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Minnesota Legislative Board

A Division of SMART, Sheet metal, Air, Rail and Transit Union
Printed In House

May 5, 2020

The Honorable
Majority Leader Paul Gazelka
Minnesota Senate
3113 Senate Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable
Speaker Melissa Hortman
House of Representatives
463 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable
Senator David Senjem
Capital Investment Chairperson
3105 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable
Representative Mary Murphy
Capital Investment Chairperson
381 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: Omnibus Capital Investment Legislation: State Passenger Service, Inclusion Request.

Dear Majority Leader Gazelka, Speaker Hortman, Chairpersons Senjem and Murphy,

Please accept my highest encouragement to include funding for state corridor passenger rail service in the state of Minnesota's Omnibus Capital Bonding legislation this year.

As operators of Amtrak, Northstar, BNSF, CN, CP and UP Railways, we are aware of the remarkable growth of state corridor passenger rail services across the nation. We believe it is imperative for Minnesota to join other regions of our nation with support for expansion of state corridor services. Our state's investment will return long term business growth.

Minnesota's future is dependent on remaining competitive in the national and world marketplace. We support a balanced approach with bonding designations to assure respective regions of our state are equally served. This includes the TCMC Corridor, Twin Cities, Red Wing, Winona-Chicago, NLX Corridor Duluth-Twin Cities, Northstar Extension, St. Cloud -Twin Cities, and emerging corridor, Northfield, Southern Minnesota.

Today the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) awarded \$22 million dollars to the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin as a grant within their Restoration and Enhancement Program for TCMC operating costs. The FRA has announced \$311.8 million in grant funding for their Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Investment (CRISI) grants. Minnesota is recognized as patient, long overdue and as a high return-value recipient. It is imperative for the future of our state that our Legislature include modest sums for passenger rail projects in the 2020 Capital Investment bill to leverage these federal investment grants.

The U.S. Congress continues to appropriate increasing federal resources to state corridor services across nearly all regions of the United States. Looking forward in this decade, it is essential for Minnesota's economic growth to be a part of state corridor passenger rail services that are taking the forefront for moving America's state and regional commerce. The workforce of tomorrow and aging demographics will depend on state corridor services.

Enclosed herewith, please find abstracted information from the Federal Railroad Administration, Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission, DFM Group Survey, Amtrak Government Affairs and the Minnesota AFL-CIO.

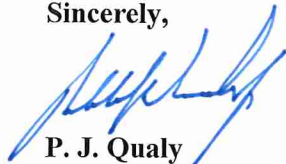
Majority Leader Gazelka
Speaker Hortman
Chairperson Senjem
Chairperson Murphy
May 5, 2020
Page two.

Efficient and integrated passenger service across Minnesota is a key component that can lead to exponential business growth, strong revenues, and an improved quality of life for all Minnesotans. Again, I respectfully request your support for inclusion of state corridor passenger rail funding in the Minnesota Omnibus Capital Investment legislation.

For our 1,100 workers of the Sheetmetal, Air, Rail and Transit Union, Transportation Division, formerly United Transportation Union, (UTU-SMART-TD), thank you for your consideration. As I retire from the railroad industry and as a steward of Minnesota's legislative corridors, I want to wish you, your staff, and families the very best.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



P. J. Qualy
Minnesota Legislative Director
UTU-SMART-TD Minnesota

enclosure

cc: Governor Tim Walz, State of Minnesota
Minnesota Congressional Delegation
Senator Susan Kent, Senate Minority Leader
Senator Scott Dibble, Senate Transportation Committee
Representative Frank Hornstein, House Transportation Committee
Mr. Jeremy Ferguson, UTU-SMART-TD Transportation President
Mr. Greg Hynes, UTU-SMART-TD National Legislative Director
UTU-SMART-TD Minnesota Legislative Representatives



FRA 06-20

Tuesday, May 5, 2020

Contact: FRA Public Affairs

FRAPA@DOT.gov

U.S. Department of Transportation Announces More Than \$22 Million in Grants to Restore and Enhance Intercity Passenger Rail Network

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) today announced more than \$22 million in grant funding to three projects that collectively span eight states. Funding is provided through FRA’s Restoration and Enhancement (R&E) Grants Program to initiate, restore, or enhance intercity passenger rail service around the country. All three grants will be awarded to projects located in Opportunity Zones.

