

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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Train Day: A lot of things worth celebrating

National Train Day is May 10 and let's list all of things to celebrate in Michigan this year:

- Three new stations will replace older stations in Dearborn, Grand Rapids and Troy this year;

- A new station is in the planning stages in East Lansing and serious discussions are underway to replace the Port Huron station where the number of boardings are soaring;

- Passenger are already enjoying a brand new station in Pontiac and a completely reconstructed station in Battle Creek;

- The state of Michigan now owns the railroad tracks between Dearborn and Kalamazoo leading to fewer freight train related delays for passenger trains along the route;

- The tracks and ties between Dearborn and Kalamazoo have received major rehabilita-

tion over the past year allowing passenger trains to travel at faster speeds. Future track, signal and crossing improvements planned for the next two years will allow train speeds to reach 110 mph between Kalamazoo and Detroit;

- The state of Michigan is purchasing new locomotives capable of 110 mph to replace its aging fleet;

- The state is also look-

(See **TRAIN DAY**, page 3)



ONE OF THREE NEW STATIONS. Amtrak train no. 350, "The Wolverine," rolls past the new station in Dearborn, still under construction in April. This station along with ones in Grand Rapids and Troy are expected to open this year. The new stations are one of many things passenger rail advocates have to celebrate this National Train Day on May 10. See the story above for more. (Photo by Steve Sobel)

Michigan could get disputed trains

BY LARRY SOBCZAK train sets.

There is speculation in the press that Michigan could end up with two brand new high speed passenger trains which have been the center of a legal dispute between Wisconsin and Spanish train manufacturer Talgo, Inc.

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported Michigan's Department of Transportation (MDOT) issued a request for proposals in March for ready-to-operate trains capable of 110 mph speeds for its Wolverine service between Chicago and Detroit for August delivery.

The newspaper noted that the only new train sets that could be delivered in such a short time frame are two brand new, high-speed passenger Talgo train sets currently stored in a building in Milwaukee.

Neither Talgo nor MDOT would discuss whether any proposals have been submitted and whether Michigan was specifically interested in the Talgo

In support of the speculation on the Talgo train sets is the long turnaround time between when brand new trains are ordered and when they can be delivered.

Michigan, as part of a multi-state compact, just ordered high speed locomotives capable of 110 mph from Siemens. However the earliest date the company could begin delivering new locomotives would be 2016. (See related article on page 6.)

MDOT officials have publi-

cally said that adding additional train frequency and train equipment to The Wolverine line linking Pontiac/Detroit to Chicago would help maximize the \$450 million the state and federal government is investing to get the majority of the line up to 110 mph by 2016.

"We're trying to find ways to continue the service at a lower operational cost and increase ridership and revenues," Michigan DOT spokesman Nick Schirripa

(See **TALGO**, page 6)

Troy's train station troubles

BY LARRY SOBCZAK

It's in and out of court for the city of Troy as it tries to gain clear title to the land where its \$6 million federally-funded transit center sits along the railroad tracks between Pontiac and Detroit.

In February, an Oakland County Circuit Judge threw out a condemnation lawsuit the city

filed against developer Grand Sakwa, who owns the land, because the city used a three year-old appraisal value in the lawsuit.

The transit center located at Maple Road and Coolidge Highway has been a part of litigation since 2000 between the city and Grand Sakwa. The property was given to the city for use as a

(See **TROY** page 3)

Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc.

OFFICERS

Chair

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

Vice Chair

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

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

Treasurer

Jeanie Merckel
(734) 717-0326
JCMerckel@aol.com

REGIONAL CHAIRS

Metro Detroit

Robert Patterson
313-836-3736
ridethetrainmich@sbcglobal.net

East/Central Michigan

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

West Michigan

Vacant
Contact MARP if you are
interested in this position.
marprail@yahoo.com

Northern Michigan

Don Monteith
(231) 675-1608
damonteith4@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 & MARP Webmaster:

Larry Sobczak,
editor@marp.org
586-781-6891

Contributors:

Kay Chase
John DeLora
Ren Farley
Jeff Prygoski
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>

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TRAIN DAY (Continued from page 1)

ing for two complete passenger trains to press into service by the end of the summer. The new train sets will be capable of 110 mph service.

- The Amtrak owned tracks between Kalamazoo and Porter, Indiana are the longest high speed stretch of track outside of the Amtrak Northeast Corridor.

If that makes you want to go out and cheer, there are plenty of places to do that in Michigan on May 10:

- Flint, 6:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. There will be refreshments and displays from National Association of Business Women, Mid-Michigan Railway Historical Society, Fairmont Motorcar

and Operation Life Saver at the Flint Amtrak station;

- Jackson, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Events are planned at the Old Freight House at 323 S Cooper St, 4000 N. Mechanics St. and the Amtrak station;

- Kalamazoo, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Kalamazoo Model Railroad Historical Society is holding its annual open house at 9336 North Riverview Drive;

- Plus Amtrak stations in Ann Arbor, Detroit, Dearborn, Grand Rapids, Holland, Kalamazoo and New Buffalo will have treats and refreshments available for anyone that stops by. Don't be surprised if a public official or two stands up and reads a proclamation celebrating the arrival of the train.

