



# Badger Rails

## Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers (WisARP)

Volume 40, Issue 3

Third Quarter 2022

---

### **WisARP October General Meeting with Board Member Elections – Terry Brown**

The Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers (WisARP) will have our annual Fall General Membership Meeting in Madison this year on Saturday, October 29. The meeting will be held at the Double Tree Hotel by Hilton on East Washington St. in Madison, but other details are being worked out. Watch our web site <http://WisARP.info> for updates.

Board member elections are held annually at the fall meeting. The following positions will have elections this year: President, Vice–President, Vice-President (Public Relations), Vice-President (Internet Communications), Vice-President (Membership), Secretary, Treasurer and Board of Directors (2 positions expiring in 2024). If you are interested in finding out more about any of the Board Member positions including running for a position, contact Frank Ingram at 920-445-3758, [frankingram@new.rr.com](mailto:frankingram@new.rr.com).

One of our mainstay speakers for several years regarding news covering the Wisconsin Passenger Rail scene has been Arun Rao from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT). But Rao worked his last day as Passenger Rail Manager on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022. Rao is now employed by Amtrak as a Regional Corridor Development specialist. If WisDOT appoints a new Passenger Rail Manager by our October 29 meeting, WisARP will do everything possible to present the new Manager.

### **Promises to Keep - Madison Extension Amtrak Station Study - Susan Foote-Martin**

With \$66 Billion for funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill available for passenger rail, communities across Wisconsin are coming together to look for ways to utilize federal funds to bring passenger rail service back to the state. The Madison Extension train would run daily between Milwaukee and Madison and both Mayors have sent letters of support for this service to Amtrak, Federal and State DOT officials, asking to be considered for new passenger rail service along existing freight routes. The IIJA has allocated \$12 billion for lines like this route being proposed.

The City of Madison has awarded a \$125 thousand dollar contract to HNTB, a national consulting firm with an office in Madison to lead a station identification study. The study began in July and will be completed by February, 2023 with the goal of having a procurable train station location identified that will interface with downtown Madison. The end product will also demonstrate local interest in the project which will help the FRA determine interest in and need for funding.

A Channel 3000 story dated September 6, 2022 reports the City of Madison Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway in her 2023 budget has requested \$350,000 “to help plan how to bring Amtrak service to Madison.”

The proposed Madison Extension project is projected to cost \$500 million for the service with an 80/20 cost share with WisDOT and Amtrak as potential sponsors. It is anticipated WisDOT will handle the 20 percent funding for the Wisconsin share of the project.

There is ample interest in the Madison Extension train in Dane and surrounding counties. The benefits are there for all to utilize when we show what can be gained by the new service. Future work will focus on building community support for Amtrak service, working with legislators to gain support for the project and creating an education and information product for our citizenry.

WisARP has a role to play in the work that lies ahead for the Madison Extension train. There has been historic interest in renewing passenger rail service to Madison and we have come close. This once in a generation chance to succeed in bringing Amtrak service to Madison must win the day and this time we have promises to keep.

### **Green Bay Extension - NEWRails Momentum Building!** - *Larry Rueff*

Since the Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passenger's Spring Meeting March 26, 2022 in Appleton, momentum has been building in support of the NEWRails (Northeastern Wisconsin Rails, an affiliate of WisARP) proposal that was detailed at the meeting by Chair Frank Ingram. (See "Second Quarter 2022" Badger Rails at <http://WisARP.info> )

The passenger rail advocacy effort detailed as NEWRails' proposal is cost-effective. This proposed Amtrak Hiawatha passenger rail route north through Milwaukee to Green Bay with three daily trains currently visioned to rural and urban stations will be run on existing trackage.

The next WisARP Meeting is October 29, 2022 in Madison when the Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers' 2022 State Rail Plan will be announced. In that Plan as discussed at the Spring Meeting support for specific routes that Amtrak wants to re-establish for rail passengers and consideration of the need for commuter rail services will be points advocated by WisARP to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and other agencies.

WisDOT continues work on the official state "Wisconsin Rail Plan 2050". For more information or to sign up for updates see <https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/projects/multimodal/railplan/default.aspx>.

As analyzed at this year's Spring Meeting social issues are federally required to be emphasized and addressed in planning for passenger rail infrastructure. A complete list with references to Federal Regulations is in "Appendix C: Wisconsin Rail Plan 2050 Public Involvement Plan" (PIP) Coordination Document p31 of 37 - <https://tinyurl.com/2rff5bwr>.

