



Badger Rails

Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers (WisARP)

Volume 40, Issue 2

Second Quarter 2022

Spring Meeting March 26, 2022 – Larry Rueff

As announced in the "Green Bay Extension Newsletter" the Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers (WisARP) Spring 2022 Meeting was held in Appleton on Saturday, March 26.

Vice President of Public Relations Terry Brown published in that Newsletter (TCMC Volume 4, number 2NR - see www.wisarp.info) articles on the history of Green Bay passenger rail, the importance of federal funding advances in the 2021 Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (IIJA), the AMTRAK Connects US! mapping for the Green Bay Hiawatha Extension and other planned services across the state.

We knew that successful advocacy for the Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago (TCMC) Corridor was just the beginning of expanding passenger rail in Wisconsin. Speakers at the Spring Meeting detailed how we should advocate for federal/state funding and the benefits of reestablishing passenger services.

WisARP affiliate Northeast Wisconsin Rails (NEWRails) proposes that trains of two 2-car diesel multiple units (DMUs) be added to run on existing trackage north through Milwaukee on to passenger rail stations to be constructed in Washington, Fond du Lac and Winnebago Counties. At Oshkosh the DMUs would divide with the front unit becoming the express to Appleton and Green Bay. The second 2-car DMU would continue north with stops at Neenah/Menasha, Appleton, Kaukauna, Wrightstown, DePere and Green Bay. This second train in football season could transport fans to Packers games at Lambeau Field.

Southbound Green Bay Extension DMUs would run the reverse of these express and multi-stop routes.

As an Extension of the Amtrak Hiawatha, the proposed train could be an obvious choice for other attractions to the south such as Milwaukee Brewers and Bucks games. Additional trains in Milwaukee and Northern Illinois could be scheduled for service as more examples of passenger rail destinations.

Appleton Mayor Jake Woodford opened the Spring Meeting and stressed that passenger rail is needed for many reasons. One is to help relieve the congestion of highways in our state. <http://Fox11online.com/news/local/green-bay/amtrakprovides-update-on-possible-passenger-rail-train-between-green-bay-and-milwaukee>

Mayor of Green Bay Eric Genrich also addressed the Spring Meeting. He drafted the June 14, 2021, letter to Wisconsin's Congressional Members which Mayor Woodford and six other Mayors signed supporting passenger rail. His message also stressed the need for better transportation in Northeast Wisconsin and the strong economy of the area.

Fox River Valley municipal planner and WisARP member George Dearborn presented information on local communities and connections to public transit. Dearborn is Director of Community Development for the Village of Fox Crossing, one of Wisconsin's fastest growing communities. He made a convincing argument that the Fox River Valley economy will support expanding passenger rail services.

Senior Manager for Amtrak, and State Relations and Business Development, Derrick James presented via Zoom AMTRAK's 2035 Plan that includes expansion of Hiawatha passenger rail service from Chicago through Milwaukee, Fond du Lac, Oshkosh, around the west side of Lake Winnebago, through Appleton in the Fox River Valley and on to Green Bay. James presentation is currently on WisARP's YouTube channel. (*Search for WisARP Wisconsin.*) He pointed out that ridership of the Thruway AMTRAK I-41 Bus Service currently in place helps make a convincing argument that passenger rail service must be re-established to Green Bay. Further he explained that while a long-distance corridor through Chicago to Nashville was not currently planned that local connections from Wisconsin to Chicago were supported. Under the new federal grant process of the IJA he said that Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) could be a primary partner in reestablishing passenger rail service from Chicago to Green Bay.

Derrick James promised that he would help passenger rail advocates by providing economic and other data to include in their public commenting to federal and state agencies.

