



ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

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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. The public is invited to attend.

MARP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

2012-2014

| | |
|------------------|--|
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*The Michigan Passenger Editor and Webmaster, Larry Sobczak
ON TRACK Editor, Kay Chase*

2014 MEETINGS (tentative)

18 January – Williamston Depot-Museum

February – University of Detroit-Mercy

March – Herrick District Library, Holland

April – TBA

10 May – National Train Day

June – TBA

12 July – Traverse City

August – Executive Committee

20 September – Annual Meeting at Durand Union Station

18 October – Grand Rapids

November – TBA

December – Executive Committee

Visit www.marp.org
Email marprail@yahoo.com

Season's Greetings



The Four Flags Garden Club will host the 22nd Annual Hometown Christmas celebration at the Historic Amtrak Depot in Niles on December 7, from 4:30 – 6:00 pm. Niles Mayor Mike McCauslin will greet visitors and the Niles High School CounterPoints Show Choir will provide entertainment. Santa and Mrs. Claus will drop by with homemade cookies and candy.

Dowagiac, too, is welcoming visitors with lights on the station, thanks to the efforts of MARP member Ron Leatz. Dowagiac's lights glow from November 9 through March 9, brightening the way throughout the winter for Michigan train passengers.

*There will be no member meeting in December.
All of us on the MARP Executive Committee wish
you and yours a safe and joyous holiday season.*

BEHIND THE SCENES AT CHICAGO UNION STATION

Meeting Notes by Hugh Gurney

On November 2, approximately 35 MARP members plus representatives from allied passenger rail groups in Wisconsin, Illinois and Indiana gathered in a conference room on an upper level of [Chicago Union Station](#) for a rare behind the scenes tour of this iconic terminal. We were welcomed by Amtrak Superintendent of Customer Service Sidney Birkett and Joy Smith, Amtrak Superintendent, Passenger Services, Central Division.



While waiting for all to arrive and for the buffet lunch to be set up, Steve Sobel gave a power point presentation on current construction projects along the **Wolverine** line. The Troy Transportation Center is complete; however the opening is yet to be scheduled due to legal issues. Construction on the Dearborn Transportation Center is moving along nicely and should be complete sometime in 2014. A significant amount of work has been done on the tracks between Dearborn and Kalamazoo, with work currently focusing on the stretch between Battle Creek and Kalamazoo. During 2013, Amtrak and

Norfolk Southern crews, under Amtrak supervision, are concentrating on the worst sections with the goal of getting operating speeds up to 80 mph between Dearborn and Kalamazoo. The elevation on some curves is being increased. A number of crossings are being upgraded and new signals are being installed.

Travel has been disrupted, with through trains operating earlier in the morning and later in the evening, using bus bridges to link Kalamazoo with points east during the middle of the day. Construction will wind up on November 21, enabling Amtrak to run full service during the Thanksgiving weekend.

Construction will continue during 2014 and 2015 with the goal of increasing speeds on most of the line to 110 mph when complete. New equipment is scheduled to arrive in late 2016 or early 2017.

After lunch, Joy Smith walked us through Amtrak's recent reorganization. As originally planned, each of the fifteen long distance trains would have its own manager supervising both on board staff and staff at stations along the route. Due to the sequester and uncertainty about further funding, some long-distance routes have been grouped together under one supervisor. All state supported trains, including those operating in Michigan, will have a manager based in Oakland, California, with a deputy located in Chicago. Moe Savoy, as Deputy General Manager, Long Distance Business Line, will have responsibility for all aspects of long distance trains operating out of Chicago and will assure that all equipment dispatched from Chicago is in tip top operating condition.

Rick Harnish, CEO of the Midwest High Speed Rail Association, briefed us on [CrossRail Chicago](#), his vision for linking O'Hare Airport, Chicago Union Station and McCormick Place with electrified express trains. Existing Metra lines would be upgraded as a step in developing high speed rail service throughout the Midwest. Eventual electrification of the proposed South of the Lake right of way would be another step.

