

TCMC NEWSLETTER

Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers

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photo by Alan Baker

TCMC EARLY 2022 UPDATE

ADMINISTRATIVE PROGRESS OVER CONSTRUCTION PROGRESS

As the calendar year rolled over to 2022, progress on the second daily train between St. Paul, MN and Chicago going through Milwaukee, was happening more over Zoom connections and emails than on the rails that already serve the Empire Builder train.

Many important details like the fact that a contractor had already been selected for the construction phase was announced in 2021. Other important details have waited until 2022 including the Memorandum of Understanding between the States of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois and the Canadian Pacific railroad.

The most exciting news this month for the TCMC train was a February 7, 2022, Trains Magazine news wire story over a regulatory filing by Amtrak in support of the Canadian Pacific- Kansas City Southern (KCS) merger. The story written by Bob Johnston claims an eighth Hiawatha train will be permitted by CP after the following conditions are met.

These are; the second platform being constructed at the Milwaukee Airport Station; improvements are made to Muskego Yard in Milwaukee that would allow freight trains to bypass the Milwaukee Intermodal Station (MIS), and CTC signaling installed into MIS. It is presumed the eighth train would be the TCMC, continuing past Milwaukee going west towards La Crosse and on to St. Paul.

Arun Rao, Passenger Rail Manager for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation previously this year announced CP will permit the TCMC to roll before the agreed upon track improvements are completed. These track projects are surrounding Winona and La Crescent, MN and La Crosse, WI.

Completion of the Milwaukee area construction projects could mean that the TCMC train will debut in the last days of 2023. That is if everything goes well, and construction stays on schedule.

Perhaps the biggest surprise of the Johnston- Trains Magazine story was CP could entertain a possible second regional train between St. Paul and Chicago. This idea could be explored approximately one year after the beginning of the first regional train, the TCMC.

Trains Magazine News Wire is a very good source for TCMC updates, in addition to the TCMC Newsletter.



The new Siemens built Charger ALC-42 locomotive was supposed to make its Empire Builder debut as the lead engine power on Tuesday, February 8. The Positive Train Control (PTC) software did not load properly and an older P42 was called in to take the lead. (Amtrak Photo)

AMTRAK EMPIRE BUILDER ON-TIME CHARTS FOR 2021

This year will mark the third year that the TCMC newsletter has gathered this data on the Empire Builder train, mostly within the State of Wisconsin. This information was started to put hard numbers on many of our

suspensions about the good and bad of the Empire Builder on time performance between St. Paul, MN and Chicago.

As we reflect on this information in calendar

year 2022, understand new on-time performance rules mandated by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) are in effect for all Amtrak trains now. How the on-time numbers are calculated is complex and therefore this newsletter will not attempt to duplicate that formula this year.

The current rules indicate the FRA is expecting trains to be within 15 minutes of the scheduled time. But there are other considerations that ultimately figure into the percentage that the FRA and Amtrak will report.

For the 2021 year on-time chart, TCMC news used the same rules that were in effect for Amtrak in 2020, which allows a more apples-to-apples comparison. The westbound Empire Builder was judged by the regional train standard of up to 20 minutes late for on-time, upon arrival at St. Paul, MN. The eastbound Empire Builder used the long-distance standard of up to 30 minutes late for the on-time label. This number was calculated using the stop at Columbus, WI.

2021 EMPIRE BUILDER westbound #7					
	number of trains	annulled	On-Time PCT	late train PCT	avg. mins late
january	13		54	54	41
february	12		58	58	52
march	13		62	77	22
april	13		31	92	66
may	18		56	89	49
june	30		83	43	24
july	31		74	58	27
august	31		84	45	25
september	29	1	76	52	38
october	31		90	19	16
november	30		87	30	48
december	29	2	69	59	26
total	280	3	74	51	36

the TCMC will be. Although considerably better on time numbers than the eastbound Builder, the westbound Builder under the 2022 standard of measure is falling short of the current 80% on-time goal.

For 2021 #7 Westbound was on-time 74 percent. That's off by one percent from the 2020 on-time chart. The average number of minutes late for 2021 is up four minutes over 2020 at 32 minutes. These similar numbers over the last two years do show a level of consistency from the host railroad, Canadian Pacific.

What is the TCMC train?

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 between the three state sponsors: Illinois, 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/>
Check out this link for the National Rail Passengers Association and information reviewing the new on-time standard implemented by the FRA. This website also has information about Amtrak's on-time performance nationally for January 2022.

EASTBOUND BUILDER NEEDS PLENTY OF HELP

The performance of the Eastbound Empire Builder defied any standard of measurement you may choose. Without reaching for obnoxious superlatives, this service for the most part failed to meet any decent standard.

The first year of the Empire Builder on-time performance chart was 2019. The eastbound #8 had a 38 percent on-time performance. For 2020 it skyrocketed to 71 percent, and one would think many of the problems had been worked out.

