



ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

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Issue #3

December 2011

Seasons Greetings !



The lighting of the Niles train depot took place on December 3 this year. Thanks to MARP member Ron Leatz, travelers across southern Michigan will enjoy the glow of lights on the Dowagiac depot as well. A community ceremony on November 7 featured Southwest Michigan College musicians, a brief history by Steve Arseneau of the SMC Museum and remarks by Mayor Don Lyons, State Senator John Proos and State Representatives Sharon Tyler and Matt Lori.

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UPCOMING MEETINGS

December – no meeting

14 January – Williamston Depot

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Day Tripping from Kalamazoo (Letter)

There is an inexpensive and effective way to improve day trips to Chicago (and Detroit).

Phyllis Rose's recent column is an excellent explanation of why Amtrak's schedule must be changed. Her day trip into Chicago was actually a four hour and fifty minute stay in Chicago. That hardly constitutes a day of travel and is precisely why most people don't take Amtrak to Chicago or Detroit for a day trip.

If Amtrak would relocate their trains to Kalamazoo and Battle Creek to depart from here in the morning and return in the evening, dramatic changes to the schedule would become possible, with very little expenditure for Amtrak. The train starting in Battle Creek could leave at 6:30 a.m., dropping off workers in Kalamazoo for 7 a.m. jobs. Then the train could continue to Chicago arriving before 9 a.m. The train leaving from Kalamazoo would do the same for Battle Creek workers and Detroit arrivals. At current speeds it takes six hours to travel from Chicago to Detroit or vice-versa. That means that there could be trains leaving Chicago and Detroit at 9 a.m., 3 p.m. and 9 p.m., giving commuters the option for six-hour visits in the morning, early evening or a 12-hour day trip.

This can be accomplished with no additional moving stock, no increase in train speed and minor accommodations for train house-keeping in Kalamazoo and Battle Creek.

I encourage anyone who is interested in this practical, very low-cost change for greatly improved Amtrak service to write their state and federal representatives to encourage them to implement this plan.

This letter by Mr. Frank Lucatelli appeared in the Kalamazoo Gazette, November 25, 2011. tinyurl.com/marp00015

For more information on his proposal, visit <http://sites.google.com/site/amtrakdaytriptostomajorcities/home>

Please continue to the next page for Jim Wallington's commentary on this proposal.

Welcome to The New Editor of The Michigan Passenger

Larry Sobczak has been named as editor of *The Michigan Passenger*. He has tackled the job with great vigor, preparing a Fall Issue that, if not already in your hands, soon will be. Larry has done a superb job with the MARP website over the last few years. If you do not regularly visit the site, you are missing out on a valuable resource.

All of us at MARP thank J.R. Valderas who created a truly professional newspaper in his tenure as editor of *The Michigan Passenger*. We wish him well as he takes on new responsibilities as a photographer for the Holland Public Schools and as a mentor for students interested in pursuing careers in photojournalism. We hope you will continue to share your photography with us, J.R.!

Commentary on Mr. Lucatelli's Proposal --

Frank Lucatelli is a smart man. He is an architect and the author of papers on personality growth. And he has put together an elaborate rail passenger plan.

Lucatelli has devised a savvy plan that would make Amtrak more useful and popular for in-state passengers and taxpayers. Simply put, he proposes that Amtrak run trains within Michigan that would get people from Kalamazoo to Detroit and to Chicago early enough for a day's business or pleasure. It is shades of the short-lived "Michigan Owl" that operated on an experimental basis Labor Day weekend a year ago.

[Check out details of Mr. Lucatelli's proposal at <http://sites.google.com/site/amtrakdaytriptomajorcities/home>]

There are significant obstacles to such a plan - can they be overcome? Money and fortitude can overcome just about anything. Michiganders may have the latter, but the state and Amtrak lack the former. But, then, whoever thought that Michigan would be buying a railroad stretching from Kalamazoo to Dearborn and planning to bring it to 110 mph passenger train speeds?

That's the bright side. Now some reality:

--**Basing trains in both Kalamazoo and Battle Creek.** How to pay for fueling and cleaning? Amtrak fuels and/or cleans trains at three locations in Michigan: Pontiac, Port Huron and Grand Rapids. Maybe a roving crew of cleaners could be formed regionally to reduce overhead costs.

