

Rev. 10/18/14

MICHIGAN NORTHERN RAILWAY

The Michigan Northern was formed in December 1975 to take over operation of the Grand Rapids & Indiana Line of the former Pennsylvania Railroad between Grand Rapids (Comstock Park, north of Grand Rapids) and Mackinaw City, Michigan. The line was not slated for inclusion in Conrail and it was purchased by the Michigan State Highway Commission to maintain rail service in the area. Michigan Northern began operation on April 1, 1976, which was also start-up day for Conrail.

It was a rocky ride for the Michigan Northern. "Handicapped from the start by its long route (248 miles) and death of originating traffic, the Michigan Northern made up for its short comings by making news: exotic locomotives, long-distance passenger trains, a controversial rate "flag-out.""

"Michigan Northern began life with a couple of ex-Southern Alco RS3's, later operated the last two existing Baldwin RF-16's Sharknose cab (ex-Delaware & Hudson, originally NYC), three Baldwin RS-12's, and eventually settled on a collection of GP7's. Initially, the Michigan Northern was subsidized by the state. The railroad hauled only a modest amount of traffic until 1978, when it refused to go along with a 5 per cent rate increase - the infamous flag-out, a maneuver in

which Michigan Northern undercut its connections and offered its own rates on bridge traffic. Michigan Northern had maintained that its solvency depended upon bridge traffic which could be ferried across the Straits of Mackinac by the car ferry *Chief Wawatam*. The result of the flag-out was a rush of Pacific Northwest lumber moving over the route. Revenue had soared from \$20,000 a month to \$150,000. In June 1977, Michigan Northern handled only 10 cars overhead traffic; in June 1978, the figure was 642 carloads! This high level of overhead traffic continued until the early 1980's when deregulation eliminated Michigan Northern's bridge-route advantage."

In February 1982, C&O abandoned its most northerly reach, the Manistee- Traverse City-Bay View (Petoskey) line, once the route of Pere Marquette's *Resort Special*. Michigan Department of Transportation purchased two segments: 21 miles, Grawn-Traverse City-Williamsburg (connecting in Traverse City with Michigan Northern's Walton Junction branch) and 16 miles, Charlevoix-Bay View. The Michigan Northern was designated operator; C&O scrapped what the state did not pick up.

On October 1, 1982 the Michigan Northern grew even longer, when it assumed responsibility for the 148 mile Alma - Frankfort segment of the Ann Arbor Railroad, formerly operated by Michigan Interstate. When Michigan Interstate had reinstated service in the summer of 1982, after a dispute with the Michigan Department of Transportation, it was without any provision to resume the carferries, which had last operated on April 27, 1982. Despite attempts by former carferry employees and concerned citizens to persuade legislators in Lansing to resume a ferry subsidy, the cross-lake service never returned. (The best-known Ann Arbor boat, the Viking, was left tied up in a Sturgeon Bay (Wis.) boatyard awaiting disposition.)

The Penn Central closed rail operations, the *Chief* was conveyed to the Straits Corp. On December 1, 1982, the Boat Company, a subsidiary of Michigan Northern Railway, took over the service.

With loss of the overhead traffic and the imminent phase-out of the state's rail subsidy program, Michigan Northern attempted to augment income by expanding into passenger trains. First in 1982 with the *Bay Rail Express*, four round trips on summer weekends over the 16-mile ex-C&O line between Petoskey and Charlevoix. The following year, Michigan Northern revived the *Michigan Arrow* name (Pennsy's Chincinnati-Mackinaw City resort train which ran until 1961) with several lengthy trains of streamlined equipment between Cadillac and Mackinaw City.

Alas, Michigan Northern couldn't last. Unhappy with the road's accounting procedures and doubtful of its ability to survive, the state of Michigan withdrew its subsidy from Michigan Northern, in May 1984. The Tuscola & Saginaw Bay took over operation of the Alma - Frankfort segment of the old Ann Arbor line. The *Chief* made its last run in late August 1984 after the Soo Line dock in St. Ignace

was determined to need repairs. The old boat, serving since 1911, was tied up in Mackinaw City and service was never resumed. In 1986, Soo Line was granted approval to abandon its St. Ignace Trout Lake line, the only Upper Peninsula rail link to the ferry. In the early 1990s the Chief Wawatam was scrapped and turned into a barge.

