



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. The public is invited to attend.

MARP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2014-2016

Larry Krieg	Chair
Jim Wallington	Vice-Chair
Jeanie Merckel	Treasurer
position open	Secretary
John Langdon	Governmental/Public Affairs Coordinator
Kathleen Newell	Membership Coordinator
Kay Chase	Communications Coordinator
Don Westcott	Meetings Coordinator
Don Monteith	Northern Region Chair
Robert Patterson	Detroit/Metro Region Chair
Warren Fritz	West Region Chair
Steve Vagnozzi	East/Central Region Chair

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

2015 MEETINGS

10 January – Lansing’s former Grand Trunk Depot with Special Guest Speaker Bob Johnston, writer for TRAINS Magazine

February – Battle Creek
details to follow

March – Kalamazoo
details to follow

April – TBA

9 May – National Train Day

June-August -- TBA

5 September –Annual Meeting
Durand Union Station

October-December – TBA

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

Lawmakers Decide We Should Decide

The Michigan Legislature adjourned its 2014 session shortly before Christmas with a decision to leave it up to the voters to decide how to plug the hole in the state’s transportation budget.

The problem has been widely acknowledged since as far back as 2008 when the [Report of the Transportation Funding Task Force](#) was released. The thirteen members of TF2 (as it was widely known) included four legislators and nine persons representing interests including manufacturing, labor, transportation, agriculture, aviation, commerce, public transit, tourism, and the general public. Among the “hard truths” they identified was that “if Michigan’s transportation system is to continue to serve the state adequately, our investment in transportation must increase significantly”. Almost since assuming office in 2013, Governor Snyder has been calling for \$1.2B in new funding to keep our transportation system from falling ever further behind.

Responding to a constant barrage of “fix our roads” during the recent campaign season, the state Senate and House responded with two widely different bills. A major defect of the House bill was the failure to funnel any of the new money to the Comprehensive Transportation Fund (CTF). [The CTF](#), as provided for in ACT 51, garners somewhat less than 10% of the state’s total transportation budget of \$2.3B (in 2014) and provides for funding transit, passenger and freight rail, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities – in short, everything that isn’t a road. The House bill also would have meant significant cuts in school aid and local revenue sharing.

MARP and our allies in the Transportation for Michigan coalition (Trans4M.org) rallied to urge lawmakers to take another look. On December 10, MARP members Larry Krieg, John Langdon, Chuck Merckel, Kay Chase and Bob Lovell joined some 35 other Trans4M.org members in Lansing to meet with lawmakers or their staff to tell them why it is important to us that they support provisions that benefit all transportation options, not just roads.

The lawmakers listened and hammered out an agreement to raise the state sales and use tax from 6-cents to 7-cents and make changes

(BALLOT continues on page 2)



MARP MEMBER MEETING

Saturday, January 10, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

Former GTW Railway Station

Now Reo Town Depot

1205 S Washington Street, Lansing MI

[Map & Directions](#)

Special Guest Speaker

Bob Johnston, writer for TRAINS Magazine

Details on the website www.marp.org Or send email to marprail@yahoo.com

Executive Committee Planning Retreat

The Executive Committee met on December 13 for an all-day session to organize for the coming year. We enjoyed the hospitality of the planning consultants Smith Group JJR at 201 Depot Street in Ann Arbor, who made their facilities available to us for the day.

Treasurer Jeanie Merckel presented the draft budget for 2015, projecting income from dues (\$7000), donations (\$1000) and a grant from Michigan Environmental Council (\$5000). A major expenditure is for the four issues of *The Michigan Passenger* provided to the membership and widely distributed through train stations and outreach events. MARP pays membership dues to the National Association of Railroad Passengers (\$150), Midwest High Speed Rail Association (\$200), Transportation Riders United (\$100), and Transportation for Michigan (\$150). An annual grant of \$500 to Durand Union Station, Inc. supports a basic organizational purpose of MARP (preservation of historic train stations) and allows us use of the facility for the annual meeting. The Michigan Environmental Council (MEC) grant aids MARP is covering expenses associated with our participation in MEC (environmentalcouncil.org) and Transportation for Michigan (Trans4M.org) projects which this year will include a number of community meetings to promote the Coast-to-Coast rail project, as well as other activities associated with the Michigan By Rail campaign (mibyrail.wordpress.com). A contribution of \$1000 from American By Rail will fund speakers for special events such as the annual meeting.

