

**Midwest Regional Rail Passenger Initiative and Passenger Rail Service in Iowa
Status Report
February 1, 2008**

This report is submitted as required per Iowa Code section 327J.3(5), "The director shall report annually to the general assembly concerning the development and operation of the midwest regional rail system and the state's passenger rail service."

Background (also provided previously in 2007 Legislative report)

The Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI) is a nine-state effort to develop an implementation plan for a 3,000-mile, high-speed rail system hubbed in Chicago. Studies done since 1996 have concluded that such a regional system, including a line from Chicago to Omaha through Davenport, Iowa City and Des Moines, is viable. Most of the system would be upgraded to allow 110 mile-per-hour service. Some low volume lines, including the Iowa portions, would be upgraded for 79 mile-per-hour service.

The nine-state coalition released an updated 2004 executive report for the system. As reported, the updated cost estimate for the Chicago to Omaha corridor, which includes a branch to Quincy, Ill., is \$638 million for infrastructure and \$167 million for rolling stock. These costs are higher than first estimated in 1998 and are given in 2002 dollars, (not adjusted for the cost of inflation). Operating subsidies would be required during an extended start-up phase. The allocation of these subsidy costs among the various states has not been determined, and is still a subject for analysis and negotiation. Little progress on implementation is expected unless a federal funding package is passed for passenger rail initiatives.

Participation of the Iowa Department of Transportation in the MWRRI is authorized under Iowa Code section 327J.3.

Current Status of MWRRI

The ongoing work of the nine-state MWRRI steering committee is currently focusing on:

- Further efforts of system planning in preparation for a programmatic environmental analysis and getting projects ready to proceed.
- Developing support and advocating for a federal program to provide funding for passenger rail initiatives.
- Continuing to develop ideas to address ongoing institutional and long-term management issues.

The MWRRI states participate in a variety of regional and national outreach activities to encourage congressional support for a dedicated, federal passenger rail-funding program. The states have cooperated with a number of passenger rail support groups, including the Midwest High Speed Rail Coalition, Iowa Association of Railroad Passengers, States for Passenger Rail Coalition, and American Association of State Highway and

Transportation Officials. All of these support groups recognize that a strong state and federal funding partnership is essential to the development of a national passenger rail system.

Other MWRRRI states are proceeding with studies and developing funding mechanisms to be ready if federal funds become available. These steps will also be required for the development of Iowa's portions of the system. To date, Iowa funds have not been appropriated for system engineering, design, environmental assessment, construction, or operation.

A copy of the recently released *Midwest Regional Rail System, Executive Report, September 2004* on the MWRRRI is available at www.iowarail.com.

Amtrak regional feasibility studies

Amtrak completed a Feasibility Study for service between Chicago and Dubuque in June 2007 and a Feasibility Study for service between Chicago and the Quad Cities in January 2008. These routes are primarily in the state of Illinois but will provide passenger rail connections to and from Chicago for Iowans. Iowa DOT is coordinating with Amtrak, Illinois DOT and the local communities on the development of these routes.

In summer 2007, Iowa DOT requested Amtrak feasibility studies for service from Chicago to extend to Iowa City and Des Moines. These studies are anticipated to be received from Amtrak in 2008.

Iowa DOT has met with communities along these proposed routes, including Dubuque, Quad Cities, Iowa City and Des Moines. Iowa DOT will update the DOT's Rail Plan in 2008 and identify state and local needs for a future program.

Federal Funding

Continued congressional discussion on policy directions relative to Amtrak clouds the issue of passenger rail funding. In 2007, the Senate passed S294 which reauthorizes Amtrak and provides some capital to states. The House has not taken action on this bill.

The 2008 Omnibus appropriations bill provides a capital program for the states in the amount of \$30 million. This is the first time capital funding is available to the states for passenger rail service.

Iowa Department of Transportation