

Portland Press Herald EST. 1862 Maine Sunday Telegram

Extended train service seen as lure for tourists

A rail link to Freeport and Brunswick, set to be completed in 2012, will lure more out-of-staters, officials say.

By TOM BELL, Staff Writer

February 3, 2010

SHARE

[Printer-friendly version](#)

[Reader Comments](#)

 story tools

 sponsored by

PORTLAND — Amtrak's Downeaster has never lived up to supporters' expectations that it would be a tourist magnet. For the vast majority of its passengers, the train is a way to get to Boston, not Maine.

Just wait two years, supporters say.

In 2012, when the service is extended to Freeport and Brunswick, more residents of Massachusetts and New Hampshire will ride the train north, said Patricia Quinn, executive director of the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority.

Quinn says Freeport will be the draw. About 3.5 million people a year visit Freeport, making it Maine's top tourist destination.

The Freeport and Brunswick train stations will be in walkable downtowns, Quinn said, ideally situated for tourists who want to leave their cars at home.

In contrast, visitors who arrive at Portland's station on Sewall Street must ride cabs or Metro buses to get downtown. Quinn said the location has made it difficult to market Portland as a tourist destination for train riders.

The Obama administration announced last week that it will award the rail authority \$35 million in federal stimulus funds to extend Downeaster service north to Brunswick. The extension is part of an \$8 billion plan to develop a nationwide system of high-speed intercity passenger rail.

The \$35 million is enough to complete the extension, including laying welded rail and improving grade crossings along the 30-mile route between Portland and Brunswick.

When the line is complete in 2012, tourists will be able to switch in Brunswick from the Downeaster to a train that's now operated by the Maine Eastern Railroad to Bath, Wiscasset and Rockland.

Connecting Amtrak with the Maine Eastern Railroad will create a marketing opportunity for the midcoast, said state Rep. Edward Mazurek, D-Rockland, who chairs the rail caucus in the Legislature.

"Now we have another tool to get people in, not simply by car," he said.

One obstacle is the schedule. Two daily round trips are planned between Boston and Brunswick. The last southbound train would leave Freeport around 1:30 p.m, too early for day trippers from Boston.

Quinn said a bus service could be provided to take people from Freeport to Portland so they could catch an 8 p.m. train to Boston.

A rail authority analysis of current ridership shows that 84 percent of the Downeaster's passengers use the train to get to Boston and back.

The authority projects that the number of riders, now about 1,300 a day, will increase by 10 percent when the extension to Brunswick is complete, with tourists making up most of the increase. The projection does not include ridership between Portland and Freeport and Brunswick.

Ticket sales and food purchases fund about half of the Downeaster's \$15 million annual operating budget. State and federal dollars pay for the rest, with the federal government paying 80 percent of the subsidy.

The state subsidy, about \$1.5 million a year, comes from a portion of the tax on rental cars.

Because Amtrak will serve Freeport and Brunswick with the same train equipment it's using now for the Downeaster, the operating costs will increase only modestly, Quinn said.

The service to Brunswick will add \$1.25 million in operating costs, while ticket and food sales will generate about \$1 million, she said. The remaining \$250,000 will be shared by the federal and state governments, with the federal government picking up 80 percent.

When trains are running to Brunswick, she said, the subsidy per passenger is expected to decline from \$17.38 for every trip to about \$15.

"What the expansion does," she said, "is maximize the use of our equipment and our labor pool and



TaxACT

FREE

IRS Return

for Everyone!

FREE to Prepare

 +

FREE to Print

 +

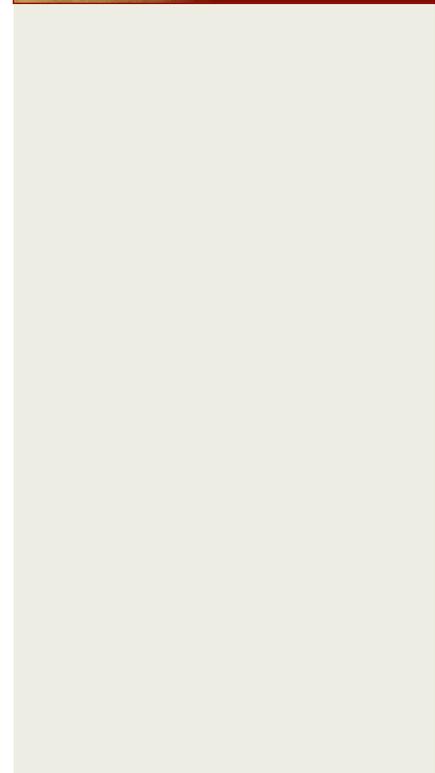
FREE to E-file

START

AUTHORIZED

 e-file

 PROVIDER



makes the service more efficient."

Staff Writer Tom Bell can be contacted at 791-6369 or at: tbell@pressherald.com

Copyright 2010 by The Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram. All rights reserved.

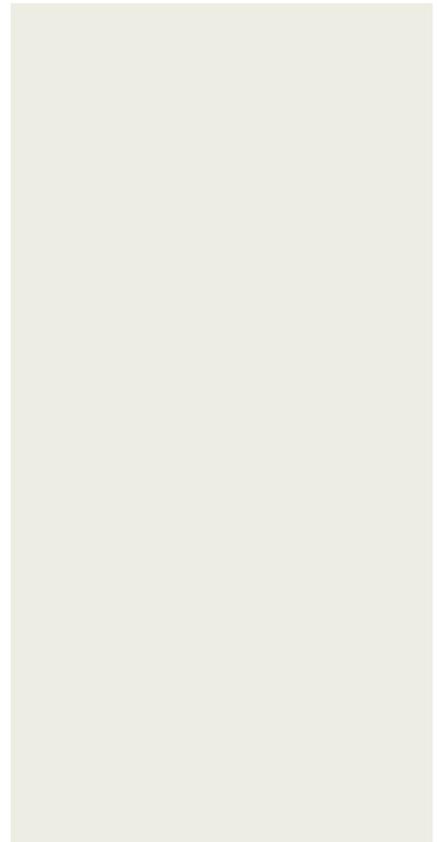


Reader comments

[Click here to view or add comments on this story](#)

Were you interviewed for this story? If so, please fill out our [accuracy form](#)

[Send Question/Comment to the Publisher](#)



[Place an Online Ad](#) | [Place a Print Ad](#) | [Place a Classified Ad](#) | [Reader Services](#) | [Contact us](#)

[Copyright](#) ©2010 MaineToday Media, Inc.