--**Crew bases.** Amtrak would be unlikely to create a new crew base in Kalamazoo, a mere 22 miles from a base in Battle Creek.

--**Parking the trains overnight.** Will the railroads rent space in Battle Creek and Detroit at an affordable cost to Amtrak? Sidings could be built or upgraded, but they are costly. And will Norfolk Southern allow these trains to operate Porter to Chicago Union Station or through Dearborn into Detroit, where permission from CN would be needed?

--**Passenger demand.** Other than students heading for Ann Arbor on Monday mornings, is there sufficient demand for an earlier train to the Detroit area? Would there be a larger passenger base for travel to (and from) Grand Rapids or Lansing/East Lansing? A single set of equipment could hit both destinations and then possibly Detroit, greatly expanding Amtrak's reach in Michigan.

--**Equipment.** Amtrak would need more equipment to handle the extra trains. Amtrak's aging fleet is stretched even now.

--**Finances.** With Congress chopping away at Amtrak's budget, backers would have to find a way to finance the network that Lucatelli is proposing, not only capital expenditures but operating costs. And the state is facing the federal demand that the state start paying for the operation of the current three Wolverines in addition to the Blue Water and Pere Marquette.

These are just some of the issues that Lucatelli's trains would face. Passenger train backers hate to toss cold water on a smart plan. But experience with Amtrak and its operating railroads indicates that such an effort could be futile.

Might it be better to start with a baby step, such as bringing back the "Michigan Owl" traveling from the Battle Creek-Kalamazoo area to Chicago? Even that effort has proven monumental.

-- Jim Wallington, MARP Executive Committee Member

St. Joseph Station Sparkles November MARP Meeting Notes

The newly remodeled St. Joseph Amtrak station was the site of the November 12 MARP meeting. The historic station is privately owned and houses the thriving Silver Beach Pizza restaurant. The owners, Jay Costas and Tony Bertig, at their expense, have added a larger and more attractive waiting room, complete with racks for timetables and Amtrak posters on the walls. Thank you!

State Senator John Proos of St. Joseph and State Representative Al Pscholka welcomed the group to West Michigan. Both urged members to develop engaging stories about the value of rail passenger service as a way of building support among wary legislators. Proos agreed to push the governor and MDOT to get the **Pere Marquette** route added to the Midwest Rail Initiative blueprint.

St. Joseph and Benton Harbor are pushing for extra trains from Chicago to bring visitors to the Senior PGA tournament at the Harbour Shores Golf Course, May 22-27, 2012. Both the PGA and Amtrak have expressed interest in doing so, building a temporary platform adjacent to the clubhouse.

Mayor Bob Judd thanked MARP for its rail advocacy and stressed the need for increased funding and for keeping the issue before the public. *(continued on page 3)*

Canadian Governments Release Findings of HSR Study

<http://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/policy/acg-acgb-high-speed-rail-2956.htm>

Executive Summary: The feasibility study for a high speed rail service (HSR) in the Quebec City – Windsor Corridor evaluated two technologies based on speeds of 200 km/h using diesel traction and 300 km/h using electric traction. It further identified potential routes to accommodate each of the 200 and 300 km/h technologies including stations at Quebec City, Trois-Rivières, Montreal, Ottawa, Kingston, Toronto, London and Windsor.

The financial analysis considered a government financing case (wholly public) and a partly private sector-funded case (private sector). The total development costs in 2009 dollars for the full Quebec City – Windsor Corridor are estimated to be between \$18.9 billion for the 200 km/h technology and \$21.3 billion for the 300 km/h technology. Developing the section between Montreal-Ottawa-Toronto could cost between \$9.1 for 200 km/h and \$11 billion for 300 km/h. The main findings from the financial analysis for both the public case and the private sector case for the full Quebec City – Windsor Corridor indicate that while the project could cover all operating costs, governments would need to contribute significantly to the project development cost and receive no financial return on investment.

The economic analysis assessed the viability of the project and its contribution to the economy as a whole by taking into account non-financial costs and benefits, such as changes in atmospheric emissions, public safety improvements and impact of HSR on transportation operators within the corridor. From the point of view of the Canadian economy as a whole, the economic analysis showed that HSR between Quebec City and Windsor would not generate a positive net economic benefit. However, a project between Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto could generate a positive net economic benefit at both 200 and 300 km/h.

Doug Wilson, MARP member from Ontario, Canada comments . . .

