2. PASSENGER INVENTORY AND PERFORMANCE

2.1 System Description and Inventory

Passenger Network

Iowa has a rich history of passenger rail with services starting 160 years ago. Although these services used to be widely used, ridership has declined over the years due mostly to competing modes of transportation, such as personal vehicles on the highway system and air travel. As shown in Figure 2.1, Iowa is currently served by two Amtrak lines, the California Zephyr (Chicago, IL to San Francisco, CA) and the Southwest Chief (Chicago, IL to Los Angeles, CA). Amtrak also offers Thruway bus service to and from Davenport connecting with the California Zephyr and the Southwest Chief at Galesburg, IL. Iowa is also researching potential new routes to provide service in the state and maintaining historical tourism rail efforts.

The Southwest Chief provides once daily round-trip service between Chicago and Los Angeles, making one stop in Iowa at Fort Madison. Intermediate stops outside Iowa include Kansas City, MO; Albuquerque, NM; and Flagstaff, AZ. The Southwest Chief's route on the BNSF line through Iowa is 20 miles long.

The California Zephyr provides once daily round-trip service between Chicago and Emeryville (San Francisco), making multiple stops in Iowa at Burlington, Mount Pleasant, Ottumwa, Osceola, and Creston. Intermediate stops outside Iowa include Omaha, NE; Denver, CO; Salt Lake City, UT; and Reno, NV. The California Zephyr's route on BNSF's line through Iowa is 274 miles long.

Passenger Stations

Each of Iowa's six passenger rail stations is serviced twice daily. All stations are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible; however, not all the facilities in the stations are ADA accessible. Table 2.1 identifies select characteristics for each passenger rail station in Iowa. These stations saw total boardings and alightings of about 41,000 passengers in 2023. While this reflects an increasing ridership trend since the COVID-19 pandemic, it is lower than pre-pandemic ridership which averaged almost 58,000 boardings and alightings per year from 2015-2019. See Appendix A for additional details for each station.

Figure 2.1: Iowa passenger rail network

Source: Iowa DOT

Table 2.1: Iowa passenger rail station characteristics

Characteristics	Fort Madison	Burlington	Mount Pleasant	Ottumwa	Osceola	Creston
Address	1601 20th St	300 S Main St	418 N Adams St	210 W Main St	143 E Webster St	100 W Adams St
Ownership	BNSF	BNSF owns platform and track; City of Burlington owns facility and parking lot	BNSF	BNSF owns platform and track; Wapello County owns facility and parking lot	BNSF owns platform and track; City of Osceola owns facility and parking lot	BNSF
Served by	*Southwest Chief*	*California Zephyr*	*California Zephyr*	*California Zephyr*	*California Zephyr*	*California Zephyr*
Service Frequency	Twice Daily (EB AM; WB PM)	Twice Daily (EB AM; WB PM)	Twice Daily (EB AM; WB PM)	Twice Daily (EB AM; WB PM)	Twice Daily (EB AM; WB PM)	Twice Daily (EB AM; WB PM)
Depot Hours	10:00 AM – 1:00 PM and 5:00 PM – 6:30 PM M-F; closed weekends and holidays; lobby open daily	8:00 AM – 6:00 PM Daily	9:30 AM - 1:30 PM and 2:30 PM - 6:15 PM MTuWF; 9:30 AM – 3:45 PM and 4:45 PM – 6:15 PM Th; closed weekends and holidays	8:30 AM – 11:30 AM and 5:30 PM – 8:00 PM	7:00 AM – 10:00 AM and 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM daily	No Station Hours
Station Location Type	Urban	Urban	Urban	Urban	Urban	Urban
Parking	49 spaces (2 ADA)	40 spaces (2 ADA)	100 spaces (2 ADA)	30 spaces (3 ADA)	63 spaces (3 ADA)	19 spaces (2 ADA)
Shared Use	BNSF Facility	No	No	Wapello County Historical Museum	No	BNSF Facility
Intermodal and Non-Motorized Transportation Access	SEIRPC dial-a-ride service	SEIBUS local fixed route bus service and SEIRPC dial-a-ride service and bike racks	SEIRPC dial-a-ride service	Ottumwa transit fixed route local service	Southern Iowa Trolley dial-a-ride service	Southern Iowa Trolley dial-a-ride service
FY 23 Boardings and Alightings	4,841	6,184	8,578	7,803	11,495	2,145

Source: Amtrak

2.2 Performance

Service Objectives

Current intercity passenger rail services are long-distance trains operated by Amtrak on rail lines owned by BNSF, which limits Iowa's ability to directly impact specific service levels. Since Iowa does not have any state sponsored passenger rail efforts, all service objectives align with Amtrak's long-distance objectives. Table 2.2 shows Iowa's passenger rail service objectives for service frequency, train miles, ridership, and on-time performance (OTP) by route. These goals and objectives are set by Amtrak on a national level for each route, so the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) establishes the same goals and objectives for these routes.

