Legislature approves regional transit

By Larry Sobczak

On Dec. 19 Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder signed legislation that created the first regional transit authority (RTA) for southeast Michigan.

The historic legislation, more than 40 years in the making, was approved by the slimmest of legislative margins, 57-50 in the State House of Representatives. Bills need 56 votes to pass.

The new authority will serve as an umbrella layer over the existing transit agencies in Wayne, Macomb, Oakland and Washtenaw counties and most significantly the Detroit Department of Transportation, SMART, and the Ann Arbor Transportation Authority.

The authority is tasked with:

• Coordinating the transit agencies at the points they overlap, whether that’s geographic (why do you have to switch buses at 8 Mile to get from Royal Oak to Wayne State?) or operational (why do you need to carry three

(See RTA, page 3)

Transit moves forward in Troy

By Larry Sobczak

Ground was broken Nov. 27 at the Troy Transit Center marking the end of 13 years of planning that often left the transit center advocates wondering if it would ever become a reality.

Construction of the station is expected to be completed later this year on the 28,000 square foot facility that includes a 2,000-square-foot building with a waiting area and public restrooms, a pedestrian bridge to the Amtrak platform, bus docks, taxi stands and parking.

It is being built on a 2.4 acre parcel behind a shopping center located on Doyle Drive near Maple Road and Coolidge Road at a cost of $6.3 million.

One of the biggest proponents of the transit center was Troy Chamber of Commerce Director Michele Hodges who saw it as a vital direct link from her city to other major Michigan cities and Chicago.

“Troy has so many people supporting Troy’s future,” she said at the groundbreaking ceremony. “I have to pinch myself.”

(See TROY, page 3)
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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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RTA
(Continued from page 1)
different bus passes to transfer among the three bus systems?)

- Developing a network of regional rapid transit corridors. The legislation states this “may” include the Woodward and Gratiot Avenue corridors, a western cross-county line to operate between the downtown Detroit station and the Ann Arbor Blake transit center for a distance of approximately 47 miles and a line that roughly follows either M-59 or Big Beaver Road/Metropolitan Parkway in Macomb and Oakland counties. The authority shall determine the exact route.

- Establishing a source of funding, either a property tax or vehicle registration fee, through a voter referendum. The funding source would be approved by a majority of voters in the combined four-county region.

The RTA will have a 10 member board. The county executives of Oakland, Macomb, Wayne and Washtenaw counties will appoint two members each. One of the

Wayne county board members must be from Detroit and the city of Detroit will appoint one additional member. The governor will appoint one non-voting member. Board members cannot hold elected office, or be the paid staff of a city, county, transit agency or the state.

Once the RTA board is appointed, it will hire staff, adopt a regional transit plan and develop a funding plan to put before the voters.

At press time, Washtenaw County had appointed Richard Murphy and Elizabeth Gerber to the board. The rest of the counties and Detroit have until March 19 to appoint the rest of the members.

Funding plans will require a super-majority of 7/9 of the board to set the rate of any tax or fee it will put before voters. The funding ballot will cover the entire four-county area and it will be an all-up or all-down vote.

Additionally, a unanimous vote of the RTA board would be required to acquire or construct any form of rail passenger service or to absorb any existing transit provider.

TEST DRIVE. In November, the Michigan Department of Transportation tested passenger cars acquired for future commuter service. The test was conducted between Pontiac and Jackson. These shots were taken in Pontiac by Steve Sobel while the train was parked.

It is unclear what effect the unanimous vote requirement for passenger rail service will have on the future Detroit to Ann Arbor commuter service which presumably will be overseen by the RTA and in which millions have already been invested in rail upgrades and passenger equipment.

Passage of the RTA prompted the U.S. Department of Transportation to begin injecting millions into mass transit in metro Detroit, starting with $25 million for a light-rail line from downtown Detroit to the New Center neighborhood referred to as the M-1 Rail project. (See story on page 8.)

During a visit to Detroit in January, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood said that the federal government is in favor of rail options for the new RTA.

Metro Detroit was one of the last major metropolitan areas in the nation without an RTA to coordinate regional mass transit and to distribute federal funds towards mass transit projects.

It is a couple hundred yards north of the new site.

The current Birmingham Amtrak Station consists of a Plexiglas bus shelter and two handicap parking spots. There is no short term or long term parking at the station and there are several “no stopping or Amtrak parking” signs posted along the side streets near the station although it is rarely enforced.

