

## WHAT IS THE PROGRAM?

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), in partnership with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT), and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), has initiated a program to evaluate passenger rail improvements for the Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac passenger rail corridor. The program includes three components:

- An evaluation of potential route and service alternatives for the corridor.
- A Tier I Environmental Impact Statement that reviews the impacts and benefits of the rail service.
- A Service Development Plan that will serve as a business plan for future implementation decisions..

The vision for the corridor includes safe and reliable passenger rail service that offers frequent, daily round trips at speeds up to 110 mph. The program will provide sufficient information for the FRA to potentially support future decisions to fund and implement a major investment in the passenger rail corridor.

## WHO ARE THE PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS?

MDOT, which is the lead state agency for the program, is working in partnership with INDOT and IDOT. The FRA is the lead federal agency, and it is responsible for approving the Tier I Environmental Impact Statement and the Service Development Plan.

## WHEN WILL THE PROGRAM BE COMPLETED?

The program was initiated in 2012 and is expected to be complete in 2016. The schedule is focused on milestones surrounding the program's main components: alternatives analysis, Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement and a Service Development Plan.

## WHERE IS THE CORRIDOR?

The corridor extends approximately 300-miles from Union Station in downtown Chicago, east to a station terminal in Pontiac, Mich. The corridor is a federally-designated high-speed rail corridor with passenger service currently provided by Amtrak's Wolverine line, and it is also one of the busiest freight railroad routes in the country. The corridor includes portions of Cook County in Illinois; Lake, Porter and La Porte counties in Indiana; and Berrien, Van Buren, Cass, Kalamazoo, Calhoun, Jackson, Washtenaw, Wayne and Oakland counties in Michigan.

## WHAT IS A TIER 1 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT?

Environmental review of federally-funded projects is required pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA provides a formal process to help government agencies make an informed decision about the potential social, economic, and environmental impacts of a proposed action. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) analyzes the potential significant effects of an action, identifies the appropriate mitigation measures and summarizes input from the public and government agencies.

Due to the long and complex area of analysis, the FRA will conduct two stages – or “tiers” – of environmental review for this corridor. In Tier 1, FRA will prepare an EIS that broadly analyzes the whole corridor. The Tier 1 EIS will result in the identification of a preferred route and service alternative and FRA's Record of Decision will identify the Selected Program Alternative.

Future detailed Tier 2 environmental studies, which are not part of this current program, will evaluate specific projects needed to implement the Selected Program Alternative and consider site-specific impacts and benefits.

## WHAT IS A SERVICE DEVELOPMENT PLAN?

A Service Development Plan or SDP will be completed for the Preferred Alternative. An SDP is a comprehensive business and operating plan that lays out the overall scope and approach for the improved rail service.

The SDP will include service operating plans that show train frequencies and schedules, station locations and access, ridership and revenue projections, capital needs for both equipment and infrastructure, an assessment of the economic benefits and costs and financial projections. The SDP will also include a recommended implementation plan that shows how the service improvements will be phased over time.

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE AND NEED OF THE PROPOSED PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE?

The purpose of the program is to enhance intercity mobility along the Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac corridor, by providing an improved passenger rail service that would be a competitive transportation alternative to automobile, bus and air service.

The need for the program arises from the inadequacies of existing passenger rail service and other modes of transportation to meet current and future mobility needs within the corridor including:

- Limited ability to accommodate current or anticipated travel demand on the corridor, resulting in the deterioration of transportation service quality as a result of congestion, longer trip times and decline of service reliability.
- Limited intercity travel options restrict the mobility of the resident populations and the potential for economic development near station locations.

- Inadequate rail capacity in the corridor provides uncompetitive trip times, poor reliability, and low levels of passenger comfort and convenience for travelers.
- Lack of competitive advantages for modern intercity passenger service resulting in the inability to attract passenger rail travelers within the corridor who may be currently choosing other modes of transportation.
- Retain employment and generate new job opportunities within the transportation and rail economic sectors

## WHEN WILL THE NEW PASSENGER SERVICE START?

Due to the complex nature of passenger rail programs, projects must go through various phases of development before the new or improved service can be initiated. From start to finish, a typical passenger rail project can take several years to complete and service improvements are likely to be incremental. The major phases of a passenger rail project include:

- Planning (Tier 1 Service Level Analysis) – This is the current phase of the program. High-level analysis is completed for the proposed alternatives and a Tier 1 EIS is prepared to assess corridor-wide benefits and impacts. A list of projects that are needed for service implementation are identified.
- Preliminary Engineering (Tier 2 Project Level Analysis) - Detailed analyses and design are completed for specific implementation projects. Tier 2 environmental documents are prepared to examine site-specific environmental impacts for each project.
- Final Design and Construction (Corridor Program Implementation) - Final design and construction activities are completed during this phase.
- Corridor Revenue Service - Passenger service begins.