For an up to date list of events or more details on celebrations across the country, visit nationaltrainday.com.

TROY (Continued from page 1)

transit center as a concession in a prior lawsuit to allow Grand Sakwa to construct an adjacent shopping center and condominium complex.

The concession came with strings attached—the city must complete construction of the transit center by 2010 or the property reverts back to Grand Sakwa.

Last year, the Michigan Court of Appeals ruled that the city did not complete the transit center in time and the property reverted back to Grand Sakwa. The decision was appealed to the Michigan Supreme Court but the court declined to hear the case.

The Troy City Council had the property reappraised and of-

fered Grand Sakwa \$1.05 million in March. Grand Sakwa has not responded to the offer as of press time.

City leaders said that they will go back to court and ask for the property to be condemned with the revised appraisal figures if the developer does not respond within a reasonable time.

Amtrak officials have told the city that it will not sign a lease with the city to begin using the transit center as a station until the city has clear title to the land.

The Troy station will replace the Birmingham station which is a Plexiglas bus shelter and two handicap parking spots a couple hundred yards north of the Troy Transit Center.

MARP's website is at:
www.marp.org

Passenger service supporters manage to gain reprieve on cuts to the Algoma Central Railway

BY KAY CHASE

As suddenly as an extreme rain event or snow storm cuts off access to towns and settlements in the Algoma Country north of Lake Superior, the Canadian National Railway announced on Jan. 24 that passenger train service on the Algoma Central Railway north of Sault Ste. Marie would cease on March 31.

Reaction was swift among the people who live and work along the 300 miles of track that stretch from Sault Ste. Marie to Hearst, Ontario and they set to work to save this vital service.

Their work paid off with the April 14 announcement by the Minister of Transport, Lisa Raitt, that financial support for the service will continue for another year. Significantly, the Minister made it clear that government funding will not be part of any permanent, long-term solution.

At issue is \$2.2 million in annual funding provided, since 1977, to the Algoma Central Railway (ACR) to provide passenger service, operating on tracks owned by Canadian National Railway. Under provisions of the Remote Passenger Rail Program adopted in 2013, the ACR passenger service was deemed to no longer meet the criteria of providing access to communities with few or no other transportation options.

The Sault Ste. Marie City Council voted \$50,000 to sup-

Transport Minister extends funding;

Supporters have one year to find a permanent funding source

port the Stakeholder Committee. Wawa and Hearst each pitched in \$5,000 and tiny Dubreuilveill contributed nearly \$1,000,

The respected accounting firm BDO Canada LLP released a draft study on April 18 showing that Canada's \$2.2 million investment in the service returns an economic benefit of at least \$38 million annually to the communities along the route. The study can be accessed at www.algomapassengerrail.com.

The stakeholder survey included in the BDO study drew nearly 500 responses, a significant sample size that will bolster the case for continuation of the Algoma Central Railway passenger service as a worthwhile investment.

In reality, while Sault Ste. Marie, Hawk Junction, and Hearst have highway access, many of the sixty-four stops along the line are "whistle stops" that are difficult or impossible to reach by car.

This became immediately apparent at a standing-room-only town hall meeting in Sault Ste. Marie, Canada, on Feb. 19, as a succession of speakers spoke of what the loss of the train would mean for their families and livelihoods.

One, a trapper, said he would not be able even to retrieve his trap lines, worth thousands of dollars. Not only have generations of "cottagers" used the train to get to properties in this remote area, but there are scores of operators of hunting and fishing lodges, and other commercial ventures along the route for whom the train service is essential.

Also at issue are ambitious plans to expand a fledgling tourist industry focused on sustainable, environmentally sound, ecological and cultural tourism.

The Agawa Canyon fall color tours and the snow train are well-known (and also in jeopardy) and the Searchmont Ski Resort is popular. Less well known is the Searchmont Music Festival which last fall featured a special train to the event, with musicians on board and troubadours leading folks from the train to the festival grounds.

There are plans to expand the scope of the annual train tour celebrating the legacy of Canada's famous "Group of Seven" landscape painters and offering a bonus exploration of the town of Wawa, a favorite haunt of the pianist Glenn Gould. Students ride the train to Hearst for French language immersion study.

Having achieved the short term goal of keeping the train running for another year, the ACR Passenger Service Stakeholder Committee, comprised of municipalities, First Nations, tourist operators, and cottage owners, now has a major challenge ahead in seeking a solution to ensure the long term viability of the service.

