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Michigan Association of
Railroad Passengers
www.marp.org

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Observations on Norfolk Southern south of the lake

(Ed. Note: The 45-mile segment of the Norfolk Southern (NS) mainline between Porter, Indiana, and Chicago Union Station (CUS), "South of the Lake", is outside of Michigan. But it is very important to Michigan because all of the Michigan Amtrak trains (and others) pass over this route. Severe NS freight train congestion on this segment constantly delays Amtrak's passenger trains. Studies have been made, or need to be made, to either identify another route for passenger trains or determine what could be done to improve the NS route to provide the capacity for reliable passenger train operations.)

By Nick Little

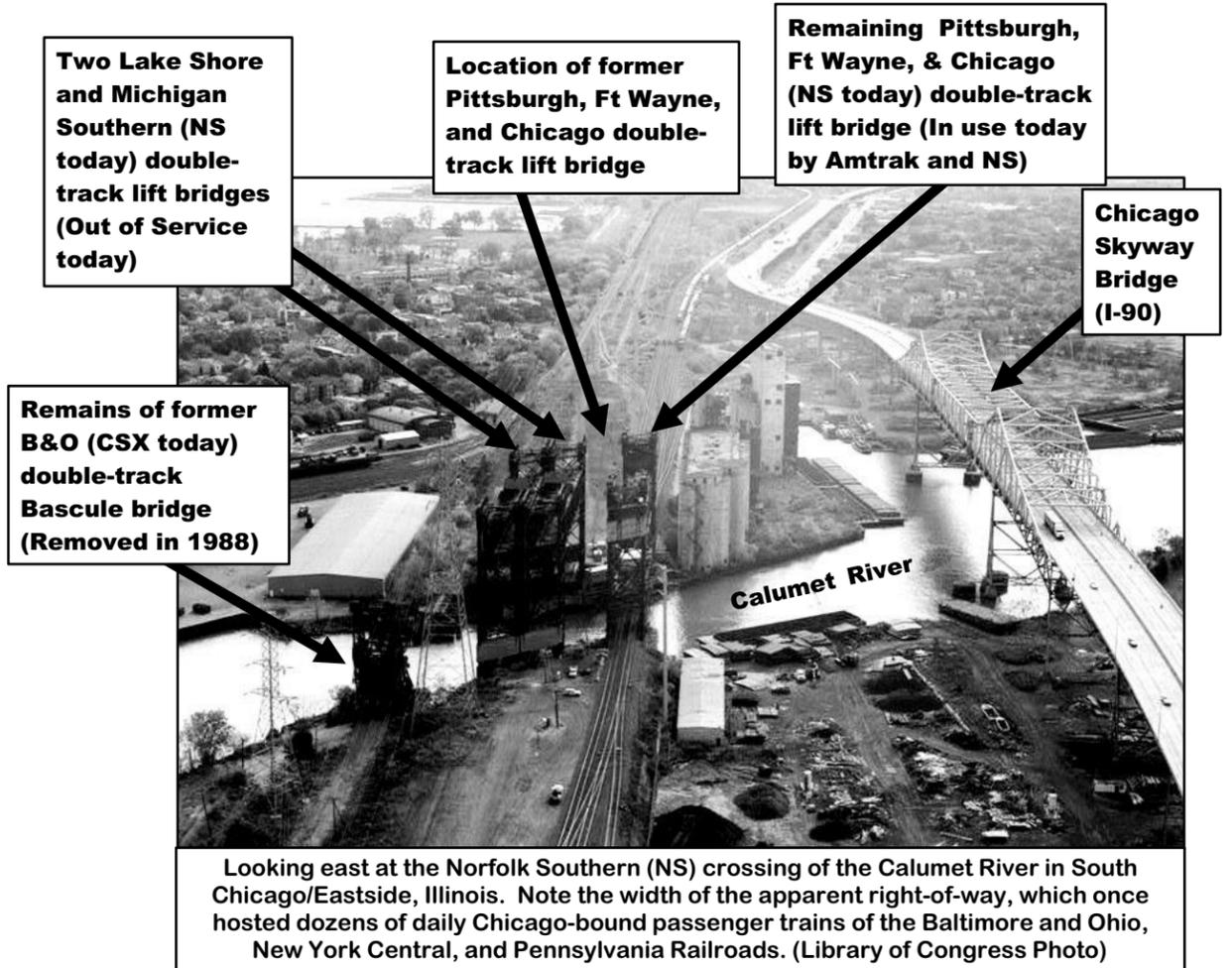
I have observed that NS appears to have modified their dispatching procedures to better serve Amtrak in recent months. I believe there are three main factors at play here. (I emphasize that the following is based on personal observation only and not on scientific analysis and, as such, does not necessarily represent the views of MSU/CRRE):

1. NS traffic is down (as it is on the other freight railroads) compared to recent years. This is partly due to a slowing national economy. Current freight rail traffic reduction pattern is a sign of approaching recession per John Gray at American Association of Railroads. When really busy, NS

would park trains just outside the Chicago terminal limits to observe the curfew for Metra and Amtrak trains in the morning and evening rush hours. That caused trains to form queues way back through their network.

2. NS intermodal traffic patterns and volume have changed. Less is originating on the west coast heading east to and beyond Chicago. More is originating in the Gulf or east coast (NY/NJ has overtaken Los Angeles/Long Beach traffic numbers in Q2/2022). Intermodal traffic overall is down due to many factors resulting from continuing whiplash effects following the early pandemic supply chain chaos. Retail sales this season reflect consumers'

See *Observations* page 3



Looking east at the Norfolk Southern (NS) crossing of the Calumet River in South Chicago/Eastside, Illinois. Note the width of the apparent right-of-way, which once hosted dozens of daily Chicago-bound passenger trains of the Baltimore and Ohio, New York Central, and Pennsylvania Railroads. (Library of Congress Photo)



Rendering of proposed replacement bridge at Albany. Note pedestrian walkway across the river. (NYSDOT rendering)

Replacement of Albany Livingston Avenue Bridge Moving Forward

New York State Department of Transportation will start design work on replacing the railroad bridge across the Hudson River at Albany. The bridge normally carries 12 Amtrak Empire Corridor trains, including the Lake Shore Limited, and between 2 and 6 CSX and Canadian Pacific freight trains each day. The existing 1,100-foot double-track bridge is owned by CSX and leased to Amtrak, and contains a movable swing span for water traffic. Currently limited to one train at a time at 15 MPH, parts of the existing bridge date to the period immediately after the Civil War.

The new bridge will be built alongside the existing bridge and employ a lift span for water traffic. The bridge will include a pedestrian walkway that connects to a local trail system. The project will also include work on the tracks on the Rensselaer side and rebuilding bridges over Water Street and Centre streets on the Albany side. Construction should start later this year and be completed in 2026. The old bridge will be removed after the new bridge is put into service.

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Contributors to this issue: Nick Little, John Boyse, Hugh Gurney and Todd Schultz

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About MARP

The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. (MARP) was established in 1973 as a customer advocacy group to improve intercity passenger rail and bus service, commuter rail service, and transit, and to encourage the preservation of historic railroad stations.

MARP is not affiliated with Amtrak, the railroads, governments, or any political party. MARP is incorporated as a Michigan non-profit organization and is exempt from federal income tax under the IRS code 501(c)(3) as a charitable educational organization. Donations to MARP may be tax-deductible in accordance with IRS rules.

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MICHIGAN SERVICES

Amtrak Train Schedules Effective November 21, 2022 Chicago-Kalamazoo-Ann Arbor-Detroit-Pontiac Chicago-Kalamazoo-East Lansing-Port Huron														
Wolverine Service	Wolverine Service	Blue Water	Wolverine Service		Train Name			Wolverine Service	Blue Water	Wolverine Service	Wolverine Service			
350	352	364	354		Train Number			351	365	353	355			
Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily	Mile	Days of Operation			Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily			
6:45a	2:15p	4:00p	5:50p	0	Dp	CHICAGO, IL, Un Sta (CT)			Ar	10:32a	11:45p	2:02p	10:40p	
7:11a	↓	↓	↓	16		Hammond-Whiting, IN (CT)			↑	↑	↑	1:15p	9:54p	
9:04a	4:31p	6:10p	8:04p	62		New Buffalo, MI (ET)						11:24a	1:21p	10:02p
9:29a	4:52p	6:32p	8:24p	89		Niles, MI						11:04a	1:01p	9:42p
9:40a	↓	6:43p	↓	102		Dowagiac, MI						10:52a	↑	9:29p
10:14a	5:26p	7:11p	8:58p	138		Kalamazoo, MI				9:16a	10:26a	12:28p	9:00p	
10:56a	6:03p	7:33p	9:35p	160		Battle Creek, MI				8:48a	10:00a	12:01p	8:33p	
		9:00p		208		East Lansing, MI				↑	8:54a	↑	↑	
		9:37p		238		Durand, MI					8:08a			
		10:08p		256		Flint, MI					7:35a			
		10:34p		274	↓	Lapeer, MI					7:08a			
		11:31p	↓	319	Ar	PORT HURON, MI			Dp		6:20a			
↓	↓		10:03p	184		Albion, MI			↑	8:15a				
11:51a	6:55p		10:28p	208		Jackson, MI				7:51a		10:58a	7:37p	
12:28p	7:35p		11:08p	243		Ann Arbor, MI				7:14a		10:23a	7:00p	
12:57p	8:11p		11:37p	271		Dearborn, MI				6:44a		9:53a	6:29p	
1:25p	8:44p		12:10a	281		DETROIT, MI				6:26a		9:35a	6:11p	
1:49p	9:05p		12:34a	292		Royal Oak, MI				6:03a		9:12a	5:48p	
1:57p	9:12p		12:42a	296	↓	Troy, MI				5:56a		9:04a	5:41p	
2:11p	9:29p		1:01a	304	Ar	PONTIAC, MI (ET)			Dp	5:43a		8:50a	5:28p	

Amtrak Train Schedule Effective November 21, 2022 Chicago-Grand Rapids

Pere Marquette	Train Name					Pere Marquette	
370	Train Number					371	
Daily	Mile	Days of Operation			Daily		
6:30p	0	Dp	CHICAGO, IL, Un Sta (CT)			Ar	9:08a
9:14p	89		St. Joe-Benton Harbor, MI (ET)			↑	8:10a
9:50p	116		Bangor, MI				7:32a
10:33p	151	↓	Holland, MI				6:49a
11:34p	176	Ar	GRAND RAPIDS, MI (ET)			Dp	6:00a

NOTE: These schedules are provided for planning purposes only and may not show recent time changes. Consult with Amtrak at AMTRAK.COM or 1-800-USA-RAIL when making reservations.

