



# TCMC NEWSLETTER

## Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers

Volume 5, Number 5

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### ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS...

#### A Train? Really?

Mariah Carey and Walter Afanasieff wrote this song almost 30 years ago you might have heard. It's widely considered to be a Christmas Standard now.

Personally, I've become well acquainted with Model Train Shows over the past two years, and I've seen young and old, male and female look at trains with growing eyes and interest. Beauty, they say, is in the eye of the beholder.

Let's cut the options here down to a passenger train.

Not a model train, but an American passenger train. There are still many shapes and designs of moving rail cars that carry many people. I'm not carrying favor for one particular design. How about

a train that rolls safely down the track? A train that's clean, warm in the winter, cool in the summer, comfortable upholstery that isn't visually unattractive and has a toilet that works as it should. Have you been on a train that failed any of these requests lately? I hope not.

Once upon a time, or maybe it was 2015, Amtrak released a study implying that a second daily train

between Milwaukee, the Twin Cities and Chicago would be a good idea. It would travel on the same track as the Amtrak Empire Builder. That would hold the cost of constructing the train down compared to an entirely new routing of a train. As the early studies and analysis was being completed a voice from the front of the room estimated it would be the end of 2024 before this train could roll. It wouldn't happen until all the construction improvements were completed. Hmmm. That's Nine Years from start to finish.

Guess what's around the corner? 2024.



Then an important voice from the freight railroad hosting the train said you didn't need to have the construction finished before this train could start. Let's use an old saying, the railroad was proceeding on Good Faith, and Best of Intentions by all parties involved that the agreed upon construction

would happen. Would that mean the train would appear sooner than 2024? Guess not.

Six months ago, what was clear and bright, eventually became dark and murky. What happened? I do know what happened. 21<sup>st</sup> century adults.

*The picture at the top of the page is courtesy of the Canadian Pacific Kansas City Limited. The picture at the bottom of the page is courtesy of KansasCity.com.*

## TCMC UPDATE

During the October Chippewa/ St. Croix Rail Commission meeting, WisDOT Passenger Rail Manager Rich Kedzior admitted there's been no tangible progress on getting the TCMC train on the rails. It appears the TCMC is mired in legal quicksand which ended hope that the train would roll in 2023. Several parties including Amtrak are now saying the TCMC will roll in the second quarter of 2024. Keep your fingers crossed, but don't hurt yourself doing it.



increasing the frequency of Hiawatha trains to ten trains per day from the current seven trains per day, the additional boarding platform at the Airport station will be the most visible construction progress from 2023.

The picture on this page, taken during the summer of 2023 at the Milwaukee Airport Station, shows how the Hiawatha has occasionally been forced to board and detrain passengers from the west track. A decent quality walkway has been installed at the north end of the

## WHAT'S GOOD FOR THE HIAWATHA IS GOOD FOR THE TCMC

The last TCMC Newsletter contained news that the Milwaukee Airport Station construction project had begun during July 2023. Progress on that construction project continues while another Milwaukee area Hiawatha project reached a critical juncture this fall.

A boarding platform on the west side of the tracks with a crossover building like the Sturtevant station is the goal for the Milwaukee Airport Station. As a condition of

platform and appears to be as safe as possible.

Precision placement of the train becomes priority number one for the engineer if a stop is required on the west track. Note the extra Amtrak employee watching passengers walk over the track, and no doubt watching for any train movement on the east track approaching the platform.

At the WisARP General Membership Meeting on October 28, 2023, in West Allis, Lisa Stern WisDOT Chief of Railroads and Harbors announced the environmental review for the Muskego Yard project had finished.

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Now WisDOT is turning to the FRA for additional funding for the increased cost of the project. Unforeseen environmental issues were discovered in Muskego Yard during the initial environmental process creating a secondary review. Obviously, the cost of the project has jumped compared to the original price tag. What was originally about \$45 million has doubled to an estimated \$93 million. An additional CRISI grant will be sought to cover the balance. *Thanks to Bill Becwar for taking the photo on this page. Becwar is known for hosting the Friends of Milwaukee Streetcars page on Facebook.*

## 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, former Vice President- Public Relations for WisARP and is solely responsible for its content.

