

THE MICHIGAN PASSENGER

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of Railroad Passengers

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Constitutional amendment could boost train funding

BY LARRY SOBCZAK

Passenger train and mass transit programs in the state may see an estimated \$112 million increase annually if voters approve an amendment to the state constitution raising the sales tax and restructuring how taxes are col-

lected for transportation.

In a December lame-duck session, Michigan lawmakers approved plans for a statewide ballot proposal and an 11-bill package that could yield \$1.2 billion a year in new funding for roads and bridges as well as the

estimated \$112 million increase to the Comprehensive Transportation Fund (CTF) which funds programs such as passenger trains, transit programs, intercity bus and freight rail.

The \$112 million figure for
(See FUNDING, page 6)



DOUBLE TRACK. Crews delivered rails on Dec. 23 in Dearborn just west of the new train station for a second mainline. Workers will install a second track from Monroe Street in Dearborn to the diamond at Wayne Junction this spring. This means tracks 1 and 2 will run from Town Line (Greenfield Avenue in Dearborn) to CP Ypsilanti, just east of Depot Town. The upgrade is funded by part of a \$240 million federal grant awarded in 2010 to upgrade passenger service to 110 mph between Detroit and Chicago. (Photos by Steve Sobel.)



Wrong timing idles commuter cars

BY LARRY SOBCZAK

The public and Michigan lawmakers are asking how the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) ended up with nearly two dozen commuter railcars sitting in a rail yard instead of providing service to Ann Arbor as originally intended.

The questions arose from an article published in the Detroit Free Press Feb. 1 that revealed

MDOT was spending \$1.9 million annually in leasing fees to Federated Rail to essentially store 23 commuter railcars in Owosso.

The article prompted the Michigan House of Representatives' Transportation Committee to convene Feb. 10 to get answers from MDOT Director Kirk Steudle on the matter.

The answer to how the situation developed is in the long lead

time it takes to order passenger rail cars from the manufacturer and the unexpected changes in railroad ownership as well as funding while MDOT was waiting for the railcar order to be filled.

"It's not like ordering a brand new automobile," MDOT Spokesman Michael Frezell said. "They are not sitting around in a factory waiting for custom-

(See COMMUTER, page 3)

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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.

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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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COMMUTER (Continued from page 1)

ers to buy them. As a matter of fact, there is a shortage of commuter rail cars in some parts of the country so we are lucky to have them now.”

The 23 refurbished commuter cars were ordered by MDOT in 2010 at a cost of \$10.3 million for commuter service between Ann Arbor and Detroit as well as Ann Arbor and Howell.

In 2013, MDOT became the new owner of the segment of the Norfolk Southern Railway which the Ann Arbor to Detroit commuter service is slated to run along.

The state is now in the process of rehabilitating that segment of the track, creating a

continuous double track segment between Dearborn and Ypsilanti and replacing antiquated signals dating back to the 1930s.

“We can’t run a commuter service along that section of track until the work is complete,” said Tim Hoeffner, who is Director of MDOT’s Office of Rail.

The work is expected to be completed after the 2016 construction season.

Meanwhile, the Ann Arbor Railroad was sold to Watco in 2013, affecting the Ann Arbor to Howell service which is known as the Washtenaw and Livingston Line or WALLY.

In a break from the old owners, Watco said it was interested in allowing the commuter service to use their tracks.

“It really changed the nature of the project,” Frezell said.

A new feasibility study was needed for WALLY and the study is a necessary component to receiving federal grants and funding for the project.

Frezell said that while the cars were being refurbished, the source of funding for the commuter services at the federal level had switched from the Federal Highway Administration to the Federal Transit Administration and the Federal Railroad Administration causing problems for grant applications.

Hoeffner said that the commuter projects were on a fast track to completion in the late 2000s when the railcar order was placed and that it would have been unacceptable to have funding but no cars to operate the service.

He said the state saved considerable money by leasing the

refurbished bi-level stainless steel commuter cars from the 1950s and 1960s versus purchasing brand new cars.

The cost to refurbish the railcars was approximately \$450,000 apiece, whereas purchasing new railcars would have cost between \$2 million and \$3 million apiece.

At that rate, MDOT would have had to pay lease fees on the refurbished cars in the Owosso yard for decades before the cost exceeded that of brand-new cars.

Despite the savings, Hoeffner said that if he could have anticipated the unexpected changes in funding and ownership, he would have delayed the order.

“Obviously we would like to have those cars in service,” he said.

