

# THE MICHIGAN PASSENGER

Your source for passenger rail news since 1973

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Michigan Association  
of Railroad Passengers

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## Passengers are reaping long-awaited rewards



**NEW STATIONS.** Above, Amtrak train no 353, The Wolverine, passes Dearborn's new multi modal train station which is expected to open by the end of autumn. Below, federal, state and local dignitaries cut the ribbon to open a brand new station in Troy. Both projects and another in Grand Rapids are the result of a massive investment in passenger rail in Michigan. (Photos by Steve Sobel)

## More than \$700 million invested since 2009

BY LARRY SOBCZAK

Ceremonial ribbons and shovels have been flying this year in Michigan while the state is in the middle of an unprecedented amount of passenger rail investment in the Amtrak era.

Federal, state and private investments totaling more than \$700 million have spawned projects which will make passenger trains increasingly more convenient for travelers.

New stations opened this autumn in Troy and Grand Rapids and another station in Dearborn is expected to open by the end of the year.

Work began at a new station in East Lansing while plans are actively under way to replace stations in Ann Arbor, Port Huron and Detroit.

Crews finished work this past summer on signals and road crossing gates between Kalamazoo and Battle Creek which will allow trains to reach speeds up to 110 mph on that stretch of tracks by 2016.

Signal work has begun on the stretch of state-owned rail between Dearborn and Battle Creek. Plans are underway to begin double tracking the railroad between Dearborn and Ypsilanti



which will relieve congestion and allow trains on that stretch to travel at 110 mph.

A major choke point for Michigan passenger trains at Englewood in Illinois has been relieved with the opening of a fly-over or overpass that separates a freight railroad and Amtrak from Chicago's METRA commuter service.

Work began on the so-called West Detroit connection this autumn which will shave another 15 to 20 minutes off of trips between Pontiac and Chicago.

Crews are feverishly working the M-1 streetcar project on Woodward Avenue in Detroit which will connect the Amtrak station to most of the attractions, institutions and businesses which draw people to the downtown district.

Meanwhile, new passenger rail equipment began to be manufactured this year in Illinois and California and is expected to be delivered to Michigan beginning in 2016 or 2017.

The state has bid on two brand-new sets of Talgo passenger trains which have sat idle in Wisconsin after that state cancelled plans to add passenger train service. Results of those bids are expected by the end of the year.

All of this year's accomplishments sit atop projects completed since 2009 including a new station in Pontiac, complete rehabilitation of the Battle Creek station and extensive rehabilitation of the track between Dearborn and Kalamazoo.

**Please turn to pages 4 and 5 for more detailed stories on**



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

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### *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(c)(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!

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# Creativity can solve platform issues

BY JOHN DeLORA

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 raises many issues in regards to platform heights and ease of boarding at passenger train stations.

At platforms where a public entity, such as Amtrak, owns the right-of-way or there is passenger only train traffic, the act requires car-floor level boarding for as much of the train's length as practicable.

But what should be done at stations and platforms where freight traffic exists?

Amtrak Chief Executive Officer Joe Boardman settled that issue in May of 2012 by signing the Amtrak level boarding policy.

It states, "Amtrak will minimize the use of station-based mobile lifts at stations with more than 7500 annual boardings/alightings, and aggressively pursue more integrated boarding solutions at such stations whenever practicable."

The policy further states, "It is Amtrak's goal to enable as close to independent access as possible to board and alight the train for all Amtrak passengers, including passengers with disabilities."

If only one or two types of cars were in use, this could easily be solved. However, there are nearly a dozen varieties of rolling stock used in passenger operations in North America which severely complicates things.

Amtrak has contracted with RLE International, which has facilities in Madison Heights and Sterling Heights, to help design and develop a level boarding type solution.

On Sept. 22, RLE demonstrated working prototypes at its Sterling Heights facility.

The prototypes are of four basic types:

- A moveable shuttle platform 20 foot long and 12 foot wide for use with conventional single-level (48 inch ATR) or bi-level cars (15 inch ATR); The shuttle platform, has integrated modular concrete sections that create a quick to assemble set-back platform including concrete ramps;

- A lightweight onboard ramp that has integrated hand rails for bi-level cars allows one to easily go from street level to car floor level;



Top photo, Gary Talbot, Amtrak ADA Program Director demonstrates one of the ramp designs. Bottom left photo, MARP Treasurer Jeanie Merckel operates a hand crank used to put one of the ramps into place. Bottom right shows the mock car used to test designs. (Photos by John DeLora.)

