



ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

www.marp.org

marprail@yahoo.com

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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
Sanford Centennial Museum
Sanford MI
- 16 July** – Executive Committee
- 7-9 August** – Michigan Rail Conference
Michigan State University
- 14 September** – 46th Annual Meeting
Lansing MI
- 8 October** – Executive Committee
- 16 November** – Member Meeting
Kalamazoo Location TBA
- 10 December** – Executive Committee

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

MARP Marks 46th Anniversary

Nearly forty members and friends gathered in Lansing on September 14 to mark forty-six years since a handful of founding members met in a living room in Detroit determined to do something about the rather sorry state of affairs that existed for train passengers at that time. Amtrak, created to take over passenger service from an industry more focused on moving goods than people, was off to a rocky start, but this intrepid band of Michiganders saw potential and set about making things happen. Today Michigan has a system that, in many ways, is the envy of our neighbors in the Great Lakes region.

Our **keynote speaker, Mr. Mark Walbrun**, with more than 40 years' experience in railroad and transit system planning, design and construction, is currently Senior Consultant in Rail and Transit for Quandel Consultants. He is acquainted with the Michigan system, having directed the first PTC project in the country—the 110mph Amtrak route west of Kalamazoo.

Titling his talk ***"Building a fast, high frequency passenger railroad in Michigan"***, Mr. Walbrun focused on some ideas for moving toward this goal. Public ownership of most of the *Wolverine* route offers the potential for a European-style arrangement in which private entities bid to provide service on infrastructure owned by the state. The revenue risk is borne by the operator who will evaluate the potential of a given route to provide an acceptable rate of return. Differing models compete on service, on price, or a combination of the two. TOCS, i.e., Train Operating Companies, look at a number of factors in evaluating the potential, among them a comparison of the time it takes to reach the destination by car or by train, then crunching numbers in a complex formula where the desired outcome—the "investment factor"—is a value approaching 1.0 or less. Frequency is a key element in the calculation. The investment factor is lowered each time an additional frequency is fed into the model, thus increasing the attractiveness to private investment. As an example, the Capitol Corridor in California, with 15 round trips/day has an investment factor of 0.5. For Chicago-Detroit driving/train times are close, but lack of frequency would be a deterrent to investment. Walbrun ended with two observations: (1) "To make money you have to have enough service to get a significant market share"; and (2) "Success has little to do with high speed,

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MARP November Meeting

Scheduled for November 16 in Kalamazoo, the meeting will feature a presentation on hydrogen fuel cell technology to power trains by Andreas Hoffrichter, Director of the Center for Railway Research and Education at MSU. The meeting will begin at 11:00am to accommodate those who would like to come by train.



Holly Union Depot Needs Your Vote

Holly Union Depot in Holly MI is one of 20 historic sites around the country vying for a piece of \$2 million dollars available for projects designed to engage the public in preserving and increasing awareness of America's historic places and their role in sustaining local communities.

The people of Holly **have rallied to move the depot** so that it can once again become a vital part of the community. Those of you who have visited the nearby **Michigan Renaissance Festival** may know that the depot is located between tracks of the CN and CSX railroads. While the building is owned by the Village, the ground on which it stands is railroad property, making access unsafe—and also illegal. The plan is to move the building to a green space about 1,000 feet closer to downtown, a site not far from where the original depot sat at this rail junction. The non-profit group behind this effort envisions the depot as a gathering place for visitors and townspeople alike to socialize and learn the history of the area.

The venture received a huge boost when it was selected for this year's Partners in Preservation Grant voting competition, a project of the National Trust for Historic Preservation with the support of Main Street America, American Express, and National Geographic.

MARP members can play an important role in this quest for a \$150,000 grant to move and rehabilitate the depot. Simply go to the website www.nationalgeographic.com/voteyourmainstreet/ and sign in with your email address. You will be sent a link allowing you to cast your votes.



You may **vote every day through October 29—and cast all five of your daily votes for Holly Depot**. According to an Oct. 1 posting on the **Holly Depot Facebook Page**, the Depot is coming in at #5 in the voting, just ahead of the Ohio project! Let's help our friends at the Holly Depot land a share of \$2 million in preservation funding. When you have voted, you may choose to enter the sweepstakes for a chance to win a 3-day, 2-night trip to the nation's capital.

The Holly Union Depot is on the National Registry of Historic Places and has been a landmark for the community since it was built in 1886.

