



# ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

www.marp.org

marprail@yahoo.com

Issue # 93

August 2019

*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.*

## MARP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

2018-2020

Adam Tauno Williams	Chair
Open	Vice-Chair
Steve Vagnozzi	Treasurer
Open	Secretary
Dwight Phillips	Gov't/Public Affairs Coordinator
Jeanie Merckel	Membership Coordinator
Kay Chase	Communications Coordinator
Chuck Merckel	Meetings Coordinator
Robert Patterson	Detroit/Metro Region Chair
Open	Northern Region Chair
Warren Fritz	West Region Chair
Joshua Hamilton	East/Central Region Chair

*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  
Sanford Centennial Museum  
Sanford MI

**16 July** – Executive Committee

**7-9 August** – Michigan Rail Conference  
Michigan State University

**14 September** – 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
Lansing MI

**8 October** – Executive Committee

**9 November** – Member Meeting  
West Region Location TBA

**10 December** – Executive Committee

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

## Great Lakes Rail—A Mystery

Great Lakes Rail. Remember that? The website? The public meetings and comment period? The voluminous data? The detailed maps? The quest for a solution to south-of-the-lake delays? The promise of increased frequency on the *Wolverine* line? The wait for the final report?

Formally titled **Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac Passenger Rail Corridor Program**, the Tier-1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was begun in 2012 in partnership with the departments of transportation in Indiana and Illinois.



As the lead agency, the Michigan Department of Transportation was interested in evaluating the 304-mile route with an eye to providing a “competitive alternative to automobile, bus and air service between Chicago and Detroit”. A major goal was to ease passage of the 14 daily Amtrak trains that maneuver through the congested corridor around the south end of Lake Michigan. It was anticipated that the Tier-1 EIS would provide information “for the FRA to potentially support future decisions to fund and implement a major investment in the passenger rail corridor”.

In addition to agency-sponsored public meetings and online outreach in 2012 and 2013, MARP sponsored meetings with public officials in the Niles region, Battle Creek and Ann Arbor to raise awareness of the study and foster interest in the potential benefits to communities along the Michigan Line. The final public comments were taken in the last quarter of 2014. Since then, all that was known was that MDOT and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) were “in the process of reviewing and preparing responses to public and agency comments on the Draft EIS received between September and December 2014”. The Tier-1 Final EIS was anticipated for release in the summer of 2017.

The website [GreatLakesRail.org](http://GreatLakesRail.org) has long since disappeared, but a recent search of MDOT and FRA websites has revealed some perhaps-not-so-surprising information. It is apparent that a final Tier-1 EIS will not be forthcoming and a final Record of Decision (ROD) will not be issued.

*(RAIL STUDY continues on page 2)*

**MARP's 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting**  
**Saturday, September 14, 11:00 am to 3:00 pm**  
**At Tony M's in Lansing**

**REGISTER NOW!**  
See Next Page for Details



**ALL ABOARD  
MICHIGAN!**

## MARP 46<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL MEETING

**Saturday, September 14, 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM**

*Tony M's • 3420 S Creyts Rd • Lansing MI 48917*

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER**

**Mark Walbrun**

*“Building a fast, high frequency passenger railroad in Michigan”*

Make plans now to attend! Our featured speaker is Mr. Mark Walbrun, who brings to his topic a long and varied career in railroad and transit system planning, design and construction. Other invited speakers will provide updates on developments in the state of Michigan and the Midwest.

### PRINT THIS PAGE • CLIP THE FORM • MAIL

The cost to attend is \$25 per person and includes a catered luncheon. The registration deadline is Saturday, August 31.

Please Register \_\_\_\_\_ people at \$25 per person. Fee includes a catered lunch.

