

**Midwest Regional Rail Passenger Initiative
Status Report
December 2002**

Background

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 between 1996 and 1998 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, will be upgraded for 79 mile-per-hour service.

The nine-state coalition, together with Amtrak, has been working since 1998 on efforts to further refine specific proposals for the system. As reported in the initial study, the preliminary cost estimate for the Chicago – Omaha corridor, which includes a branch to Quincy, Illinois, is \$402 million for infrastructure and \$85 million for rolling stock. Operating subsidies would also be required during a start-up phase. The allocation of costs among the various states is not complete and is still a subject for analysis. Little progress on implementation is expected unless there is passage of a federal funding package for passenger rail initiatives. Continued Congressional discussions on policy directions relative to Amtrak clouds the issue of passenger rail funding.

The participation of the Iowa Department of Transportation in the MWRRI is authorized under Iowa Code Section 327J.3.

Current Status

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

- 1) Finalizing an update of the capital infrastructure and equipment cost estimates.
- 2) Updating and refining MWRRI feeder bus system recommendations with input from Greyhound including impacts on ridership and revenue.
- 3) Addressing the costs for use of freight railroad facilities and tracks.
- 4) Updating the ridership and revenue forecasts for the system.
- 5) Providing ongoing technical assistance to states on implementation activities.
- 6) Continuing to develop ideas to address ongoing institutional and management issues.

An updated Plan Report is expected early in 2003.

The MWRRI states also 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 several passenger rail support groups including the Midwest High Speed Rail Coalition, Iowa Association of Railroad Passengers, and the States for Passenger Rail Coalition.

The states of Wisconsin and Illinois have worked cooperatively with Amtrak on the procurement of rolling stock (train sets) specifically designed for high-speed corridor service in the Midwest. Even though specifications have been developed, negotiations have been discontinued pending action on federal funding legislation and the unstable status of Amtrak.

Illinois and Michigan have begun work to rehabilitate track and upgrade rail signal systems to allow the higher speeds the system plan calls for. Illinois has recently completed an operational test of their system. Some of this work is groundbreaking innovation in cooperation with the Association of American Railroads and could provide new systems for use nationwide.

Wisconsin has completed preliminary engineering and environmental assessment work on the corridor between Milwaukee and Madison. Work continues on rehabilitation of the Milwaukee Amtrak station and plans call for a new station at the Milwaukee airport.

Other states are proceeding with studies and developing funding mechanisms in order to be ready for federal funds if they become available. These steps will also be required for the development of the Iowa portions of the system. To date, no Iowa funds have been appropriated for system engineering, design, environmental assessment, construction or operation.

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