State Rail Plan Vision

• Network of passenger rail services connecting Minnesota’s economic centers to each other and Midwest States

• Increased Mobility

• Enhanced economic development opportunities
Passenger Rail Goals

- Advance corridors incrementally to build ridership and system advantages, leaving open all future options for viable improvements.
- Continue to participate with the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative States.
- Develop an intrastate intercity passenger rail network connecting the Twin Cities with viable service to major outlying regional centers.
- Develop all services with the ultimate goal to connect to both the Target Field Station and St. Paul Union Depot.
Key Accomplishments

Passenger Rail Program

2009 - $26 Million in funding

New Stations

• Saint Paul Union Depot
• Investments in Target Field Station
  • Right of way
  • Vertical circulation

Intercity Passenger Rail Planning Activities

• Midwest Regional Rail Initiative HSR corridor
• Twin Cities – Milwaukee – Chicago (TCMC)
• Minneapolis – Duluth/Superior (NLX)
Twin Cities to Milwaukee High Speed Rail Corridor to Chicago

• Builds upon the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative, Nine – state Chicago hub network of passenger rail corridors
• Longer term vision, with some corridors achieving top speeds of 110mph: Chicago – Detroit, Chicago – St. Louis

• Objectives
  • 6 round trips daily, up to 110mph, travel time under 6 hours from St Paul to Chicago
  • Evaluate only the one build alternative along with the no-build alternative
  • Identify environmental consequences and measures necessary to mitigate environmental impacts

• Current Status
  • Updated ridership forecasts and operations modeling
  • Refine the purpose and need for the project
  • Agreement from FRA on the service alternative
  • Estimated completion – December 2017
Feasibility study for adding a second daily intercity passenger train between the Twin Cities (or St. Cloud) and Chicago, IL completed by Amtrak in 2015.

The purpose of a second daily train is to offer more options to travelers in the corridor by providing better eastbound reliability and increased train frequency.

The feasibility study recommended initial service start up between Union Depot, St. Paul and Union Station, Chicago along the existing Empire Builder route and stations stops (plus Milwaukee Airport stop).
• Partnership with WisDOT, RCRRA, La Crosse APO, Mn. HSR Commission

• Completing 1st phase of the environmental work, rail capacity modelling, integration with existing Hiawatha service ridership and revenue forecasts and capital cost estimates.

• Service could begin as early as 2020 - 2021.
Northern Lights Express (NLX)

• Intercity passenger rail service
• Four round trips/day
• Connects Minneapolis and Duluth
  • Coon Rapids
  • Cambridge
  • Hinckley
  • Superior
• 150 miles
• Existing BNSF tracks
• 90-110 mph
• Under 2 hour DT-DT travel time
• 2009 Feasibility Study

• Alternatives analysis studies complete in 2012

• Tier 1 Environmental Assessment completed, FONSI – 2013

• Completion of PE/NEPA Phase – June 2017
  • Financial Plan – Dec 2016
  • Service Development Plan – March 2017
  • Tier 2 Project Level EA – June 2017

• Final environmental approval – November. If funding for final design and construction is received in a timely manner, service could start as early as January 2020.
St. Cloud to Minneapolis Amtrak Demonstration Proposal

• Proposal by the Governor’s office to conduct a $2 million, 3-6 month demonstration of intercity rail service on the corridor
  • St. Cloud to Target Field Station
  • Outside of current Northstar schedules
  • No intermediate stops - platform/trackage rights issues

• Anticipated outcomes
  • Data on exclusive St. Cloud to Mpls. demand
  • Integration with current freight/commuter rail services on the corridor
  • Inclusion of Target Field Station in Amtrak’s nationwide reservation system
  • Assessment of operational needs, equipment, crew training and platform integration at Target Field Station
Passenger Rail Program Funding Status

• Office general fund appropriations through the current 2018-2019 biennium

• 2018 G. O. bond fund request - $11 million (proposed by MnDOT, not yet approved by the Governor’s Office)
  • TCMC - Requesting $1 million to complete environmental work and service planning and $3 million for the state’s share of final design.
  • NLX -$5 million for State’s share of final design work and any supplemental environmental documentation.
  • $2 million for demonstration project(s) and/or initial project work for “new” corridor projects (TBD)

• NLX TIGER Grant submission - $10 million for 16 rural grade crossing improvements for NLX
Questions?

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MnDOT Passenger Rail Program  
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