

MoDOT Virtual Passenger Rail Open House Summary

Overview

The Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) hosted a Virtual Passenger Rail Public Open House from May 3, 2021 – June 11, 2021 via MoDOT's Website. This virtual open house was part of the development of the 2021 State Freight and Rail Plan (SFRP). The SFRP identifies current and future trends to help make informed decisions on future investments in the freight and passenger rail industries in Missouri. Freight and rail plans are required documents for the state to receive federal funding for future transportation projects. Currently, there are no dedicated federal funding sources for passenger rail, so the SFRP and gathering input is vital to the *Missouri River Runner's* long-term viability.

Meeting Summary

Two hundred thirty-two (232) members of the public attended the virtual open house. The content included:

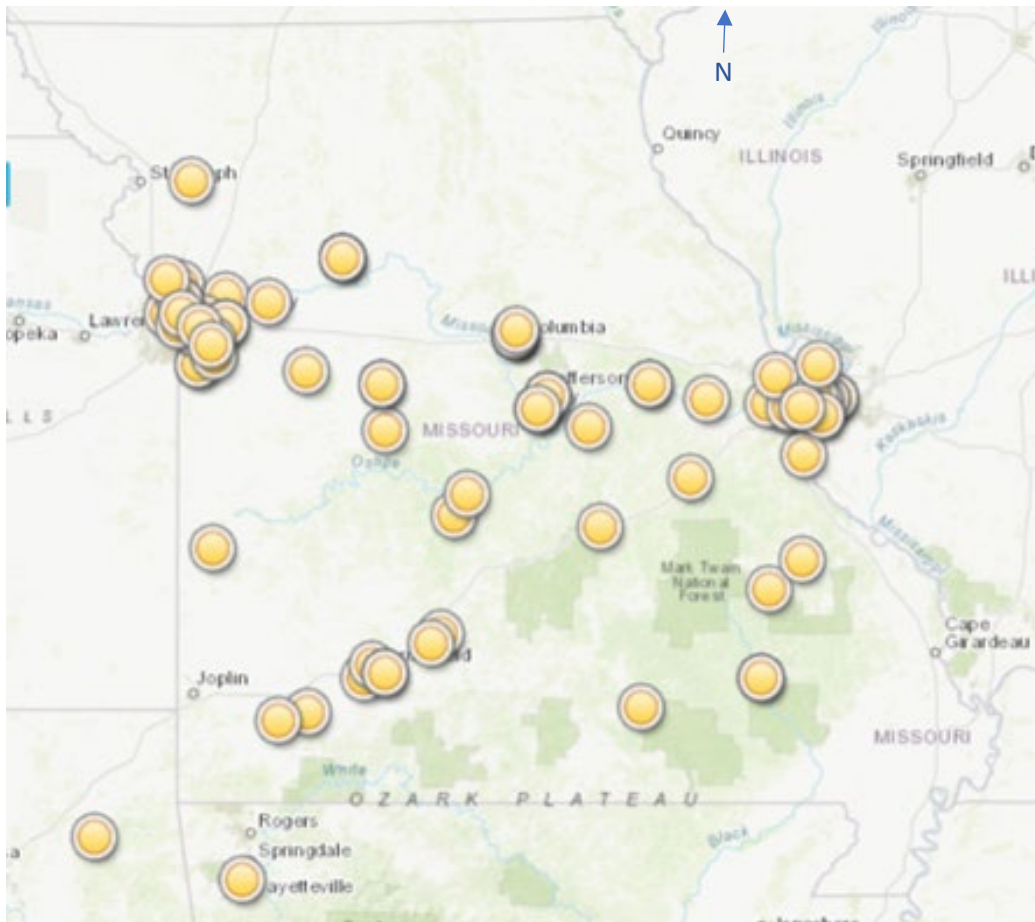
- The purpose and schedule of the SFRP;
- Goals and objectives of the SFRP;
- MoDOT's role in the passenger rail;
- Existing passenger rail conditions throughout the state;
- On-time performance (OTP) and funding for the passenger rail; and
- The economic impact of the passenger rail line.

To promote the open house, MoDOT posted the virtual open house link on their website; promoted at all industry forums (held in early May 2021); sent a newsletter to the mailing list; asked metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and regional planning councils (RPCs) to help promote the open house; posted on MoDOT's Twitter and Facebook pages; and sent out a media release which was also included in their Express Lane electronic newsletter. Flyers were also left at the Kirkwood station to encourage participation.