Follow the est developments at *Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains*: <http://captrains.ca>

Amtrak ridership by station FY 2013

Ann Arbor	158,717	+9.7%
Kalamazoo	129,858	+3.7%
Dearborn	81,878	+0.6%
Detroit	70,626	+6.1%
East Lansing	64,552	-3%
Grand Rapids	50,809	-8.9%
Battle Creek	49,203	-2.6%
Holland	39,228	-1.3%
Royal Oak	37,158	+13%
Flint	36,045	-4.8%
Port Huron	29,461	+10%
Birmingham	23,257	+18%
Niles	21,306	+7%
New Buffalo	19,902	+34%
Pontiac	16,813	+3.1%
Durand	14,295	+11%
Jackson	13,102	+13%
St. Joseph	11,366	+3.5%
Lapeer	9,997	+0.6%
Dowagiac	4,108	+9.8%
Bangor	3,856	+6.6%
Albion	1,932	+2.4%

Percent change is between fiscal years 2012 and 2013. Fiscal years begin on Oct. 1 and end on Sept. 30. Source: MDOT.

Should Michigan have a station volunteer program?

MARP Member describes his experience in Maine

Editors note: Through the years MARP members have had casual and sometimes serious discussion about establishing a unified volunteer station host program. MARP member Ren Farley spends the winters near Maine's Atlantic Coast and shares his experiences as a volunteer station host at a nearby station.

BY REN FARLEY

Two mornings each week, I open the Wells, Maine depot at 5:30 a.m. and welcome passengers who board #680 to Boston at 5:59 a.m.

Wells is one of five depots along Amtrak's Downeaster train that has volunteer station hosts and it's where my wife and I spend our winters. There are 11 stations served by the train.

I remain at the depot most the morning waiting for #682 which stops at 8:39 on its way to Boston and for northbound #681 which stops at 10:53 on its trip to Brunswick.

The basic idea is that the Wells depot should be a pleasant place to wait for a trains and that someone should be there to provide information.

Most of the volunteer hosts are retired persons who have either a strong interest in trains or in promoting their community.

Ten trains stop every day at Wells. A volunteer station host is there for the arrival of six of them. During the fiscal year 2013 (Oct. to Sept.), the passenger count at Wells was 52,000 – about the same patronage as in Grand Rapids or Battle Creek.

Station hosts do not sell tickets or handle cash. We assist people who use the QuikTrak machine and sometimes call Julie (Amtrak's automated telephone line), to get a reservation for a person lacking a ticket. We also provide information for travelers and call taxis, although most who use the Wells depot are frequent riders or commuters.

As station host, I check the status of trains and inform passengers about delays. Fortunately, Downeaster trains are almost always on time. During our recent polar vortex blizzard, one was fifty minutes off the time card. The conductor called me to tell me the train would be late.

Some passengers still doubt



TOP PICTURE: Ren Farley, right, shows a passenger how to work the Amtrak Quik-Trak ticket machine. BOTTOM PICTURE: The Wells Maine Amtrak Station. (Photos courtesy Ren Farley)

that coded information on their cell phone or on a piece of paper is a valid ticket.

The Downeaster is the only Amtrak service that is physically separated from all other Amtrak routes. Quite a few passengers travel south to New York or Washington and it can be complicated to explain how to connect to the rest of the Amtrak system in Boston. A few need information from the station host about how to use Boston's Orange or Green line trains to get from Boston North Station to Amtrak's Back Bay Station.

The longest passing siding on the Pan Am railroad between Billerica and Portland is at the Wells depot. Quite often freights stop here to allow Downeaster trains to pass or are parked here when their crew time expires. From time to time, I have chatted with crews about their jobs and Pan Am. I have always enjoyed trains, so I find it very rewarding to serve as a station host.

Are there depots on the

Michigan Amtrak lines that would benefit from a station host? Presumably, stations with Amtrak staff do not need station hosts although some staffed California stations have volunteer stations hosts.

There is potential for a station host program at some unstaffed stations in Michigan.

Some depots have no convenient waiting space for passengers or a station host such as New Buffalo and Royal Oak. Albion has very low patronage.

On an average morning, 14 passengers board the Blue Water train at Lapeer and 20 passengers board it at Durand. Typically, 16 people board the Pere Marquette at St. Joseph. It would be helpful to have a station host welcome those passengers.

Given that many passengers now use their computer or cell phone to buy rail tickets, Amtrak has incentives to reduce the staff in most stations. If that occurs, there may be a need for volunteer station hosts in more of our depots.

About the Downeaster: Reestablishing passenger service to Maine

The Boston and Maine Railroad offered convenient passenger service from Boston to Portland until 1965.

In the mid-1980s, a resident of Portland, Wayne Davis, recognized that it was time to restore rail service to Boston. Working persistently, it took him more than a decade to accomplish his goal.

The Maine legislature, in 1989, adopted a Passenger Service Act. Then, in 1992, Maine voters approve a bond issue to provide \$5 million to refurbish the tracks that were owned by the firm that is now Pan Am Railroad.

This was strongly supported by Maine's congressional delegation and, in 1992, Congress approved \$35 million for capital improvement on the line.

In 1995, Maine established a non-profit, the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPR), to operate trains. Maine – but not New Hampshire or Massachusetts – provides about \$1.8 million annually to cover costs not paid for by fare box revenues.

