



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  
ON TRACK Editor, Kay Chase

### 2018 MEETINGS

- 27 January** – Member Meeting  
Okemos Public Library
- 20 February** – Executive Committee
- March** – Executive Committee
- April** – Member Meeting  
Detroit
- May** – Executive Committee
- June** – Member Meeting  
Location TBA
- July** – Executive Committee
- August** – Executive Committee
- September** – Executive Committee
- October** – Member Meeting  
Location TBA
- November** – Annual Meeting
- December** – Executive Committee

Visit [www.marp.org](http://www.marp.org)  
Email [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com)

## Infrastructure Plan Unveiled

*"The \$200 billion proposed by the administration for infrastructure would be paid for by cutting funding for critical public transportation infrastructure programs, including the Capital Improvement Grants (CIG), Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery program (TIGER) and Amtrak . . . This would be a big mistake and counterproductive to fostering prosperous communities."*

--Paul P. Skoutelas, CEO, **American Public Transportation Association**

The nation's infrastructure is an area where a vestige of Congressional bipartisanship remains. Few deny that something must be done to repair and modernize the country's infrastructure—its roads, bridges, rails, airports, water and sewer systems. How to pay for this is another question.

The proposed **infrastructure plan** released by the White House on February 12 appears to offer an answer to that question: make state and local governments and the private sector pick up the tab.

All but \$200 billion of the touted \$1.5 trillion spending plan would come from sources other than the federal government. "Incentive" grants to states and localities would require matches of 80% of the funding needed for their projects, thus turning on its head the usual 80/20 federal/state split for road projects and 50/50 for transit projects.

The Administration proposes direct federal spending of \$200 B over 10 years, but at the same time cuts **that amount or more** from existing infrastructure spending. The Amtrak grant, already a tiny portion of federal spending, would be cut in half. The TIGER grant program, which has invested \$5.1 B in capital projects, would be eliminated. Among other Michigan projects, TIGER grants helped Muskegon buy compressed natural gas buses and expand rural service and were the major source of funding for improvements on the *Wolverine* route in Michigan. The "Fast Starts" program, which has already promised a total \$19.5 B in transit funding to localities around the country, including **several in MI, IN and IL**, would be eliminated.

Thus the plan actually reduces the federal investment in infrastructure improvements and is silent on the need to prop up the failing Highway Trust Fund, the major source of funding for most of the nation's transportation infrastructure.



Photo by Steve Sobel

### MARP Member Meetings in 2018

In addition to the Annual Meeting which will take place in November, there will be three more general membership meetings in 2018. The next meeting will be held in April in the Detroit Metro area. Other meetings will be scheduled in June and October. Details will be made available as plans are finalized and will be posted on the website [www.marp.org](http://www.marp.org)

## A New Direction for MARP

By Kay Chase

When I first visited Portland OR several years ago, I was flattered to learn that I was considered an “honored elder” and thus eligible for the reduced fare on Portland’s excellent transit system. Look around at any MARP meeting and it’s hard to deny that the membership consists largely of “honored elders”.

To point us in a new direction, the January 27 meeting at the Haslett Public Library featured a panel discussion on the topic “How do we engage the younger generation?” The very lively discussion was led by Tim Hoeffner, Director of MDOT’s Office of Rail, and Ray Lang, Senior Director of Amtrak’s National State Relations.

College students and young professionals appear to prefer ride-hailing services and public transportation to the debatable joys of car ownership. Hoeffner pointed out that the MARP membership is not representative of the people who are using trains and that our aspirations may not be what the future patronage wants. However, we do have a role to play in reaching out to the next generation of passengers to help MDOT and Amtrak figure out how to develop services to match their expectations. To make this happen, we need to meet students and young people where they are—on campus or in social settings and on a week-day. We won’t find them at train shows nor will posters and handouts have much impact. Today’s “elevator speech” needs to fit on one screen of a smart phone.

Lang suggested that MARP hold meetings on campuses and set a goal of getting 20 students to each meeting. A questionnaire could be used to learn what their needs and expectations are. MARP could establish student chapters. He pointed out that Amtrak has a robust social media presence and uses geo-targeting in their marketing efforts. Amtrak tracks visits to Facebook, sees how many visitors go from there to the Amtrak website and can determine how many then buy a ticket.

Lang committed to having Amtrak personnel on hand if we meet on three campuses this year and said that the focus should be “mobility”. He reminded us that MARP’s role is advocacy, not to make money for Amtrak.

In the ensuing discussion, it was pointed out that students have little spare time and little spare cash, but will find time if there is free pizza and a compelling topic. Activist students gravitate toward environmental issues and are concerned that business as usual is not sustainable. MARP’s message should be that trains are the most environmentally sound way to get around. Partnering with organizations such as the Michigan Environmental Council, Sierra Club, and Ann Arbor’s Ecology Center could be productive.

