

Badger Rails

Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers (WisARP)

Volume 42, Issue 1

1st Quarter 2024

MARK YOUR CALENDARS – WISARP SPRING MEETING ANNOUNCED!

SAVE THE DATE! Saturday, April 6, 2024, in Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin. Check back with Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers website (<http://WisARP.info>) for meeting site and agenda details. See you in the Dells! has a different meaning now with increased passenger rail interest in Wisconsin!

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN – *John Parkyn, President*

I usually try to be upbeat but sometimes I need to be pushy. We had every reasonable expectation to have the second train between the Twin Cities and Chicago running in the 4th quarter of 2022. It is now still being "set up" while the national route has been inundated with new proposals to study more routes.

I am all for more routes but a little history. Way back in the years before Amtrak an analysis of a first national system rail service of just 10,000 miles versus the over 20,000 of today had few multi-train-per-day routes. Chicago —Twin Cities was one of them as being viable and self-supporting.

After the shutdown during President Carter's term, we went to one and have never restored this most vital service. Our highest priority is no more delay.

One recent reason I was given is the station contracts, but the stations already have service so it is not a site issue. We need to roll these trains now to keep our network viable. The Midwest Regional Rail Initiative showed them making a profit, let's go for that now!

The hopes for our next targets of Green Bay and Fox River Valley need to be pushed more rapidly through the planning stages that should be very doable. We still will encourage the expanded national network, but our state goals must be advanced!

Spend time now contacting your Wisconsin legislators to begin encouraging closure and startup. If you have any questions or suggestions for me, give me a call.

Seven Corridor ID Grants for the Upper Midwest - *Ian Weisser, Member, Web Group*

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) announced on December 8, 2023, that seven corridors affecting Wisconsin would each receive \$500,000 federal funding for the first step of the FRA Corridor ID grant program.

- More services on the current Hiawatha corridor (WisDOT)
- Milwaukee – Green Bay (WisDOT)

- Milwaukee – Madison – Eau Claire – Twin Cities (WisDOT)
- Eau Claire - Twin Cities (Eau Claire County)
- North Coast Hiawatha (Big Sky Rail Passenger Authority, Montana)
- Northern Lights Express Twin Cities - Superior- Duluth (MNDOT)
- TCMC additional service via La Crosse (WisDOT)

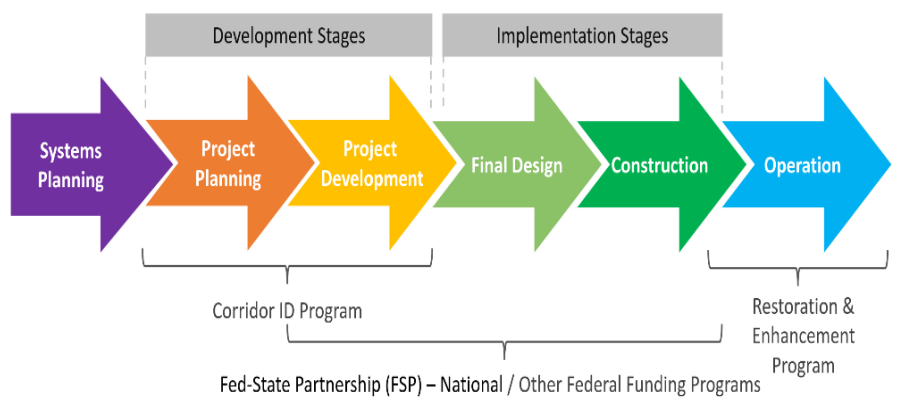
The purpose of Corridor ID is not “another study”. The purpose is a Service Development Plan (SDP), a detailed implementation plan that requires the collaboration of all stakeholders. With an approved implementation plan in place, additional Federal funding becomes available as the grantee completes each step.

The first step that all seven corridors will do is to forecast the work needed to create their SDP. The current grants cover only this step.

The second step is the creation of the actual SDP. The SDP is a big document: It includes alternatives analysis, business plan, capital cost estimate, key environmental considerations, construction estimate, local-match finance plan, and more. The approved SDP is the blueprint for implementation, scheduling, budgeting, and further grants.

The third step is the 30% design, environmental clearance based upon that design, and then the 100% design required for the fourth step - construction.

