

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MEETINGS SUMMARY

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1. MEETING OVERVIEW

1.1 Meeting Format

Two Open Houses were held for the Twin Cities – Milwaukee – Chicago Intercity Passenger Rail Service (TCMC) Project in September 2017. The purpose of these meetings was to provide information and updates on the progress of the Phase I study being conducted for the proposed additional service to the public and obtain comments and feedback from the public. Topics covered included the purpose and need for the proposed project, the alternatives analysis process and recommended alternative, proposed infrastructure improvements, and a schedule and next steps for the project. All the information presented was completed as part of the Phase I study of the project.

Each meeting was two hours in length, from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., and conducted in an open house format with visual display boards. Each meeting included a presentation beginning at 5:30, to be followed by a question and answer (Q&A) session. Due to the turnout at the La Crosse Meeting and the size of the presentation room, two formal presentations were held, each followed by a Q&A session. The first presentation began at 5:15 and the second presentation began at 5:45. The final Q&A session began at 6:05. Attendees were told of the change in schedule so they understood they would be able to hear the second presentation if they did not hear the first. The Union Depot meeting followed the schedule as planned.

Staff from the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority, La Crosse Area Planning Committee, Amtrak, and the consultant team were available to answer questions during the open houses, and MnDOT staff fielded questions during the Q&A session following the formal presentation. MnDOT videotaped the presentation given by Praveena Pidaparathi and Nani Jacobson at the Union Depot meeting, and posted it to the MnDOT project website at: www.dot.state.mn.us/passengerrail/tc-mil-chi/public-engagement.html. Attendees were also provided with the opportunity to submit written comments using comment forms available during the open house.

Amtrak staffed a table and provided information on service at both meetings. Advocacy groups at the Open House events were also available to provide information and answer questions. The following advocacy groups were in attendance:

- All Aboard Wisconsin
- All Aboard Minnesota
- MN High Speed Rail Commission (information on the East Metro Yard Improvement Project was shared at this table)
- The Environmental Law and Policy Center

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A tour of Union Depot was conducted by Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority staff prior to the meeting at Union Depot. The tour began at 3:30 and was attended by 28 members of the public.

1.2 Attendance

152 total attendees signed-in at the welcome table for both meetings. A consultant staff person was located at the welcome table to request attendees sign-in. Attendee information is shown in Table 1. See Appendix D for copies of the original sign-in sheets.

Table 1 - Open House Attendance

| Date / Time | Location | Attendance* |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| September 6, 2017 5:00 – 7:00 pm | La Crosse County Administrative Center <i>La Crosse, WI</i> | 58 residents; 4 media |
| September 7, 2017 5:00 – 7:00 pm | Union Depot <i>St. Paul, MN</i> | 87 residents |

*Attendance figures based on participants who signed in or filled out a comment form. The attendance figure does not include staff.

1.3 Notification

Notification of the community engagement meetings was provided on the TCMC website, through social media (e.g., MnDOT Facebook page, MnDOT and Ramsey County Twitter accounts), and through the MnDOT Gov Delivery list. MnDOT issued two news releases on July 25 and August 30, respectively, announcing both meetings, which were also distributed by the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority. See Table 2 for the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority social media summary.

Table 2 - Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority Social Media

| Date | Type | Audience | Engagement |
|---------------------|---|---|---|
| 08.03.17 | E-news | Union Depot subscribers (10,854) | 21% open |
| 08.15.17 | Facebook share of MnDOT event | Union Depot followers (19,951) | 8,768 reach/218 likes/10+ comments/3 shares |
| 08.18.17 | GovDelivery | East Metro Rail study subscribers (544) | 13% open |
| 08.30.17 | Facebook | Union Depot | 3,783 reach/49 likes/5 comments/4 shares |
| 09.01.17 | Twitter | Ramsey County followers (6,840) | Unknown |
| 09.05.17 | Facebook | Ramsey County followers (3,433) | Unknown |
| 09.05.17 | Twitter | Ramsey County | Unknown |
| 09.06.17 | Facebook | Union Depot | 1,236 reach/25 likes |
| 09.06.17 | Twitter | Union Depot followers (2,825) | 546 impressions |
| 09.06.17 | GovDelivery | Regional Railroad Authority subscribers (2,856) and East Metro Rail study | 21% open |
| 09.06.17 | Facebook | Ramsey County | Unknown |
| 09.06.17 | E-news | Union Depot | 21% open |
| 08.15.17 – 09.07.17 | Ramsey County and Union Depot calendars | Web calendar viewing audience | Unknown |

