



*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
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Open	Secretary
Open	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
Open	West Region Chair
Joshua Hamilton	East/Central Region Chair

*The Michigan Passenger Editor and Webmaster, Larry Sobczak  
ON TRACK Editor, Kay Chase*

### 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)

**09 July**– Virtual Member Meeting  
via Zoom

**18 July** – Executive Committee  
Zoom Meeting

**12 September**  
(possible Zoom meeting TBA)

**17 October** – 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
(Tentative Zoom Meeting)

**12 December** – Executive Committee  
Location TBA

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

## 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 47<sup>th</sup> 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.



*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**.

*"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](https://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](mailto: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](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com).

# MRC | Midwest Rail Conference



## VIRTUAL Midwest Rail Conference 2020

*"Sustaining Midwest Rail"*

August 11-12, 2020

## MRC | VIRTUAL Midwest Rail Conference 2020

Tuesday, August 11, 9 AM – 1 PM EDT

Wednesday, August 12, 9 AM – 1 PM EDT

Make your plans now to attend this "virtual" conference. The scope of the annual Michigan Rail Conference has broadened this year to include our neighboring states in a program touching on a wide variety of topics in both freight and passenger rail. Each of the half-day sessions will conclude with a keynote speaker. Joe McHugh, Amtrak Vice-President for State-Supported Services Business Development, will speak on Tuesday. Mike McClellan, Vice-President Strategic Planning at Norfolk Southern will conclude the conference on Wednesday.

Rail Passengers Association CEO and President, Jim Mathews, will be part of the opening day plenary session discussing challenges facing the rail industry in the time of COVID-19. On a panel addressing improvements in the passenger experience, MARP member Joshua Hamilton will talk about the volunteer station host program he helped establish at the East Lansing station.

Opportunities for growth in passenger rail will be addressed by Arun Rau, WisDOT, and Scott Rogers, Chair of the West Central Wisconsin

Rail Coalition, a group working to restore passenger train service between Eau Claire WS and St. Paul. Al Johnson, MDOT Office of Rail, has been invited to be part of this panel.

Complete information and the draft program are available at [rail.mtu.edu/MRC2020/agenda](http://rail.mtu.edu/MRC2020/agenda). You may **REGISTER HERE** at the rock bottom rate of \$25. **But, hurry! Registration is limited and will go up on August 1.**

## 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.

**Have you renewed your MARP membership?**

**[CLICK HERE to pay online](#)**

**Or download a mail-in form [HERE](#)**



## *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.

## 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.



## 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](#)



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