SINCE THE FOUNDING OF MARP IN 1974, PART OF OUR MISSION
HAS BEEN "PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC STATIONS".



Quarterly Meeting On Tap in October

The next quarterly meeting of Michigan Operation Lifesaver is scheduled for Friday, October 18, 2019, beginning at 9:30am. MARP members are always welcome to attend and can expect to hear several interesting speakers.

The October meeting takes place in the Washtenaw County Learning Resource Center which is part of the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Service Center at **4135 Washtenaw Ave., Ann Arbor MI**. Take exit 37A off US 23 and head east, crossing Hogback Road and turning left at St. Luke's Church. Look for the building on the right just beyond St. Luke's. Lunch is included, hosted by Michigan Railroads Association.

Rail Corridor Challenge

You Decide!

What are the Top 10
New Trains in the US



Rail Passengers Association (aka NARP) is gathering feedback on proposed policies and asking members to take time to think about what these policies would mean for service in their communities and across the U.S. There's no better way to do that than to **LOOK AT A MAP** and think "Where do we need more train service?"

To this end, Rail Passengers has identified **10 exciting new routes and services** all across the country and is asking for your vote during the month of October. This is a great opportunity to provide input to guide the future of passenger train service in our country.

CLICK HERE TO VOTE NOW!

(MEETING continued from page 1)

it has to do with frequency”. He would challenge Michigan to adopt this approach in order to capitalize on the considerable investment already made. Also required would be working in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration with the freight railroads to find ways to benefit both entities.

Former 7th District Congressman Joe Schwarz, who served several years in the state legislature and is currently a lecturer in the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy at U of Michigan, spoke following lunch. He urged members to talk with lawmakers about overturning term limits, positing that term limits adversely affect the quality of work in the legislature due to lack of experience and the loss of institutional memory. Convincing decision-makers of the importance of improving train service and extending it through Detroit and Port Huron to Toronto and the East Coast, as well as investment in equipment, are things **“we’ve got to do”**. He offered to do all he can to help MARP in working with the legislature.

Chair Adam Williams convened the business portion of the meeting and highlighted a number of encouraging developments during the past year. MDOT recently received a **\$23.3 million federal grant** to rehabilitate bridges at Jackson and Mechanic streets in Jackson and to do other trackwork to the east. The **West Michigan Express (WMX) project**, which could be considered the first phase of implementing the Coast-to-Coast project (which would link Detroit-Ann Arbor-Lansing-Grand Rapids/Holland), is proceeding and could be operational in 2020. MARP has contributed \$1000 from the MEC/Hands Foundation grant to help advance the next phase of planning for **WMX bus rapid transit service** along Chicago Drive between Grand Rapids and Holland. **The Laker Line**, a 13-mile bus rapid transit route from downtown Grand Rapids to Grand Valley State University’s Allendale campus (M45/Michigan Drive), began construction in April, received the first of its thirteen 60-foot compressed natural gas fueled buses in June and is slated to begin service in August 2020.

Not so encouraging are: lack of progress on addressing Michigan’s road funding issues, the “austerity politics” that are stymying other urgent transportation needs, and the hype over autonomous vehicles that distracts attention from more rational and equitable solutions.

Williams suggested three things needed to make our preferences manifest in public policy: Activation – Alternatives – Awareness. He ended his report by asking Joshua Hamilton to speak about a project “making lemonade out of lemons” – the start of a volunteer station host program.

Joshua Hamilton, East/Central Regional Chair, explained the **Volunteer Station Host Program** being instituted at the East Lansing station. He and Steve Vagnozzi worked with the

(MEETING continued previous column)

Capitol Area Transportation Authority (CATA), Rail Passengers Association (RPA), MDOT and Amtrak to begin this program designed to fill (partially) the vacuum left by the elimination of Amtrak station agents and to create a sense of the station as a community asset. Hamilton was pleased with the number and variety of people who came to the August 23 and 24 open houses to learn about the program and to volunteer. Background checks are being carried out by Amtrak police personnel and the training program will commence next week, led by James Ratliff, Amtrak.

Treasurer Steve Vagnozzi reported a bank balance of \$18, 079. The Pratt Fund (Vanguard Total Stock Market Investment VTSMX) is valued at \$28,344. As of 31 August 2019, annual income exceeds expenditures by \$2,060. Joshua Hamilton suggested thinking creatively about how to use Pratt fund monies to invest in projects to support our mission. Clark Charnetski pointed out that the Pratt Fund, originally set up as endowment, could be used more creatively since dues and donations are sufficient to cover normal operations. John Langdon mentioned the availability of grant money from the Michigan Environmental Council for outreach and education to advance the Michigan By Rail program.

