



# ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

www.marp.org

marprail@yahoo.com

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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  
ON TRACK Editor, Kay Chase*

### 2013 MEETINGS

- 12 January** – Williamston Depot-Museum
- 9 February** – Capac Depot Museum
- 9 March** – St. Johns Railroad Station
- 20 April** – Niles Depot
- 11 May** – National Train Day
- 15 June** – Vicksburg Historic Village & Depot Museum
- 20 July** – Flushing Historic Depot
- 10 August** – S.S. City of Milwaukee Train Ferry
- 14 September** – Annual Meeting at Durand Union Station
- October 12** – Bangor Depot
- November** – Chicago Union Station
- December** – Executive Committee

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

## SOUTH OF THE LAKE PLANNING MOVES FORWARD

Report by Hugh Gurney

After a year of sorting through all possible ways to route passenger trains between Porter, Indiana and Chicago Union Station, consultants HNTB have narrowed the options to four, MDOT spokesman Mohammed Alghurabi and HNBT presenter Matt Webb reported at a briefing in Dearborn on September 24. Each of these four routes meets the basic requirements of the study: two parallel tracks to be used exclusively by passenger trains, providing frequent, reliable service at speeds of up to 110 mph. Up to 56 trains a day will use these tracks as they operate between Chicago Union Station and such diverse points as Kalamazoo and beyond, Fort Wayne and beyond and Indianapolis and beyond. All four alternatives are considered equal at this point.

Over the coming winter, HNTB consultants will apply even more stringent criteria as they weed out the weaker alternatives and come up with a single, preferred alternative. A Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement will then be drafted describing all aspects of the alternative including possible drawbacks such as moveable bridges, impacts on the neighborhoods the project passes through and all impacts on the natural and built environment. In tandem, a Service Development Plan will be drafted covering such factors and likely ridership and sources of funding.

Both the Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement and the Service Development Plan should be completed by the end of 2014 and submitted to the Federal Railroad Administration. The FRA will then issue a Record of Decision as to the preferred alternative. A detailed Tier 2 Environmental Impact Statement will follow.

In response to the frustration expressed by some in the audience as to the time it was taking to complete the study, Alghurabi explained that it will be quicker to do the required analysis right rather than have it done quickly and sloppily and sent back by the FRA. Until the Tier 2 Environmental Study is completed, the project is not eligible for federal funding.

*(SOTL continues on page 3)*



photo by Suzie Martin

**MARP MEMBER MEETING**  
**Saturday, October 12**  
**11:00 am – 3:00 pm**  
**Former C&O Depot**  
**Bangor Amtrak Station**  
**555 Railroad Street**

MARP will enjoy a “working lunch” at a unique passenger station combining the old and the new in passenger rail with private enterprise. Shuttle service will be provided from the Kalamazoo Amtrak Station. Please let us know you’re coming. Send email to [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com). Visit [www.marp.org](http://www.marp.org) for details.

## Celebrating Forty Years Of Service To Rail Passengers

*Notes by Hugh Gurney*

Almost sixty people gathered at Durand Union Station on September 14 for MARP's 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting. Some were long time members who recalled early meetings around a kitchen table, while others are new to the organization.

State Representative Ben Glardon from nearby Owosso applauded MARP's work on behalf of railroad passengers and the preservation of historic stations. Melissa Horste from Senator Carl Levin's office likewise saluted MARP's achievements and briefed the group on legislative issues. The Senate has approved \$1.45 billion for Amtrak in Fiscal Year 2014, but the House of Representatives has come up with a lower figure, so a compromise figure needs to be worked out. She expects a Continuing Resolution to fund the agency through the end of the year. It is too early to say how much will be available for High Speed Rail and New Starts.

Federal Railroad Administrator Joe Szabo sent video greetings, noting that Michigan has experienced a 30% growth in ridership since 2005. At the moment, all are working hard to make up for decades of poor investment, with crews at work right now to upgrade the tracks between Dearborn and Kalamazoo for 110 mph speeds.

U. S. Representative Dave Camp of Midland sent a congratulatory letter, commending MARP for its efforts to promote passenger train safety and conserve historic railway locations.

