



# P *The Michigan* PASSENGER M

YOUR SOURCE FOR PASSENGER RAIL NEWS • SINCE 1973

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Michigan Association of  
Railroad Passengers  
www.marp.org

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## 'Amtrak Connects Us'

*Major new national vision for expanded passenger service announced*

On April 2nd, Amtrak unveiled a bold new vision to grow rail passenger service across America. Branded "Amtrak Connects Us", the proposed expansion would add up to 160 communities to the 500 communities presently served by the Amtrak system. Multiple daily train service in form of new rail passenger corridors would be added in 15 states. Also included would be up to 30 new routes, expansion of service on up to 20 existing routes, adding up an esti-

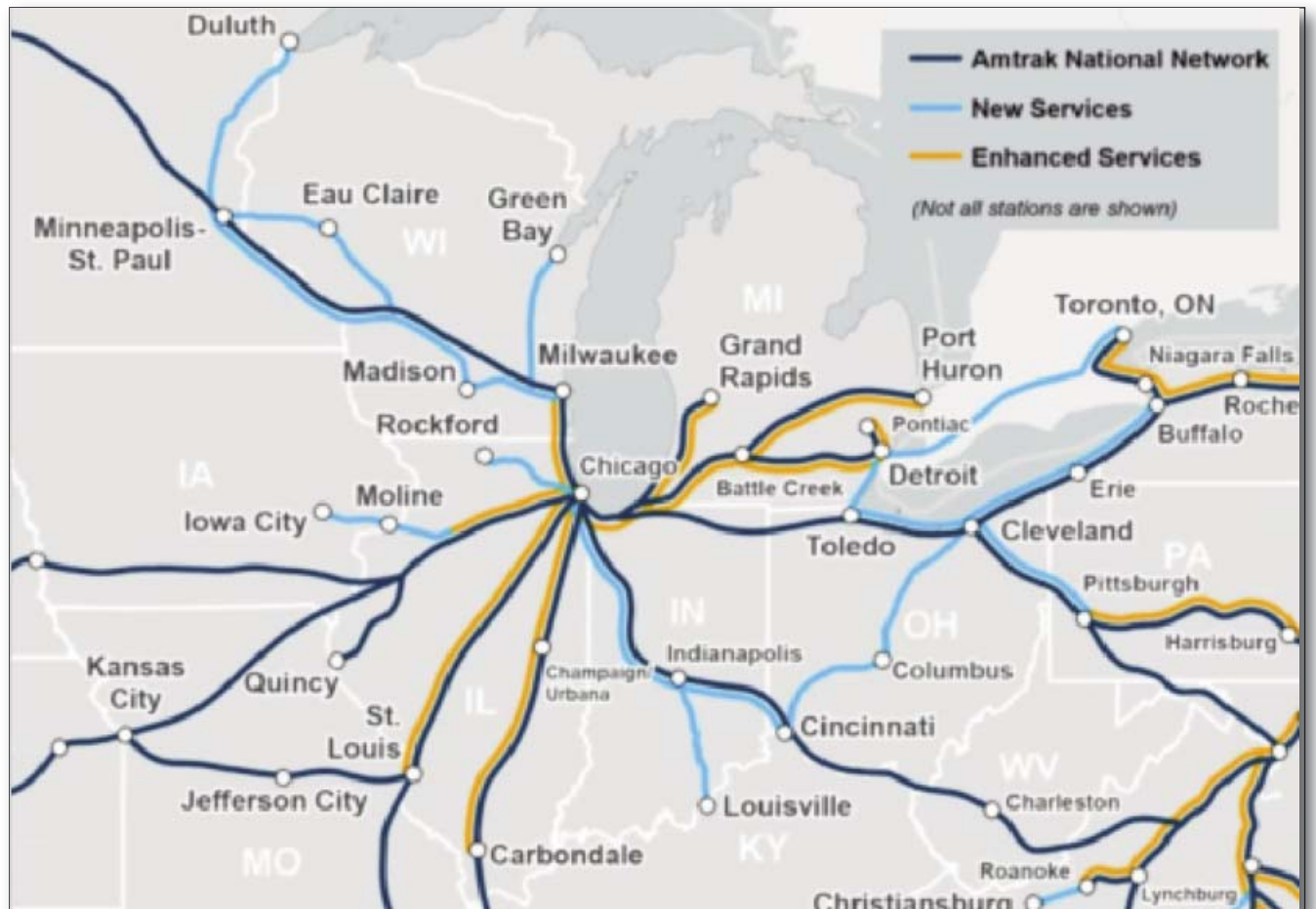
mated 20 million new passengers to the 32 million passengers served by Amtrak in 2019.

Amtrak points out that the proposed Amtrak Connects Us expansion would require significant funding from government sources, as does all other passenger rail service around the world. This would include increased federal funding for Amtrak's National Network Grant to support operating and capital costs for new and improved corridor routes.

A cost estimate is not included in the Amtrak plan, but the \$2 trillion infrastructure plan act proposed by U.S. President Biden on March 31st includes \$621 billion for transportation, with \$85 billion for transit and \$80 billion for Amtrak.

The Amtrak Connects Us vision also calls for other important federal support that would streamline the process for accessing freight rail lines and determining reasonable capacity

See *Amtrak* page 3



"Amtrak Connects Us" proposed route expansions in the Mid-Western United States. Map source: Amtrak, April 2, 2021.

## Lakeshore Working Group explores ideas for expanding rail service

Several rail supporters in Michigan, Ohio, and New York, grouped loosely as the Lakeshore Working Group, have been discussing ideas for expanding rail passenger service between New York and Chicago on the route of Amtrak Trains 48 and 49, the Lakeshore Limited. This is the route of the former New York Central via Chicago, Toledo, Cleveland, Buffalo, Albany, and New York City, with a section taken off at Albany to Boston. Many Michigan residents board this train at points in Indiana such as South Bend, Waterloo, or Bryan, and at Toledo, Ohio. This is the only remaining through train on this route, once the premier route of the New York Central between Chicago and New York with many fast passenger trains.

We understand that Amtrak wants

to make Cleveland into a mini-hub with extensions of existing trains or new trains that currently operate to Buffalo, Harrisburg, and Detroit. A 2011 study on improvements to the Lakeshore done for NARP and the Midwest High Speed Association sat dormant for years until the Working Group came along.

