



Badger Rails

Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers (WisARP)

Volume 37, Issue 4

Fourth Quarter, 2019

Passenger Rail was Once a Bipartisan Goal

For the full article, See: https://madison.com/ct/opinion/column/dave_zweifel/plain-talk-passenger-rail-was-once-a-bipartisan-goal/article_30ef93de-e20a-5b2d-8887-94d90318769f.html

See also: https://madison.com/ct/news/local/derailed-tells-the-story-of-the-wisconsin-high-speed-rail/article_89ed1e6f-9cfc-55b2-95c1-360a9f75c50c.html

Wisconsin Public Radio recently launched a new podcast series called “Derailed.”

This production reviews how Wisconsin lost a great chance to expand passenger rail service with high speed service. Governor Walker sent all of the money that was awarded back. Actually another city published a piece a piece in their newspaper saying “Thank You Wisconsin” for helping them to get Wisconsin’s money for their rail projects. Walker claimed that this HSR project would cost Wisconsin taxpayers \$7 million a year maintenance. Ironically, Wisconsin taxpayers ended up paying roughly \$ 100 million for a train set that had been already built, plus the improvements elsewhere on the Hiawatha line that would have been paid for with federal money.

Originally, this project was actually supported by Governor Tommy Thompson. Passenger rail was not a partisan issue then and never should have been. Thompson wanted to connect Milwaukee and Madison with high speed trains and sought to eventually improve service to the Twin Cities. Later on, President Obama’s stimulus program included \$ 810 million of federal funds for the Madison-Milwaukee Route along with other improvements for the Milwaukee station, and also along the route to Chicago.

Then came Scott Walker as Governor and his Republican colleagues, and suddenly passenger rail was a partisan issue dividing Wisconsinites. They insisted that the “Liberals” of Milwaukee and Madison would get all the benefits and the rest of the state would get nothing. Walker became famous for” Divide and Conquer” for political gain. The argument he used said that Wisconsin taxpayers would have to pay \$ 7 million a year for maintenance and turned the money back to the federal government. But Wisconsinites ended up paying \$ 100 million for a train already built, that ultimately was awarded to another state. They also had to pay for improvements along the Hiawatha line that would have been paid for with federal money.

Note: This article has been edited for length. The link above leads to the full article in the author’s words

(Note: both articles cited above use the same picture, but they are different discussions)

Dane County's Path to the Future

Part Two

(Part Two is a Continuation from Part One published in the 3rd Quarter of Badger Rails)

An article in the third quarter 2019 Badger rails, painted a broad picture of the challenges Dane County could face over the next 30 years as a result of projected population increase ranging from 100,000 to 400,000 people. What options exist to assure preservation of valuable land resources (agricultural, wet lands, recreation areas) while coordinating residential and commercial development in a way that will maintain a comfortable living environment for all residents?

The Objective: Pending challenges of increasing population density and climate change point to a need to focus on public transportation as a way to counter costs associated with increasing land value and competition for wages needed to cover family living expenses. In addition to reducing family transportation costs, an efficient commuter transit system will reduce demands associated with traffic congestion, energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions.

Government officials responsible for assuring the environmental and economic health of Madison and Dane County should reevaluate the risk/benefit analyses that supported the Transport 2020 proposal conducted as a cooperative effort of Madison, Dane County and Wisconsin DOT. While that plan dealt primarily on public transit within Madison city limits, it focused attention on publicly-owned rail infrastructure that could provide the foundation for an electrified Light Rail Transit (LRT) system centered on the Madison isthmus and extending through numerous Dane County communities to the borders of Dane County.

LRT could provide comfortable, energy efficient, environmentally friendly public transit service. Successful LRT service has been shown to generate high levels of ridership. It easily adjusts to varying capacity demands extending to limits 2 to 3 times that of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). LRT is time-competitive with the automobile, and costs less than heavy rail transit. Transit Oriented Development

An LRT running on existing corridors would address projected growth problems confronting Madison including : population density, congestion and protection of recreation areas. Convenient low cost Public transit would encourage commuters to leave autos at home. Impacts on density and congestion will aid the preservation of parks and recreation areas, free up space for pedestrians, bikes and buses, and maintain comfortable family living space. As Madison is the HUB of existing corridors, it would still be a prime destination for cultural events as well as jobs but with reduced need for parking.