NEWRails Chair Frank Ingram reviewed the history of advocacy for re-establishment of passenger rail service to Green Bay. He credited WisARP members for their efforts in the 1980's, 1990's and again for renewing this project in the past twelve years. Explaining that a corridor from Green Bay through the Fox River Valley, Milwaukee and on to Chicago is the core route of Wisconsin's economy. He detailed the state's growing population density along the proposed Extension. This proposed route would be on existing trackage mostly owned by Canadian National, a cost-effective expansion of passenger rail service.

Larry Rueff, Municipal and Legislative Liaison of NEWRails spoke about the federal and state funding processes, what criteria changed for grant approval, success in the recent Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Corridor Identification public commenting, revision of the current WisARP Program 2020 Rail Plan, the coming opportunity to comment on WisDOT's 2050 Plan and the history of its previous rail plans.

WisARP President John Parkyn commented on the advocate's role in presenting NEWRails and other passenger rail expansion plans. The next WisARP meeting of he announced will be in the Madison area on October 29, 2022. The annual election of WisARP officers will be held at this meeting.

Parkyn invited all those interested, if they haven't already done so, to join WisARP. The first-year membership is \$5.00, \$10.00 thereafter. See page four of the Green Bay Extension Newsletter.

Parkyn commented that trains will operate for passenger service that we need, at acceptable speed on existing trackage cost effectively. He encouraged advocates to meet with legislators and particularly those candidates challenging incumbents in the coming months before the November election.

Once the WisARP Rail Plan (Program) is re-written it should be presented to legislators and Municipal Leaders. You can obtain legislators and Municipal Leaders' contact information then send their names, position, phone, street address and email to gpassrail@new.rr.com .

When commenting is opened for WisDOT's 2050 Plan, send a copy of your submission in support of passenger rail to your legislators and Municipal Leaders asking them to join you by agreeing with expanding passenger rail services. Also send copies of your submission to your friends urging them to join in your comments to WisDOT or legislators/Municipal Leaders and to share their submissions with others who will also join in support. Always send a copy of what you submit to the "GB" email address above and NEWRails will help get your comments distributed.

Become informed on federal/state funding criteria [examples: Title VI (race, color, national origin), mobility services, air quality, equity, multi-modal connections, opportunity for economic growth] and stress the beneficial effects passenger rail has as a solution for these social issues.

Attend local Municipal meetings to demonstrate that passenger rail advocates support further economic growth (57% of manufacturing and 52% of retail/wholesale business now exists along the Chicago-Milwaukee-Oshkosh-Fox River Valley Green Bay Corridor) and support planning for intermodal public transportation by Municipal Planning Organizations (MPOs).

We need to advocate for passenger rail expansion now promoting a statewide rail network for the 21st century.

Amtrak - Poor training? Lack of experience? Equipment problems?- Jerry Ratliff - Outreach Coordinator – All Aboard Minnesota

My spring Amtrak vacation began on Monday, April 4 leaving from St. Paul, MN on the eastbound Empire Builder. As we have come to expect, this train was sooo late.

In Chicago I transferred to an airplane flight to Newark. I did this because of the great rail connection to Manhattan's Penn Station. The air terminal's train takes you directly to New Jersey Transit and Amtrak connections with trains about every 20 minutes and 30 minutes to Penn Station.

The engine switch in Washington, DC was about 30 minutes. I thought this was fast but have been told it should take about 20 minutes. The train was 15 cars long and 100% sold out. In one coach a family sneaked into the diner to eat. (What is the real reason for Amtrak NOT opening the diner to coach passengers?) Plenty of Moms and kids going to Disney on this train. Longest American train I have been on though only half of the Canadian excursions I took a some years ago.

New York City to Washington DC was fast and then it went slower, especially in Florida.

I initially booked the Silver Meteor to Florida, but Amtrak changed my ticket without notifying me. **Luckily, I noticed.** I took the Silver Star which goes inland to Tampa with a long back up move. That Tampa backup move is scary and strange at that speed.

