



# ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

www.marp.org

marprail@yahoo.com

Issue # 101

September/October 2020

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 2020-2022

John Guidinger	Chair
Joshua Hamilton	Vice-Chair
Steve Vagnozzi	Treasurer
Kay Chase	Acting 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  
Planning Session

**10 September** – Virtual Member Meeting  
Guest: Clark Harder  
Michigan Public Transit Assoc.

**17 October** – 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
via Zoom

**19 November** – Will be rescheduled

**16 December** – Executive Committee  
via Zoom

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

## Congress Missing in Action as Cuts in Amtrak Service and Jobs Go Into Effect

As of mid-October, daily service on ten long-distance routes has been reduced to tri-weekly service. This despite the outcry from advocates and industry watchers warning that cuts to an already barebones service threatens the very existence of Amtrak's National Network.

Amtrak President and CEO William Flynn appeared before the **Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation** on 21 October and was unequivocal in his commitment to the existing long-distance routes as integral to the functions of the national network. In his **written testimony**, Flynn outlined three metrics for restoring daily service: (1) stable or falling rates of COVID-19 hospitalizations along the route served; (2) advance bookings for June 2021 at least 90% of the percentage for June 2020 bookings; (3) ridership in the first quarter of FY 2021 at least 90% of Amtrak's projected FY 2021 operating plan which already takes into account reduced ridership.

Flynn also made it clear that precipitous declines in ridership and revenue due to the pandemic require additional funding from Congress to keep Amtrak solvent and able to provide full services across the network. He appealed for \$5 billion in supplemental funding to keep trains running in the short term while looking for a significant increase in the FY 2021 appropriation. So far, the Senate has failed to act on this request.

**Michigan Senator Gary Peters** sits on the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. Please let him know that you are a constituent, that you vote, and that this issue is important to you. Tell him why trains are important to you. Tell him that you expect the Senate to step up to support the men and women whose jobs are on the line, jobs that make a difference in the lives of people in the 500 communities served by Amtrak, particularly in those smaller communities in the heartland that have few, if any, other travel options.

Then, **find your Congressperson here**. Thank her or him for supporting essential public transportation services through the CARES Act and remind them that there is still a great need for a coronavirus relief package to sustain workers and passenger services as the pandemic continues to rage.

### MARP Meeting Schedule

Due to the continuing (and resurgent) COVID-19 crisis, MARP has suspended in-person meetings indefinitely. We urge you to **get acquainted with Zoom** as meetings will be held using this platform. The Executive Committee will meet via Zoom on 16 December to discuss plans for the coming year. If you have ideas to contribute, send them to us at [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com). If you would like to participate in the meeting, please contact MARP Chair John Guidinger at [jhguidinger1@yahoo.com](mailto:jhguidinger1@yahoo.com).



## Rail Passengers Association Presents

The **November 18** edition of the monthly webinar series hosted by the Rail Passengers Association (RPA) featured Anne Canby from the [OneRail.org](https://www.onerail.org) coalition formed to educate about the benefits of freight and passenger rail. Along with RPA's Sean Jeans-Gail and Jim Mathews, Canby discussed prospects for public transit and passenger rail after the 2020 election. All three were guardedly optimistic, citing strong support for passenger trains among a number of returning lawmakers who sit on relevant committees and the fact that President-elect Biden comes in with a deep understanding of the issues. Canby highlighted **results of a recent poll** showing that Americans support transit and trains and believe the country should invest more in those modes. Mathews pointed out the importance of educating our members of Congress on our issues by contacting them "early and often".

**You may view this and all past webinars at [railpassengers.org/webinars](https://railpassengers.org/webinars)**

## When Does My Train Run?

Almost all Amtrak trains are currently operating on altered schedules. The most up-to-date schedules are available when booking your trip on [Amtrak.com](https://www.amtrak.com) and in the **mobile app**.

Go to [amtrak.com/timetables](https://www.amtrak.com/timetables) to find timetables for the long-distance routes now operating on tri-weekly schedules.

Trains of interest to Michiganders depart Chicago on these days:

California Zephyr <i>MonWedSat</i>	Lake Shore Limited <i>MonThuSat</i>
Capitol Limited <i>MonThuSat</i>	Southwest Chief <i>MonThuSat</i>
City of New Orleans <i>MonThuSat</i>	Texas Eagle <i>TueFriSat</i>
Empire Builder <i>MonThuSat</i>	

**Tell MDOT the Future You Would Like To See**



Would you like to see fast, frequent trains in Michigan's future? What about better urban transit? More bicycle lanes? Safer places for pedestrians?

You can chime in by going to [MM2045.Metroquest.com](https://mm2045.metroquest.com) and submitting your ideas and comments. The survey is open through November 30. The thousands of responses to an earlier survey helped to establish a **vision for a transportation network** that is multi-modal, connected and environmentally sound, and that gets people where they need to go—in contrast to one focused simply on moving more vehicles down the road faster. Your voices have made a difference!

