

The Michigan Passenger

Winter 2012

Your Source For Passenger Rail News Since 1973

Volume 39, Number 1

Winter 2012
Volume 39, Number 1



Michigan Association
of Railroad Passengers

www.marp.org

WHAT'S INSIDE...

Indian Trails
discusses growing
services
See Page 3

Construction starts
on Englewood
Flyover
See Page 3

Route Enhancement
Committee makes
recommendations
See Page 4

Lazurus Lives
See Page 7

Port Huron considers
new station
See Page 8

PRESORT STD.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 10
SANDUSKY, OH
44870

Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers
PO Box 532256
Livonia, Michigan 48153-2256

Amtrak throttling up speeds

By Hugh Gurney

Michigan trains began running at speeds of up to 110 miles per hour on the 97 mile Kalamazoo-Porter, Indiana, Amtrak-owned tracks used by both *Wolverine* and *Blue Water* trains on Feb. 7.

In December, speeds on the Indiana portion of that line were boosted from 79 to 95 mph. Trains on the Michigan's section have been

operating at 95 mph for several years.

Michigan Department of Transportation's (MDOT) Office of Rail Administrator Tim Hoeffner told MARP members gathered at the Williamston Depot on Saturday, Jan. 14 about the state's plans to boost train speeds.

It will be at least three years before similar speeds are achieved

between Kalamazoo and Dearborn, Hoeffner said.

The stretch between Kalamazoo and Battle Creek will be upgraded within 24 months, with the remainder of the route ready for 110 mph in 36 months.

Between Ypsilanti and Dearborn, the line will be double tracked, with more and longer passing tracks

(See *SPEED* page 6)

The Great Dome Car



Passengers enjoy the early afternoon sunshine aboard Amtrak's Great Dome Car in Battle Creek on Jan. 13. The car made special visits to Michigan in November and January. Michigan Passenger contributor Steve Sobel's got a chance to ride it. Read his trip report on Page 5.

(Photo by Steve Sobel)

Troy Transit Center is back on track

By Larry Sobczak

The project to build a combined train station, bus transfer stop, taxi stand and car rental facility near Maple and Coolidge roads in the northern Detroit suburb of Troy is back on again after surviving a near-death experience in December.

After initially entering into a contract with the Michigan Department of Transportation to construct the \$8.4 million facility in September, the city council decided not to approve the construction manager and architect contracts in December, effectively canceling the project due to tight deadlines imposed by the Federal grants that are funding the center.

Troy Mayor Janice Daniels, who was elected to office in November along with two other Tea Party

council members, led efforts against the transit center. The mayor and the two council members cited a ballooning federal deficit, crime fears and a \$30,000 annual maintenance cost as reasons to oppose it. A fourth council member, Wade Fleming had expressed reluctance about the project in the past and was the swing vote.

The vote to turn down a project entirely funded by the federal government was so unusual that it attracted national media outlets such as The New York Times, The Chicago Tribune and the Associated Press to report about it.

National political observers noted that the returned grant money would not go back to the treasury to reduce the Federal deficit. Instead the grant money would be re-

appropriated towards to one of the \$90 billion worth of grant applications Troy had initially beat out.

The implication of the vote was also compared to the high speed rail grants that Tea Party-influenced governors in Florida, Wisconsin and Ohio had returned to the federal government in 2010.

The Troy Chamber of Commerce, which counts many international and Fortune 500 companies in its ranks, expressed embarrassment over the vote. An internal memo within one auto supplier was leaked to the public and it called for a halt of future investment in the city.

The Chamber was counting on the transit center to be a major

(See *TROY* page 3)

Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc.

OFFICERS

Chair

Robert Tischbein
586-726-9737
rptischbein@juno.com

Vice Chair

Barney Whittier
269-429-8839
whittierbc@comcast.net

Secretary

Hugh Gurney
517-545-2979
hgurney@hsmichigan.org

Treasurer

David Randall
248-924-4078
boksul@yahoo.com

REGIONAL CHAIRS

Metro Detroit

Jim Hinkins
313-881-6258
jimhinkins@yahoo.com

East/Central Michigan

Jim Wallington, acting
517-303-6038
jwallington@msn.com

West Michigan

John D. Langdon, acting
616-218-9009
john-langdon@sbcglobal.net

Northern Michigan

Don Monteith
231-547-6854
damonteith2008@gmail.com

AT-LARGE EXECUTIVES

John D. Langdon
616-218-9009
john-langdon@sbcglobal.net

Jim Wallington
517-303-6038
jwallington@msn.com

Kay M. Chase
269-388-3777
kay.chase@wmich.edu

Kathleen Newell
310-740-0421
knewell1187@comcast.net

The Michigan Passenger

is published four times annually by the
Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc.

Copyright © 2012 Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc.

All articles not originated by MARP are copyrighted by their respective originators. All rights reserved. Articles used in accordance with the Fair Use Clause of the United States Constitution.

The Michigan Passenger welcomes submissions on passenger rail issues for publications. Material sent for publication should be sent to our Editor at: larrysobczak@hotmail.com

Clippings from newspapers and magazines must include the publication's name and date. Photos sent in by e-mail should be in JPEG format.

We reserve the right to edit all submissions.

To subscribe to this publication, join MARP by filling out the application below. All MARP members receive a copy of this publication sent to their home or business.

Michigan Passenger Editor:

Larry Sobczak, larrysobczak@hotmail.com
586-781-6891

Contributors:

Kenneth Borg
John DeLora
Hugh Gurney
Steve Sobel

About MARP...

The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. (MARP) was established in 1973 as a consumer advocacy group to improve intercity rail and bus service, improve local transit and encourage the preservation of historic railroad stations.