- A lightweight 17 pound bridge plate used for level boarding platforms with safety railings for people who use a wheelchair and other mobility aids;

- And a longer bridge plate version with integrated handrails that covers horizontal gaps up to 33 inches with a gentler slope than the current ramps.

The shuttle platform got the most attention during the demonstration due to its ingenuity. Essentially, it is composed of concrete units linked together into a high level platform, but can also be built at a lower height including 15 inch ATR.

It has a very simple and effective manual operation in the event of a drive and/or power failure. When the train arrives, a wide section (20 foot) moves from the permanent platform to the car door. Several safety fea-

tures are included.

Because this is under development in Michigan, the question of snow came up almost immediately.

The answer is that the platforms are heated so that no ice or snow buildup can occur.

The other three solutions are basically variations of ramp types.

The surprising feature was

their very light weight and sturdiness. I tested one by jumping up and down on it while it was deployed, and there was no "give" to it at all.

The plan is to test a prototype shuttle platform at a station in the Detroit Metro area (near to RLE's facility) and testing it to complete the development phase.

Once any problems have been found and corrected and the shuttle platform is fully tested

## Amtrak ridership by route

Service name	FY 2013	FY 2014	Change
Wolverine:	509,100	477,157	-6.3%
Blue Water:	191,106	191,231	+0.1%
Pere Marquette:	104,491	100,961	-3.8%
Michigan Services total:	804,697	769,349	-4.6%
Amtrak national total:	30,854,954	30,921,274	+0.2%

The Blue Water set a ridership record in Fiscal Year 2014. Amtrak said that ridership reflects a harsh winter season and on-time performance issues associated with freight train delays and infrastructure in need of replacement. The Wolverine had a modified schedule during the summer months to accommodate construction which may have affected ridership numbers.

Source: Amtrak



# New Amtrak station finally opens in Troy

BY LARRY SOBCZAK

An old Plexiglas bus shelter and two handicap parking spaces used to greet the 21,000 train passengers using the Birmingham Amtrak station each year. There was no other parking spaces, so the streets around the station at train times would swarm with automobiles illegally standing curbside waiting to drop-off or pick-up passengers.

That changed on Oct. 20 with the official opening and dedication of the \$6 million Troy Transit Center which replaced the Birmingham station a few hundred yards south on the track.

“Amtrak and our passengers depend on engaged communities to provide stations and the new Troy Transit Center is a major improvement for the Amtrak Wolverine Service,” said Mark Murphy, the Chicago-based general manager responsible for operating the six daily Amtrak trains to and from Pontiac and Chicago, via Troy, Detroit, Dearborn and Ann Arbor. “With the opening of the Troy Transit Center will come more connections to other transportation modes and a welcoming all-weather place for Amtrak passengers.”

The new station has an ample parking lot on Doyle Drive which is west of the intersection of Maple Road and Coolidge Highway, a climate-controlled station building, a bus stop and a taxi stand. It even has an enclosed climate-controlled walkway over the railroad tracks to the passenger train platform.

The opening of the station marked the end of a 14 year struggle to upgrade the station for the Troy and Birmingham area.

In 2000, the station land was given to Troy as part of a planning commission concession to allow a large shopping center and condominium development near the intersection of Coolidge Highway and Maple Road.

The city of Birmingham was interested in jointly developing the station with Troy but backed out of the project when the owner of a parcel on the Birmingham side of the tracks wanted a substantial higher than expected amount of money for it.

The developer of the adjacent shopping center, Grand Sakwa, reclaimed the land from the city because the original deed had a reversionary clause in it that said the property reverted to the shop-



ping center developer if the station is not built within 10 years or 2010.

A judge at the Oakland County Circuit Court sided with the city in the dispute but the developer appealed it to the Michigan Court of Appeals which gave the developer title to the property despite a nearly completed transit center sitting on it.

This past summer, the city was able to regain title to the land through use of eminent domain.

The city and Amtrak signed a lease deal in September, and the station, which was ready for use almost a year ago, was finally ready for its first passengers.

## Grand Rapids dedicates new station

The Vernon J. Ehlers Amtrak station in Grand Rapids was dedicated Oct 27.

Named in honor of the former U.S. Congressman, the station is located at 440 Century Ave. SW., adjacent to The Rapid Central Station.