For a single daily round trip, two basic ideas have been mentioned. These include:

1. Reroute the Existing Train Between Porter (Indiana) and Toledo via Michigan. This proposal has been discussed before and at one time was strongly supported by Amtrak. Eastbound, the train would leave the current Norfolk Southern route at Porter, Indiana, and travel on the Michigan Corridor as far east as Dearborn. Here it would turn south on

CSX to Toledo where it would regain the existing route to the east. Although the 959-mile Chicago-New York route would be lengthened by about 96 miles, a much larger population in the Michigan segment would be served (about 4 million versus 0.3 million on the existing segment) and all station facilities are in place. Detroit would not be served directly, but service would be provided at the suburban Dearborn Station. South Bend would still be served by the train at Niles, Michigan, which is within the South Bend urban area. Elkhart, Waterloo, and Bryan would lose service, but they would still be served by the Capitol Limited.

2. Split the Existing Lakeshore at Buffalo. The existing train would be divided into two sections. One section would continue on the existing

See *Lakeshore Working Group* page 3

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

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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.

# JOIN MARP TODAY!

It's easy.  
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 Apt/Unit# \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
 E-mail \* \_\_\_\_\_

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**MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS, Inc.**  
 c/o Jean Merckel, Treasurer  
 33373 Hampshire Road  
 Livonia, Michigan 48154-2952

#### MEMBERSHIP

- Student (under 21) \$20
- Seniors (65+) \$20
- Individual \$30
- Family \$40
- Advocate \$50
- First Class \$100
- Life \$500

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Amtrak Train Schedules Chicago-Kalamazoo-Ann Arbor-Detroit-Pontiac Chicago-Kalamazoo-East Lansing-Port Huron									
Blue Water	Wolverine Service	Train Name						Wolverine Service	Blue Water
364	352	Train Number						351	365
Daily	Daily	Days of Operation						Daily	Daily
4:00p	1:25p	Dp	CHICAGO, IL, Union Station (CT)				Ar	10:33a	11:45a
			Hammond-Whiting, IN				↑	↑	↑
			Michigan City, IN (CT)						
6:10p	3:41p		New Buffalo, MI (ET)						11:24a
6:32p	4:02p		Niles, MI						11:04a
6:43p	↓		Dowagiac, MI						10:52a
7:11p	4:36p		Kalamazoo, MI					9:16a	10:26a
7:38p	5:11p		Battle Creek, MI					8:49a	10:00a
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
	5:41p		Albion, MI				↑	8:16a	
	6:06p		Jackson, MI					7:52a	
	6:46p		Ann Arbor, MI					7:15a	
	7:22p		Dearborn, MI					6:45a	
	7:55p		DETROIT, MI					6:25a	
	8:16p		Royal Oak, MI					6:03a	
	8:23p	↓	Troy, MI					5:56a	
	8:40p	Ar	PONTIAC, MI				Dp	5:43a	

Amtrak Train Schedule Chicago-Grand Rapids					
Pere Marquette	Train Name				Pere Marquette
370	Train Number				371
Daily	Days of Operation				Daily
6:30p	Dp	CHICAGO, IL, Union Station (CT)			Ar
9:14p		St. Joseph-Benton Harbor, MI (ET)			↑
9:49p		Bangor, MI			
10:31p	↓	Holland, MI			
11:34p	Ar	GRAND RAPIDS, MI			Dp

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	James Eldridge
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	Mit Renroc
Holland	None	
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

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Apt/Unit# \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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Individual \$30

Family \$40

Advocate \$50

First Class \$100

Life \$500

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# Former Michigan Central Station ideas developed

By Clark Charnetski

The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers officials is developing a policy about the use of Detroit's former Michigan Central Station for future passenger train use.

In 2018 the Ford Motor Company purchased the station, ending thirty years of decline of that famous structure. Amtrak vacated it in 1988 and moved to the present station on Woodward Avenue in the Detroit New Center Area six years later.

Ford is restoring the station and the nearby post office to use as a center for research and development of new urban transportation solutions. It will also serve as a community gathering place and a new technology showcase according to the company web site and press releases. Ford plans to employ five thousand people in the completed project. This development is expected to lead the way for the revitalization of the Detroit Michigan Avenue Corridor which has not experienced the same growth as has Woodward Avenue.

Ford's action has led to speculation that the company may propose returning rail passenger service to the station. Its proximity to the portal of the Detroit-Windsor twin tube rail tunnel beneath the Detroit River was the major reason why the Michigan Central, a part of the New York Central, moved its station from downtown Detroit to this location in late 1913.

On May 5, 1994, Amtrak opened its Woodward Avenue station. This new location enabled Amtrak to extend service twenty miles to the

Oakland County cities of Royal Oak, Troy, and Pontiac. These stations had been used by the former Grand Trunk Western/SEMTA commuter trains to Detroit until late 1983. Stations in Pontiac and Birmingham (the new station is in Troy) were subsequently replaced at a cost of \$10 million.

Investments totaling \$16 million in Michigan and Federal funds were used to make track and signal improvements to allow Amtrak trains to operate between Dearborn and Detroit while bypassing the busy West Detroit and Bay City Junction used by five freight railroads. In 2019 Dearborn, Detroit and Oakland County each contributed one-third of Amtrak riders for the Metro Detroit region.

It appears that Michigan Central Station would be able to accommodate passenger trains. Not known by MARP is whether new construction of a parking garage and office building on the east and west portions of the Ford property would block access to the mainline tracks. Direct access to the tunnel to Canada and Toronto is the main reason given for using the MC Station for trains once again. Another argument in favor of the change is that the MC Station is slightly more than one mile closer to downtown than the present Woodward Avenue station.

However, the present Amtrak station is closer to the center of population of the City of Detroit, a third of whose residents do not own automobiles. It is located on Woodward Avenue with its many attractions such as



Wayne State University, the Cultural Center, medical centers, and sports venues. The new QLINE streetcar operates frequently between the station and downtown. Woodward also offers frequent local and suburban buses. Continued use of the present route would also make possible future Ann Arbor-Detroit-Pontiac commuter or regional train service.

The three Oakland County stations provide a third of metro Detroit passengers. If Oakland County were not served, would the increase in passengers that might result from using Michigan Central Station offset the loss of Oakland County business? Would the \$26 million spent to improve the route and stations between West Detroit and Pontiac go to waste?

This issue is rather complex. A more complete history and analysis is available on the MARP web site

Above: A sketch of Detroit's Michigan Central Station at its opening in 1913. (JHG Collection)

Below: Development of a commuter rail system could have some trains terminating at Michigan Central Station (MCS), which is under restoration by Ford. Future trains from Michigan to Toronto or the East Coast would have to use MCS to avoid a long back up movement from Amtrak's Woodward Avenue station.



## Lakeshore Working Group . . . continued from page 1

route to Chicago. The other section would travel about 250 miles through Ontario on Canadian National and Canadian Pacific to Detroit and then on to Chicago for 281 miles on the Michigan high speed line (a route similar to that of the former Michigan Central between Buffalo and Chicago). To minimize customs delays at the international border, the train would be sealed and run non-stop through Canada or another special customs arrangement would be needed. This route would be the most direct route to and from the east for the residents of Michigan and Detroit.

