

MINNESOTA HIGH SPEED RAIL COMMISSION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Union Depot, Suite 200
214 4th Street East
St. Paul, MN 55101
651-266-2760

www.mnhighspeedrail.com

RIVER ROUTE MEMBERS:

Dakota County
Regional Rail Authority

Goodhue County
Regional Rail Authority

Ramsey County
Regional Rail Authority

Wabasha County,
Regional Rail Authority

Washington County
Regional Rail Authority

Winona County
Regional Rail Authority

Cottage Grove

Goodview

Hastings

La Crosse

Lake City

Prairie Island Indian Community

Red Wing

St. Charles

St. Paul

St. Paul Park

Utica

Wabasha

Winona

WHAT IS HIGH-SPEED RAIL?

High-speed rail is a generic name of passenger rail transport that operates faster than the normal speed of rail traffic and is intended to relieve highway and air traffic.

The Federal Railroad Administration has broken passenger rail into the following categories:

- High-Speed Rail Express: No at-grade crossings on its own track traveling at least 150 mph while serving cities between 200-600 miles apart with few intermediate stops;
- High-Speed Rail Regional: No at-grade crossings primarily on its own track traveling between 110-150 mph while servicing cities between 100-500 miles apart with some intermediate stops;
- Emerging High-Speed Rail: Advanced grade crossing protection while utilizing shared track while traveling between 90-110 mph while servicing cities between 100-500 miles apart. Intended to develop the passenger rail market for additional high-speed investments;
- Conventional Rail: Traditional intercity rail service utilizing shared track with top speeds of 79-90 mph depending on track conditions while serving cities more than 100 miles apart.

High-speed passenger rail is a cost-effective option for relieving congested intercity areas, and often has the most efficient trip time available for travel.

WHAT IS HIGH-SPEED RAIL IN MINNESOTA?

The Twin Cities to Chicago route connects the Twin Cities to the entire Midwest via the 'hub and spoke' system centered in Chicago. Trains would travel at speeds of up to 110 mph which would reduce the eight hour total travel time between the metropolitan areas by over two hours.

The project is a three-for-one investment in rail infrastructure that would benefit high-speed passenger rail, freight rail and Red Rock Corridor commuter rail.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) recently completed the Alternatives Selection Report that identified the high speed rail route between the Twin Cities and Milwaukee, WI (the Milwaukee to Chicago portion is a separate project). This report identified the existing Amtrak alignment along the Mississippi River as the only reasonable and feasible route for high speed rail. The report estimates the capital cost to upgrade the corridor at \$2.4 billion or \$7.1 million a mile for the 340 mile corridor. This cost includes all track work, safety improvements, and engineering costs for the project.

The River Route was selected because it provided the most competitive and attractive alternative mode of transportation through the shortest travel time, improved train frequency, ability to be implemented incrementally in phases, and that it currently has Amtrak service.

WHAT IS THE MIDWEST REGIONAL RAIL SYSTEM?

The Midwest Regional Rail system includes nearly 3,000 miles of existing railways to connect urban and rural areas. Additional connections to alternative forms of transportation such as light rail, bus and commuter rail will improve overall accessibility for travelers in the Midwest. The system would introduce new, modern train equipment capable of operating at speeds over 100 mph.

A map can be found by clicking here (<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/passengerrail/pdfs/MWRRIOverallMap.pdf>)

HOW WILL A HIGH-SPEED RAIL LINE BENEFIT MINNESOTA?

Minnesota would significantly benefit from high-speed rail in the Midwest, because it:

- Provides a safe, competitive transportation alternative;
- Saves money and the environment; and
- Grows our economy.

High-speed rail would benefit the tens of thousands of Minnesotans who, according to the Minnesota Comprehensive Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan, make more than 9.7 million trips between the two metropolitan areas of Chicago and the Twin Cities every year. The reduction in travel time would provide a safe, cost-effective alternative to driving or flying.

Investments in the rail infrastructure will increase the speed of passenger service and provide additional capacity for freight rail, avoiding more expensive truck transport. Use of increased capacity in passenger and freight rail service avoids the use of cars and trucks for transportation. The American Association of Railroads (www.aar.org/~/media/aar/Background-Papers/Freight-RR-Help-Reduce-Emissions.ashx) has determined that freight rail is four times more fuel efficient than trucks, resulting in a 75% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions when moving freight by rail instead of truck.

A high-speed alternative will not only positively enhance the quality of life for many Minnesotans, but it will lead to an increased level of business activity, including tourism, from Chicago that will benefit the urban, suburban and rural communities along the Corridor. The proposed line will provide up to \$2.3 billion in economic benefits for the state, creating 15,000 construction jobs and 1,600 permanent jobs in Minnesota.

HOW WILL HIGH-SPEED RAIL BENEFIT ME?

