

# The Michigan PASSENGER

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Michigan Association of  
Railroad Passengers  
www.marp.org

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# Michigan Central Station restored to its former glory

## Can Trains Ever Return?

Detroit's Michigan Central Station, the long forlorn, ruined headquarters of the former Michigan Central Railroad and a major rail depot once serving 1.5 million passengers a year, reopened fully restored on June 6, 2024. Ford Motor Company's commitment to its own Detroit heritage and a costly six-year restoration effort, presented Detroit the gift of the century. Reopening to unanimous glowing reviews, Ford's solid support for this Detroit icon had cost the company an amount estimated as high as a cool \$1.2 billion.

Opened in December of 1913, Michigan Central Station served the traveling public and railroad office workers for 75 years. It was closed in 1988 and over the next 36 years the building deteriorated from the ill effects of weather and aggressive vandalism. Ford courageously acquired the derelict building in 2018 and renovated the station



Detroit's beautifully restored Michigan Central Station. The building was built by the Michigan Central Railroad and opened to the public in December of 1913. It was designed by the architectural team of Reed and Stern, and Warren and Wetmore of New York City, who also designed Grand Central Terminal. (Kenneth Borg photo.)

not to be a train station, but the centerpiece of Michigan Central, a 30-acre technology and cultural hub in the Corktown neighborhood of Detroit's south side. Michigan Central will now be an Innovation Center housing entrepreneurs, scholars, creators, and

others to working develop new ideas, technologies, and products.

A neighboring building also acquired by Ford is the former post office. This building has been fully restored to become

See *Michigan Central* page 4

## Replacement of Susquehanna River Bridge Begins



As reported in *Progressive Railroading* on July 22, Amtrak, federal, state and local officials the previous week met to mark the start of the Susquehanna River rail bridge replacement project in northeast Maryland. The \$2.7 billion project involves constructing two parallel, double track bridges each about 4,200 feet long, as well as modernizing five miles of track and replacing catenary, signals, and three interlockings. The improvements will allow safely increasing train speeds to 160 mph, and eliminating conflicts with maritime traffic. Standing in front of the bridge in the photo above are Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner (third from right), Deputy US Transportation Secretary Polly Trottenberg (holding sign with Gardner), FRA Administrator Amit Bose (fourth from left) and other state and local officials. (Amtrak Photo)

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

Contributors: Eric Schertzing, Hugh Gurney & Tom Fletcher

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## MICHIGAN SERVICES

### Amtrak Train Schedules Effective April, 2024 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 (SEE NOTE)	Daily	Daily	Daily	Mile	Days of Operation	Daily	Daily	Daily (SEE NOTE)	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	10:02p
9:29a	4:52p	6:32p	8:24p	89		Niles, MI				11:04a	1:01p
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	Mile	Days of Operation	Daily		
6:30p	0	Dp	CHICAGO, IL, Un Sta (CT)	Ar	9:08a
9:14p	89		St. Joe-Benton Harbor, MI (ET)		8:10a
9:50p	116		Bangor, MI		7:32a
10:33p	151		Holland, MI		6:49a
11:34p	176	Ar	GRAND RAPIDS, MI (ET)	Dp	6:00a

NOTE: Trains 350 and 353 will operate Friday, Saturday, and Sundays only for the period of May 6 through October 18, 2024, to allow for track work. Holiday exceptions during which these trains will operate normally are: **Memorial Day**, Monday, May 27; **Juneteenth**, Wednesday, June 16; **Independence Day**, Thursday, July 4; and **Labor Day**, Monday, September 2.

These schedules are provided for planning purposes only and may not show recent time changes. Contact with Amtrak at [AMTRAK.COM](http://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](http://MARP.ORG)

### MARP STATION REPRESENTATIVES

Chuck Merckel, Coordinator (734-330-0281)

Station	Staff	MARP Volunteer
Albion	Bus	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	Greg Ptucha/Roberta Deering
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	Tom Schindler
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 VandeGrift

## Letters & emails

### Small town residents have difficulty getting around

Dear Editor,  
I read with interest Louis Vallance's article about the convoluted trip he must take to travel between two states in the Midwest. I liked his article very much. This really illustrates the need for more intercity connections. He described in great detail the inconvenient trans-

fers and delays in order to make what should be a simple, easy trip. This type of personal story best illustrates what people in smaller towns go through to get around without driving. Since Covid, Greyhound has cut back so much between larger cities. I looked into travel by Amtrak and bus to some

of the vacation spots in Michigan such as Traverse City and Charlevoix from where I live in Detroit. It seemed like such an unnecessarily long trip that I decided to vacation in areas that are easier to get to by bus or train.

Sincerely, Justine Smith, Detroit, MI

# JOIN MARP TODAY!

It's easy.  
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Or visit [marp.org](http://marp.org) to join online.

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Apt/Unit# \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
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# Amtrak Ridership up in 2023 from 2022

By Tom Fletcher

In March Amtrak Governmental Affairs released the annual State of Michigan Fact Sheet for the previous fiscal year, 2023. As can be seen from the table at right, overall ridership on the three Michigan Lines (Blue Water, Pere Marquette and the Wolverines) was up nearly 18% in 2023 compared to 2022.