Summary of Questions and Comments

Participants were able to submit questions and comments to MoDOT and the Project team and share their thoughts on how passenger rail service can better serve the citizens of Missouri. One-hundred nineteen (119) comments were submitted to MoDOT and the Project team. Understanding participants' concerns and questions will help the Project team make decisions moving forward. When participants submitted comments, they were able to identify if the comments was about a specific location. Responses are found in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Passenger Rail Comment Distribution Map



The summary below captures common themes noted by the public during the virtual open house:

- **Accessibility.** Many participants submitted comments inquiring on the mobility and reliability of proposed passenger rail routes and connections. Participants also commented about how transporting more bikes should be incorporated into existing and future routes.
- **Convenience.** Participants asked questions about which major cities would be connected via passenger rail and if the River Runner would be expanded.
- **Service Times.** Many of the participant's questions and comments centered on enhancing the Kansas City and St. Louis connection and adding in more service time options. Participants commented on how a connection from Kansas City to Omaha would be helpful for travel.
- **Routes.** Questions and comments regarding routes focused on constructing a passenger rail route along the western border of the state and additionally connecting St. Louis to Springfield. Other comments discussed how having plans to connect to rail lines in other states would help connect Missouri to other communities who could in turn use the rail line to travel to Missouri.
- **Right of Way.** Questions came up about how existing rail lines could be used to minimize right-of-way impacts. Participants also mentioned enforcing the laws on the tracks for passenger rail lines and building a high-speed rail line between major rail stations.

A few of the comments included:

Accessibility

- “With the growth of bicycle travel, the Rock Island trail coming together and the Katy trail, 4 bicycles on the train is not enough. I ride a fully loaded touring bike with 4 panniers as I travel long distance and to use Amtrak to return home at times and getting it in and out of the passenger car is a challenge. Better training for your conductors, sometimes your conductors can be very impatient with cyclists trying to get their bikes on and off. I've tried to go online and look at website at your website and have not really found a lot of valuable information on how to be prepared and be more prepared when I get to the train.”
- “I believe a route between Missouri’s third largest city and St. Louis and/or Kansas City would be beneficial. The groundwork is there, service wouldn’t need to be daily either. It’s my contention that a feasibility study be done. It could be done as a project by students from Missouri State University, therefore keeping costs down.”

Convenience

- “We positively have to develop passenger rail over the I-44 corridor between St. Louis to Springfield, MO, to serve the online colleges in Rolla and Springfield, plus the tourist destination of Branson. Furthermore, a connection west of Springfield can be made to the Heartland Flyer giving travelers access to population centers in Oklahoma and Texas. BNSF Railway's Cuba Subdivision is grossly underutilized, thus mainline capacity is not an issue.”
- “Expediting the situation with the Jefferson City station is imperative. But even before the closing there was nowhere to park.”

Service Times

- “Please put more effort into passenger rail to make it a better and more viable service. It's the law to prioritize passenger rail on the track over freight. Enforce it! Make the freight trains wait on the side. Make sure tracks and equipment are replaced so there aren't so many breakdowns. It needs dedicated funding at a higher amount than it gets. Work with the federal gov't to make this happen. I would LOVE high speed rail! We need a train to Omaha and Minneapolis. To Little Rock would be great too.”
- “I am a regular rider of Amtrak. I regularly ride from Lee's Summit to Sedalia and back to visit extended family twice a month. I dislike driving because it is risky, costly (especially with the very high gasoline prices) and also stressful. I feel for persons with disabilities unable to drive and persons without cars. We all need the trains. A huge chunk of generation, The Baby Boomers are getting older, poorer and sicker. They depend on others for rides, and often no longer can afford a car. I am very upset that the second Amtrak round trip that was cut due to the pandemic, has not been reinstated yet.”
- “The missing afternoon trains makes it impossible to make a Westbound daily same day excursion trip to Kansas City. It also makes too long a lay-over in Saint Louis for connections with the Texas Eagle and the City of New Orleans (via Amtrak Thruway bus). It also does not allow an afternoon same day return going Westbound on the Missouri River Runner. I strongly recommend that more trains be put between KC and St Louis and that the route be beyond the 750-mile one-way cap that prevents more Federal funding and leaves it to the States that are cash strapped.”

Routes

- “We need passenger rail going north to south on the western edge of the state. By connecting Kansas City to Carthage/Joplin Missouri, Amtrak would have the option of then serving Springfield to the east, and or expanding from Kansas City north to St. Joseph, Omaha Nebraska, Sioux city and Sioux Falls South Dakota, and beyond.”
- “There is currently no major rail access that runs north to south past the Mississippi river with the exception of Small short line passenger rail. The rail infrastructure is there, you just need the Amtrak cars and about three small stations across Missouri to get started. This would serve millions of people in the Midwest who currently only have individual cars on the interstate as a transportation option.”

Right of Way

- “Please put more effort into passenger rail to make it a better and more viable service. It's the law to prioritize passenger rail on the track over freight. Enforce it! Make the freight trains wait on the side. Make sure tracks and equipment are replaced so there aren't so many breakdowns. It needs dedicated funding at a higher amount than it gets.”
- “I would like to be able to travel more on Amtrak through the state, especially from Kansas City to St. Louis and the stops in between. I would also like the state to consider a high speed option between the 2 cities as an economically viable alternative to car travel on I-70.”