

Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030 Newsletter

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) continues to deliver a quality transportation system. Department efforts are focused on moving people and goods safely and seamlessly. With an emphasis on continued development and enhancement of a multimodal transportation system, WisDOT supports the state's initiatives to grow a Wisconsin that is competitive in the global markets while remaining attractive and livable. Sustaining and supporting the improvement of Wisconsin's rail service is a critical component of these efforts.

Overview of the *Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030*

To define the state's future vision for rail and further understand the network needs and issues, WisDOT developed the draft *Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030*, Wisconsin's statewide long-range rail plan. With a focus on freight, intercity passenger and commuter rail, the rail plan identifies rail network and service issues and corresponding recommendations. The result is a framework within which the state and related stakeholders can maintain, improve and plan for the state's current and future rail network.

The purpose of the plan is to:

- Meet the rail planning requirements specified in the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008 and the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008
- Support continuing efforts to implement a strong rail system that complements the state's other transportation modes
- Continue the state's emphasis on supporting local economic growth and improving the state's competitiveness regionally and globally

Topics addressed in the plan include:

- Inventory of Wisconsin's existing rail system
- Rail's impacts on Wisconsin's economic development
- Importance and needs of the state's freight rail network
- Benefits of, issues, needs and recommendations for, intercity passenger rail
- Recommended future commuter rail developments
- Rail's contribution to building livable and sustainable communities
- Safety and security issues, including rail crossings and trespassing
- A review of the plan's potential impacts on the environment and on minority and low-income populations
- Identification of rail capital projects anticipated to be supported by the state in the long-range rail investment program

In addition, the plan includes a funding chapter that identifies funding sources for freight, intercity passenger and commuter rail. It also touches on potential future funding sources and methods that could be used to support future rail needs.

Rail plan development process

WisDOT developed the *Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030* using a three-phase process that built upon previous department planning efforts. The phases included:

1. Plan scoping – Spring/ summer 2010

Outreach during this phase was structured to obtain feedback from stakeholders and the general public pertaining to rail-related issues and needs. Specific outreach activities included an online questionnaire supplemented with a telephone survey of minority and low income populations, and persons aged 65 years and older; a stakeholder workshop; and environmental resource agency and tribal consultation. In addition, the department continued to work with the metropolitan planning organizations and regional planning commissions, presenting the proposed structure and obtaining feedback on issues for inclusion in the plan. The results of this outreach were used to refine the scope and content of the draft rail plan.

2. Draft plan outreach – Fall 2010

During this phase, the department will present the draft plan to the public for review and comment. A public hearing and targeted outreach meetings are scheduled across the state to obtain feedback. Comments during this phase will be part of the formal public record and will be used to help finalize the discussion in the plan.

3. Final plan adoption – Late fall 2010

During this final phase, the comments received during the draft plan phase will be used to amend the plan as needed. The final plan will be submitted to the WisDOT Secretary for consideration and approval. Once the plan is adopted, a copy will be sent to the Federal Railroad Administration.

Wisconsin's rail plan builds on *Connections 2030*

Overall, the *Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030* builds on the analysis and recommendations identified in *Connections 2030*, Wisconsin's statewide, long-range, multimodal transportation plan. Adopted in 2009, *Connections 2030* defines Wisconsin's vision for transportation through the year 2030:

An integrated multimodal transportation system that maximizes the safe and efficient movement of people and products throughout the state, enhancing economic productivity and the quality of Wisconsin's communities while minimizing impacts to the natural environment.

Organized around seven themes, *Connections 2030* addresses system preservation, safety, economic growth, mobility and transportation choice, improving system efficiencies, environmental considerations and transportation security.

Within each of these themes is a series of policy and action statements to guide decision-makers as they consider future challenges and make transportation investment decisions.