My Name \_\_\_\_\_

My guest's Name \_\_\_\_\_

\$\_\_\_\_\_ enclosed (\$25 per person)

**SEND THIS FORM in an envelope with your personal check payable to MARP, Inc. to:**

**MARP, Inc. | PO BOX 405 | OKEMOS MI 48805**

**ONLINE REGISTRATION is available at [marp.org/?p=6949](http://marp.org/?p=6949) using Pay Pal, a major credit card or debit card**

**ACT NOW! The deadline is Saturday, August 31.**

#### **(RAIL STUDY continued from page 1)**

A notice was published on November 30, 2018, in the Federal Register (**83 FR 61709-10**) “to advise the public that the FRA is rescinding the Notice of Intent (NOI) for the Chicago to Detroit/Pontiac Corridor Investment Program” (and seven other projects). The notice included the caveat that MDOT and the FRA “have agreed to rescind the NOI, however the associated alternatives analysis and service development plan may be used for further environmental reviews, where necessary”.

Somewhat less tersely, the MDOT Office of Rail website has **posted this notice**:

*“As an update to the work that was anticipated, MDOT as lead state, in consultation with the FRA, has concluded that continued work at the corridor level would not be beneficial in the longer term and that advancement of work at the project level identified in this plan would be more beneficial . . . The FRA will not issue a Final EIS or Record of Decision. They also concluded that this does not prevent future*

*National Environmental Policy Act review of projects within the corridor, if federal funding is received, as defined under the work to date in the **Level 1 Alternatives Analysis** dated April 2014 and the SDP dated August 2017. Work will continue at the project level.”*

SDP refers to the **Service Development Plan** prepared independent from the Tier-1 EIS. The SDP is the business plan that will guide implementation of enhanced speed service along the corridor. The SDP provides such details as station stops, operating plans and schedules, and a phasing plan detailing improvement in service reliability, operating speeds and service frequencies.

Because the SDP is prepared for a Selected Program Alternative, questions arise. In the absence of a final Tier-1 EIS and record of decision, exactly how will the state of Michigan proceed with development of the corridor? And, is there a solution for the south-of-the-lake challenges?

**The DRAFT Tier-1 EIS continues to be available at <https://www.fra.dot.gov/Page/P0658>**



## Rail History Conference September 20-22

The first Michigan Railroad History Conference was held 32 years ago at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn as an educational outreach of the Bluewater Michigan Chapter of the National Railroad Historical Society (NRHS). Held every two years since that time, the 15<sup>th</sup> iteration is scheduled for Saturday, September 21, and will take place in Ann Arbor in the Morris Lawrence Building on the campus of Washtenaw Community College. The primary program on Saturday will be a full day of presentations focusing on Michigan's railroad heritage.

A featured presenter this year will be Kevin P. Keefe, retired editor and publisher of *Trains* magazine, who will illustrate his talk on "How the Michigan Central Got to Chicago"

with images from the *Trains* magazine collection. Keefe will make an encore presentation with "Personal and Professional Reflections on a Life with Trains".

Other presentations to pique the interest of passenger train enthusiasts are: "Electric Trolleys of Washtenaw County", presented by Mark Hildebrandt; and E. Ray Lichty's account of the "History and Sale of the Pere Marquette / C&O / CSX Carferry Services".

The conference is bookended with field trips on Friday, September 20, and Sunday, September 22. Conference participants always look forward to trips led by Norm Krentel, whose knowledge of the interurban railways that once connected communities throughout Michigan and the Midwest is encyclopedic. This year he will lead participants on an exploration of the two competing Ann Arbor to Jackson electric railroads.

The Michigan Railroad History Conference is organized by an all-volunteer Michigan non-profit corporation recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501 (c) (3) educational private organization.

**For More Information and to Register, Visit the Website**

[michiganrailroads.com/register#RegForm](http://michiganrailroads.com/register#RegForm)

## What Does "Fix the Damn Roads" Mean for Passenger Rail?

When the legislature broke for the August recess, they were far from agreement on how to fix the roads, much less on how to—even whether to—adequately support passenger train service. Indeed, **HB 4246 passed by the House in June** would find much of the money for fixing the roads by taking it from other parts of the budget, for example, by reducing the Office of Rail budget by \$572,700. Also of concern are two provisions attached to the bill that would (1) prohibit spending on the *Wolverine* line for anything other than routine maintenance and (2) direct MDOT to "solicit proposals for delivery of daily round-trip rail passenger service between Grand Rapids and Chicago".

