



IOWA CHAPTER

Expanding Rail in Iowa for Passengers and Freight

The Iowa Chapter supports expansion of passenger rail and freight rail in Iowa, including

- Support of Amtrak expanding service in Iowa, including current plans to extend lines from Chicago to both Dubuque and Davenport, and continuing westward expansion in later phases.
- Support for the development of spur connections that can be used for passengers and freight.
- Support light rail or commuter rail between and in major cities in Iowa. One proposal is for a loop between Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, and the Amana Colonies. Another proposal is for a Des Moines area commuter service, linking Waukee to Altoona, along with a spur linking Des Moines to Urbandale.



Why Passenger Rail is a Solution?

The southern part of Iowa is currently served by an Amtrak line that runs from Omaha to Burlington. Southeast Iowa has access to an Amtrak line that runs through Fort Madison. The major cities in Iowa currently do not have rail service.

- Ability to use passenger rail allows a traveler to avoid the congestion that comes with driving in large cities, such as Chicago.
- Expanded passenger rail provides rail connection between the large cities in Iowa and other communities across the country.
- Providing additional Amtrak service in Iowa will allow Iowans to more readily have access to other train lines across the county, including connections in Chicago.
- Passenger rail provides alternative transportation options for those who might have difficulty driving.
- Passenger rail is a comfortable way to travel; one can work or read while riding.
- Rail is cleaner on the environment than cars or planes.
- Economic development opportunities are expanded in those communities near the stations.
- Passenger rail enhances opportunities for tourists to stop and visit in the communities where a station is located.
- Passenger rail is easier than flying for shorter trips.
- Expansion of rail, both passenger and freight, creates construction and operation jobs once the line is running.



- Expansion of passenger rail provides an opportunity for spur lines to develop from the depots to other parts of the state.
- Passenger rail will decrease congestion on I-80 by diverting some traffic to Amtrak.

Before passenger trains can begin using the existing railroad tracks, the tracks must be upgraded to allow the trains to move at greater speed. Signals must be updated and upgraded at intersections, as well as the grading at crossings. Stations will need to be built or existing depot buildings will need to be remodeled. Additionally, platforms for boarding the trains will need to be built.



Expanding Amtrak from Chicago to Davenport to Iowa City to Des Moines and to Omaha

Iowa and Illinois have been working together to request federal grants to expand passenger rail from Chicago to Iowa City. A federal grant for \$230 million was given for this project, however Iowa did not meet the financial matching requirement and consequently lost a significant portion of the federal grant. Illinois has proceeded with extending passenger rail to the Quad Cities. Iowa's estimated share of on-going operating costs for the route between Chicago and Iowa City are estimated to be \$600,000 each year, which would be paid by local communities along the route. ¹

When this route is fully completed in later phases, it would extend rail service from Omaha to Davenport and on to Chicago.

The Iowa Department of Transportation expects to add a lane in each direction on Interstate 80 by 2030. Passenger rail would cost a third of the amount needed for the extra lane. Further passenger rail would remove some of the traffic from I-80 and thus would extend the time frame for construction of the additional lane. Finally the upgrades to the rails to support passengers also benefits freight trains.

Expanding Amtrak from Chicago to Dubuque and onward to Sioux City

The State of Illinois has used its own funds to pursue expanding passenger rail between Chicago and Dubuque.

Estimates for Iowa's share of the Chicago to Dubuque route are \$300,000 for equipment and \$500,000 for annual operations. Once the money is available to fund the project, it is expected to take two construction seasons to rehabilitate the existing lines.



The City of Waterloo is requesting Amtrak examine extending the route from Dubuque to Waterloo.

When this route is completed in a later phase, it would extend from Sioux City to Dubuque and on to Chicago.

¹ In 2010, Iowa and Illinois were awarded \$230 million in federal funds to extend passenger rail between Chicago and Iowa City. In 2011, the money was divided so that Illinois would receive \$177 million and Iowa would receive \$53 million. As of 2018, Illinois planned to construct the rail line to the Quad Cities; Iowa had not committed any money to undertake construction.

Developing Routes between Minneapolis and Kansas City

The Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) has suggested a route between Minneapolis and Kansas City, with a stop in Des Moines, as a passenger rail route. In addition to the passenger rail lines already planned and those already operational, this route would complete the connections between Iowa and the major Midwest cities.

The Iowa DOT has suggested a second passenger rail service that would connect Minneapolis to Sioux City, Omaha and Kansas City.

Resources

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<http://www.iowadot.gov/iowainmotion/rail.html>

<http://www.iowadot.gov/iowarail/passenger/visionplan.htm>

Iowa Department of Transportation, "2009 Iowa Railroad System Plan"

Iowa Department of Transportation, "Iowa Connections – Get on Board with Passenger Rail!" January 4, 2011

Mary Nevans-Pederson, "Amtrak on Track for Huge Payday," *Dubuque Telegraph Herald*, April 23, 2011

Steve Gravelle, "Amtrak More Transparent about its Dependence on Subsidies, Supporters Say," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, April 17, 2011, page 7A.

Steve Gravelle, "Rail Backers Call For House GOP to Fund Project," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, June 4, 2011

James Q. Lynch, "Braley to Des Moines: Support Rail Proposal," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, May 12, 2011

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The Gazette's Editorial, "Keep the wheels rolling," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, December 22, 2013