MARP is not affiliated with Amtrak, the railroads, governments or any political party. MARP is incorporated as a Michigan non-profit organization and is exempt from federal income tax under the IRS code, 501©(3) as a charitable educational organization. Dues and donations to MARP may be tax-deductible in accordance with the IRS code.

MARP is an all-volunteer organization. Its membership consists of passengers and citizens who want a viable, balanced transportation system in Michigan. We can all use the help we can get!

<http://www.marp.org>
marprail@yahoo.com

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/michigan-association-of-railroad-passengers>
<http://twitter.com/michrailpass>

Membership Application

Clip this form and mail your check or money order to: Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, PO Box 532256, Livonia, MI 48153-2256

Name: _____

Address: _____ Unit: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: (____) _____

Email: _____

MEMBERSHIP DUES

Student (under 21)	\$15
Seniors (65+)	\$15
Individual	\$25
Family	\$30
Advocate	\$50
First Class	\$100
Lifetime	\$500

Contact me, I want to be **active!**
 Please send me information about the National Association of Railroad Passengers
 I want to be notified no more than 4 times per year by email or phone when critical issues arise
Total Dues: _____
Additional Donation _____
TOTAL ENCLOSED: _____

* We do not sell, rent or trade email addresses. We use emails for important time-sensitive news and when urgent phone calls are needed for elected officials.

Indian Trails discusses growing services in Michigan

By Hugh Gurney

Indian Trails CEO Gordon MacKay and other Indian Trails officials hosted a meeting with members of MARP's Thruway Bus Committee at their headquarters in Owosso on Jan. 18, where issues of mutual concern were discussed.

Indian Trails reported that ridership continues to grow on the Michigan Flyer, the scheduled bus service connecting East Lansing, Jackson and Ann Arbor with Detroit Metropolitan Airport.

TROY:

(Continued from
Page 1)

gateway along the Detroit to Chicago high speed rail project currently under development.

Under pressure from the Chamber of Commerce, the city council held a special meeting on Jan. 18 to vote on a revised proposal which scaled back the size of the building, eliminated a geo-thermal heating system, altered the bus transfer area and eliminated landscaping. The scaled-back project is estimated to save \$2 million. The chamber pledged to cover the estimated \$30,000 in annual maintenance costs to the center.

The transit center vote passed 4-3 with Fleming changing his vote from December.

The Federal Railroad Administration, which awarded the grant, also agreed to move its completion deadlines ahead a few weeks.

The latest round of trouble experienced by the transit center project was not its first.

The nearly three acre transit center land parcel was originally awarded to the city in a 2000 consent agreement at the Oakland County Circuit Court with a developer that built townhomes and several strip malls nearby.

The developer sued the city in 2010 to get the parcel returned back to it but lost to the city which retained its parcel.

The future of the project also looked uncertain in April when the city of Birmingham backed out. Birmingham had planned on including access to the station from its side of the tracks but could not acquire property within federal price guidelines. The Birmingham City Council also said it would not use eminent domain to acquire the necessary property.

(MARP member and co-founder John DeLora offers perspective on the Troy Transit Center on Page 7.)

Since its initiation in 2006, the Michigan Flyer has transported almost 430,000 passengers between the airport and the three cities it serves at a 99% on time performance. Four new buses are now in service replacing four aging vehicles.

Committee member Hugh Gurney expressed MARP's pleasure with the ridership growth reported on the bus company's interconnecting routes serving the northern two-thirds of Michigan. Indian Trails Vice President Chad

Cushman noted that the northern service had a 52% fare box recovery, a remarkable achievement for such a sparsely populated region.

Accolades were also given for initiation of new motor coach service to Duluth, Minnesota, a welcome boon for users of public transportation in Northern Michigan. Indian Trails' buses now continue to Duluth rather than dead-ending in Ironwood, Michigan. Indian Trails' Ken Henry noted that they had seen an uptick in cross UP travel to Duluth. Obstacles with ticketing by

other motor coach carriers are slowly being resolved.

MacKay reported that 65 new way-finding signs have been installed on state highways along the Sleeping Bear route between Grand Rapids and Boyne Falls and the Straits route between East Lansing and St. Ignace. He said the signs should raise the visibility of the service and increase ridership.

Problems continue with locating and signing stops in several Northern

(See INDIAN TRAILS page 8)



UNDER CONSTRUCTION. In 2012, passenger train travellers in Windsor, Ontario, will be able to enjoy this new station currently under construction. The station will serve VIA Rail passengers and will fit 125 customers in 12,000 square feet of space. Its design is similar to the bus station in Windsor. The old station will be demolished to make way for up to 110 parking spots. (Photo by Steve Sobel.)

Ground broken on "Englewood Flyover"

Ground was broken in October on the "Englewood Flyover" project, a critical component to the Chicago hub of the Midwest high-speed rail network.

To be completed in spring 2014, the project will accommodate additional tracks for proposed 110-mph Amtrak service from Chicago to Detroit, Cleveland and other eastern points as well as Port Huron and Grand Rapids.

The construction project will build a bridge to separate traffic along two railroads, allowing 130 trains per day to move more quickly through one of the worst bottlenecks in North America. The investment will improve on-time performance of passenger trains, reduce freight congestion and create nearly 1,500 jobs.

The flyover will eliminate a chokepoint where NS and Metra tracks intersect; each day, about 78 Metra trains, 46 NS trains and 14 Amtrak trains travel through the intersection. The bridge also will help eliminate more than 7,500 hours in Metra train delays.

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood was joined by Illinois

Governor Pat Quinn, U.S. Senator Dick Durbin, U.S. Congressmen Bobby Rush and Dan Lipinski, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel and other state and local elected officials, as well as business, labor and civic leaders at the groundbreaking.

"Projects like this one are exactly why President Obama has made transportation such a big part of the American Jobs Act," said Secretary LaHood. "We have workers on site today, American factories producing new supplies, and when the project is completed, people and goods will move more quickly and easily through the Midwest, making the region a better place to start a business or hire new workers."

