

**NEWS FROM ALL ABOARD WISCONSIN**

***November, 2015***

**HILL TAKES THE THROTTLE.**At its Annual meeting on October 19, 2015 in Duluth, MN, the Board of Directors of All Aboard Wisconsin elected officers for the coming year; naming Nona G. Hill of Madison as the new President of the organization for 2016.  Hill moves-up from her post as Vice-President, with Mark R. Quam of Eau Claire assuming that position for the coming year.  Gary Goyke and Clark Johnson, both of Madison, continue as Secretary and Treasurer of the organization respectively.  Founding AAW President Michael H. McCoy of Madison did not seek another term as president for personal reasons, but has agreed to continue as a member of the Board of Directors; lending his knowledge and experience to the organization in that less rigorous role.  Dan Kane of LaCrosse was appointed to the Board, replacing the retiring Dale Anderson as Board representative of the Amalgamated Transit Union.  Additional board vacancies will be filled at the January, 2016 Board meeting; including a replacement for Jesse Auerbach, who formerly represented the Environmental Law and Policy Center on the AAW Board, and who relocated out of the area.  ELPC is expected to name a successor in the next month.

As she enters on her new responsibilities, Hill saluted Mike McCoy for the leadership and vision that he brought to All Aboard Wisconsin, and issued a call to action to new and current members.

**“I would like to take this opportunity to thank our retiring President Michael H. McCoy for all of his work on behalf of All Aboard Wisconsin.  As a founding member and first President, his unwavering spirit and conviction; inspiration and dedication have been the single most important reason that AAW is here today.  Mike McCoy helped bring AAW from an idea to a recognized non-profit organization in the state of Wisconsin.**

**‘Mike’s advocacy for passenger rail exists on all fronts and has never wavered.  He was a founding member of ProRail in Madison, and a lifelong member of the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) and it’s state chapter, WisARP, serving on the boards and as an officer in all of those organizations over the years.  Mike McCoy’s decades of experience and the conviction that passenger rail is right for Wisconsin has been the chief reason that All Aboard Wisconsin exists today.**

**‘Mike kept the dream of more and better passenger rail in Wisconsin from being forgotten when political winds were blowing in the opposite direction.  He was the driving force in starting the idea of AAW’s Passenger Rail Forums; public meetings to be held throughout the state to remind Wisconsin citizens that passenger rail was alive and well and that trains were operating and that we should be riding them.  His belief that travel was the most likely path to passenger rail interest and advocacy has kept our focus on the current opportunity to ride the train, not just a dreamed for future.**

**‘Mike has requested to step down as President due to health reasons but he has agreed to continue to serve on the AAW Board.  We are most grateful for his participation.”**

**As we seek to follow Mike McCoy’s legacy and example, your AAW Board needs the support of all of the organization’s members to continue its mission of advocacy for all forms of public transportation in Wisconsin.  We stand for better passenger rail, better bus services and better connectivity between all transportation modes.  We are always looking for more people who would like to be involved in all of these activities.  We welcome your ideas and your participation!**

**Nona Hill**

**President**

**FALL CONFERENCE BREAKS NEW GROUND.**For the first time, All Aboard Wisconsin was an official sponsor of the Bi-state Wisconsin-Minnesota Public Transportation Conference held recently in Duluth, MN.  This triennial event brings together several hundred public transportation professionals from all modes across the upper Midwest, and for the first time, this years’ meeting included specific passenger rail programming.   In addition to our Annual Meeting and election of officers, we held a joint meeting with our colleagues for All Aboard Minnesota to discuss and agree on strategies where both organizations can work jointly and in mutual support of important passenger rail initiatives in the upper midwest.  We enjoyed a presentation by Ed Ellis, Chairman and President of Iowa Pacific Holdings, on his company’s ventures into privately-operated passenger rail service; beginning with the “Hoosier State” service in Indiana which has received wide recognition and acclaim for excellent customer service, and his philosophy of how adding value to passenger service through excellent customer service and amenities allows his company to “turn a profit” on this and other projected services.

On Tuesday, we held a well-attended general session presentation on Passenger Rail Planning in the Midwest, featuring Arun Rao, Rail Planner at WisDOT and Dan Krom, his opposite number from MnDOT.  The gentlemen brought us up to date on the “Second Train Study” on the Chicago-St. Paul/Minneapolis route and outlined what’s next for that effort; talked about the upcoming FRA-funded update of the Midwest Passenger Rail Plan, and the Midwest passenger rail equipment joint-purchase which will see new 125 MPH Siemens passenger locomotives powered by the new QSK-95 Cummins engines start to replace Amtrak’s P-40’s and 42’s on midwest services, along with new bi-level cars being manufactured in Rochelle, IL.  Finally, the environmental review of the Hiawatha service required before train frequencies can be increased from 7 to 10 daily departures was also covered, along with the updates to the Milwaukee intermodal station, now underway.   An interesting presentation from folks “on the inside”  of the efforts to increase passenger rail service in our region, with great audience interaction and questions.

Based on the success of this conference, we look forward to additional passenger rail programming at future meetings.  The Wisconsin state conference will be next October in Green Bay.  More information will be forthcoming in the spring.

