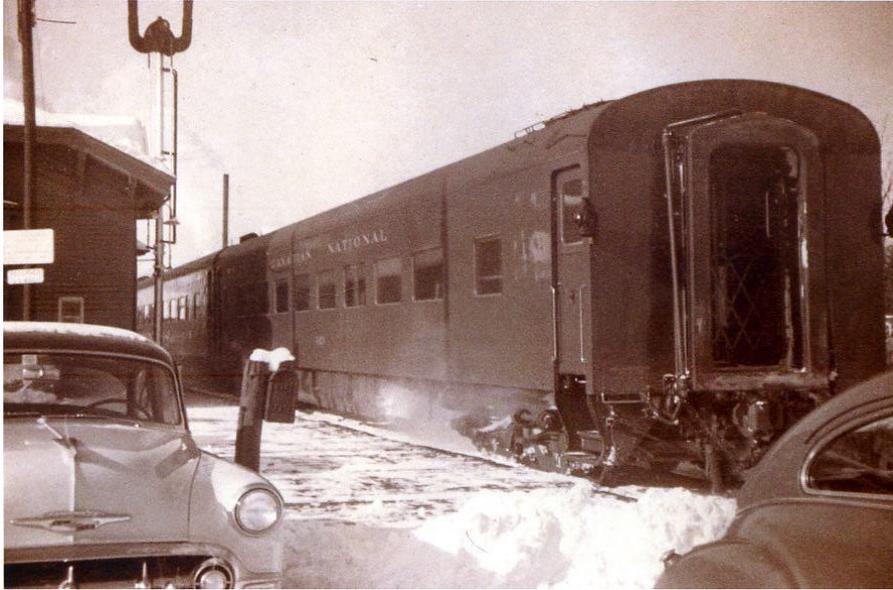


# Bethel, Maine's Passenger Rail Story: Past and Present

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October 7, 2011



Grand Trunk/Canadian National passenger train stops at Bethel Station in 1953. In addition to passengers, trains carried mail and Railway Express Agency shipments. Trains 16 and 17 (east and west) passed through Bethel daily stopping at each station on their way between Portland and Island Pond, VT.

March 10, 1851

On March 10, 1851 the Atlantic & St. Lawrence engine, Montreal, "entered Bethel with the regular morning train from Portland to commence regular service between the two points."

On September 26, 1874, the rails of the Atlantic & St. Lawrence which had been laid on the broad gage of 5 feet 6 inches were changed on the same day to the standard gage of 4 feet 8 ½ inches from daybreak to 9 am from Montreal to Portland.

During the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, there were three scheduled passenger trains going down and up from Portland and stopping at Locke's Mills, Bethel, West Bethel (Allen), and Gilead. Passenger service was of course in addition to extensive freight service.



**Grand Trunk passenger trains terminated in Portland at this station. (Photo from the Grand Trunk history Website, [www.sullboat.com](http://www.sullboat.com)) The former Grand Trunk Portland office building still stands on the corner of India Street. It can be seen in the above photo at the far right. The old engine roundhouse stands on Presumpscot Street and is in the same general lot where the Sunday River "Silver Bullet" Ski Train loaded.**

**February 1960:** The "metro system" of mail distribution started Feb. 6. Rail transportation (for mail) ended in this area and mail was routed to and from Auburn by truck.

**September 1960:** Passenger train service ended on the Grand Trunk between Portland and Island Pond, VT.

**[Read more about Bethel, Maine rail history.](#)**

**December 1993: Chicago Tribune Snowseekers Head For Maine, Lonely Hearts To Alaska** By David McCracken. Special to the Tribune.

The first dedicated [ski](#) train to run in New England in more than 40 years sets out Dec. 26 from Portland, Maine, heading to the Sunday River [Ski Resort](#) near Bethel. The newly formed Sunday River Transportation company will offer service daily except Tuesday and Thursday through the end of February, with weekend service in March and April. Some summer dinner excursions are also planned. The company expects to offer connections to points south of Portland when Amtrak service returns to Portland next year. The train can carry up to 400 passengers and consists of vintage cars, one dating to 1917, including three passenger coaches, two dining coaches, a snack bar car, lounge car, Pullman kitchen car and baggage car. The Coors Brewing Co. is principal sponsor of the train and is planning promotions in Maine.

Trains leave Portland at 6:30 a.m., pick up more passengers in Auburn and arrive in Bethel at 8:45. Round trip coach fare is \$15, with fares for non-skiing passengers slightly higher. At present, the only other such ski train in the U.S. operates between Denver and Winter Park, Colo. For more information on the Sunday River train, call 207-824-RAIL.

**Wikipedia 2008:** The ***Downeaster*** is a 116-mile (187 km) [regional passenger train](#) service managed by the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) and operated by [Amtrak](#), connecting [North Station](#) in [Boston, Massachusetts](#), to [Portland, Maine](#). With five daily round trips, the route carries 500,000 passengers annually, and was Amtrak's fastest-growing service in fiscal years 2006 and 2008.

**September 17, 2010:** Wednesday afternoon at the Bethel Inn, about 70 from Bethel and other interested persons listened to a presentation followed by a Q & A session about a study to extend rail passenger service from the Downeaster terminal in Portland to Auburn and on to Montreal. Such a plan would pass by Bethel and use the Bethel railroad station. One of the study's objectives, and a grant seeking inducement, is to improve economic development in rural areas, i. e., Bethel and western Maine tourism. Maine DOT is the study leader and the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments is a cooperating agency. The current study is due for completion in December 2010. If the study says the next step is feasible, a decade or more years would pass before anyone got off the train in Bethel.

