



ABOVE: Train B19, the Wayne Yard-Oakwood Yard road local, will often "die on the law" before making it back to Wayne, Mich. This results in B19 being parked just east of the Dearborn station awaiting one of the yard crews to find time in their day to bring this train the final miles to Wayne. The crew of NS B17 re-crews B19 as Amtrak Train 353 arrives at Dearborn on September 5, 2022.



RIGHT: A drone provided this view of Wayne Yard. There are no grade crossings or other access points to shoot this yard from the ground without an extremely long lens. AERIAL PHOTO

BELOW RIGHT: The appropriately named Depot Town area of Ypsilanti is named after the former Michigan Central station located along the tracks that cut through this vibrant, historic neighborhood. On September 23, 2023, NS Train B25 makes a Saturday daytime appearance past the old station as it heads east toward Wayne Yard.



DREL/ELDR (Detroit-Elkhart), and EJDJL (Chicago EJ&E-Detroit Livernois Yard). A few locals were based out of Wayne and Jackson, including WDWA-60 operating out of Wayne Yard behind the Ford Michigan Assembly Plant in Wayne, Mich.

As Conrail saw continued success into the 1990s, it sought merger with another railroad. The 1997 announcement of a merger with CSX triggered a bidding war with Norfolk Southern — which had attempted to purchase Conrail from the federal government in 1985 before it was spun off as an independent company. A compromise was reached where CSX and NS agreed to an equitable split of Conrail's assets, which took effect in 1999.

During the early years of Norfolk Southern ownership, the route was referred to as the Michigan Line. Daily freight schedules included 49/48E (Jackson-Detroit Sterling Yard), 43J/42J (Detroit Rouge Yard-Elkhart), 48J (Jackson-Wayne Turn), 27V/28V (serving the Ford assembly plant in Wayne), B18/B44 (Wayne locals), and B20

(Wayne-Chelsea). On the Amtrak side, the three round trips between Chicago and Detroit lost their individual names and began to be marketed together as Wolverine Service in 2004.

MDOT Ownership and a Decade of Change

In 2012, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) purchased the Kalamazoo-Dearborn segment of the Michigan Line from NS for the purpose of preserving and enhancing freight and passenger service along the former Michigan Central. During its first few years of ownership, MDOT reinstated the second main track between CP Towline in Dearborn (where the former MC transitions to Conrail ownership) to CP 28 in Ypsilanti. NS maintains freight rights on the now-Amtrak Michigan Line per the agreement.

Over the next decade, the track and

signal systems would be gradually upgraded and improved, mostly working west to east, in anticipation of having the entire Amtrak-dispatched portion of the former MC capable of 110 mph running, including the section from Porter, Ind., to Kalamazoo.

On December 9, 2014, the John D. Dingell Transit Center opened in Dearborn serving Amtrak and intercity bus services. This station, owned by the city of Dearborn, replaced the 1978 Amtrak-built structure. It is located behind the police headquarters and gives passengers living in Detroit's western neighborhoods easier access to Amtrak service.

From 2017, Amtrak would take delivery of Siemens SC-44 Chargers (actually owned by Illinois Department of Transportation and carrying IDTX reporting marks) for use on Amtrak Midwest routes, which included the Wolverine trains. These locomotives would replace

the GE P42DCs that had been in use on all Michigan Amtrak trains since the late 1990s. On May 25, 2021, the track speed limit from Kalamazoo to Albion was increased from 79 to 110 mph. Plans call for the Albion to Dearborn segment to also be raised to 110 mph as track and signal infrastructure upgrades continue.



Amtrak Jackson Subdivision Today

Today, Amtrak runs the same six Wolverine Service trains between Chicago and Detroit as it has in the past. One of the biggest differences is the trains have taken on an eccentric look as Amtrak Midwest is in the midst of receiving Siemens Venture cars to replace the 40- to 50-year-old Amfleet I and II and 30-plus-year-old Horizon cars. Because there are not enough new Venture cars yet certified for service to result in consistently solid trainsets, you can often find all three models of passenger cars on a single Wolverine train.

On the freight side, there are no through trains that ply the Amtrak Michigan Line. Instead, "road locals" forward freight between the rest of the rail network and hubs like Wayne, Jackson, and Battle Creek for final delivery by local jobs to customers along the line. This

also includes interchange with other railroads like Jackson & Lansing in Jackson.

