



# ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

www.marp.org

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*The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. (MARP) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation established in 1973 to improve passenger train service, travel conditions for passengers, and to work for the preservation of historic rail stations.*

*Member meetings are held at locations around the state. Check the website for dates and venues. The public is invited to attend.*

### MARP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2022-2024

John Guidinger	Chair
Carolyn Ulstad	Vice-Chair
Jeanie Merckel	Treasurer
Todd Schultz	Secretary
Clark Charnetski	Elected Member
Tom Fletcher	Elected Member
Robert Lovell	Elected Member
Chuck Merckel	Elected Member
Robert Patterson	Elected Member
Todd Schultz	Elected Member
Matthew Thompson	Elected Member
Thaddeus Wojcik, Jr.	Elected Member
Open Position	Elected Member
Gov't Affairs Coordinator, Steve Vagnozzi	
ON TRACK Editor & Communications,	
Kay Chase	

### 2023 MEETINGS

**11 February** – In-Person Meeting  
Dearborn Amtrak Station

**03 June** – In-Person Meeting  
Niles District Library

**05 August** – In-Person Meeting  
Crossroads Village | Huckleberry RR  
Flint

**14 October** - 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
Durand Union Station

**Executive Committee Meets**  
3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month

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

## August Member Meeting Hears from Director of Michigan Infrastructure Office

A mild summer's afternoon found a lively group of MARP members gathered in Crossroads Village in Flint MI for MARP's August 05 meeting. The meeting featured two speakers from the Michigan Infrastructure Office (MIO): Zachary Kolodin, MIO Director, and Tim Fischer, appointed by the Governor to the MIO staff.

The **Michigan Infrastructure Office (MIO)** was created within Governor Whitmer's office early in 2022 in response to the **Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)** enacted by Congress in the fall of 2021. Usually referred to as The BIL, this legislation is meant to support a wide range of infrastructure development across the nation. In Michigan, the Infrastructure Office is intended "to coordinate statewide efforts to better position state and local governments to be as competitive as possible for grant funding" and "to make sure resources sent to the state under The BIL, are used effectively and efficiently" to address a broad range of infrastructure needs. Michigan expects to receive upwards of \$11 billion through The BIL in the next four years, including as much as \$1 billion to improve public transportation.

Mr. Kolodin explained the overall goal of the MIO as it relates to passenger rail specifically is to increase ridership and frequency and to think about what new services the state could potentially invest in. Among new services eligible for funding under The BIL are:

- a passenger rail connection between Detroit and Toledo;
- the Coast-to-Coast proposal to connect Detroit/Ann Arbor to Lansing and Grand Rapids/Holland, perhaps extending as far as Muskegon;
- the A2TC project connecting Ann Arbor and Traverse City.

Mr. Kolodin also mentioned increasing frequency on the *Wolverine* route between Kalamazoo and Dearborn.

The MIO will coordinate with MDOT and other state and local agencies in looking for opportunities to "prime the pump", leveraging state and local funds to draw down available federal funds. As an example, this year's

*(INFRASTRUCTURE continues on page 3)*

## MARP 2023 Meeting Schedule

MARK YOUR CALENDARS! MARP will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 14 October at Durand Union Station. See page 2 for more information.

In the meantime, remember that the Executive Committee meets via Zoom on the third Wednesday of the month. If you have ideas to contribute, questions, or concerns please send them to us at [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com). If you would like to sit in on a meeting, please contact MARP Chair John Guidinger at [jhguidinger1@yahoo.com](mailto:jhguidinger1@yahoo.com).

## Meet Tom Fletcher Newest Executive Committee Member



Tom Fletcher became the newest member of the MARP executive committee when he was appointed earlier this year to fill a vacancy. He has been a member of MARP for many years and, as he approached retirement, saw an opportunity to become more involved in support of an organization dedicated to a life-long interest of his – TRAINS!

ON TRACK recently chatted via e-mail with Tom to learn a little about him, his life, and interests.