The prospect of operating faster and more convenient passenger trains between four of the biggest city regions in North America should be simple.

But the recently released feasibility study for a high speed rail service (HSR) in the Quebec City – Windsor Corridor suggests otherwise. The report concludes that true HSR is justifiable only for the triangle Montreal-Ottawa-Toronto at between \$9B and \$11B. The full Quebec City-Windsor routing would cost \$19B to \$21B and would not generate a net economic benefit based on the parameters of the study.

Reaction from Southwestern Ontario communities was swift, criticizing the study's failure to consider the potential for upgrades/new services where track capacity is available and well-maintained, and where the population is growing. Furthermore, it again did not consider the possibility of much-needed international passenger rail services in the traditional Montreal-Toronto-Detroit-Chicago corridor using AMTRAK/VIA joint operating. At this time, an international Border Coalition is deliberating once again to resolve the Canada-US border process for rail passengers.

Already being discussed is the possibility of a new entity called GO Regional, investing in and servicing SW Ontario sections of the corridor that AMTRAK and VIA find hard to justify. London and Kitchener are clamoring for hourly scheduling and both Windsor and Sarnia want more and faster trains, with better connections, running on an 18-hour service day.

November meeting continued --

John Langdon attended the Great Lakes International Trade and Transport Hub Summit held on Oct. 16 at the Kellogg Center, East Lansing. Present were numerous people interested in strengthening trade between Chicago, Montreal, and the Port of Halifax, Nova Scotia, including trucking interests and representatives of Customs and Immigration on both sides of the border. The governor spoke enthusiastically about Chicago-Montreal passenger rail. The current high level tunnel beneath the Detroit River may be used for passenger rail.

The governor reiterated his support for Chicago-Montreal passenger service at the Michigan Rail Summit, held in Lansing on October 31. [Note: The current issue of *The Michigan Passenger* includes a report of this meeting.]

The meeting schedule for 2012 is taking shape, with meetings planned in Williamston, Kalamazoo, Pontiac, Chelsea, Muskegon, Grand Rapids, Durand, St. Louis and Essex, Ontario.

Dave Randall reviewed a proposed contract for production of *The Michigan Passenger* by a paid contractor. Acceptance of the contract wording was moved by Langdon, seconded by Randall, and approved by the Executive Committee members present. The likely contractor will be Larry Sobczak.

After a delicious pizza buffet, Robert Meyers, Curator at the Court House Museum in Berrien Springs discussed the history of railroads in Southwest Michigan. Meyers noted that the first in the area was the Michigan Central, which reached Niles in 1848 and New Buffalo in 1849. Until the line was extended into Chicago, passengers took boats across Lake Michigan. Interested communities then issued bonds for the construction of the present CSX line through St. Joseph and Benton Harbor. While other rail and interurban lines followed, they were not successful over the long run. It is interesting to note that the first two railroads, now Amtrak and CSX, are the ones that remain to this day.

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING . . .

. . . streamlining the border crossing at Sarnia or Windsor would open this corridor straight through to Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Quebec. Restoring and upgrading regional passenger rail service one-step-at-a-time is a frustratingly slow process. But "continuous improvement" is the most prudent way to spend our limited resources during difficult economic periods. And in the long run, we are headed in the right direction. The resurgence of regional passenger rail is driven by the diminishing global supply of easily extractable fossil fuel. This fact cannot be avoided by political demagoguery. Development of the Chicago to Quebec corridor is a certainty. It's just a matter of how long it takes us to accomplish it.

— comment posted on mlive.com by [Willie Green](#)

Let us hear your thoughts www.marprail@yahoo.com



Amtrak's "Great Dome" is seen here leaving Jackson as part of the consist of Wolverine #351 on Thanksgiving Day. MARP member Larry Krieg was aboard and made a video that can be seen at youtu.be/U3MB9C0VALs

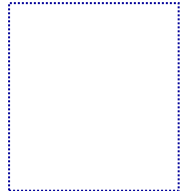
Originally numbered 1391, the "Ocean View" was built in 1955 by the Budd Company for the Great Northern Railway, for use on the Chicago-Seattle Empire Builder. Amtrak acquired the car in 1971, giving it the number 10031. The only dome car remaining in Amtrak service, it has recently acquired the Amtrak Phase III paint scheme in honor of Amtrak's 40th anniversary. *Photo by Ken Borg*

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