As Municipal and Legislative Liaison of NEWRails I have been working to facilitate communications in the next few months. Municipal Leaders and Legislative contacts of various transportation groups will be approached by the current WisDOT rail planners before and after this year's General Election. We need to make contact with these Leaders and Legislators. NEWRails has a list of public officials and will advocate for passenger rail expansion once the new WisARP State Rail Plan is announced.

You as a passenger rail advocate can also do this simply by sending emails to your Municipal Leaders, Legislators and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT). An example letter, and please feel free to use this as a model, is attached by link here: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/17B9-4tzSSY0kQVBQgz41ppkUvBWjFu8b/edit>

We need to alert our Municipal Leaders to make plans, coordinate with their Regional Planning Commissions and interest groups like 30th Street Corridor in Milwaukee; and prepare to file grant applications under the numerous federal programs already funded by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021 - also

known as the "Bipartisan Infrastructure Law" (BIL). That can be as simple as asking your Town's Chair, Mayor or Economic Development Director to look at the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) website <http://railroads.dot.gov>, explore the new Department of Transportation (DOT) Navigator <https://www.transportation.gov/dot-navigator>, and read how Municipalities can seek funding <https://tinyurl.com/3yvf4tdn> and other opportunities <https://tinyurl.com/k6cj32jd>

Citizen organizations are not eligible to receive funding for even planning passenger rail service. The legislative history of the IIJA documents the reason for this as the organization requesting funding must be able to raise money for its "share" of passenger rail development.

Most recently Pete Buttigieg's United States Department of Transportation has started taking applications through the Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program. We should advocate for reestablishing passenger rail service from Milwaukee to Green Bay utilizing this funding now to plan for the route NEWRails proposes connecting rural towns, villages, county seats and larger municipalities - pointing out that is the particular purpose of that Program.

Another example you can use in your communications with Municipal Leaders and Legislators is the story of how Normal, Illinois has benefited from re-establishment of passenger rail service. <https://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/the-trains-interview-chris-koos/>

NEWRails Chair Frank Ingram has been busy in his hometown. See his article in this Badger Rails issue discussing Mayor Eric Genrich's plan to build an Amtrak station in Green Bay's downtown.

Fox River Valley Municipal Leaders, particularly Mayor Genrich of Green Bay have announced their commitment to passenger rail. Since June 2021 when Mayor Eric Genrich wrote a letter that other Wisconsin Mayors across the state signed and sent to our Congressional Representatives several more Municipal Leaders and Legislators have publicly supported passenger rail expansion. Mayor Genrich looking to the future is planning for the Green Bay Extension. Mayor Eric Genrich's recent statement is available for distribution. <https://www.wearegreenbay.com/top-stories/mayor-eric-genrich-says-hes-working-on-a-coalition-to-push-for-a-national-rail-hub-in-green-bay/>

Please continue advocating for passenger rail expansion in Wisconsin.

1. Contact Legislators and Candidates challenging incumbent Wisconsin Legislative Members urging them to support budgeting sufficient amounts and to release funding in the coming fiscal year for extension of passenger rail service.
2. Also write to Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) urging it to propose a "partnership" with Amtrak, finalize its 2050 State Rail Plan and do all it can including seeking federal funding to extend the Hiawatha Service by application to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for NEWRails' proposed Green Bay Extension.
3. Send a copy of your correspondence in support of the Extension by email to [gbpassrail@new.rr.com](mailto:gbpassrail@new.rr.com) so NEWRails can help get your comments in favor of passenger rail distributed.
4. Join WisARP and attend the Annual Fall Meeting October 29, 2022. Receive the new 2022 WisARP State Rail Plan and include its points supporting passenger rail service in your comments and other correspondence advocating for the Green Bay Extension.

### **Green Bay Station Options Reconsidered – Frank Ingram**

The location of the Green Bay Amtrak Station is in flux. Fifteen years ago the likely station location would have been adjacent to the old CNW Depot (now a restaurant) but development around it in the intervening years has

made that problematic. It appeared in 2021 that the likely site would be in Leicht Park opposite the Depot. This would have required most station users to park in ramps one thousand feet away on the other side of the Fox River as well as taking most of the Park parking.

