



Council Bluffs-Omaha

Chicago

# CHICAGO TO COUNCIL BLUFFS-OMAHA

## Regional Passenger Rail System Planning Study

### Purpose of the study

The Iowa Department of Transportation, in cooperation with the Federal Railroad Administration and Illinois Department of Transportation, is studying the feasibility of expanding existing passenger rail service and developing a new regional passenger rail service from Chicago, Ill., to Council Bluffs, Iowa, and Omaha, Neb.

The purpose of this study is to:

- Evaluate potential route alternatives.
- Evaluate levels of service and ridership.
- Analyze environmental impacts.
- Determine a preferred Chicago to Council Bluffs-Omaha passenger rail route alternative for intercity regional passenger rail service.

This study will be a major step in assessing the viability of a regional intercity passenger rail system serving Iowa and the Midwest through this corridor.

### Study costs

- Overall cost of the planning study: \$2 million
- Costs are allocated between the State of Iowa and the FRA.
- Implementation costs will be identified during the study.

### Route selection

- This study will evaluate potential route alternatives between Chicago and Council Bluffs-Omaha for their costs of construction and operation, travel times, population and urban areas served, ridership and revenue potential, and environmental impacts.
- A Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and a Service Development Plan will be completed as part of the study.
  - An EIS assesses potential effects that the proposed passenger rail service would have on the environment, as well as potential effects if the passenger rail service is not built.

- A Service Development Plan (SDP) describes the details of the transportation system. Major elements include proposed passenger train timetables; passenger capacity; station locations; and the track infrastructure, trains, and institutions required to operate and maintain the passenger rail service.
- The Tier 1 EIS and SDP will take approximately 18 months to complete and will result in the selection of a preferred route alternative and initial definition of the potential passenger rail service. A Record of Decision (ROD) will be issued by the FRA signaling formal federal approval of the Tier 1 EIS.
- If the State of Iowa decides to move ahead with implementation of the project and funding for implementation and operation is established, Tier 2 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) studies (for one or more sections of the preferred route alternatives) will need to be completed. After any Tier 2 NEPA studies are completed and a final service design of the Chicago to Council Bluffs-Omaha passenger service is determined, then infrastructure, equipment and operations design will be completed, which will be followed by constructing, equipping, and operating the passenger rail service.

### Relationship to Chicago to Quad Cities route

One route alternative being considered includes the future Chicago to Iowa City via Quad Cities Passenger Rail Service route. In 2009 and 2010, the Iowa and Illinois DOTs, in conjunction with FRA, completed the Chicago to Iowa City Intercity Passenger Rail Service Tier 1 Service Level Environmental Assessment. On Oct. 14, 2011, FRA agreed to a phased implementation approach for the Chicago to Iowa City corridor. Illinois DOT is proceeding with the Tier 2 Project Level studies for the portion of the corridor extending from Chicago to the Quad Cities. More information can be found at [www.connectthemidwest.com](http://www.connectthemidwest.com)

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## Service goals

Once a preferred passenger rail route is identified:

- The final number of round trips will be determined by comparing ridership and revenue forecasts to construction and operating costs.
- The mileage and trip duration will be determined. All route alternatives being reviewed are approximately 500 miles long.
- The final speed will be determined by assessing how higher speeds might improve demand for the passenger service versus the costs to obtain higher speeds. The study is based on initial maximum speeds of 79 to 90, or 110 mph.
- The estimated cost for a roundtrip ticket will be determined. To provide a reference, a typical fare for the 300-mile round trip between Chicago and St. Louis ranges from \$48 to \$104 per person.

## Collaboration

- The Midwest High-Speed Rail Steering Group, representing nine Midwestern states, executed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2009 supporting Midwest routes connecting to the Chicago hub.
- In the planning and study phase of the project, the FRA and Iowa and Illinois DOTs will be collecting input from federal, state, and local agencies along with communities and other interested individuals, and the railroad companies with tracks that may host the passenger service.
- Iowa and Illinois DOTs have a strong partnership to study and evaluate the potential Chicago to Council Bluffs-Omaha passenger rail service.

## Public and economic benefits

It is anticipated that if the project is implemented it will:

- Help create jobs during the design and construction of the project, along with permanent jobs created for the operation and maintenance of the service.
- Assist in providing transportation alternatives to the citizens of Illinois, Iowa and Nebraska, and improve the overall Midwest transportation program.

- Improve the regional rail infrastructure, which is used for both freight and passenger transportation.
- Encourage transit-oriented development.
- Generate business revenues within Illinois, Iowa and Nebraska, including materials supply (steel, fuel) and services (housing, food, utility). These numbers will be forecast during the study process using standardized methods approved by the federal government.
- Provide upgrades to highway-railroad crossings, including improved grade-crossing signal systems that will improve motorist and railroad safety.
- Provide reliable, all-weather transportation to travelers between Chicago and Council Bluffs-Omaha.

## Environmental benefits

It is anticipated that this project will:

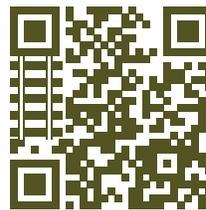
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Contribute to fuel savings.
- Reduce vehicle miles traveled by automobiles.
- Reduce highway congestion.
- Incorporate Iowa and Illinois DOTs' "GreenLine" vision – a program advancing innovative, sustainable practices.

## Provide your input to the study

- Log on to [www.iowadot.gov/chicagotoomaha/](http://www.iowadot.gov/chicagotoomaha/)
- Call the hotline at 800-488-7119
- Send an email to [email@chicagotoomaha.com](mailto:email@chicagotoomaha.com)
- Attend an in-person or online, open house meeting

Public comments provide valuable input and contribute to the development of a complete environmental analysis. The Tier 1 EIS and planning effort will take approximately 18 months to complete. Comments will be collected throughout the EIS development phase. All comments received will be reviewed and considered.

More information is available at  
[www.iowadot.gov/chicagotoomaha](http://www.iowadot.gov/chicagotoomaha)



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