

## Congressional Listening Session on Surface Transportation Reauthorization

2/20/11

### Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission Testimony (Laura Kliewer, Director)

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On behalf of the Midwestern states, the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission asks that Congress include passenger rail development as a key component to any reauthorization of the federal surface transportation program. We also recommend that transportation programs continue to be delivered through a partnership with the states, local government, and the private sector, but the current programs be consolidated into a performance-based approach to decision-making and funding of projects.

Over the past five years, passenger rail ridership on the Midwest's shorter-distance corridors has grown 55 percent.

Illinois is an excellent example of how passenger rail development can benefit a state and a region. In FY 2007, Illinois doubled the frequency of passenger rail service on its three routes. Over the last five years, the number of riders on the service has grown tremendously. For example, during FY 2010, ridership on Illinois' state-supported *Lincoln* service – four daily roundtrips between Chicago and St. Louis – grew by more than 13 percent; over the last five years, it has grown by **136 percent**.

Last fall, Illinois began upgrading approximately 90 miles of existing track along the Chicago-to-St. Louis route to prepare it for future passenger train operations up to 110 mph. This is the first phase of construction on the route, made possible by the \$1.1 billion the state has been awarded through federal stimulus funding for intercity passenger rail capital improvements.

Ridership on Missouri's twice-daily roundtrip service between St. Louis and Kansas during FY 2010 was up 14.4 percent over FY 2009. Missouri has been awarded \$34.5 million in funding through the High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program for various improvements along the St. Louis-to-Kansas City line.

The Midwestern region has and will benefit strongly from the federal government's commitment to partnering with the states to provide capital improvements to corridors in our region. Our states, and states across the country that are planning for faster, more frequent passenger rail service will continue to need the federal government's partnership. We need to shift to looking at transportation development as a system. Passenger rail is generally the best option for transporting people who are traveling between 100 and 600 miles. It is also often a better transportation mode than others in certain types of weather and under emergency situations. When that transportation "leg" is weak, it leads to the congestion, lost travel time, and decreased fuel-efficiency.

The Midwest's desire for faster, more frequent passenger rail service did not materialize as a response to the first-ever infusion of federal capital assistance for passenger rail service provided under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Midwestern states have been working together for over a dozen years to develop a coordinated plan to increase access and improve passenger rail service across nine states. The build-out of these multi-state plans are projected to bring more than \$30 billion in economic benefits to the region, as well as create a significant number of short- and long-term jobs. Advancing those plans requires the same strong federal partnership that has historically benefited other modes of transportation such as highways and aviation.

Illinois is especially important to this plan, and will especially benefit, because Chicago already is the hub for passenger rail service to hundreds of destinations across the nation. Additionally,

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our states have the detailed plans to make that service better for corridors from Chicago across the Midwest: to Detroit; Cleveland; Indianapolis and on to Cincinnati; St. Louis and on to Kansas City; Des Moines and on to Omaha; and Minneapolis/St. Paul.

Our region is ready with the plans to build an efficient, cost-effective, vibrant system with the potential to reap tremendous economic returns and job creation for the region, while connecting 150 communities across the Midwest. The estimated return for this plan is 1.8, meaning that every dollar spent is expected to yield a return of 1.8 dollars. We ask that the current Congress make passenger rail development a strong, vital component in the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization, with a dedicated source of funding similar to other modes of transportation.

As the current Congress begins to consider reauthorization of the federal surface transportation act, it can strongly benefit from the work that has already been done by a key commission that was authorized by the last surface transportation reauthorization, SAFETEA-LU, in 2005. The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission was a 12-member commission representing federal, state and local governments; metropolitan planning organizations; transportation-related industries; and public interest organizations.

Beginning in May 2006, the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission met regularly to hear about the challenges facing America's surface transportation network. Commissioners heard testimony from national transportation advocates, policymakers, industry, labor, and from the general public. They also held ten field hearings around the country to learn about regional issues and dynamics that affect America's transportation system and authorized the creation of a 77-member blue ribbon panel of transportation experts from all levels of government, the private sector, industry, labor, and academic and research institutions to provide "big ideas" on improving the transportation network.

The commission's report, which was submitted to Congress on December 31, 2007, recommended a "new beginning" for surface transportation, including a collapsing of the current surface transportation categories (there are over 100!) into 10 programs, each guided by a national plan to accomplish key goals.

MIPRC concurs with the Study Commission's approach, including that intercity passenger rail be an integral aspect of that new paradigm.

In addition, as Congress works to craft a new surface transportation bill, the MIPRC asks that:

1. **there be a guaranteed funding level for each of the program areas.** The Study Commission report estimated that an average annual investment in intercity passenger rail of \$8.1 billion per year over 44 years is needed, primarily to develop "new and enhanced 'regional service' in high growth intercity corridors." (*Ch. 4, pg. 20*).
2. **specific criteria be utilized when considering the inclusion of any earmarks in the legislation.** This criteria should require that earmarked projects be consistent with state and regional planning efforts and products. These planning efforts generally result in a prioritized array of projects that are arrived at through a data driven and collaborative process.

Thank you.