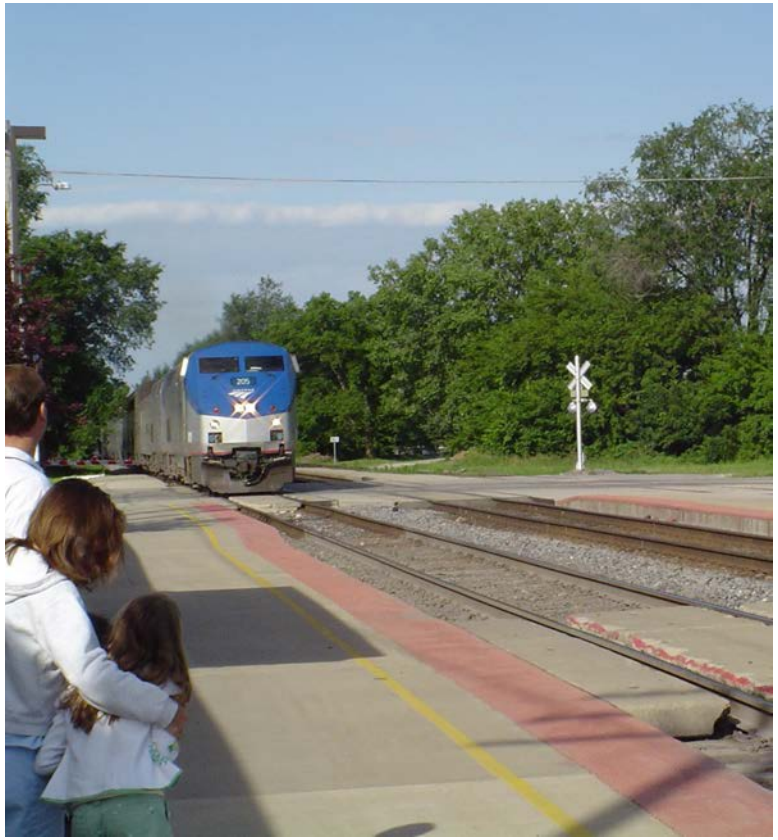


Table 2.2: Iowa's goals and objectives for passenger rail performance

	Southwest Chief	California Zephyr
Service Frequency	Twice Daily	Twice Daily
Train Miles	1.7 million	1.6 million
Ridership	294,000	361,000
On-Time Performance	80%	80%

Source: Amtrak

Southwest Chief Performance Evaluation

The Southwest Chief's OTP slowly decreased from about 47% in Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 to 25% in FY 2022, as shown in Figure 2.2. The route's national average OTP was 27% in 2022, which indicates the Chief's performance in Iowa is on-par with the national average. Table 2.3 shows the leading causes of delay per 10,000 train miles for this route. The leading causes are slow orders (restrictions on speed) and freight train interferences, which make up over half of the total delays for the Chief.

The Southwest Chief stops at one station in Iowa, so total Iowa ridership is equal to the ridership at Fort Madison. Prior to 2020, the Chief experienced a slow decline in usage. During 2020 to 2021, there was a dramatic drop in ridership due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, ridership has been on the rise as shown in Figure 2.3. While the Chief's total utilization has not yet exceeded pre-pandemic numbers, the current rate of growth suggests a full recovery will happen. Nationally, the Southwest Chief's average monthly passenger miles were 18.3 million in FY 2024, with an annual total of 219.0 million.

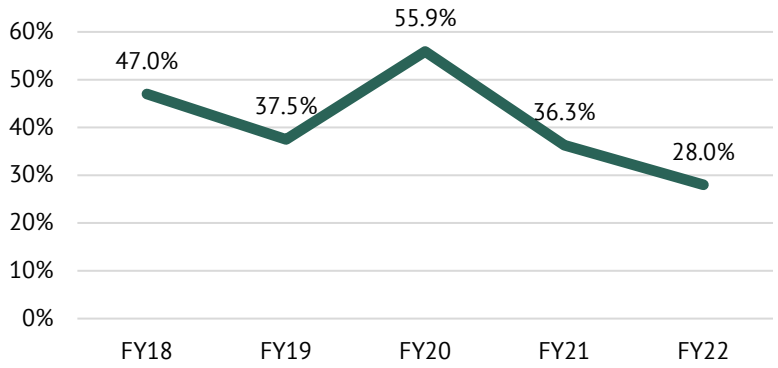
In 2023, the Chief failed to meet Amtrak's national service objectives set for OTP but did meet the objectives for service frequency.