Notably, all Michigan stations except Bangor showed growth year over year. Increases in ridership of over 30 percent were recorded for Port Huron (40 percent!!), New Buffalo, Kalamazoo, Niles, and Battle Creek. This robust ridership increase greatly helps support adding the additional trains that MARP continues to support. On a less than happy note, Amtrak continues to rate on-time-performance (OTP) on most host railroads as “poor.” In Michigan, other than for the Pere Marquette, the Michigan trains showed less than ideal OTP for the year.

In other information contained in the release, Amtrak highlighted several projects completed or in the works, several of those listed include:

**Projects Completed**

- Two viaducts replaced in Jackson
- Various sections of track upgraded
- Incremental Train Control System (ITCS) upgraded from Chesterton, Indiana to Albion, that extended the distance of 110-mph running

**Future Projects (dependent upon securing funding)**

- Installation of 20 miles of second main

State of Michigan Ridership			
City	2022	2023	% Change
Albion	1,890	2,044	8%
Ann Arbor	122,757	136,431	11%
Bangor	3,337	3,250	-3%
Battle Creek	24,581	32,452	32%
Dearborn	52,850	61,448	16%
Detroit	54,304	69,346	28%
Dowagiac	3,878	4,621	19%
Durand	9,535	10,532	10%
East Lansing	59,224	70,706	19%
Flint	23,026	23,434	2%
Grand Rapids	40,753	44,464	9%
Holland	28,581	28,622	0%
Jackson	15,319	16,598	8%
Kalamazoo	73,613	97,957	33%
Lapeer	6,831	7,547	10%
New Buffalo	19,564	26,598	36%
Niles	13,056	17,105	31%
Pontiac	12,013	13,340	11%
Port Huron	10,177	14,271	40%
Royal Oak	20,432	22,794	12%
St. Joseph	11,741	12,721	8%
Troy	25,769	30,417	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>633,231</b>	<b>746,698</b>	<b>18%</b>

- track between Niles and Glenwood Road
- Installation of the Battle Creek bypass
  - Installation of the Wayne Junction flyover
  - Completion of the South of the Lake Analysis – in cooperation with Indiana and Michigan, the FRA, and the freight railroads from that area

While the ridership results are certainly encouraging, there is still much improvement to be had as MARP continues to advocate for improvements in many areas of passenger rail service.



The small Port Huron Station recorded a 40 percent increase in ridership between 2022 and 2023. (Adam Moss photo via Wikipedia.)

# Rail Passenger Association Day on the Hill



Left to right - Larry Krieg, Eric A Schertzing, and Stanley Rhodes representing Michigan on March 19th at the RPA Capitol Hill Day. (Stanley Rhodes photo)

By Eric A Schertzing

For the first time in a long time Michigan has a full contingent of three elected National Council of Representatives working for the Rail Passenger Association (RPA). The Council consists of up to 112 elected representatives and up to 10 elected at-large members. Elected officers can add up to 15 additional at-large positions. Michigan is lucky to also have an at-large representative. Our three elected representatives are based on 301 RPA Michigan members of the 10,909 national RPA members as of August 31, 2023. Position terms run thru February, 2026. Larry Krieg is our returning Council member and Eric Schertzing and Stephen Schaack are new. Bob Meisner is our at-large member.

Larry and Eric returned from RailNation:DC-2024 Spring Advocacy Summit and Day on the Hill held March 17 to 20. Capitol Hill visits included meetings with staff from Michigan Congressional Representatives: Bergman, Scholten, Walberg, Slotkin, Kildee, McClain, James, Stevens, Tlaib, and Senator Peter’s Office. An RPA student intern from the University of Michigan, Stanley Rhoades, attended Hill meetings. The reception on Capitol Hill was cordial and very positive from both Republican and Democratic offices.

Wednesday’s agenda included remarks from the RPA Board Chair and President, Jim Mathews, a panel on success stories in passenger rail service in the Southeast, Amtrak and Federal Railroad Administrator presentations, and an address by luncheon speaker Christopher Coes, Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy at USDOT. Afternoon Workshops included Supporting the Corridor Identification Program, Preparing for the Next Surface Transportation Reauthorization, Advocacy lessons, and orientation for new Council members.

A key take-away from all the speakers was how much federal money is available. We learned that it’s up to the states to take the initiative and apply for it. It our job as advocates to get Michigan to go after more funding! Personal connections to elected officials are especially important and in-district meetings are a goal. Please feel free to reach out to any of us to learn more about RPA and our national advocacy.

The RPA Fall Council meeting will be held the last week-end of October in Tucson, Arizona. Everyone is welcome. Contact information for Michigan Council members is: Larry Krieg, [krieg45@gmail.com](mailto:krieg45@gmail.com).





A CPKC train about to enter the Detroit River Tunnel to Canada passes the restored Michigan Central Station. Passenger and mail trains once calling at Michigan Central Station included those of the Michigan Central, the New York Central (the MC was a subsidiary of the NY Central), trains of the Canadian Pacific, and trains of the Baltimore and Ohio. On the right in the photo is the newly restored post office building, now Ford's NewLab, a center for innovation. (Kenneth Borg photo.)

## Michigan Central Continued from page 1

NewLab at Michigan Central. Designed by Albert Kahn and opened in 1936 as a post office and mail-sorting facility serving the railroad, the building became the Detroit Public Schools' Book Depository in the early 1960s. After a devastating fire in 1987, this architectural gem was abandoned and stood empty for more than three decades. In 2018, it was bought by Ford to become a key piece in the Michigan Central vision. Today, this building is Michigan Central's engine of innovation and home to an open platform concept where everyone from startups to Fortune 500 companies work on solving the world's mobility challenges and discovering new technology.