## IS THIS PROGRAM BEING COORDINATED WITH OTHER HIGH-SPEED RAIL PROJECTS?

Yes, the Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac corridor, is one of several major branches in the hub-and-spoke passenger rail system centered on Chicago called the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI). Since 1996, the MWRRI has been developing a regional plan to link major metropolitan areas in nine states using high-speed rail. The MWRRI envisions developing a passenger rail system that offers business and leisure travelers shorter travel times, additional train frequencies, improved reliability and connections between urban centers and smaller communities. Go to [www.connectthemidwest.com](http://www.connectthemidwest.com) for more information.

## HOW ARE THE RAILROADS AND AMTRAK BEING INVOLVED?

MDOT, its state partners and FRA are coordinating with the railroads and Amtrak on the development of alternatives. Options that require additional passenger train frequencies on privately owned railroad tracks will be

reviewed with the railroad owner. In addition, improvements will be designed to make sure increases in passenger service do not negatively impact the freight railroad's ability to provide reliable service and to grow its business. Amtrak has a unique role in this corridor as the operator of the existing Wolverine service and the owner of the 97-mile segment between Porter, Ind., and Kalamazoo, Mich. As a result, close coordination with Amtrak will occur throughout the program phases.

## WHAT ARE THE AREAS OF ANALYSIS?

The 300-mile corridor between Chicago and Detroit/Pontiac has two main areas of analysis:

- The area between Chicago Union Station and Porter, Ind., includes the area known as the South of the Lake (SOTL). SOTL is one of the busiest freight rail corridors in the country and the existing Amtrak route in this area does not have the capacity for additional passenger trips. This area of analysis contains many possible route alternatives along former and current railroad corridors. The area's proximity to Lake Michigan and its unique ecosystem present several environmental concerns. Potential impacts to communities and neighborhoods are also being considered.
- Between Porter, Ind., and Pontiac, Mich., significant investments have been made to establish the existing Wolverine line as the most reasonable route in this area. Amtrak owns the rail line between Porter, Ind. and Kalamazoo, Mich., and trains are already operating at speeds up to 110 mph. In addition, \$384 million of federal and state funding will be used for the Kalamazoo-Dearborn segment in Michigan to make improvements and purchase the Norfolk Southern rail line. Additional improvements will be needed to accommodate more train frequencies and higher speeds.

## HOW WILL ROUTE ALTERNATIVES BE EVALUATED?

A range of route alternatives will be screened and evaluated based on the program's purpose and need, operational characteristics, physical constraints, environmental impacts, community impacts and input from agencies and the public.

The route alternatives analysis includes three steps of evaluation that become more detailed with each step.

- Preliminary alternatives (Level 1) - Screened a wide range of alternatives for the South of the Lake (SOTL) area between Chicago Union Station and Porter, Ind. In total, 86 different route options were considered. Of those 86 routes, four South of the Lake alternatives that have the greatest likelihood to support two dedicated passenger tracks were retained for additional analysis.
- Reasonable alternatives (Level 2) - The South of the Lake alternatives were combined with the remainder of the corridor to form the four build alternatives that were evaluated in the Tier 1 Draft EIS along with a No Build Alternative.

- Preferred alternative (Level 3) - The third level of analysis will involve a screening process to narrow the range of reasonable alternatives and select a Preferred Alternative that will be identified in the Tier 1 Final EIS. The Preferred Alternative will not be final until the Federal Railroad Administration issues a Record of Decision and identifies the Selected Program Alternative.

## **WHERE WILL THE STATIONS BE LOCATED?**

The existing station locations along the Wolverine route will be evaluated as part of this program. Plus, a potential new station in northwestern Indiana will be considered.

## **WHO'S PAYING FOR THE PROGRAM?**

In August 2011, MDOT and its state partners were selected for a \$3.2 million federal grant from FRA's High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) Program to complete the Chicago/Detroit/Pontiac corridor program. MDOT and its state partners provided the required 20% matching funds in the amount of \$800,000 for a total program cost of \$4 million.

