



Posted Online: Posted online: May 11, 2007 7:14 PM  
Print publication date: 05/12/2007

## **Q-C making new pitch for rail service**

By Amy Thon, [athon@qconline.com](mailto:athon@qconline.com)

MOLINE - Area supporters of passenger rail between the Quad-Cities and Chicago, met Friday to launch the Quad Cities Passenger Rail Coalition.

QC Rail was formed by leaders from Rock Island and Scott counties to rally support for creation of a local passenger railway service.

"We have a long history of rail," Rock Island County Board chairman Jim Bohnsack said as he stood in front of the Moline Depot now used as Quad Cities Convention and Visitor's Bureau offices. The depot was built in 1900 and is part of local rail history.

The last time passenger rail ran through the Quad-Cities was in 1978, Mr. Bohnsack said. "We now realize how important the rail is."

He said the coalition will act as an advocacy group to promote passenger rail between the Quad-Cities and Chicago, and provide support to local, state and federal government agencies, including Amtrak and the Illinois Department of Transportation.

The goal is to have passenger rail in the Quad-Cities within two years, Mr. Bohnsack said. "It shouldn't be that difficult."

Ridership on passenger rail in Illinois has been expanding, said Jeff Nelson, chairman of the Illinois Quad City Chamber of Commerce. He said IDOT has shown interest in developing the passenger rail network in Illinois and momentum is building.

"There's a focus on expanding this service in the region," he said, adding that the Quad-Cities isn't alone in its desire to get the service expanded to its community. Peoria, Rockford and Dubuque also are interested in passenger rail.

In recent years, Mr. Nelson said passenger rail has become more popular as an economic and efficient way to travel, especially as gas prices continue to rise. "It's extremely important for the Quad-Cities to become connected to the world economic market in Chicago."

Rising energy costs also are straining state and federal highway funds. Highway construction costs have increased more than 30 percent over the last three years, while

revenues have remained flat, according to Rick Harnish, executive director of the Midwest High Speed Rail Association.

"A statewide network of fast trains, well integrated with local transit, will stretch the state's transportation dollar," he said.

IDOT and Amtrak are studying the best route between the Quad-Cities and Chicago, said Paul Rumler, director for talent attraction and retention at the Illinois Quad City Chamber of Commerce. Peoria has requested a similar study.

The coalition will show the state and Amtrak that the community is serious about establishing passenger rail as soon as possible.

A cohesive advocacy group with representatives from Scott and Rock Island counties, as well as state and federal government, will demonstrate the area's enthusiasm for the concept, Mr. Bohnsack said.

"This coalition is just going to be rallying the community for support," he said.

The coalition also will monitor the progress of passenger rail service in the Quad-Cities and make the information available to the public.

Staff writer **Amy Thon** can be reached at (309) 786-6441, Ext. 208.

Add your name to the list of passenger-rail supporters by visiting

[www.quadcitychamber.com/qcrail](http://www.quadcitychamber.com/qcrail)

Infobox:

If you want to see a more historic passenger train, head down to the foot of the Centennial Bridge in Rock Island. Several passenger rail cars will be parked there this weekend. The cars were chartered by a group of people spending the weekend in the Quad Cities.