



# 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 2011-2012

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

### UPCOMING MEETINGS

**14 January** – Williamston Depot-Museum

**11 February** – Old Dog Tavern,  
Kalamazoo

**17 March** – New Pontiac Station (tentative)

**21 April** – Chelsea Depot

**12 May** – National Train Day

**June** – Muskegon Union Station

**28 July** – Rapid Central Station, Grand  
Rapids

**August** – Executive Committee Retreat

**September** – Annual Meeting in Durand

**13 October** – Pere Marquette Station, St.  
Louis MI

**10 November** – possible excursion on  
Little River RR, Jonesville MI

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

## What's In Store in the New Year?

For those of us who view passenger rail as a vital part of our transportation system, it will be difficult to top the year just passed. On the Detroit-Chicago rail corridor, eight major projects, worth over \$500M, are in progress. The Midwest is slated to receive some of the “next generation” rail equipment – 48 cars and 7 locomotives - that will be bid in a few weeks.

Michigan's Governor Snyder has bucked a trend among Republican governors with his strong support for trains and for robust transit systems in our major metropolitan areas. He has publicly stated a desire to see the Detroit-Chicago corridor extended to Toronto and beyond.

Congress came through with a FY2012 appropriations bill – signed by the President in November – that was less draconian than had been feared. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chair, John Mica, responding to a storm of protest, has apparently abandoned his proposal that threatened to shut down Amtrak service anywhere but the northeast corridor.

The coming year is likely to be filled with challenges. Will the Michigan legislature, which has supported most of the Governor's initiatives, begin to push back on transportation issues? How much of the operating expense of the Wolverine trains will Michigan be required to pick up as a result of provisions of the PRIIA legislation passed in 2008? Will the President's American Jobs Act succeed and will it restore funding to continue development of the high-speed rail corridors? Will Congress find the will to act on a new multi-year funding authorization for surface transportation?

The campaign season will soon be in full swing with all the attendant silliness and obfuscation that are becoming ever more characteristic. As advocates for more and better transportation options, we must continuously and steadfastly address the candidates – in public forums, letters, and newspapers – and ask “Will you stand up for trains?”

### Impromptu “Fun Trip” Planned for Saturday, January 21



Several MARP members and friends will be on the trains for various segments of the Wolverine route on the 21<sup>st</sup>. One group will travel from Kalamazoo to Ann Arbor for the afternoon and return on the evening train. To make your reservation and receive 20% off the regular fare, go to: [www.marp.org/?p=3686](http://www.marp.org/?p=3686). Scroll down to the link

shown there and be sure to click on “Book Now” to make your reservation. If you are unable to travel on the 21st, the dome car will be on trains #350 and #355 on these dates as well: January 12-16, 19-23. Seating is “first come, first served”.

Amtrak's “Great Dome” is seen above leaving Jackson on Thanksgiving Day. Originally numbered 1391, the “Ocean View” was built in 1955 by the Budd Company for use on the Great Northern's Chicago-Seattle *Empire Builder*. Amtrak acquired the car in 1971, giving it the number 10031. *Photo by Ken Borg*

## St. Joseph Station Welcomes Travelers With a New Look

One of the most important aspects of train travel is to have a station in a community that creates a positive experience for the travelling public. This past spring, St. Joseph, in Southwest Michigan, opened up a new Amtrak waiting room adjacent to the Silver Beach Pizza restaurant. This was long overdue, as ridership to and from St. Joseph has risen 26% over the past two years, even during tough economic times. With restaurant owners Jay Costas and Tony Bertig funding the project and the cooperation of the City of St. Joseph and Amtrak, a bright and inviting waiting room for passengers has been created. The station increased seating capacity and became more open with windows on two sides, providing views of the Whirlpool Compass Fountain and Silver Beach Carousel, both popular attractions.

