

# P *The Michigan* PASSENGER

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Michigan Association of  
Railroad Passengers  
[www.marp.org](http://www.marp.org)

## What's inside...

**St. Charles Air Line Railroad:  
See pages 4 and 5.**

**MARP Attends the Railway  
Age Next-Gen Conference.  
See page 6.**

**Mini passenger revolt at  
Jackson. Page 6.**

**SHORT LINES - Page 7**

**Trip: The Canadian to  
Vancouver - Page 8**

# MARP meets with Michigan legislators

**By Steve Vagnozzi, MARP  
Government Affairs Coordinator**

Since the beginning of March, I have met with over 20 Michigan House and Senate Transportation Committee Legislators to update them on MARP's Intercity Passenger Rail Vision. My presentation included both increased frequencies on existing routes and service to new destinations. I specifically covered the (1) North-South (A2TC) Passenger Rail and (2) the Kalamazoo-Detroit proposals in detail.

I found widespread support for expanding passenger rail across party lines. The legislators I met re-

present districts throughout the state including the upper peninsula. I was surprised by the level of knowledge of the existing Amtrak service with an astonishing number of legislators having ridden at least one of the Michigan Services routes. One legislator is a Rail Passenger Association member. Another was involved in the relocation of the Clare Depot. A third would like to be able to travel from his metro Detroit district to Lansing.

I believe that our next step should be to push for funding a cost estimate study for adding the Kalamazoo to Detroit trains to serve Detroit better. This has been pro-

posed by MARP before and consists of adding two additional round trip trains on the existing corridor between Kalamazoo and Detroit/Pontiac. To do that we need a reasonable estimate of the cost.

I also testified at a Senate hearing that MARP supports bills to support grade crossing separation funding. This is a huge public safety issue in Detroit and Downriver communities. This area of the state has the highest concentration of railroad tracks in the state. Access to several hospitals in the area is frequently cut off by trains blocking crossings.

## *MARP considers a reply to legislators about new trains*

During the meetings Steve Vagnozzi held with members of the Michigan Legislature in March and April, he received many very positive responses to which we need to respond. He discussed the specific MARP proposals to expand service to Detroit/Pontiac on the Michigan Corridor and to start a new service on the Ann Arbor-Traverse City/Petosky route. He was asked to come up with a cost estimate for additional service on the Michigan Corridor to serve Detroit better. (A separate feasibility and cost study has been funded for the Ann Arbor-Traverse City/Petosky project.)

Cost estimating for a project of this magnitude is difficult for MARP. However, MARP wants to respond to the legislators. At press time we are in the process of developing a response by meeting with knowledgeable persons to determine the best way to proceed.

Some thoughts we have in mind:

1. The current Michigan Budget has \$29 million for operating intercity passenger services. For 5 trains, this would average to about \$5.8 million per train per year. Ticket revenues, MDOT overhead, and other costs should be accounted for in this cost.

2. The Illinois cost is about \$40 million a year for 7 trains, or about the same cost per train as in Michigan.

3. New trains A, B, C, and D (see the proposed schedule on page 3) must have the goal of serving Detroit better. The first train should arrive there before 11 am and the last train should leave after 8 pm to allow the passenger to have a full day in Detroit. If the trains originated and terminated in

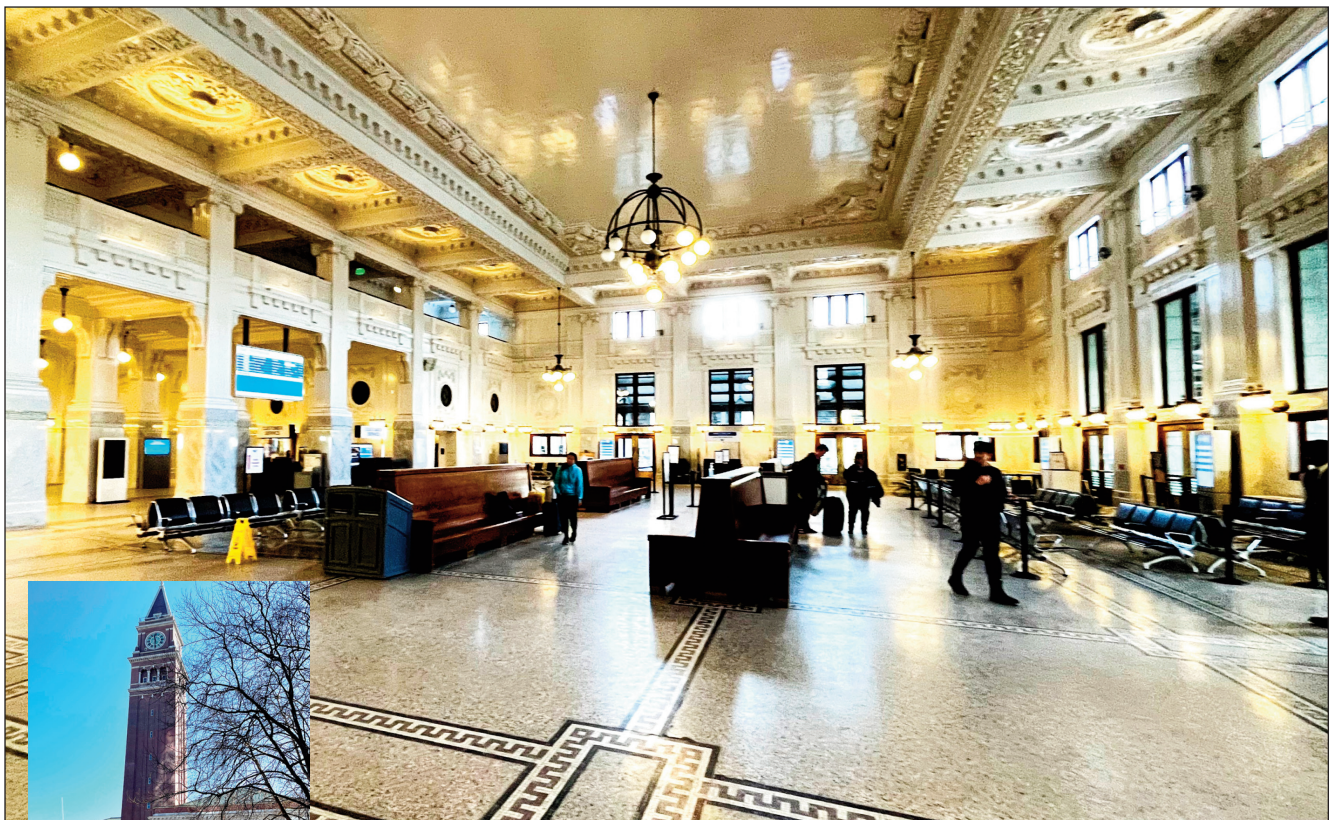
Kalamazoo, they would have routes about 140 miles shorter than the existing trains in Michigan and Illinois that originate and terminate in Chicago. Can we assume that they should therefore be somewhat less costly to operate than the full routes out of Chicago? And, yes, Kalamazoo will need to have a parking and cleaning facility built on property near the depot.

4. We must be aware of crewing issues. If we can use existing crew arrangements, costs will be lower than if new crewing arrangements must be made. Battle Creek-Pontiac is an existing crew run, but we want to start the trains 25 miles west in Kalamazoo which has a larger population than Battle Creek and a large university. Can

See Reply to legislators page 3

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The Amtrak Station in downtown Seattle is in the beautifully restored King Street Station. Built by James J. Hill and the Great Northern Railroad in 1906, this magnificent building has a 245-foot clock tower modeled after the Campanile of the Piazza San Marco in Venice. The station today serves many Amtrak Trains and commuter trains.

