



# ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

www.marp.org

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*The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. (MARP) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation established in 1973 to improve passenger train service, travel conditions for passengers, and to work for the preservation of historic rail stations.*

*Monthly meetings are held at locations around the state. Check the website for dates and venues. Everyone is welcome.*

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### 2013 MEETINGS

- 12 January** – Williamston Depot-Museum
- 9 February** – Capac Depot Museum
- 9 March** – St. Johns Railroad Station
- 20 April** – Niles
- 11 May** – National Train Day
- 15 June** – Vicksburg Historic Village & Depot Museum
- 20 July** – Flushing Historical Depot
- 10 August** – City of Milwaukee Train Ferry
- 14 September** – Annual Meeting at Durand Union Station
- October** – Grand Haven (tentative)
- November** – Albion Amtrak Depot (tentative)
- December** – Executive Committee

Visit [www.marp.org](http://www.marp.org)  
Email [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com)

## Lawmakers Approve Funding for the Wolverine Trains

For the third year in a row, the Michigan Legislature has approved a balanced state budget four months before the start of the next fiscal year. Of particular importance to MARP is the inclusion of full funding for the operation of the *Wolverine* trains that make 6 daily trips between Detroit/Pontiac and Chicago.

Under terms of the federal Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA), states are now required to assume the cost of operating trains on routes of less than 750 miles. For Michigan, this represents an increase of \$19.3 M in state funding. Following Governor Snyder's budget recommendation, SB 184 (Pappageorge) included this amount, while the original HB 4328 (Haveman) did not. A conference committee appointed to reconcile the differences between the two bills agreed on inclusion of the additional funding. Conferees included Reps. [Poleski](#), [Kowall](#), and [Durhal](#), and Senators [Pappageorge](#), [Kahn](#), and [Bert Johnson](#).

In announcing agreement on the budget, Governor Snyder also noted the inclusion of \$350 M in new funding to fix Michigan's crumbling roads and bridges. This is far short of the \$1.2 B he called for in his budget message earlier in the year and he challenged lawmakers to continue working toward filling the gap in transportation funding identified by the 2008 [Transportation Funding Task Force](#).

The final budget bill HB 4328 as amended was passed by a vote of 63-46 in the House on May 28 and a vote of 24-14 in the Senate on June 4. It should be noted that this bill is a General Omnibus Bill, funding all state government functions. A yea or nay vote does not reflect an individual's support or lack of support for the transportation sections of the bill. When you write your lawmakers – **and it is hoped you will do that** – you

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**MARP MEMBER MEETING**  
**Saturday, June 15**  
**10:00 am – 1:00 pm**  
**Vicksburg Historic Village**  
**And Depot Museum**

300 N Richardson St, Vicksburg MI 49097  
[Map & Driving Directions](#)

We will meet in the historic Brady Township Hall which is part of the Vicksburg Historic Village to hear about trains and ice and enjoy viewing several pieces of train equipment on the grounds. Details on the website [marp.org](http://marp.org).

## Indian Trails gets Greyhound route; survives Thruway scare

by Jim Wallington, MARP

What Amtrak has taken away can be given back. That is what Indian Trails, Michigan's premier bus line, learned in a topsy-turvy week of dealing with government entities. In the end, you could say Indian Trails hit two big bumps in the road, but had one major pothole paved over in its attempts to expand passenger service in the state.

**FIRST BUMP** -- Late in May, Amtrak withheld Thruway designation from two critical routes, including the line from Detroit to Flint that Indian Trails look over from Greyhound on June 1. Citing connection policy, Amtrak said it would not honor proposed Thruway service designation for Indian Trails' new run from Detroit and Pontiac through to St. Ignace. And the national railroad company reportedly told Indian Trails that it also was withdrawing Thruway designation on the current Kalamazoo/Battle Creek bus to Flint that extends to Bay City and Cheboygan because passengers would have to change motor coaches in Flint.

However, under pressure from the National Association of Passengers, Amtrak's Thruway guru George Genge rescinded this decision, allowing Thruway designation to remain on the bus from Kalamazoo/Battle Creek despite the need to change buses in Flint. Genge, whose official title is Senior Manager, Operations Support & Intermodal Service, also said Amtrak was extending the Thruway designation from Flint to Mackinac City and St. Ignace. Previously, the Thruway agreement had ended at Cheboygan.

Thruway service is an arrangement that allows Amtrak to issue connecting tickets between its trains and bus companies to expand service to cities on the bus routes. Indian Trails is the major Thruway carrier in Michigan.

In another positive step for Indian Trails and Michigan passengers, southbound bus #85 from St. Ignace was designated a Thruway to connect in Pontiac with Train #355, with an hour-long window between bus arrival and the 5:40 p.m. Wolverine departure.

Remaining intact was the decision by Amtrak not to establish Thruway service at Pontiac from Train #350 to Bus #84 going to St. Ignace. Cited as the reason for this decision was heavy track work this year that could make the proposed 20-minute connection problematic. However, members of the Michigan Association of Rail Passengers hope the connection will be instituted after the construction season.