“This \$22 million is another example of the President’s continued investment in infrastructure to help connect communities as our economy recovers,” said U. S. Transportation Secretary Elaine L. Chao.

The Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act authorized the Fiscal Years 2018-2020 R&E Grants Program, which provides operating assistance to initiate, restore, or enhance intercity passenger rail transportation through eligible projects that may include adding frequencies to current services, extending current services to new markets or station stops, offering new on-board services, initiating new service, or restoring a previously operated service.

Funding under this program was made available by the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020, and the Consolidated Appropriations Acts of 2019, 2018, and 2017.

“This funding will make a significant contribution to passenger rail-related operating assistance projects in our communities and ultimately make a big difference in people’s lives,” said FRA Administrator Ronald L. Batory.

Wisconsin Department of Transportation

Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago Intercity Passenger Rail Service Project

\$12,569,200

Chicago, IL, to Saint Paul, MN

The project adds a second daily roundtrip passenger train between Union Depot in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and Union Station in Chicago, Illinois. These endpoints are currently served along Amtrak’s Empire Builder long distance service. This additional train will provide travelers with more reliable service at convenient times between Saint Paul and Chicago, as poor on-time performance from the eastbound Empire Builder currently results in unreliable daily passenger service from Saint Paul. The proposed service will make 12 station stops in St. Paul, Minnesota; Red Wing, Minnesota; Winona, Minnesota; La Crosse, Wisconsin; Tomah, Wisconsin; Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin; Portage, Wisconsin; Columbus, Wisconsin; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Sturtevant, Wisconsin; Glenview, Illinois; and Chicago, Illinois. The project supplements the existing Empire Builder and Hiawatha routes with passenger rail service approximately four to six hours apart from the existing Empire Builder schedule and increases intercity transportation options and connectivity for rural communities between St. Paul and Milwaukee.



U.S Department of Transportation
Office of Public Affairs
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590
www.transportation.gov/briefingroom

News

FRA 05-20

Friday, April 17, 2020

Contact: FRA Public Affairs

FRAPA@DOT.gov

U.S. Department of Transportation Makes Available \$311.8 Million for Capital Rail Projects

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) issued a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) today for the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program.

“We’re committed to addressing the unmet transportation needs of rural areas, which face unique challenges in safety, infrastructure condition, and passenger and freight usage,” said FRA Administrator Ronald L. Batory. “I encourage all eligible parties to take full advantage of this funding opportunity.”

With funding provided in the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020, this NOFO will fund up to \$311.8 million in freight and passenger rail projects that improve transportation safety, efficiency, and reliability as authorized under the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act. Eligible applications for competitive selection include projects that address congestion challenges, highway-rail grade crossings, upgrade short line or regional railroad infrastructure, relocate rail lines, improve intercity passenger rail capital assets, and deploy railroad safety technology.

The CRISI grant program also directs investment to rural America, with at least 25 percent of available funds reserved for projects in rural communities.

FRA will consider how projects support key objectives, including enhancing economic vitality; leveraging federal funding; adopting life-cycle accounting; using innovative approaches to improve safety and expedite project delivery; and holding grantees accountable for achieving specific, measurable outcomes. Preference will be given to projects where the proposed federal share of total costs does not exceed 50 percent.

FRA may also consider geographic diversity; diversity in the size of the systems receiving funding; the applicant's receipt of other competitive awards; and projects located in, or that support transportation service in, qualified opportunity zones.

In addition, \$45 million of the \$311.8 million is available for projects eligible under 49 U.S.C. 22907(c)(2) that require the acquisition of rights-of-way, track, or track structure to support developing new intercity passenger rail service routes.

Applications for funding under this NOFO are due 60 days after the date of publication in the *Federal Register*. Following publication, FRA will offer web-based training and technical assistance for eligible applicants. For more details about the CRISI program, visit FRA's Competitive Discretionary Grant Program [webpage](#). To view the NOFO, click [here](#).

Amtrak Host Railroad Report Card 2018

Who delays passengers?

The Host Railroad Report Card grades each of the six Class I freight host railroads based on delays caused to Amtrak trains over the last 12 months.

| | | |
|---|------------------|---|
| 1 | Canadian Pacific | A |
| 2 | BNSF | B |

Average grade for all host railroads: C

Grades reflect the passenger experience

| | |
|---|--|
| A | Most passengers are on-time |
| B | Passengers on some routes are late |
| C | Many passengers are very late |
| D | Most passengers are very late |
| F | Majority of passengers are severely late |

**March
2019**

**Minnesota Statewide Survey
Railroad Issues**



DFM RESEARCH

St. Paul, Minnesota
www.dfmresearch.com

Minnesota's transportation infrastructure – including roads, highways, bridges, rail, air, and public transportation – how would you rate it?