# The Michigan PASSENGER

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The Michigan Passenger welcomes your comments and submissions on passenger rail issues. Comments, articles, and other materials sent for publication should be sent by email to [jhguidinger1@yahoo.com](mailto:jhguidinger1@yahoo.com). Clippings from newspapers, magazines, and electronic sources must include the publication's name and date. Photos sent by email must be in .jpg format. We reserve the right to edit all submissions.

Contributors to this issue: Steve Vagnozzi, Larry Krieg, and Ron Cady.

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### Letters & Emails

**To: Michigan Passenger Editor**  
Yours is one of the most straightforward, unencumbered, and refreshingly realistic publications in this genre. The publication is well worth the cost of MARP membership. "Observations on NS" (MP February issue) hit the facts, presenting an insightful view of the pre-

sent and realistically possible future, without the typical digressions into the wistful wishes for a return to the 1950s. As a resident of the Calumet, Indiana, region, I appreciate all the efforts of those that make this newsletter possible.

**Dan Hawtree,**  
Calumet, Indiana

### 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	11:45a	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](http://AMTRAK.COM) or 1-800-USA-RAIL when making reservations.

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Chuck Merckel, Coordinator (734) 330-0281

Station	Staff	MARP Volunteer
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Ann Arbor	Amtrak	Clark Charnetski/Steve Sobel
Bangor	None	J. P. Descamp
Battle Creek	Amtrak	Shuler Harmon
Dearborn	Amtrak	Mary Jo Durivage
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	Rich Knoll
Niles	Caretkr	Jack Kessler
Pontiac	Bus	Robert Tischbein
Port Huron	None	T. J. Gaffney
Royal Oak	None	David Roberts
St Joseph	None	Todd Schultz
Toledo, OH	Amtrak	Patrick Miller
Traverse City	None	Carolyn Ulstad
Troy	None	Thomas VandeGrift

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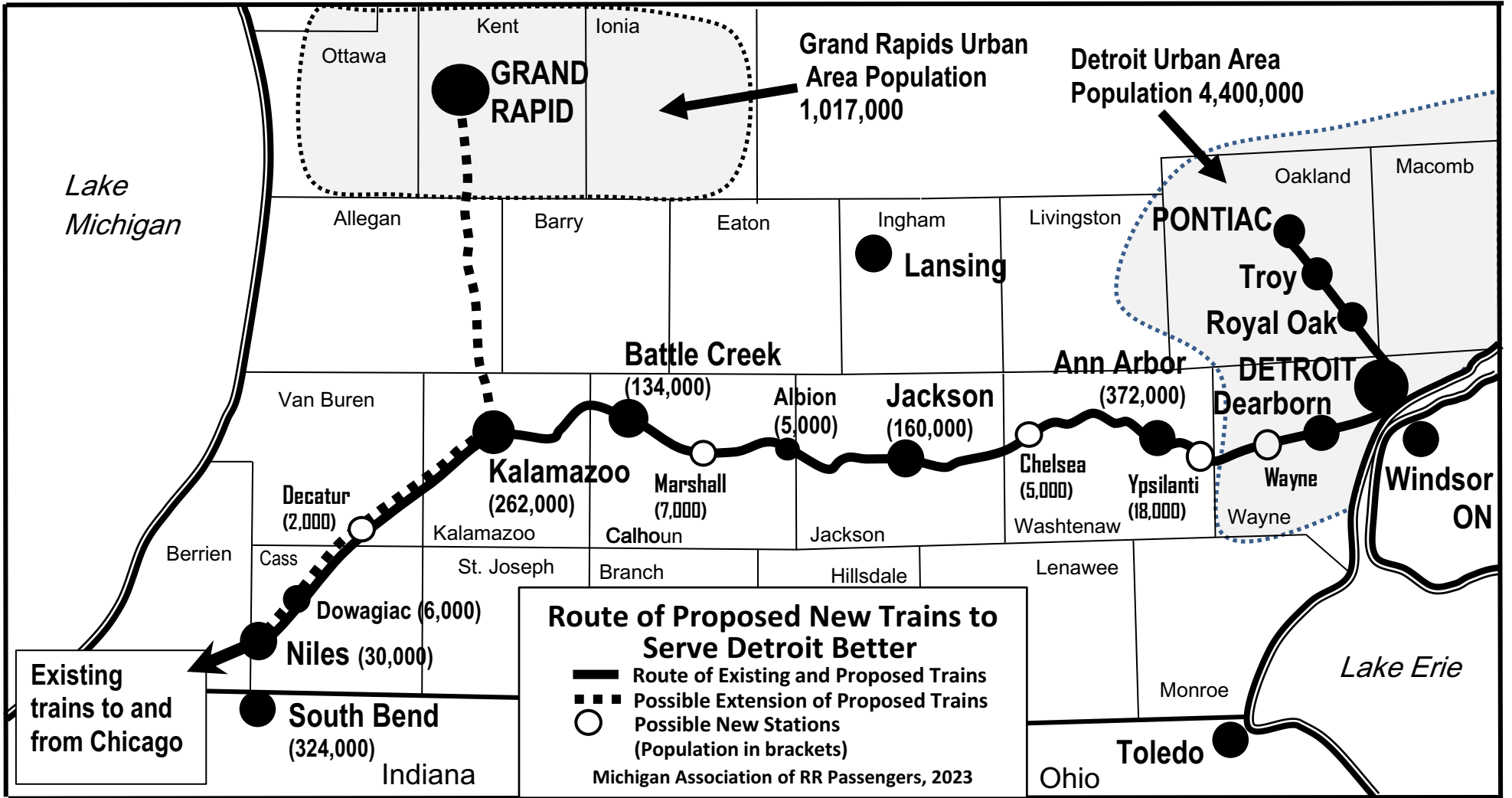
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**THE EXPONENT**



## Reply to legislators . . . Continued from page 1

this 25-mile run be added on to the existing crew arrangements?

5. Of course, we could start and terminate the new trains in Chicago where an existing crew base (and maintenance center) is located. The attached schedule shows the estimated train times at Chicago if the new trains originated and terminated in Chicago. Train A would have to leave Chicago about 4 am to get to Detroit before 11 am. And for Train D to leave Detroit after 8 pm, it would get to Chicago about 1:30 am. Not very marketable times. Amtrak would have to add staff at Unions Station to originate and receive these trains at such late hours. Interference on NS west of Porter would not be avoided and the longer routes would cost more. So, do we gain enough with going to Chicago?

6. Another idea might be to originate/terminate Trains A and D in Kalamazoo and Trains B and C in Chicago. This alternative would avoid the late hours in Chicago and limit delays from NS freight west of Porter to only one new train. Perhaps the equipment on Trains A and D could be alternated everyday with Trains B and C so that all equipment would be in Chicago at least every other night

for maintenance issues. (This could also be applied to Trains A, B, C, and D and the existing trains in the other situations discussed.)

7. Yet another idea would be to originate the trains in Niles. Niles is on the existing Amtrak-owned portion of the route. There appears to be plenty of Amtrak property for a siding and servicing facility at Niles. But a special crewing arrangement would be needed for Niles-Battle Creek portion of the route and the population west of Kalamazoo is sparse, unless we could tap into the population of South Bend. (The Niles depot is only 10 miles from downtown South Bend.)