*(New Direction continues in next column)*

*(New Direction continued from previous column)*

Placing articles or ads in campus newspapers is another way to reach out. Students are interested in taking action and making a difference. There is an opportunity to engage them in the design phase of the new Ann Arbor station

Hoeffner wrapped up the discussion expressing willingness to work with MARP in putting together programs to entice students, mentioning the possibility of raffling train tickets. He emphasized that MDOT can help facilitate our efforts, but we must do the legwork. He left us with the thought that engaging students now will prime them to continue to ride and advocate for trains in their post-college years.

## Update on Michigan Services

Also during the January 27 MARP meeting, Tim Hoeffner gave an update on Office of Rail projects and activities. Reaping the benefits of infrastructure work over the last three years, a **new time table** in effect January 22 shaves 11-22 minutes off the *Wolverine* and *Blue Water* schedules. A revised *Pere Marquette* schedule in effect February 19 also shows time savings. Reliability has suffered somewhat under severe winter conditions with locomotives that are 20-25 years old. The new SC-44 Charger locomotive on the *Pere Marquette* route has experienced some winter issues as well, but Siemens is “focused on assuring excellent performance”. Resolution of issues related to implementation of the ICTS train control system with the new locomotive is expected within a few months. MDOT continues efforts to drive down costs and Hoeffner gave kudos to Al Johnson, Manager of Operations, for strategic decision-making that is leading these efforts. Recognizing that new equipment is still a few years away, MDOT sees an opportunity to use the period to grow support and patronage with a focus on increasing mid-week and off-peak season ridership. Marketing efforts are planned around the Senior PGA Tournament, the Holland Tulip Festival and, perhaps, other events.

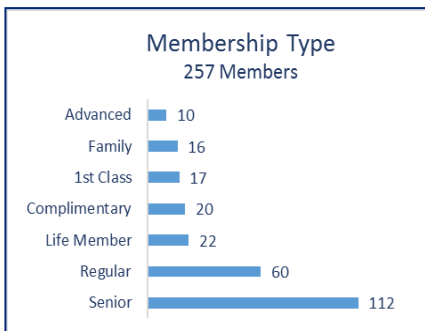
The feasibility study is ramping up for the proposed Ann Arbor to Traverse City (A2TC) route. The SE Michigan Regional Transit Authority still holds the potential for Detroit to Ann Arbor commuter service. MDOT is “starting to have some talk about linking up with Toronto”. There is a lot going on in Toronto, but no immediate plans for extending new or higher speed to Windsor. Regarding issues around station staffing, MDOT believes communities need to take a more active role in supporting these “gateways” to their communities.

Hoeffner thanked MARP for all the support and looks forward to continuing to work together. He also cited the “unique and fruitful working relationship with our sister states”, particularly Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin. “It’s not just about Detroit to Chicago, it’s about Detroit to Milwaukee or Detroit to St. Louis.”

## MARP Has Members in 18 States and 2 Canadian Provinces

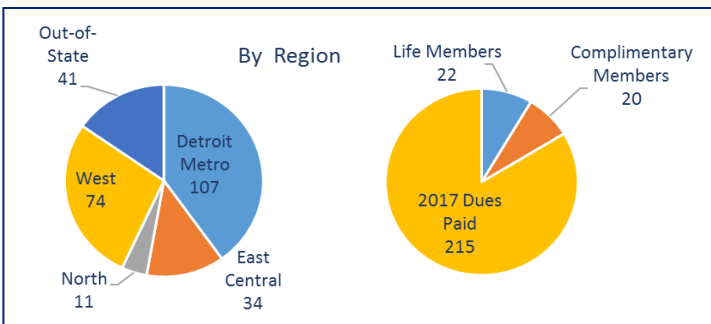
MARP welcomed 22 new members in 2017, significantly fewer than the 53 who joined in 2015 or the 34 who came aboard in 2016. One of the new members lives in Arizona and joins two other out-of-staters— one from Illinois and one from Pennsylvania. Two of the newest members live in the Northern Lower Peninsula, their interest perhaps spurred on by the prospect of a train connecting Traverse City to the southern part of the state.

About half of MARP’s current members have been members since 2007 or earlier, including 13 who came aboard during MARP’s first decade. That number may be low due to lack of some data as to when members first joined. Looking around



the room at a typical MARP meeting gives one the impression that the membership is largely composed of the over-62 crowd. In actuality, perhaps 70-80 of the current dues-paying members are not in that age category.

