



# ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

www.marp.org

marprail@yahoo.com

Issue #36

September 2014

*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.*

### MARP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2012-2014

Robert Tischbein	Chair
Larry Krieg	Vice-Chair
Jeanie Merckel	Treasurer
Hugh Gurney	Secretary
John Langdon	Governmental/Public Affairs Coordinator
Kathleen Newell	Membership Coordinator
Kay Chase	Communications Coordinator
Jim Wallington	Meetings Coordinator
Don Monteith	Northern Region Chair
Robert Patterson	Detroit/Metro Region Chair
Warren Fritz	West Region Chair
Rosemary Horvath	East/Central Region Chair

*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)

## The Pere Marquette Turns 30

On the morning of August 4, 1984, a group of eager passengers boarded the first passenger train to depart Grand Rapids in nearly a decade and a half. None were more excited than an intrepid group of West Michigan MARP members who had been working toward this moment almost since the day in May of 1971 when Amtrak assumed what was left of a struggling passenger train system and discontinued service to hundreds of communities across Michigan and the nation.

Many of those same MARP members will be on hand on Tuesday, September 16, to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the *Pere Marquette* passenger train linking Grand Rapids, Holland, Bangor and St. Joseph to the nationwide Amtrak system in Chicago. Observances are planned prior to train departures in each of the communities and Amtrak is offering 30% off companion fares throughout September (see page 3).

In the late 70's, Ed Heckman, Ron Vander Kooi and Ray Hamacher (now deceased), with the enthusiastic support of Scott Hercik at MDOT, saw that the *Wolverine*, *Blue Water* and *Michigan Executive* trains were well established and felt that the time was ripe to push for the return of service to the western part of the state. With the help of other MARP volunteers – among them Carl Sinke, Fred Slikkers, Eric Elliot, Dave Vanderbee, Ralph Busse, Dennis Kent, Clark Charnetski, John Guidinger and John DeLora, some 13,000 petition signatures were gathered. With a supportive governor and legislature and the cooperation of the C & O, a route was chosen – routing through Kalamazoo was given up due to the cost of upgrading the track - and plans made for stations. It all took some time, but by the late summer of 1984 everything was ready to go.

Hercik says that he has always thought of the *Pere Marquette* as “his train”, but that it has been the strong local West Michigan support, highlighted by MARP, that has sustained success through the years. In a recent email, he recalled watching the deadhead equipment arriving from Chicago on the eve of the launch and says “watching the train prepare to be born was a pretty terrific experience.” He wondered at the time why it had taken so long to accomplish, but adds, “After all of these years, I guess it was worth the wait.”



**41<sup>st</sup> ANNUAL MEETING**  
**Saturday, September 13**  
**10:30 am – 2:30 pm**  
**Durand Union Station**

200 Railroad Street  
Durand, MI 48439

This year's keynote speaker is Thomas C. Carper, Amtrak Board of Directors. Other speakers will focus on Detroit's M-1 Rail Project and on prospects for expansion of Michigan passenger train service. Registration closed Sept. 1. Details on the website [www.marp.org](http://www.marp.org) Or email [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com) .



MARP members present 13,000 petition signatures to re-instate passenger train service from Grand Rapids to Chicago. From left, Governor William G. Milliken, Ed Heckman, Ron Vander Kooi, Carl Sinke, Ray Hamacher, unidentified, and State Representative Steve Monsma, who arranged the meeting with Gov. Milliken.

## *In The News*

### **Blue Water 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in October**

Make your plans now to ride the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary train on Wednesday, October 1. Observances are planned at stations along the route. If you are available to help out as a car host or in the station, contact Don Westcott at [dwwestcott@yahoo.com](mailto:dwwestcott@yahoo.com) or phone 810-517-5787. [CLICK HERE](#) for 40% off companion fare valid for travel Sep 2–Oct 1.

### **Amtrak Extends Schedule Changes**

The *Wolverine* and *Blue Water* schedule changes in effect during the summer have been extended through the end of September. Battle Creek and Kalamazoo travelers are enthusiastic about being able to finish their workday and catch Train #359 at 5:45p or 6:15p, respectively, for an early evening arrival into Chicago. The very early morning Train #349 (Mondays only) appears to be a hit with families and business persons. Also in effect is an earlier departure on the westbound *Blue Water* train #365. The printed timetable does not reflect these changes, but you can access the schedule on page 3 [here](#).

### **Chris Bagwell Takes the Throttle at GLC**

Great Lakes Central Railroad (GLC) has named Chris Bagwell general manager. Chris is well known to MARP for his enthusiastic work retrofitting the *MITRAIN* cars and facilitating their display at events. Chris was honored in 2013 as a “Rising Star” by Progressive Railroading. You can read his [profile here](#). Chris recently “starred” as well in a video talking about GLC operations in Michigan and promoting the proposed *WALLY* commuter train. The video is posted on the MARP website. View it [HERE](#).

## **MITRAIN Cars Launch Revenue Service**

*by Clark Charnetski*

The first passengers to ride the MDOT *MITRAIN* commuter cars in revenue service boarded at the former Ann Arbor Railroad depot in Howell as part of that city's 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Melon Festival. Rides were provided by the Steam Railroad Institute and the Great Lakes Central Railroad.

A static display of one of the refurbished former Burlington Route METRA commuter cars was held on Friday through Sunday, August 15 through 17, 2014, and rides were offered on Saturday and Sunday at 10 AM, noon, 2 PM and 4PM. GLC “Geep” locomotives 396 and 398 were attached to the ends of the train. *MITRAIN* cars FRYX 705 and 701 followed locomotive 396 northward to Cohoctah Rd., ten miles up the line. A Steam Railroad Institute generator car provided head end power for the two passenger cars.

