



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.

MARP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

2020-2022

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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

13 May – Join HSRail.org to hear
Derrick James Speak on
Amtrak's Vision 2035

Executive Committee

3rd Wednesday
of the Month

Fall Date TBA

48th Annual Meeting

Visit www.marp.org

Email marprail@yahoo.com

Toledo to Detroit by Train is Topic of Discussion at MARP's April Meeting

Setting an attendance record, the 15 April online MARP meeting hosted 38 members and 32 guests. Attendees included State Senator Dale Zorn, who represents the Monroe area (17th District) and was recently appointed to the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission; State Rep. Padma Kuppia (District 41), who would like to see expanded service into Oakland County; State Rep. Felicia Brabec; and Danielle Branz, a staff member for U.S. Rep. Lisa McClain).

Our guest speaker was Roger Streiffert, Transportation Planner for the Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments (TMACOG), who spoke about the **Toledo-Detroit Ridership Feasibility & Cost Estimate Study** completed in 2019.

TMACOG includes three SE Michigan townships—Erie, Whiteford and Bedford—that the federal government considers part of the Toledo metropolitan area. TMACOG has an active and enthusiastic **Passenger Rail Committee** with a diverse membership (planners, professional people, former rail employees, advocates, labor representatives, economic development representatives). This committee provides guidance for transportation planning in the metropolitan region.

Encouraged by the **Ann Arbor to Traverse City (A2TC) passenger rail study** and envisioning a potential for connecting to northern Michigan, TMACOG and the Toledo City Council committed \$50,000 for a study to "examine how passenger rail service between Toledo and Detroit could...improve local economies through better access to "markets, jobs, and...the social and leisure facilities of both...regions." The study, completed in 2019, was conducted by *TEMS, Inc.*, the same firm that did the **A2TC** and **Coast-to-Coast Passenger Rail** studies in Michigan.

Streiffert cited interest in a direct connection to Detroit Metro airport (DTW) as a primary motivation for seeking a rail connection, at the same time acknowledging some reluctance of city fathers in the prospect of diverting business from Toledo Express Airport, an airport with a smaller

(TOLEDO continues on page 2)

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.

(**TOLEDO** continued from page 1)

range of destination options.

The study makes a **strong case for development of a Toledo-Detroit-Ann Arbor rail service** with a major hub at the DTW Airport, (see summary, Section 9.1, on page 90). The service is seen as comparable to Amtrak's *Hiawatha* service (Chicago-Milwaukee) in that it would handle a significant share of daily commuter trips. As a next step, *TEMS* advises completion of a more detailed Tier 1 EIS or feasibility study to "refine the marketing, train equipment, infrastructure, operating and funding strategies for the corridor."

The financial challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic have dimmed near-term prospects for securing the estimated \$300,000 needed to take the next steps, although the City of Toledo remains interested in pursuing the project.

Streiffert made a point of highlighting the importance of having a "champion" and credited Toledo Councilman Chris Delaney as key to moving this project forward. In addition, the proposal has been received enthusiastically by the City of Monroe. The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) prefers the alternative of connecting Toledo directly to Detroit and then going west to the airport. DTW expressed enthusiasm for rail connections, showing TMACOG a rough plan for a station on the *Wolverine* line with a bus connection to DTW; the connection to Toledo via the CSX line would give access from three directions.

TMACOG will be meeting with Amtrak in the next few weeks and is excited about Amtrak's recently announced Vision 2035, dubbed **Amtrak Connects US**, which shows expanded Cleveland to Toledo service extending to Detroit. TMACOG is looking to enlist further interest and support within the region, as local buy-in will enhance chances for securing federal grants. Passenger Rail Committee member Tim Porter suggests that MARP could be helpful in this effort.

In response to a comment that frequent express bus service to DTW would be more time efficient, Streiffert said that *Michigan Flyer* is interested in running such a service and, pre-COVID, was looking at scheduling round trips from two Toledo locations to DTW. Plans have been put on hold.

At this point, CSX has not been approached, but that is seen as a necessary next step.

Also featured on the program was Peter Anastor, who assumed the position of Director of the MDOT Office of Rail in January. He said the most immediate challenge is how to get back to where we were before COVID-19. While ridership is only 35%-40% of pre-COVID levels, steady increases have been seen on all 3 routes and the first 2 weeks in April logged

(**TOLEDO** continues on page 3)

IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO RSVP

High Speed Rail Alliance Brown Bag Lunch

Thursday, 13 May, 1:00 pm EDT

"Amtrak's Vision 2035"

with speaker

Derrick James

In lieu of a MARP membership meeting in May, we are inviting members and friends to enjoy a Virtual Brown Bag Lunch with the High Speed Rail Alliance.

Derrick James, Amtrak Director of Government Affairs, will be the featured speaker. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn about Amtrak's "Vision 2035" to enhance current services and connect new city pairs across the country.

The zoom link will be provided when you register.

