



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.

Member 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

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The Michigan Passenger Editor and Webmaster, Larry Sobczak
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2020 MEETINGS

22 February – Member Meeting
Dearborn Amtrak Station

14 March – Member Meeting
TechTown in Detroit
(Cancelled due to COVID-19)

09 May – Kalamazoo
(Cancelled due to COVID-19)

20 June – Member Meeting
Owosso Steam RR Institute
(Cancelled due to COVID-19)

18 July – Executive Committee
Durand Union Station
(Tentative)

12 September
(Cancelled due to COVID-19)

17 October – 47th Annual Meeting
1st Congregational Church, Jackson
(Tentative)

12 December – Executive Committee
Planning Meeting TBA

Visit www.marp.org

Email marprail@yahoo.com

Train Services to Ramp Up Soon (but not in Michigan)

Train and transit services throughout the country have been devastated as a consequence of sheltering-in-place policies intended to help lessen the spread of the coronavirus. While most passenger transportation has continued to operate in service to the essential workers—nurses and doctors, public safety first-responders, grocery and food service workers—who depend on public transportation to get to their jobs, those services have been drastically curtailed.

With the crisis easing in many areas and the start of the summer season upon us, Amtrak will begin restoring some services on June 1. Regrettably, Michigan will not see a return to normal operations in the near future. The *Pere Marquette*, suspended March 19, remains shut down. The *Wolverine* route sees only one round trip each day: #351 westbound in the morning, #352 eastbound in the afternoon. The one bright spot is the *Blue Water* that has continued to operate normally throughout the period.

An encouraging note is that a number of trackwork projects in Michigan are proceeding. Schedule adjustments are in effect through October 11. *Blue Water* train #365 will depart Port Huron 28 minutes earlier (5:52am), arriving in Chicago 17 minutes later at 12:02 pm. Return trip #364 will arrive in Port Huron 28 minutes later (11:59pm). *Wolverine* train #351 will depart Pontiac 38 minutes earlier (5:12am), arriving in Chicago at the scheduled time of 10:32am. Train #352 will depart Chicago 30 minutes earlier (12:55pm), arriving at Pontiac 7 minutes later at 8:39pm.

State-supported services on the Amtrak Midwest network to most points in Wisconsin, Illinois and Missouri have been reduced to one round trip daily, supplemented in part by long distance trains. For example, the *Empire Builder* is making stops at Milwaukee airport and Sturtevant to supplement *Hiawatha* service, which had been reduced to one daily round trip and was eventually replaced by a Thruway Bus. Some *Hiawatha* train service will be resumed on June 1. The Chicago - St. Louis corridor will continue to see only two daily round trip *Lincoln Service* trains plus the *City of New Orleans*.

(Services continues on page 2)

MARP In-Person Meetings on Hold until October

Due to continued uncertainties regarding the Covid-19 crisis, your executive committee has decided to wait until Fall to resume our regular membership meetings. We are tentatively planning to hold the 47th Annual Meeting in Jackson on October 17. We are exploring the idea of hosting a “virtual” meeting online sometime during the summer. In the meantime, we will do our best to keep you informed of passenger train news and events.

Please stay healthy and safe!

MDOT Bids Farewell to Tim Hoeffner

Tim Hoeffner, Director of the Office of Rail, was feted by friends and colleagues at an informal retirement gathering on January 9. Clark Charnetski presented a token of MARP's appreciation: a Pewabic Pottery tile depicting the Detroit Michigan Central Station. Other MARP members attending were John Guidinger, Michael Frezell, Steve Vagnozzi and Larry Krieg. Tim appeared thoughtful as he reflected on his 39-year tenure at MDOT and as head of the Office of Rail since its establishment in 2011. Major accomplishments of his tenure include: coping with the change in federal legislation requiring states to assume operating costs for the *Wolverine* trains; overseeing the



state's purchase of the Dearborn to Kalamazoo rail corridor from Norfolk Southern and the upgrading of track and signal standards for 110 mph operation; construction of new stations in Pontiac, Troy, Dearborn and Grand Rapids; major upgrades of stations in Kalamazoo, Battle Creek and Bangor; and planning for new stations in Detroit and Ann Arbor. In addition, Tim has played a strong leadership role on the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission and other committees planning for Midwest rail corridor improvements, including procurement of new locomotives and passenger cars.

