

Why Put the Brakes on Rail Projects?



AAATA staff has been observing House Transportation and Infrastructure hearings regarding MDOT's leasing and refurbishing of rail cars obtained for the North-South and East-West rail projects and related stories. Though recent news articles focused on quotes that are six years old, please be advised that Dawn Gabay, Deputy CEO of AAATA said late Tuesday "she believes **her concerns were resolved** before she handed the project off to other officials at the authority, and the federal government will allow the trains to be used with portable wheelchair lifts." Michael Benham, Special Assistant for Strategic Planning for AAATA, confirmed that Gabay's concerns have been resolved and "**these are the cars we would use if the service were to materialize.**"

Since the projects began, federal oversight agencies (and thus study requirements) have changed, causing unforeseen delays. MDOT, AAATA and other partners have already begun to consider other uses for the cars to offset lease costs until rail service is implemented.

Here are some more facts:

- The ADA-compliant, wheelchair-accessible railcars, provide hope to millions of senior citizens who cannot, or prefer not, to drive, and to many more people with disabilities, who need rail services to make longer distance trips that are impossible today.
- The availability of the rail cars has created excitement among the general public, making it easier to envision rail service, which has a very high degree of support (70% in Livingston County, 80% in Washtenaw County).
- The refurbishment of the rail cars, and the operation of them has created jobs for Michigan residents.
- After the cars were refurbished, inspected and fully tested, they were considered to be "in service." The in-service dates of these cars range between October 2013 and June 2014.
- Leased and refurbished cars cost MDOT \$447,800 each, compared to purchasing new rail cars at \$3 million each. Leasing and refurbishing the rail cars saves tax dollars.
- Ann Arbor-to-Detroit Rail and North-South Rail have the potential to directly benefit dozens of communities in Southeast MI. The MITrain Rail Car Fleet is essential for these planned services.
- AAATA has been involved in a number of community displays of the rail cars, in which thousands of residents have participated and overwhelmingly voiced support. Displays to date include downtown Ann Arbor, Genoa Township, Hamburg Township, City of Dearborn, the City of Ypsilanti and the City of Howell.
- People have paid money to take rides on these cars during the past summer in Howell, and throughout the Christmas season on the Polar Express Train. Additional excursion trains are now in the planning stages including the possibilities of serving the Ann Arbor Art Fair, the Detroit Auto Show and UM football games.