The new \$6.1 million Amtrak station integrates bus and rail transportation, offers more passenger amenities, and streamlines train operations. Travelers can connect with Amtrak trains, the new bus rapid transit “Silver Line,” local bus transit routes, intercity buses and taxis.

“We are excited to make this connection between buses and rail happen,” Peter Varga, CEO of The Rapid, said. “The Rapid is all about improving connections and access for the people in our community and those that choose to visit us. It’s been a great partnership between federal, state, and local entities to



**STATION DEDICATION.** The top photo shows the first train, Amtrak’s Wolverine Train No. 353, arriving at the Troy Transit Center on Oct. 20. It was taken from the walkway bridge linking the station to the platform. The bottom photo shows the interior of the Troy Transit Center’ waiting room. (Photos by Steve Sobel)



The bottom photo shows MARP Chair Larry Krieg, left, presenting Senator Carl Levin a plaque from MARP for his years of support for passenger trains at the dedication of the Grand Rapids Amtrak Station. (Photo by John Langdon)

make this a reality.”

The new station is now closer to the central business district and economic activity. It offers a larger waiting room, restrooms, an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant boarding platform with a covered canopy, and 118 spaces for parking.

Passenger trains can now

park on the 1,700-foot-long spur track serving the platform and station, saving both crew time and fuel costs.

Funding for the station came from a \$4.6 million U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Railroad Administration grant and a \$1.5 million match from the Federal Transit Administration, MDOT and local funds.



# Major choke point for passenger trains relieved

Federal, state and local officials celebrated the opening of the \$142 million Englewood flyover on Oct. 25, a major railroad bridge that eliminates a significant source of train delays on the south side of Chicago and reduces emissions and noise from idling trains in the neighborhood.

“Fourteen daily Amtrak trains to and from Chicago have faced delays at this location that are felt in Michigan, Indiana and all the way to the East Coast,” said Tom Carper, Amtrak board member and past chairman. “Delays drive up cost and hold-down ridership, so CREATE projects such as this one are truly of national importance and big wins for Amtrak passengers, Metra commuters and the freight railroads, too.”

The flyover bridge replaced a crossing between the Metra Rock Island tracks and a set of Norfolk Southern tracks at 63rd

and State St. With the completion of this project, 78 weekday Rock Island Line trains are now carried over the busy freight tracks used by approximately 60 trains, including all Amtrak trains servicing Michigan, eliminating conflicts between trains that result in service delays.

The flyover is a major accomplishment of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) program, a first-of-its-kind partnership between U.S. Department of Transportation, the State of Illinois, City of Chicago, Metra, Amtrak, and the nation’s freight railroads to eliminate railroad bottlenecks in the Chicago area.

The Englewood flyover is the first project planned under the CREATE program to reduce conflicts between passenger and freight trains in the Englewood area and prepare the corridor to accommodate high speed rail service.



The Englewood Flyover relieves train congestion on Chicago’s south side. (Photo courtesy Norfolk Southern)

Its completion lays the groundwork for two more CREATE projects. The planned 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project will divert trains on Metra’s Southwest Service to the Rock Island District at a point south of Englewood.

The planned Grand Crossing Project will divert six daily Amtrak trains to Norfolk Southern tracks east of Englewood.

With the flyover in service,

the 75th Street and Grand Crossing projects can move forward without creating further bottlenecks at the busy Englewood interlocker.

The flyover was funded with \$126 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act High-Speed Rail funds, \$4.9 million in other federal money, \$8.2 million from the State of Illinois and \$3 million from the railroad industry, including Metra.

## West Detroit Connector Project will shave time off travel

Work began the first week of October on the West Detroit Connector Rail Project that will improve efficiency for both passenger and freight rail carriers on Detroit’s west side.

The project is located near Junction Avenue between US-12 (Michigan Avenue) and Vernor Highway, just east of the Livernois-Junction intermodal yard.

The West Detroit Connector Project includes replacing the outdated rail bridge over Junction Avenue, installing 1 mile of new track and switches, and improving signals and communications.

Once completed in May 2015, on-time performance will be improved for Amtrak passenger service by eliminating the conflict with freight trains at the West Detroit and Bay City junctions.



It took one day to demolish the old bridge over Junction Ave. in Detroit. (Photo by Steve Sobel)

It is estimated the completed project will shave 15 to 20 minutes off the passenger train travel time between Detroit and Chicago.