The current list of daily NS trains includes trains B17 and B18 (Wayne Switchers), going on duty at 3:00AM and 2:30PM, respectively. The crews switch the yard and nearby customers, and will also provide relief to the B19 crew if they run over their hours of service. Train B19 is the Wayne-Oakwood Yard Turn with a 9:00PM call time. Train B44, the Jackson Local, goes on duty at 6:00AM, followed by B22, the Jackson to Albion local, going on duty at 7:00AM. Train B25 is the Jackson-Wayne Turn going on duty at 9:00PM; it sometimes works Chelsea Milling Co. (Jiffy) and other customers along the way, if time permits. Train B33 is the Jackson-Battle Creek Turn.

Currently, NS assigns standard cab EMD GP38-2s and SD40-2s as the primary power for the various jobs on the Amtrak Michigan Line. Well-worn former Norfolk & Western wide-vision cupola cabooses are also assigned to certain trains (such as B19) that have long shoving moves as part of their job assignment.

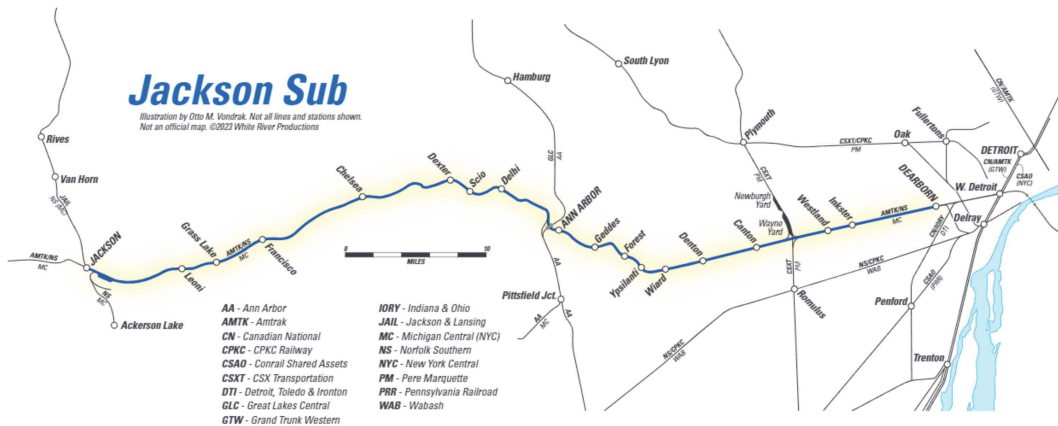
Railfanning the Jackson Sub

Chasing trains along the Amtrak Jackson Sub can be challenging. Amtrak trains have maximum speeds of 79 and 110 mph, making them virtually impossible to chase. Many NS freight trains



ABOVE LEFT: Jackson & Lansing Train JLI finishes its air test in Jackson Yard and will begin the trip north to Mason as ADBF GP40-2 822 leads solo on the night of September 22, 2023. TYLER PATE PHOTO

LEFT: Between Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor, Mich., the Amtrak Jackson Sub crosses the Huron River just above the Superior Dam. Amtrak Wolverine Service Train 355 crosses the river at sunset on August 15, 2022. AERIAL PHOTO



are slower, with a top speed of 50 mph, but some operate during the nighttime hours. One exception is when B19 outlaws near the Dearborn Amtrak station and sits in broad daylight until a Wayne Yard crew can come and fetch the train. Otherwise, you have to pick and choose your locations based on desired scenery and time of day. On a perfectly sunny day for much of the year, eastbounds have the best lighting in the morning and westbounds in the evening. Night photography is largely confined to the station areas at Dearborn, Ann Arbor, and Jackson. I tend to favor two particular stretches of the Jackson Sub for the multiple photo locations that are easy to access from a parallel route — from the Dearborn Amtrak Station to the former MC depot in Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor to Dexter.

From the parking lot of the Dearborn Amtrak station, head west on U.S. Route 12 through Dearborn, Dearborn Heights, Inkster, Westland, and Wayne. The Jackson Sub parallels the highway just to the south, providing a mix of urban and residential scenery. Good photo locations can be found at most grade crossings along that stretch, including: Mason or Monroe streets in Dearborn; Harrison Street in Inkster; Merriman Road in Westland; and Second Street in Wayne.

From Wayne west to the Depot Town area in Ypsilanti, continue on U.S. 12 until Business U.S. 12 splits from it. Take

this road west to River Steet in Ypsilanti and turn right. Follow River Street north until you come across the former MC depot; public parking can be found nearby. Along the way, the grade crossings at Sheldon Road and Beck Road in Canton allow for nice rural flatland scenes without venturing far from suburbia.