The \$133 million construction project is funded through a \$126 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation's high-speed intercity passenger rail program, with a \$6.6 million contribution from Governor Quinn's Illinois Jobs Now! Construction program.

"The Englewood Flyover will make life easier for tens of thousands of commuters every day and put people to work immediately,"

Illinois Governor Pat Quinn said. "This vital project will eliminate a problem spot and set the stage for future passenger rail growth while boosting Illinois' position at the economic engine of the Midwest."

The Englewood project will benefit passengers traveling along an improved corridor from Detroit, which has been awarded several grants for construction projects to increase speeds to 110 mph. Travelers from Cleveland, Indianapolis and Cincinnati will also see fewer delays thanks to the new bridge.

The project is part of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program (CREATE), a public-private partnership between the state, city and railroads aimed at untangling Chicago's infamously snarled railroads where conflicts cause delays across all modes of travel.

A strict "Buy America" requirement ensures U.S. manufacturers and workers receive the maximum economic benefits from this federal investment. The project will boost domestic manufacturing of railway supplies.

Governor indicates transportation direction during address



Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder during a transportation seminar in November.

By John DeLora

Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder mentioned his transportation initiatives during his State of the State address Jan. 18.

There were few specifics regarding transportation, but he made three points:

1. Snyder wants a rewriting of Public Act 51. Michigan's constitution requires that "at least 90%" of all transportation tax revenues must go to highways. P.A. 51 is a 60 year old law which specifies how the money is to be allocated- new road construction, maintenance, county and local roads, passenger and freight rail, transit, non-motorized transit, aviation and ports. The governor has consistently been a supporter

of public transportation, and reform of P.A. 51 is his best way to get more money to public transportation. Every public transportation advocate needs to get and stay on top of hearings on this and making sure our voices are heard.

2. He wants to create a new southeastern public transportation authority which would presumably merge the Detroit DOT and SMART (suburban) bus systems. D-DOT is funded by Detroit, which is expected to go into receivership this spring; SMART is funded by property tax millages, and it has been crippled by the collapse in real estate values.

3. He reiterated his support for a new international bridge at Detroit, but is now casting it as "not a bridge issue, but a jobs issue."

Route Enhancement Committee makes its 2012 recommendations

At the January 14, 2012, meeting at the Williamston Depot Museum in Williamston, the MARP Executive Committee approved the attached Route Enhancement Recommendations. MARP is asking all members to review these recommendations and help us keep abreast of the many wonderful projects underway in Michigan. MARP particularly need volunteers to help us track what is happening in Battle Creek, Troy and the proposed improvements between Porter, Indiana, and Chicago Union Station.

Relay any information to:
Hugh Gurney
2270 Hickory Circle Drive
Howell, MI 48855
(517) 545-2979
hgurney@hsmichigan.org

1. **Assure** that Section 209 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA), does not adversely affect passenger service in Michigan. (Section 209 mandates routes less than 750 miles become solely state-supported.)
 - a) Track status of implementation on a monthly basis.
 - b) Determine funding needed if PRIIA is implemented.
 - c) Establish communication links with MDOT, Amtrak, rail advocacy groups in affected states, & federal legislators to develop a unified position on actions needed, including rescinding of Section 209.
 - d) Investigate options to offset costs of PRIIA including extension of trains to Canada, the Eastern United States or points beyond Chicago on the West.
2. **Initiate** commuter rail service between Ann Arbor and Detroit and between Howell and Ann Arbor (WALLY). **Consider extension of WALLY to Durand and Flint.**
 - a) Work with TRU and other advocacy groups for the establishment of a Southeast Michigan Transportation Authority.
 - b) Find champions at the local, state and federal levels who will push for implementation of local commuter services.
 - c) Facilitate a steering group including business, community, advocacy and political leaders to educate the public on the value of commuter service and market the service.
 - d) Hold demonstration runs in 2012.
3. Initiate Community Benefit Studies to determine the possibilities of additional service on the Pere Marquette and Blue Water routes **including the possibility of combining the two routes. Include in these studies additional Wolverine service** between Battle Creek and Chicago.
 - a) Work with Michigan Environmental Council and Transportation For Michigan to identify a funding source for these studies.
 - b) Create an RFP
 - c) Select a consulting firm to conduct the studies, possibly the one that did the Grand Valley study.
- d) Review and approve findings.
- e) Communicate findings to affected communities, MDOT and the Michigan legislature.
4. Assure an adequate level of funding for replacement of intercity motor coaches.
 - a) Meet with Indian Trails and other intercity carriers to identify needs.
 - b) Involve other advocacy groups including TRANS4M, MDOT and members of the Michigan legislature to secure an adequate level of funding.
 - c) Track expenditures once funding is secured.
5. **Ensure** progress on all approved projects including MDOT acquisition of the Dearborn-Kalamazoo line and its upgrade to 110 mph speed, Amtrak upgrades Kalamazoo-Porter, the West Detroit Connector, CREATE, Indiana Gateway, purchase of new rolling stock, and station projects in Grand Rapids, Battle Creek, Jackson, Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Troy.
 - a) Report quarterly to the Executive Committee.
 - b) Demand explanations **and corrective actions** if projects fall behind schedule.
6. Push for genuine connectivity between intercity bus and rail service in Michigan.
 - a) Work with Indian Trails, MDOT, and Amtrak to identify and overcome obstacles to having all Indian Trails routes in Michigan identified as Amtrak Thruway Routes.
 - b) Identify funding required to institute new intercity motor coach routes including north from New Buffalo along the Lake Michigan shoreline and daytime service Marquette-Milwaukee.
 - c) Create website page with information about how to get around Michigan by train and bus.
7. Assure dedicated funding for passenger rail in Michigan
 - a) Determine the level of funding needed for an adequate passenger rail system in Michigan.
 - b) Support TRANS4M in its efforts to secure adequate funding for all transportation modes.
 - c) Enlist all transportation and environmental groups in advocating for a balanced transportation system in Michigan.
 - d) Insist that a full 10% of transportation funding be dedicated to public transportation including rail as specified by the Michigan Constitution.
 - e) If passenger rail funding remains inadequate even with 10% of the state transportation funding dedicated to public transportation, identify additional funding possibilities.

