

# THE MICHIGAN PASSENGER

Your source for passenger rail news since 1973

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Michigan Association  
of Railroad Passengers

www.marp.org

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Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers  
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## Amtrak sets another record

Amtrak carried more than 31.2 million passengers in Fiscal Year 2012 ending Sept. 30, marking the highest annual ridership total since the railroad started operations in 1971 and the ninth ridership record during the last ten years. Since 2000, Amtrak ridership is up 49 percent.

A year-over-year comparison of FY 2012 to FY 2011 shows ridership grew 3.5 percent to a new record of 31,240,565 passen-

gers and ticket revenue jumped 6.8 percent to a best ever \$2.02 billion. In addition, Amtrak system-wide on-time performance increased to 83 percent, up from 78.1 percent and its highest level in 12 years.

"People are riding Amtrak trains in record numbers across the country because there is an undeniable demand to travel by rail," said President and CEO Joe Boardman. "Ridership will

continue to grow because of key investments made by Amtrak and our federal and state partners to improve on-time performance, reliability, capacity and train speeds."

During FY 2012, ridership on the Northeast Corridor was up 4.8 percent to a record 11.4 million, state-supported and other short distance routes was up 2.1 percent to a record 15.1 million

(See AMTRAK, page 3)



**TRAIN MEET.** A Norfolk Southern train led by a Conrail locomotive and Amtrak Train 353, The Wolverine, meet near Jackson. Much like the trains, officials from Norfolk Southern and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) have been meeting to discuss the sale of the railroad to the MDOT. (Photo by Steve Sobel)

## State still negotiating the sale of railroad

By Larry Sobczak

Progress is continuing on the Detroit to Chicago enhanced speed passenger rail corridor even though the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) has yet to sign a deal with Norfolk Southern Railway (NS) to purchase a 135 mile portion of the corridor between Dearborn and Kalamazoo.

"There is a lot that has to be looked over in the transfer of such a big piece of property," said Tim Hoeffner, Director of the Office of Rail at MDOT.

He said that some of the title work for the railroad dates back to the 1850s and MDOT and NS are making sure all of the right-

of-way and easement agreements are accurate and up to date.

Hoeffner said he could not be more specific about possible snags when he spoke to MARP members at its 39th Annual Meeting in Durand on Sept. 22.

MDOT originally announced the sale would be completed in the spring.

Despite the longer than anticipated negotiations, MDOT and the Federal Rail Administration (FRA) have been moving ahead with full steam to bring the majority of the corridor up to 110 mph operating speeds:

- Construction has begun on the new Dearborn Intermodal Station. See

page 6 for a photo.

- A \$4 million environment study is underway examining the impacts of increasing maximum speeds from 79 mph to 110 mph as well as increasing train frequency. The study is expected to look at new alternate routes through northern Indiana where Michigan passenger train services encounter train congestion. MDOT accepted public input on the project in September and October.

- The Federal Railroad Ad-

(See SALE, page 3)

## Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc.

### OFFICERS

#### Chair

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

#### Vice Chair

Larry Kreig  
larry@wakeupwashtenaw.org  
734-347-2179

#### 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

Rosemary Horvath  
989-506-9539  
rosemaryhorvath@hotmail.com

#### West Michigan

Lawrence Bancroft  
269-870-7265  
lcbancroft@comcast.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

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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.

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, editor@marp.org  
586-781-6891

#### Contributors:

John DeLora  
Kazuya Fujita  
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(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!

<http://www.marp.org>

[marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com)

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

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## 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: \_\_\_\_\_

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#### MEMBERSHIP DUES

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

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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

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# Mich. ready to purchase passenger cars

Michigan and three other states have announced their intentions to purchase 130 bi-level passenger railcars from Sumitomo Corporation of America for \$352 million.

Michigan, California, Illinois and Missouri are pooling their resources to purchase the railcars intended for intercity rail corridors in each of those state.

The Notice of Intent to Award, which was issued on Sept. 27, does not signify that a contract has been awarded but that a potential vendor has been identified.

“By pooling our resources, all four states involved in this partnership can purchase the equipment at lower costs because it will be acquired in high volume under one contract,” said Caltrans Director Malcolm Dougherty. “These new railcars will help us meet the growing ridership demand on California trains, which is up 53 percent since 2002.”

Caltrans and the Illinois Department of Transportation will first conduct a federally required Buy America pre-award audit to verify assembly locations and manufacturing facilities for railcar components.

Buy America rules require that all 130 new bi-level cars be assembled in the United States, and that all the major compo-

nents must be manufactured domestically.

The audit will be forwarded to the Federal Railroad Administration prior to the contract award.

Sumitomo Corporation of America will also be required to submit insurance policies and performance bonds. A fully executed agreement is expected to be in place by mid-November.

“We are proud to partner with Caltrans and the Midwest Coalition to cost-effectively procure the state-of-the-art passenger railcar equipment needed to address the increasing demand for efficient and convenient passenger rail service throughout the state,” said Illinois Transportation Secretary Ann L. Schneider. “With Amtrak ridership at record levels in Illinois and the official purchasing process of the railcars under way, this massive project will continue to boost America’s manufacturing and assembling industry and provide improved travel options for the entire Midwest.”