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Excellent | 5% |
| Good | 32 |
| Satisfactory | 41 |
| Poor | 15 |
| Failing | 5 |
| (VOL) Unsure | 1 |

Q6: Currently Amtrak has one daily passenger train route in Minnesota, known as the Empire Builder, with service to Chicago and Seattle. When it comes to passenger rail service here in Minnesota, which best fits your view?

| | |
|---|------------|
| Passenger rail service should increase | 52% |
| Passenger rail service should remain the same | 37 |
| Passenger rail service should be eliminated | 4 |
| (VOL) Unsure | 7 |

Twin City Urban and Twin City Suburbs: Question 7a, n=325, MoE +/- 5.4%pts.
Greater Minnesota: Questions 7b and 7c, n=225, MoE +/- 6.5%pts.

Q7a: Some here in Minnesota have proposed additional passenger rail service in the Twin Cities, making two runs to Chicago instead of one. Generally speaking, do you support the idea of additional train service to Chicago?

| | |
|--------------------|------------|
| Yes | 65% |
| No | 26 |
| (VOL) Unsure | 9 |

Q7b: Some here in Minnesota have proposed regional rail service from outstate regional centers like Saint Cloud, Rochester, Mankato, Winona, Wilmar, Fargo-Moorhead and Duluth to the Twin Cities and back. Generally speaking, do you support the idea of regional rail service here in Minnesota?

| | |
|--------------------|------------|
| Yes | 73% |
| No | 23 |
| (VOL) Unsure | 4 |

Q7c: Now suppose there was rail service from a regional center to the Twin Cities; how comfortable would you say you are getting around the Twin Cities using light rail, buses, taxis and car sharing services like Uber?

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| Very comfortable | 23% |
| Fairly comfortable | 18 |
| Just somewhat comfortable | 23 |
| Not that comfortable | 29 |
| (VOL) Unsure | 8 |

✓ EDUCATIONAL
OPPORTUNITY FOR
MOBILITY.

Q8: Now a few questions specifically on railroads here in Minnesota. Based on what you know, how many people do you think operate a freight train that travels through Minnesota?

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| One | 6% |
| Two | 16 |
| Three | 18 |
| Four | 11 |
| Five or More | 34 |
| (VOL) Don't Know / Unsure | 15 |

Q9: Currently most freight trains in Minnesota operate with a crew of two people; but there

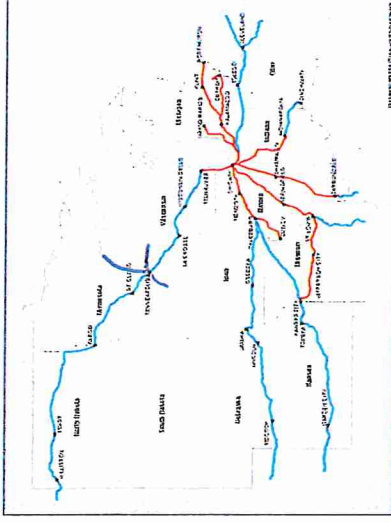
Passenger Rail Ridership Growth in the Midwest

Passenger rail is one of the most energy-efficient and environmentally friendly means to move people, and this transportation option is increasingly popular in the Midwest. Nationwide, Amtrak ridership was 31.7 million passengers for the fiscal year that ended September 30, 2018.

Corridor Service Growth

During FY 2018, more than 2.8 million people traveled on corridor service within the Midwest, capping off ten years of impressive growth on these regional, state-supported routes.* **During the past ten years, ridership on Midwestern corridor routes has increased nine percent and revenue has grown by 33 percent.**

**States subsidize the cost of passenger rail service on routes that are less than 750 miles between endpoints (routes in red on map at right are state-supported; lines in blue indicate long-distance routes).*



Long Distance Service Growth

During the past 10 years, ridership on long-distance routes that serve the Midwest has grown by two percent. Eight long-distance routes serve the Midwest, all originating out of the nation's largest rail hub, Chicago. Altogether, these routes have 80 station stops across the Midwest, **many of them in rural communities not served by other forms of intercity transportation.**

Regional Multi-State Projects

Since 1996, the Midwestern states have worked together to plan and implement a 3,000-mile Chicago-hubbed system to connect the region with fast, frequent passenger rail service. When completed, about 90 percent of the Midwest's population will be within a one-hour car ride to a **Midwest Regional Rail System** (MWRRS) station and/or within 30 minutes of a feeder bus station.