A third building, designed by Rich and Associates, the new Bagley Parking Hub is a state-of-the-art mobility center located on the south side of Bagley Street at the bridge over the railroad tracks. In addition to providing 1,200 parking spaces, it offers support for e-bikes and scooters, electric vehicle charging stations, smart parking, and enhanced street life through exterior artwork, two new public plazas, and green spaces.

A fourth building, The Factory, was the first building to be restored and open at Michigan Central. Located about 1,500 feet to the northeast on the corner of Michigan Avenue and Rosa Parks Boulevard, this industrial building was once home to the Chicago Hosiery and Detroit-Alaska Knitting Mills factories. It is now the base for more than 250 members of Ford's autonomous vehicle business and operations team.

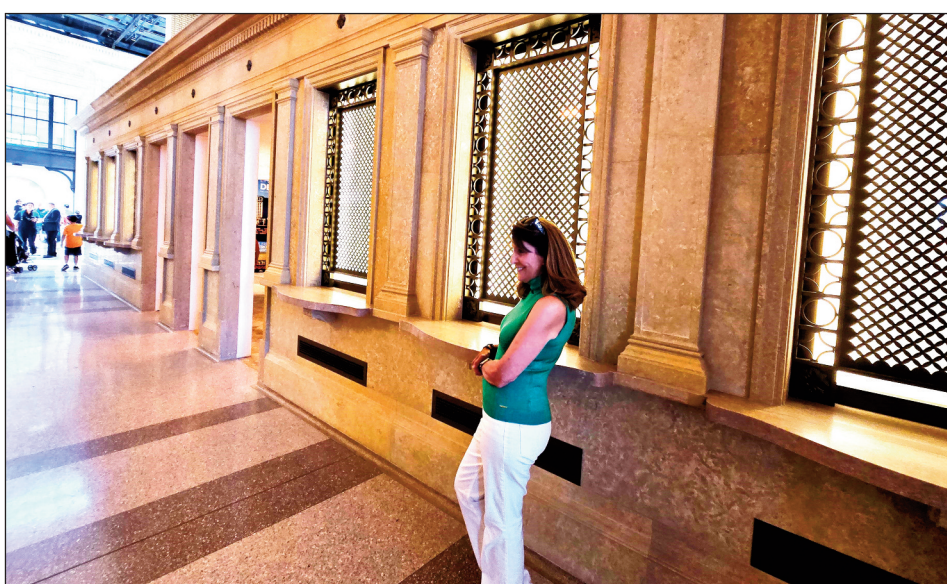
A fifth component is the restoration of Roosevelt Park, which is located in front of Michigan Central Station. In the summer of 2022, the City of Detroit broke ground on a project to restore and unify Roosevelt Park. This \$6 million revitalization project includes the removal of a roadway that split the park and divided two neighborhoods. The 13-acre park is now open for use by residents and features green space for rest, playing ball, picnics, and outdoor concerts. Green space is also generously incorporated in other parts of the Michigan Central complex.

Bill Ford, Executive Chair of Ford, the fireball behind the restoration, said, "This Station was our Ellis Island – a place where dreamers in search of new jobs and new opportunities first set foot in Detroit. But once the last train pulled out, it became a place where hope left. In 2018, I decided it was time to change that by reimagining this station as a place of possibility again. Over the past six years, Ford Motor Company and teams of forward thinkers, designers, community leaders, and more than 3,000 skilled tradespeople have worked to bring this landmark back to life."

See next page



Crowds visit the restored waiting room on June 12, 2024. The front entrance to the building with the huge windows is on the right and the entrance to the concourse and (previously) to the tracks is on the left. This room has been called the most magnificent room in Michigan. In the 1970s, MARP members volunteered to help replace the light bulbs in the chandeliers to keep the big room well illuminated. (Kenneth Borg photo.)



Left, the restored ticket windows. The exterior design of the ticketing area is similar to that of Grand Central Terminal in New York City. Right, the restored sunlit concourse where passengers once lined up to await boarding. The entrance to the tracks was at right. (Kenneth Borg photos.)



# VIA Rail to Order New Long Distance Cars and Locomotives

Federal Transport Minister Pablo Rodriguez announced on July 11 that Canada has set aside money for VIA Rail to go out for bids to replace existing long distance equipment. According to the *Daily Hive Urbanized* blog of that date, the new equipment will replace VIA Rail's long-distance fleet that currently serves over 400 communities across Canada. VIA Rail told *Daily Hive Urbanized* that the order will consist of over 40 new locomotives and more than 300 new passenger cars.

This order will be in addition to the funding in 2018 under which VIA Rail is presently acquiring 32 new sets of new Siemens Venture trains for the Windsor-Quebec City corridor. "We are very pleased with this important commitment from the Government of Canada, which is the latest in a series of significant investments supporting VIA Rail's transformation," said Mario Pélouin, the president and CEO of VIA Rail. "By renewing our fleet, we will be able to maintain our coast-to-coast services, continue to connect a multitude of communities, and

encourage more Canadians to choose rail. These new trains will support our vision of offering a modern, comfortable, accessible, and sustainable service."

The federal government first indicated its support for replacing VIA Rail's long distance fleet earlier this year in the 2024 federal budget, which stated that "funding amounts are not being released to protect the government's negotiating position for an upcoming procurement."

