



**MIDWEST
HIGH SPEED RAIL
ASSOCIATION**

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**MIDWEST HIGH SPEED RAIL ASSOCIATION HAILS BLAGOJEVICH ADMINISTRATION,
STATE LEGISLATORS FOR BUDGET AGREEMENT DOUBLING STATE PASSENGER TRAINS**

“Illinois will be the first state to have extra rail mobility ready in time for gasoline price increases,” Harnish says

CHICAGO (May 9)—When the nation turns its clocks back this fall, the state of Illinois will turn its clock forward to the future, more than doubling the number of daily passenger-train departures for its citizens and visitors.

Thanks to a landmark agreement between the Illinois General Assembly and Gov. Rod Blagojevich, Illinois’s funding for passenger-train service will jump from an annual \$12.1 million to \$25 million, enabling Amtrak’s “Chicago Hub” service to leap overnight from three daily round trips to seven.

“Although 13 states now provide Amtrak with funding to support their passenger-rail corridors, none has ever voted to double its service at a single stroke,” said Midwest High Speed Rail Association Executive Director Richard Harnish.

“Illinois’s legislators and governor have shown an unusual degree of forward thinking in agreeing to such a steep ramp-up in service,” Harnish said. “While elected officials in other states were still scratching their heads about what to do about high gasoline prices, Gov. Blagojevich and the Illinois General Assembly did something about it: They doubled their investment in rail service and ordered four more trains from Amtrak.”

Five trains a day to Springfield, St. Louis

The state’s busiest intercity rail corridor, the 284-mile Chicago-St. Louis line, will get two new state-supported round trips. Because the state already supports one round trip in that corridor and Amtrak supports two, the Chicago-St. Louis corridor will be able to offer travelers a choice of five daily round trips.

“For the first time there will be an early-morning express from Chicago that will get travelers to Springfield around 10 a.m.,” Harnish said. “State officials will now find trains a highly efficient way to shuttle between Chicago and Springfield. They can work and have breakfast en route. So can private business people who need to meet with state officials at the Capitol.

“That train also will be popular with tourists,” Harnish said. “It should be a boon to the new Abraham Lincoln Library, which is only a short walk from the Springfield station. Chicagoans will be able to make a convenient day trip to Springfield for the first time in 35 years.”

New a.m. departures make trips to Downstate more convenient

Also getting an additional frequency each will be the Chicago-Quincy and Chicago-Carbondale corridors. The 258-mile Quincy line already has one daily train leaving Chicago at dinner time. A second frequency leaving in the morning will enable Chicagoans to make day trips to Western Illinois by rail for the first time in more than a generation.

The 310-mile Chicago-Carbondale line already has two frequencies, one a state-supported local train that terminates at Carbondale, the other an Amtrak long-distance train that goes on to Memphis and New Orleans. Both leave late in the day. The state's new frequency will leave in the early morning, enabling Chicagoans to make day trips to Champaign, Mattoon, Effingham and Centralia as well as Carbondale.

"The new morning departure to Quincy is particularly exciting because between Chicago and Galesburg it shares a route with two of Amtrak's long-distance trains that leave Chicago in the afternoon," Harnish said. "When added to the two Quincy frequencies, those two trains mean Galesburg will have four daily trains to Chicago—a real resource for business travelers in a market that is not well served by air and otherwise requires a tiring 160-mile highway trip."

Coalition of advocates made new trains a reality

While the number of train frequencies in Illinois will more than double overnight, the decision to move the state to a more ambitious passenger-train program took a good deal longer and required the cooperation of a broad range of advocacy groups, Harnish said.

"The universities, local chambers of commerce and economic-development authorities, several hundred mayors and elected officials statewide, and even some individual business leaders stepped forward to urge the General Assembly and the administration to take this step," Harnish said.

He singled out the United Transportation Union and the Environmental Law & Policy Center as the Association's "partners" in a two-year advocacy campaign.

"Classic citizen activism at work"

"We also would like to thank all of those people who wrote letters, sent e-mails and made phone calls asking their legislators to fund these trains," Harnish said. "Their effort was classic citizen activism at work. And special thanks go to our members, whose membership dues and generous extra donations made it possible for me to make numerous trips Downstate to tell leaders about the importance of passenger trains to the state's economic growth."

But states cannot do it alone

But state support alone cannot provide the passenger trains necessary for Illinois' economic development, Harnish said.

"Passenger-rail transportation, like highways, waterways, airports and the air traffic-control network, needs to be a cooperative venture between the states and the federal governments," he said.

"So the next phase of our campaign must be to persuade our congressional delegation, and the Bush administration, to support a federal/state matching fund program that will raise the capital needed to build new tracks, signals, stations and rolling stock. Giving passenger rail the same kind of funding as roads and airports is the only way we will be able to provide world-class passenger trains for the Midwest."

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.