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FRA Selects New National Passenger Rail Corridors

By Tom Fletcher

In December 2023, The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) announced an exciting new program with \$8.2 billion in grants to expand the nation's high speed passenger services. Within those grants is a new Corridor ID program that seeks to expand the nation's high speed rail network. The FRA says that the corridors selected will build out a pipeline of passenger rail projects in every region of the country to achieve the President's vision of world-class passenger rail in the US.

The first round of several yearly Corridor ID announcements identifies a total of 69 projects in 44 states. With this new program, the FRA seeks to achieve three objectives:

- Establish a process for planning passenger railroad projects for grant application and award.
- Develop the tools for the appropriate governmental agencies and Congress to determine priorities amongst the applications received.
- Build a foundation for the FRA to plan a national passenger rail network.

The Corridor ID process does not fund the construction of new or expanded corridors. It does provide a grant of up to \$500,000 to assist in developing the first step of a three-step process to move these projects from inception to ready-for-construction:

- Step 1 generates the scope, schedule and budget needed to create a Service Development Plan (SDP) for the proposed new or upgraded passenger rail corridor.
- Step 2 creates the SDP, which is a comprehensive document detailing routes, speeds, frequencies and other pertinent details necessary for cor-

ridor consideration.

• Step 3 furthers the process with engineering and environmental work that is required prior to commencing construction.

The State of Michigan received three \$500,000 Step 1 awards for the following corridors:

- Wolverine Corridor (Chicago to Detroit/Pontiac) – Sponsored by MDOT: to add new frequencies, improve travel times, and support train reliability as well as extend the corridor to Windsor, Ontario in Canada.
- Pere Marquette Corridor (Chicago to Grand Rapids) – Sponsored by MDOT: to add new frequencies and improve reliability.
- Blue Water Corridor (Chicago to Port Huron) – Sponsored by MDOT: to add new frequencies and improve reliability.
- Also affecting Michigan was a Michigan-Ohio Corridor (Cleveland to Detroit) – Sponsored by the Ohio Rail Development Commission: to develop a proposed corridor between Cleveland, Toledo, and Detroit.

An observation noted in this new process is that sponsors must be prepared in advance to make their applications to the FRA. The first round projects awarded by the FRA were primarily for projects with well-developed conceptual plans already in place. These plans were generally backed up with detailed information that could be submitted in the application, thereby allowing time for the FRA to process the grant application.

MARP must support the Corridor ID process to enhance passenger rail in the state of Michigan. We must work closely with our legislators and MDOT to gain the political support for the corridors identified by the FRA.

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Westbound Turboliner Train 355 at Jackson in January of 1976. Soon it will be off to Chicago. (Doug Leffler photo)

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. 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.

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MICHIGAN SERVICES

Amtrak Train Schedules Effective October 6, 2023

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	7:38p	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	Days of Operation	Daily
6:30p	0 Dp	CHICAGO, IL, Un Sta (CT) Ar
9:14p	89	St. Joe-Benton Harbor, MI (ET) ↑
9:50p	116	Bangor, MI
10:33p	151	Holland, MI
11:34p	176	Ar GRAND RAPIDS, MI (ET) Dp

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

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If you want improved train service, join MARP on line at MARP.ORG

MARP STATION REPRESENTATIVES

Chuck Merckel, Coordinator (734) 330-0281

Station	Staff	MARP Volunteer
Albion	None	Matthew Murawski
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	James Parsons
Traverse City	None	Carolyn Ulstad
Troy	None	Thomas VandeGriff

Letter to the editor

Idea for The Michigan Passenger and other outreach

Hi everyone,

My idea is to do a small feature on a Michigan station in each issue. This information can be the basis for updating the station webpages on the MARP website, which could then serve as new content to share on the group's Facebook page.

The information wouldn't just be station address, but should include some "Pro Tips" to help a first time navigator. Where to park, what's nearby, helpful hints for the station layout. Unique things that make MARP's information about each station actually useful and unique.

We could set up a template of standard questions about obvious things - parking, pick up/dropoff, waiting room amenities, ticketing, nearby attractions, and at least one Pro Tip for each station. Then, we could send this to each of the MARP Station Reps to fill out. They know their station best and will know the layout and potentially helpful tips for passengers. They could snap a few current photos. This would be the sort of useable information that a first time rider would need to know. Or, for someone who has ridden before but might be heading to a new station for the first time.

I can't devote time to a full project like this, but as the Holland volunteer, I would be happy to set up the template questions and we could use Holland as a first example. I would be happy to work with Chuck Merckel to help craft an email to the other volunteers with instructions for what we want them to do. Hopefully, other than some light proofreading, something like this could have a lot of benefit without a huge time burden for any one person.