Improvements to this two-way connection would bring more people and goods to the River Route corridor, and offers corridor businesses and residents better access to other parts of the Midwest. High-speed rail appeals to:

- **Business:** Scores of corridor businesses would benefit from improved passenger and freight transportation – travelers benefit from high-speed passenger rail service, an additional, competitive travel option. Shipping would be improved while shipping time and cost is reduced as River Route freight rail capacity is increased. Tourist destinations, such as the National Eagle Center, Prairie Island Casino, and the historic river towns within the corridor would benefit from more frequent, faster passenger rail service.
- **Residents:** Open your world and take your family to destinations you may never have considered! Chicago is a rail hub with connections to the east, west, and gulf coasts and high-speed connections to St. Louis and Detroit. The Proposed

Minnesota High Speed Rail Commission
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
June 2012

Northern Lights Express (Twin Cities to Duluth) and Zip rail (Twin Cities to Rochester) corridors may also connect to high-speed rail from the Twin Cities to Chicago.

- Students: A safe, convenient way to get to school that doesn't require the family car – or a place to park it when you arrive.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE HIGH-SPEED RAIL PROJECT?

The Minnesota High-Speed Rail Commission supports Mn/DOT and the Federal Railroad Administration's selection of the River Route as the only reasonable, feasible high speed rail route between the Twin Cities and Milwaukee/Chicago. This route was selected as part of the Alternatives Selection Report completed in early 2012. The report can be found here <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/passengerrail/mwri/phase7.html>.

The length of the full corridor, connecting the Twin Cities to Milwaukee and Chicago is 417 miles. The Alternatives Selection Report focuses on the 340 mile corridor that connects the Twin Cities with Milwaukee (the Milwaukee-Chicago connection is a separate project). The report estimated the capital cost to upgrade the 340 mile corridor at \$2.4 billion or \$7.1 million a mile. This cost includes all track work, safety improvements, and engineering costs for the project. The River Route was selected because it provided the most competitive and attractive alternative mode of transportation through the shortest travel time, improved train frequency, ability to be implemented incrementally in phases, and that it currently has Amtrak service.

The next step is for Mn/DOT to complete a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for the 340 mile Twin Cities to Milwaukee corridor. This will identify environmental impacts and mitigation along the corridor along with specific areas in need of additional analysis as part of preliminary engineering. This study is underway and is anticipated to be completed in late 2013.

HOW MUCH WILL THIS PROJECT COST TO BUILD?

According to the Alternatives Selection Report, Mn/DOT estimates, it would cost approximately \$2.4 billion or \$7.1 million per mile (2009 dollars) to upgrade the existing rail from the Twin Cities to Milwaukee along the existing Amtrak Route to accommodate 110-mph passenger trains as well as improving the tracks for current and future freight and passenger rail. It is expensive, but it is also a very sensible transportation investment, because:

- It offers a competitive alternative to air and auto transportation
- It saves money and the environment
- It grows our economy

As a matter of comparison, I-94 from St. Paul to Milwaukee is 328 miles. If the one lane was added in each direction it would cost approximately \$4 billion or an average of \$12.2 million per mile. This estimate comes from a 2003 Federal Highway Administration study that estimated the construction cost per lane-mile. Costs were inflated to 2006 dollars and resulted in costs ranging from \$2.4 to \$6.9 million per lane-mile in areas where expansion is relatively simple. In locations where expansion is especially difficult due to dense development of sensitive environmental areas, it can range from \$7.3 to \$15.4 million per lane mile. (<http://www.railstotrains.org/resources/documents/whatwedo/policy/07-29-2008%20Generic%20Response%20to%20Cost%20per%20Lane%20Mile%20for%20widening%20and%20new%20construction.pdf>).

HOW MUCH TIME WILL IT TAKE TO TRAVEL BETWEEN THE TWIN CITIES AND CHICAGO?

The proposed River Route will cut more than two hours (from eight hours currently to approximately five and a half hours) from the existing Amtrak service from the Union Depot in St. Paul to downtown Chicago, and offering a competitive alternative to driving or flying.

WHERE WILL HIGH-SPEED TRAINS STOP?

According to the Alternatives Selection Report, high-speed rail services will serve Minneapolis, the Union Depot in St. Paul, Red Wing, and Winona in Minnesota. It will serve all existing Amtrak stops in Wisconsin including Wisconsin Dells and Milwaukee prior to traveling to Chicago. Stations along the route will provide riders with convenient connections for multiple modes of transportation including transit, intercity buses, bicycles, pedestrians, and automobiles.

IF THE HIGH-SPEED RAIL TRAINS DO NOT STOP IN MY COMMUNITY, WILL IT STILL BENEFIT ME?

If you live along the River Route, you will only be about a half hour by car or bus from a station, and will be able to take full advantage of high-speed rail.

