

## **Status Report**

### **Midwest Regional Rail Passenger Initiative and Passenger Rail Service in Iowa**

#### **February 1, 2010**

This report fulfills the requirements of the following Code of Iowa sections:

Section 327J.3(1): “The director may expend moneys from the fund to pay the costs associated with the initiation, operation, and maintenance of rail passenger service. The director shall report by February 1 of each year to the legislative services agency concerning the status of the fund including anticipated expenditures for the following fiscal year.”

Section 327J.3(5): "The director shall report annually to the general assembly concerning the development and operation of the midwest regional rail system and the state's passenger rail service."

#### **Status of Passenger Rail Service Revolving Fund 327J.3(1)**

For FY 2010, the Passenger Rail Service Revolving Fund received a \$3,000,000 appropriation from the Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund. In July 2009, the Iowa Transportation Commission programmed \$500,000 of the appropriation for use in development support of Iowa’s applications to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for the High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program (HSIPR) as funded in the federal American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009 (Recovery Act). To date, \$358,142 of the funds are under contract and the remaining balance of the fund was included in the HSIPR applications submitted to the FRA as a commitment of state funds for expansion of passenger rail service in Iowa.

#### **Passenger Rail in Iowa 327J.3(5)**

Over the past year, Iowa DOT has aggressively moved forward with Iowa’s passenger rail vision. The Iowa DOT, working with the state of Illinois, Iowa cities, planning organizations and advocacy groups, worked diligently to apply for five federal HSIPR grants through the FRA. Those applications were for the following:

- \$256,695,000 for environmental studies and capital expenditures to initiate passenger rail service from Chicago to Iowa City (a joint application with Illinois and includes costs in Illinois.) If successful, this grant would provide 100% federal monies.
- \$139,700,691 for environmental studies and capital expenditures to initiate passenger rail service from Chicago to Dubuque (a joint application with Illinois and includes costs in Illinois.) If successful, this grant would provide 100% federal monies.
- \$1 million for a planning study that would complete the preparatory steps for passenger rail service from Chicago to Omaha. If successful, this grant would provide 50% federal funding.

- \$17,309,080 for additional crossovers on the BNSF rail line that hosts Amtrak's California Zephyr service to improve on-time performance.
- \$26,754,574 for track maintenance on the BNSF rail line that hosts Amtrak's California Zephyr service to reduce congestion and delays.

These projects, if funded, will jump start the implementation of our vision to create a passenger rail network that connects Iowans to each other and the country, and makes Iowa more attractive place to live, work and visit. In addition to the HSIPR funding, it is expected that there will be a continuing annual federal investment in passenger rail and this has been demonstrated by the FY 2010 appropriation of \$2.5 billion for passenger rail funding.

In 2008, Iowa DOT formed a Passenger Rail Advisory Committee whose members are helping shape the vision for passenger rail service in the state. Since its formation, this group has met on four different occasions for formal face to face meetings and participated in various conference calls to discuss current projects, newly released federal guidance and opportunities to brainstorm new goals and objectives. In conjunction with this committee, Iowa DOT requested and successfully received the first modern day appropriation for passenger rail through the FY 2010 appropriation to the Passenger Rail Service Revolving Fund. This funding has allowed Iowa to compete at the federal level for high speed intercity passenger rail funding opportunities.

#### **Passenger Rail Initiatives:**

Iowa DOT has been involved with studies for expanded passenger rail service, for both individual routes and for a larger regional system in the Midwest (Midwest Regional Rail Initiative).

#### **Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI)**

The Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI) is a nine-state effort to develop an implementation plan for a 3,000-mile, high-speed rail system hubbed in Chicago. Studies done since 1996 have concluded that such a regional system, including a line from Chicago to Omaha through Davenport, Iowa City and Des Moines, is viable. Most of the system would be upgraded to allow 110 mile-per-hour service. The Iowa portion of the line would be upgraded for 79 mile-per-hour service. A copy of the **Midwest Regional Rail System, Executive Report, September 2004**, is available at [www.iowarail.com](http://www.iowarail.com). Participation of the Iowa Department of Transportation in the MWRRI is authorized under Iowa Code section 327J.3.

The ongoing work of the nine-state MWRRI steering committee is currently focusing on:

- Further efforts of system planning by updating and refining key MWRRI plan elements and public information materials.
- Developing support and advocating for a federal program to provide funding for passenger rail initiatives.

The MWRRI states participate in a variety of regional and national outreach activities to encourage congressional support for a dedicated, federal passenger rail-funding program.

The states have cooperated with a number of passenger rail support groups, including the Midwest High Speed Rail Coalition, Iowa Association of Railroad Passengers, States for Passenger Rail Coalition, and American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. All of these support groups recognize that a strong state and federal funding partnership is essential to the development of a national passenger rail system.

### **2009 Iowa Railroad System Plan**

After a several year initiative to solicit public input and the input of railroad shippers, users and service providers, the Iowa DOT completed the 2009 Iowa Railroad System Plan. This document defines a long-range vision for Iowa's freight and passenger railroad system that will meet Iowa's quality of life, safety, efficiency and economic development goals.

### **Midwest High-Speed Rail Steering Group**

In July of 2009, Governor Culver and other Midwestern governors participated in a Midwest High Speed Rail Summit. The purpose of this summit was to assure Midwestern efforts to develop a regional intercity passenger rail service was coordinated. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by all the governors at this summit documenting their commitment to work cooperatively to secure federal funding to implement this Midwest system. As a result of the summit, a Midwest High-Speed Rail Steering Group was established and they meet on a regular basis to coordinate activities and to promote the Midwest system.

At the July summit, Governor Culver and Governor Quinn of Illinois also signed a Memorandum of Understanding documenting the two states' responsibilities in implementing passenger rail service from Chicago to Iowa City and Chicago to Dubuque.

Prepared by the Office of Rail Transportation, Iowa Department of Transportation