

# Badger Rails

## Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers (WisARP)

Volume 41, Issue 4

4th Quarter 2023

---

### **WisARP Fall Membership Meeting in West Allis** – *Dave Rasmussen*

Kudos to Mark Quam and Terry Brown for their online meeting preparation and slate of speakers starting with Derrick James – Director, Government Affairs, Amtrak; Lisa Stern – Chief of Railroads and Harbors, Wisconsin Department of Transportation; Scott Rogers – Eau Claire Chamber of Commerce and Jim Mathews – Rail Passenger Association, Washington DC via Zoom. After break, Trevor Jung, Transit & Mobility Director, City of Racine; Andrew Davis, Streetcar System Manager, City of Milwaukee; and Ethan Johnson, Senior Engineer, South Eastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission.

**Election:** Susan Foote-Martin replaces Terry Brown as Vice President Public Relations and Tim Kiefer is our new Secretary after our loss of Robert Fisher. All other officers continued their roles.

The **WisARP Spring 2024 Membership Meeting** will be in the Dells April 6. Discussion of the TCMC Train starting in 2024 was discussed, also blogged here on Reddit including WisDOT links, shared here for an unedited view (warning) of public opinion: <https://www.reddit.com/r/wisconsin/s/zdp7SLeBlN>

### **Talking to your Legislator 101** - *Susan Foote-Martin*

Contacting your Legislator can seem like a daunting task but many of our elected officials actually enjoy hearing from you. They often need more details on an issue before casting their vote on a final bill. Remember that you are their constituent and they work for you. And as a taxpayer, you are paying their salary.

Our members recently responded to a WisARP email Action Alert by contacting their Representatives regarding the HR Appropriations Act 2024 HR (THUD 4820) which would have cut Amtrak's funding by 64%! Because of the actions of passenger rail advocates, the vote on this has been indefinitely delayed.

Some things to keep in mind when you call, email or set up an in person meeting with your Legislator:

- Be respectful
- Tell the truth
- Use time wisely
- Garner support from them
- Be specific on the topic
- Ask for action
- Thank them

Contacting your Legislators should be comfortable and convenient for you. Share information, know the issue and be professional. Remember that knowledge is powerful and each of us matters. We can make a difference on how a person votes.

Find your Legislator here: <https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/My-Elected-Officials>

### **Keystone Environmental and Economic Benefits of Passenger Rail** - *Susan Foote-Martin*

**Keystone.** Oxford dictionary: “keystone” as “the central part of a policy or system on which all else depends.” Cornerstone; Linchpin; Foundation.

Passenger rail can be a *keystone* tool for sustainable travel for Wisconsin. When considering the environmental and economic benefits of passenger rail for this article, I was excited to have the word “keystone” appear in a thought bubble, and I grabbed onto it!

Looking for a path to a bipartisan solution in the back-and-forth conversations about our need to get something done quickly and efficiently, about a warming planet is of paramount importance. Exploring the many environmental and economic benefits of passenger rail gives us a chance to look for a solution, as you might order dinner from a Chinese menu. Take one solution from the “A” list for conservatives and one from the “B” list for independents and from the “C” list, an environmental choice.

**“A” Conservative List:** Strong ROI (Return on Investment) For every \$1 spent is \$2.44 in economic, environmental, safety, and time savings benefits (TCMC corridor). More than \$159 million over 30 years!

**“B” Independent List:** More jobs created, communities connected, tourism increases, more freight rail capacity created.

**“C” Environmental List:** Using the TCMC corridor with two round trips daily takes an estimated over 124,000 people out of their cars and puts them on the train annually. Trains are considered the top environmental mode of travel and the most energy efficient way to travel followed by air and lastly, automobile travel.

**“Fortune Cookie”** Inside, there are 5 blank strips of paper. Please fill each blank paper in with your 5 favorite benefits of increased passenger rail in Wisconsin.

I could create a long list of statistics of benefits to passenger rail and I’m sure that you have probably seen them before. But, when looking at the conservative, independent and environmental examples, you can see that all three categories are compatible, interchangeable and bipartisan. One can be comfortable ordering all of these choices.

Wisconsin has been both a leader and a follower in the climate change arena. Past Governors and their administrations have been on a roller coaster ride of passenger rail projects that have been slow to evolve or even stopped. Increasing passenger rail as a keystone transportation solution, “the central part of a policy or system on which all else depends” is an idea whose time has come.