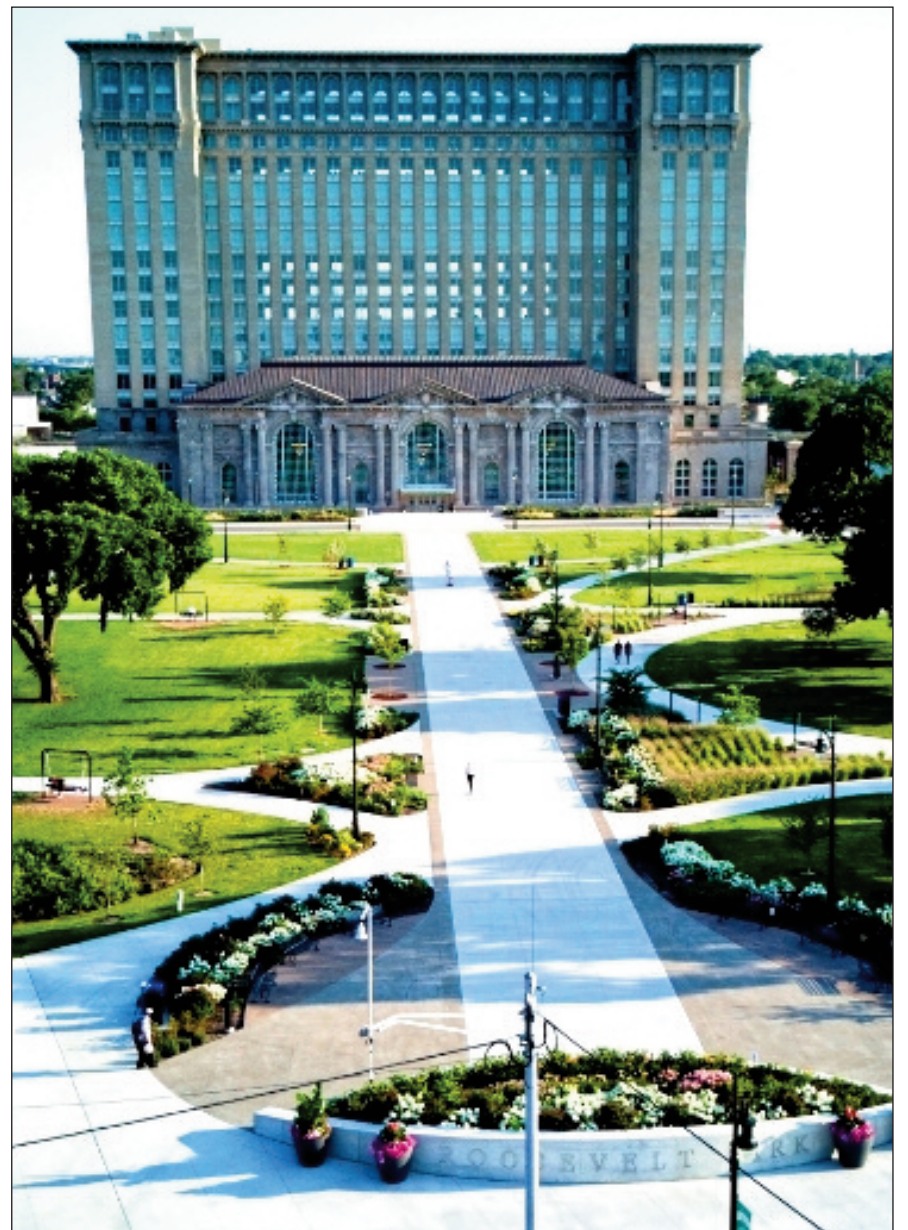
Current long distance VIA routes are:

- Toronto-Vancouver
- Winnipeg-Churchill
- Sudbury-White River
- Prince Rupert-Jasper
- Montréal-Senneterre
- Montréal-Jonquière
- Montréal-Halifax

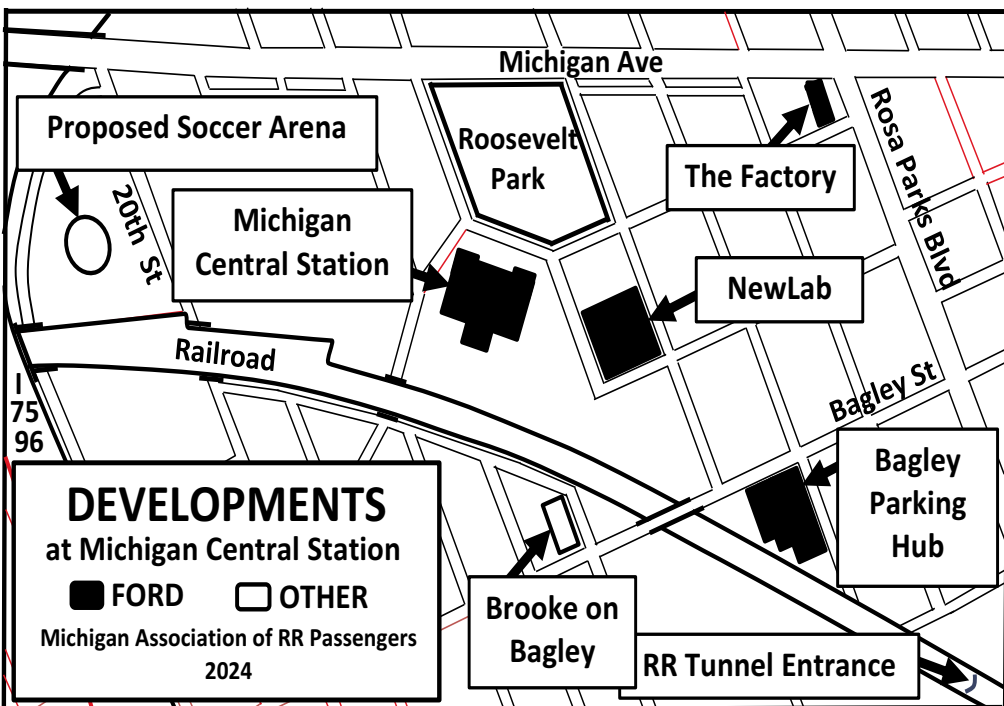
The current fleet is the oldest active equipment in North America, with most of the cars built between 1947 and 1955. MARP understands that both the Budd cars and the Renaissance cars acquired from Europe in 2000 will be replaced.



