



Badger Rails

Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers (WisARP)

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The Hunt is on for an Amtrak Station in Madison

by Susan Foote-Martin, Assistant Chair of the Madison Extension, a sub-committee of WisARP

“Yes, it’s going to happen” said Satya Rhodes-Conway, Mayor of the City of Madison followed by thunderous applause by those in attendance.

It didn’t matter if you were one of the 150-plus individuals that packed a room in Madison’s City County building on Wednesday, December 7, 2022. It didn’t matter if you were among the 315-plus passenger rail enthusiasts that attended the meeting via Zoom. You could feel the excitement emanating from everywhere that evening. Citizens came to learn more about Madison’s work to sight an Amtrak station location in anticipation of Amtrak passenger rail service coming to Madison and were not disappointed.

Earlier this year, the City of Madison awarded a contract to the consulting firm HNTB, charging them to identify locations around the city that could be suitable for a station. After months of work that included criteria specific to sighting an Amtrak station, they identified six potential locations, not in any priority order:

University Avenue and Park Street on the UW campus; Downtown near Monona Terrace; the former Oscar Mayer site on Packers Avenue; First Street and East Washington Avenue; Dane County Regional Airport and last a location near Milwaukee Street and Fair Oaks Avenue.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) signed into law in 2021 has appropriated \$102 billion in funding for rail including \$66 billion for Amtrak. Philip Gritzmacher, City of Madison Transportation Planner stated that having a preferred passenger rail station site identified will put Madison in a strong position to receive some of those federal dollars.

In addition to federal funding for Amtrak, the U.S. Department of Transportation issued a Notice of Funding Opportunity announcing \$2.3 billion in funding for Federal-State Partnerships for Intercity Passenger Rail Grant Program. Rhodes-Conway said that the U.S. DOT identifies the Madison to Chicago corridor as a “Core Express service” considered the backbone of the Midwest network with the highest potential for ridership. Cities like Madison, Green Bay and Eau Claire can apply directly to this grant program as can Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs).

“People have very strong feelings about this particular issue,” said Rhodes-Conway, “but at the end of the day we have to pick a station that works for Amtrak and the Federal Railroad Administration. That’s sort of the bottom line, otherwise we’re not going to successfully get into the process and get the funding that we need from the federal government.”

The proposed Madison Extension train will be part of the Hiawatha line and calls for four trains per day running between Milwaukee and Madison. Rhodes-Conway’s City budget for 2023 includes \$350,000 “to bring Amtrak to Madison”. But

the entire price tag for the route between Milwaukee and Madison currently sits at \$500 million, so partnerships with Amtrak and WISDOT are a must. Federal dollars can pay for 80% of the total cost with the match of 20% coming from the state and other private partnerships.

Future plans by Amtrak include a Hiawatha train that would travel from Milwaukee to Green Bay and another to Eau Claire to the Twin Cities. All these new routes could become a reality by 2035. The Hiawatha line will connect these cities to Milwaukee and Chicago. Amtrak also recommends extending three of the daily trains northward to Minneapolis - St. Paul. The City of Madison wants to hear from citizens. To learn more about the next public meetings in February and April, get more information about future Amtrak routes in Wisconsin, and voice your opinion on the Milwaukee/Madison Amtrak train, go to < <https://www.cityofmadison.com/transportation/initiatives/passenger-rail-station-study> >.

WisARP Fall Meeting in Madison – by Larry Rueff, Municipal and Legislative Liaison for NEWRails, a WisARP organization

WisARP's Fall Meeting in Madison, Wisconsin began with President John Parkyn stating that the results of the survey mailed to federal, and state legislative candidates will support Expansion of the Hiawatha Service to Green Bay as well as sustaining current Amtrak passenger rail services. In his view these results that will be shared with our members also support connections through Madison to the Empire Builder Service. Further he said after the November 8, 2022, biennial election WisARP will approach those elected with our new State Rail Plan.

Arun Rao former Passenger Rail Manager for WisDOT, in his new position as Director of Network Development in the Central United States for Amtrak, next explained that the federal Investment in Infrastructure and Jobs Act (IIJA) funds will be sought by Amtrak partnering with WisDOT to plan passenger rail expansion. Amtrak is incorporating its goal in grant applications with Net Zero Greenhouse gas emissions by 2045.