FRA Project Lifecycle Stages – Corresponding FRA Funding Programs



The FRA has moved to this process to create a pipeline of projects that it can compare, forecast, and that it can prioritize if needed. The process also includes deconfliction: Overlapping projects must synchronize their data and agree on a single service concept.

Organizations that have a library of reliable past studies and good relationships among stakeholders should find step 1 to be an easy and rapid exercise

in coordination.

Initial funding for this program is \$66 billion from the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the largest public investment in intercity passenger rail.

FRA AWARDS GRANTS FOR 2 EAU CLAIRE RAIL CORRIDORS: EAU CLAIRE-TWIN CITIES INCLUDED IN GRANTS TO WISDOT, CHIPPEWA-ST. CROIX RAIL COMMISSION – *Scott Rogers, Chair, West Central WI Rail Commission*

Longtime efforts to establish passenger rail service along the West Central Wisconsin Corridor through Eau Claire, Menomonie, Baldwin, and Hudson/River Falls took a big step forward when the route was part of two

corridors awarded \$500,000 planning grants by the US DOT's Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). They were among seven grants awarded that could expand rail passenger service to Wisconsin communities.

♦ **Eau Claire-Twin Cities Corridor:**

The Chippewa-St. Croix Rail Commission successfully submitted an application to study the Eau Claire-Menomonie-Baldwin-Hudson/River Falls-Twin Cities route as a multi-frequency regional corridor. The Commission's application is unique in that it proposes a competitive process for selecting a train operator, and an innovative direct access model for securing track access with the host railroad, Union Pacific, over whose tracks, trains would operate. In addition to serving an important mobility role for communities along the line, the Commission also will consider using zero-emission passenger equipment, and plans to aggressively pursue transportation-oriented economic development at stations on the line.

Members of the Commission include Dunn, Eau Claire, and St. Croix counties, the municipalities of Altoona, Baldwin, Eau Claire, Hudson, Menomonie, and New Richmond, and the West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition. Ex officio members include Union Pacific, WisDOT, MnDOT, Ramsey County MN, Washington County MN, West Central WI Regional Planning Commission, CVTC, Northwood Technical College, UWEC, UWRF, and UW-Stout.

• **Milwaukee to Madison to Eau Claire to Twin Cities Hiawatha Service Extension Corridor:**

One of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's (WisDOT) four Corridor ID applications is a line to extend trains from its successful Chicago-Milwaukee "Hiawatha" route to run via Madison and/or Eau Claire.

News of the announcements drew praise from EC City Council President Emily Berge:

"This investment underscores the vital role of sustainable transportation in fostering connectivity and economic growth. This grant will propel Eau Claire into a new era of accessible and efficient transportation, enhancing the quality of life for our residents and fostering regional collaboration," she said.

West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition celebrates steps forward at Annual meeting

Efforts to bring passenger trains to the Eau Claire area date back to 1999, when community leaders in the area formed what is now the West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition with the aim of adding the region to planning maps, such as the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative then being led by Wisconsin. On January 30, the Coalition held its 2024 Annual meeting with updates on its plans and speakers from WisDOT, Amtrak, Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority, and RPA. The hybrid meeting was recorded and is available to view below:

To learn more about the Coalition and/or become a member: www.westwisconsinrail.org or to view segments of the Jan 30 annual meeting: www.westwisconsinrail.org/coalition-meeting-videos

MADISON AMTRAK STATION PLANS KEEP ROLLING – *Jay Timmerman, Board Member for Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers and Terry Brown, Editor for TCMC Newsletter*

February 12, 2024 – Fourteen months after The City of Madison publicly revealed the beginning of planning for a new train station, showing Amtrak and the rest of the Midwest that Madison wants passenger rail service, the second set of public meetings were finally staged January 30 & February 6, 2024.

The January 30 meeting was an in-person meeting held at the Madison Municipal Building, explaining several proposed locations of the Madison Extension Station. There were six sites revealed at the December 2022

meeting under review by the City Transportation Department. For this meeting the planners created a graded ranking for each site location.

Although the City of Madison had budgeted funding for this initial planning process, an added source of energy was created when it was announced in December 2023 that a Corridor Identification and Development Program (Corridor ID) award had been given to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and The City of Madison, for exploring further the potential for expanding the Amtrak Hiawatha service to Madison.