Above, the newly opened Brooke on Bradley, a \$23 million apartment house investment on the corner of Bagley Street and 16th Street, is a result of the Michigan Central redevelopment. These apartments are within walking distance of MCS and the NewLab. MCS can be seen in the right rear of the photo. (Brooke on Bradley photo.)



Above, restoration of Roosevelt Park adds attractive green space in front of MCS to Detroit's Corktown community. (Gary Melford photo.) About 250 miles to the east of MCS on the same railroad is Buffalo, New York. The once magnificent New York Central Railroad Station in Buffalo is close to ruins. Can the people in Buffalo find a sponsor similar to the Ford Motor Company who will restore Buffalo Central Terminal for new uses?



Base Map Source: Airbus Maxar Technologies Aerial Photography, and Google Mapping, 2024

## Michigan Central Continued

A sign of new life in the surrounding community is the opening on June 27 of the Brooke on Bagley, a new \$23 million, privately developed apartment building on Bagley Street at the corner with 16<sup>th</sup> Street. These upscale apartments include studios, one bedroom, and two bedroom apartments with many modern amenities to which fashionable apartment dwellers are accustomed. Another sign of new life is the recent announcement by the Detroit Football Club of a new soccer stadium planned for a site west of 20<sup>th</sup> Street.

Many MARP members can remember a thriving Michigan Central Station where trains could be boarded to all regions of the US and Canada. We were all disheartened to see its slow decline into disrepair, followed by abandonment and hopeless ruin. We dreaded the certain announcement of its demolition. Ford has changed all that. MARP's founder, John Delora, who was able to tour the building a few weeks ago, said that he was amazed to see the magnificent restoration that Ford had accomplished. We never believed in our wildest dreams that full restoration

would ever happen to Detroit's Michigan Central Station.

Can trains ever return to Michigan Central Station? The boarding platforms and canopies are gone but the mainline tracks continue to pass by about 450 feet south of the waiting room. Four long tracks that were once the leads to the boarding platforms remain in the weeds west of Vernor Highway on the railroad right-of-way. Passenger trains to and from Canada cannot realistically use the Amtrak station on Woodward Avenue and would prob-

ably have to stop at a new Detroit station near MCS. Commuter trains from the south or west would also need a terminal nearby. In a strikingly similar situation, years of public support in the Twin Cities resulted in the reconnection of tracks to their historic St. Paul Union Depot, which now serves four Amtrak passenger trains a day and provides office, restaurant, and meeting space in the magnificently restored downtown building.



# Windsor Welcomes New Siemens Corridor Trainsets



The new Siemens train sets ordered by Via Rail Canada for the Windsor-Toronto-Montreal-Quebec City corridor. These trains have a top speed of 200 km per hour (120 mph) and will fully replace the older cars and locomotives by the summer of 2025. (Via Rail Canada photos)



Peloquin predicts that 63% of the Siemens trains ordered in 2018 will be serving the Windsor-Quebec City corridor. By the summer of 2025, all the existing equipment, some as much as 77 years old, will be replaced.

The new trains can reach top speeds of 200 km per hour (120 mph). Each train has 194 economy seats, 87 business class seats, six wheelchair lifts and five mobility aid spaces. “The first thing that people will notice,” Peloquin noted, “is the ride quality. They’re much smoother than the old cars. The seats are more comfortable and wider. The aisles are wider. The train is fully accessible.”

“This is a brand new train for a brand new Windsor”, commented Member of Parliament Irek Kusmierczyk, who represents Windsor and Tecumseh in the Canadian

Federal Parliament. You see the transformation that’s happening in our community. Thousands of people are moving here, you see the jobs, the optimism, and now you’ve got an absolutely new train pulling into the station that’s going to be moving people here and moving our residents to destinations across Canada.”

Kusmierczyk added, “The next step is going to be high frequency rail, to make it quicker and more efficient to ride the rails. Then the step after that, which we’re working on simultaneously, is partnering with our American friends, and connecting Amtrak services to VIA Rail, so that you’ll be able to ride the train from Chicago to Detroit, to Windsor, and connect all the way to Toronto and to Quebec City.”

## By Hugh Gurney

On June 27, 2024, some 30 Windsor stakeholders and partners got their first look at one of VIA’s new state of the art trainsets, according to *The Windsor Star* on June 30. Leading the tour was Arnaud Lacaze, Vice President, Fleet Renewal for VIA Rail Canada.

