



Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers (WisARP)

FALL MEETING 2023 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

November 22, 2023 update- The following are the questions from attendees both in-person and on Zoom from our Saturday, October 28, 2023 meeting. Note that most of the speakers have not replied to answer requests at this point.

Special consideration goes to Jim Mathews of the National Rail Passengers Association for his contributions in the CHAT BOX during the meeting. The give-and-take was outstanding for those that participated online.

Trevor Jung- are routes and stops identified? *(TB - I don't recall specifically what this question is about.)*

Trevor Jung -could the city of Racine contract with Metra for commuter rail service by passing new state legislation? *(TB – This is probably a long-winded answer that travels through some legal quicksand and then goes down a track no one wants to travel.)*

Andrew Davis-can the streetcar system be expanded to take advantage of the stadium parking? Commuters could park at the stadium and take the streetcar to work or other city events.

Andrew Davis-can Sunday service on the HOP extend to 10:30 PM to catch the last Badger Bus from Madison?

Andrew Davis- RE: L line end bracket- How does a rider distinguish the L line from the M line?

Lisa Stern and Derrick James -- I'm not the only person with a long torso. The venture seats are horrible if you're taller than the average man at six feet tall. If you could change future cars to have some seats with flat backs, I believe you would have more comfortable passengers.

Lisa Stern -- Has inflation raised the subsidy needed for the Hiawatha service?

(Is it possible to get an answer longer than "yes" or "no"?)

Is it possible to get high speed service at 110 mph between Milwaukee and Chicago? What would it take to create this service?

Who will own the TCMC train sets? Amtrak? Or the Midwest pool? Or WisDOT/ MnDOT?

(TB - I think Lisa glossed over the answer to this question during her presentation.)

Amtrak Thruway bus question - Is it possible to extend bus service from Green Bay through Manitowoc or to Door County? Maybe a second Thruway bus?

(different person) Are more Amtrak Thruway routes in Wisconsin under consideration?

Specifically, will Victorian era rail bridges on South First St. (Milwaukee?) ever be replaced?

Derrick & Lisa- The Milwaukee Airport rail station seems essentially a commuter park and ride. Is anyone looking at better transit and intermodal connections?

Is there any benefit for creating more local commissions like the Chippewa St. Croix Rail Commission?

Is anyone looking at tax incremental financing or other forms of value capture to offset Intercity Passenger Train subsidies? *(This question would have been the topic of the first group discussion but was axed due to time overages.)*

Derrick- When will the South Station at Boston be back to normal before high-rise construction? Normal for decent passenger service in total?

Jim Mathews-how can we connect with The Rail Passengers Association to advocate for full funding of the Federal Railroad Administration so that all programs that the bipartisan infrastructure law that was passed (into law) are appropriated fully. Please give us a contact from your organization.

TB – start with < NARPRAIL.org >. Go to the bottom of the page and click on CONTACT US. I would suggest starting with the email of narp@narptrail.org. My experience has been an appropriate “someone” will give you a reply. I believe most of the employees are still working remotely if not on assignment somewhere out of the office. Becoming a member of NARP with a good email address will get you their occasional “call to action” emails that will figure out your elected representatives in Washington D.C.

Jim Mathews-- In regard to CRISI, please expand on eligible (funding) for Senate earmarks.

CHAT BOX

Venture Coach Comments

00:56:56 David Wheeler: *New Amtrak Hiawatha Coaches do not have reclining seats.*

01:55:34 Charles Bensinger: *Yes. New Amtrak Hiawatha coach seats not nearly as comfortable as older Hiawatha coach seats. New seats lack serious reclining option, smaller seat area, hard seats, no footrests. Bummer!*

01:56:59 Jim Mathews, RPA CEO: @Charles Bensinger: For what it’s worth, those seats were “chosen” by Illinois DOT, not Amtrak. The new Airo trainsets will have much better seats. I know because I sat in a bunch of them in the Philadelphia warehouse the design team set up for design reviews!

TB: Interesting comment. Did IDOT choose the seats before Brightline signed the contract for their coach cars from Siemens? Are the Brightline coach cars completely different from the Amtrak versions? The Airo Train?

01:10:45 Jerry Ratliff: *Lisa, Is WisDOT still the lead on the second train project?*

01:38:11 Jay Timmerman: *What is RPA doing to keep the pressure on Amtrak so that Amtrak improves its' accounting and financial reporting?*

01:39:24 Jerry Ratliff: *Thanks for all your efforts. I want to know 2 things. When do you think all the LD trains will have their full consist or all the cars, so they don't sell out so fast with higher ticket prices? Second, do you see any timeline for improvement of On Time Performance on LD trains? Thanks*

02:02:19 Jim Mathews, RPA CEO: @Jerry Ratliff On your first question (at least that I can see in the chat.) I’ll let you know. I’m due for a consist-planning briefing sometime in the next week or two. As for on-time performance...on the one hand, we have more tools at our disposal than ever: a supportive FRA and Surface Transportation Board, an aggressive Amtrak legal department, and some — not enough — congressional support. On the other hand, the GOP has already introduced in the House something called the “Freight First Act” and is threatening a markup of that bill during this session. I’m not sure I believe they’re organized enough to do it, but there it is. It will go nowhere because there’s no companion measure in the Senate...nonetheless the idea is a threat of sorts.

01:57:08 David Wheeler: *(Derrick) Does Amtrak have a recycling program? A lot of Aluminum cans are discarded from trains. Same for plastic bottles.*

01:57:55 Jim Mathews, RPA @David Wheeler They do, but compliance varies. A lot of it depends on passengers doing their part.

01:58:13 Charles Bensinger: Jim: Will the Hiawatha receive Airo transits?

02:00:14 Jim Mathews, RPA @Charles Bensinger Unfortunately, no. The Cascades will get the first trains during the five-year rollout period. Then they'll start running on other state-supported services and in the Northeast Corridor, replacing Regional consists. In addition to the Cascades and the Regionals, these new trainsets are expected to run on the Palmetto, plus the state-supported Adirondack, Carolinian, Downeaster, Empire Service, Ethan Allen Express, Keystone Service, Maple Leaf, New Haven/Springfield Service (Amtrak Hartford Line and Valley Flyer), Pennsylvanian, Vermonter, and Virginia services.

02:03:52 Charles Bensinger: When will the Cascades Service receive the Airo transits? That service sure needs better cars. Present ones are really bad. Traveled on them last spring.

02:04:32 Jim Mathews, RPA CEO: @Charles Bensinger Probably 2026, if we can stay on schedule.

03:14:46 Scott Rogers: Thanks for a good meeting. I'm a member but need to run.

03:17:44 Kenneth Hunzicker: Thank you for all the good information.

00:47:17 Steve Moscarelli: In case you missed this, it's about the inability to reliably return on time to Milwaukee and Chicago from St. Paul, Omaha, Kansas City and St. Louis: <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2023/3/20/23637380/amtrak-expands-service-2023-2024-st-paul-minneapolis-new-train-cars>