Plan to take a little extra time with the new survey. There are opportunities to add your comments at each step. MARP members Joshua Hamilton and Kay Chase are representing your interests on the stakeholders group guiding this process and have seen that the consultants are working hard to see that your ideas will underpin the final plan.

### Looking Ahead to Next Steps

The next phase of the process will look at how these ideas will be implemented over the next twenty-plus years. You have an additional opportunity to tell MDOT what passenger rail projects you would like to see go forward in coming years. **Submit your comments to MDOT here**. Then, send a copy to us, as well, at [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com). Your ideas will help MARP in developing its own submission.



**Brown Bag Lunch:**  
Virginia's Rail  
Expansion Plans

December 4, 2020  
12pm CT, 1pm ET  
**REGISTER HERE**



**Brown Bag Lunch:**  
Multitrack, the Rail  
Operations Simulation  
Software

View this and all past  
Brown Bag Lunches at  
[HSRail.org/events](https://HSRail.org/events)

**Have you renewed your MARP membership?**

**CLICK HERE to pay online**

**Or download a mail-in form HERE**



## 2020 Edition of the Michigan Rail Conference A Resounding Success : Part II

Day Two of the Michigan|Midwest Rail Conference 2020, “zoomed” on August 12 to more than 200 virtual attendees, opened with a stellar panel discussing **Rail Industry Policy Issues**. **Ian Jeffries, President & CEO, Association of American Railroads**, led off with the observation that since March “everything has been done through the lens of COVID-19.” While freight railroads experienced reductions in traffic, they have fared better than other segments of the transportation industry. FRA operational waivers allow workers to operate safely while social-distancing and relatively few workers have contracted the virus. The industry has concerns with pandemic-related liability issues and is seeking enhanced unemployment benefits for furloughed employees not eligible for standard workforce benefits. On the broader policy issues, Jeffries voiced concerns with pending economic regulations, rules “we’re not too excited about”, and questions about how to deal with small shippers. Overall, Jeffries remains optimistic that the Surface Transportation Board will deal fairly with the railroads.

**Chuck Baker, President, American Short Line & Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA)**, echoed Jeffries’s concerns with the surface transportation reauthorization bill passed by the House in July, but noted the industry will “have another bite at the apple” when the bill is taken up by the Senate. *[Editor’s note: as of mid-November, the Senate has failed to take action.]* Concerns with the bill focus on a mandate for two-person crews and a 10-minute limit on blocked crossings. On the plus side, Baker was thankful the bill contained no poison pills, specifically that truck size and weight limits will not be increased. Favorable tax treatment for short lines remains in place through 2022 and the industry hopes it will be made permanent. Noting the energy efficiency and lower emissions when freight moves by rail, Baker expressed the hope that the government will focus on a modal shift away from transport by road.

**Patrick Fuchs, member of the Surface Transportation Board**, outlined four policy areas defining the work of the STB, citing rate reform as the #1 priority. Secondly, an expectation for action in the fall regarding demurrage so as to give shippers a better understanding of charges. Finally, the STB is looking for improved data analysis and for filling two open positions on the Board.

The issue of on-time-performance came up during the Q&A period. Jeffries feels a key tenet must be a mutually agreed on schedule that is appropriate and feasible, with the provision for a third-party decision-maker if the parties can’t agree. He commented that present schedules were set many years ago, echoing an objection that was expressed repeatedly during hearings on the proposed FRA rule on **Metrics and Minimum Standards for Intercity Passenger Rail**. *[Editor’s note: the final rule was published in the Federal Register on 16 Nov 2020.]* Fuchs added that there is value in focusing on the customer’s interest in being on time, that there is likely a need for realignment of schedules, that access to train data is needed, and that the STB wants to avoid unnecessary litigation.

**Impacts & Opportunities from USMCA**—the recent trade agreement among the U.S., Mexico and Canada—was led off by **Bill Anderson, Director, Cross Border Institute, University of Windsor**. Anderson said Canada, initially apprehensive, is relieved the agreement reduces uncertainty around business and infrastructure investment, mentioning the **Gordie Howe Bridge** as an example. The bridge could serve to increase integration of retail supply chains (the integration of industrial supply chains is why Canada-US trade is so robust)

*(CONFERENCE continues on page 4)*

**CLICK HERE** to view the conference program. Scroll to the bottom of the program to view Speakers’ Bios. All sessions were recorded and are posted at [rail-learning.mtu.edu](http://rail-learning.mtu.edu). Registration is free. Sessions may be viewed on YouTube as well. See links below.