For adding a second train on the

Lakeshore route, several ideas have been mentioned:

1. Extend an Existing Empire Service Train to Chicago via Cleveland. One of the existing 431-mile New York City-Buffalo Empire Service trains would be extended to the west 528 miles to Chicago. Sleeping car and improved meal service would need to be added to the train. The schedule could be established so as to finally bring day time service to Cleveland. The extended train would no longer serve Niagara Falls, but other trains would continue to serve Niagara Falls. No new stations or track work would be required.

2. Extend an Existing Empire Corridor Train to Chicago via Canada. At Niagara Falls, one of the Empire Service trains could cross the bridge and travel through Canada and then reenter the US at Detroit and travel through Michigan to Chicago. Again customs issues would need to be minimized.

3. Extend the Boston section to Chicago. The existing 200-mile Boston-Albany section of the Lakeshore could be made into a separate train and extended 818 miles to Chicago via Cleveland (or through Canada via Detroit.) Eliminating the switching of the Boston section at Albany would save about an hour in the

schedule of the existing Lakeshore and save switching costs at Albany.

Many other ideas have been mentioned to bring daytime service to Cleveland and develop a mini hub there. These ideas include extending an Empire Corridor train from Buffalo 187 miles west to Cleveland, extending a Michigan Corridor train east from Dearborn about 166 miles to Cleveland, and extending a Keystone Corridor train west from Harrisburg about 460 miles to Cleveland. No preferred options have been identified.

## Amtrak Connects Us . . . continued from page 1

improvements required to add passenger trains on the freight lines. Also called for are new enforcement tools for the operational rights of Amtrak passenger trains over freight trains to ensure the Amtrak trains run on time.

For the Mid-West, the vision of Amtrak Connects Us includes:

- Existing Michigan Routes - Additional frequencies on all three routes
- Chicago-Detroit-Toronto - A new through train

- Pontiac-Detroit-Toledo-Cleveland - Three round trips a day on this new route
- Chicago-Indianapolis-Cincinnati-Four round trips a day, apparently in addition to the tri-weekly Cardinal on this route
- Cleveland-Columbus-Dayton-Cincinnati - Three round trips a day on this new route
- Cleveland-Buffalo-Albany-New York - Two round trips a day, apparently in addition to the daily Lakeshore Limited on this route
- Cleveland - Pittsburgh - Washington -

New York - One daily round trip, apparently in addition to the daily

- Capitol Limited on this route as far as Washington
- Chicago-St Louis - Additional frequencies on this existing route
- Chicago-Carbondale - Additional frequencies on this existing route
- Chicago-Minneapolis/St Paul - An additional frequency via Madison and Eau Claire in addition to the Empire Builder
- Other new services proposed in the mid-west include: St Paul/Minneapolis-Duluth,

Chicago-Rockford, Chicago-Iowa City, Chicago-Louisville, and Chicago-Green Bay.

While the funding plans are not fully defined, it appears at present that the states involved must make a formal request to Amtrak to initiate these services. Capital and operating startup costs will be covered by Amtrak and the federal government for a period of time with the federal operating funds gradually diminishing over several years.



## Bridge replacement work continues



Looking north at the Mechanic Street Bridge on March 17, 2021.

JHG Photo

Soil dewatering and work on the underground utilities was completed about the beginning of April at the railroad bridge over Mechanic Street in downtown Jackson. Later this year MDOT plans to replace this bridge and the nearby Jackson Street Bridge. Both bridges are on the MDOT owned portion of

Amtrak's Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac route. The \$17.4 million project is jointly funded with \$8.2 million grant from MDOT, \$7.2 million from the Federal Railroad Administration, and \$2.0 million from Amtrak.

The two bridges to be replaced were built in 1901 and

1902 by the Michigan Central Railroad. Both are steel plate-girder bridges with masonry abutments. The abutments and lower steel members of the bridges are badly deteriorated. Replacement of these bridges will also increase clearance under the bridges for road traffic and provide a safe operating

environment for Amtrak trains and freight trains. Both of these bridges and a third bridge over the Grand River are within 800 feet of each other. The Grand River Bridge is not part of the replacement project.

# Buttigieg heightens hope for rail

*New U.S. Secretary of Transportation has a history of improving rail travel*

**By Hugh Gurney**

Hope for better passenger rail service, already high after the election of "Amtrak Joe" Biden in November, intensified with the confirmation of "Mayor Pete" Buttigieg as United States Secretary of Transportation. At his confirmation hearing, Buttigieg declared himself "probably the second biggest passenger rail enthusiast in this administration. I enjoy long train trips as well as short ones, and I think Americans ought to be able to enjoy the highest standard of passenger rail service." He stated his intention to make the USDOT less auto-centric.

As the two term mayor of South Bend, Indiana, Buttigieg utilized the "Smart Streets" strategy to revitalize downtown South



Pete Buttigieg  
U.S. Secretary  
of Transportation

Bend by redesigning streets for multipurpose use, thereby encouraging greater economic investment. For decades after the demise of Studebaker, South Bend had been considered just another dying Midwestern city.

During his confirmation hearing, Buttigieg declared, "There are so many ways that people get around, and I think often we've had an auto-centric view that has forgotten, historically, about all other different modes. We want to make sure anytime we're doing street design that it enables cars, and bicycles, and pedestrians and any other modes – and businesses – to co-exist in a positive way, and we should be putting funding behind that."

Railroads played a part in Buttigieg's South Bend strategy. As mayor, he advocated bringing the terminus of the South Shore Railroad into downtown South Bend from its current terminus at

the South Bend International Airport and constructing a new station downtown. "Think of the possibilities, if the heart of our

**"We've been asked to settle for less in this country, and I just don't know why people in other countries should have better train service and more investment in high-speed trains service than Americans do."**

city was 90 minutes away by train from the heart of the most dynamic economic centre in the world," Buttigieg is quoted as saying in 2018. "Mayor Pete" strongly supported the double tracking of the South Shore commuter line between Gary and Michigan City, Indiana. The double tracking project, now fully funded, is projected to cut travel time from South Bend to downtown Chicago from 114 minutes to 84 minutes. South Bend is cur-

rently served by two Amtrak long distance trains, the Capitol Limited and the Lake Shore Limited. Shortly after his confirmation, Buttigieg noted in an interview with MSNBC host Joy Reid that he foresees the United States becoming the global leader "when it comes to high-speed rail. And I think we have a real opportunity to do that, especially with the bipartisan appetite for real investments that we have before us this year." Later in that interview,

he added, "We've been asked to settle for less in this country, and I just don't know why people in other countries should have better train service and more investment in high-speed trains service than Americans do."