Amtrak sets revenue record in fiscal year 2014

Amtrak generated record revenue of \$3.2 billion during fiscal-year 2014 and recorded the lowest operating loss since 1973 at \$227 million.

During the 2014 fiscal year, which ended Sept. 30, Amtrak covered 93 percent of its operating costs with ticket sales and other revenue, up from 89 percent the year before. The unaudited operating loss of \$227 million represented a 37 percent decrease from the 2013 fiscal year’s operating loss and 52 percent drop from the 2007 fiscal year’s mark, Amtrak officials said in a press release.

As a result of the railroad’s strong performance, long-term debt reductions of 61 percent over the past seven years and other factors, Moody’s Investor Service confirmed Amtrak’s A1/Stable debt rating as of Nov. 12,

they said.

“Our efforts to operate a more financially sound railroad for our stakeholders continues to exceed expectations,” Amtrak President and Chief Executive Officer Joseph Boardman said. “Amtrak’s customer value proposition improves each year as seen by our continued ridership and revenue growth for the better part of the past decade.”

Amtrak officials attributed the improved financial performance to an ongoing corporate restructuring program that features increased financial transparency, a de-leveraged balance sheet, an emphasis on improved service and increasing ridership.

The railroad also is developing the infrastructure and organization, and employing the equipment needed to ensure its growth

continues, Amtrak officials said. In recent years, the railroad has expanded state-supported services, introduced Wi-Fi and eTicketing technologies, procured new equipment for the Northeast Corridor and long-distance services, implemented a major planning effort for next-generation high-speed rail and installed positive train control equipment.

To meet future passenger demands, increased levels of federal capital investment are needed to improve, expand and replace the aging infrastructure that supports intercity passenger rail,

Boardman and Amtrak Chairman Tony Coscia said.

“Our financial performance over the past year is the clearest indication yet that Amtrak’s investments, operating efficiencies and focus on its customers is paying off,” Coscia said. “As we continue to make improvements in our operating and financial performance, we call upon the federal government and our stakeholders to support the capital investments necessary to keep moving Amtrak forward.”

Amtrak revenue by route

Service name	FY 2013	FY 2014	Change
Wolverine:	\$19,398,853	\$18,900,614	-2.6%
Blue Water:	\$6,228,730	\$6,487,869	+4.2%
Pere Marquette:	\$3,152,828	\$3,101,530	-1.6%
Michigan Services total:	\$28,780,411	\$28,490,013	-1.1%
Amtrak national total:	\$2,105,007,664	\$2,188,654,846	+4.0%

Source: Amtrak

Port Huron area explores future station option

BY LARRY SOBCZAK

The Amtrak station in Port Huron has become a victim of its own success in recent years.

Both the station and the train that serves it, Amtrak’s Blue Water, set ridership records in 2014.

The station is so popular that at train times people crowd into the so-called temporary modular building erected in 1974 and fill the parking lot beyond capacity with many people parking their vehicles on the lawn and on 10th Street, which is a tow away zone.

The overcrowding problems have caught the attention of Paul Maxwell, who is director of the

Port Huron Township Downtown Development Authority.

“The current station has very, very tight quarters,” Maxwell said at the MARP November meeting in Port Huron.

Maxwell said that he is cautiously trying to assemble a coalition of stakeholders to deal with the dilemma.

One strong proposal which is under investigation is the relocation of the Amtrak station from the southeast corner of Canadian National’s Tunnel Yard to the northwest corner.

“We would like to relocate the Port Huron Station to a location on 24th Street, about eight to

ten blocks from the current location,” he said.

Canadian National Railway is selling about 120 acres of land at that location.

The proposed location would allow for an adequately sized parking lot and a new station.

The new building could include intermodal facilities for taxis, city buses and intercity buses.

Trains at the 24th Street location would have access to tracks leading towards Canada, Detroit and Chicago via East Lansing without much trouble.

For automobile travelers, the proposed location has easy ac-

cess to Interstates 69 and 94 as well as the Blue Water Bridge.

The proposed station is near an existing bike trail which would link the station to downtown Port Huron by non-motorized means. Other complements to the station could include a small hotel and a family-style restaurant.

“We see this as an economic engine for the entire region,” Maxwell said.

Maxwell said the first step towards relocating the Port Huron station is to secure funding for a \$100,000 feasibility study.

Maxwell said it could be as long as five years before a new station is built.

From the boardroom:**Meet the newest MARP board members****BY KAY CHASE**

The MARP executive committee has recently named three new members, all of whom have a wide range of experience and interests that they bring to the organization. I'd like to introduce them to you.

