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Michigan Association  
of Railroad Passengers  
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# Windsor Connector

BY YURI O. POPOV, PH.D

*You can now take a train to  
Chicago. Imagine you could also  
take a train to Toronto!*



Windsor Connector buses may look like this Amtrak California coach.

**The idea.** The Detroit metropolitan area is the largest metro area in the State of Michigan with a combined population of over 5 million. It is the 11th largest combined statistical area in the United States according to the 2010 Census. This metropolitan area is located half way between Chicago and Toronto. While it is connected well to Chicago by direct Amtrak train service (three roundtrips a day), connection to Toronto is much poorer. Even though VIA Rail Canada runs four roundtrips a day to Toronto, the end point of this rail service is located in Windsor, ON, across the river and out of the way from most activity and population centers on the American side of the border.

To improve the current situation, we propose "The Windsor Connector" – a dedicated feeder/Thruway bus service connecting several points in the Detroit Metro area and Southeast Michigan to VIA trains in Windsor. Eastbound, such a dedicated bus would arrive a reasonable time before a VIA train departure (say, 20-30 minutes before the departure). Westbound, this Connector bus would wait for late trains, departing the Windsor station promptly after the train's arrival. In many ways, we envision it to be similar to the existing Amtrak Thruway Bus service connecting Southeast Michigan to two long-distance trains at the Amtrak station in Toledo, OH. In addition,

this route would establish a missing connection between Amtrak and VIA trains that would allow daytime train travel between Chicago and Toronto (one roundtrip a day) with only 7 miles aboard a bus and no changes to any rail schedules.

**The route.** We propose a bus route that would initially serve the Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Detroit Amtrak stations and the Rosa Parks Transit Center in downtown Detroit (a major local transit hub) in the eastward direction, reversing the route for the westbound trips. The one-way distance is slightly less than 50 miles (80 km). Why these stops and not others? Simply because of their ridership potential. Ann Arbor is the busiest Amtrak station in Michigan, while Dearborn and Detroit are third and fifth busiest. Their combined annual ridership is about 300,000 passengers (arrivals and departures). If feasible, the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor (with its 44,000 students) and the Detroit Metro Airport may also be served directly by the same route. Success of such a feeder bus depends on how well patronized it will be, and starting with busy hubs is a good way to guarantee initial ridership. Additional stops and routes could be added later, if the initial concept works well.

There is also an additional factor. Despite a clear ridership potential, there are no reasonable public  
(See CONNECTOR page 4)

# Michigan Operation Lifesaver Raises Awareness of Safety Around Railroads

**LOOK  
LISTEN  
LIVE!**

**OPERATION  
LIFESAVER**

Michigan Operation Lifesaver (MI-OLI.com) will be holding a training class in June, at a location to be announced, for anyone interested in becoming an Operation Lifesaver Authorized Volunteer (OLAV).

Participants will be provided with all the necessary materials to give presentations and do Special Events across the state and nation. All materials are free and lunch will be provided.

Anyone interested may contact Michigan State Coordinator Sam Crowl for more information.

You are encouraged to visit the OLI web site at [www.oli.org](http://www.oli.org) or the Michigan site at [www.mi-oli.org](http://www.mi-oli.org).

**CONTACT:**  
Sam Crowl 248-823-7037 or [samcrowl@comcast.net](mailto:samcrowl@comcast.net)

Did you know? There were 2,100 train-motor vehicle collisions across the country in 2017. While that may seem an alarming number, it is a dramatic reduction from the roughly 12,000 annual incidents that occurred in 1972.

This 83% reduction in accidents at rail crossings can be credited in no small part to the efforts of Operation Lifesaver, a nonprofit public safety education and awareness organization dedicated to reducing collisions, fatalities and injuries at highway-rail crossings and preventing trespassing on or near railroad tracks.

A dedicated group of volunteers throughout the U. S. and Canada generously give of their time to help advance this vital mission of Operation Lifesaver.

Rick Burn, a long time MARP member, is one of those volunteers. He was recognized last fall for his efforts as a presenter and as the prime mover in organizing a successful event

(See LIFESAVER page 3)

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The Michigan Passenger welcomes submissions on passenger rail issues for publication. Material sent for publication should be sent to our Editor at: editor@marp.org.

Clippings from newspapers and magazines must include the publication's name and date. Photos sent in by e-mail should be in JPEG format.

We reserve the right to edit all submissions. To subscribe to this publication, join MARP by filling out the application below. All MARP members receive a copy of this publication sent to their home or business.

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## About MARP...

The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. (MARP) was established in 1973 as a consumer advocacy group to improve intercity rail and bus service, improve local transit and encourage the preservation of historic railroad stations.

MARP is not affiliated with Amtrak, the railroads, governments or any political party. MARP is incorporated as a Michigan non-profit organization and is exempt from federal income tax under the IRS code, 501(c)(3) as a charitable educational organization. Dues and donations to MARP may be tax-deductible in accordance with the IRS code.

MARP is an all-volunteer organization. Its membership consists of passengers and citizens who want a viable, balanced transportation system in Michigan. We can all use the help we can get!

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# Senators Honored For Saving the *Southwest Chief*

BY HUGH GURNEY



Pictured here are some of the 5,000 Scouts who, for decades, have taken the Southwest Chief to Philmont Scout Ranch each summer. From Chicago to Los Angeles and beyond, they disembark in Raton, New Mexico, just an hour's bus ride from the gates of Philmont.