With strong bipartisan support, the United States Senate confirmed Pete Buttigieg as U. S. Secretary of Transportation by a vote of 86-13 in early February.

Buttigieg Photo courtesy USDOT



# Transforming passenger rail service in Virginia

On March 31, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam announced that the Commonwealth of Virginia had finalized an agreement with Amtrak, CSX, and Virginia Railway Express to launch a \$3.7 billion investment to expand rail passenger, commuter, and freight services in Virginia. U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg joined state and railroad officials in announcing the agreement at the Amtrak station at Alexandria, Virginia. The program will be funded in part by The American Rescue Plan that was recently passed by Congress and which provides \$43.2 billion to support and improve U.S. national transportation needs. The very ambitious Virginia program includes:

1. Construction of a new \$1.9 billion bridge, 2,500 feet long over the Potomac River adjacent to CSX's Long Bridge for the exclusive use of

passenger trains.

2. Acquisition from CSX of half of the right-of-way width between Washington and Petersburg, a north-south distance of about 137 miles. With the exception of 1.2 miles through the town of Ashland, the existing right-of-way is wide enough to accommodate two new tracks for passenger trains. Over the next ten years two additional passenger only tracks will be built between Washington and Richmond. This will allow the doubling of state-supported Amtrak service and allow Virginia Railway Express to expand their existing commuter service between Washington and Virginia by about 60 percent.

3. Acquisition of the CSX right-of-way from Petersburg to Ridgeway, North Carolina, a distance of about 75 miles. This route extends south toward Raleigh, North Carolina,

which will tie in with rail passenger expansion plans in North Carolina.

4. Acquisition of the CSX right-of-way between Doswell and Clifton Forge (about 170 miles). This line will be held in state ownership for the future development of east-west passenger service into the western part of the state.

In 2020 the Virginia Passenger and Rail Authority was established to manage and govern state-wide passenger and commuter service. The VPRA is an independent entity designed specifically to own and acquire rail infrastructure and partner with Amtrak to fund intercity rail operations. Under the plan announced on March 31st, the VPRA will oversee the acquisition from CSX of 386 miles of right-of-way and 223 miles of rail lines.

## Station representatives eyes and ears for MARP



Amtrak Station at St. Joseph, Michigan. Photo by Station Representative Todd Schultz, March 30, 2021.

MARP has initiated a new program where a local volunteer will be designated the MARP Station Representative for the local Amtrak lines and several MARP members have already volunteered to serve as the Station Representative for their station. A list of the stations and the names of the representatives who have already volunteered

are shown on page 2 of this issue of the *Michigan Passenger*.

The MARP Station Representative will be the eyes and ears for MARP at their station. They will be passive observers and simply report to MARP anything of significance that happens at their station and forward any news reports in the local media concerning their station. They will also place copies of MARP's newly printed timetable

cards at their station for the use of passengers and ensure that the *Michigan Passenger* is in the station.

The program will be coordinated by Chuck Merckel. If you would like to volunteer for your station contact Chuck at crmerckel@aol.com or 734-330-0281.

## Metra Orders 200 New Coaches for Chicago Commuters

By Hugh Gurney

Metra has awarded a contract in the amount of \$775.4 million to Alstom for 200 new multi-level coaches to serve Chicago area commuter rail lines. Expected delivery of the first cars in mid 2024.

The coaches will be built at Alstom's plant in Hornell, New York. The coaches will have a "streamlined modern" interior with large windows, USB plugs, full LED lighting, a climate control system that adjusts to passenger load, and wide, touchless doors. They will comply with all Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

requirements. Each car will have wheelchair lifts on each side. According to Alstom Americas President Jerome Wallut, the new cars will allow Metra to "extract maximum value from their fleet investments by increasing fleet reliability, enhancing overall passenger experience and ensuring maximum accessibility for all passengers."

Metra's Board of Directors has authorized the company to order a total of 500 multilevel cars worth \$1.8 billion.

## SHORT LINES

**Canadian National** and short line operator Watco have reached an agreement on the sale to Watco of 900 miles of CN track in northern Ontario, Wisconsin, and Michigan. The sale includes the former 250-mile Algoma Central Railroad between Sault St Marie and Oba in Ontario. Watco will continue to operate the popular Agawa Canyon excursion train. Also included are 650 miles of branch lines of the former Wisconsin Central in Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan..... **New York City Subway ridership** reached 1.9 million on March 12. Since the pandemic hit, subway ridership, which was routinely above 5 million a day, had dropped to as low as 300,000 a day according to a *Progressive Railroading* report of March 18th...

..... **The long awaited Gulf Coast service** is back in the news as a frustrated Amtrak heads to the U.S. Surface Transportation Board for a favorable ruling to get the train restarted. Amtrak is proposing new twice daily service between New Orleans and Mobile, Alabama. Amtrak has been continually rebuffed despite their legal right to access the tracks of railroads after payment of a fair and reasonable fee. CSX is requiring a huge fee of \$2 billion and the City of Mobile is breathlessly claiming that a train every few hours would somehow paralyze freight movements to the Port of Alabama..... **Sound detection sensors** have been added by Canadian Pacific to wayside monitors that can determine from the sound if a wheel bearing needs to be replaced.

*Trains Magazine* reported in November that hot box detectors might give a 100-mile warning, but sound detectors can give a three month warning, allowing plenty of time to replace the bearing before it fails and causes a wreck..... **Michigan Governor Whitmer's budget** recommendations added \$12.8 million for transit and rail improvements in Michigan. This includes \$6.8 million of new support for local and intercity transit and \$5.6 million for passenger and freight improvements. The recommendation also restores previously diverted sales tax revenues to transit and rail programs..... **The first Rocky Mountaineer** excursion to Moab, Utah, in August will have MARP's Chuck and Jean Merckel on board. They will travel in the private sleeping car *Berlin* from Chicago to Denver where they will join the excursion train to Grand Junction, and then traverse the Cane Creek branch line to Moab. The branch has never seen a passenger train..... **Grand Trunk passenger locomotive 5030**, a 4-6-2 Baldwin that has been a static fixture in Jackson's R. A. Greene Park since 1958, has been sold by the city to the Colebrookdale Railroad Preservation Trust in Boyertown, Pennsylvania, who plan to restore it to operation..... **The Agawa Canyon Tour Train and the Bear Train** are the subject of negotiations between Watco and a trio of organizations in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. Northern Ontario Business reported on April 20 that Watco, which purchased the 476-kilometer Sault Ste. Marie-Hurst railroad from Canadian National, has agreed to continue to operate the Agawa Canyon Tour Train on a seasonal basis. The Missanabie Cree First Nation, N1 Strategy, and The Machine Shop have formed a partnership and are working to create the ultimate tourist experience in Sault Ste. Marie. Plans to operate the Bear Train have not been finalized, but the train would resurrect passenger service over the full length of the railroad to Hurst for the first time since the train was discontinued in 2015..... **New York City's new Moynihan Train Hall** opened to great acclaim on January 1, 2021, following a \$1.6 billion renovation of the interior of the James A Farley Building, New York's former main post office. The behemoth Beaux-Arts Farley Building occupies a complete block between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Avenues, across 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue from Pennsylvania Station, both of which sit above most of the 21 below-ground tracks. Although not as majestic as the former above ground structure of Penn Station (demolished in the 1960s), the former mail sorting space, transformed into the Moynihan Train Hall, is a lofty temple with soaring skylights, giving the city the uplifting gateway it deserves. All sorts of herculean challenges remain to be solved at the dreary, subterranean Penn Station, referred to by *The New Times* on January 11 as that "raging dumpster fire."



