



# 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. The public is invited to attend.*

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

### 2014 MEETINGS

- 18 January** – Williamston Depot-Museum
- 15 February** – University of Detroit Mercy
- 8 March** – Herrick District Library, Holland
- 5 April** – Wayne County Community College, downtown Detroit
- 10 May** – National Train Day
- 14 June** – Former GTW Depot, Lansing
- 19 July** – Traverse City
- August** – Executive Committee
- 13 September** – Annual Meeting at Durand Union Station
- 18 October** – *The Rapid* Central Station, Grand Rapids
- November 15** – Port Huron
- December** – TBA

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

## “Revenue Service” for WALLY?

In one of the most exciting events in recent Michigan railroading, the **Friends of WALLY** have announced that demonstration runs of the MiTrain passenger coaches will be a feature of the **54th Annual Howell Melon Fest**. The **Michigan Steam Railroading Institute**, in partnership with **Great Lakes Central Railroad** will provide the motive power and crew for hour-long rides available to the public from 10am to 4pm on Saturday and Sunday, August 16 and 17, at \$20 per adult, \$15 per child. This will be the first time the cars will be used for a revenue service. In addition, visitors will be able to tour a MiTrain Passenger Car on display in front of the Historic Train Depot Museum throughout the festival.

Kudos to MARP member Steve Manor and the **Friends of WALLY** who have worked with MDOT, SEMCOG, and Michigan Steam Railroading Institute to make this happen!

**WALLY** is the proposed commuter train that would connect Livingston and north Washtenaw Counties to downtown Ann Arbor as a vital part of relieving congestion the US-23 corridor. With the recent announcement of a Federal Highway Administration grant, the **North-South Commuter Rail Study** is being launched to determine what it will take to get the service up and running: where to locate stations, what track and signal work is needed, what the environmental impacts are, what the potential ridership is.

**Friends of WALLY** is a dedicated group of people working to move the plan into reality, seeing it as a part of building a strong and healthy community. The public is welcome to attend the next meeting to be held Saturday, August 9 at 1:00pm at the Howell Library in the Conference Room.

Please plan to drop by the MDOT, SEMCOG, MARP and the Friends of WALLY informational tables during the August 15 -17 **Howell Melon Fest**. If you would like to help staff the MARP table, contact Chuck Merckel [crmerckel@aol.com](mailto:crmerckel@aol.com) or phone him at 734 522-7329.

*Be one of the first paying customers aboard  
the newly renovated MiTrain cars.*



Train Ride Information  
[HERE](#)

**There will be no MARP Member Meeting in August.**  
**Instead, plan to attend the Annual Melon Fest in Howell MI where you will have the opportunity to be one of first to take a ride in a MiTrain passenger coach on the proposed WALLY commuter route between Howell and Ann Arbor.**

## Rail Service Coming to Traverse City?

*Meeting Notes by Hugh Gurney*

Limited passenger rail service connecting the former Pere Marquette station in Traverse City with the Village of Williamsburg and the Turtle Creek Casino eleven miles to the east is a possibility, MARP members attending the July 19 meeting in Traverse City learned. James Bruckbauer, Transportation Policy Specialist for the Michigan Land Use Institute (MLUI), suggested that passenger trains operating on existing tracks between these points could relieve traffic congestion along U.S. 31 and M-72, offering a more scenic and tranquil way to get from the emerging areas east of Traverse City to the city center. Bruckbauer is the co-author of [Getting Back on Track: Uncovering the Potential for Trains in Traverse City](#), released to the public at the MARP meeting by the Michigan Land Use Institute. In addition to environmentally friendly transportation, MLUI focuses on getting locally grown food into the hands of local consumers and promoting clean energy. The report was funded by the National Association of Realtors, the Traverse Area Association of Realtors, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and others.

The proposed rail link could be used by visitors coming into the Traverse City area on M-72 after exiting I-75 at Grayling. Rather than fighting bumper to bumper traffic, riders could enjoy vistas of East Traverse Bay as the train moved effortlessly into the city. Residents and visitors already in downtown Traverse City, could access the casino and developing attractions to the east in Acme and Whitewater townships. Bikers and walkers could use the train to reach particular sections of the parallel Traverse Area Recreational Trail.

