

# P *The Michigan* PASSENGER

YOUR SOURCE FOR PASSENGER RAIL NEWS • SINCE 1973



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

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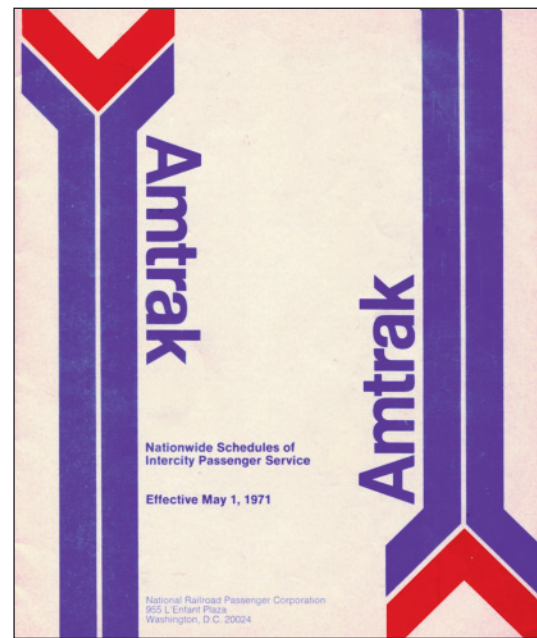
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# Amtrak turns 50

*Some comments on the last 50 years*



Ms. Patty Saunders, wearing a stylish pair of kinky boots, waves bravely from a Metroliner repainted with an Amtrak logo in Washington Union Station on the first day of Amtrak operations. (JHG Col.)



Cover of the first Amtrak national timetable of May 1, 1971. This was the first combined timetable ever issued for American passenger trains. It represented a new hope that consolidation of the former disjointed passenger system of the individual railroads could result in success. (JHG Col.)

By John Guidinger

Many MARP members can remember May 1, 1971, when Amtrak began operating a series of intercity trains chosen by a national study committee from what was left of our once great national passenger rail system. On May 1<sup>st</sup>, we went down, curious and expecting, to stand on the platform of our hometown depots to see the first Amtrak train come through town. We were inquisitive when a train of mixed up cars and locomotives arrived, the equipment displaying familiar color schemes and railroad names, but which were now hooked together in a seemly haphazard fashion into a single train.

On our first Amtrak trip, we were dismayed when we found that the interiors of the cars were just as worn and faded as before, and the old heating and cooling systems still failed to provide basic creature comforts on hot summer days or on cold winter nights. The locomotives were just as tired and unreliable as before, and they often could not go fast enough to maintain the schedules, or they suddenly stopped in the middle of nowhere and we had to wait for hours until a freight locomotive could come rescue us. When we walked by a diner we still could still smell the smoke of briquette fueled fires in the old fashioned cooking stoves. When we made reservations we noted that the old manual reservation system was still in use, requiring 5x8 file cards and the railroad agent making telephone calls to a central office to book space and then calling other railroad companies to make connecting reservations. So what had changed under Amtrak? Let us review the last 50 years.

The last Michigan intercity Penn Central schedule of March 3, 1971 is

shown on page 3. Study of the schedule shows some interesting facts. Up to the end of Penn Central passenger operations on April 30, 1971, the railroad still provided two direct Michigan schedules a day between Michigan and New York City. Eastbound trains 14 and 52 and westbound trains 351 and 17 operated through Canada to Buffalo. As a result of continual service cuts, in 1971 coach passengers had to make a connection at Buffalo for New York City or Boston. But even in 1971 sleeping car passengers at Detroit could still use through sleeping car service to and from New York City, the sleepers being switched at Buffalo to or from the New York City trains. At

Detroit the sleepers were added or taken off the trains and no longer ran through Michigan to Chicago. (Through sleeping car service at the end of Penn Central passenger service between New York City and Chicago was still provided on the route through Buffalo via Cleveland south of Lake Erie.)

Trains 14, 17, 52, and 351 did not stop in Canada. Several MARP members remember that the doors on the cars were physically sealed with strap-type customs seals at Detroit and Buffalo and the seals were removed after passing through Canada. In those simpler times, cus-

See *Amtrak at 50* page 3



Penn Central eastbound train 356 near Jackson in 1969. Although still scheduled and operated, the trains were shabby and provided only minimal onboard services until the end of Penn Central intercity passenger service on April 30, 1971. (Doug Leffler photo)

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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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Amtrak Train Schedules								
Effective July 19, 2021								
Chicago-Kalamazoo-Ann Arbor-Detroit-Pontiac								
Chicago-Kalamazoo-East Lansing-Port Huron								
Wolverine Service	Blue Water	Wolverine Service	Train Name		Wolverine Service	Blue Water	Wolverine Service	
350	364	354	Train Number		351	365	355	
Daily	Daily	Daily	Days of Operation		Daily	Daily	Daily	
7:05a	4:00p	5:50p	Dp	CHICAGO, IL, Un Sta (CT)	Ar	10:47a	11:45a	10:55p
7:31a				Hammond-Whiting, IN				9:54p
8:13a				Michigan City, IN (CT)				9:12p
9:24a	6:10p	8:04p		New Buffalo, MI (ET)			11:24a	10:02p
9:49a	6:32p	8:24p		Niles, MI			11:04a	9:42p
10:00a	6:43p			Dowagiac, MI			10:52a	9:29p
10:32a	7:11p	8:58p		Kalamazoo, MI		9:16a	10:26a	9:00p
11:10a	7:38p	9:33p		Battle Creek, MI		8:49a	10:00a	8:33p
	9:00p			East Lansing, MI			8:54a	
	9:37p			Durand, MI			8:08a	
	10:08p			Flint, MI			7:35a	
	10:34p			Lapeer, MI			7:08a	
	11:31p		Ar	PORT HURON, MI	Dp		6:20a	
		10:03p		Albion, MI		8:16a		
12:12p		10:28p		Jackson, MI		7:52a		7:37p
12:58p		11:18p		Ann Arbor, MI		7:15a		7:00p
1:34p		11:54p		Dearborn, MI		6:45a		6:29p
2:04p		12:29a		DETROIT, MI		6:26a		6:11p
2:26p		12:50a		Royal Oak, MI		6:03a		5:48p
2:34p		12:57a	Ar	Troy, MI		5:56a		5:41p
2:46p		01:16a	Ar	PONTIAC, MI	Dp	5:43a		5:28p

### Amtrak Train Schedule

Effective July 19, 2021  
 Chicago-Grand Rapids

Pere Marquette	Train Name		Pere Marquette	
370	Train Number		371	
Daily	Days of Operation		Daily	
6:30p	Dp	CHICAGO, IL, Un Sta (CT)	Ar	9:08a
9:14p		St. Joe-Benton Harbor, MI (ET)		8:10a
9:50p		Bangor, MI		7:32a
10:33p		Holland, MI		6:49a
11:34p	Ar	GRAND RAPIDS, MI	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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MARP STATION REPRESENTATIVES		
Chuck Merckel, Coordinator		
Station	Staff	MARP Volunteer
Albion	Bus	Matthew Murawski
Ann Arbor	Amtrak	Clark Charnetski/Steve Sobel
Bangor	None	JP Descamp
Battle Creek	Amtrak	Charles Shong
Dearborn	Amtrak	Mary Jo Durivage
Detroit	Amtrak	Dwight Phillips
Dowagiac	None	Dowagiac Chbr of Commerce
Durand	None	Mary Stone
East Lansing	Caretkr	Steve Vagnozzi
Flint	Bus	Barb Westcott
Grand Rapids	Caretkr	Tim Corner
Holland	None	Nathan Nietering
Jackson	Caretkr	John Guidinger
Kalamazoo	Caretkr	Warren Fritz
Lapeer	None	Jim Slater
Michigan City, IN	None	
New Buffalo	None	Lori S. Peterson
Niles	Caretkr	Jack Kessler
Pontiac	None	Robert Tischbein
Port Huron	None	Anita Ashford
Royal Oak	None	Rbt Patterson/David Roberts
St Joseph	None	Todd Schultz
Troy	None	Brad Socier/Robert Patterson



