

MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES
Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers
12 March 2016
Cleary's Pub, 115 Main Street, Howell MI

Members Present: Dirk Bartley, Michael Benham, Mark Cowles, Leo Hanifin, Charley Bonnell, Clark Charnetski, Kay Chase, Warren Fritz, Hugh Gurney, John Langdon, Nick Little, Larry Krieg, Chuck Merckel, Jeanie Merckel, Mark Miller, Don Monteith, Diane Patterson, Robert Patterson, Richard Pekarek, Dan Platz, David Roberts, Cecelia Roberts, Dennis Schumaker, Pat Schumaker, Radley Smith, Bob Tischbein, Liz Treutel Callin, Steve Vagnozzi, Adam Tauno Williams

Guests Present: Nick Proctor, Clayton Farmer, Jim Hinkins, Dave Holder, Michael Lamb, Sheila Larson, Mike Mason, Yuri Popov, Mary Priebe, Sandy Smith, Julien Wolfe, Howard Ziegel

Call to Order and Business Meeting

The meeting was called to order at 10:07 a.m. by Chair Larry Krieg. He introduced Howell Mayor Nick Proctor who welcomed MARP members and friends to Howell "the future home of the WALLY and Coast-to-Coast lines" which he characterized as a boon for the community lauding trains as a simple easy way to travel that provides an opportunity to actually see the countryside.

Before asking all present to introduce themselves, Krieg led three cheers for the ten members of Friends of Wally who were present and recognized Michael Lamb for his leadership of the group.

Dirk Bartley moved, Robert Tischbein seconded, **members approved the Order of Business as presented.**

Krieg thanked Hugh Gurney and Steve Vagnozzi for making the arrangements for the meeting venue.

Approval of minutes was postponed due to lack of printed copies.

Jeanie Merckel gave the financial report covering January and February. Dues receipts of \$3,049.00 from 113 new and renewing members and donations of \$330.00 brought total receipts of \$3,379.00 for the two months. Expenditures of \$1680.25 included a new printer, mailing costs, a train ticket for the 2016 annual meeting speaker, office supplies, PayPal fees, and food and beverages for meetings and the opening of the new East Lansing station. Funds available for operations are \$13,746.57. The Pratt Fund was valued at \$17,211.39 at the end of February.

Warren Fritz moved, Steve Vagnozzi seconded, **members approved the treasurer's report as presented.**

Meetings Chair Adam Tauno Williams was delayed arriving so his report was postponed until later in the meeting. At that time, he **announced that the next meeting will be April 16 at the New Buffalo Township Library.** This will be a joint meeting with Indiana rail advocacy groups and will feature speakers on the Indiana Gateway project and other rail concerns of the Indiana groups.

Krieg announced that vacancies exist in the positions of Secretary and East-Central Region Chair.

Warren Fritz, West Regional Chair, gave an update on advocacy work in his region. As an effort to build support among local officials and community leaders along the Wolverine route, meetings were held in Niles on December 5 and Battle Creek on January 28. People want greater reliability and more frequency. At the same time, it appears that many people are not well-informed about current service. Rick Harnish, Midwest High Speed Rail Association, gave a presentation in which he argued for double-tracking the entire route to realize its full potential.

Krieg reported on a similar meeting held in Dearborn on January 28, with about 25 people in attendance including MDOT staff and local elected officials. Follow up efforts will continue in order to raise awareness, keep people informed, and encourage participation so that when there is a need to rally support for initiatives, such as the upcoming Regional Transit Authority millage request, the groundwork has been laid.

Krieg requested that if members observe ongoing problems with train or station operation, they document them and report to him or to John Langdon for further action if deemed necessary.

Program

Michael Benham, Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority, provided an update on the current status of the North-South Commuter Rail Project, otherwise known as the WALLY. The idea for commuter service between Howell and Ann Arbor was first introduced in 2007 and appeared ready to get underway in earnest in 2009 when it encountered bureaucratic hurdles and questions about cost and potential ridership. To better answer these questions, a more rigorous study was undertaken. This feasibility study, underway for about a year, is wrapping up and a series of public meetings is being planned in the near future.

