



ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

www.marp.org

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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*

2019 MEETINGS

- 26 January** – Member Meeting
St. Johns
- 12 February** – Executive Committee
- 12 March** – Executive Committee
- 6 April** – Member Meeting
Dearborn Amtrak Station
- 14 May** – Executive Committee
- 22 June** – Member Meeting
Central Region Location TBA
- 9 July** – Executive Committee
- 7-9 August** – Michigan Rail Conference
Michigan State University
- 14 September** – 46th Annual Meeting
- 8 October** – Executive Committee
- 9 November** – Member Meeting
West Region Location TBA
- 10 December** – Executive Committee

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

Tell MDOT You Want More Trains

This could be the most important thing you do this year. If you would like to see more trains, better urban transit options, expanded bike lanes, and safer pedestrian walkways, MDOT is actively seeking your input—input that will influence the shape of Michigan’s transportation network for the next three decades.

MDOT is developing a new state long-range transportation plan (SLRTP), dubbed **Michigan Mobility 2045 (MM 2045)**, that will establish a vision and priorities for transportation in Michigan for the next 25 years. According to project manager, Bradley Sharlow, MM 2045 “will be a multi-modal effort that integrates all transportation modes, operators, and users.”

In seeking to engage a broad spectrum of the public, a wide variety of techniques will be employed, many involving innovative technologies: online surveys, telephone town hall meetings, webinars. In addition, MDOT has identified a long list of stakeholder groups for targeted outreach. If you are a member of a group that should be heard but has not been, it is important that you contact MDOT’s Public Involvement Officer, Anita Richardson at richardsona13@michigan.gov.



And for everyone, right now, **please take the online survey**. This is an interactive survey that takes only a few minutes to complete and is actually fun to do! Then **go here to submit a comment** and to get your name on the list to be contacted when a telephone town hall or other outreach event is happening in your area.

MDOT will make staff available for public presentations to public groups, a wonderful opportunity for your school or church group, service club, or other community organization. You can even request a “meeting in a box” to help in facilitating such a meeting. If interested, please contact MDOT’s Public Involvement Officer, Anita Richardson at richardsona13@michigan.gov.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO THE PROJECT WEBSITE

michiganmobility.org



Photo by Steve Sobel

MARP Member Meetings in 2019

The next membership meeting will be April 6 at the Dearborn Amtrak Station. Other meetings are planned for June and November, along with the Annual Meeting in September. Details will be made available as plans are finalized and will

be posted on the [website](http://www.marp.org). Executive Committee conference calls take place at 7 pm on the 2nd Tuesday of each month. Email marprail@yahoo.com if you have issues for discussion or would like to join the conversation.

MARP Members Contemplate The Future of Passenger Trains in Michigan

On a cold, but sunny, January 26, some two dozen MARP members and friends gathered in the former Grand Trunk depot in St. Johns to dream with Nick Little about the future of passenger trains in our state. Little, who began his career with British Railways, is now the Director of the Center for Railway Research and Education at Michigan State University.

While one might dream of daily commutes of 100 miles on a fast train—a reality for Little when he worked in London—rail transportation in Michigan and the U.S. is a different reality. It is a reality fraught with challenges, but offering opportunities. Little suggests there are two things needed to grow train travel in Michigan: connectivity and improving the experience of traveling by train. Because Michigan is a peninsula, it is necessary to think in terms of a network connecting Michigan's major population centers to one another and to the larger Midwest network. It is also good to recognize that the younger generation has different expectations and is more receptive to the idea of shared mobility.

Little sees a two-pronged role for MARP: promoting “purposeful” train travel, as opposed to “tourist” train excursions, among a public that is largely unaware of trains; and teaching people how to ride the train—how to buy a ticket, find a seat, where to put luggage. Beyond that, it's not just the train ride, but the end-to-end journey: how to get to and from the train. Stations need bigger pick-up and drop-off zones to accommodate ride-sharing options that are becoming more available.

Reliability of Michigan trains is improving and the new equipment coming in the next few years will enhance the image of train travel. Operational procedures (trains dwell too long in stations) and infrastructure inadequacies (too much single track) need improvement. Figuring out how freight and passenger interests can work together more cooperatively is a hurdle to be overcome.

Little shared thoughts about technological advances that hold promise for the future such as trains powered by batteries or by hydrogen fuel cells. He would do more with self-propelled multiple-unit trains (MUs) which allow adding or subtracting cars as needed. A California rail official with whom he spoke recently thinks most of their future commuter trains will be based on a 2-car multiple-unit configuration. Little opined that if he were running the railroad, he would have a multiple-unit shuttle service between Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo to connect with the higher-speed line and would also replace the *Pere Marquette* equipment with multiple-units.

Little ended with this thought: “Part of educating people about trains is educating them about the bigger opportunities that trains can help them open.”

Kudos or Brickbats? RPA Introduces Travel Review

How often has this happened to you? You had a particularly pleasant Amtrak journey or were impressed with an Amtrak employee who went the extra mile to be courteous and helpful. You thought, “I must send a note of commendation to Amtrak.” But you finished your journey and plunged back into daily life, forgetting about your good intentions. Or perhaps your trip was not that pleasant: the coach was cold, the bathroom didn't work, the sleeping car attendant was surly. You weren't happy, but you complained only to your associates, when a word to Amtrak might help remedy the situation for future travelers.

The Rail Passengers Association (aka NARP) has come to the rescue with an easy to use online survey that you can access from your cell phone and complete quickly as soon as you have finished your journey. Feedback obtained from the [Rail Passengers Travel Review](#) will be collected, summarized and provided to Amtrak.