*When did you become interested in trains?*

I became interested in trains as a young boy; both my grandfathers were avid railfans and my family would typically take a summertime trip west when we were young—riding the *Empire Builder* or the *California Zephyr* to see the Rockies and so many other sites west of the Mississippi River.

*Talk about your favorite train journey.*

My favorite journey is on the *Empire Builder*, getting off at one of the Glacier National Park stops and touring such a beautiful place that also featured a busy rail line (now BNSF's high line). We occasionally took the *Builder* all the way to Seattle, spending the three days and two nights on the train.

*You have recently retired. What was your occupation?*

I spent approximately 35 years working for Pfizer in Kalamazoo, retiring in the Fall of 2022. Being a Mechanical Engineer, I spent my entire career there working in the Engineering Organization, spending time in Maintenance, Project Management and finally Utilities. These days I am working 1/2 time for Projective Engineering, supporting several manufacturing plants across the US.

*Where did you grow up?*

I grew up in Kalamazoo and haven't strayed far from home. I started working right out of college (UM) at what then was called the Upjohn Company. My wife, Marcia, and I now live on the far west side of Kalamazoo County.

*Tell us a little about your educational background.*

Elementary school took place in Kalamazoo, followed by two years of engineering school at Calvin College in Grand Rapids followed by three years at the University of Michigan, graduating with a Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering.

*(FLETCHER continues at right)*



## MARP 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting

**14 October 2023**  
**12 Noon to 2:30 pm**  
**Durand Union Station**

Plan to arrive early to chat with friends before luncheon is served at Noon. Our keynote speaker, Katie Mitzner, will tell how *Brightline* trains are transforming the travel landscape in Florida.

Watch your mailbox for your mail-in registration form. Or go to [marp.org/?p=7844](http://marp.org/?p=7844) for more information and to register online.

*(FLETCHER continued from left)*

*Aside from your interest in trains and travel, what other interests or community activities benefit from your participation?*

Raising four children, I spent time coaching soccer and baseball, spending time on the respective boards as well. I have served on my church's leadership team on several occasions, finishing up my recent term at the end of this year. I also spent 30 years as a part-time firefighter for the Oshtemo Township Fire Department and the Pfizer Emergency Response team.

*What do you like to do in your spare time?*

I haven't had much spare time until recently. Raising four active kids (three of them were triplets) meant spare time was when you slept :). Today with less work commitments I spend time with our kids in town and especially enjoy six grandkids who tire me out. I am also rediscovering some old hobbies such as Ham Radio—I hope to get relicensed before the end of the year.

*What you would like to see MARP accomplish in the near future? What Ideas do you have about building support for passenger trains?*

I'm excited about the current work to expand rail service in the State, both between Chicago and Detroit as well as possibly up north. My rides on the *Wolverines* and *Pere Marquette* recently have featured nearly sold out trains which is good to see. Educating the public is needed to build support for expanded passenger rail in Michigan. I meet so many people who have no idea that they can take a train to Chicago or Detroit—despite the fact that they have lived here their entire lives.

*Tom assures us that all four of his children “received the love of passenger rail travel in the gene-pool.”*



Thank you to all who  
have renewed their  
membership for 2023!

Annual dues are payable in January of each year.

You may renew online at [marp.org/?page\\_id=4782](https://marp.org/?page_id=4782)

Or download a mail-in form at [tinyurl.com/marp014](https://tinyurl.com/marp014)

*(INFRASTRUCTURE continued from page 1)*

Michigan State Budget includes a \$20 million appropriation for “high speed rail” development. (Note: “high speed rail” is a bit of a misnomer here, actually referring to the “enhanced speed” projects we’re used to.) Another source of “seed money” included in the FY 2024 State Budget is \$50 million available for transit innovation grants.