If you don't live near the corridor, research shows that high-speed rail will save money and the environment, and grow our economy (see "How will a high-speed rail line benefit Minnesota?").

The River Route high-speed rail line will provide up to \$2.3 billion in economic benefits for the state of Minnesota, and even more for the Midwest as a whole. Additionally, the proposed high-speed rail line will create 1,600 permanent jobs in Minnesota, not including the 15,000 construction jobs and 57,000 permanent jobs in the Midwest. (Midwest Regional Rail Initiative Benefit Cost & Economic Analysis: www.dot.wisconsin.gov/projects/state/docs/mwri-economic.pdf)

Improving the River Route's rail infrastructure will also improve freight rail efficiency and capacity, allowing more agricultural commodities and industrial goods to be transported within Minnesota and from Minnesota to the rest of the country. These economic benefits will help increase commerce opportunities and encourage businesses to expand their operations more widely across the region.

Overall, high-speed rail will positively enhance the quality of life for many Minnesotans, while benefiting the communities along the Corridor in many ways.

ONCE I GET OFF THE TRAIN, HOW WILL I GET TO MY DESTINATION?

In order for any alternative transportation system to work, significant thought must be put into getting people "that last mile" from the depot to their final destination. High-speed rail will provide ample, safe parking as well as working with every community with a station to connect local transit, taxi companies, multi-use paths and dial-a-ride services with stations to make sure passengers get where they need to go. Many transit alternatives will be available to whisk passengers to their destination when they arrive in St. Paul (Union Depot), Minneapolis (Target Field) and Chicago (Union Station). Stations in other cities would also connect to local transportation alternatives.

Minnesota High Speed Rail Commission
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
June 2012

WHY THE RIVER ROUTE?

The River Route in Minnesota, roughly following Highway 61 and the Mississippi River from the Twin Cities to La Crescent, has been selected by Mn/DOT and the Federal Rail Administration as the preferred route for high-speed rail. It was selected over other routes because it is the existing route of Amtrak's Empire Builder passenger rail service which makes the project less expensive and allows construction of upgrades to occur incrementally along the line instead of all at once.

(www.dot.state.mn.us/passengerrail/mwrri/phase7.html)

IS THERE A SUBSIDY TO OPERATE HIGH-SPEED RAIL?

Just as roads and airlines are subsidized, we expect high-speed rail will also require a subsidy for operations and maintenance. Mn/DOT is planning to complete additional studies that will determine operating costs, ridership and revenues and will compare them with market rates to determine fare prices and the level of subsidy needed.

Airlines

Air travel improvements are funded in part by the Federal Aviation Administration/Airport and Airway Trust Fund. This fund mainly generates its revenue through user fees; however, general funds are also used to cover the difference between the user fee revenue and the budgeted amount. In FY 2011, the \$16.1 billion budget included \$11.1 billion in user fees and \$5 billion in general fund appropriations.

(www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/apl/aatf/media/AATF%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf)

Additional subsidies include The Transportation Security Administration which received \$7.85 billion in FY 2012 and a total of \$60 billion since its inception. This cost has covered the screening of 712 million passengers which results in a total cost per screening of \$11.38, of which \$8.88 is taxpayer funded. This amounts to a cost of \$43.86 per U.S. household per year. If this cost is allocated to flights and not passengers, then the subsidy per flight is \$1,133.

(<http://tsanewsblog.com/1625/news/is-tsa-just-another-airline-subsidy/>)

A second area of air travel subsidy is Essential Air Service. This program provides subsidies to airlines to continue providing air service to regional airports. The subsidy amounts to \$200 million a year.

(www.nytimes.com/2011/07/19/business/economy/24-small-towns-may-lose-airline-service.html?pagewanted=all)

A third area of air travel subsidy is the NextGen Aviation Control system. This is an upgrade of the existing air traffic control system to improve efficiency and safety. The cost of the system is estimated at \$40 to \$160 billion over 20 years.

(www.informationweek.com/news/government/enterprise-apps/228500257)

Highways

Highways are also not fully funded from user fees. The "Who Pays for Roads in Wisconsin" study that was completed in 2011 documented that from 2004 to 2008; Wisconsin households spent \$779 each year on roads outside of the user-fees paid for operating a motor vehicle. If the gas tax were to cover this cost fully, it would need to be raised by \$.50 a gallon.

(http://ssti.us/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/WI_Road%20costs%20report.pdf)

Between 1998 and 2000, \$2.55 billion was spent on roads in Minnesota. Of this amount, \$1.02 billion was not funded through user fees like the gas tax and vehicle registration.

