



The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. (MARP) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation established in 1973 to improve passenger train service, travel conditions for passengers, and to work for the preservation of historic rail stations.

Monthly meetings are held at locations around the state. Check the website for dates and venues. The public is invited to attend.

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*The Michigan Passenger Editor and Webmaster, Larry Sobczak
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2016 MEETINGS

- 16 January** – REO Town Depot (former Grand Trunk Depot), Lansing
- February** – Cancelled
- 12 March** – Cleary’s Pub, Howell
- 16 April** – New Buffalo Library
- May** – Amtrak Train Days
- 11 June** – Amtrak Station, Dearborn
- July** – Executive Committee
- August** – tentative Marquette, in conjunction with 4th Annual MI Rail Conf.
- 24 September** – Annual Meeting at Durand Union Station
- 8 October** – Dowagiac
- November** – TBA
- December** – Executive Committee

Visit www.marp.org
Email marprail@yahoo.com

Amtrak vs. the Host Railroads

The Surface Transportation Board in December issued a call for comment on the interrelated issues of “on-time performance” and “preference” as it relates to Amtrak trains and their host railroads.

The comment period for the on-time-performance (OTP) proposal ended on February 8. Thank you to those MARP members who submitted comments, along with more than 100 other individuals and organizations. Search for Docket EP 726 [HERE](#) to read all comments. Particularly recommended is the submission from the [Environmental Law and Policy Center](#). The background information included in this document is an excellent primer for those who would like a better understanding of the issues.

We are now hearing from the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) and other advocacy organizations that the [proposed guidance on “preference”](#) poses the greater threat to the operations of the national passenger rail network.

The principle of “preference” was established by Congress in 1973 and has since been confirmed by the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Transportation. The statute -- 49 U.S.C. §24308(c) – states that “Amtrak has preference over freight transportation in using a rail line, junction, or crossing” . . . except in “emergencies” or circumstances in which providing Amtrak preference would “materially . . . lessen the quality of freight transportation provided to shippers.”

In its proposed policy, the STB maintains that the statute fails to define “preference”. Critics contend that the STB, in seeking to redefine preference, is overturning what has been accepted practice for more than 40 years. More importantly, and significantly, the Board seeks to establish requirements for the kinds of evidence it will accept in complaint proceedings. The concern is that the Board is, in effect, putting the burden of proof on the party bringing the complaint, asking the complainant to show “evidence of host carrier’s internal processes and incentives.” The board is particularly interested in receiving “evidence from which it can determine the host carriers’ policies and procedures used to satisfy their preference obligations to Amtrak trains” and “evidence indicating whether a host carrier’s policies and processes have, in practice, resulted in a pattern of minimized or exacerbated passenger train delays.”

Thus the STB’s proposal devotes most of its attention to what kinds of evidence it wants the “complainant” to present in making its case to the

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There will be no MARP Member Meeting in February
The next meeting is March 12 in Howell MI
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If This is January, We Must Be in REO Town

In what is becoming a January tradition, MARP held its first meeting of the year at the former GTW Depot in Lansing. This beautifully restored building, now called REO Town Depot, belongs to the Lansing Board of Water and Light and is used for their board meetings and conferences. The LBWL has generously made the building available for yearly MARP meetings, to the great delight of members who recall boarding trains here when it was still a functioning rail depot.

Tim Hoeffner, Director of MDOT's Office of Rail, was the featured speaker for this meeting attended by 45 members and 13 guests. Hoeffner gave an update on the ongoing projects along the Chicago-Detroit corridor, as well as addressing some of the challenges facing his agency in continuing to improve and expand passenger train service in Michigan.

Michigan completed acquisition of 135 miles of track between Kalamazoo and Dearborn on 6 December 2012. During the following two construction seasons, work on the Kalamazoo-Battle Creek segment replaced ties and rail and completed curve modifications and grade crossings. During the 2015 work period, 140,000 ties were replaced, 9 miles of new mainline track were laid east of Dearborn (thus double-tracking this stretch), with 6 new cross overs and upgrades at 18 grade crossings. Another project enhanced Norfolk Southern access to Wayne Yard (Ford plant). In all, 50 slow orders have now been eliminated. The West Detroit connection, a key piece of the plan to improve time-keeping is now complete. Reportedly, Amtrak trains are moving through at 30 to 40 mph, shaving 3- 7 minutes off the schedule. Hoeffner's slide presentation may be viewed [HERE](#).