Six United States Senators were honored recently by the Rail Passengers Association for their successful efforts to save the Southwest Chief as a through train. The Southwest Chief connects Chicago with Los Angeles and also serves thirty two intervening communities in Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and California. At a ceremony in Washington, DC, on April 2, RPA President Jim Mathews presented the organization's premier Golden Spike Award to Senators Jerry Moran and Pat Roberts of Kansas, Michael Bennet and Cory Gardner of Colorado and Martin Heinrich and Tom Udall of New Mexico "for the crucial role they played in saving the Southwest Chief train, and for their service to tens of millions of Americans who depend on the national train network."

The Golden Spike Award is given to persons who have offered great service on behalf of America's rail passengers.

Early in 2018, Amtrak turned its back on an earlier pledge to provide \$3 million in support of a TIGER grant totaling \$25 million designed to upgrade tracks used by the Southwest Chief in Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico. Others contributing to the grant included the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad, the United States Department of Transportation and numerous small communities along the route. Amtrak was the only partner unwilling to fulfill its pledge.

At a meeting requested by the six senators from Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico, Amtrak President and CEO Richard Anderson outright refused to work with the affected communities and states and announced that Amtrak would discontinue rail service between Dodge City, Kansas, and Albuquerque, New Mexico, and instead would bus passengers a total of 500 miles over mountainous two lane roads. Transferring baggage from train to bus, enduring a 7 1/2 hour bus ride, and moving baggage from bus back to train would have been difficult for all passengers and impossible for the elderly or handicapped. An analysis by the Midwest High Speed Rail Association indicated that breaking the rail connection would cost Amtrak more than it would save by discouraging the 20% of

high dollar sleeping car passengers from using the service. Ridership would have declined on the Southwest Chief and all connecting trains, including Michigan trains.

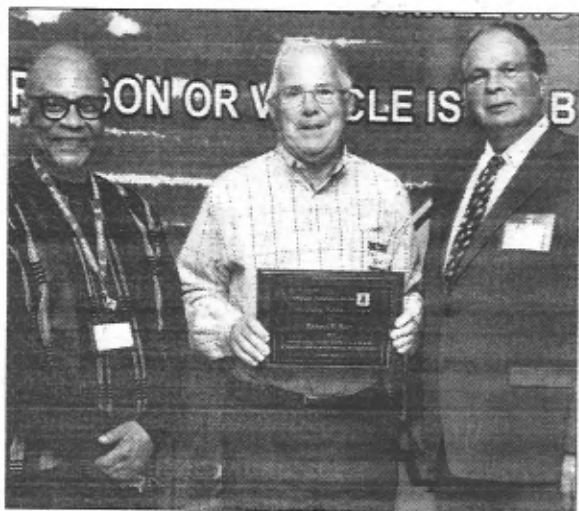
The six senators, three Democrats and three Republicans, were determined to thwart Anderson's proposal. Later in the summer, when the Amtrak budget came up for a vote in the Senate, they proposed an amendment which would specifically assure funding for the Southwest Chief. The amendment passed overwhelmingly in the Senate and became part of the 2019 appropriation. Amtrak reversed its earlier decision to withhold matching funds for the grant, meaning an additional \$26 million in much needed upgrades along the line.

"The nation's rail passengers are exceptionally grateful to Senators Bennet, Gardner, Heinrich, Moran, Roberts and Udall for their actions to save the Southwest Chief, particularly those who live and work in Kansas, New Mexico and Colorado," said RPA President Jim Mathews. "Thanks to their decisive work, we've seen a complete defeat of the proposal to replace the train with a bus bridge, and the communities that depend on the Southwest Chief can rest easy knowing the train's future is on solid ground."

## Quick Facts on the Southwest Chief's Economic Benefits for Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico:

- **Generates \$180 million in annual economic activity**, including:
  - \$116.4 million in "Permanent Direct Economic Gains" each year, which includes spending on operations, tourists and the income from those visitors, and lower travel costs for families that live along the *Southwest Chief* route;
  - \$63.7 million in "Permanent Indirect Gains" each year, which includes reduced pollution, fewer highway fatalities, reduced highway maintenance and increased levels of tourism.
- **Will generate \$135 million in "Temporary Direct Economic Gains"** resulting from construction related to Positive Train Control (PTC), a safety technology mandated by the federal government that can remotely monitor and control of train's speed.
- The overall socio-economic benefits include:
  - **32 universities** that will keep their train service;
  - **47 hospitals** that will keep their train service
  - **130,000 fewer auto trips**, which would have been diverted onto roads that are four times more dangerous than the national average; and
  - Retention of rail service along a stretch of the *Southwest Chief* route which has the lowest median income (\$35K) of the entire corridor.

Source: Rail Passengers Association Study [tinyurl.com/Bustituted](http://tinyurl.com/Bustituted)



Rick Burn, Holland MI, holds the Outstanding Volunteer Award presented to him for his work with Michigan Operation Lifesaver. He is flanked by Curtis Stewart and Sam Crowl.

## LIFESAVER

(Continued from page 1)

in Holland MI as part of the annual nationwide observance of Rail Safety Week.

