The Michigan PASSENGER

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Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers
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Okemas, Okemas Public Library
Saturday, August 29 10 a.m.- 2p.m.
ANNUAL MEETING
Durand Union Station
See MARP.org for details

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Penn Station in New York City Begins Redevelopment



Busiest railroad station in North America getting facelift

New York City's Pennsylvania Station, the busiest railroad station in North America, is beginning its long-awaited redevelopment as a modern railroad station. According to an Amtrak press release dated June 22, 2026, a public-private partnership consisting of Amtrak and Penn Transformation Partners (PTP) has been established to finalize the design, obtain stakeholder input from more than 50 organizations, and develop a more justifiable cost estimate for the work. The project is moving ahead on an ambitious schedule showing construction work to start at the end of 2027. Penn Station will remain in operation during the construction work, serving 600,000 daily commuter passengers and tens of thousands of visitors.

Today Penn Station is the name for the commuter station of the Long Island and New Jersey Transit Railroads, located between 7th and 8th Avenues. Amtrak is now located at the Monahan Train Hall between 8th and 9th Avenues, a block west in the renovated former Farley Post Office Building, built in 1914 in the classical style of the original 1910 Penn Station building. The eleven boarding platforms and 21 tracks are under both buildings. Tracks 1-4 are used by New Jersey Transit (NJT), tracks 5-14 by NJT and Amtrak, and tracks 15-21 by the Long Island Railroad.

During this phase of the Penn Station project, Special Advisor Andy Byford will lead the input from Amtrak, owner of Penn Station. PTP is a joint venture led by construction companies Halmar International of Nanuet, NJ, and Skanska of New York City. Web

See ***Penn Station*** page 3

Lawton, Michigan



Amtrak train 353 passing the cobblestone Michigan Central Depot at Lawton, Michigan, on May 27, 2026. Built in 1897, it was the sight of campaign speeches by William Jennings Bryon and Theodore Roosevelt. Today it serves as an Americal Legion Post. (Kevin Keefe photo)

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The Michigan Passenger welcomes your comments and submissions on passenger rail issues. Comments, articles, and other materials sent for publication should be sent by email to jhguidinger1@yahoo.com. Clippings from newspapers, magazines, and electronic sources must include the publication's name and date. Photos sent by email must be in .jpg format. We reserve the right to edit all submissions.

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MICHIGAN SERVICES

Amtrak Train Schedules
Effective August 1, 2026
Chicago-Kalamazoo-Ann Arbor-Detroit-Pontiac
Chicago-Kalamazoo-East Lansing-Port Huron

Wolverine Service	Wolverine Service	Blue Water	Wolverine Service	Mile		Train Name		Wolverine Service	Blue Water	Wolverine Service	Wolverine Service
350	352	364	354			Train Number		351	365	353	355
Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily			Days of Operation		Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily
6:45a	2:15p	4:00p	5:50p	*0*	Dp	CHICAGO, IL, Un Sta (CT)	Ar	10:42a	11:45a	2:12p	10:50p
7:11a	↓	↓	↓	*16*		Hammond-Whiting, IN (CT)		↑	↑	1:25p	10:04p
9:04a	4:31p	6:10p	8:04p	*62*		New Buffalo, MI (ET)			11:24a	1:31p	10:12p
9:29a	4:52p	6:32p	8:24p	*89*		Niles, MI			11:04a	1:11p	9:52p
9:40a	↓	6:43p	↓	*102*		Dowagiac, MI			10:52a	↑	9:39p
10:14a	5:26p	7:11p	8:58p	*138*		Kalamazoo, MI		9:26a	10:26a	12:38p	9:10p
10:56a	6:03p	7:38p	9:35p	*160*		Battle Creek, MI		8:58a	10:00a	12:11p	8:43p
↓	↓	9:00p	↓	*208*		East Lansing, MI		↑	8:54a	↑	↑
↓	↓	9:37p	↓	*238*		Durand, MI		↑	8:08a	↑	↑
↓	↓	10:08p	↓	*256*		Flint, MI		↑	7:35a	↑	↑
↓	↓	10:34p	↓	*274*	↓	Lapeer, MI	↑	↑	7:08a	↑	↑
↓	↓	11:31p	↓	*319*	Ar	PORT HURON, MI	Dp	↑	6:20a	↑	↑
↓	↓	↓	10:03p	*184*		Albion, MI		8:20a	↑	↑	↑
11:51a	6:55p	↓	10:28p	*208*		Jackson, MI		7:56a	↑	11:03a	7:42p
12:33p	7:40p	↓	11:13p	*243*		Ann Arbor, MI		7:19a	↑	10:28a	7:05p
1:02p	8:14p	↓	11:42p	*271*		Dearborn, MI		6:49a	↑	9:58a	6:34p
1:30p	8:45p	↓	12:15p	*281*		DETROIT, MI		6:31a	↑	9:40a	6:16p
1:54p	9:09p	↓	12:39p	*292*		Royal Oak, MI		6:03a	↑	9:12a	5:48p
2:02p	9:16p	↓	12:46p	*296*	↓	Troy, MI	↑	5:56a	↑	9:04a	5:41p
2:21p	9:39p	↓	1:11a	*304*	Ar	PONTIAC, MI	Dp	5:43a	↑	8:50a	5:28p

Read Down ↓ / Read Up ↑

MARP.org

Amtrak Train Schedule
Effective October 6, 2023
Chicago-Grand Rapids

Amtrak.com

Pere Marquette	Mile		Train Name		Pere Marquette
370			Train Number		371
Daily			Days of Operation		Daily
6:30p	*0*	Dp	CHICAGO, IL, Un Sta (CT)	Ar	9:08a
9:14p	*89*	↑	St. Joe-Benton Harbor, MI (ET)	↑	8:10a
9:50p	*116*	↑	Bangor, MI	↑	7:32a
10:33p	*151*	↓	Holland, MI	↑	6:49a
11:34p	*176*	Ar	GRAND RAPIDS, MI	Dp	6:00a

Read Down ↓ / Read Up ↑

These schedules are provided for trip planning purposes only and may not show recent changes. Always consult with Amtrak at AMTRAK.COM or 1-800-USA-RAIL when making reservations.

Printed by the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers - August 1, 2026.

Join us at MARP.ORG for better trains.

Letter to editor

Our Station Representative for Niles provided us with the following report:

From: Jack Kessler, Email, May 25, 2026
Hi All,

My apologies, I let myself get busy and forgot to complete the first job! Yes, I did get to the station on Friday! Delivered the new Michigan Passenger. And placed the new timetable sheets. And inside otherwise, looking good. The same 5 light bulbs are out.

A fun delay getting there, almost to the station and the gates came down! Guessing 351 was running late. And pulling in to a parking spot, I noticed the grounds were looking very nice. It was a pleasure to sit out on one of the benches after inside-duties were complete. 365 was running about 15 minutes late, plenty of time to take in the view. A sea of yellow irises to please the eyes! The garden club has some beautiful flowers showing. And the grass was cut, looking very nice. Even trimmed under the benches! And 365 had 4 boarding, 5 stepping off.

Enjoy this great weather!

Jack

(Note: If you would like to be a station representative for your home town Amtrak depot, Contact Chuck Merckel at 734-330-0281. Currently the position of Station Representative for Toledo is vacant.)