(CHICAGO continues on page 3)



CHRISTMAS DINNER AT DURAND UNION STATION

Phone 989-288-3561 for Reservations

The Depot is hosting [Christmas Dinners](#) at 6:00 pm on Friday, December 13th, and Saturday December 14th. Enjoy the display of 50 illuminated Christmas Trees while dining with friends and family in this beautiful historic depot. Tickets are \$16.00 per person, \$14.00 for DUSI members, \$10.00 per child under 10, and \$120 for a table of eight.

Door prizes will be awarded at each dinner as well. Reservations are required.



4,752 Michiganders rode Michigan trains on November 23, 2011 the day before Thanksgiving. It would have taken 32 – 149 passenger Boeing 737s to carry these people – and those planes weren't flying to most of the places those people wanted to go!

(CHICAGO continues from page 2)

Larry Krieg reviewed the status of the Chicago Union Station Passenger Action Taskforce (CUSPAT). Clear signage, located at key confusion points, would help significantly. The taskforce is recommending replacing the present artistic but hard to read lettering with standard Amtrak signage and greater use of international symbols. Putting signage in the most effective locations will require elimination of some advertising. Train status monitors could be larger, paid for with advertising along one edge.

The taskforce recommends returning the Great Hall to its original purpose as the main waiting room. Approximately 45 minutes before train time, passengers could be called up and given boarding passes to enter the current boarding lounge.

Krieg recommended gentle pressure to encourage change. Letters to [Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel](#) would help.

The group was then divided into two groups, with Group A going first on a "Behind the Scenes Tour" with Sid Birkett and then to the Dispatch Center with Dick Rogers, Terminal Trainmaster for Equipment Planning. Group B did the tours in reverse order. The "Behind the Scenes Tour" visited several large unused spaces adjacent to the Great Hall, including a museum of train related photographs, the original ladies' waiting room with its elegant murals, and the former Fred Harvey Restaurant, closed since a fire in 1977. Most significantly, we visited an unused area near the current Metra ticket windows which is slated to become the new Metropolitan Lounge in 2014. This would permit the current coach passenger waiting lounge to be expanded significantly.

In the Dispatch Center, we watched a number of video monitors showing train movements in and around Chicago Union Station, along the Amtrak owned section of the **Wolverine** line, as well as an area around the terminal in New Orleans. Metra and Amtrak trains arriving and departing are also monitored. Amtrak controls all train movements into and out of Chicago Union Station for several miles to the north and to the south. It was particularly interesting to watch the progress of Train #352 as it moved eastward across western Michigan.

All in all, it was a highly informative day.

Public Meetings to Gather Input On Woodward Avenue Rapid Transit Alternatives

The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) has announced a series of community meetings in December to provide information and answer questions about Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and its "possible future as the next generation mode of choice for cruising Woodward Avenue," according to Carmine Palombo, SEMCOG's Director for Transportation Programs.

New information that will be presented includes:

- **Proposed Alignments:** What roadways will the BRT travel on?
- **Travel Times:** How long will it take to travel between downtown Detroit and Pontiac on the BRT?
- **Feeder Bus Network:** How will BRT operate with existing SMART and DDOT service?
- **Ridership:** How many riders are projected to utilize BRT?
- **Evaluation of Alternatives:** What factors are used to examine the merits of an alternative?
- **Next Steps:** What happens after a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) is selected? Who are the decision-makers and what is the process for selecting the LPA that will move forward for further analysis and future implementation?

