



# ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

www.marp.org

marprail@yahoo.com

Issue #28

January 2014

*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

Robert Tischbein	Chair
Larry Krieg	Vice-Chair
Dave Randall	Treasurer
Hugh Gurney	Secretary
John Langdon	Governmental/Public Affairs Coordinator
Kathleen Newell	Membership Coordinator
Kay Chase	Communications Coordinator
Jim Wallington	Meetings Coordinator
Don Monteith	Northern Region Chair
Robert Patterson	Detroit/Metro Region Chair
Open	West Region Chair
Rosemary Horvath	East/Central Region Chair

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

### 2014 MEETINGS (tentative)

- 18 January** – Williamston Depot-Museum
- 15 February** – University of Detroit-Mercy
- 8 March** – Herrick District Library, Holland
- 5 April** – Central Michigan University  
(tentative)
- 10 May** – National Train Day
- 14 June** – Former GTW Depot, Lansing
- 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](http://www.marp.org)  
Email [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com)

## Running On Empty

The newly reorganized national coalition [Transportation for America](#), leads off the New Year with the alarming statement that “there could be zero federal dollars to invest in transportation next year.” That’s Transportation with a capital “T” – not just roads, but urban transit systems, pedestrian safety features, and bicycle facilities. Amtrak infrastructure and operations are funded separately, with several states, Michigan included, now assuming the cost of operating routes of fewer than 750 miles.

Without Congressional action in the next several months, the so-called Highway Trust Fund – in actuality, the pot of money from which all surface transportation modes other than intercity passenger rail are funded – will be broke.

In point of fact, the Trust Fund has been teetering on the edge of collapse since 2008, requiring infusions of \$55 billion from general funds to stay afloat. So much for the popular notion than gasoline taxes pay for the roads. It has been pointed out that this is more money than has been appropriated to Amtrak in its entire 42 year history.

How did we get here? At the same time that cars have become more fuel efficient, Americans have been driving less, with the result that gas tax revenues have been steadily falling. In addition, the federal gas tax of 18.4-cents per gallon has not been raised in more than two decades. Worse yet, the tax has never been indexed for inflation. If it had been, it would have risen more or less painlessly over the years to 29-cents per gallon and we would not find ourselves in the current crisis.

To bring attention to the seriousness of the situation, [T4America](#) is calling on local elected, business, and civic leaders to support a realistic proposal to raise and invest additional revenue. “For the cost of coffee and a doughnut each week per commuter, \$30 billion a year can be raised – enough to fix the trust fund so that we can maintain our existing infrastructure, reward local innovation, and prepare for the future.”

*(TRUST FUND continues on page 3)*



**MARP MEMBER MEETING**  
**Saturday, January 18**  
**10:00 am – 1:00 pm**  
**Williamston Depot-Museum**  
369 West Grand River  
Williamston, MI 48895

Come early and peruse the museum collection. Our guests include Debra Alexander, CATA Asst. Exec. Dir., to update us on the new East Lansing station; also transportation consultant Ron DeCook who is conducting a passenger preference research project. Details at [www.marp.org](http://www.marp.org).

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETS IN OWOSSO

*Notes by Hugh Gurney*

With an agenda that would have taken the entire weekend to get through, the Executive Committee, meeting in Owosso on 7 December, decided to address what seemed to be the most critical issues first.

Among decisions made were:

The Route Enhancement Committee recommendations for 2014 will call for a request to MDOT and Amtrak to operate one train between Chicago and the East Coast through Michigan once funded track and signal improvements on the Chicago-Detroit route are completed. The Route Enhancement Committee will meet following the meeting in Williamston on January 18.

Mike Whims, asked to attend the meeting because of his expertise in federal regulatory matters, will track the request by CSX to remove current signaling between Plymouth and Flint. The line is included in MARP's Vision for passenger rail expansion, but not in the Michigan State Rail Plan. The consensus of the group was that entirely new and more sophisticated signaling would be required before passenger trains could operate on that rail line.

MARP is planning a Community Conversation Forum with the Center for Michigan at Central Michigan University on Saturday, April 5, 2014. We will encourage all MARP members to participate in this discussion of transportation issues in advance of this year's political campaign season. A regular MARP meeting will be scheduled in Mount Pleasant in conjunction with the forum.

MARP will not pursue the issue of having all coach seats turned forward on Michigan trains. This would require Amtrak to assign extra trainmen to Pontiac, Port Huron and Grand Rapids. MARP would prefer to have funding put first into station staffing and increased frequencies.

