



For Immediate Release (10/2/08):

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QC Rail: Congress Passes Important Amtrak Legislation

QUAD CITIES – The Quad Cities Passenger Rail Coalition announced the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives passed the Amtrak Reauthorization Bill, which authorizes the largest ever funding amount for state intercity passenger rail capital grants. These grants will help restore passenger rail service from Chicago to the Quad Cities and extended service to Iowa City, Des Moines, and Omaha.

The Amtrak provisions were included in HR 2095, the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008 and the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act. The U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed HR 2095 by a voice vote on September 24th. The U.S. Senate passed HR 2095 by a 74-24 vote on October 1st. The bill now awaits signature by President Bush before becoming law.

“The Amtrak provisions passed by Congress authorize unprecedented federal support for new intercity passenger rail routes, which will help make the Chicago to Quad Cities route a reality,” said Paul Rumler, Executive Director of the Quad Cities Passenger Rail Coalition. “Because of continued community organizing and support from key federal and state legislators, the Quad Cities is well positioned to receive funding for passenger rail service as lawmakers focus on providing residents with affordable, efficient, and reliable transportation options. The Quad Cities Congressional Delegation has provided important leadership and support to advance this regional priority.”

The final Amtrak authorization is a compromise version of similar legislation passed by the House and Senate earlier this year. QC Rail worked with area lawmakers to strongly advocate for provisions that will benefit the Chicago to Quad Cities corridor.

Key provisions of HR 2095:

- Reauthorizes Amtrak and provides a total of \$13.06 billion over five years to meet Amtrak's ongoing operating and capital needs.
- Authorizes \$1.9 billion to encourage the development of new and improved intercity passenger rail service through an 80/20 Federal/State matching capital grant program. The bill authorizes the Secretary of Transportation to award \$390 million each year on a competitive basis for projects based on economic performance, expected ridership, and other factors.
- Authorizes \$325 million (an average of \$65 million per year) out of the State Capital Grant program for "congestion grants" to Amtrak and the States for high-priority rail corridors to increase capacity along certain lines in order to reduce congestion and facilitate ridership growth.
- The bill authorizes \$1.5 billion (\$300 million per year) for grants to States and/or Amtrak to finance the construction and equipment for 11 authorized high-speed rail corridors.

Since forming in May 2007, nearly 5000 area individuals have joined the Quad Cities Passenger Rail Coalition. This coalition includes area residents, elected officials, community, labor, and business leaders, and college students. In addition, over 125 businesses, labor and community organizations, and governmental entities have become official supporters of the QC Passenger Rail Coalition.

The Quad Cities Passenger Rail Coalition is advocating on behalf of the greater Quad City region for restored passenger rail service. A thriving metropolitan area of 400,000 residents, the Quad City region is the next most logical addition to the passenger rail system.

As a result of substantial ridership increases on existing Illinois routes, the Illinois Department of Transportation and Amtrak are planning expanded routes to include restored passenger rail service between Chicago and the Quad Cities. An Amtrak feasibility study completed in January 2008 identified that 110,000 riders annually would use 79 mph Amtrak service between the Quad Cities and Chicago.

Amtrak service from Chicago to the Quad Cities is the lynchpin for an extended route being planned along a highly populated corridor from the Quad Cities to Iowa City, Des Moines, and Omaha. The Iowa Department of Transportation is working with Amtrak to extend service from the Quad Cities to Iowa City. Amtrak recently identified that 78,000 riders annually would use 79 mph Amtrak service between the Quad Cities and Iowa City.

More Information about the Quad Cities Passenger Rail Coalition is available at www.qcrail.com

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