

February 10, 2015

Michigan House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee
Lansing, MI

Re: Support MDOT's Investment in MiTrain Rail Cars

Dear Representatives:

I am pleased to hear that the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee has taken an interest in our state's improving passenger rail infrastructure. As many of you may already know, there were many exciting developments in Michigan passenger rail last year, with the opening of three new Amtrak stations,^(d,g,k) the start of construction on M1 Rail in Detroit,^(h) and the capital improvements between Dearborn and Kalamazoo for accelerated passenger rail service.^(f) Unfortunately, a recent news article^(c) regarding rail cars the State has refurbished for future use on commuter rail projects currently being planned for routes in southeast Michigan⁽ⁱ⁾ has caused some unnecessary alarm, due to some information missed in the report. I write to you to highlight a few of these key missed points, and express my full support for the Michigan Department of Transportation's continued work on these rail projects, in accordance with the Michigan State Rail Plan.^(e)

First, I refer you to our Michigan State Rail Plan, which guides the development of passenger and freight rail infrastructure across our state. The Plan clearly outlines a development plan that includes "Cab car coach refurbishment and leasing," as well as further studies and capital improvements for the Washtenaw Livingston Rail Line (WALLY) and the Ann Arbor – Detroit Regional Rail projects.^(e) This State Rail Plan was thoroughly researched and composed, "based on the understanding that the maintenance and expansion of rail service is critical to the economic well-being of the citizens and businesses of Michigan."^(e)

Second, as many of you know and as MDOT has already stated, the \$1.1 million per year price MDOT is paying for the MiTrain rail cars, as reported in the February 1st news article,^(c) could not have been spent on projects outside the scope of the Comprehensive Transportation Fund (CTF). If this \$1.1 million were to hypothetically be redistributed through the CTF though, the final allocation that would make it to individual transit agencies would be too small to make a significant impact in the services they provide. The relative small size of this as an annual expense to the State represents less than 1 percent of the current fiscal year's Michigan Transportation Fund allotment.^(j) This investment is a small short term investment, that can lead to much greater gains for many communities in Livingston, Washtenaw, and Wayne Counties.

Third, I would like to remind you of the current study being undertaken on the North-South Rail corridor between Howell and Ann Arbor.^(a) The study is assessing the overall feasibility of the North-South Commuter Rail (WALLY) project, and prepare the project for future federal funding.^(a) Two important pieces of the viability of this future commuter rail service is that the tracks are already laid, and the State was able to refurbish these used rail cars for far less than it would have cost to order brand new rail cars to be built.⁽ⁱ⁾ If the State were to do away with these rail cars not only would the investment in

refurbishing these cars be thrown away, but it would severely hinder the progress of the WALLY Commuter Rail and Ann Arbor – Detroit Commuter Rail projects. As you know, the planning process for transportation infrastructure is one that takes several years. In order for MDOT and other local transportation agencies involved to ensure that their investment in new infrastructure will be fruitful and implemented in the most efficient and impactful way possible, they must take the time to plan out the most effective way in which to carry out the project from drawing board to cars on the rails.

Finally, I would like to share with you why these rail cars and the future commuter rail services they are intended for are important to me. As a young graduate student born and raised in Michigan, I was very fortunate to be able to find my program of study in a university close to home, and in a city that has a well-developed multi-modal transportation system. With the immense amount of money I have to spend on tuition, and will eventually have to pay on my student loans, I rely on local bus services, walkways, and bike lanes in Ann Arbor to get myself to class and to work. I drive as little as possible because driving costs more than any of these other methods to get where I need to go. I am very encouraged that our State is taking a serious interest in re-installing commuter rail, because this is something that will make commuting not only more affordable, but far more enjoyable than any highway traffic jam. With that said, many of my friends and peers have either already left or are currently planning to leave Michigan for cities with more accessible transportation systems, not entirely dependent upon cars. Please keep this in mind in your considerations on the value-added we will get from the State's early investment in the MiTrain rail cars.

Again, I fully support MDOT's continued work on the WALLY and Ann Arbor – Detroit Regional rail projects with the refurbishment of the MiTrain cars, and their continued follow-through on other planned steps in the Michigan State Rail Plan. The views expressed in this letter represent my own views only, and do not reflect my employer nor my university. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this. As always, I am available to answer any questions about my comments that you may have.

Best,

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Works Cited:

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- e. HNTB Corporation. *Michigan State Rail Plan: Final Report*. Rep. Lansing: Michigan Department of Transportation, 2011. Michigan Department of Transportation, Sept. 2011. Web. Feb. 2015.
- f. Hoeffner, Tim, and Wynne Davis. "MICHIGAN T.O. 5 Midwest." 2014 Rail Program Delivery. 2014. Web. 9 Feb. 2015.

- g. Lawrence, Eric D. "First Train Pulls out of New Dearborn Amtrak Station." *Detroit Free Press*. N.p., 10 Dec. 2014. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.
- h. M1 Rail. *Construction Activities Begin Today on Detroit's M-1 Rail Streetcar Line*. M1 Rail. N.p., 28 July 2014. Web. 9 Feb. 2015.
- i. Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. *Ann Arbor-Detroit Regional Rail & North-South Commuter Rail (WALLY) Projects: Winter 2015 Update*. Rep. Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, 2015. Web. 9 Feb. 2015.
- j. Steffens, Glenn. *Conference Report: Transportation SB 777*. Rep. Michigan State Senate Fiscal Agency, 2 July 2014. Web. 9 Feb. 2015.
- k. Vanbergen, Steve. "New Amtrak Station Opens in Grand Rapids on Monday." *Fox17*. WXMI, 27 Oct. 2014. Web. 9 Feb. 2015.