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Detroit	Amtrak	Dwight Phillips
Dowagiac	None	Dowagiac Chbr of Commerce
Durand	Museum	Mary Stone
East Lansing	Caretkr	Steve Vagnozzi
Flint	Bus	Barb Westcott
Grand Rapids	Caretkr	Mit Renroc
Holland	None	Nathan Nietering
Jackson	Caretkr	John Guidinger
Kalamazoo	Caretkr	Warren Fritz
Lapeer	None	Jim Slater
New Buffalo	None	Katha Kissman
Niles	Caretkr	Jack Kessler
Pontiac	Bus	Robert Tischbein
Port Huron	None	T. J. Gaffney
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Pere Marquette Suffers from Reduced and Inconsistent Consists



The Chicago bound Pere Marquette arrives in St. Joseph, Michigan, on December 16, 2017, with Superliner coaches. (Todd Schultz photo)

By Todd Schultz

Today's Chicago-Grand Rapids Pere Marquette is a shorter train. A "standard" capacity Pere Marquette, which had been 210 to 225 seats for decades, was

reduced to an average of 150 to 175 seats in October, November, and December of 2022. In January of this year harsh weather and unreliable locomotives resulted in damage to the consist

and had the effect of further reducing the capacity for eight days to as low as 83 seats on some days. The trains have confusing mixtures of Superliner, Horizon, Amfleet, and Venture cars.

Capacity was increased briefly to 284 seats for the week of Thanksgiving; an appreciated boost, but only a return to "normal" and not a true expansion to meet holiday demand. Capacity was not increased for Christmas. Passengers tell us they encountered sold out trains on weekends approaching Christmas. Practically all trains were sold out Christmas week, before they were cancelled due to the weather. Looking back seven to ten years, it was not uncommon to see trains capable of carrying 358 passengers during Thanksgiving week and 284 during Christmas, Spring Break, and summer holidays.

This month (January) during the post-holiday lull, spot-checks indicate that weekday trains are running 50 to 60 percent full. Weekend trains are 90 to 99 percent full, with business class often sold out for much of the route. Amtrak says that it doesn't have the equipment to add more cars.

However, a passenger who can't get a seat when he or she needs to travel is

less likely to choose the train again in the future. This situation needs to be resolved as soon as possible. As winter transitions to spring, MARP urges MDOT to monitor capacity on the Pere Marquette and ensure that Amtrak increases the number of available seats as soon as possible. Reduced capacity on the train translates into lower revenue and higher costs for MDOT.

It might be time to think differently. Maybe it's time to consider adding another coach on Friday night, running through Monday morning. This would do wonders for weekend demand in the summer and in the Thanksgiving-Christmas busy season.

And we must return to the practice of running a second train on Friday night through Sunday morning during holiday periods. Up until 2018, extra trains were run during Thanksgiving, but they were not run 2019, reportedly due to capacity constraints on the NS and other considerations. MDOT and MARP agree that a second frequency on the Pere Marquette route makes sense in the long term. But, meanwhile adding another coach or a second train during peak demand periods is a needed step towards adding a second train.

Observations on Norfolk Southern . . . Continued from page 1

fears of continuing high inflation, so bargains are sought from overstocked inventory sales, resulting in lower replenishment and less risk by retailers tying-up capital in inventory, especially given no more "cheap money" as interest rates rise. Finally, on this topic, NS streamlined their Chicago intermodal services and now run a timetabled service to/from Chicago terminals that finally resembles some of the original Precision Scheduled Railroading goals that are precise and scheduled.

3. Leading up to the first labor strike deadline back in September, NS discovered that they could run Amtrak between Elkhart and Chicago using as much of a dedicated track with Amtrak trains operating in flights wherever possible. (Is this the way things were originally planned?) Hence the departure times from CUS are close together at some times of the day. They upgraded a lot of the crossovers a few years ago to enable faster switching of freight trains (i.e., close to line speed for freights) and occasionally they can pass an Amtrak train around a stopped freight using one of the "freight" tracks as you experienced. (John Guidinger recently described to Nick an incident of skillful dispatching by NS on this route segment in mid-December, which helped to result in a rare on-time arrival in Jackson.)

The problem before those changes was that there were too many really long freight trains that ran slow and led to crews timing out and blocking a track for too long thanks to lack of crew cover. NS has, to an extent, addressed the crew shortages but is also trying to see if they can change the crewing philosophy between Elkhart and Chicago terminals to be based on "out and back" turns rather than having crews overnight away from their home terminal. That's the way

Amtrak works for the most part and why crews change at Battle Creek.

I think NS changes have been predicated by the Surface Transportation Board's focus on freight train performance. Martin Oberman, STB Chairperson, addressed our Railway Management Certificate Program's graduation in November and spoke extensively about the need for the freight railroads (he specifically meant the Class I's) to raise their game and better address shippers' needs and concerns, or else face increased regulation.

NS is working with data analysts from Georgia Tech University in Atlanta (the university owns the land where NS' new HQ is located) to apply Operations Research and machine learning to improve dispatching and thus train performance. It will be interesting to see how this all pans out because other Chicago improvements to train performance through the whole Chicago Terminal seem to have been limited by disruptions elsewhere on the rail network. That is interesting because in the past, once Chicago gummed-up, it spread to other parts of the country. Now all the railroads in Chicago (except for CN so far) cooperate continually to share information about inbound trains so they can be more responsive to issues such as crew timing out or locos needing refueling, etc.

NS may also be using their skill at making Chicago to Elkhart work to demonstrate the scale of infrastructure improvements needed in other parts of their network to meet Amtrak's expansion plans. In other words, this could be a way to get badly needed improvements to their system from some of the BIL and other grant funds available for Amtrak. This would both help Amtrak and help improve freight train perfor-

mance in terms of improving overall fluidity on the route in question. PTC funds were used by NS to update their lineside signaling equipment which undoubtedly has enabled more data to be available to dispatchers.

Concerning the best passenger route to enter Chicago from the east, using the NS route makes sense but a couple of major improvements are still needed to remove lift bridge bottlenecks and avoid the need for slow freights to cross all tracks, such as at the US Steel furnace to the rolling mill at Indiana Harbor.

Fourteen passenger trains each day is not a lot for an upgraded NS system on the east side of Chicago. Total track capacity is optimized when all trains run at the same speed, or close to it. Track separation is the solution for mixed traffic. Manifest trains run at a different speed from intermodal trains, which run at different speeds from passenger trains. Intermodal trains get priority over manifest trains and both are lower priority than passenger trains. Most dispatchers I've talked with simply want to get the passenger trains out of the way as quick as possible.

Normally high frequency, mixed traffic routes should be triple or quadruple tracked with frequent crossovers that can operate close to line speeds. That provides dispatchers with flexibility for trains to pass. Following the implementation of PSR and the realization that really long freight trains create issues, a lot more track is scheduled for upgrading, first to bi-directional signaling and next to longer sidings or double track/triple track. Admittedly, that is harder for NS and CSX to do given their network and geography compared to BNSF, CN and CP on their transcontinental routes.

Comment by John Guidinger on Nick's Observations

(Disclosure note: I am a stock holder in Norfolk Southern.)

The very thorough but incomplete South of the Lake Study wrapped up in 2014 by the FRA did not recommend an exact route for passenger trains to access Chicago from the east. But, as Nick says above, many observers concluded that adding capacity to the existing NS route seemed to offer a very good, practical solution.

This route is straight, direct, largely elevated on fill and, as a result, is largely free of grade crossings. It primarily passes through industrial land uses and does not run through busy residential or commercial neighborhoods. But best of all, it comes with much unused right-of-way already in place for additional passenger tracks. It was built over many years to become the principal passenger and freight route into Chicago from the east of the Baltimore and Ohio, New York Central, and Pennsylvania Railroad. Nick Little mentions the need to triple-track or quadruple-track this line for passenger and freight reliability. Casual review of aerial photos seems to indicate that much of the right-of-way that once supported four and more parallel tracks remains in place and is basically available today. Improving passenger access on this route would also improve NS freight capacity, an important consideration since the line between Elkhart and Chicago is a freight route of national importance.

Capacity developments already underway by NS seem to have already made some new operating possibilities. My observations on December 21, 2022, on Train 352, were that we ran at high speed past an eastbound NS double stack train running slowly on the south track. I had the impression that the NS train was going to take our track and follow us as soon we passed. A couple miles further east, Train 352 was expertly shifted to the north main track and immediately passed a stopped westbound coal train on the center track. After passing that train, Train 352 was quickly shifted back to the middle track, all the time running at a constant high speed. The crossovers were nicely positioned and designed for high speed. Train 352 ran fast all the way to Porter, where it left NS and arrived on time at Jackson where I got off. This looked to me like the NS dispatching people were trying very hard to get us through and they had the track capacity and properly positioned cross overs to accomplish their goal.