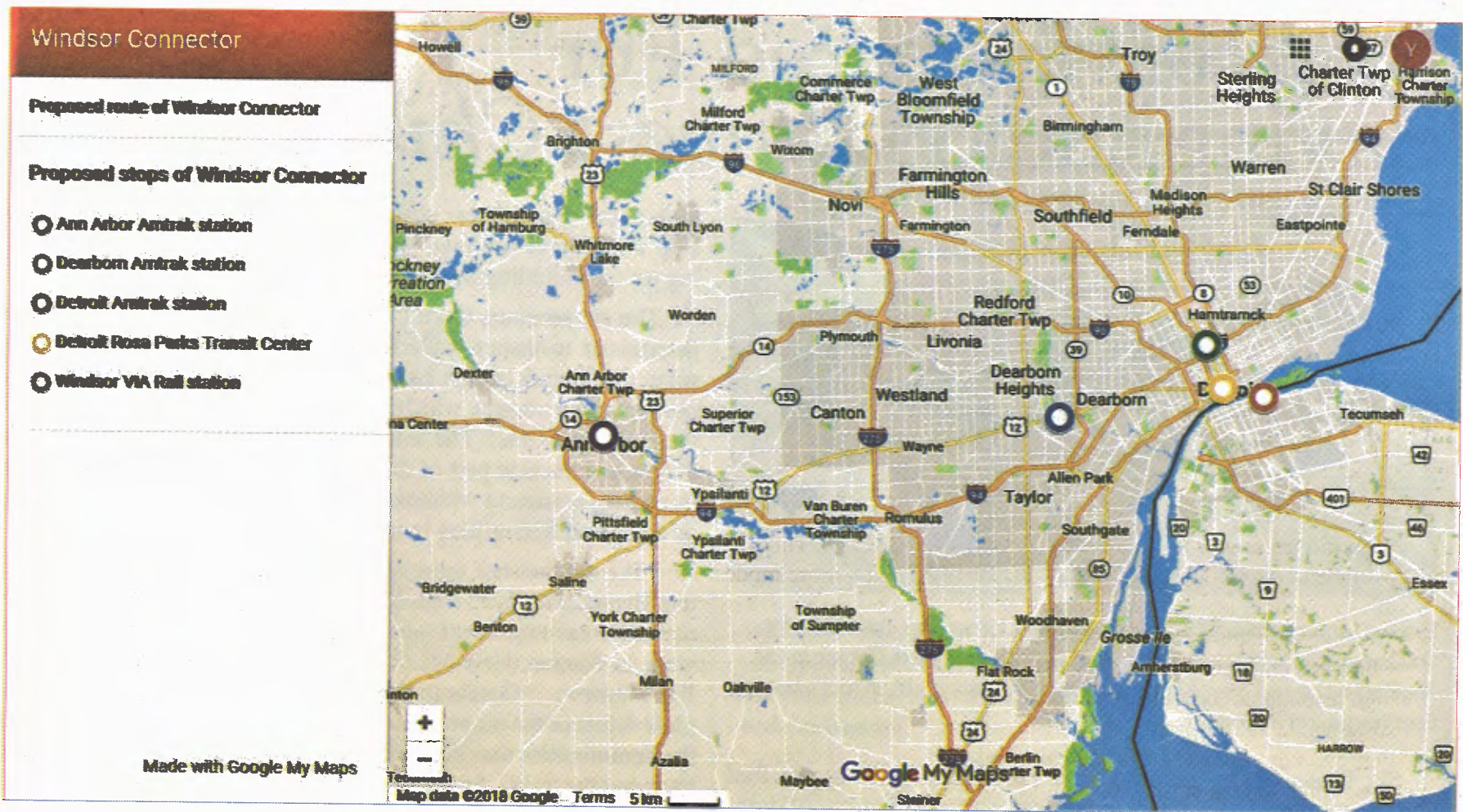
Rick is an enthusiastic champion for Operation Lifesaver and is intent on recruiting others to join him in this important work. "There is a great need for more volunteers," says Rick, adding, "You will find a warm welcome into a very congenial group." Volunteers are needed for train shows and community forums where they distribute educational materials and answer questions. Another important function is making presentations to law enforcement officers and emergency responders.

Michigan Operation Lifesaver (MI-OL.com) will be holding a training class for anyone interested in becoming an Operation Lifesaver Authorized Volunteer (OLAV) in June at a location to be determined.

This is an opportunity for those interested in this lifesaving program to learn the material and become part of this dedicated group.

Participants will be provided with all the necessary materials to give presentations and do Special Events across the state and nation. All materials are free and lunch will be provided.

Interested? Contact State Coordinator Sam Crowl at 248-823-7037 or [samcrowl@comcast.net](mailto:samcrowl@comcast.net). In addition, you are encouraged to visit the website [www.mi-ol.org](http://www.mi-ol.org).



A map of the proposed route showing all stops.

# CONNECTOR

(Continued from page 1)

transportation alternatives between activity/population centers in Southeast Michigan and the Windsor VIA Rail station. A present-day trip from a typical home in Ann Arbor to

the Windsor station requires 5 (five!) local-bus rides and takes longer than the four-hour train ride from Windsor to Toronto. Without the proposed Connector bus, it is unlikely that strong ridership will ever materialize under the existing conditions. We are looking for an experimental period of feeder bus operation

to demonstrate that the cross-border ridership is indeed there and this metropolitan area can provide equally strong ridership to Toronto, not just Chicago.

In fact, there are clear indications that large American ridership is already present on the VIA Rail Windsor – Toronto trains. A member of our group counted license plates at the Windsor station over a holiday period several months ago. He discovered that exactly half of more than a hundred license plates in the station’s parking lot were American. While this is hardly scientific, it provides a good sense of how large a fraction American ridership constitutes on the Windsor – Toronto route. We believe that providing a dedicated feeder bus would increase accessibility of VIA Rail trains for Michigan residents and further boost American ridership. Moreover, Amtrak trains would also benefit from the increased ridership due to the connection to VIA.

