

New England commission funds rail improvements

ROCKPORT Me. (AP) — The New England Regional Commission yesterday adopted a \$7.7 million budget with almost half the funds earmarked for improving rail transportation.

The six New England governors adopted a spending plan for a year beginning Oct. 1, which allocates \$3.4 million for transportation, \$1.8 million for economic development, \$2 million for energy programs and almost \$500,000 for administration of the federal-state panel.

Virtually all of the funds come from federal sources, with the states splitting half the administrative costs.

The largest single program would set aside \$3 million for repairing railroad roadbeds.

That program would provide the equivalent of 350 jobs for six months. The Regional Commission provides funds for labor, and participating railroads provide material and supervisory personnel for the repairs.

Of the total, \$362,000 would be allocated to Massachusetts, \$631,000 to Maine, \$414,000 to New Hampshire, \$407,000 to Connecticut, \$339,000 to Vermont and \$277,000 to Rhode Island.

The largest recipient among 14 participating railroads would be the Boston and Maine Railroad, with \$832,000. Other major recipients are Providence and Worcester, \$515,000; Maine Central, \$458,000; Bangor and Aroostock, \$350,000; Conrail, \$305,000; Central Vermont, \$212,000 and Lewiston and Auburn, \$112,000.

Railroads receiving less than \$50,000 each are Narragansett Pier, Rhode Island Port Authority, Rhode Island DOT, Delaware and Hudson, Montpelier and Barre, Vermont, and Green Mountain.

Other transportation funds would be devoted to preparing studies for improving New England rail freight shipments, developing rail passenger service in Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, and setting standards for land-use decisions on transportation based on energy conservation.

Included in funds for economic development is \$202,000 for creating a planning research and evaluation unit to develop a strategy for promoting increased private investment and jobs in the region.

Some energy funds will be used to examine federal energy policies and their implications for New England.

Another \$75,000 would be earmarked to provide states with technical assistance to deal with the economic development of offshore oil drilling in the Georges Bank.

More than \$530,000 would be set aside for hiring skilled and supervisory personnel to carry out winterization programs when federal funds for such projects are limited.

And \$174,000 would fund studies for developing alternative renewable energy resources for New England.

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