Numerous challenges will need to be met. The tracks are currently in deplorable condition, permitting freight traffic only at no more than 10 mph. It will cost at least \$1.7 to \$2.0 million to bring them up to a level where passenger trains could operate at 25-30 mph. Equipment would have to be identified and acquired and an operating entity created. Looking at examples from Astoria, Oregon; Kenosha, Wisconsin; Nashville, Tennessee and Napa Valley, California, Bruckbauer suggested the service could be operated by a non-profit organization, the local transit authority or a for profit corporation.

The report recommends that Traverse City begin slowly, with service on summer Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, adding service during the Cherry Festival and the Michael Moore Film Festival. With a positive response, tracks and signals could be upgraded further to permit faster and more frequent commuter level service eventually extending southward to the Grawn area and ultimately to

*(MEETING continues in next column)*

Please Plan to Attend  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Annual  
 Michigan Rail Conference**

Aug. 26-27, 2014

John Lewis Center

Macomb Community College

14500 E. 12 Mile Road

Warren, MI 48088

[More Information Here](#)

*(MEETING continued from previous column)*

downstate Michigan. As noted by Kim Pontius of the Traverse Area Association of Realtors, which helped fund the study, limited service on the Williamsburg line could be the beginning of a return to passenger rail for Northwest Lower Michigan.

A couple of those in attendance questioned the viability of the proposal, citing obstacles they had encountered operating a dinner train on the route for nine years. Noting that the report presents a vision and not a concrete plan, Bruckbauer and Pontius invited their input in turning the vision into a reality.

In other business, John Langdon introduced Warren Fritz of Kalamazoo, who has agreed to serve as Western Region Chair. Fritz has already begun a project to place MARP and Amtrak information in public libraries as a way to promote passenger trains.

Don Westcott reported that September 10 has been set as the day for commemorating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the **Blue Water** route between Chicago and Port Huron. A special anniversary train trip is planned for that day. Approximately 9-10 billboards are now visible along highways paralleling the **Blue Water** route, with several in the Lansing area. Posters promoting the anniversary event are being distributed to senior citizen centers and other locations. Another poster is in preparation promoting the fact that the **Blue Water** welcomes bicycles on board. Persons who can help distribute these posters in their communities are asked to email [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com).

Samuel Chupp observed that the Amish frequently travel on Amtrak. He publishes a newsletter for the Amish community and would be happy to include information about passenger trains.

Outreach Chair Chuck Merckel needs more volunteers to help staff outreach events in locations throughout the state. He is stressing a MARP presence at events likely to attract large numbers of people unfamiliar with train travel. Contact him at [crmerckel@aol.com](mailto:crmerckel@aol.com) or phone 734-522-7329.

*Thank You to all  
who recently sent their  
membership renewals!*

### *Mark Your Calendars*

**Michigan Operation Lifesaver** invites you to attend the next quarterly meeting on **August 8** beginning at 9:30 am. These meetings always feature interesting speakers and include lunch hosted by Jon Cool, President, Michigan Railroads Association. Takes place this month at the Washtenaw County Sheriffs' Office complex, 4135 Washtenaw Avenue, Ann Arbor MI 48107. The meeting will be in the Learning Resource Center building near Hogback Road. RSVP required. E-Mail [samcrowl@comcast.net](mailto:samcrowl@comcast.net) or phone 248-823-7037.

**The Friends of Wally** will hold their next meeting Saturday, **August 9**, 2014, at 1:00pm at the Howell Library in the Conference Room.

**Livingston County Partnership with Livingston County Transportation Coalition** is holding a Strategic Planning Meeting open to anyone interested in public transportation. The meeting will be at the Hartland Senior Center on **August 14th** from 11am-1:30pm. Lunch will be provided. If you wish to attend please RSVP to Anne Rennie at [arennie@cmhliv.org](mailto:arennie@cmhliv.org).

**MARP will hold its 41<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting** on Saturday, **September 13**, at Durand Union Station. Announcements will be mailed to members soon. Paid Reservations are due by September 5. Email [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com) if you have questions.

### **Secretary Foxx Hosts Town Hall Live on the Internet THIS WEDNESDAY**

In the wake of yet another stop gap measure to keep federal money flowing to road and transit projects around the country, USDOT Secretary Anthony Foxx has announced a live-on-the-internet Town Hall Meeting to take input from the American public and send a message to Congress.

