FRA-IA-IL-EA-2009

Chicago to Iowa City Intercity Passenger Rail Service

TIER 1 SERVICE LEVEL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Submitted Pursuant to 64 FR 28545
by the

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Railroad Administration

and

Illinois Department of Transportation

and

Iowa Department of Transportation

September 24, 2009
Date of Approval

Tamara Nicholson
For Iowa DOT

September 24, 2009
Date of Approval

George Weber
For Illinois DOT

Date of Approval

For FRA

The Illinois Department of Transportation (DOT) and Iowa DOT, in conjunction with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) are evaluating alternatives to reestablish passenger rail service between Chicago, Illinois, and Iowa City, Iowa, via the Quad Cities of Illinois and Iowa. This is a Tier 1 Service Level Environmental Assessment (EA) which addresses the service level issues that would be part of the initial operations of two round-trip passenger trains per day. The Route A Alternative (Preferred Alternative), is the environmentally preferable alternative. It requires fewer miles of track improvements, is a shorter and faster route, provides better ridership and would provide more environmental benefits than the Route B Alternative. The Route A Alternative would reduce air pollutants and energy use to a greater extent, and have fewer noise impacts than the Route B Alternative. Impacts on natural resources are very similar between the two build alternatives, with some key exceptions. The Wyanet Connection is only needed for the Route A Alternative and would include work outside of the existing right-of-way (ROW). The Route B Alternative is adjacent to critical habitat of the threatened Indiana bat and, due in part to its longer length, crosses eight more waterways and has 119 more National Wetland Inventory-listed (NWI) wetlands within 100 feet of the ROW than the Route A Alternative.

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Comments on this Tier 1 Service Level EA are due by October 14, 2009, and should be sent to either George Weber or Tamara Nicholson at the above addresses.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Illinois Department of Transportation (DOT) and Iowa DOT, in conjunction with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) are evaluating alternatives to reestablish passenger rail service between Chicago, Illinois, and Iowa City, Iowa, via the Quad Cities of Illinois and Iowa. The proposed passenger rail service would have two round trips per day (four passenger trains per day) from Chicago to Iowa City with a stop in the Quad Cities and other intermediate locations and would attract approximately 187,000 passengers per year. The Chicago to Iowa City passenger rail service would be part of the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI), an initiative of nine Midwest states and Amtrak to establish an intercity passenger rail system in the Midwest. Chicago would be the hub of the MWRRI and a series of high speed and conventional speed rail corridors would provide land based connectivity with the major Midwest population centers. The Chicago to Iowa City passenger rail service would be one section of the Chicago to Omaha corridor and is planned for conventional speed (79 mile per hour).

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is a Tier 1 Service Level EA which addresses the service level issues that would be part of the initial operations of two round trip passenger trains per day. Future Tier 2 Project Level analyses would be prepared for specific project level activities required to implement the Chicago to Iowa City passenger rail service. These project level activities include the evaluation and selection of specific station locations and designs, identification and evaluation of specific track improvements, and evaluation of the location of specific construction activities such as sidings and new connecting track. The purpose for the proposed passenger rail service is to re-introduce passenger rail service in Iowa City and the Quad Cities to increase regional mobility, reduce roadway congestion, meet future travel demands, and provide an affordable modal option for the communities served.

In addition to the No-Build Alternative, Illinois DOT and Iowa DOT evaluated two different alternatives for providing passenger rail service from Chicago to Iowa City. Both alternatives would use a combination of existing passenger rail and freight rail alignments to provide passenger service. The Route A Alternative would connect Chicago's Union Station to Iowa City using rail lines owned by Amtrak, BNSF Railway Company (BNSF), and Iowa Interstate Railroad (IAIS). This alternative would require the construction of a new connection between the BNSF and IAIS rail lines near Wyanet, Illinois. The Route A Alternative would reestablish passenger rail service to Geneseo, Illinois; the Quad Cities (Moline, Illinois); and Iowa City, Iowa; and would provide expanded passenger service to the existing stations in La Grange Road, Naperville, Plano, Mendota, and Princeton, and Illinois. The Route B Alternative would connect Chicago's Union Station to Iowa City using tracks owned by Amtrak, Canadian National (CN), Metra, CSX Transportation (CSX), and IAIS. The Route B Alternative would not require any new connections. It would provide new passenger rail service to; Morris, LaSalle, Geneseo, Illinois; Quad Cities , Illinois; and Iowa City, Iowa; and would provide expanded passenger service to the existing station in Joliet, Illinois.