FINAL PENN CENTRAL SCHEDULE IN MICHIGAN BEFORE AMTRAK, MAY 1, 1971

EAST via DETROIT		TO		NEW YORK BOSTON	
and Intermediate Stations					
LOCAL TIME		14 Daily	356 Daily	52 Daily	
Lv CHICAGO (Union Station).....(CT)		1 05	4 00	10 05	
" Englewood.....		R 1 23	R 4 18		
" Gary (257 Broadway).....			A 4 53	10 55	
" Michigan City.....(CT)		2 28		11 29	
" Niles.....(ET)		↓ 4 10	↓ 7 02	1 08	
" Dowagiac.....				1 21	
" Decatur.....				J 1 33	
" Lawton.....				J 1 42	
" Kalamazoo.....				2 19	
Lv Battle Creek.....	374 Note E	↓ 5 06	↓ 7 55	2 54	
" Albion.....		↓ 5 32	↓ 8 22	J 3 19	
" Jackson.....				3 50	
" Ann Arbor.....		↓ 6 20	↓ 9 12	4 30	
" Ypsilanti.....		↓ 7 10	↓ 10 00	5 15	
Ar DETROIT.....		↓ 8 00	↓ 10 55	6 45	
Lv DETROIT.....		↓ 8 30		5 30	
Ar BUFFALO (Penn Cent. Sta.).....(ET)		↓ 1 07 AM		↓ 1 10 PM	
62 Daily					
Lv BUFFALO (Penn Cent. Sta.).....(ET)		↓ 2 30		↓ 2 30	
" Batavia.....				3 30	
" Rochester.....		3 30		4 45	
Ar SYRACUSE.....		4 45		4 50	
Lv SYRACUSE.....		4 50		5 15	
" Rome.....				5 30	
" Utica.....		5 30		6 45	
" Amsterdam.....				7 10	
Ar ALBANY-RENSELAER.....		6 45		7 10	
428 Daily					
Lv ALBANY-RENSELAER.....		7 40		8 44	
Ar Pittsfield.....		8 44		9 54	
" Springfield.....		9 54		11 02	
" Worcester.....		11 02		11 30	
" Framingham.....		11 30		11 47	
" Newtonville.....		11 47		12 02	
" Back Bay.....		12 02		12 15	
Ar BOSTON (South Station).....(ET)		12 15			
62 Daily					
Lv ALBANY-RENSELAER.....		7 20		7 20	
" Hudson.....				7 45	
Ar Poughkeepsie.....		D 8 20		D 8 20	
" Croton-Harmon.....		D 9 05		D 9 05	
Ar NEW YORK (Grand Cent. Term.)..(ET)		10 00		10 00	



NOTES

Three round trips a day between Chicago and Detroit.

Two of these trains operate to and from Buffalo thru Canada.

Connections at Buffalo for New York City and Boston.

Sleeping car service between Detroit and New York.

Weekday commuter train between Ann Arbor and Detroit (Trains 374 and 357)

Early morning service to Detroit provided by overnight train.

Many small communities served.

WEST via BUFFALO		TO		DETROIT CHICAGO	
and Intermediate Stations					
Miles		LOCAL TIME	71 Daily	61 Daily	
0	Lv NEW YORK (Grand Cent. Term.)..(ET)		AM 8 30	PM 6 30	
33	" Croton-Harmon.....		R 9 22	R 7 22	
74	" Poughkeepsie.....		R 10 00	R 8 00	
114	" Hudson.....		10 35		
142	Ar ALBANY-RENSELAER.....		11 10	9 10	
427 Daily					
0	Lv BOSTON (South Station).....(ET)			PM 4 00	
1	" Back Bay.....			4 07	
8	" Newtonville.....			4 20	
21	" Framingham.....			4 40	
44	" Worcester.....			5 10	
98	" Springfield.....			6 15	
148	" Pittsfield.....			7 33	
200	Ar ALBANY-RENSELAER.....			8 55	
357 Daily					
142	Lv ALBANY-RENSELAER.....		11 15	9 30	
151	" Colonie-Schenectady.....		11 30	9 45	
174	" Amsterdam.....		11 55		
236	" Utica.....		12 45	11 05	
250	" Rome.....				
284	Ar SYRACUSE.....		1 35	11 50	
284	Lv SYRACUSE.....		1 40	11 55	
370	" Rochester.....		2 50	1 10	
402	" Batavia.....		3 25		
436	Ar BUFFALO (Penn Central Sta.).....(ET)		4 00	2 35	
351 Daily					
436	Lv BUFFALO (Penn Cent. Sta.)..	Note N	PM 5 15	AM 3 15	355 Daily
687	Ar DETROIT.....		↓ 10 05	↓ 7 45	PM
687	Lv DETROIT.....		5 15	↓ 8 25	↓ 12 10
715	" Ypsilanti.....		5 45	↓ 9 06	↓ 12 53
723	" Ann Arbor.....		↓ 12 16	↓ 9 50	↓ 1 38
761	" Jackson.....		↓ 1 15	↓ 10 15	↓ 2 28
781	" Albion.....			↓ 10 43	↓ 2 59
806	" Battle Creek.....			↓ 11 13	
829	Lv Kalamazoo.....		↓ 3 20		
846	" Lawton.....				
854	" Decatur.....			J ↓ 11 40	
865	" Dowagiac.....			J ↓ 11 51	
877	" Niles.....(ET)		↓ 4 29	↓ 12 10	↓ 3 54
914	Lv Michigan City.....(CT)				
944	" Gary (257 Broadway).....(CT)		\$4 50	\$12 25	
964	Ar Englewood.....		05 25	D 1 05	D 4 45
970	Ar CHICAGO (Union Station).....(CT)		5 45	1 20	5 05

Equipment:  
Trains 14 & 62: Sleeping Cars (Roomettes and Bedrooms) Detroit-New York.  
Train 62: Sleepercoaches (Single and double rooms) Buffalo-New York.  
Train 62: Dining Car Buffalo-New York.  
Trains 14, 52, 62, 74, 356, and 428: Light meal service, snacks and drinks.  
Trains 14, 52, 62, 74, 356, and 428: Reclining Seat Coaches.  
Train 374: Rail Diesel Car Coach.

Equipment:  
Trains 61 & 17: Sleeping Cars (Roomettes and Bedrooms) New York-Detroit.  
Train 61: Sleepercoaches (Single and double rooms) New York-Buffalo.  
Train 61: Dining Car New York-Buffalo.  
Trains 17, 61, 71, 351, 355, and 427: Light meal service, snacks and drinks.  
Trains 17, 61, 71, 351, 355, and 427: Reclining Seat Coaches.  
Train 357: Rail Diesel Car Coach.

Source: Penn Central East-West Timetable, effective March 3, 1971.

Amtrak at 50 . . . continued from page 1

FIRST MICHIGAN AMTRAK SCHEDULE

CHICAGO-DETROIT (VIA KALAMAZOO-BATTLE CREEK-JACKSON)					
No. 356 Daily	No. 14 Daily	Miles	TABLE 19 (Penn Central)	No. 17 Daily	No. 355 Daily
↓ 4 05 P M	↓ 1 05 P M		lve. CHICAGO (C.T.) arr. (Union Station)	↑ 1 20 P M	↑ 5 05 P M
7 07 P M	4 02 P M	93	Niles (E.T.)	12 10 P M	4 03 P M
7 57 P M	5 00 P M	141	Kalamazoo	11 13 A M	3 00 P M
8 24 P M	5 32 P M	164	Battle Creek	10 43 A M	2 28 P M
9 14 P M	6 20 P M	209	Jackson	9 50 A M	1 38 P M
10 02 P M	7 10 P M	247	Ann Arbor	9 06 A M	12 53 P M
10 55 P M	8 00 P M	283	arr. DETROIT (E.T.) lve.	8 25 A M	12 10 P M
EQUIPMENT					
Train Nos. 14, 17, 355 and 356					
Coach.....			Chicago-Detroit		
Snack Bar Coach.....			Chicago-Detroit		
EXPLANATION OF SIGNS					
◆ No baggage service on this train.					
(C.T.)—Central time. (E.T.)—Eastern time.					

toms issues and delays could be avoided by simple means.

The 1971 Penn Central schedule shows that, unlike today and even with these severely pruned schedules, travel for Michigan passengers was not skewed to favor travel to and from Chicago at the expense of Detroit. The schedule of Train 52 provided, imperfect as it was after all the cuts, a semblance of an early morning arrival in Detroit, and train 351 provided an evening departure from Detroit, which allowed for a full day of business in Detroit, something we cannot do today.

But we should not pine for the old Penn Central, which in 1970 had declared bankruptcy, and which was soon to be declared hopelessly bankrupt. The bankruptcy was a catastrophe of national importance, the largest corporate failure in history at the time, and one that was brought

on in part from huge passenger train losses. Although the trains described above were still scheduled and operated on good routes, they were poorly maintained, unreliable, late, dirty, staffed by demoralized crews, and rode on rough track. The point here is to note that direct service to the east on this route and sleeping car service, however deficient, was lost when Amtrak took over.

The first Michigan Amtrak schedule effective May 1, 1971 is shown above. Amtrak chose to start service in Michigan with a very small presence. Only one route was to be continued, that of the former Penn Central Chicago-Detroit route (281 miles). Only two daily round trip trains were started under Amtrak on a 5 hour and 55 minute schedule, offering only coach seating and light meal service. The direct Michigan connections

to and from New York City and all sleeping car service at Detroit was ended. The Chicago-Detroit route became a stub that dead-ended at Detroit. The trains on the Grand Trunk and the Chesapeake and Ohio routes in Michigan were not selected for continuance under Amtrak and were discontinued on April 30, 1971.

