



TMACOG Passenger Rail Committee Agenda & Notes – May 2022

Thursday, May 26, 2022, 2:30 p.m. via Videoconference

Welcome and introductions – Tim Porter, Committee Chair

1. Update on the Ann Arbor to Traverse City passenger rail plan and progress report on other Michigan plans and developments – James Bruckbauer, Transportation Director, Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities

Jim Bruckbauer from Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities, a private non-profit based in Traverse City, Michigan, presented on their plan to connect Ann Arbor and Traverse City by passenger rail. Presentation and discussion highlights:

- Groundwork began working on a rail connection between Ann Arbor and Traverse City in 2012 in conjunction with MDOT.
- Rail line is owned by MDOT, and the Great Lakes Central RR uses the line to haul various products from northern Michigan.
- Track repairs are ongoing and 65% of the trackage is safe for 60 mph service.
- Project has received good public support as well as support from bipartisan legislators and from MDOT rail office.
- The project is included in the state long range transportation plan as well as the state rail plan, where it was the number one priority rail project.
- Funding for track upgrades has come from both public and private sources.
- There are approximately 90,000 students, including international, residing in communities along the rail line who would potentially use the rail service.
- Initial feasibility study was completed by Alex Metcalf and TEMS in 2018.
- Study looked at 25, 60, 90, and 110 mph scenarios, with the 60 to 80 mph range needed to compete with automobile travel and attract more ridership.
- From the study, the total cost for all needed track upgrades to 60 mph service is \$153 million in pre-COVID dollars, and \$244 million for 80 mph service.
- Because the freight being moved is not time sensitive, passenger service can be prioritized, and track upgrades will also maximize freight opportunities.
- Since 2018, funding for track repairs, mostly in the northern section, has been included in the state budget.
- Still needed is a business plan, ridership forecast, and service development plan as required by the FRA.
- The next study phase cost (\$1.2 million) will be included in the state's 2023 budget. The state will draft an RFP to complete the next phase.
- Demo rides from Ann Arbor to Traverse City may be organized in 2023.

We will continue to follow the progress of the Ann Arbor to Traverse City connection.

2. General discussion on passenger rail plans and developments in Michigan and Ohio – All Attendees

Highlights from the Michigan/Ohio discussion:

- Michigan is looking at establishing future commuter or regional service between Detroit and Ann Arbor.
- Some sections of the Detroit to Chicago Amtrak corridor (Kalamazoo to Porter, IN) have been improved to 110 mph standards, with more improvements planned.
- There is a plan to increase the train frequency from 3 to 6 on the Amtrak line.
- Ann Arbor and Detroit are planning new stations, depending on availability of funding. The Detroit station will cost approximately \$57 million.
- Other routes across Michigan are in the planning stages, including connections to Saginaw and Bay City and a possible connection to Windsor, Ontario.
- A connection from Toledo to Ann Arbor via the Ann Arbor RR would not connect to the Amtrak east-west line because there is no junction, only a bridge.
- Creating a junction between the Ann Arbor RR and Amtrak east-west line would be very costly and would have environmental limitations.
- The City of Toledo is moving forward on the next study phase of the Toledo to Detroit (or Detroit Metro Airport) project at a cost of \$300,000.

3. Update on various events and other topics:

Train Day Toledo 2022: highlights and insights – Bill Gill, All Aboard Ohio

National Train Day Toledo 2022 was held on Saturday, May 14 at MLK Plaza with an opening ceremony at 9:30 am. Approximately 2500 to 3000 guests attended the free event. Attractions included rail artist Craig Stauffer, the Ohio Valley Railcars, Romick's children's train, model train layouts of different gauges, Taylor's trolley tours, food trucks, and music.

Speakers included Richard Rudolph, Richard Harnish, Stu Nicholson, and Lou Hebert. Sponsors included TMACOG, Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority, NOPRA, All Aboard Ohio, BLE&T, and others. In-kind services donated to the event added up to a savings of \$3000. The event will be back in 2023.

National Infrastructure Bank proposed legislation – Tom Galloway, Vice Chair

NIB webinars and calls are ongoing. Several meetings have been held with legislators and others looking for support. Resolutions supporting the legislation have been submitted from several statewide entities and legislators. The legislation has received bipartisan support across Ohio. Organizers are hoping to get the support of U.S. Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur. Please check out the website and Facebook page for upcoming webinars and further updates: <https://www.nibcoalition.com/>.

TMACOG Transportation Legislative Agenda – Roger Streiffert, TMACOG

The update to the passenger rail policy brief of TMACOG's Transportation Legislative Agenda is complete. Thank you to all who submitted comments or suggestions. The full document, which is designed to inform legislators of important transportation issues facing the region, is updated every two years. TMACOG staff is looking for any further comments on the draft document from our regional partners before finalizing it later this year. A copy of the final passenger rail policy brief will be sent to all committee members, and the final draft of the full document will be shared with committee members later this year.

4. Roundtable discussion and committee member announcements – All Attendees

Stu Nicholson and All Aboard Ohio held a strategy session for Ohio MPOs on May 26, planning on next steps in supporting Ohio's passenger rail development plan. A TMACOG staff member in attendance reported that ideas were shared on how to keep pushing rail project development at the state level.

MORPC's (Columbus MPO) Interregional Connections Committee met on May 25. TMACOG staff gave an update on passenger rail planning efforts in the Toledo region. Also discussed was the Columbus plan for a passenger rail station in anticipation of Amtrak's 3C plus D corridor development.

Meeting Adjourned

Schedule of 2022 Passenger Rail Committee Meetings:

Thursday, May 19, 2022, 2:30 p.m.

Thursday, August 18, 2022, 2:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 17, 2022, 2:30 p.m.

Additional meetings scheduled as needed.