

## **MIPRC 2023 Year in Review**

**Presented by Laura Kliewer, MIPRC director, on Sept. 18, 2023** (during MIPRC 2023 Annual Meeting)

The Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission just completed one of its most eventful years. Things kicked off with the commission's 2022 Annual Meeting, which took place Nov. 16-18 in Indianapolis.

During that meeting commissioners, partners and allies toured Amtrak's historic Beech Grove Maintenance Facility. Federal Railroad Administrator Amit Bose joined our 2022 annual meeting in person and addressed the group. In addition, as always, we had representatives from our member state DOTs update us on passenger rail activity in their states. Attendees also discussed the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act's passenger rail provisions, and plans for the commission to submit its first grant application for regional planning. The meeting also included presentations on the Rail Passengers Association's economic modeling program, Amtrak's master plan for Chicago Union Station and Indiana's passenger rail development goals. Meeting participants also considered whether to push for further reform of PRIIA Section 209.

In addition, commissioners gave final approval to MIPRC's 2023 budget and elected a new slate of officers – Kansas Sen. Carolyn McGinn as Chair; Peter Anastor, director of the Michigan Department of Transportation's Office of Rail, as Vice Chair; and Scott Rogers, director of governmental affairs and workforce director for the Eau Claire, (Wisconsin) Area Chamber of Commerce, as Financial Officer. We thank them for their service to the commission.

Please contact [miprc@miprc.org](mailto:miprc@miprc.org) if you would like the complete meeting minutes from the 2022 Annual Meeting.

Since our 2022 Annual Meeting...

Two weeks after the meeting (on Dec. 1, 2022), the Commission submitted its first federal grant application – for a \$5 million Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant for "Invest Midwest," our proposed plan for MIPRC, its member state departments of transportation and Amtrak to create a detailed long-term passenger rail plan for the entire Midwest, providing safe, reliable and more frequent service, new connections to rural and urban markets and reduced travel times between communities.

A big shout-out to Quandel Consultants for providing their time and expertise to write the application at a much-reduced rate. While the successful CRISI grants have yet to be announced, we expect an announcement any day.

In February, as the governing authority under which the Midwest equipment states (Illinois, Michigan, Missouri and Wisconsin) own, operate and maintain their fleet of locomotives and train cars, MIPRC joined Amtrak as a co-applicant for a Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Program capital overhaul grant application that will allow Amtrak and the states to make necessary maintenance improvements to the 33-unit Siemens Charger locomotives fleet. Amtrak is the lead applicant, as well as the sole grantee and project manager.

Then in July, MIPRC submitted a grant application for the new Interstate Rail Compacts Program.

This new federal program, authorized by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, is the first direct federal support offered to compact organizations like MIPRC and the Southern Rail Commission, and is a direct result of MIPRC's ongoing communication with federal officials and Midwestern members of Congress.

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If successful, this grant will allow MIPRC to increase its staff, rebuild its website and update its printed materials, improve and expand its communication and outreach, and help prepare MIPRC to evolve into the regional governance body envisioned in the FRA-led Midwest Regional Rail Plan of 2021.

For both applications, MIPRC relied on a subcommittee of commissioners and partners who dedicated much time and effort in developing the “asks” and language necessary for the federal grant process. We so appreciate everyone’s time, effort and dedication.

MIPRC continues its active participation in discussions of the IIJA-required Amtrak Long-Distance Service Study. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law directed FRA to conduct a study to evaluate the restoration of daily long-distance intercity rail passenger service and the potential for new Amtrak long-distance routes, as well as making current non-daily services into daily ones.

This effort, which the agency began at MIPRC’s 2022 Annual Meeting in Indianapolis, is ongoing. Through workshops and extensive submitted comments, MIPRC and its member state DOTs have identified several former routes that, if restored, would greatly strengthen the Midwest’s passenger rail network; along with segments of possible new routes that would bring greater geographic equity to the Amtrak’s long-distance network; and other improvements that would be beneficial, such as adding frequencies on current long-distance routes that only serve much of the Midwest late at night or very early in the morning.