Those of us who were familiar with the railroad scene watched the changes with conflicting thoughts. We were dismayed by the termination of the other Michigan routes and trains while at the same time we were grudgingly realistic enough to know that the railroads could never sustain the huge and constantly increasing financial losses that they incurred from passenger operations. We were also cautiously optimistic that somehow, someday, perhaps modernization and consolidation of the remaining trains into a single coordinated, national system could save enough money to achieve profitability, allow for growth, and maybe allow reinstatement of the discontinued trains. We hoped that, perhaps miraculously, a national expansion and modernization of rail passenger service could occur similar to what was happening in Europe and in other developed countries.

Gradually Amtrak brought renewed optimism that trains could attract ridership and the shabby Penn Central image could be overcome. A new advertising campaign started to promote the image that passenger trains were indeed back. Slowly changes were made.

In 1974 Amtrak service supported financially by MDOT returned to the Grand Trunk route between Chicago and Port Huron (319 miles). A new train, the *Bluewater Limited*, was initiated and served busy stations in the college towns of East Lansing and Kalamazoo. Unlike the Grand Trunk operation, a connecting track was installed at Battle Creek to shift the trains west of Battle Creek to the former Penn Central route via Kalamazoo to Chicago.

On October 31, 1974, The New York-Niagara Falls *Empire State Express* was extended west about 211 miles from Niagara Falls, New York, to Detroit, approximating one of the final Penn Central trains. MDOT and the state of New York jointly funded the extension as a day train without sleeping cars, but it did have a diner and checked baggage. (At Buffalo, passengers could connect with a Penn Central train that ran to Toronto over the Toronto, Hamilton, and Buffalo Railroad). In 1976 the train was renamed *The Niagara Rainbow*. It crossed the Niagara Gorge on the large Michigan Central Bridge and ran over the Canada Southern with Canadian station stops at St Thomas and Windsor, Ontario before passing through the Detroit River tunnel to its final stop at Detroit's Michigan Central Station. After about five years (during which there was no advertising), New York and Michigan withdrew their financial support in 1979 and the train was terminated at Niagara Falls, New York, and the name reverted back to *The Empire State Express*. (Since

then, most of the Canada Southern Railroad has been abandoned and the massive Michigan Central Bridge, just downstream from the Falls, sits unused and disconnected from the rail system. However the parallel Whirlpool Bridge and a CN/CP line remains available for future service from New York City via Buffalo and Niagara Falls directly to Detroit.)

In April of 1975, Amtrak added a third round trip on the Detroit-Chicago route and began using attractive imported French-built turbine powered train sets referred to as Turboliners. A glitzy advertising program was initiated and the new trains became very popular and greatly increased ridership on the route (topping 370,000 in 1976). The Turboliners were capable of 125 MPH speeds, but the unsuitable condition of the tracks and signal system limited them to a maximum of 79 MPH. Ridership quickly rose to the point that the Turboliners, with their fixed 5-car consists and 296 seats, could not handle the crowds and in 1976 locomotive hauled trains with Amfleet coaches began to be substituted on busy days. Thoughts about adding a 4<sup>th</sup> round trip train to accommodate the crowds remained just that; thoughts.

In 1974 the State of Michigan provided financial assistance for Amtrak to take over the Penn Central Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti-Detroit commuter train, which ran only on weekdays. The "train" consisted of only a single Penn Central Budd car that was



# Amtrak at 50 . . . continued



Amtrak's Niagara Rainbow at St. Thomas, Ontario, September 23, 1978 (Wikipedia Photo)

serviced and stored in Jackson. Although the Amtrak mandate did not include commuter trains, by starting its run in Jackson, 74 miles to the west of Detroit, the train apparently could be called an intercity train. The first run from Jackson occurred on January 20, 1975 and it provided a needed early morning train to Detroit. Chartered buses were used to distribute the commuters from Detroit's Michigan Central station to various office buildings and other points in downtown Detroit. During the summer of 1975, the train ran on Fridays all the way to Chicago and returned to Jackson on Sundays. Ridership grew rapidly to 96,000 riders in 1979 and things look very good. But after several fare increases, an economic depression, and the continued decline of downtown Detroit, ridership began dropping significantly. When the monthly commuter ticket from Ann Arbor rose past \$100, ridership dropped sharply as people went back to driving. On June 14, 1982 the train was discontinued and efforts to try and carry the commuters using the other trains on this route proved unsuccessful. So, the seed to start a commuter train system so badly needed in Detroit withered away through neglect.

But slowly some improvements were made by Amtrak. The reservation system was computerized so that reservations could be made by agents and later directly by passengers through a new national reservation system established by Amtrak.

In 1980, one of the Chicago-Detroit trains was extended 57 miles south from Detroit to Toledo. The train was renamed *The Lake Cities* and was intended to offer a direct connection at Toledo to and from east coast destinations served by the *Lake Shore Limited*, and avoid the long round about trip through Chicago. But from the beginning *The Lake Cities* service was abysmally slow, requiring two hours to travel the 57 miles to

Toledo. The author remembers riding on this train and being passed by lumbering 40 MPH freight trains on parallel tracks. The slow speed was caused by obstinate opposition from down-river municipalities, who slapped 25 MPH speed restrictions specifically on the passenger trains, citing exaggerated safety concerns. Interviews at the time by MARP and others with officials in these communities uncovered an intense long term hatred of the railroads for spoiling prime real estate along the Lake Erie shoreline. They believed mistakenly that by penalizing Amtrak they could apply pressure to the railroad companies. This problem was exacerbated by the slow action taken by MDOT to remove the ability of local jurisdictions to regulate the speed of intercity passenger trains. Despite good possibilities for this connection, the agonizingly slow speed eventually doomed the effort and the connecting train was discontinued in 1995. A Thruway Amtrak bus was placed on this route, with an extension from Jackson to East Lansing.

In 1982, after long discussions by MDOT and other parties, the *Bluewater* was extended from Port Huron 172 miles to Toronto and renamed *The International*. The train was jointly operated by Amtrak and Via Rail Canada using the equipment of both companies and became quite popular for Chicago-Toronto travelers and for tour companies offering weekend vacations in the popular destination cities of Toronto and Chicago. However, after the September 11, 2001 attack in New York City, border crossings became very difficult for passenger trains and required schedule lengthening. The westbound train was placed on a siding where all passengers had to get off and all luggage removed. The train was inspected, the luggage x-rayed and often opened, and the passengers often subjected to tough questioning by intimidating customs officers, tactics that could

be avoided by simply driving across the border. After the lengthy border procedures caused a decline in ridership, the cross-border operation was discontinued on April 24, 2004, and the train, renamed *The Bluewater* was terminated at Port Huron again.

In 1984 Amtrak service, again supported financially by MDOT, returned passenger trains to the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad (by 1984 merged into the Chessie System, today CSX) on the 176-mile route between Chicago and Grand Rapids. Unlike the C&O trains that had been discontinued in 1971, the new service did not cover the remaining 153 miles to Lansing and Detroit. The trains used a variety of equipment including Amfleet, Horizon Level, and Superliner cars. Similar to the *Bluewater*, the trains were rerouted off the former C&O route west of Porter, Indiana, and instead followed the former Penn Central (Conrail, now NS) route to Chicago with the other Amtrak trains.

In 1995, the Chicago-Detroit trains were extended 23 miles from Detroit to Pontiac to serve the growing northwestern Detroit suburbs. The shift of *The Lake Cities* from a Toledo destination to a Pontiac destination was part of this extension. This extension seemed to be successful and continues today.

So, now in 2021 on Amtrak's 50 year anniversary we in Michigan are still stuck at a 1995 level of service. After the pandemic subsidies, we will have the three *Wolverine Service* trains (without their individual names) again running between Chicago and Detroit/Pontiac, the one *Pere Marquette* to Grand Rapids, and the one *Bluewater* to Port Huron.

We have lost direct service from Michigan and Detroit to the east coast. We have even lost the connecting train alternative to the east via Toledo. We have lost the seed that could have grown into rail commuter service to Detroit, replaced by 50 years of talk. We have lost direct service to Toronto, again replaced by talk. We have a corridor still skewed for travel in and out of Chicago and poorly suited for travel to Detroit.

But some progress has been made. In 2012 MDOT, with federal money, purchased the railroad between Kalamazoo and Dearborn, rebuilt much of the tracks, and installed a new signal system. This action is not so much from Michigan funding initiatives, but the result of the availability of federal funding. Although most of the railroad ticket agents are gone, most of the station buildings have been replaced or rebuilt. And we should be receiving the latest round of new equipment for our trains. But will there be enough cars to add new trains? Or will the tired old excuse be trotted out once again that new trains cannot be added because there are not enough cars?

