

MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES
Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers
16 April 2016
New Buffalo Township Library
33 N Thompson St, New Buffalo MI 49117

Members Present: Dirk Bartley, Charley Bonnell, Eldeen Carpenter, Clark Charnetski, Kay Chase, JP Descamps, Clayton Farmer, Warren Fritz, John Guidinger, Ken Jones, Jack Kessler, Larry Krieg, John Langdon, Nick Little, Chuck Merckel, Jeanie Merckel, Diane Patterson, Robert Patterson, Dan Platz, Kim Powell, Steve Sobel, Bob Tischbein, Steve Vagnozzi, Rich Vavra-Musser, Adam Tauno Williams, Doug Wilson, Julien Wolfe

Guests Present: Steve Coxhead, Marilyn Guidinger, Phil Streby, Martha Wolfe, Don Yehle

The meeting was called to order by Chair Larry Krieg at 11:05 am. Members and guest were asked to introduce themselves. 17 members had arrived via Train #351 which made a special stop in NBU to accommodate members wishing to take the train to the meeting. Two other members arrived via Train #350 from Chicago.

Krieg asked for and received member approval for two changes to the printed agenda: (1) postpone consideration of the North Region Chair position since candidate Mark Miller was unable to be in attendance due to a prior commitment, and (2) add discussion of MARP's endorsement of A Coalition for Transit (ACT).

Program

Krieg introduced Steve Coxhead who is President of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA). Coxhead briefed us on developments with the Hoosier State train service, a primary focus of IPRA at this time. Indiana is served 3 days per week by Amtrak's *Cardinal*. The *Hoosier State* runs the other 4 days between Chicago and Indianapolis. Indiana is currently trying out a unique public/private partnership whereby the *Hoosier State* is funded by the state and communities along the route, with Amtrak operating the trains, and a private entity, Iowa Pacific Holdings, providing equipment and onboard services. Ed Ellis, who heads Iowa Pacific Holdings, believes that enhanced customer service and increased train frequencies can make money. A business class fare has been introduced and though total ridership is down (as it is on many routes), revenues are up for the *Hoosier State*. For the first six months, on-time-performance was 86%. In February, OTP rose to 93.9%.

Coxhead feels that if the investment per passenger can be shown to be decreasing, there is a better chance of convincing the state legislature to support the train service in the next biennial budget. With a goal of daily *Hoosier State* service, IPRA is suggesting that INDOT reach out to Amtrak, Iowa Pacific Holdings and CSX Transportation to request estimates of the capital costs and necessary contractual arrangements before going to the legislature to seek funding. In the meantime efforts are ongoing to improve track conditions and signals. IPRA is focusing efforts on public outreach/education.

Don Yehle, a member of the leadership group in IPRA, pointed out that Iowa Pacific Holdings has created a position specifically to market the train. He also said that IPRA feels they need to develop a "dog and pony show" to take to chambers and community groups to educate and to generate support and enthusiasm for expanding train service.

Fred Lanahan, who heads the Northeast Indiana Rail Passenger Association (NIPRA), was unable to come to this meeting. Don Yehle provided some information on that group's efforts to start a passenger train service connecting Chicago, Fort Wayne IN and Columbus OH. NIPRA is working to strengthen and clarify its mission, as well as to strengthen outreach efforts to gain strong public support for its goals.

Clark Charnetski reviewed progress on the Indiana Gateway project using a slide presentation made available to us by Michael Riley, the INDOT project manager. Slated for completion in the next few months, the work involved 8 projects, primarily to benefit freight movements (90 trains per day), but one of which was an Amtrak project to allow Michigan trains (14 per day) to pass near Porter with less interference in the busy freight corridor. The project involves new passing sidings and crossovers in addition to 6.5 miles of new main track in the Hammond-Whiting to Porter corridor.

Eldeen Carpenter, an All Aboard Wisconsin board member, spoke briefly about collaborative efforts among several interrelated groups in Wisconsin and Minnesota to develop a region-wide transportation network and to seek permanent, stable, dedicated funding for passenger trains. At a recent meeting in Eau Claire, the West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition highlighted strong business interest in that community for a train to the Twin Cities utilizing a lightly used freight route. Eau Claire is looking to a public-private partnership to build a new station. A preliminary study is favorable for a second Empire Builder between Milwaukee and the Twin Cities, projecting up to 100,000 passengers annually. Funding is being sought for the Environmental Impact Study. The new Milwaukee train shed is 2/3 complete.