Reduced Energy and Emissions: A well planned public transit system comprising coordinated LRT and metro buses will provide a major advancement toward Madison's zero emissions goal. Steel wheels on steel rail have lower rolling resistance than rubber tires Electrification, whether by overhead wire, third rail or on-board energy storage is the clean power source likely to be used for buses as well as trains but rail corridor is more conducive to rapid recharge or continuous power transfer.

Conclusion In preparation for projected impacts of climate change and population growth, a regional transit plan involving all Dane county constituent communities should be developed as a means of controlling efficient land and energy as well as greenhouse gas emissions. Existing, state-owned rail corridor provides a foundation on which to build a LRT system that can significantly reduce auto traffic through the isthmus, facilitating the coordination of Metro buses to meet city transportation needs.

*Badger Rails thanks Ron Wolfe of ProRail in Madison, for this series on Madison Light Rail Transit

Lack of Freight Trains Does Damage Wisconsin's Rural Roads, Advocates Say

<https://www.wpr.org/lack-freight-trains-does-damage-wisconsins-rural-roads-advocates-say> (a podcast)

Rhineland Hearing Makes Case For Expanding Northwoods Freight Rail Access

Written by Rob Mentzer

That was the message of a public hearing recently in Rhineland organized by state Sen. Tom Tiffany, R-Minocqua, and Michigan state Sen. Ed McBroom, who represents the Upper Peninsula.

Freight rail service has been expanding across the state, but far northeastern Wisconsin is an exception. Florence, Forest and Marinette counties on the Michigan border, as well as nearby Menominee County, were the only places in the state that saw a decline in rail service from 2014 to 2017, according to data from the state Department of Revenue.

That means fewer shipping options, and potentially higher costs, for Northwoods businesses. And because the lack of freight train options means logging companies and manufacturers must rely on trucks to move their goods, it means more damage to Wisconsin's rural roads, too.

A state survey of Northwoods businesses in 2018 found that those surveyed shipped 85 percent of their logs, lumber, wood and pulp products by truck. The 41 businesses surveyed could account for more than 105,218 additional rail cars, the survey found. Doing so would remove nearly 350,000 trucks per year from Wisconsin's roads.

The largest freight rail operator in northern Wisconsin is Montreal-based Canadian National, or CN, which in 2001 purchased the Wisconsin Central railroad company. Advocates and officials at the hearing butted heads with a CN representative over the company's decision to shut down some service to the region, and sometimes over the rates it charges shippers.

"There is a direct relationship," said Rich Kedzior, a Wisconsin Department of Transportation freight rail specialist, "between CN's rates and damage to state and local roads."

CN's Larry Lloyd said the company simply doesn't see enough demand to justify rail service in some parts of the state. "Service follows demand," Lloyd said. "If there was demand to return service on that line, we would do it." Tiffany wasn't buying that explanation. "There's much more opportunity out there, and they've squelched some of their opportunity, and they need to take another look at their business plan,"

Tiffany said the state should consider funding infrastructure improvements such as railroad bridge enhancements that could make the lines more profitable. Such a proposal, he said, would need to be tied to some strict requirements on CN's side, such as minimum service requirements.

Note: Robert Mentzer as the network's rural communities reporter. Mr. Mentzer will be based in Wausau

Bike Trails and Old Railroad Tunnels Make Great Adventure

See: <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks/name/badger/>

See also: <https://www.travelwisconsin.com/things-to-do/outdoor-fun/biking-/linear-bike-trails>

Wisconsin is known, in some places, for its bike trails, that were once rail lines for small freight shipping. Many hundreds of people walk, run or bike these trails every year. The trails are often surrounded by beautiful wildlife areas with bees, butterflies and bird breeding areas. Some trails even have exciting features from the former railroad including tunnels that are now part of the bike train system. Riding or walking through these tunnels is quite an experience, and the Badger State Train is no exception. It travels 40 miles between Madison and the Wisconsin-Illinois border while traversing farmlands, woods, rolling hills, scenic meadows, remnant prairies, ravines, glacial remains and several small communities.

