



Durbin: 'Expanding Amtrak to Q-C makes sense'

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EAST MOLINE -- An Amtrak route between the Quad-Cities and Chicago could do more than provide transportation, Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said Monday.

"Expanding Amtrak to the Quad-Cities makes sense on many levels," Sen. Durbin told a standing-room-only crowd at MetroLink East Pointe, 1201 14th Ave., East Moline.

A feasibility study conducted by Amtrak and released last month showed that establishing service between Chicago and the Quad-Cities would cost \$14 to \$23 million initially, with an annual operating cost of about \$6 million. The initial cost, according to the study, includes \$2.8 to \$4.2 million for rehabilitation of train cars and about \$1.05 million for radio equipment, training and uniforms.

The study showed two possible routes. One would go from the Quad-Cities to Naperville to Chicago, while the other would go from the Quad-Cities through Joliet to Chicago.

The first route is the faster of the two, according to the study. If trains traveled at 60 mph, the trip would take about three hours and 55 minutes, while the time would be reduced to about three hours and 20 minutes if the trains could travel at 79 mph. The route likely would attract 110,800 riders annually.

The fate of Amtrak in the Quad-Cities hinges on the Illinois legislature passing a capital bill, Sen. Durbin said.

"The sooner we have a capital bill, the sooner we can look for the federal match," he said, adding that federal funds could help defray some of the high initial costs. Sen. Durbin said he is open to using a lot of different sources to pay for Amtrak service. "I'm agnostic when it comes to funding."



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Photo: Robert Leistra
IDOT Director Joe Clary, Division of Public & Intermodal, listens along with U.S. Senator Dick Durbin during the Quad Cities Passenger Rail Service Public Forum on Monday, Feb. 18, at the MetroLINK East Pointe Station in East Moline.

Sen. Durbin thinks if more people used Amtrak, it would help reduce carbon emissions that cause global warming as well as be convenient.

"People are flocking to these trains because of the convenience," he said. "You just get much more efficiency for much less carbon."

Though a potential schedule created for the feasibility study showed stops in Moline and Geneseo, the actual station locations would be determined by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT).

"We look for a consensus on a local level," said Joe Clary, director of IDOT's division of public and intermodal transportation.

According to George Weber, IDOT's bureau chief of railroads, communities that want Amtrak service pitch their ideas to IDOT.

"The local communities themselves are going to come up with a plan," he said.

East Moline Mayor John Thodos wouldn't mind if Amtrak used MetroLink East Pointe as its Quad-Cities station but knows the important thing is having Amtrak in the area, no matter where the station is.

"Would I like it here? You betcha. Do I have a facility? You betcha," Mayor Thodos said. "It is our feeling that wherever the terminal is, it would be great for the Quad-Cities."