To get to the second stretch of the Jackson Sub, between Ann Arbor and Dexter, you'll want to make your way from Ypsilanti to Route M153 and turn left to go west. Follow signs for U.S. Route 23 South/M14 West. Follow M14 West to Business U.S. 23 in Ann Arbor. Immediately after getting onto Business U.S. 23, turn right onto Huron River Drive to head west toward Dexter.

The scenery along Huron River Drive between Ann Arbor and Dexter features high hills, the Huron River, a man-made pond above a dam, and various woodland features along the way as you follow the

road. In fact, the Jackson Sub crosses the Huron River six times from the beginning of Huron River Drive in Ann Arbor to Delhi Metro Park, with some of the river crossings photographable from the side of the road, including at the Barton Nature Area.

Upon arriving at the outskirts of Dexter, turn left onto Central Street and then onto Third Street. This will bring you to the MC depot, home to the Ann Arbor Model Railroad Club. Here, a great shot of an eastbound coming around the sweeping curve west of the depot presents itself.

Other Photo Locations

West of Dexter in Chelsea is another former MC depot and Chelsea Milling Company's Jiffy plant. Follow Broad Street from the depot to Main Street and turn right. Turn left onto Dexter-Chelsea Road, which parallels the railroad



RIGHT: Amtrak Train 350, with IDTX Charger 4630, passes the Jiffy mix plant in downtown Chelsea on February 13, 2022. The factory mural makes for a fantastic backdrop for passing eastbound trains.

BELOW RIGHT: Spring is in the air as Amtrak Train 351 arrives just after sunrise for its station stop at the John D. Dingell Transit Center in Dearborn on May 12, 2022. Greenfield Village Museum can be seen in the background.

BELOW: The Dingell Transit Center opened in December 2014 — replacing a nearby facility built by Amtrak in 1978 — giving riders in Detroit's western suburbs easier access to the train.



ABOVE: Norfolk Southern Train B44 pulls out of Jackson Yard with loaded plastic pellet cars behind GP38-2 5335 on November 16, 2020. TYLER PATE PHOTO



LEFT: The sidewalk at the west end of the Ann Arbor Amtrak Station platform allows good lighting for shooting westbound trains during the afternoon hours, such as this scene of IDTX Charger 4629 leading Amtrak Train 355 in August 2021.

wide-open view of the west end of Jackson Yard; the main line runs just to the north. You can park along the edge of the access road that runs between the NS yard and Miller Trucking (an important customer located in the old MC locomotive shops). The NS crews and Miller Trucking have been mostly tolerant of this activity, so be respectful and don't venture beyond the edge of the road.

Visiting the Area

Name-brand hotels, gas, food, and other amenities are readily available in Dearborn, Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor, Jackson, and more. Tourist attractions in towns and cities along the Amtrak Jackson Subdivision include the Henry Ford/Greenfield Village Museum complex in Dearborn, the restaurants and shops in the Depot Town area of Ypsilanti, the Dexter Cider Mill and Ann Arbor Model Railroad Club in Dexter, the Lost Railway Museum in Grass Lake, and Jackson Historic Prison Tours in Jackson.

While the Amtrak Jackson Sub doesn't have a high volume of trains, it more than makes up for it with easy-to-time Amtrak trains, the challenge of shooting the elusive NS trains, varied scenery, and plenty of different spots to shoot from trackside to enhance the appeal of this state-owned main line. 📸

between Dexter and Chelsea; in Chelsea, it turns into Railroad Street. Follow it to McKinley Street and turn left. Turn right onto Middle Street and follow it to Route M52 and turn right again. The M52 crossing gives you views of both the Jiffy plant and the Chelsea depot; park in the public parking area next to the depot. Here, the Jiffy plant makes a good scene for eastbounds, with the depot providing the supporting scene for westbounds.

From here, travel south on Route M52 to I-94 and head west. Exit the freeway at Mount Hope Road and head south, following signs for Grass Lake. Mount Hope turns into Union Street upon arrival at Grass Lake. Turn right onto Michigan Avenue, where the Jackson Sub parallels the road.

From Grass Lake, retrace your steps back to I-94 to continue west toward Jackson. Exit the freeway at M106/

Cooper Street and head south toward downtown, following signs for the train station. You can find public parking adjoining the historic former MC station off nearby Elisabeth Street. The station interior has been nicely restored and the station platform and the public sidewalk at the adjacent grade crossing provide photography opportunities in both directions.