Don Westcott was appointed to one of the four at-large positions on the MARP executive board, with responsibility for planning and coordinating the monthly member meetings. Warren Fritz has filled the long vacant position of West Region chair, while Steve Vagnozzi has assumed the equivalent position for the East-Central region.

Don Westcott is a kind of "renaissance" man of railroading, having been involved a wide variety of rail-related activities. He has been President of the Board of Durand Union Station, Inc. He currently serves as the Superintendent of the North-Central Region of the National Model Railroad Association and is a past-president of the Mid-Michigan Railway Historical Society. He is a part-time conductor on the Huckleberry Railroad and, along with Barbara, his wife of 46 years, devotes countless volunteer hours to the railroad and to Crossroads Village.

Don grew up in Durand (is it any wonder he has trains in his blood?). He started drawing at age seven, a talent recognized and fostered by his parents and which eventually led to a degree in industrial design from Michigan State University in 1968. Don told me that industrial design includes a wide gamut of possible career choices and his life certainly illustrates this point.

He began his professional life as a draftsman and was soon designing furniture for Herman-Miller where he worked for 15 years. He has worked at three different architectural firms and was a principal in setting up GM's Hydromatic plant in Three Rivers in the early 80's. Before his recent retirement, Don had spent twenty years at Harada & Associates, a general contracting firm offering design services and custom home remodeling, rising to President of the company.

He continues to do consulting work while pursuing his current career of "professional volunteer." Appearing somewhat frazzled at the executive committee retreat in mid-December, he confessed to having put in 174 volunteer hours since Thanksgiving!

In point of fact, Don has done significant volunteer work throughout his lifetime. With no children of their own, Don and Barb have worked with children in a number of roles, including a shepherding a group of teenagers on a European trip and guiding another group on a visit to a Colorado dude ranch. Other organizations that have benefitted from his energy and enthusiasm are the First Presbyterian Church in

Flint and the Friends of McFarlan Veteran's Memorial Park, for which he is spearheading a \$350,000 fund raising campaign. In his "spare" time, he likes to relax with woodworking and modeling.

Don sees his involvement in MARP as a way to raise awareness about passenger trains and encourage people to use this form of transportation.

I first met Warren Fritz and his wife Marti when the three of us were answering phones for the local public radio spring fund drive. Between calls, Warren was regaling us with tales of their adventures sailing their 38 ft. vessel "Jubilate" on a ten-week, 1600 mile journey on Lakes Michigan and Huron. When Warren paused to take a breath, I chimed in that, personally, I preferred traveling by train. Warren piped up "Oh, do you know about this rail passenger organization?" Warren has long been in the habit of picking up each new issue of The Michigan Passenger at the station and had seen that MARP was looking for a West Region chair. He wondered what to do next.

Well, I suggested he contact John Langdon and, being a man of action, Warren did just that – and he has been busy ever since!

Warren was born in Chicago, but spent most of his growing up years in Skokie. He earned a degree in accountancy from Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois. Fresh out of college, he joined the Peace Corps and spent two life-changing years teaching in Addis Ababa, and later in a nearby village, during an interesting time in the reign of Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie.

Returning to the U.S. in 1965, Warren took a job as an accountant with Price Waterhouse in Detroit, but soon decided that accounting wasn't really what he wanted to do with his life. He enrolled at Michigan State University and earned a degree in International Education & African Studies with the hope of going back to Africa. Although that move is still on the horizon, Warren says the degree has served him well for its emphasis on a philosophy of education that has informed much of his work since.

His next jobs were in the public sector, running a Head Start program in Hillsdale, and then developing a Day Care Center in a church on Mt. Hope in Lansing (where he met Marti). From there, he took a job as Director of Mental Health for seven counties surrounding Alpena just at the time the state was closing its mental hospitals and transferring responsibility to community-

based programs.

Warren "decided to have my mid-life crisis early and start a bike shop somewhere in SW Michigan". With his analytical bent, he poured over the 1970 census records and determined that Kalamazoo was a community with a lot of advantages. Having moved six times in two years, he and Marti made the plunge and now have lived in the same house in Kalamazoo for 41 years. The bicycle shop, too, became a reality: New World Bicycles on the corner of Lover's Lane in Portage.

Involved since college in "useful non-profits that do good things", Warren has more recently worked with Colleagues International and has served as Board President for Habitat for Humanity in Kalamazoo. One of his associates as he pursued these interests planted the idea of getting into financial services. Warren took the bait, establishing his own firm. He's now been at it for 31 years.

