



ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

www.marp.org

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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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Webmaster, Larry Sobczak	
ON TRACK Editor, Kay Chase	

2021 MEETINGS

28 January – Member Meeting
Virginia High Speed Rail

18 March – Member Meeting
Amtrak has Plans for Ohio
Zoom at 5:00 PM

15 April – Member Meeting
Toledo Passenger Rail Committee
Zoom at 5:00 PM

Executive Committee
3rd Wednesday
of the Month

Fall Date TBA
48th Annual Meeting

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

Passenger Trains May at Last Get the Boost They Deserve

It has been an exhilarating couple of weeks for supporters of frequent, fast and efficient passenger trains. On March 31, President Biden rolled out his massive infrastructure proposal, **the American Jobs Plan**, with \$80 billion to address Amtrak's repair backlog and improve and expand the existing passenger rail network. With \$85 billion for transit bringing the total for rail/bus modes to \$165 billion, and \$115 billion for repair of roads and bridges, the administration is signaling a shift to mass transit and a fix-it-first policy over continued expansion of the highway system. By far the biggest slice of the pie, \$174 billion or 28% of the total transportation portion, goes to electric vehicle infrastructure and incentives.

Following quickly on the heels of the President's announcement, Amtrak issued a **Fact Sheet and Map** detailing its *Amtrak Connects US* vision for the future. This is an elaboration of ideas it has been promoting across the country for several months that include adding new service to major cities currently without Amtrak service, such as Las Vegas, Nashville, Columbus OH, and Phoenix.

A few days before the Biden announcement, U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal and U.S. Representative Danny Davis introduced the **Intercity Passenger Rail Trust Fund Act**, which would provide permanent funding for Amtrak in much the same way the Surface Transportation Trust Fund supports highway construction and repair.

Also in March, U.S. Representative Seth Moulton reintroduced his **American High Speed Rail Act** to invest \$41 billion annually in high-speed and higher-speed rail through grants administered by the Federal Railroad Administration over the next five years, with incentives for \$38 billion or more in non-federal funding. Rep. Moulton spoke about his plan **on this March 30 webinar**.

The reality check for all these plans is that none of this will happen without Congressional action. We, as advocates for a safer, more equitable and sustainable transportation network, have our work cut out for us in persuading the decision makers in our state capitals and on the Hill that these investments are important to our country's future.

MARP 2021 Meeting Schedule

Due to the continuing 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 continue to meet via Zoom on the third Wednesday of each month. If you have ideas to contribute, questions or concerns, please send them to us at marprail@yahoo.com. If you would like to participate in the meetings, please contact MARP Chair John Guidinger at jhguidinger1@yahoo.com.

MARP Members and Friends Learn of Plans to Expand Ohio Passenger Train Services

Nearly sixty rail advocates from around the Midwest “zoomed in” to MARP’s 18 March meeting to hear more about [Amtrak’s recent proposals to expand passenger train services on existing routes in Ohio and initiate new services](#) connecting Cleveland-Columbus-Dayton-Cincinnati and Toledo-Detroit.

Our speaker was Stu Nicholson, the executive director of [All Aboard Ohio](#). Nicholson reflected that it has been an interesting few weeks as Amtrak has made known plans for service expansion or new services in 30-35 corridors around the country. All Aboard Ohio (AAO) is particularly excited about the “3C Corridor”—now the “3C+D Corridor” with the inclusion of Dayton. AAO views the Amtrak proposal as a validation of the work they did more than a decade ago for restoration of service not seen on this corridor since 1971 only to have the federal stimulus funding available at that time rejected by then-Governor Kasich.

Under the Amtrak proposal, Cleveland would become a regional hub with services connecting to Albany, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati, as well as to Detroit via Toledo. AAO is distributing resolutions of support to all municipalities along the 3C+D route. The Cincinnati City Council, recognizing the economic boost that daily *Cardinal* service connecting Cincinnati to Indianapolis and Chicago would bring, unanimously passed a resolution of support.