The 2021 result returned to the sub-40 percent line of 2019 at 39 percent. Eighty-seven percent of the trains were late by the scheduled arrival time, with no allowance for a late train. In 2021 the eastbound Empire Builder averaged 90 minutes late.

If you weren't already convinced Congress and the FRA needed to step in and create some new on-time rules, this should help making you understand the problem. We all understand the Amtrak employees are professionals. They don't start their days out thinking up ways to make their trains late. Rail Passengers Association and others have clearly documented the leading cause of late Amtrak trains is freight train interference.

We understand the Empire Builder travels up to 2000 miles through mountains, it snows in the winter, poor driving places autos and trucks on the track in front of trains of all varieties. And don't forget mechanical failures or defects. *(Continued next column.)*

2021 EMPIRE BUILDER eastbound #8					
	number of trains	annulled	On-Time PCT	late train PCT	avg. mins late
january	13		77	92	37
february	11	1	18	100	115
march	13		23	85	107
april	13		38	100	84
may	17		35	100	79
june	29	1	52	93	54
july	31		48	94	61
august	31		52	87	56
september	28	2	54	96	53
october	30	1	47	87	57
november	30		37	87	133
december	31		23	87	213
	277		39	87	90

AMTRAK SERVICE REDUCTIONS AGAIN

Early January 2022 Amtrak announced a reduction in Empire Builder service due to crew shortages owing to the Omicron variant of Covid-19. Amtrak currently expects to restore full service to the Builder on March 28, 2022.

A Press Release from Amtrak states "Although 97 percent of Amtrak's employees are vaccinated, we've had several hundred of our on-board service personnel, conductors, engineers, and mechanical crews continue to be impacted by Covid infections or exposures, particularly given the highly infectious nature of the new variant and the prevalence of breakthrough cases."

The reductions have also affected the Hiawatha service between Milwaukee and Chicago. If you plan on riding one of these trains on or before March 27, 2022, booking your travel on Amtrak's website or on the Amtrak App assures you will receive accurate scheduling.

EASTBOUND EMPIRE BUILDER continued

Think of it this way: When you plan on riding a train where only one in nine trains is likely to be on-time, what is one supposed to think? I applaud the ones who still ride this train despite these numbers.

For more information on the current on-time standards, begin your search at the

Rail Passengers Association webpage:

<https://www.railpassengers.org/happening-now/news/blog/january-on-time-performance-not-there-yet/>

For more detailed information regarding our 2021 on-time data, head to the WisARP website:

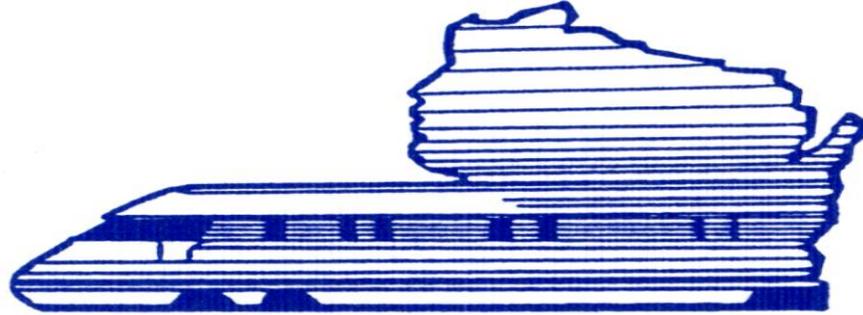
www.wisarp.info

See page four of this newsletter for information about the WisARP Spring Membership Meeting in Appleton on March 26, 2022.



TCMC NEWSLETTER

Is created and written by Terry Brown, Vice President- Public Relations for WisARP and is solely responsible for its content.



Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers (WisARP) New member sign-up form 2022

Since 1977, WisARP has been the voice of the rail passenger in Wisconsin. Our strength is in the size of our membership. A one-year trial WisARP membership is just \$5. Besides our quarterly newsletter Badger Rails, WisARP also has email groups to provide members with the latest news.

It has been over 10 years since the Walker administration turned back federal money that WisDOT had applied for to continue development of the Madison Extension. But the work of WisARP has continued. 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.). Funding has been secured, but our education efforts continue.

(2) Educating the public on the usefulness of the Hiawatha service in a post-Pandemic/ Endemic era, and

(3) Creation and Implementation of the Hiawatha Extension trains to Green Bay and Madison.

If you would like to join WisARP for the journey ahead, it is simple. Just fill out the form below. Your first year (2022) is \$5 with this special TCMC Newsletter form! Just \$10 per year afterwards.

Join us for our General Membership Meeting on Saturday, March 26, 2022, in Appleton. This meeting is of special interest for those interested in Green Bay and Fox Valley Passenger Rail. Visit www.wisarp.info.

Jim Sponholz, WisARP VP-Membership- February 2022

Name _____

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City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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

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