

## **MIPRC Year in Review**

Presented by Laura Kliewer, MIPRC Director, during 2018 Annual Meeting (10/4/18)

### **MIPRC 2017 Annual Meeting**

MIPRC held its 2017 Annual Meeting from October 9 to 11 in Wichita, Kansas. The meeting included presentations from member states on their passenger rail activities, an outlook for passenger rail at the federal level from Amtrak, an overview of Amtrak's long-distance passenger rail service in the Midwest and updates on federal funding for passenger rail from the Federal Railroad Administration, and on the FRA-led Midwest Regional Rail Planning Study.

The meeting also included a spotlight on efforts to extend Amtrak's *Heartland Flyer* service north from Oklahoma City to Wichita. Wichita has not had passenger rail service since 1979, but in 2016 Amtrak began offering bus connections from Wichita north to Newton, where passengers can connect to the *Southwest Chief*, and south to Oklahoma City. The bus service has been popular, and state and local officials hope to restore passenger rail service in the future.

Commission business included election of commission officers for FY 2018: Beth McCluskey, director of the Office of Intermodal Project Implementation at the Illinois Department of Transportation (and Gov. Rauner's designee to the commission) as MIPRC's chair; Tim Hoeffner, director of the Michigan Department of Transportation's Office of Rail (and Governor Snyder's designee to the commission) as vice chair; and Indiana Rep. Sharon Negele as financial officer.

The full meeting minutes, including copies of presentations, is in your packets.

### **Subcommittee on MIPRC's Long-Term Finances**

At last year's annual meeting, a subcommittee was created to look at MIPRC's long-term finances and explore ways to increase revenue. The subcommittee met via conference call, reviewed MIPRC's finances and focused on the MIPRC Partners program as a potential source of additional participation/ revenue. All of MIPRC's Partners were up for renewal in 2018, and the subcommittee focused on seeking renewal for existing MIPRC Partners and outreach to a number of prospective partners. We are pleased that most of MIPRC's existing partners have renewed at the three-year level. Partners who renewed include Quandel Consultants at the corporate level, and five at the non-profit level: Ohio Association of Regional Councils, Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority, SMART-Transportation Division, Teamsters Rail Conference, International Brotherhood of Teamsters; and the University of Illinois. We also welcome two new corporate partners this year, Siemens Mobility Division and WSP USA.

### **Nebraska Compact**

In 2015, there was an effort by some Nebraska legislators to repeal Nebraska's membership in the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact. MIPRC worked with Nebraska's MIPRC commissioners and ProRail Nebraska, and was able to fight back the repeal, but as a compromise, [LB317](#) was passed, which sunset Nebraska's membership this year. Since then, MIPRC has worked to try and get the sunset rescinded.

Since MIPRC's last annual meeting, MIPRC officers, staff and Sens. Quick and Walz worked together, along with ProRail Nebraska, to strategize and develop materials and testimony. Sen. Quick drafted legislation that would have reinstated the compact the day after it sunset, and a hearing was held January 23<sup>rd</sup>, at which MIPRC Chair Beth McCluskey and I testified. We also followed up with a number of committee members. Unfortunately, the legislation was stalled in committee, which currently means Nebraska will leave the compact in July of 2019. We hope to continue to work with MIPRC's Nebraska commissioners and others to reinstate the compact before the effective date of repeal.

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### **MIPRC DC Trip**

MIPRC had a very successful trip to DC in May. MIPRC Commissioners, partners and staff met with the head of Amtrak, Richard Anderson, and FRA Administrator Richard Batory. We also visited 39 Midwestern members of Congress who sit on passenger rail-related committees, and their staff, and held a briefing for House and Senate transportation-related committee staffers. MIPRC Commissioners and Partners who participated included Beth McCluskey from Illinois; Rep. Sharon Negele and Jim Stark from Indiana; Rep. Brad Ralph and Pete Meitzner from Kansas; Joan Bray from Missouri; Sen. Dan Quick from Nebraska; Rep. Kim Koppelman from North Dakota; Sen. Mark Miller from Wisconsin; Phil Pasterak and Anna Lynn Smith from WSP and Steve Morrison from Siemens.

### **Involvement in FRA-led planning study**

MIPRC is a key stakeholder in the Federal Railroad Administration-led long-term planning study for the Midwest. The goal of the Midwest Regional Rail Planning Study is to produce a 40-year framework for the Midwest intercity passenger rail network, including a prioritization of corridors and investment projects, a governance structure, and funding strategy. The FRA held four workshops last year between March and December to receive input from stakeholders.

During discussions of a governance structure for the region, attention increasingly focused on Midwest's unique position. Unlike other regions where FRA is conducting similar studies, the FRA and stakeholders agreed that the Midwest is unique in that it has an established governance structure, MIPRC. There was agreement that MIPRC's current structure and activities are working well, and there was strong support for the continuation of MIPRC as the Midwest's overall passenger rail governing body. Final discussions at the December workshop focused on the desire to expand MIPRC's role while balancing states' individual interests.

### **Letters of support for federal grant applications**

MIPRC wrote two letters of support for Infrastructure For Rebuilding America (INFRA) discretionary grant applications in our states: one for a \$160 million grant to help untangle the Midwest's worst rail junction, located on Chicago's south side grant (the Illinois Department of Transportation – along with the Chicago Department of Transportation, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, the Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways, and the region's freight railroads – applied on behalf of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program, or CREATE); and another for the Missouri Department of Transportation's application for a \$73 million grant to help replace the 127-year-old Merchants Bridge spanning the Mississippi River between Venice, Illinois and St. Louis, Missouri. INFRA grants were announced in June and CREATE was the recipient of \$132 million.

### **MIPRC Website**

MIPRC's website ([www.miprc.org](http://www.miprc.org)) continues to offer a variety of resources related to passenger rail development in the Midwest, including news, testimony, letters and information on both long-distance and corridor service across the region. News posts are also continually shared via social media, including Twitter (@MW\_Rail) and LinkedIn.

Jon Davis heads up the writing and sharing of our articles and other news – please contact him if you have ideas for articles.

I encourage you to follow us on Twitter if you are not doing so already, for not only MIPRC news, but for tweets and retweets on passenger rail happenings in the region and that effect the region.