However recently the City has reached an agreement to swap the Reiss Coal dock for a site downriver. And Green Bay Mayor Eric Genrich has proposed the old coal dock as a site for a new Amtrak Depot. Amtrak's response has been positive. You can find it on Google Maps by searching for C Reiss Coal.

There are still some hurdles that need to be clarified. Amtrak normally requires a straight length of track 1000 feet long for a platform (although the new Grand Rapids Depot is shorter) and this will likely require the platform to pass under the Mason Street Bridge (presumably owned by WisDOT). For operational flexibility a track to the north from the Depot would be helpful. We want to avoid any track layout that involves a reverse move.

Meetings between interested parties are planned in the near future so we should have an update in the Fall.

*Editor's note: Brian Nelson, President of All Aboard Minnesota, had an extensive Amtrak travel agenda this past April. He completed a loop from Galesburg, IL to Los Angeles, #3 Southwest Chief; LA to San Francisco #14 Coast Starlight; and finally, SF back to Galesburg, IL on #6 California Zephyr. Brian's overall summary was the long-distance trains are being squeezed to death. This is a narrative we've all heard for several years.*

**Trip Observations – Brian Nelson**

My trip began with the Southwest Chief #3, which was sold out the entire way. An extra coach was added in Kansas City. This increased the train to three coaches from two. Half of the Sightseer Lounge was still taken up with coach passengers. The full passenger train could have been due to the Easter weekend. In chatting with the train crew, I heard comments that they desperately need the Transition dorm and a baggage car back in the consist along with a dedicated third coach.

The Coast Starlight #14 was completely sold-out traveling from Los Angeles to San Francisco. It was the exact same situation as the Southwest Chief: The train needs more cars. There's a need for a baggage car, and a greater need for a third coach.

In my opinion, there were catering shortages in both the diner and the lounge on the Southwest Chief and the Coast Starlight. The lack of a dining car option for long distance coach passengers is a real problem. I overheard numerous complaints. The regular Cafe announcements by all crews "we have a very limited menu" just is not good.

A crew shortage on the Coast Starlight delayed the Los Angeles departure by an hour. This isn't a problem exclusive to airplane travel. This has been happening on Amtrak trains more frequently this summer according to the crews I was talking to.

Most of the equipment used on this trip looked pretty tired, even more so for Superliner II equipment. On all three trains the upholstery in the lounge was visibly soiled on about one-third of the seats. The surfaces are very worn and patched and the windows very dirty inside and out on all three trains. I believe this overall looks kind of tacky. On the Lake Shore Limited that I rode in October 2021 and again in January 2022, the appearance was much better with refurbished Amfleet I coaches, a new Viewliner diner and sleepers.

Equipment failures are becoming more rampant out on the road according to crews I talked with. There were toilet failures on the SW Chief and the California Zephyr. The crews always apologized, but not much they could do.

The Demographics throughout the entire trip were very mixed race with plenty of families with young kids, college students, (or they looked like college age students.) and lots of singles. I met a few people from Europe and a few passengers traveling on business. A couple of guys in their 50's were going to conventions and combining a train trip with a vacation. Another couple told me this was their first time taking a "bucket list" train trip. I met lots of first timers on Amtrak and of course, lots of Baby Boomers. But in my opinion, these trains reflected to me that people use these for transportation; they aren't just a land cruise for wealthy, older folks.

The crew on the California Zephyr was superb throughout. Absolutely top notch in all regards. Conductors went out of their way on most segments to engage passengers asking how they are doing, and more. The crew on the Southwest Chief was more mediocre and unengaging. Personally, I have been noticing more inconsistency lately in crew performance.

But based upon what crews have been telling me, they are struggling. The constant battles with under maintained equipment, short consists, and not getting enough supplies in some cases. One conductor told me "we get what they give us, that's all we can do." Amtrak trains are also tiring from frequent staff member substitutions and shortages, in addition to the previously mentioned growing number of equipment failures on the road. Crews mainly noted the electrical failures and toilet problems. It's 1969 all over again!!

What to do about this? Report to Amtrak? I have filled out their survey for the SW Chief. Beyond that, always report this to the national Rail Passengers Association, although I am no longer a member. I would ask you to report your comments and concerns to our Congressional delegation. Particularly members that are on one of the transportation sub-committees.

### **Monarch Butterflies and Railroads Share Common Ground - CP & KCS Step Up to Help – Susan Foote-Martin**

What is orange and black, weighs less than one gram, and migrates 2,485 miles from Mexico to Canada, closely following a migration path along the CP and KCS rail networks? You guessed it, the Monarch Butterfly!

