



RAILCET

A Labor-Management Initiative of **LIUNA!** & **IUOE**

To: RAILCET Team
From: Ray Chambers
Date: December 6, 2024

Subject: Report on Chippewa Rail Commission Meeting

There are sixty-nine FRA grants for Corridor Identification and Development (CID) scoping studies. The Chippewa Commission received a grant to develop an operation in the Eau Claire-Twin Cities Corridor. In a study funded in part by RAILCET, there are a number of State/Authority sponsors open to the competitive model. However, only Chippewa specifically rejects the Traditional Amtrak Model and calls for competition in the selection of operators and service providers through the Competitive Direct Access Model (which is endorsed by RAILCET). I helped draft the application that was funded by FRA. As a result, I have been closely monitoring progress on the Chippewa CID Scoping Study. I participate in the Commission Meetings. This is my report on the most recent meeting.

CHIPPEWA RAIL COMMISSION MEETING

December 4, 2024

Highlights

SCOPING PLAN.

There was significant participation from numerous stakeholders and agencies at this meeting. In attendance was Rick Stone of the Union Pacific (who made no comments) and the primary consultant Rick Degman of HDR. The meeting centered on Degman presenting the "Project Management Plan" for

the Step 1 Scoping Study. Here are the takeaways from Degman. The Scoping Plan is complete and received FRA approval on November 8. The “Gap Analysis” should be completed this week, and the hope is for FRA approval by late January, 2025. Gathering the data is somewhat difficult because the earlier analysis of this Corridor is over a decade old and irrelevant. It must be redone by HDR prior to Step 2- Project development. Key issues being addressed are getting a handle on the cost of the project and identifying the source of the 10% local match required for Step 2. Here are the critical issues:

Cost –What will implementation of this project cost? A rough estimate of the project cost is to be completed by mid-January. Under questioning, Degman estimated the Step 2 cost will be somewhere between \$3 and \$8 million. The federal grant money for step 2 has been pre- appropriated. This means the 10% local match will be between \$330k and \$800k for the Commission.

Budget -- The goal is to submit the Step 2 Budget with final FRA approval by the end of March 2025.

OVERLAP

The Commission is a sponsor of the Eau Claire-Twin Cities Corridor. WisDOT is sponsor of other three other corridors in the region including the overlapping Milwaukee-Madison-Eau Claire-Twin Cities route. This includes the West Central Wisconsin route along the Eau Claire-Menomonie-Baldwin-Hudson-Twin Cities corridor. A priority for FRA is that these plans be coordinated including the required funding.

After a presentation by Scott Rogers, the Commission approved a letter to Wisconsin Governor Evers. It proposes the Commission and State work together on common innovations *“including a competitive process for selecting an operator, applying a direct access model for use of track capacity on the host railroad*, and inclusion of transportation oriented economic development as an integral part of its implementation.” This, in fact, is a direct appeal to the Governor to adopt the proposed AIPRO-RAILCET Competitive Direct Access Model reforms across the board to Corridor Identification and Development (CID) projects with which they are involved.

The letter notes the Step 2 SDPs benefit from 90% federal funding under the CID program. This requires a 10% state/local match to continue in the pipeline. The State and Commission should work together to achieve the match. Specifically, it says it is important for the state’s 2025-27 biennial budget to include the resources to ensure that all of these studies move forward with the needed matching funding. The letter requests that WisDOT be given the funding to move forward with its four corridor applications (including the Milwaukee-Madison-Eau Claire-Twin Cities route) and also provide significant participation in match requirements for all the the corridors in the region.

MIDWEST INTERSTATE PASSENGER RAIL COMMISSION.

Scott reported on a recent meeting of the MIPRC. This commission coordinates intercity passenger rail effort between eight states. MIPRC has recently received FRA grants to help fund their coordination efforts.

AGENDA Chippewa-St. Croix Passenger Rail Commission Wednesday, December 4, 2024, at 8:30 A.M.

1. Call to Order and confirmation of meeting notice
2. Roll Call • Voting Members • Ex-officio Members (by organization) • All others
3. Public Comment
4. Review/Approval of Meeting Minutes – Discussion/Action • October 23, 2024
5. FRA Scoping Study Update – HDR - Information/Discussion
6. Next steps – Service Development Plan and matching funding requirements - Discussion/Action • Proposed letter to the Governor, WisDOT – Scott Rogers
7. Report: Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission, November 18-20, Scott Rogers Information/Discussion
8. Announcements – Information
9. Future meeting agenda items • Status of Scoping Study • Discussion of sources for 10% match for Service Development Plan