8. And of course, there is Grand Rapids. The second largest city in Michigan (over a million people in the urban area) has only token service to Chicago. Originating and terminating two new round trips to Detroit via Kalamazoo would be a big help in improving rail service in Michigan. The trains would probably make at least one reasonable connection at Kalamazoo to Chicago, thus adding a second train to Chicago for Grand Rapids people. Issues to overcome would include the need for an agreement from Grand Elk which owns the

59 miles of track from Grand Rapids to Kalamazoo. We would also have to make some level of track or signal upgrades (over time) on Grand Elk, install a track connection at Kalamazoo, and address the special crew arrangements for a Grand Rapids-Battle Creek run.

It is obvious that there are many other issues with startup costs, especially concerning acquisition of equipment, the coaches, locomotives, and food service cars. Assuming Amtrak has no existing cars for these new trains, do we ask for new equipment, which would introduce several years of delay? Do we rebuild older equipment such as a few of the GE Genesis Locomotives and Amfleet or Horizon cars? Do we want MDOT to own the cars or should they be added to the Midwest or national pool of cars? What about acceptance of the new trains by Canadian National and Conrail Shared Assets, the freight railroads we would have to operate over for short distances, and Norfolk Southern if we go to Chicago. This would be up to Amtrak to negotiate. Is acceptance by MDOT an issue if the legislature supports this proposal and puts up some amount of money? These startup costs and issues are difficult to sort out and apply a cost estimate.

Still, it would be nice to get back with the legislators with some kind of cost. We could just be bold and tell them we believe the operating cost would be based on what the other states are paying, perhaps \$5 to \$6 million per train per year to start plus unknown startup costs. Perhaps we tell the legislators that for about \$250,000 we think a consultant could be brought on board to provide a better cost estimate and conceptualize the unknown matters.

After giving the legislators this information, we could then ask them to direct MDOT to get involved in this expansion. MDOT working with Amtrak should be able to provide a ballpark estimate of the operating and startup costs of the new trains that would be adequate for the legislators to put something more specific in the state budget. Hopefully, they should also be able to quickly come up with a consultant to conceptualize this project better.

MARP does not want let these positive words by the legislators grow cold, especially during a this very rare time when Federal funding for rail projects such as this is available. We need to keep this moving. Your comments and ideas will be appreciated. Send them to the Michigan Passenger editor.

### Proposed Expanded Kalamazoo-Detroit/Pontiac Service

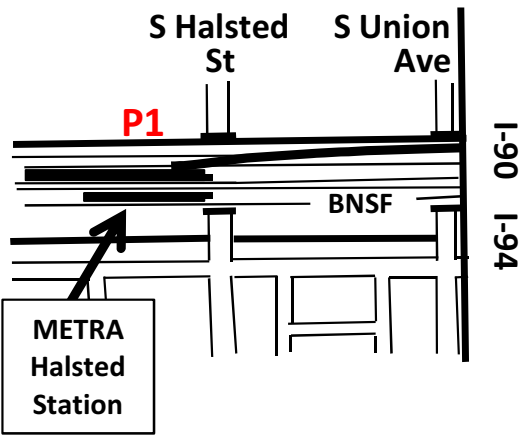
	Miles	NEW TRAIN A (Daily)	Existing Train 350 (Daily)	NEW TRAIN B (Daily)	Existing Train 352 (Daily)	Existing Train 364 (Daily)	Existing Train 354 (Daily)
Chicago, IL (CT)	0	418a	720a	903a	125p	400p	550p
Hammond-Whiting, IN	16	↓	744a	↓	↓	↓	↓
New Buffalo (ET)	62	637a	939a	1122a	341p	610p	804p
Niles	89	702a	1004a	1147a	402p	632p	824p
Dowagiac	102	713a	1015a	1158a	↓	643p	↓
Kalamazoo	138	745a	1047a	1230p	426p	711p	858p
Battle Creek	160	817a	1125a	102p	511p	738p	933p
Albion	184	845a	↓	130p	↓	↓	1003p
Jackson	208	910a	1226p	155p	606p	↓	1028p
Chelsea (New service)	229	935a	↓	220p	↓	From Huron	↓
Ann Arbor	243	959a	103p	244p	645p	↓	1108p
Ypsilanti (New service)	253	1008a	↓	253p	↓	To Port Huron	↓
Dearborn	271	1031a	134p	316p	722p	↓	1139p
DETROIT	281	1100a	204p	345p	755p	↓	1214a
Royal Oak	292	1124a	226p	409p	816p	↓	1235a
Troy	296	1131a	234p	416p	823p	↓	1242a
Pontiac (ET)	304	1159a	246p	444p	840p	↓	101a

	Existing Train 351 (Daily)	Existing Train 365 (Daily)	Existing Train 353 (Daily)	NEW TRAIN C (Daily)	Existing Train 355 (Daily)	NEW TRAIN D (Daily)
Pontiac (ET)	543a	↓	938a	200p	528p	735p
Troy	556a	↓	952a	214p	541p	749p
Royal Oak	603a	↓	1000a	222p	548p	757p
DETROIT	626a	↓	1023a	245p	611p	820p
Dearborn	644a	From Port Huron	1041a	310p	629p	845p
Ypsilanti (New service)	↓	↓	↓	338p	↓	913p
Ann Arbor	714a	↓	1111a	347p	700p	922p
Chelsea (New service)	↓	↓	↓	411p	↓	946p
Jackson	751a	↓	1146a	435p	737p	1010p
Albion	815a	↓	↓	459p	↓	1033p
Battle Creek	848a	1000a	1249p	532p	833p	1106p
Kalamazoo	916a	1026a	116p	603p	900p	1137p
Dowagiac	↓	1052a	↓	629p	929p	1209a
Niles	↓	1104a	149p	644p	942p	1220a
New Buffalo (ET)	↓	1124a	209p	704p	1002p	1245a
Hammond-Whiting, IN	↓	↓	205p	↓	954p	↓
Chicago, IL (CT)	1032a	1145a	250p	745p	1040p	123a

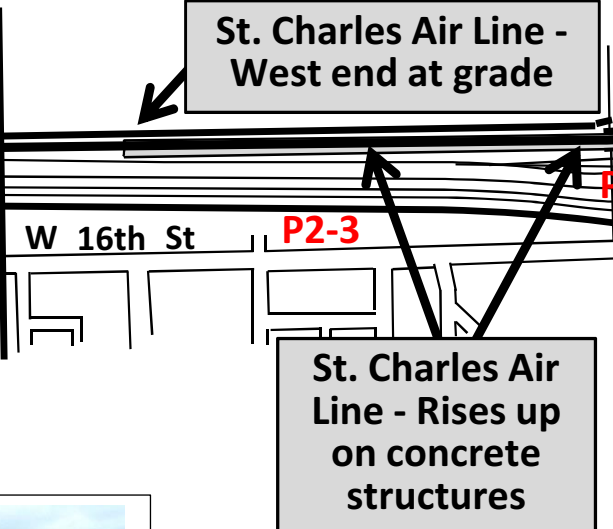
Notes: The scheduled times for the new trains are based on the Amtrak schedule in effect as of Nov 1, 2021. Source: MARP, 2023