(www.lrrb.org/pdf/200404.pdf)

Minnesota High Speed Rail Commission
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
June 2012

In 2011 the US PIRG Education Fund completed the “Do Roads Pay for Themselves, Setting the Record Straight on Transportation Funding” Study. This study states that highway users typically pay for half the cost of highways and that since 1947 the cumulative deficit between highway revenues and what has been spent on highways at all levels (federal, state, and local) is over \$600 billion in 2005 dollars.

<http://uspirg.org/sites/pirg/files/reports/Do-Roads-Pay-for-Themselves.pdf>

THE TRAINS STILL BURN DIESEL – HOW CAN THEY REDUCE OUR RELIANCE ON OIL OR IMPROVE THE ENVIRONMENT?

A train uses 10 times less fuel to transport a person than automobiles and 6 times less fuel than transporting a person by air, reducing our dependence on oil and significantly reducing the amount of emissions released into the air. Increased capacity on railways will increase the amount of goods served by freight rail carriers, and decrease the number of trucks on roads, decreasing the amount of fuel needed and green-house gas emissions.

IS HIGH-SPEED RAIL SAFE?

Trains operate constantly and very rarely are involved in accidents. You are many times less likely to be injured in a passenger rail accident than in a car accident. High-speed rail improvement will make an already safe mode of travel even safer by improving at-grade road and rail crossings through lights and gates, closures/consolidations, and grade separations. The table below provides additional detail on the safety of rail travel compared to other modes.

Fatality rate per billion passenger miles traveled

| | |
|----------|-----|
| Car | 7.2 |
| Airplane | 2.3 |
| Bus | 2.0 |
| Train | .5 |

<http://airfare.michaelbluejay.com/modes.html#pm>

WHY WILL HIGH-SPEED RAIL ONLY RUN AT 110 MPH WHEN BULLET TRAINS TRAVEL AT 250 MPH?

At this time, the investment in a bullet train would be very costly. This investment will still reduce travel time to 5.5 hours from St. Paul to Chicago (Amtrak’s Empire Builder currently takes 8 hours). The key to going fast is not going slow and the proposed speed is the first step toward faster train travel. Future increases in speed will be dictated by public demand for it.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE SERVED BY A TWIN CITIES TO CHICAGO ROUTE?

The Minnesota Comprehensive Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan estimated that in 2005 more than 9.7 million trips were taken annually between the Twin Cities and Chicago. This number is forecast to grow to 11.3 million in 2030 with high speed rail accounting for 1.7 million of the trips. Current Amtrak service between the Twin Cities and Chicago is one round-trip daily. A second round-trip is currently under study by the Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Transportation.

Connections to other rail projects will significantly expand the areas served and the potential number of people served. The Northern Lights Express (NLX) high-speed rail line is proposed to run between the Twin Cities and Duluth. The Zip line project, a high-speed rail from Rochester to the Twin Cities, has been proposed. Federal proposals would link many cities on the east coast, while the hub in Chicago would link passengers to Milwaukee, St. Louis and the Twin Cities.

WILL HIGH-SPEED RAIL BE COMPETITIVE WITH AIR OR CAR TRANSPORTATION?

The train can beat the plane and the automobile from city center to city center on trips up to 400 miles. Travel times of much more than three hours will put a shift back to air travel for business travelers, however, the key benefit of rail is that its travel time isn't downtime. It can be productively used by riders for staying in touch with the office, catching up on work, or connecting with friends.

WHAT MAKES PERMANENT RAIL TRANSPORTATION A COMPETITIVE ALTERNATIVE TO ROAD TRANSPORTATION?

The permanence of rail transportation can be considered a drawback, but it is also one of the biggest selling points of rail. Private investment follows long-term transportation improvements. A developer is more likely to invest in a project along a rail corridor that will be there for 25-50 years than a bus route that may go away in a year. No mode of transportation is as flexible as a car. However, in those areas where many people are traveling along the same corridor, rail offers a more efficient way to move people while using less space than a highway.

WHAT IS THE MINNESOTA HIGH-SPEED RAIL COMMISSION?

The Minnesota High-Speed Rail Commission is one of the leading authoritative voices on high-speed rail in Minnesota. Comprised of local elected officials, the Commission advocates for the development of Minnesota's first high-speed rail line within the federally designated high-speed rail corridor that connects the Twin Cities to Milwaukee and Chicago. The Commission is a strong proponent of bringing high-speed rail to the Midwest through the scenic upper Mississippi River valley.

Commission members represent:

City of Cottage Grove
City of Goodview
City of Hastings
City of Lake City
City of Red Wing
City of St. Charles
City of St. Paul
City of St. Paul Park
City of Utica
City of Wabasha
City of Winona
Dakota County Regional Railroad Authority
Goodhue County Regional Railroad
LaCrosse Area Planning Committee
Prairie Island Indian Community
Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority
Wabasha County Regional Railroad Authority
Washington County Regional Railroad Authority
Winona County Regional Railroad Authority