



Ohio Rail Development Commission

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NEWS RELEASE

Ohio & Great Lakes Regional Rail Network Moves Up the Track

Officials see Cleveland rail transportation hub as a “bridge” for the nation’s rail system

Transportation officials from four states, along with representatives from Amtrak, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and Canadian rail officials, are meeting in Cleveland today to launch a study that could lead to Cleveland’s designation as a major hub in a national high-speed rail system.

Meeting at the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA) at 1299 Superior Avenue, transportation officials are launching a study of several potential high- and intermediate-speed rail corridors that will connect Cleveland with Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton, Toledo, Detroit, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Erie, Buffalo, Niagara Falls and Toronto.

“Rail transportation in America is at a crossroads and the prospects for a national high-speed rail system are more promising than ever,” said James Seney, executive director of the Ohio Rail Development Commission. “There is ample evidence that federal officials are warming to the idea of a national rail system – one that is built regionally by linking city-pairs and by creating “bridges” between regional networks. Ohio is well-positioned to be the bridge between already-proven eastern rail corridors and the emerging rail corridors of the Midwest region.”

Already, the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI), a joint venture between nine state transportation agencies, Amtrak and the FRA, has unveiled detailed plans and cost estimates for a 3,000-mile rail system with Chicago as its hub that will connect cities such as Detroit, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Kansas City, Minneapolis, Indianapolis, and Cincinnati at speeds from 80 mph to 110 mph.

“Studies already completed confirm that the Midwest region is ideally suited for high- and intermediate-speed rail,” said Mike Franke, an Assistant Vice President at Amtrak. “Over distances of several hundred miles, rail has proven to be faster, more comfortable and more productive than car travel. Additionally, it can compete with flying in time and cost while delivering passengers into the center of the region’s major cities.”

Building Markets, Linking Cities and Securing Ohio’s Future

The Ohio & Lake Erie Regional Rail Study being launched today will focus on the development of three regional passenger rail routes: (1) a Detroit to Pittsburgh corridor that runs through Toledo, Cleveland and possibly Youngstown; (2) a Cleveland-Buffalo-Toronto corridor; and (3) a Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati corridor that is already a federally designated high-speed rail corridor.

Conducted by Transportation Economics & Management Systems, Inc. (TEMS), this study will assess the ridership and revenue potential, identify capital and operating costs as well as technology requirements, and set out financial and implementation plans for each of the proposed corridors. In addition, the study will evaluate the existing rail infrastructure, analyze alternative routes and determine optimal future train speeds. Maryland-based TEMS provided consultant support for the development of the Midwest Regional Rail System.

“We are not setting out on our own to pursue some sort of ‘pie-in-the-sky’ high-speed rail vision,” said Don Damron of the Ohio Rail Development Commission. “To the contrary, we are preparing America’s heartland to play a crucial role in the revitalization of the nation’s rail network and we are ensuring that Ohio and its neighbors are positioned to take full advantage of any federal rail infrastructure program.”

According to Seney, a federal commitment to invest in the nation’s rail infrastructure will have massive benefits for passenger and freight transportation in Ohio, since the state’s rail lines are shared by both systems.

Development of the Cleveland hub will fill a large hole in a rail network for the nation’s most heavily populated areas. “Ohio is surrounded by emerging incremental passenger rail corridors, which together can form a national network connecting more than 20 states and two Canadian Provinces, with the Cleveland hub at its center,” Seney said.

“Northeast Ohio is blessed with a large number of corporate headquarters and an extensive railroad network, reflected David Goss, Senior Director for Transportation and Infrastructure of the Greater Cleveland Growth Association. “Development of a Cleveland Hub rail passenger system will bolster our status as a world-class region. It will help stimulate the creation of new jobs and new investment in Northeast Ohio – a fact supported by studies of the Chicago Rail Transportation Hub. And it will confirm once again that the Northeast Ohio region is the best location in the nation as we provide a bridge between the nation’s two busiest rail passenger centers.”

The benefits of connecting specific hub cities with 300- to 500-mile intermediate-speed corridors include substantially lower investments – by 30 to 50 percent. Intermediate-speed corridors can achieve travel times that are only slightly longer than those of high-speed rail, while using modern trains that incorporate all of the amenities, comfort and convenience of higher speed trains. Immediate-speed corridors have the capacity to move trains at 80 to 110 mph instead of the 150 to 180 mph commonly found on high-speed rail systems in the northeast and in Europe.

(MORE)

The development of the Cleveland hub will provide rail connections for more than 140 million people in the United States and Canada, with an estimated rail mileage of about 875 miles.

Participating in today's meeting are representatives from the Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio departments of transportation, metropolitan planning organizations, regional transit authorities, and city planning staff. Also participating are officials from Norfolk Southern, CSX, Amtrak, the Federal Rail Administration, and Canada's VIA Rail.

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