

# P *The Michigan* PASSENGER

YOUR SOURCE FOR PASSENGER RAIL NEWS • SINCE 1973



WINTER 2025  
Volume 52, Number 1

52 Years



1973-2025

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

## What's inside...

Letter to the editor: Page 2

Commuter train possibilities  
for Detroit - Page 3

The new Amtrak Board  
members - Page 6

SHORT LINES - Page 7

MARP meets with TRU  
- See Page 8

## In New York, Congestion Pricing Began January 5



Above: Stalled traffic on Sixth Avenue  
(David Shankborne, Wikipedia Commons)

### *Big Possibilities for other Congested Cities*

AM New York reports that at midnight on January 5, the Big Apple rang in 2025 by becoming the first city in the US to put congestion tolls in place. Hopefully, the tolls will reduce the unbearable traffic congestion on Manhattan Streets and raise an estimated \$1 billion to fund transit. The money will be used to bond an additional \$15 billion a year to pay for the MTA's \$54 billion transit capital plan. The program was approved by the MTA board on November 18, and the Federal Government soon afterward. In many cities outside the US, congestion pricing tolls have been used to reduce traffic congestion and raise transit money.

During prime hours of the day, the New York program charges private cars \$9 and trucks with tolls starting at \$14.40. The tolls are levied for driving into Manhattan below 60th Street, an area known as the Congestion Relief Zone. During the overnight hours the tolls for cars will drop to \$2.25, trucks would pay more, and motorcycles less. The charges will be billed automatically to dri-

See *Congestion pricing* page 5

### A vision at night



The lights in the Durand Depot in Durand, Michigan, shine warmly on a cold winter's night in 2024. MARP has met many times in the upstairs room in the front of the depot building overlooking the CN mainline tracks. The large building, built by the Grand Trunk Western Railroad in 1903, serves as the Michigan Railroad History Museum and the Durand station for Amtrak's Blue Water trains. (Mark Hinsdale photo)

PRESORTED  
STANDARD  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
BROOKLYN, MI  
PERMIT #44

MARP, Inc.  
760 Woodlawn Ave.  
Jackson, MI 49203-2979

# The Michigan PASSENGER

YOUR SOURCE FOR PASSENGER RAIL NEWS • SINCE 1973

Published four times a year by the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc.  
 Copyright © 2025, Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc.  
 All rights reserved.

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.

Contributor: Tom Fletcher

## Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. Executive Committee

- Todd Schultz, Chair**, (269) 235-9920, [todd.schultz@marp.org](mailto:todd.schultz@marp.org)
- Tom Fletcher, Vice Chair**, (269) 998-5630, [tom.fletcher@marp.org](mailto:tom.fletcher@marp.org)
- Matt Thompson, Secretary**, (989) 233-8918, [matt.thompson@marp.org](mailto:matt.thompson@marp.org)
- Jean Merckel, Treasurer**, (734) 717-0326, [jean.merckel@marp.org](mailto:jean.merckel@marp.org)
- Chuck Merckel, Mtgs & Station Rep Coordinator**, (734) 330-0281, [chuck.merckel@marp.org](mailto:chuck.merckel@marp.org)
- John Guidinger, Newsletter editor**, (517) 918-9958, [john.guidinger@marp.org](mailto:john.guidinger@marp.org)
- Steve Vagnozzi, Government Affairs Coordinator**, (517) 927-1118, [steve.vagnozzi@marp.org](mailto:steve.vagnozzi@marp.org)
- Clark Charnetski**, (734) 761-3814, [clark.charnetski@marp.org](mailto:clark.charnetski@marp.org)
- Alexander Kofman**, (313) 591-0855, [alexander.kofman@marp.org](mailto:alexander.kofman@marp.org)
- Bob Lovell**, (527) 256-4552, [bob.lovell@marp.org](mailto:bob.lovell@marp.org)
- Eric Schertzing**, (517) 303-7233, [eric.schertzing@marp.org](mailto:eric.schertzing@marp.org)
- Ted Wojcik**, (231) 590-2916, [ted.wojcik@marp.org](mailto:ted.wojcik@marp.org)

- Carolyn Ulstad, Webmaster**, (231) 941-6584, Ext 710, [carolyn@groundworkcenter.com](mailto:carolyn@groundworkcenter.com)
- Kay Chase, Communications Coordinator**, (269) 388-3777, [chase@wmich.edu](mailto:chase@wmich.edu)

## MICHIGAN SERVICES

Amtrak Train Schedules Effective October 14, 2024 Chicago-Kalamazoo-Ann Arbor-Detroit-Pontiac Chicago-Kalamazoo-East Lansing-Port Huron									
Wolverine Service	Wolverine Service	Blue Water	Wolverine Service	Mile	Train Name	Wolverine Service	Blue Water	Wolverine Service	Wolverine Service
350	352	364	354		Train Number	351	365	353	355
Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily		Days of Operation	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily
6:45a	2:15p	4:00p	5:50p	0	DP	CHICAGO, IL, Un Sta (CT)	Ar	10:32a	11:45a
7:11a	↓	↓	↓	16		Hammond-Whiting, IN (CT)	↑	↑	2:02p
9:04a	4:31p	6:10p	8:04p	62		New Buffalo, MI (ET)			1:15p
9:29a	4:52p	6:32p	8:24p	89		Niles, MI			1:21p
9:40a	↓	6:43p	↓	102		Dowagiac, MI			9:42p
10:14a	5:26p	7:11p	8:58p	138		Kalamazoo, MI			10:54p
10:56a	6:03p	7:38p	9:35p	160		Battle Creek, MI			9:00p
		9:00p		208		East Lansing, MI			8:33p
		9:37p		238		Durand, MI			↑
		10:08p		256		Flint, MI			↑
		10:34p		274	↓	Lapeer, MI			↑
		11:31p	↓	319	Ar	PORT HURON, MI	Dp		↑
↓	↓		10:03p	184		Albion, MI	↑		↑
11:51a	6:55p		10:28p	208		Jackson, MI			8:54a
12:28p	7:25p		11:08p	243		Ann Arbor, MI			8:08a
12:57p	8:11p		11:27p	271		Dearborn, MI			10:58a
1:25p	8:44p		12:11a	281		DETROIT, MI			10:23a
1:49p	9:05p		12:13a	292		Royal Oak, MI			7:00p
1:57p	9:12p		12:42a	296	↓	Troy, MI			6:44a
2:11p	9:25p		1:01a	304	Ar	PONTIAC, MI	Dp		9:53a
									6:29p
									6:11p
									5:48p
									5:41p
									5:28p

## Amtrak Train Schedule Effective October 6, 2023 Chicago-Grand Rapids

Pere Marquette	Mile	Train Name	Pere Marquette
370		Train Number	371
Daily		Days of Operation	Daily
6:30p	0	DP	CHICAGO, IL, Un Sta (CT)
9:14p	89		Ar
9:50p	116		St. Joe-Benton Harbor, MI (ET)
10:33p	151	↓	Bangor, MI
11:34p	176	Ar	Holland, MI
			6:49a
			6:00a

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

Printed by the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers - November 1, 2024

## Letters & emails

### Consider mobility issues when planning

I read in the Fall 2024 "Michigan Passenger" your favorable reporting about the Floridian (Trains 40/41) single level cars that will replace the Capital Limited Viewliner cars. Unfortunately, this leaves many of us with mobility issues (i.e. we don't do steps) at a big disadvantage, as we now must request (and keep reminding) Conductors and Station Agents to get out the manually hand cranked lifts for us to board and de-boarding the Viewliner cars. Most stations do not have accessible high level platforms for the Viewliner cars. Some type of semi-permanent ramping made of metal, in lieu of the elaborate concrete structures, needs to be installed at Amtrak stations, similar to what I've seen at the University of Michigan Student Union. This should have been put in place, before removing the low level Superliner cars. I've made this suggestion to Amtrak, thus far to no avail.