It's my thought. I welcome your thoughts and comments.

Nathan Nietering

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Mexico Decrees that Railroads Must Allow Passenger Trains

According to *Progressive Railroading* on January 18, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador issued a decree on November 8, 2023, that called for freight railroads to allow passenger trains to use their tracks. The decree stated that Mexico will “require private rail companies that mostly carry freight to offer passenger service or else have the government schedule its own trains on their tracks.” The decree requested that the railroads submit a response to the Mexican government by January 15. Five railroads responded. Although the government did not identify the five railroads, Canadian Pacific Kansas City de Mexico acknowledged in an email that it is one of the respondents.

“CPKC representatives will meet with Mexican federal officials to discuss our submission, next steps and the critical importance of maintaining and not reducing freight capacity on the CPKC de Mexico network, today and in the future to address increasing demand from nearshoring,” the company said in an emailed statement, that was reported by *Progressive Railroading*.

The Mexican government has identified seven priority routes for potential passenger-rail development. These are:

1. Mexico City-Veracruz Intercity route to the east from Mexico City to Veracruz on the Gulf of Mexico, approximately 225 miles in length.

2. Felipa Angeles International Airport Pachuca/Tula

Interurban route about 40 miles in length to the northeast of Mexico City.

3. Buenavista-Tula-Querétaro-León-Aguascalientes Intercity route to the northwest of Mexico City, about 280 miles in length.

4. Manzanillo-Colima-Guadalajara-Irapuato Intercity route from Manzanillo on the Pacific Coast inland to Irapuato, about 280 miles in length.

5. Mexico City-San Luis Potosí-Monterrey-Nuevo Laredo

Intercity route about 600 miles in length from Mexico City to

Nuevo Laredo on the United States border in Texas.

6. México City-Querétaro-Guadalajara-Tepic-Mazatlán-Nogales

Intercity route about 1,200 miles in length to the northwest of Mexico City to Nogales on the United States border in Arizona.

7. Aguascalientes-Chihuahua-Ciudad Juárez

Intercity route about 760 miles in length to Ciudad Juarez on the United States border at El Paso, Texas.

In addition, both *Railway Age* and *Progressive Railroading* reported that Mexican Federal and Nuevo Leon state officials have reached an agreement

with CPKC de Mexico to develop a plan for an interurban passenger-rail line in the Monterrey area. The plan calls for construction of a 75-kilometer (47 mile) passenger-rail line between the city of Garcia, which is located west of Monterrey, and Pesqueria, which is east of Monterrey. The plan would include 26 stations and a connection with the city’s light rail system. Many large American controlled manufacturing companies are in the area. *Railway Age* editor William C. Vantuono adds that the chances of this project going beyond the study stage are remote.

Cascades Expands With Two Additional Round Trip Frequencies

In late November the Washington and Oregon Departments of Transportation, in partnership with Amtrak, announced the addition of two more Cascades daily round trips between Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, Washington. This Northwestern corridor now has six round trips between these two large cities in addition to Amtrak’s Coast Starlight that runs daily in each direction.

Jason Briggs, WSDOT Director commented, “Many of our trains are sold out, so the addition of these two trains between Portland and Seattle has long been awaited by our customers.” Kris Strickler, ODOT Director echoed his Washington counterpart, “Amtrak Cascades passenger rail gives people a great way to move between key cities and towns in the Pacific Northwest, and now it will be easier than ever to take the train.”



Amtrak Cascades rolls along Puget Sound. (Amtrak photo)