MARP’s postal address has changed:

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Utica, MI 48318-0076

Please take note when sending your new membership form or your membership renewal.

We can also be contacted at marprail@yahoo.com.

Visit www.marp.org

TROY
(Continued from page 1)
recall effort against her. By a vote of 52 percent, she was recalled from office on Nov. 6.

Another setback for the Troy Transit Center was the city of Birmingham pulling out of the project in 2011 because it could not reach agreement to purchase property on the Birmingham side of the tracks.

The Birmingham property was near a school bus depot and the tracks. The owner wanted more than the roughly $500,000 the city had to offer.

“We could have used eminent domain,” said Robert Bruner, Birmingham city manager, “but it would have been expensive. Eminent domain doesn’t solve our problem of time and money.”

In 2009, the developer of the shopping center filed a lawsuit in Oakland County Circuit Court seeking return of the transit center parcel.

Developer Grand Sakwa claimed the original consent agreement stipulated the transit center must be constructed by 2009 or the property reverts back to it. The city argued that the funding and the plans were in place to begin construction. The Circuit Court agreed and the city retained the parcel.

The Troy Transit Center will replace the Birmingham Station for Amtrak’s Wolverine passenger train service which is located

(Continued from page 1)
Booster start
Spartan Line
charter trips
By Larry Sobczak

The charter train trip known as the Spartan Line made its inaugural journey on Nov. 16 and included nearly 60 participants from the Chicago area in a graphically wrapped green and white train car to East Lansing via Amtrak’s Blue Water Line.

The charter trip was organized by East Lansing-based Prima Civitas Foundation, Michigan State University (MSU), the MSU Alumni Association, the MSU Alumni Club of Metro Chicago, MSU Athletics, the Greater Lansing Convention and Visitors Bureau (GLCVB), the Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP), and the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum.

The Spartan Line was started as an initiative that provides a unique travel experience for Chicago-area MSU alumni and showcases economic growth in the Greater Lansing area.

In addition to transportation, the participants also received tickets to that Saturday’s MSU vs. Northwestern football game and an exclusive after-hours tour of the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum.

Tremaine Phillips of the Prima Civitas Foundation told the East Lansing publication Capital Gains that they were pleased with the turnout and they are planning future events to commence in spring of 2013.

“For a first event, we thought that was a success,” he said. “We got great feedback from those who participated. They said they would love to do it again and bring friends and family. We know that we have struck a nerve.”

The Spartan Line wrapped car has been spotted in Naperville, St. Louis and Milwaukee.

Amtrak sets records during Thanksgiving week

Amtrak ridership and ticket revenue both set records for the Thanksgiving period.

Amtrak carried a record 737,537 passengers during Thanksgiving 2012, up 1.9 percent over the previous year and the prior record set in 2011.

In addition, Nov. 21, the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, was the single busiest day in the history of Amtrak with 140,691 passengers. Ticket revenues were a best ever $56.1 million, up 8.4 percent versus 2011.

Thanksgiving ridership on the Amtrak’s Wolverine service in Michigan was 15,361, up nearly 17 percent from the year before, in large part due to extra holiday four-round-trip trains operated between Kalamazoo/Ann Arbor and Chicago.

The increase in ridership during Thanksgiving on the Wolverine prompted Amtrak to add two extra round-trip Wolverine trains over the Christmas holiday. Statistics for those trains were not available as of press time.

Amtrak reported that it recovered quickly from Hurricane Sandy and served the same number of Northeast Corridor holiday passengers as the year before. Ridership was up 3.4 percent on state-supported and other short distance routes and up 0.8 percent on the long-distance services. The Thanksgiving 2012 travel period extended from Nov. 20 – 26.

“Amtrak is a key element of the regional response to Sandy and it was critical for us to restore service and operate our full and expanded schedule to connect families for the holiday — and with the help of our commuter partners we did it,” said President and CEO Joe Boardman.

When compared with Thanksgiving 2010, the two-year increase is even more impressive, 737,537 vs. 704,446 passengers, up 4.7 percent and $56.1 million vs. $47.6 million in ticket revenues, up 17.9 percent.

Amtrak said that lines at ticket windows and Quik-Trak kiosks were reduced over the holidays with this year’s nationwide implementation of eTicketing, enabling passengers to print their own boarding documents or have their smartphones scanned by Amtrak conductors.

Amtrak accommodated additional passengers with extra trains scheduled in the Northeast Corridor, the Chicago Hub, the Pacific Northwest and in California. In addition, Amtrak added capacity to many other trains in the 46-state national network.

