

Iowa Railroad Ties



News and insights into Iowa's rail industry and the role it plays in Iowa's economy.

A newsletter published by the Iowa Department of Transportation's Office of Rail Transportation

Fall 2007

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Did you know...

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) requires railroads to report all rail accidents and incidents. The FRA's Office of Safety Analysis maintains a Web site that allows individuals to query the railroad accident statistics and highway-railroad crossing inventory data.

<http://safetydata.fra.dot.gov/officeofsafety/>

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Passenger Rail Corner

Amtrak ticket information on the Internet at www.amtrak.com or call 1-800-USA-RAIL

Feature Articles

From the Rail Director

As Iowa citizens visit other states and countries, they often use public rail transportation to get around. When they come back home, some wonder why rail passenger service is not more available to Iowans.

Existing Amtrak service is in the southern part of the state, and the daily California Zephyr train from the west is frequently behind schedule. In the last two years, I have used the light-rail commuter system in Boston, metro train system in Washington D.C., subway in New York, and Hiawatha light rail line in Minneapolis to avoid using automobiles on congested urban streets.

The number one question I've received since becoming the rail office director is, "When are we going to have reliable rail passenger service in Central Iowa where the population centers are?"

First a few definitions:

- **Light rail** is an electric railway operating on dedicated tracks – the modern equivalent of a streetcar (e.g., Hiawatha line in Minneapolis/St. Paul).
- **Commuter rail** is a passenger rail operating between a central city and outlying suburbs, most often on existing freight lines (e.g., Minnesota's Northstar Corridor).
- **Rapid transit or heavy rail** is a high-capacity/frequency underground, subway or elevated railway system operating on dedicated tracks with grade separation from other traffic (e.g., Chicago's "L").
- **Intercity rail** provides long-distance passenger rail service between cities operating on existing freight lines (e.g., Amtrak's California Zephyr line).
- **Regional rail** is a subset of the intercity rail passenger system serving multiple communities and states within a region, and operating on existing freight lines (e.g., the proposed Midwest Regional Rail Initiative).
- **Amtrak** is a national network of rail passenger service that includes the entire intercity rail system and selected commuter rail corridors.

Several years ago, the Des Moines Metropolitan Planning Organization contracted for a study of possible commuter rail service on existing freight rail lines in the Greater Des Moines area. The challenge for any commuter system is to provide door-to-door service in equivalent or less time than the commuter's personal car. The Des Moines study found that the service would be slow, passenger count too low and the cost too high.

More recently, the planning agencies in Linn and Johnson counties hired a consultant to study the feasibility of commuter rail service on the freight line between Cedar Rapids and Iowa City. The study (available on the Internet at www.jccog.org/documents/railfeasibilityreport.pdf) concluded that commuter rail service would likely be feasible between North Liberty and Iowa

City in three to five years and between Cedar Rapids and Iowa City in six to 10 years. The conclusion assumes rapid population growth along the I-380 corridor and higher gas prices.

And therein lies the real issue, in my opinion – currently, there is not enough highway traffic congestion and population density in most Iowa communities to support rail passenger service. However, it is envisioned that the demand for rail passenger service will grow in Iowa over the next five to 25 years. Intercity passenger rail service may grow in incremental stages where there is sufficient interest and passenger use to support the service. Yes, it may require federal funding and state assistance to cover the implementation and operating cost – similar to public funding to build and maintain public transit systems.

Several trends that may speed the investment in regional intercity rail passenger systems include:

- Energy costs – few authorities expect the price of gasoline to decrease significantly and some are projecting further increases.
- Emissions – state and federal governments will be implementing strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which may translate into increased costs for flying or driving.
- Demographics – as baby boomers age, they may want to use alternates to the personal automobile.

In the long term, Iowans may see improved intercity rail passenger service in select corridors.

Peggy Baer
Director, Office of Rail Transportation

Travel by train

In 1920, U.S. rail passenger travel reached its historic peak with 1.2 billion passengers. Over the following decades, poor economic conditions, world wars and other events caused passenger use to decline. However, it was America's love affair with the car, that symbol of freedom and prosperity, and a first-class Interstate Highway System that dealt rail travel a near-fatal blow. By 1970, railroads carried only 7.2 percent of travelers. In 1971, Congress created Amtrak, a national rail passenger system, to preserve passenger rail travel and provide some balance in transportation options.