MARP STATION REPRESENTATIVES
Chuck Merckel, Coordinator (734-330-0281)

Station	Staff	MARP Volunteer
Albion	Bus	Betty Chlystek
Ann Arbor	Amtrak	Clark Charnetski
Bangor	None	J. P. Descamp
Battle Creek	Amtrak	Matt Muraeski
Chicago	Amtrak	Robert Degrnhart
Dearborn	Amtrak	Mary Jo Durivage
Detroit	Amtrak	Mr. & Mrs. Greg Ptucha
Dowagiac	None	Matt Money
Durand	Museum	Mary Stone
East Lansing	Caretkr	John Boyse
Flint	Bus	Richmond Riggs
Grand Rapids	Caretkr	John Langdon
Holland	None	Nathan Nietering
Jackson	Caretkr	Tom Schindler
Kalamazoo	Caretkr	Warren Fritz
Lapeer	None	Jim Slater
New Buffalo	None	Rich Knoll
Niles	Caretkr	Jack Kessler
Pontiac	Bus	Robert Tischbein
Port Huron	None	T. J. Gaffney
Royal Oak	None	David Roberts
S Joseph/Benton H	None	Todd Schultz
Toledo, OH	Amtrak	Vacant
Troy	None	Thomas VanDeGrift
Upper Michigan	None	Louis Valance

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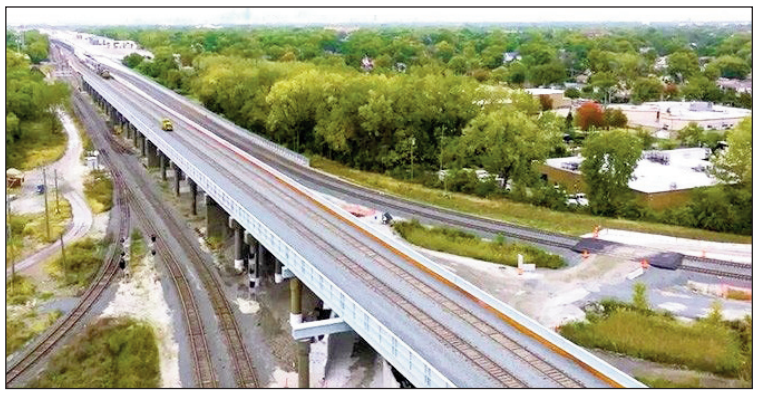
☐ Students	$20
☐ Family	$40
☐ First Class	$100
☐ Life	$500
Additional Donation	$_____
Amount Enclosed	$_____

CREATE Continues to Move Forward in Chicago



Part of the 75th Street Corridor Project. (CREATE Program photo)



Opened in November 2025, the Forest Hill Flyover elevates CSX tracks above a critical intersection. (CSX photo)

Jeff Stagl, Managing, Editor of *Progressive Railroading*, writing on June 22, provides us with a nice summary of the progress to date on CREATE. The Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) program has the goal of untangling the nineteenth century maze of rail lines resulting from the independent railroad development in the Chicago urban area. The result has been to increase rail capacity, speed, safety, and reliability in the Chicago area - the railroad capital of the US. The program is funded by multiple sources including federal, state, and local grants, and money from the railroads themselves.

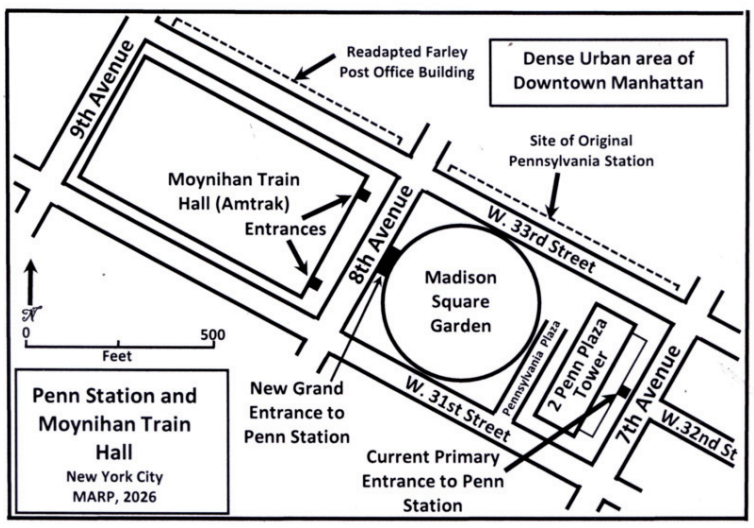
CREATE is managed under a public-private partnership that includes representation from
• Amtrak
•Association of American Railroads (AAR)
• Belt Railway of Chicago (BRC)
• BNSF Railway
• Canadian Pacific Kansas City
• Canadian National Railroad
• Chicago and Illinois Departments of Transportation
• Cook County
• CSX Transportation
• Indiana Harbor Belt Railroad
• Metra
• Norfolk Southern (NS)
• Union Pacific Railroad
• USDOT

Initiated in 2003, the $6 billion CREATE program identified 70 specific projects designed to separate freight and passenger trains at six key junctions. A total of 36 projects have been completed so far and construction or planning is underway on several more projects. Typical work consists of constructing rail flyovers at junctions, installing double/triple tracking, building short segments of new railroad, replacing old bridges, upgrading signal systems, eliminating grade crossings, rearranging utility lines, and many more highly specialized projects.

In November, the large Forest Hill Flyover was opened with a new bridge that eliminates or significantly reduces operational conflicts between CSX, NS, BRC, and Metra. About 35 freight trains operate daily on CSX's Western Avenue Corridor, and the flyover reduces freight train and Metra delays on the route and increases the service fluidity of rail movements.

Another project will eliminate the most congested rail chokepoint in Chicago, Belt Junction on 71st Street. This junction sees 30 Metra and 90 freight trains cross paths each day. Work involves constructing a grade crossing separation at 71st Street to reduce neighborhood traffic delays and improve safety, building an additional mainline for Metra, and establishing a flyover connection.

Penn Station redevelopment . . . continued from page 1



sites for both of these companies show world-wide experience with major urban projects of the complexity of rebuilding Penn Station. The project will be built with union labor.

The present cost estimate is between 7 and 8 billion dollars. The project will be funded primarily through federal funding, with some private financing and equity raised by PTP. So far, the U.S. Department of Transportation has invested 243 million dollars into early studies concerning the station.

Specifics announced so far include:

Single Floor Design. The new Penn Station will be a single-level concourse with soring ceilings. All amenities presently in Penn Station, such as restaurants, shops, waiting rooms, and customer services, will be consolidated on one floor.

Madson Square Garden. Questions about whether Madison Square Garden, which sits atop Penn Station, will be removed, have been resolved. Madison Square Garden will remain in place. New art deco cladding will be attached to the exterior of the circular building to match that to be applied to the exterior of the new Penn Station.

Infosys Theatre. The 5,600-seat Infosys Theater will be removed. Removal of the theatre, which is located above the west side of Penn Station and below the Garden, represents a partial victory for those advocating the entire removal of the Garden. Removal of the Garden would have allowed sunlight once again to enter the station, which was a much-admired feature of the original 1910 station. However, removal of the Theatre will allow some sunlight to enter the station and make for a more airy, open interior.

Two Penn Tower. The Two Penn Plaza office tower over the current primary east side entrance to Penn Station on 7th Avenue will remain in place. The relatively small, elevated foot print of this multistory building does not interfere significantly with Penn Station.

New Primary Entrance, A new grand entrance for Penn Station will be developed on on the east side of 8th Avenue, directly across the street from the primary entrance to the Monihan Train Hall used by Amtrak. At present, the traditional entrance to Penn Station is a mundane entrance down steps off 7th Avenue. (However, the station may be entered at various street level locations and directly from many subway lines without coming to the surface.)

Expanded Track Capacity. Limited through-running by "regional" trains (Amtrak?) will be instituted. This is another partial victory for those who advocated a major change in station operations to institute extensive thru-running as a means to expand the train handling capacity of the station. Due to inherent operational differences by the railroads using the station, extensive use of thru-running would require major and very expensive operational changes beyond the station building.

Columns on Platforms. One of the problems at Penn Station has been the eleven hundred supporting columns on the platforms, most of which were added in 1968 to support Madison Square Garden. Removal of the Infosys Theatre will allow many of these columns to be removed, which will open up the platforms for easier movement of passengers and Red Cap equipment.

Cramped Public Spaces and Passageways. Removal of the Infosys Theater will provide the vertical space for the new station to have soring ceilings. This will also transform the current cramped, decrepit passageways into open concourses. It will be easier for visitors to move around and will deliver other passenger experience improvements.

Retail Businesses. The existing maze of retail will be reorganized into a more attractive arrangement of dining and shopping offerings. These businesses include a multitude of restaurants, bars, shops, newsstands, etc., all of which provide services relied on by passengers and yield revenue for station maintenance.