## Proposed Windsor Connector Timetable

### Key to reading the timetable:

**BLACK** = existing Amtrak and VIA Rail trains (no changes to current rail schedules)  
**BLUE** = proposed Windsor Connector bus trips  
**BOLD** = guaranteed train-bus and bus-train connections at Windsor and Detroit  
 Despite short connection times, westbound buses wait for late VIA Rail trains at Windsor.  
 All proposed bus stops are shown, but many intermediate train stops are omitted for clarity.  
 All services are **daily**, except as noted at the bottom of each timetable.  
 All times are in the 24-hours format and on Eastern Time, except Chicago (which is on Central Time).

### Eastbound: Chicago > Ann Arbor > Detroit > Windsor > Toronto

station	train or bus									
	70*	bus	72	bus	76	350	bus	78	352	354
Chicago, IL (Union)	—	—	—	—	—	07:20	—	—	13:25	17:50
Battle Creek, MI	—	—	—	—	—	11:13	—	—	17:02	21:24
Ann Arbor, MI	—	<b>06:20</b>	—	<b>11:00</b>	—	12:48	—	—	18:34	22:57
Dearborn, MI	—	<b>07:03</b>	—	<b>11:43</b>	—	13:17	—	—	19:08	23:26
Detroit, MI (Amtrak)	—	<b>07:29</b>	—	<b>12:09</b>	—	<b>13:40</b>	<b>14:55</b>	—	19:33	23:54
Detroit, MI (Rosa Parks)	—	<b>07:44</b>	—	<b>12:24</b>	—	—	<b>15:10</b>	—	—	—
Windsor, ON (VIA)	05:30	<b>08:44</b>	<b>09:05</b>	<b>13:24</b>	<b>13:45</b>	—	<b>16:10</b>	<b>17:45</b>	—	—
London, ON	07:20	—	10:56	—	15:37	—	—	19:36	—	—
Aldershot, ON	09:21	—	12:34	—	17:13	—	—	21:15	—	—
Toronto, ON (Union)	10:04	—	13:11	—	17:52	—	—	21:51	—	—

(\* ) VIA Rail train 70 operates daily except Sundays.

### Westbound: Toronto > Windsor > Detroit > Ann Arbor > Chicago

station	train or bus									
	351	353	71	73	bus	355	75	bus	79*	
Toronto, ON (Union)	—	—	06:45	12:15	—	—	17:30	—	19:45	
Aldershot, ON	—	—	07:25	12:58	—	—	18:12	—	20:23	
London, ON	—	—	09:05	14:30	—	—	20:01	—	21:57	
Windsor, ON (VIA)	—	—	11:02	<b>16:30</b>	<b>16:40</b>	—	<b>21:56</b>	<b>22:06</b>	23:44	
Detroit, MI (Rosa Parks)	—	—	—	—	<b>17:40</b>	—	—	<b>23:06</b>	—	
Detroit, MI (Amtrak)	06:33	10:45	—	—	<b>17:55</b>	<b>18:18</b>	—	23:21	—	
Dearborn, MI	06:51	11:03	—	—	—	18:36	—	<b>23:47</b>	—	
Ann Arbor, MI	07:20	11:32	—	—	—	19:06	—	<b>00:30</b>	—	
Battle Creek, MI	08:51	13:07	—	—	—	20:36	—	—	—	
Chicago, IL (Union)	10:32	15:05	—	—	—	22:40	—	—	—	

(\* ) VIA Rail train 79 operates daily except Saturdays.

The proposed schedule.

(Continued to page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

lays (an hour or two or less), which is a reasonable expectation for both train systems.

The schedule assumes about an hour for the border crossing at the Detroit – Windsor tunnel, a realistic estimate given the current Greyhound timetable and our personal experience at this crossing. Both Transit Windsor and Greyhound buses routinely clear the border at this location in under half an hour. The combined bus+train end-to-end trip time from Ann Arbor to Toronto (or back) is expected to be less than 7 hours for all trips, making it attractive for daytime travel.

**The funding.** We understand that the main question is funding. With a one-way trip of about 50 miles and a rough rate of about \$5 per mile to run a coach, we estimate the cost of this connecting service at about \$1000 a day. We envision fares of \$15-20 per one-way trip, which is significantly lower than taxi fares, but high enough to provide potential long-term sustainability of this route. They are also in line with the current fares of the Toledo Thruway Bus, which enjoys strong ridership of almost 19,000 passengers per year (or about 52 per day) despite the overnight nature of the connecting Amtrak trains and does not require public subsidy.

If done right, this Windsor Connector bus service may ultimately become self-sustaining, as is the Toledo bus. All that is needed is about 60 passengers a day among the five one-way trips, i.e. 30 passengers per day per direction or about 15 or fewer per one-way trip, a very reasonable ridership expectation. Given its current average ridership to/from Chicago of 400+ per day, Ann Arbor alone should be able to provide 60 passengers per day to/from Toronto. We have little doubt this service will succeed financially and in terms of ridership. In fact, its chances to become successful are higher than those of the Toledo bus, since it would connect to daytime trains and would not require multi-hour waits at the connecting station in the dead of night.

**Whom did we contact?** Our group has approached both Amtrak and VIA regarding this project. Both were supportive of the idea. Amtrak confirmed that our schedule is feasible and

can be accommodated with a single bus (which lowers expenses significantly). They have also largely confirmed our cost estimates. While VIA ridership is the primary beneficiary of the Windsor Connector, Amtrak ridership will also benefit from the connection to VIA. There are benefits to both Amtrak's and VIA's national rail systems, since additional connectivity and a larger network of possible destinations boost overall ridership. In particular, if such a bus is implemented, same-day daytime travel between Chicago and Toronto will become possible in both directions.