In addition, **CREATE** (Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program) is a project of national economic significance that is reducing rail congestion throughout the region.

In July of 2015 the Midwest was chosen – based on a statement of interest submitted by MPRC on behalf of the Midwest – as one of two regions that the Federal Railroad Administration will partner with to develop a long-term (20-40 years) vision for a high-performance regional rail network. The **Midwest's FRA-led Planning Project** will determine the priorities, studies and investment needs to advance projects within the multi-state network context and will also identify the potential institutional arrangements, financial requirements, phasing, planning and development activities needed to achieve the vision.

Studies show that **each dollar spent on passenger rail in our region is expected to provide a social benefit of up to two dollars.**

Passenger Rail Development – a State/Federal Partnership

Economic development nationwide will benefit if transportation is developed as an integrated system of all modes. **Passenger rail is generally the best option for transporting people who are traveling between 100 and 600 miles.** It is also often the best transportation mode in certain types of weather and under emergency situations. A weak intercity passenger rail “leg” results in congestion, lost travel time and decreased fuel-efficiency. Continual and reliable capital investments are key to the success of all transportation modes – including passenger rail.

Awarding of Passenger Rail-Related Capital Funds

Between FFY 2009 and FFY 2011, Congress appropriated more than \$10 billion in federal funding to states for passenger rail capital improvements and planning.

Under the High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) program, the Midwest was awarded \$2.5 billion. The majority of funding is helping improve or develop four key interstate passenger rail corridors: *Chicago-St. Louis-Kansas City; Minneapolis/St. Paul-Chicago; Chicago-Quad Cities; Detroit/Pontiac-Chicago.*

A group of Midwestern states has also received \$268 million to buy Next Generation** rail cars and locomotives that will modernize the Midwest's fleet, help accommodate increased ridership, improve service reliability and reduce operating costs on eight interstate corridors.

***The state/federal Next Generation Equipment Pool Committee developed standardized specifications for passenger rail equipment and helped initiate and facilitate the first joint equipment purchases.*

In addition, Midwestern states received funding to study and plan three new routes: Kansas City to Oklahoma City, Minneapolis/St. Paul to Duluth, Minnesota and Chicago to Omaha.

While this funding is allowing our states to strengthen and expand passenger rail service significantly in our region, in order to continue this valuable development, Midwestern states need continued assurance of adequate federal capital assistance.

FAST Act

Since its inception, MPRC has advocated for intercity passenger rail to be included in federal surface transportation reauthorization legislation. In December of 2015, Congress laid the groundwork for the development of a truly multi-modal transportation system in our nation with passage of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. **For the first time in transportation legislative history, intercity passenger rail and Amtrak reauthorization language are included as part of this comprehensive five-year surface transportation bill.**

Three new intercity passenger rail grant programs were established in the FAST Act. While limited funding for these grants was provided within the FFY 2016 & 2017 transportation appropriations, we are pleased that Congress approved funding for these grants above the authorized level in FFY 2018 & FFY 2019. **We ask that full funding for these important programs continue to be included within federal transportation appropriations, so our states can continue to build on their passenger rail development successes.**