Today, record-breaking gas prices, the threat of petroleum depletion, concerns about emissions and global warming, and delays and frustrations due to congestion have dulled the passion for the automobile for many highway users. Interest in passenger rail travel is increasing and Amtrak has marked the third straight year of record-breaking national ridership increases.

Here is a brief update on current issues and developments in passenger rail.

National picture



Amtrak provides intercity passenger rail service to more than 500 destinations in 46 states on a 22,000-mile route system. The system consists of long-distance routes (like the routes through Iowa) that primarily use the track of freight railroads and shorter commuter routes, primarily in the Northeast,

where Amtrak owns more track.

Amtrak relies on annual appropriations from the federal government to supplement its budget. Many states have negotiated additional rail passenger service by agreeing to provide state funding for rail infrastructure improvements, operating subsidies or both.

Amtrak in Iowa

There are two Amtrak intercity routes that cross Iowa, each with one departure and arrival time per day.

- The California Zephyr, a Chicago to San Francisco route, has stops in Burlington, Mount Pleasant, Ottumwa, Osceola, and Creston.
- The Southwest Chief, a Chicago to Los Angeles route, has a stop in Fort Madison.



Both routes within Iowa operate on track owned by BNSF Railway.

Challenges for passenger rail

The freight rail system is nearing capacity and experiencing some congestion. Amtrak's on-time performance record on many intercity routes is poor, often due to conflicts with freight traffic. Without better predictability in schedules, business travelers and others that must arrive in time for an event have difficulty taking advantage of rail travel.

Intercity passenger rail must be recognized as an integral part of the overall transportation system to thrive and better meet the needs of passengers throughout the nation. Because the passenger rail system is a national system, that issue must first be addressed in Washington, D.C.

Currently, several proposals are before Congress. The issues under consideration include the system size; level of support for a national system; cost sharing, role and responsibility of the states; structure of Amtrak; and, of course, level of federal investment. Public investment will be required to maintain Amtrak's nationwide system. The outcome of these policy questions will directly impact passenger rail service in Iowa, the Midwest and throughout the country.

What is happening in Iowa and the region?

In addition to the continuing national discussion on Amtrak issues, some exciting state and regional rail passenger activities are underway.

Amtrak is currently conducting two studies that could lead to additional passenger rail service in Iowa.

- The Illinois Department of Transportation asked Amtrak to study adding passenger service from Chicago through Rockford, Ill., to Dubuque, Iowa. The recently completed study (available on the Internet at www.dot.il.gov/amtrak/RCK_Feasibility.pdf) estimates the cost of capital improvements and state-sponsored annual subsidy required for Amtrak to add this service. Many residents of Dubuque are excited about the prospect, but any potential service additions are dependent on future funding availability.

- Amtrak is conducting a study of the Chicago to Quad Cities to Iowa City corridor. The study originally stopped with the Quad Cities, but the Iowa DOT asked Amtrak to look at the prospect of extending service to Iowa City. The study is due for completion later this fall. The Iowa DOT has also requested a follow-up study extending service to Des Moines.

There are many hurdles for potential new passenger rail service – an analysis of cost/benefit, cooperation and agreement on cost-sharing and service issues with the State of Illinois, and the support of Iowa's legislators and the Governor to appropriate the needed funding.

The Midwest Regional Rail Initiative is an ongoing effort to improve and expand passenger rail in the Midwest. Made up of nine states (including Iowa) this group advocates a regional "hub and spoke" rail system with Chicago as the hub. The recommended route would pass through the center of the Iowa, providing better access to more Iowans, and increased speed, reliability and potential destinations. A recent economic analysis showed significant positive benefits to an improved Midwest passenger rail system. More information is available on our website at www.iowarail.com/railroads/passenger/passengerhome.html

The Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission brings together state leaders from across the region to advocate for passenger rail improvements. Iowa has joined this commission, with Senator Daryl Beall, of Fort Dodge, and Representative Paul Bell, of Newton, as Iowa's legislative representatives. More information is available on the Internet at <http://www.miprc.org/>

States for Passenger Rail Coalition is a 30-state association of state transportation agencies working for a national policy and federal program for passenger rail development. Iowa is an active participant in this organization. More information is available on the Internet at www.s4prc.org/

Rail Revolving Loan and Grant Program (RRLGP) update



Applications for financial assistance to build or improve railroad track and structures were accepted through Aug. 17, 2007. Grants and loans totaling \$2.8 million were available in this round of funding through the Railroad Revolving Loan and Grant Program.