The project was announced in May 2012 and it was estimated to cost \$15.8 million.

The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Rail-

road Administration is providing a grant for \$7.9 million, which is being matched with another \$7.9 million from the State of Michigan.

## BO tower facing retirement

On Sept. 30, signal crews working on Amtrak’s Michigan Line upgrades retired the 44-lever Saxby & Farmer interlocking machine at the BO Tower in Kalamazoo, marking the end of an era.

For the time being, operators still work around the clock at BO, operating signals from a control panel in the tower. The signals will eventually be remote-controlled, once responsibility for MDOT’s Kalamazoo-Dearborn route is handed from Norfolk Southern’s dispatchers

in Dearborn to Amtrak’s train directors in Chicago.

The state acquired the former New York Central route east of the tower in 2013 with NS retaining freight rights. Amtrak and the state of Michigan are in the process of upgrading the Kalamazoo-Dearborn corridor for 110 mph speeds, which includes major track upgrades along with a complete replacement of the signal system to modern technology that provides positive train control.



New signals have made the BO Tower in Kalamazoo practically obsolete. The Michigan Department of Transportation, which owns the tracks, has not indicated its fate. (Photo by Steve Sobel)



# Projects galore discussed at 41st annual meeting

BY HUGH GURNEY

More than fifty people gathered at the Durand Union Station on Saturday, Sept. 13 for the 41st Annual Meeting of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers.

Mary Warner-Stone, Executive Director of Durand Union Station Incorporated (DUSI), welcomed all to the beautifully restored facility.

DUSI now has a professional archivist-curator, Michael Boudro, on staff who is organizing the museum's extensive library and archives, starting on the lower floor and working up to the attic.

Boudro will also be upgrading the current museum exhibits.

DUSI will be participating in a study of the bygone orphan train era and 4th graders will be arriving at the station on Amtrak for a related presentation.

Warner-Stone urged all to return during the holidays and enjoy one of the two Christmas dinners on Dec. 6 and 12 amid lavish Christmas decorations.

DUSI is planning an extensive commemoration of its 30th anniversary in 2015.

Others with words of welcome were Durand Mayor Deborah Doyle, State Representative Ben Glardon and Shiawassee County Commissioner Les Schneider.

Chairman Tischbein reviewed the multitude of projects MARP is actively participating in or closely tracking including: the South of the Lake corridor study, the Howell-Ann Arbor commuter line (Wally), upgrades of the track between Kalamazoo and Dearborn, construction of a new transportation center in East Lansing, restoration of the Jackson depot, pedestrian traffic flow at Chicago Union Station, recertification of steam locomotive 1225, Wi-Fi on Amtrak, federal transportation funding, support for continued passenger service on the Algoma Central Railroad, a study of proposed passenger rail service between Holland and Detroit, and the M-1 streetcar project in Detroit.

Joseph C. Szabo, Administrator of the Federal Rail Administration, greeted the group by video, noting the upcoming 30th anniversary of the Pere Marquette, the 40th anniversary of the Blue Water, a ridership increase on Michigan trains of over 30% since 2005, higher speeds on the



**CHANGING LEADERSHIP.** Robert Tischbein, left, stepped down as Chair of MARP and Larry Krieg was elected to take his place. Check page 2 for all of the new officers elected at the meeting. (Photo by Larry Sobczak)

Kalamazoo-Dearborn portion of the Wolverine route in the near future, new stations in Dearborn and Grand Rapids and the South of the Lake study which promises faster and more reliable service between Chicago and Porter, Indiana. He urged support for the administration's transportation bill which would provide dedicated funding for passenger rail.

Melissa Horste, Regional Representative for Senator Carl Levin, stressed the Senator's strong support of Amtrak.

She highlighted a recent grant of \$12.2 million for Detroit's M-1 Rail in addition to an earlier \$25 million grant.

At this point, it looks as though current Amtrak funding will be extended through May, 2015, giving legislators more time to work on reauthorization of transportation funding measures known as MAP 21 and PRIIA.

Clark Charnetski asked Horste to offer MARP's thanks to Senator Levin for his constant support of rail over the years.

Kali Fox, Regional Manager for Senator Stabenow, voiced Stabenow's support for public transportation in general, including the East Lansing Transportation Center now under construction, and the M-1 Rail project. The Senator is closely tracking the Railroad Safety Act, currently under review by the Commerce Committee and reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Act.