Carolyn Cokley, RPA Director of Customer Programs, asks that all members promote the Travel Review to both members and non-members who want to make their positive or negative Amtrak travel experiences known. Just direct them to:

www.railpassengers.org/TravelReview



Midwest High Speed Rail Association Annual Meeting 2019

Saturday, 23 March 2019, 8:30am - 3:00pm
Maggiano's, 516 N Clark St, Chicago 60654

Please plan to attend this always interesting and informative gathering. A variety of guest speakers will provide insight and updates on passenger rail projects in the Midwest and lessons to be learned from California.

Confirmed Speakers include: Andrea Reed & Linda Thisted, Coalition for a Modern Metra Electric; Karen Hedlund, WSP; Demetrius Villa, American Rail Club; Matt McNicholas, MGLM Architects.

Lunch is provided. Discounted tickets are available to current students. [REGISTER HERE](#)

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Did They Have the Polar Vortex?

Amtrak has drawn some criticism for its decision to shut down all trains in and out of Chicago on 30 January. Amtrak typically cites “an abundance of caution” in curtailing train service in risky situations. With near-record setting temperatures throughout the Midwest—and wind chills as much as -50 degrees in Chicagoland—there was little doubt of the potential for trouble.

The shutdown inspired a number of observers of the passenger rail universe to comment on the situation. While lamenting what seem to be more frequent cancellations of train service in inclement weather, most recognize a number of reasons justifying such caution.

Tight-fisted budgetary policies and liability issues are two drivers of cautious attitudes among rail managers. Jim Mathews, CEO of Rail Passengers Association (aka NARP), has written that “Railroads today are hyper-focused on operating ratios . . . holding lots of resources and manpower in reserve to keep the trains running in unusual conditions breaks that formula.” Fear of bad press is also a factor. Mathews continues, “And in this age of social media, that’s all Amtrak needs: Someone live-tweeting a rare cold-related tragedy.”

Abe Zumwalt, Director of Policy Research for Rail Passengers Association, began his blog “[All Weather Transportation?](#)”

(Continues in next column)

Now Arriving!

2019 Membership Dues Are Being Accepted

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(Continued from previous column)

with this line from “Snowstorm Boogie”, courtesy of Garrison Keillor and Pat Donohue: “*Airport’s closed and the highway’s packed, But Amtrak’s running, and that’s a fact.*” Zumwalt sees the curtailment of passenger trains in bad weather as a missed opportunity. “Trains are the closest thing we have to all-weather ground transportation, yet they are not recognized in United States transportation policy for it, nor are they funded appropriately because of it.” He ends the piece emphatically: “This needs to change.”

Rick Harnish of the Midwest High Speed Rail Association, agrees with Zumwalt that inadequate funding is hindering our nation’s train operations in conditions that trains in other parts of the world are able to handle, citing in particular China’s “ice train” that is capable of operating reliably in temperatures ranging from +40 degrees to -40 degrees Celsius. He urges advocates to “**Tell Congress: This is unacceptable**” and has created an easy way for you to **send your message now**.

Craig Sanders, whose blog [Amtrak in the Heartland](#) is an amazing source of breaking news, cites the very real safety concerns for workers, as well as the havoc visited on operating procedures in extreme conditions. He notes that Amtrak spokesperson, Marc Magliari, was quoted in a news story as saying Amtrak worries its trains could get stuck in heavy freight traffic and be unable to get around slow moving trains ahead. Echoing other commentators, Sanders notes, “Amtrak management has increasingly become risk averse. The best way to avoid a worst case scenario is to stay out of a position in which a number of factors could combine to cause one to happen.”

Sanders concludes his blog with the scene as he looks out the window of his home. Seeing the freights on the two busiest mainlines in Cleveland continuing to move through the storm, he wonders, “Why if railroads can move coal, manifest freight, tank cars and double-stacked containers despite the realities of severe winter weather why can’t Amtrak move passengers?”

RENEW YOUR MARP MEMBERSHIP TODAY!

View from elsewhere . . .

"Americans want to see a bipartisan bill with strong investments in public transit and other crucial infrastructure because they know it will have wide-ranging benefits for workers, businesses, the economy and their quality of life"

--American Public Transportation Association CEO Paul Skoutelas, speaking of [a recent poll of likely voters](#) in which nearly 90% of respondents indicated support for a bipartisan infrastructure bill.

"We support better, more frequent, daylight service into under-served or un-served communities . . . what we reject is the idea that we have **to choose** between having more and better trains in these fast-growing areas **or** having a National Network that connects the entire U.S."

--Jim Mathews, Rail Passenger Association CEO, in [commentary on](#) an article in the [Wall Street Journal](#) suggesting that Amtrak might end long-distance trains.

"The demand is clearly there for additional short-corridor service throughout the U.S., which includes both additional frequencies for existing routes and establishing new routes between city pairs. The present network simply does not fit the future."

--Amtrak CEO Richard Anderson in [written testimony](#) submitted to the House T&I Committee 07 Feb 2019



The Amtrak Bag Collection

When Amtrak updated the interiors of the *Acela Express* trains on the Northeast Corridor, an Indianapolis non-profit named [People for Urban Progress \(PUP\)](#) came up with a use for the old upholstery from 6,080 leather seats. Batch 4 of the luxury bags was released on February 12. PUP is known for repurposing old infrastructure, famously turning the roof of the RCA Dome, former home of the Indianapolis Colts, into wallets, handbags, office bins and more, saving 13 acres' worth of material from the landfill.



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