Currently Amtrak is ahead of projections for beginning the Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago (TCMC) train but agreed upon construction projects for this corridor will continue on into 2024. Rao also recognized that Madison, Pewaukee, Watertown, Eau Claire, and Green Bay have submitted "Expressions of Interest" to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for consideration in the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) to be announced early December 2022 by the FRA for its Corridor Identification Program.

Rao encouraged us to obtain letters of support and otherwise enlist businesses, Chambers of Commerce and Municipal Leaders to advocate for expansion of passenger rail service. < <https://youtu.be/Dy0garkgcCQ> >

The next speaker, Lisa Stern, Chief of Railroads and Harbors for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) announced that her passenger rail section of WisDOT has already applied for the second of two supplemental Six Million Dollar grants under the IIJA, or as it is popularly referred to as now the Bi-Partisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). This latest application made through the FRA is to complete construction on the TCMC so that passenger rail service Extension will be operational in 2023. Stern's complete presentation is available at < <https://youtu.be/Y6voAoGBDcE> >.

WisDOT has documented that there is significant bus ridership on the "Thruway Initiative I - 41" supporting a decision to expand passenger rail service to Green Bay from Milwaukee. Important for that expansion and for existing routes is the addition of six new locomotives and coaches built in California by Siemens. These will be available from the Amtrak Midwest Equipment Pool jointly owned with Michigan, Illinois, and Missouri.

Stern also announced the Wisconsin 2050 State Plan should be ready for public comment the first quarter of 2023. A budget for the Department has been sent to the Governor. WisDOT is trying to fill the one of two passenger rail positions in her section that Arun Rao, former Passenger Rail Manager held.

Leading off the afternoon session was Kevin Roggenbuck, Senior Transportation Planner at Ramsey County (MN) Regional Railroad Authority. Roggenbuck discussed the Great River Rail Commission which in 2019 re-purposed itself after Minnesota turned down high speed rail funding. Now after spending collected dues for lobbying and website development successfully in advocating for the TCMC, the Commission is redefining its focus to help fund Minnesota's share of that Corridor's operating costs. < www.greatriversrail.org >

Jason Ilstrup, President of Downtown Madison, Inc. presented a demographic study of the population and businesses in Madison and the Counties surrounding it including Dane County. His view is that the Madison passenger train station should be constructed near the existing bus terminal.

Tim Kiefer, WisARP Member and Supervisor of the Dane County 25th District from Waunakee, presented the county board's current passenger rail advocacy actions include consideration of paying sums to the High Speed Rail Alliance (HSRA). Kiefer indicated the board's legislative lobbyist will contact Congressional Members to convince Amtrak to add Madison to its rail planning.

MIPRC CONFERENCE OBSERVATIONS - by *Brian Nelson, President - All Aboard Minnesota*

Editor's Note: The Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission (MIPRC) Annual Meeting was held in Indianapolis on November 16 thru the 18th. Brian Nelson attended this meeting as a representative of All Aboard Minnesota (AAMN). Below is a summary of observations and information learned. Observations and opinions in this story are by Nelson alone.

Overall Summary State DOT's are really stepping up plans throughout the Midwest for expanded and new passenger rail corridors. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is really stepping up their Corridor ID program to help states plan, implement, and fund (grant opportunities) new and expanded corridor service. There are many new plans to expand rail corridors in seven states. This is a very dynamic time for passenger rail.

FRA Overview Amit Bose, Administrator for the FRA, confirmed by the US Senate in January 2022, made an appearance at the MIPRC Annual Meeting. He mostly spoke of the programs the FRA has available promoting passenger rail throughout the United States.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) signed into law by President Biden in November 2021, has already allocated \$185 Billion for passenger rail. \$1.4B in Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Grants have already been allocated primarily for grade crossings and more, three times more than previous administrations. The FRA has expanded partnerships with states, and \$12 Billion is allocated for states over the next five years to establish new service in corridors that are considered long term sustainable.

Corridor ID Program plans from states are due in December 2022, although there will be opportunities in the future to submit plans and expression of interest letters during the next two years from what I heard. The FRA is expanding the Corridor ID program/office and redoing their policy office. The message was that the FRA is really stepping up to help states with new corridors and get an overall plan in place with the intent of full implementation.

State DOT summaries

Illinois – In Fiscal Year 2019 Illinois had five million riders in their 5 corridors. Illinois paid Amtrak \$55 Million for their corridors, which would have run October 1, 2018, to September 30, 2019. Their expansion plans include new service from Chicago to the Quad Cities and Rockford.