This was the first Thanksgiving for the new extended Downeaster service to Freeport and Brunswick, Maine, and for Amtrak Thruway bus service in Eastern North Carolina that provides rail connections for eight communities to the Palmerton service.

Also, Amtrak partnered with VIA Rail Canada, which provided several passenger railcars to help make additional seats available on Northeast Corridor trains and on the Albany – Montreal segment of the Adirondack service.

Save 20 percent

Cure yourself of cabin fever and save 20% on select routes in Michigan with The Midwest Winter Warm Up Sale.

Save when you ride the following routes: the Blue Water, the Pere Marquette and the Wolverine.


Your trip could take you to shimmering Lake Michigan, beautiful Chicago or bring you as far as Grand Rapids or Detroit.

Staying cooped up is no way to spend your winter. So make the most of The Midwest Winter Warm Up Sale and enjoy traveling in comfort with less stress and great amenities.

Discounts are also available on Amtrak routes between Chicago and southwest Illinois, including on Lincoln Service, Illinois Zephyr/Carl Sandburg, and Illini/Saluki.

The discount also applies to the Missouri River Runner between Kansas City and St. Louis.

Booking your trip, changing your reservation and boarding the train are easier than ever thanks to eTicketing.

With e-Ticketing, say goodbye to waiting in ticket lines at the station and say hello to even more convenience. eTicketing is now available on all routes and you can print your eTicket anytime, anywhere.

Book your tickets at amtrak.com/deals.
Visit to Ontario educates MARP about cutbacks

By Hugh Gurney

MARP held its first-ever regular members and executive committee meetings in Essex, Ontario on Nov. 10 to hear first-hand about passenger train service cut backs immediately to Michigan’s east and north.

Harry Gow, founder of Transport 2000, the predecessor of Transport Action Canada, addressed the MARP membership and gave an extensive update.

MARP membership has expressed concerns about service in Canada because many members use the country’s passenger rail service, VIA Rail, and hope to someday reestablish direct connections between Ontario and Michigan.

Gow reported that the proposed new Detroit-Windsor rail tunnel accommodating double stack rail loads is still on the books. Funding may come from the Building Canada Fund. CP and Borealis, which holds a major stake in the project, will make a joint application. The new tunnel can accommodate passenger rail. Unfortunately, the new VIA station in Walkerville is nowhere near the proposed tunnel portal, which complicates matters considerably.

Gow noted that he had spent a good part of his life and much of his own money to get what was first known as Transport 2000 underway. The organization supports all forms of public transportation, particularly rail and interurban buses. Many recognize the name Transport Action Canada has developed its National Dream Renewed, calling for a renewed commitment to passenger rail. Starting with a town hall meeting in Sarnia, Transport Action has held public forums throughout Eastern Canada. The hope is that the squeaky wheel will alert enough of the public to bring about a change in attitude by the government. Many in Eastern Quebec and New Brunswick are outraged, as cuts in the Ocean Limited service will now require an overnight stay in Quebec City or Moncton when they go there for medical appointments.

In Ontario, reductions in service are affecting employment opportunities in Kitchener and on the Niagara Peninsula. Even where commuter rail or bus service is available, people with disabilities find it harder to get around.

The last of the Eastern National Dream Renewed forums was scheduled for mid-November, with more planned for Western Canada in the new year, after which a report will be made to all Members of Parliament and to the federal government, including a specific proposal to Parliament. Taking a leaf from NARP’s and MARP’s book, Transport Action will work very closely with the legislators to bring about desired changes.

Gow attributed the demise of the Northlander connecting Toronto to Cochrane to feuding within the Ontario Parliament between the dominant Liberal party which is stronger in the heavily populated southern part of the province with the less numerous New Democratic Party which is stronger in the sparsely settled north. Premier Dalton McGuinty, who ordered the cuts, resigned his post recently, but the bloodletting continues.

Gow is hopeful that the Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains (CAPT) will take the lead in fighting for the restoration of the Northlander as well as reestablishment of rail service between Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury, Ontario. Greyhound has reduced service to Sault Ste. Marie to one or two frequencies a day. CAPT has the support of the northern municipalities and has reduced service to Sault Ste. Marie from Michigan’s Lower Peninsula. Gow takes heart in the fact that young workers in northern Ontario are very supportive of passenger rail as a way to get to and from population centers.