As might be expected, the largest portion of MARP members, 107, are in the most populous region of the state—the Detroit Metro area. The West region, encompassing the area south from Ludington and extending east to a line stair-stepping east and south to the Battle Creek area, is not too far behind with 74 members. The East Central



has 34 members and includes the Thumb and a wide corridor along the *Blue Water* route extending to the Greater Lansing area. The 11 members in the North Region are hoping for the resumption of passenger train service to Traverse City, but in the meantime are glad for Indian Trails Thruway bus service.

If you would like to connect with other members in your region, your regional chair would be happy to hear from you. Mark Miller is North Region Chair and can be reached at [trains@mrmiller.us](mailto:trains@mrmiller.us). Reach West Region Chair Charles Shong at [charles.shong20@gmail.com](mailto:charles.shong20@gmail.com), and you can contact

*(Members continues in next column)*

### IT’S TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Current members are asked to renew their membership at the beginning of each new year. However, if you are a new member who joined in the last quarter of 2017, your membership runs until the end of 2018. Visit the website to **renew online** or to **download a form** to mail in.

*(Members continued from previous column)*

Detroit Metro Chair Robert Patterson at [ridethetrainmich@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ridethetrainmich@sbcglobal.net). The East Central Chair position is vacant. If you would like to volunteer to fill this position, or suggest someone else, please let us know. Send an email to [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com).

### Beat the Winter Blahs, Part II



Let’s go to Dee-troit! Last month we highlighted some reasons for a train excursion to Kalamazoo. This month we are recommending a visit to Detroit.

If it’s been awhile since your last visit, you will be **pleasantly surprised** with the great variety of **places to go and things to do**. Highly recommended is the **"Come Hungry, Leave Happy"** brunch tour of the famous Eastern Market. Check it out!

You can ride the **QLINE** from the Amtrak station or use your **Lyft app** to hail a ride. To help you plan your visit, both the **Detroit Travel Guide** and **Visit Detroit** are full of ideas.

### Midwest High Speed Rail Association Annual Meeting 2018

24 March 2018, 8:00 am - 3:00 pm  
 Maggiano's Little Italy Chicago  
 111 W. Grand Avenue  
 Chicago, IL 60654

On the agenda for this always interesting gathering are presentations on Chicago’s ambitious plans for a Downtown to O’Hare Express Rail Link, the state of California’s 20-year plan for development of its rail network, and the future of Midwest passenger rail following the FRA’s groundbreaking Midwest network study.

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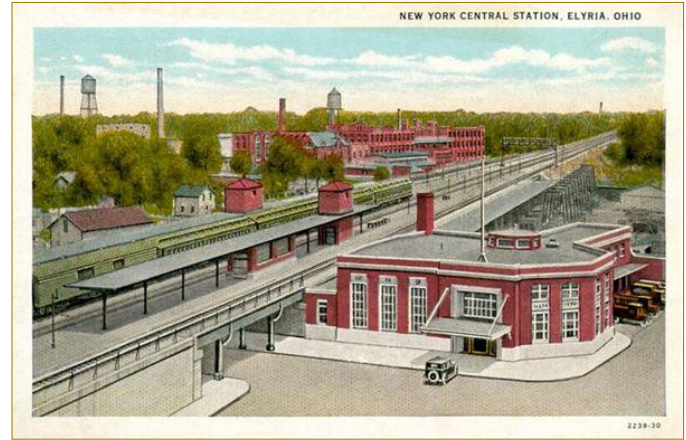
## View from elsewhere . . .

*“Although the [Administration’s budget] plan seems to be just as dead-on-arrival as the White House’s previous budget proposals, it has succeeded in moving the conversation in a bad direction. Instead of discussing where it makes sense for the federal government to invest more, we’re reduced to arguing for any level of spending at all. We can’t let fighting for scraps become the way we make infrastructure investment decisions.”*

--In the wake of the renewed White House call to defund Amtrak’s long distance trains, the 15 February Midwest High Speed Rail **Blog** urges moving the conversation back toward greater investment in trains. Read the article and then **click on the link** to send a letter to your representatives in Congress.

*“This not a spending plan, but a financing idea. Trump’s bill does not include new money for funding infrastructure.”*

--Linda Bliss, in **an article** taking a critical look at the President’s \$1.5 trillion infrastructure plan. Also thought-provoking is **Five things you may have missed in Trump’s infrastructure plan**



## Trains to Return to Historic Elyria Station

The former New York Central train station in Elyria OH, currently operating as the Lorain County Transportation Center, will break ground soon on a new platform and other amenities to once again accommodate train passengers. The platform will replace the station at 410 East River Street which was severely damaged in a 2013 fire. Funding for the project has come from Amtrak along with local, state, and federal support. The cooperation of Norfolk Southern has been critical to success of the project.



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