



**MIDWEST
HIGH SPEED RAIL
ASSOCIATION**

P.O. Box 805877 Chicago, IL 60680
773-334-6758

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Contact: Rick Harnish
Executive Director
Midwest High Speed Rail Association

Office: 773-334-6758
Cell: 312-339-0116
www.midwesthsr.org

Madrid – Barcelona High-Speed Line to Open Tomorrow

The first revenue high-speed train linking Madrid to Barcelona operated today, marking an important milestone in Spain's economic development. The nation's two largest economic centers will now be just 2 hours and 38 minutes apart. The Madrid to Barcelona trip is roughly equivalent to Chicago to Minneapolis.

"High-speed rail is much more than a plane on the ground," said Richard Harnish, Executive Director of the Midwest High Speed Rail Association. "Madrid and Barcelona now are close enough to act as a single economic force. The rugged geography that once separated them has been bypassed."

The Madrid – Barcelona line is just one step in the world's most aggressive high-speed rail program. The Spanish government is working quickly to bring the entire country within 3 hours of Madrid. That would be the equivalent of linking Chicago to Minneapolis, Kansas City, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh and Detroit in under 3-hours by train.

Madrid-Barcelona is the third Spanish high-speed rail line to open in as many months. Because Spain is the most mountainous European country after Switzerland, all three lines faced challenging topographic obstacles. The Madrid-Malaga line that opened in December has one of the world's longest railroad bridges. The Madrid-Valladolid line, also opened in December, has the world's longest railroad tunnel. The Barcelona line required digging a tunnel through a highly built-up urban area.

"It is hard to comprehend how the new railroad network is changing Spain's economy," said Harnish. "The entire country of Spain will be able to cooperate and act as a single unit. The Midwest simply cannot achieve this level of productivity with its current transportation systems."

Harnish said easy access to rail stations and the broader choice of departures and lower fares of high-speed trains make it possible for Spaniards to just "hop on a train" for a quick meeting or even just lunch in cities hundreds of miles away.

"The Midwest economy is facing a number of economic challenges that will require our cities to cooperate in ways not dreamed of just a few years ago," said Harnish "We will need own high-speed network to compete."

The Midwest High Speed Rail Association is a member-supported non-profit educational organization promoting the development of fast, frequent and dependable train service connecting the entire Midwest. Our members include business leaders, mayors and individuals that want the option of traveling by train.