We also shared our proposal with Michigan Department of Transportation. Even though Chicago is not within the State of Michigan, Michigan fully funds extensive rail service to Chicago. Thus, it is not unreasonable to expect much more modest funding from the state for a bus service delivering Michigan residents to the Canada-subsidized rail service to Toronto. In addition, the proposed connection between Amtrak and VIA will allow passengers along the entire Chicago – Detroit line to use the state supported trains as far as Detroit and then transfer to VIA to continue their train trip into Canada. This will boost ridership and revenue on the eastern section of the poorer performing Amtrak trains 350 and 355, thus potentially decreasing Michigan's subsidy for these trains.

A member of our group has also approached several private bus companies on this proposal. All were interested, all largely confirmed our cost estimates, but none was willing to run this service at their own risk and expense. They all need at least some initial funding to demonstrate that such a service is viable.

**Where are we now?** Everyone we talked to about this service agrees that this is a great idea. However, the cross-border nature of it poses some difficulty, and coordination of all parties is clearly lacking. Our group simply lacks any legal standing and expertise to provide such coordination. Such a connection would require some cross-border cooperation, but the benefits would definitely justify the effort.

In addition, the initial funding to demonstrate the concept and to prove that the ridership is indeed there is a major obstacle. The main beneficiary of this service will be the travelling public of Southeast Michigan who will be able

to travel to Toronto by train without using a car. Thus, it would be natural to expect at least partial funding from public sources.

**What can you do?** Contact your elected officials and tell them that you support the Windsor Connector proposal and you want it to come true! Federal lawmakers: Senator Debbie Stabenow [stabenow.senate.gov](mailto:stabenow.senate.gov); Senator Gary Peters [peters.senate.gov](mailto:peters.senate.gov); find your member of Congress at [house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative](http://house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative). State of Michigan: Governor Gretchen Whitmer [michigan.gov/whitmer](http://michigan.gov/whitmer); find your State Senator at [senate.mi.gov](http://senate.mi.gov) and State Representative at [house.mi.gov](http://house.mi.gov).

You can also help by requesting a letter of endorsement from your city council, mayor, Chamber of Commerce, or another civic body. Such letters proved crucial for building up political support for other transportation projects in the past. If you obtain such a letter, please send us a copy to [yopopov@gmail.com](mailto:yopopov@gmail.com). If you are a member of a civic organization, we would love to have a letter of your organization's support and endorsement!

Please feel free to leave a comment at [windsorlink.livejournal.com](http://windsorlink.livejournal.com) or send it by email to [yopopov@gmail.com](mailto:yopopov@gmail.com).

**Who are we?** We are a small group of Southeast Michigan and Southwest Ontario residents, who are interested in improving transportation options between the two jurisdictions. This group includes several individuals of various backgrounds, both American and Canadian citizens: Dr. Yuri Popov (a physics lecturer at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and a life-long public transit advocate), Dr. Larry Krieg (a member of the Rail Passengers Association council and past chair of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers), Chuck Merckel (a retired businessman and frequent train traveler), Hugh Gurney (a public transportation advocate), Doug Wilson (a 40-year transportation analyst/advocate, Transport Action Canada/Ontario member and former TAO Board member), Jean Merckel (a business owner and frequent rail passenger), Clark Charnetski (a retired physicist and a public transportation advocate), and others.

*This article may be viewed online at [windsorlink.livejournal.com](http://windsorlink.livejournal.com).*

## NEXT STOP, TOLEDO?

Transportation Economics and Management Systems (TEMS), the same consultant that recently completed a study of the feasibility of passenger rail service between Ann Arbor and Traverse City, is currently working on a proposal to reinstate rail service between Toledo and Detroit/Ann Arbor.

As reported in the April 16, 2019 issue of the **Toledo Blade**, Alexander Metcalf, President of Transportation Economics and Management, Inc., recently stated to the Toledo City Council subcommittee on regional growth, development and small business that the capital costs of a system connecting Toledo with Detroit Metro Airport, Detroit and Ann Arbor would be \$389.2 million if built to 79 mph standards and \$524 million if built to accommodate 110 mph trains. Much of the cost of upgrading the infrastructure would be eligible for federal funds.

Metcalf's comments stressed the economic value of connecting Toledo to Detroit Metro

Airport and surrounding developable land. According to Toledo City Councilman Chris Delaney, who introduced Metcalf, "It's really not about trains in Toledo. It's about economic development in the region."

Metcalf estimates that 79 mph service would attract 4.25 million passengers a year, while 5.06 million riders per year would patronize 110 mph service. While trains would still carry a small percentage of total traffic, building the proposed rail system would cost less than expanding freeways.

The proposal has been dubbed the "T" because of its T-shaped layout, coming north from Toledo, thence east to the Detroit area and west to Ann Arbor. The 86 mile rail system would link Toledo with Monroe and Detroit Metro going south to north, then Dearborn and Detroit going east and Westland, Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor going west. It would use portions of the recently upgraded Amtrak line. Travel time between Toledo and Detroit is estimated to be 1

BY HUGH GURNEY

hour and 12 minutes at 79 mph and 1 hour and 3 minutes at 110 mph.

The \$50,000 study was overseen by the Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments, with \$30,000 coming from the City of Toledo and \$20,000 from Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments (TMACOG) planning funds.

Until 1995, Amtrak operated one daily trip between Toledo and Detroit, an extension of one of the three daily Chicago-Detroit trains. Amtrak used tracks now owned by the Norfolk Southern Railroad. That service was discontinued during a round of budget cuts. Canadian National mostly parallels Norfolk Southern between the two cities, while CSX connects Toledo and Detroit via Plymouth and runs closer to the Detroit Metro Airport. According to David Gedeon TMACOG's Vice President for Transportation, much of the decision as to which rail line to focus on for the new service is which of the three is most interested in cooperating.