Benham outlined the alternative service plans that are proposed and said that possible station locations have been identified and preliminary cost estimates completed. The team is doing some comparisons with similar projects (Northstar in Minneapolis, Music City Star, a couple others) and exploring ways to reduce capital costs, for example, less than full protection at some grade crossings and reducing the size of maintenance facilities. Other options considered are use of DMUs and running a train north in the morning. Issues of governance and sources of funding are yet to be addressed. Ridership estimates will be ready in a few weeks. To be eligible for federal New Starts funding, a detailed financial analysis would have to be done.

The full service alternative would have 4 daily trains between Howell and Ann Arbor and require both a midday service area and an overnight layover facility. MDOT owns the tracks south to Barton Drive. South of there, Watco owns the tracks and is amenable to passenger service as long as freight movements can be accommodated. The parties are exploring moving the freight interchange point to accomplish this, a not insignificant undertaking. If freight and passenger trains can be separated temporally, the service could be operated without PTC.

Terminating at Barton Drive is not a huge cost savings. A third alternative -- a shuttle between Whitmore Lake and Barton Drive -- would be a minimum service configuration that could demonstrate viability and be the basis for future expansion.

Asked why costs are higher than cited in earlier work, Benham said current estimates are based on more rigorous analysis. In addition, the original plans did not go all the way in to Ann Arbor and PTC was not then a requirement.

Liz Treutel Callin, Michigan Environmental Council policy associate, reported on the recently released Coast-to-Coast Passenger Rail Ridership and Cost Estimate Study, for which she was the project manager. Funding for the study, conducted by Transportation Economics & Management Systems, Inc. (TEMS), was provided through a federal grant with matching funds from several agencies and organizations along the route. The effort was spear headed by the Michigan By Rail Coalition of which MARP is a member. Undertaken as an exploratory study to get an idea of potential ridership and probable costs, the consultants conclude that the project shows sufficient promise to warrant more detailed analysis. Three potential routes were identified connecting Detroit and Lansing: Route 1:

Detroit to Lansing via Wayne, Ann Arbor and Jackson; Route 2: Detroit to Lansing via Wayne, Ann Arbor and Howell; and Route 3: Detroit to Lansing via Wayne and Plymouth. All three continue west from Lansing to Grand Rapids and Holland. As defined in the study, Route 1 has the highest potential ridership, while Route 2 has the greatest potential return on investment. Service on each of the three routes was evaluated for conventional equipment operating at 79 mph and for advanced equipment capable of operating at speeds up to 110 mph. Not surprisingly, the study finds that the higher-frequency, faster-service options generate the greatest ridership and potential to provide an operating surplus. Capital costs include actual purchase of the track to enable 110-mph service.

An ambitious public engagement process -- 11 town hall meetings, 5 campus events and an online site -- collected feedback from 575 Michigan residents and generated much enthusiasm. People cited safety and convenience as an attraction, but cited lack of public transit, taxis or Uber-type services to get around in some of the communities that would be served by the train.

It will take some time to identify partners and funding to undertake a full feasibility study. In the meantime, there is a need for more outreach and education to keep the momentum going. The study report can be accessed at www.MiByRail.org.

Krieg presented Treutel Callin with a Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of her energy, level of enthusiasm, and ability to deal with a range of interest groups in shepherding this project to its conclusion.

Announcements

Krieg announced that the long-sought Ypsilanti train stop has been given a green light by MDOT. Funding must be secured and two little-used grade crossings closed. Challenges include compliance with ADA regulations, accommodation of freight movements and historic district considerations. Construction will not start for at least a year.

Discussion Items

There was brief discussion of three items currently in the news, but no action was indicated.

1. MDOT is reportedly preparing a response to a recent Detroit news article critical of the MiTrain commuter cars. MARP members as individuals may want to weigh in on this.
2. The Surface Transportation Board has extended the period for replies on the On-Time Performance rule until March 30 and on the issue of passenger train preference on host railroads until April 13
3. The Michigan Flyer, operated by Indian Trails, Inc, provides 13 daily round trips to the Wayne County Airport. In response to new regulations at the airport that would inconvenience bus passengers, add time to the route and apparently fail to comply with ADA requirements, Michigan Flyer/Indian Trails has asked the federal court in Detroit for a restraining order.

Appointment of a new North Region chair was tabled due to confusion about whether there is a vacancy. **Approval of the minutes of the 16 January meeting were tabled** due to lack of time.

Adam Tauno William moved, Mary Priebe seconded, **members approved adjournment at 12:24 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Kay Chase

Kay Chase, Acting Secretary

Larry Krieg

Larry Krieg, Chair