Railroad Safety Grants for the Safe Transportation of Energy Products by Rail

Metropolitan Des Moines Track Improvements

Submitted by Iowa Department of Transportation

Appendix F

Chicago to Council Bluffs-Omaha
Regional Passenger Rail System Planning Study

IOWA PASSENGER RAIL

Chicago to Council Bluffs-Omaha

REGIONAL PASSENGER RAIL SYSTEM PLANNING STUDY

Iowa DOT, in conjunction with the Illinois DOT and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), studied the potential to extend passenger rail service from the Quad Cities to Iowa City, to Des Moines, to Council Bluffs, and then to Omaha. This service would begin with two round trips per day from Chicago to the Quad Cities at a maximum speed of 79 mph. Ultimately it would extend across Iowa with up to seven round-trips per day at speeds up to 110 mph.

The primary objective for the study was to conduct an analysis of existing rail lines between Chicago and Council Bluffs/Omaha to identify the preferred route. That route would need to be both feasible from an engineering perspective and have minimal impacts on the environment. A general concept for the route and how it might operate were also part of this study. The study was jointly funded by the Iowa DOT and an FRA planning grant. It fulfills the initial National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements and is a prerequisite for future federal funding.

Reestablishing passenger rail service between Chicago and Council Bluffs/Omaha has been evaluated as part of the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI) since 1996. Numerous routes were identified and refined, with Chicago as the hub (the Midwest Regional Rail System). By 2004, a single regional passenger rail system plan was developed that included all of these routes. Full implementation of the regional system would significantly improve Midwest passenger rail service by upgrading existing rail lines to permit frequent, reliable, efficient, passenger train operations. This would provide travelers with another option to travel to, from, and within Iowa and make connections to other transportation resources in Chicago.

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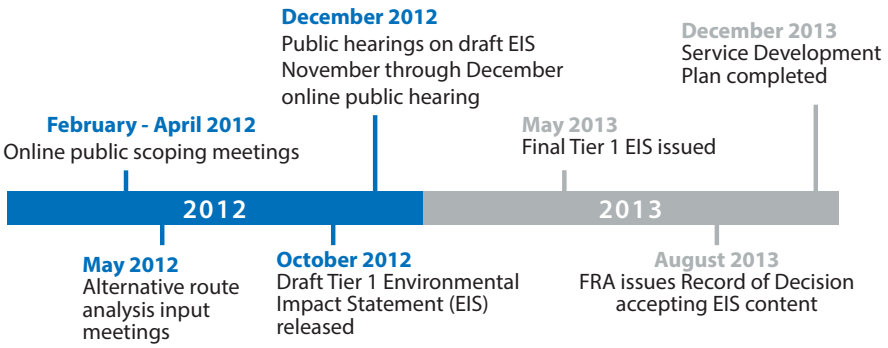
The Chicago to Council Bluffs - Omaha Regional Passenger Rail System Planning Study consists of two major activities.

1. High-level analysis of the route resulting in the preparation of a Tier 1 Final Environmental Impact Statement.
2. Preparation of a Service Development Plan.

Timeline

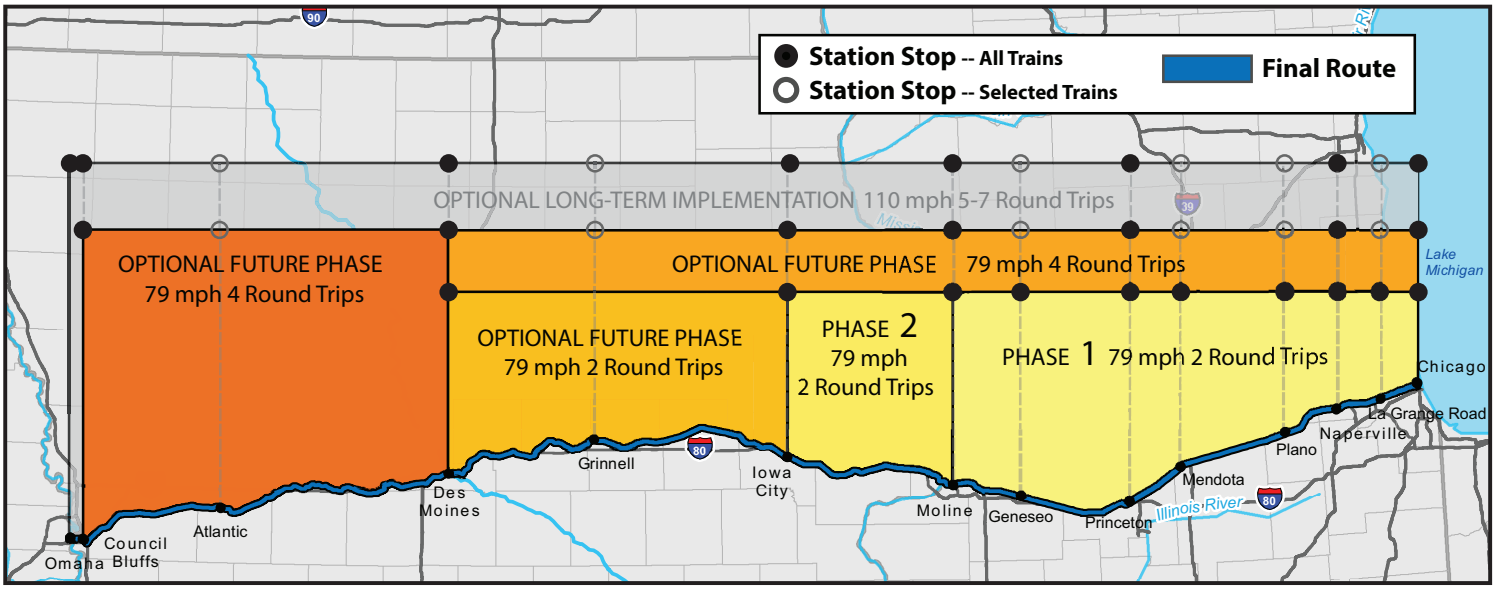


Service Development Plan

The Service Development Plan describes the operation, maintenance, equipment, infrastructure, organization, implementation schedule, finances, economics, and benefits of a regional passenger rail service proposed to operate between Chicago and Council Bluffs, and on to Omaha.

The passenger rail service studied during the service development planning process could be carried out in phases from city to city. The scope of each implementation phase is subject to change and is dependent upon the results of further study and the availability of funding.

Potential Long-Term Phased Implementation



Next Steps

The planning study was complete when the Federal Railroad Administration approved the Service Development Plan, in December 2013. The first critical step to expanding intercity regional passenger rail in Iowa is implementing passenger service to Iowa City. Future phases of service will be considered as demand grows and funding is made available.

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