

## Overview of MIPRC 2015 Annual Meeting

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The Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission (MIPRC) held its 2015 Annual Meeting on September 22-25. Commissioners met in Chicago to take the Amtrak *Empire Builder* service to St. Paul. While at Chicago Union Station, the group received a tour of the many current and planned renovations of the station. On the train ride up, they heard about the master plan for Chicago Union Station and a proposed second frequency of Amtrak service between Chicago and the Twin Cities (currently, the only Amtrak service to the Twin Cities is via the long-distance *Empire Builder*).

In St. Paul, MIPRC commissioners, partners and allies met for two days in the recently-restored St. Paul Union Depot, where they heard presentations on and discussed a range of passenger rail-related issues, from federal legislation to plans for outreach to universities and colleges and highlighting the important role of rail suppliers to the Midwest's economy. State DOT representatives from each member state also gave an update on their passenger rail projects and planning.

MIPRC commissioners also heard from the Federal Rail Administration (FRA) about the multistate planning project it will undertake in the Midwest which will help the region and FRA determine the priorities, studies and investment needed to advance projects within a multistate network context. (The Midwest as a region was chosen by the FRA based on a "statement of interest" submitted by MIPRC on behalf of the Midwest.) The project is still in its formative stage, but workshops to begin the planning process are expected to commence after the first of the year.

Following a presentation on the status of installation of Positive Train Control (PTC – integrated command, control, communications, and information systems that have the ability to provide continuous, real-time information on train location and speed), commissioners decided to ask Congress to extend the deadline, while giving the FRA the authority to review and enforce implementation. Federal legislation currently requires that most passenger railroads and Class I freight railroads install this safety technology by the end of the 2015. However, most railroads will not be ready to fully implement PTC by that date, and not extending the deadline would mean that most intercity passenger rail and commuter service would cease (as well as certain freight shipments).

Attendees also received an update on the Next Generation Equipment Committee and the Midwest's plans to procure Next Generation equipment. Four Midwestern states (Illinois, Michigan, Missouri and Wisconsin) will soon become joint owners of new locomotives and train cars that are currently being manufactured. Those states are negotiating a legal structure for that ownership and it was anticipated that they would they might do so under the authority of the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact. Commissioners voted to revive the MIPRC Governance Committee and tasked it with making a recommendation on the action steps necessary for the Commission to "implement or provide oversight for specific rail projects" as set forth in Article IV, section 6 of the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact.

The commission re-elected Tim Hoeffner, director of the Michigan Department of Transportation's Office of Rail (and Governor Snyder's designee to the commission) as MIPRC's chair for FY 2016; Joan Bray, Missouri Gov. Nixon's designee to the commission, as vice chair; and Kansas Sen. Carolyn McGinn as financial officer.

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Other actions during the meeting's business session included:

1. Budget. The draft FY 2016 budget that was sent to commissioners prior to the meeting was approved, with one amendment: commissioners gave MIPRC officers discretion to decide whether a trip to Washington, D.C. by the commission is needed, and approved up to \$10,000 to be spent on the endeavor.
2. Bylaws change. By unanimous approval, an addition to MIPRC's bylaws was approved, giving MIPRC's officers the power to "provisionally adopt or amend the Commission's annual operating budget for the current or next fiscal year, subject to the review and approval of the full Commission at its next meeting."
3. Participation in long-term investment pool. Unanimous approval was also given to a motion to authorize the MIPRC officers to invest MIPRC reserve funds in CSG's long-term investment pool.

During the meeting, commissioners also decided to hold MIPRC's next annual meeting in St. Louis in the fall of 2016, and in Indiana in 2017.