The meeting concluded with time for member comments. Hugh Gurney reported encouraging developments in expanding transit services in Livingston County, most notably the introduction of **Michigan Flyer service connecting Brighton** to East Lansing, Ann Arbor and Metro Airport.

John Langdon mentioned state funding to upgrade a track segment into Traverse City to allow **“demonstration” trains** for special events. Also, completion of the **Toledo-Detroit Ridership Feasibility & Cost Estimate Study**, initiated by the Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments.

Clark Charnetski expects the final environmental report on siting of the new **Ann Arbor station** in the next few months. Challenges remain with a city council loath to build anything. He says the **high-level platform** at the station generally works well, allowing much faster boarding of passengers.

Robert Patterson reported uncertainty in next steps for **SE Michigan regional transit plans**, particularly how to accommodate rural areas that may not benefit directly from new regional services. Krieg adds that the **RTA board makeup** is changing with entry of a new Oakland County manager and that there are statutory constraints on what the board can do. Further legislative action may be needed.

Dan Platz would like to see **commuter service** between the **Michigan Central Station** and Ann Arbor. Williams has been in contact with **Ford Land Holdings**, the entity that purchased the station, and is cautiously optimistic of a meeting with MARP at some point.

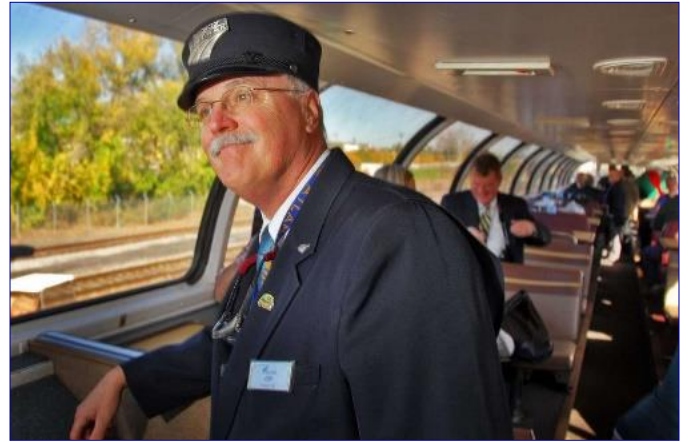
View from elsewhere . . .

“I believe that Metro Detroit is, maybe, the only major metropolitan region in the country that doesn’t have some kind of comprehensive mass transit system. It desperately needs one. And that includes Oakland County. I think from a quality of life perspective, it’s important. I think for an employer to be able to attract and retain talent to the region, it’s important. From an economic development perspective, it’s important . . . I ran on better mass transit and public transit, when I ran in 2002 as a county commission. We’ve been talking about this. I’ve been talking about it for 17 years. The region’s been talking about it for decades. It’s time to get this right.”

--Dave Coulter, new Oakland County Executive, in a 16 August interview with the Oakland County Press. Read his [views on regional transit highlighted here](#) by Transit Riders United (TRU).

“The automobile has been pitched as a machine for freedom, but travelling inside a small metal box, strapped to a chair, forced to focus on the road while your life is threatened by two-ton projectiles doesn’t sound like freedom.”

-- David Levinson, in [a recent blog](#) in which he presents a different idea about freedom of movement.



Amtrak Retires The Great Dome Car

Conductor Jim Kaufman, photographed more than a decade ago aboard the *Adirondack*, appears nostalgic as if he already knows the days of the “Great Dome” are numbered. Amtrak spokesman Jason Abrams told the [Albany Times Union on August 30](#) that, “due to the age and expense of maintaining this vintage car, the Great Dome Car will no longer operate as part of Amtrak’s fleet.” In recent years the Great Dome has been a fixture on [fall foliage trips](#) on *Adirondack* and *Downeaster* trains. In 2011, Midwesterners had a chance to ride in the Dome on Michigan and Illinois trains. A video by Larry Krieg on a Thanksgiving Day 2011 trip on the *Wolverine* [is here](#). *Photo by John Carl D’Annibale, Albany Times Union*

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MARP, INC
PO BOX 405
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