Michael Benham of the Ann Arbor Transportation Authority briefed the group on the status of the proposed Howell to Ann Arbor commuter rail project. (See *WALLY* update elsewhere in this issue.)

Tim Hoeffner, Director of MDOT's Office of Rail, wished MARP a Happy 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Starting on October 1, the State of Michigan will be financially supporting all Amtrak operations in Michigan including the **Wolverine**, **Blue Water** and **Pere Marquette**. Hoeffner does not anticipate any major changes in operations. Hoeffner is hopeful that Amtrak's focus on corridor trains outside the Northeast Corridor will keep operational costs down. MDOT's investment in Wi Fi will more than pay for itself within a year or two. CSX has agreed to implement Positive Train Control on its route, saving MDOT hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Hoeffner expressed the need for broader public support, citing Westrain as an example, and reiterated the need to get more young people involved in the transportation debate.

After a delicious lunch, Chad Cushman offered greetings to MARP on its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on behalf on **Indian Trails**, which last year celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. **Indian Trails** is proud of its association with MARP, with the *Amtrak Thruway Services* it provides, and with the *Michigan Flyer*, which is experiencing tremendous growth.

**Keynote speaker Kevin Keefe**, publisher and vice president for *Kalmbach Publishing*, reminisced on growing up in Niles and his association with old time railroad employees who still considered that they worked for the *Michigan Central*, not the *New York Central*. He recalled crack trains like the **Wolverine**, **Mercury** and **Twilight Limited**. As a student at MSU, he became familiar with the *Grand Trunk*, the **Maple Leaf** and other fine trains on that line. He commended Michigan for real progress in making 110 mph speeds a reality. Keefe then showed a series of photographs of the **Twilight Limited** at its peak in the 1950's. This was an extra-fare, all parlor-car train that ran between Detroit and Chicago for many years.

MARP founder John DeLora was unable to be with us on this occasion but sent a slide program that was shown with commentary offered by George Schlaepfer, who was one of the seven original members of MARP. The presentation highlighted some of the accomplishments of MARP over its forty years, including rehabilitation of the Chelsea Depot and hosing down the Detroit Michigan Central Station as a Bicentennial Project. Other milestones included operation of the Passenger Service Aide program under contract to MDOT (1977-1982), work to promote ridership leading to the addition of a third train on the Wolverine route, as well as restoration of service to Durand in 1974 and to Grand Rapids in 1984.



*A highlight of MARP's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary meeting was the presentation of a \$1,000 Travel Certificate to Norma Ward for her successful efforts to save the Durand Union Station and for her many years of service as a tour director for America By Rail. Jim Wallington presented the certificate on behalf of America By Rail Chairman Larry Swartz.*

*Photo by Don Westcott*

## Community Meeting Set to Discuss WALLY Station Locations

Tuesday, Oct. 8, 7 - 9 p.m.  
Ann Arbor Community Center  
625 N. Main St

A discussion of potential station locations proposed for the 27-mile-long north-south commuter rail service connecting Ann Arbor and Howell.

*hosted by*

Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority

## Interest in WALLY Ramping Up

Speaking at MARP's 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in September at Durand Union Station, Michael Benham of the Ann Arbor Transportation Authority briefed the group on the status of the proposed Howell to Ann Arbor commuter rail project, generally referred to as **WALLY**. Graphs from recent studies demonstrate that property values in a transit-shed outperform a region as a whole by 41.6%. In 2010, MDOT has upgraded tracks and grade crossings on about 4/5 of the proposed route, so trains can now operate at 59 mph. A layover track has been constructed at Osmer, just north of Ann Arbor. Twenty-three former **Metra** coaches have been completely rebuilt by *Great Lakes Central Railroad* under contract with MDOT. Windows have been replaced, all new seats installed, and wheelchair access provided. Over 2,500 people walked through these cars during the recent Ypsilanti Heritage Days.



Benham is encouraged by the response of **Watco**, the new owners of the *Ann Arbor Railroad*, who are far more positive about letting the commuter trains come into downtown Ann Arbor on the portion of the route that they own.

A total of \$19 million in capital costs is needed to get **WALLY** up and running. Annual operating costs are estimated at \$7.2 million, about 2/3 of which would be covered by passenger fares and the Michigan Comprehensive Transportation Fund.