Because implementation of these plans hinges on Congress providing tens of billions in the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization bill, Nicholson says he is finding himself in the position of “having to manage expectations” and cautioning that this is not going to happen overnight. He foresees 3 to 4 years to get expanded services in existing corridors and longer yet for new service that will have to start from scratch with environmental assessment, right-of-way acquisition and infrastructure work.

Although Amtrak proposes covering the first 2-3 years’ operating expense, Nicholson sees a need for Ohio to establish a dedicated fund for long-term support of train service. CSX reportedly wants to sell a segment of track north of Columbus, an excellent opportunity for state purchase. Nicholson mentions that corridor preservation rather than track preservation has been a focus.

In discussion following the presentation, several points were made:

- think outside the box, capture value of development around stations to cover operating expense
- need to engage local developers, planning departments

(OHIO continues at right)

(OHIO continued from left)

- Amtrak is sending up trial balloons to stimulate thinking about creating a program that doesn’t exist today; advocates will need to rally the troops to convince Congress to get behind this
- this is the first time we’ve seen Amtrak be seriously proactive about expanding service
- this is an opportune moment with a President and a USDOT Secretary who understand the importance of passenger rail
- for long term success, focus on the 3 pillars of the business models adopted by *Brightline* and *Texas Central*: (1) invest in the infrastructure; (2) plan for high frequencies; (3) capitalize on the advantage/enhanced value of property with good access to rail
- Ohio Governor DeWine consistently voted for funding for Amtrak when he was in Congress and appears to be favorable to expansion of passenger train service; seeing some GOP support in the Ohio General Assembly where the ODOT budget is handled separately from general budget

In closing observations, Nicholson opined that this is an economic development tool. Businesses look for a strong transportation network when relocating. Florida’s *Brightline* and Maine’s *Downeaster* are two examples that we can point to in making the case for passenger rail as a vital component of a transportation network that gets people to the places they need to go.

In the business portion of the meeting, Governmental Affairs Coordinator, Steve Vagnozzi, reported that both MDOT and Rail Passengers Association (RPA) have asked that MARP members thank members of Congress for passing the American Recovery Plan Act (ARP) signed into law in March. Amtrak has announced that funding from the ARP will allow recall of 1200 furloughed employees and restoration of daily services on the long distance routes. The ARP includes funds for state-supported services. MDOT is assessing what this means for service on the *Wolverine* line that has seen just one daily round trip since last spring.

(OHIO continues on page 3)

Have you renewed your MARP membership?

[CLICK HERE to pay online](#)

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

Rail Passengers Advocacy Summit and Virtual Day on the Hill April 18-20

It's cherry blossom time in the nation's Capital and time for the annual Advocacy Summit and Day on the Hill hosted by the Rail Passengers Association. The event is being held "virtually" this year, giving all of us a rare chance to take part without the considerable expense of traveling to Washington, D.C. **Registration is now open** and final touches are being put on the program.

Headlining the event are three speakers who will have much to tell us about a year that is shaping up to be an extraordinary one for the future of passenger rail. William Flynn and Stephen Gardner, Amtrak CEO and President, respectively, will speak during sessions on the second day of the conference, as will Amtrak Board Chair Anthony Coscia.

We will sit in on meetings of the RPA Board of Directors and the Council of Representatives on the opening day. The next two days will be filled with legislative updates, advocacy skills building and virtual meetings with members of Congress or their staff aides.

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER NOW

Michigan is represented on the RPA Board of Directors by MARP member Rich Vavra-Musser. Dwight Phillips and Larry Krieg, also members of MARP, sit on the Council of Representatives.

If you plan to attend (and we hope you do), please let us know. We plan to hold a virtual "de-briefing" session a few days after the conference and would welcome your participation. Send email to marprail@yahoo.com if you would like to be included.