NNPRA contracted with Amtrak to supply the equipment and operate the trains. The tracks were refurbished to permit a 79 mph speed but Pan Am delayed the start of service, insisting that trains not exceed 59 mph.

Finally, service began in December 2001 with four daily Portland to Boston round trips of the Downeaster.

Michigan By Rail proposes coast to coast study

BY JEFF PRYGOSKI

Plans are underway for a ridership demand study of passenger rail service between Holland and Detroit, via Grand Rapids and Lansing.

The proposed study is a project of Transportation for Michigan's Michigan By Rail team, which includes the Michigan Environmental Council, Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Michigan Land Use Institute, Freshwater Transit and Friends of WALLY.

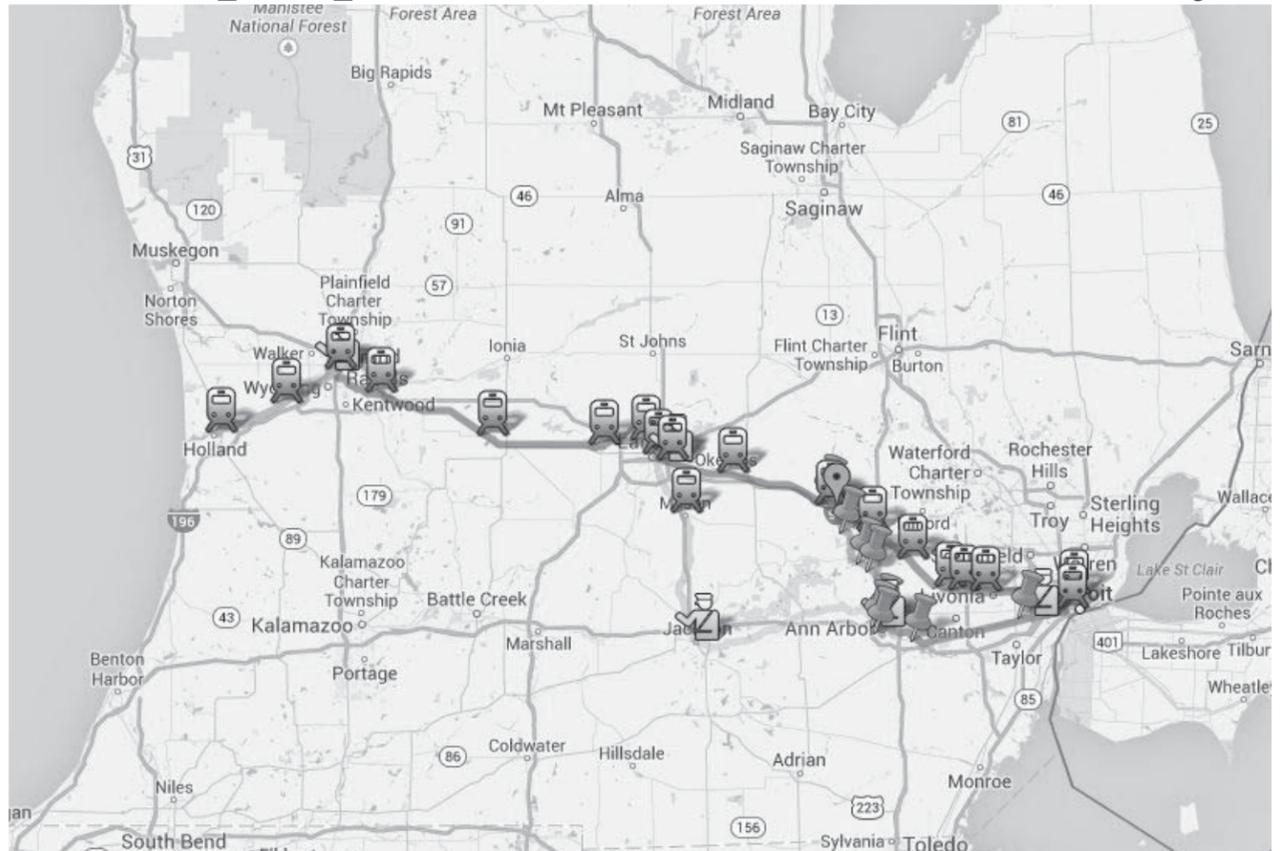
The service, which has been dubbed by supporters as Coast-to-Coast, would diversify transportation options in the region by reestablishing passenger train service that has been absent since the 1970s and by connecting the rail service to other modes of transportation.

The proposed study comes at a time when demand for passenger trains in Michigan is booming. Michigan Amtrak ridership has increased 78 percent since 2002 and last year over 800,000 passengers chose rail service over other modes of transportation in Michigan.

The proposed Coast-to-Coast line would help meet Michigan's burgeoning demand for passenger rail service—good news for travelers and for communities along the corridor.

The Coast-to-Coast line has received broad support from stakeholders in large part because of its potential for economic benefits along the route. Research on the economic impact of rail service in Michigan provides data on how much investment and spending trains and passengers bring to town.

