

Dept. of Transportation: Wisconsin-Minnesota passenger rail project selected to receive \$31.8 million federal grant

Posted on Wednesday, Sep 30, 2020

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The joint Wisconsin-Minnesota Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago (TCMC) Passenger Rail Project has been selected to receive a \$31.8 million federal rail grant. The TCMC project will add an additional daily round-trip between the Twin Cities, La Crosse, Milwaukee, and Chicago and points in-between, along the existing long-distance Amtrak Empire Builder route. The TCMC service will be an extension of one of the existing Amtrak Hiawatha round trips.

“The expanded service provides a much-improved connection between the Midwest economic hubs of Minneapolis/St. Paul, La Crosse, Milwaukee and Chicago,” Craig Thompson, Wisconsin Department of Transportation Secretary-designee said. “Just as important is the enhanced service for residents in the many rural communities. They will have increased travel options, with better reliability and on-time performance.”

“Minnesotans will benefit from the expanded passenger rail service by having access to a safe, reliable and affordable alternative to driving or flying,” said MnDOT Commissioner Margaret Anderson Kelliher. “This project will also help Minnesota create new jobs and generate economic growth in our communities and improve access to higher education facilities along the corridor.”

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) announced today that the project has been awarded a Consolidated Railroad Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI) competitive grant for final design and construction of railroad improvements

needed for the project.

The grant application received broad support from communities, stakeholders, business groups, state legislators, as well as members of Wisconsin's congressional delegation.

The TCMC project will improve the existing passenger rail corridor, making it more valuable and useful for corridor communities, residents, and visitors by:

- Increasing the existing rail service on the corridor from one round-trip daily to two daily round-trips. The new round-trip will have a shorter travel time and greater on-time performance and reliability for regional trips - especially important for business and student travel.
- Doubles schedule options making more regional trips viable by rail. For example, it enables a one overnight business or personal trip to the Twin Cities, Milwaukee, or Chicago from mid-size and rural communities in Wisconsin and Minnesota, which is not possible with the current one-round-trip schedule.
- Supports tourism efforts among communities on the route.
- Supports communities' ability to attract and retain jobs and business through improved connectivity to the economic centers of the region

The grant is the final piece of federal support needed to implement this service. The states and Amtrak need to provide \$21.2 million in matching funds in order to accept the award.

"Amtrak contributed \$5 million to match the grant for this project because it will greatly improve passenger rail service and freight operations in Wisconsin and Minnesota, better connect the Great Lakes states and contribute to the economic competitiveness of cities along the route," said Joe McHugh, Amtrak Vice President, State Supported Services. "The development of corridors is an important part of our mission at Amtrak, where we have a history of success using the foundation of an interregional train such as the Empire Builder and adding round-trip segments to develop a corridor service."

Earlier this year, FRA provided a \$12.6 million grant for operating support to offset the cost of the first three years of service.

Planning for the TCMC Service began in 2012 when project partners requested that

Amtrak assess the feasibility of providing a state-supported second round-trip intercity passenger train service between the Twin Cities and Chicago Union Station. Amtrak's findings, completed in 2015, indicated favorable ridership and revenue projections which initiated more detailed study of the proposed service. The first year of TCMC rail service is anticipated to begin in 2024. More information on this project can be found on the TCMC

webpage: <https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/projects/multimodal/tcmc.aspx>