Table 2.3: Southwest Chief leading causes of delay per 10,000 train miles nationally

	Slow Order	Freight Train Interference	Other Cause	Total
Total Delay (min)	245	241	275	**761**

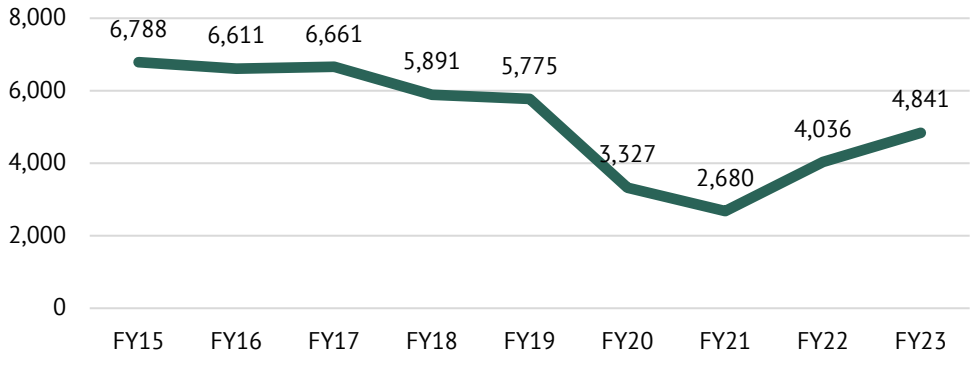
Source: Amtrak

Figure 2.2: Southwest Chief OTP in Iowa, FY 2018-2022



Source: Amtrak

Figure 2.3: Southwest Chief ridership in Iowa, FY 2015-2023



Source: Amtrak

California Zephyr Performance Evaluation

The California Zephyr's OTP slowly decreased from roughly 49% in FY 2018 to 29% in FY 2022, as shown in Figure 2.4. In 2022, the Zephyr had a national average OTP rate of 25%, which indicates that the Zephyr performed slightly above average in Iowa compared to nationally. Table 2.4 shows the leading causes of delay per 10,000 train miles for this route. Slow orders and freight train interferences make up over half of the total delays for the Zephyr.

Figure 2.5 shows the California Zephyr's ridership in Iowa by station since FY 2015. The Zephyr experienced decreases in ridership from 2016 through 2021, including a dramatic decrease in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, the Zephyr has seen a steady rise although it has not made it back to pre-pandemic levels. All stations in Iowa follow roughly the same trend year to year. Ottumwa has the most ridership, Creston sees the least ridership, and the annual change of usage rates for each station remain relatively the same. Nationally, the California Zephyr's average monthly passenger miles were 20.1 million in FY 2024, with an annual total of 240.9 million.

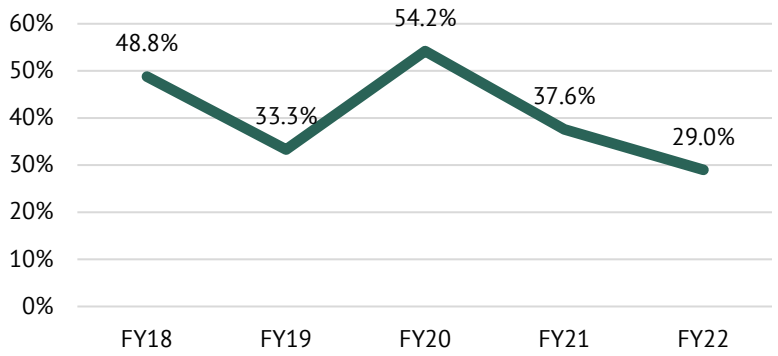
In 2023, the Zephyr failed to meet Amtrak's national service objectives set for OTP but did meet the objectives for service frequency.