On October 1, 1984, the Tuscola & Saginaw Bay took over operation responsibility for the remaining state-owned lines from the Michigan Northern. Service was discontinued south of Reed City

The Michigan Northern refused to die. The embattled company retracted to the northernly Bay View (north of Petoskey) - Mackinaw City segment, which Michigan had not purchased. (The line was not included in Conrail.) The Michigan Northern now extended from a connection with the Tuscola & Saginaw Bay at Petoskey to a connection with the Detroit & Mackinaw at Mackinaw City, Michigan, 33 miles north. Rail is 75-100 pound, and the load limit is 263,000 pounds. The line was opened in 1882 as part of the Grand Rapids & Indiana system, which was leased to the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1919. Regular passenger service ended in 1949. The Michigan Northern worked out a purchase agreement with Penn Central, establishing a headquarters in Pellston. A truck - to - rail transfer facility was established for steel products from the Algoma Steel Plant in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. This freight, carried in leased gondola cars, constituted Michigan Northern's sole traffic except for occasional excursion trains. By January 1986, though, the steel traffic had dried up as the U.S. - Canada exchange rate fluctuated and oil prices fell. The loads were then turned over to T&SB at Petoskey.

In spring 1986, the demise of the Michigan Northern was widely anticipated, but the railroad with nine lives was back again in the summer with excursion trains. Claiming the Michigan Northern had been delinquent on payments, the Penn Central sold the track to the Equipment Co. of Greenville, S.C., which planned to scrap the line. In July, a federal district judge granted Michigan Northern a six month grace period to purchase the track back from the Equipment Co. Service was suspended January 11, 1986. But the railroad never raised the necessary \$150,000. On Friday, April 10, Michigan began removing its motley assortment of equipment stored in Pelston. A half dozen battered GP7's, some box cars, a snow plow, two heavyweight passenger cars, and other rolling stock. The last train rolled out on Sunday afternoon, April 12, and the equipment was stored in Petoskey on the Tuscola & Saginaw Bay, where it awaited disposition. The scrappers began dismantling the northernmost remnant of the Pennsy in June 1987.

In 2006 the Tuscola & Saginaw Bay was sold and became the Great Lakes Central Railroad.

Note: The some of the above information was copied from an article in Trains, "Michigan Metamorphosis" by Ron Cady, October 1987.

Address of general offices: P.O. Box 359, Cadillac, MI 49601

Shops: Cadillac, MI

Miles of road operated: 1976 - 248; 1983 - 432

Reporting marks: MIGN

Number of locomotives: 1976 - 2; 1983 - 8

Number of freight cars: 1983 - 22

Number of passenger cars: 1986 - 2

Principal commodities carried: Sand, lumber, LP gas, foodstuffs

Junctions with other railroads:

Cadillac & Lake City: Missaukee Jct.;

Chessie System: Alma, Clare, Reed City;

Conrail: Grand Rapids;

Detroit & Mackinac: Mackinaw City;

Soo Line: Mackinaw City;

Tuscola & Saginaw Bay: Alma

Radio frequencies: 160.650

Passenger route:

Cadillac-Mackinaw City, Cadillac-Charlevoix, Traverse City-Williamsburg.

