



TMACOG Passenger Rail Committee Agenda & Notes – February 2021

Thursday, February 18, 2021, 2:30 p.m. via Videoconference

Welcome and introductions – Tim Porter, Committee Chair

1. Biden administration's renewed support for rail and Amtrak's "visionary plan" for expansion – All Attendees

Biden administration Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg strongly supports passenger rail enhancements and expansion. We would anticipate expanded rail and transit funding in the coming years. Announced in January 2021, Amtrak has announced five priorities in their visionary plan for expansion:

- Sufficient federal funding, including \$1.5 billion in 2021.
- An intercity passenger rail trust fund, because passenger rail is the only mode of surface transportation without a federal trust fund for reliable, multi-year funding.
- Congressional support and statute updates to allow Amtrak access to freight railroads for new service or additional trains on existing service.
- Preference enforcement on freight rails to minimize delays.
- Nationwide expansion, especially on reliable corridor routes, usually less than 500 miles long.

Amtrak is looking to fully recover from the pandemic effects in 18 months to 2 years, including rehiring furloughed employees and revamping food service. Recovery is based on regaining a consistent stream of funding.

We'll continue to follow the Biden administration's plans for public transportation funding and development.

2. Amtrak's five corridor plan for Ohio and how this plan affects regional planning efforts - All Attendees

Another part of Amtrak's visionary plan is a five-corridor expansion plan for Ohio and surrounding states. The five corridors include: new service linking Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati, plus Dayton, known as the 3C corridor; Cleveland to NYC via Buffalo and Albany; Cleveland to NYC via Pittsburgh; Cleveland to Detroit via Toledo; Cincinnati to Chicago via Indianapolis. Discussion points from this topic included:

- The Toledo to Detroit connection is a project that the City of Toledo, TMACOG, and other partners have been planning and promoting for the last couple of years. If Amtrak is able to fund this connection, it would be a great cost savings for all those involved in the project.



- Amtrak would most likely connect to the MDOT-owned rail line that currently runs to Detroit and Pontiac. This line also runs westward to Ann Arbor and may eventually have a stop at Detroit Metro Airport.
- If Amtrak's five corridor plan is successful, it may lead to other rail connections in Ohio including MORPC's plan to connect Columbus to Chicago via Fort Wayne. If the Columbus-Ft Wayne-Chicago connection is completed, the next step could be a Detroit to Columbus connection via Toledo-Bowling Green-Findlay-Dunkirk, another long range TMACOG passenger rail plan.
- Capital improvement costs for the 3C corridor would be extremely expensive with the need for an entirely new rail line and right-of-way. Amtrak would look for state financial support after five years of operation, which could be a problem in Ohio.
- It's possible that a private passenger rail operator, who is not looking for any public financial support, may be interested in operating a 3C corridor route if they can operate at a profit.
- Because of the high cost and lack of state support for a 3C rail corridor, Amtrak may be more likely to build connections from their existing east-west national corridor. This would include the Toledo to Detroit connection and the new connections from Cleveland to Buffalo, Albany, and Pittsburgh. This may make the Toledo to Detroit connection more likely to move forward.

We will continue to follow and discuss developments in Amtrak's national and Ohio plans for expansion.

3. Reprise of the Lakeshore Corridor Initiative – Tim Porter

Tim briefly discussed the possible reprise of the Lakeshore Corridor Initiative with the possibility of increased federal funding for passenger rail. The Lakeshore corridor is a 960-mile rail corridor between New York and Chicago and includes Toledo. What is needed is faster, more reliable service, more frequent trains, daylight service, state-of-the-art trains, upgraded tracks, and station improvements.

Improved passenger rail funding on a national level is key to the success of this initiative. Regional and local support for improving service and upgrading stations is also very important. Support is needed from jurisdictions, economic development agencies, the private sector, and others. For train station improvements, Amtrak would need to push for improvements that are needed in Toledo and in other cities along the corridor.

4. Update on National Infrastructure Bank efforts – Tom Galloway, Vice Chair

Tom Galloway gave an update on efforts to establish a National Infrastructure Bank. There are many shovel-ready projects nationwide that are ready to go and need funding. The NIB concept would provide up to \$4 trillion at a 2% loan rate for



highway improvements, mass transit including passenger rail, water supply, housing, schools, electricity grids, broadband, and other projects.

The establishment of a NIB is supported nationwide and statewide by legislators, jurisdictions, MPOs, and other entities. Ohio State Representative Lisa Sobecki has recently introduced House Resolution HR 19 into the Ohio House of Representatives urging the U.S. Congress to create a NIB to finance urgently needed infrastructure projects. For more information and upcoming webinars visit the NIB Coalition website: <https://www.nibcoalition.com/>

5. TMACOG FY 2022 AWP for passenger rail – Roger Streiffert, TMACOG

Staff presented the TMACOG FY 2022 annual work program (AWP) for passenger rail planning. The TMACOG 2022 fiscal year runs from July 2021 through June 2022. The passenger rail planning AWP gives an overview of what TMACOG includes in its planning efforts along with specific items we hope to accomplish by the end of the fiscal year. The draft AWP was sent to committee members ahead of the meeting and we greatly appreciate your comments and suggestions.

6. Roundtable Discussion or Announcements – All Attendees

There are abandoned or low-volume rail corridors in Toledo that could be used as a part of an intracity passenger rail system. Abandoned rail corridors are now often converted to trails and not considered for future rail use.

There is a study funded by ODOT, TMACOG and MORPC to find a solution to the congested and inefficient US 23 corridor north of Columbus that is a vital highway connection between Toledo and Columbus.

Meeting Adjourned

Schedule of 2021 Passenger Rail Committee Meetings:

Thursday, February 18, 2021, 2:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 20, 2021, 2:30 p.m.

Thursday, August 19, 2021, 2:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 18, 2021, 2:30 p.m.

Additional meetings can be scheduled as needed