With the new stations in Troy, Grand Rapids, Dearborn and East Lansing now complete, the focus shifts to Ann Arbor and Detroit. Hoeffner mentions that Wynne Davis, formerly FRA Midwest project manager, has taken a new job. He praised her work and anticipates some delays with the station projects and the Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac Corridor Program as the new manager takes over.

Hoeffner expects, in the next 60-90 days, to put out an RFP for a development partner for the new Detroit station. This will be a true intermodal station consolidating all passenger services into one facility. He hints that there may be something about a potential public-private partnership in the Detroit business media next week.

There is good news and bad news on the NextGen equipment procurement for the Midwest. The locomotives being built by Siemens in California are "going great".

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Board. There appears to be no change in the existing designation of parties eligible to file a complaint: Amtrak, the host carrier, the STB, and the states. John DeLora, former MARP chair and current member of the NARP Board, has pointed out that it is the passengers who are the victims of poor time-keeping and careless dispatching. He argues that passengers should be "eligible" to complain to the STB, either directly or through passenger associations such as MARP.

Comments on the policy on preference are being taken by the STB through February 22. You may download the [proposal on preference here](#). To submit your comment, go to: <https://federalregister.gov/a/2015-32412>.

Here are some of the points made by participants in a Rail Working Group (Transportation for America) conference call on 10 February:

- The host railroads have shown they can run passenger trains on-time when they have a reason to do so. The STB's proposed "redefinition" of preference takes away this reason.
- Look at the map: Passenger trains operate over only a few of the nation's freight routes.
- "Preference" is not an absolute. There is a safety valve giving host railroads the option to petition for relief when they can show harm to their shippers. The fact that no railroad has done this, demonstrates that the practice has not been detrimental.
- Failure to maintain on-time performance leads to loss of riders and revenue, resulting in greater operating costs and the possible loss of portions of the system.

(MEETING continued from previous column)

However, work on the bi-level coaches, which failed a stress test last August, has been suspended while an engineering solution is sought. Of concern is the stipulation in the federal contract that the first 130 of the cars be completed by October 2017. Hoeffner will be meeting on February 19 with Nippon Sharyo which has the contract to build the cars at its plant in Rochelle IL.

In answer to a question about adding amenities and increasing frequencies, Hoeffner offered that it is the new equipment will excite the public. However, two provisions of PRIIA, Section 209, present serious challenges to the State. The PTC mandate increases the costs of Michigan's planned commuter projects. Also, the cost allocation model now in effect, wherein the states assume more of the operating costs, is having "a negative impact on our plans to add frequencies."



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For a list of winter events in Michigan cities along Amtrak routes

[Click Here](#)

Thank You to All Who Have Renewed Their MARP Memberships

We thank all those who have renewed their memberships for 2016. If you are not among them, please [click here NOW to go to the MARP website](#) and use Pay Pal to renew your membership. It is quick and easy. When you have finished your renewal, you may [click the Donate button](#) if you would like to make an addition contribution. If you prefer to mail in a check, you may download a membership form from the MARP website.

MARP memberships come due on January 1st of each year. If you are a NEW member who joined in the last quarter of 2015, you are considered as paid through the calendar year 2016.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUING SUPPORT

WALLY on the Agenda



The MARP membership meeting in March will focus on WALLY, the planned Howell to Ann Arbor commuter line. An update on the project will be given by Michael Benham, Special Assistant for Strategic Planning, Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority. The meeting will begin at 10 am on 12 March at **Cleary's Pub**, 117 East Grand River Avenue, Howell MI 48843.

