



701 E. 22nd Street
Suite 110
Lombard, Illinois 60148
tel: 630.925.1922
fax: 630.925.1930
www.miprc.org
miprc@miprc.org

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*Bringing Together
State Leaders from
Across the Region
to Advocate
for Passenger Rail
Improvements*

The Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission is an eight-state interstate compact commission that promotes, coordinates and supports regional improvements to passenger rail service. Our member states include Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota and Wisconsin.

April 20, 2021

The Honorable Joe Biden
President of the United States

Transmitted via email to Charles Small, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Intergovernmental Affairs, U.S. Department of Transportation (charles.small@dot.gov)

Dear President Biden:

Intercity passenger rail is a critical component of our nation's transportation network and a safe, viable, energy-efficient, and economically attractive transportation option. It's also a much more viable option for those in rural areas or traditionally under-served communities and for those who cannot afford to own a car or fly – an option that opens a region to those who have no other way to get around for work, education, family visits or the simple joy of travel.

MIPRC was pleased to see the American Jobs Plan's proposal to invest \$80 billion in the modernization and expansion of passenger rail in the U.S., and to realize this proposal will move in parallel to reauthorization of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act of 2015, which expires in September 2021.

Between this letter and our FAST Act reauthorization principles (attached), we hope to call your attention to the ongoing effort of Midwestern states to build a genuinely regional passenger rail network – one we believe the Jobs Plan can help to serve as an example to the nation of the economic benefits to be gained from regional cooperation in planning and operations, resulting from a strong state-federal partnership.

Since 2009-2010, Midwestern states have been awarded more than \$3.1 billion in federal grants via the High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail program (HSIPR), Tiger grants (now BUILD), and the passenger rail-related discretionary grant programs authorized in the FAST Act.

Under the HSIPR program, the Midwest was awarded \$2.5 billion. The majority of this funding helped improve or develop four key interstate passenger rail corridors: *Chicago-St. Louis-Kansas City; Minneapolis/St. Paul-Chicago; Chicago-Quad Cities; Detroit/Pontiac-Chicago.*

In addition, four MIPRC states – Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, and Wisconsin – banded together as the Midwest States Consortium to jointly own and operate new passenger equipment, under the authority of MIPRC. Built by Siemens in Sacramento, Calif., new locomotives began revenue service in mid-2017, and are now on all state-supported routes between Chicago and St. Louis, Milwaukee, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Mich., and Port Huron, Mich., and between St. Louis and Kansas City. The first of 88 new passenger and cafe cars (also built by Siemens) began arriving in late 2020 and will enter revenue service this year. Wisconsin is currently in procurement to add more cars and cab cars for the *Hiawatha* service. As other MIPRC states implement new services, they will also be eligible to join the equipment consortium.

MIPRC members have used funding provided through the FAST Act to build multi-modal stations; make track, station and corridor improvements; and complete elements of the nationally significant CREATE program to untangle freight and passenger rail in the Chicago metropolitan area. Wisconsin and Minnesota plan to use recently awarded Restoration & Enhancement and Consolidated Railroad Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI) grants for a second daily train between the Twin Cities, Milwaukee and Chicago, known as the TCMC project.

Several Midwestern states are in the process of establishing new routes/additional frequencies:

- Illinois's Chicago-Moline, Ill., expansion sets the stage for possible future service to Iowa City and Des Moines, Iowa, and Omaha, Neb. Illinois also will restore service between Chicago and Rockford, Ill.
- Wisconsin is also planning for additional frequencies on its Milwaukee-Chicago *Hiawatha* service, in addition to the new TCMC service.
- Minnesota plans to restore service from the Twin Cities to Duluth.
- Kansas is working to extend the *Heartland Flyer* (Fort Worth, Texas, to Oklahoma City, Okla.) north to Kansas City via Wichita.
- Ohio is looking at new service from Columbus to Chicago via Ft. Wayne, Ind.

State departments of transportation across the country have reported 155 passenger rail projects – for a total cost of \$58.7 billion – that are in their states' project pipelines as of February 2021. Attached is the project list compiled by the States for Passenger Rail Coalition (SPRC) and American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO).

These projects speak to both an immediate need to fund a backlog of passenger rail projects, as well as an ongoing need to establish a continuous, dedicated form of passenger rail project funding for the years ahead.

If completed, these projects would result in nearly 80 additional daily round trips using more than 150 new or refurbished locomotives and passenger rail cars, almost 40 new cities being served by passenger rail, and significant improvements to over 70 stations.

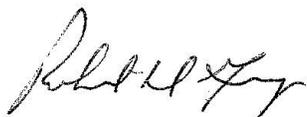
These projects would create or enhance services where the states and, often, Amtrak, want them to enhance regional mobility and access. Additionally, nearly 400 upgraded grade crossings/closings to vehicular traffic would realize significant safety, capacity, and reliability improvements not only for passenger rail but for freight rail traffic.

Since its inception in 2000, MIPRC has taken a primary role in advocating for the federal government to develop an enduring collaboration with states for passenger rail development similar to the partnership it has with states for other modes of transportation. The commission worked closely with Congress in developing the rail title contained in the FAST Act and has also communicated our priorities to Congress regarding the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization.

During the 116th Congress, the U.S. House passed H.R. 2, which contained most of our priorities. We have updated our reauthorization principles to reflect our recommendations of clarifications to some of the language in H.R. 2, and some additional priorities that we hope to see in the final FAST Act reauthorization legislation that is brought forward and sent to you for signature.

Regarding the Jobs Plan funding for passenger rail in particular, we ask that equal consideration be given to Amtrak's priorities and those of the states. Together, the states and Amtrak can usher in a new era of fast, reliable, frequent passenger rail service that our country desperately needs to meet both our transportation and energy-efficiency needs of the future, while providing thousands of jobs and boosting state and local economies.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact Laura Kliewer, MIPRC's director, at 630.925.1922 or lkiewer@csg.org at any time, and we look forward to working together collaboratively to advance these key priorities.



Bob Guy
MIPRC Chair



Arun Rao
MIPRC Vice Chair



Rep. Sharon Negele
MIPRC Financial Officer

cc: Pete Buttigieg, Secretary, U.S. DOT
Amit Bose, Acting Administrator, FRA
William J. Flynn, CEO, Amtrak
Paul Nissenbaum, Associate Administrator for Railroad Policy & Development, FRA
Ray Lang, Vice President, State Supported Services, Amtrak