Let us hope that during the next 50 years our descendants will finally see development of trains that are modern, fast, reliable, and frequent enough to provide meaningful alternatives to driving everywhere all the time.



Amtrak Turboliner at Ann Arbor about 1975. (Amtrak photo.)

## Amtrak speed raised to 110 MPH between Kalamazoo and Albion

MDOT and the *Detroit News* reported on May 17, that effective May 25, Amtrak passenger train speeds have been raised to a maximum of 110 miles per hour on most of the 45 miles of the Michigan Corridor between Kalamazoo, Battle Creek, and Albion. The Federal Railway Administration granted approval to Amtrak and MDOT for the increase following extensive upgrading of the former Michigan Central mainline and after testing showed that the improved track conditions safely warranted the higher speeds.

"Michigan will have the first state-owned rail corridor with passenger trains traveling up to 110 MPH," State Transportation Director Paul C. Ajegba said. "I am proud of the partnership and hard work among MDOT, Amtrak, and its contractors to modernize this vital rail corridor. Passengers will truly benefit from the safety and reliability this important project has provided."

This improvement represents another milestone resulting from the state purchase in 2012 of the 130-mile portion of the Michigan Corridor between Kalamazoo and Dearborn from Norfolk Southern. Since the 90 miles of the corridor between Porter, Indiana, and Kalamazoo, proposed for abandonment by Penn Central in the 1970s, has been extensively rebuilt by Amtrak for 110 MPH, a total of 135 miles has now been upgraded for 110 MPH. Further speed increases will occur between Albion and Dearborn over the next several years, as improvements are made. This will eventually result in faster and more reliable passenger train service over 225-miles of the 304-mile route between Chicago and Detroit/Pontiac.

## Midwest Amtrak service finally returns to pre-pandemic levels

By Hugh Gurney

Amtrak service frequencies are returning to the levels offered prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. For the *Wolverine* operating between Chicago and Detroit/Pontiac, one additional round trip (trains 350 and 355) was added, on July 19<sup>th</sup> thereby providing two daily round trips. Train 352 will be discontinued. The third round trip (trains 352 and 353) will be reinstated on September 7<sup>th</sup>, according to a MDOT press release of July 13<sup>th</sup>. Other Michigan trains, the *Blue Water* and the *Pere Marquette*, with a single daily round trip prior to the pandemic, continued on their regular schedules throughout the period of reduced service. A current Michigan timetable effective July 19<sup>th</sup> is shown on page 2 of this paper.

As to the other Midwest regional trains, *Hiawatha* service between Chicago and Milwaukee resumed pre-pandemic schedules on Monday, May 24. Almost all other Midwest trains are scheduled to return to full pre-pandemic service on Monday, July 19, 2021. This includes *Lincoln* service between Chicago and St. Louis, *Illini* and *Saluki* trains between Chicago and Carbondale, Illinois, *Illinois Zephyr* and *Carl Sandburg* service between Chicago and Quincy, Illinois, and the *Missouri River Runner* between St. Louis and Kansas City, Missouri.

As of June 9, 2021, all long distance trains resumed their pre-pandemic levels of service with daily runs on all routes except for the *Cardinal* and *Sunset Limited*, which continue to offer round trips three days each week.

## Second Chicago-Twin Cities Train Clears A Major Hurdle

By Hugh Gurney

On June 28, 2021, plans for a second Chicago-Twin Cities train cleared a major, and hopefully, the final hurdle when the Minnesota legislature authorized \$10 million toward the project. The required funding was included in a more than \$7 billion omnibus transportation funding package signed into law by Governor Tim Walz. Minnesota's \$10 million, combined with funds already committed by Wisconsin and Amtrak, result in a full match for a federal Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI) grant for capital improvements such as passing sidings, automatic switches and signals to add capacity for both freight and passenger trains.

The project, dubbed TCMC Second Train, calls for a second daily train between Chicago and St. Paul, operating on a reverse schedule to the current *Empire Builder*, offering a morning departure from Chicago and an afternoon departure from the Twin Cities. With the CRISI grant in place, final design and necessary improvements can be completed. The second train is projected to carry 124,000 passengers annually and begin service in 2024.

"This is a great day for passenger and freight rail, and a great day for Minnesota," said Great River Rail Commission Chair and Hastings City Councilmember Mark Vaughn. "The members of the commission representing 18 local governments have long advocated for the expansion of passenger rail service in our state. We are extremely grateful to the Minnesota legislators and the Governor who worked so hard to pass this important legislation."



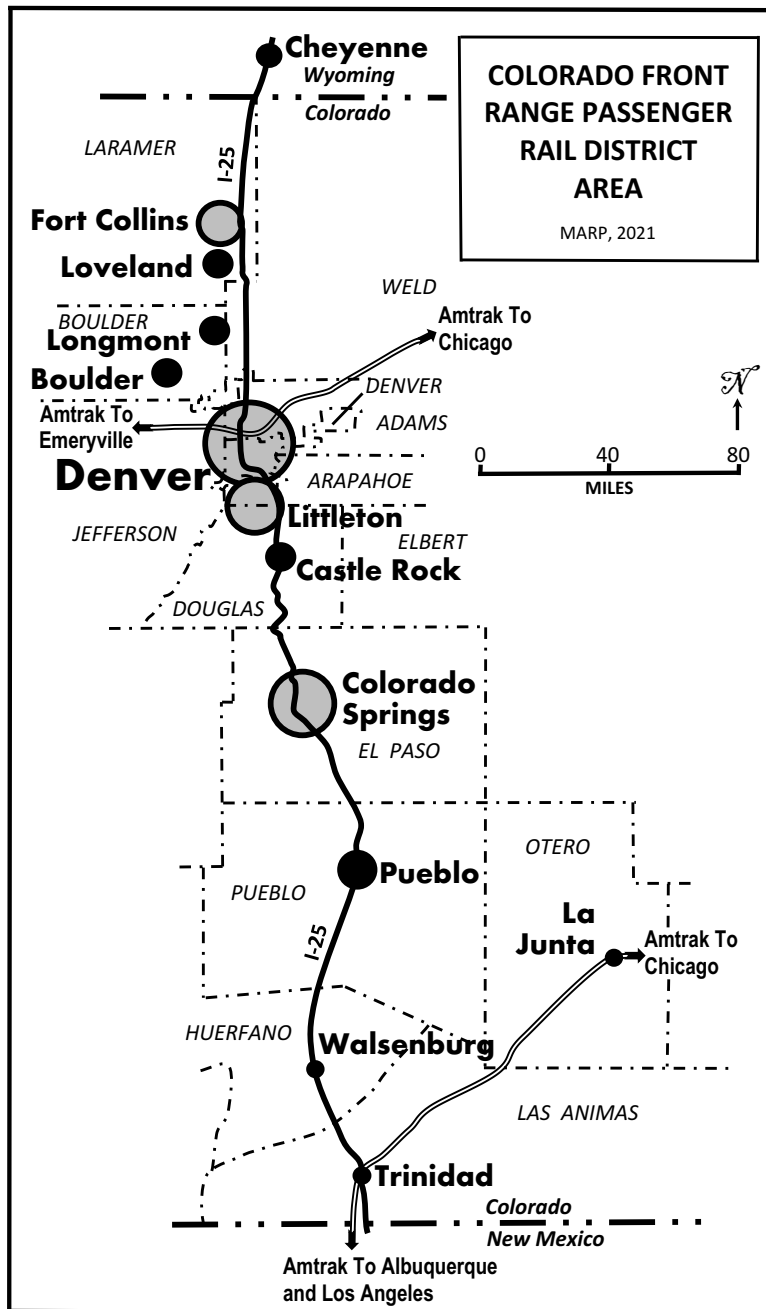
# Passenger rail district created in Colorado

The Denver Post and the Colorado Passenger Rail Association report that on June 30, 2021 a new passenger rail district was created in Colorado when Colorado Governor Jared Polis signed enabling legislation at Pueblo's historic Union Depot. The legislation establishes the new Front Range Passenger Rail District and is the result of many years of action by various groups in the rapidly growing cities and communities along Colorado's Front Range to implement commuter and intercity passenger rail service. The new district extends from Fort Collins and Boulder in the north through Denver to Colorado Springs and Pueblo in the south. It is hoped that eventually the District can be extended from Cheyenne, Wyoming, all the way south to Albuquerque, New Mexico. This district is the latest of several passenger rail districts that have been designated in the U.S. to establish passenger rail and transit services. Other examples are the multi-state Southern Rail Commission, the Northern New England Rail Passenger Authority, and in California, the San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority.

The Colorado legislation provides for a District Board of Governors to plan, design, develop, finance, construct, operate, and maintain a passenger rail system. The district is an independent entity and not a part of any existing state office.

