

Report says Amtrak service between Iowa City, Chicago could work

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By [Pat Curtis](#)

If Amtrak had a railway operating between Iowa City and Chicago, how many passengers would take advantage of the service? Amtrak's Mike Franke claims it would draw about 187,000 customers a year. An Amtrak study on the matter was released Friday.

"We use an outside firm that does these estimates. They look at demographics, travel demand, and all kinds of modeling. We're very confident these numbers are very solid. In fact, they may be somewhat on the conservative side," Franke said. The study also covers the feasibility of railway service from the Quad Cities to Iowa City on a route originating in Chicago.

The current rail system would require about \$55 million in upgrades to get the tracks ready for passenger service. Those costs would be shared by Iowa and Illinois. Iowa Interstate Railroad's Dennis Miller says it could work. "We've analyzed our freight traffic...our trains that we run. We feel comfortable that we can accommodate this schedule between Iowa City and Chicago," Miller said.

Iowa Department of Transportation Director, Nancy Richardson, whose agency requested the study, says a Passenger Rail Advisory Committee is being assembled. The committee will put a proposal together to take to the Iowa Legislature during next year's session. State Senator Daryl Beall of Fort Dodge says demand for passenger rail service is building.

"I think one of the main catalysts we're seeing is the high cost of fuel and the efficiency with which rail can run," Beall said. The ridership projection is based on twice-daily round trips on tracks that would allow train speeds of 79 miles per hour. Another phase of the study, examining an extension of the route to Des Moines, is expected to be completed later this year.