In addition, an announcement was sent out to individual stakeholders in each area, which included representatives of cities, counties, chambers of commerce, local organizations and media outlets. Passenger rail advocacy organizations in Minnesota and Wisconsin also publicized the meetings. All stakeholders were encouraged to forward the meeting notice and to post it on their agency’s/organization’s website and social media sites.

1.4 Information Presented

The boards presented at the meetings provided information on the Phase I Study being completed for the Project. The boards explained the purpose of the meeting and how to get more information on the TCMC project. The boards illustrated project elements such as the anticipated timeline, purpose and need for the proposed project, alternatives analysis process (including route alternatives, service alternatives, and recommendations), infrastructure improvements, and next steps for the project.

The Purpose and Need statement has been approved by Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and a copy was available during the meetings for the public to review. A fact sheet on the project was also available, and over 100 copies were taken by attendees.

All materials from the meetings are available in Appendix A and on the project website:

www.dot.state.mn.us/passengerrail/tc-mil-chi/public-engagement.html



2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Comment forms were available at the meetings. Attendees were encouraged to complete a form and submit it during the meeting or mail it in at a later date. Attendees were also informed that comments could be filled out online through the project website. For a full listing of the written comments received at the La Crosse meeting and the Union Depot meeting see Appendix B and Appendix C, respectively. Appendix E includes copies of the original comments received at the meetings.

2.1 Summary of Written Comments

The summary below is based on the comment forms submitted in writing during the two Community Engagement meetings. Feedback received at the meetings reflected overwhelming support for the proposed TCMC project. This was also true of verbal feedback received at both meetings, which can be found in Section 2.2.

Review of the verbal and written comments received at the meetings found several common themes:

- Support for the second train as proposed
- Improved passenger rail service especially benefits older populations and college students
- Benefits of passenger rail service, including health reasons, more comfort than airplane travel, easier to travel with disabilities, winter weather concerns, reduced traffic congestion on roads, environmentally friendly, better investment of taxpayer funds, and increasing options for those who may not drive
- A second train will increase ridership
- Providing more schedule options is an improvement over only one train per day. Several mentioned they would use the proposed service to visit the stops in between St. Paul and Chicago
- Concern with current service, including personal safety, schedule reliability, and conflicts with freight rail service
- Concerns including the length of time to implement the plan (4 years), equipment capacity, and adjusting the schedule to arrive in Chicago earlier in the day
- Requests for the proposed second train included wi-fi, high-quality Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access, lounge space, sleeper car, dining car, snack car, and roll-on bicycle service

2.2 Summary of Question and Answer Sessions

The summary below is based on the Q&A sessions held at the end of each formal presentation during the meetings.

2.2.1 La Crosse, WI

Common themes and key points made by the verbal comments included:

- Arrival into Chicago should be earlier than in the proposed schedule
- Desire for prioritizing passenger rail over freight rail traffic
- FRA will determine the level of environmental study
- Significant support for the project as proposed
- Improved passenger rail service especially benefits older populations and college students

Summary of the verbal comments:

- Arrival in Chicago considered by some to be too late, including to make connections
- Due to shorter station dwell times and no baggage check-in, the travel time is shorter from St. Paul to Chicago, even with additional stops
- No transfers on the proposed second train from St. Paul to Chicago
- Project is planned to be jointly funded by IDOT, WISDOT, and MNDOT, but the exact cost sharing is not determined yet
- Sturtevant station is included as a proposed stop for the second train
- All transportation modes are subsidized, not just rail, highways and airports are also subsidized
- Passenger rail service is essential in bad winter weather, especially for older populations
- College students (for example in Winona) are also driving less
- Social and quality of life benefits to providing more passenger rail service
- Railroads can be susceptible to flooding, for an example see 10 years ago for Empire Builder
- FRA will determine the level of environmental study needed
- A second train should increase the east-bound ridership because it provides more schedule options
- The level of service and amount of passenger personal space are higher on Amtrak trains compared to air service
- Planning and analysis may need to be refreshed in the future if the project is delayed, including updating operations modeling and environmental analysis
- FRA is completing a Midwest regional passenger rail plan

