

Grow it and they will come

Old tracks could get new future

Purchase of Westbrook-Windham line secures train route

By Ben Bragdon
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Stephen Estes remembers when freight from the Sebago Lake region was delivered to market over the Mountain Division rail line.

Lumber, grain and wood shavings were just a few of the products that local businesses shipped from small enclaves like Steep Falls, Hiram and Fryeburg to large markets in Portland, Boston and beyond, said Estes, owner of P.Y. Estes & Sons, a quarry operation in Baldwin.

"They were all active when the rail went offline. I can't help but think they could come back and do some business," said Estes, who hopes the state can return rail service to the region and give companies another shipping option.

In mid-May, the state purchased a 5.2-mile section of the Mountain Division Rail Line running from Westbrook to South Windham from PanAm Railways, formerly known as Guilford Rail.

The state now owns or has access to the
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AREA FARMERS MARKETS

Rippling Waters Organic Farm has a farm store open seven days a week from 8 a.m.-6 p.m. on River Road in Steep Falls	Naples Farmers Market - Thursdays, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. on the Village Green
Bridgton Farmers market - Saturdays, 8 a.m.-1 p.m. on Depot Street behind Renys	Lakes Region Farmers Market - Saturdays 8 a.m.-12 p.m. at the Manchester School on Route 302 in Windham

be busy selling tomatoes and corn, Ramsdell said. Vendors also sell honey, apples and maple syrup.

Bruce Fournier of Meadowsweet Lamb & Herb Farm in Denmark was selling meat and herbs at Saturday's market. Fournier said he has seen a remarkable increase in customers in the four years he has been with the Bridgton Farmers Market. "The foot traffic is just phenomenal," Fournier said of this season.

Fournier, who has been farming for 20 years, largely attributed the growth to the expansion and back entrance at Reny's, the paved parking lot adjacent to the market

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to the grocery store. Helen Ramsdell, a farmer in Denmark and organizer of the markets in Bridgton and Naples, said both markets have seen increased traffic.

"We see more and more people coming," Ramsdell said of the Bridgton market. The increase in visitors is combined with the addi-

tion of three new vendors to make a total of 15 in Bridgton and two new vendors in Naples to make a total of seven.

The vendors at Saturday's market were selling everything from baked goods to greens, from various kinds of meat to zucchini. Later in the summer farmers will

process to conclude in quarry proposal

application, hear testimony from Busque, his experts, and residents, then decide if the plan meets the criteria laid out by the town's mineral extraction ordinance. The application, like the one before it, was approved by the Planning Board before it was handed to the council.

When Busque cleared the land in 2004, he hoped the quarry operation would be up and running by now. Instead, the project is in limbo, caught in a review process that started four years ago.

During the current review, the second go-round Busque has had with the council, questions have been raised about

the logic of having both the Planning Board and the Town Council conduct hearings.

Busque, who scaled back the operation in the latest application, said he has done everything that has been asked of him, from integrating a noise mitigation plan to paying for studies on vibration, water quality and traffic impacts. The quarry would take up around 55 acres of the 160-acre property, and be mined in phases.

But the neighbors who have formed a group, the Windham Preservation Committee, to oppose the quarry continue to say Busque's plan will intrude on their day-to-day lives, and

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Peter Busque hopes to begin work soon on his proposed Windham quarry. The Windham Town Council is scheduled to meet Aug. 12 to decide whether to approve his second proposal. Staff photo by Harmony Motter

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sives technician for North American Industrial Services of Gorham.

"Tony was always happy, loved baseball, loved snowboarding," said Tanya Olsen, the girlfriend of Clarke's boss, Dan Lyman, with whom he was close. "He was just an all around fun guy."

In 2007 there were 45 lightning deaths in the United States, and one of those was in Maine.

The lightning was part of powerful storms that left thousands of people out of power July 18. Central Maine Power estimated that at 4 p.m. that day, an estimated 9,800 homes and businesses were out of power, mostly in the Gorham and Standish areas.

Earlier in the afternoon more than 10,000 accounts were without service due to thunderstorms with high winds, lightning and hail.

business n critical on

flew from his motorcycle and hit the sedan. He was not wearing a helmet, said Bridgton Police Chief David Lyons.

Marston was airlifted to Central Maine Medical Center with head and internal injuries. The driver of the car, Kara Thurlow, 34, of Harrison was uninjured.