# Planning for the future

Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers officials provide long-term rail planning comments to MDOT



Amtrak train 359 at Jackson in 2014. (JHG photo)

Developing train schedules that facilitate connections with other trains, intercity buses, and local transit for maximum passenger convenience is one recommendation from MARP officials to MDOT.

MARP provided MDOT with a series of comments about the future of rail passenger service in Michigan. The comments were submitted on February 10 following a virtual interview with MDOT on February 4. The purpose of the interview was to obtain input for developing the Michigan Mobility 2045 State Long Range Transportation Plan. The plan will guide the development of road, air, rail, transit, water, and other passenger and freight modes for 25 years into the future. It is scheduled to be adopted by the Michigan Transportation Commission in October of 2021.

MARP indicated that we want to see a system of intercity trains that are modern, fast, reliable, and operate on frequent, regular-interval schedules to meet the travel needs of all passengers. On the corridor between Chicago and Detroit/Pontiac departures should be hourly or bi-hourly. The trains should connect all significant population centers in Michigan with other

population centers in Michigan and centers throughout the United States and Canada. The system must be closely integrated with other means of public passenger travel to allow seamless transfer from one mode to the other and to promote travel into Michigan.

We believe that the reduced dependency on road travel will bring enormous economic benefit to Michigan through the rejuvenation of the downtown areas of our cities, increased tourism, expansion of rail-oriented industry, and a less hectic lifestyle. These important societal advantages will accrue over road travel even when travel times are similar. Other advantages include reducing conflicts with urban and rural land uses, improving human mobility and convenience, reducing road congestion, decreasing the need for costly road expansion, increasing travel safety, conserving energy resources, reduction of impacts to air and water resources, and improving space

utilization. We believe Michigan is in a unique position to optimize the return on assets from its ownership and previous investments in rail service, both passenger and freight.

We listed the following specific rail passenger issues that must be addressed:

1. Continue the development of the Michigan Line Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Program as defined by MDOT. This is essential to develop a reliable, high-speed corridor for rail passengers traveling between Chicago and Detroit/Pontiac and on routes connecting to and from the corridor. We cannot overemphasize the importance of this program.

2. Make critically needed improvements in two specific problem areas in Michigan in order to prevent delays for passengers traveling on the Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac corridor.

- a. Separate passenger trains and freight trains on the 1.7 mile

section of Canadian National railroad at Battle Creek. (See Figure 1 below).

- b. Work with host railroads Canadian National and Conrail Shared Assets to reduce freight train interference between Dearborn and Pontiac. Improving fluidity of train movements will benefit both passenger and freight.

3. Continue to work with Indiana and Illinois, Norfolk Southern, Amtrak, and USDOT to develop the federally designated high-speed corridor between the Michigan border and Chicago. Congestion in this area results in continual, lengthy delays for Michigan passengers. Removing this congestion will not only help rail passengers, but will also help speed rail freight movements and potentially draw trucks and autos off roads.

4. Install a track connection northeast of New Buffalo to allow trains to/from Grand Rapids access to the high speed corridor and allow these trains to serve New Buffalo (See Figure 2 at end of article).

5. Continue the ongoing program to separate or protect road/rail grade crossings. This is an important safety issue, especially as passenger train speeds increase. Grade crossings should be closed, grade separated, or protected by devices such as four quadrant gates, skirting/center line barriers, pedestrian barriers, and advanced warning devices.

6. Install fencing and cautioning signage in appropriate areas to prohibit crossing between station tracks, and reduce trespass-

ing near stations, in yards, and on portions of the right-of-way deemed prone to trespassing.

6. Continue to improve, rebuild, or replace passenger stations in order to improve the total passenger experience, consistent with the preservation and adaptive reuse of the remaining historic depot buildings. Provide multimodal facilities that support the complete end-to-end journey, including suitable waiting rooms, restrooms, platforms, parking, lighting, multilingual signage, handicapped accessibility, emerging mobility access, and micro-mobility solutions.

7. Initiate a program to install level boarding facilities, consistent with FRA and ADA standards, at the busiest stations to enhance the comfort and safety of all passengers as well as help keep trains on time.

8. Establish train schedules to provide departures on the corridor between Chicago and Detroit/Pontiac once every hour during prime hours and approximately once every two hours at other travel times.

9. Ensure that every possible effort is made to adhere to scheduled times of arrival and departure. This is critical to attracting and retaining passengers, particularly business travelers.

10. Develop the Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac corridor to at least 5-6 round trips before initiating any new routes in Michigan. Once the corridor is running well with large numbers of passengers, support for new routes will be strong.

