



**MIDWEST
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Interstate Trains Require Federal Commitment

“Imagine the equivalent of a major hub airport right in the middle of America’s third largest city,” said Rick Harnish, Executive director of the Midwest High Speed Rail Association.

This could happen soon, with the right commitment. California’s rail program has caused Amtrak boardings to increase five-fold. A similar increase in Chicago would put Union Station in the same league as Midway Airport.

“Chicago’s specialized services would become more accessible to business leaders across the entire Midwest. The Midwest would be better positioned to compete in the global marketplace,” added Harnish.

Metra, Chicagoland’s very successful commuter rail agency, can provide useful lessons for making this dream a reality, but the Metra model also demonstrates why President Bush’s proposal for Amtrak is fatally flawed.

Metra’s service is highly dependable despite operating on several very busy freight lines. Metra’s 11 routes offer varied examples of workable public/private partnerships ranging from routes that are 100% publicly owned and operated to privately owned routes operating under contract to Metra.

This success, in large part, results from a steady and predictable stream of funding generated by a local sales tax. Metra’s managers are able to make long-term operating and capital budgets since they forecast revenues with a high level of confidence. Amtrak, on the otherhand, has been forced to live from annual appropriation to annual appropriation.

And yet, you can’t catch a Metra train in Lake Geneva, WI. Train service was discontinued soon after Metra’s creation, not because the service was Metra’s poorest performer, but because Lake Geneva is in another state.

Rockford, IL, Kanakakee, IL and long list of other Illinois cities also need commuter rail service but go without because they are outside another political border, the Regional Transportation Authority’s taxing district.

A similar situation exists in Los Angeles, CA where you can’t take a train to Las Vegas, NV even though that is one of America’s busiest travel corridors.

“California’s passenger rail program is the best in the nation,” said Harnish. “Their program is a full decade ahead of the next best state program, and yet California hasn’t been able to get a passenger train across the state line.”

Highway promoters encountered a similar problem with the Interstate Highway system. It took 90% federal funding to overcome that obstacle and get the highways built.

Despite this fact, the administration has insisted that cities and states develop their own rail routes.

“States do not work well together, partly by design,” said Harnish. “Expecting multiple states to cooperate on a rail route is a fantasy.”

“84% of passengers boarding an Amtrak train in Chicago’s Union Station will travel across the state line,” said Harnish. “It would be impossible for Illinois to coordinate with 46 other states to provide railroad service.”

“No single state can lead the effort. The federal government is charged with providing for interstate commerce for just this reason,” added Harnish.

“We need a federal policy that recognizes that our rail system is a nationwide, interconnected network,” said Harnish. “The policy should include an adequate and predictable source of funding. It should recognize that rail operations are interstate in nature. Unfortunately, the administration’s current proposal will eliminate interstate service altogether.”

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.

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