Krieg updated the group on current Michigan train and Thruway services as well as the several passenger train projects underway in the state. Track and signal improvements between Kalamazoo and Dearborn are scheduled for completion this year. The south-of-the-lake reroute study is still in process. Kalamazoo-Battle Creek has been cut over to the new signal system, but some grade crossings need to be closed before trains can run at 110-mph. Battle Creek to Jackson work will be done in the current construction season. The \$19 million West Detroit connection project has been completed, cutting running time by several minutes. New stations have been completed at Troy, Grand Rapids, Dearborn and East Lansing and planning for Ann Arbor and Detroit stations is underway. The new Charger Locomotives for the Midwest are coming off the line, but production of the bi-level cars is stalled due to structural failure when subjected to stress tests. The recently completed Coast-to-Coast study found that restoring service linking Detroit, Lansing, Grand Rapids and Holland could be profitable with frequent trains operating at 110-mph. A grant is being sought to assess the feasibility of train service between Ann Arbor and Traverse City. Detroit streetcar construction will be completed in late 2017 with equipment arriving in early 2018. Formerly known as M-1 Rail, it is now called the Q-Line. Planning is moving forward on two SE Michigan commuter lines. The WALLY between Howell and Ann Arbor has a strong Friends group behind it. The Detroit to Ann Arbor line is being considered for a minimum of 8 trips per day, 6AM to 11:30PM. Consideration is being given to extending it as far as Chelsea.

In answer to Don Yehle's query about how the "automobile state" was able to get legislative support for its trains, John Guidinger cited the strong history of passenger train service in Michigan and, perhaps, a somewhat more progressive political climate than Indiana enjoys.

Business Meeting

Steve Vagnozzi moved, Adam Williams seconded, **members approved the January 16 meeting minutes as presented.**

Clayton Farmer moved, Steve Sobel seconded, **members approved the March 12 meeting minutes as presented.**

Treasurer Jeanie Merckel reported March income and donations from 21 new and renewing members for a total of \$456.00. Expenditures of \$1,116.09 included government affairs events, member meeting expenses and printing of new MARP brochures, leaving \$13,086.48 available for operations. The Pratt Fund (invested in Vanguard Index Fund VTSAX) was valued at \$18,335.05 as of 16 March 2016.

John Langdon asks that the Treasurer be directed to pay the organizational dues approved in the 2016 budget. Krieg so directs.

Langdon moved, Fritz seconded, **members approved the treasurer's report as presented.**

Meetings Coordinator Adam Tauno Williams announced that the May 21 meeting will be at the Carnegie Library in Jackson and feature a discussion of Route Enhancement Committee work and a demonstration by member Gerald Callison of a Google Earth map of Michigan train routes he has created. Plans are moving forward for a MARP meeting in conjunction with the August 17-18 Michigan Rail Conference in Marquette MI.

A Coalition for Transit (ACT) has been formed to promote regional transportation goals in southeast Michigan, including possible passenger train service between Detroit and parts of Washtenaw County. Organizers include the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce, Transportation Riders United, MOSES, and the Harriet Tubman Center. MARP has been asked to add its name to the list of organizations endorsing the effort.

Langdon moved, Charnetski seconded, **members approved MARP's endorsement of A Coalition for Transit (ACT).**

Membership Coordinator Chuck Merckel would like suggestions from members for Train Hobby shops in their areas that would allow placement of plastic brochure holders with MARP brochures. Already helping are Robert Tischbein (east Detroit metro), Merckel (west Detroit metro), Mark Miller (Saginaw area), and Langdon (West Michigan).

MARP member Doug Wilson, who lives in Ontario and is a member of Southwestern Ontario Transportation Alliance (SWOTA), briefly reported on the organization's efforts to gain support from all the counties in the region for an integrated public transportation system. He provided some handouts and urged visiting the website SWOTA.ca.

Krieg expressed the idea that complaints about Amtrak operations and on-board service might be resolved more effectively if they are documented to establish patterns or trends that need to be addressed and that they be communicated to the chair or governmental affairs coordinator for possible action.

Steve Vagnozzi reported that Langdon contacted Amtrak to make them aware of the current parking situation at the East Lansing station and to request that Amtrak post an alert on the website and also email ticket holders that they need to obtain a parking permit from the station agent. Steve added that this is a temporary situation until the new parking lot is completed.

Krieg expressed thanks to Sen. Debbie Stabenow for meeting with Michigan folks attending the recent NARP meeting in D.C.; as well as to staff in the Washington office of Rep. Fred Upton, in whose district this MARP meeting is being held. Krieg also mentioned that he would like to submit comments on behalf of MARP regarding the Michigan Long Range Transportation Plan that will be out on May 10. Krieg will take under advisement the suggestion from Phil Streby that IPRA and MARP exchange membership lists as IPRA has done with Ohio organizations.

The meeting was adjourned shortly after 1PM. Lunch was enjoyed at the nearby Stray Dog Bar & Grill and those who came by train boarded Trains #352 and #353 in mid-afternoon to return home.

Respectfully submitted,

Kay Chase

Kay Chase, Acting Secretary

Larry Krieg

Larry Krieg, Chair