

Durbin, other officials support Amtrak proposal

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Federal and state representatives, mayors and members of the public turned out Friday to show support for bringing Amtrak passenger rail service to the Quad-Cities.

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said there is local interest in having passenger trains run through the region.

"What we need to do now is channel that interest," he told the crowd of about 100 gathered Friday at Rock Island's Abbey Station to show support for the idea.

Present were state legislators and officials, as well as representatives from all over the Quad-Cities and neighboring areas, including Patrick Verschoore, D- Milan, Mike Boland, D-East Moline and Donald L. Moffitt, R-Gilson.



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Photo: John Greenwood

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL), center, speaks to a large crowd of area representatives Friday afternoon at Abbey Station regarding the possible addition of Amtrak rail service to the Quad Cities. To the left is George Weber of IDOT and at right is Ray Lung with Amtrak.

All had good things to say about the potential of having Amtrak in the area. Service between the Quad-Cities and Chicago would stimulate economic growth, and ease some of the problems associated with extensive vehicle use like traffic fatalities, pollution, fuel consumption and congestion.

"Every person sitting in that Amtrak train is a person not driving a car," Sen. Durbin said after the meeting.

There is Amtrak service to Chicago from Galesburg and Princeton, Ill., but the Quad-Cities hasn't had rail service since Dec. 31, 1978, when the Rock Island Railroad went bankrupt, Amtrak representative Marc Magliari said Wednesday. Rock Island Railroad service then used what is now the historic Silvis train station.

Amtrak passenger service was initiated by the U.S. government in 1970, when officials were able to convince Congress it was too expensive for freight train companies to provide public transportation, as had previously been a requirement when the railroad lines were constructed across the country.

The recent Rockford Amtrak study was initiated with an August 2006 letter from Sen. Durbin to Gov. Rod Blagojevich urging the state of Illinois DOT request Amtrak study a potential route and costs associated with adding new passenger rail service along the corridor that spans from Chicago to Dubuque and includes stops in Rockford and Galena.

Sen. Durbin helped secure a commitment from Amtrak to supply four new trains for additional round-trip service on the three Illinois routes, by doubling Amtrak funding in the 2007 state budget, bringing that to \$24.3 million, according to Christina Durbin Angarola, a representative of Sen. Durbin's office.

Sen. Durbin has made it clear that he sees the need for rail service in the Quad-Cities area. Last week, he spoke with Amtrak President and CEO Alex Kummant about funding for three Illinois intrastate lines, as well as initiatives to fund new lines in Rockford, Peoria, and the Quad-Cities.

This is the third public forum Sen. Durbin has conducted concerning Amtrak connections, Mr. Magliari said. One occurred in July in Rockford, and an October forum in Champagne was attended by Quad-City representatives.

But getting passenger trains running through the Quad-Cities is still some time off, officials said.

"It will take capital," Amtrak spokesman Ray Lang said at the meeting. "It's not easy to start new train service in corridors that we don't currently operate in."

But it is "doable," he added.

A feasibility study is planned to find the best way to set the service up and determine the costs of doing so, he and Illinois Department of Transportation spokesman George Weber said.

The study could be completed as soon as the end of the year, Mr. Weber said. But both men agreed that actual service is probably at least two years away.