Amtrak® and the States



15 Million
trips in FY 2017

21
agencies

5

State Supported routes with

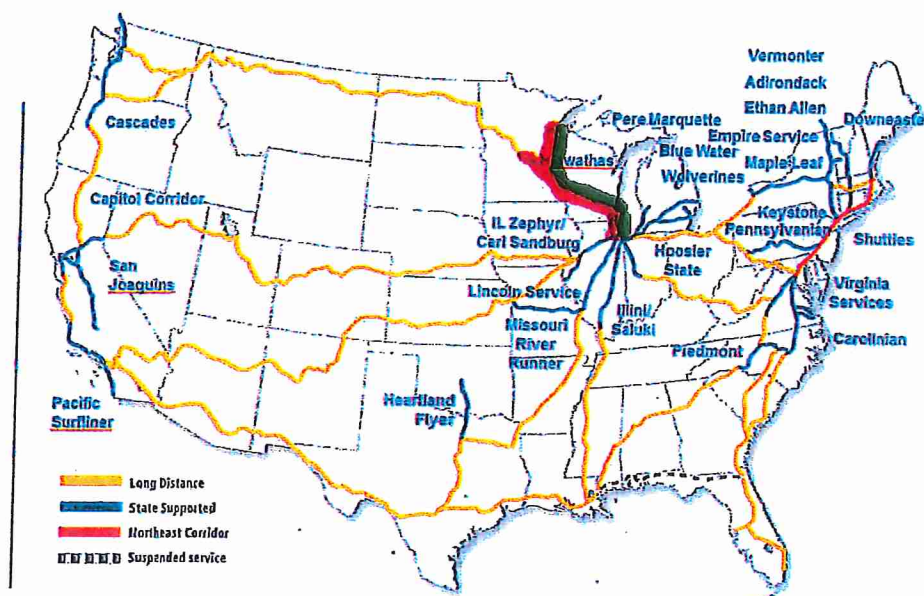


1 Million +
trips in FY 2017

29
routes

lengths up to

704
miles



Across the National Network, trains of less than 750 miles make up our "State Supported" services. These trains are largely funded by our State Partners: 29 routes are funded by 21 partners from 18 states, resulting in a diverse collection of services reflecting the states, regions, and cities they serve.

- Over 15 million Amtrak passengers rode on State Supported routes in 2017.
- State Supported trains serve 300 stations, over half of the 500 communities served by the Amtrak® network.
- State Supported routes are the fastest growing segment of our business. In the past 10 years, ridership has grown by almost 35%.
- Over the past decade, states have spent almost \$1 billion improving stations, track infrastructure and passenger facilities.
- 31% of State Supported passengers travel for business; 24% travel for vacation/leisure; 45% are visiting friends, family or on personal business.

How does my State Establish or Grow its State Supported service?

- Many State Rail Plans, prepared by State DOT's, have identified promising corridors for passenger rail development.
- State Supported trains are funded primarily by states under Section 209 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA).
- Together with Amtrak, State DOT's can project ridership, revenue, schedules and identify necessary state funding.

Federal Grants

Federal resources are available to assist States on a competitive basis to develop their corridor train networks. Project components include, but are not limited to: infrastructure repair or improvements, safety, PTC and/or state of good repair investments; restoring or enhancing service; station or rail facility upgrades; technology upgrades and training activities, as well as other rail related improvements.

- Grants – Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI), Restoration and Enhancement (REG), Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD, formerly TIGER), Federal-State Partnership for State of Good Repair (Fed-State) and more.
- Loans – Railroad Rehabilitation & Improvement Financing (RRIF) and Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA)

What's New at Amtrak?

Here are just a few items Amtrak and the State Partners have achieved to modernize the service recently...

Extending the Reach of Rail

- First-Last Mile connections - We partner with more than 50 carriers including buses, ferries, commuter trains, shuttles, taxis and rideshare to provide thruway connections to countless (more than 400) communities, through Amtrak's mobile/web platforms. In 2017, more than 1.6 million riders traveled on a Thruway to our service – extending the reach of Amtrak's National Network from station to destination.

Amtrak touts record ridership, revenue for fiscal 2019. Amtrak carried a record 32.5 million passengers in the 2019 fiscal year with record growth on the Northeast Corridor and state supporter lines, officials with the railway system said Friday. Amtrak officials said the company also inched closer to breaking even in the last fiscal year, reporting new financial milestones. Amtrak's total operating revenue rose to \$3.3 billion, up by 3.6 percent from the previous year, the company said.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2019/11/08/amtrak-touts-record-ridership-revenue-fiscal/>

Amtrak aspires to a 2-hour D.C.-N.Y. trip, but it's going to take a lot more than faster trains. Amtrak appears to be on a roll, with record ridership, faster Acela service and improved amenities for its customers. But its ambitions for the busy Northeast Corridor, including higher speeds, fewer delays, more trains and an eventual two-hour Washington-to-New York trip rest largely on its ability to raise billions needed for costly improvements to its aging and inadequate infrastructure.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/amtrak-aspires-to-a-2-hour-dc-ny-trip-but-its-going-to-take-a-lot-more-than-faster-trains/2019/11/02/b761a61a-e523-11e9-a331-2df12d56a80b_story.html

Amtrak's Hiawatha line to get new trains for Milwaukee-to-Chicago route. The Legislature's budget committee approved spending \$13.2 million on new passenger train cars Thursday for Amtrak's Milwaukee-to-Chicago line....The cash will come from money raised by the gas tax and vehicle registration fees. The borrowed funds will have to be paid back by Wisconsin taxpayers, rather than Amtrak riders. In all, the new train cars will cost \$39 million, with the federal government picking up \$25.7 million of that amount.