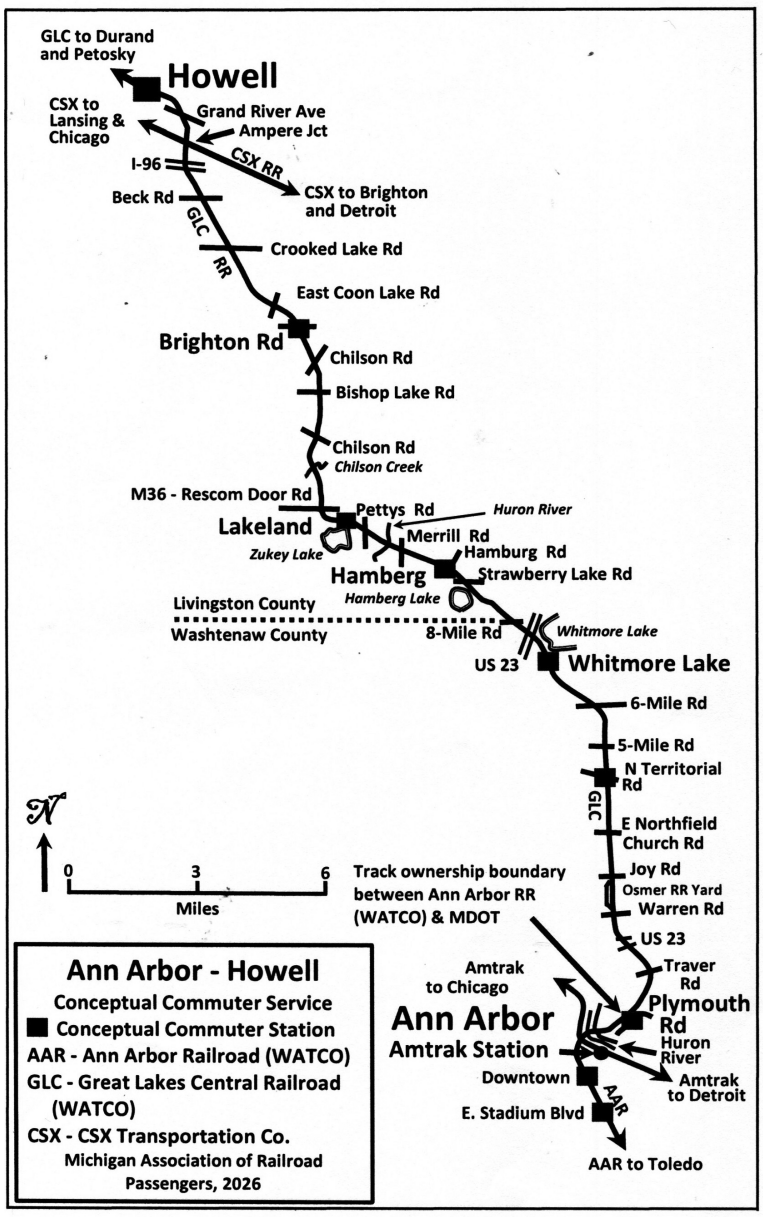
Lighting and signage. Improved lighting and signage will be developed to make the station interior attractive and easy to navigate no matter if passengers enter at the 8th Avenue entrance or elsewhere.

Exterior Beautification. The sidewalks around the building will be reconfigured to enhance the beauty of the completed transformation. There will be new entry points, taxi stands, and passenger pick-up and drop-off locations around the station.

Seventh article in a series

Ann Arbor to Howell

Possible Commuter Service Between Detroit and Howell



Introduction

This is the seventh article on a possible rail commuter system for the Detroit area. This article explores a 29.7-mile Ann Arbor-Howell commuter route. (See map above.) Unlike the other routes all of which terminate in Detroit, the Ann Arbor-Howell route would terminate in downtown Ann Arbor, probably near the location where the Ann Arbor Railroad crosses East Stadium Boulevard. Also, unlike the other routes, this route was extensively studied between 2013 and 2015 as WALLY. Although the WALLY study is dormant today, elements of the WALLY proposal are incorporated into this study. We also explore whether this route could connect to the Amtrak line to be extended to Detroit. The extension would require a construction of a difficult new connection between the two railroads at Ann Arbor.

Constructed during the decades after the Civil War, the 292-mile Ann Arbor Railroad had a difficult history. It was conceived as a means to move freight on a route that would avoid congestion at Chicago. It was constructed in two segments: between Toledo and Ann Arbor in 1878 and between Ann Abor and Frankfort in1889. The railroad operated four car ferry routes from Frankfort to the west side of Lake Michigan delivering freight and passengers to connecting western railroads in Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

The railroad experienced numerous bankruptcies during its history and came into the control of other railroads, the last of which was the Penn Central in 1968. As such, it was embroiled in the financial collapse of the Penn Central in the 1970's and placed on a path to abandonment. In an act of great foresight, the State of Michigan purchased the Ann Arbor Railroad in 1976 in order to preserve freight service to shippers in central Michigan.

Today the portion of the Ann Arbor between Toledo and Ann Arbor has been sold to WATCO, an operator of numerous short line railroads across the United States. The portion of the railroad north of Ann Arbor remains in place as far as Yuma, Michigan, and was until recently operated by the Great Lakes Central Railroad. In 2025, the Great Lakes Central operation was purchased by WATCO, but the railroad tracks remain in State of Michigan ownership. The line from Yuma to Frankfort has been abandoned, and the Lake Michigan car ferries have been discontinued. (Although WATCO owns both railroad companies, WATCO continues to use the Ann Arbor Railroad and Great Lakes Central Railroad names to identify the two railroad companies.)

Previous Passenger Service

MARP is unaware of any commuter service having existed on the Ann Arbor-Howell segment. The Ann Arbor Railroad was never a strong passenger carrier, although at one time intercity passenger trains operated on the whole length of the Toledo-Frankfurt railroad. An Ann Arbor Railroad schedule on page 565 of the January 1910 *Official Guide* shows two daily round trip local passenger trains. Intermediate stops on the Ann Arbor-Howell segment were made at Whitmore Lake, Hamberg, Lakeland, Chilson, Ampere, and Howell.

The *Official Guide* on page 226 of December 1941 shows that this service was reduced to one daily except Sunday round trip passenger train. Between Ann Arbor and Howell, the trains stopped at the same locations except for Ampere, which had been dropped. All passenger service on the Ann Arbor Railroad ended in 1950.

Few passenger facilities survive on this segment. The Ann Arbor Railroad depot building in downtown Ann Arbor on South Ashley Street remains in use as a private school. The Ann Arbor depot in Howell on Wetmore Street also remains, under local ownership as museum. The Howell Depot is shown in a photograph on the following page.

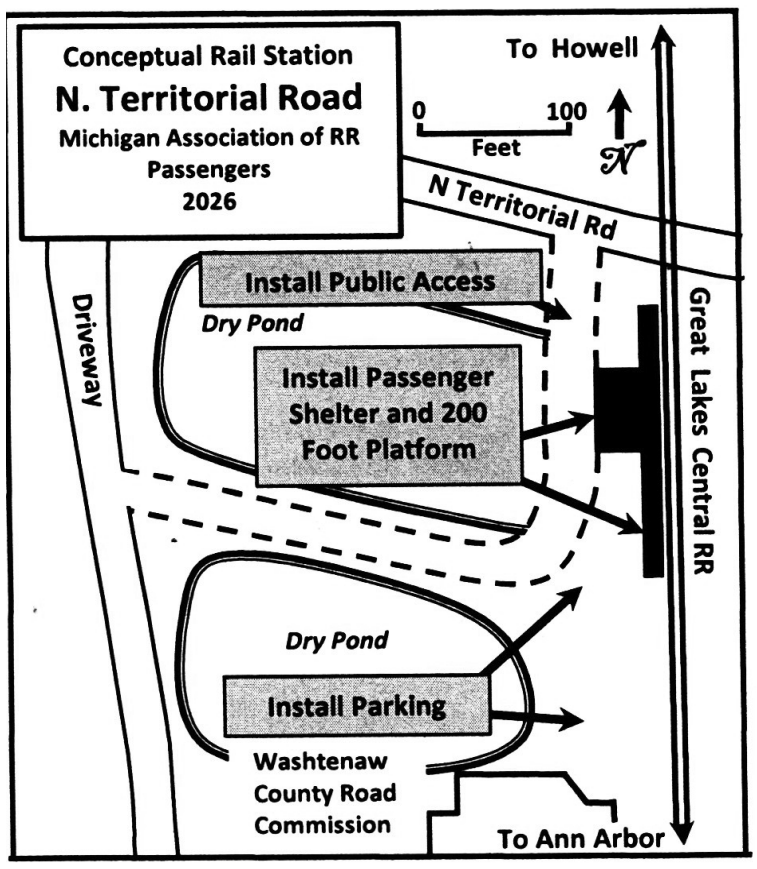
Description of Conceptual Commuter Route