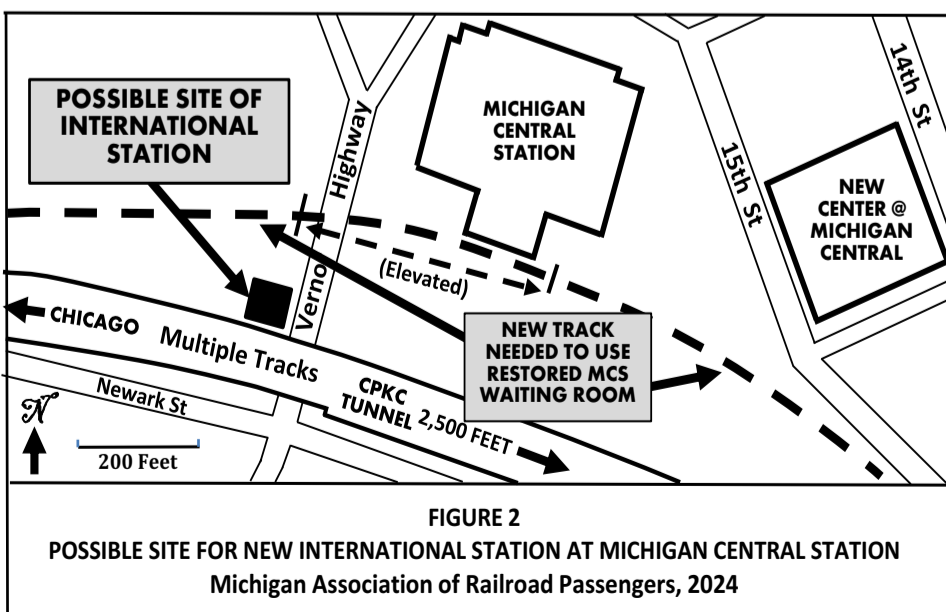
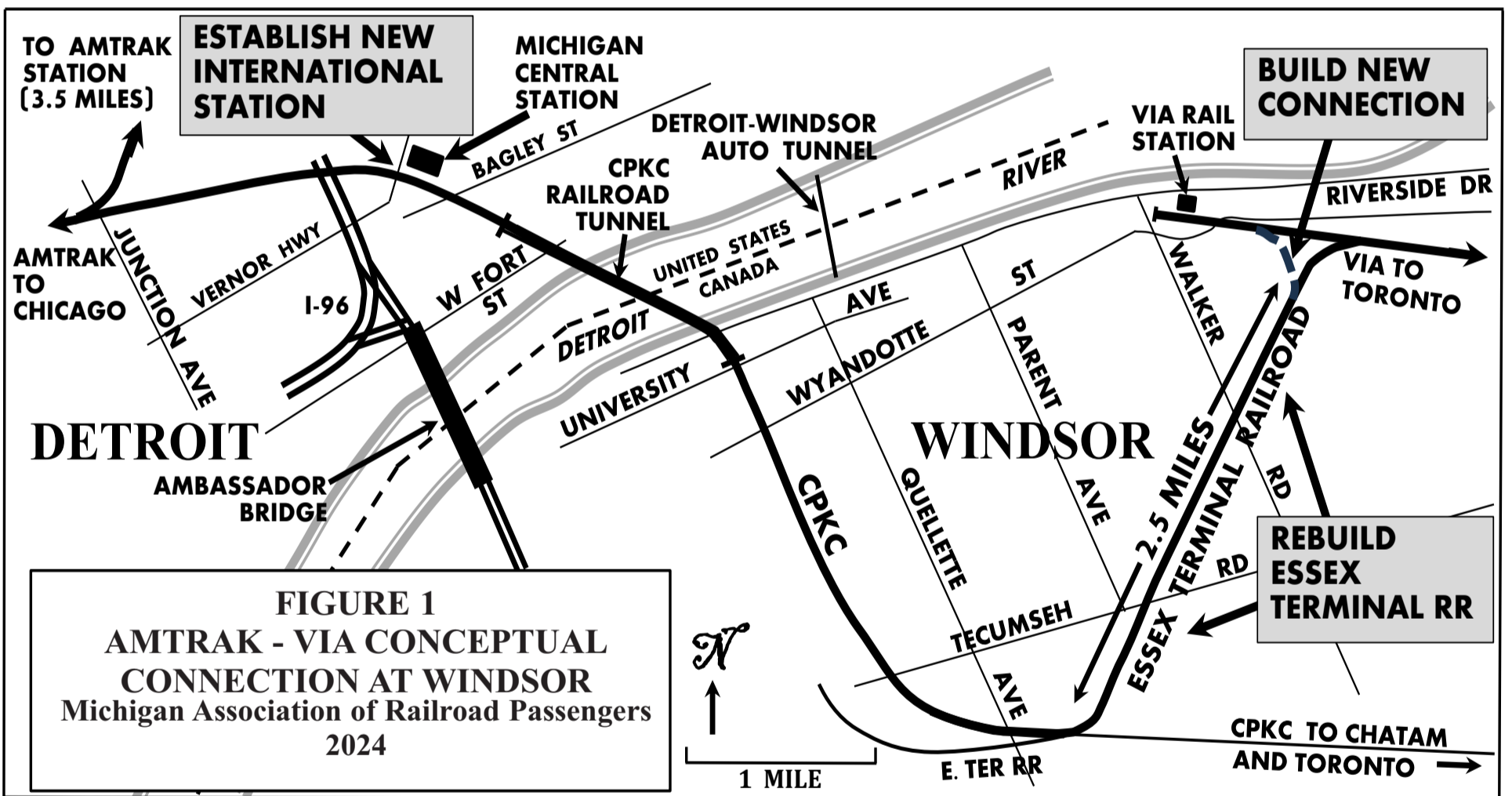