Ross Capon, president of NARP, was given credit by former MARP chairman John DeLora for convincing Genge to change his mind about the Thruway connections.

**SECOND BUMP** -- In another roadblock to improved service in the state, Indian Trails has been denied a state approved federal grant of \$595,000 to help expand its Michigan Flyer service from 8 to 12 daily round trips between East Lansing, Ann Arbor and Metro Airport. The grant, which had been endorsed by the Michigan Department of Transportation, was blocked May 29 by the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission in a 9-9 vote. The grant required the planning agency's approval, but it was aggressively fought by local airport interests.

"We needed a majority vote," Chad Cushman, an Indian Trails vice president, said after the vote. "Only saving grace yet is that one of the commissioners was absent, so a motion was made to readdress at the next meeting. There is still some hope, but not much at this point." The [Commission](#) meets again June 26.



*Indian Trails inaugurated service between Detroit and Flint on June 1, 2013, taking over service formerly provided by Greyhound. MARP member John DeLora was on the scene as the motor coach prepared to leave Pontiac for Flint where it will continue on the existing route to Bay City and beyond. Travelers now have through service from Detroit to St. Ignace along the Lake Huron shore, serving such cottage and resort towns as Tawas City, Oscoda, Harrisville, Alpena and Cheboygan, and connecting with the route across the Upper Peninsula.*

*Photo by John DeLora*

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Despite overwhelming support of the grant by speakers at the May 29 public hearing, as well as several agencies and groups, including MARP, the nine opponents of the grant cited fears that the four additional trips would draw too many potential passengers away from Lansing's Capitol Regional Airport, despite testimony to the contrary. Opponents of the grant said airlines would see the expansion of Michigan Flyer as a deterrent to providing additional flights to Lansing.

**SO, WHATS LEFT IN THIS FALLOUT? First, good news.** Thanks to Greyhound ceding the Detroit-Pontiac-Flint market to Indian Trails, travelers now have through service from Detroit to Bay City and through to St. Ignace along the Lake Huron shore, hitting such cottage and resort towns as Tawas City, Oscoda, Harrisville, Alpena and Cheboygan, and connecting with service to and across the Upper Peninsula.

Indian Trails officials hope this move will boost passenger numbers and help preserve the state-supported run north of Bay City. State transportation officials have said they would drop financial support if ridership doesn't improve.

In the takeover from Greyhound, Indian Trails is adding a shorter run, leaving Detroit for Bay City in the morning. Trips returning south through Bay City later in the day will provide local riders a daily round trip.

An Indian Trails official said his firm historically stayed out of the Detroit-Flint market to avoid conflict with Greyhound, which served the market for years. But Greyhound was not making convenient connections for Indian Trails passengers north of Flint, he said.

**Not so good news.** The westbound Thruway bus will now depart Flint 2 hours earlier, creating a 2-hour and 45-minute layover in Battle Creek for Wolverine #353 passengers. Previously, the layover was a more reasonable 54 minutes. Indian Trails cited the need to connect with Greyhound runs out of Chicago.

**No news may be good news.** Indian Trails is making no changes to its Thruway Service between Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids and St. Ignace, nor to late evening connections from Battle Creek to East Lansing and Flint or the early evening connections from Flint and East Lansing to Kalamazoo via Grand Rapids.

Amtrak provides another Thruway service between East Lansing, Jackson, Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Detroit to Toledo to connect to overnight trains to and from Washington, D.C., and New York City. It is operated under contract with Trinity Transportation of Detroit. Indian Trails has bid to operate this service and MARP hopes that it will be expanded to Grand Rapids.

Indian Trails, a private, family-owned company based in Owosso, has been in the transportation business for more than century. It also operates extensive charter service, local services at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, as well as The Michigan Flyer service from East Lansing and Ann Arbor to Detroit Metro Airport. For information about [Routes](#) and schedules, see [indiantrails.com](http://indiantrails.com)

## AHOY! TIME'S A'WASTIN' TO MAKE YOUR AUGUST PLANS

MARP's August 10 meeting will take place on the rail car deck of the retired railroad ferry - the *S.S. City of Milwaukee* - which is permanently berthed on Lake Manistee in the northwest Michigan vacation community of Manistee. Members of the *City of Milwaukee's* preservation group, meeting the same weekend, will attend our meeting and have invited us to attend their events.

Manistee is a popular tourist destination, so you are urged to make your reservations now. [CLICK HERE](#) for meeting details and information about lodging aboard ship or in nearby motels. Or visit [carferry.com/contact](http://carferry.com/contact) to request booking information.

Make this part of your family's summer vacation plans.

QUESTIONS? Phone Jim Wallington 517-303-6038 or email [marprail@yahoo.org](mailto:marprail@yahoo.org).



## MARP Membership Cards

MARP membership cards have been mailed to all whose 2013 dues were processed before April 30. Our records incorrectly show many of our members as having joined in 2007. If you will let us know when you first joined MARP, we will make that change to our records.

Send email to [marprail@yahoo.org](mailto:marprail@yahoo.org).