The conceptual commuter trains would originate in the East Stadium Boulevard area of Ann Arbor where space is available for terminal facilities. From this point the trains would follow the Ann Arbor Railroad past the old downtown depot building on Ashley Street and across the curving 725-foot bridge over the Amtrak Chicago-Detroit line at Main Street and the Huron River. At a point about 3.3 miles north of the crossing of Stadium Road the tracks pass from Ann Arbor Railroad and WATCO ownership to State of Michigan ownership. The route continues north to Howell on the Great Lakes Central Railroad to a point near the old Howell Depot on Wetmore Street. From Stadium Road in Ann Arbor to Howell, the route would be 29.7 miles in length.

Conceptual Commuter Operations

From Ann Arbor the commuter trains would operate to the north on the Great Lakes Central to the location near the Howell Depot, where a small storage yard would be built. Southbound trains would operate in a similar manner to East Stadium Boulevard where maintenance facilities would be built.

It is envisioned that commuter train schedules would be developed once highway commuting patterns have been studied and identified. The goal would be to attract the greatest number of passengers to reduce road congestion on parallel U.S. Highway 23. The necessary track upgrades and signal facilities would be installed and servicing facilities would be built at each end of the line to maintain and store the commuter train equipment. The location of conceptual commuter stations shown on the map at left would be adjusted as necessary to meet commuter patterns and the availability of property for station facilities.



Conceptual Station for North Territorial Road

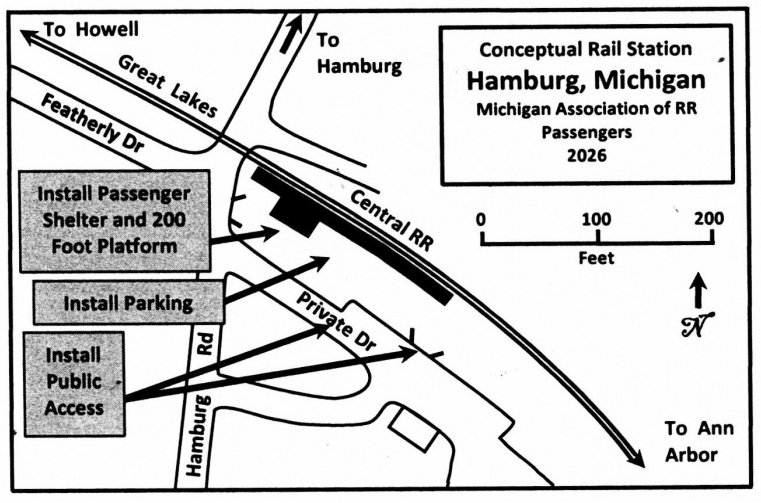
The sketch above shows a conceptual layout for a commuter station to serve the North Territorial Road area, 9.0 miles north of East Stadium Boulevard. The site appears on aerial photos to be on land owned by the Washtenaw County Road Commission. Two dry groundwater recharge ponds are nearby. The station would require reducing the size of the northern pond by about 25 percent. A passenger platform about 200 feet long and a passenger shelter would be built along the west side of the single-track railroad. Access would be directly off North Territorial Road and use part of the existing driveway that provides access to the Road Commission buildings further south on the property. Parking for the commuters would be developed along the tracks on the west side of the railroad right-of-way in such a manner as to minimize the effect on the ponds. This station should have a minimal effect on the railroad, use of the land by the property owner, and the surrounding land use.

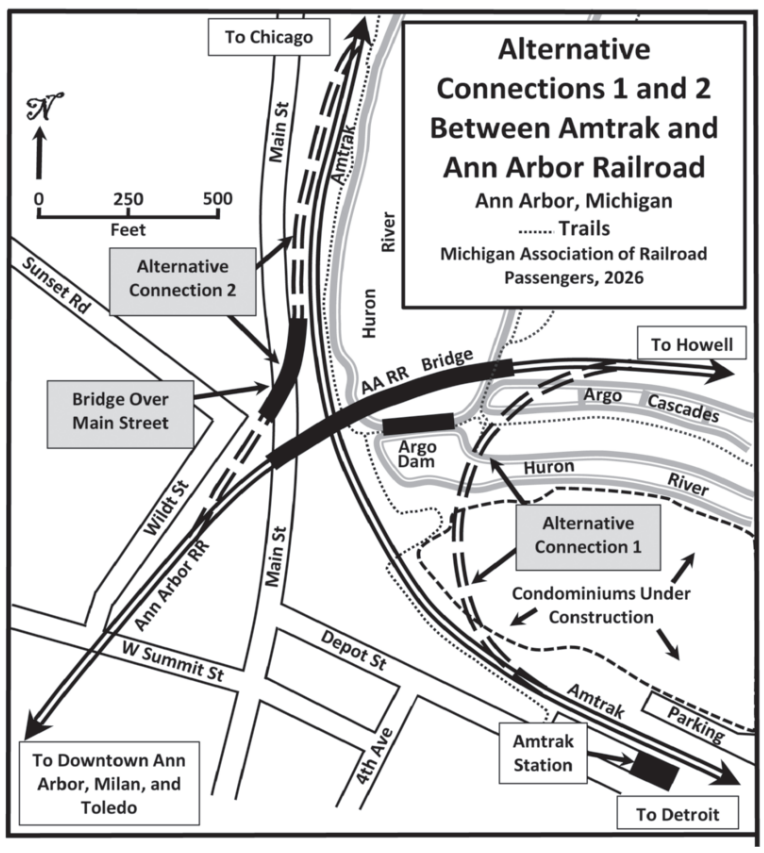
Conceptual Station for Hamburg

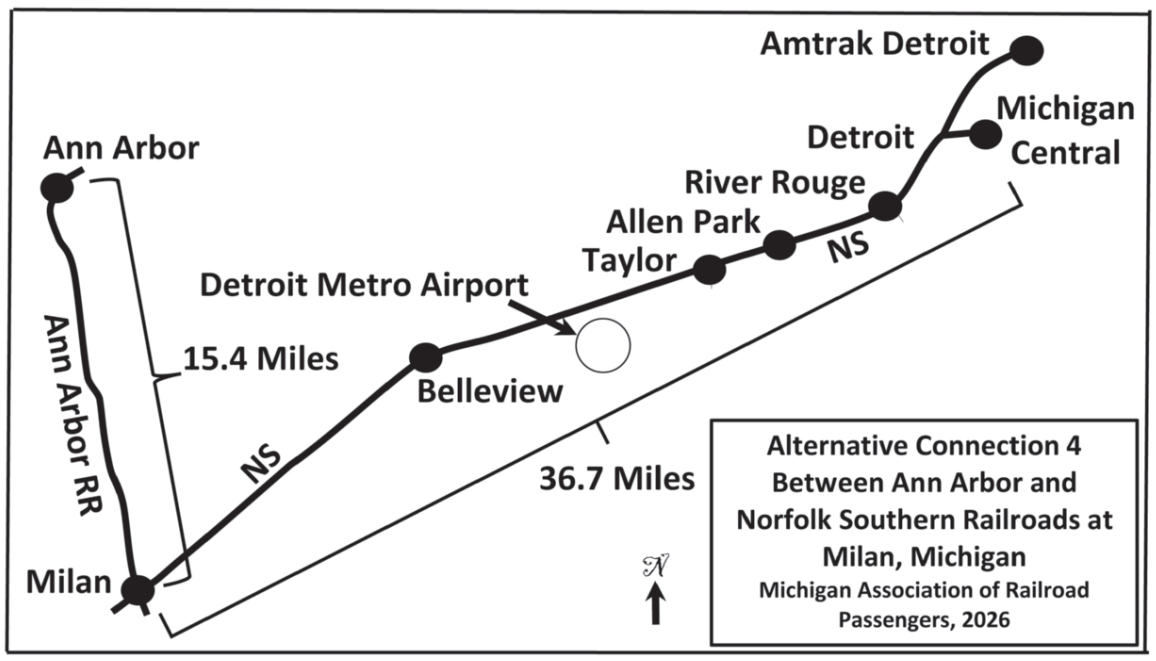
A second sketch below shows a conceptual layout for a commuter station to serve Hamburg, 17.7 miles north of Ann Arbor. The site appears on aerial photos to be a strip of undeveloped land between the railroad and a private drive to a commercial building along the southwest side of the railroad. The site is on the south side of Hamburg with residential and commercial developments nearby. A passenger platform about 200 feet long and a passenger shelter would be built along the southwest side of the single-track railroad. Access would be directly off Hamburg Road. Parking for the commuters would be developed along the tracks on the south side of the railroad right-of-way. This site should have minimal effect on the railroad, use of the land by the property owner, and the surrounding land use.