TIM, YOU'LL BE MISSED.

(Services continued from page 1)

The pandemic is a major setback for Amtrak, which was on course to **breaking even** on operating costs for the first time. Amtrak reported in mid-April that it is transporting only 4,000 passengers daily on its entire network as opposed to the usual 90,000 prior to the outbreak. As a result, schedules were reduced on many routes, *Acela* service in the Northeast was suspended as was service west of Denver on the *California Zephyr* (since restored). While most long distance trains are operating as usual, traditional diner service on Western trains has been suspended until at least May 30. First class passengers are being offered pre-packaged meals in their rooms or in the dining car and coach passengers are directed to café service in the Sightseer Lounge.

On June 1, three weekday *Acela* roundtrips will be restored and *Northeast Regional* frequencies will be increased from eight to ten roundtrips. *Keystone* and *Pennsylvanian* services, both of which were suspended earlier, will return. However, the nine daily *Keystone* roundtrips will run only between Harrisburg and Philadelphia. The *Pennsylvanian* returns with a daily roundtrip Pittsburgh – New York City.

Check out Craig Sanders's blog [Amtrak in the Heartland](#) for more information on Amtrak's plans for the summer.

A Membership Snapshot

Membership renewals are off to a fast start in 2020. So far, 170 members have renewed their support for more and better trains. Nine new members have joined us: Christopher Davidson (Sterling Heights MI), Derek Buyan (Ferndale MI), R Jamros (Fennville MI), Murray Tobin (Canton MI), Colleen Coughlin (Shelby Twp MI), Robert Scroggins (Cross Village MI), Keith Munson (Petosky MI), Henry Kranz (Oak Park IL) and Dan McFarling (Aloha OR). One member has chosen to invest in a Lifetime membership. Complimentary memberships have been given to the eleven volunteer station hosts at the East Lansing station in recognition of their very real contributions to improving the passenger experience, a key MARP goal. Thank you to Cady Ness-Smith, Ed Oxer, Honey Bentley, Joy Gleason, Patricia Bates, Julie Genson, Tonya Hardy, Jeff Arbour, Evelyn Thompson, Matthew Murawski and Kim Baker. Longtime member Jerry Becker also volunteers at the station.

MARP particularly thanks those who have included an extra donation along with their dues.

While Michigan is home for most members, several other states and Canadian provinces are represented: Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Florida, Colorado, Oregon, Ontario and Quebec.

While MARP membership is robust, there is a need for greater member involvement. Let us know how you would like to help. Most critically, we have five vacancies on the executive committee. If you would like the opportunity to more directly influence the policy decisions and direction of the organization—or would like to recommend someone—please let us know. Send email to marprail@yahoo.com.

Support Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

When you shop at AmazonSmile, a portion of your eligible purchases will be donated to MARP—at no expense to you!

[CLICK HERE](#)



MDOT Hosts Meeting on Jackson Bridge Replacements

By John Guidinger

On February 26, 2020, MDOT held an open house public meeting in Jackson to explain the Jackson and Mechanic Streets Railroad Bridge Replacement Project and to receive public comments. The two bridges are on the MDOT-owned portion of the Chicago-Detroit-Pontiac Amtrak route. The existing bridges are plate-girder designs, about 80 feet and 135 feet long, respectively, built by the former Michigan Central Railroad in 1901 and 1902. The masonry abutments and steel braces of the bridges have deteriorated and the low clearances under the bridges result in frequent strikes by medium-sized trucks trying to pass under the bridges.