According to Michigan Department of Transportation and Amtrak reports, service along



This map shows the Coast-to-Coast route from Holland to Detroit via Grand Rapids and Lansing. The train icons represent potential stations. Also shown are proposed commuter train connections from Detroit to Ann Arbor and Howell to Ann Arbor as well as Lansing-Jackson-Ann Arbor. Map prepared by Michigan By Rail.

the Michigan Amtrak lines currently provides cities with more than \$62 million in community benefits a year.

Statewide, Amtrak purchased more than \$31 million in goods and services from Michigan companies to maintain its operations in 2013.

Other benefits include rail connections between world-class medical centers, colleges and universities throughout the corridor, better access to business and job opportunities and a more relaxed and accessible means to visit some of Michigan's premier cities and attractions.

MARP members John Langdon and Larry Krieg are key members of the Michigan By Rail team doing extensive outreach to gather support for a \$100,000 Service Development and New Technology grant through the Michigan Department of Transportation.

portation.

The grant requires a 20 percent local match from community members.

So far the Coast-to-Coast study has garnered a diverse lineup of 25 supporters from all corners of the corridor, including convention and visitor's bureaus, local governments, chambers of commerce, elected officials, transportation service providers and planning organizations.

The team is more than halfway to reaching its \$20,000 local match goal and has 22 letters of support along with it.

At the same time, the Michigan By Rail team is pursuing funding through the state's 2014-15 transportation budget.

Language calling for the study is included in the House version of the transportation budget, House Bill 5308. The

team is working hard to keep this item moving as the budget process continues.

The Coast-to-Coast line could be a major step forward for the corridor and state. The feasibility study would provide decision-makers, elected officials, and the public with a much clearer picture of the impacts rail service would have on corridor communities and residents.

As the Michigan By Rail team continues to work to make the study a reality, you can find more details by visiting www.michiganbyrail.org or contacting Dan Sommerville at dan@environmentalcouncil.org. Stay informed by following Michigan By Rail on Facebook and Twitter.

Jeff Prygoski is a fellow at Transportation for Michigan

Northern Ohio cities form alliance to improve rail service

BY LARRY SOBCZAK

Three metropolitan areas in northern Ohio are stepping up efforts to expand and develop freight and passenger rail capacity in their region.

An alliance of the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency, the Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments and the Erie County Regional Planning Commission was formed in April in response to growing traffic along an east-west rail corridor that's already one of the busiest in the nation.

"The next steps are to iden-

tify additional partners in Ohio and adjoining states, develop a scope of planning work and secure funding for it. It's an exciting time for Ohio's cities which are seeing significant redevelopment. Enhancing rail infrastructure that already focuses on our urban cores is a cost-effective way of supporting their continued redevelopment," said Ken Pendergast, executive director of All Aboard Ohio.

Seventy daily freight trains carry about 20,000 truckload equivalents and four daily passenger trains carry enough passen-

gers to fill a dozen 737s per day.

The Ohio Statewide Rail Plan of 2010 estimated that rail freight tonnage is expected to increase by a compound annual growth rate of 1.6 percent until 2030.

Meanwhile passenger boardings have grown dramatically in the past five years at train stations in Cleveland (+38%), Elyria (+91%), Sandusky (+64%) and Toledo (+36) despite nocturnal Amtrak service.

Passenger rail advocates in Ohio hope the cities' efforts lead to station improvements in northern Ohio, additional passenger

train frequency during the daylight hours and better connections outside the region.

"The interesting thing is that this effort may create a 'me too' effect with Detroit and Pittsburgh jumping in," said Bill Hutchison, former president of All Aboard Ohio and a long time passenger rail advocate. "If they do, we will now be talking about a Amtrak Northeast Corridor level connection, Pittsburgh-Youngstown-Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit, with 12 million in population, anchored by major cities at each end and another in the middle."

It's official: Siemens to build next generation of locomotives for Amtrak's Michigan Services

The Illinois Department of Transportation, on behalf of the states of Illinois, California, Michigan, Missouri, and Washington, on March 18, 2014 formally granted the Siemens Rail Systems Division an official Notice to Proceed on 32 "Charger" diesel-electric passenger locomotives. The NTP follows IDOT's December 2013 announcement of its intention to move forward on the order with Siemens.

The order is worth \$225 million and includes a purchase option for another 225 locomotives—75 locomotives for use in regional transportation and another 150 locomotives for intercity transportation. The initial 32 locomotives, which will be manufactured at the Siemens plant in Sacramento, Calif., are scheduled to be delivered between the fall of 2016 and mid-2017. They

will be used for regional and intercity passenger trains traveling at speeds of up to 125 mph.

The Charger locomotives, which are based technically on the Siemens Eurosprinter, Eurorunner, and Vectron locomotive platforms, feature a primary traction drive consisting of a 4,400-hp-rated Cummins QSK95 diesel engine with 16 cylinders and a cubic capacity of 95 liters. The QSK95, which complies with EPA Tier IV emissions regulations, will be manufactured in the U.S. by Cummins Inc., headquartered in Columbus, Ind. The 120-ton (approximate) Charger locomotive offers a starting tractive effort of 65,200 pounds (290 kN). Siemens says all components "are procured and manufactured exclusively in the U.S."

