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News Release

Growing Passenger Rail Ridership Spurs New Hope for the Midwest

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LOMBARD, IL – More than 2.6 million people took the train in FY 08 on corridor service within the Midwest last year, capping off five years of impressive growth on these regional, primarily state-supported routes. Ridership was up 17 percent over the previous year, and up almost 64 percent over the past five years.

“Amtrak ridership numbers released earlier this month confirm that the region will benefit strongly from the federal commitment to passenger rail development demonstrated in enactment of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act last week,” said Laura Kliewer, director of the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission.

Ridership on all corridor service within the region showed impressive growth (*also see attached chart*):

- Missouri’s twice-daily state-supported service between St. Louis and Kansas City saw 30 percent more riders taking these trains over FY 07, reversing a two-year decline in ridership caused by freight congestion and construction.
- Illinois’ three state-supported routes (Chicago-Quincy, Chicago-Carbondale and Chicago-St. Louis) all posted double-digits ridership gains over the past fiscal year, and five-year trends illustrate the staying power of passenger rail in the state. The Chicago-Carbondale service has gained 86 percent in ridership since FY 04, while the state’s Lincoln service (Chicago-St. Louis) has grown 124 percent and the Illini/Saluki (Chicago-Carbondale) service has grown by almost 140 percent.
- Ridership on the Chicago-Milwaukee Hiawatha service grew by 26 percent last year, reporting almost three quarters of a million riders. Amtrak’s fourteen daily trains between the two cities are supported by both Illinois and Wisconsin.
- Corridor service from Chicago to points in Michigan had 720,647 riders in FY 08, an almost 6 percent increase over the previous fiscal year. Two of the three Michigan routes (the *Blue Water* and *Pere Marquette* services) are supported by the state of Michigan.
- The daily Hoosier State service from Chicago to Indianapolis also continues to grow impressively, posting more than 20 percent in ridership gains in FY 08 over the previous year, and a 77 percent increase from FY 04.

(more)

Ridership on long-distance routes that serve the Midwest also continued to grow steadily, with an overall increase of 9.5 percent. The *Empire Builder*, which serves several Midwestern states, including Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota and North Dakota – continues to be the most popular overnight passenger train, and ridership grew by almost 10 percent in FY 08. Several routes that had suffered ridership losses in FY 07 (the *Capitol Limited*, the *California Zephyr* and the *Texas Eagle*) rebounded strongly in FY 08.

On October 16, President Bush signed HR 2095, which contains the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA). The act reauthorizes Amtrak for five years and provides authorization for significant new programs and funding, including:

- **Intercity Passenger Rail Service Corridor Capital Assistance** – \$1.9 billion over five years, at up to 80 percent federal match, for “financing the capital costs of facilities, infrastructure, and equipment necessary to provide or improve intercity passenger rail transportation”;
- **Congestion Grants** – \$325 million over four years for projects identified by Amtrak to reduce congestion or facilitate passenger rail growth along heavily traveled corridors, or by the Surface Transportation Board to improve on-time performance;
- **High Speed Rail Corridor Program** – \$1.5 billion over five years, specifically for projects that would achieve speeds of at least 110 mph; and
- **Next Generation Corridor Equipment Pool** – \$5 million to design, develop specifications for, and procure standardized next-generation corridor equipment.

In addition to individual state plans to increase passenger rail service, the region has two aggressive, innovative plans – the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative and Ohio Hub – that will bring faster, more frequent passenger rail service to the region. Advancing those plans requires the same strong federal partnership that has historically benefited other modes of transportation such as highways and aviation. The new programs authorized through PRIIA, once funded, will allow the region to implement those plans.

“For the first time, the Amtrak reauthorization provides grant funding for states for intercity passenger rail development,” Kliewer said. “With the Midwest’s combination of strong demand for service and excellent plans that will significantly improve passenger rail access, our region should be first in line to receive PRIIA funding.”

Since 2000, the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission has worked on behalf of its member states to promote, coordinate and support improvements to passenger rail service. A primary objective of the commission is to help build the strong federal-state partnership necessary to advance passenger rail improvements in our region and nation.

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The MIPRC is a 10-state compact of Midwestern states – Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio and Wisconsin – working together to preserve and improve passenger rail service in the region.