



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. Everyone is welcome.

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*The Michigan Passenger Editor and Webmaster, Larry Sobczak
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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

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A Transportation Heavy Agenda

"A sound and modern infrastructure is vital to attracting and retaining jobs. We need a multi-modal system that will serve the movements of a new, more urban, more tech-savvy, and more active generation."

With that clarion call, Governor Snyder set the tone of his October 26, 2011 *Infrastructure Address* which called for new ideas and greater investment to move Michigan's economy forward. He followed up a few days later in his keynote address to the *Michigan Rail Summit 2011* where he spoke with conviction about the importance of both passenger and freight rail as vital components of a modern, reliable, and efficient transportation system.

Continuing this theme, the Governor devoted much of his January 18 *State of the State* address to the need for addressing regional transit issues in Southwest Michigan and calling attention to the recent history of underinvestment the state's roads.

Perhaps most noteworthy, in this day of strident anti-tax rhetoric, he called for an increase in revenues to provide the \$1.4 B needed annually to repair the state's crumbling roads and bridges. Governor Snyder is calling for a three-pronged approach:

- 1) Increase the vehicle registration fee an average of \$60 a year, generating about \$500 M in new revenues. Among other things this would ensure that electric and hybrid vehicle owners, who buy little or no fuel, continue to help fund road repair.
- 2) Replace the current 19-cents-per-gallon gasoline tax and the 15-cents-per-gallon tax on diesel fuel with a tax on the wholesale price of fuel, generating another \$541 M annually.
- 3) Changes in the road funding formulas embodied in the 60-year old Public Act 51 that governs how transportation revenue is distributed and how it can be spent.

It is this last point that should cause some concern for advocates of passenger trains and city transit

(TRANSPORTATION next page)



MARP MEMBER MEETING

Saturday, February 11, 10:30 – 1:30 pm
The Old Dog Tavern

402 E Kalamazoo Ave, Kalamazoo MI 49007
(269) 381-5677

We'll have cars to transport those arriving by train. Mike Madill & John Conor will tell about the history of the CK&S whose tracks run alongside the building and are now used by Grand Elk. More details on the website www.marp.org or leave a message at (269)388-3777

Williamston Depot Museum Hosts MARP Member Meeting

Mitch Lutzke, Williamston Depot Museum Board Member and local historian, welcomed the group to the 1891-92 Williamston Depot, the third such structure serving the community. It was in use as a passenger station from January 1893 until 1963. It is not coincidental that passenger service to Williamston ceased within a year after I-96 opened.

Tim Hoeffner, recently named Director of MDOT's new Office of Rail, reported that Michigan trains may be running at speeds of up to 110 miles per hour on the 97 mile Kalamazoo-Porter section within weeks. But it will be three years or more before we see similar speeds between Kalamazoo and Dearborn. When ownership of the Kalamazoo-Dearborn sector is acquired by MDOT, approximately 240 miles of the 304 mile Pontiac-Detroit-Chicago *Wolverine* route will be dedicated to passenger service, a possible model for the rest of the nation. Norfolk Southern will have the exclusive right to provide freight service. MDOT will work with Norfolk Southern to grow the freight business as one way of covering the cost of the passenger service.

In other business, the Executive Committee reviewed the proposed budget for Calendar Year 2012. Chase distributed a list of all the High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail projects affecting Michigan, a list that will be posted on the MARP website. Membership renewal notices are scheduled to go in the mail within the week and a membership card will be provided for the first time. The Executive Committee approved the ambitious 2012 goals of the Route Enhancement Committee, details of which will be reported in the Winter issue of *The Michigan Passenger* which should be arriving soon in your mailbox.

(continues TRANSPORTATION)

Under PA 51, up to 90% of transportation revenues are directed to roads and bridges with the balance, currently about 8%, providing funding for everything else. Not factored into the estimated shortfall of \$1.4 B in the state transportation fund are all the non-road funding needs: trains, buses, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

The Michigan State Rail Plan, finalized in September 2011, recommends that the state invest \$7.2 B in its rail program to reach a "Good" level of freight and passenger service. Currently that vision is underfunded by \$2.6 B.

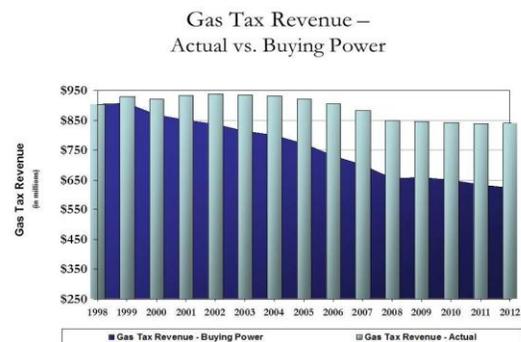
A bi-partisan package of bills to implement the Governor's proposals has been introduced in the legislature and is considered a top priority for action this year.

Rail and transit advocates must take a keen interest in how the legislature addresses the proposals to increase transportation funding and make sure that the proceeds are distributed according to the current funding formula.

Read the Governor's *Infrastructure Address* here:
tinyurl.com/marp00010

Read outline of *State of the State* here:
tinyurl.com/marp00022

The Michigan State Rail Plan is here:
www.michigan.gov/mirailplan



"The last time Michigan faced up to the need to maintain its current bridge and road infrastructure was 1997."