"For Siemens, this order marks our entry into the U.S. diesel-electric locomotive market and



Image courtesy Siemens

strongly underscores our long-term vision for the U.S. passenger rail market," said Siemens Rail Systems Division CEO Jochen Eickholt. "As one of the fastest, most efficient and safest modes of transportation, passenger rail is a key priority for

U.S. infrastructure development. Siemens wants to play a major role in this lucrative market and can already look back on first successes, for example the new, advanced-technology ACS-64 electric locomotives built in Sacramento for Amtrak."

Steam engines visit Michigan in June and July

BY LARRY SOBCZAK

There will be several opportunities to see and experience steam locomotives pulling vintage passenger cars on the open rails in Michigan this June and July.

The first chance is at the Steam Train Expo 2014 at the Steam Railroading Institute (SRI) in Owosso on June 20, 21 and 22.

Each day during the Expo, two half-day long steam-powered train excursions are planned between Owosso and Alma using the SRI's Pere Marquette no. 1225 locomotive and the Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society's Nickel Plate Road no. 765 locomotive.

Each train will pull a variety of vintage passenger equipment. Ticket options range from \$90 to \$250.

For people with less time, there will be hour-long train rides each day pulled by the Little River Railroad no. 110, the Flagg Coal Company no. 75 and Lehigh Coal Company no. 126. Tickets start at \$20 with some admission tickets to the SRI including the one hour trip.

Other events include exhibits on the SRI grounds, plane rides aboard vintage World War II aircraft at nearby Owosso Community Airport and a vintage automobile show at the nearby Baker College Auto Diesel Institute.

Tickets and more informa-

tion are available at <http://michigansteamtrain.com/expo-2014/> or by calling (989) 399-7589.

The Steam Railroading Institute is located at 405 South Washington Street in Owosso.

Another opportunity to see a steam locomotive in action is the Norfolk Southern Employee Special, "The Mercury Express," which is scheduled to make an employee-only run between Detroit and Toledo on July 5 and 6.

Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society's Nickel Plate Road no. 765 will be pulling the train.

Although rides are not open to the public, the train can be viewed as it makes it run on Norfolk Southern's tracks between the two cities.

July 12 and 13 will be the big chance for the public to ride a steam train on Norfolk Southern's tracks between Allen Park and Fort Wayne Indiana aboard The Detroit Arrow.

Each day the train pulled by Nickel Plate Road no. 765 will depart at 8 a.m. from 4200 Allen Road, Allen Park and arrive in Fort Wayne, Indiana at noon.

Passengers will be able to experience the city's Three Rivers Festival before the scheduled departure at 4 p.m. for arrival back in Allen Park at 8 p.m.

Tickets range from \$109 to \$349 for the 282-mile round-trip excursion and features seating

options aboard a fleet of restored coach, deluxe coach, dome car, and first class passenger cars.

Tickets for The Detroit Arrow are available at <http://fortwaynerailroad.org/events/> or by calling (888) 718-4253.

TALGO

(Continued from page 1)

said in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel article.

When the state of Illinois added frequency and equipment to its state-operated lines, it saw ridership and ticket revenue jump at a higher factor than the amount of equipment added due to greater convenience for travelers.

There could be hiccups involved in a sale. The trains are the subject of a lawsuit about who owns the trains.

After the state of Wisconsin commissioned the trains from Talgo in 2009 for the Hiawatha line between Chicago and Milwaukee and ultimately spent \$52 million on them, Gov. Scott Walker and the Republican administration clashed with the company, canceling a maintenance contract and disputing testing costs in 2012. The state halted payments, eventually leading Talgo to end the contract.

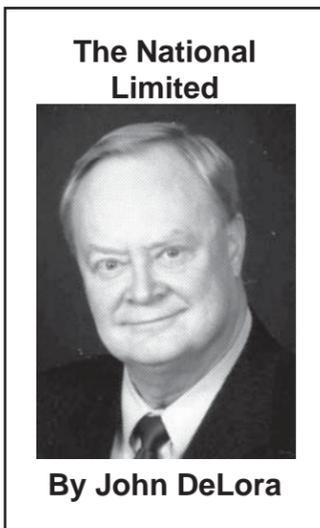
As of press time, the litigation between Wisconsin and Talgo is still ongoing.



The Little River Railroad no. 110 pulls passenger cars on a one hour long excursion near Owosso in 2009. (Photo by Larry Sobczak)

Now is the time to heed Boardman's warning

On March 28th, Amtrak President Joe Boardman sent out a message to employees which sent a chill down my spine. It went into some detail about Amtrak's revenues and costs and the obvious conclusion was that the money was running out. I read on, hoping to see what he proposed to deal with the situation, but there was nothing. The obvious conclusion was that he was giving everyone, especially Congress, a heads-up. It has been an open secret for some time now that deferred maintenance,



The National Limited

By John DeLora

especially on the NEC, is reaching a critical point. Two years ago, Mr. Boardman publicly said, "We're eating our assets." Now there's nothing left to eat.