2.2.2 St. Paul, MN

Common themes and key points made by the verbal comments included:

- General support for arrival into Chicago should be earlier than in the current proposed schedule
- Desire for prioritizing passenger rail over freight rail traffic
- Discussion about project funding and the need for increased political and public support
- Significant support for the project as proposed
- Improved passenger rail service especially benefits college students
- Concern that TCMC service would not have enough amenities such as chair space, food service, Wi-fi

Summary of the verbal comments:

- Hiawatha service train has recliner seats but does not have dining or a snack car.
- An overnight service train to Chicago is preferred by some; however, this schedule would be difficult for the cities in between St. Paul and Chicago.
- ADA accommodations were considered less than optimal for the Hiawatha train service.
- Passenger trains have priority over freight trains under federal law.
- WisDOT is coordinating with MnDOT on this project.
- Suggestion for an alternate route using the BNSF railroad through Freeport.
- Amazon is an example of a company that is looking for mass transit for their next location.
- No checked baggage service.
- St. Cloud area is interested in increased passenger rail service.
- Minneapolis Mayor's office supports the second train proposal and encourages the public to contact their political representatives to support the project.
- Winona-area college students will use the second train and benefit from additional service.
- All Aboard Minnesota suggested the public contact their legislators at the state level.
- 38 inches for the seats is not enough space.
- Snack car and lounge are crucial for a seven-hour trip.
- Some rural area legislators support this project and transit.
- Service should include wi-fi service and bicycle roll-on service.

APPENDIX A. Information Presented at the Community Engagement Meetings

Informational Boards

Presentation

Fact Sheet



APPENDIX B. Written Comments Received at the La Crosse Community Engagement Meeting



This Appendix B is a compilation of the written comments received from the comment forms at the Community Engagement Meeting at the La Crosse Administrative Center, La Crosse, WI. Additional personal identifying information (name, zip, address) was submitted on most comment forms and not included here. See Appendix E for the electronic scans of all information submitted in writing at the community engagement meeting.

The following is a list of written comments:

1. Older people find it intimidating to drive in large metro areas. Train travel in and out is the alternative of choice. Not having rail service to be able to visit family and friends is unhealthily isolating. I use rail for long distance personal travel. I take organized train tours. I would like to be able to take day trips. Train travel is and should become even more ecologically wise. We have the technology. Soon we should be able to consolidate technology and rail – using electricity to power trains. As a first and more immediate move to make more seats available on existing routes, more cars should be built and added to existing trains. Yes, this would be an expense, but sooner or later – sooner rather than later, you’ll need them anyway. Studies have shown that road traffic congestion contributes to certain forms of cancer, leukemia, and asthma, for people – especially children living in and near those areas. Lowering that congestion will promote better health.
2. Next meeting allow for large enough meeting rooms for attendees.
3. I favor the proposed TCMC project.
4. We need more short trips for the availability to travel at age over 70+.
5. It is woefully disappointing that the organizers of this meeting so badly underestimated the interest in this public meeting as to not arrange for a larger space than a mere conference room. Wasted time, wasted communication and networking interest.
6. Statement in support of “Twin Cities – Milwaukee – Chicago” Intercity Passenger Rail Study, and the addition of a second train on this route, All Aboard Wisconsin.
7. Empire Builder Expansion Makes Sense, La Crosse Area Development Corporation.
8. Office of the Mayor, La Crosse, WI.

APPENDIX C. Written Comments Received at the St. Paul Community Engagement Meeting



This Appendix C is a compilation of the written comments received from the comment forms at the Community Engagement Meeting held at the Union Depot, St. Paul, MN. Additional personal identifying information (name, zip, address) was submitted on most comment forms and not included here. See Appendix E for the electronic scans of all information submitted in writing at the community engagement meeting.