Sincerely,  
B. Demczyk

## MARP STATION REPRESENTATIVES

Chuck Merckel, Coordinator (734-330-0281)

Station	Staff	MARP Volunteer
Albion	Bus	Matthew Murawski
Ann Arbor	Amtrak	Clark Charnetski
Bangor	None	J. P. Descamp
Battle Creek	Amtrak	Shuler Harmon
Dearborn	Amtrak	Mary Jo Durivage
Detroit	Amtrak	Greg Ptucha/Roberta Deering
Dowagiac	None	Matt Money
Durand	Museum	Mary Stone
East Lansing	Caretkr	John Boyse
Flint	Bus	Barb Westcott
Grand Rapids	Caretkr	Mit Renfor
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

# JOIN MARP TODAY!

It's easy.  
Just fill out and return this form today  
Or visit [marp.org](http://marp.org) to join online.

### MARP Membership Application

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 Apt/Unit# \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
 E-mail \* \_\_\_\_\_

\* We do not sell, rent, or trade e-mail addresses. We use e-mails to send meeting announcements, other time-sensitive information, and the monthly online bulletin.

Send check or money order payable to:

**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
- Contact me - I want to be ACTIVE!**
- Please send me info on the *National Association of RR Passengers*
- I want to be notified by phone or email not more than 4 times per year when critical issues arise

Additional Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

The First of a Series of Articles on the Possibilities

# A Detroit Area Commuter System

## Introduction

Although Detroit once had a well-developed street railway system, MARP understands that Detroit never had an extensive rail commuter system similar to what developed in many northeast US cities and Chicago. Perhaps this is the result of an understandable anti-transit attitude of the automobile industry or the result of other unknown factors. The reason for the lack of a commuter rail system in Detroit could be the subject of an interesting research project.

Commuter trains in Detroit have been talked about for many years. The small Grand Trunk Detroit-Pontiac system of four round trip trains a day was discontinued in 1982. The last Penn Central Jackson-Ann Arbor-Detroit commuter train, taken over by Amtrak as the *Michigan Executive* was discontinued in 1984. Today, these routes are the first mentioned when commuter trains are discussed for Detroit.

This review addresses the Detroit-Ann Arbor-Jackson route. This route is

unique in that MDOT owns the railroad from Dearborn to Jackson. Other Detroit area commuter routes on existing railroads will be discussed in subsequent issues of the *Michigan Passenger*.

MARP is aware of many obvious limitations to this review. The complex issues involving a campaign to develop support for the system, cost estimating, funding, jurisdictional issues, alternative destinations other than the downtown area, operational alternatives, maintenance facilities, crewing, railroad track capacities, working with the freight railroad companies, etc. are not addressed. Commuter rail versus regional rail operations is not addressed, although a regional rail system would certainly be desirable development after a commuter system is started and proves successful. This is simply an effort to show what could be possible using the current rail system.

## Detroit-Ann Arbor-Jackson Route

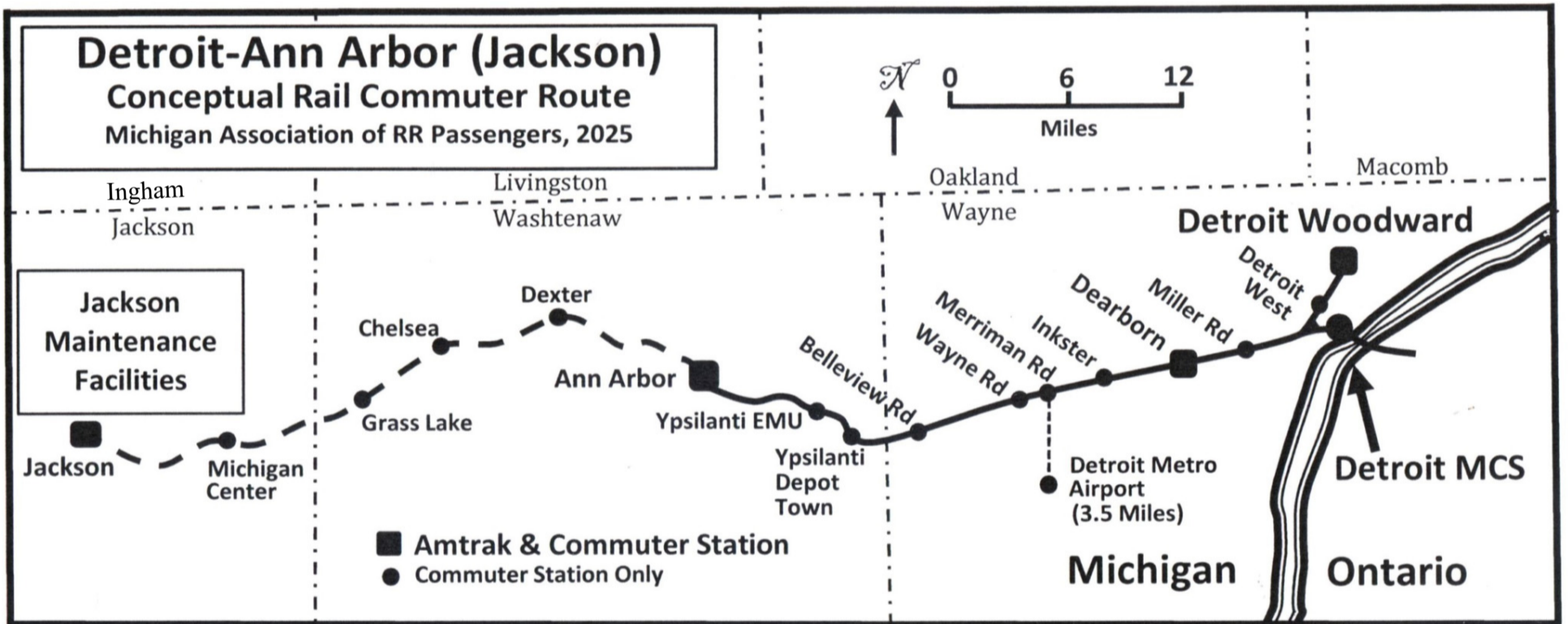
The existing rail route and potential commuter stations between Detroit,

Ann Arbor, and Jackson are shown below. The portion of this route between Detroit and Ann Arbor has been the subject of many commuter rail studies over the last 40 years.

This route is that of Amtrak's former *Michigan Executive*, a single train operating as one round trip on week days between Jackson and Detroit. This train stopped at intermediate locations in Chelsea, Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, and Dearborn and terminated at Detroit MCS (Michigan Central Station). Wikipedia reports that the train carried 96,000 passengers at its peak in 1979. Dedicated buses took the passengers from MCS to downtown employment centers. But ridership dwindled to 26,000 in 1983 and the train was discontinued in January of the following year. The reasons for the decline included breaching a psychological barrier after raising commuter fares above \$100 a month, the decline in downtown Detroit employment, and the limitations of a commuter service with only one train a day.

