

Report for ProRail Nebraska Board of Directors

Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission (MIPRC) Annual Meeting

St. Louis, MO (originating in Chicago)

September 27 through 29, 2016

Submitted by Bob Kuzelka (rkuzelka1@unl.edu) on October 15, 2015

The meeting began in Chicago with a brief tour of renovations underway at Union Station, and a ride on Amtrak's *Texas Eagle* (Chicago-San Antonio, Texas) to St. Louis. Aboard the train, commissioners, partners and allies heard about – and saw – ongoing work to upgrade the Chicago-St. Louis corridor to 110-mph service between Joliet and Alton by the end of 2017 or early 2018. They also received an update from Amtrak, with a special emphasis on state-supported routes.

The St. Louis portion of the meeting included a half-day trip on the state-supported *Missouri River Runner* to Kirkwood for a tour of that city's historic station (see photo, below) and presentations on how the city has embraced the station as both a gateway and popular civic space/downtown anchor; and on the success of the Missouri River Runner service and the [Missouri Passenger Rail Advisory Committee](#) (MORPAC).

Commissioners spent Wednesday afternoon and all of Thursday at the St. Louis City Center hotel hearing and discussing presentations from the MIPRC states on the status of their passenger rail programs/activities, along with reviews of MIPRC's past-year activities and the pending Midwest regional rail planning project with the Federal Railroad Administration. They also reviewed the Universities and Colleges Passenger Rail Survey and discussed steps to follow up on its findings and recommendations. Other topics included updates on federal passenger rail-related legislation and rulings, the Next Generation Equipment Committee and the status of new equipment coming to the Midwest.

Commission business included election of commission officers for FY 2017: Tim Hoeffner, director of the Michigan Department of Transportation's Office of Rail (and Governor Snyder's designee to the commission) as MIPRC's chair; Joan Bray, Missouri Gov. Nixon's designee to the commission, as vice chair; and Kansas Sen. Carolyn McGinn as financial officer.

MIPRC Annual Meeting Attendance: All of the MIPRC member states were present with appointed members except Nebraska. Elected official members were there from Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, North Dakota and Wisconsin. Nebraska and the non-member states of Iowa and Ohio had representation by partners or allies.

Member State Reports:

- Illinois – The meeting started with a Amtrak trip and on board presentation about the planning, work and progress on the Chicago- St. Louis hi-speed project
- Indiana – Work on Chicago to Indianapolis route

- Kansas – Completion of \$1 million in state funds for reconditioning of BNSF/AMTRAK line in western KA to insure that line is not relocated by AMTRAK south into OK and TX
- Michigan – Report on three passenger routes result in 10 round trips daily to MI destinations originating in Chicago
- Minnesota – Work on state rail plan
- Missouri – Status of Missouri River Runner route related to tourism and intermodal cooperation with adjacent hike/bike trails; included train trip to Kirkwood and historic restored and reused station and on Missouri Passenger Rail Advisory Committee
- North Dakota – Work on state rail plan due in 2016 and economic value of existing Amtrak service to state
- Wisconsin – Need for Amtrak service through Madison

Major Agenda Items:

Federal Update

- AMTRAK presentation by Derrick James and Jim Brzezinski about AMTRAK's developing strategic plan and promotional advertising; relations with on-line communities; discussed AMTRAK contractual relations with connecting bus lines; emphasis on state-supported routes (see MIPRC meeting report attachments)
- FRA's Midwest Multi State Rail Planning Project was not discussed to any length and only one FRA staff was in attendance.

MIPRC Activities and Actions

- Results of survey of students in colleges and universities on AMTRAK lines – questioned how institutions contacted and got cool “we can talk later” from Laura.
- Priorities are federal funding for long distance trains, continuation and development of intercity lines and create a dedicated source of federal funding.
- Report of the Next Generation Equipment Committee and status of new equipment coming to the Midwest.