*No content in this newsletter was created by Artificial Intelligence.*



## CHANGE OF DIRECTION AT THE MILWAUKEE CONNECTION FOR THE TCMC

Amtrak and WisDOT have apparently changed their course of direction on how the TCMC will be handled between Milwaukee and Chicago while the Hiawatha train is limited to seven trains per day. There are several conditions steering this issue.

Going back to Covid times Amtrak hinted they would run the TCMC to Milwaukee, and passengers continuing to Chicago would need to transfer trains at the Milwaukee Intermodal Station. Ditto for northbound passengers out of Chicago needing to transfer in Milwaukee to a TCMC train continuing west towards La Crosse and St. Paul. It has been discussed this fall that the TCMC will be one contiguous train running from Chicago through Milwaukee and on to St. Paul and back. In very clear language, this means Amtrak is counting on CPKC to run the TCMC on time from the Twin Cities to Milwaukee and not soil the overall on time performance of the Hiawatha.

The Amtrak Hiawatha has been running at seven trains per day in each direction since April 2003, save for Covid restrictions. WisDOT has long desired to increase the frequency to 10 trains per day. Currently

Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) is one of the big obstacles keeping the Hiawatha at seven trains per day. There are several conditions on the table CPKC is demanding before allowing the Hiawatha to increase to 10 trains per day. The Milwaukee Airport Station platform expansion and The Muskego Yard bypass track are discussed earlier in this newsletter.

In the background the Hiawatha train also must deal with Metra, the owner of the track between Rondout and Chicago Union Station. Amtrak and WisDOT still need to negotiate with Metra to increase the number of “train slots” in a heavily traveled corridor for a 10 train per day Hiawatha.



## NEW PLATFORM FOR TOMAH STATION

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.

The picture on this page shows the Tomah Station platform construction in progress on October 23, 2023. The additional features in the ground are related to the use of steam pipes for Hydronic Heating with the new concrete. When completed the Tomah platform will not require salting or shoveling when winter weather is happening. Walkways leading up to the platform will not have this feature.

This story appeared in the recent Badger Rails available to WisARP members via e-mail December 1, 2023. Printed copies of Vol41 N4 will appear around December 10, 2023, in select train stations. A complete version of this story

with more pictures will be available at our website, **WisARP.info**, on December 15, 2023.

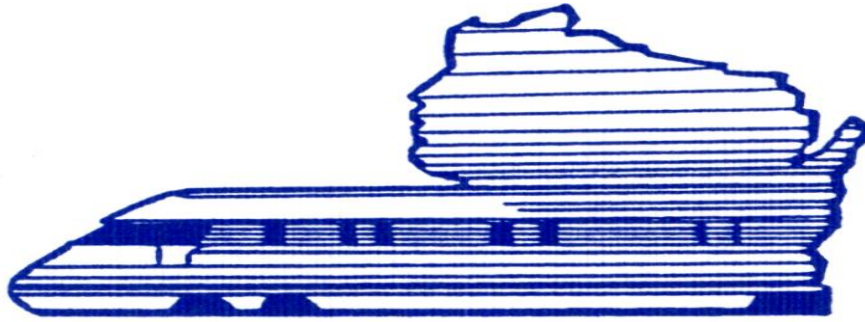
**Another story TCMC Newsletter is following:**

### RAMSEY COUNTY APPLIES FOR TCMC FUNDING

When the TCMC train does run, what happens to the trainset that stays in St. Paul overnight? Ramsey County and

Amtrak have applied to the Federal Railroad Administration to create a storage track at St. Paul Union Depot. This track will have the capability of storing two trainsets, and it will allow full routine maintenance of the train overnight. This storage track will not interfere with regular operation of the Amtrak Empire Builder or Canadian Pacific Kansas City freight trains. More information on this application will appear in the next TCMC Newsletter in 2024.

**Check us out on the web at WisARP.info.**



## Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers (WisARP) **Holiday donation 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.

If you like the news and information the Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers provides with our newsletters and website, please consider a year-end donation in addition to your annual dues payment. Our staff continues to supply the latest news and informative reading and is continually reaching out to more rail passengers to keep spreading the news. For example, in 2022 WisARP supplied new brochure holders in the Tomah and Wisconsin Dells stations. An extra donation will help us continue to support passenger rail projects. Our regular focus continues to be 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, 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 (2024) is \$5 with this special TCMC Newsletter form! Just \$15 per year afterwards.

Jim Sponholz, WisARP VP-Membership- December 2023

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

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

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