Over the years I have often had similar positive impressions between Toledo and Porter, where my Amtrak train was running fast and being shifted back and forth between the two tracks to pass slow freights. Of course, on some trips we would get stuck behind a slow freight, but I always thought that simply having additional high speed crossovers would go a long way to solving the problem.

The accompanying photo on page 1 shows the situation on the NS at the crossing of the Calumet River in South Chicago. Note the width of the right-of-way and the unused capacity available for additional passenger only tracks. There were once ten parallel tracks crossing on these five bridges, of which, the two northern-most were used by the Baltimore and Ohio, the next four used by the New York Central, and the four on the south used by the Pennsylvania Railroad. NS has only two tracks crossing here today on the southern-most former Pennsylvania Railroad bridge. The NS route seems to be the best route for the development of reliable passenger train access to Chicago from the east.

Track Connections Ex

TRACK CONNECTIONS AT ANN ARBOR

The proposed train to Traverse City and Petoskey should start in the Detroit urban area to tap a market large enough to support the train. However, a through train has apparently never operated on a route from Detroit to Ann Arbor and then to northern Michigan cities. Such an operation would require a new track connection in Ann Arbor to access the Great Lakes Central Railroad to reach northern Michigan. Due to elevational differences of the tracks to be connected and intensive local development in Ann Arbor, this connection will require considerable study to minimize negative impacts.

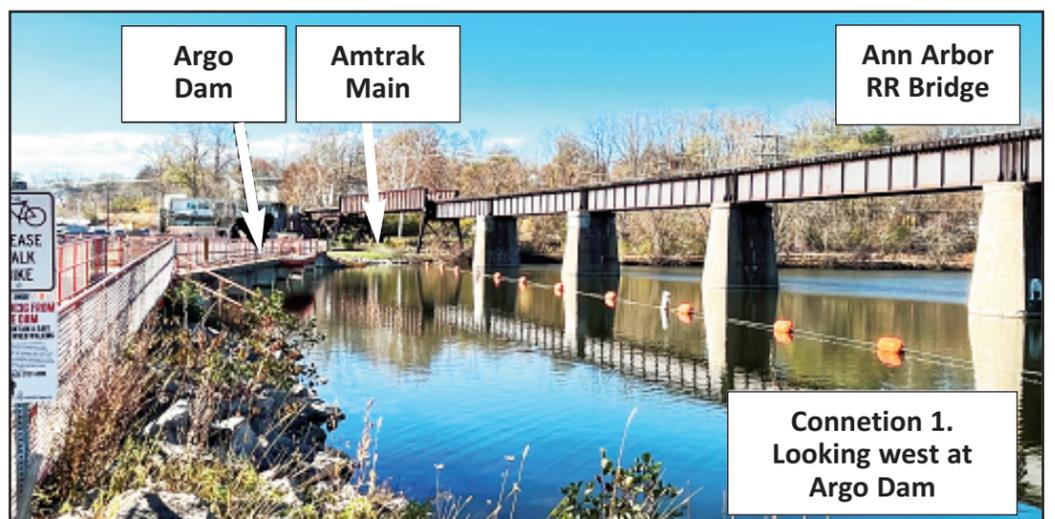
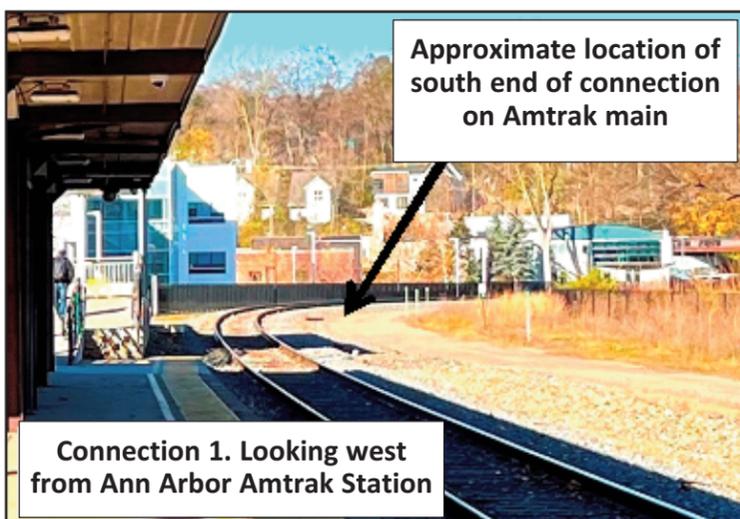
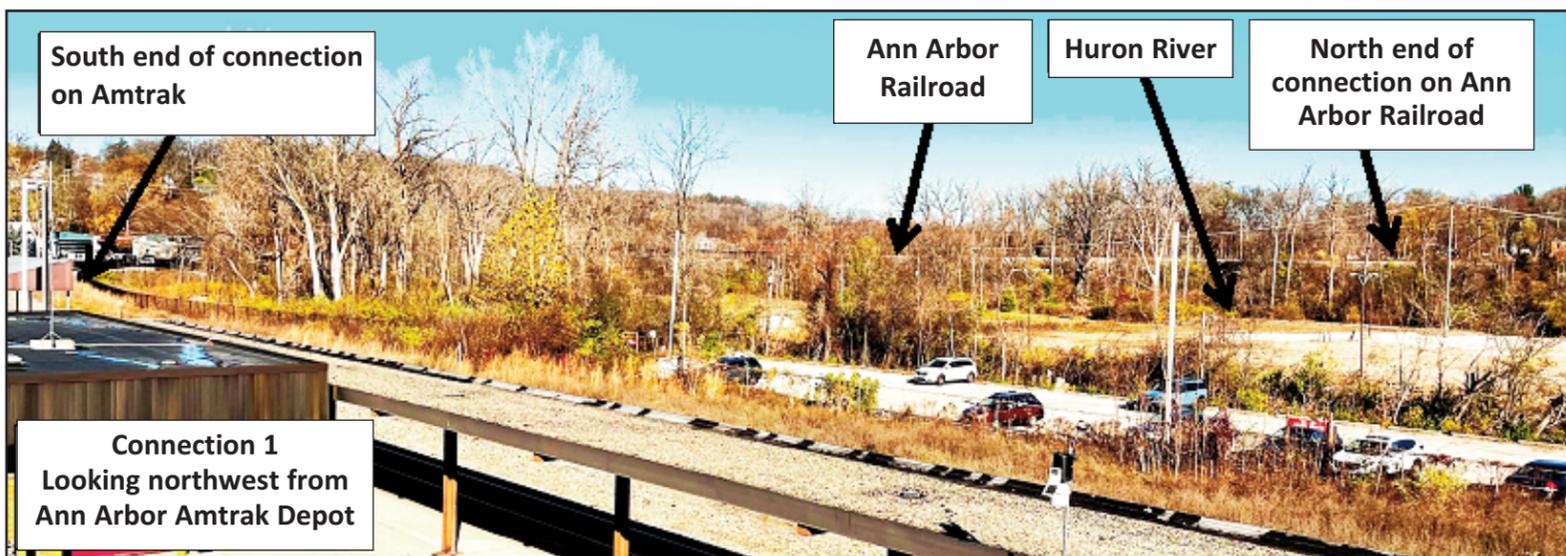
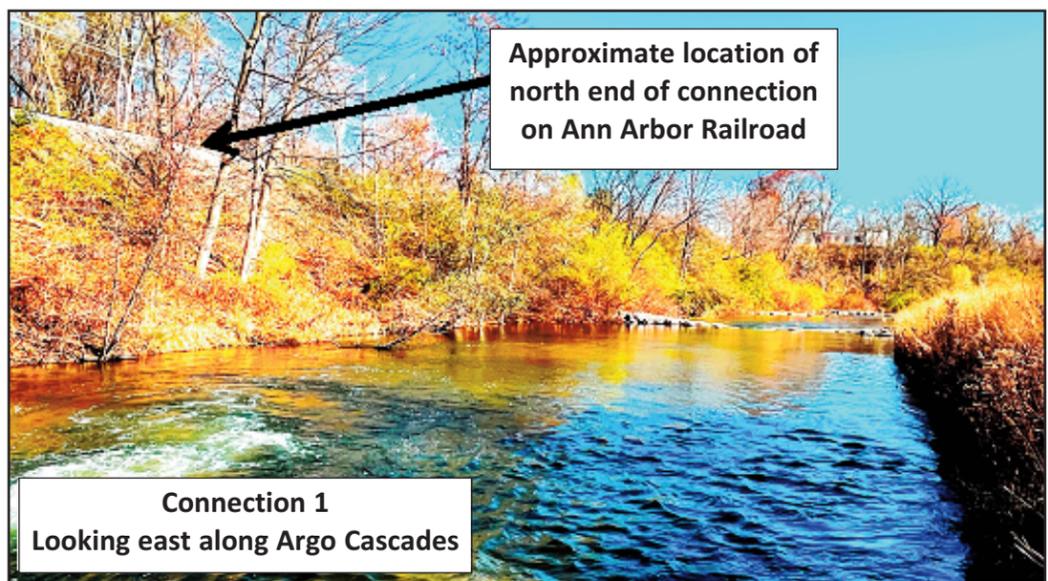
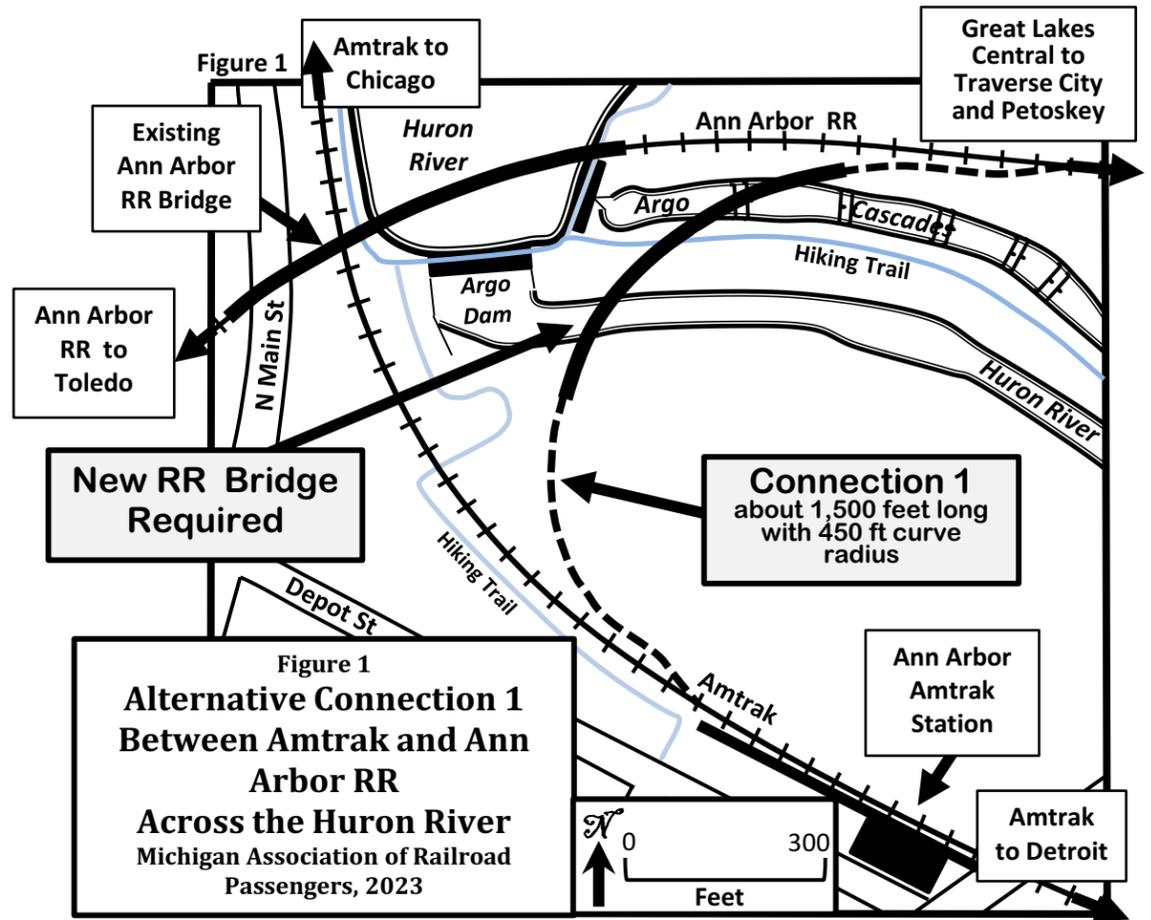
MARP members John Guidinger, Clark Charnetski, and Chuck Merckel examined conceptual track connections using maps, aerial photography, and field observations made on November 9 and 15, 2022. Three connection alternatives were identified. These are:

Alternative 1. Build a ±1,600-foot connection from the Amtrak main line at a point immediately west of the Ann Arbor Amtrak depot. This connection would curve to the north, rise up about 25 feet in elevation, cross the Huron River on a new bridge, and connect to the Ann Arbor Railroad north of the river. (The Ann Arbor Railroad becomes the Great Lakes Central Railroad about a mile further north at mile point 47.5, which is along Plymouth Road.)

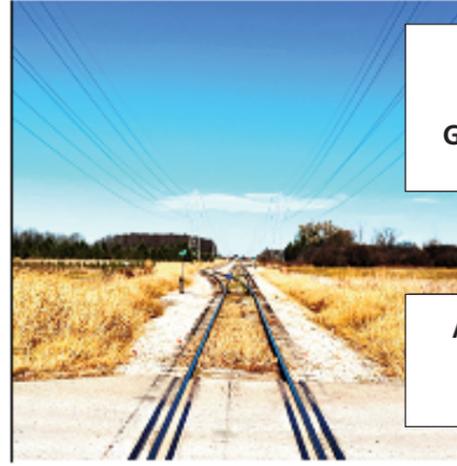
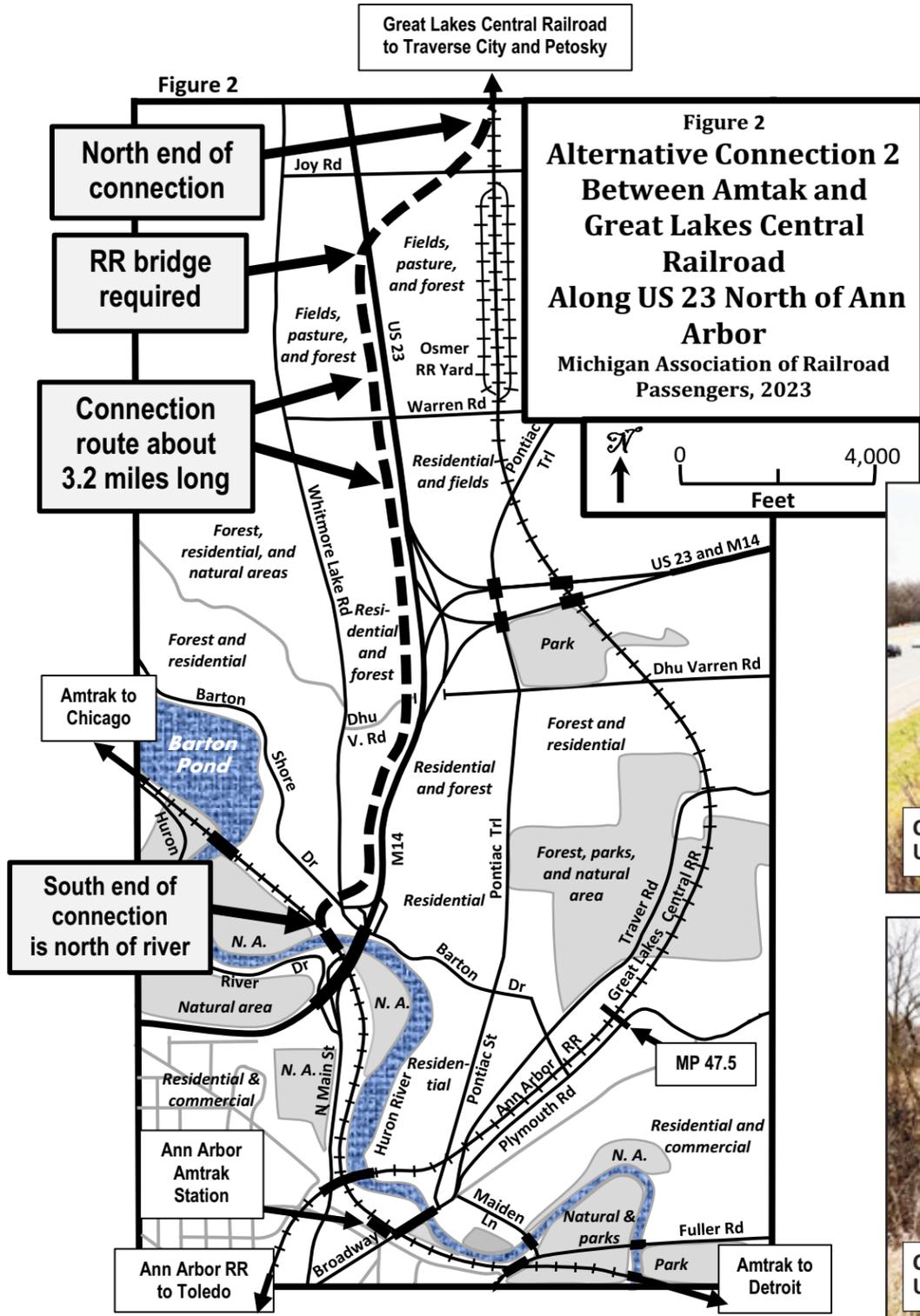
Alternative 2. Build a 3.2-mile connection from the Amtrak main starting at a point north of the river near the intersection of Barton Shore Drive and US 23/M14. This connection would follow the west side of Highway 23/14, and then cross over Highway 23 on a new bridge near Warren Road. It would connect to the Great Lakes Central at a point north of Joy Road.

Alternative 3. Reinstall the old connection that once crossed North Main Street between the Amtrak line and the Ann Arbor Railroad near the Huron River Bridge. This would be a low-cost connection and allow use of the existing railroad bridge. But it would require backing all trains across North Main Street and upgrade to access the Ann Arbor Railroad, which is about 25 feet higher in elevation than the Amtrak line. The connecting track would be about 1,500 feet in length.

The three alternatives are described further in the accompanying maps and photographs on the following three pages.