California will receive 42 railcars, while the Midwest Coalition, consisting of Illinois, Michigan, and Missouri will receive 88 railcars.

Railcars delivered to California will be used on the three state-supported intercity routes, the Capitol Corridor (Sacramen-

to area-Oakland-San Jose), the San Joaquin (San Francisco Bay Area/Sacramento-Bakersfield/Southern California), and the Pacific Surfliner (San Luis Obispo-Los Angeles-San Diego).

The Midwest Coalition will use its new railcars on the following corridors: Blue Water (Chicago-Port Huron), Wolverine (Chicago-Detroit-Pontiac), Pere Marquette (Chicago-Grand Rapids), Illini/Saluki (Chicago-Carbondale), Lincoln Service (Chicago-St. Louis), Missouri River Runner (St. Louis-Kansas City), Illinois Zephyr/Carl Sandburg (Chicago-Quincy), and future services between Chicago and Dubuque and Chicago and the Quad Cities, with potential extension to Iowa City.

“The collaborative effort of the states working together on selecting a rail equipment manufacturer is an important step toward saving money for all. We appreciate the leadership that Caltrans has taken toward spearheading this effort,” said Timothy Hoeffner, Michigan Department of Transportation, director of the Office of Rail. “Michigan is experiencing unprecedented ridership growth, and when the new equipment arrives, this will improve the travel experience and grow passenger rail service even more.”

The first railcars are slated for delivery in the fall of 2015,

with the final car expected to be delivered in early 2018.

“Today’s announcement moves America one step closer to building a transportation system for the 21st Century,” said US Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood. “These 130 bi-level railcars will revitalize America’s passenger rail manufacturing industry base by creating new jobs up and down the rail supply chain and fostering a stronger market for passenger rail. They will improve passenger service and provide more flexibility for train operations, and because multiple states have – for the first time – pooled their resources and settled on a standardized design, this top of the line equipment can be purchased, repaired, and maintained for the lowest possible price.”

Funding for the new rail equipment comes from Federal Railroad Administration grants totaling \$808 million.

Of these funds, \$551 million was reserved to purchase the bi-level railcars; the remainder is slated to fund future locomotive and “trainset” procurements as well as to support project management and oversight expenses.

California’s share (\$168 million) of the grants is supplemented by \$42 million from Proposition 1B, a transportation bond approved by California voters in 2006.

## AMTRAK

(Continued from page 1)

and long-distance services was up 4.7 percent to their best showing in 19 years at 4.7 million.

In Michigan, Amtrak’s Blue Water route saw an increase in ridership of 1.1 percent in from 187,065 riders in FY 2011 to 189,193 riders in FY 2012. The Blue Water’s ticket revenue jumped 5.1 percent from \$5,797,878 in FY 2011 to \$6,094,659 in FY 2012.

The Pere Marquette serving western Michigan including Grand Rapids saw a ridership increase of 2.5 percent from 106,662 in FY 2011 to 109,321 in FY 2012. Ticket revenues also increased by 2.5 percent from \$3,197,106 in FY 2011 to \$3,424,242 in FY 2012.

The Wolverine which runs between Chicago and Detroit/Pontiac saw a decrease in both ridership and ticket revenues be-

tween FY 2011 and FY 2012.

The major reason for the Wolverine’s decreases resulted from track repairs for eventual upgrade of the speed and capacity which delayed and cancelled many trains.

Wolverine ridership dropped 3.8 percent from 503,290 riders in FY 2011 to 484,138 riders in FY 2012. Ticket revenue dropped 5.7 percent from \$18,769,770 in FY 2011 to \$17,704,897 in FY 2012.

FY 2012 also produced other ridership achievements including new records for 25 of 44 Amtrak services, and 12 consecutive monthly records with July being the single best month in the history of Amtrak.

Boardman noted ridership numbers for FY 2013 will get an early boost this fall when the extension of Downeaster service to Freeport and Brunswick, Maine begins Nov. 1, and Amtrak Virginia Northeast Regional service is extended to Norfolk, Va., start-

## SALE

(Continued from page 1)

ministration has awarded Indiana \$71.3 million to make track improvements to reduce train congestion for 30 miles between Porter and Illinois/Indiana state line.

- A \$93 million contract for the Englewood Flyover Project on Chicago’s south side was awarded in July. The Englewood Flyover is a bridge project which will eliminate delays caused by a major choke point for hundreds of daily commuter, freight and intercity pas-

senger trains including all of Amtrak’s Michigan Services.

MDOT became interested in purchasing the railroad after NS announced it planned to sell it to a short line railroad operator in 2007.

MDOT received an FRA grant for \$135 million in Oct. 2011 to purchase the railroad.

An additional grant of \$200 million was awarded by the FRA to upgrade the tracks, crossing gates and signals to accommodate trains with speeds up to 110 mph. The railroad currently hosts three daily round-trips of Amtrak’s Wolverine service. The Blue Water service uses tracks between Kalamazoo and Battle Creek.