Some of the rail-related recommendations include:

- Ensuring that freight rail remains a viable transportation mode for Wisconsin's shippers
- Implementing the Wisconsin component of the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative
- Continuing to support commuter rail studies
- Preserving the local road and bridge system
- Emphasizing the preservation of protected resources
- Emphasizing system connectivity to enhance mobility and choice
- Supporting economic growth and development through transportation system improvements and related business support

Early outreach shapes the rail plan

In drafting the state rail plan, WisDOT used input from several activities to help define rail-related issues:

- Online questionnaire and environmental justice telephone survey
- Stakeholder workshop
- Consultation meetings
- Rail freight carrier and port outreach

Online questionnaire and environmental justice telephone survey

In March 2010, WisDOT posted an online questionnaire to the rail plan Website. The questionnaire asked respondents to provide input on the needs and issues facing freight, intercity passenger and commuter rail through 2030. The intent of the questionnaire was to capture concerns, as well as the level of support for future investment in the state's rail transportation network.

Over 5,000 people participated, with responses received from each of Wisconsin's 72 counties. Overall, respondents support increased investment in freight, passenger and commuter rail. Issues identified for each area focused on funding, ongoing maintenance and operation costs, coordination, and the importance of multimodal connections.

To supplement the Web-based questionnaire results, WisDOT conducted a telephone survey of African American, Hispanic, Asian, urban low income, and rural low income populations, and persons aged 65 years and over. Over 500 telephone surveys were completed.

Approximately 50 percent of the survey respondents indicated that they live in a community that trains travel through. Of those who identified concerns, safety and noise were the most noted. The results indicate that most respondents in each demographic group would use passenger rail for trips over 200 miles. While respondents indicated a high level of support for expanding the state's passenger rail system, the personal importance attributed to passenger rail service was lower. This may be due in part to the limited service provided in most parts of the state. Most participants, with the exception of the African American and urban low income members, indicated that they do not feel commuter rail service is very important to them personally. Again, this may be due in part to the fact that commuter rail service in Wisconsin is limited to one station in Kenosha. African American and urban low income participants indicated that they would be interested in this type of service.

For more information, visit www.wisconsinrailplan.gov.

Stakeholder workshop

WisDOT hosted a one-day workshop on May 26, 2010 with invited rail stakeholders. Participants included representatives from freight rail companies, intercity passenger rail and commuter rail operators, shippers, transit and intercity bus operators, and interest groups. The purpose of the workshop was to educate participants regarding the development of the *Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030* and to ask participants for their feedback and comments on specific issues and needs regarding rail in Wisconsin.

Workshop attendees identified funding, public education and coordination as key issues. Concerns identified include: the capital-intensive nature of rail activities, the imbalance in the amount of inaccurate and negative information available in the media, and the importance of coordinating with the appropriate stakeholders to implement rail activities statewide.

Agency and Tribal Consultation

In preparing the draft plan, WisDOT consulted with state and federal environmental resource agencies such as the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection. The agencies identified issues related to air quality, safety, siting of railroad facilities such as rail yards, and potential impacts to the adjacent communities.

WisDOT also consulted with tribal governments having a historic interest in Wisconsin. Discussion focused on several issues ranging from concerns and support for revitalization of rail lines across the state, to the role of the tribes in decisions regarding rail lines that pass through tribal lands, to the potential costs and affordability of passenger rail services.

Rail freight carrier and port outreach

The department also conducted outreach with rail freight carriers and ports operating in the state. These efforts were focused on understanding the scope of their respective operations and identifying potential issues and needs.

***Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030* key recommendations**

The rail plan presents a comprehensive review of the current status of the state's network, potential future challenges and recommended actions. The rail plan also addresses safety and security, sustainable and livable communities, and funding.

Wisconsin's rail network is primarily owned and operated by private railroads, with a portion of the system owned by the state and several local Rail Transit Commissions and operated by private shortline and regional railroads. As a result, plan recommendations are presented with an understanding that implementation will require communication and coordination between all key stakeholders.

