

## **Amtrak looks at adding Iowa City to Chicago route**

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — Amtrak is mulling a twice daily train running between Chicago and Iowa City, with service a realistic goal by late 2011, Amtrak officials said Friday.

The train, operating at a top speed of 79 mph, would make the trip in about five hours. Amtrak officials believe as many as 187,000 passengers would ride the route annually, which would include a stop in the Quad Cities.

Amtrak announced the proposed route at a press conference in Iowa City on Friday. Jim Larew of Iowa City, who is also Gov. Chet Culver's policy director and chief legal counsel, urged train backers to rally support for the Amtrak plan. The proposal would require the Iowa Legislature to subsidize the train service with taxpayer money.

“Let us all become torchbearers, lighters of political bonfires,” Larew said.

Nancy Richardson, Iowa Department of Transportation director, cited high gas prices, the environment and traffic concerns as reasons to support the route.

“But this isn't going to be easy,” Richardson said. She noted the proposal will require partnerships with Illinois, Amtrak, private railroads, community leaders, state and federal lawmakers, and others.

The transportation department will ask Iowa lawmakers next year for money to expand railroad passenger service, Richardson said.

If the money is provided, it would require two additional years to upgrade the tracks and rehabilitate passenger cars for a Chicago-Iowa City train, Amtrak officials said.

Iowa and Illinois would share the capital investment costs for the proposed train, as well as the estimated Amtrak operating contract expense of about \$6 million annually.

Officials believe upgrading the railroad tracks and signals would be about \$54.9 million. That doesn't include costs for railroad cars, locomotives and train stations.

Iowa is currently served by two Amtrak long-distance trains that pass through southern Iowa daily between Chicago and the West Coast.

Amtrak last year completed a study of establishing passenger rail service between Chicago and Dubuque. It has also explored train service between Chicago and the Quad Cities.