The large Board will consist of 17 voting members and 7 non-voting members. Ten of the voting members will represent the existing Metropolitan Planning Agencies and the Councils of Government in the district. Six voting members will be appointed by the Governor and one will represent CDOT. The 7 non-voting members will (or may) represent the freight railroads, Amtrak, the Denver RTD, the I-70 Commission, and the states of New Mexico and Wyoming.

The Board has various powers, including the ability to refer



questions to ballot measures to implement a district sales tax of up to 0.8 percent to fund new passenger rail services. The first Board meeting must be held by May 2022. The Board will replace the Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission and take over management of two existing planning grants. These grants involve the development of through cars on the Southwest Chief to and from Pueblo and Colorado Springs via La Junta and the development of plans to allow freight and passenger trains to operate together efficiently along the Front Range.

Approval of the legislation by the Governor, who has long supported passenger rail, is seen by everyone as only the first step. Despite the powerful support of Amtrak and the Biden Administration, the District must be finalized and will have to face significant political and funding issues. Governmental units to be included within the District will depend on local support. Most likely, the District will encompass all of metro Denver and all or parts of 13 counties near I-25 between the Wyoming and New Mexico borders.

There are important lessons for Michigan here.

# SHORT LINES

**Replacement of the 148-Year Old Baltimore and Potomac Tunnel** on the busy Northeast Corridor was the subject of a June 18th announcement from Amtrak and the State of Maryland. *Railway Age* reports that, although no construction funding source has been identified, Amtrak is in the process of finishing the design work and purchasing sections of new right-of-way. The \$4 billion project could start in 2022 and be completed over a ten-year period. The current concept is to build two single track tunnels for electric powered trains about a half mile north of the existing 1.4-mile long double track tunnel. The existing tunnel is a major choke point that the FRA has identified as structurally deficient, with poor soil and sinking floor slabs which required \$71 million in repairs in 2020. Trains passing through the existing tunnel are limited to 30 MPH; the new tunnels will allow trains to travel at speeds up to 100 MPH. The existing tunnel will remain in service for freight trains.....

**RPA (NARP) Praised the new Siemens ALC-42 Locomotives** after a June 15 visit to the Siemens Mobility plant in Sacramento as a "train geek's dream." The new Diesel-electric locomotives are intended to replace the GE locomotives on the long-distance trains with Amtrak taking delivery of 75 units by 2024. The locomotives will be capable of speeds up to 125 MPH and allow major reductions to air quality emissions, and provide remote monitoring of 800 data points on the engine. The newest version of the locomotives will have about 200 changes from lessons learned while operating the first version of the Siemens Charger engines on the Midwest routes.....

**MDOT Reports** that the severity of highway crashes increased, seat belt use declined, and the number of minorities killed in traffic crashes increased by 23 percent during the Pandemic.....

**The first of Amtrak's 28 new Avelia Liberty train sets** will not begin running until about the Spring of 2022, a year later than planned. The *Washington Post* reported that French manufacturer Alstom will have to modify the design of the pantograph and wheels after a test train at high speed intermittently lost contact with the catenary and the nineteenth century curving alignment of the railroad caused wheel issues. The new train hit 165 MPH on newer track at the Pueblo, Colorado, federal test site.....

**Canada will reopen** the border for non-essential travel on August 9 with certain restrictions. It is unlikely that passenger trains will operate across the border until the U.S. fully reopens....

**Using an innovative process, a 1,500 ton rail bridge complete with concrete abutments and road deck was pushed into place** using hydraulic jacks over a weekend on the Long Island Railroad's Oyster Bay Branch. The busy commuter line was closed on Friday and returned to service the following Monday. *Railway Age* and *A Modern LI* report that the new double track bridge spans a new below-grade roadway on Willis Avenue in Mineola, New York. On July 10, a second bridge will be jacked into on the LIRR's Mainline which also crosses Willis Avenue 180 feet south of the Oyster Bay Branch crossing. Similar grade crossings on the Mainline caused six fatal accidents between 2007 and 2017. Previously, the two crossings of Willis Avenue had their crossing gates in the down position up to 50 percent of the time during commuter rush hours, causing major traffic backups. The two new bridges and underpasses will not only remove serious safety issues and traffic backups, but they eliminate the need for signals and gates, and greatly reduced neighborhood noise by ending the constant sounds of ringing signal bells and passing locomotive whistles.....

**The New York Hudson River Tunnel** received the environmental green light from the feds in May, which should allow the Corps of Engineers to issue a final permit this fall and letting this critical project proceed to funding and design. A truly massive infrastructure project, this \$11.6 billion project will involve installing a new tunnel with twin rail tubes starting at a point near the portal of the existing tunnel and extending for about 2.8 miles, passing under Weehawken, Union City, and the mile-wide Hudson River to a point under Manhattan Island where it will join the existing underground tracks just west of Penn Station. The alignment of the new tunnel will veer about a half mile south of the existing rail tunnel at the mid-point under the river, where it will be about 85 feet below the river bed. Once the new tunnel is operational, the existing tunnel will be closed and each tube completely rebuilt. The existing tunnel, which carries every day hundreds of Amtrak and New Jersey Transit trains and hundreds of thousands of passengers, was built by the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1910 and suffered massive damage when both tubes were completely flooded by salt water during Superstorm Sandy in 2012. Delays to the project by the Trump Administration added an estimated \$300 million to the project cost.....

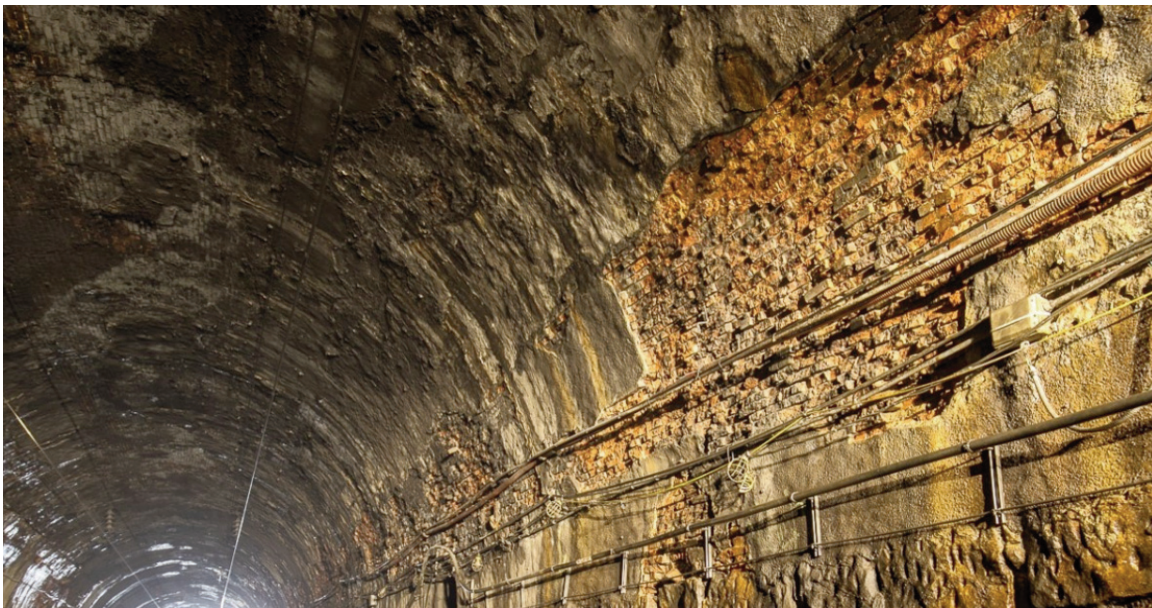
**In July stockholders of the Kansas City Southern**, the smallest of the American Class One Railroads, will vote on a proposed merger with Canadian National. Approval is almost certain, which will leave only Surface Transportation Board approval needed to allow the merger to go forth. The effect of the merger on passenger service is unknown; however CN is not friendly to Amtrak.....

**Tim Hoeffner**, the retired former director of the MDOT Office of Rail, joined Chicago rail and transit firm Quandel Consultants to grow Quandel's presence in the midwest and beyond.....

**High level boarding platforms** are planned by Amtrak for stations in Niles and Dowagiac, stations which are owned by Amtrak and which had no clearance restrictions imposed when the line was purchased in 1976 from Penn Central.....

**Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary, Alberta, could be connected** by a high speed rail line proposed by a partnership of EllisDon, Canada, (a world-wide construction company) and Aecom US (a major consulting company). As reported by *Railway Age*, the partnership signed a MOU with the Government of Alberta laying the groundwork to cooperatively advance the C\$9 billion project, which has been named "Prairie Link." The 278 km (173 mile) route has been the subject of several proposals over the years, but nothing has been built.

