

Posted Online: April 18, 2008; 10A:50 a.m.

Q-C to Iowa City Amtrak study released

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Press release submitted by Iowa Department of Transportation

CHICAGO, Illinois, and AMES, Iowa – April 18, 2008 – A study conducted by Amtrak on behalf of the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT) concerning the feasibility of passenger rail service from the Quad Cities to Iowa City on a route originating at Chicago was released today at a news conference in Iowa City.

Annual ridership on the full route is estimated at about 187,000 passengers, based on two daily round-trips and if improvements are made allowing maximum speeds of 79 mph. The states of Iowa and Illinois would share the capital investment costs and the estimated annual Amtrak operating contract expense of about \$6 million. The estimated cost to upgrade the railroad infrastructure in this example is \$54.9 million.

Iowa Governor Chet Culver said, “Regional intercity passenger rail service is a positive alternative to highway and air travel. Rail service has tremendous advantages in terms of reducing our dependence on fossil fuels and foreign sources of oil; slowing the growth of highway congestion and associated pollution; energy conservation; and lifestyle enhancement through improved mobility for persons who either cannot or simply do not want to drive or fly. That’s why passenger rail service has a bright future in America and why we are going to have to give it a higher priority in moving people in Iowa.”

Iowa DOT Director Nancy Richardson said, “In light of escalating fuel prices, congested interstates and the environmental impacts of highway transportation, modal opportunities such as rail passenger service need to be seriously examined.”

Richardson also said, “This project is an excellent example of the type of public-private partnership that will be essential to sustaining and expanding this country’s multi-modal transportation network. The Iowa DOT appreciates Amtrak’s interest in expanding rail passenger service in Iowa, and is anxious to join them, the Iowa Interstate Railroad and Illinois Department of Transportation in determining the next steps to making this route a reality.”

Amtrak President and CEO Alex Kummant said, “State-supported routes are the

fastest growing part of our business. We look forward to working with Iowa and Illinois to meet with the host railroads and take the next steps to initiate this service.”

Amtrak has never operated scheduled trains to Iowa City, which lost its Rock Island Railroad passenger rail service in 1970, or the Quad Cities, which lost its Rock Island Railroad service in 1978.

The Amtrak study released today is an addendum to an earlier study and report issued in December 2007 for the Illinois Department of Transportation, analyzing the feasibility of rail passenger service from Chicago to the Illinois Quad Cities. Both reports are available at: iowadot.gov/amtrakstudy.

The Illinois report found the best route between the Quad Cities and Chicago would use a portion of the former Rock Island Railroad, now owned by Iowa Interstate Railroad (IAIS), from the Quad Cities to a proposed track connection to the BNSF Railway near Wyanet, Ill. The choice of the IAIS/BNSF route is also enhanced by taking advantage of recently improved Amtrak stations at Princeton, Mendota and Naperville, Ill.

A map depicting the preferred routes from Chicago to the Quad Cities and from the Quad Cities to Iowa City can also be found at: iowadot.gov/amtrakstudy.

For Amtrak service to reach Iowa City, passenger rail service must first be established to the Quad Cities. The addendum released today specifically examines the feasibility of extending service the 59 miles from the Quad Cities to Iowa City via the Iowa Interstate Railroad.

Summary of Findings			
		Train Speed Scenarios	
		Scheduled Running	
		Times (hr:min)	
	As-is	60 mph	79 mph
Illinois segment	4:00	3:35	3:20
Iowa segment	2:20	1:57	1:38
Totals	6:20	5:32	4:58

Estimated Annual Ridership (two daily round-trips)			
Illinois segment	90,000	102,700	110,800
Iowa segment	43,800	60,700	76,100
Totals	133,800	163,400	186,900
“Order of Magnitude” Capital Cost (\$millions)			
Illinois segment	\$5.6	\$13.8	\$22.4
Iowa segment	\$0.3	\$26.1	\$32.5
Totals	\$5.9	\$39.9	\$54.9
Estimated Annual Revenue (\$millions)			
Illinois segment	\$2.1	\$2.4	\$2.6
Iowa segment	\$1.2	\$1.7	\$2.2
Totals	\$3.3	\$4.1	\$4.8
Estimated Annual Operating Expense (\$millions)			
Illinois segment	\$8.4	\$8.4	\$8.5
Iowa segment	\$2.1	\$1.9	\$2.3
Totals	\$10.5	\$10.3	\$10.8
Estimated Combined State Contract Cost (\$millions)	\$7.2	\$6.2	\$6.0

(Not included in the table above are capital expenditures related to railcars and locomotives or the local cost for providing train stations.)

Moving forward

Although there were general operational discussions and field inspections with the host freight railroads, the specific infrastructure improvement proposals, draft schedules and other railroad-related comments in these reports have not been negotiated or agreed to with the host freight railroads, and reflect only the findings and best judgment recommendations of the study team.

For rail passenger service to be extended to Iowa City, several things must occur.

- There must be support from Iowans.
- Funding must be secured.
- Detailed discussions and formal negotiations must take place between Iowa and Illinois and the railroads
- Railcars and locomotives must be procured and stations must be developed.
- Infrastructure improvements must be completed.
- Additional personnel must be recruited and trained.

About Iowa DOT

The Iowa Department of Transportation has been in business since July 1, 1975, following its creation and dissolution of the Iowa Highway Commission. The State of Iowa executive branch agency has multi-modal regulatory, administrative and operational responsibilities. Headquartered in Ames, Iowa, the department employs approximately 3,100 full-time employees, and has operations and facilities located throughout the state.

About Amtrak

Amtrak provides intercity passenger rail service to more than 500 destinations in 46 states on a 21,000-mile route system. For schedules, fares and information, passengers may call 800-USA-RAIL or visit Amtrak.com.

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