## **HOW DOES THIS PROGRAM RELATE TO THE MORE THAN \$600 MILLION IN FEDERAL FUNDS ALREADY INVESTED IN THIS CORRIDOR TO IMPROVE EXISTING SERVICES?**

Michigan, Indiana and Illinois have already been selected for grants to improve existing passenger rail service along this corridor. Projects such as the CREATE Englewood Flyover (\$140 million), the Norfolk Southern Indiana Gateway (\$71 million), the purchase and upgrade of the Kalamazoo-Dearborn segment (\$384 million) and the Michigan station upgrades (\$40 million) will greatly improve the reliability of the existing and future passenger rail service in the corridor. It is anticipated that the program's Preferred Alternative will make maximum use of these improved sections of the corridor.

## **WHAT WILL THE PROPOSED PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE COST?**

The cost of building the proposed improvements and the cost of annual operations will be estimated for each alternative considered in this program. Costs will be one of the criteria that will help evaluate alternatives and select the Preferred Alternative.

## **HOW WILL THE RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS BE PAID FOR?**

No funding has been set aside to help implement the improved rail service. As part of this program we will identify potential funding from federal, state, local and private sources.

The U.S. Congress passed the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) in 2008. This legislation provided a new statutory framework to develop and fund high-speed and intercity passenger rail service in the United States. It gave FRA broad responsibilities to administer and manage grants for rail projects and established grant programs that provide 80% federal funding with a 20% state match including the High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program.

The federal funding that has already been received came from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) and other federal appropriations. However, additional federal appropriations will need to be made for future projects. Also, non-federal sources for matching funds of at least 20% of the total cost will need to be identified.

## **HOW FAST WILL THESE TRAINS OPERATE? HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO GET FROM CHICAGO TO DETROIT/PONTIAC?**

Proposed infrastructure improvements will allow trains to operate at speeds up to 110 miles per hour. Existing travel times between Chicago and Detroit are approximately 5 hours and 36 minutes. Under the proposed service levels, travel times would be about 3 hours and 46 minutes, providing nearly two hours of travel time savings. The trip from Detroit to Pontiac is currently about one hour. The proposed travel time is expected to be as low as 40 minutes for this segment of the corridor.

## **WHY ISN'T TRUE HIGH-SPEED SERVICE WITH MAXIMUM SPEEDS OF 150 MPH OR HIGHER BEING CONSIDERED?**

MDOT, INDOT, and IDOT are taking an incremental approach to implementing high-speed rail. A maximum speed of 110 mph is an appropriate first step along the continuum of high-speed rail development and is consistent with the vision set forth by the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative.

Maximum speeds of 110 mph will significantly reduce travel times, making rail service competitive with other modes of transportation in the corridor. At the same time, a 110 mph corridor is less costly to implement and has fewer environmental and community impacts because it allows passenger and freight rail to share track with advanced grade crossing protection. Also, 110 mph corridors can be implemented within a relatively short time frame (5 to 10 years).

Constructing a high-speed rail corridor with maximum speeds of 150 mph or higher is subject to a greater level of safety standards. Passenger train operations would need to be completely separated from freight operations, all railroad/highway crossings would have to be grade separated and the corridor would be fenced. These improvements significantly increase the implementation costs and create substantially more impacts to the environment and communities. Also, the development of such a system would take a considerable length of time.

## **WILL THESE TRAINS SERVE DAILY COMMUTERS?**

While some commuting trips may be accommodated by the proposed service, daily commuting is not the main goal of intercity passenger rail. The frequencies of the intercity passenger service are likely to be spread evenly over the day. In contrast, commuter schedules are concentrated around work schedules and the morning and evening rush hours. Also, intercity passenger rail is meant to move people between regional population centers and commuter rail is meant to serve a corridor within a metropolitan area. In northern Indiana and Chicago, the proposed service will be designed to complement, and not compete with, the existing commuter services provided by the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District and Metra.

## **WHAT KIND OF TRAINS WILL BE USED AND WHAT AMENITIES WILL BE ON THE TRAIN?**

To support the anticipated future ridership demands, a range of equipment options were evaluated. The program team is recommending the proposed train equipment consist of next generation locomotives and six non-tilting, bi-level passenger cars. Each trainset would have a capacity of 463 seats.

The trains would be consistent with the specifications outlined by the Next Generation Corridor Equipment Committee which was established by the federal Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) of 2008 to develop standards for next-generation train equipment.

## **HOW MUCH WILL A TICKET COST?**

Ticket costs will be considered as part of the ridership analysis that will be conducted for the Service Development Plan. Fares will be set to maximize both revenues and ridership and to be competitive with other modes of transportation.