Table 2.4: California Zephyr leading causes of delay per 10,000 train miles nationally

	Slow Order	Freight Train Interference	Other Cause	Total
Total Delay (min)	321	201	200	**722**

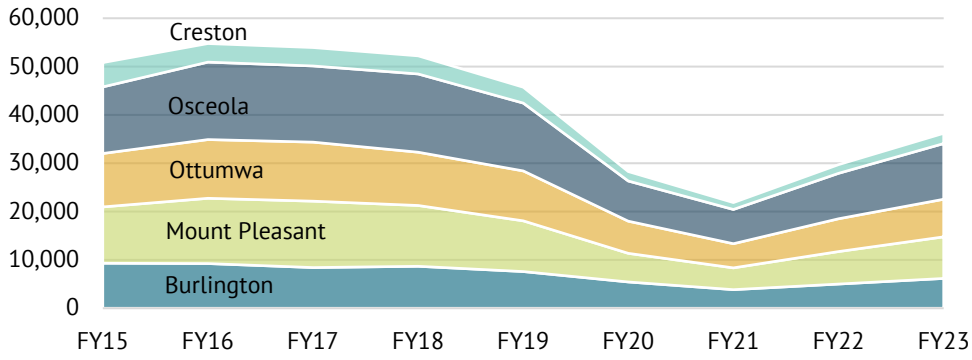
Source: Amtrak

Figure 2.4: California Zephyr OTP in Iowa, FY 2018-2022



Source: Amtrak

Figure 2.5: California Zephyr ridership in Iowa, FY 2015-2023



Source: Amtrak

2.3 Passenger Rail Improvements and Investments

This section provides an overview of ongoing or proposed passenger rail initiatives across Iowa. These include intercity passenger rail efforts and proposed commuter rail services, special events and tourism rail, and other passenger rail efforts that have been recently completed or are underway.

Improvements to Existing Services

Long-Distance Routes

Current projects and initiatives to improve existing long-distance Amtrak services are solely on the BNSF southern route across the state over which the California Zephyr operates in Iowa. Recently completed improvements include the Burlington Bridge Replacement over the Mississippi River at Burlington, the Ottumwa Subdivision Crossover Improvement Project between Burlington and Ottumwa, and various station improvements. The ongoing implementation of Positive Train Control (PTC) on the BNSF network, including on the southern route across Iowa, will have positive impacts to Amtrak services in the state.

Stations

Fort Madison

Amtrak joined the City of Fort Madison in celebrating the opening of the historic Santa Fe Depot, which was restored after a multi-year fundraising and design effort to replace the Amtrak station in an industrial area on the west side of town. The city secured $3.2 million in grants and commitments from several sources, including Iowa DOT, BNSF, Amtrak, and the regional riverboat commission, to finance the relocation and necessary construction. The historic Santa Fe Depot, in use until 1968, and adjacent freight house were elevated above the 500-year flood stage, the depot interior was renovated, and a new ADA-compliant passenger platform was constructed. The complex, designated as the Steve Ireland Transportation Center, is very close to the Mississippi River, separated by a park and the railroad. It will also remain the home of the North Lee County Historical Society.

Burlington

In 2017, the City of Burlington restored the Great Room of the historic depot used by Amtrak. The city secured an Iowa DOT Public Transportation Infrastructure Grant (PTIG) award for $480,000 to rehabilitate the public portions of the depot. With the support of the local Friends of the Burlington Depot group, the community is moving forward with a vision for a reactivated civic space in the imposing mid-century modern structure that includes a restaurant and intermodal transportation center. Amtrak broke ground in summer 2022 on a complete platform and canopy reconstruction to bring the two station boarding platforms into ADA compliance. Amtrak is funding the $12 million project.

Mount Pleasant

Amtrak plans to modify the station to ensure ADA compliance. This will include providing an accessible route from the public right of way to the platform, constructing a new platform with associated ramps, stairs, railings, and signage, and providing platform city identifier signs.

Ottumwa

Amtrak has completed the design for a historically respectful replacement of the two 1940s era station boarding platforms, to bring them into ADA compliance. Amtrak broke ground in summer 2022. Amtrak has offered design assistance and guidance as the community begins conceptualizing a new multimodal ground transportation center at the historic CB&Q Railroad Depot, the present site of Amtrak service.

Osceola

Amtrak plans to modify the station to ensure ADA compliance. This will include providing an accessible route from the public right of way to the platform, constructing a new platform with associated ramps, stairs, railings, and signage, and providing platform city identifier signs. Designs for this platform have gone through many variations, and construction is projected to begin in 2025.

Creston

Amtrak completed improvements to the historic Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad (CB&Q) Depot structure, now used as Creston City Hall, to bring the facility's historic waiting room, doorways, restrooms, and pathway to the train platform into ADA compliance. The depot is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and has resumed its historic role as the community's passenger rail station. Before the renovation, rail passengers waited for trains in a 1960s modular, manufactured building that was used by freight railroad crews. Amtrak and Creston local officials and residents celebrated the historic depot's return as a railroad station during the community's summer 2019 sesquicentennial celebration. In 2024, Creston was working on building a new platform to service this station with all its required amenities.