(OHIO continued from page 2)

Vagnozzi also shared information concerning new equipment and operations:

- The new *Venture* cars will go into revenue service in the Midwest in the 2nd quarter of 2021; 18 are now in Chicago and plans are for rollout of the new cars across all eight Midwest lines during 2021.
- 90 mph operation is set to begin soon for all passenger trains on the Joliet–East St. Louis segment
- 90-110 mph operation will be extended east of Kalamazoo in the areas where warranted

Secretary, Kay Chase, reported that renewals have come in from 100 MARP members. Two new members joined us on this call: Lawrence Lee (Wilmette IL) and Carol Ulstad, a staff member with Groundwork Center in Traverse City. Others recently welcomed as members are: Karen Kiski-Roe (Las Vegas NV), Mark Quam (Secretary/Treasurer, West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition), and Constance Howse (Livonia MI).

Clark Charnetski is preparing a White Paper to aid in developing a MARP policy position regarding use of Detroit's Michigan Central Station, now being renovated by Ford Land Development. He is researching the history of how and why the current *Wolverine* service evolved as it has. As a result of his research and in discussions with Hugh Gurney, he believes Amtrak's Detroit service should remain at the New Center location on Woodward Ave. Stay tuned for more discussion of this matter.



Amtrak Connects US
CLICK HERE for Fact Sheet
and Large Map



High Speed Rail Alliance



Brown Bag Lunch: CREATE Passenger Rail Improvements

April 16, 2021
1 pm ET, 12 pm CT



By Maryland GovPics

Brown Bag Lunch: Baltimore - Washington DC Maglev Project

April 23, 2021
1 pm ET, 12 pm CT



Brown Bag Lunch: The National Passenger Rail Agenda

April 27, 2021
1 pm ET, 12 pm CT



Brown Bag Lunch: Talgo Trains

April 30, 2021
1 pm ET, 12 pm CT

To REGISTER For Any of These Events, Go To HSRail.org/Events

View from elsewhere . . .

“Columbus might be a “smart city” of the future, but it’s struggling in the present to maintain intercity transportation options . . . Columbus and Phoenix are identified as the most prominent ‘pockets of pain’ in the country because of their lack of express bus service (such as Megabus, which left Columbus in January) or Amtrak service (Columbus lost passenger rail in the 1970s).”

—from **The Columbus Dispatch** reporting on a Chaddick Institute study focusing on large cities that lack rail and express bus connections to other major cities. Among the cities that came up short are Akron and Dayton in Ohio, as well as Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Fort Myers, Florida. See the full study at <http://bit.ly/2xd2LEb>.

“Sustainable transportation advocates are already questioning how much President Biden’s infrastructure package will transform our national addiction to cars — especially since hefty electric car incentives will hand drivers more money than transit riders.”

—from **"Five questions about Biden's infrastructure package"** in the 31 March issue of StreetsBlogUSA.

Arrival Time	Number	Name	To	Status
05:08	339	HIAWATHA	MILWAUKEE	BOARDING
05:58	383	ILL. ZEPHYR	QUINCY	ON TIME
06:30	370	PERE MARQ.	GRAND RAPIDS	ON TIME
07:00	307	LINCOLN S.	ST. LOUIS	ON TIME
09:04	342	HIAWATHA	CHICAGO	ON TIME
11:10	306	LINCOLN S.	CHICAGO	ON TIME

The Solari Board Lives On

The electromechanical status boards that have disappeared from Amtrak stations everywhere (Philadelphia’s 30th Street Station was the last to lose its board—just two years ago) still live, in simulated form, on the internet. Go to dixielandsoftware.net/Amtrak/solari to watch the tiles flap and hear the metallic clatter for any station in the country, even tiny Lapeer (although it’s certainly more fun to visit one of the busier stations.) The ingenious creator of this site also has a **Slide Rule Manual** that those of a certain age may enjoy, while others may ask “What’s a slide rule?” Some interesting history of the Solari board may be found [here](#).

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