Passengers boarding an Amtrak Cascades Train at Portland. (Amtrak photo)

Chicago-Detroit-Windsor-Toronto International Service Studied



The modern Via Rail Canada Station on Walkerville Road on the northside of Windsor in 2021. (Sourav Sinha photo)



In November of 2023 the news leaked out that that Amtrak and VIA were working seriously toward an exciting new service that would connect Amtrak's Chicago-Detroit corridor with Via Rail Canada's Windsor-Toronto Corridor. Rail planners are finally talking seriously about providing rail passenger service between three of the largest cities in North America – Chicago, Detroit, and Toronto.

We understand that, under this plan, both existing Amtrak Trains 350 and 355 would be shifted from serving the Detroit Station on Woodward Avenue and Pontiac to serving Windsor by way of the CPKC rail tunnels under the Detroit River. As shown in Figure 1, Eastbound Amtrak Train 350 would travel from Chicago to a new

International Station near Michigan Central Station (MCS), then through the rail tunnel, pass over a rebuilt Essex Terminal Railroad for about 3 miles, and terminate at the existing VIA Rail Station in Windsor. Passengers would leave the train, pass through a new customs inspection facility and then board VIA Train 76 to continue to Toronto.

Westbound passengers would travel from Toronto on VIA Train 73 to Windsor where they would leave that train, pass through customs, and then board Westbound Amtrak Train 355, which would take them through the tunnel, to the International Station in

See *Study* next page

First electric bus added to Amtrak Thruway Fleet



The new full size electric bus can make its 200 mile daily run on one charge. (Amtrak photo)

Progressive Railroading reported on August 17th that Amtrak and the Washington State Department of Transportation have replaced a diesel-powered bus with an electric bus on the Amtrak Cascades Thruway route. This is the first EV bus in Amtrak's

national Thruway network. It is expected save approximately 10,000 gallons of diesel fuel per year, and reduce CO2 emissions by 109 tons annually.

This bus is one of several buses on the Thruway Route between Seattle and Bellingham that provide connec-

tions from the morning and evening trains. The new EV bus is owned and operated by MTR Western and it can make the nearly 200-mile route roundtrip on one charge. The Cascades Thruway buses also stop in Everett and Mount Vernon, and con-

nect with trains heading to and from stations south of Seattle. It is interesting to note that the charging hub, installed at MTR Western's Seattle facilities, sits on land once used to store large petroleum tanks.

International service study . . . continued from page 4

Detroit, and on to Chicago. Through ticketing would be provided by VIA and Amtrak. Conceptual schedules would look like:

EASTBOUND

Amtrak Train 350

Lv Chicago 6:45 am (CT)

Ar Windsor 1:29 pm

VIA Train 76

Lv Windsor 2:49 pm

Ar Toronto 6:30 pm

WESTBOUND

VIA Train 73

Lv Toronto 11:30 am

Ar Windsor 3:45 pm

Amtrak Train 355

Lv Windsor 4:45 pm

Ar Chicago(CT) 10:40 pm

A new International Station to serve Detroit would be needed. Figure 2 shows a possible site at the crossing of Vernor Highway behind MCS, a location about 2,500 feet west of the mouth of the Detroit River Tunnels. This station site would be about 350 feet southwest of MCS, now owned by Ford Motor Company. (Perhaps a single track could be installed behind the station to bring the trains closer to the station to facilitate use of the historic MCS waiting room.)

MARP believes that, while not perfect,

this seems to be a very workable solution to adding badly needed rail passenger service between Chicago, Detroit, and Toronto. We have always believed that this service should operate via Detroit instead of on the former route via Port Huron, which has far less population.

We note that the cooperation of CPKC, owner of the Detroit River Tunnels, has greatly advanced this service. We wish other railroads were as cooperative toward developing passenger rail services. We compliment Amtrak and VIA for taking the initiative themselves and pressing forward with it. We also note that this should greatly increase ridership on Amtrak Trains 350 and 355, which seem to be the weakest in terms of ridership of the six trains on the Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac corridor. We are also encouraged to see MCS, widely cherished in Detroit, return to limited use for rail passengers.

