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## \$233 million price put on rail service to Iowa City

By Steve Gravelle The Gazette, Cedar Rapids, Iowa  
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IOWA CITY (MCT) — It should cost something over \$230 million to bring passenger trains into Iowa City in five years.

The joint application for federal stimulus funds filed Friday by Illinois and Iowa transportation officials seeks \$233 million for the project, more than four times the \$54.9 million estimated in a 2007 Amtrak study.

"It's kind of like apples and oranges with what's included in the Amtrak feasibility study and what's included in the application," said Tamara Nicholson, Iowa Department of Transportation rail planner. "We had to present a service that could go from beginning to end and (the funds needed) in order to implement that service." "This is more of a turnkey application," said Nancy Quellhorst, president and CEO of the Iowa City Area Chamber of Commerce, which supports the proposed service.

The more detailed funding application includes costs omitted from the feasibility study, Nicholson said.

They include improved grade crossing protection — usually installation of gates and flashers — renovations to three train stations, construction of some new track, and installation of an upgraded train-control system that became mandatory after the 2007 study was done.

The safer crossings "were mentioned in the Amtrak study but did not have dollars on them," Nicholson said. The plan calls for a schedule of about five hours between Iowa City and Chicago.

The cost of passenger cars and locomotives jumps from \$4.2 million in the 2007 study to \$59 million. A new federal mandate for improved train-control systems added \$20 million, Nicholson said, and other states' rail expansion plans have depleted the available supply of cars.

"We're not sure when this project gets funded whether there will be used Amtrak equipment available," she said. "I would hope if there's used equipment available at a lower price, we could do that." Instead of refurbishing used equipment, the stimulus plan calls for buying new — seven coaches, three locomotives, three food-service cars, and three cars equipped with operators' cabs.

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Under the initial study, communities along the route would buy and remodel their train stations. Instead, the stimulus proposal includes \$13.4 million for that purpose.

In addition to \$4.2 million for Iowa City's 1898 depot, the plan funds stations in Moline and Geneseo, Ill.

"Purchasing the depot is in our long-term plans," Iowa City Mayor Regenia Bailey said. Based on initial ridership of 187,000 passengers a year, the financial plan calls for the two states to split the annual operating subsidy of \$7.4 million.

If approved — Quellhorst and Nicholson hope for word by early next year — equipment would be ordered and engineering studies conducted next year. Station improvements would begin in 2012, with trackwork over the next two years.

The first trains would roll over the route in 2014.

The Iowa Legislature has appropriated \$3 million for the project, Illinois \$5 million.

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