
Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission

June 18, 2002

Advocacy in Washington, D.C.

The Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission and our allies went to Washington, DC, on June 18 to meet with Midwestern Members of Congress. We advocated for passage of legislation to fund Amtrak in the short term and for the provision of substantive investments in high speed rail corridor improvements.

Passenger rail advocacy organizations across the Midwest are supporting a common set of principles for federal investment in passenger rail. On June 18, the MIPRC and our allies presented these points to Congressional members on behalf of all the sponsors:

A) PROVIDE ENOUGH IMMEDIATE FUNDING TO AVOID TRAIN DISCONTINUANCE.

Given that the demand for expanded rail service is growing, it would be shortsighted to allow any trains to cease running while work continues on a new federal policy for intercity passenger rail. While we recognize that some routes may need to be changed in the future, cutting routes now would severely constrain the nation's ability to formulate a comprehensive rail plan for the future. The federal government needs to provide enough funding to allow Amtrak to continue operating all its trains (system- and state-supported) until a comprehensive rail plan is developed.

B) SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASE FEDERAL RAIL FUNDING.

Three types of funding are required:

1) Short-term maintenance of Amtrak. To insure that no routes are cut, we support Amtrak's \$1.2 billion request, with the caveat that Amtrak be held accountable to certain performance standards.

2) Medium-term infrastructure funding. Federal investment in key infrastructure projects will make the system work much more efficiently within a short period of time. The Midwestern states, for example, have a solid plan for increasing the speed and frequency of passenger rail service in nine Midwestern states. The Midwest Regional Rail Initiative needs funding to proceed with acquisition of new trainsets, ongoing planning, and the construction of infrastructure build-outs and improvements. These improvements would benefit the entire region as first phases of planned overall improvements to a 3,000-mile passenger rail network in the Midwest. We support passage of federal legislation such as the High Speed Rail Investment Act as a way to fund these projects.

3) Long-term dedicated funding. The highway, aviation and transit development programs are successful, in large part, because they have a steady, predictable level of funding that facilitates long term planning. Passenger rail needs a comparable funding stream to allow it to reach its transportation potential.

C) UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF THE U.S. DOT OR ITS DESIGNATED AGENCY, DEFINE ONE BODY OR AGENCY SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR COORDINATING AND SETTING THE POLICIES AND FUNCTIONS OF A NATIONAL PASSENGER RAIL SYSTEM.

Currently there is inconsistency within the federal government regarding federal policy and accountability for passenger rail. We support the clear delineation of responsibility and accountability of a national passenger rail system, under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Transportation or its designated agency.