

MIPRC 2021-22 Year in Review

Laura Kliewer, MIPRC Director

MIPRC 2022 Annual Meeting, Indianapolis, 11/17/22

Hello and welcome to Indianapolis. Thank you, Administrator Bose for your kind words. We look forward to working closely with you over the coming years.

After the seemingly interminable time of COVID isolation, we were elated to be able to meet at least partially in person for MIPRC's annual meeting last year. The meeting began with an FRA-led press conference at Chicago's Union Station, during which the release of the Midwest Regional Rail Plan was announced. Participants then took the Michigan state-supported *Wolverine* service to Detroit for the bulk of the meeting. Due to continued COVID restrictions at our meeting host site, TechTown on the Wayne State University campus, we had to limit in-person participation. So, we provided a virtual option, as well. In all, sixty-three commissioners, partners and allies (and your MIPRC staff) joined both in-person and online. Detroit proved to be a wonderful host, showing us a rebounding city with the potential to be a critical node in the Midwestern regional passenger rail network.

We had robust discussions about myriad new – and then, pending – federal initiatives and funding, and how MIPRC can and should position itself to take these new opportunities. You can recap those discussions in detail in the 2021 meeting minutes in your packets. In addition to re-electing Bob Guy, Arun Rao and Sharon Negele as officers for 2022, commissioners agreed to raise MIPRC's federal profile in 2022.

Firstly, we agreed to be a co-applicant with Amtrak for a grant to cover the Chargers' 5-year overhaul if a state can't do it. Or, if another state was willing to be the lead applicant, MIPRC would provide a letter of support. MIPRC ended up applying as a co-applicant with Amtrak for a State of Good Repair grant. Unfortunately, that application was not successful, so other opportunities will need to be explored.

Second, commissioners agreed that MIPRC should take steps to become a grant-eligible entity and establish a subcommittee of those familiar with the grant process to pursue a planning grant and begin considering staff resource/capacity questions. That group hit the ground running in January to begin developing the CRISI planning grant application – about which you'll hear more this afternoon – to advance the FRA's Midwest Regional Rail Plan.

In a nutshell, however, the subcommittee awarded MIPRC partner Quandel Consultants a contract to prepare that application – a decision ratified by an online meeting of the full Commission this past January. Amtrak was approached to be a partner in the grant application (spoiler: they agreed). That work has continued throughout 2022 and is about to culminate in submission of our application, which is due to the Federal railroad Administration on Dec. 1, a date suddenly just two weeks away.

Subcommittee meetings also included further discussion of MIPRC's potential need to expand our capabilities as a grant recipient and/or manager. Those discussions will continue as we navigate the still-new landscape created by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which became law just a year ago.

Speaking of the IJJA, MIPRC engaged in active conversations with the Federal Railroad Administration regarding how to implement two of the new programs it authorized.

In March, MIPRC coordinated its comments on the Corridor Identification and Development program with those of member state departments of transportation to show a united Midwestern voice. We

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stressed the need for consultation and cooperation with Amtrak, the need for guidance and technical assistance from the FRA and the need to use states' state development plans. We also shared thoughts on how the "pipeline" of corridor capital projects should work, and how selective the program should be.

We were happy to see many of those suggestions incorporated in the program as it was established in May, and then when the FRA provided more details on the program in September. You'll hear all about the Corridor Identification and Development program during Wynne Davis' presentation later this morning.

In September, MIPRC provided extensive background and input on the Interstate Rail Compacts program, drawing on our 22-year history to help the FRA set parameters for funding compacts' activities. We also offered advice to help FRA develop other regional compacts, noting the general parameters of establishing interstate compacts, and our specific strength which comes from the "buy-in" of member states' legislative and executive branches because they each have a voice in the organization's activities and governance.

Copies of these submissions can be found in your meeting packets.

Prior to that, In June, MIPRC was asked to present during an FRA educational webinar on interstate passenger rail compacts, during which I explained the history and structure of the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact and the commission.

I also gave a virtual presentation to the annual meeting of the Kansas Passenger Rail Coalition, a coalition of legislators and other passenger rail advocates led by Kansas state senator and MIPRC commissioner Carolyn McGinn.

In July, we were sad to see Arun Rao leave Wisconsin's DOT and, since no longer a MIPRC commissioner, resign as MIPRC's vice chair. Our sadness, however, was tempered by the fact that we lost him to Amtrak, and gained an able vice chair successor in Peter Anastor from Michigan DOT's Office of Rail.

Finally, many of our legislative commissioners last week were re-elected or successfully switched chambers. To them, we offer our congratulations and hope you will let your leadership know you want to continue serving as a MIPRC commissioner. To those whose legislative service is ending, thank you for your service and your work with MIPRC. We wish you well and hope to see you on an Amtrak Midwest-branded train soon.

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