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/2019/10/31/wisconsin-legislators-consider-funding-new-amtraks-hiawatha-trains/4102369002/>

Get Ready to Ditch Your Business Class Flight. ...Europe's railways are potentially a huge asset in the fight against emissions. Unlike cars, much of the rail system is already electrified. Deutsche Bahn claims its long distance trains run on 100% renewable power. As part of its recent 54 billion euros climate package, Germany announced higher aviation taxes and gave several billion euros to the national rail company. Berlin intends to boost demand by cutting sales tax on train tickets. And trains have plenty going for them besides their green credentials: Stations are in city centers, you don't have to pay for baggage, kids travel free and there's none of the hassle of airport security. Deutsche Bahn even offers childcare on some weekend trains.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/energy/get-ready-to-ditch-your-business-class-flight/2019/10/29/eafc4c96-fa22-11e9-9e02-1d45cb3dfa8f_story.html

Looming cuts to transit cast doubt on Microsoft's vision for Seattle-Vancouver high-speed rail. Microsoft's aspiration to build one of America's first high-speed rail lines in the Pacific Northwest hit a speed bump this week as Washington state voters pumped the brakes on other ambitious transportation projects. An initiative passing comfortably in the latest ballot count puts some of Washington's boldest transit plans in jeopardy. And while Washington officials pledge to find other sources of funding to continue building out the state's transportation network, Initiative 976 could become a cautionary tale for leaders pushing for a high-speed rail line connecting the Pacific Northwest's largest cities.

<https://www.geekwire.com/2019/looming-cuts-transit-cast-doubt-microsofts-vision-seattle-vancouver-high-speed-rail/>

Carbondale finally gets grant to transform Amtrak station into downtown transit hub. After years in the making, it was announced Wednesday that Carbondale will receive nearly \$14 million in grant funding from the federal government to build its multimodal transit facility downtown. Starting in 2016, the city has pursued funding for the project through grant funding from the U.S. Department of Transportation.

<https://thesouthern.com/news/local/communities/carbondale/carbondale-finally-gets-grant-to->

Why airlines want you to go by train. Dutch airline [KLM recently announced plans](#) to partner with European train companies Thalys and NS to replace one of its five daily flights between Amsterdam and Brussels with a high-speed rail service....There's clearly a business rationale. Replacing short-haul flights with trains frees up landing and departure slots at busy airports that can be used for more lucrative long-haul services. They also make the airline look greener, even if there's no long-run difference to its carbon footprint.

<https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/air-rail-alliances/index.html>

Vegas to LA high-speed train looking more realistic. After years of chatter, Virgin Trains USA appears ready to bring the long-discussed Las Vegas to Southern California high-speed rail project to life.

Bob O'Malley, Virgin Trains' vice president of corporate development, told the Clark County Commission on Tuesday that the Las Vegas to Victorville, California, rail line is on track to break ground in the middle of next year, with operations to start toward the end of 2023. <https://www.reviewjournal.com/business/tourism/vegas-to-la-high-speed-train-looking-more-realistic-1871032/>

Passenger rail service to Duluth, another train to Chicago, still being considered. Supporters of passenger rail service in Minnesota, including restoration of the route from the Twin Cities to Duluth and additional service to Chicago, are plotting their push for state funding to keep expansion efforts alive. The nexus of their efforts will come during the legislative session, which begins in February. <http://www.startribune.com/passenger-rail-service-to-duluth-another-train-to-chicago-still-being-considered/563010322/?refresh=true>

U.S. Cities Play Catch-Up on High-Speed Rail. For decades, countries such as China, Spain and Turkey have connected distant cities with rail links of 200 mph or faster while American infrastructure has languished. The country's only moderately high-speed train, Amtrak's Acela Express, which spans from Boston to Washington, briefly reaches a top speed of 150 mph. But now that several new private sector efforts are underway, will American cities finally catch up? <https://www.usnews.com/news/cities/articles/2019-09-10/us-cities-play-catch-up-on-high-speed-rail>