11. Schedule at least one train

See *Planning* next page

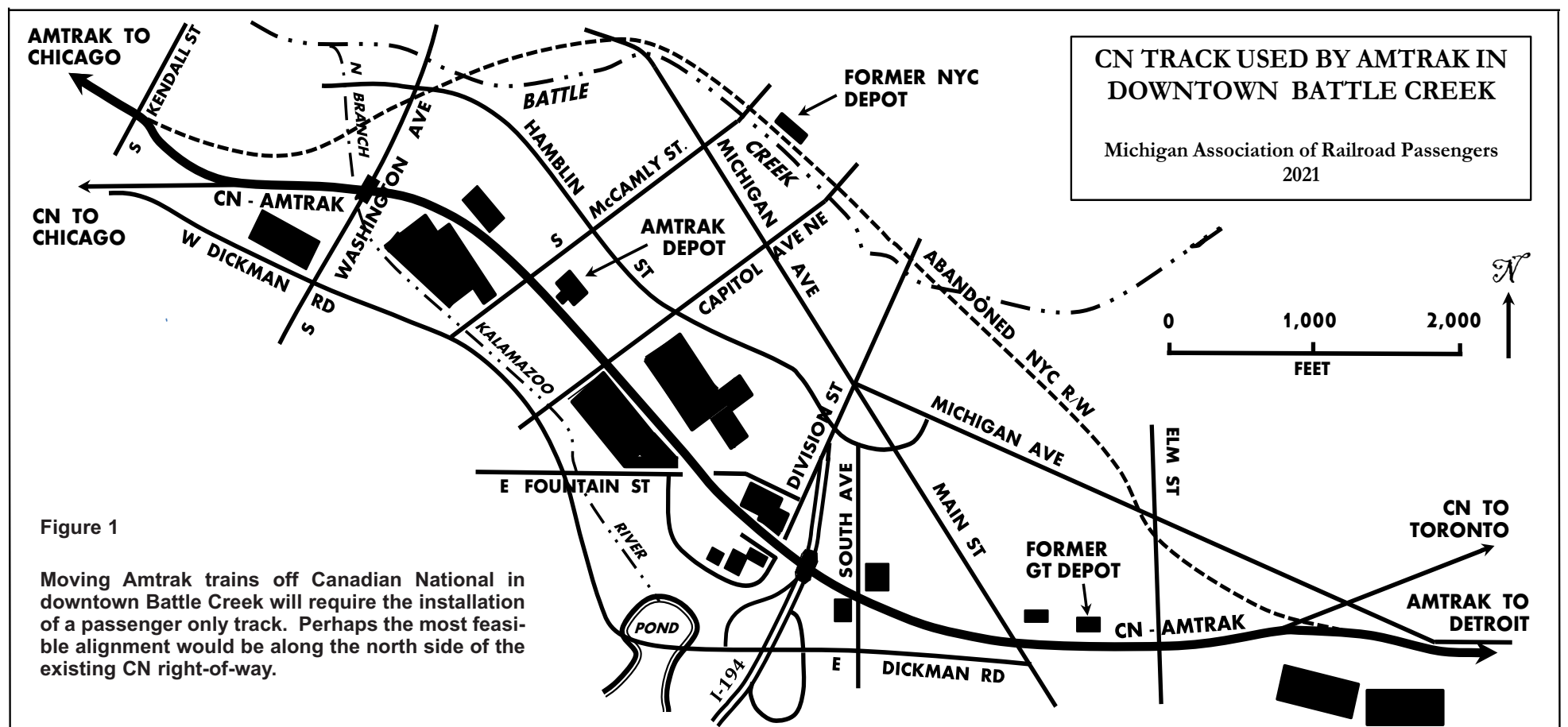


Figure 1

Moving Amtrak trains off Canadian National in downtown Battle Creek will require the installation of a passenger only track. Perhaps the most feasible alignment would be along the north side of the existing CN right-of-way.



## Planning continued from page 6

to arrive in Detroit before 11 AM and one train to depart from Detroit after 8 PM. This will require either an overnight train, or trains leaving/arriving at Chicago at inopportune hours, or trains that originate and terminate in Niles, Kalamazoo, or (via Kalamazoo) in Grand Rapids.

12. Develop train schedules that facilitate connections with other trains, intercity buses, and local transit for maximum passenger convenience.

13. Provide modern, well maintained coaches and improved on-board food service to make for a comfortable travel experience for the passenger. There should be a business class seating option. Provisions must be made for regular maintenance and mid-life upgrades for the new coaches coming online today, as well as planning for replacement of this equipment about 2045.

14. Provide fast, safe, and reliable Diesel locomotives that meet or exceed evolving emissions standards. Evaluate the use of electrification of the Michigan corridor or the use of emerging power systems, such as hydrogen powered locomotives. Provisions must be made for regular maintenance and mid-life upgrades for the new locomotives coming online today, as well as planning for the replacement of this equipment about 2045.

15. Support new through trains between Michigan and Canada to allow convenient and efficient travel between Canada and the U.S.

16. Initiate Thruway bus services, such as those proposed by MARP between Ann Arbor, Dearborn, Detroit, and Windsor, to provide corridor train connections for Amtrak and Via trains terminating in Detroit and Windsor.

17. Add service between Chicago and Grand Rapids on a route that operates on the corridor via Kalamazoo.

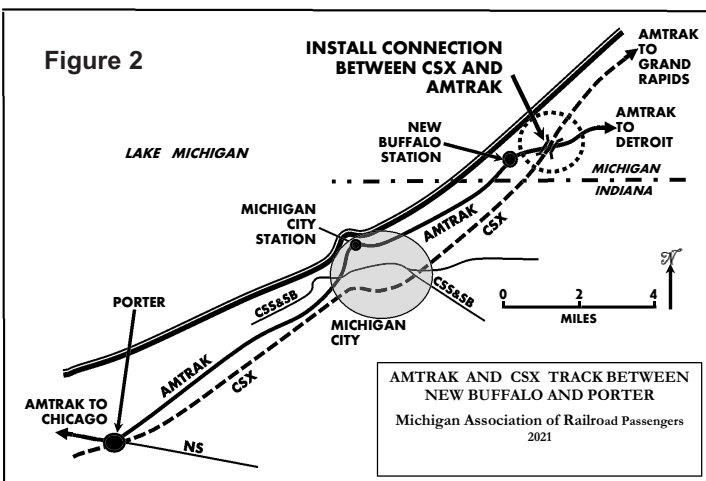
18. Add service to the Blue Water route. Terminate at least one new train on this route in Bay City instead of Port Huron.

19. Complete the required environmental and engineering studies and implement new service connecting Detroit, Ann Arbor, Lansing and Grand Rapids/Holland/Muskegon. Extend this route to Toledo to provide vitally important connections to the rest of the Amtrak system.

20. Complete studies of the proposed excursion service between Ann Arbor and Traverse City/Petoskey and implement service. Consider the use of a private operator similar to the operation of the Grand Canyon Railroad in Arizona and the Cumbres and Toltec Railroad in Colorado and New Mexico.

21. Implement the long sought commuter rail service in Southeast Michigan, including service in the Detroit area, service to Detroit Metro Airport, and service on the Ann Arbor-Howell-Brighton route. MDOT should take the lead in implementing this service by working with all parties involved. In the Detroit area, trains could serve both the existing Amtrak Station and, as a secondary station for Detroit, the former Michigan Central Station (MCS), which is currently under restoration for an office complex by the Ford Motor Company. (See the separate article about MCS.)

22. Continue state support for Thruway bus service to points in Northern Michigan and across the Upper Peninsula that make connections to transportation networks in Wisconsin and Minnesota. This will serve the mobility needs of underserved populations in rural areas of the state.



Shifting Amtrak's Pere Marquette from CSX to the Amtrak high speed line between Porter and New Buffalo will require a new track connection east of New Buffalo.