REGISTER HERE

Or go to HSRail.org/Events



Amtrak Connects US
CLICK HERE for Fact Sheet
and Large Map

Rail Passengers Association Successfully Navigates a "Virtual" Day on the Hill

MARP members Steve Vagnozzi, Larry Krieg, Dwight Phillips, and Carolyn Ulstad attended RPA's annual advocacy training and legislative visits on April 18-20. Krieg and Phillips are members of the RPA Council of Representatives and thus involved as well in planning and policy sessions on Day One. Day Two was devoted to legislative updates and sessions on the issues and "asks" that members would be addressing in their visits to the Hill the following day. The four MARP members divided up for "virtual" visits with staffers for both Sen. Gary Peters and Sen. Debbie Stabenow, as well as staff for Representatives Jack Bergman, John Moolenaar, Peter Meijer, Bill Huizenga, Tim Walberg, Elissa Slotkin, Haley Stevens, Lisa McClain, Debbie Dingell, Andy Levin, Dan Kildee and Rashida Tlaib. **Fact Sheets** were provided to each office. It appears that much of the Michigan Congressional delegation views passenger rail favorably. In his send-off, RPA's head Jim Mathews exhorted the troops, "This is not a one and done. We need to follow through, keep the relationship alive. This is the beginning of a process that will culminate with the end of the budget year in September."

(*TOLEDO* continued from page 2)

the best figures since the start of the pandemic. Anastor hopes to bring back a 2nd Wolverine round trip at the earliest time feasible, depending on how ridership is going and how soon operational aspects can be restarted safely. The third COVID-relief bill will help fill some of the funding gaps. He believes the 50% capacity restriction may

be lifted in mid-May. Although he could not give a firm date, he feels Michigan is close to seeing the new Siemens *Venture* cars in revenue service. MDOT is anticipating FRA approval in the next few months for raising speeds to 110 mph on the Kalamazoo to Albion segment. Anastor is optimistic about federal grant possibilities under the Biden administration and with “Mayor Pete” Buttigieg as USDOT Secretary.

In answer to questions, Anastor said that Ford’s reported interest in returning trains to Michigan Central Station has come up in conversations with SEMCOG and “the wheels are in motion to sit down with Ford and see what their vision is for Michigan Central Depot.” He sees potential for a stronger impact when private enterprise is talking about rail and seeing it as a benefit for workers. He also said MDOT “has not sat down with CP” concerning the Detroit

Exhibit 1-1: Proposed Toledo-Detroit-Ann Arbor Rail Corridor



Exhibit 1-2: Additional Toledo-Detroit-Ann Arbor Alternatives for a Future Assessment



River tunnel, but certainly wants to explore the connection with Toronto.

A final questioner said a recent news article revealed that an \$87 million highway project will widen 2.7 miles of I-94 in Kalamazoo and asked Anastor what he would do if \$87 million were dropped in his lap. He chuckled and answered that “even rail projects cost more than you think.” He continued, “It’s exciting to think we’re entering a time when passenger rail will be considered for some of these investments in a way that they haven’t been in the past.”

Anastor added that passenger trains have a role in the sustainability and equity of the transportation network and he has a goal of taking “the opportunity to change the mindset so we build a truly long term sustainable network that can meet the needs of our citizens and companies here in Michigan.”

HAPPY 50TH ANNIVERSARY
AMTRAK
1971-2021

Celebrate at 30th Street Station
with Amtrak's
Bill Flynn & Stephen Gardner

Reminisce with
“Amtrak Joe” Biden
Then Hear His Plan to
Build Back Better

See our New *Venture* Cars
Crossing the St. Joe River

Calling all 9th – 11th Graders

Students currently in the 9th through 11th grades are invited to explore rail and intermodal transportation and have some fun doing it. Scheduled for July 12-16 at Michigan Technological University, the program features hands-on classroom activities and numerous field trips to give you a first-hand look at the Rail & Intermodal Transportation Industry - the people who keep the world on the move! Visit BNSF and CN railyard facilities and explore the North Shore Scenic Railroad & Lake Superior Railroad Museum in Duluth MN.



FULL SCHOLARSHIPS ARE AVAILABLE
FOR COMPLETE INFORMATION VISIT

<http://www.rail.mtu.edu/event/rail-and-intermodal-summer-youth-program-2021>

Or contact David Nelson at dannelso@mtu.edu or by phone at 906-487-1734

View from elsewhere . . .

“Given President Biden’s call for even more rail funding, I am proposing to robustly fund high-speed rail planning and development in our surface transportation reauthorization package. It is time the United States makes a long-term bold effort to bring greater mobility to the nation”

—Transportation & Infrastructure Subcommittee Chair Donald Payne Jr., in a prepared statement opening a **06 May hearing** on the benefits and challenges of high-speed rail and emerging rail technologies. Speakers, in the second half of the four hour hearing, included Amtrak CEO **Bill Flynn**, Texas Central CEO **Carlos Aguilar**, former USDOT Deputy Secretary **John Porcari**, Northeast Maglev CEO **Wayne Rogers** and others. They provided a range of perspectives on the opportunities and limitations associated with HSR and emerging rail technologies, touching on regulatory oversight, technology readiness, project costs and available federal resources. Rep. Moulton had a particularly pointed exchange with a witness critical of the Texas Central project **at 1:31:42 in the hearing**. Watch the entire hearing **HERE**. Bill Flynn appears in the second half of the hearing, which begins at 2:48:42, and is given numerous opportunities to elucidate Amtrak’s vision for the future.



Private Varnish on the Michigan Line

MARP member JP DesCamp caught this rare sight at the Kalamazoo station on April 23. The *“Hollywood Beach”* was attached to Train No. 351 headed for Chicago with a group of bachelor party celebrants. This sleeper-lounge car is one of three **“Sun Lounge” cars** built by the Pullman-Standard Company in 1956 for the *Seaboard Air Lines* flagship fleet known as the *Silver Meteor* operating between New York City and Miami, Florida. The car remained part of the Amtrak fleet until 1981. Now privately owned, it is available for chartered trips.

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