The trainset is one of 32 ordered by VIA from Siemens Canada in December, 2018 at a total cost of CA\$989 million according to the January,

2019, issue of *Progressive Railroading*. The new units will replace the current equipment, some dating back to the 1950’s, on VIA’s Windsor-Quebec City corridor, which serves more than 4.5 million passengers annually.

Powered by one Siemens EPA Tier 4 compliant Charger locomotive, each trainset consists of five semi-permanently coupled coaches, including a cab car at the opposite end of the train, permitting it to operate in both directions.

These units are similar to Siemens trainsets currently operating within Austria and the Czech Republic and on international routes from Austria to Germany, Hungary, Switzerland, Italy and Slovakia, according to an article found in Wikipedia.

Mario Peloquin, VIA’s President and CEO, said that VIA has now received a total of 17 of the Siemens trainsets. Ten are currently in service and the other seven are still being tested. By the end of 2024,

# Amtrak On Time Performance for June

## By Tom Fletcher

Michigan trains averaged 68.5 percent on time in June, compared to 79.5 percent for May and 81.4 percent for April. The Wolverines, Blue Water and Pere Marquette had the following individual on time characteristics for June:

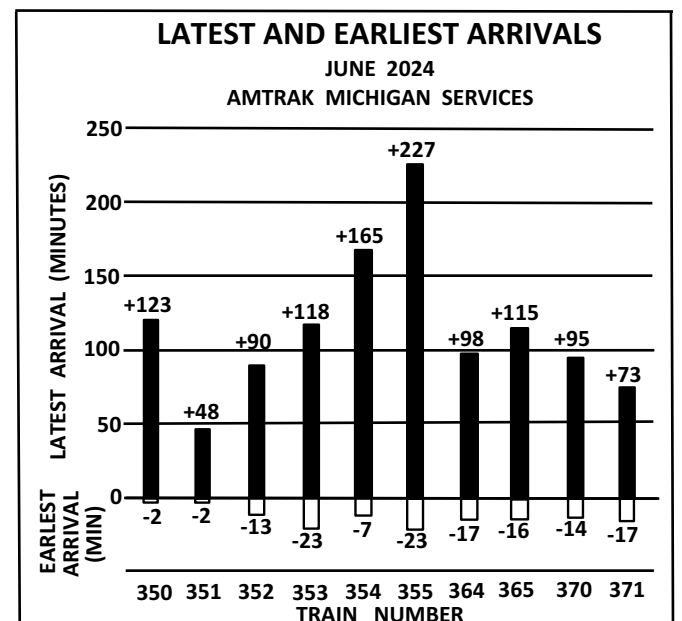
- The Wolverine trains were an average of 60% on time. Westbound 351 had the best on time performance. Westbound 355 was the worst offender. One westbound 355 was the latest train of the month, arriving in Chicago 3 hours and 30 minutes late.
- The Blue Water trains were an average of 73% on time. Eastbound #364 performed slightly better than Westbound 365.
- The Pere Marquette was on time an aver-

age of 90% of the time. Westbound 371 performed better than Eastbound 370.

- Data was missing for 35 trains.
- Ten trains arrived at stations more than 1 hour late during June.

OTP is defined as arriving within 15 minutes of the scheduled arrival time. The source for this information is Amtrak, which makes the station-to-station information available to the public. While the information is valuable, one cannot glean from it why the trains are late.

MARP recognizes the work of MARP members Chuck and Jeanie Merckel and Ren Farley in tracking the on time performance for the Michigan routes. Larry Krieg summarized the June results.



Source: Amtrak. Data missing for 35 trains.



# Indian Trails president and CEO answers criticism



By Chad Cushman  
President and CEO, Indian Trails

In an opinion article in the Spring 2024 edition of the Michigan Passenger, Louis Vallance, a resident of Cheboygan, Michigan, accused Indian Trails of operating a “horrible excuse of a transportation network.” As president and CEO of Indian Trails—and a member of MARP—I’d like to share a few facts and observations in response to Mr. Vallance’s criticisms.

Indian Trails is a 114-year-old, family-owned bus company based in Owosso, Michigan. We operate group charters, tours, shuttles, and airport transfers—as well as ten daily scheduled rural routes with which Mr. Vallance takes issue.

Under contract with the Michigan Department of Transportation and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, these ten routes connect 80 towns throughout rural Michigan and into Wisconsin and Minnesota. They also connect with airports, Amtrak, and the national transportation network, enabling thousands of rural residents each year to access urban centers such as Washington, D.C., St. Louis, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and many more.

Mr. Vallance has been a valued Indian Trails passenger on these rural routes for some 15 years, even though, for most of this time, he has bombarded us, MDOT, WisDOT, state representatives, and others with suggestions, complaints and demands. Due to his frequent, insistent communications, Indian Trails has asked Mr. Vallance to limit contact with our employees and route feedback through official channels only. We understand others have taken similar steps.

The chief subject of Mr. Vallance’s communications is how our schedules could be changed to better suit his wishes. Specifically, he’d like our schedules to coordinate with Amtrak’s in such a way that he can conduct same-day business in Chicago, return in the evening, and avoid any overnight stays.

Unfortunately, as we’ve explained to him, his suggestions are unrealistic due to various factors he fails to consider. For instance, Federal and state subsidies limit us to operating just one schedule per route. Therefore, our limited schedules must operate to best maximize connections to the rest of the national network for the millions of passengers who use it each year, not just one passenger. Our priority is to maximize connections for all passengers we serve. Judging by the lack of complaints, nearly all appreciate the essential transportation network we operate.