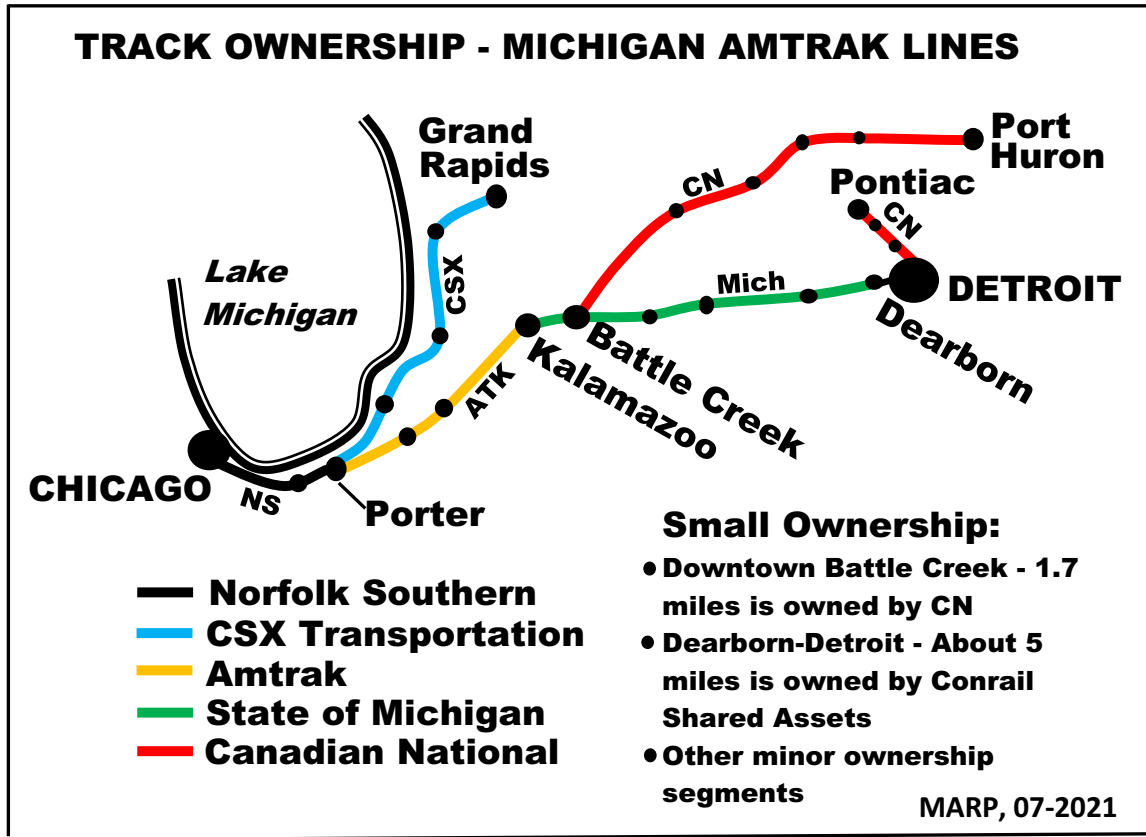
## Damaged tunnel



The above photo shows the badly damaged inside surfaces of the 148-year old Baltimore and Potomac Tunnel used by hundreds of Amtrak and commuter passenger trains every day. (Amtrak photo)



# Why does Amtrak always seem to be late?



The National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) was established by Congress in 1970 to preserve passenger services and routes on the Nation's railroads. See *Lebron v. Nat'l R.R. Passenger Corp.*, 513U. S. 374, 383-384 (1995); *Nat'l R.R. Passenger Corp. v. Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe R.R.*, 470U. S. 451, 454 (1985); see also *Rail Passenger Serv. Act of 1970*, Pub. L. No. 91-518, 84Stat. 1328 (1970).

As a condition of relieving the railroad companies of their common carrier obligation to provide passenger service, Congress required them to permit Amtrak to operate over their tracks and use their facilities. See 45U.S.C. §§561, 562 (1970 ed.). Since 1973, Congress has required railroads to give Amtrak trains preference over freight service when using their lines and facilities: "Except in an emergency, intercity and commuter rail passenger transportation provided by or for Amtrak has preference over freight transportation in using a rail line, junction, or crossing..." 49U.S.C. §24308(c); see *Amtrak Improvement Act of 1973*, Pub. L. No. 93-146, § 10(2), 87 Stat. 552 (initial version).

**By Laurence J. Krieg**  
If you've used Amtrak more than once or twice, you've probably asked questions like these: "Why does Amtrak always seem to be late? Can't anything be done about it?" Let's talk about that. First, why? Then, what?

Why Do Amtrak Trains So Often Run Late?

Of course, there are obvious causes that delay trains such as accidents, weather events, and mechanical problems. Add to these signaling problems. The aging, mid-twentieth-century systems on Michigan tracks have caused lots of delays, but a new system was installed over the last five years using Positive Train Control (PTC). This is a complex system involving track sensors, grade crossing protection, switch positions, satellite geolocation, wayside signals, and controls in the locomotive cab. Several technology providers are involved with different brands of components on different railroads. Most glitches seem to have been worked out, but if any crop up, they are likely to result in slowdowns for safety.

Running on shared tracks causes delays. Most railroads in North America are owned by shareholder corporations. Amtrak owns some of the track we run on in Michigan service, and the State of Michigan owns other tracks. But all Michigan trains run at least part of the way on tracks owned and controlled by railroad companies whose primary business is hauling freight. In all, six different owners lay claim to the tracks Michigan passenger trains use.

## How Is Rail Traffic Controlled?

It helps to understand that trains don't run freely on their tracks like cars or trucks on highways. Trains run only when they are signaled to do so by a system "dispatcher." Rail operating safety rules are very strict. Locomotive engineers are very safety-conscious and they know that even a little speeding could cost them their job. Running through a red signal could also cost them their life, as well as yours and mine. Speeds and signals are strictly controlled by the dispatchers on each host railroad. Over the years, the a major cause of Amtrak's lateness

has been delays caused by the dispatchers on host railroads. So let's look at who controls the tracks.

## Who Controls Each Railroad?

When the Michigan Central originally built the mainline west from Detroit to Chicago, they owned the entire route and operated passenger trains as part of their wholly owned system. But today, after massive railroad bankruptcies, abandonments, reorganizations, mergers, consolidations, and other maneuvers, the Chicago-Detroit line is owned by several entities. The map shows the current ownership of this route and the other routes operated by Amtrak using information from ([michiganrailroads.com/existing-dispatch-centers](http://michiganrailroads.com/existing-dispatch-centers))

Norfolk Southern Railway (NS) owns the very busy line from Chicago to Porter, Indiana. All Michigan trains use this line, along with Amtrak's *Capitol Limited* and *Lake Shore Limited*. NS also operates about 100 freight trains daily on this 44-mile segment of railroad, which is one of the most congested rail lines in the United States, despite recent improvements to increase track capacity. All traffic is controlled by NS from Atlanta, Georgia.

Amtrak owns the line between Porter, Indiana, and Kalamazoo. The Amtrak traffic control center is in Chicago Union Station.

With one exception, the State of Michigan owns the line between Kalamazoo and Dearborn. Michigan contracts with Amtrak to maintain the line and dispatch it from the Chicago control center.

Canadian National (CN) owns a little over a mile of track in Battle Creek used by *Wolverine* and *Blue Water* trains. This separates the State of Michigan's ownership into two sections and results in frequent delays at the intersection of the two sections.

Conrail Shared Assets owns about ten miles of track between Dearborn and a point known as "Milwaukee Junction," a location a little north of the Amtrak station, in Detroit. The trains are controlled by Conrail Shared Assets from a location in New Jersey.

CN owns the final section of line from Milwaukee Junction to Pontiac.

For the Blue Water route, Canadian National owns the line from Battle Creek to Port Huron. Traffic on all of these CN lines is dispatched from CN's Chicago control center.

For the Pere Marquette, CSX Transportation owns the railroad from Porter, Indiana, to Grand Rapids. Traffic on this line is controlled by CSX from Calumet City, Illinois.

How Does This Affect an Amtrak Train From Chicago to Pontiac?

Here's what the engineer and conductor need to do to run the *Wolverine* Chicago to Pontiac:

Starting from Chicago Union Station, they must contact Amtrak dispatch center in Union Station for permission to leave the station and enter the local yard tracks.

In South Chicago, they must obtain permission from NS in Atlanta to use their track to go from the yard tracks to Porter, Indiana.

Approaching Porter, they must ask Amtrak's Chicago dispatch center to enter Amtrak-owned rails to Kalamazoo and on Michigan-owned track to Battle Creek.

West of Battle Creek, they must ask CN's dispatch center in Chicago for permission to use their track through downtown Battle Creek. Often a wait for permission is required at this point.

East of Battle Creek, they must ask Amtrak in Chicago to get back on Michigan-owned tracks to move east to Dearborn.

Approaching Dearborn, they must request permission from Conrail Shared Assets in New Jersey to enter their tracks east of the Dearborn station.

At Milwaukee Junction, they must again contact CN's dispatch center in Chicago for permission to enter their tracks and continue on to Pontiac.