**JOIN MARP IN WILLIAMSTON  
ON JANUARY 12, 2013**

Executive Committee- 10 a.m., General membership- 11 a.m.

**THE PUBLIC IS WELCOME**

More details about this meeting and future meetings is available at [www.marp.org](http://www.marp.org)

# Durand hosts MARP's 39th annual meeting

By Hugh Gurney

Upwards of sixty members gathered on Saturday, September 22, for MARP's 39th Annual Meeting at the historic Durand Union Station. Long time MARP member Norma Ward, one of the handful of residents who rescued this national treasure from destruction, oversaw arrangements. Durand Union Station Executive Director Mary Warner-Stone welcomed all to the facility and pointed out recent improvements including a paved and beautifully landscaped long term parking area, refinished floors, repainted walls and new exhibits.

Melissa Horste from Senator Carl Levin's office briefed the group on the Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill signed into law in July, 2012. Referred to as MAP-21, it authorizes funding for both highway projects and public transportation for the next two years and promises to create or sustain 3 million jobs nationwide. A New Starts program can be used for both rail and bus rapid transit projects. A loan provision offers seed money for much larger transportation endeavors. Members present asked Horste to thank Senator Levin for his support for passenger rail over the span of many years.

Chris Hennesey was asked to convey similar thanks to Senator Debbie Stabenow for her unwavering support for passenger rail.

Past MARP Chair John DeLora unveiled the Status Board Project which will display on electronic boards all arrivals and all departures from the Kalamazoo Transportation Center. Designed by Larry Sobczak, the board will scroll up as each Amtrak train or Kalamazoo Transit, Indian Trails, or Greyhound bus arrives or departs the station. It will show both scheduled and actual times for arrivals and departures and connections to the Kalamazoo Airport. Funded by the NARP Foundation, the Status Board is a prototype for other transportation centers. Battle Creek and Flint may be the next on line.

Tim Hoeffner, Director of the MDOT Office of Rail, expressed confidence that the actual transfer of the Dearborn-Kalamazoo rail line from Norfolk Southern to MDOT would take place shortly. Establishing clear title to property that has not been transferred in 180 years is proving a challenge. Hoeffner confirmed that Amtrak



Trains Magazine correspondent Bob Johnston was a featured speaker at MARP's 39th annual meeting in Durand Michigan. Johnston spoke about endangered passenger railroad services in the United States and Canada. (Photo by Steve Sobel)

would be responsible for track maintenance once the transfer takes place. Contracts for design of the double track section from Dearborn to Ypsilanti have been awarded. Major construction work is slated for the spring of 2013. Construction at West Detroit is awaiting a final meeting with Canadian National.

Hoeffner urged all present to participate in public meetings scheduled during the coming week initiating work on the Environmental Impact Statement for the Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac Passenger Rail Corridor.

DeLora offered tribute to Dietrich Bergmann, one of MARP's early supporters and past Chairman. Bergmann, who passed away earlier in 2012, had remarkable grasp of details.

Bob Johnston, correspondent for Trains Magazine, briefed the group on the conflict over food service on trains. Those involved in the operation of trains see food service as an intrinsic part of ticket revenue, while Congressional critics try to compare it to restaurant revenue. Johnston then provided visuals of rail passenger service in the remote northern regions of Ontario and how trains keep resi-

dents in communication with the outside world. In areas without roads, trains are the only way to move people and their goods in and out. Johnston bemoaned the planned discontinuance of the Northlander Express connecting Toronto to Cochrane in the far north.

Johnston explained the threats to segments of the Empire Builder route in North Dakota because of flooding in the Devil's Lake area and to the Southwest Chief's present route through Western Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico because of deteriorating track conditions. Unless the states affected are willing to assume responsibility for the maintenance of the tracks, the Southwest Chief will be rerouted through Oklahoma and countless small communities will lose passenger rail service.

Marc Magliari, Amtrak Media Relations Manager, acknowledged that Chicago Union Station is hopelessly overcrowded. Air conditioning of the Great Hall is now complete, so better use can of that space is now possible. Business Class passengers will now be allowed to use the Metropolitan Lounge, freeing up some space in the overcrowded

coach waiting area. A CTA Bus Transfer Facility on Jackson is funded and should alleviate some of the mayhem outside the station. Magliari foresees funding in the coming fiscal year for a taxi starter to control the jockeying of taxis on Canal Street. Awaiting funding are such projects as moving the Metropolitan Lounge to the upper level of the Great Hall, restroom expansion, and streetscape improvements to help people find their way into the station more expeditiously. Magliari would like to see a below ground passageway from Chicago Union Station to the Blue Line. A long term solution is more frequencies, so passengers do not have to wait as long at the station.

At the short business meeting, the slate of candidates for Executive Committee positions was approved by acclamation. New to the Executive Committee for 2012-2014 are Vice Chair Larry Krieg of Ypsilanti Township, Western Region Chapter Chair Lawrence Bancroft of Kalamazoo and East/Central Chair Rosemary Horvath of Crystal. All other members of the Executive Committee have agreed to serve for another term.