# A suggestion for corridor service improvements

GUEST COMMENTARY BY  
JOHN GUIDINGER

Let us start a discussion about adding additional trains to the Michigan Corridor. We need to take advantage of the hundreds of millions of Michigan and Federal dollars invested in the Chicago-Detroit-Pontiac route. We need to expand service beyond the three Chicago-centric trains we have had for decades.

In 1971, Penn Central's last operation before Amtrak consisted of three trains on the Michigan Corridor. Two trains ran from Chicago through Detroit, through Canada, to Buffalo, New York City, and Boston. One train ran from Chicago to Detroit. Amtrak took over on May 1, 1971, and discontinued the two trains to New York. They continued the Chicago-Detroit train and started a second Chicago-Detroit train. About 1973, Amtrak added a third Chicago-Detroit train. These three trains and their schedules that favor going to and from Chicago are what we have been stuck with for forty-plus years despite hundreds of millions of dollars of investments in tracks, stations, and signals.

I suggest we add two new round trips on this route with the explicit goal of better serving Detroit. The proposed new trains are shown below. The table shows these trains merged into the existing Amtrak schedule between Kalamazoo and Pontiac.

Proposed Train A would leave Grand Rapids early in the morning, travel south to Kalamazoo, and, turning EAST, would arrive in Detroit before 11 am. Train D would leave Detroit after 8 pm and return to Grand Rapids about midnight. This would allow a full day in Detroit for business or shopping.

Trains B and C would provide additional choices for Detroit-bound passengers. Train B would leave Grand Rapids before noon and arrive in Detroit in mid-afternoon. Train C would leave Detroit in mid-afternoon and return to Grand Rapids in early evening. Trains B and C would also give Grand Rapids people the option of connecting at Kalamazoo with an existing train to and from Chicago.

### Features of the Proposal

**Improve Detroit Service.** For the first time since the 1960's, Michigan travelers would have a useful rail service to Detroit (as well as Ann Arbor, Pontiac, etc.). Today the train schedules allow, at best, 4 hours in Detroit. Proposed Train A would allow passengers a choice of spending 3 hours, 7 hours, or 9 hours in Detroit. Michigan riders on Train 350 would now have 4 or 6 hours in Detroit. People would have time for business, shopping, or an afternoon Tigers vs Lions game. People could visit the Detroit Institute of Art, the Detroit Public Library, Wayne State University, or attend special event such as the Detroit Auto Show. All of these events are reachable from the Detroit station by the convenient new Woodward Avenue trolley, or by local buses, Uber, cabs, or rental cars. A revitalized Detroit needs these types of visitors.

**Add Chicago Connections.** Trains B and C would connect at Kalamazoo with existing Trains 353 and 352 to give people in Grand Rapids a badly needed afternoon schedule to and from Chicago. Once operational issues have been perfected, these connections could be as close as 30 minutes.

**Improve Ridership on Existing Trains.** The new trains would stimulate ridership on the existing three trains, all of which have low ridership on the eastern end of the corridor.

**Build Support for Commuter Services.** The expanded schedule would provide for a limited type of commuter service between Pontiac and Detroit, and between Detroit and Ann Arbor. This would whet appetites for finally implementing the long-studied, but never implemented, commuter train service on this route.

**Use Existing Stations.** No new stations would be needed. However, new stations could be added at Marshall, Chelsea, Dexter, and Ypsilanti, which are unserved by the existing trains.

**Avoid Rail Congestion.** The new trains would not add to the congestion on the Chicago end of the corridor west of Porter, Indiana.

**Minimize Infrastructure Costs.** Minimal new track upgrade would be needed. Operating agreements and some level of track and signaling improvements would be required between Grand Rapids

and Kalamazoo (48 miles) on the Grand Elk Railroad. At Grand Rapids, the previously planned second station track and, at Pontiac, a lengthened track would be needed for overnight cleaning and storage. At Kalamazoo, a connection from the Grand Elk and about 1,300 feet of track (perhaps a third track on the existing right-of-way north of the two tracks at the depot) would be needed to turn and back the new trains in and out of the existing depot.

**Justify Existing Investments.** The new trains would spread the enormous investment made for high speed track improvements over more trains and passengers and help rationalize these costs.

**Operational Considerations.** The trains would run entirely in Michigan. Freight train interference and operating payments to freight railroads would be minimized, because most of the track is publicly owned. The new trains could be branded under a name such as "Amtrak Midwest" and MDOT should own or otherwise control the locomotives and cars. Two trainsets would be required, each perhaps consisting of three coaches and a locomotive (with some spares). Used locomotives and cars are available for rebuilding. Amtrak would provide crews and the reservation system for booking tickets. A basic type of food service should be provided, perhaps using a food cart as employed by Via Rail Canada on their corridor trains. The food service could be contracted out in Grand Rapids and Pontiac. Rolling stock would be cycled on existing Amtrak trains in and out of Chicago for maintenance at Amtrak maintenance facilities.

**Alternatives.** Obvious alternatives would be to start the trains in Kalamazoo, Niles, or Chicago instead of Grand Rapids. If started in Chicago, Train A would leave Chicago about 4:40 AM and Train D would arrive in Chicago about 12:40 AM to meet the new service goals for Detroit.

Let's seriously consider this suggestion. Let's finally get meaningful passenger service to Detroit, Ann Arbor, Pontiac, and southeast Michigan where most of our residents live. Let's see some discussion of this idea.

