

Passenger rail grant awarded to Iowa and other Midwest states

Posted: *October 03, 2008*

AMES, Iowa--The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has awarded Iowa, along with eight other Midwest states, a \$297,000 grant under the "Capital Assistance to States – Intercity Passenger Rail Service Program."

The grant provides for continued planning for the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI), including passenger rail alternatives analysis; updating the MWRRI system costs, equipment, train control and operating plans; and preparation of public outreach materials. The proposed MWRRI route in Iowa includes service from Chicago-Quad Cities-Des Moines-Omaha.

The MWRRI system is a 3,000-mile system providing improved intercity passenger rail service using Chicago as a regional hub. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation serves as Secretariat for the MWRRI Steering Committee, representing the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

"We're pleased about being selected for this grant by the FRA," says Tamara Nicholson, director of the Iowa Department of Transportation's Office of Rail Transportation. "It helps validate the Midwest states' passenger rail plans at the federal level and keeps Iowa moving toward development of expanded rail passenger service."

Description: This planning work is intended to continue the MWRRI on the path to implementation by updating and refining key MWRRI plan elements and public information materials and completing corridor alternatives analysis work called for in the FRA Rail Corridor Transportation Plan Guidance Manual. The MWRRI Plan provides the basic blueprint for state implementation efforts in the region and insures regional consistency in each state's efforts as well as the efficient use of state and federal implementation funding.

As planned, the MWRRI would:

- Improve existing rail corridors owned by freight and commuter railroads and Amtrak to accommodate both passenger and freight trains.
- Use Chicago as the network hub.

- Use state-of-the-art train equipment to provide improved reliability, speed and passenger comfort.
- Provide frequent service.
- Operate at speeds up to 110 mph (79 mph in Iowa).
- Include new or remodeled stations.
- Use a coordinated intercity/feeder bus service to connect to additional communities.
- Link, wherever possible, with air, intercity bus, transit, taxi service, and bicycle and pedestrian modes

More details on the MWRRI system and operation can be found on the Iowa DOT's Web site at: <http://www.iowarail.com/passenger/passengerhome.htm>.

Benefits: The goal of MWRRI is to construct a high-performance passenger rail system that serves as a catalyst for economic growth and development. The MWRRI expands railroad capacity to provide competitive train travel times; system-wide connectivity; and fast, frequent and reliable passenger services that offer an attractive transportation option for travelers throughout the Midwest region.

The planning objectives outlined in the grant support Iowa's initiatives to expand passenger rail service, including establishing intercity passenger rail service within the Midwest region that can serve Iowa cities.