### **Amtrak 10-point Pledge** – *Dave Rasmussen*

Amtrak Customer Service recently posted a broad ranging list of their commitment to customers in station and onboard, to get us to destinations safely, promptly and aiming to provide high quality service that exceeds our expectations. Reading this can help us all experience the stress-free ease of traveling with them. <https://www.amtrak.com/amtrak-customer-service-commitments>

- 1 Get us to destinations safely and promptly along with timely communication of known delays and cancellations.
- 2 Offer convenient trip modification options
- 3 Provide cancellations without penalty
- 4 Issue prompt refunds
- 5 Continually improve our services to customers with disabilities / seniors/ minors
- 6 Care for checked baggage
- 7 Put safety as the top priority in an uncontrollable event
- 8 Address inconveniences resulting from cancellations and missed connections
- 9 Take care of us onboard during disruptions in service
- 10 Provide a prompt response to our questions, suggestions or concerns.

### **Midwest Interstate Rail Passenger Commission Annual Meeting – Brian Nelson, President, All Aboard Minnesota**

The Interstate Rail Passenger Commission (MIPRC) held its annual meeting last month in Normal, Ill. This eight-state commission is responsible for helping states build out their state rail plans and building out a broader mid-west passenger rail plan.

Most states are waiting for the Federal Railroad Administration to select winners in the Corridor ID program, which state DOT's have applied for last spring 2023. The FRA will help with study money and planning resources for corridors selected, which is expected to be announced in December 2023. Some of the highlights included Michigan, seeking to expand service frequencies on all three of their state corridor routes and expand their 110-mph speed limit. Another is Wisconsin, wanting to extend Hiawatha service from Milwaukee to Green Bay and Madison, along with a third Twin Cities to Chicago train routed through Eau Claire, WI. Another Midwest state, Indiana, wants to decrease the travel time between Indianapolis and Chicago and return the Cardinal to daily.

The MIPRC itself applied for a \$5 Million federal grant to build out the mid-west passenger rail plan which was not granted. Minnesota gains new representation on the Council with Senator Rob Kupec from Moorhead replacing Rep. Alice Hausman who retired. Senator Kupec is a strong proponent of adding daytime passenger service from St. Paul to Fargo/Moorhead, which AAMN has worked on for years. We look forward to a strong partnership with Senator Kupec.

The AAM web site also states that sources close to the **Northern Lights Express** (Twin Cities to Duluth) project informed them that the work is nowhere near "shovel ready" as is often cited. The final design and construction study, along with the environmental impact study - both necessary to secure federal grants, are at the end of their shelf lives and need to be updated. This update will take approximately two years, when negotiations with BNSF Railway will need to be restarted. The next step would be applying for and receiving federal matching grants before construction could begin to upgrade the existing freight railway for passenger train speeds. This entire process is estimated to take from seven to ten years, according to Greg Mathis, Minnesota DOT State Planning Director for Passenger Rail. This information was also discussed at the AAM 10th Anniversary event on November 18, 2023.

### **Pop Up Metro – Dave Rasmussen**

Rail entrepreneur Henry Posner is promoting Pop Up Metro, a more affordable way to try out passenger service through his co-founding of Railroad Development Corporation (RDC) which owns the Iowa Interstate Railroad along with operations in England, France, Germany, Belgium and Peru. The German subsidiary, RDC Deutschland, will operate five routes using new Stadler Flirt battery-electric trainsets (<https://www.stadlerail.com/en/flirt-akku/details/>). In the US Posner is demonstrating this system at the Rockhill

(Pa) Trolley Museum's 1.8-mile line using remanufactured Vivarail 230 dmu cars from Britain.

The 36-ton, 60-foot rail cars were converted to run on Lithium Iron Magnesium Phosphate batteries, safer and with longer life cycle than lithium-ion batteries so with two sets of 60 cells, the train can run 60 miles on a full charge depending on grade and speed. They include regenerative braking and be fully fast charged in ten minutes trackside. For more info see <http://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/pop-up-metro-aims-to-provide-affordable-passenger-operation/>

Frank Ingram says the Vivarail story is interesting, [Vivarail - Wikipedia](#) , but mainly about converting old London Underground stock into Diesel Multiple Units. They did have one Battery EMU prototype. [Battery electric multiple unit - Wikipedia](#) . He thinks the most likely use of Battery Units as a way of extending existing electrified services to none electrified lines with a range of sixty to 100 miles. In the mid-west the South Shore could extend to Fort Wayne in the south and O'Hare in the north. Batteries also mean that no expensive catenary is needed in complex terminals or depots. Complete new trains would not be needed as a car with batteries and pantograph can be inserted into an existing consist.