Extension of Trains to Detroit

The reader will question why, in a study of Detroit area commuter system, the Ann Arbor-Howell commuter trains are not extended at Ann Arbor onto the Amtrak line into Detroit. At Ann Arbor the Ann Arbor Railroad crosses on a bridge about 25 feet above the Amtrak line to Detroit, which is owned by the State of







Michigan and, which is under development for passenger trains.

The problem is that these two railroads apparently never connected at this location for trains to the east and installing a new connection at this congested location would be very costly and difficult. MARP looked at alternative connection ideas in 2022 and again in 2026. A connection between these two railroads would be very desirable, not only for commuter trains, but for intercity trains presently understudy for Detroit-Ann Arbor-Lansing-Grand Rapids passenger service and for intercity trains from Detroit to Traverse City and Petoskey. For both of these studies the routes should go by way of Ann Arbor where demand for rail passenger service is very high.

MARP looked at four alternative connections. These are conceptual in nature and are described as follows:

Alternative Connection 1

Alternative Connection 1 is shown in the sketch above. This alternative would involve installing about 1,200 feet of track in the shape of a loop immediately west of the Ann Arbor Amtrak Depot. New right-of-way, switches, signaling would be needed. The track would curve around to the north and rise up about 25 feet in elevation to join the Ann Arbor Railroad at a point about 400 feet east of the Huron River Bridge. Conceptually, the railroad would be built on a curving, concrete bridge mounted on single-shaft columns placed to avoid the Huron River and the recreational facilities on the north side of the river related to the Argo Dam. Although negative impacts would be imposed on current visual resources, the river, reservoir, dam, and boating cascades should not be directly affected. Apparently, the new condominiums being built north of the depot can be avoided, although it is likely that a column or two may have to be placed in landscaping or parking on the west side of the condominiums.

Alternative Connection 2

Alternative Connection 2 is also shown in the sketch above. Alternative 2 would involve reactivating the connection that once existed for trains traveling to and from the west between the Ann Arbor Railroad and the Michigan/New York Central Railroad (now the Amtrak line). Field investigations in 2022 found remnants of the old track now covered by forest, and an apparently intact right-of-way. About 1,500 feet of new track, and the required switches and signaling equipment would be needed. A ramp made of fill or a ramp structure would be needed on the east side of Main Street to gain about 25 feet in elevation to cross on a new bridge over Main Street and to access the elevated Ann Arbor Railroad tracks. Backing of trains would be required. Northbound trains would have to back up hill, cross over Main Street, and back onto the Ann Arbor Railroad. Southbound trains would be required to back up in a similar fashion to come down to the Amtrak line. However, neither train would have to be turned around.

Alternative Connection 3

Alternative Connection 3 is shown as a new railroad route in the sketch at right. This alternative would involve building about 3.3 miles of new railroad west of Highway 14/23. Conceptually, the new route would take off from the Amtrak line west of the Huron River to avoid having to install a new bridge over the river. The route would then immediately curve to the northeast to avoid residences, cross Barton Shore Drive and Whitmore Lake Road, and reach the west edge of the Highway 14 right-of-way. Here it would turn north and follow the west edge of the highway right-of-way for about 2.0 miles, where the highway becomes US 23. The route would avoid scattered residences on the west side of the highway due to extensive residential development on the east side. After crossing over/under Warren Road the railroad would continue to the north another 3,000 feet and then angle to the northeast and cross over (or under) US 23. On the east side of US 23, the route would continue on a northeast alignment across farmland, cross Joy Road, and connect to the Great Lakes Central Railroad at a point about 2,000 feet north of Joy Road. The Osmer Rail Yard would be avoided.

Alternative Connection 3 would require new right-of-way and the attendant switches and signaling equipment. A new bridge about 400 feet long would have to be built over US Highway 23 on an oblique angle. The multiple access lanes and elevational variations at the junction of Highway 14 and 23 would be avoided. It would be in within the City of Ann Arbor, and Washtenaw and Livingston Counties. It would likely be the most expensive of the alternatives described here.

Alternative Connection 4

Alternative Connection 4 is shown in the sketch at top of page, right. This alternative is an attempt to "look outside the box." Instead of trying to connect to the railroad to Detroit in Ann Arbor, Alternative 4 looks for another path to Detroit outside of the congested Ann Arbor area. With this Alternative the commuter trains would continue south on the Ann Arbor Railroad.

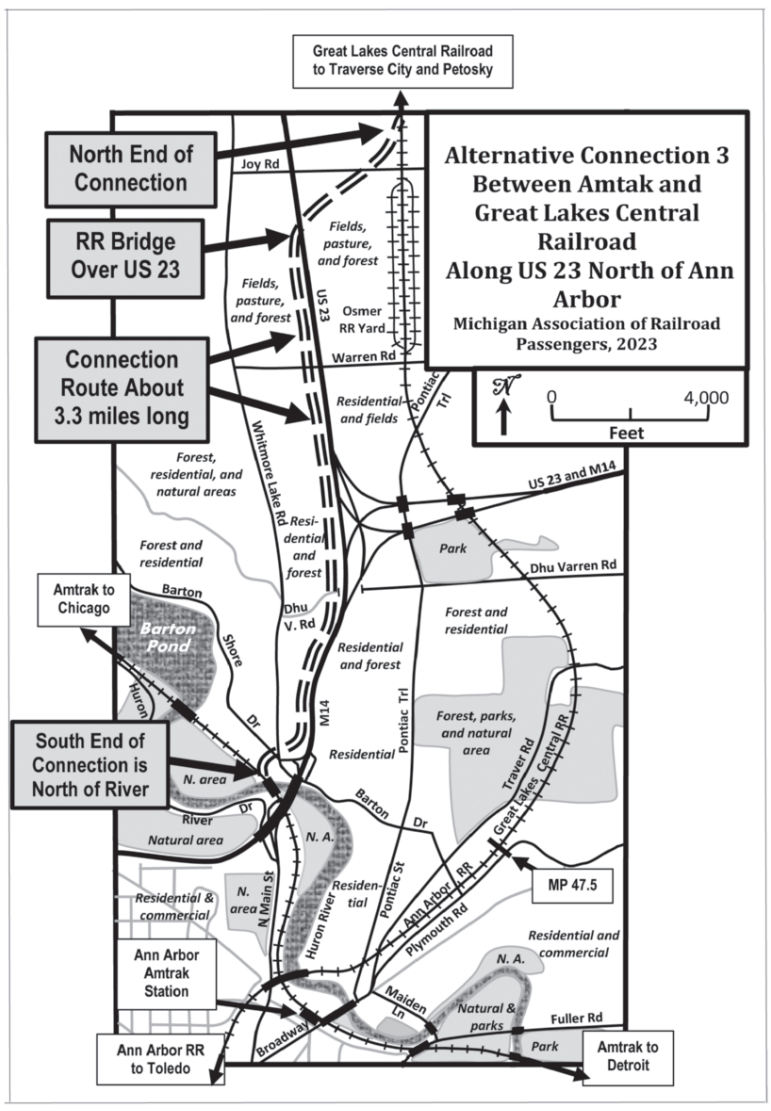
The first railroad to Detroit south of Ann Arbor is about 15.4 miles south in Milan, where the Norfork Southern (NS) crosses the Ann Arbor Railroad. (The NS route was described in the sixth article on a commuter system for Detroit in the Spring 2026, *Michigan Passenger*.) The 36.7-mile NS route would arrive in Detroit at Ford's Michigan Central Station or at the Amtrak Station on Woodward Avenue.