Predecessor railroads:

Ann Arbor, Pennsylvania Railroad, and Pere Marquette

Successors:

Tuscola & Saginaw Bay (Great Lakes Central)

Portions still operated as of March 1986:

Michigan Northern: Petoskey-Pellston;

Tuscola & Saginaw Bay: Reed City - Petoskey-Charlevoix;

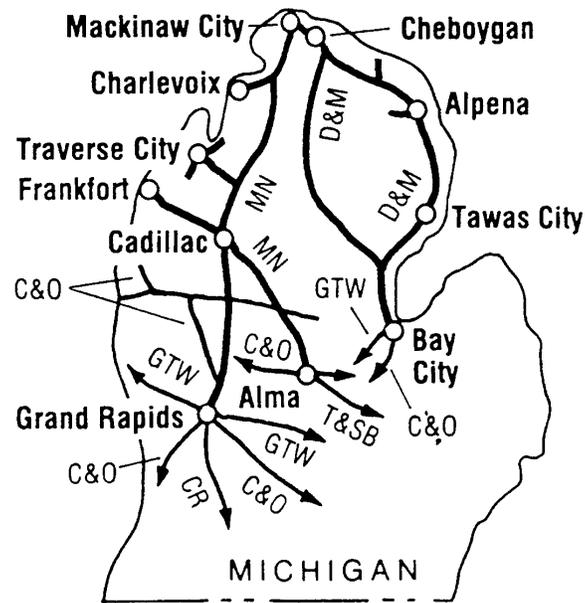
Alma-Frankfort; Walton Jct.-Traverse City;

Grawn-Williamsburg;

Portions still operated as of December 1997-12-17

Tuscola & Saginaw Bay: Petoskey-Cadillac; Alma-Thomasville;

Walton Jct.-Traverse City; Grawn-Williamsburg;



Michigan Northern Railroad, *the Model Railroad*

The Michigan Northern Model Railroad, first called the Tiger Line, was established April 1, 1967 after acquiring trackage from the Pennsylvania Railroad. (Formerly the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad). In 1976 the railroad Board of Directors decided to change the road name from the Tiger Line to the Michigan Northern Railroad. President: Fred G. Paepke, Chairman of the Board: Joyce Paepke, and stock holders are Fred, Paul and Amanda.

The model railroad, loosely follows the growth and operation of the Michigan Northern Railway for the ten year period from 1976 through 1986 to present. The exception being the Michigan Northern Railway became a fallen flag and the Michigan Northern Railroad continues on as a "*what if*" model railroad. The following assumptions have been made for the Michigan Northern to continue today.

1. Michigan Northern Railway continued to operate the line from Mackinaw City to Grand Rapids, Michigan.
2. Ann Arbor Railroad (Tuscola & Saginaw Bay) continued to serve west of Cadillac, and the Michigan Northern continued to operate the Ann Arbor line east of Cadillac.
3. The Canadian National (Soo Line) continues to operate the trackage from St. Ignace to Trout Lake.

4. The *Chief Wawatam*, due to age and the need to move larger height cars across the Straits, was converted to a car float pushed by an all-weather tug. This also allowed the use of a second car float during peak time.
5. The steel truck-to-rail transfer operation at Pellston is moved to Petoskey, Michigan.
6. There is talk of the transfer being developed into a small intermodal terminal servicing the northern section of lower Michigan:
 - Traverse City, Charlevoix - for transfer of containers and truck trailers to rail cars;
 - Petoskey, Cheboygan, Alpena, etc.
 - To the East, Sault Ste Marie (MI and Ont), Marquette, Escanaba, etc.

Because the distance between Grand Rapids and Mackinaw City is **248 real miles** and the full main line of the model railroad is only 155 feet or **2.81 scale miles** (*3.4 scale miles with TC line included*) from end to end, modeler's license was used. Therefore, many of the town names and industrial locations are not in the same order as they actually were on the Michigan Northern Railway.

The railroad is a bridge route between the car ferry at Mackinaw City and Comstock Park (Grand Rapids), Michigan. The mainline runs north and south in direction. All of the railroad is located in the State of Michigan. Most of the revenue for the railroad comes from the movement of general freight, lumber, grain, and chemicals from the northwestern part of the United States and coal and manufactured equipment from eastern and mid-Atlantic states.

There are online food processing plants, paper mill, saw mill, stone and gravel quarry, grain elevators, small steel mill*, refinery*, casting sand loading, and light manufacturing companies. (*waiting for future expansion.)

