

Passenger Rail Infrastructure... what are other midwestern states doing?

Improving *existing* railroad main line trackage to enable more and faster passenger rail service is taking place in many areas of the country—including the upper Midwest. Examples:

- 1) In Wisconsin: Low-cost “Hiawatha” service between downtown Milwaukee and Chicago’s Loop was so popular (pre-pandemic) that the state planned to increase service from 7 to 10 round trips per day. This service connects directly with Milwaukee’s airport, also serving suburban WI and IL communities enroute. Business and community leaders in Eau Claire are also working with the Union Pacific Railroad to develop round-trip service to the Twin Cities.
- 2) In Michigan: Years of bi-partisan support has resulted in the steady development of three routes: (1) “Pere Marquette” Chicago-Grand Rapids, (2) “Blue Water” Chicago-Lansing-Flint-Port Huron, and (3) “Wolverine” Chicago-Detroit. The state has actually purchased much of the mainline between these two latter destinations and is upgrading much of it to 110 mph standards. When complete, this will cut an hour off transit time between the two downtowns... while also serving online communities of Dearborn, Ann Arbor, Jackson, Battle Creek, Kalamazoo, and Niles.

(*A recent Michigan University economic study found that Amtrak service throughout the state (even on lines with but one daily round trip) accounted for over \$40,000,000 in economic activity *that wouldn’t have occurred otherwise*. And this doesn’t include the reduction of congestion or maintenance on parallel highways, reduction of air pollution, etc.).

- 3) In Indiana: the Republican Governor and Legislature are embarking on what they call “the biggest transportation infrastructure project in Indiana history”.... investing nearly a billion dollars to upgrade the Chicago, South Shore & South Bend commuter railroad and building a brand-new north-south line to serve burgeoning communities in northwestern Indiana—taking pressure off the highway system and creating convenient travel options for their residents;
- 4) In Illinois: working in partnership with the Union Pacific Railroad, a direct Chicago-St. Louis route is steadily being upgraded to 110 mph standards. This line serves the state capitol of Springfield as well as Bloomington-Normal, which has transformed it’s downtown into a bustling business/travel node;
- 5) Ohio: A proposed higher-speed line between Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati is being discussed, and support is growing around the state for it.

Safe, modern transportation is a bi-partisan, “quality of life” issue. Indeed, a DFM Group study conducted in 2015 among MN residents throughout the state showed wide bi-partisan support for improving passenger train service.* Community leaders from Moorhead to Winona are asking Legislators to support these efforts. The time is NOW.