But we have some concerns. Detroit's Amtrak Station on Woodward Avenue and the communities of Royal Oak, Troy, and Pontiac will lose two of their six trains. This loss will be felt in these communities. The solution to retaining service to downtown Detroit and the other communities north to Pontiac is contained in MARP's proposal to improve service to the eastern portion of the Michigan Rail Corridor by adding two new round trips on the corridor.

We wish this was a through train between Chicago and Toronto without

forcing passengers and luggage to change trains in Windsor. We hope that a through train can eventually be implemented like the other international rail passenger border crossings between the US and Canada. We do not understand that, with all the new information and screening technologies, why modern customs inspections cannot be handled onboard a through train as was done for decades on trains across this border in the past. We have always felt that rail passengers are discriminated against compared to driving over the border.

We note that only one hour is allowed for customs in Windsor and we are concerned that this may be overly optimistic. Our experience is that international border crossings by rail usually require up to two hours, especially if custom issues arise. Simplifying and speeding the border crossing is of utmost importance in making the train competitive with driving across the border. Because of the customs delays, we question if there will be many passengers boarding at Detroit for Toronto or at Windsor for Chicago on the new train because of the comparative ease of simply driving over the border and boarding the train at the opposite location.

We note the continual late running of Train 350 (averaging 30 minutes late at Detroit and over an hour at times) and we seriously question the ability of Amtrak to deliver this train on time to

Windsor. Meanwhile, we note the strong effort to achieve on time performance on the VIA system. We fear that VIA will be forced to pad the schedule at Windsor to provide on time performance to VIA passengers between Windsor and Toronto. This has been done on the New York-Toronto route at Niagara Falls, Ontario. Adding an hour of padding at Windsor will seriously damage the competitiveness of the new train versus driving to Toronto. Amtrak must deliver train 350 on time at Windsor and do it consistently.

Finally, we note that improvements for the new connection have not been funded. We think that most of the \$44 million estimated cost of the new service would be needed for construction in Canada for track improvements on the Essex Terminal Railroad, which is a dark railroad without a modern signal system needed for passenger operations, and for new customs facilities at the Windsor VIA Station. We doubt that the new US Infrastructure funding can be used for improvements in Canada. We will have to wait for Canadian funding action. We hope that expedited efforts can be made to fund the improvements needed for the train to get into service as soon as possible.

However, despite these concerns, MARP strongly supports this initiative.

Nevada Northern Railway - Be the Engineer!



Steam Engine Number 93, a 2-8-2 built in 1904.

By Robert Lovell

A chance to be a railroad engineer was what caused me to notice the Nevada Northern Railway's ad in a *Trains* magazine. NNRY is a working excursion railroad, offering many scheduled and special excursion runs behind one of their two steam engines or their vintage diesel. But there is a 7 to 8 hour drive to Ely, Nevada, round-trip from Las Vegas.

The chance to "Be the Engineer" is a fundraiser for the museum, costing more than \$1,000 for a two or four-hour unique experience. Your cost will depend on several options.

Lessons begin with a test on the rules, based on a manual sent beforehand. Instructions for starting and stopping followed. The controls for Engine Number 93 were a bewildering array of valves, gauges, levers and pull chains. I got to use exactly five of these: throttle, brake, Johnson Bar (think of it as the gearshift), whistle, and speedometer. Earl Koob, my instructor, got me into a five-step pattern for starting, a similar pattern for stopping.

Then away we went, at 15 mph maximum, 5 mph on a long stretch of bad track, for two hours. Slow by most standards, this was plenty fast for me, considering the weight, motion, heat, and noise of this ancient monster. It was clear that the real work was done by the fireman, who is responsible for coal and water, fire and steam. Number 93 is a manual stoker, meaning shovel after shovel of coal tossed artfully through the gates of hell, butterfly doors opened by a foot pedal.

My afternoon class was in diesel Number 204, built by General Motors Electro-Motive Division. Mechanically much simpler than number 93, it is also much simpler to operate. Where the throttle for 93 was a long ratcheting bar, 204 had a simple brass handle. Diesels don't need a Johnson Bar. The fireman had little to do but watch for hazards on his side of the track. My instructor was Gary Hansen, another patient, careful man.

In sum, I had a great time, a capstone experience for this life-long railfan, and well worth the long desert drive.



Boiler front on Engine 93.

SHORT LINES

A total \$6 billion in two FRA grants have been approved to fund the development of high-speed rail projects in California.

