



Q-C to Chicago rail closer after U.S. Senate action

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The Quad-Cities could have passenger rail service to Chicago within two years, if all the chips fall into place.

"I don't think it's unrealistic," Jim Bohnsack, chairman of Quad Cities Passenger Rail Coalition, said. "Maybe it's optimistic. If we don't shoot for two years, it could be 10."

The U.S. Senate has approved legislation that could provide federal grants to help states pay for new passenger rail service, including a route from Chicago to the Quad-Cities.

The legislation, which still must be considered by the House of Representatives, would provide \$11.4 billion for Amtrak over six years.

"It's extremely good news for the Quad-Cities and the nation as we're looking to increase passenger rail," said Paul Rumler of the Illinois Quad City Chamber of Commerce and Quad Cities Passenger Rail Coalition.

Mr. Rumler said the legislation calls for \$1.4 billion in capital improvements. The rest of the \$11.4 billion for Amtrak would go for things such as security and operating costs.

States could apply for matching grants -- with a 20 percent state match -- for rail infrastructure.

"I think we've been focusing on our state efforts," he said. "Even without the federal funding, we could get it done in the Quad-Cities, but (federal funding) certainly would make it a lot easier."

In March, the Illinois Department of Transportation and Amtrak began a feasibility study on a passenger rail from Chicago to the Quad-Cities. Study results are expected soon, Mr. Rumler said.



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Photo: Todd Mizener

Richard Bohnsack, Rock Island County Board Chairman, announces the formation of the Quad Cities Passenger Rail Coalition in this May 11 photo. The organization will act as an advocacy group to promote passenger rail service between the Quad Cities and Chicago.



Photo: Submitted

Paul Rumler

The study is looking at whether a direct, 79 mph passenger rail system is feasible from Chicago to the Quad-Cities. It also will look at the possible route and cost, Mr. Bohnsack said.

Amtrak provides quick, cost-effective and reliable public ground transportation, said Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), who co-sponsored the Senate bill.

"As investment in passenger rail has increased, more and more communities are clamoring for service," he said.

Federal, state and local leaders recently worked to find a rail route from Chicago to Rockford to reduce congestion. The same process now is under way for a route to the Quad-Cities, Sen. Durbin said.

"This bill, in tandem with state funding, makes it possible for us to continue to expand rail service throughout the state and country," he said.

Local legislators have made a formal request for \$45 million to fund Amtrak passenger rail service to the Quad-Cities in the Illinois House of Representatives Capital Bill, Mr. Rumler said.

"It certainly would help the state of Illinois' investment if it's getting matching (funds) from the federal coffers as well," he said.

Without matching federal funds, it may be difficult for the state to fund the passenger rail system on its own, Mr. Bohnsack said.

Amtrak set a new record for ridership this year with 25.8 million passengers, an increase of 1.5 million people over 2006.

"These record-high ridership numbers on Amtrak show the general public feels that Amtrak is a vital element of our national transportation system," Sen. Durbin said.

Mr. Rumler said Illinois is leading the way by demonstrating how passenger rail is good for business, the economy, tourism and energy efficiency.

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