Trip report:

Riding The Great Dome between Dearborn and Battle Creek

By Steve Sobel

Did you ride Amtrak's Great Dome Car when it visited Michigan in November and January? For those of you who did not get the chance, here's what took place and perhaps some "unanswered" questions. So, let's get on with the show!

The dome car is a bi-level lounge car that features an upper level with windows on all sides – as well as overhead – to provide passengers with panoramic views. The dome section runs the full length of the car, a rare feature even when dome cars were more numerous on the nation's railroads.

The Great Dome, also known as "Ocean View" and Amtrak car number 10031, was once used on the Empire Builder between Chicago and Seattle and most recently was used on a route between Orlando and Washington, D.C. It was built in 1955 and is painted red, white and blue. It's the only remaining Great Dome car in Amtrak's fleet.

Amtrak ran the dome car on The Wolverine (Pontiac to Chicago) service on select trains near the Thanksgiving holiday week and during the month of January.

On Friday, Jan. 13, I purchased three round-trip tickets to ride between Dearborn and Battle Creek. One of the riders in my group boarded the train in Ann Arbor.

The train was on-time considering the operating speeds that I had learned later on from our train conductor aboard our homebound train..

Speeds between Chelsea and Albion are 60 mph. Top speeds between Chelsea and Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti are at 70 mph. Train speeds in Albion are at 30 mph. For now, 79 mph and faster is out of the question until the \$196 million in track and signal upgrades are completed over the next several years.

Upon our arrival in Battle Creek, only eight minutes behind schedule, we took the opportunity to take some photos of our train and within minutes of its departure, westbound train 365, "The Blue Water" arrived 20 minutes early before its 9:54 a.m. departure.

For the next two hours, Julien Wolfe and I checked out the temporary Amtrak "shack" which sits on the west side of McCamly Street while the permanent station is undergoing interior reconstruction work. It is fenced off and boarded up for the time being while work progresses inside.



Amtrak's Great Dome Car, the only domed car in the national passenger railroad's fleet, attracted hundreds of riders as well as photographers, railfans and curious onlookers when it made its way along the rails in southern Michigan on select Wolverine trains during November and January. Here it is waiting for passengers at the Jackson station which can be seen in the background. As of press time, there is no word if this car will return to Michigan in the near future.

(Photo by Kenneth Borg)

The station is due to reopen in April. The Amtrak "shack" although small, has what it needs: A station agent, some seats, two bathrooms and it's warm inside.

After a short three-block walk to Michigan Avenue, we found the Griffin Grill and Pub which opens for breakfast daily at 6 a.m. Once inside, it was basically empty. It was recommended by nearby "Clara's on the River" which did not open until lunch.

The food was good. My six ounce steak and eggs with hash browns and toast was reasonably priced at \$7.95. Julien said his stack of pancakes was fluffy and very tasty and cost only \$2.95. Coffee was pretty good, but not as strong as some other places. Service was okay.

Upon return to the station we learned that our eastbound train, #350, was running about ten minutes late which is technically still on time according to Amtrak. We set up in nice sunshine to capture the train as it rounded the bend with The Great Dome as the second car behind the engine.

Upon loading in Battle Creek, we boarded at the door just before the dome car. We went straight up into the car, found seats and within a few minutes, the conductor came by and took our tickets. No questions asked nor were we told to go back and find seats in the coach cars. I found this to be a nice surprise; based on all

the "rumors" I've heard prior to riding it today.

Here, a quick crew change and off we went back to Ann Arbor and Dearborn. As I stated earlier, a conductor who was seated in one of the dome's ends, gave me some information regarding train speeds. Basically, Norfolk Southern Railway (who owns the rails for the time-being) restored speeds to what is now considered a more "doable" trip so timekeeping is held fairly close to what the schedule calls for...for now.

It is here that I can firmly state that this car was opened the entire distance from Chicago and through to Pontiac. There is no cafe service being rendered from this car. The conductor said it would behoove Amtrak to stock the car for those wishing to sit in it and so Amtrak could sell additional food. He couldn't understand why it wasn't done! Also, friends Gary and Julien agreed and said a car of this nature would be a good selling point for Amtrak.

The Dome ran smoothly and was comfortable for the most part. Only one small section was a bit on the warm side. Occupancy while we rode it was less than a third full and just before Ann Arbor, the car, except a few young boys and one other couple riding to Pontiac, was empty.

The conductors kept us abreast of the station stops and made sure we were ready to get off at the proper

car door, which was close to our Dome car.

By the time #350 left Dearborn, it was only 18 minutes off schedule, not bad for a 113 mile each way trip over a period of six and a half hours since we began our journey in Dearborn.

The on-board personnel are very courteous and once again, I can give Amtrak's personnel a nice pat on the back! The same goes for the engineer on train 351 who took a few moments to speak to me before taking his break before returning back to work on train 350.

It was a nice ride with some fresh snow, sunshine, a nice riding car and meeting Amtrak rider, Rayburn L. Howland who was making his 607th trip from Chicago back to Ann Arbor where he lives. Each Friday, he rides to Chicago on train 355 to see his wife who works at Chicago University and returns on Monday, train 350, for another week of work at the University of Michigan. When his wife retires next year, both of them will live right here in Ann Arbor.

What's nice about our brief chat....a very enthusiastic man who knows Amtrak and best of all, he just might become our next MARP member!