### Michigan Rail Conference 2020 — DAY 1

Plenary Session - Railroading in an Era of Social Distancing  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJAbCr2Jlm8>

#1A - Passenger Rail Transportation - Post COVID  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-rf5AVrzfc> starts at 3:00

#1B - Precision Scheduled Railroading  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uluDTX-GyLs> starts at 2:00

#2A - Developments in Grade Crossing and Trespasser Safety  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gvka1SSliag> starts at 2:00

#2B - LNG Transportation by Rail  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8t92R6nTDHo> starts at 7:00

Keynote Address - Joe McHugh, Amtrak  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVdJ7PBnNz0> starts at 4:30

### Michigan Rail Conference 2020 — DAY 2

Plenary Session - Rail Industry Policy Issues  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ol-kxpN2Am0> starts at 2:00

#1A - Freight Rail Transportation  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZaMNTF8DSeo> starts at 1:15

#1B - Passenger Rail Experience Improvements  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvCmFNPL0yA> starts at 9:00

#2A--Impacts & Opportunities from USMCA  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-srNpNXYew> starts at 3:25

#2B - Climate Impacts and Infrastructure Resilience  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HS9T8TVc2Ok> starts at 2:50

Keynote Address by Mike McClellan, Norfolk Southern VP Strategic Planning, was not recorded at his request.

## View from elsewhere . . .

*“It’s safe to say I’ve gotten to know the hardworking men and women of Amtrak over the years — I’m proud to stand with them as they face furloughs due to funding cuts. These essential workers have kept us moving during this pandemic — now it’s time we have their backs.”*

—September 30<sup>th</sup> tweet from then-candidate Joe Biden, who himself boarded a train in Cleveland for a **whistle stop tour** through Ohio and Pennsylvania the day following the first Presidential debate.

*“We recognize that the coronavirus has profoundly affected the national rail network with a major reduction in ridership, which is especially unfortunate when considering that Amtrak had set passenger service records in recent years. However, placing the burden of the pandemic’s effects on all of these essential workers who faithfully kept the service running during this ongoing national emergency is absolutely wrong. Job cuts are not the cure.”*

—**Statement by presidents** of the SMART-TD, BLET and TCU labor unions that organized rallies across the country to call attention to Amtrak service cuts and job losses.



## Amtrak Workers Rally in Dearborn

On September 30<sup>th</sup>, rail union workers in New York City, Chicago, Washington DC and Los Angeles rallied to urge members of Congress to provide emergency funding to Amtrak to prevent planned cuts to service and its work-force. Nate Hatton, a conductor on Michigan trains, stepped up to coordinate a pop-up rally outside the John D. Dingell Transportation Center in Dearborn. Dearborn Councilwoman Leslie Herrick showed up in support saying, “This is an important part of intermodal transportation. It’s important for the future of Dearborn.” Amtrak employed 196 Michiganders in FY2019 and purchased \$10,248,682 in goods and services.

*Photo: Briana Gasorski/The Arab American News*

**(CONFERENCE continued from page 3)**

and portend a future for interconnected intermodal facilities located in the US and serving demand in Canada.

**Andrea Waldock Neithold, Gov’t Affairs, US Canadian National**, pointed out that CN is the only railroad that reaches all three United States coasts. CN is working on automated systems to make border crossings safer, quicker and more reliable. She noted that CN is adding a track at the plant in Flint and commented that 1 out of 4 finished automobiles leaves Michigan on a CN train.

**Dan Ujcz, chair of the international and regional practice group of Dickinson-Wright law firm**, characterized the USMCA as a renovation, rather than a ripping up, of NAFTA, but made it clear there are challenges for companies bringing semi-finished products from overseas, China in particular. Rebalancing trade with Mexico is intertwined with issues including absence of a resolution of Mexican trucking issues and prospects for rapid unionization. To help companies navigate the changes, the law firm **provides a series of free webinars**. Ujcz advised keeping an eye on the Niagara Falls crossing where New York Sen. Schumer has recently **pushed for implementing pre-clearance of rail passengers** at the new **Amtrak Niagara Falls Station**.

**Mike McClellan, Norfolk Southern VP for Strategic Planning**, closed the conference on an optimistic note, focusing mainly on the industry’s embrace of **Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR)** designed to control expenses, manage assets, operate safely, and develop and empower people. New operating efficiencies will bring a “capacity dividend” allowing transport of greater volumes and resulting in better customer service. He pointed out that railroads are “prone to be chastised by investors” for failure to lower operating ratios. He sees greater productivity through PSR, increasing automation and next-gen railcar technology, all of which will help the railroad industry remain competitive in the face of the threat of autonomous trucks. In the Q&A period, he said the Class I’s “have an interest in running passenger trains on time” but need a mechanism to agree on schedules. Asked about adding passenger service, he said “If you want to bring passenger trains, you need to bring money,” adding that new capacity has allowed some new passenger service in Virginia. He looks for public policy to ensure modal equity (trains vs trucks). Because rail is already very fuel efficient, the economics of alternative motive power must be compelling; hydrogen fuel cells appear to be the best alternative.

## Contact Your Lawmaker

Congressional Switchboard  
202-224-3121