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No point person, yet, for Midwest passenger rail push

by [Pat Curtis](#) on October 6, 2009

in [Legislature](#), [Politics & Government](#)

Iowa's federal application for expanded Amtrak service could be approved before the end of the year.

The federal stimulus package includes about \$8 billion for passenger rail throughout the country. There are two proposed routes in Iowa, one from Dubuque to Chicago and another from Iowa City to Chicago. U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood urged a coalition of nine Midwest states to select a point person to manage the region's application. The governors of those states have yet to choose somebody.

Nancy Quelhorst, President and C.E.O. of the Iowa City Area Chamber of Commerce, says choosing a point person would be an added benefit. "I think that opportunity still exists and I think it would behoove us to listen to what Secretary LaHood indicates the Obama administration needs to advocate on our behalf. Although, the decision on that would be one of our governors," Quelhorst said.

Chicago recently lost a bid to host the 2016 Olympics. Quelhorst says that should not affect Illinois' and Iowa's chances for federal funding. "While there would certainly have been economic value to having the Olympics held in Chicago and the subsequent patronage in Iowa City, the conditions of the grant were that it be a multi-state project – which obviously it is for us," Quelhorst said.

State officials sent in their application for funding on Friday. The federal government is expected to decide which projects get funding in December or January. Quelhorst is optimistic about Iowa's chances of getting more Amtrak service because she says there has already been cooperation among states, especially between Illinois and Iowa.

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