For this study, additional stations have been added to this route to make a more serviceable commuter system for the commuting population. It is also assumed that, instead of just one train a day, several daily round trips would be operated initially to offer passengers a range of time selections. If the service becomes successful, it could be expanded in terms of the number of trains, train schedules, and station locations to maximize ridership.

The *Michigan Executive* (like the previous New York/Penn Central commuter service) was based in Jackson because the yard facilities were located on the east side of Jackson to service and store the train. It is assumed that a reinstatement of a new commuter service on this route would also be based in Jackson. If the service did not run west of Ann Arbor, the trains would have to deadhead to Jackson, or new maintenance and storage facilities would have to be built somewhere in Washtenaw County west of Ann Arbor.



## Conceptual stations

A conceptual list of stations for the Detroit-Ann Arbor-Jackson Route is shown in the table at right. This is a tentative list. The stations would be located and developed to meet commuting needs.

The Detroit terminal could be at the existing Amtrak Woodward Avenue Station or at a new station built on the west side of Vernor Highway near Ford's Michigan Central development. The Woodward Avenue site is more centrally located in modern day Detroit, but a terminal for storage facilities would have to be developed nearby. If the route terminates at the Vernor Highway/MCS site, land should be available to develop the storage facilities on property owned by Conrail/CPKC or Ford. The commuter trains would also serve the thousands of workers Ford plans to place at MCS within walking distance of the Vernor Highway/MCS Station.

If the commuter trains are to serve both locations, the trains would have to back out of the Vernor Highway Station for about 2 miles to West Detroit Junction to continue north about 5 miles to Detroit Woodward. The issue of where the downtown Detroit commuter terminal would be located needs to be resolved in a separate study.

Continued on page 4

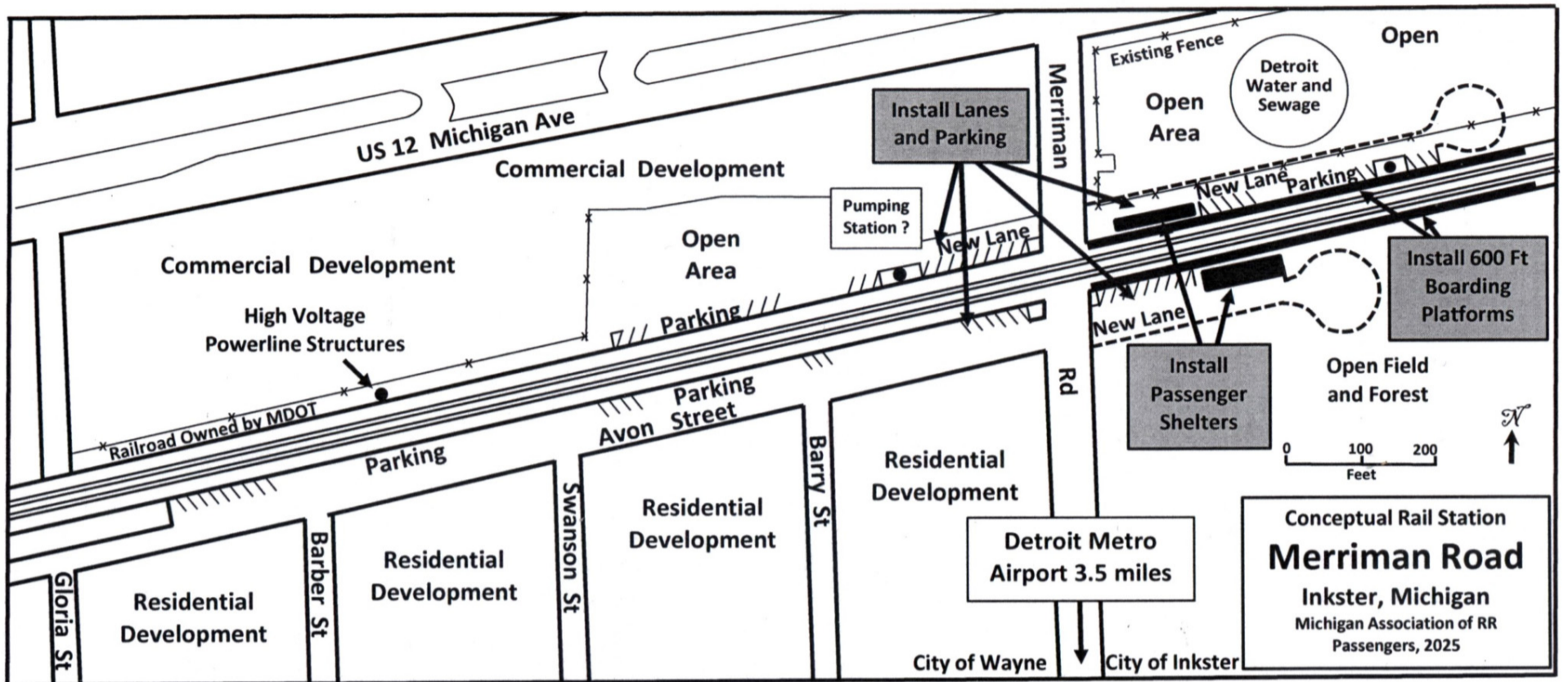
Miles From MCS	Station	Location	Assumed Railroad Owner	Notes
5.0	Detroit Woodward	Amtrak Station	CN	New Center Detroit
2.8	Detroit West	Clark Avenue	CN	At Michigan Avenue
0.0	Detroit MCS	Vernor Highway	CPKC	Adjacent to Ford's Michigan Central Station
4.2	Miller Road	Dearborn	Conrail	
8.8	Dearborn	Amtrak Station	Conrail	Adjacent to Greenfield Village
12.8	Inkster	Inkster Road	MDOT	
14.5	Merriman Road	Wayne	MDOT	Direct route for shuttle to Detroit Metro Airport
16.3	Wayne	Wayne Road	MDOT	South of Interstate 94
21.6	Bellevue Road	Van Buren Twp	MDOT	
28.1	Ypsilanti Depot Town	Cross Street	MDOT	Downtown Ypsilanti, former Amtrak stop
29.5	Ypsilanti EMU	Ann Road	MDOT	Adjacent to EMU Campus
35.9	Ann Arbor	Amtrak Station	MDOT	At crossing of Broadway Street
45.4	Dexter	Broad Street	MDOT	
52.7	Chelsea	Main Street	MDOT	Former Amtrak stop
63.8	Grass Lake	Main Street	MDOT	
74.2	Jackson	Amtrak Station	MDOT	Elm Street maintenance facilities

**Merriman Road Station**

A conceptual station site sketch for the Merriman Road Station is shown below. This layout is based on the foot print of the Brookfield Station on the Chicago-Aurora BNSF commuter route in suburban Chicago.

The site on Merriman Road would not only provide a station in a nice suburban location, but it would be also on a direct road route to the main entrance of Detroit Metropolitan Airport, about 3.5 miles to the

south. Shuttle buses could be added to provide ready access from and to the trains and would help satisfy a long desired need for improved transit service to this major international airport.



