

## Destination imagination

### Artist creates 'subway line' for Washington County

BY JOHANNA S. BILLINGS  
BDN STAFF

STEUBEN — Imagine a subway line serving all of Washington County and beyond.

Steuben artist JT Bullitt has.

The Downeast Rapid Transit is his creation. But, no, it's not actually a real subway system.

"Downeast Rapid Transit is a public art concept entrusted to imagine safe, reliable, affordable, accessible, inclusive, carbon-neutral and beautiful underground rapid transit service to residents, neighbors and visitors of coastal Washington County, Maine," reads the website, [www.downeastrapidtransit.com](http://www.downeastrapidtransit.com), which Bullitt launched this past spring.

The website shows six subway lines with stops all over Washington County, from Steuben to Calais, and connections outside Washington County to places such as Campobello, Acadia National Park, Bar Harbor and Ellsworth



JOHANNA S. BILLINGS | BDN

JT Bullitt works on a sign for the Downeast Rapid Transit, his subway line creation, recently in Steuben. The sign will be installed in the water near Petit Manan.

The public art includes signs identifying various locations as subway stations along with other "evidence" of station activity such as benches.

These items are installed by "station masters" who agree to host the signs on

their properties, said Bullitt.

The sign for the first station, Pigeon Hill, was installed June 15 near Bullitt's home on Pigeon Hill Road, where he is the station master. The signpost includes an attachment containing

postcards with maps of the transit system on them. The postcards also are available by mail, according to the website.

Milbridge House Restaurant owner Kristin Nabarrete said Bullitt was a mem-

*See Subway, Page B3*



# Bangor Daily News

Coastal edition

BDN bangordailynews.com

Tuesday, September 22, 2015 \$1.25



JOHANNA S. BILLINGS | BDN

Milbridge House Restaurant owner Kristin Nabarrete stands next to the "reserved parking" sign for the Downeast Rapid Transit on Thursday in Milbridge.

## Subway

*Continued from Page B1*

ber of an art group that met Wednesday mornings at the restaurant. When he approached her about making the Milbridge House the site of the Milbridge Bayside station, she agreed.

"I thought it was a neat idea," she said. "I didn't realize it would entail being station master as well. I was pretty excited when he showed up with my business cards."

The Milbridge Bayside station "opened" July 8.

Nabarrete also put up a sign that marks an area on one side of the restaurant as "reserved parking" for riders of "The D" as the Downeast Rapid Transit is sometimes called.

She said one customer actually moved his vehicle after parking near the sign and then seeing a police officer pulling in, she said.

The station to "open" most recently is Lubec, where Station Master Fritz Buehner installed a sign on Sept. 3.

"I could see myself at

some time placing a bench adjacent to the sign for those who would care to sit and ponder the idea of such a system actually existing," he said.

Buehner, also an artist, said he's been doing stealth public art projects since the early 1990s.

"Making and being involved in art work that straddles the public and private sectors of art and not art creates an exciting space for unexpected dialogue," he said.

So far, eight stations are "open" and Bullitt plans on having a call for more station masters later this fall.

He said he is enjoying the attention his creation is receiving.

"I'm just letting this thing kind of evolve, according to people's level of interest ... and the interest seems to be there," Bullitt said.

"Each station is an invitation to descend into the world of imagination, a reminder of the deep connections that weave our lives together," reads his website.

Bullitt said he ran into one glitch after installing a station sign at McClellan Park in Milbridge.

"The town took the first

sign down because a neighbor complained because tourists were driving down his driveway. And I hadn't gotten a permit," he said. "The sign went back up in a better place."

That sign is now located at the intersection of Tom Leighton Road and Watchtide Landing, within walking distance of the park.

Bullitt said he estimates it would cost \$100 billion to build a transit system such as the one he has envisioned. But that's not the point.

"My strategy is not to start fundraising for this \$100 billion project," he said. "It's just to put this idea out there and see where it goes."

Bullitt first envisioned the Downeast Rapid Transit in 2010, just a year after he moved to Washington County from Massachusetts.

"I quickly realized it takes forever to get around. Wouldn't it be nice if there were a subway system?" he said. "I started sketching a map of a subway and the idea that there's something that connects us all."

In fact, the Downeast Rapid Transit's tagline, "the underground connects us all," reflects a deeper idea

that all people are connected on a deeper, more spiritual level, he said, adding, "That idea is very exciting to me."

In addition to letting the concept continue to evolve, Bullitt plans to write a station masters' handbook and further engage the public through Facebook and Twitter. He enjoys it when people send messages that show they buy into the concept, he said.

Some conversations have centered around questions such as, "Why doesn't the area have a subway?" and "What would be different if it did?"

"A lot of this is really valuable conversation," Bullitt said.

He has met people he would not have met without the Downeast Rapid Transit, he said. People also are connecting with each other because of it.

This gives people an opportunity to explore the boundaries between what is real and what isn't. The Downeast Rapid Transit isn't real, but the conversations and connections it generates are.

"There's no obvious answers to [such] questions," he said.