USA Today recently conducted a nationwide “10Best Readers’ Choice Awards” contest to choose the 10 Best Bus Services in America for 2024. Indian Trails was voted #3 of the 10 Best—above such well-known companies as Megabus, Greyhound, and FlixBus—and was the only Michigan-based carrier to make the list.

Ultimately, Mr. Vallance’s choice to ride with us for over 15 years suggests that, deep down, he might actually appreciate the service Indian Trails provides. We hope to welcome him aboard many more runs in the future.

# SHORT LINES

**Floridians are more afraid of traffic jams than alligators in their swimming pools** according to a recent Brightline ad. When asked, 59% of Floridians would prefer to find an alligator in their pool than to get stuck in traffic on a family road trip. Brightline suggests to leave the car (and the alligators) at home and book a train ride between South Florida and Orlando instead. To get a special Brightline fare of 40% off with a 7-day advance purchase use promo code “GATOR.” (Does Amtrak use such creative advertising?)..... **The Chicago Transit Authority has started work to extend the Red Line another 5.6 miles** into Chicago’s south side. As reported in *Rail Track and Signals* on June 6, the extension will go from the 95<sup>th</sup> Street Terminal to 130<sup>th</sup> Street and create four new stations. The initial work involves utility relocation, installation of shorter poles to provide utility service to adjacent properties, and relocation of power transformers on poles to underground. Demolition work will begin either late summer or fall and continue into 2025. The CTA states it has acquired all properties planned for demolition that are in the future track alignment.....**In New York City an innovative congestion pricing plan was shelved indefinitely** by New York governor Kathy Hochul, thereby threatening funding for badly needed transit projects. According to *NBC Universal* and *AM New York* in early June, the first such toll program in the US was to be a major source of new money for the MTA. But Hochul said she was concerned about the cost to New Yorkers. The MTA had board had voted by a wide margin to approve congestion pricing in December and it was set to begin on June 30. Cars would be charged \$15 to enter Manhattan at 61st Street and south, while trucks would be charged between \$24 and \$36, depending on size. The tolls would have been charged automatically using cameras at entrance places. Apparently, most of the overhead cameras had been installed and on June 14, the Federal Highway Administration gave their approval for the plan. Now proponents may sue the state over the cancellation issue.....

**The Brazilian state of São Paulo, has launched a massive investment program to build 40 inter-city, commuter rail, metro and light rail projects.**

According to the online *International Railway Journal* of May 31<sup>st</sup>, the Reais 194b (\$US 37b) program has a total length of over 1,000 km and was initiated by the progressive Governor, Tarcísio de Freitas. Nine projects have already been approved, including a North Axis of the Inter City network that São Paulo is now developing. Under a public-private partnership contract signed on May 29, the North Axis will involve upgrading express passenger operations and providing maintenance for 30 years. Governor de Freitas said “Roads are becoming increasingly congested and we need a sustainable solution that is in line with what the world is doing. If we’re going to start restoring passenger rail in Brazil, it has to happen in São Paulo.” .....**Brightline West recently hosted Nevada state officials on a tour of Brightline Florida** to show off the positive economic impact created by Brightline. A report in *Railway Age* on June 6 indicated that the tour party included Nevada Governor Joe Lombardo, representatives from the Nevada DOT, and the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada. The delegation took a ride on Brightline rails, heard from local elected officials, and met members of the business and tourism communities about Brightline’s helpful impact on tourism, business recruitment, transit oriented development, and connectivity to public transportation systems, including Florida’s Tri-Rail and Metrorail systems .....**The temporary closure of Amtrak’s Adirondack route has been extended to September** to allow for track modifications.

According to several reports quoted in *Railway Track and Signals* on June 12, service from Montreal to New York City, which has been shut down since May 20, will now remain shut down through September 8. *Adirondack Explorer* says the train is presently operating only as far north as Saratoga Springs. Work will take place between Rouses Point and Montreal to address heat restrictions that lead to speed restrictions. In May it was reported that CN and Amtrak said that the work will mitigate, but not eliminate all heat slow order speed limits. Amtrak and CN said that they appreciate the interest of local stakeholders and the leadership of the New York Congressional Delegation to resolve this matter.....**The New York City subways saw a big drop in crime after 1,000 cops were assigned** to patrol the heavily used system. *AM NY* said on June 24 that during the first half

