

# Funding catalyzes County railroads

*Fort Fairfield tracks unused for 10 years*

FORT FAIRFIELD - Railroad cars, silenced 10 years ago by the abandonment of rail lines, again will rumble along the tracks from Fort Fairfield to Easton thanks to \$1,775,000 in grants the town has acquired.

The final \$400,000 for the project came Wednesday morning from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Agency. The town held a ceremony at the town's railroad museum, the former Bangor and Aroostook Railroad station.

Michael Aube, state director of the USDA Rural Development Agency, delivered the money in the form of a large check Wednesday morning.

The town started its most recent effort to re-engage rail service in the fall of 2000. Wednesday's announcement was the culmination of that work.

The grants funded the town's purchase of the 8.6-mile rail line, its reconstruction, and the construction of two sidings that will be used by local industry for future shipping business.

"This has been quite a process for the town, but now it's a very positive step," Town Manager Dan Foster said after the ceremony. "The town refused to accept abandonment.

"We had a lot of support and help locally, at the state and federal levels," he said. "Now, the money is in the bank and we are ready to go forward."

The town bought the 8.66 miles of abandoned rail line that cost \$275,000 with some of the grant money.

Now it's time to move forward, and little time will be lost. Foster said the town would be going out to bid on June 30 on reconstruction of the line. The \$1.5 million upgrade includes replacement and reinstallation of 15,540 rail ties. Completion of the reconstructed rail line is expected by the end of November.

"This will connect us to Easton, Presque Isle and the world," Foster said. "At one time this railroad was a very busy place, and it will be again.

"We already have three businesses interested," he said.

Foster said Aroostook Starch Co., Boralex, and New England Grain are already on the sidelines waiting for service. The two sidings will be built at Boralex and at McShea Siding off Route 1A.

Foster said the sidings, loading and unloading areas, will see raw material come into town and finished product shipped out.

A side project Foster talked about is the purchase of the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad Station. The town's historical society, Frontier Heritage Society, is looking to purchase the old building from its present owner. The station is located near the town's rail museum.

The museum, a former Canadian Pacific Railway Station, was once located on Main Street. It was moved to Depot Street on the site north of town by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers when they built a flood protection dike between the town's business district and the Aroostook River in the late 1990s.

At one time, Bangor and Aroostook Railroad and Canadian Pacific Railways served Fort Fairfield. The rail lines have not been used since 1994, according to Foster.

The town's first rail service came from Canada in 1878. At the time, the farthest rail lines ran in Maine was to Bangor.

For a period of time after rail service ended, there was a 1.5- mile scenic ride in Fort Fairfield along the Aroostook River.