



## Governor toots rail's horn

Culver promotes rail expansion, green technology, I-Jobs on southeast Iowa tour.

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The rail lines that cut across the nation carry everything from coal to grain to cars to people.

Gov. Chet Culver, a Democrat, used those multiple-use rail lines Wednesday to multitask. During his southern Iowa tour from Creston to Burlington -- and a brief trip into Illinois -- Culver promoted the state infrastructure I-Jobs program and a renewed focus on green energy, but mostly maintained focus on the state's passenger rail service.

"It's really a two-pronged approach; it's a new concept that we're going to continue to have the longer hauls, the kind of east to west Zephyr-type of service, and we're going to complement that with more of a regional-type approach," Culver said during a BNSF-hosted train ride from Mount Pleasant into Burlington.

He said that will require maintenance and upgrades to the existing system, as well as developing an almost-commuter rail type of service. While the main focus has been on a route from Iowa City to Chicago, Culver said the southern route will not be forgotten.

"It's not going to compete with some other transportation or even rail options; it's just if that's your destination and you want to make a round-tripper, that suddenly is a good option," Culver said. "We've made it very clear that we've got to have both, and the advantage for Burlington and for Mount Pleasant is that as a result of this new refocus, this line, the California-Zephyr line is going to improve."

The first key is improving reliability and increased speed, Culver said.

"That should mean you suddenly get more people that say, 'Wait a second;' instead of flying into a regional hub like Chicago, you suddenly have a better option with the train," Culver said, adding that it is going to take effort to push Iowans into the rail mindset.

Culver has made four trips across the state on the rail lines to promote passenger services.

While some of those improvements -- which includes construction of a new BNSF Railway bridge and new lines to route passengers around the slower-moving coal trains -- are federally funded, others are statewide and across-state-

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Gov. Chet Culver speaks to a crowd Wednesday after making a stop at the Burlington Depot during his train tour, which traveled from Creston to Burlington and made stops along the way in Osceola, Albia, Ottumwa, Fairfield and Mount Pleasant.

lines initiatives.

"We had a very historic Midwestern governors summit in Chicago a couple months ago, and we brought all the federal officials in and we are one of the only regions in the country that was really organized to tell the federal government, essentially we're ready to move," Culver said in Burlington.

By doing their homework, he said the states are more likely to qualify for some of the \$8 billion in federal stimulus dollars designated for passenger rail service, including the green line from Iowa City to Chicago route.

Culver said that green line, and others that may come after it, will use biodiesel and soy lubricant; its conductors will punch paperless tickets; and the depots will be certified as energy efficient.

"That should allow Iowa to stand out even more from the pack, but we are very optimistic and hope we can get that done in the next two to three years," Culver said.

Culver said the stimulus and I-Jobs funds also should help improve depots throughout Iowa, whether they're energy-efficient certified. The Fort Madison depot already received a \$1.13 million grant from the \$830 million I-Jobs initiative that was approved in the past legislative session to build on the federal stimulus program.

"The first round is out the door, but we hope to be able to do more, especially through some of these depot projects, and that's something I've talked to the local officials about as I'm here today and with Amtrak officials, and so between the federal stimulus money the I-Jobs money, there's never been a better opportunity to get this renovation done," Culver said. "It's like a modern airport; you want to have a modern depot and that investment should help with ridership too."