MARP Steps into the Virtual World

MARP hosted its first “virtual” meeting on July 9 with great success. Some forty-eight members and friends participated and the lively question and answer period following the presentations was enjoyed by all.

Our two speakers were Al Johnson, acting director of the MDOT Office of Rail, and Derrick James, Amtrak Government Affairs.

Mr. Johnson led off with a slide showing encouraging trends in revenue and ridership over the last decade, albeit with a drop in 2016 when extensive track work was underway. The effects of COVID-19 have been severe, but ridership is beginning to pick up. The state received funds from the CARES Act that will bridge the funding gap through September. On the brighter side, work is proceeding on projects funded by federal grants and matched by the state and Amtrak. A recent $750,000 CRISI grant for the Battle Creek Connection will fund preliminary environmental and engineering work in preparation for future work to alleviate conflicts with CN. The long-term goal is to build the flyover necessary for the proposed expansion to 10 daily round trips on the Wolverine. Work will continue at the project level as defined in the Service Development Plan (SDP) that came out of the Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac Passenger Rail Corridor Program begun in 2012. The SDP does address the south-of-the-lake improvements needed, but will take several billion dollars to implement. The FRA will not issue a final EIS for the corridor, but work may proceed at the project level. Other funded projects going forward in the next two years will allow speeds of 110 mph on successive segments of the Wolverine route: Kalamazoo-Battle Creek Q4 2020, Battle Creek-Jackson Q1 2021, Ypsilanti-Townline projected for 2021. Increase in speeds between Jackson and Ypsilanti is dependent on completing a series of curve modifications. MDOT is applying for a grant for this project and will seek further grants to extend sidings on Amtrak territory for better train meets.

Delivery of the first of the Midwest passenger coaches being built by Siemens is expected in August 2020. Michigan anticipates new coaches in service on all three routes by 2023. The new coaches will have business class seating and will accommodate bikes, although Jeff Martin (MDOT Office of Rail) was unsure of the number.

(MEETINGS continues on page 2)

MARP In-Person Meetings on Hold

Due to continued uncertainties regarding the COVID-19 crisis, your executive committee has decided to suspend face-to-face meetings for the remainder of 2020. We are tentatively planning to hold the 47th Annual Meeting “virtually” on October 17. With the success of our July 9 Zoom meeting, other “virtual” meetings are being planned. In the meantime, we will do our best to keep you informed of passenger train news and events.
"We would not be in the position we’re in if it weren’t for the advocacy of so many of you, over a long period of time, who have believed in passenger rail, and believe that passenger rail should really be a part of America’s intermodal transportation system."

Secretary Ray LaHood, U.S. Department of Transportation
2011 Spring NARP Council Meeting

(MEETINGS continued from page 1)

Derrick James focused his remarks on three areas: Amtrak’s vision for the future; how Amtrak aims to keep passengers safe and improve their travel experience; and how our advocacy can help improve and expand passenger train services in the state and the nation.

Amtrak sees the greatest growth potential in the development of multi-frequency corridors linking major population centers. Mr. James lauds Michigan’s efforts as leading the way. Twin goals are making train travel time-competitive with autos and airlines and improving on-time performance.

Faced with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, Amtrak has stepped up its digital initiatives to safeguard passengers by moving to “touchless” ways of transacting business. (See article on next page.) The “contemporary dining” model now offers 8 meal choices, some of which will be migrating to the café car. Sleeping car passengers will select their meals when making their reservations. Self-check-out will help relieve congestion in the café car.

On the legislative front, Amtrak received $1.02 B in the CARES Act to see them through this fiscal year. Additional funding has been requested in anticipation of an expected 50% drop in ridership in the next year. Amtrak is pinning its hopes on the FY2021 spending bill recently approved by the U.S. House of Representatives. If the Senate comes up with a similar bill and it becomes law, it will fix not only the current shortfalls that portend cuts in service and staff, but will allow Amtrak to move aggressively to improve services on existing corridors as well as start new services. This is where MARP members can help by educating their lawmakers.

THE MEETING WAS RECORDED
CLICK HERE to watch and listen
Or go to: tinyurl.com/marp010

At its regular monthly meeting on July 18, the MARP Executive Committee appointed Joshua Hamilton to fill the vacant position of Vice-Chair.

