

Information on the Midwest's FRA-led Multistate Planning Project (as of 11/13/15)

What will the Midwest's multistate planning project process look like?

FRA has developed a planning framework to guide the development of high-performance rail networks and services from concept through project development to implementation. FRA's planning framework, from general to specific, includes:

1. National rail planning – criteria, guidance and tools to support local decision-makers
2. Regional rail plans (multi-state) – the subject of this information brief
3. State rail plans (FRA guidance available at <http://www.fra.dot.gov/Page/P0511>)
4. Passenger rail corridor investment plans (which include a Service Development Plan and Tier I NEPA study)

The Midwest's regional rail plan will help the region and FRA determine the priorities, studies and investment needed to advance projects within a multi-state network.

A regional rail plan:

- Is a process led by the FRA in partnership with stakeholders that identifies and describes a common, long-term (30- to 40-year) blueprint for a high-performance rail network within a specified region.
- Will help the region and FRA determine the priorities, studies and investments needed to advance projects within a multi-state network context.
- Illustrates how links with local transit, aviation, highways and non-motorized modes can create a seamless, integrated transportation system to carry travelers from origin to destination throughout the region.
- Identifies the potential institutional arrangements, financial requirements, phasing planning and development activities needed to implement the plan.

Components and subcomponents that FRA plans to include in the Midwest's regional rail plan:

1. **BASELINE CONDITIONS AND MARKET ASSESSMENT** will examine market opportunities for regional corridors and connections; analyze goals, policies and priorities in existing transportation studies; and consider land-use opportunities. Among the activities will be:
 - Assessing baseline conditions and market opportunities for rail in the region.
 - Analyzing regional transportation goals, studies and priorities for all modes.
 - Identifying potential corridors and connections for testing with FRA's CONNECT tool. FRA developed CONNECT specifically for regional planning. It provides data, not answers. The products of the tool provide comparisons of the relative differences in ridership, revenue and costs for various network configurations. This information allows users to assess the tradeoffs of higher or lower investments. Conducting a structured regional planning process is crucial for converting the data from CONNECT into decisions and actions with regional buy-in.
2. **GENERALIZED NETWORK VISION AND SERVICE PLAN:** The Generalized Network Vision will describe the communities to be served by rail and the corridors that link them. The Service Plan will describe the range of train service (frequencies, speeds, capacity) connecting markets in the network and how those services would operate and interact in the network. These will be accomplished by:
 - Developing a map of the proposed passenger rail network and describing the communities to be served and the corridors between them.
 - Describing service plans to link markets in the network with characteristics (frequencies, speeds, capacities).
 - Describing potential benefits a passenger rail network would bring to freight rail.
 - Describing opportunities for integrating modes within the corridors.

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Components and subcomponents that FRA plans to include in the Midwest's regional rail plan (cont.):

3. **GOVERNANCE STRATEGIES** will identify and address the institutional, financial, political and regulatory structures necessary to develop the envisioned system. It will involve:
 - Identifying a working group to address the institutional, financial, political and regulatory structures necessary to develop, operate, maintain and fund the system.
 - Delivering a proposal and action plan to put the institutional and governance frameworks in place.
4. **PRIORITIZED INVESTMENTS AND MAPS** will create a list of corridors, potential stations, proposed levels of service (e.g., frequency, average speeds, station spacing, etc.) and a logical progression of development of segments and corridors that will comprise the regional network. This will require:
 - Creating a map and written description of the proposed regional network, including a corridor-by-corridor description of service levels and potential stations.
 - Prioritizing the development or upgrading of specific segments of the network in a logical order.
5. **COSTS, BENEFITS AND FUNDING.** The regional rail plan will include a high-level capital cost estimate for developing the regional network, forecasts for operating the network (including high-level ridership and revenue estimates), and a preliminary analysis of the benefits and costs. The regional rail plan also includes a discussion of potential funding and financing strategies. It will include:
 - Creating a high-level, capital cost estimate for developing the regional network.
 - Creating conceptual financial forecasts for operating the regional network.
 - Conducting a benefit-cost analysis for the regional network.
 - Assessing potential funding sources and private sector participation.

Ultimately, a key outcome of the Midwest's regional plan will be to identify a pipeline of corridors that will be evaluated at the next level of analysis – a Tier 1 Corridor Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Service Development Plan. The FRA's goal is for member states to:

- Adopt the findings of the regional rail plan and join or create the regional governance structure.
- Incorporate relevant studies, corridors and projects from the regional rail plan into state rail plans to ensure eligibility for federal grants under the High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail program.

What states will be included in the Midwest's Regional Rail Plan development?

At a minimum, the study will consider the states that wrote letters of support for the Midwest's Statement of Interest. Initial stakeholder feedback and data analysis from the CONNECT Tool will be used to determine whether additional states should be considered in the Midwest regional rail plan.

How will the FRA get this process going?

- Within the next few weeks, FRA will issue a request for proposals for contractors to assist with the plan and with efforts to update and improve the CONNECT tool.
- Once the consultant(s) are chosen at the end of this year or the beginning of next year, the FRA will begin seeking input from state and local stakeholders.