# St. Charles Air Line Railroad - Chicago, Illinois

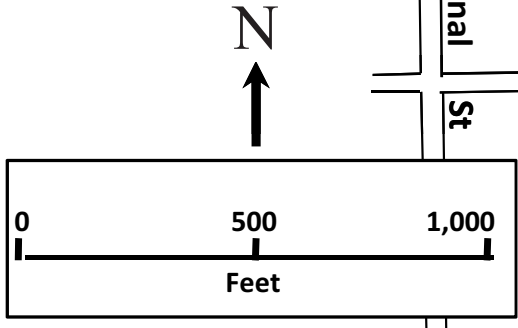
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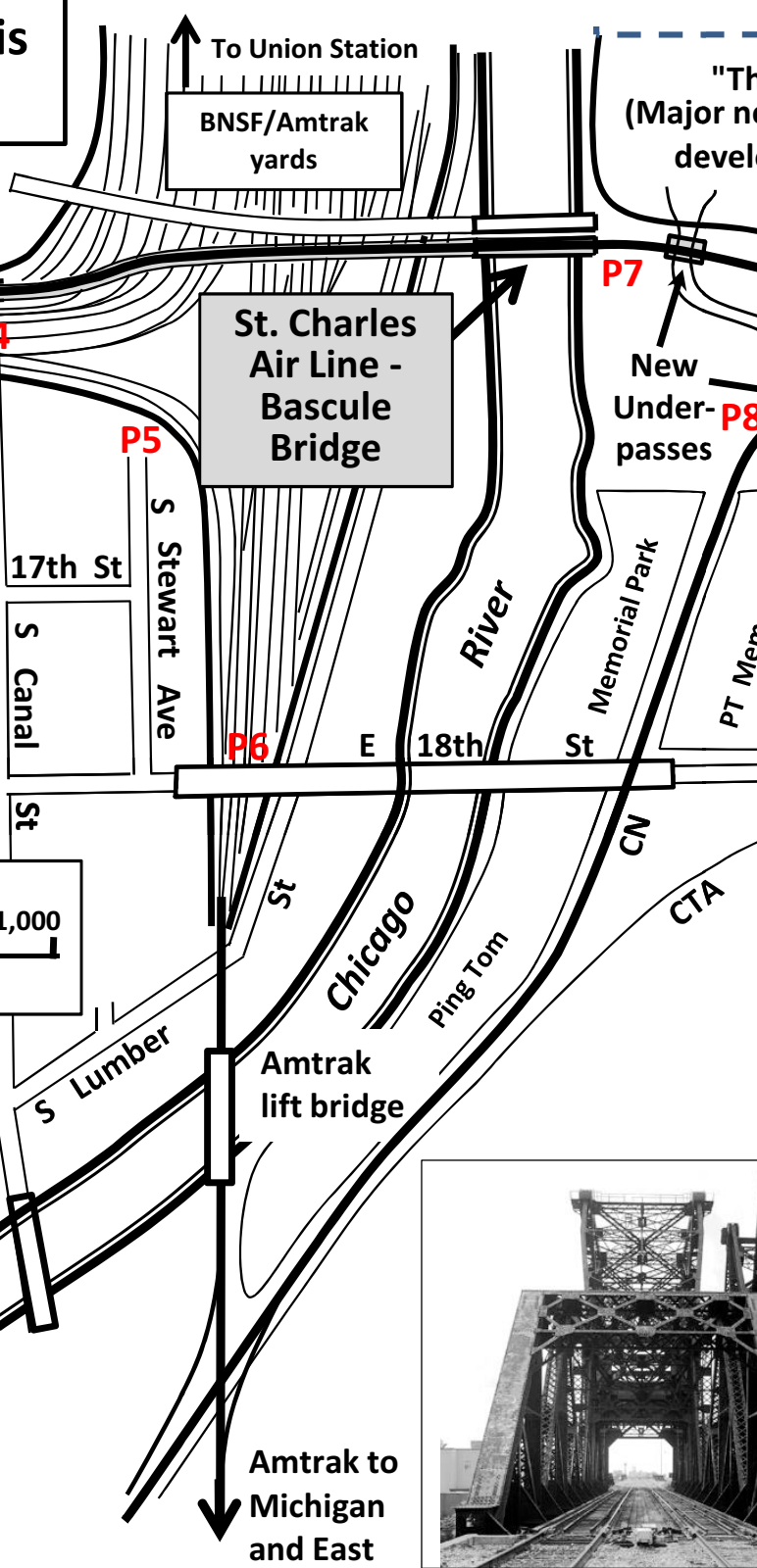
P1. Looking east from the Halsted METRA Station.



St. Charles Air Line - Rises up on concrete structures



PHOTOS TAKEN  
OCT. 18, 2022  
& APRIL 13, 2023



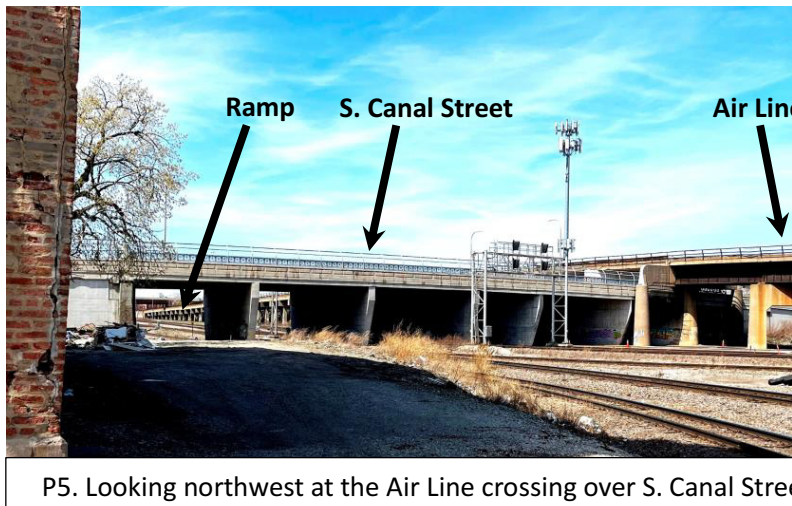
P2. Looking northwest at the Air Line rising on a concrete structure.



P7. Looking west from the Chicago River at Air Line bridge (Library of Congress photo)



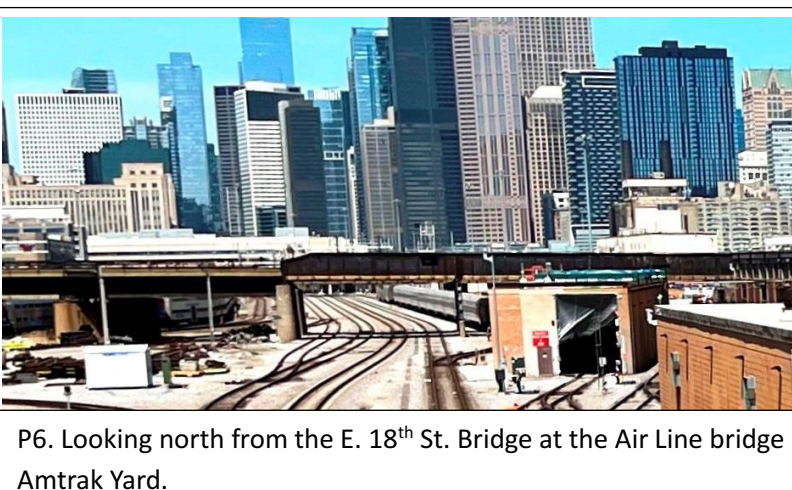
P3. Looking northeast at the Air Line crossing over S. Canal Street.