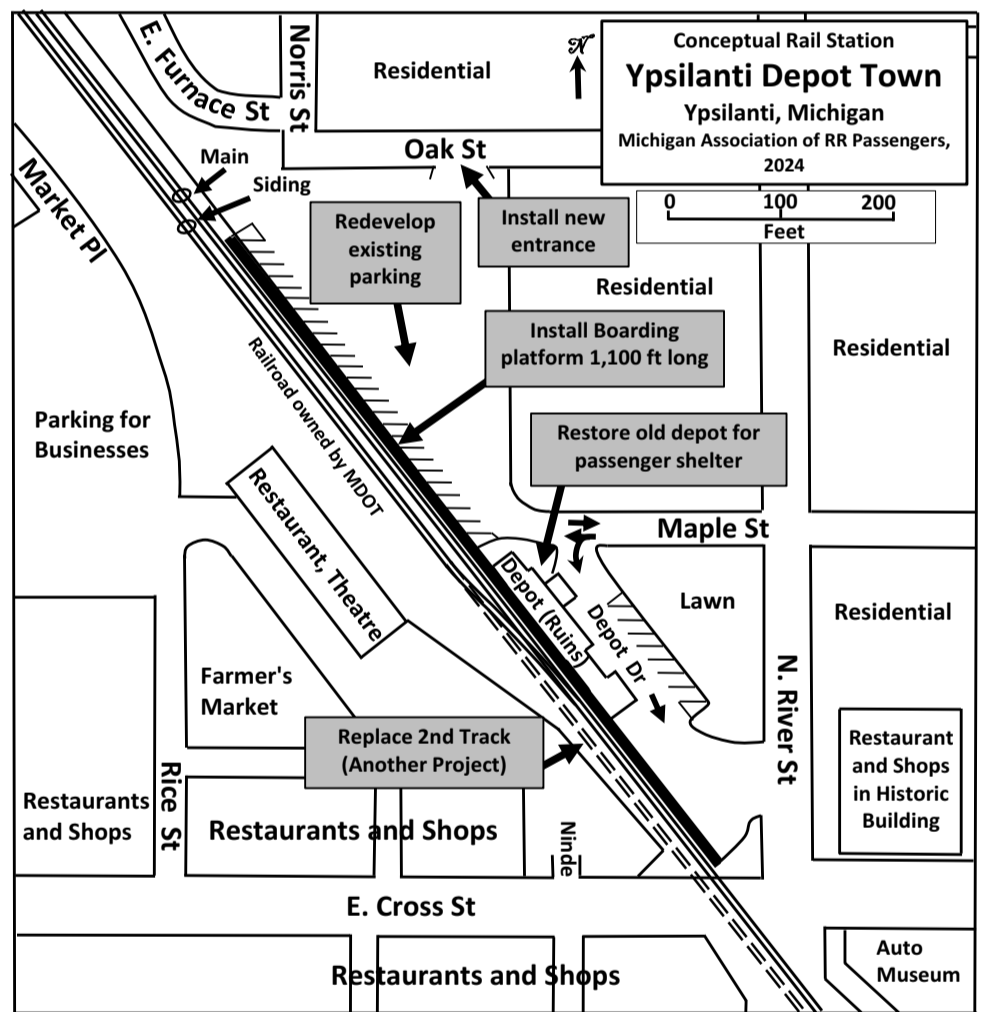
Base Source: Airbus, Maxar Technologies, Aerial Photography, and Google Mapping, 2024

**Ypsilanti Depot Town Station**

A second conceptual site sketch is shown at right for a Ypsilanti Depot Town Station. Unlike the Merriman Road site where no former depot was located, Depot Town is the site of a old Michigan Central Depot long since closed. The Ypsilanti Depot Town district is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the development of a commuter station would be subject to certain protective historic covenants. The District is a popular area of shops, restaurants, stores, historic buildings, and the site of many unique festivals. The site sketch was laid out in an effort to minimize the negative effect of the station and parking on historic and adjacent residential resources.

This site sketch is on existing property apparently associated with the old Michigan Central station building. The building, which is in ruins today, could be restored to serve as a passenger shelter. This sketch assumes that the second track would be extended on the existing railroad right-of-way starting about 2.5 miles east of Ypsilanti to a point west of the station.

Commuter stations in not only Ypsilanti, but in Dexter, Chelsea, Grass Lake, and Jackson would also be in communities of historic and residential resources near their existing nineteenth-century station buildings. If the new commuter station and parking facilities cannot be positioned in these communities without negative impact to these adjacent resources, then new sites would have to be relocated, perhaps outside of these communities.

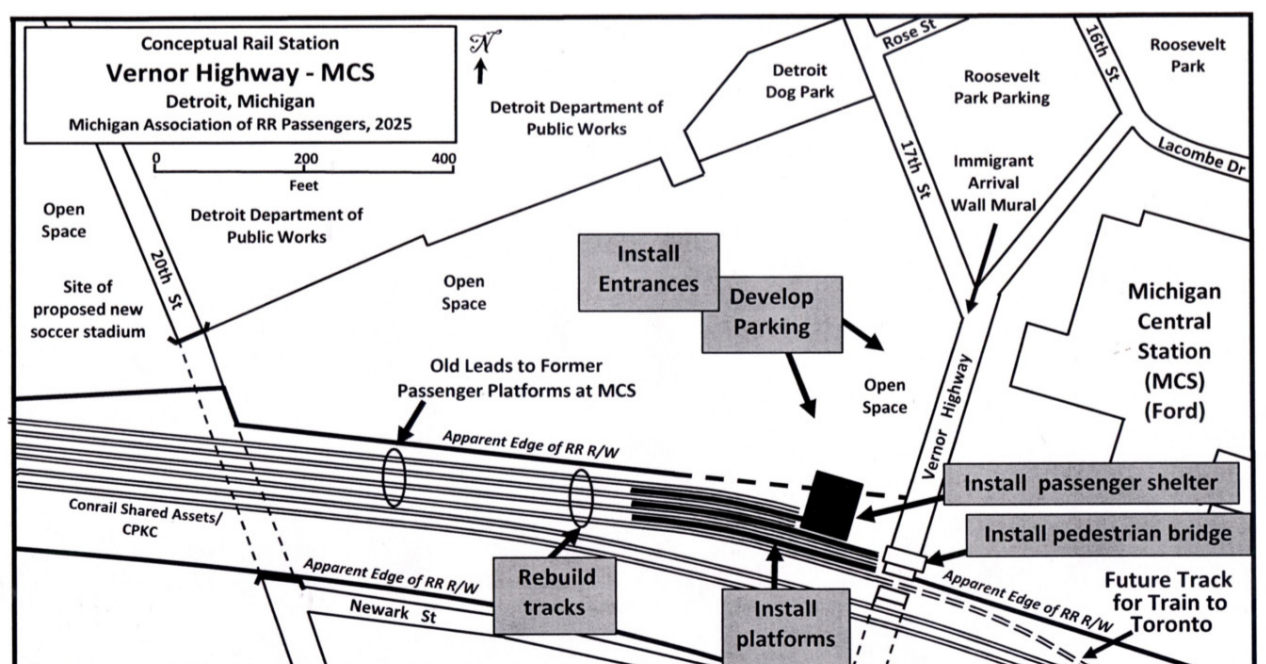


**Vernor Highway/MCS Station**

A third site sketch has been prepared for a conceptual Vernor Highway/MCS commuter station. Ford's intentions are not known for their currently vacant property between the MCS building and the railroad tracks. Perhaps, if agreeable to Ford, one or two tracks could be extended into the property (elevated due to site characteristics) so that commuters (and international intercity passengers) could use the waiting room in historic station building, which would add greatly to the purpose and amount of foot traffic in the large waiting room.

