

Input sought on passenger rail plan

Service from Chicago to Iowa City could stop at Morris

CHICAGO, Ill. – The Iowa Department of Transportation, in cooperation with the Illinois Department of Transportation, is seeking public input concerning the environmental assessment of proposed routes for intercity passenger rail service between Iowa City and Chicago.

Under one of the proposed routes, new train stations would also be established at Morris and La Salle.

An open forum public input meeting will be conducted from 4 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 29, at the i wireless Center, Room D, 1201 River Drive, Moline, Ill.

The EA of the proposed routes will be available at the meeting for public review and comment. It will include information evaluating the proposed routes and the potential impacts on the human, natural and economic environments along the corridors.

It is in a cooperative effort to increase regional mobility, reduce roadway congestion and meet future travel demands, that the state transportation agencies in Illinois and Iowa are moving forward with plans to evaluate possible routes for new intercity passenger rail service between Chicago, the Quad Cities, and Iowa City.

As part of the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative, the Iowa and Illinois DOTs, in conjunction with the Federal Railroad Administration, have been evaluating specific alternative routes to establish passenger rail connections between Chicago and Iowa City.

These alternatives are currently undergoing a thorough environmental assessment to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act and help qualify the planning effort for federal grant funding from the FRA and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

The EA is anticipated to be released Thursday, Sept. 24, and it will be made available for a 21-day public review and comment period. The document can be accessed on the project Web site and at local libraries along the corridor.

“Right now, the only realistic options for those traveling or commuting between Iowa City and Chicago are taking the bus or driving; we need more options to connect our metropolitan areas” Nancy Richardson, director of the Iowa DOT, said.

Illinois DOT Secretary Gary Hannig added, “Daily rail service will provide thousands with a safe, comfortable and sustainable mode of transit. It will also help relieve the growing burden on our existing roads.”

The two proposed routes would make use of existing freight and passenger rail lines.

From Union Station in Chicago, the northern route (Alternative A) would travel west along the existing BNSF Railway, which already serves Amtrak, passing through Naperville, Plano, Mendota, and Princeton, before connecting to the Iowa Interstate Railroad (IAIS) at Wyandot.

The southern route (Alternative B) would follow the METRA line from Union Station to Joliet, and then continue on to Morris and La Salle on what is known as the CSXT line, which currently moves freight. Like Alternative A, this route would connect to the IAIS at Wyandot.

Both routes would then travel west to Geneseo, the Quad Cities and Iowa City. New Amtrak stations would be established at these last three destinations and, if Alternative B is selected, new stations would also be established at Morris and La Salle.

The MWRRI plan would provide an ultimate service level of 10 trains per day (five round trips) from Chicago to Iowa City,

with train speeds reaching approximately 80-90 mph. Initial service would begin with four trains per day (two round trips) at peak speeds of 79 mph.

For more information or to view the proposed routes, EA and locations where the EA can be viewed locally, please visit www.CHICAGOTOIOWACITY.com or call 800-487-2302.

Fast facts:

- The existing railroads that will be used to provide this new passenger service originally carried both passengers and freight, dating back to the 1860s. Between the 1950s and 1970s, rail passenger service declined dramatically, and most of the passenger-carrying operations were eventually terminated. However, one segment between Chicago and Naperville has been providing regular commuter rail service since 1863.
- The American Association of Railroads estimates that every dollar spent on investment in our nation's railroads – including tracks, equipment, locomotives, and bridges – yields \$3 in economic output. In addition, each \$1 billion of rail investment creates 20,000 jobs.

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