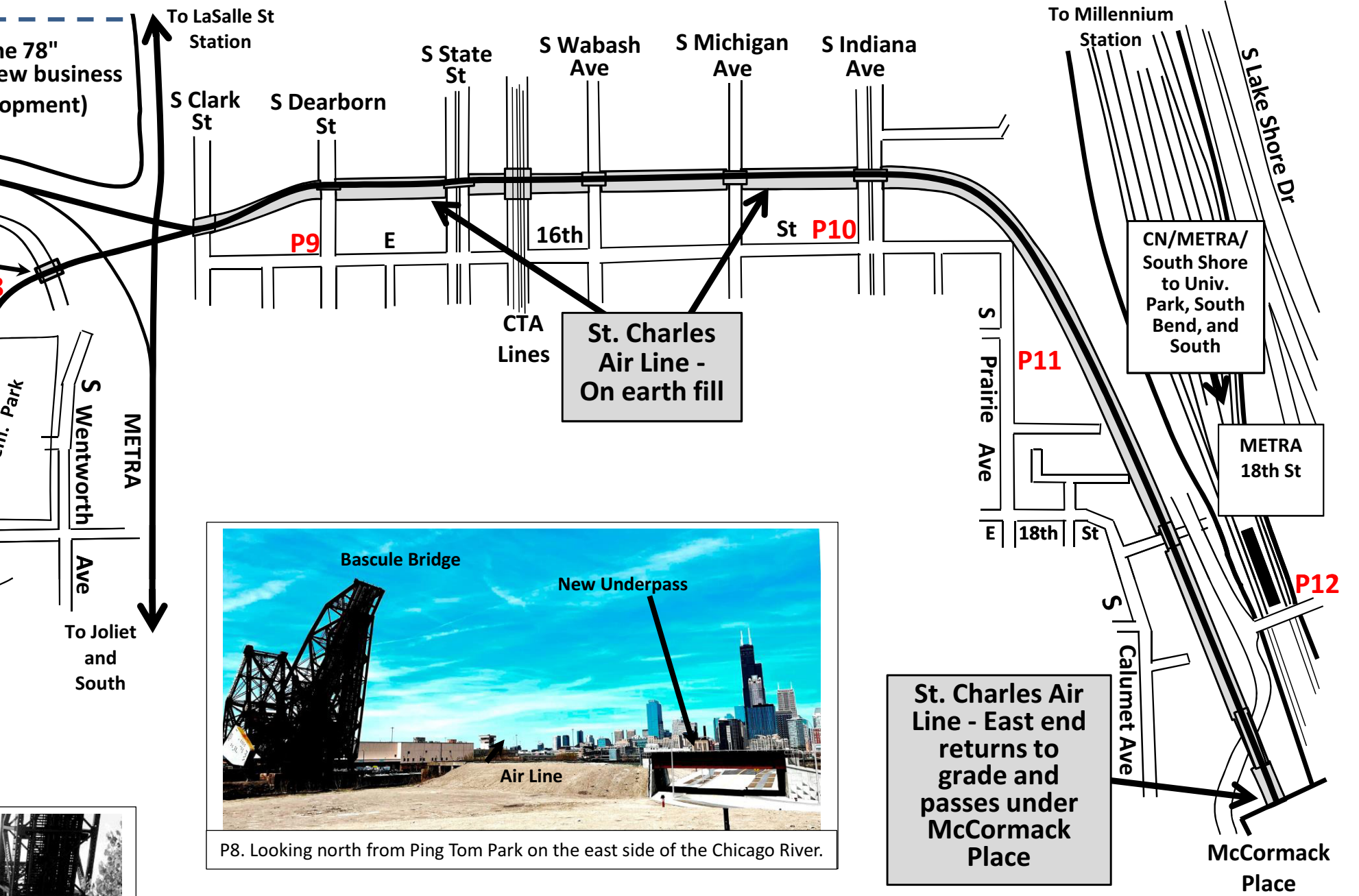
P5. Looking northwest at the Air Line crossing over S. Canal Street.



P4. Looking north along S. Canal Street at the crossing of the Air Line on an overhead bridge.



P6. Looking north from the E. 18th St. Bridge at the Air Line bridge and Amtrak Yard.



P8. Looking north from Ping Tom Park on the east side of the Chicago River.



P9. Looking north at the Air Line Bridge over Dearborn St.



P12. Looking south near the METRA 18th Street Station where the Air Line passes under McCormack Place.



P10. Looking north from E. 16th St. at the Air Line Bridge over S. Indiana Ave.



P11. Looking north on S. Prairie Ave. at the curve in the Air Line.

### The St. Charles Air Line

The St. Charles Air Line has often been talked about as a potential route for Amtrak trains to the south and east. Access to the Air Line would allow Amtrak trains to travel in the Chicago urban area over passenger friendly railroads that are less subject to congestion. Access would require the construction of a ramp to reach the elevated Air Line where it crosses over the Amtrak yard south of Union Station.

As shown on the map, the west end of the Air Line is at a point near the Halsted Street METRA Station on BNSF. The Air Line extends to the east over the METRA and Amtrak yards, then over the Chicago River on an immense Bascule Bridge, and east through the near south neighborhoods to the CN/METRA Lakefront Line. Here it turns south and joins the Lakefront Line under McCormack Place.

The Air Line is 1.6 miles in length and is owned by a consortium of railroads. It was installed in segments starting in the 1850s and elevated on fill and concrete structures after the 1890s. It is normally in daily use by freight trains and a few Amtrak trains to and from Union Station. Amtrak must use a clumsy back-up move between Union Station and Halsted Street to access the Air Line.

Currently the west half of the line and the bascule bridge line are temporarily out of service while the railroads are realigned on the east bank of the river as part of building "The 78", a massive new business development immediately north of the Air Line. During this time Amtrak trains must back into Union Station via the Amtrak lift bridge at South Lumber Street.

# Rail Passengers Association Spring Legislative Meeting in Alexandria, Virginia, March 27-28, 2023

By Laurence J. Krieg,  
RPA Council Member for  
Michigan

At the RPA Spring Legislative Meeting, the first day was an inspiration. We heard from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), Amtrak, and American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) about the Long Distance Service Study, Amtrak's future LD plans, AASHTO's state-focused programs for improved and expanded passenger rail, and from RPA staff about our legislative priorities this year. Many of us then spent the evening enjoying chili and beer at AleNation. Our hosts were trained chef and RPA Communications Manager, Madison Butler, and Haley Glynn, Marketing Manager for the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority. They told us of their work on Amtrak's Food and Beverage Working Group. From what we heard, Amtrak seems to be serious about improving on-board food options in practical ways.

The next day RPA members made over 200 visits to Congressional Offices in another extraordinarily successful "Day on the Hill." I personally visited each of the 13 Michigan congressional offices and the two Senators' offices, delivering materials to update them on projects we hope they will support, individually tailored to each of the 13 districts. I was able to speak with staff members at both of the Senators' offices and four of the congressional offices.

The national goals include:

1. Fully funding the passenger rail authorizations in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Legislation (IIJA)
2. Support legislative initiatives to improve Amtrak responsiveness to passengers needs and increase transparency for taxpayers
3. Address Amtrak Board of Directors vacancies: There are currently two vacancies and six expired seats on Amtrak's

Board of Directors. We ask that Congress work with the White House to advance a slate of Directors that, as required by Congress in the IIJA, provides balanced regional representation, speaking for both rural and urban passengers.

4. Pass a Rail Safety bill: It is time to start thinking about the benchmarks for acceptable levels of service, and the mechanisms for ensuring that rail carriers are accountable to passengers.