From VIA Rail’s nascent interest in better bus-rail connections in Eastern Canada, Gow sees hope for a Thruway bus system similar to that existing in the United States. He would love to see Indian Trails expand its service into Ontario.

Windsor opens new station

By Larry Sobczak

VIA Rail dedicated its new $5.4 million Windsor station on Nov. 16.

The new station is located at 298 Walker Road, near the Hiram Walkers Distillery on Riverside Drive, and replaces an older station which facility is slated to be razed and converted into a parking lot.

The fully-staffed station sells tickets, accommodates up to 300 people and meets accessibility standards for people with reduced mobility.

The new station boasts a more efficient layout, wider platforms and more spacious waiting areas than the old station. It has recharging stations for electronic devices such as laptop computers and cell phones. There are more parking spaces and a passenger drop-off area outside.

“Our government is committed to quality and efficient passenger rail for Canadian,” said Minister of State (Transport) Steven Fletcher at the dedication ceremony.

Since 2007 VIA Rail reports that it has spent $1 billion Canadian dollars to improve its stations and infrastructure.
Electronic arrival and departure signs debut at Kalamazoo Transit Center

Electronic arrival and departure boards were installed at the Kalamazoo Transit Center in January.

The status boards are two 60-inch LED television screens that display bus and train arrival departures within an hour time span; 55 minutes before the current time and five minutes after the current time.

Times displayed are for Amtrak, Greyhound, Indian Trails and Kalamazoo Metro Transit, which all serve the station with more than 760 arrivals and departures per day. It is estimated that more than one million people use the station each year.

The status board project is sponsored by the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) through a grant from the Sally Mead Foundation. The Sally Mead Foundation funds projects that encourage green transit.

The Sally Mead Foundation granted NARP $25,000 for the project. A portion of the grant was used to develop the software and hardware for the project. The remaining funds will be used to install status boards in stations in Michigan, Wisconsin and Illinois.

The status boards did not cost the city of Kalamazoo anything with all costs covered by the grant.

Kalamazoo was chosen for the status boards because of the number of transit carriers it serves, the number of annual passengers and the number of departures and arrivals.

“The status boards are intended to give passengers information about other forms of transit available at the station and to encourage people to use multiple forms of transit to get to their destination,” NARP Vice Chairman John DeLora said.

According to DeLora, Amtrak provides times to the status boards through its website. There are future plans to provide status times for Kalamazoo Metro Transit which is in the middle of a major upgrade of its dispatch and vehicle tracking software.

Greyhound and Indian Trails told DeLora that they do not have the capability to provide vehicle status at this time; however their schedules are posted on the boards at the appropriate times during the day.

Besides arrival and departure information, the status boards give connection information to major destinations within the city, weather and tourism information.

The status boards were warmly received at a dedication ceremony on Jan. 28 by the public and city officials.

Kalamazoo Mayor Bobby Hopewell, Metro Transit Director Bill Schomisch and DeLora spoke briefly about the status boards before Larry Sobczak, who edits The Michigan Passenger and also designed the boards, threw the switch to activate the boards.

This report was prepared by Larry Sobczak who also designed and installed the status boards for NARP.

Tentative MARP meeting schedule 2013


**February 09** – Capac Depot Museum, old M-21

**March 09** – St. Johns Depot Museum, downtown St.Johns at the RR tracks

**April 20** – Niles Amtrak Station; will need #351 to stop to deboard Detroit area members

**May** – National Train Day activities pre-empt monthly meeting

**June 15** – Vicksburg Depot Museum

**July 20** – Flushing Depot Museum

**August 9-10-11** – Historic Train ferry City of Milwaukee berthed and open in Manistee; possible overnight stays

**September 14** – Durand Union Station for the annual meeting –Kevin Keefe of Trains magazine is the speaker

**October 12** – Grand Haven Depot Museum

**November 2 or 9** – Albion Amtrak Depot

**December** – executive meeting only

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

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

We post meetings announcements on the web with agenda information and travel information. We have archived meeting minutes so you can have a look at past topics covered.
Observations from the Woodward Avenue Rapid Transit Alternative Analysis meetings

By Robert Patterson

During December, I attended several meetings of the Woodward Avenue Rapid Transit Alternative Analysis Meetings, presented by the Southeast Michigan Council of Government (SEMCOG). These public forum meetings in Oakland and Wayne counties were aimed at looking at what SEMCOG calls “Alternative Analysis - AA.” As one SEMCOG speaker stated, AA “does not start with a solution, but ends with one.”