The Route A Alternative would provide a shorter and faster route than the Route B Alternative, and because of the more competitive travel time, the Route A Alternative would attract a higher ridership than the Route B Alternative. Almost half of the Route A Alternative (110 miles out of a total of 219 miles) currently supports 79 mph intercity passenger service and would not require any improvements. Far less of the Route B Alternative (42 miles out of a total of 238 miles) currently supports passenger trains, which means that the Route B Alternative would require more improvements to the track structure and grade crossings than the Route A Alternative.

Both the Route A and Route B Alternatives would divert a substantial number of passengers from automobiles to the passenger trains, providing some congestion relief on the regional highway system. Both the Route A and Route B Alternatives would have an increase in rail traffic of four additional passenger trains per day, which would add to the existing train related noise and vibration effects. However, in several locations the track structure would be improved which would reduce the noise impact. In addition, improvements to the track in the Quad Cities area would allow for an increase in the train speed through the communities which would further reduce noise impacts. The warning systems at the at-grade crossings would be improved as needed by installing gates and flashing lights at public crossings and upgrading to constant time warning circuitry. This would allow communities to pursue quiet zones if the communities so desired. Illinois DOT and Iowa DOT selected the Route A Alternative as the preferred alternative since it requires fewer miles of track improvements, is a shorter and faster route, provides better ridership, has fewer adverse environmental impacts and provides for more environmental benefits than the Route B Alternative.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ARRA	American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
BGEPA	Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act
BMP	Best Management Practice
BNSF	Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CERCLA	Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CN	Canadian National Railway Corporation
CO_2	carbon dioxide
CSXT	CSX Transportation Company
CTC	centralized traffic control
CWA	Clean Water Act
CWR	continuous welded rail
CWTD	constant warning time activation
dBA	A-weighted decibels
DNR	Department of Natural Resources
DOT	Department of Transportation
DTC	direct traffic control
EA	Environmental Assessment
EJ	environmental justice
EJ&E	Elgin, Joliet and Eastern Railway
EO	Executive Order
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
EPCRA	Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act
ESA	U.S. Endangered Species Act
et seq.	and the following
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency

FHWA	U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
FR	Federal Register
FRA	Federal Railroad Administration
ft	foot or feet
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
GBV	ground-borne vibration
GHG	human-generated greenhouse gas
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
HSIPR	High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail
IA	Iowa
IAIS	Iowa Interstate Railroad
IC&E	Chicago & Eastern Railroad
IL	Illinois
ILCS	Illinois Compiled Statutes
Illinois EPA	Illinois Environmental Protection Agency
ISTEA	Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991
Ldn	day-night noise level
LUST	Leaking Underground Storage Tank
MBTA	Migratory Bird Treaty Act
µin	microinch(es)
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
mph	miles per hour
MSA	Metropolitan Statistical Area
MWRRI	Midwest Regional Rail Initiative
MWRRS	Midwest Regional Rail System
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NO_2	nitrogen dioxide
NO_x	nitrogen oxides

NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
NRI	Nationwide Rivers Inventory
NWI	National Wetlands Inventory
O_3	ozone
Pb	lead
PHMSA	U.S. Department of Transportation Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration
PL	Public Law
PM-10	particulate matter less than 10 micrometers in diameter
PM-25	particulate matter less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter
Preferred Alternative	Route A – Amtrak-BNSF-IAIS
Project	reestablishment of passenger rail service between Chicago, Illinois, and Iowa City, Iowa
PTC	positive train control
RCRA	Resource Conservation and Recovery Act
ROW	right-or-way
SARA	Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act
Section 4(f)	Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) Act of 1966
Section 6(f)	Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Act of 1965
Section 106	Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended
Section 404	Section 404 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
SO_2	sulfur dioxide
TEA-21	Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century
TOD	transportation-oriented development
TPD	trains per day
TSCA	Toxic Substances Control Act

TWC	track warrant control
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USC	United States Code
USDOT	U.S. Department of Transportation
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
VdB	vibration decibels
VOC	volatile organic compound

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