Six sites were selected for station evaluation: The former CMStP&P or Milwaukee Road station, known as the closest to the University campus; a downtown site either at Monona Terrace or along East Williamson Street; a site at First Street next to East Washington Ave; a site adjacent to Fair Oaks Avenue; the old Oscar Meyer site; and near the Dane County Regional Airport.

These locations were chosen because they met one or more of the following criteria: being accessible to many people and jobs, accessible via multiple modes of transportation, accessible to lower income housing, and that they would have minimal impact on freight railroad operations. The sites also had to use existing infrastructure whenever possible and have space for a station platform.

It also should be noted that existing connections going west of Madison are on the east side of the Isthmus, with one low speed freight line going west to Prairie du Chien, WI. Madison's geography also complicates the issue, in that the central business district is located on an isthmus, and this acts as a constraint for the space available for station buildings, trackage, bus stops, and parking.

The following is a list of the selected station sites with comments over their rankings and if they were chosen for additional analysis and planning:

Campus Corridor - Not recommended for advancement to site analysis despite being the location of the former Milwaukee Road station, due to a poor ranking for rail operations, a fair ranking for ridership potential and equitable access, and a good ranking for access and multimodal connectivity, and land use and development. This location would also require trains to traverse the Isthmus to reach the station and is the farthest from the east side tracks that go to either Milwaukee or St. Paul.

Downtown & Isthmus Corridor - Received the highest number of "Good" rankings, for access and multimodal connectivity, land use and development, ridership potential and equitable access. This site was ranked fair for rail operations. It should be noted that this area would involve choosing a site at either Monona Terrace, or along Blair, Livingston, or Baldwin Streets. Recommended for advancement to site analysis.

First Street site - Good for ridership potential, equitable access, and rail operations. But this area only ranked fair for access and multimodal connectivity, and land use and development. This location was recommended for advancement to site analysis.

East Side Corridor (Fair Oaks Ave) - Received a good ranking only for rail operations. It is directly located on the mainline track coming from Sun Prairie. A poor ranking was given for access and multimodal connectivity, land use and development, ridership potential, and equitable access. It was not recommended for further analysis.

The Oscar Meyer site – This site, located between Sherman and Packers Avenues, received a good ranking only for rail operations, with fair rankings for land use and development, ridership potential, and equitable access. It was given a poor ranking for access and multimodal connectivity. Nonetheless, this site has been recommended for advancement to site analysis.

The Airport site – This site was not recommended for advancement to site analysis because it received poor ranking for access and multimodal connectivity, land use and development, ridership potential, and equitable access. It received one good ranking for rail operations.

Based on these comments, the downtown sites at Monona Terrace, the First Street site, and the Oscar Meyer site all have been recommended for continued study. The City’s preliminary draft of the Station Identification Study can be found at <https://www.cityofmadison.com/transportation/initiatives/passenger-rail-station>.

AMTRAK COLD WEATHER & SNOW – Terry Brown, Editor for TCMC Newsletter

February 20, 2024 - January 2024 was not exactly a good month for Amtrak and passenger train travel in the upper Midwest. Between January 12 and 22, Amtrak had over 70 cancellations involving Midwest operations in the Chicago terminal. Granted an honest winter hit the region including subzero temperatures.

There are many people that like to post train travel as being durable enough to go through any snow or deep subzero cold. In the third decade of the 21st century it looks like modern realities aren’t honoring those cherished traditions.

Start with a January 19, 2024 story from Jennifer McLawhorn, Managing Editor of RT&S (Railway, Track & Structures), explaining a BNSF LinkedIn post thanking crews for working to clear snow and ice from track and switches, particularly in Iowa and Wisconsin. The Class I reported on its crews working in freezing temperatures across the Northern Corridor to restore service as “service interruptions remain elevated,” reported McLawhorn. Here’s a question to think about: if the host freight railroad decides to push the Pause button on its operations until the track infrastructure gets better, what does Amtrak do? If the service outage is due to the host railroad halting the passenger train, that’s on the freight railroad, is it not?

“Long gone are the days of NYC running a snowplow train ahead of the 20th Century so it could stay on time,” says Mark Weitenbeck, former WisARP Vice President, and current WisARP Treasurer. “We like to think of trains as the all-weather mode, but railroading has changed over the years.”

