Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030

SUMMARY

Introduction

Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030 identifies rail issues that reflect the views of Wisconsin citizens, businesses and government officials. The plan includes a number of key parts, including a statewide vision for freight, intercity passenger and commuter rail; and an inventory of Wisconsin's rail system, rail service and rail facilities. The System-plan Environmental Evaluation (SEE) identifies statewide system-level environmental impacts that may result from implementing the plan. *Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030* serves as a guide for decision-makers through 2030. It is a requirement that it be updated every five years to keep it current.

Plan materials are available on the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) *Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030* website.

Paper or electronic copies are available from:

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Purpose

- Build upon *Connections 2030,* Wisconsin's adopted multi-modal long range plan.
- Meet federal requirements and position Wisconsin to qualify for future federal rail funds
- Present a high level review of recommendations relative to freight, passenger and commuter rail
- Reflect Wisconsin's future plans for passenger rail and more fully develop policies for freight and commuter rail
- Continue state emphasis on supporting economic growth, and improving the state's competitiveness regionally and globally
- Define a long-range investment program of projects

Overview: content, policies & actions
Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030 comprises 12 chapters. Several chapters include background technical and historical information about rail service in Wisconsin. The three types of rail service examined in the plan are:

- Intercity passenger rail: longer distance travel for people by rail. Amtrak currently provides this service
- Commuter rail: shorter travel for people by rail between cities or within a county
- Freight rail: movement of goods and materials like coal, wood, agricultural and manufactured products

The plan also discusses safety and security issues, as well as livable and sustainable communities.

The following is a short summary of plan recommendations for the different types of rail service, safety and sustainability.

Intercity passenger rail
Intercity passenger rail recommendations were developed to address system issues and needs including:
- Increased demand for passenger rail service
- Integration and coordination between rail modes
- Preservation of rail lines for future service needs

Recommendations
- Continue to support and improve intercity passenger rail service on existing corridors. These corridors are between Milwaukee and Chicago and between Milwaukee and Minneapolis-St. Paul
- In the long-term, implement the state component of the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI) that may add service to more communities and more corridors in Wisconsin
- Continue to assist and coordinate with neighboring states on intercity passenger rail studies and projects that impact Wisconsin
- Continue to partner with freight railroads when planning and implementing intercity passenger rail service to avoid or minimize traffic conflicts
- Facilitate and encourage intermodal connections between all the ways people travel
- Fund the Rail Station Capital Assistance Program that may be used to upgrade existing stations and build new ones

In addition, there is an inventory and evaluation of Wisconsin's existing Amtrak stations. It identifies needs to modernize and make stations fully accessible to those with disabilities.

Commuter rail recommendations
- Continue to provide support and technical expertise to fixed-guideway transit projects begun by local communities. Fixed-guideway transit may include bus rapid transit (buses with reserved lanes and other characteristics), commuter rail (trains) or streetcars
- Work with the legislature and local governments to examine options for transit governance, local funding and revenue-raising authority for local or regional transit systems
- Support and provide funding for planned commuter rail projects in Wisconsin's largest urban areas

Freight rail recommendations
- Work with railroads to ensure that appropriate rail service is provided to shippers statewide
- Acquire rail lines into public ownership, when appropriate, to preserve essential railroad service
- Continue to preserve, as appropriate, rail corridors for future use
- Support the creation of rail transit commissions to promote rail service preservation in northern Wisconsin and elsewhere
- Work with partners to define appropriate rail infrastructure improvement needs
- Fund publicly owned rail needs to meet changing industry standards
- Support efforts to improve connections between short-line railroads and other carriers

Safety and security recommendations
- Work with others to identify and address rail safety and security concerns
- Discourage new at-grade crossings on potential passenger rail corridors

Livable and sustainable communities plan recommendations
- Continue coordination with local governments in comprehensive planning efforts
- Encourage connections between modes of travel

Development/public participation
To help the department organize the outreach effort, WisDOT developed and followed the *Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030* Public Participation Plan. Outreach followed a

consultation process with state and federal agencies, tribes, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and regional planning commissions (RPCs). In addition, there were specific outreach activities to low income and minority populations, as well as people aged 65 years and older and people with disabilities.

Other outreach activities taking place during the plan development and review process include:

- *Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030* website which has links to all chapters of the final plan
- Web-based questionnaire. See Appendix 2-A, *Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030* Online Questionnaire Results, for more details
- Telephone questionnaire. Over 500 telephone surveys were conducted. Six specific groups were contacted: African American, Hispanic, Asian, urban low income, rural low income and respondents aged 65 years and over. See Appendix 2-B, *Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030* Environmental Justice Telephone Survey for more details
- Consultations with Tribal representatives, environmental resource agencies, regional and metropolitan transportation planning agencies and other stakeholders
- Public hearing on the final draft plan

Review and consideration of revisions to the draft rail plan are the culmination of a public involvement process that began with the development of *Connections 2030.* The majority of comments were general in nature, indicating support for the plan without suggesting any major changes or suggesting only minor technical changes. A large majority of the suggested changes pertain to intercity passenger rail. Other comments concern funding, economic development and commuter rail.

Based in part on this feedback, WisDOT staff made minor revisions to the draft plan to clarify wording and correct technical details. Comments suggesting the final plan be updated with more recent data were noted. These changes were not added to the final draft plan but will be considered during the development of the five-year update to *Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030*.

The revisions incorporated into the final plan are focused on two topic areas:

- Addition of language in several chapters to acknowledge increases in rail shipment of frac sand and oil and the impacts on the transportation system

- Clarification of language in Chapter 6 regarding intercity passenger rail corridors and options for intercity passenger rail service in the long-term (through the 2030 plan horizon)

Other final changes included minor editing and formatting revisions to ensure consistency and improve readability throughout the plan.

More information, including a copy of the public participation plan, is available on the *Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030* website.