The RRLGP has a dual purpose to provide assistance to:

- Businesses to build or improve rail facilities that will spur economic development and job growth.
- Railroads for the preservation and improvement of rail transportation.

Established in 2005, the RRLGP has assisted 15 businesses with awards totaling \$4.6 million. The awards assisted in the creation or retention of more than 1,200 jobs. The program helped build rail spurs to new businesses and industrial parks, build or rebuild rail sidings to accommodate growth, and rehabilitate rail lines to increase capacity and safety.

Assistance for rail development through the RRLGP got a boost when the Iowa General Assembly passed, and Governor Culver signed, a bill including \$2 million to assist businesses and railroads in building and improving rail infrastructure. The funding initiative, called Access Rail, was one of the Iowa DOT's two top legislative priorities. Thanks to legislators and other supporters who recognized that public investments in rail infrastructure and helping businesses connect to the rail system can reap much larger benefits and build Iowa's economy.

The Iowa DOT is hopeful that additional Access Rail funding will be approved in the upcoming legislative session. An annual investment in the RRLGP of \$2 million for the next few years will allow the program to continue to assist businesses in accessing the rail system and build a sustainable pool of funds, replenished with loan repayments.

More information is available on the Internet at www.iowarail.com/assistance/rrlgp.htm

The last of the steam locomotives (reprinted with permission from INSIDE magazine)



It takes a lot of steam to power 454 tons of steel down the tracks. With 23,500 gallons of water onboard, the Union Pacific Railroad's steam locomotive No. 844 chugged through Iowa in late June on a mission to celebrate the rich heritage of railroading in the United States.

The locomotive pulling 10 cars spent 16 days traveling more than 3,000 miles from its base in Cheyenne, Wyo., to North Platte, Neb.; Denison, Boone, Des Moines, and Carlisle, Iowa; Kansas City, Mo., and circling back through Topeka, Kan., and Hastings, Neb., on its way back to Wyoming. The vintage engine and rail cars serve as a moving museum of 145 years of the railroad industry.

"This was the first time No. 844 has stopped in Carlisle, Iowa, Trenton and Liberty, Mo., and Fairbury, Neb. We were pleased to bring a piece of living history to this part of our rail network," said Steve Lee, Union Pacific's manager – operating practices and locomotive engineer. "We are extremely proud of our collection of historical railroad equipment, which is the largest of any U. S. railroad."

Steam locomotive No. 844, delivered in 1944, is the last steam locomotive built for the Union Pacific Railroad. A high-speed passenger engine, it pulled such widely known trains as the Overland Limited, Los Angeles Limited, Portland Rose and Challenger. When diesels took over passenger train duties, the UP placed No. 844 in freight service in Nebraska between 1957 and 1959. It was saved from being scrapped in 1960 and held for special service.

The engine returned to service in 2005 after one of the most extensive steam locomotive overhauls in the United States since the 1950s. The work began in 2000 and affected its running gear, pumps, piping, valves, and springs, along with replacement of its firebox and extensive boiler work. The cab interior also was refurbished.

No. 844 has run hundreds of thousands of miles for UP's Heritage Program. It has made appearances at Expo '74 in Spokane, the 1981 opening of the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento, 1984 World's Fair in New Orleans, and 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Los Angeles Union Station in 1989.

Information for this article is from the Union Pacific Railroad's Web site at www.uprr.com.

Rail fan journeys far

Clark Humble and his two sons, Ryan and Colin, ages 13 and 11, traveled from Marietta, Ga., to enjoy a special train ride on the Cedar Rapids & Iowa City Railway Company (CRANDIC) on June 15. As a fundraiser for the Cedar Rapids United Way campaign, CRANDIC auctioned

off a train ride to the highest bidder. Humble, a Cedar Rapids native, aggressively bid \$655.44 on eBay® to earn the ride. "CRANDIC has a lot of memories for me. This is a chance for me to come back and share the experience with my sons," Humble said.

Future events

Moving Iowa Forward Conference, April 2, 2008, Downtown Marriot Hotel, Des Moines – The Iowa departments of Economic Development and Transportation will host the second joint conference exploring how transportation can contribute to economic development in the state.

TRANSCAER tour - A tour in April 2008 will offer free emergency preparedness training to local and regional emergency response organizations. Tentative stops include Burlington, Creston, Red Oak, Sioux City, Storm Lake, and Waterloo. Stay tuned for more details or check www.transcaer.com closer to the event.