Moynihan Station, New York City

It is a wonderful building compared to the old dark Penn station or dark Chicago station. Their first-class lounge is the best in the system – beautiful - (See it on YouTube.) Complementary food and beverages. Amtrak announcing the trains to us in First-Class before the station announcement was a great idea. They then put boarding information up on the main departure boards a few minutes later. I had breakfast at Moynihan and was very impressed with the counter presentation and service. I had a delicious breakfast in the Amtrak lounge, which had two departure boards

Moynihan- The Bad

The train was about 40 min late due to “yard problems”. When first class passengers went down to the boarding area, there were already over 50 people in line. We asked an Amtrak person where sleeper passengers should wait, and she sent us to the back of the line.

At the bottom of the escalator to the boarding track one did not know where the front of the train was to find the sleepers. Because First-Class and standard Coach Class passengers were boarding simultaneously, people were constantly bumping into each other. We finally departed one hour late. Moynihan's beauty contrasted with the ugly NY subways under massive construction near Penn Station.

New Viewliner 2 Roomette

Check this car out online at Amtrak's YouTube Channel. It has a pleasant smooth ride and nicer linens, at least for now. I loved the improvements and was shocked Amtrak did such a great job of simply tweaking the Roomette with better use of space, more outlets, and removing the toilet to gain nice luggage space under the sink area on the floor. I liked the bigger table, better vent and light controls and nicer sink with space for towels.

The restrooms only had a toilet, no urinal. This is harder to keep clean and uses more water. Also lacks a grab bar. Showers had a recessed place for used towels instead of piling them on the seat.

Service

We only had one conductor announcing stops. I would suggest conductors tell the passengers what is happening when the train is backing up, like in Tampa. Announcing stops for the passengers is always helpful. Only one conductor in Florida announced stops. It would also be helpful to know if a particular stop is also a “stretch break.”

The Public Address system was occasionally used for staff chatter like: “Becky, it is 12:30. Where are you?”

My room attendant was cheery and positive but sometimes forgot stuff. She turned off the water while I was in the shower. She was refilling the car in a station stop. I mentioned it later and she apologized and explained. A note on restroom and shower doors would have been nice. No soap or shampoo in the shower area, but I had brought my own.

The wrong car number was displayed outside of the train car. It could have been a clerical error. It was 9212, not 9112. Is it a 21st century omission to have no schedule available on the train? No USA map of Amtrak routes visible on the train? For those that are not smartphone users like me, we’re instantly second-class passengers. I believe most of these negatives were from poor training and having new personnel onboard.

Food

I tried different food for each meal. Car attendant took lunch and dinner orders along with times. One would go to the diner counter to give them your car and room number. When done you bused your trash and threw away all including aluminum cans into huge trash bins. Lunch had beef short ribs and looked like a lot of sliced beef. The taste was okay, and a brownie was best along with Bacardi Rum. The chef brought me a new one as she noticed it was cold.

Salmon for dinner was actually pretty good. I liked the salad and fresh roll included. Amtrak should do that with all lunch and dinners. My favorite meal had corn on the cob, but it honestly looked strange. For Breakfast I had an omelet after French toast ran out. I would rate that a C for flavor and appeal. (How can you botch cooking eggs?)

The second lunch had Chicken a la Rosa and it was a C for flavor and appeal. The cake for dessert was pretty good. The server would not give me a second free alcoholic drink on second day as per Amtrak policy. Even though we arrived at 7pm, we did not get snacks or supper served to us. Normal mealtime is 6:30pm.

After each meal I asked for water or soda pop to take with me to my room. Overall food was better than I thought compared to a Dairy Queen carry out box, but nothing like my Empire Builder cooked on-board dinners. I survived the plastic ware.

Most riders ate their dinners in their rooms, so the diner had plenty of room and I ate there most of the time. I usually eat too much on vacations, but this ride I lost a little weight, 😊 leaving more food behind than usual.

Brightline ride to West Palm Beach was simply out of this world!