What a nice trip, a fine day and a nice ride in Amtrak car 10031. May it survive many years to come!

MEMBERS MEETING SCHEDULE – 2012

(Meetings begin at 10 a.m.,
except where noted)

February 11 – 10:30 a.m. The Old Dog Tavern, located in the historic STAR*BLDG at 402 East Kalamazoo Avenue, Kalamazoo.

March 17 – 11 A.M. — new Pontiac Amtrak & Greyhound station, 51000 Woodward Ave., Pontiac

April 21 – Chelsea Area Historical Society Museum, 125 Jackson Road, Chelsea

May – National Train Day activities pre-empt monthly meeting

June 16 – Muskegon Railroad Historical Depot, 610 Western Ave., Muskegon

July 28 – Grand Rapids, Grand Rails 2012-77th Annual NMRA National Convention, the Rapid Central Station, 2nd Floor Conference Center, Bartlett Street SW, Grand Rapids

August – no membership meeting as July 28 meeting was for both July & August; executive committee meeting probable

September 15 – Durand Union Station tentative site for the annual meeting

October 13 – St. Louis Historical Society, which is housed in the c. 1910 Pere Marquette Railroad Station, 110 E. Crawford Street, St. Louis, MI

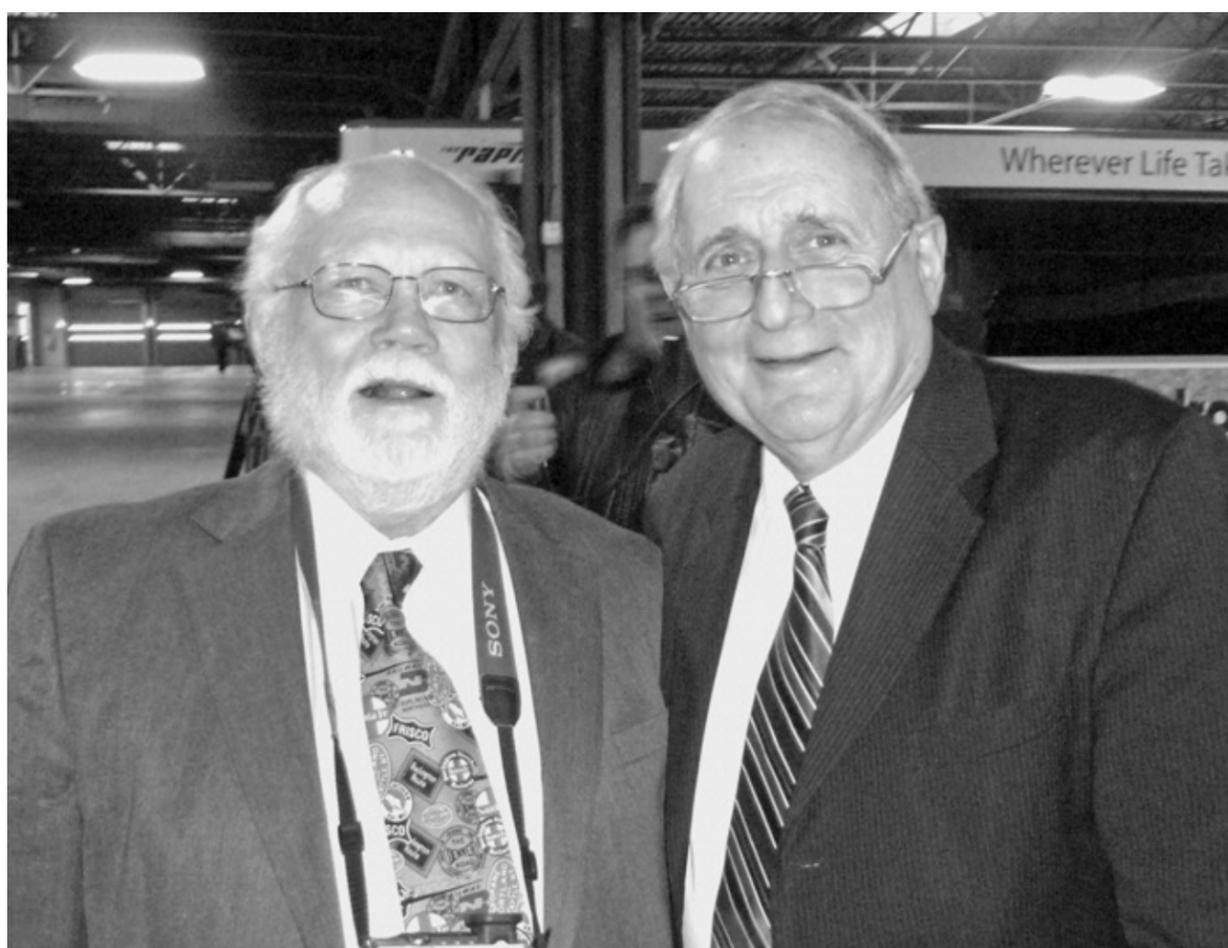
November 10 – Essex, Ont., historic Michigan Central Station, 17 miles southeast of Ambassador Bridge between Detroit and Windsor

December – no member meeting; executive committee meeting probable

Check www.marp.org for additions and changes to this schedule.

MARP meetings are held in various places around the state in order to give everyone a chance to participate.

We post meetings announcements on the web with agenda information and travel information.



RIBBON CUTTING. Acting MARP West Michigan Chair John Langdon, left and U.S. Sen Carl Levin, right attended a ribbon cutting Jan. 28 at the Rapid's new \$32 million Wealthy Street Operations Center in Grand Rapids.

(Photo by Paul Troost)

Jan. 14 MARP member meeting highlights

By Hugh Gurney

The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers met in Williamston on Jan. 14.