The following is a list of written comments:

1. Train travel is a comfortable, but also critical component of our travel infrastructure. As a RN at a St. Paul hospital, I can attest to the many patients that take Amtrak home after treatment because it is the most convenient option. I have also take[n] the train to Chicago multiple times for leisure. A 2nd TCMC train would vastly improve travel options, on-time performance.
2. I'd like Amtrak to provide some type of security person between the station and the light rail train itself. If a train comes in after sundown, it's helpful. A human being would encourage light rail use, even if it's well-lit.
3. This is an economic engine. Good for progress and for the environment. | Comfortable seating!
4. Amtrak should operate the 2nd train.
5. There has to be a way to cut down the building time from 4.5 to 2.5. Europe train systems are improving year by year. I used to work for European Rail and saw their constant improvements.
6. Will 3 coaches and a food service car be able to handle 155,000 passengers per year? Given that the Hiawatha trains turn in Milwaukee to run the next routing back to Chicago. Have you started looking at how much equipment will be needed.? Thank you for work and good luck. - Ron
7. Great job. You are doing terrific work. No changes. The plan is excellent. Just keep us moving ahead. Thank you. – William D.
8. Please consider naming the train after the historic 400 trains.
9. I am very interested in seeing this project move forward as quickly as possible. I have been following attempts to expand rail service between the Twin Cities and Chicago since 1991, but nothing has happened. MN and WI have each grown by 1.6 million residents since Amtrak formed in 1971, and we should have much more service running. I'm not convinced that existing freight lines are running at capacity. Run more trains and see what happens.
10. I am so excited about this proposal! Thank you! My family in La Crosse is also happy and we would definitely take additional trains to travel and to visit each other.
11. Comment card #2. I want a 2nd train to succeed. If an overnight east bound is not possible, then leave St. Paul 3-4 hours before the Empire Builder. That would greatly help Amtrak connections in Chicago. And make more time available in Chicago for sightseeing.
12. Second train is a great idea (and long overdue). Please make train as easy as possible to access (stairs, etc.) and have same spacing as current Amtrak for seats.
13. I think this project is a great start at adding frequencies to train service between St. Paul and Chicago. I understand the compromises needed to get train #2 going to lay the groundwork for train #3, etc. and think the plans are reasonable. Please consider having business class and coach class when the time comes for that level of detail. Thanks!

14. (1) Are we going to create another Amtrak, an unaffordable, richer vacationers, train, often double the cost of airplane, 3 or 4 times the cost of bus? (2) What efforts are you taking to convince people like me – who visits often to Chicago by bus – to switch over to trains?
15. This train must have wi-fi, lounge space, dining, and bike storage.
16. If not already, project should coordinate with Midwest High Speed Rail Association, Amtrak, and WI state government (if possible).
17. This is an EXCELLENT and much needed project. The unreliability (not the speed) of the existing Empire Builder service is the only reason that I frequently opt to fly. Adding one or two additional trains that began in St. Paul would increase on-time reliability. I echo other comments that a train that arrived in Chicago before 6 pm would be preferable. (Even if it was early in the day.)
18. Unless there are going to be attention to the Empire Builder schedule, I think it sensible to have a departure from the Twin Cities later in the afternoon, rather than 12:25 pm. Also, I strongly support serving Minneapolis’s downtown intermodal station.
19. This is much needed. A great way to unclog the interstates.
20. I would like the purpose and need statement to include: better on time service to Chicago enabling connections with other trains. I often miss my connection to Kalamazoo or Michigan as the E. [Empire] Builder can run late due to many factors.
21. Would be best if east bound train got into Chicago in time to make all connections. Make the east bound an overnight train with sleep car in consist. An east bound leaving 4-5 hours later than the Empire Builder makes worse connections – not better connections.
22. The idea of a 2nd train is connections. This country does not have alternative to air or drive. I’ve driven to San Diego many times, faster vs. the train. Even taking 3 nights Sydney to Melborn has 2 trains daily. For example, how about an overnight train? Maybe overseas airline seats (business) that make it more comfortable.
23. I travel once a month between Mpls/StP and Sturtevant, WI. The equipment between Mpls/StP is easily accessible for disabled people and mothers with strollers etc. The equipment between MKE and Sturtevant is not really accessible. Although there are “lifts” available, in the last 15 years I have never seen them used. I hope the equipment chosen for this expansion will be more accessible than the equipment Hiawatha equipment. P.S. Thanks so much for all you have been doing to improve mobility in the state.

APPENDIX D. Sign-In Sheets