VENTURE COACHES - As the days passed during this period of Amtrak service outages, some customers were beginning to observe the issues plaguing the out-of-state Long-Distance trains weren’t the same problems affecting the Hiawatha service, or the Amtrak Midwest intercity services. To be sure it was plenty cold, but Mother Nature wasn’t stirring up Blizzard conditions along Lake Michigan

When the Hiawatha is reduced to one train per day each way; and when the Lincoln Service is reduced to one train per day, and others as well, what gives? Rumor has it the major problem was the water pipes froze in the Venture coach cars. Siemens, the manufacturer of the Venture coach cars made for the Midwest Services, built in heaters specifically for the water pipes. When the cars are taken out of service and disconnected from lead power, they need to be plugged into an auxiliary power source. Guess what didn’t happen? Can you hear it now? “We didn’t have to do that before.” It apparently took days to recover from this. This one is on Amtrak.

SC-44 CHARGER - At the February 14, 2024, Chippewa / St. Croix Rail Commission meeting, Wisconsin Department of Transportation Passenger Rail Manager Rich Kedzior mentioned during his update that he believed Amtrak was losing confidence in the Siemens SC-44 charger locomotive to operate properly in subzero temperatures.

Recent observations around the Chicago Amtrak Maintenance Facility will find no less than nine SC-44 Chargers on a holding track at the maintenance facility. Amtrak Midwest’s original order of 33 SC-44s is apparently down to only 17 locomotives in working order. Four units were involved in collisions and are currently labeled Wrecks. Up to 12 Midwest Chargers may need alternators replaced. Reportedly Siemens has no replacement alternators to offer. Is this what causes all Charger locomotives to die in cold weather?

The Siemens ALC-42 locomotives which have been delivered to Amtrak for long distance service have also had a checkered history in sub-freezing temperatures in the northern latitudes, but more detailed information on what ails those locomotives does not seem to be public knowledge. Even after 30 years I still enjoy watching the General Electric Genesis P42 engines pull a passenger train down the track. We all might see more of these soon, if not during next winter. This problem could be placed in the lap of Siemens.

RETURN TO NORMAL STRATEGY – Towards the end of this extreme cold snap, it was observed some services were running again while others weren't. "Because we did not want customers to be stranded on trains, services we did dispatch we doubled up on locomotives," says Derrick James, Director of Government Affairs for Amtrak in Chicago, while speaking at the West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition Annual Meeting in Eau Claire back on January 30, 2024. "By doubling up on locomotives, we did have to cancel some trains. This was done to make sure the trains we were running were getting through."

While that certainly created some rare picture opportunities for rail fans, it seemed to exaggerate a sore spot for Amtrak assigning power to the long-distance trains out of Chicago. For most readers looking at this story winter will likely be over. This issue falls squarely on Amtrak and its current owner of engine manufacturing, Siemens.

~commentary~ By December 2024 all parties from top to down, executive to shop workers, need to get a strategy in place to deal with extreme winter weather. When extreme blizzard conditions exist and the freight railroad host decides to shut down, nothing can be done about that. But sunny mornings when the temps are 20-below can happen, and Amtrak and host freights need to keep rolling, safely. Siemens needs to realize the weather potential with northern latitudes and Amtrak's shop forces need to create a plan to help protect the working engines and rolling stock before the extreme weather hits.

Trains, Planes and Automobiles part 2 – *Dave Rasmussen, Badger Rails Editor*

My exploratory vacation with O2 started Monday Dec 18, 2023, in 1st class on United Airlines, Milwaukee to Houston and Houston to San Diego. 1st class barely has leg room nor head rest for me. As mentioned in last issue's article, now lugging a 5# Inogen G5 pulse oxygen generator, considered flyer disabled, I can no longer sit in Exit, nor Bulkhead as a 7-footer because the device has to go under the seat ahead of me when we take off. And FAA rules state that one needs a battery that lasts 1.5x the duration of the flight including taxiing - medically I only need it above 20,000 feet. With 2 3-hour flights, my 13-hour battery sufficed. Breakfast and Lunch were excellent.