Recently in Gland, Switzerland, the International Union for Conservation of Nature listed the Monarch as endangered, a classification that chronicles the fact that without human intervention, extinction of this once common insect is likely. The EPA also recognizes the plight of the Monarch and has published a holistic approach to the butterfly problems which includes encouraging best management practices to protect pollinators.

To help the Monarch, Canadian Pacific and Kansas City Southern Railroads have introduced the "[Save the Monarch Butterfly 60,000 Tree Challenge North American Boxcar Tour](#)" to raise funds and awareness of the butterfly's precarious future.

The Tree Challenge has a goal to raise \$100,000 to purchase 60,000 oyamel fir trees to begin to restore the El Rosario Monarch Butterfly Sanctuary in Michoacan, Mexico, one of the wintering grounds of the butterfly. This effort promises to help not only the butterfly, but also the local communities that rely on the forests for their livelihoods, water, healthy soil and erosion control.

Monarchs return to winter in Mexico to congregate by the millions in towering oyamel fir tree forests. Deforestation and climate change over decades have fragmented the habitat and impacted the monarchs. The butterflies return to Texas in the spring to begin a new generation of monarchs that will journey north through the US to Canada, returning to Mexico in the fall.

The "Boxcar Tour" will start in the fall in Windsor, Ontario and end at the El Rosario Monarch Butterfly Sanctuary in the fall, stopping at cities along the way. A crowd-funding QR code is seen on the side of the Monarch Mariposa boxcar in hope that many butterfly enthusiasts will contribute to the cause.

### **Railroad Activism and Education from Saint Paul to Milwaukee – Terry Brown**

What would you think would be one of the best ways to convince anyone about the benefits and the honest pleasure of riding an inner-city passenger train? In this world of social media, talking heads and streaming television news documentaries, I think I discovered an old solution to a current problem.

Your persuasion speech to almost anyone about the benefits of passenger rail would likely improve with a train ride. And within the State of Wisconsin, perhaps you'll start with a ride on the Empire Builder.

This was an easy conclusion I realized in early August when I was invited to ride with the Great River Rail Commission (GRRC) on a train ride on the Empire Builder from St Paul to Milwaukee. Quoting from the background summary document issued to all riders, this was “an experiential trip to learn more about the Twin Cities -Milwaukee -Chicago Second Train and the benefits of intercity passenger train and intermodal connections.”

In case you're not aware of the GRRC, this Commission and their decisions have been extremely influential in persuading the Minnesota State government to budget money for the Minnesota share of the construction of the TCMC train. (The amount was \$10 million.) This Commission, normally made-up of 18 members from local governments, would have to be looked upon as strong advocates for the second train. Yet, while I was on the train chatting with many of the officials that were able to travel along, I realized only about half of these commission members had ever ridden a train before.

The delegation on the train did include several non-commission members who were representing the cities or counties they work for. Included in this delegation were two Minnesota State Senators and one MN State Representative.

All of the talk about the benefits of passenger rail, the scheduling benefits of an additional train and the “green” benefits to our environment all became secondary discussion when people actually sat in a seat on the train, and it began moving. At that moment they all realized the benefits of a roomy- comfortable seat, an ample amount of legroom compared to an airplane or a bus and the ability to have a conversation with someone next to you without having to shout over road noise or endure frowns and stares from other airplane passengers while having an open conversation. And it's rather easy for a neighboring passenger to interrupt “I had that happen once, too!” Although there never was a steward or stewardess that came down the aisle offering a 6-ounce cup of soda, everyone was free to get up at their leisure and walk to the lounge and purchase a muffin or a bag of chips and maybe even a Heineken.

The ability to chat with any other train riders is an enticing proposition to almost everyone except the reclusive. Every one of us did not miss the TSA checkpoint; the fastening of seat belts for takeoff, and after sundown the ability to comfortably read a book, magazine, or tablet even when the rest of the car was dark. Only the personalities that need to be in total control of every mile and every speed change are likely to be non-repeat customers.