We learned that Congressmen Seth Moulton (D-MA) and Don Bacon (R-NE) were able to secure a total of 109 signatures for their bipartisan letter supporting Amtrak and passenger rail programs, including three signatures from Michigan: Debbie Dingell (D-Ann Arbor), Dan Kildee (R-Flint), and Hillary Schloten (D-Grand Rapids).

Michigan projects for which support was requested include:

- 1) Development of a dedicated passenger corridor between Michigan and Chicago
- 2) Increasing frequencies on the Michigan Corridor
- 3) Building a new Ann Arbor multimodal station
- 4) Adding new services between:
  - a) Ann Arbor and Traverse City
  - b) Detroit and Grand Rapids/Holland
  - c) Toronto and Chicago via Detroit
  - d) Cleveland and Detroit
  - e) Southeast Michigan to Toledo and points south
- 5) Separation of CN and Amtrak in Battle Creek
- 6) Adding Grand Rapids area regional service
- 7) Double-tracking in the Niles area
- 8) Diversion of the Lakeshore Limited through Michigan
- 9) Improving the Jackson Station platforms
- 10) Building the proposed Detroit Multimodal station
- 11) Starting commuter services in Southeast Michigan
- 12) Simplifying Milwaukee Junction in Detroit

# MARP Attends the *Railway Age* Next-Gen Conference



**BNSF Railroad President and CEO, Katie Farmer (third from left), discusses railroad topics with other women in railroading at the *Railway Age* 2023 NextGen Conference in Chicago on March 14, 2023. Ms. Farmer was an excellent speaker well versed in railroad management issues.**

MARP attended the 2023 Next-Gen Conference at the Union League Club in Chicago on March 14<sup>th</sup>. The conference is intended to spotlight the next generation of railroaders, the up and coming future leaders of the rail industry, with special emphasis on women in railroading. Despite the concentration on the freight side of railroading, many comments were heard about passenger railroading.

The new President and CEO of CSX, Joe Hinrichs, formerly with Ford Motor Company, addressed the conference and among many complex freight related topics, he mentioned that he meets regularly with Amtrak President Stephen Gardiner. Mr. Hendricks has just taken over as CSX President from Jim Foote, who was at war with Amtrak over the proposed passenger trains that Amtrak wants to operate on CSX between New Orleans and Mobile. After his talk, I had the opportunity to shake his hand and tell him that CSX received a lot of very bad press from this disagreement and this needed to end. He seemed to understand.

Another presenter was Jeff Necciai, Chief Technology Officer with Duos Technologies, a rail car inspec-

tor and manufacturer of way side sensors. With the widely noted February derailment caused by an overheated axle bearing on a Norfolk Southern freight train in East Palestine, Ohio, his talk was very timely. An outgoing man, he talked about heat and dragging equipment detectors. He said that they were starting to investigate way side sound detectors. He understood that sound detectors have the potential to identify problems in rail car trucks days or weeks before failure, in contrast to heat detectors, which often give only hours or minutes notice before failure.

John Cech, BNSF VP of Engineering, showed slides on the construction and completion of BNSF's major new bridge across Lake Pend Oreille in northern Idaho. Built alongside the existing bridge, the new second bridge removes a single track constriction and is part of the effort by BNSF to improve capacity on their important transcontinental line. He mentioned that this is the route of Amtrak's Empire Builder.

Pat Ottensmeyer, President and CEO of Kansas City Southern, gave a very upbeat talk on the need for uninhibited trade between the US and

Mexico. He said that 50 percent of KCS owned track mileage is in Mexico. About 25 trains a day now cross the international bridge on KCS over the Rio Grande River at Laredo and that this is by far the largest border crossing of rail freight. This crossing is an extremely important aspect of the merger of Kansas City Southern and Canadian Pacific. KCS is also a 50 percent owner in the rebuilt Panama Canal Railroad.

Finally, Katie Farmer, President and CEO of BNSF answered questions about her job from a panel of other women in railroading. A well-spoken speaker, she expertly addressed various topics, including passenger operations with commuter agencies and Amtrak. She said that BNSF is open to new passenger trains under the right conditions in a partnership with the passenger provider that does not inhibit freight operations. She said that BNSF has certain passenger principals she wants to see addressed. Among these is her desire that the passenger have a good experience on BNSF, certainly a most refreshing comment.

# Mini-Passenger Revolt at Jackson

By John Guidinger

A small passenger revolt took place on a cold day at Jackson on March 13, 2023, while waiting for westbound Train 353. The passengers, including myself, already irritated by the train being an hour and ten minutes late, stepped out onto the platform after Train 353 was called by the station caretaker. Eastbound Train 350 was just leaving on Track 1 as Train 353 approached on Track 2. But instead of

stopping, the train slowly pulled through the station to the west, crossing over to Track 1 and continuing until about 1,000 feet west of the station. There it sat faintly visible for 10 very long minutes. Several passengers went back into the station to stay warm. The station caretaker said it would back into the station on Track 1.

Soon the train backed slowly up into the station, but instead of stopping, it continued backing until about 400 feet

east of the station. The passengers were mystified. We could see the conductor step out onto the platform and wave for us to walk down there with our bags to get on. A big snow pile was between us and the train.

We were seized by sudden anger! We waved for the train to come up to the usual boarding point at the station. The conductor waved for us to come down there. The engine tooted its horn. But we were resolute! We stood our

ground!

The waving and horn tooting went on for at least two minutes. But we had taken our stand and could not give in! Soon we saw the conductor reboard the train. It started moving towards the station. We wondered if it would continue west and leave us standing there. But it stopped and the doors opened and we boarded at the normal place. Not a word was said to the conductor. But we had won!

# Meltdown in Chicago

TIME	TRAIN	NAME	DESTINATION	GATE/TRACK
1:45P	21	Texas Eagle	San Antonio	CANCELED
**NO ALTERNATE TRANSPORTATION**				
2:00P	5	California Zephyr	Emeryville	CANCELED
**NO ALTERNATE TRANSPORTATION**				
2:10P	B6	Van Galder Bus	Madison	CANAL ST
2:15P	352	Wolverine	Pontiac MI	CANCELED
**NO ALTERNATE TRANSPORTATION**				
2:50P	3	Southwest Chief	Los Angeles	CANCELED
**NO ALTERNATE TRANSPORTATION**				
3:00P	B7	Van Galder Bus	Madison	CANAL ST
3:05P	7	Empire Builder	Seattle	CANCELED
**NO ALTERNATE TRANSPORTATION**				
3:05P	27	Empire Builder	Portland	CANCELED
**NO ALTERNATE TRANSPORTATION**				
AMTRAK TRAINS WITH NO GATE BOARD FROM GREAT HALL				
AMTRAK GATES ARE CLOSED & LOCKED 5 MINS BEFORE DEPARTURE				
AMTRAK Departures Saturday 3/25/2023 2:06P				

By John Guidinger

On March 24<sup>th</sup> the Amtrak computer system that handles Positive Train Control (PTC) apparently collapsed causing chaos in many Amtrak stations. The first sign of difficulties came about mid-day on March 24<sup>th</sup> when the eastbound Empire Builder, the train I was riding, stopped in rural Wisconsin. The announced reason for the stop was that the PTC system had shut down. After about 30 minutes we were able to proceed at somewhat less than full speed. The conductor announced that most of the trains at Chicago were not running, an ominous sign to someone wanting to connect the next day with train 352 to Michigan.

When we arrived in Milwaukee that afternoon, a huge crowd boarded our train because all local Milwaukee-Chicago trains had been cancelled. We arrived in Chicago at about 7 PM, over 2 hours late. The monitor screens disclosed that most of the afternoon trains had been posted as "Cancelled" or "Delayed." There was a great deal of confusion among the passengers stranded in the station.