Indiana – After failing to fund the former Hoosier service Amtrak train between Indianapolis and Chicago in 2019, the State of Indiana would like to re-establish Hoosier service between Chicago and Indianapolis daily. Indiana is also requesting a daily Cardinal long-distance train.

West Virginia has formed a states' coalition across the entire Cardinal train route to increase this service to daily, but Indiana has not joined. They stated they need a formal invite to do so, but one meeting attendee strongly criticized Indiana officials over their failure to join. The Indiana state DOT has about 3,300 employees, all but 22 are multi-modal personnel with only three in rail. Like most states, most DOT employees are focused on roads and bridges.

The State of Indiana also wants to re-establish passenger rail service through Ft. Wayne on the old Pennsylvania Railroad route, ultimately continuing into Ohio. The economic and feasibility plans are done.

Michigan – This state has three main corridors: Pere Marquette (to Grand Rapids), Blue Water (traveling through Kalamazoo, Battle Creek, and East Lansing.) which are both a single daily train. The Michigan DOT wants to add another daily round trip on each route. The Wolverine which parallels much of I-94 is now three daily trains, and hopes are to expand to 10 trains daily. All Michigan trains begin 110mph running at Porter, IN. MDOT hopes to enable the entire Wolverine route for 110mph. The long-term plan is to extend the Wolverine to Windsor, Ontario. MDOT wants to establish new service on a Detroit, Toledo, and Cleveland routing for better eastern connections and build a new station in Detroit.

To expand 110mph east of Jackson, MI., engineers will need to focus on the western portion of this route straightening out curves and renewing bridges. There is a \$196.5M American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA signed into law in 2009.) grant for the line. There is also a \$6.5M State of Good Repair (SOGR from 2020.) grant for gates and bridges. Ridership of 598k in all three corridors this year is almost pre-covid levels.

Minnesota - Dan Krom, Director of the Passenger Rail Office for MnDOT, provided Minnesota's update. The main corridor focus for the new MN state rail plan is the NLX to Duluth, MN and Superior, WI.; extending the TCMC second daily train to Fargo, ND, and ultimately up to Grand Forks and Winnipeg. Other routes on the MN State Rail Plan are the Twin Cities to Kansas City route, Twin Cities to Sioux Falls and Sioux City, SD. A third daily train from TC to Chicago routed through Madison and Eau Claire is also on the rail plan. Arun Rao, now with Amtrak, stated it's still Amtrak's plan to run the second daily train to Duluth and back.

Krom said MnDOT has been in touch with Iowa and Missouri DOTs about TC-KC service. Krom also mentioned Minnesota does not have a corridor program. MN will be taking the lead from Wisconsin for the TCMC second train planning and implementation, and MnDOT plans to submit letters of interest to the FRA for all corridors in December 2022.

Krom gave All Aboard Minnesota a very nice call out, complementing us on our outreach and advocacy for their plans. This is a huge recognition for AAMN in front of this group. He also called out the Great River Rail Commission, (GRRC)

Minnesota State Senators Scott Newman (R) and John Jasinski (R) attended and spoke to the importance of TC-KC service and their interest in making this happen. "We need better connections other than through Chicago," said Newman. "We are kind of hanging out on the western end of the system." Newman also commented there is interest in the MN Legislature with this route. Sen. Newman is retiring but has indicated he would stay connected in State Government and has also indicated Intercity Passenger Rail is one issue he favors.

Wisconsin - The Hiawatha trains generated over 880k riders in 2019 with 85 percent farebox recovery and 90 percent On-Time Performance. (OTP) You Badgers already know these are great stats out of the Midwest that we can use. I noted new bus lines to connect trains, especially the TCMC second daily train to Eau Claire. There have been Amtrak buses connecting the Green Bay corridor to Milwaukee since the 2010s decade. The Wisconsin 2050 Rail Plan should be made

public soon, which will include rail service to Madison and Green Bay. Scott Rogers from Eau Claire is building business coalitions in Eau Claire and Green Bay to promote and support new and expanded passenger service in the Wisconsin State legislature.