Government News

A quiet birthday

The city of Nevada recently passed a birthday in silence – the silence of the train horns. July 15 marked one year since the town declared a section of railroad track that bisects the town of nearly 6,700 a quiet zone. Now, locomotives no longer routinely sound their horn when approaching the intersections within the zone.

City Administrator Dave Hougland said, "The quiet zone has made just a tremendous difference in the quality of life for those living near the tracks." Locomotive engineers can still sound their horn if they spot a specific hazard.



Nevada began investigating solutions to train horn noise when the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) began considering new rules on horns. Approved in June 2005, the train horn rule requires trains to sound horns at each crossing for a specific time. With four crossings just a few blocks apart, that meant near continuous horns as a train passed through Nevada. Located on the Union Pacific's main line, with approximately 60 trains whizzing through town daily at up to 70 mph, meant residents would hear a lot of horns around the clock.



However, the FRA rule also includes specific ways in which communities can make safety improvements to crossings to silence the horns. First, all crossings must have warning lights and gates. Secondly, the calculated safety risk of the proposed quiet zone corridor must be *no more* than the calculated risk at crossings where train horns sound. Frequently, that requires making some level of safety improvements within the proposed zone. In Nevada's case, lights and gates were already in place at the four crossings. Channelization devices were added at all four crossings to discourage drivers from crossing into the left lane to pass through lowered signal gates.

When asked for advice by other communities considering quiet zones, Hougland said: "The FRA process is pretty well laid out. Just do your homework to understand the rule, get residents involved early on so they know what to expect and can buy into the idea, choose your option or options for safety improvements, and work with the FRA and railroad. The quiet zone on the east-west main line has been such a success, we are starting to look into establishing a quiet zone on the north-south rail line as



well."

More information is available on the Internet at www.fra.dot.gov/us/content/1318

Industry News

Powerful Iowa storm

Severe weather warnings put us all on alert with concern about our homes and families. But have you ever considered the havoc a serious storm can create for a railroad? When high winds hit the Muscatine area June 1, the Iowa Chicago & Eastern Railroad Corp (IC&E) found that even large, heavy rail equipment is not immune when Iowa winds blow.

IC&E had 32 rail cars knocked off the tracks by high winds. The storm derailed 21 cars in one train, with another nine tipped over and two cars leaning against other cars in other yard locations.

IC&E Roadmaster Jim Manning said: "Post storm cleanup went very well, beginning Friday night and was mostly completed by noon Saturday. Luckily, the train was in the process of switching cars and not moving at the time the storm hit. A moving train would likely have torn up a lot of track. As it is, track damage was minimal."

The storm totaled seven cars, while several others sustained repairable damage. With many of the rail cars returning empty to a destination, cleanup was straightforward and relatively rapid. No damage estimate was available.

Union Pacific celebrates 145th anniversary



On July 1, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed into law the Pacific Railroad Act, creating the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads, and chartering the two companies to link the country from Omaha to Sacramento.

Now, 145 years later, Jim Young, chairman and chief executive officer of Union Pacific Corporation said: "The anniversary is a time to not only remember the railroads' rich past, but also to highlight the tremendous progress Union Pacific has made. Today, the Union Pacific is committed to moving the products that fuel the nation's economy in the most safe, economical and environmentally friendly manner possible."

Union Pacific links 23 states in the western two-thirds of the country and serves the fastest-growing population centers. The railroad, made up of 32,000 route miles, employs 50,000 and has an annual payroll of \$3.7 billion.

Manly Terminal gains new alliance

KAG Ethanol Logistics has joined efforts with LB Transport and Iowa Northern Railway Company, entering into an investment alliance with Manly Terminal LLC. KAG Ethanol Logistics can coordinate and manage the overall logistics, providing the simplicity of a single invoice from the ethanol producer to consumption point.

Safety News



Safety in numbers

The news continues to improve for Iowa rail safety. A recently updated, comprehensive safety report reveals the official safety statistics for 2005 and preliminary figures for 2006. Derailments, crashes at public highway-railroad grade

crossings and trespasser casualties are all down from 2004 figures, despite increasing train traffic.

The full text of the report can be found on our web site at www.iowarail.com/safety/2005_safety_report.pdf.

Prior issues of *Iowa Railroad Ties* are available on our web site at www.iowarail.com/resources/newsletter/archive.htm