*John Guidinger, a founding member and past chair of MARP, has traveled tens of thousands miles by train, both for business and for pleasure. If you would like to respond to Mr. Guidinger's proposal, please send email to marprail@yahoo.com.*

Proposed Improved Grand Rapids-Kalamazoo-Pontiac Schedule

Eastbound								
	Miles	NEW TRAIN A	Existing Train 350	NEW TRAIN B	Existing Train 352	NEW TRAIN C	Existing Train 364	Existing Train 354
Chicago, IL (CT)	0		720a		125p		400p	550p
Hammond-Whiting, IN	16		746a					
Michigan City, IN (CT)	52		827a					653p
New Buffalo (ET)	62		939a		341p		610p	804p
Niles	89		1004a		402p		632p	824p
Dowagiac	102		1015a				643p	
Ar Kalamazoo	138		1047a		436p		711p	858p
Dp Kalamazoo	138		1117a Bus			531p		1000p Bus
Ar Grand Rapids	186		1212p Bus			701p		1100p Bus
Dp Grand Rapids	---	617a		1106a				
Ar Kalamazoo	---	747p		1236p				
Dp Kalamazoo	138	747p	1047a	1236p	426p		711p	858p
Battle Creek	160	813a	1113a	102p	502p		738p	924p
Albion	184							954p
Jackson	208	906a	1206p	155p	555p			1018p
Ann Arbor	243	948a	1248p	234p	634p			1057p
Dearborn	271	1017a	117p	308p	708p			1126p
Detroit	281	1040a	140p	333p	733p			1154p
Royal Oak	292	1104a	204p	357p	757p			1218a
Troy	296	1112a	212p	404p	804p			1225a
Pontiac	304	1139a	239p	432p	832p			1255a

Westbound							
	Existing Train 351	Existing Train 365	NEW TRAIN B	Existing Train 353	NEW TRAIN C	Existing Train 355	NEW TRAIN D
Pontiac	550a			1000a	200p	535p	735p
Troy	603a			1014a	214p	548p	748p
Royal Oak	610a			1022a	222p	555p	755p
Detroit	633a			1045a	245p	618p	818p
Dearborn	651a			1103a	303p	636p	836p
Ann Arbor	720a			1132a	332p	706p	906p
Jackson	756a			1213p	413p	742p	942p
Albion	819a						
Battle Creek	851a	952a		107p	507p	836p	1036p
Ar Kalamazoo	916a	1019a		131p	531p	900p	1100p
Ar Grand Rapids					701p		1230a
Dp Grand Rapids	723a Bus		1106a			712p Bus	
Ar Kalamazoo	825a Bus		1236p			820p Bus	
Dp Kalamazoo	916a	1019a		131p		900p	
Dowagiac		1049a				929p	
Niles		1104a		204p		942p	
New Buffalo (ET)		1124a		224p		1002p	
Michigan City, IN (CT)						912p	
Hammond-Whiting, IN				218p		952p	
Chicago, IL (CT)	1032a	1145a		305p		1040p	

From The Boardroom:

# Toronto is one connection among many to examine

BY KAY CHASE

In early April, the Detroit media was abuzz with talk of restoration of passenger train service to Toronto. What, we wondered, had prompted this sudden flurry of interest? Surprisingly, it was a single line of text buried in the Amtrak FY 2020 Grant Request. With no cost estimate or timeline attached, this was one of five “aspirational” projects that can be viewed as an indication of Amtrak thinking about future expansion of the national network. Other projects on this short list include extension of the *Heartland Flyer* to Newton KS and right-of-way acquisition and/or improvements New Orleans to Mobile Alabama.

MARP has long aspired to restoration of passenger train service between Michigan and Ontario. Learning that this is on Amtrak’s radar screen is good news but good news tempered with the recognition, based on current political and fiscal realities, that it is not likely to happen soon.

In the interim, we invite readers to consider the proposal presented by Yuri Popov elsewhere in this issue that would make access to VIA trains to Toronto more convenient for Michigan passengers.

Also in this issue, John Guidinger invites readers to a discussion of his ideas for expanding the schedule of Michigan’s eastbound trains to enable day trips to Ann Arbor and Detroit.

What do you think? Is it time for

Michigan to abandon the status quo and think about expanding options for travel within our state? Do the ideas presented in this issue by Yuri Popov and colleagues or by John Guidinger have merit? What would you do differently? *The Michigan Passenger* would like to hear from you. Let’s have some lively discussion of these, and other, ideas. Comment on the Windsor Connector proposal at [windsorlink.livejournal.com](http://windsorlink.livejournal.com). Or send your ideas about connecting Grand Rapids to the Michigan Line at Kalamazoo to us at [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com). We’ll publish a sampling in the next issue of *The Michigan Passenger*.

*Kay Chase is an At-Large Executive Committee member with responsibilities for MARP Communications.*



The Hoosier State is northbound out of Rensselaer, Indiana on February 21, 2017. At the time, the train was running with Iowa Pacific equipment, including a full length dome car where business class passengers were served fresh meals prepared by an onboard chef. Photo courtesy of Steve T. Sobel.

## Going....Going...Almost Gone

BY HUGH GURNEY

Unless there’s an unexpected change of heart by Indiana’s governor and legislature, the Hoosier State will cease to operate as of July 1, 2019. The four day a week train connecting Indianapolis and intervening points with Chicago has been removed from Amtrak’s reservation system effective that date. The train has operated between the two cities on the same schedule as the Cardinal on the four days each week that the long distance train does not run.