In the meantime, the **Friends of WALLY** will hold their regular monthly meeting in the conference room of the **Howell Carnegie District Library** from 1-3pm on 27 February. If you are unable to attend in person, phone conferencing will be set up. For information, email friendsofwally@gmail.com or phone Michael Lamb at 517-896-5275. Learn more about the **North-South (WALLY) Commuter Study here.**


MARP Welcomes New Members

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| David Seely | Albion |
| Frances Williams | Auburn Hills |
| Peter Voorhees | Detroit |
| Stewart Bolinger | East Lansing |
| Rodney Horton | Haslett |
| Lisa Lees | Lansing |
| Elizabeth Green | Lawrence |
| Larry Betzler | Milford |
| Erin Strang | Mt Pleasant |
| Mike Smith | Muskegon |
| Mark Miller | Oscoda |
| Chris Bagwell | Owosso |
| Lou Fleet | Paw Paw |
| Nicholas Little | Portland |
| Daniel & Alice Spurgeon | Rogers City |
| Albert Wolf | Dayton OH |

We also want to thank those who made an extra donation during the past year. Your support helps us to continue our work to improve and expand passenger train services in Michigan.

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|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Barry Adams | Stanley & Doris Jablowski |
| Michael Dobosenski | Richard Jager |
| Donald Heydens | John C Jamison III |
| Bob Lovell | Joseph Krause |
| Kathleen Newell | Laurence J. Krieg |
| Tim & Nancy Backhurst | Phillip Mange |
| Christine Ballard | Donald Monteith |
| Frederick B Bevis | Joseph Moran |
| Herman Boruta | Richard & Sharon Nash |
| Jan Bourque | Nathan Nietering |
| Philip Chamberlain | Edward K Planchon |
| Kay Chase | Richard Schultz |
| Alan Corbitt | David Scott |
| Dolores C Daudt | Gary Seleski |
| John Doyle | James Stoddard |
| James Elmleaf | George Strombeck |
| Malcolm & Rita Goodwin | John Svendsen |
| Harry Gow | James C & Lola Thompson |
| Leonard Gregory | Bob & Pat Tischbein |
| Richard Hall | Larry Urevig |
| David Harrell | Ron Vander Kooi |
| David Haugan | Gregory Veeck |
| Donald Heydens | Michael Whims |
| Charles & Mavis Hibbard | Adam Williams |
| Harry Hodgson | Julien & Martha Wolfe |
| Don & Sharon Houghtby | Charlene Zdanio |

Will aging infrastructure become an issue in the presidential campaign?

No  60% (169 votes)
Yes  40% (112 votes)

Total Votes: 281 Poll conducted week of 2/1/2016 [Source](#)

View from elsewhere . . .

“During the most recent reauthorization of the intercity passenger rail programs, Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) this past December, Congress indicated that it supports Amtrak service in their respective states so long as it is not a burden on U.S. taxpayers. However, for Amtrak to maximize its revenue and lessen taxpayer burden, intercity passenger rail service must be on time: otherwise people will not ride the trains. Accordingly, the Board must use its oversight authority to ensure that intercity passenger rail in the U.S. runs on time to accomplish the goals of maximizing Amtrak revenues and lessening the burden on U.S. taxpayers.”

-- excerpted from a **comment** submitted to the Surface Transportation Board by the Environmental Law and Policy Center

“Congress, since 1973, has been clear and unambiguous that ‘Amtrak has preference over freight transportation in using a rail line, junction, or crossing’ . . . Preference as defined in statute will support on-time Amtrak operations while containing built-in relief to allow host railroads to seek exceptions so that the rail network should not suffer a material lessening of the quality of freight service to shippers.”

-- **Comment** submitted by The Southern Rail Commission to the STB in opposition to the statement on preference



New East Lansing Station Opens

Passengers await the first departure of Train #365 from the new East Lansing Transit Center on January 26. A frequent rider, returning from Chicago the previous evening, expressed “exuberance” about the new facilities, saying she would not miss “the old, dingy station”. She and others like the brightness and openness of the glass walls and being able to see the tracks. East Lansing resident Kaz Fujita commented wryly that the old station was opened as a “temporary” facility on September 14, 1974 . . . only 41 1/3 years ago!

Photos by Kaz Fujita and Steve Vagnozzi



MARP, INC
PO BOX 510842
LIVONIA, MI 48151-6842

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