Ridership estimates are within the range of other new commuter rail projects, while start up costs are lower than the average. Benham thanked Tim Fischer of the Michigan Environmental Council and Transportation for Michigan for providing the funds to enable one of the commuter cars to be displayed in Hamburg on Saturday, September 21. See [tiny.cc/FriendsOfWALLY](http://tiny.cc/FriendsOfWALLY) for more information.

*(SOTL continued from page 1)*

The project will not provide for true high speed operations of up to 220 mph, but they are not precluded.

Those interested in studying the four routes now under consideration and making comments can go to the website [www.GreatLakesRail.org](http://www.GreatLakesRail.org) to review the material discussed at the public briefing. **Comments must be submitted by October 28, 2013.** Comments can be submitted on line at the web site or mailed to:

Bob Parsons  
Public Involvement and Hearings Officer  
Michigan Department of Transportation  
P. O. Box 30050  
Lansing, MI 48909

The South of the Lake Study is a joint effort of the Michigan, Indiana and Illinois transportation departments in conjunction with the Federal Railway Administration. MDOT is the lead agency.

*MARP members Hugh Gurney, John DeLora, Steve Sobel, Clark Charnetski, Jim Hinkins, Robert Patterson, John Guidinger, Kathleen Newell, Jerry Becker, and Jim Roach were among those attending the briefing.*

## Work Progressing on Michigan Projects

According to Tim Hoeffner, Michigan Office of Rail Director, total Michigan ridership for FY 2013 will be around 890,000, if this September is comparable to last September. Overall, revenue is holding up well, down slightly on the **Blue Water** and **Pere Marquette**, but up by \$1 million on the **Wolverine**. While ridership has been down slightly on the **Pere Marquette**, possibly due to competition from **Megabus**, Hoeffner is not alarmed.

A major rebuild of the **Wolverine** route between Dearborn and Kalamazoo is underway at this time. The new transportation centers in Birmingham/Troy and Dearborn are coming along well. The new Grand Rapids station is taking shape. Planning for the East Lansing station is moving forward and a consultant has been hired for the Ann Arbor project. MDOT is working with **M-1 RAIL** on plans for a new Detroit station to tie in with the M-1 streetcar project. Work on the M-1 project will likely get underway in the spring. Consultants for the South of the Lake project have come up with four route alternatives for further review. Project documents may be viewed at [GreatLakesRail.org](http://GreatLakesRail.org). **Comments are due Oct 28.**

### View from elsewhere . . .

*“Former Congressman Joe Schwarz gave a five minute rendition at the Library of Michigan Rail Conference on Saturday, September 21. People were charged up hearing his positive outlook for freight and passenger rail service in this state.”*

-- comment by MARP member Rosemary Horvath. [CLICK HERE](#) for a video of Schwarz’s talk at the August 7 Michigan Rail Conference in Lansing. All conference materials are available on the Michigan Tech [High Speed Rail Learning System](#). Registration is free.

*“Just five years after the high-speed rail system opened, it is carrying nearly twice as many passengers as the country’s domestic airline industry. Airlines have largely halted service on routes of less than 300 miles when high-speed rail links open. They have reduced service on routes of 300 to 470 miles.”*

-- Keith Bradsher, New York Times 10.23.13  
[Speedy Trains Transform China](#)



Travelers on Trans4M’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Transportation Odyssey gave a big “thumbs up” to the train ride from Kalamazoo to Ann Arbor on the third leg of a trip that started in northern Michigan and ended in downtown Detroit. Along the way they biked the TART Trail in Traverse City, took *Indian Trails* to Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo, walked the Kalamazoo River Valley Trailway, hopped the *AirRide* in Ann Arbor to get to Detroit Metro Airport and arrived at their final destination via SMART and DDOT transit. Read accounts of their adventures on [Odyssey Day One](#) and [Odyssey Day Two](#) and enjoy all the great pictures in the [PHOTO ALBUM](#). .

## 2013 Michigan Transportation Odyssey

In this 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of Trans4M’s Transportation Odyssey, eight intrepid travelers set out to make their way across the state to discover where improvements have been made and to document the challenges remaining in using public transportation and making connections among travel modes.



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