



High Speed Rail Alliance

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MEDIA RELEASE

ILLINOIS GENERAL ASSEMBLY CREATES COMMISSION FOR HIGH-SPEED RAIL *Proposed Line & Feeder Network Connects St. Louis & Chicago with Rockford, Moline, Peoria & Decatur*

CHICAGO -- The Illinois legislature has sent Gov. J.B. Pritzker [HB 0399](#) which would create the High-Speed Railway Commission. It would be tasked with developing a “statewide plan for a high-speed rail line and feeder network connecting St. Louis, Missouri and Chicago, Illinois, that includes current existing Amtrak and Metra services, connects the cities of Rockford, Moline, Peoria and Decatur, and uses inter-city bus service to coordinate with the rail line.”

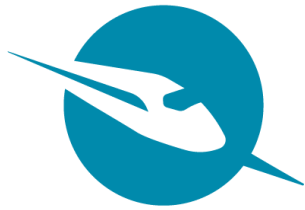
“The commission will provide a forum that the Illinois Department of Transportation can use to go from its current wish-list of projects to a true, statewide plan,” said Rick Harnish, executive director of the High Speed Rail Alliance. “HSRA has been an advocate for creating this commission for more than three years. This is a major step forward for our alliance and for the nation.”

HSRA [envisions a plan](#) that would modernize intercity and commuter trains, transit systems and buses -- and integrate them into a connected network, with a 220-mph high-speed trunk line to tie the statewide network together.

“We are far past diminishing returns from investing in highways,” Harnish said. “They are a big expense for drivers, cities and municipalities, and there’s really no way to improve on that system. Trains could be a game changer. People could stay where they are and still earn a living. Companies like Caterpillar and ADM would still be here.”

The alliance, which initiated and helped draft the bill, says that, when done right, with other railroads, roads and walkways going over or under the tracks, high-speed rail is twice as fast as driving and more convenient than short flights.

“The timing of the legislation is opportune, with the Biden Administration pushing hard for more rail funding and travel rebounding as the country emerges from the pandemic,” said Joseph P. Schwieterman, Director, Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development DePaul University. “Forming the commission gives the high-speed rail movement added momentum and greater opportunity to build the intergovernmental collaborations needed to move complex projects forward.”



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The bill was sponsored by Sen. Steve Stadelman, D-Rockford, and Rep. Marty Moylan, D-DesPlaines.

“Investing in a high-speed rail network gives people new options for traveling quickly and safely across the state,” Stadelman said. “With that comes economic growth, which is why connecting Rockford to Chicago though rail has always been one of my top priorities.”

Stadelman credited Harnish and the High Speed Rail Alliance “for helping develop and pass this legislation, which ultimately will provide a statewide masterplan to modernize rail travel and carry Illinois far into the future.”

Rep. Moylan points out that high-speed rail is also an essential element on the path toward a clean-energy economy.

“We must look toward a future where the jobs we create are moving us forward to a cleaner environment,” he said. “High-speed rail is a significant leap forward in that direction. A statewide network that feeds into the high-speed backbone will significantly increase the ridership and make the tired rail network more cost effective for passengers. Growth in the passenger rail system relieves the burden of cars on the highway system, removing the volume of cars from the highways and decreasing the carbon dioxide burden on the climate. And while it is doing that, it will help tie the state of Illinois and its people more tightly together, becoming a force for uniting the urban north with the rest of our great state.”

The law requires the commission’s plan to include a ridership study, findings and recommendations concerning a governance structure, frequency of service and implementation. An annual report would go to the General Assembly and the governor no later than December 31st of each year.

"This legislation is an essential step toward development of a safe, efficient, and environmentally sustainable 21st-century transportation system for Illinois," said Christopher P.L. Barkan, Professor and George Krambles Director, Rail Transportation and Engineering Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. "Such a system will fundamentally transform Illinois citizens' mobility and bolster the state's economy. It will also transform our higher education system by enabling fast, convenient travel between the three University of Illinois campuses. Beyond the educational benefits, this will also support the objectives of the University's Design Partners Institute <https://dpi.uillinois.edu>. I hope the Commission will soon get underway and quickly complete their efforts so the real work of planning, design and construction can begin."



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The commission will be composed of appointees by the governor, the four top leaders in the General Assembly, the Transportation secretary, chairs of the Illinois State Toll Highway

Authority, Interstate Commerce Commission and Metra board of directors, the Chicago mayor, a rail workers union, a rail-industry trade group, the Metropolitan Mayors and Managers Association, Illinois Railroad Association, the University of Illinois System, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, the Illinois Municipal League, the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District and regional planning agencies from the Rockford, Bloomington and Metro East (St. Louis) areas. The commission is authorized to work from the bill's signing through 2026.

About

The High Speed Rail Alliance is a growing community working to bring the game-changing power of fast, frequent and affordable trains to North America. We know that high-speed trains, integrated with expanding transit networks, will revitalize cities, towns and regions by making visits to family, friends and business partners easier, more productive and more affordable. And they will dramatically reduce carbon emissions in the process. For more information go to <https://www.hsrail.org/>.

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