Highlighting the trail is the 1,200-foot long Stewart Tunnel. The tunnel is unique because it is built on a curve and visitors cannot see the other end when first entering the tunnel. The best thing about this tunnel is that it is built on a curve, so that the traveler cannot see the end of the tunnel. One just enters blackness, just as the train engineers of old must have seen it.

The former Illinois Central Railroad company ran during the 1880s and was a crucial link between Madison and Freeport Illinois for the transport of goods and people. The railroad ran for 90 years until roads were improved and trucking became the economical way to ship goods. The railroad itself was removed in the early 1908s. Thereafter, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources developed the trail and the inside of the tunnel as a recreational place for Wisconsinites seeking adventure.

Today, in the tunnel, hikers and bikers must bring lights to see where they are going. The tunnel becomes completely black and people cannot see a thing. All people in the tunnel must walk, even bike riders. A state trail pass is required to hike or bike on the Badger State Trail, but a one day pass is only \$5.



Photo from: <https://www.trailink.com/trail/tunnel-hill-state-trail/>

-WisDOT Will Purchase New Cars for the Hiawatha

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/2019/10/31/wisconsin-legislators-consider-funding-new-amtraks-hiawatha-trains/4102369002/>

<https://biztimes.com/wisdot-awarded-25-7-million-grant-to-buy-new-hiawatha-passenger-cars/>

WisDOT has awarded \$13.2 million for new train cars that will run on the Hiawatha line. This action is related to a \$ 25.7 million grant from the FRA. The new passenger cars will add seats to the service and cut operational costs. Three cab coach cars and 6 coach cars will be purchased. Some funds will come from the State of Good Repair fund. The cars that are currently used are costly to repair as they are near to the end of their useful life of 30-40 years. The new cars will reduce fuel use, add seating and reduce maintenance costs and make cars easier to use for passengers with disabilities.

The federal money will allow all cars to be replaced with new ones according to WisDOT. Customers will start seeing the new cars in late 2020. A manufacturer must still be chosen before a closer timeline for service can be developed. Ridership on the Hiawatha has grown steadily for the last few years and these new cars will improve service to riders. A second FRA grant for the Midwest of \$ 17.8 million for the Chicago Metra commuter line has also been awarded. These funds will provide for the construction of a new grade separated double tracked rail bridge over Milwaukee Avenue in Chicago.

On another matter, WisDOT is also working on plans to expand the Hiawatha from 7 to 10 round trips/day and seeks to add a second platform at Milwaukee's Airport Station, and a bypass of freight trains through Muskego Yard, thereby not needing to use Milwaukee's Intermodal Station.

However, Glenview and Lake Forest have convinced the Illinois DOT to drop plans for two sidings intended to hold freights while these additional Hiawatha trains to pass through the area. Residents objected to noise and vibrations of the freights make while idling near their homes. Illinois officials are working on alternative ways to add the 3 Hiawatha trains some other way. At least one additional train might be able to be added with some rail improvements in Wisconsin.



Photo published on CBS 58 Newsroom website at: <https://www.cbs58.com/news/wisconsin-dot-receives-grant-to-buy-new-amtrak-passenger-rail-cars>

From a Talk Given by Arun Rao at the WisARP Meeting in October 2019

The Hiawatha is continuing to improve. There has been a 6% increase in ridership over the last fiscal year to 880,000 people, and this is a record high increase ticket revenue. This allows WisDOT to continue to invest in improving the service. The Hiawatha has one of the highest cost recovery ratios in the country. There was a 84% cost recovery for 2019. This is in part due to rising revenue and decreasing operating costs.

Trains have 408 revenue seats and peak trains fill up quickly and there is more demand than there is equipment. Table cars have been added on peak trains which are highly popular with business travelers and families. Amtrak is also refreshing Horizon coaches. It is working with Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri and Michigan to improve the regional rail network. The states and Amtrak worked to make Midwest schedule improvements to enhance connectivity across the Midwest. Easy transfers in Chicago have increased connections by 20 % which has increased overall ridership on Midwest corridors.

Also, next generation cost efficient passenger rail equipment for the Midwest state supported routes is coming on line being manufactured in California by Siemens Manufacturing. Eighty-eight cars will be for the Midwest. That order will equip the Hiawatha with six coaches. The equipment is similar to the Brightline equipment.