A long line had formed at the small ticket counter (all that remains of the much larger ticket counter of the pre-online days of the past). I found that Train 354, due to leave for Michigan at 5:50 pm, was posted as "Delayed" and had not left, so I got in line to get a ticket on that train. I finally got to the counter and bought a ticket about 7:30 pm. But within 30 minutes, that train was cancelled as well.

About this time, it was announced that St Louis trains 305 (due to have left at 5:20 pm) and 307 (scheduled out at 7:10 pm) would run as a combined train. There was a big scramble to the boarding gates for this departure.

I took a cab to the Holliday Inn on South Canal and West Harrison Streets for the night. I am not sure what happened to the other passengers, many of whom were bewildered elderly and handicapped people. I did not see any efforts by Amtrak to care for them. Perhaps they felt something like what the passengers on the Titanic must have felt when they learned that there were not enough lifeboats and that the steamship company could not do anything for them.

The following morning, I heard reports from the hotel clerk that everything was still shut down. I walked up Canal Street to the station and found that all the morning trains had been canceled. I was able to get a ticket on afternoon Train 352 and waited that morning until about 2 pm when 352 was posted as being "Cancelled."

This was enough for even an old train guy. I decided against waiting all afternoon to take a chance on Train 354 at 5:50 pm to Michigan. I called Southwest Airlines, took a cab to Chicago's Midway Airport, flew to Detroit, and took a limo home in Jackson. I arrived home about 2 am Sunday morning. On Monday I heard sounds of the trains passing through Jackson, indicating that the trains were running again.

## Some Conclusions.

Once again, Amtrak seems to have ignored the legitimate concerns of their passengers who trust Amtrak to get them to their destinations. Amtrak should have set up special tables in the waiting area of the station with several employees (called in to work, if necessary) to assist the passengers. A real live, uniformed person meeting the passengers, addressing their questions, and expressing a little sympathy would have been most helpful.

Announcements on the station sound system should have been more immediate. Many of the announcements were out of date, such as announcing well into the afternoon that early morning Train 350 had been cancelled. They should have addressed the trains scheduled for leaving at the current time and directed the passengers to a place in the station to receive information from an Amtrak representative.

Amtrak did not seem to have a plan in place for these types of emergencies. Such a plan should include setting up information tables, bringing in staff if needed, giving out information on nearby hotels, assistance in making hotel reservations, offering bus transportation to and from the hotels, and rebooking passengers on other trains.

Of course, the cause of the PTC computer failure needs to be addressed and a more robust backup system must be put in place. This must not be allowed to happen again.

# SHORT LINES

## Ohio may finally be moving to consider passenger rail development

according to a note in *Progressive Railroading* on February 9<sup>th</sup>. Ohio Governor Mike DeWine asked the Ohio Rail Development Commission to apply for the first phase of FRA funding to study expanding passenger rail in Ohio for two routes - Cleveland-Columbus-Dayton-Cincinnati, and Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit. Stu Nicholson of Columbus reports broad support for rail passengers service from Ohio mayors and regional planning commissions.....**In Tampa, Florida, monthly streetcar ridership surged to over 118,000 trips in December, 2022.** The *Mass Transit* website reports that this is the highest monthly ridership in more than 20 years. For the October 2021 to September 2022 fiscal year, total ridership was over a million. Tampa Historic Streetcar Inc. operates a 2.7-mile single track system between downtown Tampa and the Ybor City area. Nine of the eleven electric cars are newly constructed to 1920-era designs. The tenth car is a new open "breezer car" where passengers enter from the sides. The eleventh is original car 163 that was rebuilt by volunteers for daily operation. The original Tampa streetcar system shut down in 1946 and the new system started in 2002. It is incorporated as the Streetcar Division of the Hillsborough Area Rapid Transit bus system. The system has helped drive economic development along its route and expansion plans for the streetcar system are ongoing...

.....**New long distance service between New York City and Dallas/Ft Worth via Atlanta is under study** by Amtrak and the Southern Rail Commission, according to a note in the *Mass Transit* website on March 13. The new 500-mile route would branch off the New York-New Orleans Southern Crescent route at Meridian, Mississippi and run over the former Kansas City Southern line (soon to be merged under passenger-friendly Canadian Pacific) through Jackson and Shreveport. The line is partly owned by Norfolk Southern which would also have to approve the new service. The Southern Rail Commission also has plans to place passenger trains on a 75-mile route between New Orleans and Baton Rouge.....

**Three round trips a day are the vision for a new Scranton-New York City service** over trackage owned by New Jersey Transit, PennDOT, the Pennsylvania Northeast Regional Railroad Authority, and Amtrak, according to the *Mass Transit* website on March 20. A recently released two-year study projects ridership of 470,000 a year on tracks upgraded to 110 miles per hour on some segments of the route. Extensive design work, permitting, rebuilding of deteriorated rail infrastructure, and acquisition of equipment is estimated to cost several hundred million dollars. The 135-mile route had extensive passenger service as a segment of the former Erie-Lackawanna's New York-Chicago mainline. The last train serving Scranton was discontinued in 1970.....

**MARC is looking to expand commuter rail passenger service by coordinating with passenger providers in Delaware and Virginia**, according to an article in *Mass Transit Magazine* on April 14, 2023. The Maryland Transit Administration signed an agreement with Delaware Transit Corp. and the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority as a first step to expand MARC train service and streamline the region's transportation network. The agreements outline actions to advance discussions and explore opportunities for a pilot service to link Newark, Delaware and Alexandria, Virginia.....**The merger of Canadian Pacific (CP) and Kansas City Southern (KCS) to form CPKC was officially celebrated on April 14.** According to a *Railway Age* report of that day, CPKC, will have its global headquarters in Calgary and will extend from Vancouver east to Canada's Atlantic Coast and south to the Gulf of Mexico and further south in Mexico to Lázaro Cárdenas on Mexico's Pacific coast. Although still the smallest of what are now six U.S. Class I railroads by revenue, the newly combined company will operate approximately 20,000 miles of track and employ 20,000 people. The two railroads are expected to be fully integrated over the next three years and should be friendly to new passenger train initiatives.....

**Dreamstar Lines Inc., wants to operate an overnight sleeping car train between San Francisco and Los Angeles.** According to on line Bay Area newspaper SFGATE on April 17, the small Newport Beach, CA, company is lining up the railcars, financing, staffing, and agreements needed to offer the first night train on the route in decades, which is among the busiest airline travel routes. Dreamstar founder Tom Eastmond, said the service would offer travelers an appealing journey with one way fares anticipated to be \$300 for a roomette, \$600 for a bedroom, and \$1,000 for a premium room. The train, would leave each end

point at about 10 pm and arrive at around 8:30 am. The route would follow the Amtrak coast route, however, the train would use the CalTrain commuter route north of San Jose and arrive in downtown San Francisco instead of across the bay at Emeryville. Dining car service would not be offered. Eastmond said Dreamstar is talking with Union Pacific Railroad and Southern California commuter system operator Metrolink, which each own or control part of the 470-mile route.....