Gurney and Chase were asked to review the best way to preserve MARP's archival materials and have them available for use. They are currently stored at Durand Union Station but not considered part of the Railroad Museum's collections.

MARP has sent notes to Amtrak and MDOT in appreciation for the additional trains during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays and to Norfolk Southern, CN, and CSXT for their cooperation in facilitating the expanded schedule.

Treasurer Randall will be asked to provide an accounting of the \$5,000 received in 2013 from Transportation for Michigan ([www.Trans4M.org](http://www.Trans4M.org)) for its work on the Coast to Coast (Holland-Detroit) Rail Proposal. MARP will probably receive \$3,000 from Trans4M in 2014. Excess 2013 funds

*(MEETING continues in next column)*

**Watch Your Mailbox**  
**2014 membership renewal**  
**notices will be mailed soon**

*(MEETING continued from previous column)*

may be used to partially match a pending grant to continue this work.

It was decided not to schedule a MARP meeting during Toledo National Train Day on May 3. MARP will, however, have a table and will serve as hosts on the display train and other aspects of the program.

MARP will schedule a monthly meeting on Saturday, July 12, 2014 in Traverse City in conjunction with the Ales by the Rails Festival. Chris Bagwell of Great Lakes Central Railroad doubted that passenger trains could be operated in conjunction with the meeting because of the poor condition of the tracks in that area.

Langdon and Chase will work with Newell on the establishment of a Membership Committee.

It was agreed that MARP provide a complimentary one-year membership to invited meeting speakers.

After discussion, it was agreed that MARP will continue to offer life memberships.

It was also agreed that, while looking for additional opportunities to promote membership at green fairs, senior expos, women's expos, and college events, MARP will continue to staff booths at model train shows. Amtrak appreciates MARP's promotional efforts at such venues.

Krieg informed the group that Wayne County Community College is setting up a course of study in light rail maintenance. They are looking for instructors with knowledge of signaling and car body maintenance and repair.

Chris Bagwell provided an overview of Great Lakes Central operations. Watco's acquisition of preferred equity in Federated Holdings, Great Lakes Central's parent company, has not changed operations in any way. The fact that Watco now owns the Ann Arbor Railroad increases the possibilities for greater cooperation between GLC and AARR. Watco appears more receptive to passenger operations.

## AMTRAK's New No-Show Policy

Effective 1 March 2014, if you make a reservation at a "Saver" or "Value" fare for coach or Acela Business Class travel and do not modify it prior to scheduled departure time and fail to board the first departure on the reservation, you are considered a "no show". The entire amount paid is forfeited and no refund or eVoucher will be issued. This applies to Amtrak Guest Rewards point redemption reservations also. Refundable or "Flexible" fares are refundable even if you are a "no show," as are non-Acela Business and Acela First Class fares.

[Click Here For Details](#)

## MARP Members at the Capitol

On 12 Nov 2013, more than 100 people from across the state journeyed to Lansing for the annual Advocacy Day sponsored by [Trans4M.org](#).

Meetings with legislators focused on two main policy issues – the [Vulnerable Roadway User Protection](#) bills (HB 4792 and HB 5080) and a bill to create a [Merit-Based Transportation Infrastructure](#).

The **Vulnerable Roadway User** bills were reported favorably from the House Criminal Justice Committee. The bills would impose enhanced penalties on motorists who strike a bicyclist, pedestrian or wheelchair user while also committing a moving violation. The **Merit-Based Performance Measures** policy is draft legislation being championed by Representative [Jim Townsend](#) (D – Royal Oak). The legislation would help to ensure that our limited transportation dollars are used in the most efficient and strategic ways on projects.

For a recap of the day's events [CLICK HERE](#).



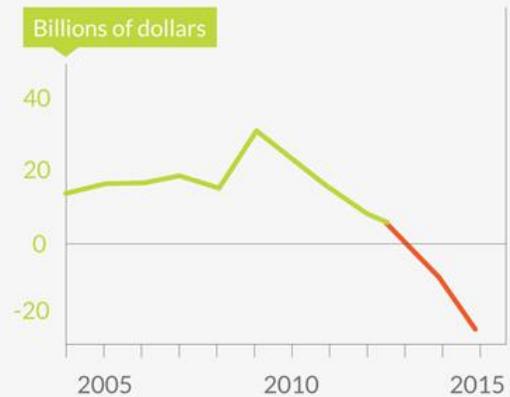
MARP members John Langdon, Chuck Merckel, Kay Chase, and Larry Krieg at the State Capitol.