Backtracking railroad east a tad is Norfolk Southern's Jackson Yard, which supports local and regional needs plus serves as the interchange point with Jackson & Lansing (JAIL). To get a view of the yard from the train station, cross the tracks at Cooper Street and immediately turn left onto Hupp Avenue. Turn left onto Washington Avenue and follow it east, passing Amtrak's small maintenance yard. Washington Avenue dead-ends at Elm Avenue, providing a



DEARBORN TO JACKSON

Amtrak's Jackson Sub

JACK STRYKER/PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR EXCEPT AS NOTED

IT'S A WARM, September morning in 2020 at the John D. Dingell Transit Center in Dearborn, Mich. The sun and headlights appear at the same time on the eastern horizon, when the automated announcement comes over the P.A. system: "Can I have your attention please! Amtrak Wolverine Service Train 351, en route to Ann Arbor, Chicago..." Moments later, a 4600-series Amtrak Midwest SC-44 Charger pulls smoothly into the station with its mixed consist of Horizon and Amfleet coaches. Two minutes later, the engineer sounds off the horn and the train accelerates down the former Michigan Central main line and out of sight.

Welcome to the Jackson Subdivision. We'll focus on the former MC main between Dearborn and Jackson, the subject

of most of my photography. This is known as the Amtrak Jackson Subdivision, or the "East End."

History

The original Michigan Central Railroad dates to 1846, originally chartered to connect Detroit with St. Joseph, Mich. It would grow to cover most of the state, as well as expand across Ontario to connect with the eastern rail hub at Buffalo, N.Y. By 1867, the railroad came under control of New York Central, operating MC as a subsidiary. In 1968, NYC merged with Pennsylvania Railroad to form Penn Central. The fallout from the massive 1970 corporate bankruptcy of PC resulted in the formation of Conrail by the federal government to assume operations in 1976.

In the early years of Conrail operation, there were three round-trip Amtrak trains operating between Chicago and Detroit, plus Amtrak's *Michigan Executive* commuter train operating between Detroit and Jackson. In addition, Conrail operated six to eight daily freight trains between Detroit and Jackson, where some freight trains diverted to the former Michigan Air Line route between Jackson and Three Rivers destined for either Elkhart, Ind., or Chicago. Train symbols included DJ-5 (Detroit-Jackson), DC-1 (Detroit-Elkhart), TL/TJ-2 (Toledo, Ohio-Jackson), LS-1/LS-3 (New York-Chicago via southern Ontario), NY-2/NY-4 (Chicago-New York via southern Ontario), JT-1/JT-3 (Jackson-Toledo), CD-4 (Chicago-Detroit), and ND-4 (Elkhart-Detroit).

The 1980s and 1990s would see mostly unkind changes to the former MC main in both train operations and route restructuring. In the wake of Conrail divesting itself of connecting routes across Ontario and southern Michigan in the 1980s in favor of consolidating as many trains as possible to the former New York Central "Water Level Route" through Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana, the former MC main line was simultaneously

upgraded and rationalized. Between 1986 and 1988, centralized traffic control (CTC) and welded rail were installed in place of the 1940s-era automatic block system and jointed rail, with support from the state of Michigan. This also resulted in most of the second main track being removed from Dearborn to Jackson and Kalamazoo. The *Michigan Executive* was discontinued in 1984, and Amtrak stopped serving Michigan Central

Station in Detroit on January 6, 1988. Trains stopped at a temporary platform located near MCS until the new station opened in the New Center area of Detroit in 1994.

While Amtrak continued to operate three daily round trips between Chicago and Detroit, only a handful of Conrail freight trains plied the rails between Dearborn and Jackson including ML441/DNCH (Detroit North Yard-Chicago),



OPPOSITE: With plenty of lighting on both platforms, the John D. Dingell Transit Center located near MCS for an excellent location along the Amtrak Jackson Subdivision to photograph trains in low-light situations, like this scene from September 19, 2023.

LEFT: On a frigid January 2022 morning, we find eastbound Amtrak Train 350 kicking up fresh powder as it approaches the Sheldon Road crossing in Canton, Mich., en route to its next station stop in Dearborn.

BELOW: "NS B33 slow clear CP 75, 3 Main to 2 west, out," crackles the radio as the three-man Norfolk Southern crew takes the Battle Creek-bound train out of Jackson Yard, passing the historic Michigan Central depot on September 17, 2020. Opened in 1873, it remains one of the oldest, continually operating passenger stations in America. TYLER PATE PHOTO