At the opening of his remarks, Timothy R. Fischer, Chief Administrative Officer for M-1 Rail, produced a section of old streetcar track unearthed on Woodward Avenue as excavation for M-1 got

underway this summer.

Visuals in his power point presentation showed the exact route of the 3.2 mile light rail line and how it ties in with the People Mover at the south end and Amtrak and the crosstown bus routes at the north end.

The project includes 20 stations, each with shelters, where passengers can purchase tickets at ticket machines.

Each station offers level boarding of the light rail cars.

Construction is underway in the downtown area, with fences between the sidewalks and work areas and covered crosswalks to protect pedestrians.

A portion of the bridge across I-75 has already been demolished and will be rebuilt incorporating tracks for the light rail line.

Fischer noted that 40 percent of all jobs in the city of Detroit and 20 percent of all jobs in Wayne County are in the Woodward Avenue corridor served by M-1.

Support from numerous foundations and businesses, the City of Detroit, Wayne County, MDOT and the federal government are making M-1 possible.

The cars, powered by electric batteries, will be carrying passengers by the end of 2016 or the beginning of 2017.

Elizabeth Treutel, Policy Associate with the Michigan Environmental Council, updated the group on the Coast-to-Coast project, whose ultimate goal is restoration of passenger rail service along a route connecting Detroit with Lansing, Grand Rapids and Holland.

Coast-to-Coast hopes to fulfill one of the objectives of those participating in Michigan By Rail public forums in 2012 and incorporated into the State Rail Plan.

With support from 52 organizations, Coast-to-Coast successfully raised the required local match and secured a \$100,000 Service Development and New Technology grant from the federal government to do a Ridership Demand Study.

Treutel urged all present to follow the progress of the study and participate in the planned public engagement process.

Richard King asked that plans for Coast-to-Coast permit a Flint-Grand Rapids connection.

Thomas C. Carper, former Chair and still a member of the Amtrak Board of Directors, stressed the importance of Amtrak as a tool for economic development.

As a local businessman in Macomb, Illinois, he took Amtrak service for granted until the threat of losing it brought a wake up call.

Community leaders, mayors, and chambers of commerce all across the country see Amtrak as an engine of economic growth.

Carper noted that from the earliest days, when land grants supported construction of the first railroads, public support has always been part of the equation.

In Michigan, Amtrak links big cities like Detroit with Chicago, but also connects numerous smaller cities and towns, stimulating employment and economic growth all up and down the lines.

Amtrak itself employs hundreds of people in numerous communities who pay taxes and make other purchases in those communities.

Carper pointed to Memphis, where rejuvenation of the train station has stimulated rejuvenation of the entire city core.

Communities make a long term investment in their economic growth when they build or restore a train station.

Amtrak service is essential, both in the Northeast Corridor, where one out of every six Americans reside, and in rural areas, where it is often the only public transportation.

Commenting on additional costs assumed by the states under PRIIA legislation in 2008, Carper

(See MEETING, page 7)



**From the boardroom:**

# One step to fixing Michigan's trains to Chicago

by LARRY KRIEG

"Hi, Mom? ... Yes, I'm on the train. We're stuck somewhere in Indiana. ... No they can't tell us when we'll get to Chicago. ... Look, I'll call you when we get going again. Maybe then they'll know when to expect the train will get to Union Station.... Sorry to mess up your day, Mom! Thanks for hanging in there with me. ... Love you! Bye!"

If you've taken the train to Chicago lately, you've probably overheard more than one conversation like that. Maybe you've had to make that kind of call yourself. The train is a great way to get from Michigan to Chicago – comfortable, convenient, and ecologically responsible – but very unreliable when freight trains get in the way.

For the last few years, Michigan has been upgrading the track between Dearborn and Kalamazoo, thanks to Federal stimulus funds. In a couple more years, trains will be able to run up to 110 MPH along most of that distance, as well as along the Amtrak-owned line from Kalamazoo to the tiny town of Porter, Indiana, where our line joins the former New York Central line from New York to Chicago. That's where everything slows down, dramatically.

Norfolk Southern (NS) owns this track from Cleveland to Chicago, and operates about a

hundred freight trains on it every day. Things get very, very congested. To make matters worse, freight rail traffic has grown tremendously over the last few years all around the country. Chicago's rail yards are so full that trains are often forced to wait outside on the main line, tying things up even worse. As if that weren't bad enough, NS is short of train crews and locomotives, and can't get more nearly fast enough.