Examined in Ann Arbor



Looking north from Warren Road along Great Lakes Central RR

Area along railroad is not developed



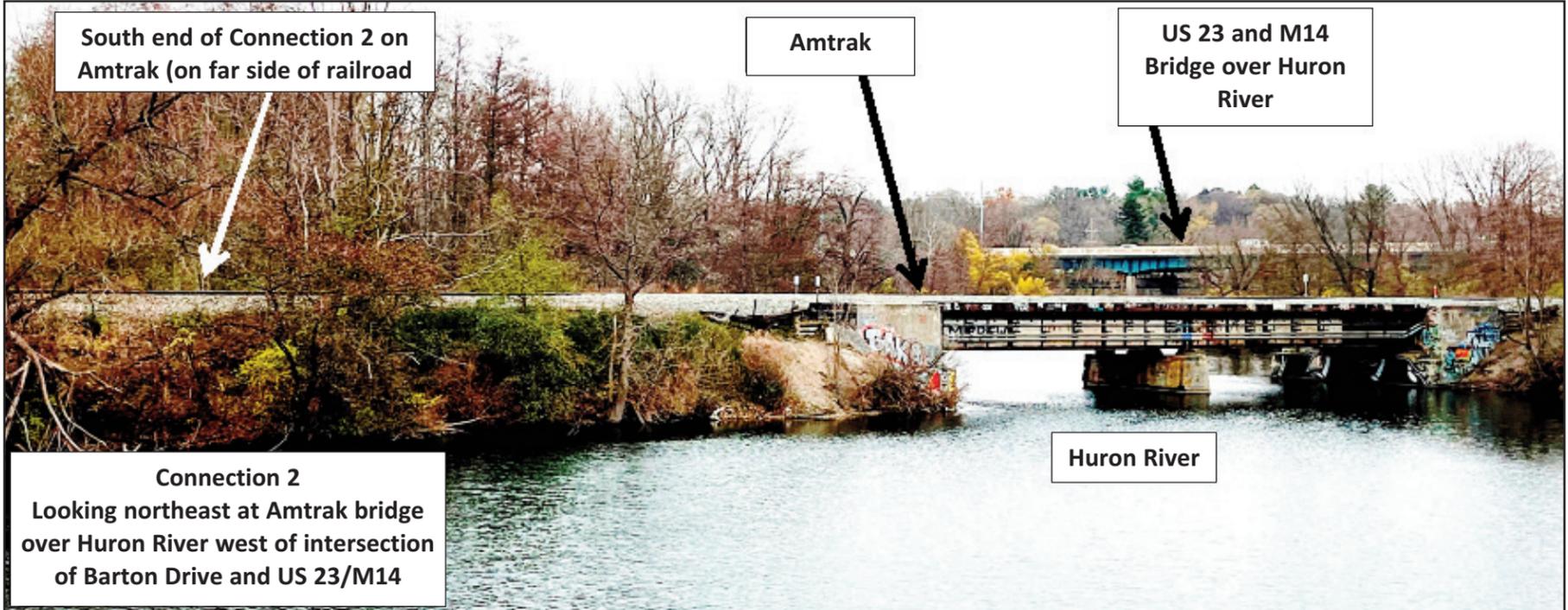
Connection route would be in field adjacent to highway

Connection 2. Looking south along US23/M14 from Warren Road



Connection route would be in field adjacent to highway

Connection 2. Looking north along US23/M14 from Warren Road

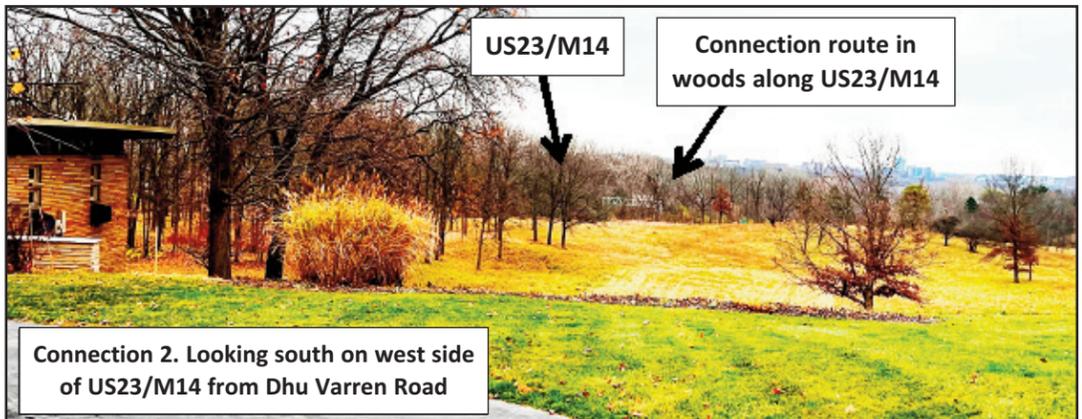


South end of Connection 2 on Amtrak (on far side of railroad)

Connection 2 Looking northeast at Amtrak bridge over Huron River west of intersection of Barton Drive and US 23/M14



South end of Great Lakes Central RR along Plymouth Rd.

