Midwest Regional Rail Passenger Initiative

**Status Report**

**December 2003**

# 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 on 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 related to Amtrak cloud the issue of passenger rail funding. However, Congress is expected to address passenger rail issues and funding in 2004.

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. Capital costs are expected to increase due to inflation, track speed adjustments and more reliable estimates of current condition.
2. Addressing the costs for use of freight railroad facilities and tracks including better estimates of on-going maintenance.
3. Updating the ridership and operating revenue and costs forecasts for the system based on updated population/income estimates, more refined network analysis and updated market research.
4. Continuing to develop ideas to address ongoing institutional and management issues.
5. Preparing an updated Plan Report which is expected early in 2004.

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 a number of passenger rail support groups including the Midwest High Speed Rail Coalition, Iowa Association of Railroad Passengers, the States for Passenger Rail Coalition and American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. All recognize that a strong state and federal funding partnership is essential to the development of a national passenger rail system.

Other MWRRI 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.

Prepared by the Modal Division

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