of 2024 the transit system suffered over 200 major felonies, including several shootings. But since then, police said crimes dropped thanks to placing the additional cops underground and renewing an emphasis on fare evasion that led to hundreds of weapons being seized.....**On June 19, due to bad track on CN, VIA added 90 minutes to the west-bound schedule of the Ocean** and 45 minutes to the eastbound schedule. *Trains News Wire* reported on June 10 that the slowdown is the result of numerous slow orders on CN, primarily on 187 miles of track between Moncton and Campbelltown, New Brunswick. *Trains* said that CN has diverted most through freight between Quebec and Atlantic Canada to a different route, and the railroad demanded that VIA pay for additional maintenance to maintain passenger train speeds.....**The Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA) is talking with Norfolk Southern to purchase** another Virginia line for passenger service. According to a June 5<sup>th</sup> report in *Progressive Railroading*, the VPRA is interested in buying the NS Manassas main line. In addition, the VPRA is also pursuing an option to extend passenger-rail service into the New River Valley on another NS main line, known as the N-Line. Purchasing the Manassas Line would allow Virginia Railway Express (VRE) to add trains, start Saturday service, and extend commuter service beyond the VRE’s current terminal in Manassas with northbound trains operating in the morning hours and southbound trains in the afternoon. Extending service to the New River Valley via the N-Line would allow VPRA to offer passenger-rail service to Christiansburg. NS Vice President and Chief Strategy Officer Mike McClellan said: “We look forward to continuing to partner on projects like this that stand to serve the interests of our communities while also balancing the needs of our freight customers and the economy we support.” .....**Rehabilitation of the famous Johnstown Inclined Plane was halted on the advice of consultants and industry experts** when broken strand wires were found in the 2 inch diameter safety cable and the hardness of the steel in the shive wheels was questioned. The incline had been closed in 2021 for a two year project to extensively renovate the cars, the mechanical and electrical systems, and replace all the track ties. The historic incline was opened in 1891 as an 896.5-foot long funicular operating on two parallel 8-foot gauge tracks in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The incline and its two stations connect the city of Johnstown in the Little Conemaugh River Valley to the borough of Westmont on Yoder Hill. The Johnstown Inclined Plane is billed as the world’s steepest inclined plane and can carry automobiles and passengers up or down a slope with a grade of 71.9 percent in 90 seconds. It is operated as a part of the Cambria County Transit Authority system and should reopen in 2025.....**The Federal Railroad Administration announced on July 12 that it will receive grant applications to draw from \$153 million in available funding** for restoration and enhancement of intercity passenger rail services. Grant funding will assist with planning, construction, and operating costs for eligible projects that will establish service on new routes, restore service on routes that formerly had intercity passenger operations, and enhance service on existing routes. These upgrades will complement the dozens of major rail projects that are underway across the country under President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Applications for funding are due 75 days after the announcement date..... **North America’s first self-powered, zero-emission (ZEMU) passenger train recently arrived in San Bernardino, California.** According to the San Bernardino County Transportation Authority (SBTA), the train uses a hybrid hydrogen and battery technology to propel the train and power onboard electrical systems. Stadler Rail and SBCTA debuted the ZEMU at the October 2023 American Public Transportation Association’s annual EXPO in Orlando, Florida. At the conclusion of testing at the FRA Pueblo testing facility, the new train was moved by BNSF to San Bernardino. The new train has a distinctive white water-vapor design wrapped around the train’s two passenger cars and center power pack where the hydrogen and battery propulsion system are located. Water vapor is the only emission generated from the propulsion system. In the coming weeks, the ZEMU train will begin final testing on Metrolink and go into regular service later this year.



# Caltrain's Electrification in Final Testing



The new Stadler electric trains will start service this fall on the Caltrain San Francisco-San Jose commuter system.

Final testing is underway by Caltrain on the San Francisco-San Jose commuter system with the new electric trains sets being supplied by Stadler. Installation of electric catenary was completed earlier this year. According to online reports on May 20 and May 31 by *Mass Transit*, this is the first instance in decades where a North American diesel powered rail system is being replaced by an electric system.

The new high-performance electric trains, will provide all Caltrain service between San Francisco and San Jose starting this fall. Sixteen stations will receive trains every 15 to 20 minutes during peak hours and twice hourly on weekends. Express service from San Francisco to San Jose will be scheduled for under an hour.

Caltrain says that the new cars

offer new digital onboard displays, power outlets at each forward-facing seat, energy-efficient lighting, baby changing tables in the restrooms, security cameras, and expanded storage under the cantilevered seats. They will also generate less noise than their diesel equivalent, making the trip more enjoyable both for riders and residents that live near Caltrain tracks.

Caltrain says electrification will also help meet regional and state climate action goals by lowering greenhouse gas emissions, improving air quality, and relieving traffic congestion. It will also set the framework for California's future High Speed Rail network that will run on the Caltrain corridor to San Francisco.

Caltrain held three public tours of the agency's new electric train cars. The third tour held in early 2024, drew more than 5000 tour requests on the morning of the tour, a larger crowd than the first two events held in San Jose in July 2023 at San Francisco in September 2023. Attendees enjoyed food trucks and a live DJ as they awaited their opportunity to see the future of Caltrain for themselves.

The Electrification project is fully funded due to the efforts of federal, state, and local partners that helped secure funding. The Caltrain delegation led by U.S. Rep. Nancy Pelosi, Sen. Padilla, U.S Rep. Anna Eshoo, and the late Sen. Dianne Feinstein, secured more than \$1 billion in federal resources.

## Amtrak's Borealis



Amtrak's new Borealis, shown here passing through Sturtevant, Wisconsin on its first westbound run on May 21, has attracted hundreds of daily passengers. According to a July 3, 2024, report by the *Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal*, the new St. Paul-Chicago train carried 6,600 passengers during the 11 days it was operational in May. The Wisconsin DOT confirmed the Borealis carried over 600 passengers daily during that 11-day period. The daily average for westbound travelers, they said, was 329 and eastbound 275 passengers. It also turned a profit, collecting revenue of \$600,000 in May compared to expenses of \$500,000. The Borealis is the second daily train on the 411-mile, Chicago-St. Paul route, which is also served by the Empire Builder on its way to Seattle. The new train is sponsored by the states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois. A federal grant was to provide 90% of the first year operating costs. (Al Baker photo)