# MARP elects three new executive committee members

**Lawrence Bancroft, new West Michigan Regional Chair**, was born and grew up in the Durand, Michigan area. Not knowing exactly what to do after graduating from high school, Lawrence picked up the once weekly Durand Express newspaper and read an ad for "Railroad Workers Wanted." Lawrence arrived at the historic Durand Union Station for an interview. He was told to take a physical and start work the next day. Little did he know that this was the beginning of a rewarding 41-plus year career with Grand Trunk Western and its successor Canadian National Railroad.

During Lawrence's early years with Grand Trunk Western, he completed two years of military service with the Army and served in the Vietnam War. After returning from the military, Lawrence was granted an educational leave while acquiring an Associates Degree from Flint Community College.

In 1978 Mr. Bancroft began his management career in Flint, Michigan, as Assistant Supervisor of Track and later held the positions of Track Supervisor, Production Engineer, Production Supervisor, Operations Supervisor, and Trainmaster. Most

recently, Lawrence held the position of Manager of Production for Canadian National's Illinois Central Railroad where he was responsible for managing the capitol expenditure for ties and rail installation between Chicago and New Orleans.

Along the way, Lawrence acquired a Bachelor of Business Leadership degree and successfully completed the Operations Supervisor program in Winnipeg, Canada. After his recent retirement, Lawrence moved back to Michigan from his office location in Memphis, Tennessee. Lawrence and his wife, Ellen, reside in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

**Rosemary Horvath, new East/Central Michigan Chair**, has received MARP notices since February 2010 and regretted never attending one single meeting. Not until a steady newspaper gig as a news reporter ended in April could she become a regular and is pleased to accept appointment of East-Central Region chair.

Rosemary lives in Crystal, a small lake community in Montcalm County known as a popular summer retreat. Local historians tell that, at the turn of the century, the Butternut station that was located south about four miles on the Grand Trunk Railway Sys-



Rosemary Horvath



Larry Krieg

tem unloaded visitors that were brought by wagon to Crystal Lake for a holiday.

Originally from Dayton, Ohio, Rosemary has lived and worked for weekly and small daily newspapers in Ohio, Indiana, New Mexico and Michigan. She won't forget the moonlight ride on the Cumbres Toltec narrow gauge from Chama NM to Antonito CO. Publicized as a short trip, it turned into nearly an all-nighter because the tracks were drenched from a heavy rain and the overworked steam engines didn't have enough muscle power to pull that many train cars up the mountain, at least steadily. Slippin' and slidin' wasn't just a little Richard song anymore.

During her years as a

journalist, Rosemary has written about trains, people who collect trains and people who restore depots. She lived in southwest Michigan 20 some years ago when tracks along the Blue Water and Wolverine routes were upgraded in preparation for high-speed rail. She wonders now if she reported then those faster trains would be decades away.

**Larry Krieg, new Vice Chairman**, is a retired academic and the principal force behind Wake Up Washtenaw!, an informal citizen organization based in Washtenaw County, Michigan working to encourage individuals, organizations, corporations, and governments to cooperate and apply creativity to the development of sustainable housing and transportation solutions for the region.

## Extra trains set to run around Thanksgiving

In anticipation of its busiest travel week of 2012, Amtrak is adding more trains between Chicago and Michigan for Thanksgiving week. The passenger railroad encourages passengers to plan ahead for Thanksgiving travel and book their tickets now for best availability and pricing.

The busiest travel days that are likely

to sell out are the Tuesday and Wednesday before and the Saturday and Sunday following Thanksgiving. Passengers can also consider traveling on less-busy days such as the Monday before or the Friday and Monday following the Thanksgiving holiday, when more availability and price options could be available.

Amtrak will offer two additional eastbound and one additional westbound Wolverine Service trains between Chicago and Kalamazoo/Ann Arbor, Mich., on Thanksgiving Eve, Nov. 21. Amtrak will operate two additional Wolverine Service round-trips daily between Chicago and Kalamazoo/Ann Arbor on Friday, Nov. 23, on Saturday, Nov. 24, and on Sunday, Nov. 25.

Amtrak ordinarily offers three daily round-trips through Ann Arbor and four daily roundtrips through Kalamazoo, with all these trains operating at top speeds of 110 mph through parts of Indiana and Western Michigan. Please see the adjacent schedules for the special added trains 356-359. Check [www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com) for a complete schedule of all available trains for these dates.

In preparation for the anticipated heavy holiday passenger volume, Amtrak will also operate every available passenger rail car in its fleet and is scheduling extra trains to accommodate additional passengers in the Northeast, Midwest, and on the West Coast.

More than 724,000 passengers traveled on Amtrak trains for the Thanksgiving holiday in 2011, the most ever for the holiday. Amtrak carried more than 31.2 million passengers in the 12 months ending Sept. 30, marking its highest-ever ridership.