**November 30, 2010:** Passenger rail proposed for Auburn, Paris, Bethel, Sun Journal

The feasibility of passenger train service from Portland to Montreal, with stops in Auburn, Paris and Bethel, was presented to about 25 residents Monday afternoon at the Bethel Inn Resort. The \$183,000 study started in August was paid for by the federal government and done by a Los Angeles-based consulting firm. For Robin Zinchuk, executive director of the Bethel Area Chamber of Commerce, getting a train to bring skiers and others who want to visit the area during any season of the year is crucial to the growth of the tourist industry. Jay Duncan, based in the Boston office of AECOM and project manager for the rail feasibility study, said stations would be established in Auburn, South Paris, Bethel, and several other towns in New Hampshire and Vermont, if a passenger train travels to Montreal. He said layover facilities would be needed at the Auburn intermodal site, adding that the study showed that eight round trips per day were possible between Auburn and Portland. For Bethel, he said a layover facility would also be needed, and four round trips per day could be planned.

Adams Streit, an engineer with Jacobs, said all stopping sites would need 400-foot platforms to accommodate a five-car train. He said Bethel would have to rebuild its existing platform. Many of the other proposed stopping sites were once a part of the Grand Trunk railroad. Buses that could take people from Portland to Lewiston-Auburn, or all the way to Bethel, were also an option given, at least until a rail system is in place. An extension of the Downeaster to any of the sites would likely take years to fulfill. The Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments is working closely with the Maine DOT on the project.

**January 7, 2011,** The Forecaster, Falmouth, ME

Pan Am Railway workers upgraded tracks September 2010 on the \$38.3 million project extending the Amtrak Downeaster passenger rail service from Portland to Freeport and Brunswick. The project is scheduled for completion in the fall of 2012.

**The Downeaster** Re-established in 2001 after a citizen-initiated petition signed by more than 90,000 residents, the Downeaster now runs between Portland and Boston. The success comes with a price: The service runs on about \$9.5 million in annual public subsidies. About \$8 million comes from the federal government through a rare exception in the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program that allows Maine to divert transportation money earmarked for capital projects, such as roads, bridges and ports, to the Downeaster for operations. The service also receives about \$1.5 million from the state's car rental tax.

**August 12 2011:** Amtrak's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Exhibit Train in Freeport: The exhibit train arrived in Freeport Friday afternoon the 12th in preparation for public viewing of the train on Saturday and Sunday, August 13-14. The train, coupled with two Pan Am business cars and an F40 Pan Am locomotive, was painted in Pan Am's stunning cobalt blue livery.

The very shiny and freshly painted Amtrak sections included a P-40 diesel-electric locomotive and a non-powered-control unit to allow push-pull operation. Those units are arrayed in an historic Amtrak paint scheme. The air conditioned Exhibit Train also includes three baggage cars that have been renovated and transformed into exhibition space through the addition of display cases. The major events and

achievements of Amtrak's four decades are conveyed through advertising materials, photographs, and other items.



**August 2011**, Maine Department of Transportation: MDOT released Portland to Lewiston / Auburn & Montreal Intercity Passenger Rail Feasibility Study [Read full study](#)

**September 17, 2011** at The Bethel Inn: Bethel chamber rallies for rail service :By Erin Cox, Staff Writer

The Rally for Rail conference, hosted by the Greater Bethel Chamber of Commerce, drew approximately 60 guests, including congressional delegate staff members. Ed Barrett, city administrator for Lewiston, said he was happy Bethel stepped to the front and energized the movement. "This has to be a regional effort and that's what Bethel is trying to accomplish today," Barrett said. "During the initial study Bethel leaders caught the consultants' attention and brought a lot of energy into it." The 2010 feasibility study Barrett mentioned showed ridership for a rail service between Portland and Montreal with stops in Auburn, Bethel and Berlin, N.H., would not support the project. Mark Latti with the Maine Department of Transportation did mention that with future efforts and preparedness from the area a rail service could roll into Western Maine.

**September 21, 2011**, MPBN News:

Maine's passenger rail authority has received nearly \$21 million in federal money towards the Downeaster rail line, which is scheduled for expanded service that will connect Boston and Brunswick by next year. While the announcement was welcomed in Maine by Democrats and Republicans alike, there's a larger debate nationally about funding for passenger rail service.

**The Adirondack- AMTRAK from Montreal to New York City.** The **Adirondack** is a [passenger train](#) operated daily by [Amtrak](#) between [New York City](#) and [Montreal](#). The trip takes approximately 11 hours to cover a published distance of 381 miles (613 km), traveling through the scenic [Hudson Valley](#) and the [Adirondack Mountains](#).<sup>[2]</sup> The *Adirondack* operates as train 68 towards New York, and as 69 from New York to Montreal.

The *Adirondack* service is financed by the [New York State Department of Transportation](#). The *Adirondack* service suffers from numerous delays along the route because almost none of the trackage is owned by Amtrak, and also because the route crosses an international boundary. The on-time performance of the route averaged 62.7% for the year ending February 2009. According to Amtrak, 47.4% of the train delay was due to track- and signal-related problems, especially along the Delaware & Hudson ([CP Rail](#)) segment.<sup>[3]</sup>

During [fiscal year](#) 2010, the *Adirondack* carried a total of 118,673 passengers, a 13.4% increase from FY 2009's total of 104,681 passengers.<sup>[1]</sup> The train had total revenue of \$6,058,894 during FY 2010, an increase of 14% from a total of \$5,312,772 during FY 2009.<sup>[1]</sup>

Read also about the [Maine DOT Intermodal Facility](#) located next to the Auburn airport on Lewiston Jct Road

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