Most of us have read and maybe heard first-hand accounts of how bad long distance train service has become in the third decade of the 21st century. I can tell you with all sincerity that this ride from St. Paul to Milwaukee was about as perfect as one could expect in 2022. We are talking about the Empire Builder eastbound, train number 8 which has about as poor of a reputation for being on time as any other long distance Amtrak train. On this day when the GRRC made their train excursion to Milwaukee, the train was on time. The train may have been short on food stuffs in the lounge; the train may have been short on seasoned and experienced Amtrak assistants; the train might have been short on the number of coach cars it could have had, allowing for more revenue generating passengers to ride with us on this beautiful day.

But this train was also missing empty seats, because every seat on the train was filled with paying passengers. Most had smiles on their faces. Some faces reflected the deep slumber state they were in. But there were no grumpy faces to be found on this day traveling on the eastbound Empire Builder. For the committee members of the GRRC that had never ridden an Amtrak train before, on this day they experienced about as great a representation of what the Amtrak long distance train can be today. There are those readers who would like to quickly chime in about better diner service. A diner that would serve all customers; not just those residing in the sleeper cars. There are those readers who would like to have more amenities on the train. But for today there were no exploding toilets anywhere to be found.

Even the Republicans on the train disembarked in Milwaukee feeling good about what they had just experienced. Several of us had phone apps that showed the train speed. There were numerous times when any of the

passengers looked at my phone, when the first number began with an 8, the look of amazement on their faces reflected a sense of joy that none of us can convey in a persuasive speech or document. You simply have to be riding on a train to enjoy this.

The second day of this odyssey included a system wide ride on the Milwaukee streetcar named The Hop, and a visit to its maintenance facility underneath I-794. It finished with the gathering of Milwaukee dignitaries, civic leaders and private company representatives that joined the GRRC delegation in talking up the expectation of the TCMC train and listening to a presentation from Amtrak.

But what followed might have been more meaningful to everyone in attendance when GRRC Chairperson Trista MatisCastillo asked everyone in the room to introduce themselves and give a short story of why they were there and the importance of passenger rail to them in the community that they came from. The impressively wide collection of people and depth of stories they had, equaled a good motivational speaker.

Looking ahead to the next train project that WisARP and other passenger train advocates within the state of Wisconsin will be aiming for, how do we emulate this event? There simply is no substitute for the overall experience of riding an intercity or long-distance passenger Train.

### **Carolina Panthers can ride Amtrak this fall, and Mileage-Based User Fees? - Dave Rasmussen**

It's possible this fall to avoid the hassle of traffic and parking for the home games of the Carolina Panthers. Fans will benefit from <https://www.ncbytrain.org/> hosting football trains to bring fans to and from home games in Charlotte, served by Amtrak train #78 the Piedmont between Raleigh and Charlotte, 166 miles. That's roughly the distance between Chicago and Green Bay.

The 8/30/22 issue of TDA opens with an article about Badger Institute's new report, Future-Proofing Wisconsin's Highway Funding System, looking at alternatively fueled vehicles and expected loss of gas tax over time as they are adopted. It projects a 33% reduction in Wisconsin gas tax revenues by 2050, not covered by current \$100 surcharges on EVs or \$75 for hybrids.

The report recommends transitioning to mileage-based user fees and gaining Federal Highway Administration approval for a pilot Wisconsin mileage-based user fee program.

-----

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

WisARP President is John Parkyn, Stoddard, WI, (608)788-7004, [email:cen10297@centurytel.net](mailto:cen10297@centurytel.net)

Send membership questions/address changes to: [wisarpmembership@gmail.com](mailto:wisarpmembership@gmail.com)

Send comments or new items to the Editor at: [badgerrails@gmail.com](mailto:badgerrails@gmail.com)

### **Important links :**

WisARP on the Web: [www.wisarp.info](http://www.wisarp.info) WisARP on Facebook: [tinyurl.com/WisARPFb](https://www.facebook.com/tinyurl.com/WisARPFb)

All Aboard Wisconsin: [www.allaboardwisconsin.com/](http://www.allaboardwisconsin.com/)

All Aboard Minnesota: [www.allaboardmn.org/](http://www.allaboardmn.org/)

**WisARP**

**4230 N Oakland Ave, Box 259**

**Shorewood, WI 53211-2042**

**First class**



#8, Empire Builder, at the Oakwood Interlocking (Six & Half Mile Rd in Racine, MP 70.2), Al Baker, Apr 2022  
**New to WisARP ? Join Us ! We would Love to Have You !**

**Send us your name, email address, mailing address, city, state and zip.**

**Send to: WisARP, 4230 N. Oakland Ave., Box 259, Shorewood, WI 53211-2042**