IIJA Act and what it holds in store for MIPRC and our states session -

FRA has established the Corridor ID Program which can be used for new or enhanced service. The corridors selected get priority for funding and planning. There can only be one submission per corridor, which is important if a corridor crosses a state line. The state DOTs will need to figure out which state takes the lead on multi-state corridors. Once initial submissions are vetted and selected, the FRA will release a national map. Corridors selected will receive a \$500k grant for planning in phase one. Phase two must include a service development plan, and phase three includes a 20% match.

The Federal State Partnership program is broken down into two groups, the NorthEast Corridor (NEC) and the national network. The Office of Rail Development, Amtrak's NEC Corridor, and the Corridor ID Program are all available for multi-layered assistance for the states. The FRA plans on new regional outreach sessions in 2023.

FRA Long Distance Study - The goal for this work is to link communities from rural to urban, and large and small towns and cities in regional networks. Studies will include long-distance trains Amtrak previously ran and discontinued, like the North Coast Limited, long-distance services that existed prior to Amtrak and could include new services. The goal for new long-distance services is to advance community relationships, economic well-being, and connectivity for rural areas.

New Venture Cars – The Amtrak Midwest order is 54 - 70 seat coaches, 30 of which have been delivered already. Also 17 business/coaches have been ordered which contains 36 business seats and 16 coach seats; and 17 cafe/coaches which will be delivered in early January 2023. The cafe/coaches will have integrated wheelchair lifts.

Siemens - Vendor issues that were noted at this meeting include: cracked ceiling brackets and lead pipe fittings, which in my opinion were very much downplayed. Dan Krom mentioned in his address Minnesota will buy into the Midwest Venture car pool. This might accelerate the implementation of these new coaches on the TCMC second daily train.

Chicago Union Station - Arun Rao, Director of Network Development, Central Region from Amtrak discussed many of the projects coming up at CUS at your (WisARP) October 2022 meeting. Check out the YouTube video at [WisARP Wisconsin](#) of his presentation and his detail.

Note on attendees - This meeting was very well attended including administrators and staff from the FRA, State DOTs, commissioners, assorted politicians, and advocacy groups from most of the states.

Bob Johnston, Trains Magazine columnist frequently writing about Amtrak, expressed concern about Amtrak's meltdown and their current leadership. He praised AAMN for sending his article on Amtrak's capacity crisis to the MN US Congressional Delegation. "That's what all rail advocates should be doing. Great!!" Johnston told me. For the March 2023 Trains issue, he wrote an extensive article on VIA, saying they are a total mess.

Mason Baxter with the Association for Innovative Passenger Rail Operations. AIPRO is a business development group for non-Amtrak passenger operators like Herzog, Keolis and component suppliers. He expressed strong interest in the Twin Cities -Kansas City route, thinking it has great potential and wants to work with us on it. He has a meeting with Union Pacific next month, and I'm sure the topic of passenger trains rolling on that route will come up.

Editor's note: Nelson's essay has been reduced to fit in this Badger Rails edition. The complete version is available at WisARP's website as a downloadable PDF file.

Passenger Railroads Should Get Our Support - © 2022 John B. McHugh

Congress perpetually battles over expenditures for infrastructure, and it seems that the survival of Amtrak invariably is mentioned during these discussions. One political party generally is against spending public dollars to subsidize Amtrak while the other side supports public funding for Amtrak.

This discourse recalls a president who understood the value of railroads as vital to U.S. infrastructure and believed that they should be supported by U.S. taxpayers. President Biden isn't the first president to understand this truth. In fact, we have one of greatest U.S. presidents, Abraham Lincoln, to thank for the development of the nationwide railway system.

On July 1, 1862, after decades of U.S. congressional debate and disagreement on a Transcontinental Railroad and an appropriate route the road should take, President Lincoln brought the debate to a close and brought the enterprise to life, all with a stroke of his pen.

On July 1, 1862, one year into America's bloody Civil War, President Lincoln signed into law the Pacific Railway Act, which established a public-private partnership, and commenced a 10-year project (it took instead only seven years) to build a railroad to the Pacific Ocean. [Utah Department of Heritage & Arts](#)

As result the public support of the expansions of US railway, westward migration was enabled, agricultural goods could be shipped to eastern markets, new western markets were opened for goods manufactured in the east, and, in general, gave a significant economic boost to the United States Post Civil War economy.

Public Good

Amtrak is a "public good," meaning that it benefits all U.S. citizens and that we support it with our tax dollars. Other public goods that impact our lives include schools, libraries, U.S. Postal Service, National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control, plus transportation infrastructure such as highways, airports, harbors, etc.