The proposed budget was accepted by the Committee. Further discussion is needed on reimbursable expenses for various MARP activities

At the recommendation of Jeanie Merckel, a Finance Committee was named with Merckel as chair and John Langdon and Warren Fritz as committee members.

National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) has suggested sharing of mailing lists to recruit members who belong to NARP but are not members of MARP and vice-versa. The project is on hold pending organizational changes at NARP. The Executive Committee would like assurances that the MARP list would be used for a one-time mailing only and would not be rented, sold, or shared.

The bylaws committee, chaired by Hugh Gurney, has been working for several months to assess the need for, and suggest possible revisions to, the MARP bylaws. After considerable discussion, a number of changes were approved. When finalized, the document will be presented to a vote of the entire membership.

(RETREAT continues in next column)

(BALLOT continued from page 1)

in how funds are distributed. Because a change in the sales tax rate requires a change in the Constitution, voter approval is needed.

Thus it will be up to the voters in May to approve

a penny increase in the general sales tax. Legislation tied to passage of the ballot measure will eliminate the sales tax on motor fuel and replace the current per gallon excise tax on motor fuel with a 14.9% wholesale tax. All taxes collected at the gas pump will be directed to the [Michigan Transportation Fund](#). It is worth noting that the talk is almost always of “fixing the roads”, but in truth the increased funding will benefit the total transportation system, including transit and passenger trains.

Other statutory changes tied to success of the ballot measure include provisions for warranties and competitive bidding on road projects and changes in vehicle registration fees. All told, these changes will bring new revenue for roads (\$1.2B), for transit and rail (\$107M), for constitutional revenue sharing (\$118M), and for the school aid fund (\$349M), as well as \$260M in tax relief via restoration of the Earned Income Tax Credit.

There is no plan B should the ballot measure fail. Michigan will be back to square one in seeking a solution to a critical situation in maintaining our transportation infrastructure and providing a range of options to meet the transportation needs of people of all ages, abilities, and income levels.

Further information:

[Trans4M Blog](#) includes two excellent graphics, one explaining the Michigan Transportation Fund and the other explaining the May ballot issue and its implications.

[Michigan Municipal League Blog](#) by John LaMacchia, Legislative Associate for the League.

Article from [Crain's Detroit Business](#) looks at how groups are lining up on the ballot issue



Advocates at a December 10 rally at the Capitol give “thumbs up” for transportation.

(RETREAT continued from previous column)

The Executive Committee proposes development of a set of “best practices” to guide its work in carrying out the various functions of the organization. Electronic communications and teleconferencing provide opportunities for policy discussions and decision-making, but it is unclear how best to incorporate these resources into our work.

The Naysayers Were Wrong- And How!

By John DeLora

When the Troy Transit Center was being debated before the Troy City Council in 2011, the naysayers were arguing, among other things, that the station was not needed because ridership at the existing Birmingham station was so low. Predictably, they tried calling it “The Train to Nowhere.”

Our response was that Chicagoans might resent their city being called “Nowhere” and that the main reason for the low ridership for Birmingham was that there was absolutely no general parking at the Birmingham station.

Much to our relief, the opposition was overcome and the station was built. The City of Troy celebrated the opening of the handsome new station in mid-October of this year.

I visited the new station over the Thanksgiving weekend and found much to like. There is ample parking and it is being well-used by the public. One minor surprise was that passengers don’t wait in the waiting room. They either go to the boarding platform or wait on the enclosed bridge over the tracks. Waiting in the bridge area gives them a great view of the tracks in both directions, so they can see an arriving train well in advance.