### Additional trains for the Thanksgiving holiday

<b>Wolverine Service</b>		
Amtrak Train 356		
All Times Local		Days of Operation WeFrSaSu
9:00 a.m.	Dp	Chicago
11:39 a.m.	Dp	New Buffalo, Mich.
12:03 p.m.	Dp	Niles, Mich.
12:37 p.m.	Dp	Kalamazoo, Mich.
1:09 p.m.	Dp	Battle Creek, Mich.
2:00 p.m.	Dp	Jackson, Mich.
3:00 p.m.	Ar	Ann Arbor, Mich.

<b>Wolverine Service</b>		
Amtrak Train 357		
All Times Local		Days of Operation ThFrSaSuMo
6:15 a.m.	Dp	Kalamazoo, Mich.
6:40 a.m.	Dp	Dowagiac, Mich.
6:52 a.m.	Dp	Niles, Mich.
7:12 a.m.	Dp	New Buffalo, Mich.
6:22 a.m.	Dp	Michigan City, Ind.
7:45 a.m.	Ar	Chicago

<b>Wolverine Service</b>		
Amtrak Train 358		
All Times Local		Days of Operation WeThFrSaSu
10:00 p.m.	Dp	Chicago
11:01 p.m.	Dp	Michigan City, Ind.
12:12 a.m.	Dp	New Buffalo, Mich.
12:35 a.m.	Dp	Niles, Mich.
12:46 a.m.	Dp	Dowagiac, Mich.
1:30 a.m.	Ar	Kalamazoo, Mich.

<b>Wolverine Service</b>		
Amtrak Train 359		
All Times Local		Days of Operation WeFrSaSu
4:05 p.m.	Dp	Ann Arbor, Mich.
4:45 p.m.	Dp	Jackson, Mich.
5:44 p.m.	Dp	Battle Creek, Mich.
6:15 p.m.	Dp	Kalamazoo, Mich.
6:51 p.m.	Dp	Niles, Mich.
7:12 p.m.	Dp	New Buffalo, Mich.
7:45 p.m.	Ar	Chicago

# These are exciting times for passenger rail

These are exciting times for those of us who advocate travel by train. That doesn't mean everything is looking good (remember the so-called "Chinese curse" - May you live in exciting times?) but we really seem to be on the cusp of great changes in passenger rail service, for better or for worse.

Let's start from the ground up: the right-of-way (ROW) on which trains run. Here in Michigan, it's getting better.

Since early this year, we've had Wolverine and Blue Water trains running up to 110 MPH between Kalamazoo and Porter, Indiana (the place where Michigan trains join the busy Norfolk-Southern main line into Chicago).

Shiny new yellow track machines are arriving in Niles to allow Amtrak to take over improvement and maintenance of the rails east from Kalamazoo, thanks to Federal and State transportation grants that are allowing the State of Michigan to purchase that rail line from Norfolk-Southern.

It will still be a couple of years before the tracks to Dearborn see speedier running, and there will be the same kinds of construction delays we're used to on the highways, but the end result will make train travel in southern Michigan faster and smoother. And the congested main line in Indiana is also slated for improvement with Federal funds.

The changes in Michigan get above the rails, too. A new station opened a few weeks ago in Battle Creek. Grand Rapids' intermodal terminal will soon link to the Amtrak station a block away. Dearborn is moving dirt to build a new station closer to the Henry Ford Museum, and it will include retail space and apartments for those who want to live and shop near transportation. Troy City Council has approved spending Federal funds for an intermodal station, and Ann Arbor is working on plans for a new station, too.

All our trains currently go to Chicago Union Station, and MARP is working with Amtrak and other Midwestern passenger

rail groups to make short-term improvements there, as Amtrak waits for funds to make serious, capacity-building renovations.

The trains themselves will get better, too. A contract was approved recently to acquire

## From the Board



By Larry Krieg  
MARP Vice Chair

200 new bi-level coaches for service in Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, and California. They'll be built over the next three years in Illinois by the experienced rail car builder Nippon-Sharyo. The specifications call for lots of practical and comfortable improvements over

the cars we're using now, which were built between 30 and 50 years ago.

Specifications are also ready for new locomotives to be built in this country. They'll be a bit faster (rated to go up to 125 MPH where track conditions permit), lighter – to keep fuel usage more efficient, accelerate faster, and be less wearing on the rails – and they'll meet the toughest new emissions standards.

So is everything going great? Not exactly. Transportation used to be a non-partisan issue many decades ago, but now it's become a cause of strife and an election-year issue.

Our neighbors in Ohio and Wisconsin have lost out on potential rail passenger service because of governors who don't understand the practicality and economy of passenger rail compared with highways.

Our friends in Indiana have long had leaders who have not appreciated rail travel. And everybody, at every level, has little money to spend on transportation, and far less to invest in trains.

In Washington, there have been congressional hearings in which people – who should know better – have attacked Amtrak with distortions and half-truths.

One of our leading presidential candidates has pledged to eliminate all funding for Amtrak. At the Federal level, spending in all sectors is likely to be drastically reduced in order to help reduce the national debt.

It's our role as advocates to help everybody understand the

facts about passenger trains. Do they pay for themselves? No. Can they? Probably not. So why not get rid of them? Because they bring benefits that other modes of transportation can't, both economically and to the nation as a whole.