MIPRC and its member state DOTs submitted [joint comments](#) to the FRA on the study in March and August.

MIPRC staff also spent quite a bit of time reviewing and writing letters of support for our state DOTs and a few other entities that applied for the first round of the FRA’s Corridor ID & Development Program, a program that holds great promise for helping spur a better way for new and improved passenger rail routes to develop. MIPRC wrote letters of support for:

Illinois:

- Chicago-St. Louis High-Speed Rail Corridor (*improvements*)
- Chicago-Quad Cities (*new service*)
- Illini/Saluki (Chicago-Carbondale) (*improvements*)
- Chicago-Rockford (*new service*)

Indiana:

- Chicago-Indianapolis (*improvements, increased frequencies*)
- Chicago-Ft. Wayne-Columbus-Pittsburgh\* (*new service; application was submitted by the city of Ft. Wayne, IN*)

Kansas:

- Extension of *Heartland Flyer* to Wichita and Newton, Kansas

Michigan:

- *Wolverine* (Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac) (*improvements, increased frequencies*)
- *Blue Water* (Chicago-Port Huron) (*improvements, increased frequencies*)
- *Pere Marquette* (Chicago-Grand Rapids) (*improvements, increased frequencies*)
- Extension of *Wolverine* across the U.S.-Canadian border to Windsor and, potentially, Toronto, Ont. (*new service*)

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Minnesota:

- *Northern Lights Express* (Minneapolis-Duluth, MN via Superior, W) (*construction, new service*)

North Dakota:

- *North Coast Hiawatha\** (*long-distance service restoration; application was submitted by the Big Sky Authority in Montana*)

Missouri:

- *Missouri River Runner* (St. Louis-Kansas City) (*improvements, increased frequencies*)
- Extension of *Carl Sandburg/Illinois Zephyr* service from Macomb, IL to Hannibal, MO
- Kansas City-St. Joseph (*Northwest Missouri*) (*new service*)
- Kansas City-Joplin-Springfield-Branson (*Southwest Missouri*) (*new service*)

Wisconsin:

- *Great River* (Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago) (*enhancements*)
- *Hiawatha* (*Chicago-Milwaukee*) (*increased frequencies*)
- Extension of *Hiawatha* (*new corridor to the Twin Cities via Madison and Eau Claire*)
- Extension of *Hiawatha* to Green Bay, WI

Again this year MIPRC's Director Laura Kliewer was invited to present at the Kansas Rail Coalition's 2023 meeting in January, chaired by Sen. McGinn, and was pleased to do so.

Other conferences she presented at include:

- The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) High-Speed Rail Seminar in March;
- the Greater Northwest Passenger Rail Summit in Boise, Idaho, in July, where she had been invited to talk to legislators and others who may be interested in forming an interstate passenger rail compact in that region. She talked about the structure of interstate compacts and offered MIPRC's compact language as a template for their effort; and
- the Midwest Rail Conference, in Toledo, Ohio, in August, where she joined Amtrak's Derrick James and FRA's Lyle Leitelt to talk about planning efforts. During that presentation, she stressed both MIPRC's and member states' regional planning efforts, including our Invest Midwest application, which you will hear more about later, and our state's Corridor ID applications, as well as how key restored, daily and new long-distance routes could significantly strengthen both the regional and national passenger rail network.

New/renewed legislative appointments were sought in January – legislative appointments are for two years and started mid-January of this year. We are excited to have several re-appointments and many new faces, also including some new gubernatorial appointments.

Last, but not least, we continue working with interested parties and legislators to encourage Iowa, Nebraska and Ohio to rejoin the compact. I have also been in communication with the South Dakota DOT, particularly regarding the FRA long-distance study and the passenger rail it could bring to South Dakota for the first time.

We encourage interested parties to check our website often ([www.miprc.org](http://www.miprc.org)) and to follow us on Twitter (@MW\_Rail).