Biden: 'We Can Take Millions of Vehicles Off the Road if...' Former Vice President Joe Biden told a CNN town hall on climate change Wednesday night that he endorses high-speed rail as a way to "take millions of vehicles off the road." "Everything is incremental," Biden said. <https://www.cnn.com/news/article/susan-jones/biden-we-can-take-millions-vehicles-road>

The end of an American tradition: The Amtrak dining car. Amtrak says it is reinventing its dining service on long-distance trains, killing the traditional dining car to create more "flexible" and "contemporary" dining options....With the transition, Amtrak is doing away with the traditional onboard kitchen, switching to serving prepackaged meals and easing restrictions on the traditional serving times. The change allows the railroad to cut costs associated with cooking aboard and keeping up with the white-tablecloth service that was once known to rival high-end restaurants and clubs. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/the-end-of-an-american-tradition-the-amtrak-dining-car/2019/09/21/d63cca3a-d888-11e9-bfb1-849887369476_story.html

Opinion/Editorial: Ambitious rail plan would benefit city. Charlottesville Amtrak riders will be interested in this: An east-west route is being proposed by a group of organizations that includes the Piedmont Environmental Law Center, which has an office in Charlottesville. The proposed route is euphoniously labeled the Commonwealth Connector, linking the Blue Ridge and the beach. https://www.dailyprogress.com/opinion/opinion-editorial-ambitious-rail-plan-would-benefit-city/article_3f1c4178-922e-59b0-b3ac-bb62f333b459.html

Back on track: Amtrak proceeds in restoring Gulf Coast service. All aboard! Gulf Coast rail service between New Orleans and Mobile is about to leave the station. That highly anticipated service is now much closer to being a done deal, with some help from the federal government. "Congress has now put up over 30 million dollars. That'll be matched by almost an equal amount, so I think the total is around 59 million dollars that'll be used on rail upgrades and infrastructure between New Orleans and Mobile," says John Spain, Chairman of the Southern Rail Commission. The money from the Federal Railroad Administration is to be matched by funds from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Amtrak. Alabama's deadline for matching funds is today. And, Spain says, once that's done the trains will return to the coast within 24 months. <https://www.radio.com/articles/amtrak-gulf-coast-service-between-new-orleans-and-mobile-back-track>

Another new high speed rail line advances! A new study shows that high-speed rail could whisk passengers from Atlanta to Charlotte in a little more than two hours, transforming the region in the process. The study examined three possible routes for the roughly 280-mile line, comparing projected travel times, construction costs and ridership. <https://www.capitolhilltimes.com/2019/11/25/another-new-high-speed-rail-line-advances/>

Tennessee officials take step forward with potential Nashville-Atlanta Amtrak line. On Wednesday, the Tennessee Legislature's transportation committee passed a bill that could lead to the creation of a feasibility study, which would assess potential train routes to Atlanta, how much they might cost, and who would pay for them. Tennessee state Rep. Jason Powell, a Democrat from Nashville, told Curbed Atlanta today the potential commuter rail line would provide a crucial connection between the fast-growing cities, with possible stops in Chattanooga, Tullahoma, and Murfreesboro. <https://atlanta.curbed.com/2020/2/20/21144408/atlanta->

Illinois Congress members support push for Amtrak in Quad Cities. Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), and Rep. Cheri Bustos (D-IL-17), urged the U.S. Department of Transportation to issue an extension for federal funding of the proposed Amtrak route. The proposal calls for \$225 million in state funding as part of the state's recently-passed capital bill. In a letter to U.S. DOT secretary Elaine Chao, Durbin, Duckworth and Bustos say Molina has already converted a downtown warehouse into a transportation center that can be used as an Amtrak station. <https://www.wifr.com/content/news/Illinois-Congress-members-support-push-for-Amtrak-in-Quad-Cities-511521881.html>

'Wowed' investors snap up bonds for Florida's Virgin Trains USA. The Virgin Trains USA name made a hit with qualified investors who eagerly scooped up its high-yield bonds to finance Florida's privately owned passenger train project. In the largest municipal bond deal of the week, the \$1.75 billion of unrated private activity bonds priced Monday with the Florida Development Finance Corp. as the conduit issuer on behalf Virgin Trains USA, formerly known as Brightline.... Bond proceeds will be used to extend rail service from West Palm Beach to Orlando, reimburse costs, refund \$600 million of bonds issued in 2017, fund reserves, and pay capitalized interest and issuance costs. <https://www.bondbuyer.com/news/wowed-investors-snap-up-bonds-for-virgin-trains-usa?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=ca2f3db3-5ea9-482e-9ffc-237299054f9d>

