



Amtrak, DOT say 'yes' to rail service between Q-C, Iowa City

By Megan Stephenson | Friday, April 18, 2008

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Rail service that would extend a Chicago-to-Quad-Cities line to Iowa City is financially feasible and has community support, according to a study conducted by Amtrak that was released Friday in Iowa City.

A link between the Quad-Cities and Iowa City would require state subsidies to operate, but annual ridership could reach 186,900 people and bring in up to \$4.8 million in revenue, said Mike Franke, the assistant vice president of state and commuter partnerships for Amtrak.

The Amtrak study, requested by the Iowa Department of Transportation, is an offshoot of a previous study of the Quad-Cities to Chicago. Nancy Richardson, director of the Iowa Department of Transportation, said the next step is to take the proposal to the Iowa Legislature in 2009.

It already is drawing support from potential users.

Kelly Stavnes, a 2004 graduate of Pleasant Valley High School and a senior at the [University of Iowa](#), said the service would be a boost to Quad-City natives at the university.

“For students who don’t have cars, as long as the train station was within walking distance of campus, this could be a big time-saver for parents who would otherwise have to come get their children for the weekend,” Stavnes said.

She said the train would be equally beneficial to university students wanting to travel to Chicago for weekend trips.

And community leaders at both ends of the proposed rail line are backing the plan, too. Tara Barney, president and CEO of DavenportOne, said her group will now look at how it can support the proposal.

“This will open up opportunities for the Quad-City area,” she said. “Chicago is a huge resource for [our] residents.”

Barney also pointed to the large connections between Iowa City and the Quad-Cities, especially involving the [University of Iowa](#). She said her next step would be to meet with the city governments and fellow chambers of commerce in the Iowa City area and Chicago.

Iowa City Mayor Regina Bailey said that she has waited a long time for this day and that Amtrak "would enhance what we already think of as a great place to live."

The [University of Iowa](#) community, she thinks, would embrace the rail line.

The proposed route would most likely be over the old Rock Island Railroad, which used to carry services from the Q-C to Chicago and is now owned by Iowa Interstate Railroad. The freight routes of either the IIR or BNSF rail company could work as the blueprint for the passenger train routes, which would then need to be upgraded.

The Iowa portion of the route would cost between \$26.1 million and \$32.5 million, paid for by state subsidies, Amtrak and the cities served. The faster of the two proposed trains, which would reach 79 mph, would increase revenue but keep operating costs relatively stable. Operating expenses are estimated at \$10.8 million for both states, and revenue at \$4.8 million.

Because of a state contract between Iowa and Illinois, Chicago, the Quad-Cities, and Iowa City would share in the \$6 million annual operating costs left over after revenue. If the train were slower, however, the contractors could pay up to \$7.2 million.

Stavnes, a future student of the [University of Iowa](#) School of Law, has plenty of reasons to like this new way of transportation between school and her hometown.

"It might encourage people to do more commuting to both work and school, since for now, it seems like high gas prices, problems parking in Iowa City, and the relatively long, boring commute discourage people from working farther from home," she said.

Prices for a one-way ticket to Chicago from the Quad-Cities are estimated as low as \$19, and a one-way ticket from Iowa City to Chicago might be as low as \$25, said Marc Magliari, Amtrak spokesman.

What Amtrak still needs, according to the report, is to secure funding, have negotiations between Iowa and Illinois, work on infrastructure improvements and station development and build the "support of Iowans."

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