Economically, trains make sense because they bring low-cost mobility to people and businesses, and mobility is critical for freedom and prosperity.

Every form of transportation is subsidized by the government in one way or another: highways have never even been considered a source of revenue, and fuel taxes have fallen short of paying for them for several years now.

Airports and air traffic control are subsidized to the tune of billions of dollars annually, but airlines are cutting service and going bankrupt anyway.

It's well documented that good roads, good airline connections, and – yes – even good passenger trains bring measurable economic benefits to the regions they serve.

It's our job to make sure people understand this, whether they chair congressional committees or simply need to get from point A to point B.

Passenger trains are also beneficial because of how they get people from point A to point B.

For each person traveling one mile, they use less energy than any other form of powered transportation. (OK, walking and biking uses even less!) If they run on electricity, as many do, trains can be powered by any of a number of renewable power sources – wind, solar, geothermal, etc.

And they're far safer than most other forms of transportation.

Time you spend on a train can be used to sleep, send text messages, read a book, work on your computer, watch a movie, or play a game with your friends.

You can get up and walk about, you can usually buy food and drink (including beer, wine, and spirits).

You can look at the passing scenery without running off the road.

Business people can even use their train-time as billable hours.

To get on a train, you don't have to take off your shoes or be body-scanned.

The ordinary seats have almost as much room as business-class seats on airplanes – wide enough to get comfortable. In short, it's a pleasant, dignified way to travel.

So let's make sure everybody knows that trains are worth just as much subsidy as any other form of transportation in this beautiful country of ours. And let's make sure our Governor here in Michigan knows we appreciate his support, and want him to keep improving our Michigan passenger trains!

*Larry Krieg, a retired academic, is the principal force behind Wake Up Washtenaw!, an informal citizen organization based in Washtenaw County, Michigan working to encourage individuals, organizations, corporations, and governments to cooperate and apply creativity to the development of sustainable housing and transportation solutions for the region.*



**DEARBORN STATION.** Site work has begun on the new Dearborn Intermodal Station along Michigan Ave. Work along the railroad right-of-way will begin after the Michigan Department of Transportation completes its purchase of the railroad. (Photo by John DeLora.)

# Rebuttals to Amtrak Attacks

Recently Congressman John Mica (R-FL) began a series of hearings on Amtrak. It soon became apparent that the same old false claims were being trotted out and repeated endlessly until they became "facts." I began making a list of these claims, and offer the arguments below as rebuttals.

## **"Gas taxes are user fees."**

Black's Law Dictionary, the standard reference in the legal profession, defines "User Fee" as "A fee paid for the use of a particular facility" (Emphasis added). E.g., a toll paid to drive on a turnpike is a user fee.

Gasoline and vehicle registration fees are simply general taxes because they are collected from everyone and can be used anywhere. The key distinctions are whether a person has an option to pay the tax or not, and whether the proceeds are restricted to the upkeep of a specific facility.

See also Alex Marshall's

analysis at <http://www.governing.com/columns/eco-engines/Not-Just-Semantics.html>

See also *Covell v. City of Seattle*, 127 Wash.2d 874, 879, 905 P.2d 324 (1995). "Furthermore, the amount of the charges was not individually determined and the city could not prove a direct relationship between the fee and service or between the fee and burden produced."

This case, although not about gas taxes, defines what constitutes a user fee. A thorough discussion of this case can

be found in the *Gonzaga Law Review* (Vol 38:2, p. 335) at <http://law-td.gonzaga.edu/law-review/files/2011/02/Spitzer.pdf>. In effect, the *Law Review* found that if a tax is collected everywhere and the proceeds can be spent at any location, it is not a user fee. Taxes collected for deposit into "Highway Trust Funds" are instead tax revenues dedicated to

a certain purpose- i.e., subsidies.

## **"Highways pay for themselves"**

The Federal Highway Trust fund has run a deficit for the last five years, and the deficit has been made up by using money from the general fund. At the State Level, former Rep. Hoon Young Hopgood, in response to a question, said that Michigan's current gas taxes were inadequate to keep up with needed road maintenance. In response to a follow-up, he said that in order to maintain roads in a state of good repair, the Michigan gas tax would need to be increased by twelve cents per gallon.

## **"The weight of a truck is not relevant because the weight is spread over several axles."**

Commonsense will tell you that it doesn't matter how many axles a truck has when it goes over a bridge.

## **"Amtrak's loss per passenger is \$xxx (the number is different in each hearing)."**

This requires a new definition of "operating loss". For FY 2012 Amtrak's operating support is \$485 million, and it is expected to carry 32 million passengers; this works out to \$15.16

per passenger. The number quoted by opponents includes operating losses, capital, ARRA and TIGER infrastructure grants, etc.

## **"Giving Amtrak money for capital is wasted money"**

Capital investments allow Amtrak to operate more efficiently, and past investments have resulted in substantial savings in operations. In 1980 Amtrak's operating support was \$750 million. \$750,000,000 of 1980 dollars would be worth: \$2,089,136,490.25 in 2012. Amtrak's FY 2012 operating support is \$485 million. Can anyone name any other government program whose operating support has declined by 75%?