**HOUSE PASSES NEW 6 YEAR TRANSPORTATION BILL; AMENDMENT TO INCREASE TRUCK WEIGHT/LENGTH DEFEATED:  HR 3763, The Surface Transportation Reauthorization and Reform Act of 2015** passed the House of Representatives as this newsletter was being written, ending a drought of several years since a “normal” six-year surface transportation reauthorization has been passed. Late word from Washington indicates that additional funding for the bill, taken from a Federal Reserve Surplus, passed the House with 374 “yeas”.

The overall Bill has been criticized in various quarters for not developing any new revenue sources for Transportation, instead relying on other “one-time” revenues and non-traditional sources of funding. The 18.6 cent per gallon federal motor fuel tax, not adjusted since 1993, remains in place. The bill now goes to a House-Senate conference committee to resolve differences between the legislation passed by each chamber. No date for final consideration has been set.

An amendment to the bill that would have increased truck weights on the highway system was defeated by a 236-187 vote in the House of Representatives on November 3rd. The measure would have allowed the gross weight of heavy trucks to increase by 11,000 pounds from the current 80,000 lbs to a new high of 91,000 lbs, with the length of certain combinations also increasing by as much as 8 feet. Sponsored by Rep. Reid Ribble of Wisconsin’s 8th Congressional District, the bill drew fire from highway safety advocates, state departments of transportation, and not surprisingly from the freight railroad industry through the Association of American Railroads and rail labor, as well as the railroads themselves.  The wear and tear on highways, the increased safety risk from heavier trucks on the road, and the cost of all of that were key factors in the arguments defeating the measure.

**IT’S TIME TO RENEW!**As we approach the end of another program year, All Aboard Wisconsin begins its annual membership drive for 2016.  As with all membership organizations, dues are an important part of the resources that allow AAW to continue its outreach activities to emphasize the importance of a balanced, multimodal transportation system in the Badger state; and particularly the importance of maintaining and growing passenger rail service as an important component of that system both here and throughout the Midwest.  A healthy dues-paying membership is also important when your Association approached foundations and other potential supporters for additional financial assistance.  These folks want to know what we are doing to raise funds from our own members as a condition of extending additional financial support to us; so your continuing contributions send an important message to them about your commitment to our shared cause.

Your funds also assist your Association in engaging in advocacy activities at the local, state, regional and national levels; all designed to further and support our goal of ***“more trains to more places”*** both within Wisconsin and our region.

***With your support:***

* AAW will continue to hold community forums around the state;
* Prominently display its message at various public events;
* Continue its support of efforts such as the Second Train Study in the Chicago-Minneapolis corridor, the increase of Hiawatha service up to 10 daily round-trips, the recently announced FRA-funded Midwest Passenger Rail study update;
* Support maintenance of state-supported intercity bus service that serves as a feeder to passenger rail, and of course,
* Continue to push for the expansion of Passenger Rail service in Wisconsin to areas currently without service.

***Your support allows AAW officers to spread our message to elected officials at the local, state and national levels, and is crucial when applying for grants from foundations and organizations to expand our efforts and reach.***

AAW makes it easy to be a part of its important work with economical Regular $25.00 annual memberships, and special rates for seniors, students and families.  We’d also ask you to seriously consider becoming an “Advocates Club” or “Sustaining Member” at $100.00 or $75.00 respectively annually, or contribute to one of our corporate-level sponsorships to provide additional support for our activities and demonstrate the level of our members’ commitment to potential outside funding sources.

**Please look for your membership renewal form in the mail shortly,** ***and please return it promptly when you receive it.***Dues paid during the 4th quarter of 2015 will renew your membership for all of 2016!

**AAW KEEPS MOVING FORWARD.** With the current year winding-down and 2016 just around the corner, All Aboard Wisconsin is continuing to keep-up the pace of its activities for the balance of this year, and planning for an active first quarter of 2016.

* **Tuesday, November 10**: AAW representatives will participate in the fall Public Transportation Day at the state capitol in Madison.
* **Wednesday/Thursday, December 2-3**: AAW has been invited to participate in the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) High Speed and Passenger Rail Committee meeting and advocacy day on Capitol Hill.
* **January, 2016**: First quarter AAW Board Meeting, 754 Williamson Street, Madison. (Date and Time To be Announced)
* **March 7** – **9, 2016:** AAW participates in APTA annual Legislative Conference and public transportation advocacy days on Capitol Hill. (Another meeting of the APTA High Speed and Passenger Rail Committee generally occurs at this time also.)

**THINGS WE’RE WORKING-ON.** We’ve no dates to announce yet, but watch for the following events in 2016.

* **Passenger Rail Forums:** Our goal is one per quarter around the state. We’re looking for locations – if you’re interested in hosting a forum in your area, please contact Nona Hill or Dave Mumma.
* **AAW Booths at Train Shows:** If you’ve ever been to one of the regional train shows in Wisconsin, you know that they attract a wide variety of folks, well beyond the dedicated model railroaders whose work people like me go to see and admire and try to replicate (maybe) at home. What you do see are families, kids, retirees and lots of folks who are lured to these shows by their love and curiosity about “all things railroad”. What better place to get our message about “More Trains to More Places” out to the public! Again, this takes people who are willing to donate a day of their time and man our booth. If you’re willing, please let Nona or Dave know!
* **Amtrak Train Day Promotion:** Last year AAW participated in Milwaukee and St. Paul. We’d like to expand that this year to other locations in Wisconsin. AAW can supply materials, but what we need is “person power” to show-up and set-up at a station near you. If you’re interested, again, please contact Nona Hill or Dave Mumma.

***Please remember to renew your membership for 2016! Do it NOW!!***