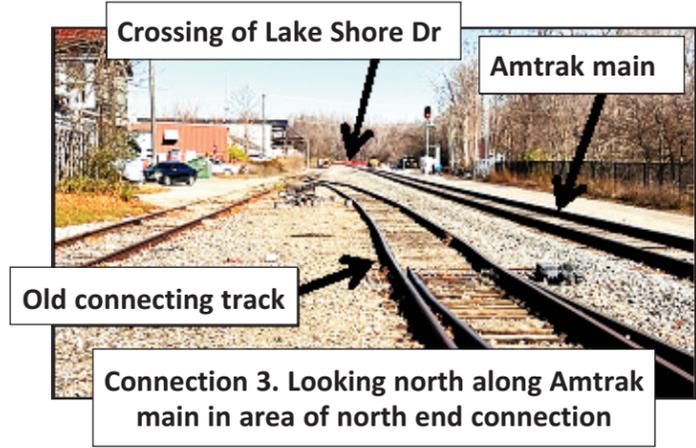
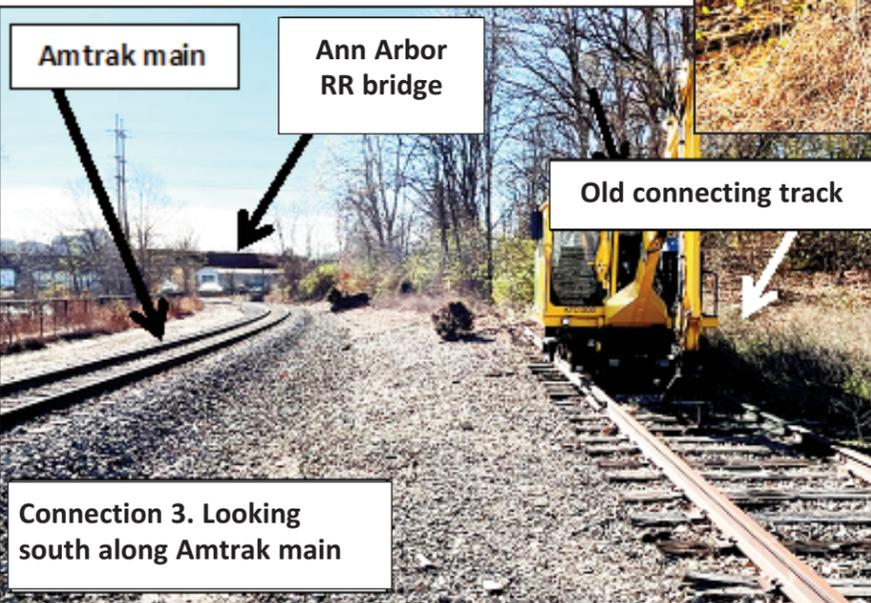
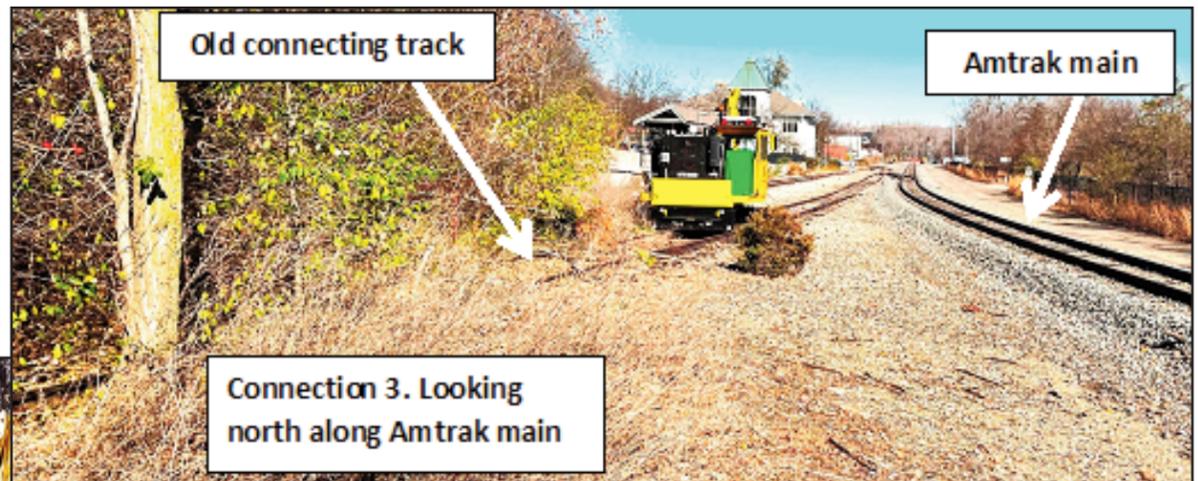
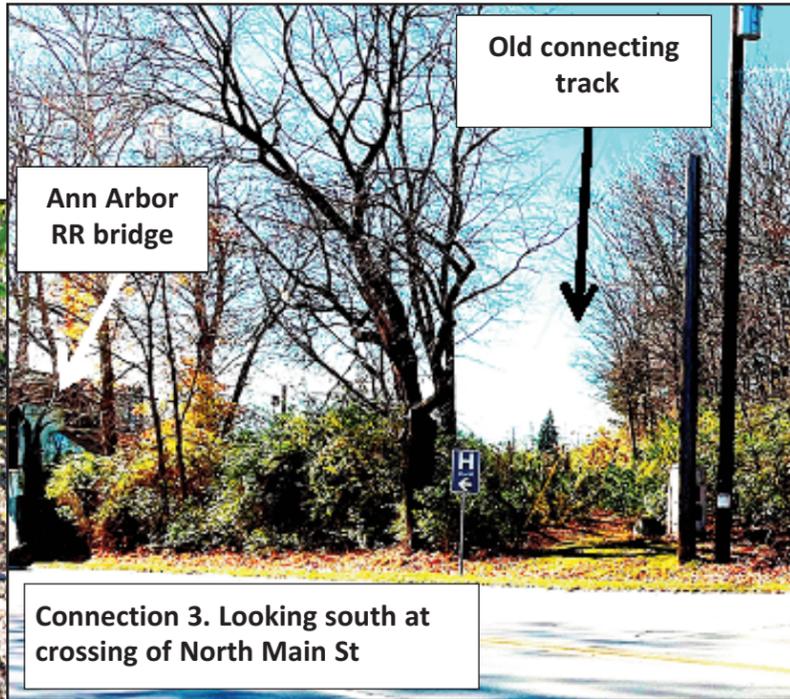
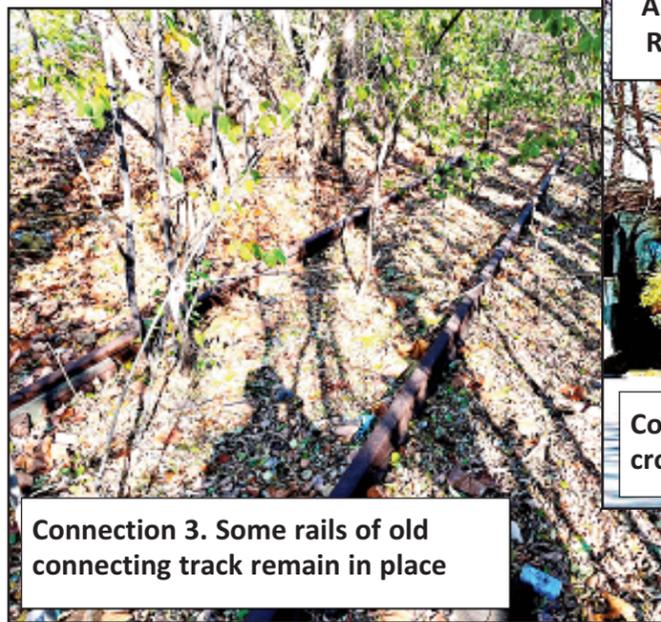
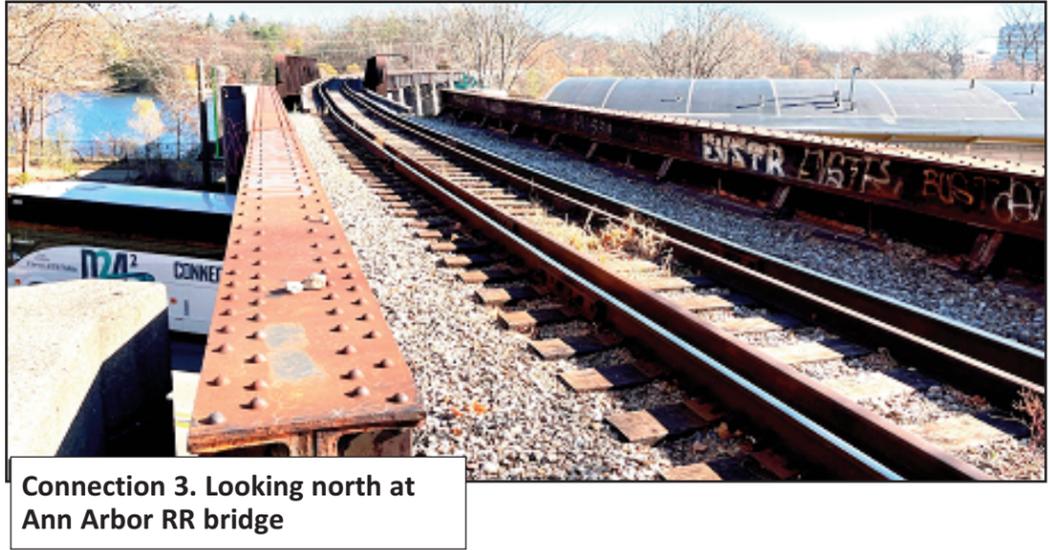
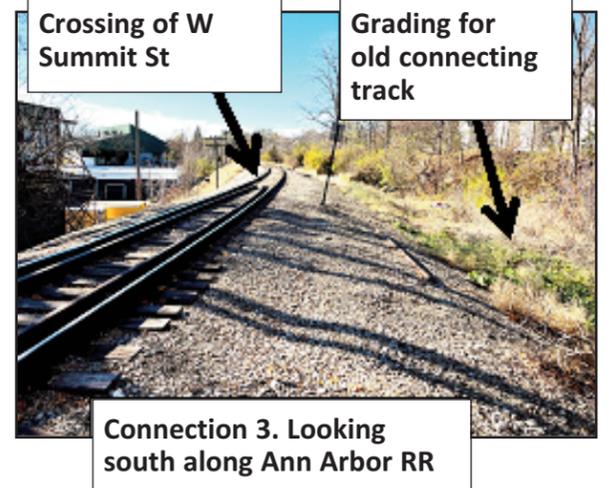
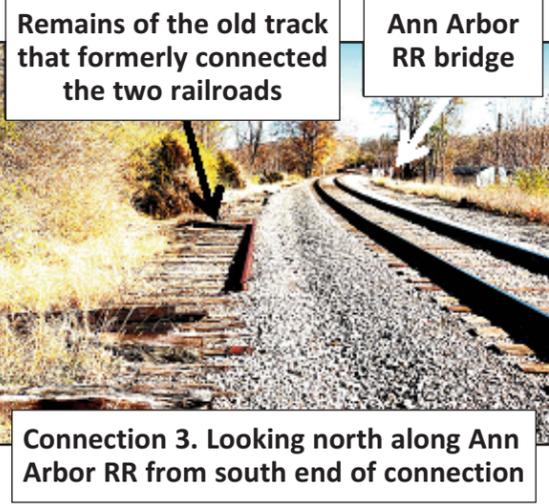
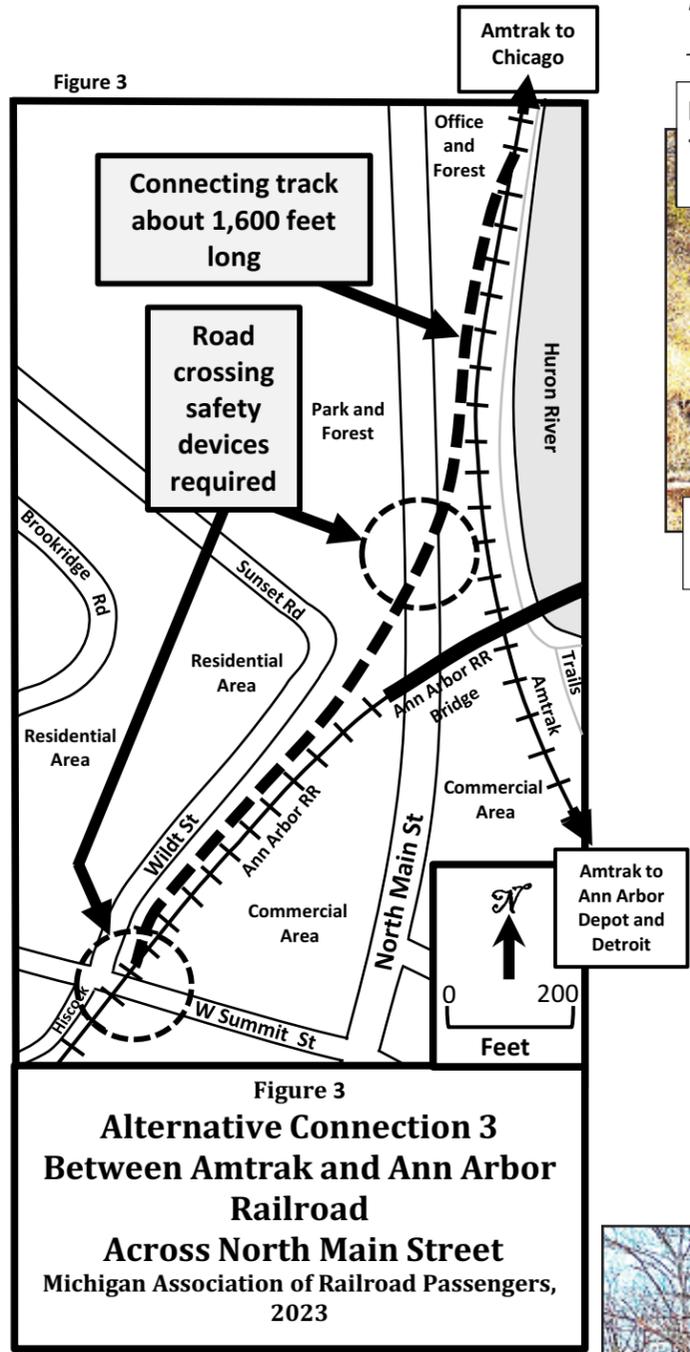


US23/M14

Connection route in woods along US23/M14

Connection 2. Looking south on west side of US23/M14 from Dhu Varren Road

Track Connections Continued



MARP East Lansing Station Hosts Face Challenges



East Lansing Station Host John Boyse, at right, helps Amtrak passengers on November 23, 2022, at the East Lansing Amtrak Station during the busy Thanksgiving holiday season.