WisDOT to receive \$25.7M to upgrade train cars on Amtrak's Hiawatha line. There will soon be a new look for the trains that connect Milwaukee and Chicago on Amtrak's Hiawatha line. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation will be awarded up to \$25.7 million for the upgrade of train cars on the route. It's the busiest Amtrak route in the Midwest. The project will replace deteriorated, outdated passenger cab-baggage and coach cars used in the Chicago-Milwaukee Amtrak Hiawatha Service with three single-level cab-coach cars and six single-level coach cars. <https://fox6now.com/2019/08/20/wisdot-to-receive-25-7m-to-upgrade-train-cars-on-amtraks-hiawatha-line/>

Two Grants Aim to Improve Amtrak Midwest Network. In addition, the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) announced a federal SOGR Program grant award for more than \$23 million to the Michigan DOT (MDOT). The federal grant will be used by MDOT to improve rail, crossties and track surfaces between Battle Creek and Dearborn on the Michigan-owned segment of the Chicago-to-Detroit/Pontiac corridor. These improvements include replacing approximately 80,000 railroad ties east of Battle Creek and 15 track-miles of rail east of Jackson. The project aims to improve rail safety and increased passenger train speeds for the Amtrak Midwest Wolverine Service, which carries nearly 500,000 annual passengers. <https://www.railwayage.com/passenger/two-grants-aim-to-improve-amtrak-midwest-network/>

Amtrak, MassDOT starting train service between Greenfield and New Haven. Amtrak and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation are launching a train service Friday between Greenfield and New Haven, Amtrak said. The Valley Flyer train will make 12 stops every day, with the option of transferring trains and continuing into New York City, Amtrak said. Service will end in fall 2021 unless Amtrak meets MassDOT's goal of gaining 24,000 new riders each year. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2019/08/28/new-amtrak-massdot-train-connects-western-mass-conn-and-new-york-city/KpshQ1PaBCMLhXgZnQEBxO/story.html>



May 5, 2020

Representative Mary Murphy, Chair
House Capital Investment Division
343 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Senator David Senjem, Chair
Senate Capital Investment Committee
3401 Minnesota State Office Building
95 University Avenue West
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Representative Murphy and Senator Senjem:

As you are likely aware, the Minnesota AFL-CIO supports a substantial bonding, infrastructure, jobs bill this session in the range of \$2 billion. In April 2016 the Minnesota AFL-CIO Executive Board members passed resolutions on two rail projects that have yet to be enacted. These projects are: Northern Lights Express (NLX) passenger rail and the extension of NorthStar Commuter Rail to St. Cloud. We also support the Governor's proposal on the Twin Cities to Chicago Corridor TCMC, and Emerging Corridors. We would respectfully request funding for these projects in the 2020 Capital Investment bill.

Funding for Northern Lights Express (NLX) would run on existing track operated by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad between the Twin Cities and Duluth with projected stops in Minneapolis, Coon Rapids, Cambridge, Hinckley and Duluth. The difference between NLX and the previous Amtrak line (ended in 1985) is that the trip would be in state-of-the art passenger cars with Internet access and space for business meetings. The project is expected to provide long-term reduction in highway crashes and fatalities while improving time and productivity by reducing highway congestion.

Extending NorthStar Commuter Rail from Big Lake to St. Cloud would provide important economic benefit for the residents of East Central Minnesota. NorthStar

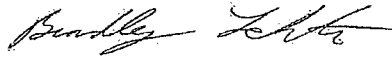
was originally planned to run to St. Cloud and it is time to complete this commuter line.

It is important that an approximately \$2 billion bonding bill passes this session. Capital projects benefit communities, our state and, create thousands of family-sustaining private sector jobs. I would, again, appreciate inclusion of design and planning funds for the two rail projects (NLX and the extension of commuter rail). Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



William McCarthy
President



Bradley Lehto
Secretary-Treasurer

CC: Governor Tim Walz
Representative Frank Hornstein
Representative Paul Torkelson
Senator Scott Newman
Senator Scott Dibble
Phil Qualy, Legislative Director, UTU-SMART Minnesota

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