The 20 mile round trip took one hour. Ticket prices were \$20.00 for adults and \$15.00 for children. Besides the GLC and SRI, sponsors of the event included MDOT, Friends of Wally, Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority and Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.

Officials from MDOT, MARP and Friends of Wally staffed tables and cars and answered questions from the public. The passenger cars have been completely rebuilt by GLC at a cost of \$310,000 per car, including new seats manufactured in Michigan by American Seating.

A video of the Melon Festival train can be found on the [MARP website](#).



*MITRAIN* cars depart the Howell Historic Train Museum on August 16 for an hour-long excursion north to Cohoctah Rd. and back as part of the 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Howell Melon Fest. *MITRAIN* coaches have been refurbished by MDOT for eventual use on proposed commuter routes from Howell to Ann Arbor and Ann Arbor to Detroit. *Photo by Clark Charnetski*



## Pere Marquette 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Tuesday, September 16

**Festivities begin prior to the 7:35am departure of Train #371 from the Grand Rapids station**

431 Wealthy Street SW at Market Street SW

Other community events will take place prior to the train's arrival

**Holland 8:26 am    Bangor 9:07 am    St. Joseph 9:44 am**

**Save 30% on Companion Fare on the Pere Marquette**  
**Purchase your ticket today and be part of the on-board celebration.**

Passengers will receive commemorative gift bags and be treated to cake and coffee.

### MARP Outreach Successes

Efforts of Outreach Coordinator, Chuck Merckel, are paying off with the addition of some large train shows not previously covered and expansion to events such as the Portage Green-a-thon and the Senior and Veterans Expo in Mattawan. Chuck reports that 20 MARP members have turned out (some of them more than once) at 16 events so far this year, reaching perhaps 2,000 – 3,000 people.

MARP is exploring ideas for reaching a broader audience with information about the many exciting developments taking place in train travel in Michigan and throughout the Midwest. We would like to bring greater awareness of these advances to a public that is not generally well-informed.

MARP has found that programs on “how to ride the train” are well received, particularly by seniors. Let Chuck know if you know of a group that would enjoy such a program. We would also like to make presentations to clubs, service organizations, community interest groups, and student organizations in colleges and universities.

If you have ideas, or would like to volunteer to help at events, contact Chuck at [crmerckel@aol.com](mailto:crmerckel@aol.com) 734 522-7329.

### September Outreach Events

**Volunteers are needed. See the contact persons listed with each event.**

#### **Bronco Bash**

Western Michigan University  
5 September, 3:00 pm - 7:00 pm  
Contact: [john.langdon@sbcglobal.net](mailto:john.langdon@sbcglobal.net)

#### **Iron Rails Model RR Show**

Barry Expo Center  
1350 North M-37, Hastings MI  
20 September, 10:00 am - 3:00 pm  
Contact: [john.langdon@sbcglobal.net](mailto:john.langdon@sbcglobal.net)

#### **Mt. Clemens Michigan Train Show**

St. Louis Social Hall  
39140 Ornsby, Clinton Twp. MI  
27 September, 10:00 am - 3:00 pm  
Contact: [Robert Tischbein rptischbein@juno.com](mailto:Robert Tischbein rptischbein@juno.com)

Do you agree with those who say President Obama's high-speed rail program has been a failure?

Yes 63%

No 36%

Total Votes: 319

Poll conducted 8/24/2014

### Shaping America's Transportation Future

USDOT is holding three interactive Webinars this week, 9-11 September, to gather input on the nation's transportation challenges and opportunities in **aviation**, **passenger**, and **freight** transportation. This Information will be used by the department to help in developing its transportation policy over the next three decades. The webinars are free, but you must **REGISTER** in order to attend.

### View from elsewhere . . .

*"Ridership and revenue are at all-time highs for Amtrak, and unfortunately so are delays. Late trains and unnecessary delays turn passengers away from Amtrak and can slow the incredible growth we have seen so far."* Adding that Illinois has invested almost \$2 billion in passenger-rail infrastructure in recent years, Sen. Durbin continued, *"We cannot let these investments go to waste due to unnecessary freight train interference."*

-- Illinois Senator Dick Durbin, during a 20 August **hearing** in Champaign IL focused on ways to address Amtrak service delays.

*"Amtrak's on-time performance figures recently published in the press incorporate delays not attributable to or involving CN, such as delays at stations, delays as the result of Amtrak equipment problems, or delays as the result of trains not coming to CN at the scheduled times. CN has provided the state of Illinois and Amtrak several proposals for infrastructure investments to add capacity and reduce passenger delays, particularly for the Illini train, on this busy and congested passenger and freight corridor."*

-- CN spokesman Patrick Waldron in an email response to Sen. Durbin's 20 August **hearing** in Champaign IL.



### The Empire Builder Strikes Back

The Summer 2014 edition of the online magazine **RAIL: Connecting Communities by Moving People** has a number of informative and thought-provoking articles on rail developments in Minnesota. In addition to a look at the history of the *Empire Builder*, there are articles on the proposed *ZipRail* project to link the Twin Cities and Rochester with high-speed rail, the *Northern Lights Express* connecting Minneapolis-St Paul with Duluth, a "transit awakening" in Minnesota's largest metropolitan area, and the convergence of Duluth's past, present, and future in its Union Station. **Take a look!** *Photo by Amtrak*



**OUR ADDRESS HAS CHANGED**



MARP, INC  
PO BOX 510842  
LIVONIA, MI 48151-6842

### Contact Your Lawmaker

Congressional Switchboard  
202-224-3121

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

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

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

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

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