He returned to school around 2000 for a degree in Library Science from Wayne State University, where he found archival work "fascinating" as he organized the papers of Malcolm Pirney, an early leader at the W.K. Kellogg Biological Station.

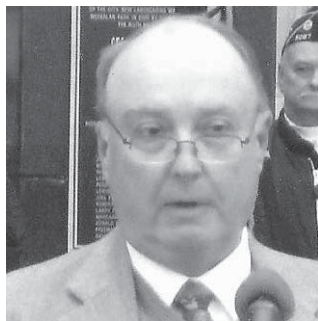
Asked what he brings to MARP, Warren says "'my best suit – outreach", building on his varied experience to connect with individuals and organizations that can advance passenger trains.

Warren and Marti (who recently retired from Kalamazoo Public Library) have three grown sons. When they manage to find some spare time, they like to go sailing and, of course, they look for opportunities for train trips.

Steve Vagnozzi has had a lifelong interest in train travel. His dad, Aldo Vagnozzi (who was a big Amtrak supporter while serving in the Michigan House of Representatives), took him on a Detroit streetcar ride just before that service ended. His first train ride was from Grand Rapids to Plymouth on the C & O railroad. He remembers watching the soup slosh while eating in the dining car.

Steve's first Amtrak trip was from Detroit to New York City in 1974 or 1975 when the equipment was in pretty rough shape. In 1979 he bought a USA rail pass and traveled to San Francisco, San Diego and Los Angeles. The return trip was memorable because the train was full of people who were grounded due to an airline strike. He remembers the train crew throwing an inebriated passenger off the train at Barstow, CA in the middle of the night. In 1982 he rode the Denver and Rio Grande from Salt Lake City to Denver. He and his wife traveled to Toronto on the International in the 1980s.

(See **BOARDROOM**, page 6)

**Warren Fritz****Don Westcott****Steve Vagnozzi**

All Aboard! Now departing—The Michigan Flyer

BY HUGH GURNEY

Even some of us die hard rail fans *must* fly on occasion. Twice in the past two years, my wife, daughter and I have used Michigan Flyer/Air Ride to get to and from Detroit Metro Airport. I am a real fan.

Michigan Flyer/Air Ride operates 12 round trips daily between East Lansing and Detroit Metro Airport, the first bus leaving East Lansing at 2:45 a.m. and the last at 5:05 p.m. From Detroit Metro, the first bus departs at 6:10 a.m. and the last at 10:15 p.m. All buses stop twice in Ann Arbor, at the Blake Transit Center downtown and at the Kensington Court Hotel near the junction of State Street and I-94. A thirteenth bus operates daily, Ann Arbor-Detroit Metro.

The trip takes two hours between East Lansing and Detroit Metro, 40 minutes between downtown Ann Arbor and 30 minutes between the Kensington Court Hotel and the airport. On time performance stands at 98 percent, something Amtrak fans can only dream about.

Long term parking is available at each of the three departure points, in downtown East Lansing, downtown Ann Arbor and the Kensington Court Hotel in Ann Arbor.

Thanks to a cooperative agreement with the Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority, parking costs just \$2 per day at the Ann Arbor locations.

Passengers 65 years-old and older ride at half fare between Ann Arbor and Detroit Metro with an AAATA Senior Pass. All seniors qualify for the AAATA Senior Pass, not just Ann Arbor residents. Call 734-973-6500 for details.

In mid-November 2014, my family and I flew from Detroit Metro to Ft. Lauderdale, departure point of a Holland America Caribbean cruise.

About two weeks before departure I called the Michigan Flyer office to book passage from the Kensington Court Hotel in Ann Arbor to the McNamara Terminal at Detroit Metro.

I was told that I could save \$2 if I booked online but I elected to proceed with arrangements by phone.

We wanted to have plenty of time before our flight departed at 10:15 a.m. so we decided to take the 6:20 a.m. bus from Ann Arbor.



The Michigan Flyer/Air Ride connects East Lansing to Metro Airport via Ann Arbor. (Photo courtesy Michigan Flyer/Air Ride, Indian Trails)

Within minutes the boarding passes for the bus and a parking permit to place on the dashboard of the car arrived by e-mail.

Because we both have AAATA Senior Passes, my wife and I were charged the senior rate. Round trip transportation for three plus parking for twelve days came to just \$68.00.

On the day of our departure, we arrived at the Kensington Court Hotel around 6 a.m., unloaded our luggage near the restaurant door (according to instructions) and parked the car in the designated area.

The bus arrived as scheduled.