MARP added a revolving brochure rack to provide for an expanded literature display for the benefit of current and potential passengers. During the summer tourist season, station volunteer Rich Vavra-Musser was kept busy restocking key Amtrak literature. Amtrak provided a set of colorful posters and a bulletin board.

The many visitors to St. Joseph, Silver Beach Pizza and the Amtrak station have become aware of the great asset in this community: Train service and a welcoming station. Everyone wins with this venture. The restaurant gains valuable space to support growing demand and Amtrak passengers receive a new friendly waiting room to welcome them to Michigan's Great Southwest. With ridership continuing to grow, it is only a matter of time before a second train to/from St. Joseph is added!

Next time you're in St. Joseph, visit Silver Beach Pizza and thank Jay and Tony for this beautiful and functional new waiting room.



## 831 Days : 18 Hours : 35 Minutes : 15 Seconds . . . and counting . . .

Michigan Congresspersons Candace Miller (R-District 10, Harrison Township) and John Dingell (D-District 15, Dearborn) joined 111 of their colleagues last month in expressing frustration with both the House leadership and President Obama for failure to move forward on re-authorization of a 6-year surface transportation bill. In a letter addressed to the President, 49 Republicans and 62 Democrats said that "Repairing our infrastructure is a critical priority, and ignoring this issue is simply not an option . . . A six-year transportation bill will create jobs, ease congestion, improve the safety of our roads and bridges and make America a more attractive place for international companies to grow their business."

SAFETEA-LU, the Surface Transportation spending authorization that expired in September of 2009, has operated since then on a series of 8 temporary extensions, the latest of which expires at the end of March. The lawmakers point out the need for long-term cost certainty when state and local governments are planning transportation projects: "Short-term extensions fail to recognize that meaningful, large-scale transportation projects take years to plan, approve and implement."

The letter cites analysis by The American Society for Civil Engineers (ASCE) that gives our transportation infrastructure a grade of "D". The ASCE reports that the cost of failing to invest in the nation's roads and bridges would total \$2.1 trillion in lost economic growth by 2020, costing 877,000 jobs. The ASCE went on to find that congestion by 2020 could cost us \$276 billion a year in lost time and inefficiencies. As a result of using more fuel, lost productivity and accelerated auto-wear on worsening roads, the overall cost to a family's household budget would be \$1,060 a year.

To read the letter and see the list signatories and endorsers, go to [tinyurl.com/marp00020](http://tinyurl.com/marp00020)

### Selected websites to help you track progress on this and other transportation legislation:

Transportation for America [t4america.org](http://t4america.org)

America 2050 [america2050.org](http://america2050.org)

Reconnecting America [reconnectingamerica.org](http://reconnectingamerica.org)

Primer on Federal Surface Transportation Authorization and the Highway Trust Fund [tinyurl.com/marp00018](http://tinyurl.com/marp00018)

## MARP Members Will Enjoy Another Year of Interesting Meetings in Interesting Places

Jim Wallington has outdone himself in planning another year of meetings in interesting venues, almost all of them current or former railroad stations. Not only are the stations themselves interesting, but we learn about the communities in which they are located.

**January 14** - [Williamston Historical Depot-Museum](#), 369 West Grand River, Williamston, MI 48895 (Between East Lansing and Webberville on M-43), 517-655-1785 or 517-230-9030. [Map and Driving Directions](#)

The general membership meeting begins at 11 am, but all are welcome to sit in on the Executive Committee meeting beginning at 10 am. Our guest speaker, Mitch Lutzke, is a local teacher and historian. He is an authority on The Michigan Central Railway and will tell us about the very interesting history of railroading in the area. We will also have an update from MDOT's Tim Hoeffner on implementation of Michigan's accelerated rail program.