But, if this is not possible, then a new station could be built on the west side of Vernor Highway on the north side of the railroad tracks as shown in the sketch at right. This site is vacant today, other than for the remains of four unused tracks that once severed as the leads for the station platforms at MCS.

Although not as close as a stop directly at the MCS building, the Vernor Highway/MCS Station would still be within a reasonable walking distance for commuters to MCS, the Newlab building, and probable future developments by Ford on the MCS property, as well as for people attending games and other events



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

## Congestion pricing . . . continued from page 1

vers from data collected by overhead cameras that read license plates at entrances to the Congestion Relief Zone. New rules are being proposed to ensure license plates are clean and readable.

The rates will rise gradually over time to a \$15 daytime rate for private cars by 2031. Officials said that the present rates are expected to remain the same through 2027. The toll will not apply to vehicles using the FDR Drive, West Side Highway, and Hugh L. Carey (Brooklyn Battery) Tunnel connecting to West Street.

Some New Yorkers consider congestion pricing a wonderful holiday season gift for the Big Apple. Environmental and transportation advocates have praised congestion pricing as a major win for all New Yorkers. The New York Nature Conservancy said it will set a national example on how to reduce pollution, improve air quality,

and invest in vital transit infrastructure on which all New Yorkers depend.

But many New Yorkers, especially those from Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island, vehemently fought against the “cash grab.” Opposition groups included unions, community-based organizations, the Trucking Association of New York, residents of Battery Park, and the United Federation of Teachers. There are many lawsuits pending against the plan, any one of which could derail everything. One such lawsuit was rejected by a federal judge in late December. Supporters said afterward that the program has been studied exhaustively and proven itself around the globe.

After originally “pausing” the plan in October, New York Governor Kathy Hochul “unpaused” it in December as a political necessity before President Trump, a major opponent of the plan, takes office.

Questions remain. Is it a practical way to improve air quality in the city while funding critical transit upgrades? Or is it an unnecessary money-grabbing move that will put yet another major dent in the wallets of New Yorkers? Only time will tell. But there appears to be no other option to raise the amount of money that the MTA needs for modernizing New York’s massive transit system.

During the first week, ever creative New Yorkers started devising ways to avoid the tolls. *AM New York* reported on January 7, the NYPD began watching vehicles entering the Congestion Relief Zone and stopping those trying to avoid the new \$9 toll by covering their plates to prevent overhead cameras and scanners from detecting them. Cops are using their own license plate readers to catch motorists who attempt to slip past the toll illegally. The operation is about dishing out summons and looking for potential criminals. “So again, there’s

multiple reasons behind why we do what we do, but ultimately it’s for public safety,” Police Chief Thomas Alps told *AM New York*.

During their stops, police say they have recovered drugs and potentially deadly weapons from scofflaw drivers. During the first few days, *AM New York* reported that NYPD issued 274 summonses, seized 40 vehicles, and arrested 10 people who were wanted for other crimes.

The early indications are that ridership on the NYC subway, Metro North Railroad, Long Island Railroad and NYC ferry system has increased and traffic congestion has been reduced. Unlike many cities, New York has a massive transit system of subways, commuter trains, buses, and ferries that allow an attractive alternative to driving and fighting traffic congestion.

## Used Commuter Cars Are Available for Rebuilding

MARP understands that used commuter cars are available for rebuilding to start commuter systems, such as what would be needed in Detroit. Ozark Mountain Railcar (P.O. Box 167, Kirbyville, MO 65679, 417.336.2401) represents owners of used equipment. They have for sale eight former MBTA coaches, which are based on the design of the Comet Railcar of the 1970s, similar to the Bombardier Horizon cars used by Amtrak today. They are priced at \$40,000 to \$50,000 each and are presently located near Boston. Ozark also has four bilevel gallery cars and one bilevel cab car for sale. The bilevel cars are former Pullman Standard Chicago METRA commuter cars and range in price from \$10,000 to \$34,000 each. Other dealers likely have additional commuter cars for sale.

As the commuter railroads and Amtrak replace their fleet with newer cars, large numbers of the older cars (including Amfleet cars) will become available for short term use to start new commuter systems, such as in Detroit and SE Michigan.

## Detroit Commuter Study continued

the proposed new Soccer Field west of 20<sup>th</sup> Street.

The eventual development at Michigan Central by Ford and others is likely to become the single largest concentration of workers within walking distance on the entire Detroit commuter system.

Finally, this station would also be at a good location for an International Station in Detroit for Amtrak’s proposed new intercity trains to Windsor to connect with Via Rail Canada’s trains to and from Toronto.

The sketch for the Vernor Highway/MSU shows that three or more platforms could be developed at this site for use as a downtown terminal for other Detroit area commuter trains if the terminal is not near the Woodward Avenue Station.

In the next issue of the *Michigan Passenger* we will examine the Detroit-Pontiac route.

## Government of Canada Re-Acquires the Quebec Bridge

*Railway Track and Signal* reported on November 13, 2024, that the Canadian Government has repatriated the massive Québec Bridge from Canadian National. The bridge was originally built by the Canadian Government and carries freight and passenger trains over the St Lawrence River. A deed of transfer between Canada and CN was finalized with payment of one dollar on November 12, 2024. The Government of Canada declared that the transfer is to ensure the

sustainability of this strategic infrastructure so that it can continue to benefit the economies of Canada and Quebec, as well as the entire population of the greater Quebec City region. Management of the bridge will come under the Federal Crown Corporation Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges Incorporated. The Government of Canada plans to rehabilitate the bridge over 25 years with an investment of more than C\$40 million a year.



**The Quebec Bridge is a road, rail, and pedestrian bridge across the lower Saint Lawrence River between Sainte-Foy, a suburb of Quebec City, and Lévis, in Quebec, Canada. The bridge is a riveted steel truss structure and is 987 m (3,238 ft) long. Cantilever arms 177 m (581 ft) long support a 195 m (640 ft) central structure, for a total span of 549 m (1,801 ft), still the longest cantilever bridge span in the world. (It was the all-categories longest span in the world until the Ambassador Bridge was completed in 1929.) It is the farthest downstream complete crossing of the Saint Lawrence River. The project failed twice during its construction, in 1907 and 1916, at the cost of 88 lives and additional people injured. The bridge eventually opened in 1919. (Photo from Jiaqian Airplane Fan via Wikimedia Commons)**

# New Amtrak Board Members

Per 49 USC Sec 24302, an individual nominated by the U.S. President and confirmed by the Senate to serve on the 10-member Amtrak Board shall be appointed for a term of five years. The term may be extended. No more than five members may be of the same political party.

## Mr. Sean Duffy

**Secretary of Transportation**  
Mr. Duffy, 53, an attorney, has been nominated by President Trump to be the U.S. Secretary of Transportation. The U.S. DOT Secretary is by statute a member of the Amtrak board. Mr. Duffy represented Wisconsin in the US House for nine years after he was elected as part of the tea party wave in 2010. In the House, Duffy served on the House Financial Services Committee and Subcommittee on Housing and Insurance. He resigned in 2019, citing a need to care for his large family. Duffy joined Fox News as a contributor in 2020 and has been one of Trump's most visible defenders.

## Mr. Stephen J. Gardner, Amtrak Chief Executive Officer

The Amtrak CEO is a member of the board by statute, although he does not have voting privileges.