Proposed New Intercity Service

Figure 2.6 highlights existing passenger rail in Iowa along with routes that have been studied or identified as conceptual corridors. Each of the potential routes is discussed in the following section.

Figure 2.6: Existing and potential passenger rail efforts in Iowa

Source: Iowa DOT

Studied Routes

Chicago to Council Bluffs-Omaha

The Chicago to Council Bluffs-Omaha rail corridor through Iowa and Illinois has been explored through various studies since 2004 for its potential for implementing new intercity passenger rail service. In 2004, the Midwest Regional Rail System Executive Report identified this route as a fundamental component of the regional system. In 2008, Amtrak developed its Feasibility Report on Proposed Amtrak Service, and identified the route as feasible and able to proceed with development.

The basic service concept between Chicago and the Quad Cities (Moline, IL), was adopted as Phase 1. In 2009, the states of Iowa and Illinois partnered to also study and pursue funding for implementation of an intercity passenger rail service from the Quad Cities to Iowa City.

In 2010, the state partnership completed the Chicago to Iowa City High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program Service Development Plan and applied for a federal High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) grant. The partnership received $230 million in HSIPR funds from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), which were jointly awarded to the states of Iowa and Illinois. The funds were split between the states in 2011 to allow for phased service implementation, with $177 million obligated to Illinois to complete Phase 1 of the corridor between Chicago and Moline. The remaining $53 million was left for Iowa to complete Phase 2 of the corridor between Moline and Iowa City, but due to challenges associated with progressing Phase 2, Iowa completed a Corridor Study and the remaining funds were de-obligated.

Iowa DOT launched a broader review of new intercity passenger rail service in 2012 by studying the potential for implementation on the remainder of the corridor to Omaha, NE. In 2015, the City of Moline began construction of an intermodal train station, where Phase 1 of the line would terminate. Construction of this facility was completed in 2017, however, no passenger rail service has been added.

In December 2023, the FRA accepted an application by Illinois DOT to enter the Chicago–Moline route into its Corridor Identification and Development Program. The program grants $500,000 toward service planning and prioritizes the route for future federal funding.

There is still no passenger rail service connecting to the Quad Cities as of 2024. As delays continue, potential alternatives to the route will be further studied.

Chicago to Dubuque

Passenger rail service between Chicago, IL and Dubuque was operated by Amtrak until it was discontinued in 1981. The Chicago to Dubuque project aims to restore intercity passenger rail service in the corridor incrementally. In the first phase, service would be implemented from Chicago to Rockford, IL. Improvements would include upgrading tracks, capacity improvements, a layover facility, bridge improvements, and new stations. It is anticipated that the proposed service will be provided by Amtrak, with future plans to extend service west to Freeport, IL, Galena, IL, and Dubuque in a second phase. This would serve as an extension of Metra, the primary commuter rail service in the Chicagoland area.

In 2007, Amtrak studied multiple routing options in the corridor in its Feasibility Report on Proposed Amtrak Service, Chicago-Rockford-Galena-Dubuque.

In October 2009, Illinois DOT submitted a grant application for the Chicago to Dubuque service, seeking $140 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding under the HSIPR discretionary program. The funding request was to support environmental impact analyses, track structure improvements, layover facility construction, equipment acquisition, and station improvements. Total capital costs were estimated at $147 million, and ridership was forecasted at 82,700 per year. The application was not selected for award. That proposal assumed use of a CN line between Chicago and Dubuque.

The project received $223 million from the Illinois Jobs Now! Capital Program in 2014. The money was to be used to upgrade the UP line between Rockford and a new connection with Metra at Elgin, a western suburb of Chicago. The service would then share tracks with Metra from Elgin to Chicago Union Station. Plans called for corridor improvements to be completed and the start-up of state-sponsored Amtrak service in 2016, but the project is now on hold and under administrative review while the state of Illinois addresses comprehensive budgeting for all state programs. The East Central Intergovernmental Association (ECIA) applied for planning funds through Illinois DOT and completed a study for service from Dubuque to Rockford in 2022.

Conceptual Routes

Dubuque to Sioux City

This conceptual route would extend the Chicago to Dubuque service to Sioux City. The service would stop in Waterloo and Fort Dodge with an additional stop in Iowa Falls that could serve as a potential connection to the proposed Twin Cities to Des Moines service. This route's potential and viability remains to be studied.