Progressive Railroading reported on December 6, 2023, that a \$3 billion grant to the State of California will help complete the state high-speed rail project and a \$3 billion grant will help Brightline West connect Las Vegas to Southern California. The money is from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. According to the Hi-Speed Rail Alliance, after receiving the award, Brightline West announced it is launching field investigations in Nevada and has started recruiting workers to construct the high-speed line. Total hires are anticipated to be 11,000 to construct the 218-mile railroad. Brightline hopes to connect Las Vegas with Southern California in time for the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028..... **Restoration of the Canadian Algoma Passenger service received promising statements from Watco Management.**

At a November 2023 meeting of the Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains in Sault Ste. Marie, Canada, Wesley Logan, general manager and director of operations for Agawa Canyon Railroad (Watco), said that problems needed to be overcome, but the railroad was favorably inclined to get the excursion service started again. "We live here and work here and this bodes well for us too." In 2022 Watco purchased the freight and passenger rail line from Sault Ste. Marie to Oba from CN. Logan said the line incorporates 245 miles of Class 3 main line track, which allows passenger rail up to 40 m.p.h. Logan added, "There are over 700 culverts and bridges, over 800 curves, and 50 miles are considered mountain grade over 12 locations. In 25 years, I've never seen a railroad like this, it is a challenging line." Watco now has three F40 locomotives and 17 passenger coaches for the tour train, which Logan said are circa 1950 and are being assessed for their remaining life..... **In 2023, North Carolina set a passenger rail ridership record for the second consecutive year,**

according to *Progressive Railroading*. The state's intercity passenger-rail service last year logged more than 641,000 passengers, up 23% compared with the previous record of 522,000 passengers set in 2022. Joey Hopkins, the North Carolina Transportation Secretary said, "Based on the success of the last two years, we are continuing to explore opportunities to further increase frequencies and expand service to communities across the state." Contributing to the services growth and popularity were the addition of a fifth-round trip between Raleigh and Charlotte in July 2023..... **Florida's Tri-Rail will expand their commuter trains into Brightline's Miami Central Station.**

According to *Mass Transit*, the new service will be introduced as a train-to-train transfer at the Metrorail Transfer Station in Hialeah Fla., where a shuttle train will connect the South Florida Rail Corridor with the Florida East Coast Railway for a direct service to Miami Central and back. The service will soft launch on Jan. 13 for two weeks, starting with six trains going in and six trains out of Miami Central, with more trains incrementally added to the schedule before having the full schedule consisting of 26 weekday trains, 13 in and out of Miami Central..... **The Federal Railroad Administration awarded a total of \$16.4 billion for 25 passenger rail projects along the Northeast Corridor** through the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Program. Amtrak will receive nearly \$10 billion for the 12 projects it will lead. FRA's investment will be used to replace or upgrade 12 major bridges and tunnels on the NEC that are more than 100 years old as well as upgrade tracks, power systems, signals, stations, and more, that will allow for increased speeds, reduced travel time, and a more reliable experi-

ence for riders. The project includes up to \$3.8 billion for final design and construction of the New Jersey/New York Gateway Program, the new Hudson River Tunnel, and rehabilitation of the existing 113-year-old North River tunnels..... **New passenger operators have announced plans to operate high-speed trains between the UK and mainland Europe, via the Channel Tunnel.** For nearly thirty years Eurostar has been the sole passenger rail operator using the tunnel, but it now seems likely they will have competition soon. The Channel Tunnel is owned and operated by GetLink, which leases track access to Eurostar. GetLink has said that the tunnel is designed for almost double the current rail traffic level. There is hope that these new competitors could lead to more frequent service, lower fares, better amenities, and service to more locations. Multiple competitors on other routes in Europe led to better service for travelers. In Italy, since Italo began running service to compete with state-owned Trenitalia in 2021, prices have fallen and ridership has grown..... **Alstom announced on November 17 that it has delivered the first of 60 additional new streetcars to the Toronto Transit Commission.** According to *Railway Age*, the remaining new low-floor Flexity™ light rail vehicles will be delivered throughout 2024 and 2025. The LRVs, which are jointly funded by \$568 million in contributions from the federal government, Ontario government, and City of Toronto, officially entered service on November 17. The vehicles, which are being produced at Alstom's Thunder Bay facility, will be added to a fleet of 204 Alstom Flexity LRVs built by predecessor company Bombardier Transportation (now part of Alstom). According to the company, 400 highly skilled Alstom employees in Canada are at work on the cars..... **Caltrain marked 160 years of passenger-rail service operating between San Francisco and San Jose.** According to *Progressive Railroading*, Caltrain is the oldest continually operating rail system west of the Mississippi. The idea of creating a rail line between the two cities first came about in 1851, when San Jose was still the California's capital city. Construction began in May 1861 at San Francisquito Creek and the line was completed in 1864. The creation of the railroad was central to the development of the San Francisco Peninsula and South Bay as cities built their downtowns around the railroad depots. Accessible transportation led to economic prosperity and development, because trains could move far more people and goods than stagecoaches on dirt roads. Today Caltrain's electrification project, the first new electrification project in North America in a generation, approaches completion later this year..... **RTA of Southeast Michigan to consider moving QLINE under its management. According to a report by Mass Transit, on December 15, 2023, discussions have started between M-1 Rail and the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) of Southeast Michigan for the RTA to move the streetcar line in Detroit under its management.** The City of Detroit recommended that the RTA consider the transfer. Step one of the three step process was completed when the plan was introduced during the RTA Board's December meeting "It is the role of the RTA to ensure the ongoing viability of regional transit services," said Dave Massaron, chair of the RTA Board of Directors. "The RTA appreciates the dedication of the philanthropic community for bringing M-1 RAIL to life. We also congratulate the leadership of the QLINE for delivering a service that is on pace to carry a record 1 million riders in 2023, a dramatic expansion in ridership. We will continue to discuss the plan at future Board meetings, with a goal of making a decision in early 2024".