Meanwhile, the number of people riding trains keeps growing, while the number of people driving has gradually fallen ever since 2006. And since trains can carry people faster than cars, emitting less carbon dioxide for every mile a person is carried, this is a trend we all want to encourage.

We just have to get our passenger trains off that freight railroad! Enter, the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative.

In 1996, nine Midwestern states realized that people were going to need better ways to travel through the Midwest. They banded together and came up with a high-level plan which – among other things – included proposed rapid connections between Chicago and the rest of the region, hub-and-spoke fashion. Chicago to Detroit was one of the "spokes" out of the Chicago hub, and it was clear even twenty

years ago that something would have to be done to un-clog the route south of Lake Michigan.

Fast-forward to 2010, when Federal funds were made available to establish fast passenger train routes. Michigan led the charge to make sure the critical "South of the Lake" route, together with the line all the way to Pontiac, were in shape to accommodate continued growth in railroad passengers. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) got together with their counterparts in Indiana and Illinois to work with the Federal Railroad Administration and find a solution. Along with consultant HNTB, the team has been studying possible solutions since about 2010.

We are fortunate in Michigan that governors from both major parties understand the economic and environmental benefits of improved passenger train service. Both Jennifer Granholm and Rick Snyder have been great supporters. Not all states have been so fortunate. Three state governors refused to accept Federal stimulus funds for rail service improvement, and some of those funds came to us here. With them, Michigan purchased the rail line between Kalamazoo and Dearborn from NS, and is working to upgrade the line for higher speed and more trains.

But it's a huge, complex problem - not so much in Michi-

gan, but south of Lake Michigan. That's a heavy industrial area with a maze of tracks crossing and re-crossing each other.

The initial investigation by HNTB from 2010 to 2012, found there are 86 possible ways for trains to get from Porter to Chicago.

Not all are practical, so the period from 2012 until now has involved screening out the ones that clearly won't work and arriving at a few that can be studied in more detail.

The number of possible routes was reduced in September when the study team, led by MDOT's Mohammed S. Alghurabi, published the Chicago – Detroit/Pontiac Passenger Rail Corridor Program Tier 1 DRAFT Environmental Impact Statement, a 300+ page document exploring the possibilities and fulfilling the intent of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 ("NEPA") and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ("Title VI"). It's available libraries and municipal offices in southern Michigan, as well as online at <http://GreatLakesRail.org>

**The public is welcome to comment on this report and participate in public presentations around the state. More information can be found on Page 8.**

*Larry Krieg is the Chair of MARP.*

## MEETING (Continued from page 6)

noted that 14 percent of allocated costs are still paid by federal appropriations. Carper asked that all present encourage mayors, land developers, and local business people to speak up in favor of investment in our transportation system.

Responding to questions, Carper expressed hope that the current suit by Amtrak before the U.S. Supreme Court will be successful as other freight railroads will be watching.

Recently, Carper accompanied Amtrak CEO Boardman to North Dakota to work out problems with rail service there.

With cooperation from the freight railroads and strategic investments where major conflict points exist, Carper believes that

90 percent on time performance is possible with the present system.

Charnetski stressed to Carper the importance of having one of the East Coast trains pass through Michigan, serving a much larger population base than the present route through Indiana and Ohio.

Ronald K. DeCook, founder of DeCook Governmental Policy & Strategies, discussed the findings of his recent study of how the younger, wireless generation Chicago gets to Michigan now and how they could be persuaded to use the train in the future.

Currently, 87 percent drive and 5 percent fly when traveling to Michigan points.

DeCook predicts that more people in the City of Chicago and its western suburbs would use the train if they were aware of that possibility, if Amtrak offered more frequencies to current destinations and if rental cars

were available at Amtrak stations in Michigan. DeCook suggested a tie in with Pure Michigan marketing.

Timothy H. Hoeffner, Director of MDOT's Office of Rail, updated the group on a variety of projects.

He anticipates that the new Grand Rapids station will open in October and the new Dearborn Transportation Center in late November.

MDOT is working with both consultants and constituents to determine what people really want in a new Detroit rail station and how to deal with parking.

The railroads have finally agreed to the crossover in West Detroit, so that project will be underway in the very near future.

Double tracking between Dearborn and Ypsilanti is scheduled to begin in about a month. The cutover of signals in the Kalamazoo to Battle Creek sector

has been very complicated, but the new positive train control system will be operational in the near future.