## **"The average American only rides Amtrak 19 miles in a year."**

The only way this number can be reached is by including the populations of the vast areas of the country which have no Amtrak service. Extending this logic, it would be correct to say, "The average person on earth rides Greyhound for 37 feet per year." According to Amtrak, the average passenger rides 218 miles per trip.

### The National Limited



By John DeLora

## Amtrak train #350 derails Oct. 21 near Niles

By Larry Sobczak

An Amtrak train that derailed in Niles Oct. 21 was on the wrong track as a result of a reversed switch that sent the train into a rail yard, according to a statement released by the National Transportation Safety Board.

Amtrak Train #350 was carrying 174 passengers and four crew members from Chicago to Pontiac at 10:10 a.m. when it

was sent into a rail yard by the switch, injuring nine passengers who were sent to area hospitals.

The NTSB said the train had a green signal allowing it to proceed at maximum speed and had accelerated to 60 miles per hour just before the accident.

The passenger train derailed about 290 feet beyond the switch and continued on the yard track before stopping with all of its

cars upright, the statement said. Empty ballast hopper cars were stored on the yard track and the passenger train came to a stop 21 feet from the nearest hopper car.

Passenger train traffic was disrupted on the line while officials inspected the scene and begun the process of clearing the derailment and repairing equipment damaged during the incident. Service was restored the

following day.

That stretch of track is owned by Amtrak and has an advanced signal system which allows trains to travel at 110 miles per hour.

Amtrak Spokesman Marc Magliari did not comment on the NTSB report but said Amtrak is cooperating with investigators. A full report is expected in the next six to nine months.

## EAST LANSING (Continued from page 8)

section was added to the mix.

Subsequent efforts included an effort by CARC to hire an architect and design a new station for the present site in 1997-1998 and again about five years later.

More recently, in 2009, the City of East Lansing submitted a \$27.4 million Transportation Initiative Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant to completely renovate the site, including a multi-story parking structure, which was not funded.

As major renovation plans

failed to materialize, the original station was remodeled for access by persons with disabilities in 1990 and improved lighting was installed in 1994. With the addition of bus services in 2002, a bus ticket window was added, and minor cosmetic improvements were made to the Amtrak ticket window several years later.

Despite these upgrades, the East Lansing facility began to look run-down and shabby as compared to new or renovated facilities in Lapeer, Flint, Durand, Battle Creek, and Kalamazoo.

The current application, which was approved on its sixth try, is entitled the Capital Area

Multi-modal Gateway Project and is led by CATA, with support from the City of East Lansing and MSU, and with assistance from other parties.

CATA representatives distributed concept drawings for the redevelopment of the current station site, including the abandoned MSU buildings immediately to the south.

They include a ground level parking area and future potential for a platform on the CSX track-age should future Grand Rapids - Detroit intercity or commuter service be developed.

Access to the site is shown through a single stoplight at Service Road, allowing for easier ac-

cess from both north and south.

A section closes to the Trowbridge diamond remains undeveloped under the present concept plan.

Although the grant is termed for "renovation," all plans and discussions are directed toward a new station facility.

Passengers who were interviewed by the press, both at the presentation and at train time, were generally favorable to the project and relieved that the cramped and out-dated facilities would be replaced.

# East Lansing receives funding for a station

By Kazuya Fujita

Robert Rivkin of the U.S. Department of Transportation announced during a press event July 23 at the East Lansing intermodal station that the Capital Area Transportation Authority (CATA) would receive a \$6.28 million grant to upgrade the current station site and build a new gateway station for the Lansing area.

“The station provides a vital link for thousands of students and local commuters who pass through here every day,” Rivkin said. “This is a great win for the Greater Lansing region, bringing an essential facility into the modern age, and, above all, restoring a measure of civic pride to all who pass through here.”

The grant is part of the Federal Transit Administration’s Bus and Bus Facilities Program Livable Initiative funding and it will be matched by \$500,000 each from Amtrak and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) in addition to a long-term lease of the site from Michigan State University (MSU) valued at \$3.2 million.

According to CATA Executive Assistant Debbie Alexander, planning should be completed in three to six months, with construction potentially completed by the end of 2013. Planning will begin when funds are received.

East Lansing Mayor Pro-Tem Nathan Triplett discussed the benefits the station would bring at the press event.

“It will serve as a catalyst for economic growth in our East Lansing – MSU community,” he said

“(The station) project will provide the infrastructure necessary to create a vibrant community with jobs, improved housing, and an enhanced multi-modal transportation system,” CATA Executive Director Sandy Draggoo said.

Dr. Fred Poston, MSU Vice President for Finance and Operations, said it is vital the university is tied into students and faculty that live elsewhere.