Of course, these moves are all scheduled and agreed to in advance, and much of the process is handled digitally. But at any one of these points, there is potential for traffic congestion, so it's easy to see why Amtrak trains struggle to keep on schedule.

## Why Does Amtrak Need Permission To Use The Track Of The Railroads?

To see why, let's take a look at Amtrak's story. Before 1971, all railroads were required by law to carry both passengers and freight. For more than a century that worked pretty well. But after about 1958 the Interstate Highway system was built at government expense, and jet airplanes made flying cheap and convenient. Passenger trains started losing money big-time, so most railroads begged the Federal Government for relief from the requirement to run them.

In response, in 1971, the Federal Government created the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, "Amtrak", to relieve shareholder-owned railroads of money-losing passenger trains. But in return, the railroads were required to give Amtrak access to their railroads and priority to Amtrak trains over their own freights. However, Amtrak was not given legal authority to enforce this law. So many railroads found it more profitable to ignore the law and give their freights priority.

## How Long Will Freight Railroads Ignore The law?

During the last six years, a series of legal steps were taken to correct the situation. Amtrak, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and Surface Transportation Board (STB) agreed on rules and procedures for enforcing priority. The STB is a Federal body created to act as an "umpire" in disputes between land-transportation providers, including trucks, buses, trains, pipeline owners, and the shippers and passengers who use their services.

There are three legal "knots" to untangle in this case: (1) the definition of "late train", (2) who is responsible for delays, and (3) how often trains are late enough for the "umpire" to call a foul. Knot (2) is especially complex - who's responsible? Did Amtrak's crew or mechanical problems with Amtrak's train cause the delay? If a train was delayed while traveling on Railroad A, but then uses Railroad B's tracks, which railroad is responsible for the delay at stations on Railroad B? Keeping tabs on all this calls for careful, honest record-keeping.

## The Solution For Now

After several years of legal action, involving Congress, the STB, Amtrak, the FRA, passenger representatives (including MARP) and the Federal Court system, a solution has been worked out and agreed to by the Courts. Here's a summary:

What is a "legally late" train? At any station on its route, if a train departs more than 15 minutes behind schedule, it is "legally late"?

Whose fault is it if Amtrak is running on Railroad A's tracks? It's the fault of Railroad A if the train was delayed by Railroad A's dispatching, track or system failures?

When does lateness become legally actionable? Legal action can be taken when the trains on Railroad A are late more than 20 percent of the time, over a period of 2 quarter-years (6 months). This can result in a complaint to the STB, which is authorized to levy fines and possibly require remedial action.

## Traffic, Traffic, Traffic

But we all know that the law is one thing, but reality is often a bit different. Even when Railroad A does its best to get Amtrak trains through on time, there are sometimes situations in which delay can't be avoided. Let's look at some of these.

The technical and policy difficulties with freight trains are many. Hauling freight by rail can be profitable, but only if it's done efficiently and economically. One set of policies recently adopted by many large railroads, known as "precision scheduled railroading" (PSR) seems like a good idea for passenger trains, but in fact has raised many questions. The ultimate goal of PSR is not great on-time performance, but cutting operating costs. One of the most successful ways to do that is to make freight trains super-long.

Monster-freights of 150 cars, 200, or even 300 cars, can be controlled by only two employees in the cab of the first locomotive, and carry millions of dollars of freight, but not at high speed. The monster-freights often can't be tucked into a siding to let other trains pass them, because existing sidings aren't long enough. This is especially true on single-track routes: the monsters just have to keep rolling along. Amtrak trains, being much shorter, can easily be put into a



## Why late? continued from page 6

siding until the monster has lumbered past. For a busy dispatcher hundreds of miles away, sidetracking Amtrak is the simple and obvious solution.

Many segments of track are congested with freight trains. During the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, freight railroads saw a large decline in business and had big financial troubles. They had no need for multiple tracks along previously busy routes, and couldn't afford to maintain unnecessary rails. So, many railroads pulled up extra rail lines to reduce maintenance costs and sold the steel to shore up finances.

This was done between 1985 and 1988 on the Michigan Central route between Detroit and Chicago. For many years, the Michigan Central was proud of their double track mainline that extended all the way from Detroit to Chicago (actually 450-miles from Buffalo to Chicago). But with the bankruptcy of the successor Penn Central company and the need under Conrail to rationalize the system to serve reduced freight needs, the majority of the Chicago-Detroit route evolved into a single track system. Even with the best signaling system, this severely limits the number of trains that can operate reliably. Unfortunately, money has not yet been made available to add passing tracks and restore the double track along most of the route.

No-Passing Zones are a result of having only one track for long stretches. There are many examples, such as about 30 miles between Ypsilanti and Chelsea. Of course, the schedules are set up so that two passenger trains aren't expected to be on that stretch at the same time. But since trains are so often delayed in other places, it frequently happens that, for example, eastbound Wolverine 352 is late, forcing westbound Wolverine 355 to wait quite a while in Ypsilanti, making it seriously late as well.

Probably the biggest bottleneck and cause of late trains in Michigan is the stretch of track known as "South of the Lake". This is the line in Indiana west of Porter immediately south of Lake Michigan. All ten scheduled trains between Chicago and Michigan use this stretch before fanning out to different parts of Michigan. Four other Amtrak trains use this route as well, on their way between Chicago and the East Coast. In spite of the recent "Indiana Gateway" project by NS to increase capacity, the complexity of heavy traffic makes precision scheduling a real challenge. If you've ever driven to Chicago along parallel I-90, you won't forget the long double-lines of heavy trucks grinding slowly to and from the Windy City! These result from the same bottleneck effect of Lake Michigan funneling traffic into this busy road corridor.

### What Can Be Done?

First, to be fair, we need to point out that for decades, improvements have been made bit-by-bit.

Amtrak has slowly but steadily invested in improvements, in the 90 miles they own between Porter and Kalamazoo and are now operating at 110 MPH speeds.

The State of Michigan purchased from NS (largely with Federal High Speed Rail dollars) the original Michigan Central line from Kalamazoo to Dearborn in 2012. Also using primarily Federal funding, this line has been improved to allow 110 MPH speeds over much of the line.

One important bottleneck was removed by the construction of a new connection at West Detroit Junction (between the Dearborn and Detroit stations). This has shaved 12 minutes from the run and, more importantly, reduced unpredictable delays by avoiding congested tracks.

Equally important is modernizing signaling and control systems to use Positive Train Control (PTC). As mentioned earlier, PTC is extremely complex, but also extremely important for safety. Getting it right has probably been the most challenging aspect of the speed upgrade.

New rolling stock are the most visible part of improving passenger rail service. In 1975, Amtrak introduced Turboliners to the Wolverine service. These French-built trains had good acceleration and a top speed of 125 MPH, which they were never able to reach because of poor track conditions. Most of all, they attracted a lot of new riders, in fact, so many that they proved to be too small to meet the jump in demand. They were fixed-size "train-sets" with five cars, and could not be expanded. Amtrak had to go back to

conventional trains the following year. The new coaches brought into service at that time are mostly still in service 45 years later.

An attempt was made in the last decade to replace coaches with bi-level cars like those used in California, but technical difficulties prevented their being built. Now, new single-level equipment known as "Venture" cars – similar to the ones used on Florida's *Brightline* trains, are arriving and being put into service. They are complemented by new locomotives as well, better suited to higher speed service. These are all made in California by the Siemens company, and are similar in design to newer European trains.

### What More Can We Do?

A long-standing goal in Michigan has been to increase Wolverine service from 3 to 10 round-trips daily. Having that many trains will make train travel much more convenient and reliable. Instead of having to plan our travel around the train schedules, we will be able to find a train that meets our personal travel schedule needs. This many trains may seem unrealistic, but California and a few other states have made the investment to provide that level of service. What they've discovered is that people really do fill up those trains because they are so convenient.

There are several major bottlenecks preventing this in Michigan. In order to increase service, long single-track stretches need to be supplemented with frequent passing sidings and, eventually, restored to the original double-track of the Michigan Central days.

South of the Lake, through Indiana and Illinois, NS can't accommodate many more passenger trains. A study was completed in 2016 evaluating possible alternatives. MARP members participated in the evaluation, culminating in an official recommendation to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). The FRA eventually recommended implementing the plan in small segments, but that would produce very few improvements over a long time-period. However, with the current Biden administration now in office, there is a much better chance of completing the needed improvements in a reasonable time – especially since the current Secretary of Transportation, Pete Buttigieg, is quite familiar with the situation in Northern Indiana, having been Mayor of South Bend.

