

**MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES**  
**Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers**  
**Saturday, January 16, 2016**  
**REO Town Depot, 1203 S Washington Ave, Lansing MI 48910**

**Members Present:** Larry Krieg, Adam Tauno Williams, Barb Spaulding-Westcott, Bob Lovell, Bob McLean, Bob Tischbein, Casey Anderson, Cathy Hart, Charles Shong, Charley Bonnell, Clark Charnetski, Dan Platz, Darryl Apps, Dave Seely, Dennis Schumaker, Diane Patterson, Don Heydens, Don Westcott, Doug Wilson, Gerry Callison, Hugh Gurney, Jim Hinkins, Jim Roach, Jim Wallington, John DeLora, John Guidinger, John Langdon, Kay Chase, Kim Powell, Liz Treutel Callin, Mark Kivela, Martha Benedict, Michael Frezell, Nick Little, Pat Schumaker, Rich Vavra-Musser, Richard Pekarek, Robert Patterson, Sandy Duffy, Steve Manor, Steve Vagnozzi, Tim Fischer, Tim Hoeffner, Tom Boswell, Vera I. Boyd

**Guests:** Tim Hoeffner, Marc Magliari, Adrianna Jordan, Dirk Bartley, Ken Hart, Ken Johnson, Kenneth Brundage, Linda Apps, Mark Miller, Paul Anderson, Ron DeCook, Sandy McLean, Yuri Popov

**Call To Order**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Larry Krieg at 10:02 a.m. The safety briefing was given by Jim Wallington. Members and guest introduced themselves. Krieg thanked Wallington and Steve Vagnozzi for securing the meeting site and setting up the meeting.

DeLora moved, Gerry Callison seconded, **members approved the Order of Business** as presented.

Vagnozzi moved, Langdon seconded, **executive committee members approved the Minutes of the Executive Committee Retreat** on 05 December 2015.

Langdon moved, Adam Williams seconded, **members approved the Minutes of the Membership Meeting** on 21 November 2015.

In the absence of the Treasurer, a brief summary of the **December Treasury Report** was given by Krieg. Receipts totaled \$1,172.00, Disbursements were \$1,916.17. Funds available as of 31 December 2015 are \$12,047.82. The Pratt Fund (invested in Vanguard Index Fund VTSAX) closed the year at \$18,054.93. Langdon noted that over \$900 came in year-end donations. Chase said that acknowledgements are sent to all donors for their tax records.

Adam Williams moved, Robert Tischbein seconded, **members approved the Treasurer's Report** as presented.

**Meetings Coordinator Adam Tauno Williams** presented a summary of planned 2016 meetings: February – no meeting; 12 March – Cleary's Pub in Howell with speaker Michael Benham on WALLY commuter rail progress; 16 April – New Buffalo Township Library, possibly a joint meeting with Indiana rail groups; May – possible Amtrak Train Days events; 11 June – Dearborn Amtrak Station, with program by Radford Jones on "Presidential Travel by Train"; July – Executive Committee Retreat; August – tentative, in conjunction with 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Michigan Rail Conference at Northern Michigan University, Marquette MI; 24 September – Annual Meeting at Durand Union Station with keynote speaker John Robert Smith, Transportation for America; 8 October – Dowagiac City Hall, with a visit to the Dowagiac Area History Museum; November open to suggestions; December – Executive Committee Retreat.

Steve Vagnozzi announced that Amtrak will move into the new East Lansing station after the morning train departure on 25 January. He is working with Debbie Alexander of the Capitol Area Transportation

Authority to have coffee and donuts for passengers departing on Train #365 on Tuesday 26 January. He asked for volunteers to help with this from 8:00 – 9:00 am.

Jim Wallington spoke briefly about the history of the room in which we are meeting. Once the waiting room for the Grand Trunk Western which ended passenger service in 1971, it now serves as a conference room for Lansing Board of Water and Light which owns the building and is responsible for the extensive restoration work. A Railway Express office was housed in a no-longer extant building east of the depot. Amtrak restored service along the route in 1974, but the train stop was moved to East Lansing. Wallington also reported that on-time performance has improved for Michigan trains as well as for the Empire Builder and the California Zephyr.

DeLora announced that Amtrak and MDOT are collaborating to offer 20% off fares on Michigan trains and promoting travel to winter events in communities along the three routes. Members Tim Fischer and Michael Frezell were instrumental in developing this program. Information can be found at <http://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/MIDOT/bulletins/12f7aed> . Use the fare code V441 to obtain the special fare now through 31 March 2016.

## **Program**

Tim Hoeffner, Director of the Office of Rail, Michigan Department of Transportation, and Chair of the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission ([MIPRC.org](http://MIPRC.org)) began his remarks with the reminder that the transfer of ownership from Norfolk Southern to the State of Michigan of 135 miles of track between Kalamazoo and Dearborn was finalized on December 7, 2012 - Pearl Harbor day. A service development program grant allowed Norfolk Southern to complete tie and rail replacement in 2013 and, in 2014, completion by Amtrak of curve modifications and grade crossings between Kalamazoo and Battle Creek. Work during the 2015 season included:

- 140,000 ties in 60 days
- 9 miles of new mainline track east of Dearborn (thus double-tracking this stretch), with 6 new cross overs and 18 grade crossings (actually 36 counting those reconstructed)
- enhanced Norfolk Southern access to Wayne Yard (Ford plant)
- elimination of 50 slow orders

The hallmark of the project is the train control system, costing roughly \$1 million per mile. The timing of the cutover from NS control to Amtrak is an ongoing discussion, but probably will happen in late 2017.