We gave our names to the driver who verified that we had reservations on his hand held computer and boarded the bus.

Promptly at 6:50 a.m., the bus arrived at the McNamara Terminal.

The driver directed us to an elevator and we were soon checking in at the Delta counter. We had ample time for breakfast at the National Coney Island on the boarding concourse.

Returning 11 days later, we picked up our luggage, followed

the signs marked Ground Transportation and quickly found the Indian Trails/Air Ride bus stop.

As it was cold and windy, we decided to wait until the scheduled departure time in a heated, enclosed area near the elevators.

Within five minutes, we were approached by an employee of Prospect Airport Services. Confirming that we were Michigan Flyer/Air Ride customers, he asked us to wait in the heated waiting room until he gave the word that the bus was approaching.

A few minutes later, he announced that the bus was arriving and led us to the designated stop. The bus departed as scheduled at 3:45 p.m. and we were back in Ann Arbor at 4:15 p.m. and in our car headed home by 4:20 p.m.

The clean, comfortable buses were about $\frac{3}{4}$ full each way, an indication that the service is well patronized. Most passengers probably did not qualify for the senior pass.

Due to protests by MARP and other passenger groups and

a law suit by a paralyzed veteran and a blind East Lansing resident, the Wayne County Airport Authority has agreed to provide a comfortable, climate controlled indoor waiting area in the Ground Transportation Center with accessible phones, restrooms, drinking fountains and other amenities nearby by June 15, 2015 at the latest. MARP, among others, will be tracking these promised improvements to assure that the Airport Authority lives up to its agreement.

If planning to travel by Michigan Flyer/Air Ride, always check www.michiganflyer.com or phone 517-333-0400 to confirm schedules and make reservations. All transactions are done through the web site or by phone.

It is possible to book travel between East Lansing and Ann Arbor or reverse on Michigan Flyer/Air Ride.

Michigan Flyer/Air Ride is a subsidiary of Indian Trails, which operates most of the Amtrak Thruway service in Michigan. Indian Trails has a strong commitment to public transportation in Michigan.

New fleet of Michigan Flyer buses hit roads

Michigan Flyer put a brand new fleet of seven luxury motorcoaches on the road in November, representing a \$3.8 million investment by parent company, Indian Trails.

The new fleet—all state-of-the-art 2015 Prevost H3-45 coaches—is equipped with technology that reduces exhaust pollutants to near zero. In addition, motorcoaches like these achieve about 206 passenger miles per gallon on average, and have the potential to remove 50-55 automobiles from the highway, fur-

ther reducing air pollution and traffic congestion according to an Indian Trails press release.

Safety features include an electronic stability system that enables drivers to avoid danger on slippery roads; an engine fire-detection and suppression system; two GPS systems; and a tire pressure monitoring system. All the coaches are equipped with three-point retractable seatbelts for passengers; ADA-compliant wheelchair lifts, and a large under-floor luggage compartment.

As for comfort, the new coaches offer deluxe, ergonomic seating with leather headrests and ample leg room; individual climate controls, reading lamps and cup holders; tinted, panoramic side windows; 110-volt AC outlets at each seat for charging mobile devices; free WiFi; on-board lavatories, and enclosed, overhead parcel racks.

The Michigan Flyer has carried nearly 700,000 passengers since its inaugural trips in November 2006.

BOARDROOM

(Continued from page 4)

There was a gap in his train trips until his son, Justin, joined him on a trip from East Lansing to Glenwood Springs, CO. Justin was seven and suffered terrible ear pain when he flew, so Amtrak was a good alternative. That trip was the beginning of almost annual trips on Amtrak long distance trains. In 2005, Steve and Justin were lucky enough to travel on the Empire Builder just after its equipment had completed a major refurbishment. This trip evolved into a quest for Justin to travel to or through all 50 states before he started college. As part of this quest, the traveling duo rode every long distance route that travels south or west from Chicago. They have also traveled from Boston to Toledo on the Lake Shore Limited. The 50th state, Alaska, was visited in July 2013 just before Justin started classes at Western Michigan University. They traveled from Anchorage to Fairbanks on the Alaska Railroad.

Steve and Justin's next big adventure -- Burbank to San Francisco and back to Chicago -- will pick up routes that Justin hasn't been on before. Steve is excited to travel in the opposite direction from his 1979 trip and is eagerly anticipating some beautiful snow scenery on this early spring trip through the Sierras and the Colorado Rockies.

