



# 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.*

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

### 2014 MEETINGS

- 18 January** – Williamston Depot-Museum
- 15 February** – University of Detroit Mercy
- 8 March** – Herrick District Library, Holland
- 5 April** – Wayne County Community College, downtown Detroit
- 10 May** – National Train Day
- 14 June** – Former GTW Depot, Lansing
- 19 July** – Traverse City
- August** – Executive Committee
- 13 September** – Annual Meeting at Durand Union Station
- 18 October** – *The Rapid* Central Station, Grand Rapids
- November 15** – Port Huron
- December** – Executive Committee

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

## TRU Releases Report Critical of Planned Road Project

A new analysis of the proposed \$2.7 billion project to widen 7 miles of I-94 through the center of Detroit finds that it is based on outdated forecasts of traffic trends. The project's original documentation, from 2003, anticipated that vehicle miles traveled in the region would increase by more than 11 percent by 2025. In fact, vehicle miles traveled in the region had decreased 14 percent by 2013 and current traffic volumes are no greater than they were nearly a decade ago.

These are among the findings in **Highway Boondoggles: Wasted Money and America's Transportation Future**, a report urging reconsideration of 11 road projects across the country projected to cost taxpayers at least \$13 billion. The report concludes that policy makers need to redirect transportation spending to reflect changing demographics and travel patterns.

Transportation Riders United (TRU), based in Southeast Michigan, helped release the report to local media, stating their belief "that in a region whose population has not grown in over thirty years, it is inappropriate and wasteful to spend billions of dollars to add additional lanes to our roadways." TRU's statement continued, "While I-94 certainly needs to be repaired, tearing out pedestrian bridges and widening this thoroughway is wrong for our community."

At a time when Detroit is in the midst of building the Woodward Avenue streetcar line to tie together the riverfront, Midtown and New Center, the I-94 project could widen the gulf between these developing retail, commercial and cultural areas that hold promise for revitalizing the city. The elimination of 11 bridges that cross the freeway, currently enhancing pedestrian and bicycle access to these activity centers, could actually reverse the progress signaled by these initiatives.

*Just 3% of the cost of the I-94 widening would be enough to build and operate the long-proposed commuter train between Detroit, Metro Airport and Ann Arbor, providing a real alternative to I-94.*



**MARP MEMBER MEETING**  
**Saturday, November 15**  
**10:00 am – Noon**  
**Port Huron Museum-Carnegie Center**  
1115 Sixth Street, Port Huron MI 48060

[Map & Directions](#)

Morning speakers include T.J. Gaffney, local railroad historian, and Paul Maxwell, Port Huron DDA. After lunch, we will tour railroad facilities past, present and future as Port Huron begins plans to relocate the Amtrak Station. Details on the website [www.marp.org](http://www.marp.org) Or send email to [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com).

## Bus Rapid Transit and New Station Tour Highlight Grand Rapids Meeting

by Clark Charnetski

The October 18 meeting of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers in Grand Rapids featured a presentation on the recently opened *Silver Line* bus rapid transit system and a tour of the new Vernon J. Ehlers Amtrak station.



Twenty-four members and three guests met at *The Rapid's* Central Station, headquarters for the city's transit system. Central Station also serves *Indian Trails* and *Greyhound* intercity buses, *The Rapid's* local bus routes and the new *Silver Line* Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route. Now joining this intermodal mix is the new Amtrak station.

Michael Bulthuis, Public Outreach Coordinator for *The Rapid*, gave a presentation: "The *Silver Line*—Michigan's First Bus Rapid Transit." From planning to startup has taken more than ten years. Operations commenced on August 25, 2014. The 9.6 mile route starts at a 200-space park-and-ride

lot at 60<sup>th</sup> Street on the south end of the line, goes north on Division Avenue to the "Medical Mile" on the north end, then west and south past the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel and ends at the Central Station of *The Rapid*. Division Avenue was chosen because it is a long street with the most cross-town bus transfer points, and portions of the route are ripe for economic development. The capital cost of the *Silver Line* was \$40 million.

Stations are spaced approximately one-half mile apart — closer in the downtown area — and feature lighted and heated platforms 60 feet long, ticket vending/validation machines, emergency phones, benches and bike racks. Ramps give access to raised platforms and allow level boarding of the buses, a feature that saves time. An electronic sign announces arriving buses and how many minutes until the next one. On-board roving ticket inspectors enforce ticket regulations. The standard fare is \$1.50 one way with free transfers.