Mitch Lutzke, Williamston Depot Museum Board Member and local historian, welcomed the group to the 1891-92 Williamston Depot, the third such structure serving the community.

The building was in use as a passenger station from January, 1893 until 1963. It is not coincidental that passenger service to Williamston ceased within a year after I-96 opened.

The station was moved to its present location on Grand River Avenue in 1979.

After several years in a derelict state, the Chamber of Commerce provided funding to renovate the structure. The Chamber of Commerce has an office in the building and it staffs the museum on weekdays. The City of Williamston

plows snow and assists in other ways.

According to Lutzke, it took from 1837 until 1871 for plans for a railroad from Detroit through Williamston to Lansing to become a reality, with many false starts along the way.

Ownership of the line passed through many hands until the C & O gained control in 1929, though the Pere Marquette name was retained until 1947. As part of a merger in 1983, the C & O became CSX, which still operates freight service on the line.

In other business, the Executive Committee reviewed the proposed budget for Calendar Year 2012.

Kay Chase distributed an excellent consolidated list of all the High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail projects affecting Michigan, a list that will be posted on the MARP website.

Detroit-Chicago *Wolverine* route will be dedicated to passenger service, a possible model for the rest of the nation, according to Hoeffner.

Norfolk-Southern Railway will have the exclusive right to provide freight service between Kalamazoo and Dearborn. MDOT will work with Norfolk Southern to grow the freight business as one way of covering the cost of the passenger service.

In other news, Hoeffner said new bi-level passenger cars and locomotives should start appearing

Membership renewal notices are scheduled to go in the mail within the week and a membership card will be provided for the first time. Plans for future meetings were discussed.

Michigan Department of Transportation's (MDOT) Office of Rail Administrator Tim Hoeffner reported that he will be attending a meeting in Seattle in April to discuss cross border issues including passenger rail. It is likely that Detroit-Windsor will become the model.

Hoeffner also reported on progress being made on the planned higher speed passenger rail corridor between Chicago and Detroit. See the story on page one for more details.

The Executive Committee approved the ambitious 2012 goals of the Route Enhancement Committee, reported elsewhere in this publication.

along Michigan routes in 2015. All seven locomotives in the latest equipment order for the Midwest will be utilized on Michigan lines.

Hoeffner noted that 22 former METRA coaches are at some stage in their refurbishment at Owosso for use on planned commuter routes in Michigan. Testing awaits arrival of an Amtrak power unit.

Funding of the upgrade of the West Detroit junction will come from a variety of sources. The design phase is well along.

SPEED: (Continued from Page 1)

added between Ypsilanti and Kalamazoo.

Hoeffner told MARP members to expect frequent delays in the next couple of years while tracks are being rebuilt.

When ownership of the Kalamazoo-Dearborn sector is acquired by MDOT, approximately 240 miles of the 304 mile Pontiac-

Lazarus Lives in Troy

The back-and-forth fight over a new intermodal transit center in Troy MI has turned up interesting information about the federal stimulus grant program (formally known as ARRA, the American Recovery and Relief Act). It also contains lessons on how to combat Luddites who oppose public transportation.

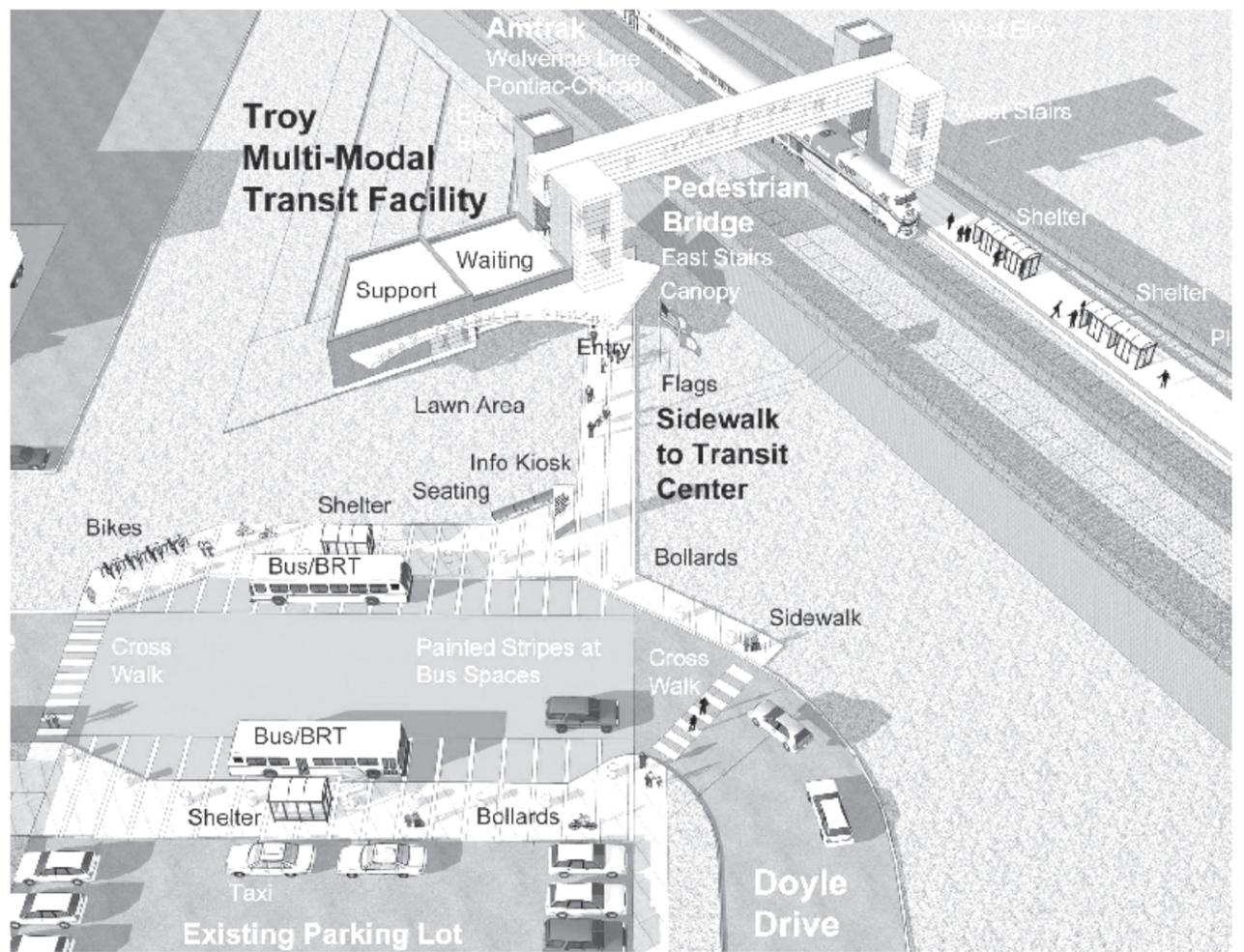
In 2009, the Congress passed the ARRA act, calling for major infrastructure improvements which would lead to high speed rail in the U.S. Shortly after enactment, the Federal Railroad Administration held a series of public conferences to explain the program and what it would do, and what it wouldn't do. The FRA conference for the Midwest was held in Kansas City, MO. Key points were:

1. States which applied for funds had to show a continuing commitment to passenger train service.
2. Applications would be graded on an objective basis to eliminate charges of political influence.

MARP warned several Michigan legislators that the practice of partial-year funding (which had been done for several years, with supplemental funding when the first tranche was exhausted) for the Blue Water and Pere Marquette would not be acceptable to FRA. They went ahead with partial year funding

anyway, and were stunned to find that FRA had denied all Michigan applications. The following year, the legislature passed a full-year appropriation, and Michigan was awarded money for new stations for Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Birmingham-Troy, plus funds to renovate and expand the Battle Creek station.

In November, 2011 Troy citizens elected a mayor and two council members who were elected on a pledge to stop all wasteful spending. Even though no City money would be involved in the construction of the



Artist rendition of the new multimodal transit center in Troy. (Graphic courtesy city of Troy.)

Troy station, they voted to kill the project on the grounds that it was "wasteful" government spending. The grant for Troy has a stipulation that the project must be completed by October 1, 2013. The council voted down the grant on December 19, 2011, the last apparent date for which approval would have allowed for completion by the 2013 deadline.

On January 17, 2012, the council reversed itself and approved the center.

What happened is a lesson for public transportation advocates everywhere.

The "antis" thought of themselves as Tea Party conservatives standing up against waste despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. NARP made a presentation to the council at the

December meeting in which council members were given contact information for the mayors and Chambers of Commerce for every Amtrak city in Michigan, and were asked to contact those cities and find out if any of them regretted their decision. NARP also worked with Michele Hodges, President of the Troy Chamber, who was a tireless worker to unite support from the business community behind the project.

The city was surprised by the national attention it got (all negative) about their vote, and major

employers advised publicly they had advised their corporate boards not to make further investment in such a backward-looking city.

If there's one group Republicans listen to, it's the business community. The Troy chamber had made a strong enough case that the swing vote said he would change his vote if the cost could be reduced, and the \$30,000 annual maintenance budget were not to be borne by the city. After a series of sessions, the architectural firm reduced the project cost by \$2.3 million; the Troy chamber made a commitment that it would find funding for the annual maintenance cost. It was also pointed out that the FRA would be friendly to a short extension of the completion deadline. With that, a special meeting was called, and the project was approved.

Lessons learned:

- The business community knows transit is essential for getting employees to work and is willing to fight for transit
- The business community also recognizes that bringing large numbers of people into an area makes that property a more attractive place to live, work and invest, which in turn leads to higher property tax revenues.
- Advocates need to have a firm grasp of the requirements set out in legislation. For example, most of the "anti's" believed that money was

appropriated to Troy and would go back to the federal treasury.

The funds were appropriated to FRA- not to individual state projects. The FRA was directed to find worthy projects for the money.

Since the money has already been appropriated, Congress treats it as money already spent. They COULD rescind the unspent money, BUT remember, the Senate and the President would have to approve legislation that did so- not very likely.

If a project were disapproved locally, the funds would not go back to the treasury, but to another city.

Every advocacy organization needs to have contact information for the mayor, the local economic development corporation, Chamber of Commerce and Visitors and Convention Bureaus in their city. These are allies who can really shake the gratings of either party, and virtually all of them understand the value of public transportation.

(This is a new column for the Michigan Passenger that will focus on issues of national significance. It is written by the Vice Chair of the National Association of Railroad Passengers and a founding member of MARP.)

The National Limited



By John DeLora

Port Huron considers replacing station

City officials in Port Huron are considering plans to move their Amtrak station from its current site at 2223 16th St, near the St. Clair River tunnel, to a location closer to downtown tourist areas and with easier access to I-94 and I-69.

The city's commitment to developments at the Thomas Edison Inn property inspired Port Huron City Manager Bruce Brown to pursue having the train station follow suit.

Brown said the Amtrak train could use the same rails Canadian National uses for freight deliveries to the Dunn Paper Plant on the St. Clair River north of the Blue Water Bridge.

The station could be built at the current Thomas Edison Depot Museum or south of the Thomas Edison Inn, Brown said.

From 2009 to 2011, passenger activity increased by 40.8% at Port Huron according to Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) data.

There often aren't enough parking spaces to accommodate passengers at peak times.

Brown said Canadian tourists now drive across the Blue Water Bridge, park their cars in Port Huron

and hop on the train to Chicago — a trend he wants to see increase.