There were three modal variations presented: light rail, bus rapid transit mixed in traffic, and bus rapid transit structured within a fixed guideway.

I attended three sessions, Berkley, Birmingham, and Ferndale. I missed the Detroit and Pontiac meetings wherein a more diverse demographic might have added more input.

The Berkley presentation was well attended by gender.

The Birmingham presentation was crowded, due to a small, tight meeting room, but did have much more active discussion. Here the demographic was far and away to the middle and senior age ranges.

The Ferndale presentation was attended by a more diverse group, with what appeared to be more student and college age participants.

Carmine Palombo, Transportation Planning at SEMCOG, was at the Ferndale presentation and his description of the event or events was, in answer to a question, “we are not close to any decision on any of the options and characteristics involved, speed, right of way, etc. We aren’t even close.”

He did seem to lean toward the bus rapid transit or the “hybrid” bus rapid transit approach. It would appear what SEMCOG may be close to is an attempt to steal the thunder from the M-1 Woodward development for the 3 miles of New Center to Downtown Detroit. The main impression is that, despite the desire of many to push for a true regional rail solution to 21st Century urban living, this is still Oakland country’s transit AA, as unfocused and unfunded as it is, with plenty of mileage separating the New Center area and Oakland County’s 8 Mile Road line in the sand.

Mr. Palombo referred to the M-1 as a “streetcar”, which it more probably is, but pushed an implied legitimacy to the Oakland County bus rapid transit format for SEMCOG’s version, while displaying some personal ownership of a Woodward Avenue version of Light or Bus Rapid Transit.

One of my questions focused on how many stops and where? Answer: at the one mile roads. Then I asked, how does a person move between the half mile roads? Answer: by other transit means. It appears this system may be intended as an over lay to bus routes.

Then the question is do we need it?

A few people drilled deeper to the core of the problem when asking “why the Detroit area always has plans and plans, but nothing ever comes from it?” Their question went unanswered, covered over by a bureaucratic form of tap-dancing.

A real answer may begin with a focus on the entitlement nature of planning agencies that insure there is always enough money for the first phase of initial planning, but no movement to real world political commitment and completion.

After years of attending meetings like this I am reminded of the mythical character, Keyser Soze, in the 1995 movie “The Usual Suspects.” Soze is a boogeyman legend among the criminals in the film that has the effect of keeping the status quo. When it comes to mass transit in Metro Detroit, maybe we need to define who or what the real Keyser Soze is.

This report was presented at the MARP member meeting on Jan. 12 in Williamston.

Commuter Rail? Event Rail? Both?

By Jim Hinkins

The future for commuter rail looks very good in southeast Michigan. Seventeen passenger cars, with MI-Train paint jobs, have been renovated and completed by Michigan Department of Transportation. Engines and cab cars have been acquired and testing at 79 mph was completed by Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG.)

The recent establishment of a regional transit authority to administer existing and proposed transit options such as light rail, rapid transit buses, Detroit and suburban buses and commuter rail seems promising. So what are we waiting for?

In a MARP-supported study in the 90's, eight existing heavy rail corridors were identified and a potential commuter rail lines. One of those, the east-west Ann Arbor to Detroit, and another, running north-south Ann Arbor to Howell, are on SEMCOG’s project list. Both of these services would be MI-TRAINS, with AA to Detroit commuter running on the same line as Amtrak.

We can start commuter rail service now, even though track improvements and stations have not yet been completed. Coordination between Amtrak and freight lines is a necessity. Simple morning and afternoon runs could be put into service. Temporary storage and lay over facilities could be used in Jackson and Pontiac.

It is time to let the public know that these services will soon be available, with the possibility of expanded service in the future. At best, let them know the progress that has taken place. With public support of event rail for sporting events and Downtown/New Center Detroit activities, there is even more reason to get started. MARP partnering with state and local level transit agencies, is ready and willing to help promote Commuter Rail in the Southeast Michigan Region. Again, what are we waiting for?

Jim Hinkins is MARP’s Metro Detroit Chairman.
**MDOT purchases railroad for 110 mph service**

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and Norfolk Southern Railway Co. (NS) signed a sale agreement that transfers ownership of 135 miles of NS railroad to MDOT for $140 million on Dec. 7.

The line is part of Amtrak’s Wolverine and Blue Water passenger rail services between Kalamazoo and Dearborn.

After ownership transfers to MDOT, the line also will continue to provide freight rail services to major Michigan companies.