Marston worked for the Bridgton Police Department in the early 1970s and is also a retired sheriff's deputy.

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Rail service could be economic engine

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entire 50-mile line, which connects to North Conway, N.H., and can begin researching more closely the opportunities presented by the rail line. While freight service may be feasible in the near future, commuter service seems more likely to be a long-term project.

The reintroduction of rail service between Portland and Fryeburg, via Windham and the Lakes Region, depends in large part on the interest of large scale customers and the future price of fuel, said Nate Moulton of the Maine Department of Transportation.

The Mountain Division line, with all but the Portland-to-Westbrook section out of service since 1984, will require an investment of around \$20 million. The repair would make the line suitable for freight and excursion passenger service, Moulton said. The timber cross ties are in poor shape along most of the line, and track would have to be laid in the Westbrook-to-Windham section.

"The goal of the state is to get it back in service and get trucks off the roads," he said. The state paid \$805,000 for the final section of the rail line, funding that was approved in a statewide bond referendum held last year. The state spent around \$1 million for the Windham-to-Fryeburg section in 1997.

A repaired rail line greatly interests Estes, who would like to ship material from his quarry to bigger markets in Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island, where it cannot be practically shipped by truck. He also thinks it would help out other businesses along the way.

"I think the rail line is just a great opportunity for economic development in this area," he said.

Larry Seidl of Seidl Trucking agrees.

"Most successful areas use all of their assets," said Seidl, who is also president of the Baldwin Business Association. "We have not been developing our assets."

High fuel costs are not going away, said Seidl, so the appeal of rail service will continue to grow. If just a couple of companies come to the area because of rail, it will be good for the region, he said.

"A factory or two along this rail line is all it will take," said Seidl.

The state will likely seek federal funds to begin the rail repair and bring the Mountain Division line up to standard. But at some point a carrier would have to come forward to operate and maintain the line, Moulton said.

"If you are going to interest any of them, it has to be a money-making proposition," he said.

A Department of Transportation study presented in December found that the most likely use for a Mountain Division line freight service would be to ship aggregates, such as sand and gravel, from businesses near the line, which runs from Portland to Windham, along the west side of Sebago Lake, then northwest to Fryeburg.

For the rail service to be viable, one or two large scale users would have to first sign-on to ship along the line, Moulton said.

"You really need one or two big customers to get it going, then you can add the smaller guys along the line," he said.

According to the study, that could be difficult. Of the two dozen businesses who were identified as likely shippers and interviewed, most were interested in the prospect of rail service. But many noted that they did not ship in sufficient amounts to use rail, or could not live with the incon-

sistent delivery times of rail.

With the entire line now secure, Moulton said the state needs to revisit the potential customers and, after presenting concrete costs and times, find who is really interested. The state, and potential rail customers and carriers, have to continually compare the costs of shipping on road versus rail, he said. As diesel prices, now at around \$4.70 a gallon, continue to rise, rail service becomes more attractive, he said.

Regardless of the initial interest, if the rail line is re-established, entrepreneurs will come forward and use it once it is in place, Estes said. Business owners who realize how to take advantage of the opportunity will be successful, he said.

"We can go and try to find markets and see if we can make them work," said Estes.

While leisurely, sightseeing-centric excursion service may be possible with the same repair that is required for freight service, commuter trains along the Mountain Division line are not likely for years, Moulton said. To bring the rail to commuter-speed standards from Portland to Fryeburg, the cost would likely be around \$42 million, double that which is needed for freight service.

Passenger service of the kind that can be useful to commuters would likely be completed in stages, Moulton said, and would likely have to be subsidized. Demand would likely depend on whether the price of fuel continues to rise, making auto travel less appealing, he said.

From Windham's perspective, commuter service should be developed sooner rather than later, said Keith Luke, the town's economic development director.

Luke, a proponent of public transportation, said the state should be looking to Massachusetts's North Shore as an example. There, in the Boston suburbs, development has occurred near the areas that feature commuter rail stations, Luke said.

Freight service will not help nearby communities a great deal, Luke said. If the state wants to realize great dividends from rail development, it should make the large investment now, and watch as commuters find the service. Fast passenger service would be popular, and as popularity increases, the areas around stations would develop, as would complementary services, he said.

"Passenger has to be the focus, and speed is important," said Luke.

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