Steve retired from the State of Michigan in 2002, spending his last 15 years as the IT systems manager for occupational and health licensing. He has been a self-employed IT consultant since then. His primary customer for the last 10 years is a Maryland software company that provides licensing and regulatory software for state licensing boards. He has attended MARP meetings when able to fit them into a busy schedule (especially busy on Saturdays during the college football season). Steve finished a four year term on the Okemos school board in December. As a result, he is now in a position to devote the needed time to be the MARP Central Region Chair.

Steve is looking forward to celebrating the opening of the new East Lansing station and working to promote Amtrak travel to millennials and college students. He is particularly interested in working to add a second round trip to the Blue Water route, as well as facilitating tours of rolling stock used on Michigan services.

Corrections and clarifications

CORRECTION: An article in the Summer 2014 edition about the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission at bottom of page 4, end of column 1 continuing into next column, should have read:

Joe Shacter, Illinois Department of Transportation Director of Public and Intermodal Transportation, said that 30 minutes will be shaved from the Chicago to St. Louis route by the end of 2015 and that by 2017, travel time between the two cities will be cut to 4-1/2 hours as speeds approach 110 m.p.h. along the entire route

MARP is indeed fortunate to have the talents and experience that Don, Warren and Steve bring to our organization. Please welcome them and when they come knocking on your door, I hope you will join me in helping them succeed in their endeavors.

Kay Chase is Communications Coordinator and editor of MARP's monthly e-bulletin. When she is not in front of a computer, she likes to be out-of-doors.

FUNDING

(Continued from page 1)

the CTF was announced by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder at a Dec. 18 press conference.

Actual funding levels for each program in the CTF are subject to future legislative debate and appropriation bills.

The revenue generated for the CTF also will depend on fuel prices and other factors.

The cornerstone of the package, a proposed constitutional amendment to increase the state sales tax from 6 percent to 7 percent, passed the House in a 94-16 vote. It initially stalled in the Senate but was successful in a second vote, 26-12.

A ballot proposal wasn't the first choice for Snyder, who had previously supported a Senate plan that relied primarily on increase fuel taxes. The governor and legislative leaders met throughout the last week of the 2013-2014 legislative session to finalize a deal.

Supermajority support from both chambers means the proposed constitutional amendment will go to the statewide ballot in a May 2015 election, where voters will decide the ultimate fate of the transit and road funding package.

The ballot proposal would also exempt motor fuel from the sales tax and ensure that the School Aid Fund is not used to supplement higher education budgets.

Approval of the ballot proposal will trigger these funding changes:

- Raise \$1.3 billion for transportation, with \$1.2 billion a year going to roads and about \$112 million going to transit.
- Remove the sales tax from fuel sales.
- Convert the existing 19-cent per gallon gasoline and 15-cent per gallon diesel taxes to a wholesale version. Gas taxes could top 41 cents by October 2015, but there would be no additional sales tax, and all resulting revenue would go to transportation.
- Increase the fuel taxes that Snyder said will result in about a 3-cent-a-gallon increase from the average fuel price in 2013.
- Increases of \$45 million in vehicle registration fees and \$50 million in fees for heavy trucks. A spokeswoman for the Senate Majority Leader said registration fees for cars and light trucks won't go up, but the 10% discounts new car buyers receive for each of the first three years they own their cars will be eliminated.
- Pay down MDOT debt from 1990s-era projects.
- Restore the Earned Income Tax Credit, which was slashed in 2011, to its full 20% of the federal EITC level. Officials said that could put another \$300 per year in the pockets of low-income families.
- Protect funding for schools and local governments, which receive much of the money that was formerly raised from the sales tax on fuel sales. Officials said the plan would actually increase school funding by \$300 million a year. Universities could no longer be funded from the School Aid Fund, though community colleges could be.
- Raise registration fees for commercial trucks while also hiking the cost of registration for hybrid and electric vehicles between \$25 and \$200.

The increase in transit funding would be the first increase since 1987.

Compiled from numerous press reports throughout the state.

Coscia suggests a trust fund for Amtrak

Amtrak Board of Directors Chairman Anthony R. Coscia said Congress should consider approving the creation of a Transportation Trust Fund that recognizes the importance of intercity passenger rail in the nation's transportation landscape, along with other modes of transportation.

In order to fund long-term capital in-

vestments in intercity rail service, Congress "should focus on . . . providing predictable, dedicated funding to develop and implement capital investments for the Northeast Corridor (NEC) and other rail corridors between America's major metropolitan areas," Coscia said Dec. 10, 2014 before a U.S. Senate committee.

Upcoming MARP meetings

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.

