



TCMC Newsletter v5n2

February 24, 2023 - As we enter the second month of 2023 there is not much new- news to report on, but there is enough news that's important to those who want to see the TCMC role. This issue will review some issues that will be playing out between now and Memorial Day 2023.

Note: some of the new information included in this newsletter was learned at the West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition meeting on January 26, 2023. Lisa Stern, Chief of Railroads and Harbors for Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) was one of the marquee speakers. (By the time you read this issue her video presentation could be available at West Central Wisconsin's YouTube channel.)

Perhaps the biggest news for all of us that want to see the TCMC train rolling, was the news from several of the speakers at the West Central Wisconsin meeting that the TCMC train would roll in 2023. Or could roll in 2023. Or should roll in 2023. Reading into the comments heard, there wasn't any hard commitment to running the TCMC seven days a week in its inaugural running. The lead issue in running the train three times a week instead of daily would most likely rest upon Amtrak. The issue of enough roadworthy equipment and the ability to staff the trains continues to be a dark cloud hanging over Blue & Gray. Honestly, there are other concerns that could dog this train from starting a daily run this year. But Amtrak's capability of providing equipment, power, and staffing will likely override all other concerns.

As discussed at the West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition meeting. Stern noted that there are several issues with three specific projects surrounding the Hiawatha service. These projects need to be finished before the Canadian Pacific railroad will allow an eighth daily Hiawatha train. The three projects remain: construction of a second platform at the Milwaukee Airport Station, construction of a freight bypass through Muskego Freight Yard, and last is a signal upgrade from the Milwaukee Intermodal Station for about two miles west, or about the area where the mainline swings northeast of American Family Field where the Milwaukee Brewers play.

The project that's likely top of mind for WisDOT is the second platform at the Airport Station. Former Passenger Rail Manager Arun Rao received a Federal Grant for the project, and WisDOT had completed design plans. But time, the pandemic and *INFLATION* have interrupted the progress. The design plans are being re-evaluated and the construction will go out for bids again, possibly in April. WisDOT will likely be applying for an additional FRA grant to cover the additional expenses due to inflation.

**TCMC NEWSLETTER is a publication from the
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Why is this Eighth Daily Hiawatha train important?

That train would truly be the TCMC; the Hiawatha Extension train that would continue beyond Milwaukee, to LaCrosse and St. Paul.

What if Amtrak brings two consists forward for the TCMC and the three construction



projects mentioned above aren't completed? What happens then?

The TCMC WILL roll, for the most part.

That coveted, seemingly elusive eighth slot for the Hiawatha is very important for the TCMC, but it won't stop the train from performing. Everyone is hoping Amtrak can supply two trainsets and staff them so this train can begin during the summer of 2023. In the likely event that the eighth train slot won't be available yet, the TCMC train will finish its run at the Milwaukee Intermodal Station, and the passengers continuing

southward towards Chicago will need to board a regular Hiawatha train. A rather minor nuisance, but a small effort necessary to make the journey complete. If this situation happens, all parties will be extremely aware of the need to make this TCMC to Hiawatha connection as smooth as possible.

How long will it take

WisDOT, HNTB, the Canadian Pacific Railway and all the other construction partners to complete these three projects? No one will say for sure. Between you and me, let's just say the end of summer 2024. *INFLATION* will likely have an impact on the date this work finishes. WisDOT may need to re-apply for more FRA money to cover the additional costs expected.

Remember, we have Canadian Pacific's word that the TCMC will run before the TCMC construction projects are finished. Just one area of need in Wisconsin for the TCMC is at the LaCrosse

depot. Other construction areas are on the other side of the Mississippi River in La Crescent and Winona in Minnesota.

How long will it take Amtrak to bring two trainsets forward? No one will say for sure answering this question either. Everyone is hoping for this summer, the summer of 2023. That would be an ideal time of year to start this service during a summer travel season. Unlike the Hiawatha's, the TCMC will need to have a Café Car for the usual snack counter Amtrak provides on these intercity trains.

