

Coalition: Rail service to Chicago possible

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MOLINE -- If things go Jim Bohnsack's way, it might not be long before Quad Citians won't have to drive if they want to get to Chicago.

"It's very possible in two years we will see rail service from the Quad-Cities to Chicago," Mr. Bohnsack, chairman of the Quad Cities Passenger Rail Coalition, told a crowd gathered Monday on the boat Celebration Belle at 2501 River Dr., Moline.

The coalition celebrated the first anniversary of its formation Monday, as well as the progress that has been made in trying to bring passenger rail service back to the Quad-Cities.

Illinois state Rep. Mike Boland, D-East Moline, said passenger rail can have many benefits.

"It is so much more efficient than hundreds of thousands of cars," he said, adding that people who want to go to Chicago but not fight traffic also would be able to use the trains. "It's really crucial for economic development."

Rep. Boland said that, with a state capital bill in doubt, he asked for \$5 million in the state's regular budget to help fund rail service in the area.

"I don't want to go out on a limb and say 'Oh yeah, we're definitely going to get it,'" he said. "Unless we get a capital bill, we're going to have to do it kind of piecemeal."

Paul Rumler, the coalition's executive director, said that besides Rep. Boland, other members of congress from Illinois and Iowa have offered to try and secure funding for rail transit in the Quad-Cities.



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Photo: Robert Leistra

Ernest Lester discuss the potential Amtrak routes extending into Iowa with John and Gale Hoff during the Quad Cities Passenger Rail Coalition one year anniversary party at the Celebration Belle river boat in Moline. Mr. Lester recalls taking the "Rock Island Rocket" to and from Chicago before the passenger train service ended in 1978. "2 hours 59 minutes to get from Chicago to Davenport," said Mr. Lester. The Hoff's said they used the passenger service to shop and visit museums before service ended, and said that now that one of their children is living in Chicago they would frequently use the Amtrak route to visit.

"(Rep.) Phil Hare (D-Ill.) has submitted a \$13.5 million earmark," he said, adding that Rep. Bruce Braley and Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa are also trying to help. "Our congressional delegation is stepping up."

Mr. Rumler said the timing was perfect to bring passenger rail service back to the Quad-Cities.

"Passenger rail is turning from an alternative form of transportation into a necessary form of transportation," he said. "The environmental benefits have never been more important."

Besides the environmental benefits, Mr. Rumler thinks bringing back passenger rail service would be a nod to the area's history.

"It's something our area is known for," he said. "We had passenger rail service in the Quad-Cities for 125 years."