South Shore Double Tracking Remains on Schedule



Catenary upgrade on the South Shore railroad. (South Shore photo)

By Hugh Gurney

Unlike many recent rail projects, the double tracking of Indiana's South Shore continues on schedule. An estimated 63% of the project is complete and scheduled to wrap up in May, 2024. When complete, South Shore will be able to operate 14 additional trains each weekday between Michigan City and Chicago. Travel time will be cut from 1 hour, 40 minutes to 1 hour, 7 minutes.

In addition to construction of 26.6 miles of second track from Gary to Michigan City, the project includes relocating street running track in Michigan City to a dedicated right of way, new station platforms all along the route, additional parking lots, and the construction of two new stations.

On August 16, 2023, the first electric train since February 28, 2022 headed westward from the Carroll Avenue Station in east Michigan City to Dune Park Station, about 15 miles east of Gary, the first of many trains testing the new catenary, roadbed and crossings. As reported in the December 21 issue of the weekly *Double Track NW*, the 26 mile bus bridge between Gary and Carroll Avenue was reduced to a 15 mile stretch between Gary and Dune Park. Revenue train service between Dune Park and Carroll Avenue resumed with stops at Beverly Shores and 11th Street, Michigan City. Bus service will continue between Gary Metro and Dune Park until May, 2024.

Completion of the new Miller Station is expected early in 2024 as is a new high level platform at Portage/Ogden Dunes. Two new low level platforms at Beverly Shores and at 11th Street are complete. Work is underway on the new 11th Street Station complex which will include the passenger station, a 500 car parking facility, 10,000 square feet of office space and 200 luxury apartments. 11th Street in Michigan City has reopened as an eastbound only one way street complete with new sidewalks and curbs.

East Lansing Station Host Update

In November, 2023, CN replaced ballast, tie, and rails around the East Lansing passenger platform. Upon completion, the crossovers to the second track were relocated 150ft west to the present boarding area of the new station. Previously, if the train arrived on the second (north) track, it would block the busy Harrison Road crossing while passengers were boarding.

However, the construction work may have damaged power for the passenger platform area lighting as all went dark. Temporary solar-powered lighting towers were brought on site to provide for safe deboarding of passengers until repairs are made.

MARP Station Hosts continue to keep the station



Westbound Train 364 at East Lansing on January 16, 2024, showing the temporary solar-powered lighting at right. Although Venture Coaches and an Amfleet café car are normally used, the coaches on this train are Horizon coaches. (John Boyce photo)

staffed each morning. In January, #365 was cancelled and buses were substituted for a few days due to the unusually cold weather. When buses are substituted, there is always a great deal of uncertainty for passengers and a few passengers usually arrive unaware of the cancellation. Business class passengers always question if they will be

reimbursed for a business class upgrade. Usually one or more buses will operate express to Chicago Union Station, while later arriving buses will make the intermediate stops. MARP Station Hosts check with arriving bus drivers and direct passengers accordingly.

MARP Chair steps down

John Guidinger, MARP Chair since 2020, resigned as MARP Chair in December. The departure was due to a serious back injury that greatly limited his physical ability. The Executive Committee appointed MARP Secretary Todd Schultz as Chair and Executive Committee member Matt Thompson as Secretary. Both positions are interim

and will be filled with permanent assignments at the next election in the Fall of 2024. Guidinger will remain a member of the Executive Committee and the Editor of the Michigan Passenger.