### What can you do?

**Educate yourself.** Recent reporting in *Bridge Magazine* reveals the thorny nature of the debate as the Governor and the leaders of the House and Senate negotiate to find common ground. Two excellent sources of information about the issues are **Fixing Michigan's Roads Plan** (an issue paper from the State Budget Office) and **Evaluating Michigan's Options to Increase Road Funding** (from the Citizens Research Council).

**Talk with your legislator.** Lawmakers are in district during the August recess. Look for (or make) opportunities to meet with your senator or representative in their local office.

### When you talk with your elected leaders:

**Be Positive.** This is not the time to gripe about late trains, dirty bathrooms, surly conductors or perceived shortcomings in Amtrak or MDOT operations.

**Listen.** If your lawmaker is supportive, thank them. If not, let them explain their position.

**Tell** your lawmaker why trains are important to you and why fast, reliable, safe passenger trains are vital to a healthy citizenry, economy and environment.

**Find Your State Senator**  
**Find Your State Representative**

**RAIL PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION**  
 is looking for a few good volunteers


  
RAIL PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

We are kicking off a Station Volunteer Program at the East Lansing station. We are looking for customer service oriented individuals interested in supporting the community through volunteerism.

If you are interested in volunteering a few short hours per month as a station volunteer, please stop by  
 Friday, August 23, 6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. or  
 Saturday, August 24, 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.  
 or contact us at [volunteer@narprail.org](mailto:volunteer@narprail.org)

East Lansing Train Station, 1240 South Harrison Road

**Save the Date**



## View from elsewhere . . .

*“The ability to travel each segment between Seattle, Portland, and Vancouver, B.C. in less than an hour will revolutionize the way we live, work, and play in the Pacific Northwest. Moreover, it helps us preserve the natural beauty and health of our region by enabling faster, cleaner, and greener trips between our region’s largest cities . . . This is a bold undertaking that reflects the collective vision of businesses, government officials, and non-profit leaders from across the three jurisdictions. They recognize the transformative potential of improved cross-border collaboration and greater regional connectivity.”*

--Washington Governor Jay Inslee, in his preface to the recently released business case analysis for connecting Portland, Seattle and Vancouver with ultra-high-speed rail. [Click Here](#) to read the final report.

*“One of the most powerful traffic safety tools a city can employ to eliminate deaths and injuries due to road traffic crashes is its public transportation system. It takes just a modest increase in public transit use to result in a dramatic decrease in traffic fatalities.”*

--Paul Skoutelas, American Public Transportation Assoc., writing in *Politico* about [an analysis of traffic fatalities](#) that found that using public transportation is 10 times safer than driving.



## Summer By Rail—A Culinary Adventure

Fifty days, thirty-two cities, traveling and cooking across America—that is how Chef Madi (aka Madison Butler) is spending her summer. With twin passions for cooking and for public transportation, Chef Madi is the perfect choice for the NARP intern program, now in its fourth year of promoting train travel with a theme. This year the focus is on connecting to interesting and innovative eateries around the country. Check out [Chef Madi's blog](#) for places you may wish to visit on your next journey on the *Downeaster*, *Acela*, *Northeast Regional*, *Carolinian*, *Crescent*, *City of New Orleans*, *Southwest Chief*, *Sunset Limited* or *Coast Starlight*.

**GET UP TO  
45% OFF FOR  
A GROUP OF SIX**



**Save up to 45% on select Amtrak® routes with friends and family**

A three-day advance purchase is required.

Other terms and conditions apply.

**[Amtrak.com/ShareFares](https://www.amtrak.com/ShareFares)**

Passenger 1 – full price   Passenger 2 – 15% off full price   Passenger 3 – 60% off full price   Passengers 4,5,6 – 70% off full price



MARP, INC  
PO BOX 405  
Okemos, MI 48805

## Contact Your Lawmaker

Congressional Switchboard

202-224-3121

**Sen. Debbie Stabenow**

**Sen. Gary Peters**

**Find Your Congressperson**

**Find Your State Senator**

**Find Your State Representative**