

Introduction

The *2009 Iowa Railroad System Plan* is intended to guide the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) in its activities of promoting access to rail transportation, helping to improve the freight railroad transportation system, expanding passenger rail service, and promoting improved safety both on the rail system and where the rail system interacts with people and other transportation modes.

The Iowa DOT has been developing railroad transportation plans since the late 1970s. The original plan was prepared in 1978 during a time of crisis in the Iowa railroad system. Several large Iowa railroad carriers had filed for bankruptcy and were reorganizing both their businesses and physical systems. The 1978 plan was a guide for determining which railroad lines the state would partner with to preserve and improve the lines. In the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, the railroad system mileage in Iowa was reduced from about 8,000 to approximately 4,000 miles, a level that has been fairly stable since that time.

Rail plan updates have been prepared about every five years — in 1985, 1995 and 2000. The main issues addressed in these plans have evolved over the years. For instance, in 1978 and 1985, the main issues were railroad line abandonments, major rail carrier bankruptcies and ways of managing both of these issues. A major change in the role of the Iowa DOT occurred during the 1980s, when U.S. freight railroads were largely deregulated by the Staggers Rail Act of 1980 (see Public Law 96-448). Railroads became responsible for setting their own rates and service patterns for the first time in a century. This law also altered the Iowa DOT's role as the department became more involved in rail transportation advocacy and placed increased emphasis on the promotion of safety improvements.

The 1980s and early 1990s were also a time of great turmoil for railroads and shippers in Iowa. By 1995, the Iowa rail system had downsized to around 4,000 miles of track and had become much more stable. At that point, the emphasis of the state rail plan targeted investments that would preserve and improve remaining rail service in Iowa. Also, there was a considerable focus on understanding the role that Iowa railroads play in transporting bulk freight commodities such as grain and coal, the two key commodities moved by rail in Iowa.

The *2000 Iowa Railroad System Plan update* had a similar focus on system preservation and commodity flows, targeting improvements to support freight transportation and freight movement.

Plan	Main area of focus
1978	Determine future rail lines
1985	Advocate preservation of rail service and safety
1995	Targeted investments
2000	System preservation and commodity flows
2009	Promoting access, safety and economic development improving passenger rail system

Public participation

Railroads are a vital part of Iowa's overall transportation system, helping to move both freight and passengers safely and efficiently. Maintaining and improving rail service in Iowa requires a proactive partnership between a number of organizations, including private rail carriers, rail shippers, passengers, the Iowa DOT, other state and federal agencies, and local governments.

Several methods were utilized to provide information to individuals and gather their input on the development of this plan, including the Rail Advisory Committee (RAC), Passenger Rail Advisory Committee (PRAC), metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), regional planning affiliations (RPAs), Dr. Forkenbrock's *Transportation Policy Strategies for Iowa to Advance the Quality of Life* report, and several rail focus group meetings.

Numerous discussions on rail issues and directions were held with the RAC, which includes a member of each railroad that operates within Iowa. In addition, rail information is regularly shared with the MPOs and RPAs.

The PRAC is a relatively new advisory group created to assist the Iowa DOT in addressing a wide array of passenger rail issues important to Iowans. They focus on providing public input on the rail plan and guidance on the development of a funding program for passenger rail.

Dr. Forkenbrock's *Transportation Policy Strategies for Iowa to Advance the Quality of Life* report utilized a diverse array of stakeholders to identify transportation investment strategies having the potential to make Iowa's economy strong and the state a place that offers a rich quality of life. Both railroads and rail users were invited to participate in the discussions and share their thoughts on rail transportation. The report can be found at http://www.iowainmotion.com/files/trans_policy_strategies.pdf.

Five rail freight roundtable meetings were previously held around the state to discuss rail freight transportation issues. The meetings focused on the future of rail transportation in Iowa; and what should be the Iowa DOT's role and investment. Participants included railroads, rail users, state agencies, and trade organizations with an interest in rail transportation.

Overview of the document organization

The *2009 Iowa Railroad System Plan* is organized in three major parts, including:

Part I - The Iowa railroad investment plan identifies the key issues facing Iowa's railroad system today. These issues impact Iowa's economic well-being and the safety of Iowa's citizens. This part of the document also contains a detailed action plan for addressing the identified issues.

Part II - The Iowa railroad resource guide provides background information for the plan, grouped by topic. It also provides information about railroads and Iowa's railroad system. The major topics covered in this section of the document include:

- Iowa's railroad system and carriers.
- Freight rail service and the Iowa economy.
- Passenger rail and the Iowa economy.
- Railroad network safety and security.
- Railroad and community interactions.

Part III - The five appendices provide detailed information about more specific topics.

- Appendix A: Government oversight of railroads
- Appendix B: Government financial assistance programs
- Appendix C: Midwest Regional Rail Initiative
- Appendix D: 2008 Iowa railroad profiles
- Appendix E: Performance measures for Iowa's railroad system