The Midwest states and Amtrak have worked to create a sub-brand, Amtrak Midwest, which will have a new website coming soon. Also, increasing train frequencies are being worked on for the Hiawatha and Midwest routes, to reduce travel time on the Chicago to Pontiac and Chicago to St. Louis routes. Refreshed Horizon cars for Midwest routes are currently being rolled out. All will have new seats and carpeting. This is funded by the states and Amtrak. It will be completed by the end of February for a much needed improvement. There has not been such improvement since the late 1990s and early 2000s.

In essence, WisDOT is using the savings from the Hiawatha's operations to reinvest in benefits for rail riders of the service in the region, including the Hiawatha service. Bus service runs between Fond du Lac and Green Bay will connect to the Hiawatha in Milwaukee and then to Chicago. More transportation increases in this area could improve economic development and mobility in the corridor.

In the area of Interstate 41, only one intercity bus trip remained after other bus services have been cut. So WisDOT has implemented a dedicated Thruway Bus service twice daily to the Hiawatha service to Chicago. This enables a same day round trip to be made from Green Bay to Chicago. The bus services Green Bay, De Pere, Appleton, Oshkosh, Fond du Lac, and Milwaukee Intermodal Station. Also, it serves the Milwaukee Airport, and is working very well. Bus riders' ticket lets them go right from the bus to the train and then to Chicago. Railcars have tables and plug-ins. Ridership here is growing gradually. Tickets can be purchased on amtrak.com. Riders of the bus are not required to also take the train.

Of course success here depends on the on-time-performance for the Hiawatha so people can make connections and be guaranteed to do so. Marketing is being done through digital ads on some sites and on Facebook and will be done on bus ads in the future. Some billboard may be placed along Hwy 41. As for the Empire Builder, for the trains running to the west coast, there are no plans to change the dining service. Customer surveys show that 85% of the riders are satisfied with the service. On time performance in fiscal year 2019 was 45%.

*Badger Rails thanks Mr. Rao of WisDOT for his presentation and for his contribution of this material

Quiet Railroad Crossings, More Peaceful but Expensive

See: <https://www.channel3000.com/news/safe-but-costly-way-to-make-railroad-crossings-quieter-heads-to-east-side-neighborhood/1132798497>

MADISON, Wis. - A railroad crossing in an east side Madison neighborhood is now being designated as a "quiet zone" after a push from neighbors. Quiet zones are designated areas where trains are required not to blow the horn except in the event of an emergency. Federal law requires trains to blow the horn at any crossing unless it's in a quiet zone, according to the city's Engineering Division.

One neighbor says: "The horn) can interrupt your sleep. You can't talk on the telephone if you're outside. One spokesperson for the city's Engineering Division, said Madison currently has 85 at-grade railroad crossings and 26 of the crossings have the required equipment for a quiet zone. She said upgrading a crossing to a quiet zone is usually about \$250,000. Most of the current quiet zones were funded through TIF and a small amount of general obligation debt. The city has to apply for the quiet zone, and the railroad reviews what the necessary upgrades would be to upgrade a crossing. Each zone has to be at least a half-mile long. The Federal Railroad Administration requires that railroad crossings that are quiet zones to have flashing lights and gates, power out indicators and constant warning time.

WisARP Membership Personnel Changes

Some Staff of WisARP are assuming new duties. Jim Sponholz has assumed the position of VP-Membership for WisARP. All address changes, email changes and membership questions should be routed to Jim. His email is: jspohnolrail@gmail.com. Or you can use wisarp@hotmail.com. Jim's address is: 4858 N. Berkeley Blvd., Whitefish Bay, WI. 53217. Dues mailings for 2020 will be made during November. There will be an online payment option like as there was last year.

The Holiday Train is Coming !



Round up those cute kiddies and take them to see the Canadian Pacific Holiday Train. Check the link below for the 2019 schedule. And more important, don't forget to bring a few non-perishable and healthy food items for donations for the hungry.

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/entertainment/2019/10/17/holiday-train-wisconsin-2019-dates-and-times-wisconsin-stops/4007015002/>

Note: Links will not work if the content is removed from the Internet

Badger Rails is published 4 times per year by the Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers, a not-for-profit Wisconsin membership association. Eldeen Carpenter, Editor; and James Sponholz, Editorial Consultant.

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