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.



TCMC NEWS

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

EMPIRE BUILDER RIDERSHIP CONTINUES UPWARD TREND 2022

For anyone that rode the Empire Builder during the summer of 2022, the news that ridership at the Empire Builder stops West of Milwaukee increased 39% for the year should come as no surprise.

This increase still leaves the five stops West of Milwaukee about 32% below the ridership for fiscal year 2019. Fiscal Year 2019 is the last full year before Covid restrictions began in March of 2020. The five Builder stops west of Milwaukee include Columbus, Portage, Wisconsin Dells, Tomah, and LaCrosse. These five stations only see one train per day, normally, in each direction.

It's possible ridership in 2022 could have increased even more if Amtrak would have matched the same size consist that they had in 2019. For most of 2022 the

Empire Builder had eight coach cars, which would have included sleeping cars, a lounge car and a dining car. This count does not include the baggage car. This count is two cars shorter than the typical consist would have been in 2019. *(Thanks to Brian Nelson, President of All Aboard Minnesota for confirming this.)*

Regardless the numbers show central Wisconsin is ready to accept passenger train service again, with or without facial masks. If the TCMC train can roll in the summer of 2023, this should help increase the number of passengers utilizing these stations.

Stern commented at the WisARP General Membership Meeting in late October 2022, that 60 percent of the population of Wisconsin lives within the Travel Shed of the Empire Builder and TCMC trains. This Shed is

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represented by 25 miles either direction of the Builder corridor. Is that crazy to think that many people live within a short drive of one of the TCMC stops?

WISCONSIN RAIL PLAN 2050

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation has opened a website which contains the current draft of the Wisconsin Rail Plan 2050. This plan will replace the 2030 Rail Plan. The website also allows Wisconsin residents to make comments to WisDOT regarding the plan.

<https://www.wisdotplans.gov/plan/wrp2050>

The Rail Plan itself is a 469-page document. A hefty document to consume for most people. But the portion



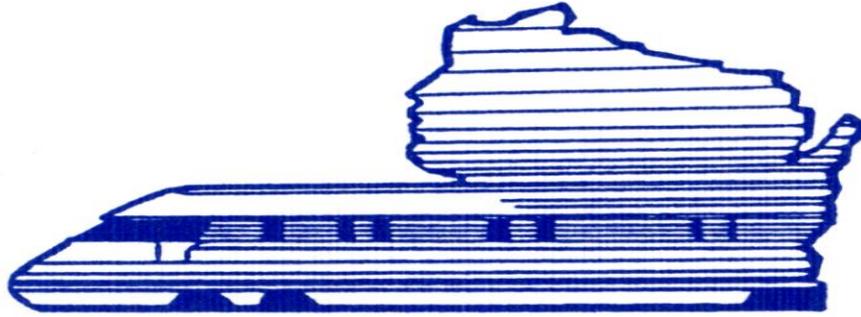
dedicated to Intercity Passenger Rail is only 40 pages. Another section regarding Commuter Rail is just an 18-page read.

In the short-term section of the document, the TCMC train tops the list. If you consider the starting point for the TCMC as the Amtrak 2015 Study results, there is still significant work to be done to get this train rolling inside of 10 years. But a second TCMC train could happen between 12-36 months after the first one rolls, as Canadian Pacific Railroad has hinted. The Rail Plan 2050 hints the second TCMC could visit Madison. It could also visit Eau Claire. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. The first TCMC train still hasn't entered revenue service yet.

This printed document does not contain the entire content for this newsletter. Look for the complete content at www.wisarp.info

PICTURES IN THIS ISSUE

All pictures in this issue are courtesy of Alan Baker.



Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers (WisARP) **New member sign-up form 2023**

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, construction will begin, 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.

Jim Sponholz, WisARP VP-Membership- January 2023

Name _____

Address _____ Cell Phone _____

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

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