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Amtrak Proposes Iowa City to Quad Cities Train

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IOWA CITY - Many people make the drive from Eastern Iowa to Chicago. It is long and can be a real hassle. But a new proposal could make the trip more relaxing. Amtrak might soon make the drive for you.

It has been nearly 40 years since a train depot in Iowa City has seen the hustle and bustle of passenger train service. But a new study suggests there is a real need and desire for a train from Iowa City to the Quad Cities and on to Chicago. That means this could be a busy place again in the near future.

The closest Amtrak station to Iowa City is in an hour away in Mount Pleasant. Amtrak believes another train in Iowa City would be popular and beneficial. It would run non-stop, twice a day to the Quad Cities. Iowa City Mayor Regina Bailey said, "I think we have to continue to study it, look at the numbers more closely and see how we can move ahead on this."

Just about everyone is aboard this plan. The one hold-out is the state government, which would have to spend about \$2-million every year to support the service. That is on top of a \$32.5-million start-up cost to improve the tracks. The railroad going through Iowa City is built for freight and trains can only go 40 miles per hour. That speed would have to double. Iowa Interstate Railroad President Dennis Miller said, "For passenger service speed is essential. That 40 mile per hour difference is very critical to get people to go."

If the passenger trains can reach 80 miles per hour, Amtrak estimates 76-thousand people will ride them each year. That would cut down on Interstate traffic and save fossil fuels. Amtrak Assistant Vice President Michael Franke said, "The amount consumed by mile or per passenger is much less than by driving or flying."

If Illinois and Iowa lawmakers like the idea of a relaxing ride from the Quad Cities to Iowa City, the train could be ready to leave the station relatively soon. A representative with Amtrak says once the funding is in place, the tracks could be upgraded with a train running on them in two years. The money will not be approved in Iowa this year, but Governor Culver expressed a desire to move forward with the plan, so maybe next year.

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