

Here are the latest TCMC (Twin Cities- Milwaukee- Chicago) updates as known for this edition of our newsletter in the month of May 2022.

There have been few updates coming from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) this calendar year. The WisARP General Member meeting in March did not have a representative from WisDOT. Therefore, most updates that we have regarding the second daily train running between Chicago and the Twin Cities have come from our friends at the Minnesota Department of Transportation. (MnDOT)

The two main actors for MnDOT are Dan Krom, Director of the Passenger Rail Office and Frank Lotterle, MnDOT Project Manager for the Passenger Rail Office.

CANADIAN PACIFIC ACQUISITION - The biggest news from the first four months of 2022 came from the partnership of Amtrak and the Canadian Pacific Railway. Several news sources broke the news in early January that Canadian Pacific had reached an agreement with Amtrak about writing a letter of recommendation for Canadian Pacific's buyout of the Kansas City Southern Railroad. CP also indicated public support for Amtrak's long-term vision for growth.

The letter of support for Amtrak by Canadian Pacific isn't just for Wisconsin in general and isn't just specifically for the TCMC. In the Midwest, Amtrak is aiming for permission to travel through the Detroit River Tunnel, enabling Amtrak to connect to Toronto. Back in Wisconsin, WisDOT is hoping the CP - Amtrak agreement will allow increased frequency of the Hiawatha service up to ten round-trip trains per day between Milwaukee and Chicago in addition to starting the TCMC service.

Amtrak is also looking to grow passenger service between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, LA, over CP/ Kansas City Southern tracks, and study the potential for service between Meridian, MS. And Dallas, TX.

The larger surprise from these discussions yielded Canadian Pacific's allowance of the TCMC train to begin before the final design and construction phase is completed. This was a huge announcement that means the commencement of the second daily train could begin one year or more earlier than the previous estimates of the fall quarter 2024. CP does want the Milwaukee-area Hiawatha construction projects completed before allowing the TCMC to roll.

The secondary news item was a comment from the CP that within one year of the beginning of the TCMC, CP would entertain the potential of another daily train running between Chicago and St. Paul. What are the possibilities here?

FORWARD TO MAY 4 - At the Great River Rail Commission meeting Lotterle announced that negotiations were currently under way for a three day a week TCMC train possibly beginning first quarter 2023. (That is not a typo error. 2023!) Many details need to be worked out. Several interested parties have asked that these trains run on the weekend when tradition has it that the Empire Builder is at its busiest.

This latest word from our friends at the Minnesota Department of Transportation has likely caught everyone unaware. This is incredible news that could set the stage for a daily train beginning by Christmas 2023.

The Minnesota DOT officials have also mentioned they will need to ask their State Legislatures for their share of operations of the TCMC in upcoming budget discussions this summer. They are ideally suggesting an ongoing funding mechanism would be best to support Minnesota's share of the operating cost.

In 2021 a Restoration & Enhancement Grant of \$12.6 million was awarded by the Federal Rail Administration to help offset the operating cost of the TCMC for the states involved. This grant was originally awarded with the intent to assist with daily running trains. The early start of a 3-day per week round trip TCMC train will likely have to be entirely supported by the States involved. Indications from Madison are Wisconsin will be able to support this states' share of an early 3-day TCMC train without a special budget session.

CAN AMTRAK CONNECT US?- The first player, and the most important team member that will be scrambling to make this three-train per week "special" happen will be Amtrak itself. The National Rail Passenger Corporation, otherwise known as Amtrak, will more than need to come up with the equipment to fulfill the requirement of these trains. They will likely need to hire and train an entirely new staff to work and serve these trains. Amtrak may also have to scramble creating a service facility in the St. Paul area as one of the trainsets will have to call the Twin Cities area home overnight.

There are scattered news reports in several regions where Amtrak is cutting service temporarily due to a shortage of employees to staff all trains. A Fox Business story by Peter Aitken from December 2021 quoted House testimony by Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner claiming that the vaccine mandate will force the company to cut services in order to comply.

There are numerous reports from the field by Amtrak riders experiencing first-hand training of new hires on revenue trains. Gerald Ratliff, Outreach Coordinator for All Aboard Minnesota reported on a recent train ride to Florida where the water was shut off during a shower. A new car attendant wasn't completely trained on the procedure for filling the sleeper car water tank. (You can read Ratliff's full report in the second quarter 2022 Badger Rail newsletter from WisARP.)

HIAWATHA IMPROVEMENTS FIRST- As part of the Amtrak- CP agreement, the freight carrier has required three Milwaukee area construction projects finish before the daily TCMC train can establish service. Those three projects are:

Construction of a second boarding platform at the Mitchell Airport Train Station on the west track, or the track farthest from the station. This would allow Hiawatha trains to be capable of boarding passengers on either track.

Second is the Muskego Yard bypass track. This bypass would permit CP freight trains south of downtown Milwaukee entry into their freight yard west of the Milwaukee Intermodal Station, (MIS) without going through MIS. Currently, all CP freights pass through MIS.

The last project is improved signaling for all trains west of MIS to allow for quicker train movements under most circumstances. This project will be performed by Canadian Pacific. The first two are managed by WisDOT.

Some of the information discussed in this story is cutting edge news. Final agreements are still being negotiated between the states involved in the TCMC, (Minnesota, Illinois, and Wisconsin.) Amtrak and the Canadian Pacific Railroad. There are currently no signs indicating the length of these negotiations are because of disagreements in operations that could stall the genesis of this train. To the contrary, all

parties are talking in unison about the positive prospects the TCMC will start out before the original fall quarter 2024 start-up.

EMPIRE BUILDER UPDATE - By the time you read this newsletter the Amtrak Empire Builder should have resumed daily operation across the entire route from Chicago, through Milwaukee and central Wisconsin, continuing west to Seattle and Portland. The subject of Face Masks could be an ongoing set of changing rules this summer. Consult with Amtrak train personnel for the current Face Mask rules.

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

Reports from the field continue an ongoing theme from this year that many trains are functionally full. Minnesota Association of Railroad Passengers President Andrew Selden has commented some of the trains that split to Seattle this spring have only had one coach and one sleeping car. That typically means the sleeping car is completely full, and the coach is essentially uncomfortably full. If you are planning on riding this train this summer, make your reservations as soon as possible.

The new On-Time Performance standard is being enforced now. The Empire Builder currently is not meeting the required 80 percent on-time standard required by the Federal Railroad Administration. (None of the long-distance trains are meeting this benchmark.) All riders should be checking the Train Status feature on the Amtrak website or Amtrak app, available for Apple and Android phones.

PICTURES IN THIS ISSUE- For those that have been around the Empire Builder this spring you've no doubt seen the new Siemens built ALC-42 engines. These have a little more horsepower than the older GE Genesis P42s, but for those concerned about the environment the ALC-42s are very low emissions earning the most recent Tier-4 certification.

The bottom picture on page one and the picture on page three show two ALC-42s that have become familiar with the Wisconsin landscape, numbers 300 and 302. On their maiden return voyage from the State of Washington heading east, 302 at the lead in Washington state collided with a pick-up truck that fouled a crossing. The picture on page three shows it is in good cosmetic repair and looking good again. These two ALC-42 pictures are courtesy of Alan Baker.

The picture at the top of page one shows a Canadian Pacific freight train at West Salem, WI. on September 24, 2021. Canadian Pacific was already showing off cooperation with Kansas City Southern using one of their engines as the second power on this train. This picture was taken by Terry Brown.