Characterizing last week's actions as "the 28<sup>th</sup> Band-Aid" Congress has passed in the last six years, Sec. Foxx added that he would like to see Congress begin work now on a long term and comprehensive "transportation solution that invests today --in roads, in rail, and in transit-- so America will be ready for tomorrow."

The Town Hall will be streamed live on the internet on Wednesday, July 6, at 1:00 p.m. Eastern time.

Questions can be submitted right now via Twitter – using the hashtag #InvestNow – or by sending an email to [publicengagement@dot.gov](mailto:publicengagement@dot.gov).

Sign-up at [www.dot.gov/townhall](http://www.dot.gov/townhall).

### **NARP and ELPC File Brief in AMTRAK v AAR**

Alleging that on-time-performance of passenger trains has deteriorated, at least in part, as a result of a previous ruling, USDOT has asked the Supreme Court to review the case.

The NARP brief will argue that a lower court was mistaken in ruling that it is unconstitutional for Amtrak to participate with the Federal Railroad Administration in setting performance standards. These metrics helped ensure that Amtrak's trains—which operate on tracks owned by the private freight railroads—meet minimum standards of service quality

Read the full story [here](#).

### **Millennial Trains Project Will Stop in Detroit**

Take twenty young people, ask each to crowdsource at least \$5,000, throw in ideas about changing the world, put it all together in 3 vintage rail cars on a 3000 mile journey. What have you got? The 2014 edition of the **Millennial Trains Project**. If you are needing some relief from the daily mayhem of TV news, click [HERE](#) for the inspiring stories of these 21<sup>st</sup> century pioneers who will be talking, learning, and doing – aboard the train and in cities they visit along the way. Beginning in Portland on August 7 and ending on August 17 in New York City, the train will make a stop in Detroit, the home of Jessica Meyer, whose project **313exchange** is a community development project focused her home town. You can sign up to receive the daily **MTP NEWSLETTER**.

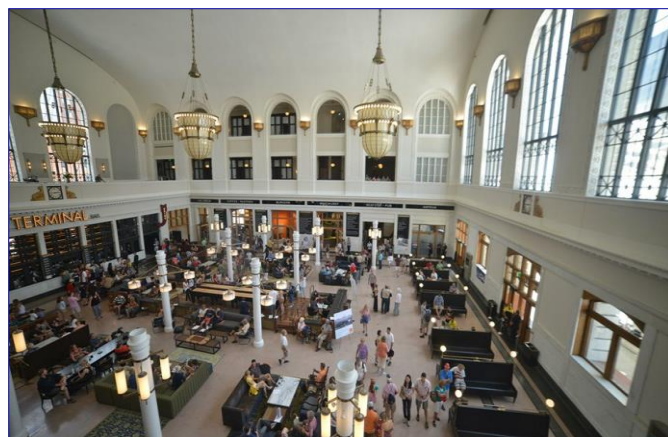
### View from elsewhere . . .

On July 21, as Congress dithered over the insolvency of the Highway Trust Fund, USDOT Secretary Anthony Foxx and 11 of his predecessors sent an **open letter** to the Hill stating

*"Never in our nation's history has America's transportation system been on a more unsustainable course."*

Decrying the fact that in the last 5 years, Congress has passed 27 short term measures in contrast to the former practice of multi-year authorization bills, they continue:

*"This is no way to run a railroad, fill a pothole, or repair a bridge. In fact, the unpredictability about when, or if, funding will come has caused states to delay or cancel projects altogether. Simply put, the United States is in a united state of disrepair, a crisis made worse by the fact that, over the next generation, more will be demanded of our transportation system than ever before. By 2050, this country will be home to up to 100 million new people. And we'll have to move 14 billion additional tons of freight, almost twice what we move now."*



### Denver Union Station Re-Opens

With flags waving, bands playing, and champagne flowing, Denver's 120-year old Union Station was re-opened to passengers and visitors on 26 July following a \$54 million renovation that includes restaurants, retail shops and the 112-room Crawford Hotel. Home to commuter- and light-rail trains, along with buses and Amtrak trains, the station will see commuter trains from Denver International Airport arriving every 15 minutes by 2016. The renovation has spurred a \$1.8 billion wave of new opportunity in the area. News article and photo gallery [HERE](#).



**OUR ADDRESS HAS CHANGED**



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### Contact Your Lawmaker

Congressional Switchboard  
202-224-3121

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