Freight rail

Wisconsin's freight rail network includes approximately 3,600 miles of railroads operated by 11 rail operators. The rail plan includes several recommendations regarding freight rail,

The state's railroads move 33 percent of Wisconsin's total freight by weight, or about 180 million tons annually. By 2030, freight rail shipping (by weight) is expected to grow 17 percent.

including:

- Work with railroads to ensure that appropriate rail service is provided to shippers statewide
- Acquire rail lines into public ownership, when appropriate, to preserve essential railroad service
- Continue to preserve, as appropriate, rail corridors for future use
- Support the creation of rail transit commissions to promote rail service preservation in northern Wisconsin
- Work with partners to define appropriate rail infrastructure improvement needs
- Fund publicly owned rail needs to meet changing industry standards
- Support efforts to improve connections between short-line railroads and other carriers



Map 1: Wisconsin's Rail System

Intercity passenger rail

Wisconsin is currently served by two intercity passenger rail routes operated by Amtrak:

- The *Hiawatha service* between Chicago and Milwaukee, with stops at General Mitchell International Airport in Milwaukee, Sturtevant, Wisconsin, and Glenview, Illinois
- The *Empire Builder* between Chicago and Seattle, Washington/Portland, Oregon, with stops in Milwaukee, Columbus, Portage, Wisconsin Dells, Tomah and La Crosse, Wisconsin

The Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030 recommends implementation of the Wisconsin component of the Midwest Regional Rail System. This will be accomplished in three phases:

- Phase 1: New service to Madison
- Phase 2: New service to Minneapolis-St. Paul
- Phase 3: New service to Green Bay



Map 2: Wisconsin's potential 2030 passenger rail network

As implementation moves forward, WisDOT will consider opportunities to expand intercity passenger rail service to other regions of Wisconsin not originally included in the Midwest Regional Rail System.

To assist with the implementation of intercity passenger rail service, WisDOT will:

- Continue to support the efforts of the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative
- Continue to partner with freight railroads when planning and implementing intercity passenger rail service
- Facilitate and encourage intermodal connections
- Continue to assist and coordinate with neighboring states on intercity passenger rail studies and projects that impact Wisconsin
- Fund the Rail Station Capital Assistance Program that may be used to upgrade existing stations and build new ones

To complement and extend the reach of new intercity passenger rail service, WisDOT will seek to implement the feeder bus routes that connect communities not directly served by train stations to the rail services.

Commuter rail

Currently, Kenosha is the only city in Wisconsin served by commuter rail. WisDOT envisions establishing fixed-guideway transit systems (including commuter rail) in Wisconsin's largest urban areas, providing a robust and environmentally friendly alternative to congested roadways. This will greatly increase transportation options and promote economic development.

To meet this vision, the rail plan recommends that WisDOT:

- Continue to provide support and technical expertise to advance and implement fixed-guideway transit projects
- Support the creation of new regional governing bodies – such as regional transit authorities with revenue-raising authority – to administer and fund regional transit systems
- Fund a capital and operating assistance program to implement fixed-guideway transit projects

Safety and Security

Safety continues to be one of WisDOT's fundamental missions. The department emphasizes safety in all of its efforts, from education and enforcement to engineering and emergency response. The plan identifies several key rail safety concerns, including crossings, quiet zones, and collisions and derailments. In addition, two issues that affect both safety and security are addressed: trespassing and shipment of hazardous materials. In response to these concerns, the plan recommends that WisDOT:

- Continue to work with the Office of Commissioner of Railroads and private railroads to identify crossing improvement needs or closures
- Discourage new at-grade crossings of potential passenger rail corridors
- Implement appropriate technologies in response to federal requirements
- Discourage trespassing along rail corridors

- Work with appropriate stakeholders to detect and deter potential security threats to the state's rail network

Sustainable and livable communities

In support of federal initiatives and the state's continued emphasis on preserving Wisconsin's unique character and quality of life, the rail plan identifies issues and recommended responses relative to sustainability and livability. Key policy recommendations include:

- Continue coordination with local governments in comprehensive planning efforts
- Encourage intermodal and multimodal connections
- Implement Wisconsin's component of the Midwest Regional Rail System
- Preserve the System to support freight mobility and future needs
- Work with the Office of the Commissioner of Railroads and private railroads to identify crossing improvement needs
- Develop guidance and procedures to discourage transportation activities from intensifying the spread of invasive species