MARP suggestions as to what the MM 2045 Plan contain

1. Specific goals for expanding existing or initiating new intercity and commuter rail service by 2045. These goals should include completion of all improvement and expansion projects already underway or in the planning process. The goals should also include the new projects listed above or other projects identified by MDOT.
2. A basic timeline for implementing these projects. The timeline must be based on reasonable assumptions. Regular progress reports should be made to the public.
3. A list of governmental funding sources to provide funding for these projects. The plan should assume that funding will be provided over the years from existing Federal, State, and local sources. In addition, careful study is needed to identify funding opportunities from existing programs that may not be normally associated with rail transportation and from anticipated future, and as yet undefined, governmental sources.
4. An assessment of the potential for private funding. Corporate funding providers should be especially attract-

ed to the development of real estate and station facilities as shown by the very successful private development of the new station at New Buffalo, as well as by the interest of Ford Motor Company in developing Michigan Central Station, and by the reported profitability of Amtrak's Real Estate Division. The potential for other private funding should be explored in areas such as joint operations with private bus operators, providing food services, advertising in stations and in Amtrak printed materials, and in the sale of naming

rights. Once the expansion of passenger services causes ridership to increase into the millions, private interest in funding other aspects of rail operations should come willingly, and relieve passenger operators from complete reliance on government funding. MDOT asked what they could do to help MARP meet these goals. We responded with two ideas. 1. Establish an advisory committee within the MDOT Office of Rail. MARP, who represents rail passengers in Michigan, will be happy to participate without compensation. Face to face

meetings such as this should promote understanding between all parties and help MDOT assess the effectiveness of rail office programs. 2. Keep the public informed of MDOT Office of Rail actions. We think MDOT and Amtrak should be proud of their work on their important projects. Statements from MDOT project managers should be given out on a regular basis as to the goals, progress to date, and anticipated future work.

# Amtrak announces resumption of daily service on long distance trains

By Kay Chase

Funding made available in the American Rescue Plan Act will allow Amtrak to restore full daily service on the twelve routes that were reduced to thrice-weekly service last fall due to the pandemic. Amtrak has announced that on May 24 daily service will begin with the *California Zephyr*, *Coast Starlight*, *Empire Builder* and *Texas Eagle*. On May 31 daily service will begin on the *Capitol Limited*, *City of New Orleans*, *Lake Shore Limited* and *Southwest Chief*. On June 7<sup>th</sup> daily service will begin on the *Crescent*, *Palmetto*, *Silver Meteor* and *Silver Star*.

The American Rescue Plan Act, passed by

Congress and signed into law by President Biden on March 11, provides \$1.7 billion in COVID-relief funding for Amtrak, which has seen ridership and revenue drop precipitously during the pandemic. The funding provided will also allow Amtrak to bring back some 1,200 workers furloughed last October as a result of the pandemic.

The most up-to-date train schedules are available when booking your trip on Amtrak.com and in the mobile app. Go to amtrak.com/timetables to find timetables for the long-distance routes now operating on tri-weekly schedules.

## Tri-weekly service continues

**Through May 23 from Chicago**  
Cal. Zephyr - MonWedSat  
Em. Builder - MonThuSat  
Texas Eagle - TueFriSat  
Coast Starlight (from Los Angeles) - MonWedFri

**Through May 30 from Chicago**  
Capitol Limited - MonThuSat  
City of N. Orleans - MonThuSat  
Lake Shore Limited - MonThuSat  
Southwest Chief - MonThuSat

**Through June 6 from New York**  
Cresent - ThuFriSun  
Palmento - MoThuSat  
Silver Meteor - Mon to Thu  
Silver Star - FriSatSun

## Daily service continues

May 24	May 31	June 7
<i>California Zephyr</i> (Chicago – Omaha – Denver – Salt Lake City – San Francisco)	<i>Capitol Limited</i> (Washington DC – Pittsburgh – Cleveland – Chicago)	<i>Crescent</i> (New York – Washington DC – Atlanta – New Orleans)
<i>Coast Starlight</i> (Seattle – Portland – Sacramento – Oakland – Los Angeles)	<i>City of New Orleans</i> (Chicago – Memphis – Jackson – New Orleans)	<i>Palmetto</i> (New York – Washington DC – Charleston – Savannah)
<i>Empire Builder</i> (Chicago – St. Paul-Minneapolis – Spokane – Portland/Seattle)	<i>Lake Shore Limited</i> (New York/Boston – Albany – Buffalo – Chicago)	<i>Silver Meteor</i> (New York – Savannah – Jacksonville – Orlando – Miami)
<i>Texas Eagle</i> (Chicago – St. Louis – Dallas – San Antonio – Los Angeles)	<i>Southwest Chief</i> (Chicago – Kansas City – Albuquerque – Los Angeles)	<i>Silver Star</i> (New York – Raleigh – Jacksonville – Orlando – Tampa – Miami)

# Michigan Flyer to Resume Service

By Hugh Gurney

Effective April 26, 2021, Michigan Flyer will resume service with twelve round trips daily serving East Lansing, Brighton, Ann Arbor and Detroit Metro Airport. The resumption is due to an uptick in air travel and support from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act. (This is a simplified schedule; all buses will serve all existing stops every day). For the time being, all coaches will be operating at 50% capacity permitting passengers to maintain a safe distance from one another and all passengers must wear masks per CDC requirements for all public transit.

As reported by Indian Trails President Chad Cushman and Interline Director Brenda Cheney, Indian Trails is operating approximately 75-80% of pre-pandemic miles with assistance from MDOT and the CARES Act. This includes all Northern Michigan and Northern Wisconsin routes subsidized by MDOT or WisDOT. Because of the reduced service on Amtrak's Wolverine line, none of the three Indian Trails routes between southern Michigan and northern Michigan are connecting with Amtrak. Amtrak Thruway service remains available on the Milwaukee-Escanaba-Marquette-Calumet run.

Indian Trails discontinued all routes to Chicago in October, 2020. Passengers heading to and from points west must now transfer to Greyhound in Kalamazoo or Benton Harbor. Indian Trails is now the only carrier serving East Lansing, Lansing and Grand Rapids as Greyhound has discontinued all service on the I-96 corridor. Indian Trails has notified the Southeast Regional Transportation Authority that it is ready to again offer service between Ann Arbor and Detroit, but has received no indication from RTA as to when that service will actually resume. For more information, go to MichiganFlyer.com.



# Rail director settling into position

*Director Anastor is looking forward to working with new administration*

On March 3rd MARP officers met virtually with newly appointed MDOT Office of Rail Director Peter Anastor and members of his staff. Mr. Anastor, who replaces Tim Hoeffner, is from Flint and has worked for the State of Michigan



**Peter Anastor**  
MDOT Office of  
Rail Director

in various positions, primarily in economic development and with the State Budget office. He looks forward to his new position, especially in light of the favorable attitudes toward passenger rail expressed by President Biden and by Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg.