Twin Cities to Des Moines

The March 2015 Minnesota GO State Rail Plan identified a potential intercity route from the Twin Cities to Des Moines. This corridor is proposed to run up to four round trips per day at 79 mph. This route was only evaluated from the Twin Cities to Albert Lea, MN. This proposed route is a Phase 1 project, which has a 0 to 20 year implementation estimate. The route to Des Moines and potentially Kansas City, MO has yet to be evaluated.

Twin Cities to Kansas City

This conceptual route would link three major metropolitan areas (St. Paul, MN; Des Moines; and Kansas City, MO) on a 478 mile north-south route through Iowa. In 2024, the FRA Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study identified this route as a preferred route for their extended network. This line would start in the Twin Cities and continue south to San Antonio, TX, making intermittent stops in Des Moines; Kansas City, MO; Tulsa, OK; and Dallas, TX. Further analysis and identification of funding after completion of the study would be necessary to advance the preferred routes through project planning and development activities prior to implementation.

Twin Cities to Sioux City

The Minnesota GO State Rail Plan also proposed service between the Twin Cities and Sioux City. The route would include stops in Mankato, MN; Worthington, MN; Sheldon; and Le Mars. The Twin Cities to Mankato segment has been evaluated as a Phase 1 Project, which has a 0 to 20-year implementation estimate. This service was envisioned with up to four daily round trips at a maximum speed of 79 mph. The extension from Mankato to Sioux City has been evaluated as a Phase 2 project, which has a 20+ year implementation estimate. The Minnesota plan envisioned that this service could continue south to Omaha, NE in subsequent phases.

The Minnesota plan developed implementation cost estimates for the service between the Twin Cities and Mankato. The route to Sioux City has yet to be evaluated. In 2024, the FRA Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study identified this route as a preferred route for their extended network. This line would start in the Twin Cities and continue south to Phoenix, AZ making intermittent stops in Sioux Falls, SD; Omaha, NE; Kansas City, MO; Newton, KS; Amarillo, TX; Albuquerque, NM; and Flagstaff, AZ. Further analysis and identification of funding after completion of the study would be necessary to advance the preferred routes through project planning and development activities prior to implementation.

Proposed Commuter Rail Service

Cedar Rapids to Iowa City Area Commuter Service

A 2015 study sponsored by the Cedar Rapids and Iowa City Railway (CRANDIC), Iowa DOT, and other local stakeholders revisited potential passenger rail implementation options for the CRANDIC's Cedar Rapids to Iowa City corridor. The purpose was to provide stakeholders with an understanding of the different modes that are available for passenger rail service in the corridor, to understand the probable capital and operating and maintenance costs for each mode, and to consider service frequencies, capacities, and the regulatory and funding environment for implementing a passenger rail service in the corridor. The study area was 20.5 miles of CRANDIC's line between Cedar Rapids and Iowa City with a connection to the Eastern Iowa Airport.

The report discussed three different modal options – streetcar, light rail transit, and commuter rail – and provided high-level, conceptual capital, operating, and maintenance cost information. For all modes, annual operations and maintenance costs were estimated at between $275,000 and $325,000 per mile and between $5.6 million and $6.7 million per year for the 20.5-mile route. No recommendations were made, and this study concluded that project stakeholders would need to revisit the feasibility of this potential commuter rail corridor at a later date. In 2022, the owners of CRANDIC stated that they were no longer interested in partnering with local governments to revive a commuter rail line, but they would not preclude local governments from reviving the efforts on their own while using their line. A Bus-Rapid Transit (BRT) study was completed in 2024 to determine its feasibility as a potential alternative to commuter rail service.

In 2024, Pop-Up Metro proposed an exploratory service from Iowa City to North Liberty on 8.2 miles of CRANDIC line. This hypothetical service, which could launch relatively quickly, has been placed on hold at the time being but may be explored further in the future. Metro is a railway and management company that provides a turnkey "kit" that includes battery propelled passenger cars and necessary equipment via an annual lease. This provides a way for communities to pilot commuter rail service in an area without as large of investment or as long of development timeline as typically required to initiate rail service.

This project would be implemented in two phases, connecting downtown Iowa City to Coralville, and then extending to North Liberty. Pop-Up Metro has identified seven temporary stops along this 8-mile line and have developed mock schedules for the service. The next steps would be to hold stakeholder briefings, conduct track and crossing inspections, validate their proposed services, identify a public sponsor, and configure a realistic funding strategy and timeline.