### **2023 WisDOT Annual Freight Rail Conference – Dave Rasmussen**

A number of our members zoomed into the meeting but Clark Johnson, Susan Foote-Martin, Chris Ott, Dave Schwengel (a past WisARP President) and I networked as Wisarp and related passenger train advocates. Susan chatted with the Commissioner of Railroads, Don Vruwick, at our table. Lisa Stern, Chief of Railroads and Harbors directed the program. and I had a few minutes with her about my Venture seating dilemma and was told they were looking into this but that I may find more room in the business class seats yet to appear. (re BR Issue two where I asked if people with longer torsos would have to forgo these trains.)



Susan and I arrived just after the meeting had started. Someone was talking about tracking intermodal locations. UP would talk at the end of the program but wasn't doing double stacks through Wisconsin mostly because of Milwaukee clearance issues in the trenches below bridges north of St Francis and some other locations. Alex Gramovot, Chief, Planning Section, WisDOT, laid out the Wisconsin Rail Plan 2050. <https://www.wisdotplans.gov/plan/wrp2050>

There were a number of interesting talks on grade crossing safety and the complications when all involved parties don't comprehensively agree on the technicalities of their features. Pre-emptive crossing logic and technology was addressed including for doubletrack mainlines like Wauwatosa.

The passenger part of the conference, delivered by Ismael Cuevas and Arun Rao of Amtrak, and Rich Kedzior, Arun's successor at WisDOT, didn't contain anything new, except that Ismael said that a solution to the Illini signaling issue had been found and that would mean the Superliners would be going back to LD service.

Interest of many of us peaked listening to Mark Bristol, Network Development, Union Pacific, talk about passenger rail and the Eau Claire, Chippewa/ St. Croix project and UP's perspective on passenger rail in general. Mark said that their Direct Access Model could be more effective to deliver sooner, involved with the new Rockford Service to be operated by Metra. He said of the Eau Claire <> Twin Cities line having capacity for 2-4 round trips a day for the fast-growing communities now driving, but that the agreement had to leave room for future capacity improvements if freight needed it. He also mentioned the Stadler Flirt DMU's and the professional advocacy by Scott Rogers and the West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition.

He seemed to say that UP as a business would rather deal directly with their customers than adding government layers to it. Wes Lujan of UP writes of their model “The power of partnership – not command-and-control, top-down preferences – will build a true legacy for elected policy makers and passenger agencies. There are win-win projects that can be accomplished through mutually beneficial partnerships to expand passenger rail options on Union Pacific. The best partnerships come from building trust and an understanding of the need to grow together. We should make that the model – not an approach that relies on unilateral coercion.” [https://www.up.com/aboutup/community/inside\\_track/freight-passenger-rail-better-partners.htm](https://www.up.com/aboutup/community/inside_track/freight-passenger-rail-better-partners.htm)

Someone asked if Cuevas and Rao were around to hear his comments. Indeed, they were. Bristol went on about some other UP freight projects in the state. The original Chicago & North Western looped around the south side of Milwaukee in the late 1800’s, undercutting about three miles of track from St Francis west to Mitchell Yard. Now that track goes under roads and freeway bridges, lacking height to haul double stack intermodal containers. These will have to be further undercut while finding a way not to flood.

The last two talks at the State Rail Freight meeting involved the rehab of the Merrimac bridge of the former Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, WSOR now serving Baraboo, and the new DeLong Grain Export Facility at the Port of Milwaukee, serving international customers by UP, CPKC and some short haul trucks.

### **Tomah stations platform improvements – Terry Brown**

For the second time in six years Tomah station is in the process of getting a new boarding platform. The new version of the platform will be at the proper height to meet the Superliner cars and be ADA compliant, meaning the era of the step stools will be over at least at the Tomah station.

In addition to proper height for boarding trains, the added feature should eliminate the need for wintertime maintenance during winter storms. The new boarding platform will include a heating system within the concrete called Hydronic Heating. This will potentially reduce or eliminate the need for, or the responsibilities of a station caretaker; or a CPKC employee clearing their property to maintain the boarding platform next to the trains. Connecting sidewalks and other paths leading to the boarding platform will still need to be maintained since they will not have hydronic pipes under their path.