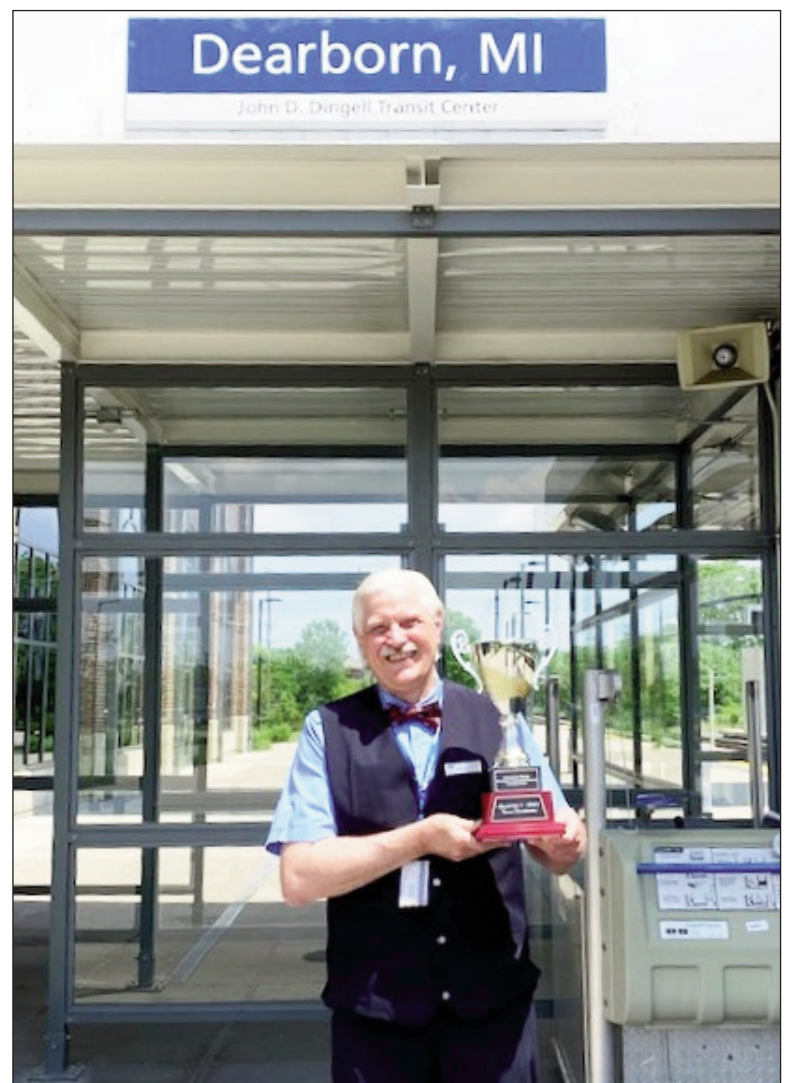
Although a lot of work has been done on debugging the PTC system, the complexity of the improvements means a lot of cautious testing is needed. Amtrak wants to speed up service, but not at the cost of safety. Top speeds have been raised on many stretches of the line between Kalamazoo and Dearborn, so you may wonder why the schedules haven't changed. The foremost reason is: CAUTION. If even the slightest safety issues are raised, Amtrak will not hesitate to slow the trains down to conventional speeds until all safety issues are resolved. So instead of promising more than they can safely deliver, Amtrak will run trains from one station to the next, and even if they arrive early because of running faster, wait at those stations for the scheduled departure time. Would you want it any other way?

Several states have realized that they can't solve traffic congestion problems by building ever-bigger highways. Instead, states like Virginia, North Carolina, California, and Illinois have invested in higher-capacity train service. The key in most cases is to invest with the freight railroads to improve both freight and passenger traffic capacity. Sometimes, it works best when the public purchases the railroad itself. In either case, passenger trains have been an effective, ecologically sustainable way to give people an alternative to sitting in heavy traffic for hours. Railroads are not cheap to build, but, here's a little-known fact, in most cases railroads are actually less expensive than highway expansion.

### You Have An Important Part, Too

You have an important part to play in this. Only with public support, made clear to our legislators, will money be voted to improve passenger train service. Do your part to let your state and federal legislators know you believe passenger trains are a better investment than more highway lanes!

## Kudos



**Amtrak Lead ticket agent at Dearborn, Clifford Neumann, holds a trophy awarded in May to the Dearborn station staff for two consecutive quarters of giving the best customer service of any station in the United States. The other agents at Dearborn are Scott Opland and Gerri Brown. The award was presented by Jonathan B. Lombardi, Chicago based Superintendent of Customer Service and Station Operations. The station also won the 2021 Yelp Award from great reviews and ratings on Yelp.**

## Driver shortages stymy recovery of Intercity Bus Services in Michigan

Driver shortages have slowed the full return of intercity bus frequencies following the COVID-19 pandemic. Michigan Flyer, the popular service connecting East Lansing, Brighton and Ann Arbor with Detroit Metro Airport, is currently operating eight daily round trips rather than the desired twelve trips. Parent company, Indian Trails, Inc., which provides the drivers for Michigan Flyer, is now offering a \$3,000 sign-on bonus, a competitive salary and numerous other perks for new drivers. For all who have ever dreamed of driving an over the highway motor coach, you are encouraged to go to [www.indiantrails.com/careers](http://www.indiantrails.com/careers) for further details. For Michigan Flyer schedules, go to [www.michiganflyer.com](http://www.michiganflyer.com).

When queried about the issue, Indian Trails President Chad Cushman stated, "Any additional service beyond what we're operating as of now will mainly depend on availability of drivers to operate service. Right now, we have a backlog of new services that MDOT, Greyhound or others would like us to start but we can't due to lack of available drivers."

In a state like Michigan with vast areas of low density population, intercity bus is a critical part of the public transportation mix, providing connections to and from small communities across the state. As shown on the map on page 8, Indian Trails, Inc., a family owned company based in Owosso, Michigan, has the most extensive system of routes, operating several frequencies daily from Benton Harbor or Kalamazoo, where it connects with Greyhound, to and from Chicago, to Grand Rapids, Lansing, East Lansing, Owosso, Flint, Pontiac, Detroit, Saginaw and Bay City. Daily service is pro Holland.

All Indian Trails schedules are designed to connect with each other and with Greyhound at Benton Harbor or Detroit.

The routes of Indian Trails in Northern Michigan are subsidized by the Michigan Department of Transportation and, in Northern Wisconsin, by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. Prior to the pandemic, all Indian Trails North-South routes were also designated Amtrak Thruway bus routes and connected to Amtrak at Milwaukee, Kalamazoo, and Battle Creek. Throughout the pandemic, the a connection between Amtrak and Indian Trails has been maintained at Milwaukee.



# The good news keeps flowing

Major plans and funding packages are on the horizon that, if enacted and implemented, could revolutionize America's rail passenger system. Much of this new support has come from new progressive leadership in the White House, the USDOT, and the new management at Amtrak.

silverware, and white linen tablecloths. (The former disposable tableware produced mounds of trash intermingled with food waste causing recycling to be impossible or to become a nightmare.) Food service in the café cars is also being upgraded to provide coach passengers with



Refreshed superliner coach

The positive message has permeated down to the more progressive states where there is new interest in improving intercity rail passenger service and transit systems.

On July 7th, Amtrak announced a new \$7.3 billion plan to contract with Siemens

better dining options.

Improvements are still needed. For some unfathomable reason, coach passengers will still be prohibited from paying for their meals and eating in the dining car. Also, the improved dining car service will not be expanded to the eastern long



Refreshed diner car service

Mobility to manufacture a new fleet of up to 83 multi-powered trains for existing state and northeast corridor services, with up to 130 additional trains to support Amtrak's growth plans. Funding for this ambitious program will come from \$200 million already approved by Congress and passage of federal infrastructure funding currently before congress.

Amtrak ridership hit a record 32.4 million in 2019 before the effect of the pandemic and, as the pandemic fears decline, ridership is rebounding quickly and should grow to new records. Many of the states who currently partner with Amtrak's passenger rail programs congratulated Amtrak on the new plans. The number of state partners is increasing as other states, such as Colorado, Mississippi, and Minnesota, begin taking an active role to promote, manage, and provide financial assistance to enable new intercity passenger service in their state.

distance trains where meals from boxes will still be served in the new single level diners, which have kitchens set up for chefs, table service, and freshly prepared food service. Another improvement needed is the development of meals for diet limited and health conscious passengers.

Improvements are also underway for the existing cars used on the long distant trains, which must last until they can be replaced with new cars. *Progressive Railroad* reports that a \$28 million project will refresh 450 Superliner and Viewliner 1 cars built in the 1980s and 1990s. Coach seat cushions, carpeting, and window curtains will be replaced, with more user-friendly designs and higher quality materials.



French toast in the diner.

Amtrak photos

## Amtrak repairs near Jackson



Staged ties and tie train; part of the ongoing track work on the Michigan Corridor at Jackson, which will include raising the tracks a few feet as part of the replacements of two bridges. (JHG photos)



Amtrak ballast train applies additional ballast as part of track maintenance west of Jackson on May 19, 2021. (Roy Davey photo)