**Transit access supports good economic outcomes and cuts to transit service are economically harmful** according to a study reported in *Mass Transit Magazine* on April 18. In 2010, amid budget pressures, Clayton County, Ga., a majority-Black county in the southern part of Atlanta, canceled its bus service. In 2015 MARTA, the city's larger transit service, began running buses in the county once again. The five years without transit buses presented a rare opportunity to study the links between access to public transit and economic outcomes, says Fei Li, an assistant professor at Georgia State University and lead author of the study. In the half-decade interim, the county endured increases in poverty and unemployment, which are explained by the loss of bus access. The buses cost about \$10 million a year to run and only collected about a fifth of that amount back in fare revenue, according to a report in the *Los Angeles Times*. Losing all bus stops in a census tract led to a 5.1 percentage point increase in the poverty rate and a 4.5 percent increase in unemployment.....

**The new Siemens Venture coaches are finally showing up** on Michigan trains to mixed reviews. Everyone seems to like their newness, bright interiors, wide aisles, and the smooth ride at high speed. The restrooms are very large and accommodating, but there is only one per car. Not so nice is that the seats are hard (yes, very hard) and do not recline at all. Some people complain that the seats do not align with the windows. The business class cars are also starting to show up. Business class seating with two and one seating on a row is wider than the coach seating by a few inches. But the business class seating is only a section of the car without any separation from the adjacent coach passengers, who seem to be always walking through with drinks, bags, and noisy kids. What ever happened to the premium priced, reserved parlor car with their big swiveling and reclining seats, and an attendant who welcomed you on board "his" car, hung up your coat, and brought drinks and snacks as you floated along at 79 mph in such luxury that you hated to get to your destination.....

**Amtrak's and Metrolink's Surf Line fully reopened on April 17th** after being closed for six months because of unstable soils in the area of San Clemente according to TV station KTLA news. During that period the schedules were drastically reduced and rail passengers had to take a bus transfer between Irvine and Oceanside. In February a weekend service was reinstated with a reduced schedule, but now the full weekday schedules are being operated once again. BNSF freight service continued over the period with trains operating at slow speeds in the unstable area.....

**New York City subway and Chicago CTA ridership is rising again.** The New York subways carried a billion riders in 2022, the first time since 2019, according *Mass Transit Magazine*. Ridership is at about 60 percent of the pre-Covid levels. In Chicago CTA ridership is rising with weekday numbers now over 900,000 trips, according to *Streetsblog*. Downtown Chicago CTA ridership has doubled as people are returning to offices and other activities in the central city.....

**Work on the Jackson railroad bridge replacement project has restarted** after a winter break. Concrete is being poured for the bridge abutments on the Mechanic Street bridge and additional sheet piling has been driven to stabilize the railroad fill. Work on the Jackson Street bridge has not been restarted. MDOT announced that Blackstone Street will be closed so the railroad crossing can be rebuilt. The replacement of the two bridges and the Blackstone Street crossing is scheduled to be completed in October of 2023.....

**New CSX President Joe Hendricks led the way in volunteering to give CSX employees four paid sick days** and up to three personal leave days annually, according to a report by *Railway Age* on February 12. This benefit had been requested by labor during bargaining last year for a new national contract, but had been removed from the final agreement under pressure from the Biden Administration to prevent a damaging national rail strike. The complete lack of paid sick days and personal leave days has been a long standing complaint from rail labor for decades. This agreement benefitting CSX employees will pressure the other railroads to do the same for their employees.

## Oh, Canada!



Canada, our neighbor to the north, is most beautiful.



Wonderful desserts are part of the trip.



Lunch is served in a full dining car.



Sunrise from the dome of the Canadian.

# Trip: The Canadian to Vancouver

By Ron Cady

On February 26, 2023, I drove from Alpena, Michigan, to Capreol, Ontario, (about 190 miles east of Sault Ste Marie) to board the evening departure of Via Rail Canada's Train No.1, the Canadian, destined for Vancouver, BC. My purpose was a vacation, traveling with other fellow rail enthusiast friends westbound and returning eastbound with the annual "Moonlighters" group of about fifty inveterate train riders, comprised of working and retired railroaders, railroad authors, photographers, and enthusiasts. The "Moonlighters" had not traveled since 2020 due to travel restrictions caused by COVID-19.

The first time I had ridden the Canadian National route was in the early 1970's, pre-VIA days with my parents on CN's premiere train, the Super Continental. Back then we rode a rebuilt heavyweight, full-section sleeper. It was a three-night trip. The Canadian (moved off the Canadian Pacific route onto the CN over thirty years ago) is now on a four-night schedule with added hours of schedule padding.

So how was my VIA experience in 2023? My high expectations were completely met. Although the VIA Budd equipment is over sixty-five years old and has gone through a couple of rebuilds, our thirteen cars still were nice and rode well. VIA wisely retained most of their vista dome fleet, which has remained a marketing draw for the train. I spent a fair amount of time in the Park car dome; the front six seats are reserved for Prestige class passengers, while the remaining dome seats are available for other sleeping car passengers. The lower lounge was not restricted. The Canadian

carries one coach for budget-minded passengers and a dome-food service car for the coach passengers. Coach passengers do not mingle with sleeping car passengers. A mid-train dome lounge was missing on our westbound trip due to it being destroyed from an unexplained fire about the time the train was being assembled in Toronto. However, on the return trip from Vancouver, a replacement mid-train dome lounge was added from the reserve pool there.

The Canadian offers only two weekly round trips due to an equipment shortage. In addition to out-of-service, Budd equipment, several of the Budd sleepers are now running as buffer cars system-wide on the ends of VIA trains in case of a rear end accident. A buffer car, obliterating the rear-end view of the park car, was on our train in both directions. However, it did not stifle the camaraderie enjoyed in that car.

Sleeping cars (each one staffed with an attendant) provide bedrooms, roomettes, and sections. Although sections do not provide a private room during the day, the sections at night feature a comfortable, wide bed. Mattresses are much thicker than those on Amtrak. However, I would advise anyone with mobility issues not to book an upper section. Climbing up the ladder when the train is moving can be challenging.

Food and beverages (excluding alcohol) were complimentary for sleeping car passengers. Meals (with soup or salad options) were prepared on board and presented with the politeness one would find in an upscale hotel restaurant.

Forget the disposable plastic and paper! Real China, linen napkins, and tablecloths, plus a full array of tableware awaited guests at each meal. Four selections, including a vegan option, were offered at all three meals. Fresh fruit, desserts, snacks, and beverages were available at all times in the lounges. Hors d'oeuvres were occasionally offered in the Park observation car (staffed with two attendants) and served to passengers at their seats. The diner carried a full and attentive staff (one chef, two kitchen assistants, one steward, two waiters and one waiter assistant), unlike Amtrak whose diners have only three employees. Food was presented in an attractive manner. For example, desserts featured an edible "VIA" in script on the plates.

Along the trip, passengers could get off for extended fresh air breaks at several stations (such as Capreol, Hornepayne, Sioux Lookout, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Jasper) during service stops. I took advantage of them all.

CN in the past had trouble keeping the train on time, often arriving hours late despite the padded schedule. Crews informed me it is not uncommon now for the Canadian to arrive two or more hours early at its destinations. My westbound trip was nearly three hours late at Vancouver due to a freight train breakdown. My return to Capreol was about 90 minutes early.

I was left with a very positive impression with the service in both directions. The professionalism of the staff was outstanding. Explanations were frequently given if the train had lost some scheduled time, and scenic or historic locations were announced in advance so one could take it all in from the dome, one of the highlights of the trip. Food was of top-notch quality. If there were equipment malfunctions (such as a non-working toilet), repairmen were brought on board to address the problem at service stops.

MARP members would enjoy this wonderful train experience that can be boarded close to Michigan.



The Canadian at Capreol, Ontario