B&M Railroad President Claims Trucking Troubles

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PORTSMOUTH, Jan. 29 — Alan Dustin, president of the Boston and Maine Railroad, is not a man with simple problems. His railroad is bankrupt. His railroad's track is a mess. No one will lend him money. And he is cut off from taxpayern dollars since his company is not part of the enormous government-subsidized Conrail system.

Yet these are not the worst of Alan Dustin's troubles. True, he hasn't enough cash to run his railroad effectively. And true, his days are haunted with the effects of past neglect and mismanagement in the railroad industry.

But these problems Alan Dustin can handle. What he can't tolerate are trucks. Not only are trucks taking away traffic that rightfully should be his, but, he says, they are doing so only at the expense of the taxpayer.

TRAINS VS. TRUCKS

While the railroad strives to survive under the load of maintenance, fuel and right-of-way costs, trucks, Dustin says, are, at least in the last 10 years, getting almost a free ride.

According to Dustin, who spoke recently at the Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce Breakfast Forum, the railroad pays 26 cents of every dollar for right-of-way costs, while the truck industry pays only about five cents per dollar in highway user fees, a charge, he says, that hasn't increased in years.

The real crime as far as Dustin is concerned is that he believes the volume of traffic to make a railroad successful is there, but it is moving on the highways with the taxpayer footing the bill for right-of-way costs.

Forced to pay for its own right-of-way ownership and maintenance, the railroad must charge higher rates and consequently loses business.

"The basic problem," he says, "is that we cannot compete with subsidized transportation."

Dustin says he wouldn't mind having railroads replaced by trucks if the railroad was efficient.

Although the B and M can obtain no federal grants and with its high-risk status is blocked from banks, help has come from the New England Regional Commission, which furnished grants for an intensified labor program.

In addition, Dustin says the company's recently concluded sale of 210 miles of track to the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) could help cut into the B and M's large debt.

Dustin is pleased with these accomplishments and is proud that his railroad is still independent and has not been swallowed up by the government.

But things could get worse. If attitudes don't change towards railroads, he says, within 10 years all lines will be nationalized.