Funded by a TIGER VI grant, work will take place in 2016 on the section between Battle Creek and Jackson. Summer train schedules will be adjusted as in the past to give extended work windows.

A key piece of the plan to improve time-keeping is now complete. The West Detroit connection is now operational and working well with trains moving through at 30 to 40 mph. Anecdotal evidence cites savings of 3- 7 minutes.

With the new stations at Troy, Grand Rapids, Dearborn and East Lansing finished, Ann Arbor is next up. Hoeffner mentions that the Wynne Davis, the “terrific” FRA Midwest project manager, is leaving the agency. He will be meeting with her replacement later in January.

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”. 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.

These things were learned during an extended Q & A period:

- Upgrades to the Wolverine corridor will be completed by the end of 2017
- Trains will achieve 110 mph on portions of the Battle Creek to Jackson section when work on that section is finished
- Maximum speed on the Battle Creek to Kalamazoo segment will be 80 mph until the cutover to Amtrak when the train control system is fully functional
- The problem with the Nippon-Sharyo bi-levels is a matter of concern because of the November 2017 deadline for expenditure of the funding
- The departure from FRA of Wynne Davis will have an effect of the completion of the Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac Passenger Rail Corridor Program (GreatLakesRail.org)
- The issue of the platform at the new East Lansing station will be “sorted out” over the next 6 months; some stabilization work has been done on the current platform; the new equipment will be low level boarding
- It is difficult to sort out the factors that may be influencing ridership/revenue on the Pere Marquette and Blue Water routes: schedule change, gas prices, MegaBus
- Part of the complexity of the M-1 Rail streetcar project in Detroit is that all underground utilities had to be moved and the entire roadway reconstructed or resurfaced
- Office of Rail staff has been asked to “look into” the question of station staffing; because of the additional costs PRIIA Section 209 imposes on the State, there is a need to find ways to reduce costs
- The Henry Ford, conscious of its image, plans to improve the entrance accessible from the new Dearborn station before it is opened to the public.

In answer to a question about adding amenities and increasing frequencies, Hoeffner offered that 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 is having “a negative impact on our plans to add frequencies.”

Hoeffner expressed no desire to go through another round of controversy over the proposal to acquire the Talgo train sets returned by the State of Wisconsin.

Hoeffner’s slide presentation may be viewed at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BzKzb6Oq8FFWY0JnbkZLbkZ5bWNPZVZkdmRNVEQtMW55N3NR/view>

### **Discussion of STB Rulemaking on On-Time Performance**

In the wake of litigation resulting from the PRIIA provisions relating to on-time performance, the Surface Transportation Board ([STB.dot.gov](http://STB.dot.gov)) is currently taking comments on a proposed rule that would consider a train on-time “if it arrives at its final terminus no more than five minutes after its scheduled arrival time for each 100 miles the train operated, or 30 minutes after its scheduled arrival time, whichever is less.” Additionally, Amtrak or other eligible party, may file a complaint with the STB if

the on-time performance of an intercity passenger train averages less than 80% for any two consecutive calendar quarters. The host railroads on which passenger trains operate are subject to penalties if this standard is not met.

John Delora presented some information on the on-time performance issue. The statute that created Amtrak stipulated that preference was to be given to passenger trains except in emergency situations. Not all railroads have honored this and in 2015 the situation on some Amtrak routes deteriorated to a crisis point. At the urging of NARP CEO Jim Matthews, the STB was flooded with 13,000 complaints. This got the attention of the Board and the situation did improve in the following weeks. The STB is now proposing to define what constitutes on-time-performance and is taking public comment. DeLora urges all members to send their comments, saying that the STB does pay attention.

Chair Krieg asks for discussion of four points in order to help shape MARP's official comment.

1. Is 5 min per 100 miles a good measure?
2. What about intermediate stops?
3. What about Amtrak trains that run on more than one railroad between destinations?
4. Should 30 minutes at the final destination be the upper limit?

A major concern expressed by members is that extra time built into the schedule allows trains to be late at intermediate stops and yet arrive at the final destination within the 30 minutes allowed. The consensus seems to be that the proposed rule must require that trains arrive at most, if not all, intermediate stops within 5 minutes of the scheduled time. One member said that 30 minutes late is too late at any point. Another expressed the fear that extra "padding" in the schedule will be an inevitable result of strict enforcement of the rule. There is uncertainty about how to allow for weather related delays and genuine emergencies. Delays as a result of planned construction should be built into the schedule. Host railroads should not be penalized when an Amtrak train is handed over to them late. The clock should be restarted when the passenger train moves onto the new host railroad.

DeLora ended with the wry comment that the host railroads agree to the schedule when it is set and they only have to be on-time 80% of the time. He also commented that the host railroads receive bonuses for good time-keeping.

Echoing Hoeffner's earlier remark that "it's not how fast the train goes, but how little it goes slow", the discussion ended with the thought that reliability is more important than elapsed time.

Marc Magliari, Amtrak Government Affairs and Corporate Communications, thanked MARP for taking on this issue. Amtrak sees this as "a critical issue going forward" and is thankful that the Supreme Court has given STB and Amtrak this opportunity. Amtrak wants OTP defined for all intermediate stops with a maximum of 30 minutes late at the end point and a minimum of 80% overall on-time performance. Construction delays should be factored in when the schedule is set.

**The meeting adjourned at 12:10 pm.**

*Following the meeting, a number of attendees enjoyed lunch at Clara's, the former Michigan Central and Pere Marquette depot in Lansing.*

Respectfully submitted,

Kay Chase

Kay Chase, Acting Secretary

Larry Krieg

Larry Krieg, Chair