

TCMC NEWSLETTER

wisconsin association of railroad passengers

Volume 3, number 1

January 21, 2021

NEW YEAR - RENEWED HOPE

WHAT'S ON YOUR WISH LIST?

Calendar year 2021 must be better than 2020. I think all of us passenger rail advocates in the State of Wisconsin have several items on our priority list.

The lists might be a little different for each of us, but I think all of us would agree number one should be reducing the grip of COVID-19 on our lives. This would begin to restore the health to the Empire Builder and Hiawatha trains that we experience before March 2020. Here's my 2 thru 8 list.

2 – Restore daily service for the Empire Builder. Daily service will begin to help us realize what regional train travel will need in a post-COVID society.

3 – Increase the sleeper car capacity on the Empire Builder. It is highly unlikely COVID will be in the rear-view mirror by the end of 2021. The number of passengers willing to pay the upcharge in 2020 just to ride in a private compartment caught us all by surprise.

4 – Do our part to help the State of Minnesota pass a budget with funding for the TCMC train.

5 – Wednesday, January 20 this year a new President will take the White House. Four years ago, there was hope Donald Trump's massive infrastructure plan would increase funding for all passenger rail for this country. It barely happened on a small scale. In Wisconsin we have FRA grants to be thankful for. President Biden has

the nickname Amtrak Joe. I am hoping his love for Amtrak extends beyond the Northeast Corridor.

6 - For this newsletter, I will attempt to inject a little more opinion into the content or a single column. The remainder of the newsletter will maintain what I call "observation-based" stories.

7 - I gave the newsletter a new look this month but

expect the Mast Head to change a couple times over the year. It does not snow year-round in Wisconsin. Neither will the top of this page remain the same all year.

8 - The original purpose of this newsletter was to increase awareness and education of the TCMC train.

During the fall of 2020, the content of this newsletter obviously shifted towards information and updates on the Empire Builder. For 2021 this newsletter will return to educating all the readers about the advent of the TCMC train, but content may shift to the EB as important information develops. A daily operating Empire Builder is an important partner to the TCMC train.



Charger 1280 still pic



TCMC NEWSLETTER

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What is the TCMC train?

EMPIRE BUILDER ON-TIME PERFORMANCE 2020

January 18, 2021 – How important is it to you to have an On-Time train experience? It is safe to say a strong majority of train riders would say important or particularly important.

Would you make an advance reservation for a train that has a 60 percent chance of being late? What if it had an 80 percent chance of being late? How many people would begin their answer with “It depends on...?”

TCMC Newsletter October 2019 issue debuted statistics on the Eastbound #8 Empire Builder for the year 2019 through September. In simple numbers it easily confirmed what the consensus was on the eastbound train.

The West bound Empire Builder #7 numbers through September 2019 were introduced at the WisARP Fall General Meeting. These numbers were a critical reflection on how well the Canadian Pacific Railroad could manage the TCMC regional train with their other freights.

All these numbers were shedding light on passenger train operations through the State of Wisconsin that others were reluctant to display and admit.

Through the 2010s decade On-Time Performance nationally was a tug of war battled in the courts as much as on the rails. The first few years of the 2010s

Amtrak On-Time Overall Performance was above 80 percent. The Host Freight Railroads won an important judgement in 2013 against the rules that permitted successful Amtrak performance. The overall On-Time Performance number for Amtrak quickly plummeted to near 40 percent.

In the latter part of the decade Amtrak began taking jobs in public at some of the worst performing host railroads. Some like CSX did adjust. Others simply



raised their nose higher.

Fortunately for the Hiawatha, Canadian Pacific and Metra have done an excellent job keeping this 90-mile regional train on time. This has been the standard Amtrak and other carriers have held as the model.

In the case of the Empire Builder and the chronically late eastbound train, fingers from different companies have been pointed in multiple directions for years. Every party involved likely has some liability and responsibility in the complaint at one point or another over any period of measurement.

In 2020 despite the COVID limitations, the *(continued page 3.)*

The acronym is derived from the endpoints with Milwaukee in the center: Twin Cities- Milwaukee-Chicago. The TCMC project will add one daily round-trip regional train between these cities and serve all current Empire Builder stations in-between. The TCMC service will be considered a regional passenger rail corridor (as opposed to Amtrak long-distance) because it is under the 750 mile-standard set by the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008. This train will be state supported like the Milwaukee-Chicago Hiawatha trains. The cost of the TCMC Train will be split mostly between the two state sponsors that will benefit the most: Minnesota and Wisconsin.

JUCKINS.NET

This website, managed by Christopher Juckins, supplied the data used for the EMPIRE BUILDER On-Time Performance charts.

Juckins.Net is not affiliated with Amtrak.com or Amtrak (The National Railroad Passenger Corporation.).

Check out this website for other archived Amtrak information.

The results shown on page three are not endorsed by Amtrak or the host railroads. Subsequent analysis of this data are solely the opinion of TCMC Newsletter only.



<https://www.railpassengers.org/happening-now/news/blog/new-fra-rule-stands-with-passengers/>

Check out this link for the National Rail Passengers Association review of the new FRA On-Time rules released in November 2020.

EMPIRE BUILDER ON-TIME (continued from page 2.)

House of Representatives held several open hearings on on-time performance. In November, the FRA rolled out the Final Rule on new On-Time Performance measurements.

The complexity of the new rules will change the meaningfulness of charts like the pair on this page. The complexity of the new rules was intentionally created to help easily identify the responsible party for a late passenger train.

But after eight years of empty promises and finger pointing, hopefully rail passengers will begin to see a new day of timeliness for regional and national passenger rail.