Although it will have no immediate effect on the traveling passenger, transfer of title to the line is one step in a multi-step process that will pave the way for track improvements designed to accommodate passenger train speeds up to 110 mph.

This will knock about 30 minutes off the travel time between Detroit and Chicago, reducing the overall trip time between the two cities to about five hours.

Once the transition to MDOT ownership is final, which is expected to occur by spring 2013, Amtrak will handle upcoming track and crossing upgrades that must be in place before accelerated passenger service can go into effect.

Expected to take two to four years to complete, the upgrades will include new, continuously welded rail and ties, improvements to highway-rail grade crossings, fiber-optic lines for train and signal control systems, and gates and flashers at highway-rail grade crossings.

NS will retain an exclusive freight easement to preserve and grow its freight business.

The $140 million used to purchase the line included FRA High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program grant funds, plus a state match of $37.5 million.

The FRA also awarded $196.5 million to MDOT for the major track and signal improvements on this corridor.

**Ann Arbor Railroad sale may help bring WALLY into city**

Watco has applied for regulatory permission to buy the 50 mile-long Ann Arbor Railroad that links Ann Arbor and Toledo.

Ed McKechnie, a Watco executive vice president and chief commercial officer, said his company expects to receive regulatory approval for the acquisition by early February.

The company owns and operates several short-line railroads across the country including a lease to operate the Norfolk Southern Railway between Grand Rapids and Elkhart.

News of the changing ownership in January sparked questions about whether Watco will be more amenable to talking with local officials about the proposed WALLY commuter rail line from Howell to Ann Arbor.

WALLY supporters have met staunch opposition from the current owners of the Ann Arbor Railroad to bring WALLY near downtown Ann Arbor and Michigan Stadium using Ann Arbor Railroad’s bridge and tracks at the Huron River.

McKechnie told AnnArbor.com he hasn’t yet had talks with anyone from the Michigan Department of Transportation or the city about his company’s acquisition of the railroad and what it could mean, but he’s hopeful there will be a good conversation.

McKechnie said when he came to Ann Arbor to look at the railroad and saw how close it comes to Michigan Stadium, he knew there’d be a desire to add some type of passenger rail.

“We’re not saying yes, we’re not saying no,” he said, suggesting Watco doesn’t want to be associated with any type of passenger rail unless it can meet people’s expectations for performance.

“Passenger rail business is vastly different than freight rail,” he said. “We’re not going to get into something where we can’t exceed people’s expectations. It’s gotta be a real deal.

“The good news is MDOT is one of the premiere transit agencies in the country,” he added. “We’re hopeful there will be a good conversation.”

**Streetcars returning to Woodward**

The M-1 Rail streetcar project in Detroit can move forward “immediately” using a $25 million Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant previously awarded for transit in the city, U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced on Jan. 18.

The grant will be used to help pay for construction of a planned 3.3-mile streetcar line designed to help revitalize Detroit’s historic Woodward Avenue corridor, U.S. Department of Transportation officials said in a prepared statement.

“What I have seen happen in Detroit is a transformation,” U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood told a gathering of top civic, political and community leaders at Wayne State University, which is on the $140-million M-1 Rail streetcar line’s planned 3-mile route from downtown to New Center. “This is a day of celebration for this city.”

M-1 Rail backers said construction on the largely private-sector effort -- funded by Detroit’s business titans, major employers, the city’s Downtown Development Authority and the Troy-based Kresge Foundation -- could begin as early as this summer, with the system operating by late 2015.

The nonprofit M-1 Rail Corp. -- a coalition of private businesses, foundations, public and private institutions -- has committed more than $100 million toward construction and operation of the $137 million project. The remainder will be funded by state and local sources. M-1 Rail Corp. initially will operate the streetcar line.

Backers raised $35 million from Kresge, $9 million from the Downtown Development Authority and smaller but significant pledges from Detroit’s major automakers, WSU, the Detroit Medical Center, Henry Ford Health System and others. The effort was buoyed by the support of Roger Penske of Penske Corp., Quicken Loans’ Dan Gilbert, the Ilitch organization and Compuware founder Peter Karmanos.

The funding announcement comes weeks after Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder signed into law legislation creating a Regional Transportation Authority to develop and operate public transportation projects in Detroit and across the state.

The line will include 11 stations, with connections to Campus Martius; Comerica Park, home of the Detroit Tigers baseball team; Detroit Medical Center; and Wayne State University.

Streetcars last ran on Woodward in 1956.