Our colleagues at the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA) were stunned when, early in 2019, they realized that the \$3 million annual appropriation for the Hoosier State was not included in Governor Holcomb’s budget for the upcoming Biennial. Efforts by sympathetic legislators to restore funding have failed. No reasonable explanation has been given for the deletion of the funding. The train has been strongly supported by the communities it served including Crawfordsville, Lafayette, Rensselaer, and Dyer. Three

of the communities have, in fact, contributed financially to support the train.

After successful negotiations with CSX, Amtrak had recently announced faster schedules and reduced costs, factors that could prove beneficial to overall performance if implemented. “Together, these trains carried more than 60,000 customers last year and provide daily service on an important Midwest route,” noted Joe McHugh, Amtrak’s vice president for state-supported services.

In addition to making it far more difficult to reach Indianapolis by rail from other Midwestern points, elimination of the Hoosier State has put the jobs of employees at Amtrak’s Beech Grove Maintenance Facility in jeopardy, as the train was used to move equipment in and out of that facility. “If we can only move rail equipment three days a week (via the Cardinal), it’s going to put these 500 jobs in some kind of risk,” commented Amtrak spokesman Marc Magliari.

Advocates of rail service have not thrown in the towel. In a recent news release, Steven Coxhead, President of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance stated, “IPRA, in partnership with other stake holders, will continue to explore alternatives to developing the Hoosier State corridor, other than by means of an INDOT contract with Amtrak. Possibilities include some form of Federal investment, operation by private sector partners and operation by a regional authority of counties served by the corridor. The model for the last would be the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District, (NICTD) operating rail passenger service in NW Indiana, connecting Chicago and South Bend.”

Speaking with reporters, Coxhead observed, “The governor says ridership has been disappointing, and we make the case that you have to have at least two trains in each direction each day, possibly three, in order to have a realistic chance of generating enough ridership to cover an operating cost.”

# Rail Passengers Travel Review Off to a Good Start

With some 400 reviews submitted in its first seven weeks in operation, the **Rail Passengers Travel Review** appears headed for success. Launched in early February by the Rail Passengers Association (RPA), the **Travel Review** is an effort to improve the travel experience for train passengers everywhere by providing valuable feedback to Amtrak and other interested passenger rail providers and transportation advocates.

Preliminary survey results reported at RPA's April "Day on the Hill" in Washington DC appear to indicate a fairly high level of satisfaction with the travel experience on the nation's passenger trains. On time arrival/departures of their trains were reported by 70% of respondents. Quality of food service and helpfulness of personnel were rated favorably and cited, along with "comfortable seating", as factors influencing their overall travel experience. Only 2% purchased their tickets at a station or from a ticket agent, while 80% made their reservations online and 13% by phone. Two-thirds traveled on long distance lines—15% of those on the California Zephyr, 12% the Lakeshore Ltd., and 12% the Southwest Chief, perhaps reflecting that this was the winter season. State supported routes garnered one-

fifth of the responses, with the Wolverine leading the pack with 14% of those responses, followed by the Blue Water with 8%-- a result of promotion in MARP's online bulletin, perhaps? A particularly interesting question asked about "the last mile"—how people get around when they reach their destination. Around 20% said they connected with public transit, while more than 75% said they had no public transit option available.

The online survey can be accessed from your cell phone, takes less than 10 minutes to complete, and must be completed in one sitting at the end of your trip. If you travel more than one route to reach your destination, a separate **Travel Review** should be completed for each segment of the trip.

Access the survey at [railpassengers.org/TravelReview](http://railpassengers.org/TravelReview).

Or use the QR code



[www.rail.mtu.edu/MRC2019](http://www.rail.mtu.edu/MRC2019)

## Register Now!



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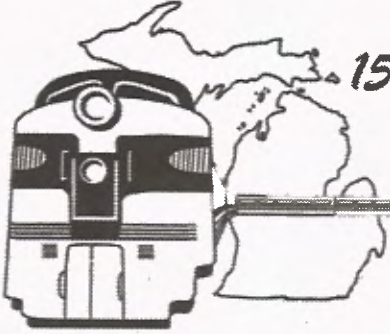
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or on Facebook at /Michigan-Association-of-Railroad-Passengers/

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### MARP OUTREACH

MARP members also frequently set up a booth at festivals, train shows and other events to spread the word about passenger rail in Michigan. Contact Robert Tischbein [rptischbein@junp.com](mailto:rptischbein@junp.com) to volunteer for the next show.



## 15th Michigan Railroad History Conference

Washtenaw Community College  
Ann Arbor, Michigan  
Saturday, September 21, 2019

The year 2019 marks the 32th anniversary of the first Michigan Railroad History Conference held at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan as an educational outreach of the Bluewater Michigan Chapter of the National Railroad Historical Society (NRHS).

This year's conference will be held in Ann Arbor, Michigan in the Morris Lawrence Building on the campus of Washtenaw

Community College on Saturday, September 21, 2019. The primary program will be a full day of presentations focusing on Michigan's railroad heritage. Field trips open to conference participants will be offered on Friday, September 20 and Sunday, September 22.

A featured presenter this year will be Kevin P. Keefe, retired editor and publisher of Trains magazine, who will illustrate his talk on "How the Michigan Central Got to Chicago" with images from the Trains magazine collection.

For more information, send email to [MRHC@gmail.com](mailto:MRHC@gmail.com). Visit the website [michiganrailroads.com/register](http://michiganrailroads.com/register).

The Michigan Railroad History Conference is organized by an all-volunteer Michigan non-profit corporation recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501 (c) (3) educational private organization.