MARP's Steve Vagnozzi and John Guidinger brought up several specific issues. In response to a comment about MDOT exploring thru rail service to Toronto, we forwarded a copy of Yuri Popov's proposal for bus connections between the Via trains at Windsor and Southeast Michigan. We pressed the

need to restore the two additional round trips on the Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac corridor, especially the Train 355 connection at Chicago to Detroit. At present, Train 354 leaves too early to connect with most of the other Amtrak trains and many of the commuter trains at Chicago.

MDOT is monitoring the situation and looking at three criteria before restoring trains. These include: 1) ridership growth on the one existing round trip, 2) the availability of funding, and 3) how well other routes in other states have recovered from the effects of the pandemic. Before a second round trip can be added it must be determined that the federal stimulus money can be used for this purpose.

We asked when the new Siemens Venture cars will be put into service in Michigan. Mr. Anastor indicated that a great deal of preliminary work is needed, including testing, putting car leases in place, and setting up various operational procedures. Perhaps in the next few months some of the new cars will start to be phased in on some of the Michigan trains. The first cars to be

placed in service will be coaches and business class cars; the latter will offer expanded seating for business class passengers, which often sell out at present. The café cars will come later.

**The first cars to be placed in service will be coaches and business class cars; the latter will offer expanded seating for business class passengers, which often sell out at present.**

We talked about the planned speed increases on the Michigan Corridor. Although the pandemic has reduced ridership, it has not greatly affected the ongoing work to upgrade the corridor track owned by MDOT. There should be a speed increase in the spring between Kalamazoo and Battle Creek as long as the FRA approves the increase. MDOT is working eastward with the improvements, but significant speed increases will not be noticeable until the entire Kalamazoo-Dearborn

segment is upgraded, tested, and approved by the FRA.

We brought up the idea that we need additional frequencies on the Chicago-Detroit corridor. Peter felt that it is too early to talk about increased service. MDOT is concentrating on getting back to the pre-pandemic level of service and placing the new cars in service. For any expansion beyond this, there will need to be federal startup money available.

Other subjects discussed included the idea that the Michigan Corridor needs to be developed to some level of increased frequencies before expanding services on other routes in Michigan. We also pressed the need for better service to Detroit with a train that would arrive before 11 AM and leave after 8 PM.

Mr. Anastor and the MDOT staff seemed to sincerely appreciate the efforts of MARP to reach out to them with our interest and ideas.

## MDOT receives kudos for excellence

By Hugh Gurney

In February, 2021, civil engineers from the Michigan Department of Transportation Office of Rail and Quandel Consultants jointly received the prestigious "Engineering Eminent Conceptor Award". The award was given by the American Council of Engineering Companies of Michigan for the extensive work completed in 2020 on the 136 mile MDOT owned rail line between Kalamazoo and Dearborn. Project management services provided by Quandel Consultants included planning, implementing and monitoring. The ACEC/M annually recognizes Michigan engineering and surveying projects and engineering professionals who have significantly contributed to the profession.

Work accomplished included replacing tracks, modifying curves for higher speeds, improving grade crossings, replacing bridges, activating a positive train control system, fencing and other safety improvements. In the Autumn 2020/Winter 2021 issue of The Michigan Passenger, MARP member Clark Charnetski provided a detailed description of this work.

The MDOT owned rail line is a key portion the Michigan Line connecting Pontiac/Detroit with Chicago.

"I am thrilled MDOT and Quandel Consultants won this top honor for their hard work involved in the important Accelerated Rail Project," said

Peter Anastor, MDOT Office of Rail Director in a press release. "MDOT took bold initiatives to become a nationally recognized leader in supporting intercity rail service by acquiring the railroad right of way and investing in three infrastructure improvements. Now Michigan is the only state outside the Northeast Corridor carrying trains at speeds of 110 mph."

Daniel Schulte, Quandel Consultants Senior Director of Engineering noted that this "truly unique project began in 2011 when MDOT became a recipient of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act federal funds dedicated to reinvigorating the economy and bringing passenger rail back as a prominent form of surface transportation. Neither the Federal Railroad Administration nor MDOT had ever undertaken a project like this, so the management team was essentially starting from scratch on many aspects of delivering a project of this magnitude."

Amtrak Vice President and Chief Engineer Gary Williams added, "Our partnership with MDOT is successful and important for the traveling public. From developing a rail safety system now used internationally to our work to correct years of deferred private maintenance, together we're building out Michigan's corridor east of Kalamazoo to shorten travel time and improve reliability."

## Second Chicago-St Paul Train Up to Minnesota Legislature

By Hugh Gurney

Most of the pieces to make possible a second daily Chicago-Twin Cities train, designated TCMC by the planners, have fallen into place. The State of Wisconsin has been awarded a \$12,569,200 Restoration and Enhancement (R&E) grant to support the first three years of operation. Wisconsin has pledged \$10 million toward the required \$25 million local match to qualify for a \$50 million Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI) grant for necessary capital improvements such as passing sidings and automatic switches. Amtrak has pledged another \$5 million. Forty one local governments, universities, chambers of commerce and host Canadian Pacific Railway have submitted letters of support. To date, the Minnesota State Legislature has failed to act on Minnesota's \$10 million portion of the required local share.

In 2020, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, long a supporter of TCMC, proposed that his state's \$10 million toward the local match be included in a transportation bond issue, but the Minnesota leg-

islature failed to include the required funding in its final legislation. Walz announced in February, 2021, that the necessary \$10 million would be included in his 2021 capital investment proposal. It was pointed out that the \$10 million would not only leverage the federal grant for TCMC but would also unlock an additional \$40 million in track and signal improvements in Southeast Minnesota adding capacity for both passenger and freight trains.

Now Minnesota Senate President Jeremy Miller (R-Winona) has introduced a bipartisan bill to fund the state's required share. Among supporters is State Senator Mike Goggin (R-Red Wing). Both Winona and Red Wing are currently served by Amtrak's Empire Builder and would be served by TCMC. As Senate President, Miller should have some clout in getting the funding bill through that chamber. State Representative Alice Hausman (DFL-St Paul) has introduced a companion bill in the Minnesota House of Representatives.

Stay tuned.

## Testing

Amtrak car 10001, the Beach Grove, is shown passing through Jackson on April 27 on the rear of a track test train. Equipment in the car is probably testing the rebuilt track for higher speed operation. Higher speeds are expected soon between Kalamazoo and Battle Creek. (Doug Leffler photo)