John Guidinger thanks the Executive Committee for their tremendous support during the time he was Chair.



Virginia Railway Express commuter train enroute to Washington. (VRE Photo)

Virginia Is Developing Modern Rail Passenger Services

Comment by Larry Krieg

Here's a great example of a state that's doing wonderful things with passenger rail.

The Virginia Passenger Rail Authority announced that 1,256,123 passengers rode from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023, easily beating the previous record of 894,065 set during fiscal year 2015. Ridership showed especially big increases during 2023 on the Norfolk and Newport News routes. A big reason for this success is the support of Virginians for High Speed Rail, a not-for-profit coalition that educates and advocates for the need for fast, frequent, and reliable rail service in Virginia.

On November 27, 2023, Virginians for High Speed Rail held a virtual town hall meeting, the third in their 2023 series. Speakers included Jennifer DeBruhl, Director, Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation; D. J. Stadler, Executive Director of Virginia Passenger Rail Authority; and Rich Dalton, CEO of Virginia Railway Express.

With long range foresight, Virginia set up several rail authorities separate from VaDOT. These include a Passenger Rail Authority, a Freight Rail Authority, and a separate commuter rail authority, Virginia Rail Express, which has operated two commuter lines into DC for the last 30 or so years. Having a concentrated responsibility for a specific purpose encourages the authorities to focus on moving things along.

The biggest motivation for increasing regional rail service appears to be traffic congestion on Virginia's interstate highways. After an in-depth study of the cost and benefit of adding lanes to I-95, VaDOT found that it would be far less expensive to turn to passenger rail transportation by expanding track capacity on the parallel CSX main line. The study forecast that even after the new highway lanes were added, the highway congestion would likely be just as choked as before.

Extensive plans were developed, the principal feature of which was to acquire an interest in the CSX rail line and increase the

2-track main to 3 tracks, with 4 tracks in some places. The goal was to separate passenger trains from freight trains and allow each type of train to operate in its most efficient way.

Hiring D. J. Stadler to head the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority a couple of years ago was a stroke of management genius. He is smart, no-nonsense, experienced, and clearly knows not only how to get things done, but also how to explain needs clearly, exactly what needs to happen, and why these things need to get done. Despite being known as overly determined (hard-headed?) he radiates excitement.

Virginia is not only focusing on improving high-density rail corridors, but also extending service to rural mountain areas like Roanoke, Bristol, and into North Carolina and Tennessee. (Think about the political ramifications.) Virginia is a swing-state politically, like Michigan. But somehow, both parties in Virginia have recognized multi-modal transportation is a non-partisan issue. Unlike Michigan, Virginia's population is

growing. The relative populations of DC and Detroit metro areas are not that different: DC is 5.5 million, Detroit is 4.5 million. Is there a link between growth and multi-modal transportation? Of course!

Here in Michigan, decision-makers seem focused on automated vehicles instead of multi-modal solutions. They seem to think this will solve the entire transportation problem, when a more detailed look would show that it solves only part of the problem. This continued reliance on automobiles means many families will continue to be forced to own and maintain more than one car; valuable city land will have to be set aside for parking; and commuters will continue to spend many unproductive hours behind the wheel. More and more young people who don't want to drive will flee to states like Virginia, where there are multiple transportation options.

Investing in reliable, frequent, attractive rail transportation is a necessary key to growing Michigan's population and economy.

City of Kalamazoo Supports MARP's Plan to Serve Detroit Better

In a letter to Peter Anastor, MDOT Office of Rail, the City of Kalamazoo expresses support for MARP's initiative to add trains between Kalamazoo and Detroit to provide meaningful service to Detroit. The letter, dated January 8, 2024, points out that under the current schedule, rail passengers from Kalamazoo and other cities to the west cannot arrive in

Detroit before 1:25 pm and must depart at 6:11 pm, leaving only about 4 usable hours without having to stay overnight in Detroit. The city supports MARP's initiative to add two new trains from Kalamazoo to get the first train into Detroit before 11:00 am and have the last train leave after 8:00 pm, thus allowing about 9 hours in Detroit.

The letter points out that, for the first time since the 1960s, people from the western side of Michigan would be able to use rail service to attend many Detroit events such as business meetings, Detroit Lions games, afternoon Detroit Tiger games, the Detroit Art Museum, the Detroit Public Library, shopping in Detroit stores, and have nice lunches at

the many unique restaurants in Detroit.

MARP is pleased at the sincere support from the City of Kalamazoo. We are working to get more support for this common sense proposal from other cities and related interests along the Michigan Corridor.