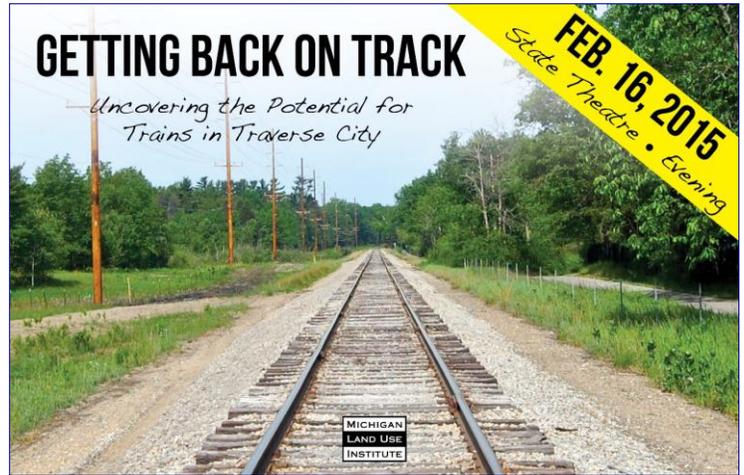
The crowd waiting for the midday train that day was well over 50 people. It will take a couple of months to be sure, but some of this may be passengers diverted from the Royal Oak station where parking is problematic and some may come from Pontiac. Others may be new “induced” business, in other words, new passengers choosing the train option because it has become available and convenient to them.

Some details still need attention:

- The arrival/departure screens need to be activated—they are currently dark.
- Road signage to the station is badly needed.

That said, the station appears to be receiving broad acceptance and should be a factor in increasing ridership on the **Wolverine** route.

Photo by Steve Sobel



SAVE THE DATE

This will be an evening program at the State Theatre in Traverse City. The event will include guest speakers and feature a cool transit/city-building documentary. Details will follow in the February issue of ON TRACK.

TRU Annual Meeting Scheduled

The Annual Meeting of Transit Riders United (TRU) is scheduled for Thursday, January 22, 6:30-8:30 pm, at Wayne State Law School Auditorium.

- Learn how to engage your community in the regional transit planning process.
- Discover best practices for public involvement in transit decision-making.
- Find out about upcoming opportunities to shape transit plans and priorities.

RSVP at www.DetroitTransit.org

Midwest Winter Warm Up Sale

Save 20% on Select Michigan Amtrak Routes

Staying cooped up is no way to spend your winter. The great Wolverine State has destinations waiting for your arrival, so get out there and enjoy discounted fares on select routes in Michigan.

[CLICK HERE FOR DETAILS](#)



Correction – Our apologies for errors in the article “MARP Meets on The Blue Water Shores” on page 2 of the December issue. The bridge over the Black River still stands, but the one crossing the canal between Lake Huron and the Black River has been removed. Dunn Paper was misspelled. The corrected version may be accessed on the MARP website at: marp.org/?p=5692.

View from elsewhere . . .

"Oysters have been central to the Maryland way of life for centuries, and restoring the Chesapeake Bay's oyster beds is critical for this region's environment and the economy. CSX is proud to be a part of this unique public-private partnership."

— CSX Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer Michael Ward in a [PRESS RELEASE](#) announcing completion of this unique project.

"In Fiscal Year 2014, [Amtrak's] Federal operating funding requirement was \$227 million, more than \$100 million less than in Fiscal Year 2013, and Amtrak's lowest operating requirement ever, in inflation-adjusted dollars. Taken as a whole, the Federal operating subsidy covers only 7% of Amtrak's operating costs, with the balance covered by corporate revenue and state support."

— Amtrak Chairman Anthony Coscia in testimony before a Senate subcommittee in which he called on Congress to "unlock passenger rail's potential" and establish a dedicated, long-term funding mechanism for rail. Read the [NEWS RELEASE](#) and the [TESTIMONY](#).



CSX's Oyster Express

CSX Transportation recently delivered the last of 22 trainloads of fossilized oyster shells dug from a deposit in Florida to the Chesapeake Bay to help rebuild oyster habitat in two sanctuaries there. Steve Williams, a board member for National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, notes that without CSX's transportation of the shells -- an in-kind contribution of approximately \$2.5 million -- "the project would have taken years and years to complete."

[READ MORE](#) and see the video about how this innovative public-private partnership is helping to bring back one of the nation's greatest natural assets through the restoration of native oyster habitat in Maryland.



OUR ADDRESS HAS CHANGED



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Congressional Switchboard
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