Des Moines Area Commuter Service

The June 2000 Commuter Rail Feasibility Study investigated a commuter rail concept for the Des Moines metropolitan area. There would be three routes running from a central location at the Des Moines Station downtown to final stops in Altoona, Waukee, and Urbandale.

Ridership forecasts were developed assuming 15-, 30-, 45-, and 60-minute peak period, peak direction frequencies. The forecasts calculated 1,300 passenger trips per weekday assuming 45-minute peak period frequencies in 2005, with an implementation cost estimate of $63.2 million. This includes track improvements, stations, grade crossing protection, rolling stock, and feeder buses and park-and-ride facilities.

Estimated operating costs for the 45-minute frequency totaled $7.5 million per year, while the annual ticket revenue would be $533,000. The annual subsidy requirement would be $7 million, which would be a subsidy per passenger trip of $21 as opposed to subsidies of $7 for comparable services. The study also noted that the service would only return a 7% fare box recovery ratio, which is far below the average fare box recovery ratios of comparable services.

The study concluded that commuter rail in Des Moines is not feasible from an economic perspective. The study recommended keeping options open, monitoring demographic and traffic trends, and preserving rail corridors which may become important for passenger rail in the future.

Council Bluffs to Omaha Streetcar

The City of Omaha developed a Downtown Omaha Masterplan in 2009 that contained various transportation elements, including a BRT system, streetcar, and other non-car transit efforts. In 2022, the Greater Omaha Chamber developed the Omaha Urban Core Strategic Plan, which identified a streetcar as a key component to strengthen Omaha's urban core. This streetcar effort is currently underway and is estimated to be completed in 2027.

The Omaha-Council Bluffs Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA), in partnership with the City of Council Bluffs, is in its fledgling stages to set up a Multimodal Connection and Expansion Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study for Council Bluffs. The study will identify the purpose and need, potential alternatives, and proposed evaluation criteria for connections to existing and future multimodal networks.

First Avenue, a former rail corridor vacated in 2013, is located one block south of Council Bluffs' main thoroughfare. Roughly 60% of Council Bluffs residents live within one mile of this corridor. The West Broadway Corridor Plan (adopted in July 2015) proposed transforming the former rail line into a multimodal corridor featuring trails, transit, and redevelopment. The multimodal corridor would enhance the operation of West Broadway, make an essential link in the trail system, create a transit link to Downtown Omaha, and provide the opportunity for redevelopment of obsolete industrial properties. The vision of this study is to create a connected Omaha-Council Bluffs metro with transit that seamlessly provides residents access between their homes, jobs, education, healthcare, and entertainment.

Official design work has not been done but, the preliminary estimated cost is $100 million for a bridge and $75 million for the streetcar extension into Council Bluffs.

Special Event Trains and Tourism Rail

Unlike commuter rail, special event and/or tourist excursion passenger rail operations typically run at a profit or at least cover their costs. Any arrangement between a host freight railroad and a third party for the operation of future passenger excursion trains in Iowa would be subject to agreement between the parties.

The Hawkeye Express

The Hawkeye Express began passenger railroad operations over the IAIS in 2004 between Iowa City's Kinnick Stadium and outlying parking areas in nearby Coralville to transport football fans during University of Iowa Hawkeyes home football games. The train accommodated approximately 5,000 fans for each of the seven home games during the 2013 season and saw about the 3,700 riders per home game in the 2019 season. In 2020, the service was ceased due to the COVID-19. The decline in ridership and the emergence of alternative transportation options contributed to a decision not to resume the service in 2024.

Boone and Scenic Valley Railroad

The Boone and Scenic Valley Railroad (BSV) operates historic railroad equipment on daily excursions from spring through fall as well as a Dinner Train, Picnic Train, and other special tourist excursion services locally at Boone, Iowa, which use privately owned railroad museum trackage only and not a host railroad on the Iowa railroad network. Some of these services include The Wizarding Express, A Day Out with Thomas, Santa Express, Brunch Services, and various historical showings of antique locomotives. BSV also offers Rail Explorers tours – pedal powered rail vehicles with electric assist motors available for customers to use on portions of the BSV line.