In the *Washington Post* comments section of March 27, 2021, a reader precisely framed the question of using our tax dollars to fund public goods.

Libertarian philosophy and economics has spent years trying to avoid dealing with **public goods** (economic technical term), that is, resources that have significant upfront costs, generally too large for any individual or company to shoulder, that have small return on investment for any individual, but large return for society, that may have a return spread out over a long period of time, and which provides benefits to people and populations that did not spend or pay for them. Think fire departments, police departments, interstate highways, light houses, the internet, clean air, and clean water. Most of the first world includes education and health care in this category. Libertarians and Republicans have for three generations denied the validity and need for "public goods."

Rarely is the concept of "public goods" ever mentioned in public dialogue. Why would it? After all, we can agree that we want future generations of our children educated, we want safe and convenient highways to get us to our jobs, and we want our mail delivered in a timely manner, and so on. Amtrak is one of these public goods that will never pay for itself but is a service that should be subsidized for the benefit of U.S. citizens.

Some might say that these other public goods affect the lives of many more citizens than Amtrak. Maybe but consider the Boston to New York, New York to Washington, DC corridors plus in my home state Wisconsin, the Hiawatha, which serves the Milwaukee to Chicago corridors and also the Los Angeles to San Diego route. These Amtrak passenger routes save tons of auto emissions from entering the atmosphere, reduces expensive wear and tear on our highways, and reduces the auto congestion on our highway systems.

Beyond the service that passenger rail provides, it is also an economic boon for many of Amtrak's 20,000+ employees, plus the local businesses that support travelers.

I am a capitalist, but I believe that free-market economics shouldn't decide how our tax dollars are allocated. Not every public enterprise will ever pay for itself, for example, the United State Postal Service and public school system. I submit

that Amtrak is also in this category. Therefore, I urge you to contact your members of Congress and ask them to vote for legislation to fund Amtrak operations and much-needed capital improvement such as rail improvement, new cars, and engines.

Thanks to my friend Liz Novak for her review and edits of this article.

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Rail Passenger Webinar – James Sponholz

Amtrak is responding to recent service disruptions with new plans meant to better manage problems as they occur. Speaking at a November 15, 2022 Rail Passenger Association webinar, Amtrak’s Vice President of Long Distance Service, Larry Chestler, said the company is making changes to improve how it responds to problems.

One change was in response to a much-publicized incident October 7, 2022, in Michigan when the Wolverine lost its Head End Power (HEP), which resulted in a loss of electricity and heating in the passenger cars. That and other malfunctions added 14 hours to the normal trip time of under six hours. Beginning in 2023, Amtrak will have in place an “HEP Plan” for all employees to follow in the event of a generator failure, with procedural steps that must be followed immediately, after 15 minutes, and after 90 minutes of the loss of power. Each step escalates the levels of communication and awareness within Amtrak aimed at resolving the problem in the minimum amount of time.

Another change for 2023 is the addition of a Service Disruption Desk in the Operations Center to better coordinate responses to significant service interruptions. Amtrak hopes to be more proactive in informing passengers of problems as they develop. Changes are in process to allow passengers to rebook a disrupted trip using the Amtrak app. Amtrak is also working on a text notification system to keep in touch with passengers. Finally, they continue to hire service agents in the Contact Center to assist passengers via telephone. Disruptions occurring last summer cost Amtrak just under \$3 million for substitute buses, taxi and rideshare services, onboard meals and beverages, and off-train meals and lodging. That is an 89% increase from a similar period five years ago. Amtrak will also deploy an internal Customer Case Management Database in 2023 as a central depository at the passenger level for tracking and measuring service recovery performance and follow-through across the company.

Chestler said service reliability has slipped due to the aging long-distance equipment (Superliners, Amfleet II and original Viewliners). Two major accidents in the last year, the Empire Builder in September 2021 and the Southwest Limited on June 27, 2022, have limited available equipment. Also, many cars that were mothballed during the pandemic have not yet been returned to service. Amtrak is at the initial stage of a procurement aimed at replacing its aging long-distance fleet by 2032.

In terms of the people who make the Amtrak system work, the company has been struggling to hire new staff, adding 3,200 in FY 2022. In FY 2023, their goals are 4,000 additional new hires. These include all positions, from on-board service crews to equipment maintenance and repair staff. Chestler noted, “We’re far from where we need to be, but we’re getting there.”

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