



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. Everyone is welcome.

MARP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

2012-2014

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

2013 MEETINGS

December 2012 – No Member Meeting

12 January – Williamston Depot-Museum

9 February – Capac Depot Museum

9 March – St. Johns Railroad Station

20 April – Niles (tentative)

11 May – National Train Day

15 June – Vicksburg Historic 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

Email marprail@yahoo.com

Seasons Greetings



The Four Flags Garden Club hosted its 21st Annual Hometown Christmas celebration at the Historic Amtrak Depot in Niles on December 2. Earlier in the year, a new roof was put on the Depot and additional lights were installed. Travelers are sure to enjoy the festive glow as they pass through Niles on their holiday travels. Dowagiac, too, is welcoming visitors with lights on the station, thanks to the efforts of MARP member Ron Leatz.

No Member Meeting in December

Our next meeting will be

January 12 in Williamston

HARRY GOW SPEAKS TO MARP ABOUT CANADIAN RAIL

By Hugh Gurney

When MARP members gathered at the Essex Historical Railroad Station on November 10, we were fortunate to have as our guest Mr. Harry Gow, founder of Transport Action Canada. After thanking America By Rail for paying his passage from Montreal - and VIA Rail for transporting him to Windsor – Mr. Gow reported that a new Detroit-Windsor rail tunnel accommodating double stack rail loads is still on the books. Funding may come from the Building Canada Fund. CP and Borealis, which holds a major stake in the project, will make a joint application. The new tunnel will accommodate passenger rail, but the new VIA station in Walkerville is nowhere near the proposed tunnel, which complicates matters considerably.

With a cut in its subsidy by the Canadian Federal Government, VIA has cut service to Sarnia to one train a day, the **Ocean Limited** to Halifax from six times a week to three times a week, and in the winter will cut the cross country **Canadian** from three times a week to twice a week. At the present time, the company has no fleet renewal strategy.

VIA's current CEO comes from a freight rail background, and the organization has little accountability to the public, reporting to the Cabinet, not Parliament. The VIA Board of Directors is made up mainly of political appointees.

To combat these unfortunate circumstances, Transport Action Canada has developed its **National Dream Renewed** campaign, calling for a renewed commitment to passenger rail. Starting with a town hall meeting in Sarnia, Transport Action will hold public forums throughout Canada. The hope is that the squeaky wheel will alert enough of the public to bring about a change in attitude by the government. Many in Eastern Quebec and New Brunswick are outraged, as cuts in the **Ocean Limited** service will now require an overnight stay in Moncton or Quebec City when they go there for medical appointments. In Ontario, reductions in service are affecting employment opportunities in Kitchener and on the Niagara Peninsula. Even where commuter rail or bus service is available, people with disabilities are finding it harder to get around.

The last of the Eastern **National Dream Renewed** forums are scheduled for mid-November, with some planned for the West in the new year, after which a report will be made to all Members of Parliament and to the federal government, including a specific proposal to Parliament. Taking a leaf from NARP's and MARP's book, Transport Action will work very closely with lawmakers to bring about desired changes.

Mr. Gow attributed the demise of the **Northlander** connecting Toronto with Cochrane to feuding within the Ontario Parliament between the dominant Liberal party, which is stronger in the heavily populated southern part of the province, with the less numerous New Democratic Party, which is stronger in the sparsely settled north. Premier Dalton McGintey, who ordered the cuts, resigned his post recently, but the bloodletting continues.

Mr. Gow is hopeful that the Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains (CAPT) will take the lead in fighting for the restoration of the **Northlander** as well as reestablishment of rail service between Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury, Ontario. Greyhound has reduced service to Sault Ste. Marie. CAPT has the support of the northern municipalities and played a part in bringing Indian Trails bus service into Sault Ste. Marie from Michigan's Lower Peninsula. Gow takes heart in the fact that young workers in northern Ontario are very supportive of passenger rail as a way to get to and from population centers.

From VIA Rail's nascent interest in better bus-rail connections in Eastern Canada, Gow sees hope for a Thruway bus system similar to that existing in the U.S. He would love to see Indian Trails expand its service into Ontario.



Photo by Rosemary Horvath

Pictured above is the affable Harry Gow, an expert on Canadian rail accomplishments and shortcomings, who didn't shy away from zinging politicians of both countries. He noted that he had spent a good part of his life and much of his own money to get what was originally known as Transport Action 2000 underway. Now called Transport Action Canada, the organization supports all forms of public transportation, particularly rail and interurban buses.

CANADA WELCOMES MARP

Notes by Hugh Gurney

Approximately forty people from both sides of the border gathered at the Historic Essex Railway Station in Essex, Ontario, on November 10 for MARP's first ever meeting in Canada. We were warmly welcomed by Town of Essex Counselor Morley Bowman, who stressed the value of the railroad to the development of the Town of Essex. Bowman expressed the town's determination to maintain the station as a symbol of that contribution. He expressed regret that Canadian National recently announced plans to rip up the rails that have served the town for 140 years and sell them to Mexico.