The Howell Depot on Wetmore Street about 2000. The station could be used for commuters with servicing facilities for the rolling stock located west of the depot building. (MARP Photo)

Alternative Connection 4 would require a simple new connecting track about 1,200 feet long on the south side of Milan near the old Milan Depot to allow trains from the Ann Arbor Railroad to travel to the east on the NS. Although aerial photos show that such a connection likely existed at one time, the installation of the new connection would likely require the removal or relocation of 1 or more existing residences on Wabash Street. New right-of-way and the attendant switches and signaling equipment would also be needed as well as successful negotiations with NS to allow the trains to run into Detroit.

Alternative 4 would obviously be much longer than the other alternatives. The total length to Detroit would be approximately 52.1 miles to Michigan Central, compared to 35.9 miles on the direct Amtrak line east from Ann Arbor. But it brings up several interesting ideas. The longer route would miss Ypsilanti and Dearborn, but new stops on NS would include Belleview, Detroit Metro Airport, Taylor, and Allen Park. It would also initiate an entirely new commuter route into Detroit from the southwest.



Conclusion

With a termination in Ann Arbor, this route would see a minimal number of GLC and Ann Arbor freight trains. It is on a railroad owned primarily by the State of Michigan, although as lease holder WATCO, would have to agree to allow passenger trains. Although preliminary studies would be necessary, this route to Ann Arbor has good potential as a commuter route and as a means to reduce traffic congestion on U.S. Highway 23.

Installation of a connection at Ann Arbor to bring the trains into Detroit would greatly expand ridership and provide additional commuter destinations. It would also allow greater operational flexibility, spread the cost of Ann Arbor-Howell over a greater number of services and sidestep the need for a separate facility to service the route rolling stock in Ann Arbor.

For Alternative Connection 4 NS would have to agree to this service on their railroad. Although their route east of Milan has a large number of freight trains that would have to be avoided, this option deserves further study.