Ten hybrid vehicles are used in *Silver Line* service. Passengers board either at front or rear doors. All BRT buses stop at all stations. Visual and auditory announcements indicate station approaches. A Traffic Signal Priority system reduces delays at stoplights. During rush hours the right traffic lane is for buses and automobile right turns only. An end-to-end ride takes just over 30 minutes. Buses run on 10-minute headways during rush hour and have 38 seats manufactured in Grand Rapids by American Seating. Standees give each bus a capacity of 70 passengers.

The Division Avenue Route #1 bus continues to operate as a local bus with separate stops about a quarter mile apart. Ridership on that route is roughly the same as before the *Silver Line*, but the added *Silver Line* patronage has led to a doubling of transit use on Division Avenue.



Photo by Clark Charnetski

The *Silver Line* gives Southeast Michigan a taste for the 3 or 4 RTA bus rapid transit lines proposed for the Metro Detroit area. *The Rapid* is now studying a second BRT route from Allendale (the home of Grand Valley State University) to Grand Rapids, a distance of 13 miles. Additional information [HERE](#).

In the business portion of the meeting, Don Wescott was accepted as an At-Large Executive Committee member with responsibility for coordinating meetings. Members voted to endorse the proposal for a "budget-based" dues structure for the Transportation for Michigan Coalition [Trans4M.org](#), of which

MARP is a member. Members discussed sharing membership information with the National Association of Railroad Passengers, approving a motion to "exchange membership data with NARP annually until further notice after informing the membership with the annual membership renewal notice."

A proposal was accepted to form a committee to draft a written statement for submission to MDOT regarding the [Draft Tier-1 Environmental Impact Statement \(EIS\)](#) for the [Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac Passenger Rail Corridor Program](#).

Following the MARP meeting, members and guests were treated to a preview tour of the new Vernon J. Ehlers Grand Rapids Amtrak station. It is located just south of *The Rapid's* Central Station, thus **(MEETING continues on page 3)**



Photo by Clark Charnetski

## LATE TRAIN ?

Did your late train cause you to miss a meeting? A connection with another train? NARP has **launched a campaign** to tell the stories of the people who are being hurt by these delays. Tell them **yours**. Then use NARP's new "**Fix It**" tool to send a personal message directly to your congressional representative and let them know this is unacceptable.

*(MEETING continued from page 2)*

allowing for easy transfer between modes. It replaces the thirty-year-old "temporary" station on Wealthy Street. The brick, metal and glass building has an airy feeling with large windows and glass doors facing the train platform on the south side of the station and a clock tower visible from the adjacent freeway. The platform has a canopy the length of the platform. The platform is 15 inches above top of rail, seven inches higher than most stations in Michigan. It is nearly level to the lower floor of Superliner cars and the new cars on order for Michigan. Grand Rapids is the first Amtrak station in Michigan to have such high platforms. The station has provision for a second track.

The 115-space long-term parking lot is between the train station and *The Rapid's* Central Station. The heated lobby, containing a ticket machine, will be open when the station itself is not.

## The "On-Time-Performance" Saga

John DeLora, former MARP Chairman and currently on NARP's Board of Directors sent this interesting news last week:

"NARP President Jim Mathews and NARP Chair Bob Stewart met early in October with FRA Administrator Joe Szabo and STB Chair Dan Elliott to discuss on-time-performance. When asked how delays were affecting passengers, Mathews sent the 1300+ complaints received by NARP in the previous two days. STB's Elliott responded with a letter to Norfolk Southern CEO, Wick Moorman asking NS to specify what it intends to do about the delays. By mid-month, time-keeping on the national network trains had improved immensely."

Fred Frailey, TRAINS Magazine contributor, noticed the improvement as well. Read his blog "NS gets that old Amtrak religion" [HERE](#).

Your letters DO MAKE A DIFFERENCE. Keep them coming.

**Correction:** Last month's issue incorrectly named Wayne State as a presenter on the panel at the Michigan Rail Conference. It was **Wayne County Community College District** represented by **Dr. Frank R. Dunbar, District Provost**.