QUICK ANALYSIS

EASTBOUND #8 – When you review the 2019 charts, you should realize the eastbound numbers had ample room to grow and show progress. Tie that into reduced freight trains over much of the Empire Builder corridor, and the results from 2020 should not totally surprise you. **ALMOST EVERYTHING WAS UP!!**

Considering the former On-Time measurement allowed long-distance trains to be up to 30 minutes late and still report on-time, you will note this is one exception in the numbers that Amtrak #8 took advantage of.

For the calendar year 2020 the eastbound #8 was On-Time 71 percent! That is up from 38 percent in 2019. That is Amazing!!

This year I added an additional column of information: Total number of late trains. If any given train was 25 minutes late, it was counted as on-time. But it also was counted in the “late train” column.

EASTBOUND EMPIRE BUILDER #8 to CBS

ON-TIME PERFORMANCE by national train standard 2020

month	number of trains	on-time	on-time avg.	number late trains	avg. mins late
january	29	16	55%	23	139.30
february	29	22	76%	20	70.10
march	31	23	74%	22	65.50
april	30	29	97%	18	13.67
may	30	24	80%	28	32.71
june	30	22	73%	23	33.52
july	30	22	73%	24	35.96
august	31	18	58%	29	57.59
september	30	16	53%	23	61.70
october	25	14	56%	24	65.71
november	13	10	77%	10	56.30
december	13	12	92%	12	27.67
year totals	321	228	71%	256	54.98
				late percentage	80%

Columbus, WI. was used for Eastbound #8 train statistics. National Train Standard allows train to be up to 30 minutes late, and still considered to be On-Time. NUMBER LATE TRAINS column counts every late train, regardless of On-Time standard.

Take December 2020 as an example. Only 13 trains that month, sadly, due to 3-train per week order. Twelve trains were On-Time! That amounts to a 92 percent

on-time percentage. But hold the champagne. Twelve trains were late. Beginning to see the picture?

The Eastbound chart used Columbus, WI. (CBS) as a point of reference. You can create your own chart for the other stations in Wisconsin by going to www.Juckins.net.

WESTBOUND #7 – The desire to chart this train for TCMC purposes was the genesis of this on-time gathering. For 2019 this train was on-time at St. Paul 69 percent of the time. For 2020 that mark rose to 75 percent. The on-time mark for a regional train, which was used for this chart, is (was?) up to 20 minutes late is still considered on-time.

The new standard for on-time for ALL trains will be 80 percent. Both trains have some work to do, OR the schedule will probably be lengthened to make the train meet the 80 percent mark. This prospect enters an entirely different discussion.

By the way, 52 percent of the westbound trains were late to St. Paul for 2020.

WESTBOUND EMPIRE BUILDER #7 to MSP

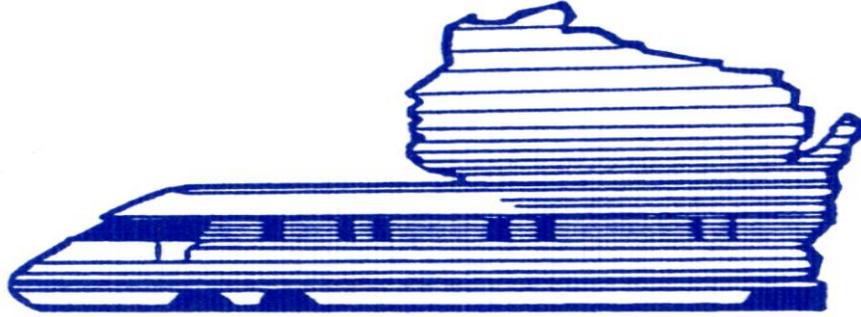
ON-TIME PERFORMANCE by regional train standard 2020

month	number of trains	on-time	on-time avg.	number late trains	avg. mins late
january	29	21	72%	16	22.88
february	29	23	79%	14	35.14
march	31	20	65%	15	35.00
april	30	25	83%	10	44.60
may	31	23	74%	17	29.76
june	30	17	57%	20	54.00
july	31	23	74%	15	32.53
august	31	24	77%	19	22.89
september	30	27	90%	11	27.27
october	24	19	79%	16	27.13
november	13	9	69%	10	42.30
december	13	12	92%	6	15.00
year totals	322	243	75.47%	169	32.38
				late percentage	52.48%

The two 2020 composite charts on this page plus all the monthly data that went into the construction of these charts is available at www.wisarp.info.

PDF files with the full 12 months of train data are available on the WisARP website. (www.WisARP.info) A video with a discussion over this information and how it was collected is

available on the WisARP YouTube Channel. Search [WisARP Wisconsin](http://www.WisARP.Wisconsin).



Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers (WisARP) **New member sign-up form 2021**

Since 1977, WisARP has been the voice of the rail passenger in Wisconsin. Our strength is in the strength of our membership. A one-year trial WisARP membership is free. Besides our quarterly newsletter, WisARP also has email groups to provide members with the latest news.

It has been 10 years since the Walker administration turned back federal money that WisDOT had applied for to continue development of the Madison extension. The work of WisARP goes on. We are still focused on:

(1) You are seeing this New Member Sign-Up sheet in a newsletter keeping Wisconsin citizens informed over developments of the second train on the current Empire Builder route between the Twin Cities and Chicago (called the TCMC train.).

(2) Getting Improvements to the existing Hiawatha service and

(3) Implementation of the Midwest Regional Rail System.

If you would like to join WisARP for the journey ahead, it is simple. Just fill out the form below. Your first year (2021) is FREE with this special TCMC Newsletter form! Just \$10 per year afterwards.

Jim Sponholz
WisARP VP-Membership

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

Please add your email address below to receive the latest WisARP news including Badger Rails.

Email address _____

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