SHORT LINES

Joe Schwarz, a long-time supporter of modern passenger trains and a speaker at MARP meetings died on May 27 at the age of 88. *TV Station WILX* in Lansing reported on May 27 that Schwarz was known for championing higher education and health care during 16 years as a moderate Republican in the Michigan Senate and one term in the U.S. House of Representatives. An ear, nose and throat physician from Battle Creek, Dr. Schwarz was memorialized by Governor Whitmer as "a leader and a hero"…… **The first two Amtrak Horizon cars are back in service.** *Reddit News* reported in early May that two restored Horizon cars from Alstom were seen and photographed in Albany New York on Train 448 to Boston. Coach 54565 and another coach were newly painted in Amtrak's Phase VII color scheme…… **Starting June 8, Amtrak passengers entering the U.S. from Vancouver, British Columbia, can clear customs before crossing the border** after Pacific Central Station was set up with new preclearance facilities. According Seattle Fox 13 News on June 10, southbound trains will no longer need to stop in Blaine, Washington, for a second inspection by U.S. Customs agents. Of 16 preclearance airports around the world, 10 are in Canada, and Pacific Central Station is the first preclearance rail station in North America. Note, this does not apply to northbound trains from the United States, The Blaine stop is still required northbound…. **The Detroit Transportation Corporation, which owns and operates the Detroit People Mover**, is leading the project to build a new transit hub at Michigan Central. According to *Axios Detroit* on May 1, 2026, a request for proposals for preliminary design and engineering studies will be issued this summer. Spokesperson Ericka Alexander told *Axios* that the "DTC was uniquely positioned to lead this project as the local transit agency with years of expertise in rail construction and operations, station design, federal guideline adherence, placemaking, economic development, activations and events."……. **Southeast Michigan's top county leaders said that the region's future hinges on stronger cooperation on long-stalled issues like transit**. According to an *MLive* report on May 1, the leaders met on April 30th at the Detroit Regional Chamber's "Meet Southeast Michigan's County Leaders." Of all the issues discussed, regional transit stood out as the most urgent according to Wayne County Executive Evans, who is pushing a countywide transit ballot proposal this August. "The goal is not for us to be friends," Oakland County Executive Coulter said. "The goal is for us to come together, to work together as a region, and to promote this region because we're all in this together"……. **Railroad photographer David Plowden died on May 4 at the age of 93.** *The Chicago Sun Times* reported on June 28th that Plowden, who published more than 20 books of railroad and industrial photographs, was a graduate of Yale and taught at Grand Valley State University and the University of Iowa. He taught his photography students to get to know their subjects before starting to take photographs by eating in local diners and walking around town talking to local people. He was born in 1932, grew up in Boston and New York City, and lived his final years in Winnetka, Illinois. He had a great sense of humor. His family recounted that before entering highway toll booths he and his son would often put on funny hats like a racoon or moose to the mortification of his wife and daughter…….**Amtrak added coaches to the *Missouri River Runner*** between June 15 and July 12 during the World Cup Soccer matches in Kansas City. According to the *Mass Transit Newsletter* of May 5, 2026, the additional cars were transferred from Illinois and Michigan, for both daily roundtrips between St. Louis and Kansas City, adding 25% capacity to each train…… **The long-suffering Denver and Rio Grande depot in Grand Junction, Colorado, may soon be rebuilt**. According to a report on CBS Colorado, June 11, 2026, reporter Alan Gionet said that progress is beginning to show at the Grand Junction Union Station. The building was purchased by Dustin Anzures and his wife Veronica Sanchez for $350,000 in 2016. Veronica is a native of Grand Junction and her father worked for the Rio Grande Railroad for 35 years. The building, designed by Henry Schacks, a Chicago architect, opened in 1906. Grand Junction is a stop on the daily *San Franciso Zepher*…… **City of Chicago to buy the downtown Greyhound bus station** after aldermen approved Mayor Brandon Johnson's purchase plan. According to a *Chicago Tribune* article published on June 22, 2026, Mayor Brandon Johnson convinced the aldermen to acquire the building as a critical step protecting bus riders and keeping bus travel to and from Chicago affordable. The vote was 38-10 among the aldermen, The move championed by transportation activists will help ensure bus companies don't operate out of nearby cities or use less safe curbside locations……**The 1930-era draw bridges at Boston's North Station over the Charles River will be replaced with vertical lift bridges** in a multiyear project. *Progressive Railroading* reported on May 7 that Skanska Corporation has been awarded a contract by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority for the $1.06 billion project. The project also involves extensive upgrades to approach trestles, the construction of a new Tower A control facility and the addition of a new Platform F at North Station. The rail corridor, which serves more than 11 million riders a year, will maintain commuter and Amtrak service throughout the construction period……..**The Texas-Oklahoma *Heartland Flier* is in jeopardy again.** On May 5 *Progressive Railroading* reported that in late April Texas issued a 90-day discontinuance of service notice for the Oklahoma City-Fort Worth Amtrak train, which is jointly funded by Texas and Oklahoma. After Texas did not include funding for the *Heartland Flyer* in 2025, the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCG) authorized emergency funding to support the route through August of 2026. With that date approaching, neither the Oklahoma nor Texas legislature has approved funding for the route, according to a report by the *Oklahoma Voice*. Both states' transportation departments and the NCTCG are in conversation about how to accomplish funding for next year……**Funding has been arranged in Melbourne, Australia, to start on electrification of the 37km (23 mile) Melton Line** commuter operation. News reports indicate that the Melton Line connects western suburbs with central Melbourne. A total of $152.7m ($US 109.6m) will be provided in equal measure by the Australian federal and Victorian state governments to fund preparatory work on the project……..**Boston is considering congestion pricing following the big success in New York City.** According to an editorial in the *Boston Herald* on May 5, 2026 (via *Mass Transit Magazine*), congestion pricing is being considered by Boston Mayor Michelle Wu to discourage people from driving into the city. The large number of private vehicles in the city congests roads, renders bus service unreliable, and contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. Boston noted that in New York City congestion pricing generated more than $562 million in net revenue in its first year after expenses. But not all Bostonians are on board. They have heard that some New York drivers pay more than $27 just to get to work in Manhattan each day. Working from home has never looked so good……..**80 Years after the Second Avenue Elevated was removed, the New York MTA broke ground on the Second Avenue Subway** to extend Q line trains from 96 Street north to 125 Street. *Mass Transit Online* reported on June 10, 2026, the groundbreaking includes preparations at the location where the tunnel-boring machine will be lowered into the ground and begin mining the new subway tunnel. In addition, the MTA notes it is already scoping and designing continuation of the Q line westward across 125th Street to Broadway with three new stations. This will connect Q line trains with the existing 4/5/6 lines. The new subway will serve East Harlem, a historically underserved neighborhood which has one of the largest concentrations of affordable housing in the U.S. and where 70% of residents rely on transit……..**The stifling heat could affect train service in the Northeast and elsewhere** as temperatures are expected to rise to100 degrees or more. The *Manchester (CT) Journal Inquirer*, reported on July 16 that Amtrak said its trains may need to travel slower because of the heat, especially between 11 a.m. and 7 p.m. on hot days. Amtrak Northeast said that all service between Washington and New York City is operating up to 30 minutes late on hot days. Amtrak reduces speeds when the ambient temperature reaches 95 degrees and when the steel rails reach 128 degrees. The heat can affect movable bridges, as well as the catenary system. During excessive heat, rails can become wavy from what's known as a sun kink, which can create a hazard for trains…… .U**.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy announced in late May a $466 million investment** in overhauling Washington Union Station. The news was shared during an event celebrating the Department of Interior's restoration of the Columbus Circle fountain. The funding will cover the replacement of the aging roof, make repairs to the parking garage, improve safety, and make improvements to the passenger concourse that will boost revenue streams…….**The City of Boise, Idaho, has been awarded a USDOT grant for $503,000 to investigate the relaunch** of intercity passenger rail service through Boise. According to *Mass Transit Online* on June 26, 2026, the funding will help the city explore financial tools, public-private partnership options, and other strategies to fund the service and identify opportunities for the historic Boise Depot. "Boiseans have made clear they want to bring passenger rail back to get around the Treasure Valley and across the West," said Boise Mayor Lauren McLean. The grant is from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021, which awarded nearly $47 million to transportation projects across the country. The last passenger train left Bosie in 1997……..**In California's June 2 primary election, voters in Marin and Sonoma counties re-approved** a quarter-cent sales tax that will fund the Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) district through 2059. On June 5th, *Progressive Railroading* reported that the tax, first approved by voters in 2008, was re-approved by more than 70% of voters. SMART operates 48 miles of passenger-rail tracks, 39 miles of pedestrian and cycle pathways, and a freight-rail line. Future projects will add another 22 miles to the passenger-rail system. SMART serves more than 1.4 million passengers annually, 33 percent of which do not have access to a car……..**In other San Francisco area news, the Connect Bay Area campaign submitted more than 305,000 signatures** to qualify a regional transit funding measure for the November ballot, far exceeding the 186,000 signatures required. According to *Mass Transit Newsletter* of May 27, 2026, the campaign effort was one of the largest grass roots transit organizing efforts the region has experienced. "We're blown away by the over 1,000 Bay Area volunteers, transit advocates and labor partners who contributed to getting transit funding on the November ballot," said Connect Bay Area Co-leader Lian Chang. The Connect Bay Area five-county sales tax measure would provide long-term operational funding for major Bay Area transit agencies such as BART, Caltrain, San Francisco Muni, and the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District, and support projects to better connect transit systems across the region……. **An 8-mile bypass that will permanently route railroad traffic around downtown Lac-Megantic, Quebec, has been approved** by the Canadian Transportation Agency. According to an article in *Progressive Railroading* on July 21st, the application submitted in September 2025 by CPKC on behalf of subsidiary Central Maine and Quebec Railways Canada Inc. was approved. A train derailment in downtown Lac-Megantic in 2013 caused the death of 47 people and destroyed the city's downtown area. The derailment also spilled 1.6 million gallons of crude oil and forced 2,000 residents to be evacuated from their homes. Construction is expected to take five years to complete…… **Merced residents oppose the California High-Speed Rail Authority's plan** to build a station outside the city's downtown area. Erik Galicia, writing in the *The Fresno Bee* on June 22, 2026, reported that the rail authority said the move out of the downtown could save the project $1 billion. But advocates have framed the plan as a broken promise, where they expected a downtown station previously planned to spur new economic investment. Rail authority CEO Ian Choudri said the move would be best for Merced and the state when considering available space downtown, the impacts of construction, and how much money the project currently has available……. **Crime on Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) trains has dropped for six straight months** after increased police patrols were placed on trains and in stations. According to the *Chicago Sun-Times* on July 9, the decline was 30 percent overall. The Red Line saw a 47 percent decline compared to last year. If the trend continues, the CTA could be over a five year crime increase that happened in 2025 with 469 violent attacks, the most in a quarter century.



BREAKING NEWS: Transportation Riders United reports the Wayne County Transit millage passed on August 4. An overwhelming majority of voters, 67% in total, approved the millage.

Build America 250 Act: Many words, no money

Introduction

The proposed Federal Build America 250 Act (HR 8870), if enacted by Congress, will provide guidance for federal transportation funding over the next five years. If enacted before the end of September it would take effect after September 30th when the Biden Administration's Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) expires. But The Brookings Institute said: "Considering the political calendar, it's far more likely that the IIJA—including supplemental transfers from the general fund—gets extended, and the next Congress and its leadership will be the ones to pass comprehensive reauthorization."

This extremely complicated piece of legislation was the subject of an excellent summary by *Railway Age* author David Peter Alan on July 14. By far most of the language in the bill is concerned with highways, airlines, and other non-rail transportation modes. For rail, some favorable language deals with the relaxation of environmental and public participation provisions that have been criticized for delaying and increasing the cost of projects. But for Amtrak, commuter rail, and transit supporters, the basic problem is that unlike the Biden's IIJA, the Build America 250 Act appropriates no money for rail. And the language seems to go out of its way to separate Amtrak out for special treatment.
Washington law firm Holland & Knight stated the difference in the proposed bill in a May 27 post. "Approximately $474.4 billion is guaranteed funding from the Highway Trust Fund, and the remaining $106 billion is authorized, subject to the availability of future appropriations, from the General Fund." Amtrak, most transit funding, and commuter railroads are in this situation. ("Authorizations" are like target limitations for planning purposes. The actual money comes from "Appropriations.")

The Build America 250 Act shifts passenger rail funding back to the uncertain annual appropriations by Congress, as was the case for 50 years from 1971 until the IIJA was enacted by the Biden Administration in 2021. The promise will end the long-tern certain stream of money to rebuild our woefully antiquated rail passenger system
This is of critical importance. Much of the improvements we have seen in transit, rail commuter, and Amtrak over the last few years came from the actual "appropriations" in the IIJA. These were forward-looking amounts of money that promised long-term Federal support for improved transit and passenger rail in the US. Based on these promises, many new factories have been built in the US (or are planned) to supply new passenger and transit cars and locomotives. Big multiyear projects such as the Gateway Project in New York and commuter improvements in Chicago were initiated because identifiable long term financial commitments were finally in place from the federal government.

