

MIPRC 2024-25 Year in Review & 2025 Annual Meeting Preview

MIPRC Director Laura Kliewer

Presented 9/10/25 during MIPRC 2025 Annual Meeting in Kansas City, Missouri

Good morning, and welcome to Kansas City Union Station and the 2025 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission. We are very thankful to the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce for allowing us to use their boardroom for our meeting this year. I also want to give a special shout-out to the Missouri DOT staff – Bryan, Kena and Alex – for helping us plan this meeting, especially the very special day yesterday – the tour of Union Station, the ride on the *Missouri River Runner* to and from Lee's Summit, and the activities in Lee's Summit. Two other people – one a current MIPRC commissioner (and officer) and the other a former commissioner – were of invaluable help; Scott Smith and David Pearce. Bryan, Kena, Alex, Scott and David, can you please stand and be recognized?

MIPRC celebrates its 25th anniversary this year and I'm happy to provide this report on all that's happened since the 2024 annual meeting as well as to provide a brief preview of our activities today and tomorrow.

With the beginning of a new biennium, we had a lot of turnovers in commissioners as governors and legislative chambers made new appointments. We welcome all new commissioners to your first annual meeting. We hope you'll find it informative.

I should note that our 2025 officers' roster also changed, as Beth McCluskey's time as a MIPRC commissioner and chair came to an end in June, after our anniversary gala. She was replaced as Chair by previous Vice Chair Jennifer Murray of Wisconsin. Scott Smith of Missouri replaced her as Vice Chair. Pete Meitzner of Kansas remains MIPRC's financial officer. Beth provided nine years of service to MIPRC, for which we can't thank her enough. We thank Jen, Scott and Pete for stepping up in the middle of the year. Officers for 2026 will be chosen tomorrow during the "MIPRC Business" portion of the agenda.

Speaking of the gala, on June 12 at Chicago Union Station, the Commission hosted the MIPRC Invest Midwest 25th Anniversary Forum & Gala, named for the federal planning grant MIPRC was awarded last October under the federal Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements program.

The event drew approximately 110 participants from member state departments of transportation, partner and allied organizations, as well as commissioners present and past – including founding commissioners former Sen. Sheila Kiscaden of Minnesota and former Rep. Joan Bray of Missouri.

The afternoon forum included a speech on MIPRC's history; presentations from state DOT representatives on the history of passenger rail development in each of our member states; a leaders roundtable moderated by Beth McCluskey, with panelists Minnesota DOT Commissioner Nancy Daubenerger, Illinois DOT Secretary Gia Biagi, and Amtrak Vice President Jennifer Mitchell; and a presentation by Amtrak on their Chicago Hub Improvement Program – a multi-stage project to both improve capacity for trains as well as comfort and convenience for passengers.

Afterward, attendees toured Union Station before the evening gala and silent auction, which raised more than \$2,500 for a new MIPRC scholarship for college students in rail-related degree

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programs at Midwestern institutions. You will hear more about this subject later this afternoon from Jon.

The high-quality signage and marketing products for the event and its sponsors were created by Cherylyn Gnadt, MIPRC's graphics and marketing specialist hired under the Interstate Rail Compact grant awarded to MIPRC in March 2024. Cherylyn has been doing a wonderful job as part of MIPRC's team overall, and through providing new ideas and refreshing "old" graphics and creating new ones for the MIPRC "brand."

Speaking of "sponsors," we are very grateful to the four high-level, and top-notch sponsors who financially supported the MIPRC Invest Midwest 25th Anniversary event: Amtrak, who provided generous in-kind support, and three MIPRC Partners: HNTB, Quandel and SMART-TD. Can those who are here representing those entities please stand up and be acknowledged?

On another note, we have been very grateful for the federal Interstate Rail Compact program, which was created within the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and provides the first direct federal support offered to compact organizations like MIPRC. We are now a year into that two-year grant, and will talk more substantively about it, as well as MIPRC's regional planning grant, dubbed "Invest Midwest-Phase 1" – which is in the process of obligation – this afternoon.

The law, known officially as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, is up for reauthorization. We will be discussing MIPRC's proposed reauthorization principles this afternoon.

I hate to end on sour note but do want to inform you that we received notice in July that North Dakota has chosen to leave the compact effective July 2026. Mitigating this development somewhat, however, were legislative efforts in Iowa, Nebraska and Ohio to rejoin the compact. While they fell short of enactment, we hope to have good news for you on them in a future report.

To summarize, much of our work since our last annual meeting has been spent in meeting planning – planning for and carrying out the MIPRC Invest Midwest anniversary forum and gala, and this annual meeting.

We've also been keeping up with federal news; drafting – in communication with the staff of the American Association of State Highway & Transportation Officials' (AASHTO) Council on Rail Transportation (CORT) – the surface transportation reauthorization principles that we will look at this afternoon; carrying out, reporting on and working to obligate our federal grants, and keeping in regular communication with commissioners, partners and allies. We've also been "refreshing" our products and thinking of new ways to communicate as well as conducting the ongoing administrative work of the commission, such as securing new commissioners and budget work.

With that, I welcome any questions you may have.