There was great signage. Retail fronts are starting to fill in at depots. There is easy ticket purchasing in two classes with ticket scanning in turnstiles and then bags scanned like MSP. First class had a separate lounge. You can see much of this is on a few YouTube videos. The ride was really smooth with electronic signage on board. Car numbers and seat numbers were clearly posted. Cars had an automatic extender to fill in the gap at train entrances.

On the lighter side, there was a HUGE end of car restroom with only a toilet. I could not figure out how to flush the toilet until I touched the open-door button and WHOOSH it flushed! The restroom is four times size of Amtrak's standard versions. The depots are well marked, have Brightline parking ramps, shuttles, and bike storage, plus they offer free shuttles for customers up to five miles from depot.

In summation, I had great experience with the onboard staff, but felt the shortcomings all had to do with poor training and/or new employees. It was obvious that Amtrak was struggling with lack of trained employees.



Craig Thompson – Wisdot Sec, Stephen Gardner - Amtrak CEO, Scott Rogers - West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition Chair and Brad Pfaff - 32nd District State Senator

Attendance Call Tells a Story - from TCMC Newsletter, by Terry Brown, March 9, 2022

Wednesday March 9, 2022, was the TCMC ceremony marking when the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois have reached broad term agreements on the operation of the TCMC train. The ceremony was held at the La Crosse, WI. depot in front of a crowd of passenger rail enthusiasts and local and regional dignitaries, including some elected representatives from the state of Minnesota.

This event seems to have had more energy than other similar Amtrak celebratory events in recent years. That could be due to the pandemic, and maybe it’s reflecting the enthusiasm of the approximately 60 people in attendance had for the TCMC train.

Some of the more spirited applause was aimed at the representative from the Canadian Pacific railroad, Senior Vice President of Operations for the Eastern Region Tracy Miller. Several speakers mentioned how CP railroad has the highest grade on Amtrak’s report card for on-time performance.

There are other published reports stating Canadian Pacific has agreed to let the TCMC begin revenue service once the Milwaukee area Hiawatha infrastructure improvements are finished. Those are specifically:

- 1) The installation of the second platform at the Milwaukee Airport Station allowing passenger train boardings and detraining’s on either CP mainline track, like the station platforms at Sturtevant,
- 2) The implementation of the Muskego Yard bypass, removing freight train movements out of the downtown Milwaukee Intermodal Station, and last
- 3) Upgraded signaling on the CP mainline for several miles west of the Milwaukee Intermodal Station.

This event wasn’t short on high level firepower from Washington D.C. The biggest names in attendance were Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner and Amit Bose, Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration. Both gave some short remarks about the TCMC.

The highest-level dignitary from the State of Wisconsin was Secretary of the Department of Transportation, (WisDOT) Craig Thompson. Leading off the parade of speakers Thompson quickly outlined the benefits of the TCMC in his enthusiastic talk. “As the first additional rail service in Wisconsin in many years,” commented Thompson in his prepared remarks for those in attendance, “freight along the corridor will benefit, too. We estimate significant decreases in our hours of freight delay as a result of the TCMC projects’ railroad infrastructure improvements.”

The only elected representatives from the state of Wisconsin were La Crosse mayor Mitch Reynolds and western Wisconsin State Senator Brad Pfaff. Pfaff is the State Senator for the 32nd District, which covers the greater La Crosse area and angling south. Pfaff is also running for the Wisconsin Third District House of Representatives seat. This seat will be open after current Representative Ron Kind retires in January 2023.

The federal face mask policy inside of Amtrak property was still in force this day, making all but the speakers and those having pictures taken somewhat hidden behind the most fashionable facemask attire of the day. Note: The federal mask mandate is currently set to expire on April 18, 2022. Check with Amtrak.com and local station employees for other state and federal facemask requirements.

Could the forward progress of the TCMC train increase hope for other passenger trains within the State of Wisconsin? One person in attendance specifically asked WisDOT Passenger Rail Manager Arun Rao about the prospect of a train coming soon to Madison. Rao did not offer any commitments after a short glance back to WisDOT Secretary Thompson. Perhaps one only needed to look for elected representatives from Wisconsin for an answer.