By John Boyse, Station Host

East Lansing Station Hosts and passengers faced several challenging days during the 2022 holidays. Michigan train 365 "The Blue Water," westbound to Chicago, was cancelled December 24, 25, 27, and 28, in the midst of the busy Christmas season. Train 364 eastbound to Port Huron was cancelled on the preceding evenings of those days. There were many unhappy passengers that confronted the station hosts with their comments. But the hosts kept the station staffed in the mornings during these cancellations, alerting travelers who were not aware of that their train had been cancelled.

On January 2, 2023 train 365 was sold-out but short one coach. To help accommodate the passengers, Amtrak sent two buses to East Lansing, with orders to go directly to Chicago without stopping elsewhere. Both train and buses arrived in East Lansing at the same time, neither aware of each other. The hosts were able to alert the

passengers waiting at the station. Although confusing at the time, it was all sorted out and the buses left on time.

The MARP Station Host program consists of a group of five dedicated volunteers who staff the East Lansing Station mornings for the departure of the westbound train. First time travelers always have questions, and the ticket and parking kiosk can be challenging for some. While we do have a new and clean station that serves Amtrak, Indian Trails, and local CATA buses, it is short on signage to direct travelers, especially for those new to train travel. We do not meet the eastbound train because most arriving passengers simply leave the station quickly and very few people board the train to travel eastbound from East Lansing.

The East Lansing Amtrak Station is on Harrison Road adjacent to the huge Michigan State University (MSU) Campus. During the sell-out travel days (MSU's spring break, fall break, and holidays), college students

make up the majority of the passengers. As young, socially mobile, and frequent travelers, they typically need very little assistance from the station hosts. However, families traveling with children and seniors are identified by the station hosts and invited to board first so they can find seats together. Some travelers with mobility issues and those with large or heavy luggage find that boarding the cars using the step box and climbing the narrow steps is difficult. (A raised boarding platform like at Ann Arbor would be a welcome addition and especially inviting for anyone with a mobility issue.)

Our current station hosts are: Honey Bentley, Jerry Becker, Joy Gleason, Dave Koval, and John Boyse. Honey Bentley is assisted by her sister Kim Baker who serves as the weekend caretaker for our station. We're all happy to be a part of the station host volunteer program, and enjoy our mornings at the station. (MARP is very proud of these dedicated volunteer hosts.)

Michigan DOT Receives Federal Grant for Trespassing Prevention

On September 23, MDOT received a CRISI Grant from the Federal Railroad Administration for \$15.6 million dollars for trespassing prevention on the state-owned Kalamazoo-Dearborn portion of the Michigan Corridor. The grant will be matched with \$14.6 million in other state funds and \$1 million from Amtrak for a total of \$31.2 million.

The grant will fund improvements in fencing and improving selected grade crossings between Kalamazoo and Dearborn. The fencing improvements will be coordinated with local governments and concentrated in downtown areas with high foot-traffic. Areas noted for possible attention include downtown Dearborn, Ypsilanti near Eastern Michigan

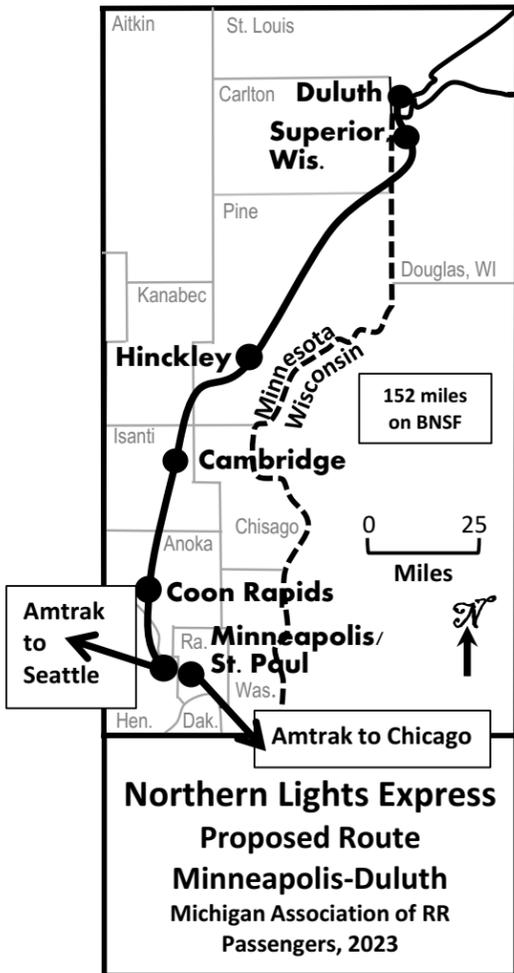
University, the University of Michigan Hospital area of Ann Arbor, the Albion College area of Albion, downtown Kalamazoo near Western Michigan University, as well as in communities such as Augusta and Galesburg where train speeds reach over 90 mph.

Between 2016 and 2019, twelve pedestrians have been struck by Amtrak trains and many more near misses have occurred on the Michigan corridor. "Safety is at the core of our Amtrak values and this project will improve safety for our customers, our train crews, and our communities," said Steven Predmore, Amtrak Executive Vice President and Chief Safety Officer.

SHORT LINES

On the Northeast Corridor the Susquehanna River Bridge replacement project is being pushed by Amtrak. *Railway Age* reports that this \$1.5 billion project will build two parallel double-track bridges, replacing the single double-track bridge between Perryville and Havre de Grace, Maryland. The new bridges will increase operating speed from 90 mph up to 135 miles per hour, add 4-track rail capacity, remove an operational bottleneck, and shorten trip times for passengers. The bridge is 3,700 feet long, the longest on the Northeast Corridor.....**The Adirondack will resume operating from New York City's Penn Station to Montreal's Central Station** in the Spring of 2023 according to the *Montreal Gazette* of December 15, 2022. After being discontinued by the COVID 19 Pandemic in 2020, the Adirondack was restarted over 141 miles between Penn Station and Albany on December 5, 2022, but Amtrak's continued ambiguity about reinstating the entire 381-mile route brought about concern from US Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and US Representative Elise Stefanik. After restarting other cross boarder service to Toronto and Vancouver, the delay on this route is apparently due to staffing issues, the need to recertify operating personnel, make arrangements with Canadian Pacific and Canadian National, and reestablish customs arrangements. In March the Quebec Government said it would establish a customs center at Montreal's Central Station, which could remove an hour or two from the very slow schedule of the train.....**European Sleeper announced that a new sleeping car service between Brussels, Antwerp, Amsterdam, and Berlin** will start in May 25th. Tickets go on sale starting February 20th for the triweekly "Good Night Train" according to the *International Journal* of December 28th. Three types of accommodations will be offered: coach seating starting at €49, couchette six-berth compartments starting at €79 per berth, and sleeping cars with double compartments at €129 per berth or single compartments at €159 each. It is hoped the service can be increased to daily and expanded to Dresden and Prague in December of 2023.....**Mitigation efforts continue in San Clemente to stabilize soils along part of the the Los Angeles-San Diego route** after through service over the line was suspended this fall. *Railway Age* on December 20 and 28 reported that hopefully Metrolink and Amtrak service on the busy rail line can be reopened in February of 2023. Ongoing mitigation efforts include dumping large amounts of rock on the seaward side of the railroad and installing ground anchors on the landward side along a 700-foot segment of the seven miles of track exposed to beach erosion. However, the long-term solution will involve protecting more of the track from beach erosion and eventually rerouting the railroad away from the beach to a more inland route.....**The Amtrak Office of Inspector General (OIG) determined that costly redesign and schedule delays for Amtrak's Airo fleet** occurred because of a lack of internal communication at Amtrak. According to *Railway Age* and *Mass Transit* of December 28 and 29, one instance of poor communications was that after signing a contract with Siemens, it was not until three months later that Amtrak food and beverage personnel determined that the café car design did not meet food storage needs or allow sufficient space for the passengers to move about the car. A change order to redesign the car increased the contract cost by \$42.5 million and added 5 to 6 months to the delivery date of the first trainset.**Toronto Union Station has begun work on a new South Concourse**. Existing platforms 24, 25, 26, and 27 have been removed and will be replaced with wider platforms with more space for passengers, according to *Railway Age* of December 19, 2022. The expansion also involves extensive improvements to the access walkways to provide a much-needed modernization, while preserving heritage features. The work includes installation of steel supports to reinforce and protect the large trainshed.....**Restoration of full service on the Philadelphia-West Chester SEPTA commuter route** appears more likely according to a report by the *West Chester Daily Local News* on December 28. Service on the 27.5-mile electric former Pennsy line out of 30th Street Station was cut back to Elwyn (15 miles) in 1986 due to poor track and low ridership. But the West Chester Borough Railroad Committee has new hopes that commuter trains will return to West Chester. Arrangements will have to be made to accommodate the Heritage Railroad, an excursion operation which carried 15,000 riders in 2022 on part of the unused line segment. The SEPTA service on the 15-mile segment that is in service carries an annual average 300,000 riders.**Congress approved the FY 2023 THUD (Transportation and Housing and Urban Development) Bill** as part of the bipartisan national budget for Fiscal Year 2023. THUD includes \$21.3 billion for transit and \$16.6 billion for passenger and freight rail funding. According to December 23 reports by *Railway Age* and the American Public Transportation Association, the amounts are slightly less than the amounts authorized in the IJA.**The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority** completed a \$100 million replacement of the Gloucester Drawbridge that carries trains on the Rockport Commuter line over the Annisquam River. The project began in 2018 and replaces a bridge built in 1911.....**BNSF opened their new Sandpoint Bridge in Idaho on November 20, 2022** according to a report in *Railway Age* on November 21, 2022. The new 4,800-foot bridge spans Lake Pend Oreille alongside an existing bridge built in 1904, which will be briefly taken out of service for upgrades. BNSF will also add a second track from the bridge for about a mile to Sandpoint Junction, which will result in a second station track at the historic Northern Pacific Sandpoint depot, now used by Amtrak. The work is part of a continuing effort by BNSF to remove single track bottlenecks in their busy transcontinental rail line.....**New York's Metro-North Railroad and New Jersey Transit both celebrated the 40th anniversary of the start of operations** on Jan. 1, 1983. Rising out of the utter ruins of the Penn Central collapse and the unhappy court-ordered operation by Conrail, Metro-North and NJ transit took over the massive commuter operations in New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey. Together they gradually rebuilt the badly deteriorated tracks and signal system; renewed Grand Central Terminal, Penn Station, Newark Penn Station, the Hoboken Terminal, and dozens of smaller stations; bought hundreds of new railcars and locomotives; extended electrification on several lines; brought new service to many new stations; took on as employees thousands of existing workers; introduced one seat rides to Penn Station; and made many other improvements. As a result, combined ridership has risen to about 200 million trips in 2021.....**Amtrak Cascades train service was resumed on September 26th between Seattle and Vancouver** with a single round trip, according to Portland TV station KOIN. Cancelled during the pandemic, the northbound train now leaves Seattle at 7:45 am and arrives in Vancouver at 11:45 am. Southbound, the train leaves Vancouver at 5:45 pm and arrives in Seattle at 10:10 pm. Portland passengers must change trains in Seattle.....**Amtrak's Ethan Allen was extended 62 miles from Rutland, Vermont, to Burlington in August of 2022**. *Sevendaysvt.com* reported that excited crowds young and old welcomed the first train at every station. This is the first service on this route since 1953. The northbound Ethan Allen leaves New York's Penn Station at 2:20 pm and arrives in Burlington at 9:55 pm. Southbound, the train leaves Burlington at 10:10 am and arrives in Penn Station at 5:45 pm. The route follows the Empire rail corridor between New York and Schenectady. With the Burlington extension, the route now totals 304 miles in length.....**The Siemens long distance ALC-42 locomotives on Amtrak's Empire Builder have been having multiple failures** due to extreme cold weather, loss of PTC connections, and other difficulties. As a result, *Railway Age* reported on January 13, 2023, that the train was often many hours late. It was eventually cancelled for several days over the Christmas season. Siemens technicians have been riding the train to help identify problems and fix them. Both hardware and programming adjustments have been identified and are being developed. (Why wasn't winter testing conducted before the locomotives were placed in service? Do test pilots fly new planes loaded with frightened passengers?)