Transit

Title III in the bill concerns transit. Many of the features of the current statutes are present in the proposed bill, including annual audits and triennial reviews of transit providers by the Federal Transit Administration. There are new provisions concerning block grants. Core capacity grants will be available for such projects as double tracking, electrification, and construction of infill stations. A project can receive a higher rating if it includes transit-oriented development (TOD). There would be specific grants for bus facilities, but with no comparable program for rail.

Passenger Trains, Especially Amtrak

Title X, Subtitle A - Authorization of Appropriations and Grant Reform
Grants to Amtrak that are authorized (but not appropriated) deal with the Northeast Corridor and the National Network, which includes long-distance routes and state-supported routes. The authorized amount for the NEC in FY27 is $1.95 Billion, and for the National Network is $3.9 Billion. If all the authorized dollars are appropriated, the increase from year to year would be about 3% annually.

Money to support the Federal Railroad Administration is authorized at $293 million for FY27. Consolidated Rail Infrastructure Safety Improvement (CRISI) grants would be authorized at $1.72 billion for FY27 and would increase by $50 million per year. Railroad crossing safety and elimination is authorized at $675 million in FY27. The National Intercity Railroad Partnership is authorized at $3.5 billion in FY27. Other grants are mentioned for emergency situations but specific amounts of funding are not shown. The Office of the Inspector General at Amtrak is authorized for FY27 $31 million, with $500,000 increases for the next four years.

Subtitle B - Amtrak Reform
Congress appears to propose micromanaging several aspects of Amtrak's operations. Specific subjects include:
• A new emphasis on Amtrak's economic competitiveness with other modes
• The words "established long-distance routes" would be replaced with less-specific language
• Attention to Amtrak's infrastructure backlog
• More disclosure about bonuses paid to Amtrak executives
• Preventing and responding to assaults on Amtrak employees
• Rules concerning baby changing tables on Amtrak trains
• Report on maintenance costs for long-distance trains and equipment
• The amount of equipment and money needed to keep the network going through FY33
• The effects if acquisition of new equipment is delayed until after 2035
• The cost of adding new long-distance routes
• A report on Amtrak's accounting and planning practices
• A report concerning Amtrak's invoices and reports
• Costs and service policies related to state-supported trains
• A comprehensive study and report about the Amtrak customer experience with strict rules about what information the report would contain
• A report concerning Amtrak service for private cars
• Comment on any Amtrak plan for restructuring, apparently a response to recent reports concerning a proposed Amtrak restructuring plan
• A study on passenger trains and passenger rail practices in other countries
• Establishment of an advisory committee concerning food and beverage service on Amtrak, including "the feasibility of providing dining to all passengers"

Subtitle C - Passenger Rail Policy
A plan is provided for considering intercity passenger rail equipment pools through interstate compacts. These would include establishment of a California High-Speed Rail Working Group (with or without Amtrak) that apparently would study whether the California High-Speed Rail project would be able to live up to its early promises. Ominously, grants or awards of federal financial assistance could not be made to the California High-Speed Rail Authority until the due date of the Working Group report. Several other proposed routes would be subject to similar evaluations. It appears that evaluations would be strict, including comparison with other transportation modes, apparently automobiles and airlines.

The liability cap on insurance covering railroad accidents would increase from $200 million to $333 million per accident or incident. A working group would be established to determine future amounts for the liability cap, which would be adjusted every five years.

Reaction from Advocates and Others

The Brookings Institute praised innovation around procedural approaches in the bill, but they also said: "The lack of forward-looking vision, however, becomes clearer by looking at what the BUILD Act cuts. The bill would reduce relative spending on transit, eliminate guaranteed funding for passenger rail, disincentivize the transition to electric vehicles, and generally commit fewer resources to consumer choice. It cuts formula programs focused on environmental resilience and reduced pollution. The bill also fails to add crucial accountability measures for how states monitor network quality and choose capital investments. Combined, these choices do too little to address affordability and safety concerns while ceding ground to our global competitors." The bill shifts passenger rail funding to annual appropriations.

The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) posted its own review of the bill on June 15. APTA praised certain grant reforms that would streamline the process. At the same time, the organization summarized its position by saying: "it is a good first step, but Congress needs to increase the bill's public transit and passenger rail investment levels (including guaranteed funding) prior to consideration by the House of Representatives."

Jim Mathews of Rail Passengers Association writes that a bloc of 44 Senators has kicked off the fight for a new transportation bill that includes advanced appropriations, just like the five-year IIJA did when it passed in 2021. These Senators reminded Senate leadership in a coalition letter that by providing nearly $37 billion every year in guaranteed funding for half a decade, IIJA bought something much more crucial than just enough money to build bridges, fix tunnels, or start other badly needed projects -- IIJA bought certainty, the kind business needs to commit to big projects. And in the U.S., unfortunately there's no such thing as a small passenger rail project.
Richard Rudolph, Chair of the Rail Users' Network (RUN) told Railway Age: "The BUILD America 250 Act provides $0 in guaranteed funding." "We are especially concerned about cuts to the FRA ID Corridor program, which provides funds to advance 69 new passenger rail projects."

Without federal support, it is difficult to understand how Amtrak could last.

DART Vote Results

In a May 2nd vote widely watched by transit operators across the nation, only member city Highland Park opted to depart the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) system. Noah Kolenda writing on May 14, 2026 in *Mass Transit Online* says that Addison and University Park voted to stay in DART.

DART now operates in 12 member cities across the North Texas region, funded by a one-cent sales tax collected from residents in each municipality. This was the first city to leave DART since 1989 when two other member cities chose to depart.

The vote suspended DART bus services within Highland Park city limits on May 14. Highland Park is not served by the DART rail system, and, although DART buses and paratransit trips will still travel through the city, neither will stop, start routes, or end routes inside city limits. No other DART service beyond the secession of Highland Park will be impacted.

At first, member cities Addison, Farmers Branch, Highland Park, Irving, Plano and University Park were considering leaving the transit network because of concerns that they were not receiving a fair return on the 1% sales tax revenue that each city contributes for membership to the network. Three cities, Farmers Branch, Irving, and Plano withdrew the ballot question after DART adopted a new cost sharing formula more favorable to the member cities.

Cascades trains arrive



The first of 8 new Airo trainsets from Siemens Mobility in Sacramento arrived in Seattle for final testing on the Cascades Route between Vancouver, Seattle, Portland, and Eugene. The new trainsets are slated to enter service later this year. The Cascades trains are part of Amtrak's large nationwide fleet renewal program, which consists of 83 Airo trainsets for use on routes across the country. Before arriving in Seattle, the Cascades trainset was tested in Pueblo, Colorado, at the UDSOT facility, and on the Northeast Corridor. (Amtrak Photo)

A train trip through Italy

By Steve Vagnozzi

My family traveled to Italy this Spring. Our principal mode of transportation between cities was high speed trains.

We traveled from Naples to Rome on Italo, Pescara to Florence on Trenitalia's Frecciarossa (Red Arrow), and Florence to Venice on Italo. (Italo and Trenitalia are private passenger companies operating various routes on the state-owned Italian railroad system.)

All three trips were in business class. The seating varied by trainset, but on all trains, it was 2-1 seating that was assigned by seat number. The ride on all of the trains was comfortable, quiet, and smooth. We were given snacks and drinks on each leg of our trips. The trains were mostly full.

The portion from Bologna to Florence was almost entirely in tunnels. I was surprised by how large the stations were in Pescara and Bologna, the latter with 19 tracks on multiple levels. The boarding platforms were very well organized with signs for each car number efficiently directing passengers to their car.

Italians are well served by their investment in passenger rail infrastructure. The US would benefit from a similar investment.



Travel from Pescara to Florence was on Trenitalia's Frecciarossa (Red Arrow) trains.



An Italo business class coach. Travel from Naples to Rome, and from Florence to Venice was on Italo trains.



Business class seating on Trenitalia's Frecciarossa Train.





Above: Arriving trains at Florence. The number of trains available in Florence was astounding. At right, the schedule filled a large display cabinet with multiple trains departing at the same time.