### **HYDRONIC HEATING**

Most of us may remember the age-old form of Hydronic Heating with a radiator in each room of the house. Some of you may already know the benefits of contemporary Hydronic Heating in your home. The alleged benefits are many, including lower cost of heating, a cleaner environment heating your abode and the luxurious feeling of rolling out of bed and standing on a warm floor. The new boarding platforms will need to have a new boiler installed somewhere near the platform. In the case of Tomah, Amtrak needed to negotiate a space in the old Milwaukee Road station building now owned by CPKC Railroad. In this instance, a bit more than half of the Tomah Station is vacant storage for CPKC. A small room will be constructed for the boiler with outdoor access allowing a repair technician access to repair a non-working boiler without access to the CPKC storage areas.



This does mean that there will be an inconvenience to passengers boarding and detraining in Tomah during the final construction, currently planned for the summer of 2024. The contractor will be bringing in intermodal container cars again like in 2017, which will serve as the waiting room and restrooms for Amtrak passengers during the actual platform construction process.

The above picture was taken on October 23, 2023. For the current work to progress, more than half of the existing platform was removed. For the Holiday Season 2023, the existing waiting room and handicap access ramp will be functional. Depending on passenger detraining needs, the Empire Builder may need to make two stops at the shortened platform length.

For those that were at the Fall WisARP meeting, October 28, you might have noticed Chuck Quirnbach from Milwaukee Public Radio was at the meeting. WUWM has run a story about the TCMC train, linked above. The WisARP statement in the story was shuttled to Quirnbach by my wife while I was driving. [Second Chicago-Milwaukee-Twin Cities passenger train on hold until 2024 | WUWM 89.7 FM - Milwaukee's NPR](#)

### **Passenger Rail Advisory Committee (PRAC) – Dave Rasmussen**

The Surface Transportation Board is creating a Commuter and Passenger Rail Advisory Committee of 18 members including representation from Amtrak, commuter rail, non-Amtrak intercity operators, a state only served by Amtrak long distance, Class 1 railroads, short line railroads, passenger rail advocacy groups, a rail shipper, rail labor and three at-large members.

Chairman Martin J. Oberman said in a statement (Monday, Nov. 13). “Once we are able to seek nominations and select members for the inaugural committee, the Board looks forward to working with the members to better understand the issues impacting passenger rail and hear their valuable insights. Based on the Board’s very positive experience with our other advisory committees, I fully expect the creation of this new passenger-oriented committee will prove equally valuable to the Board members.”

The committee will provide the board with advice on improving efficiency on passenger rail routes; reducing disputes between passenger rail carriers and freight rail hosts regarding the use of freight rail carrier-owned facilities and infrastructure for passenger service, including passenger on-time performance issues; and improving regulatory processes related to intercity passenger rail to the benefit of the public, the communities served by passenger rail, and the environment.

In December 2022 the board selected a senior staff member, Neil Moyer, to serve as acting director of the agency’s Office of Passenger Rail to investigate and analyze Amtrak on-time performance matters. In July the STB started an investigation into the on-time performance of Amtrak’s Sunset Limited service and last year the board held hearings on the dispute between Amtrak and CSX, Norfolk Southern, and the Port of Mobile, Ala., regarding the proposed revival of Gulf Coast service between Mobile and New Orleans

### **Ryde Racine and Sturtevant Amtrak – Dave Rasmussen**

Two years ago, I'd asked a friend of mine to tell her story of using Racine Ryde bus service to get from her stay at a condo north of 4 Mile Road and Hwy 32 to the Sturtevant Amtrak station to get to Chicago for medical appointments. She was able to make some multi-bus connections and also needed to use Uber or Lyft when outside the bus system’s hours. Another time I was at the station on a weekend and remember a lady who came up on Amtrak with the intent to buy groceries at a Walmart Super Center here, sitting at the bus stop, but I sadly had to tell her there was no bus service on weekends.

Ryde Racine confirmed their web schedules for Route 20 which actually serves the station at 6:31AM westbound

and 7.19AM eastbound. All other bus connections involve Route 27 on County Hwy H (Renaissance Blvd) across from the Cinema. For more info see: <https://www.ryderacine.com/>

### **Is 7'2" a handicap? Could I give anyone some height? – Dave Rasmussen**

I attend the Milwaukee Auto Show to see of the U.S. fleet what I can get in and safely see out of, for when I rent cars on trips or if I need to replace my personal vehicle. Last year my list was five cars, but only three felt comfortable. Most models I cannot see stop lights with my head on the roof line.