## Comment Period Extended for South of the Lake Route Study

The Michigan Department of Transportation is leading a multi-state effort to develop a 20-year master plan for the Detroit/Pontiac-Chicago passenger rail corridor. Much of the plan's focus is on the Chicago IL-Porter IL segment –known as the “South of the Lake” area - where two new tracks dedicated to passenger trains are to be built.

During the scoping meetings last fall, many of you asked that the final route be capable of being used by future 220-mph high-speed trains. That means no movable bridges, no highway grade crossings and no interaction with freight trains.

Rick Harnish, Midwest High Speed Rail Association, notes that the first round of analyses has been completed, comparing various route alternatives. In addition to screening out several undesirable routes, the consultants added a new alternative that likely meets these criteria.

Harnish asks that we reinforce support for a truly dedicated passenger rail corridor by sending our comments before the June 12 deadline (extended from the original May 29 deadline).

To send your comment [CLICK HERE](#)

For more background [CLICK HERE](#)

An online self-guided presentation, available at [GreatLakesRail.org](http://GreatLakesRail.org), summarizes the preliminary route analysis being conducted between Chicago Union Station and Porter IN. The last page provides instructions on how to submit comments.

The deadline for submitting comments has been extended to June 12, although the website still has May 29 as the deadline.

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can express your appreciation for funding that will continue full service on Michigan’s busiest passenger train route. Not only that, work can now proceed in earnest on upgrading the 135 miles of track between Dearborn and Kalamazoo recently acquired by the State of Michigan. As MARP learned at the April meeting in Niles, work is underway to achieve 110-mph service between Kalamazoo and Battle Creek by the end of this year. Work is proceeding as well on the east portion of the route.

Highlighting the importance of citizen involvement in the legislative process, MARP member and transportation policy lead for the Michigan Environmental Council, Tim Fischer had this to say: “We are pleased that the conference committee fully funded Michigan’s passenger train service. That there was even question about whether or not to support our trains highlights the importance for residents to stay in contact with their state elected officials. Let them know that the services are important for our quality of life, mobility and accessibility, and environmental sustainability.”

Thanks are due also to MARP Governmental Affairs Coordinator, John Langdon, who has worked tirelessly over that last few months talking with legislators about passenger transportation and making them aware of the importance of the issues of transportation choice to the citizens of Michigan.

## Opt-Out Bill Will Derail the RTA

The new Southeast Michigan Regional Transit Authority held its first meeting in April. But the Michigan legislature is already considering a bill that would hobble the RTA before it even gets started.

**HB 4637**, sponsored by Kurt Heise (Plymouth), would allow individual cities and counties to opt-out of participation in the RTA.

Tim Fischer, Deputy Policy Director of MEC, explains that allowing communities to opt-out will perpetuate the “checkerboard” pattern currently seen in the SMART bus system, where 53 of 127 communities have opted out. The creation of a more cohesive, convenient, accessible and effective transit system throughout Oakland, Macomb, Wayne and Washtenaw counties will be realized only if all municipalities in the region participate in the RTA.

You are invited to [TAKE ACTION!](#). Ask you legislator to oppose this harmful bill. Click on the link above to send a message to your state representative and senator.

## View from elsewhere . . .

*"In all honesty, there should be a passenger rail connection between Lansing and Detroit/Detroit Metro . . . Capital Region International needs to find something other than short flights to Detroit Metro to base its revenue [on] . . . Most people want to switch planes as infrequently as possible."*

--- Comment by BiddleCityGuy on May 29 article in City Pulse ["Airport-Flyer Flap"](#)

*"This agreement is another major step in our effort to reinvent Michigan. We will continue to work with our legislative partners to . . . develop a sufficient and sustainable revenue stream to maintain our transportation infrastructure."*

--- Governor Rick Snyder in announcing agreement with legislative leaders on FY2014 spending bill that includes an additional \$350 M for transportation infrastructure

*"Who in their right mind would let a gasoline tanker cut across an airport runway while a 757 is taxiing down it? Yet every day, all over America, at a hundred thousand controlled grade crossings and God knows how many unmarked, we permit that to happen."*

--- Jim RePass, commenting on last week's freight/truck collision and explosion near Baltimore. [Read More Here](#)



## A Novel Use ?

Jeanie Merckel didn't want to leave out the engineer when passing out treats to the crew of Train #351 on National Train Day in Dearborn on May 11. Along with the Michigan-made Awrey's pastry were his orders for the day: *"Eat & Enjoy between MP 10 and MP 38."*



## Amtrak Honored to Carry Senator Frank R. Lautenberg Back To Washington DC One Last Time

Amtrak Chairman Tony Coscia and President and CEO Joe Boardman lauded U.S. Senator Frank Lautenberg, who passed away on June 3, as a true friend of Amtrak who deeply believed in the national mission of America's Railroad and in the people who do every facet of work to make this railroad run. Intercity rail passengers today, and generations of Americans yet to come, will benefit from his leadership

*Thank you Sen. Lautenberg . . . You have arrived at your final station.*

### Contact Your Lawmaker

Congressional Switchboard  
202-224-3121

[tinyurl.com/Stabenow](http://tinyurl.com/Stabenow)

[tinyurl.com/SenatorLevin](http://tinyurl.com/SenatorLevin)

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