



December 2011

Ann Arbor – Detroit Regional Rail Project Update

Progress continues with many aspects of the Ann Arbor – Detroit Regional Rail Project. Below are the most recent developments.

Key Partners

Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) and Michigan Dept. of Transportation (MDOT) continue to work daily with each other as well as the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Amtrak, and our contractors toward completing many of the important steps that lead to commuter service.

Cab Cars & Coaches

Refurbishment: The Great Lakes Central (GLC) Railroad has completed the refurbishment of all nine passenger cars for the Ann Arbor-Detroit service.

Stationary Inspections: The cars have successfully completed stationary inspections of things like brake systems, door function and safety, wheel-sets, and a host of other structural and operational items.

Mechanical & Safety Test: The last step, prior to being cleared for use in service, requires hooking the cars to an Amtrak locomotive and undergoing another set of mechanical and safety tests. This work is being scheduled and commissioning is expected in early 2012.

Seats

Manufacturing: Grand Rapids, Michigan-based American Seating has completed production of seats for all nine cars.

Delivery & Installation: The seats have all been delivered and are installed in the completed cars.

Crash Worthiness: The crash-worthiness of the seats in the passenger cars was a significant hurdle to overcome. This summer the seats passed a rigorous set of Federal Railroad Administration crash tests.

West Detroit Connection Track Project

This rail infrastructure project will shave ten minutes off the travel time for the Ann Arbor-Detroit commuter rail service. Agreements with the host railroads have either been executed or are in final negotiations. Construction of the West Detroit Connection Track is expected to begin in early 2012.

Environmental Clearance

Federal Lead Agency: This summer, the federal lead agency responsibility for the Ann Arbor-Detroit Regional Rail Project was transferred from Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to Federal Transit Administration (FTA). FTA is now reviewing MDOT and SEMCOG's request to initiate the environmental process to clear the project.

Environmental Review: FTA has determined that an Environmental Assessment (EA) will be required to clear the project for construction. This is very good news as the more rigorous analysis required under a full Environmental Impact Statement could have caused significant delay. FTA has indicated that this will be an expedited EA, with priority for their staff. This will streamline their processing and result in a complete EA in the shortest time possible. However, prior to beginning this process, the project must now consider the implications of the recent high speed rail funds that have been awarded to Michigan. Capital investment must be staged appropriately.

Timeline: Once this process is completed, additional investments (e.g., track improvements and new stations in Ypsilanti and at Metro Airport) can be made in the project. A timeline is expected later this month.

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.

Ann Arbor & Detroit Layover Tracks and Facilities

Design: Work is underway regarding the design of layover tracks and facilities.

Stakeholders: The host railroads and host communities are a crucial part of the design.

Other Rail Infrastructure Improvements

A capacity analysis has been completed for most of the corridor, including the identification of infrastructure improvements needed to initiate the Ann Arbor-Detroit commuter rail service. The analysis revealed the need for improvements such as new sidings, switches, and crossovers. Work on these improvements can begin once environmental clearance has been granted. Once again, due to the recent influx of high speed rail funds, an additional capacity analysis must be run that takes into account the high speed rail trains that are being planned in combination with the commuter trains.

Stations

Station Locations: Two new stations (Ypsilanti and Airport) together with three existing Amtrak stations (Ann Arbor, Dearborn, Detroit New Center) are proposed for the commuter rail service.

Station Design: SEMCOG and MDOT have been working closely with host communities in the design of these stations. Preliminary design is complete and funding has been identified. Work can begin at these stations once environmental clearance has been obtained.

ADA Compliance

Meetings: SEMCOG, MDOT, and GLC met for a final time with an Ann Arbor-based ADA group to review improvements to the cars and the portable lifts. The group was very pleased with the modifications, but asked for a few minor physical and operational changes.

ADA Design Considerations:

- GLC is making some of these modifications (such as adding yellow paint to a door threshold).
- Portable station lifts have been obtained for the five stations to be used by the Ann Arbor-Detroit commuter rail service. In addition, all cab cars and coaches will be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The United States Access Board and an Ann Arbor ADA group have tested and provided feedback regarding the portable station lift and cars at this early point in their refurbishment.
- A second round of testing and feedback will occur once a passenger car has been completely refurbished.

Static displays

The project team is working on scheduling static displays of completed cars at venues such as the Henry Ford. Visitors will be able to view and board the train cars first-hand. Look for more in this in the coming months.

Special trains

Once commissioning is complete, the cars will be ready to be run in service. The team is working on providing service to special events in 2012.