I recently found a Hyundai Ioniq5 EV with head and leg room at the apprehension of myself and the dealer. After a fun test drive, I found I had to boost my head up to see the stop lights through the moon roof OVER the seam of the windshield and the moon roof. I decided that inch is another blind spot like the rear-view mirror which most people sit below. I'm renting a Kia Niro EV for an upcoming trip, but I don't fit well enough to drive regularly.

My "new" car is a 2003 Toyota Camry with 33k miles for \$9000, replacing mom's 2002 264k-mile Camry. The Camrys outside 02-06 don't fit me. The \$90k Ford F150 Lightning fits well but I don't want an EV yet.

The second issue of Badger Rails reported that tops of the Venture coach seats hit some in the shoulders. Think how that works for back support or keeping my chest straight to breath. Let's not get into how my upper legs are only supported at the butt and my knees with no seat in between. My doctor says that could explain my leg pain.

On my last few flights, I've noticed oxygen desaturation at high altitudes and when hyperventilating didn't work, the last time emergency oxygen was deployed. For me to sit in coach I only fit in the exit rows or the bulkhead. Now carrying a portable oxygen concentrator, I can no longer sit in exit, nor in bulkhead, where I can't put the device under the seat ahead. Thus, I've been forced to pay for Economy Premium or Business Class.

I'm going to compose a trip essay reviewing an upcoming trip in December. I'm flying First Class on United to San Diego, then the Coaster and the Coast Starlight to San Jose. Next flying on Alaska Air Economy Premium to Portland and taking the #28 Empire Builder returning to Milwaukee in a Roomette knowing it's only six foot and some inches long but my back and chest will like me better in the Roomette than in coach. I got it for \$750 holiday pricing. I know I will be ducking in the Superliners, but I can stretch in the stairwells and on long station stops. Do they have seats in the showers? This story will be continued!! I'm getting ready to become horizontal!

### **Julie's Java in Columbus Railcam**

Now we can watch trains at Columbus, Wisconsin, from anywhere, thanks to Julie's Java House Live Railcam. If you're ever there, buy a coffee to support this webcam. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5BjrbIGpK8> .

---

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.

WisARP President is John Parkyn, Stoddard, WI, (608)386-3287, email:[cen10297@centurytel.net](mailto:cen10297@centurytel.net)

Send membership questions/address changes to: [wisarpmembership@gmail.com](mailto:wisarpmembership@gmail.com)

Send comments or new items to the Editor at: [badgerrails@gmail.com](mailto:badgerrails@gmail.com)

### **Important links :**

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

All Aboard Wisconsin: [www.allaboardwisconsin.com/](http://www.allaboardwisconsin.com/)

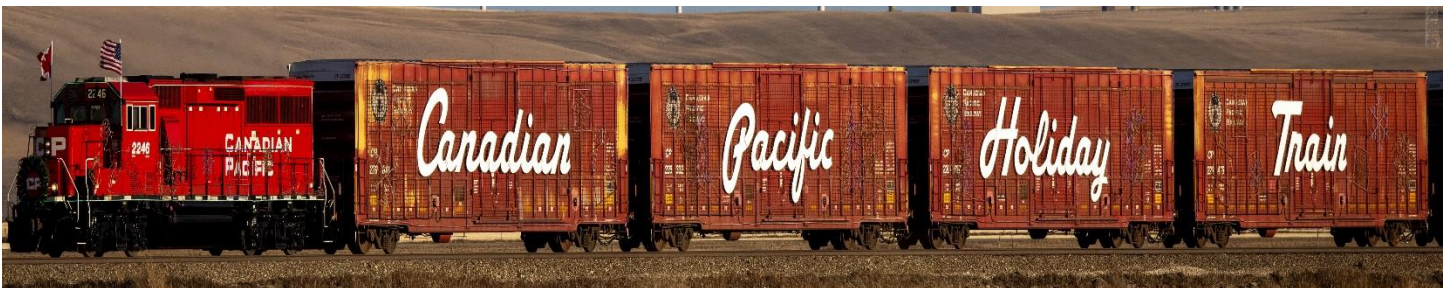
All Aboard Minnesota: [www.allaboardmn.org/](http://www.allaboardmn.org/)

**WisARP**

**4230 N Oakland Ave, Box 259**

**Shorewood, WI 53211-2042**

**First class**



**New to WisARP ? Join Us ! We would Love to Have You !**

**Send us your name, email address, mailing address, city, state and zip.**

**Send to: WisARP, 4230 N. Oakland Ave., Box 259, Shorewood, WI 53211-2042**