In the ensuing discussion, Ren Farley suggested a confluence of concerns between MIO and the **Growing Michigan Together Council** recently established to explore solutions to Michigan’s slow rate of population growth, saying that attracting young people to the state requires a broadening of the transportation network to provide better bus and train options. Along these same lines, Larry Krieg urged that MIO consider how the state can best implement the recommendations found the **Michigan Mobility 2045 Plan** adopted in November of 2021 [see pages 145-146; also, Chapters 6 & 7 of the **MM2045 Rail Plan Supplement**]. Krieg also pointed out the inadequacy of the state’s highway system to handle future growth and the need to expand bus and train options to address congested roads.

Visit the MIO website

<https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/issues/michigan-infrastructure-office>

While on the website, click on

**Track Michigan's Projects, Status & Funding**

to view an interactive map showing projects already benefiting from funding available from the BIL.

To date, \$7.3 billion in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding has been announced and is headed to Michigan with over 357 specific projects identified for funding. See the **Michigan Fact Sheet here**.

If you are interested in learning more about the Growing Michigan Together Council or submitting comments, go to

<https://growingmichigan.org>

## MARP Membership Meeting Notes

The August 5<sup>th</sup> meeting in Flint included a short business meeting prior to members joining a few hundred other Railroad Days fans for the hour-long trip aboard the steam-powered Huckleberry Railroad.

In anticipation of MARP’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Chair John Guidinger has designed a commemorative lapel pin, proposing to provide it to all current members. He also highlighted information from a written report submitted by Steve Vagnozzi, Government Affairs Coordinator. Trains 350 and 353 will continue to be suspended on weekdays until October 5<sup>th</sup> to accommodate curve modification work on the Michigan Line. All the Midwest’s new *Venture* passenger and business class coaches have been delivered and all will be in service by end of the year. Talk is in the air of reconnecting Detroit to Toronto train service, but several challenges remain. Larry Krieg reminded members of the **Windsor Connector** proposal championed by Yuri Popov in 2018 envisioning a bus service connecting to VIA at Windsor that could be done with a single bus. At the time, MDOT was not interested in pursuing the idea. MARP Secretary Todd Schultz has concerns about lack of capacity on the *Pere Marquette* which has been running with only 2 coaches. It has the highest load factor of all Michigan routes and ranks second among all Amtrak routes. Michael Frezell, MDOT Communications, said that Amtrak is still experiencing staff and equipment shortages long with the need to supply equipment for some new services that have been launched recently.



## 120 Hour Blitz Replaces Two Railroad Bridges in Jackson

On 09 August 2023, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) closed the Michigan Line rail corridor to train traffic in Jackson MI to allow crews to safely replace two century-old railroad bridges over Jackson and Mechanic Streets. The work was finished by the morning of August 14. You can watch a time-lapse video of the intricately choreographed operation to replace the Jackson Street bridge here:

<https://youtu.be/Fm2TWKVMFzw?t=181>

## View from elsewhere . . .

*“For Amtrak to become more efficient, we must grow ridership and increase service. It’s a very simple equation: investments in intercity passenger rail that improve service and increase ridership make the service more efficient and enable it to produce more economic and public benefits for each dollar of public investment.”*

--Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner in [written testimony](#) presented to Congressional hearing on 06 June 2023. View the complete hearing [here](#).

*“We’re providing customers with the fastest transit times in the rail industry and this expansion of our state-of-the-art reefer equipment gives more customers the solution they need to convert to rail.”*

--Jonathan Wahba, Canadian Pacific Kansas City Sr. VP of sales and marketing-bulk and intermodal, in announcing a [Midwest-to-Mexico rail service](#) for refrigerated shippers, a market currently served by trucks and offering transit time a day faster than the nearest competitor.



## Brightline Service to Orlando Airport Opens September 22

It’s not just airline passengers who will enjoy the benefits of a fast, direct connection to and from Orlando International Airport. It is anticipated that business & leisure travelers will use one of Brightline’s 350 reserved spots in the adjoining parking garage—not to catch the next flight out, but to hop on a fast and comfortable train to Miami or one of the intermediate stops at West Palm Beach, Boca Raton, Fort Lauderdale, or Aventura. If a trip to Disney World or other Florida destination is in your future, you may want to visit [gobrightline.com](http://gobrightline.com) to plan your trip.

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