Congress has made an art of putting off critical decisions until a crisis is at hand. Well, we're there now. If repairs and maintenance aren't accelerated, we will soon see a cascade of service failures, and a drastic reduction in quality of service.

This scenario will likely play out first in the NEC. That's where Amtrak's capital needs and deferred maintenance are greatest. That will result in slower sched-

ules and probably a reduction in the number of trains. It will be followed soon after by service failures with the National Network trains. Expect to see equipment failure begin to mushroom later this year.

For those of us on the spokes of the Midwest Hub Services, we will probably escape widespread failures, largely because the states are now paying the full costs of their routes. That said, a spiraling round of equipment failures will almost certainly cause ripple effects and work backlogs.

Phone calls to local congressional offices are desperately needed. Be polite, and tell them you ride the trains, and that you do not want Congress delaying a fix until something really bad happens. What will their excuse be then?

From the Boardroom: People can effect change

BY KAY CHASE

Margaret Meade, the renowned cultural anthropologist once said "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." She had loftier things in mind than train schedules and lost tickets, but the challenge implied in her words comes to mind as I think about the work we do in MARP.

Elsewhere in this issue, Ren Farley recounts his experi-

ences as a volunteer station host in Wells, Maine. He mentions Wayne Davis without whose passion and persistence the extraordinary story of the Downeaster train might never have happened. With 5 daily round trips between Portland ME and Boston MA (two of those trips continue north to Freeport and Brunswick), the route has seen impressive ridership and revenue gains over its 13 year history.

On the other side of the country, the energy and passion of a

tiny, white-haired lady, Doras Briggs, led to the creation of the California Station Host program in 2001 at the Emeryville station. Today station hosts assist passengers in over 50 stations in California.

Elsewhere, passengers on the Texas Eagle and on North Carolina's Piedmont and Carolinian routes are greeted by Amtrak-sanctioned volunteer hosts. Jefferson MO has initiated its own volunteer program.

In Michigan, MARP mem-

bers Ron Leatz, Jim Slater and Al Koole volunteer their time to assist passengers in Dowagiac, Lapeer and Grand Rapids, respectively. Floyd Nelson has been a welcoming face for passengers arriving in Bangor since the station opened in 2006. The Bangor Downtown Development Authority provides compensation. Two of Michigan's unstaffed stations boast caretakers. Tim Corner (Grand Rapids) and Dave Nickoll (Durand) are under contract with Amtrak to assure passenger safety.

Merckel appointed MARP treasurer; Randall honored

BY LARRY SOBCHAK

Dave Randall stepped down as MARP Treasurer and Jeanie Merckel was appointed on April 5 to replace him.

Randall said that he retired in 2012 from his full-time position as director of finance at Send International and decided to move to Texas to be closer to family.

"My wife is certifiably a Texan," he said.

Randall joined MARP in the late 1990s and volunteered to fill the treasurer position in 2005 when Terry Donnelly's health was failing.

Randall said that during his time at MARP he enjoyed seeing progress being made in improving Amtrak passenger service and increased participation by MARP members.

"I enjoyed being with like-minded people working for better and improved passenger service," he said. "I'm thankful we're in a lot better position as an organization since I first joined."

Members of the MARP executive committee presented Randall with a watch for his years of service at a lunch on April 23 at

the Gandy Dancer in Ann Arbor.

Attending the lunch were Kay Chase, Clark Charnetski, John Langdon, Robert Tischbein, Sobczak, Merckel and Steve T. Sobel.

Merckel has been a member of MARP only since 2013 but she is no stranger to passenger train travel or accounting.

Her husband, Chuck, has been a dues paying member to MARP since 2000 and he started becoming more active in meetings and activities when he retired two years ago.

The Merckels travelled numerous times by train and she said her husband has always been enthusiastic about improving passenger train travel.

"I married my husband 38 years ago. I had no choice. Our honeymoon was on a train," she said.

The Merckels owned a business for more than 30 years and she was involved in accounting and management.

She said one of her goals is to make sure the MARP books are easily understandable and easy to interpret even by a person who



Dave Randall, left, and Jeanie Merckel, right, are at a special luncheon at the Gandy Dancer in Ann Arbor. (Photo by Steve Sobel)

has no accounting experience.

Merckel is MARP's third treasurer in its 40 year history. The position was held by Don-

nelly from 1973 to 2005.

The treasurer position is the only MARP Executive Committee member that is appointed.

MARP Meeting Schedule

June 14 – Lansing, Former GTW Depot, now the REO Town Depot, Lansing

July 19 – Traverse City Depot (The Filling Station Microbrewery)

August – Executive committee only — finalizing the Blue Water & Pere Marquette anniversary plans.