Gov. Snyder State of the State 2012

Fourth round of TIGER grants to dole out \$500 million

A fourth round of the TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) discretionary grant program will make \$500 M available for surface transportation projects having a significant impact on the nation, a metropolitan area or region. The authorization was part of the FY 2012 Appropriations Act signed by the President on November 18, 2011. As in previous rounds, high-speed rail and intercity passenger rail projects remain eligible for funding of up to \$100 M.

The previous three rounds of the TIGER program provided \$2.6 billion to 172 projects in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Demand for the program has been overwhelming and during the previous three rounds the Department of Transportation received more than 3,348 applications requesting more than \$95 billion for transportation projects across the country.

POINT / COUNTERPOINT

The Troy City Council has reversed itself and decided to build a new Transit Center. Do you believe this is a good decision?

NO At \$6.3 million dollars for Troy to be on the nation's railway map, this is \$190,909.00 for each of 33 daily boarders. What train station anywhere costs "six-figures" per daily boarder?

Troy residents traveling to Chicago can park either in Birmingham or in Troy.

If in Troy, you will visit your "transit center," and then walk to an elevator taking you up to a walkway high above the railroad tracks. At the end of this walkway, you will take another elevator down to track level where you can wait for your train on an open platform in Birmingham.

Or you will park in Birmingham, and walk up a nearby ramp to the same platform. Who would park in Troy?

The costs to maintain, police and insure this "attractive nuisance" will be huge. What if there is an elevator problem when the last daily train arrives at 1:30 A.M.?

This entire proposal makes no economic sense for eleven boarders per train. Nearby stations are ten minutes away in Royal Oak, and fifteen minutes away in Pontiac, and both have trackside parking. Most savvy "repeat" riders now save time, money and aggravation by boarding their trains in Dearborn, where there is abundant parking and a staffed station with a rest room.

Labeling this project as a "gateway" insults the intelligence of taxpayers. This farce will be the only city "gateway" on the planet that can't be seen from even one of the city's nearby major roads, Maple Road and Coolidge Highway!

Richard Rosenbaum

Mr. Rosenbaum has lived in Bloomfield Township, Michigan since 1965. He is a retired college professor and previously was a cost-cutter at Fortune-500 companies.

YES In November, 2011, Troy citizens elected a mayor and two council members on a pledge of fiscal conservatism. Even though no City money would be involved in the construction of the Troy Transit Center, the Council voted in December to kill the project on the grounds of wasteful government spending.

The city was surprised by the ensuing national attention (all negative) about their vote, and major employers stated publicly they had advised their corporate boards not to make further investment in such a backward-looking city.

Through the efforts of Councilman Dan Slater - who refused to see several years of work on the project go for naught - as well as the work of Chamber President Michele Hodges and the consultants designing the project, some cost savings were identified, and on January 17, the council reversed itself and approved the Transit Center.

The Council received letters from other Michigan communities attesting to the positive aspects of the modern transit centers that have been built in the last few years and confirming that they have seen increases in ridership and thus increased economic activity in their downtowns.

Business and community leaders know that transit brings employees to work and shoppers to shop. The business community clearly recognizes that improving bus and train access creates a more attractive community in which to live, work and invest, which in turn leads to higher property values and thus tax revenues.

John DeLora

Mr DeLora lives in St. Clair Shores. He is past chair of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers and is now Vice-President of the National Association of Railroad Passengers. He has worked as a stockbroker and recently retired as a police officer for Detroit Public Schools.

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CORRECTION: In last month's issue, the caption incorrectly stated the expected date for completion of the final Master Plan for Chicago Union Station. The City of Chicago and Amtrak expect to issue the final Plan in early 2012.

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

What others are saying . . .

"The Great Lakes-Midwest economic region is the world's fifth largest economy by Gross Domestic Product, and nearly 100 million people live within 500 miles of each other. The Department of Transportation's investment of more than \$1 billion in the region's high-speed rail service will reduce trip times and save travelers money, resulting in reduced congestion for the region and making the Midwest a better place to start a business and create jobs."

1/4/2012 U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announcing \$186M for Chicago-St. Louis high speed rail

"Whenever somebody suggests a movie, book or television program with a railroad theme or setting I just know that at some point the work is going to get the railroading wrong. But in his new film "Hugo," Martin Scorsese doesn't commit any blunders. While the story isn't about trains, the trains and the vast station are used with care to further a story about the loss and recovery of reputation — and that in itself ought to give American rail advocates some grounds for reassurance and excitement..."

Read the blog by F.K. Plous at tinyurl.com/marp00021



MARP member John Langdon joined Senator Carl Levin and other dignitaries for the January 28 dedication of the newly expanded and upgraded Wealthy Street Transit Operations Center in Grand Rapids. Anticipated to be LEED-certified at the Silver level, the facility was built with Recovery Act funds and additional federal funds. Since 1998, the number of trips taken by those who depend on *The Rapid* to get to work, school, medical services and shopping has more than doubled, from 4.2 million to 10.8 million. *Photo by Paul Troost*

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Send email to www.marprail.org



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