Your Organization Needs You

MARP will be electing officers at the Annual Meeting in October. We are seeking candidates for the offices of Secretary and West Region Chair. If you would like to be considered for one of these positions, please email your interest to marprail@yahoo.com. Or, if you would like to recommend someone for either of these positions, please let us know. Send email to marprail@yahoo.com.

Rail Passengers Association Presents
Webinar #3 | The INVEST In America Act
Wednesday, July 22, 2020
3:00 pm – 4:30 pm ET

Admission is FREE

Rail Passengers Association (aka NARP) will present the third in its Webinar series on July 22nd at 3:00 pm Eastern. RPA senior staff will be online with information about recent Congressional actions that are very good news for rail passengers and what you can do to assure success.

Registration will close on Monday, July 20th.
Space is limited so reserve your spot now.

In this briefing, RPA staff will:

- Walk through the amendments and updates to the INVEST in America Act (H.R. 2) and analyze its prospects in the Senate now that the bill has passed the full House;
- Cover the latest developments in the campaign to preserve daily service and prevent massive layoffs to the Amtrak workforce; and
- Answer all your questions in a full session Q&A.

For more information and registration, PLEASE CLICK HERE. The Zoom meeting link will be sent out the day before the event. Meeting space is limited - register now!

If you have missed the previous Webinars presented by RPA, they are archived and may be viewed at any time. You will find links to all previous Webinars HERE.
**AMTRAK Expanding Digital Initiatives**

Faced with the challenges of passenger safety during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the need for greater efficiencies, Amtrak has stepped up its digital initiatives. Amtrak is pushing the use of its mobile app to streamline operations and offer new services. “Touchless” ways of transacting business are rapidly expanding. Passengers will receive gate and boarding information and two-way delay alerts on their mobile devices allowing them to seek further information. Apple Pay or Google Pay will make money transactions easier. Screens on new PC-based QuikTrak machines will be controlled with gestures and will allow no-touch payment, with tickets sent directly to the passenger’s mobile device as well as to the conductor who can simply call up the ticket of a passenger not using a mobile device. Call centers will feature a call back or “virtual queue” so customers can go about their business while waiting for a response.

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**Pere Marquette Service Returns**

A bright spot in a gloomy, rainy first day of July was the opportunity for these St. Joseph passengers to board the *Pere Marquette* for the first time since mid-March when service was suspended due to the COVID-19 outbreak. In contrast, daily round trip service continued between Port Huron and Chicago on the *Blue Water* route, while the *Wolverine* was reduced to one daily round trip between Pontiac and Chicago throughout the period. Uncertainty remains as to when ridership will rebound sufficiently to restore full *Wolverine* services.

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**Have you renewed your MARP membership?**

CLICK HERE to pay online  
Or download a mail-in form HERE
View from elsewhere . . .

Titled The Real Estate Mantra--Locate Near Public Transportation, this study presents data showing that residents of transit-oriented areas experience lower transportation costs, have higher access to jobs and are less likely to own cars. Transportation costs in transit-oriented areas are significantly lower than other regions, with an average annual savings of $2,500 to $4,400 for the typical household. One in four households in close proximity to transit do not own a vehicle, according to the study. Significantly, in regions served by multiple transit modes, the highest gains were near rapid rail transit, BRT and commuter rail.

"Public transit’s benefits go beyond moving people from point A to point B. Public transportation gets people to jobs and educational opportunities, and helps businesses attract employees and customers."

-- Paul Skoutelas, American Public Transportation Association President and CEO, on release of the study detailing how public transit increases property values and why consumers living near transit experience significant savings.

Save 20% on Travel across Michigan

A 14-day advance purchase is required.
Other terms and conditions apply.

BOOK WITH SAVER FARES TODAY!

4,000 Workers and Counting

Amidst the doom and gloom of the current economic crisis, California’s high speed rail project is bringing a bit of good news. Last week, CAHSRA announced the hiring of its 4,000th worker, spread across 32 different construction sites over a 119-mile stretch in the economically depressed Central Valley. To gain a sense of the massive extent of the project and the enthusiasm of the workers, watch this short VIDEO.

Contact Your Lawmaker

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