Other Passenger Rail Efforts

Passenger Rail Forecasting Methods

iTRAM Statewide Passenger Rail Model

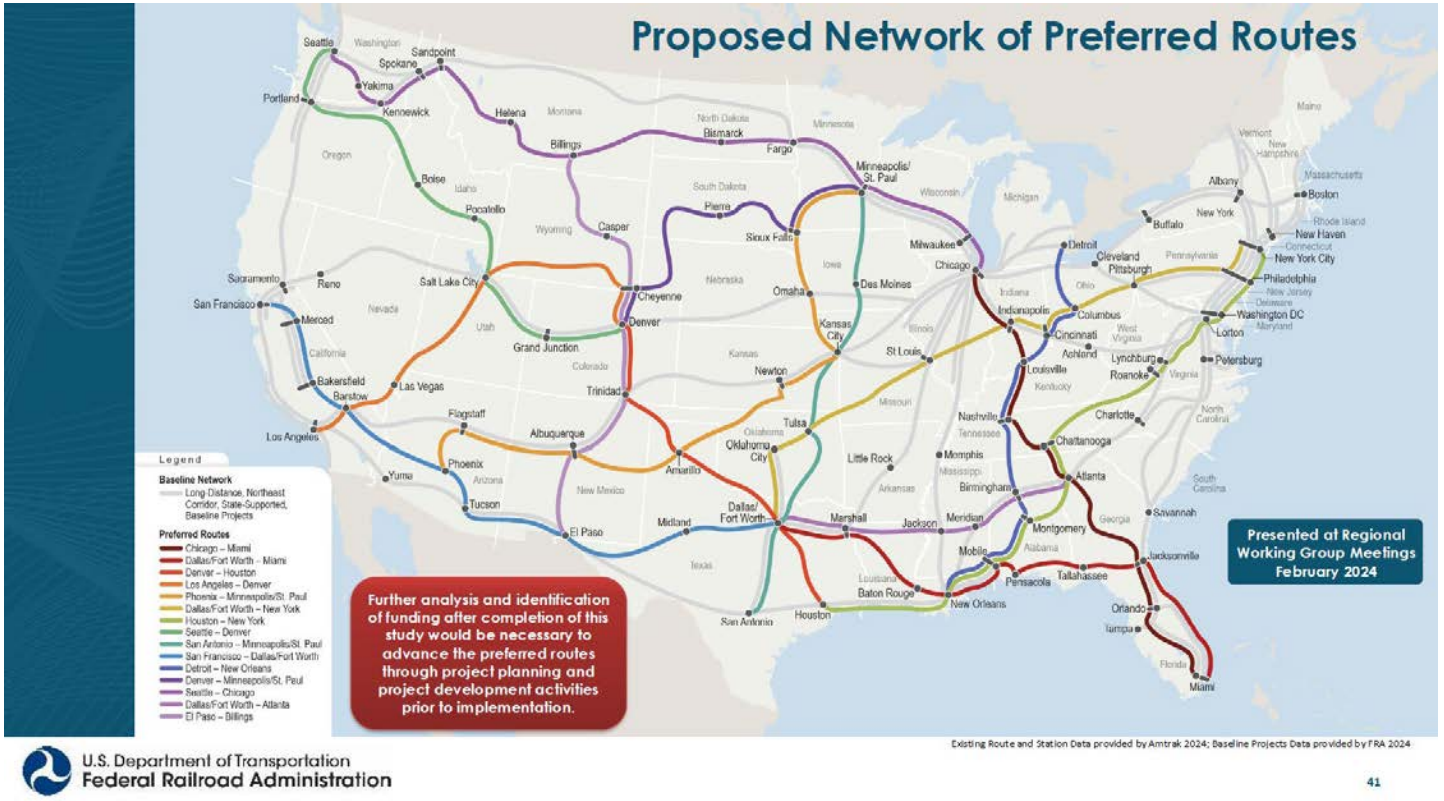
The Iowa Travel Analysis Model (iTRAM) has a passenger rail component that can be used to estimate the intercity rail demand for existing and new rail lines in Iowa. The model is a market area logit model with an independent rail network that is coordinated with the highway network by designating specific nodes within the iTRAM highway network as rail passenger stations. The model uses the long-distance work and long-distance non-work trip tables from the iTRAM Travel Demand Model as input. Passenger rail ridership forecasts are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, Rail Planning Considerations and Appendix E.

Passenger Rail Studies

FRA Long Distance Rail Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the restoration and enhancement of Amtrak's long-distance intercity rail passenger service focusing on routes that have been discontinued or are operating on a non-daily basis. The results of the study were finalized in 2024. In Iowa, the study identified both the Twin Cities to Des Moines corridor (extending on to San Antonio, TX) and the Twin Cities to Omaha, NE (extending on to Phoenix, AZ) as priority routes. Further analysis and identification of funding after completion of this study would be necessary to advance the preferred routes through project planning and project development activities prior to implementation.

Figure 2.7: Proposed long-range routes



Source: FRA