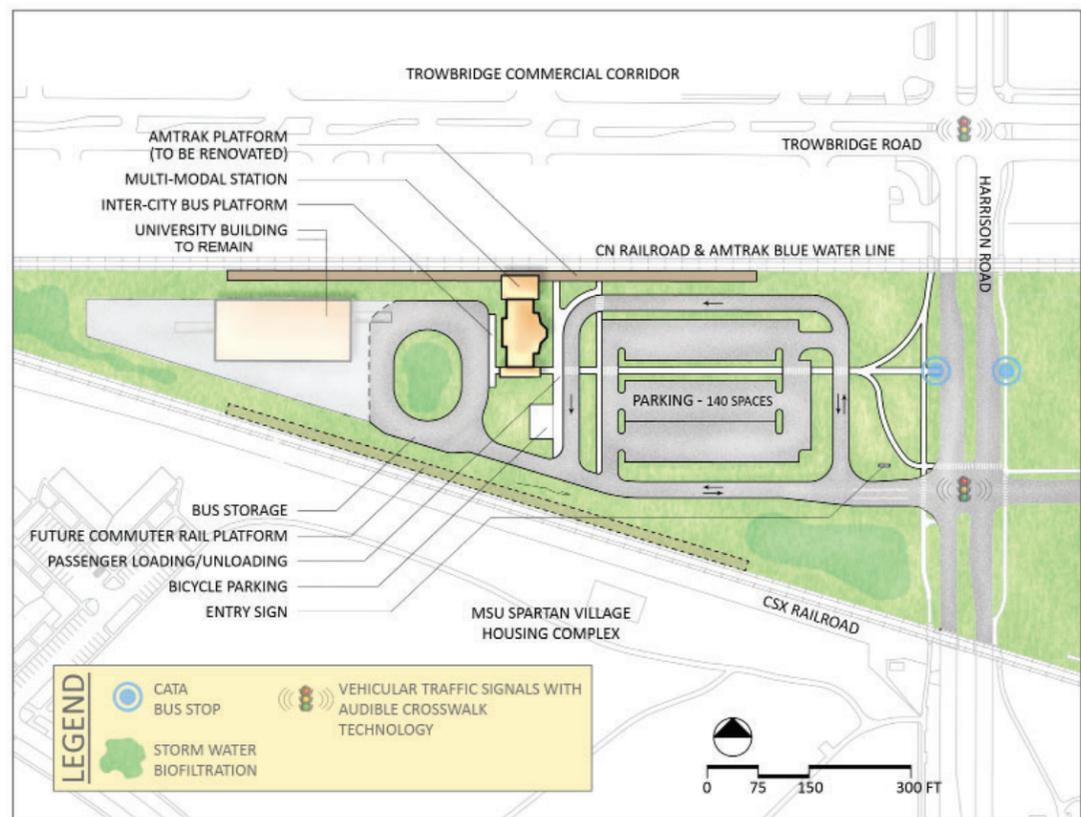
“It’s particularly important that the MSU community have good connections to both Detroit and Chicago, something this enhanced facility will provide,”

The news is long overdue. The current East Lansing station was established in September, 1974, in a former MSU warehouse when MDOT initiated the state-supported Blue Water Limited under section 403(b) of the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) Act, restoring rail passenger service between Chicago and Port Huron that had been discontinued on April 30, 1971.

The station was intended as a temporary facility for an initial two year demonstration phase of the project, with a more permanent station to be constructed later.

The station was initially administered by a non-profit corporation, the Capital Area Rail Council (CARC.)

By the late 1990s, maintaining funding solely through the efforts of volunteer mem-



Above, architectural renderings show the renovated intermodal station for East Lansing.

bers became untenable, as did liability concerns, and thus the governance of the Rail Council was transferred to CATA on December 3, 2003.

Bus service came to the East Lansing Amtrak station on May 15, 1991, with the initiation of Amtrak Thruway service to Battle Creek operated by Indian Trails. Shortly thereafter, the Amtrak Thruway service to Toledo was inaugurated on November 11, 1991; initially operated by Lakefront Trailways. The current service is provided by Trinity Transportation.

Greyhound (Detroit –Grand Rapids – Muskegon) and Indian Trails (Chicago-Flint-St. Ignace) moved their East Lansing bus center from a facility on west Grand River Avenue (present-day Biggby Coffee) to the East Lansing station in September, 2002, turning it into a true intermodal facility.

Finally Megabus initiated service (Detroit-Grand Rapids-Chicago) on July 12, 2012.

There are currently 21 bus and two train departures daily. 66,400 rail passengers used the station in calendar year 2011. No data is released for the bus services, but some speculate it is likely between 40,000 and 70,000 bus passengers per year.

Since its inception, a number of attempts to completely renovate or rebuild the station have occurred.

In the early 1980s, the City of East Lansing conducted an extensive study for a permanent station site and recommended the northeast corner of the then Grand Trunk (now CN) and Harrison junction – roughly the area between the present Trowbridge extension and the rail line east of Harrison.

In 1983, Rep. Bob Carr secured \$1 million to build a new station. This effort, however, became embroiled in politics and was side-tracked when the issue of grade separating Harrison Road from the CN and CSX rail lines and reconfiguring the Trowbridge inter-

(See EAST LANSING, page 7)