Canadian visitors have difficulty finding the station and being comfortable there, Brown said. Many international travelers purchase their tickets online, park at the Thomas Edison Inn and take a taxi to the train station, Brown said. Blue Water Area Transit buses do not serve the existing station.

"We're having an overflow problem at Port Huron," MDOT spokeswoman Janet Foran said.

Foran attributed parking problems to the influx of Canadian visitors.

"The current station has turned out to be undersized, especially parking," said Marc Magliari, media relations manager for Amtrak.

The current station is an Amtrak-owned facility and has "lived out its life expectancy," said Therese Cody, passenger rail programs manager for MDOT.

Built in 1979, the "Am-shack" is a modular design Amtrak once considered using as a prototype for small staffed stations — but never replicated.

Amtrak last made upgrades to the station in late fall 2011 — paving the once-gravel parking lot and adding lights — in order to make the facility compliant with Americans with

Disabilities Act requirements, Magliari said.

Though Amtrak is stressing the need for a new station, it isn't going to foot the whole bill.

Amtrak owns the existing station in Port Huron, and the Canadian National Railway owns the tracks.

"It's uncommon for (Amtrak) to own stations," Magliari said.

According to data from The Great American Train Stations, Amtrak owns 19% of the train stations and their accompanying parking lots in Michigan. About 43% of Michigan cities with train stations own the facilities.

"Generally speaking, we supply the train service, and the community supplies the station," Magliari said.

MDOT, which pays for the general maintenance to the Blue Water route, views building a new station as a collaborative effort between MDOT, Amtrak, CN and Port Huron.

"We'll all look at the price tag, and see who has what," Foran said.

Brown envisions using money from the Blue Water Bridge Plaza project mitigation funds from MDOT to make the station more inviting and "fun," Brown said.

Half of the city's annual mitigation money — about \$50,000 — was designated by city council in

December to help pay the county's bonds for the proposed convention center.

Brown met with officials from MDOT, Amtrak, Canadian National and the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers Inc. in late 2011.

Plans for a new station could meet snags if the Thomas Edison Depot Museum is chosen as a site, said Susan Bennett, executive director of the Port Huron Museum.

The depot was built in the 1850s and was a former station on the Grand Trunk Railroad which serviced Detroit from Fort Gratiot. It is a national historic landmark — a designation gained through a hefty price tag and years of persistence, Bennett said.

The city manager's other option is to upgrade the 16th Street train station. The parking lot would be expanded as well.

Adding a shuttle service from the station to the Thomas Edison Inn and adjacent future convention center would encourage visitors to ride the train, Brown said.

This article was edited for length from an article originally appearing in the Port Huron Times-Herald on Jan. 22.

INDIAN TRAILS:

(Continued from Page 3)

Michigan communities including college towns such as Alma, Mt. Pleasant and Houghton. For example, Michigan Technological University will not permit signing for the bus on its property, though its students would benefit.

Henry noted that the new stop at Chicago's Union Station on buses inbound from Michigan, suggested in 2011 by the Thruway Bus Committee, have been quite successful. Unfortunately, on outbound trips, Indian Trails drivers sometimes have found all six designated spaces along Canal Street occupied by other buses and waiting passengers have been missed, an embarrassing service failure. A signed pick up spot was suggested.

Indian Trails is expecting nine new motor coaches to be delivered during the spring, replacing buses that have put in over 650,000 miles of service, well above the recommended 500,000 mile replacement standard. State funding for motor coaches in 2013 is still up in the air, as the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) has combined its Operating Subsidy and Motor Coach Replacement Fund into a single allocation.

Cushman has been meeting with representatives of the local rural transit systems in communities served by Indian Trails. They see the value of the intercity service and will be advocates in the future. Cushman plans to designate a representative to work more closely with Chambers of Commerce and Convention and Visitor Bureaus to build awareness and support. Committee member John Langdon suggested he seek to have Indian Trails service added as a link to each community organization's web site.

All in attendance agreed that we should approach MDOT for assistance in developing a website titled *Getting Around Michigan by Train and Bus* as an aid to those wishing to travel throughout the state by public transportation.

Representatives of MARP and Indian Trails resolved to work towards having more Indian



HERE COMES SANTA. Canadian National's special holiday train makes it way through Waterford on Dec. 4. (Photo by Kenneth Borg.)

Trails routes designated as Amtrak Thruway routes which would be listed in the Amtrak timetable. Linking Amtrak's Thruway bus service between Toledo and East Lansing to Indian Trails' Straits service up U.S. 127 to St. Ignace was discussed. A connection at New Buffalo between Amtrak and Indian Trail's service north to Benton Harbor and Holland was suggested by Gurney.

Indian Trails voiced several issues of concern over the long haul.

Amtrak pricing on its Blue Water line has a negative impact on Indian Trails competing bus service along the same route.

The 20% discount on fares during the winter months is particularly vexing. Indian Trails service between Flint and Chicago is not subsidized.

Langdon agreed to do a fare comparison on service between city pairs served by both carriers.

Indian Trails is not in a position to do capacity management pricing as Amtrak does, since bus tickets nationwide can be used on any bus at any

time and much of Indian Trails business comes from connecting carriers such as Greyhound.

Indian Trails' Brenda Cheney agreed that capacity management was the wave of the future in the motor coach industry.

The entrance of several local transit systems into intercity service likewise threatens Indian Trails service.

The hourly service by Flint's MTA to Great Lakes Crossing is one example. RAPID's new service between Grand Rapids and Big Rapids is another example of what appears to be a growing trend.

Most pressing is the possibility that MDOT will eliminate funding for the Huron service, which operates along Lake Huron between Bay City and St. Ignace, serving such communities as East Tawas and Alpena.

MARP committee members agreed to keep their eyes and ears open and support and acceptable appropriation for intercity bus service in Northern Michigan.