*photo by Larry Krieg*

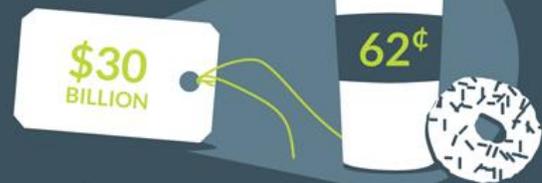
*(TRUST FUND continued from page 1)*

T4America recently brought together a group of mayors to visit with USDOT Secretary Anthony Foxx — a former mayor himself — to deliver a message about the importance of passenger rail to the economies of their communities. Read more [HERE](#).

## Trust Fund headed for insolvency



## What we need



Annual investment needed to make the transportation fund solvent and effective

Daily cost per commuter. About as much as a cup of coffee and a doughnut per week.

Read more about Transportation for America's initiative "Saving the Nation's Transportation Fund" [HERE](#).

## Mark Your Calendars

**EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION ENDS Feb 1  
Midwest HSR Spring Conference**

12 April, 2014 9am - 3 pm  
Crowne Plaza Chicago Metro Downtown  
733 W Madison St 60661

Early Bird Rate (Members ONLY): \$45.00  
Non-members \$45 + \$25 associate membership fee

[Click here to register now!](#)

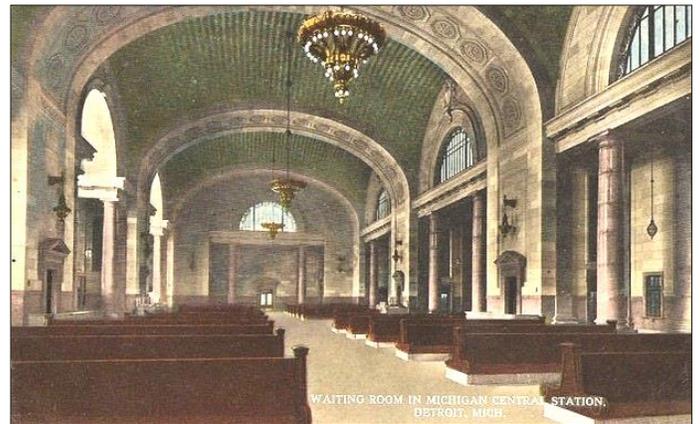
## View from elsewhere . . .

"We as a society must stop regarding the rail system as a transportation step-child. No one is surprised that the taxpayers foot the bill for local traffic lights and highway warning systems, or that the Federal Aviation Administration spends billions of taxpayer dollars every year promoting air travel and enforcing safety. Why should the railroads, which if anything are safer over-all than highway travel for both goods and people, foot the entire bill?"

-- Jim RePass, editorial [Safety First and Do It Right](#) following the Dec 1 crash of Metro-North commuter train near New York City.

"I'm very encouraged by the Legislature's willingness to devote greater investment in our transportation system. The Road and Risk Reserve Fund is a terrific start, and we'll carry that momentum forward to our goal of fully funding the needs of Michigan's roads, bridges, rails, airports and public transit."

--Gov. Rick Snyder, announcing Kalamazoo area road projects made possible with \$115M from the Roads and Risk Reserve Fund created with a one-time appropriation of \$230M from Michigan General Fund revenues. The balance of the RRR funds can be spent for roads after Feb. 1, 2014, if not yet dedicated to other purposes.



## Michigan Central Station Turns 100

The station was rushed into service on Dec. 26, 1913 after a fire severely damaged the existing station. The Beaux Arts building sits just off Michigan Ave, west of downtown Detroit and has been closed since 1988. The last Amtrak train serving the adjacent passenger platform departed in 1994.

MARP Webmaster, Larry Sobczak, has posted links to a series of articles and photo galleries recently published by the Detroit Free Press. Visit [marp.org/?p=5062](http://marp.org/?p=5062) to view this interesting material.



[CLICK HERE for details](#)



[CLICK HERE for details](#)



[CLICK HERE for details](#)



Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers  
P.O. Box 180076 Utica, MI 48318-0076

### Contact Your Lawmaker

Congressional Switchboard 202-224-3121

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

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

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

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

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