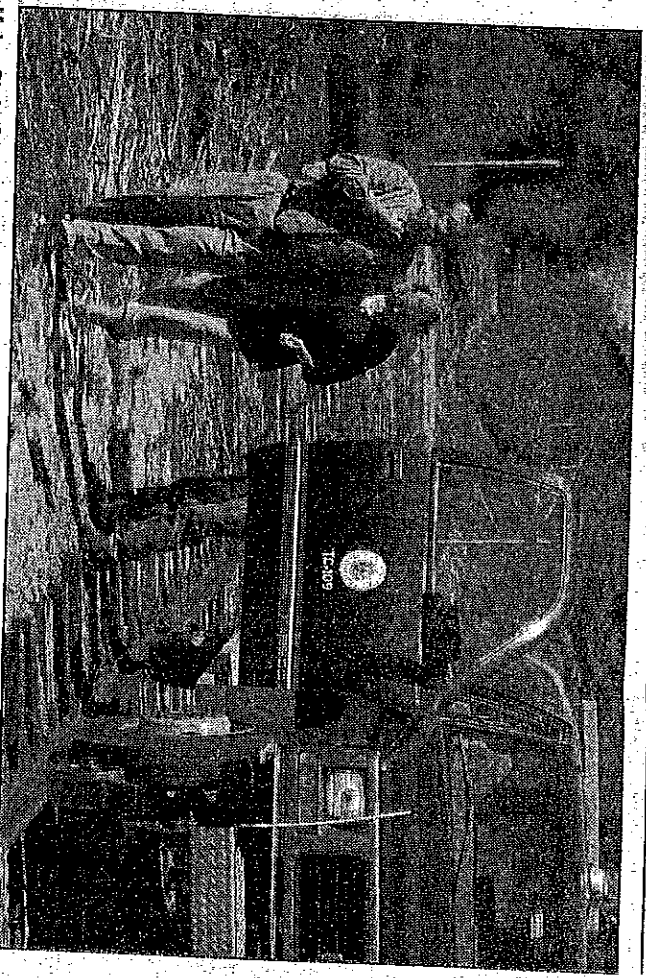
In the line's heyday, trains chugged from Portland, Maine to Sherwood, Quebec.

Along the way, they passed through through Brownfield, Fryeburg, North Conway and Crawford Notch. Some of the rail is still in use; the Conway Scenic Railroad chugs along the New Hampshire line, but most of the Maine track is derelict.

Earlier this month, state representatives joined municipal officers to travel the rail, roundtrip, from Fryeburg to Brownfield. Including a stop for lunch, the trip took about two hours.

The name of the project to resurrect, or reactivate, the line is called "If we build it, will they come?" It's a crucial question, considering that the line closed 20 years ago because "they"—the freight, the tourists—weren't coming.

Fryeburg Selectman David Knapp is a local leader in the revitalization of what is known



Maine State Sen. David Hastings, left, gets ready to board the truck for a tour of the Route 113 rail corridor that proponents are attempting to open. (JAMIE GEMMILL PHOTO).

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as the "Route 113 corridor" — the stretch of state highway connecting Standish to Fryeburg. Route 113 is a potential vein for economic activity through those areas. It's just that the movement of money and people through the corridor has to be stimulated, somehow.

"It's my hope that the rail line can first and foremost enhance the businesses and economies along the corridor," Knapp said. "Our region can only benefit from having a rail link that can take those of us that live here to Boston and get people from the Boston market to the valley.

"Businesses will be created based on an entrepreneur's capability to accurately assess the impact of a reactivated rail line," he added.

The railway could encourage a steadier flow of people to and from the valley with the local economies benefiting all round. Tourists in Portland could take a leisurely train ride to the valley — "ports to peaks?" enthused Knapp — and people west of Portland would have better access to the city's infrastructure and job market.

The line's "reactivation," for passenger use, is estimated to cost \$1 million per mile of rail ties. It's not likely that the Mountain Division Line would be used for freight. The St. Lawrence & Atlantic, which runs from Portland, Maine to Québec, dominates the local freight market. Fifty percent of the ties, the wooden slats that are perpendicular the whole length of the rail, would need to be replaced, according to Josh Mack of the Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission. Most of the ties date back to 1915.

"There's also severe ATV damage," he added. "The ATVs run alongside the line and pull away the ballast.

And there are trees growing right in the middle of the line, in some places. There's a lot of work to do."

Nathan Moulton, manager of rail transportation for Maine's Department of Transportation, warned against looking at the resurrected rail as a "silver bullet" to solve regional economic issues.

Both he and Mack said that a public forum on the issue, held in Standish two weeks ago, raised more questions than it produced answers.

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"It was pretty clear that what we need is a really detailed engineering study that will cost out what it will take to get the line up and running," Mack said. Moulton added that a study was also needed to weigh the economic benefits to towns along the line.

Based on his analysis of other Maine railways, however, Moulton said the Mountain Division Line could be a regional asset.

"The areas around the Downeaster Rail stations (there are three in Maine, three in New Hampshire and two in Massachusetts) have seen some economic boost from the train service," he reflected. "Companies such as Dragon Cement in Thomaston (Maine) have benefitted from the improved freight service, expanding their operations by more than 40 percent and exporting cement to Boston and New York, with a barge out of Rockland and to Canada via rail."

Could a similar Fryeburg renaissance by rail be far off?

## ROUTE 113 FORUMS

Two more Route 113 Futures forums, "If we build it, will they come?" — a dialogue with government, business, and community leaders on the prospects for passenger and freight rail service on the Mountain Division Line — are scheduled in Western Maine.

- Wednesday, Oct. 4, 6-9 p.m. at Brownfield/Denmark School, 637 West Main Street (Route 160), Denmark.

- Wednesday, Nov. 15, 6-9 p.m. at Brown Memorial Library off Route 113 at intersection of Route 11, East Baldwin.

The Route 113 Corridor Committee was established in 2004 by the Towns of Standish, Hiram, Brownfield and Fryeburg to serve as a forum for dialogue around issues of mutual interest. The focus this year is to identify economic opportunities along the corridor.

For more information, contact Caroline Paras with the Greater Portland Council of Governments at (207) 774-9891 or [cparas@gpcog.org](mailto:cparas@gpcog.org) or Mack with the Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission at (207) 324-2952 or [jmack@smrpc.org](mailto:jmack@smrpc.org). Also, see the Web site at [www.smrpc.org/transportation/corridor/corridor.htm#113](http://www.smrpc.org/transportation/corridor/corridor.htm#113).