Dec 21, I took the Amtrak Surfliner with California Car double deckers, from Oceanside to LA Union Station and then the Coast Starlight from there to San Jose. New to me was Amtrak Prix Fixe: \$20 Breakfast, \$25 Lunch, \$50 Dinner. No more made to order meals but optional drinks can still be ordered.

On the Surfliner I chose business-class 1 / 2 seating. These were wide flat-back type seats that fit me well. I did not run into Venture seats when out there. YAY. OJ, coffee and Danish available.

San Jose to Portland Dec 25 was Alaska Air on an Embraer 175. Was comfortable for me. This hop topped out at 10,000 feet and I needed no supplemental O2.

In San Diego and San Jose by errors of both Thrifty and Dollar for promised Kia Niro EV's I ended up with 2023 Chevy Bolts. They actually fit me. But I found they charge slowly and since my hotel didn't have a charger, I had to take vacation time to do so elsewhere.

While in Portland, Andrew Sihler, a past Badger Rails Editor from ProRail / Madison, retired from UW, took me to lunch at Higgins Restaurant. He sends warm hellos to everyone.

Dec 29th caught the Portland Empire Builder home. I developed hip pain a month before the trip and it was uncomfortable walking cars from 8th (Sleeper) to the 2nd (Diner) on the train, hunched over at my height. Fixed prices for non-sleeper passengers in the diner again. Based on my past experiences on Amtrak of old and VIA Rail, I can't really look forward to food on the train anymore except in a modified frame of mind.

The communal shower DOES have a fold down seat - useable even for a 7-footer! I slept well on side in a Roomette, or diagonally stretching my socked feet above me and the head rest on the other side of the space. The shelf in the unit was enough space for my cpap and o2 concentrator, but the wrong side for the 1 outlet provided. The porter loaned me an extension cord. The O2 device's battery came in handy when we reconnected to Seattle #8 at Spokane. We also kept time and arrived back in Milwaukee ahead of schedule!

Metra: Bikes on all Trains – *Dave Rasmussen*

Metra announced recently that it will make its COVID-era policy of allowing bikes on all trains permanent. The commuter railroad also added that it will add more space for bike parking by installing bike racks on 50 cars for starters. The policy goes into effect this Thursday, February 1.

This comes after Metra recorded its highest bike ridership in 2023 by 260,000 bicyclists, higher than pre-pandemic years. Before Covid only ADA seating areas could house bikes during non-rush periods.

For more information see: <https://chi.streetsblog.org/2024/01/30/what-does-metras-permanent-bikes-on-all-trains-policy-starting-thursday-mean-for-you>

Also, effective Feb 1 there will be a new fare structure with new fare prices, products, and policies All Ticket windows will be closed including downtown. For more info on this see <https://metra.com/2024FarePlan>

Happy Face Photos Wanted and other Blogging Info – *Dave Rasmussen*

Our web group is looking for photos of smiling or otherwise happy people riding or doing something with trains to augment our web site. We're working on a new interface from which members can submit photos and or content for future Badger Rails or Web use. You can try it at <https://wisarp.wordpress.com/share-with-wisarp/>

Mark Weitenbeck and Dave Rasmussen worked in IT until we retired. Help years ago from Dave's web designer friend Kathy Graff resulted in our almost free web site we've been using for years. Dave managed sites at work and for the Tall Clubs but we were lucky to have Ian Weisser join us at our fall meeting. His more current experience is helping us move forward.

We're looking to simplify the feel of our web site and incorporate better categories and tagging to help with searches. Please go out to <http://wisarp.info> to explore and comment or ask questions.

=====

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)386-3287, [email:cen10297@centurytel.net](mailto:cen10297@centurytel.net)
Send membership questions/address changes to: wisarpmembership@gmail.com
Send comments or new items to the Editor at: badgerrails@gmail.com

Important links :

WisARP on the Web: www.wisarp.info

Group on Facebook: tinyurl.com/WisARPFb

All Aboard Wisconsin: www.allaboardwisconsin.com/

Page on Facebook: <http://tinyurl.com/3mad8x22>

All Aboard Minnesota: www.allaboardmn.org/

WisARP
4230 N Oakland Ave, Box 259
Shorewood, WI 53211-2042

First class



Empire Builder westbound in Racine

Al Baker Photo

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