Following the meeting, we will enjoy our usual no-host lunch at the [Red Cedar Grill](#) -- good food in a nice setting, according to our meeting coordinator, Jim Wallington. **If you are interested in carpooling to the meeting, please send an email to [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com)**

**February 11** – [The Old Dog Tavern](#), located in the historic Star Building at 402 East Kalamazoo Avenue in downtown Kalamazoo. While not a train depot, it is right next to - and was likely serviced by - the Chicago, Kalamazoo & Saginaw RR on tracks now used by Grand Elk. There is much railroad history in the immediate vicinity and we could even do a short "walking tour" after lunch as people wend their way back to the Amtrak station to catch their train. The meeting will begin at 10:30 to accommodate those who ride the Blue Water #365 or the Wolverine #351.

**March 17** – The new Pontiac Amtrak station, 51000 Woodward Ave, is a tentative location.

**April 21** – The meeting will be held in the [Chelsea Depot](#) with a presentation by Robert Shannon on the Michigan Central and history of railroading in the Chelsea area. An invitation is being

extended to all members of the Chelsea Depot Association to attend.

**May 12** - [National Train Day](#) will be observed at several venues across the state. Participation by members is encouraged in their areas.

**June** - [Muskegon Union Station](#) with a short presentation by Tom Anderson, Chairperson Muskegon/Northern Ottawa MPO Transportation Policy Committee. There has been discussion of a trip across the lake on the high-speed ferry.

**July 28** – Meet in Grand Rapids at the Rapid Central Station, 2nd Floor Conference Center, where the [Grand Rails 2012-77<sup>th</sup> Annual NMRA National Convention](#) will be taking place

**August** – MARP vacations in August. The executive committee may hold a planning session during the month.

**September** – MARP will hold its 39<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting at [Durand Union Station](#).

**October 13** – This meeting will be hosted by the [St. Louis Historical Society](#), which is housed in the 1910 [Pere Marquette Railroad Station](#) in St. Louis MI. Several recent improvements have been made to the building and grounds. The station platform was redone several years ago with an MDOT Transportation Enhancement Grant and an auxiliary exhibit building was constructed. A local foundation paid for repainting of the stucco station building in 2011.

**November 10** – Possible steam excursion on the Little River Railroad's [Hillsdale Flyer](#) from Coldwater to Jonesville or all the way to Hillsdale. Jim Wallington is looking for volunteers to help plan this as a member recruitment event.

**December** – No member meeting. The Executive Committee may meet in a planning session in East Lansing near the Amtrak station.

*It's Time to Renew  
Your Membership*

[tinyurl.com/marp00004](http://tinyurl.com/marp00004)

4,752 Michiganders rode Michigan trains on November 23, the day before Thanksgiving. It would have taken 32 – 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 . . .*

### Union Station: Chicago's Downtown Airport

Chicago's Union Station is the center of the nation's passenger rail network. Most long distance Amtrak routes begin and end at the station, and it supports much of the Chicagoland area's extensive commuter network. Over 15 million people a year board Metra and Amtrak trains at Union Station, and from there can access 269 U.S. cities. In addition, eleven CTA bus routes and multiple private routes converge at the station. It is a critical Midwest transportation asset.

Unfortunately, as it stands currently, Union Station is outdated and inadequate to handle current capacities, let alone future growth. If Union Station is also going to be the hub of a future Midwest high-speed rail network, something needs to be done.

The City of Chicago is developing a master plan for Union Station, and we want them to THINK BIG! The City of Chicago needs to hear from people all around the country about how important it is to expand and modernize Union Station.

The Midwest High Speed Rail Association has launched a new website called [DowntownAirport.com](http://DowntownAirport.com). Please visit the website to learn more and to send a message to Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel.



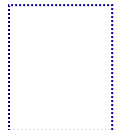
Illustration provided to MWHRSRA by Solomon Cordwell Buenz

The City of Chicago and Amtrak held a public information meeting regarding plans to expand the station on December 15, 2011. The final Master Plan will be issued early 2010.

Chicago Tribune article here: <http://tinyurl.com/marp00017>



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### Contact Your Lawmaker

Congressional Switchboard  
202-224-3121

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

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

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