Minnesota Has New Hope for Northern Lights Express



By Hugh Gurney

Democratic-Farmer-Labor party control of both houses of the Minnesota legislature following the November, 2022, election has given supporters of a proposed passenger rail link between the Twin Cities and Duluth renewed hope, reports the *Duluth News-Tribune* on December 2, 2022. "I wouldn't want to say that I am confident yet; I am very, very hopeful," commented Jen McEwen, Democratic-Farmer-Labor senator from Duluth. "There's a lot of people who are eager to see passenger rail return to Duluth and connecting Duluth to the Twin Cities again, and it's been such a long time coming."

In February, 2019, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) issued a "Finding of No Significant Impact" on a Project Level Environmental Assessment for the *Northern Lights Express* (NLX), the proposed passenger service between downtown Minneapolis and Duluth on an existing BNSF Railway line. The "Finding of No Significant Impact" cleared the way for the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to apply for federal funding in support of final design and construction. Unfortunately, at that time the Republican controlled state Senate refused to appropriate the required

match. During the 2022 session of the legislature, the DFL controlled House of Representatives passed a bill to provide \$85 million towards the project, but again the Republican controlled Senate refused to concur and passed an amendment blocking the state from spending anything on the NLX. It is hoped that Democratic control of the Senate in 2023 will support funding for NLX.

NLX would operate up to four round trips daily between Minneapolis and Duluth at speeds of up to 90 mph on the 152-mile BNSF line with intermediate stops at Coon Rapids-Foley, Cambridge and Hinckley, MN and Superior, WI according to MnDOT plans. Two train sets of six coaches and a push-pull locomotive would be required for the service with a third train-set in reserve. Construction costs include final design work, track and signal upgrades, new and longer passing tracks, gates and flashing lights at grade crossings, and expansion of existing stations. A maintenance facility and a layover facility would be constructed either on separate sites in Duluth and Sandstone or combined at a single site in Duluth. Capital costs are currently estimated at \$425 million with 80% covered by the federal government and 20% by the state. Operating and maintenance

costs for the first year of operation are estimated at \$18.9 million by MnDOT.

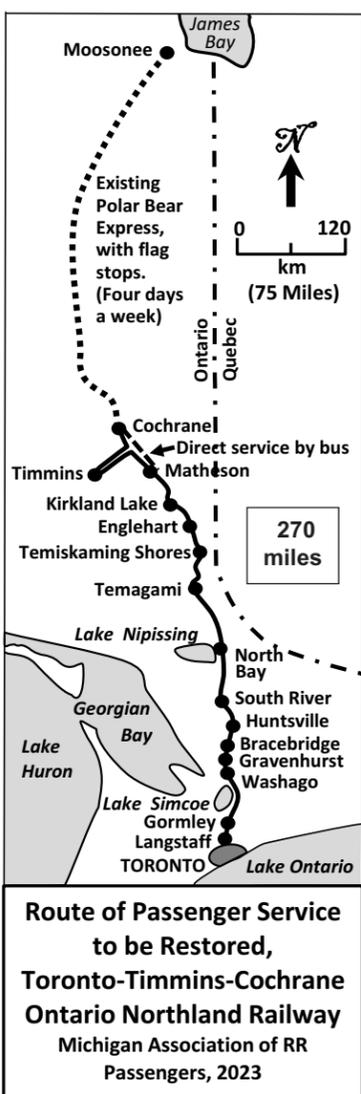
Amtrak, which last served Duluth in the 1980's, has agreed to operate the service. NLX is included in the Amtrak Connects US vision of June, 2021. The historic Duluth Union Depot will be the northern terminal for NLX. It currently houses a number of cultural and arts organizations and is the terminal for the North Shore Scenic Railroad. The former Amtrak waiting area will be upgraded for passengers using both NLX and the Lake Shore Scenic Railroad. MnDOT will add track and a platform for NLX service. Estimated ridership during the first year is estimated at 700,000 to 750,000, rising to between 900,000 and 1 million by 2040.

If the required match is approved during the 2023 session of the Minnesota legislature, NLX supporters are hopeful that federal funding will be made available through the BIL infrastructure bill enacted in 2021.



Ontario Northland to resume passenger service to Timmins and Cochrane

Move described as "a key next step" to reinstate Northeastern Passenger Rail" by officials



By Hugh Gurney
After a ten-year hiatus, the Province of Ontario has decided to reinstate passenger service between Toronto Union Station and Timmins/Cochrane. The service had been discontinued in 2012 as a cost saving measure. On December 15, 2022, the province confirmed in a news release that it ordered three train sets for the Toronto-Timmins/Cochrane service from Siemens Mobility, Ltd. at a cost of CA\$139.5 million. This order from Siemens "demonstrates real progress, as we continue to take concrete steps to build a better transportation network for the north," Associate Minister of Transportation Stan Cho said. "This is a significant step forward in bringing back the rail service that northerners deserve. The reinstated Northland train will support our northern industries and

resource sectors and provide a safe and reliable transportation option for Northern communities, especially in the winter months," Chow said. Each of the Siemens train sets will consist of a diesel locomotive that meets Tier 4 emission standards, plus three coaches with "built-in wheelchair lifts, galley-style food services, and fully accessible washrooms" according to the province's announcement. They will provide "spacious seating and modern amenities, including Wi-Fi and information systems with audio and visual announcements." It is expected that the train sets will be delivered in 2026. On the approximately 450-km (270-mile) one way trip, the *Northlander* will utilize the tracks of three different railroads – Metrolinx through the Toronto metropolitan area, Canadian National to North

Bay, and the provincially-owned Ontario Northland for the remainder of the journey. Communities served will be Toronto (Union Station), Langstaff, Gormley, Washago, Gravenhurst, Bracebridge, Huntsville, South River, North Bay, Temagami, Temiskaming Shores, Englehart, Kirkland Lake (Swastika), Matheson, Timmins, and Cochrane. Rail service will be offered four to seven days a week depending on the season. According to www.ontarionorthland.ca, Timmins will be the principal northern terminus because of its relatively large population and its status as a transportation hub. From Timmins, there will be a continuing rail link north to Cochrane for a connection with the existing Polar Bear Express train to Moosonee, a community about 15 miles south of the shores of James Bay. For pas-

sengers wishing to go more directly to Cochrane, a connecting express bus from Matheson to Cochrane will be available. Currently, Ontario Northland operates four daily buses between Toronto and North Bay, with one or two of these daily buses going on to Timmins and Cochrane. Ontario Northland also offers scheduled bus service to communities throughout northern Ontario. "This purchase is a key next step to support the Province and Ontario Northland's target of a mid-2020's in-service date for reinstating Northeastern Passenger Rail," Ontario Northland Interim President and CEO Chad Evans noted. "The rail service will provide passengers more access to safe, reliable transportation options when traveling between Northern Ontario and Toronto."