MDOT continues to review the possible purchase of two Talgo train sets.

If accepted, the two Talgo train sets will replace Horizon equipment on two of the three daily Wolverine runs.

MDOT expects delivery of the next generation rail cars and locomotives sometime in 2017.

Planning for the Ann Arbor-Detroit and Howell-Ann Arbor commuter lines continues. The proposed commuter cars were used on excursions out of Howell in August.

The move of Michael Ford from the Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority to the Regional Transportation Authority is a win for everyone, given Ford's expertise in transit.



## Two Mich. Amtrak routes celebrate milestones

The Pere Marquette, which provides service between Grand Rapids and Chicago, turned 30 years old while the Blue Water, which provides service between Port Huron and Chicago, turned 40 years old this year. Anniversary celebrations were held aboard the Pere Marquette at each of its stops on Sept. 16 and the aboard the Blue Water at each of its stops on Sept 29.

Pictured on the right is a double-decker Superliner "theater car" which was included at the rear of the Pere Marquette on its anniversary run. (Photo by Kenneth Borg)

Bottom left, Ron Leatz of MARP, hands out an anniversary goodie bag to a passenger aboard the Blue Water. Bottom right, Alicia DeHass and her son Kyle enjoy cake passed out to passengers on the 40th Anniversary of the Amtrak Blue Water Line. (Photos by Sara J. Martin Michigan Department of Transportation)



## Public reviews environmental impact of the Detroit to Chicago passenger rail

BY LARRY SOBCZAK

The public got its first up-close look at the Environmental Impact Statement for the Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac passenger rail corridor at a hearing held Oct. 26 in Dearborn.

A brief presentation along with an open forum was held at the nearly completed train station on Michigan Avenue for around 100 attendees.

The main objective for the report is to narrow down potential routes through northern Indiana and Illinois in order to separate passenger trains from the busy Norfolk Southern railroad tracks that connect Chicago with much of the east coast.

Planners also want to bring passenger train speeds up to 110 mph on the proposed stretch of tracks between Chicago Union Station and Porter, Indiana.

Trains travelling the tracks between Porter and Kalamazoo already can travel up to 110 mph. Trains travelling between Kalamazoo and Dearborn are expected to achieve 110 mph in the next few years once upgrades to that stretch of tracks are completed.

The proposal to separate freight and passenger trains is known as "South of the Lake" originally started with 85 potential routes but was whittled down to six routes for this report.

The six potential routes mostly follow existing or abandoned railroad right-of-ways.

The majority of the environmental impact found in the report is in the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore in northern Indiana.

The 300 page report also discusses potential improvements and environmental impacts along a 500 foot wide area centered along the current route from Porter, Indiana to Pontiac. This allows for future flexibility in design and allows designers every opportunity to avoid potential direct impacts by moving into adjacent areas without having to reassess the existing conditions and potential impacts.

Improvements detailed in the report include building parking lots, replacing stations and replacing existing platforms.

The report even mentions a new station in Detroit's New Center Area which would include a parking structure and a layover track.

The report envisions up to 10 daily round trip trains operating between Detroit and Chicago by the year 2035 at speeds up to 110 mph on the entire length of the corridor.

Planners hope to reduce travel time by passenger train between Detroit and Chicago to 3 hours and 46 minutes which is faster than the current travel time of 5 hours and 38 minutes.

A complete copy of the report can be found at [www.greatlakesrail.org](http://www.greatlakesrail.org). All comments must be submitted by Dec. 19, 2014, for the public record. Comments may be submitted as follows:

- Use the online comment form at [www.greatlakesrail.org](http://www.greatlakesrail.org)
- E-mail: [mdot-hsr-detroit-pontiac-chicago@michigan.gov](mailto:mdot-hsr-detroit-pontiac-chicago@michigan.gov)
- Call toll-free: 877- 351-0853
- Mail your written comments to:  
Robert Parsons  
Public Hearings Officer  
Michigan Department of Transportation  
P.O. Box 30050  
Lansing, MI 48909

A full build out of the corridor as envisioned in the report is estimated to cost between \$2.3 billion and \$2.9 billion in 2014 dollars depending on which route is selected for South of the Lake.

The report estimates that up to 2.8 million passengers could use this service per year in 2035 compared with approximately 500,000 passengers in 2014.

If the full build out is achieved by 2035, planners estimate the passenger trains will produce \$162 million in revenue with \$159 million in expenses annually.