The beautiful stone station in Essex was built in 1887. The architect is unknown. Also unknown is why the Canada Southern built such a handsome station in Essex, as most of its depots were far more utilitarian. By 1990, the structure was in very bad repair and might well have been bulldozed. Fortunately, local citizens joined together to restore the structure. A one year levy of about \$65 on local rate payers covered costs. The outside was restored in 1992 and the inside in 1993. Except for the addition of washrooms and a new counter at the entrance, the building is as it was in its heyday as a train station.

to Grosse Isle and by a second bridge to the mainland of Michigan. This route was abandoned when the first Detroit-Windsor railroad tunnel was built shortly after 1900. A branch line to Leamington enticed H. J. Heinz to locate there. Despite a thriving business, CNCP discontinued that line a number of years ago.

As a follow up, Tim Hoeffner, MDOT Office of Rail, reported that environmental reviews for the proposed new Detroit-Windsor rail tunnel are progressing. MDOT supports both the new rail tunnel and the New International Trade Crossing.

Essex historian and station caretaker Bill Gay shared Bowman's indignation, explaining that the rails serving Essex for so long are caught up in the corporate machinations of the big railroads. Built as a line linking Windsor to Fort Erie, opposite Buffalo, the Canada Southern Railroad was purchased by the Vanderbilt family, which already controlled the Michigan Central Railroad. It was immediately incorporated into the New York Central System. With its 241.6 miles of double track, the Canada Southern became a key part of the New York-Chicago route as it was 150 miles shorter than going around the south shore of Lake Erie. The railroad thrived until the 1960's, when the New York Central merged with the Pennsylvania Railroad to become Penn-Central. This merger was disastrous and resulted in bankruptcy. Its successor, Conrail, had no interest in running trains through Canada. The Canada Southern was sold in 1986 to CNCP, a consortium of Canadian National and Canadian Pacific, and over the years has been dismantled bit by bit.

Originally, the Canada Southern crossed the Detroit River south of Windsor and Detroit -- by ferry from Amherstburg, Ontario, to Stony Island, then by bridge

CHRISTMAS DINNER AT DURAND UNION STATION

Phone 989-389-4562 for Reservations

The Depot is hosting three Christmas Dinners on Friday, December 7th, and Saturday December 8th! Enjoy the display of 50 illuminated Christmas Trees. Tickets are \$14.00 for the public, \$12.00 for Depot members, and \$9.00 for children 10 and under. The Dinner times are Friday at 6:00 PM, and Saturday at 12:00 Noon and 6:00 PM.

Seating is limited, but groups of 8 are still available at a discount.
Door prizes will be handed out at each dinner as well.



WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING . . .

" . . . Canada is desperately behind places such as Europe and Japan . . . our trains plod along much like they did in the middle of the past century . . . Even U.S. President Barack Obama has pledged to give 80% of Americans access to high-speed rail within 25 years, and that could mean a revamped rail system linking Chicago to St. Louis, Portland to Seattle and Boston to Washington, D.C. If we were in the game, it could also help Quebec and Ontario by linking Boston to Montreal and Buffalo to New York City, and Windsor directly to Detroit and the Midwest."

-- Windsor Star Journal 11/22/12 tinyurl.com/marp00060

"As if to underline the increasingly bipartisan support for passenger trains, two Amtrak start-ups are taking place in—and with funds from—states with conservative Republican governors. The Downeaster extension to Freeport and Brunswick, Maine, began November 1, and Washington-Norfolk, Virginia, service will begin December 12. America's passengers are not divided along Democratic and Republican lines; we all ride the same trains, and rely on the same transit subways and streetcars and commuter railroads."

-- post-election message from Ross Capon, NARP President

Let us hear your thoughts marprail@yahoo.com



Alternative Transportation ?

Carol and Gabby - along with their pal, Ted, who declined to join them on this occasion - have been enjoying morning walks on 51st Street in New York City to the great pleasure of passersby. The trio is currently appearing in a nativity scene in a production at an area theatre.

**RTA in the House
Big Push for Quick Action Before Years End!!**

The Regional Transit Authority is closer to becoming a reality with passage of the enabling legislation by the Michigan Senate on November 27. Now a full-court press is on to ensure House passes the bills before the end of the legislative session next week.

TRU has created a quick and easy way for you to send a message to your Representative. Simply click on the link below and enter your zip code. You may personalize the letter and send it on its way with a click of the mouse.

[Ask your Representative to support the RTA.](#)

You may check at the link below to see if your Senator supported or opposed these bills. Then take a minute to thank them -- including Senator Richardville who guided the bills through the Senate -- or express your disappointment. [Thank them or express your disappointment!](#)

If the links above don't work for you, go to www.detroittransit.org .