About 75 people attended the meeting, which was held in a meeting room at the Christoff and Sons Floor Covering store at 400 North Mechanic Street. The meeting site was about 400 feet north of the Mechanic Street Bridge. MDOT representatives explained the need for the project, the estimated cost, and the work schedule. Completion of the project will increase vehicle clearance under the bridges and provide a safe environment for trains using the bridges as well as for drivers and pedestrians passing under the bridges. The estimated cost is \$17.4 million, which will be funded with \$8.2 million from MDOT, \$7.2 million from the Federal Railroad Administration, and \$2.0 million from Amtrak. The work is scheduled to start in

March of 2020 with most of the work to be completed in 2021. Some utility and landscape work may not be completed until 2022.

The project will require the railroad to be closed for about 5 days. Provision for alternative passenger service while the railroad is closed has not been evaluated. Because of restrictions at the Mechanic Street Bridge, the 10-foot clearance under this bridge will be increased by only 7 inches. New bridge abutments and extensive retaining wall work will be required at this bridge. At the Jackson Street Bridge, the clearance will be increased from 11.9 feet to about 14 feet by raising the railroad between Blackstone Street and the Grand River. No work is contemplated for the third mainline bridge in the area, the bridge over the Grand River. All three of these bridges are between 1,600 and 2,400 feet west of the Jackson Amtrak Station.



Proposed new bridge over Jackson Street. The tracks will be raised 3.5 feet to increase the clearance for road vehicles.

Artist rendering courtesy of MDOT



Proposed new bridge over Mechanic Street. Work includes extensive masonry retaining walls.

Artist rendering courtesy of MDOT

TELL THE FRA YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO BE ON TIME

The FRA is accepting comments **through June 1** on the proposed **Metrics and Minimum Standards for Intercity Passenger Rail**.

Your comment will be most effective if it is constructive, fact-based, and reflects how the standards in the rule will affect you as a passenger. RPA asks that you include the following points:

- I support the proposed Customer On-Time Performance (Customer OTP) standard because it is passenger-focused, unambiguous, straightforward and easy to understand. Schedule recovery time should be redistributed throughout the route to ensure that host railroads can reasonably meet the standard, and not simply lengthened.
- I encourage FRA to consider the enhancements Rail Passengers proposed in formal comments submitted April 22. These enhancements include RPA-suggested metrics that incorporate concerns of elderly and disabled travelers, that evaluate the customer experience without relying on surveys, and that broaden and strengthen the assessment of public benefits from each route.

Add your voice to the public comment docket by visiting this link: <https://www.regulations.gov/docket?D=FRA-2019-0069>

View from elsewhere . . .

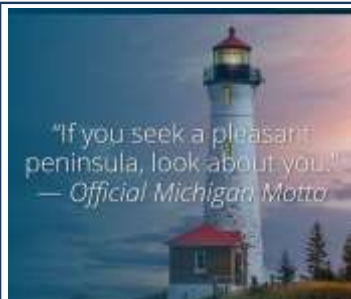
“Here, finally, is a plan for passenger rail in America that rivals the ambition of President Eisenhower’s vision for highways in the 1950s. Congressman Moulton has put forth a blueprint for a national passenger rail network that stops the long, slow decline of our country’s transportation infrastructure, bringing economic growth and opportunity outside of a handful of ‘superstar cities’ to the rest of America’s cities and towns. For too long passengers have had to fight for scraps of funding on the periphery of the transportation policy debate. Moulton’s national high-speed rail plan moves trains to the center of that debate with an ambition not seen in U.S. infrastructure in generations.”

--Jim Mathews, President and CEO of the Rail Passengers Association, after reviewing Massachusetts Congressman Seth Moulton’s **White Paper: American High-Speed Rail & Rebuilding the U.S. Economy.**



Putting the Squeeze on Transit

Now, **that’s** some illusion! Riders were wary, others delighted, when Copenhagen’s city zoo bus was wrapped by **Bates Y&R** art director Peder Schack. Mr. Schack, who says he likes to “make the illusion of something strange happening to something well known”, went on to add chimps, lions and various creepy crawlies to the interiors of the city’s subway cars. You can check out some of the **critters riding Copenhagen buses and trains here.**



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