Check our website at:
www.marp.org

Check our Facebook page at:
[facebook.com/pages/Michigan-Association-of-Railroad-Passengers/](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Michigan-Association-of-Railroad-Passengers/)

MARP members also frequently set up a booth at festivals, train shows and other events to spread the word about passenger rail in Michigan. Contact Chuck Merckel crmerckel@aol.com, to volunteer for the next show.

What to do with Amtrak's Lakeshore Limited?

BY HUGH GURNEY

I never had a chance to ride the Twentieth Century Limited in its glory days. Watching Cary Grant and Eva Saint Marie aboard that fabled train in the move *North By Northwest*, I know that the Lake Shore Limited is a poor substitute.

Yet the Lake Shore Limited is a vital link in the Amtrak system, linking two of our nation's largest cities, New York and Chicago, to many not so small communities such as Toledo, Cleveland, Erie, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Albany. Boston, Worcester and Springfield are linked by the Boston section. The train serves 171 city-pairs according to the Midwest High Speed Rail Association.

Decidedly not glamorous and often dubbed the Late Shore Limited, the train is well patronized, transporting 27,036 passengers in a recent month, sixth in ridership among Amtrak's long distance trains. The National Association of Railroad Passengers and the Midwest High Speed Rail Association are currently co-sponsoring a study aimed at increasing its frequency to four daily.

An article by Fred W. Frailey in the January, 2015 issue of *Trains* suggests to me a first step. One reason the train loses so much time is that it is currently two trains hooked

A Lake Shore Limited train backing into Chicago Union Station. The Willis Tower (formerly known as the Sears Tower) is visible in the background. (Photo by Jerry Huddleston)



together between Chicago and Albany. Because of its length, it must make two stops at many stations to board and discharge passengers.

I suggest splitting the train now, with the Boston section running independently all the way from Chicago to Boston. Assuming that the eastbound New York section continues to depart Chicago at its current time of 9:30 p.m., why not have the Boston section depart at 4:30 p.m.? That would put it into Albany by 10 a.m. the next morning, permitting a connection to the Montreal bound Adirondack. Those headed south to New York City could transfer to either the Ethan Allen Express

or Empire Service #238 for the trip down the Hudson. Our train would reach Springfield, MA, in time to connect with the Vermonter for points in Vermont and arrive in Boston by 4 p.m.

For the westbound trip, I suggest that the Boston section follow its current schedule, departing Boston at 11:55 a.m., thus maintaining the connection with the northbound Vermonter at Springfield. With fewer double stops, it is possible the train would arrive in Chicago by 9 a.m. the next morning.

For the New York section, I suggest the Lake Shore Limited depart New York City three hours earlier, at 12:45 p.m., providing a 12:30 a.m. arrival

the next morning in Cleveland, a 2:55 a.m. arrival in Toledo and a 6:45 a.m. arrival in Chicago. Those wishing a later departure from New York City to points west of Albany could connect with the Boston section in Albany by taking Empire Service #235 at 2:20 p.m., Monday-Friday; the Ethan Allen Express at 3:15 p.m. Saturday-Thursday or Empire Service #237, departing NYC at 4:40 p.m. Monday-Friday.

The expense of splitting the Boston section and running it as a separate train all the way from Chicago to Boston should be far less than operating a totally new train. The New York section would require the addition of a café car and possibly a second locomotive, Chicago-Albany. The Boston section would require a diner, an additional sleeping car and at least two more coaches.

Individuals far more skilled than I would have to work with these suggestions to come up with totally realistic schedules.

With a Chicago-New York, a Chicago-Boston and a Chicago-Washington train in place, Michigan should insist that one of these trains serve Michigan, as recommended by MARP's Route Enhancement Committee. Michigan has been a strong Amtrak supporter from the very beginning and deserves better rail service to the East Coast.

Supreme Court hears about on-time performance

On Dec. 8 the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments on the lawsuit between the Association of American Railroads (AAR) and Amtrak over the performance standards developed as a result of the 2008 Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA).

That act required Amtrak and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to jointly develop standards and metrics for measuring adequate passenger train service. Amtrak's side was argued by the Department of Justice (DOJ).

The AAR's contention is that Amtrak was a private corpo-

ration and that Congress did not have the power to allow one private company to set regulations for other private companies.

The DOJ argued that Amtrak was a government entity, and therefore does have that power.

The U.S. District Court in Washington D.C. agreed with Amtrak, and, as noted in the oral arguments, on-time performance went up after the decision was rendered. However, the D.C. Court of Appeals, overturned that ruling entirely, and

on-time performance dropped markedly.