## November Outreach Events

The Appleumpkin Festival in the pioneer community of Tecumseh was, according to Chuck and Jeanie Merckel, one of the most enjoyable of recent MARP outreach events. "We met a lot of folks and were treated so well," Chuck said. "It was fun." The big November event for a number of years has been the Lansing Train Show. MARP member Mike Frezell has played a key role in organizing and promoting this event sponsored by the Lansing Model Railroad Club. Currently the outreach schedule does not include upcoming shows in Westland on November 30 (**Railroadiana Toys & Trains**), Wyoming on December 7 (**West Michigan Railroad Club Show**) or Orchard Lake, also on December 7 (**St. Mary's Train Show**). If you have an interest in any of these show, please contact Chuck Merckel at [crmerckel@aol.com](mailto:crmerckel@aol.com) or phone 734.522.7329.

### Lansing Model Train Show

Sunday, November 9 • 10 to 4  
MSU Pavilion  
4301 Farm Lane, East Lansing  
(K. Fujita, J. Langdon)

### Rails on Wheels

Sunday, November 30 • 10 to 4  
5055 Ann-Arbor Saline Road  
Washtenaw Farm Council Grounds  
(C. Charnetski, S. Sobel)

## EXTRA HELPINGS OF AMTRAK TRAINS FOR THANKSGIVING TRAVEL IN MICHIGAN

In anticipation of its busiest travel week of the year, Amtrak is adding 18 trains to [the MICHIGAN SCHEDULE](#) during the Thanksgiving holiday season.

Passengers are encouraged to [BOOK EARLY](#).

Michigan passengers will enjoy new stations in Grand Rapids and Troy.

On the day before Thanksgiving in 2011, a total of 4,752 Michiganders rode Michigan trains "over the river and through the woods . . ." It would have taken thirty-two 149-passenger Boeing 737s to carry these people — and those planes weren't flying to most of the places those people wanted to go!



### View from elsewhere . . .

*“The freight railroads simply have to do a better job in moving Amtrak trains over their tracks. Amtrak is prepared to take all necessary steps with the freights to enforce our statutory, regulatory and contractual rights to meet the expectation of our passengers for improved on-time performance.”*

— Amtrak CEO Joe Boardman, quoted in Global Rail News article [“Record year for Amtrak”](#).

*“Americans have been driving less, but state and federal governments are still spending billions of dollars on highway expansion projects based on outdated and obsolete assumptions. The time has come to shift our resources to invest in 21st century priorities, like fixing our roads and bridges and providing more Americans with a wider range of transportation choices.”*

— Phineas Baxandall, senior analyst at U.S. PIRG and a co-author of the report [Highway Boondoggles: Wasted Money and America’s Transportation Future](#).



### MARP Presents Award to Senator Levin

With Congressman Vernon J Ehlers, for whom the new Grand Rapids Amtrak Station is named, looking on over MARP Chairman Larry Krieg’s shoulder, Senator Carl Levin is presented an award in recognition of his “enduring support for the expansion and improvement of passenger train service in our state and country.”



### TRU's Fall Meeting • Monday November 10

At the Arab American National Museum, 13624 Michigan Ave, Dearborn, MI 48126  
**Reception at 6:00pm with light refreshments • Program from 6:30pm - 8:00pm**

The featured speaker is Michael Ford, the first-ever Chief Executive of the Regional Transit Authority for southeast Michigan, who began his new duties at the RTA on October 21. [RSVP here by November 6](#)

### Michigan Operation Lifesaver Quarterly Meeting

**Durand Union Station • Friday, November 14 • Begins at 9:30 am**

In addition to an interesting guest speaker, there will be updates from Michigan’s railroad companies and information on the activities of Operation Lifesaver. You’ll be the guest of Jon Cool, President of the Michigan Railroads Association for lunch following the meeting. Please RSVP to [samcrowl@comcast.net](mailto:samcrowl@comcast.net) if you plan to attend.

*Passenger Rail Forum*

### “The Future of Rail: Connecting Communities”

**Monday, November 17 • 11 am to 1 pm**  
**The Toledo Club, 235 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Toledo OH**

Featuring a keynote presentation by David King, former head of the rail division-North Carolina DOT and now with Triangle Transit in Durham NC. Panelists include Rob Greenlese, Ohio Rail Development Commission; Gabriel Hall, President US RAIL Corp.; Royce Maniko, Mgr. of Community Planning-Michigan, The Mannik & Smith Group. Sponsored by the [Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments Transit/Rail Committee](#) and the [Northwest Ohio Passenger Rail Association](#) . Register [HERE](#) by Nov 11.



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