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High speed rail advocates unveil proposal for 220-mph Chicago-St. Louis line
Trip would be cut to 2 hours, put Champaign-Urbana within 50 minutes of Chicago

CHICAGO – The Midwest High Speed Rail Association (MHSRA) and local leaders today proposed a \$12-billion, 220-miles-per-hour high speed rail line that would cut the trip between Chicago and St. Louis to just over two hours. The ultra-fast electric-powered service would also serve Kankakee, Champaign-Urbana, Decatur and Springfield, and would complement new 110-miles-per-hour lines already proposed for other parts of Illinois and the Midwest.

The Association is asking the State of Illinois to seek \$10 million in Recovery Act funds to conduct a detailed alternatives analysis and environmental study for the Chicago-St. Louis route, which would pave the way for a formal request of funding through Congress.

“Ultra-fast trains are green, efficient transportation that brings people closer, stimulates the economy and creates jobs,” said Rick Harnish, executive director of the Midwest High Speed Rail Association. “It’s the right investment at a time when we look to curb our emissions and our dependence on oil, while helping jump-start growth.”

Any planning and construction funds should be allocated in addition to – and not instead of – monies already planned for improvements to 110 miles per hour along several corridors around the country, said MHSRA officials.

The proposal is based on a study commissioned by the Midwest High Speed Rail Association and conducted by transportation planning experts TranSystems. It concluded that the best route for achieving 220 miles-per-hour speeds with existing rights-of-way was to link St. Louis and Chicago via Decatur, Champaign-Urbana and Springfield.

“220 miles per hour is one of the most important investments in Downstate Illinois we can make,” said Illinois Senator Michael Frerichs (D-Champaign). “Better connections to St. Louis and Chicago is what Downstate needs to grow our economy.”

While the line through Champaign is considered the most feasible and cost-effective for 220-miles-per-hour service in Illinois, the Association also urged the state and federal officials to consider studying bringing the technology to other Illinois corridors, including the Chicago-Springfield line that goes through Bloomington-Normal, which is already being considered for upgrades to 110 miles per hour.

The 220-miles-per-hour service proposed today would bring Champaign within 50 minutes of Chicago and 1 hour 14 minutes of St. Louis, and Decatur about one hour from either city. Springfield would be 1 hour 23 minutes from Chicago and only 41 minutes from St. Louis. Those times make every leg of the route competitive with not only driving but also flying, once flight times and airport waits.

The current Amtrak line along that same right-of-way is limited to 79 miles an hour, but the terrain and trajectories allow for much higher speeds with newer proven technology used successfully in Europe and Asia.

“We need to plan for the future now,” said Harnish. “This is the transportation technology of the future. Over the medium to long term, high-speed rail costs a state's economy two to three times less than highways and airports for a faster, more reliable and greener return on taxpayers' money.”

U.S. Department of Transportation figures show high speed rail consumes nearly 10 times less fuel than cars and six times less than planes. Based on projects elsewhere in the country, it is estimated the project would create up to 60,000 construction-related jobs and 170,000 permanent jobs. Building the new trains in the U.S. could also help reinvigorate the manufacturing sector; Alstom, the largest high speed train manufacturer in Europe, employs more people than plane giant Airbus.

High-speed rail advocates offered the study as evidence that faster speeds are achievable and economically feasible, and urged the federal government to consider boosting funding beyond current levels, which only support 110-miles-per-hour service.

“We absolutely must upgrade major rail lines across Illinois to 110-miles-per-hour to increase reliability and speed,” said Illinois State Senator Martin Sandoval (D-Chicago), Chairman of the senate transportation committee. “But if we are to make trains a truly viable alternative to planes and automobiles for longer distances, we also need ultra-fast trains capable of going above 200 miles an hour. That is a vital investment in our future to keep our economy competitive.”

President Barack Obama has made a significant commitment to high-speed rail by allocating \$8 billion through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). In Illinois, Governor Pat Quinn has been looking to take advantage of this historic opportunity by working with the General Assembly to include \$400 million for high-speed rail in the Illinois capital bill.

“We applaud Governor Pat Quinn and President Barack Obama for their vision and commitment to high speed rail and fully support existing plans,” said Harnish. “Ensuring 110-miles-an-hour service is a crucial and long-delayed part of overhauling our transportation system. But that system should also include ultra-fast trains. The rest of the world is traveling at speeds exceeding 200 miles per hour, and so should we where possible.”

About the Midwest High Speed Rail Association

The Midwest High Speed Rail Association is a membership-based non-profit organization advocating the development of fast, frequent and dependable passenger trains linking the entire Midwest. We believe that a strong network of fast trains will make the Midwest a more attractive place to live and do business while slowing the growth of auto congestion and its related energy and pollution impacts.

About TranSystems

TranSystems' approximately 1,100 professionals in 45 offices throughout the U.S. provide architecture, engineering and planning; management and supply chain consulting; real estate consulting; and security to all sectors of the transportation industry. Our ability to meet the continuum of transportation challenges facing our clients anywhere in the world rests firmly on the range of modal expertise, technical disciplines and consulting services we have gathered into one integrated business entity. To access current and historical information, visit TranSystems' Web site at www.transystems.com.