



April 2012

## **Ann Arbor – Detroit Regional Rail Project Update**

### **FTA requests Capacity Analysis for Ann Arbor-Detroit and Accelerated Rail Program**

2011 was an exciting year for passenger rail in Michigan, especially for Southeast Michigan. It's a new year and SEMCOG and MDOT have kicked things off by sending a letter to containing updates on passenger rail service in the Ann Arbor-Detroit corridor to federal, state, and local elected officials.

SEMCOG/MDOT letter to elected officials (page 2)

In addition to major progress on the Ann Arbor to Detroit commuter rail service, the state has received over half a billion dollars in Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to advance Michigan's Accelerated Rail Program (ARP). This is very good news for both the Amtrak Wolverine (Chicago-Detroit-Pontiac) service and the Ann Arbor-Detroit service as many of the necessary improvements will benefit both. While this is good news, the additional trains from the ARP requires a revisiting of the necessary capacity and safety enhancements and, therefore, delay the start of commuter service. In a December 2011 letter to MDOT and SEMCOG, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requests a comprehensive capacity analysis be undertaken and completed prior to commencing an environmental assessment for the Ann Arbor-Detroit segment.

FTA letter to SEMCOG/MDOT (page 4)

The next step toward commuter service is to conduct a capacity analysis that considers both the ARP and Ann Arbor-Detroit services. This will identify remaining capital improvements, allowing environmental work to proceed and corridor improvements to be implemented. SEMCOG and MDOT are working closely with FRA and FTA to ensure that the capital improvements for both commuter and Amtrak service are coordinated and expedited. The results of the capacity analysis are expected this year at which time the Environmental Assessment can begin.

*SEMCOG is the only organization in Southeast Michigan that brings together all governments to solve regional challenges and enhance the quality of life for the seven-county region's 4.7 million people.*

2011 was an exciting year for passenger rail in Michigan, especially for Southeast Michigan. It's a new year and SEMCOG and MDOT want to kick things off by providing you with an update of our efforts to implement passenger rail service in the Ann Arbor-Detroit corridor. In addition to major progress on the Ann Arbor to Detroit commuter rail service, the state has received over half a billion dollars in Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to advance Michigan's Accelerated Rail Program (ARP). This is very good news for both the Amtrak Wolverine (Chicago-Detroit-Pontiac) service and the Ann Arbor-Detroit service as many of the necessary improvements will benefit both.

While this is good news, the additional trains from the ARP require us to revisit the necessary capacity and safety enhancements and, therefore, delay the start of commuter service. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and FRA are requiring that a comprehensive capacity analysis be undertaken and completed prior to commencing an environmental assessment for the Ann Arbor-Detroit segment (note the enclosed letter from FTA). Further that, this capacity analysis must be part of a Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac Corridor capacity analysis. One of the reasons for this comprehensive capacity analysis is to determine the return on the federal government's investment, particularly in the Kalamazoo-Dearborn corridor segment.

Although no one wants additional delay, the result of this work will be a more integrated and reliable set of transportation services that include commuter rail, intercity passenger rail, and connections to the three major bus systems (Ann Arbor Transit Authority, SMART and DDOT). The rail improvements will not just reduce travel times, but will also improve reliability for the Amtrak service.

Much progress has been made over the past year toward implementation of commuter rail service. We worked with host railroads on specifics of key track improvements, refurbished passenger cars, developed preliminary design of stations and layover facilities, addressed disabled/elderly access, and coordinated with Amtrak. The passenger cars have passed stationary testing and we are working with Amtrak and FRA to complete running tests. The project team is working with Amtrak to identify 2012 events to provide special trains using the completed passenger cars.

As far as capital projects, one major improvement, the West Detroit connecting track, is expected to be under construction this year. In addition, final design of two additional enhancements (Milwaukee Junction and Beaubien Interlocking) are underway. All three of these projects have cleared the environmental process.

The next step toward commuter service is to conduct a capacity analysis that considers both the ARP and Ann Arbor-Detroit services. This will identify remaining capital improvements, allowing environmental work to proceed and corridor improvements to be implemented. SEMCOG and MDOT are working closely with FRA and FTA to ensure that the capital improvements for both commuter and Amtrak service are coordinated and expedited. The results of the capacity analysis are expected this year at which time the Environmental Assessment can begin.

As always, for more information on the Ann Arbor-Detroit Regional Rail Project, review the regular updates, and/or contact me or the SEMCOG [Information Center](#) at 313-324-3330.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Carmine Palombo". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Carmine" and last name "Palombo" clearly distinguishable.

Carmine Palombo

Enclosure



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**Federal Transit  
Administration**

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Michigan, Minnesota,  
Ohio, Wisconsin

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December 20, 2011

Timothy H. Hoeffner, P.E.  
Administrator, Office of Rail  
Michigan Department of Transportation  
425 W. Ottawa Street  
Lansing, MI 48909

Carmine Palombo  
Direct of Transportation Programs  
Southeast Michigan Council of Governments  
535 Griswold Street, Suite 300  
Detroit, MI 48226

RE: Resuming the NEPA process for the Ann Arbor – Detroit Commuter Rail Project

Dear Mr. Hoeffner and Mr. Palombo:

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is committed to working with the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) and Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to plan and implement a commuter rail project between Ann Arbor and Detroit, MI. A major step toward moving this project forward is to complete an environmental assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The NEPA process for this project may resume when the project is sufficiently developed to: 1) offer FTA sufficient detail for a meaningful environmental assessment, and 2) ensure that it complies with the requirements of the Michigan Line Joint Operations Agreement (specifically that the project construct additional capacity to handle such proposed commuter rail operations).

In order for FTA to conduct a meaningful environmental analysis, a project must be defined in enough detail so that staff can quantify impacts to a range of environmental resources. The detail needed to conduct this analysis should be captured in a detailed project description. For the Ann Arbor Commuter Rail project, MDOT has already developed track schematics representing the most recent iteration of the project's alignment. Prior to formally launching into the NEPA process, FTA requests that MDOT and SEMCOG, based on the track schematics if appropriate, prepare a project description with narrative and graphics describing the location, construction requirements, and operational characteristics of all project components. Both the FTA and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) will need to concur that the project description is satisfactory.

Also, before resuming the NEPA process, FRA must concur that the track modeling and simulation supporting the commuter rail project is consistent with the Michigan Line Joint Operations Agreement, accounts for the full build-out of the project, and preserves sufficient capacity for intercity passenger rail.

Mr. Hoeffner and Mr. Palombo  
December 20, 2011  
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As such, MDOT must revise the modeling and prepare a complete project description. The FTA anticipates MDOT will complete the revised modeling by April 2012, and will submit a project description by June 2012.

It is my understanding that FRA will be funding the revised capacity analysis to support the modeling and simulation. The FTA will commit staff resources to assist with coordination during the project development and the NEPA process. If issues arise, the FTA should be contacted as soon as practicable in order to avoid delays.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marisol R. Simón". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a distinct "S" at the end.

Marisol R. Simón  
Regional Administrator

cc: Robert Kuehne, Michigan Department of Transportation  
Wynne Davis, Federal Railroad Administration  
Sean Libberton, Federal Transit Administration  
Adam Stephenson, Federal Transit Administration