## Mr. Anthony R. Coscia, Chairman of the Board

Mr. Coscia is an attorney dealing with redevelopment finance, commercial, real

estate, and corporate governance issues. Mr. Coscia has served on the Amtrak Board of Directors since June 2009 and was elected chair of the board in 2013, a role he retains today. Mr. Coscia also represents Amtrak on the Gateway Development Commission. Between 2003 and 2011 he was chairman of the Board of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and from 1992-2003 he served as chairman of the New Jersey Economic Development Authority. He is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, and he received his Juris Doctor from Rutgers University.

## Mr. Ronald L. Batory

A Michigan native, Mr. Batory began his railroad career as a traveling auditor for the Detroit, Toledo, and Ironton Railroad in 1974. In 1994, he became president of the Belt Railway Co. of Chicago, after which he was recruited by CSX and Norfolk Southern to assist in the partitioning of Conrail and creation of Conrail Shared Assets. He later became President and Chief Operating Officer of Conrail Shared Assets, before serving as FRA Administrator from 2018 to 2021. He received his BA in Business Administration and Economics from Adrian College and earned a MA from Eastern Michigan University.

## Mr. David M. Capozzi.

Mr. Capozzi, an attorney, is a retired federal senior execu-

tive who has been a long-time advocate for people with disabilities. Mr. Capozzi retired as executive director from the U.S. Access Board, a federal agency promoting equality for people with disabilities. Mr. Capozzi advocated for the rights of people with disabilities through positions with the National Easter Seal Society and Paralyzed Veterans of America. He serves on various boards, including the European Accessibility Resource Centre and the United Spinal Association. Mr. Capozzi received his BA in Psychology from the State University of New York at Buffalo and continued his education there to earn his Juris Doctor from the University's School of Law.

## Dr. Lanhee J. Chen

Dr. Chen has spent his career in business, government and academia. For more than a decade, he has served in American Public Policy Studies at the Hoover Institution and Director of Domestic Policy Studies and Lecturer in Public Policy at Stanford University. As part of his academic work, Dr. Chen conducts research and provides commentary on contemporary health care policy, economics, and U.S.-China relations. He teaches undergraduate and graduate students about public policy formation and serves on various California boards. Dr. Chen earned his Ph.D. and Master of Arts in Political Science from Harvard University and his Juris Doctor from Harvard Law School.

## Ms. Elaine M. Clegg

Ms. Clegg is chief executive officer of Valley Regional Transit (VRT), the largest transit provider in Idaho, which serves the greater Boise area. She has been a public servant focused on transportation and land use issues for nearly three decades. Ms. Clegg served for nearly 20 years on the Boise City Council, including periods as council president. During her tenure, she sponsored a memorandum of understanding between the city and VRT to stabilize funding and service policy and became a passionate voice for reestablishing passenger rail service in Idaho and the Pacific Northwest. Ms. Clegg earned her BA in Painting and Drawing from Boise State University.

## Mr. Christopher C. Koos.

Mr. Koos has been the mayor of the Amtrak-served community of Normal, Illinois, since 2003. As mayor, Mr. Koos has led efforts to drive economic and quality of life development, including the construction in 2012 of the multi-modal Uptown Station, which has the highest Amtrak ridership in downstate Illinois, and has become an anchor for the Uptown business district. He has served as the vice president of the Illinois Municipal League and the vice chair for passenger rail on the U.S. Conference of Mayors Transportation Committee. Mr. Koos is a veteran of the U.S. Army, having served as an infantry platoon leader in Vietnam.

## Mr. Joel Szabat

Mr. Szabat retired after 38 years from the U.S. DOT in 2022 as the deputy Assistant Secretary for Aviation and International affairs. During his career he oversaw a team that managed 140 bilateral air service agreements with other countries, licensed airlines operating in the U.S., reviewed airline joint venture proposals, and managed grant programs to serve more than 200 small community airports. Mr. Szabat was the executive director of the U.S. Maritime Administration from 2011 to 2017, the chief of staff of the Small Business Administration from 2006-2008, and served as the transportation attaché to the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq in 2005, overseeing reconstruction of Iraqi airports, ports, and railroads. Previously, Mr. Szabat was the principal transportation consultant in the California State Assembly from 1993-2001. He received his BA in economics from Georgetown University and earned an MBA from Harvard Business School. Mr. Szabat is a veteran of the U.S. Army, having served as a captain, leading armored cavalry units in Germany.

**Vacant Seat.** Board member to be nominated by President Trump and confirmed by the Senate. At this time, there will be five Republicans and four Democratic members



President Jimmy Carter, who died on December 28, 2024, at the age of 100, signs the Staggers Rail Act of 1980 on December 14, 1980. The Staggers Act was a far reaching effort to deregulate the nation's railroads. It is named after Senator Harley O. Staggers (D-W.Vir), who is standing at the right of President Carter in the photo. The major regulatory changes of the Staggers Act were to allow rail carriers more freedom to establish rates for a rail service, allow shippers and rail carriers to establish contracts, and dismantled collective rate making machinery among railroads on traffic in which they did not effectively participate. The overall effect of this Act greatly strengthened the financial condition of the freight railroads allowing them the financial resources to invest in modern tracks over which many of today's passenger trains operate. (Photo via Wikipedia)

## Legislature Votes to Support Transit in SE Michigan

In the last hours of the lame duck session in December 2024, the Michigan Legislature successfully passed HB 6088 for public transit. The Governor is expected to sign the legislation soon. In Michigan Counties future transit ballot measures will be voted on and funded by the entire county. Local municipalities within Wayne and Oakland Counties will no longer be able to opt-out and ignore the need for county-wide transit services.

Nearly 40 years ago, local municipal leaders throughout Wayne and Oakland Counties decided to allow their voters to choose to invest or not invest in public transit. (Macomb County did not allow opt-out options.) The communities within Wayne and Oakland that did vote approved transit investments nearly every time, resulting in the current SMART bus system. But the municipalities that were opted-out did not vote and did not receive transit services. The 17 communities in Wayne County opted-out included Livonia, Plymouth, Canton, and many southern communities. That left hundreds of thousands of people without transit options and left thousands of businesses strugg-

ling to consistently hire enough workers.

In 2022, Oakland County decided to go all-in on transit and voters strongly supported it. Formerly opted-out communities like Novi, Wixom, and Rochester now have public transit services connecting people to jobs and providing greater access to opportunities for all. Seniors and people with disabilities throughout the county are enjoying more options than ever before.

From now on, all citizens of Wayne, Macomb, and Oakland Counties will vote by county on transit questions. Detroiters and residents in 27 Wayne County communities already have at least basic transit services, including traditional buses on fixed routes and paratransit services providing advanced reservation door-to-door rides for seniors and people with disabilities. That would not change. There would be no added costs in the communities that already have SMART bus service.

For further information contact Transportation Riders United at info@detroittransit.org.

# Michigan North-South Passenger Rail Project Update

By Tom Fletcher

The push for a new north-south passenger rail line in Michigan continues from advocates within the state. A *Detroit Free Press* article published on December 16, 2024, highlighted the current status of the effort and the optimism for passenger rail service between Southeastern Michigan (Ann Arbor/Detroit) and the Northwestern Lower Peninsula (Traverse City/Petosky).

MARP Member Carolyn Ulstad continues to play a key role advocating for the new service as part of her position at the nonprofit Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities, which is based in Traverse City.

