

# U.S. Transportation Secretary LaHood Announces \$35 Million in Recovery Act Funding For Downeaster Rail Improvements



U.S. Department of Transportation  
Office of Public Affairs  
Washington, D.C.  
[www.dot.gov/affairs/briefing.htm](http://www.dot.gov/affairs/briefing.htm)  
News

FRA 08-10  
Contact: Rob Kulat  
Telephone: 202-493-6024

**Tuesday, Jul 6, 2010** Washington, DC

*Washington, D.C.* – In January, President Obama announced that Maine was awarded \$35 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds for the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA). Today, U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced that the U.S. Department of Transportation and the State of Maine have finalized a grant agreement allowing work to begin on the rehabilitation and expansion of the popular state-supported Downeaster Amtrak intercity passenger service.

The Downeaster operates five daily roundtrips between Portland, ME, and Boston, MA.

“This project is a great example of what the Recovery Act is all about,” said Secretary LaHood. “We’re giving travelers better options while putting people in Maine back to work and improving New England’s rail infrastructure. That’s a win for everyone.”

The Downeaster-Portland North Project will extend service from Portland to Brunswick, with a stop in Freeport, ME. Construction on the project is expected to begin as early as July 6, 2010, and will continue over the next 28 months. The expanded service is expected to increase ridership, improve connectivity and balance passenger flow.

“The expansion of passenger rail service north of Portland has been a priority for my administration,” Governor John Baldacci said. “Working with our federal partners, we will reach Brunswick and open the gateway for further expansion. This is an incredible project that would not have been possible without the hard work and commitment of many people, including Maine’s Congressional delegation and the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority.”

“The vital funding to extend Amtrak service to Freeport and Brunswick is a great stride in creating more jobs and fostering economic growth – not to mention providing a tremendous service to Mainers and visitors alike,” said Senator Olympia Snowe. “Indeed, the grant validates the unceasing diligence of the people who promote, manage and operate the Downeaster, a truly invaluable transportation and economic asset. Since its inception, the Downeaster has generated nearly \$40 million in fares and last year it had a customer service satisfaction rate of 93 percent – and this extension will not only help boost the economy of Coastal Maine, but all of Maine.”

“Extending Amtrak service north to Freeport and Brunswick has long been a goal of the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, and the start of this important infrastructure project is welcome news,” said Senator Susan Collins. “Not only will this create jobs, it will also help encourage tourism, therefore boosting the economy in the Midcoast region which is coping with the closure of the Brunswick Naval Air Station.”

The \$35 million ARRA grant will augment additional funds from the State of Maine to cover the project cost, including the rehabilitation of approximately 26.4 miles of existing rail lines owned by Pan Am Railways and construction of two Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant passenger platforms. The Downeaster project will improve 36 highway-rail grade crossings, upgrade numerous wayside signals, install signals on the Brunswick Branch and result in many other right of way improvements.

####