Tuesday, December 3, 6-8 pm

Beaumont Hospital Administration Building
3711 W. 13 Mile Road, Royal Oak MI 48073
(Free parking in South Deck, enter from Coolidge Hwy)

Thursday, December 5, 5:30-7:30 pm

Berkley Community Cntr, 2400 Robina Ave., Berkley MI, 48070

Saturday, December 7, 11 am.-1 pm

St. Joseph Hospital, Anthony M. Franco Communications Cntr Auditorium, 44555 Woodward Avenue, Pontiac MI, 48341

Monday, December 9, 6-8 pm

MSU Event Center, 3408 Woodward Ave., Detroit MI 48201

Tuesday, December 10, 6-8 pm

NextEnergy, 461 Burroughs Street, Detroit MI 48202

Wednesday, December 11, 6-8 pm

Coolidge Intermediate School
2521 Bermuda St, Ferndale MI 48220

Download the [Meeting Flyer](#) for detailed information. Visit the [information center](#) to view materials and comments. View poster presentations from the Dec 2012 meeting [HERE](#). Submit a question or a comment [HERE](#).

WoodwardAnalysis.com

Are you in favor of the proposed "Transportation Empowerment Act," which would transfer U.S. government authority over federal highway and transit programs to the states and lower the federal gas tax to 3.7 cents from 18.4 cents over the next five years?

No  68%

Yes  31%

Total Votes: 163 Poll conducted 11/25/13 for [Progressive Railroading](#)

View from elsewhere . . .

"The completion of the transcontinental railway made Canada a united, modern and forward-looking nation back in 1885 . . . one is left to wonder what has happened to that national dream and the vision that inspired it. Now, our rail passenger and freight systems are once again in the news, but not in ways that should make Canadians proud."

-- Greg Gormick, on the occasion of Canada's National Railway Day, November 7, 2013. Gormick is a policy advisor for [The National Dream Renewed](#), Transport Action Ontario's campaign to save VIA Rail.

"This partnership ... will help ensure the long-term success of local rail service in Michigan, and also provides a mechanism for the continued growth and improvement of our transportation assets to help grow Michigan's manufacturing and agricultural interests. We also believe that this partnership provides significant benefits to the MDOT's passenger efforts."

-- Louis Ferris, President of Federated Capital Holdings (owner of Great Lakes Central Railroad), responding to the announcement that Watco Transportation Services will make a preferred equity investment in FCH. [Read more here.](#) Earlier in the year, [Watco purchased](#) the Ann Arbor Railroad and more recently filed with the STB for [permission to lease](#) approximately 3.69 miles of track in Toledo from Norfolk Southern.



Amtrak conductor Tim Harrigan was honored with a Customer Service Award in October. Tim has been based in Battle Creek for his regular BTL-CHI-BTL round trip on the *Wolverine*. In presenting the award on behalf of the Amtrak Customer Advisory Committee, MARP member Jim Wallington related that Tim is "conscientious of his relationship with passengers and stresses to himself that they deserve respect and understanding. When he is the lead conductor, the whole train simply seems happier and more relaxed." Tim says he enjoys his job and his approach proves it. Sadly for Michigan passengers, Tim has shifted to the Toledo base for personal reasons. Look for him on the *Capitol Ltd.* and the *Lake Shore*.

More Honors for Friends of MARP

Two Amtrak employees, well-known to MARP for their dedication and professionalism, were recently honored at ceremonies in Washington Union Station. **Morrell "Moe" Savoy**, Deputy General Manager, Long Distance Business Lines, and **David Pryor**, Conductor, received President's Safety and Service Awards in recognition of their contributions to the overall success of "America's Railroad".

MARP members who have had contact with Moe over the years can attest to his energy and commitment. "Smiling Dave" Pryor's greetings are looked forward to by passengers riding the *Pere Marquette* between Grand Rapids and Chicago.

Amtrak President and CEO, Joseph H. Boardman, in his column in the November issue of [Amtrak INK](#) thanked the awardees with thoughts we all share:

"Thank you for those days you pick yourself up knowing you can do better and then doing better, thank you for those days you forgive each other and your customers as you remember how many times you have been forgiven, thank you for the integrity you show by not ignoring a situation that needs to be attended to, thank you for the respect you show each other by doing the right thing even when it's not convenient."



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