



Posted Online: Posted online: May 21, 2007 8:59 PM
Print publication date: 05/22/2007

Illinois Amtrak delays, issues not hindering desire for local service

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Delays on expanding Illinois Amtrak lines are not lessening the desire to bring passenger rail service to the Quad-Cities.

"Without a doubt, it's a good idea," said Paul Rumler of the Illinois Quad City Chamber of Commerce.

Congestion caused by freight trains, ailing infrastructure, and sometimes malfunctioning Amtrak equipment are among the problems hampering existing passenger trains, state and Amtrak officials said.

"There's a lot of freight traffic out there," Amtrak spokesman Marc Magliari said.

When service was expanded last year, the existing infrastructure was not, Illinois Department of Transportation spokesman George Weber said.

Everyone is still learning to cope with the additional traffic. The hold-ups can last hours in some cases, according to a recent Chicago Tribune article.

Mr. Weber said state officials, Amtrak and freight companies are working together to find solutions but there are no concrete conclusions yet.

But hindrances elsewhere haven't derailed the hopes of local advocates wanting service added here-something that hasn't been available for almost 30 years. An Amtrak feasibility study is underway and could be finished by the fall.

"I think it's a little premature to discuss delays between Chicago and the Quad-Cities" with the feasibility study ongoing, Mr. Rumler said.

Earlier this month, the Quad Cities Passenger Rail Coalition was formed to advocate for a passenger line between the Quad-Cities and Chicago.

In January, there was a meeting of proponents that included U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., state legislators and officials, and representatives from throughout the region, including Patrick Verschoore, D- Milan, Mike Boland, D-East Moline and Donald L. Moffitt, R-Gilson.

Currently, Quad-Citians who want to use trains must go to Galesburg or Princeton. Trains on those lines face similar problems as others, officials said. For instance, Galesburg is also a freight hub.

Mr. Rumler and Mr. Weber said the problems on existing lines would hopefully be dealt with in the planning stages of the Quad-Cities project.

"We would hope with the Quad-Cities that might be a little bit different scenario," Mr. Weber said.

On-time trains in the Q-C

This is the percentage of times that some of the train lines servicing the Quad-Cities area have been on time in the last four months.

The Illinois Zephyr No. 380:

January -- 71 percent; February -- 46 percent; March -- 68 percent; April -- 80 percent.

The Illinois Zephyr No. 383:

January -- 52 percent; February -- 50 percent; March -- 45 percent; April -- 53 percent.

The Carl Sandburg No. 381:

January -- 74 percent; February -- 50 percent; March -- 74 percent; April -- 87 percent.

The Carl Sandburg No. 382:

January -- 81 percent; February -- 50 percent; March -- 42 percent; April -- 77 percent.

Source: the Illinois Department of Transportation.