Groundwork and its partner, the Cadillac/Wexford Transit Authority have selected consultant WSP Consultants to complete this year's study which will evaluate a number of items like potential users, governance structure, cost estimates, and possible business plans. Communities that could be served by this new service include Detroit, Ann Arbor, Howell, Durand, Owosso, Alma, Mt. Pleasant, Clare, Cadillac, Traverse City, Kalkaska, and Petoskey.

Similar to other rail service expansions, cost remains the major hurdle. While MDOT owns most of the rail line, portions of the track and infrastructure are currently not suitable for higher passenger speeds.

The *Free Press* article also included comments from Eric Schertzing, MARP Executive Committee member, who pointed out that it is a matter of priorities, noting that the federal government spends hundreds of millions of dollars on our nation's roadways. Schertzing also pointed out that our nation has seen 75 years of rail disinvestment. However, with the Bipartisan Infrastructure legislation that included \$66 billion for passenger rail, maybe that trend is changing. We can look around the country and see good examples where similar efforts have resulted in increased rail passenger service. The *Borealis* service, for instance, created a second train between Chicago and Minneapolis/St. Paul, which has surpassed initial ridership expectations and is considered a smashing success.

However, amid ongoing efforts, there is uncertainty due to political shifts in Washington. We wonder if the FRA will still have the same nation-wide commitment to a world-class rail system that was envisioned by the Biden Administration.

Amtrak spokesman Marc Magliari, also quoted in the *Free Press* article, indicated they would be interested in operating the new service if the process proceeded to a point where an operator would be sought. As 2025 unfolds, the group will be hard at work on the next steps and hopes to secure future FRA funding for succeeding steps toward initiation of the service. The *Michigan Passenger* will feature updates as progress is made.



Masonry repairs are being performed by Bonnor Restoration Company to the exterior walls of the Amtrak Station in Albion. Work started in late 2024 and includes replacement and re-pointing of brick along the base of the exterior walls. The building, built in 1882, by the Michigan Central Railroad, was abandoned until saved in the 1980's by Albion's Cran Family. The structure serves a small number of daily Amtrak and Greyhound passengers. (Matthew Murawski photo.)

# SHORT LINES

**CALTRAIN will sell its fleet of 19 diesel locomotives and 90 double-deck commuter coaches to the city of Lima, Peru.**

The push-pull trains will be used to introduce a new east-west commuter service using an existing standard-gauge railway in Lima. The equipment was displaced in September by CALTRAIN's new electric equipment now operating between San Francisco and San Jose. The sale was supported by the US Departments of State and Commerce, and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District for its environmental and mobility benefits, and for its ability to strengthen ties between the United States and Peru. Caltrain also reported that it carried over 753,000 passengers in October, which is 54% more than in October 2023..... **Amtrak announced on November 4, 2024 that the Denver-Winger Park** ski trains will start sooner, go farther, and run more often in the 2024-5 season. The train started running on weekends on December 20-21 and expanded service began on Jan. 9 running Thursdays-Mondays through March 31. The trains will serve both the Winter Park Resort and the neighboring town of Fraser. Tickets start at \$19 and \$9.50 for kids. The seasonal service will have 69 roundtrips this season, 29 more than last season.....

**Californian start-up awards sleeper train design contract.**

On November 18, 2024, the *International Railway Journal* reported that Dreamstar Lines awarded a contract to Designworks, a BMW subsidiary, to create concept designs for refurbishing passenger coaches for a new overnight service that it plans to introduce next year between the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles. First class sleeping cars will have suites with en-suite shower rooms. Standard class coaches will also have sleeping berths with en-suite shower rooms as well as conventional seats. A lounge car will have a bar and a seating area. In March, Dreamstar signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Union Pacific to formalize negotiations to operate the new service along UP's coast line via Santa Barbara, the same route which Amtrak uses. The last overnight service ran on this route in 1968.....

**Most of the money in the IJ Act went for roads**

according to a report by Transportation for America titled "Fueling the Crisis." Out of 64,000 federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act grant awards from the US DOT totaling \$150 billion. 51 percent of the money was spent on highway projects. Only 21 percent of the money spent went to public transportation and passenger rail. Of the 52 states and territories receiving money, 35 increased their greenhouse gas emissions over the baseline levels predicted through 2040.....

**Passenger rail could come to Wichita, Kansas, in the next several years,**

according to an article in the *Wichita Eagle* on December 13, 2024. A link connecting the Southwest Chief in Newton to the Heartland Flyer in Oklahoma City could be fully operational by 2029, the Kansas Department of Transportation says. The connection would include a stop in Wichita, at Union Station, which hasn't had passenger rail service since the 1970s. Amtrak presently provides a bus between Newton and Oklahoma City, with a stop in Wichita, in lieu of rail service. Much of the funding will come from grants through the Federal Railroad Administration, with some local match.....

**The FRA will award a \$21 million grant for operating costs of Amtrak service returning to the Mississippi Gulf Coast.**

According to *Progressive Railroading* on Jan. 7, 2025, the funds will support the long-sought return of Amtrak service between New Orleans and Mobile, Alabama, which has been without passenger-rail service since Hurricane Katrina struck the region in 2005. The grant was supported by Senator Roger Wicker who worked to bring together federal, state and local officials in support of investment in the southern rail corridor. Southern Rail Commission Chair Knox Ross said the funding represents a "historic moment" to restore Gulf Coast passenger rail by

supplementing costs associated for two daily roundtrip services for the first three years of service.....

**Corktown has seen rent and land value increases since the 2018**

announcement of Ford's Michigan Central Station revitalization. *Axios Detroit* reported on December 11, that the median home price in Corktown was \$585,000 as of October, according to *Redfin*, up nearly 35% from last year.....

**The Detroit-Windsor Tunnel Bus may be discontinued**

according to a report in the *Detroit Free Press* on January 17. The Tunnel Bus operates on a one-hour schedule between Windsor and Detroit and with a fare of \$10 (Canadian or US) each way. Its possible discontinuance has caught the attention of transit advocates on both sides of the border. Josh Sankarlal, of Activate Transit Windsor Essex, said his advocacy group is trying to raise awareness around the issue. He said some people use the service for commuting, while others use it to connect with special events. MARP is unaware of why funding of the bus is solely the responsibility of Windsor without Detroit assistance.....

**SMART's quarter-cent sales tax that funds 41 percent of its operating budget expires in 2029.**

*Ellis on the Rails* reports that California's Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit tax is not extended, there could be severe financial difficulties in SMART's future. SMART carried approximately 750,000 riders, the most since the service began in 2017, and is on track for 850,000 passengers this year. That is more than triple the loads handled during the worst years of the pandemic, when annual ridership fell below 250,000. SMART was the only Bay Area transit agency to grow its passenger count over that period.....

**The Borealis has already carried more than 100,000 passengers between Chicago and St Paul**

and will soon pass its first-year target of 135,000 riders. Four Horizon coaches and an Amfleet I café car with a business class section comprise the consist and there are calls for extra cars, extending the route into North Dakota, and starting additional passenger services in Wisconsin and Minnesota. It could serve as a model for other routes served by just one train a day and give Amtrak a replicable low-cost growth strategy. Borealis is getting something rarely enjoyed by Amtrak services – good press.....