This event was not lacking in representatives from the State of Wisconsin passenger rail advocate groups. Those in attendance included from the Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers: President John Parkin, Vice President for Public Relations Terry Brown and Secretary Robert Fisher. Mark Quam, Vice President of All Aboard Wisconsin was also in attendance as was Scott Rogers, Chairman of the West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition. Brian Nelson, President of All Aboard Minnesota also attended.

Several members of the Great River Rail Commission were also in attendance led by recently appointed Chairperson Trista MatasCastillo, who also prepared some remarks for those in attendance. The short remarks given by MatasCastillo was one of a few energetic and somewhat motivational speeches given during the approximately half-hour ceremony.

Madison Extension Update - *Susan Foote-Martin*

The Madison Extension work that will bring train service to Madison is being accomplished behind the scenes by Christopher Ott, Jay Timmerman and myself, and we remain focused and optimistic on our chances to bring passenger rail back to Madison. We feel fortunate to have the support of WisARP members who share our desire to have Amtrak serve Madison.

An RFP (request for proposal) document for the development of a station location was posted on the City of Madison's website and a consulting firm is on the job. We should have some good engineering work done and we will then have a location proposal to ponder based on the firm's findings. There are three locations for a train station that many of us have opinions about including the Dane County Airport, Oscar Meyer and another located near or along First Street. But stay tuned as there may be other locations to consider based on the findings of the consultants.

Important in our work is the progress, launching and success of the new TCMC train that will begin service sometime in 2023 – 2024. The TCMC will be treated as an extension of the wildly successful Hiawatha rail service. The TCMC will run on a historic intercity rail line running along the 411-mile corridor between Chicago and St. Paul that is used by the Empire Builder and Hiawatha routes. The success of the TCMC train will reflect the desire for the Madison Extension Hiawatha train that will serve Dane County and the surrounding area.

It is important that Madison have rail service as it once did. A recent article in the Wisconsin State Journal under the subtitle: *What we said 50 years ago* features an editorial from 1972 stating that rail service to Madison ended that same year. People have been trying to get passenger rail service restored to Madison ever since.

With once in a generation strong funding for passenger rail in President Biden's infrastructure bill, we now have a unique opportunity that we must act upon.

Green Bay Station – *Mr. Floyd Rose, contributing member of the Railroad Station Society. Photo from 10/01/2006*

If Amtrak were to plan a route from Milwaukee to Green Bay, which existing depots would we find on that route? As a tease, let's go to Green Bay and see. The obvious choice for many would be the 1898 Chicago & Northwestern Railway depot, located at 202 Dousman St. It's an impressive brick building, built in the Italian Renaissance Revival style, designed by the firm of Frost & Granger out of Chicago. The first floor was used as the passenger /freight depot and the second floor was offices for the Lakeshore Div. of the C&NW. But what catches your eye is that dominating five story clock tower that's been a visual landmark since it was built. Passenger service ended in 1971. In 1996 Titledown Brewery moved in and stayed until 2020. Currently it houses a Gastropub, www.thedepotgreenbay.com. Green Bay still has its 1898 Milwaukee Road depot, also designed by Frost & Granger, located at 400 S. Washington St. but lost the 1897 Green Bay & Western depot to arson in 1977.



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.

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Important links :

WisARP on the Web: www.wisarp.info WisARP on Facebook: [tinyurl.com/WisARPFb](https://www.facebook.com/tinyurl.com/WisARPFb)

All Aboard Wisconsin: www.allaboardwisconsin.com/

All Aboard Minnesota: www.allaboardmn.org/

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First class



#8, Empire Builder, at the Oakwood Interlocking (Six & Half Mile Rd in Racine, MP 70.2), Al Baker, Apr 2022

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