September 20 – Durand Union Station for the annual

meeting

October 18 – Grand Rapids-The Rapid local and inter-city bus station offices adjacent to new Amtrak station – station tour scheduled.

November 15 – Port Huron to discuss new station sites.

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

Boardman sets the tone for the FY 2015 budget: Northeast Corridor profits shouldn't be used to support the rest of Amtrak

In its FY 2015 budget request to Congress, Amtrak is seeking a change in federal passenger rail investment and warns that continuation of current funding levels leave Northeast Corridor infrastructure vulnerable to a bigger, costlier and far more damaging failure than anything yet seen.

“Infrastructure deterioration and changes in business patterns have reached a point where something has to change,” said President and CEO Joe Boardman. “If America wants a modern intercity passenger rail system, the problems of policy and funding must be addressed.”

“Increased ridership, enhanced operating performance and stronger financial management are part of an improving Amtrak. It is time to consider a new paradigm for federal financial support,” said Tony Coscia, Amtrak board chairman. “The reality is that status quo federal funding levels put the Northeast Corridor infrastructure at increased risk of major failure with serious economic consequences for the nation.”

“The nation cannot afford to let a railroad that carries half of Amtrak’s trains and 80 percent of the nation’s rail commuters fall apart,” Boardman stressed, noting the NEC is vital to the mobility, connectivity and economy of the entire Northeast region.

Boardman explained a new federal policy and funding arrangement that should create a significant and reliable multi-year capital investment program to reverse the decay of NEC infrastructure and support other intercity passenger rail projects. A strong federal commitment will allow Amtrak to plan and implement major multi-year projects such as replacing century-old NEC bridges and tunnels, and make critical capacity improvements such as the Gateway Program between New Jersey and New York.

Boardman said that NEC revenues ex-



This Amtrak Acela train zooms through New Jersey and helps make the Northeast Corridor profitable. Amtrak CEO Joseph Boardman says that the infrastructure in this division of Amtrak is in dire need of overhaul. (Amtrak Photo)

ceed operating costs by more than \$300 million a year and are today used to cover some costs of state-supported and long-distance trains. To provide additional funding for NEC improvements, Congress should fully fund the operating and capital needs of the long-distance routes so the NEC revenues can be reinvested in the NEC.

By dedicating NEC revenue to meet NEC needs, it could be leveraged to pay for debt service on loans to address the most urgent NEC infrastructure issues. It also could be used to finance other funding solutions such as public-private partnerships, grants of assistance, and state and commuter rail agreements.

Boardman said long-distance trains have been a core federal responsibility since 1971,

and Congress should fulfill its obligation by funding their full cost. Long-distance trains form the backbone of the Amtrak national system, connect small towns to major cities, support local economic development, deliver passengers to state-supported corridor trains and conduct interstate trade and commerce. They are vital to the communities and people they serve, and increasingly important as airlines and bus companies abandon significant regions of America.

“It is clear that Americans want a national system of intercity passenger rail, and will continue to use it in greater numbers if we can provide it,” said Boardman. “Our work over the past decade proves this, but to maintain and improve that system will require both an increase in the overall capital levels and a real federal commitment to deliver the needed financing.”

For FY 2015, Amtrak is requesting \$1.62 billion in federal capital and operating support, an increase of approximately 16 percent from FY 2014 federal appropriations.

The preceding article is from an Amtrak press release.

National Association of Railroad Passengers Vice Chairman John DeLora offers his perspective on page 7.

Table 1. Reconciliation of FY 2015 Federal Grant Proposal
(dollars in millions)

Operating Estimates					
	Operating Revenue	Operating Expenses	Net Operating Profit / (Loss)	Operating Profits Used for Capital Investment	Federal Operating Grant Request
NEC	\$1,566	\$1,276	\$290	(\$290)	\$0
State-Supported	932	1,015	(83)	0	83
Long Distance	639	1,257	(618)	0	618
Corporate Development	98	19	79	(79)	0
Total, Operating	\$3,235	\$3,567	(\$333)	(\$369)	\$701
Capital Estimates					
	Planned Capital Investments	Capital Investment Funded from Operating Profits (See above)	Federal Capital Grant Request		
NEC	735	290	445		
State-Supported	20	0	20		
Long Distance	295	0	295		
Corporate Development	79	79	0		
Total, Capital	\$1,129	\$369	\$760		
Other Required Grant Needs					
Debt Service					150
FRA Oversight Takedown					9
Total Federal Grant Request					\$1,620

Does not include revenues from joint benefit programs; commuter and reimbursable revenue and expenses are included in each business line.
NEC includes infrastructure-related expenses.
Contributions from states envisioned under PRIIA 212 not included.

Table 2. Capital Investment	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018
Northeast Corridor	\$735	\$1,573	\$1,692	\$1,650
State Support	20	25	30	35
Long Distance	295	285	275	279
Corp Development	79	80	80	80
Total	\$1,129	\$1,963	\$2,077	\$2,044

Note: Does not include revenues from joint benefit programs or contributions from states envisioned under PRIIA 212.