

# The Future of State-Supported Passenger Rail Service in Missouri

## Background

Missouri is at a crossroads with its state-supported passenger rail service. Nationally, there has been strong ridership growth on almost all Amtrak corridors. Missouri is the exception, going from a high of 208,000 riders in FY2001 to only 144,000 in FY2007. Frequent delays due to freight rail congestion on the Union Pacific corridor carrying this service are the primary cause. Only 71 percent of trains were within 30 minutes of schedule in FY2007, with performance in some months as low as 54 percent. Many trains were two to three hours late. Understandably, the public will not ride a service they cannot depend on.

Heavy freight rail congestion impacts many state-supported Amtrak routes across the United States. Many states, including Illinois, Washington, Florida, North Carolina, Wisconsin, California and Michigan, are publicly funding capacity enhancements to private rail infrastructure to improve passenger train reliability. For example, Illinois has invested \$80 million on its Chicago –to St. Louis route and increased from three to five daily round trips. The result is a 56 percent ridership increase in the first year of expanded service, with more investment planned based on this success.

## Efforts to Date

MoDOT has participated since 1996 with eight other Midwestern states on a far-reaching planning effort known as the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative. This would develop a 3,000-mile high-speed rail system using Chicago as the main hub. However, while planning work has progressed, this proposal would require significant federal investment. Within Missouri, MoDOT recently completed a capacity analysis of the Union Pacific corridor between Kansas City and St. Louis to identify projects that would improve passenger train reliability and the flow of freight rail traffic. MoDOT regularly works with Amtrak, Union Pacific, and our rail passenger advisory committee to discuss other options for improving service. All entities agree that significant change is needed to ensure the future of Missouri passenger rail service.

## Recommendations

MoDOT recommends the following package of rail enhancements to the State Legislature for consideration during the 2008 Session:

1. Make targeted capacity improvements on Union Pacific mainline as recommended in recently completed rail capacity analysis. Specifically, extend current sidings near California and Strasburg to 8,500 feet in order to accommodate longer freight trains and expedite passenger train movement. Estimated project cost is \$10 million.
2. Install real-time passenger information displays at each unmanned train station on Missouri's state-supported route. The electronic displays would show train arrival status, delay notifications, and other pertinent public information. Union Pacific Railroad has already pledged \$50,000 toward this enhancement. Estimated project cost \$500,000.
3. Provide promotional funding to increase public awareness about passenger rail service as a viable transportation mode and partner with the Missouri Division of Tourism to attract additional riders to the service. Last appropriated in FY2002 at \$125,000.



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MoDOT  
Multimodal Operations

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