Friend of the Court briefs were submitted by the National

Association of Railroad Passenger (NARP), the Environmental Law and Policy Center, All Aboard Ohio, Virginians for High Speed Rail, and Emory Law School professor Alex Volokh.

First, in this case, Amtrak spoke for roughly 30 minutes, followed by the AAR for the same amount of time.

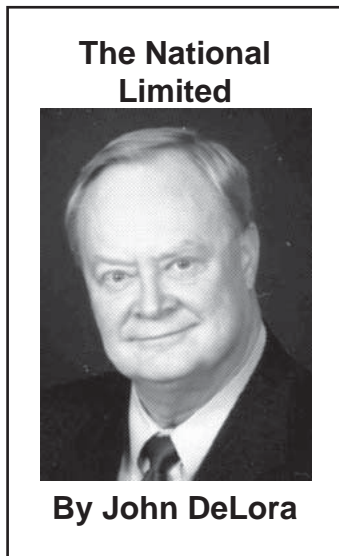
Most people, upon reading or hearing the arguments, are struck by the members of the Court continually interrupting the parties and peppering them with questions. One can only be impressed with the knowledge and ability of the attorneys on each side to quote from memory, extensively on decisions from prior court decisions even while they are being constantly interrupted by the justices.

The issues most prominent in the oral arguments were the delegatory powers of Congress,

which leads to whether Amtrak is a private company or government agency, and whether the standards developed under PRIIA were government regulations. The delegatory powers arguments are far too complicated to go into here. The DOJ said the PRIIA standards were not regulations, but only a "trigger" which would bring a case before the Surface Transportation Board and then only after a complaint had been filed.

Environmental Law and Policy Center attorney, Karen Torrent, who wrote the brief for NARP, was present and said afterwards that the decision could go either way. A decision on the case is expected sometime in the late spring.

The transcript of the arguments can be found on the Supreme Court website; It runs 63 pages, it's a critical issue and it's a guaranteed cure for insomnia.



The National Limited

By John DeLora



The top photo shows the John Dingell Transit Center in Dearborn from the Michigan Avenue side. In the middle left photo, Amtrak train no. 351 is the first train to arrive at the transit center on Dec. 10. Passengers in the middle right photo wait inside the station. Debbie Dingell, bottom left, poses next to an artist's rendition of the transit center which is named in honor of her husband. Rep. John Dingell, for whom the station is named, was unable to attend the ribbon-cutting due to an accident suffered the previous week. Dingell, a strong proponent of Amtrak, retired in December as the longest serving member of Congress. Amtrak train no. 353 leaves the station platform on Dec. 26 in the bottom right photo. (Photos by Steve Sobel.)

New transit center opens in Dearborn

BY JOHN DeLORA

Amtrak service began at Dearborn's new John D. Dingell Transit Center on Dec. 10.

The imposing \$28.1 million, 16,000 square-foot building is becoming known as "The Cathedral" due to its imposing silhouette. The station is an instant landmark and dominates an uncluttered site near Michigan Ave. and Oakwood Blvd. in west Dearborn.

Named after the longest-serving Congressman in U.S. history, and a strong proponent of Amtrak, Dingell unfortunately suffered an accident and was unable to attend the ribbon cutting and open house on Dec. 15 ceremony. His wife and successor to his Congressional seat, Debbie Dingell stood in for him at the reception.

Usually, I am the first one to criticize new station designs, but in this case, Am-

trak, Dearborn and MDOT hit the ball out of the park. The station was funded through a 2009 federal stimulus grant. (Remember those?)

Parking is ample, as demonstrated over the Christmas holiday travel period. For once, planners designed a station with ample seating and capability for easy expansion. Even at peak holiday periods, it has plenty of room to handle the crowds.

In addition to the main waiting area, there is a room on the west end which can be used for special displays, events or for overflow seating. The interior of the main waiting area has a bright, open feeling due to use of natural light and light brick and stone interior colors.

A second track has been laid on the south side of the right-of-way, but switches

have not yet been installed. For now, all trains stop on the north track next to the station. Out on the platform, bus-type shelters have been installed with radiant heaters which make them comfortable even in the coldest weather. The platforms have been built at 15" above top of rail so that they will be fully compliant with ADA regulations when the new Talgo and Midwest bi-level equipment go into service later this year and next.

SMART buses will serve the station using a loop with a stop directly in front of the main entrance. Service is expected to begin in early January.

The station was also built to allow for access to Greenfield Village, immediately to the south. A gate has been installed, but will only be used in the short term for groups.