**Trinity Metro TEXRail service between downtown Fort Worth and Dallas Ft Worth**

International Airport set a ridership record of 103,312 riders last month. According to *Progressive Railroading* on January 8, 2025, the 25% increase from the December 2023 level was an all-time high for ridership in a single month. Trinity Metro officials attributed the record ridership to the safety and reliability of the service, a recently simplified fare structure, and an increase in train frequency.....

**California High Speed Rail begins to lay track.**

According to *Progressive Railroading* on January 7, 2025, California Governor Gavin Newsom joined community leaders and workers near Bakersfield to mark the beginning of the track-laying phase on the CP4 Segment. CP4 is a 22-mile stretch of the high-speed rail between Poplar Avenue in Wasco and about a mile south of the Kern/Tulare County line. The segment includes 11 civil structures including overpasses, underpasses, and viaducts built to take high-speed trains over roadways, waterways, and existing rail lines. All major civil works have been completed and the segment is largely ready for ballast and track.....

**Amtrak's Downeaster celebrated 10 million riders since its inaugural trip in 2001.**

The Downeaster was the result of a citizen initiative started by Trainriders Northeast in the 1990s. A special celebration took place on board Downeaster Train 686 between Brunswick, ME and Wells, ME on Wednesday, December 18, 2024. The on-board celebration combined with special community partnerships, and an online giveaway have helped make the 10-millionth rider milestone truly memorable for all involved.

## Tower to be removed



Amtrak says that the old Michigan Central coaling tower that stands over the Amtrak Michigan Corridor tracks in Michigan City, Indiana, is deteriorating and must be removed. The century-old concrete structure built in the 1920s for steam locomotives is expected to be removed in late 2025. The work will lead to a two week disruption in the *Wolverine Service* and *Blue Water* trains. During demolition rail passengers will travel on buses between Chicago and New Buffalo, Michigan. Demolition is expected to begin next September once the Federal Railroad Administration gives its approval. Officials told a Michigan City radio station that demolition had been set to occur in 2026 but was moved up a year due to the deteriorating condition of the structure. Eight Amtrak trains pass beneath the coaling tower daily. (Walter Borg photo)

## MARP meets with Transportation Riders United



Megan Owens

MARP held a joint meeting with Transportation Riders United (TRU) on November 19, 2024 at the Dearborn Amtrak Station. TRU is an organization pressing for accessible, reliable, and affordable public transit in Michigan. Since 1999, TRU has been working to make sure transit is available so that everyone has the freedom to get where they need to go, to work, school, healthcare, and more. Not everyone drives an automobile.



Ms. Meghan Owens, Executive Director of TRU, spoke for TRU. There are 77 public transportation providers in Michigan providing 30 million trips annually. TRU works with the Michigan Legislature, state officials, local agencies, and others for improvements and expanded transit services. TRU's annual budget is about \$300,000 with funding coming from foundation grants and TRU member donations. TRU has about 300 members, a staff of four, as well as several active volunteers. Support is also provided from about 40 business, labor, environmental, and senior citizen organizations. MARP has been a supporter of TRU since it was organized and several MARP members are also members of TRU. Ms. Owens emphasized that pro-transit

does not mean anti-automobile.

MARP will work with TRU on the need for transit to complement trains. Trains are wonderful for intercity travel, but most people's final destinations are not within walking distance of a train station. Local transit buses are an excellent option for "final mile" transportation, and to link to places like airports. Buses can extend the reach of trains. Partnering with a group that has a lot more bus transit experience makes sense to help develop these connections.

According to a recent press release from the Federal Transit Administration, US transit agencies provid-

ed 6.9 billion trips in 2023, an increase of 17.3% from 2022, the most recent year national transit reports were recorded. Those same transit agencies moved passengers 35 billion miles, an increase of almost 17% from 2022. Also, during that period, Amtrak posted 29 million unlinked passenger trips, a 25% increase. Public transportation grew nearly twice as fast as domestic air travel between 2022 and 2023. The increase reflects more Americans choosing to take subways, light-rail systems, buses, and other modes to travel to work, school, services, and weekend activities across the country. The increase occurred as transit agencies better understood ridership needs following travel pattern changes during the pandemic,

## Four Amtrak Board Nominations Confirmed

# NY Senator Schumer Wins Race Against Time

Frank N. Wilner reported online in *Railway Age*, on December 21, 2024, that four new members were confirmed to the Amtrak Board by the US Senate. According to Mr. Wilner, Senate Majority Leader Schumer (D-NY) was able to force the vote as a rider on the Continuing Resolution to keep the government funded despite the opposition by Senate Republicans and President-Elect Trump to voting on any of the Biden recommendations for the Amtrak Board. Using a last minute maneuver forcing Republican acquiescence, Schumer won confirmation early Saturday morning, Dec. 21, of four new Amtrak Board members. The outcome was not anticipated.

Confirmed for five-year terms to the 10-member Amtrak Board of Directors were Democrats David Michael Capozzi and Elaine Marie Clegg, and Republicans Ronald L. Batory and Lanhee J. Chen. Capozzi fills a newly created seat designated for an advocate of the disabled. Clegg succeeds Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, whose term expired. Batory takes the seat of

departed Christopher R. Beall. Chen takes the seat of Jeffrey R. Moreland, whose term expired.

Batory, Federal Railroad Administrator during the Trump's first Administration and a career railroader, was nominated by President Biden in May, 2024. He is the first Amtrak board member from rail management with operating background. He is only the third railroader on the board, preceded only by former United Transportation Union President Charles Luna and former BNSF attorney Jeff Moreland, who is now succeeded by Chen.

The two new Democrats and two new Republicans join Board Chairman and Democrat Anthony R. Coscia, Democrat Christopher C. Koos, and Republican Joel Szabat. The Republican Cabinet-level Secretary of Transportation, when confirmed, will add a fourth Republican vote as an ex officio Amtrak Board member. Not until President Trump fills a still-vacant Amtrak board seat will Republicans have a voting majority at 5-4. While Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner is

the 10th Board member, he does not have a vote.

Before this year, the Senate had not confirmed an Amtrak nominee since 2015, until Senator. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash) led the confirmations for Christopher Koos, Anthony Coscia and Joel Szabat in January. After these confirmations, this is the first time the Senate has confirmed a *majority* of the Amtrak Board Members in almost a decade.

The political makeup of the Amtrak Board, which sets policy and spending priorities and approves hiring and firing of senior staff, may prove consequential. Trump, in his first term, advocated elimination of federal funding for long-distance trains. He is anticipated to attempt a clawback of unspent congressionally appropriated funds for major Northeast Corridor projects, such as the New York-New Jersey Gateway Program, the Frederick Douglass Tunnel modernization in Baltimore, and Virginia's Long Bridge expansion to allow extending the NEC to Richmond.

Confirmations of the new Board members appeared doomed a few days earlier. The President-elect instructed Senate Republicans to reject fast-tracking by the Senate Democratic-majority of the Biden nominees so that he could nominate his own slate of new Board members following his Jan. 20, 2025 inauguration, when Republicans will control the Senate.

As senators were preparing to vote on the vital Continuing Resolution, the expected final Senate vote of the 118th Congress, Schumer made his parliamentary maneuver designed to force Republicans to confirm the Amtrak Board members. After Republicans had refused to provide unanimous consent for the confirmations, Schumer gave them a choice: delay your departure for home for the holidays for at least 36 hours, or agree to immediate consent for all four, including the two Republicans. The Senate decided to vote to approve the new board members.