

Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study

Midwest Regional Working Group Meeting 3

Date: February 14, 2024, 9 am - 4 pm CST

Location: Mid-America Regional Council – 600 Broadway Boulevard Ste 200, Kansas City, MO

1. Introduction

Under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (IIJA), FRA is conducting a study to evaluate the restoration of daily intercity passenger rail service along:

- any Amtrak Long-Distance routes that were discontinued; and
- any Amtrak Long-Distance routes that occur on a nondaily basis.

FRA may also evaluate potential new Amtrak Long-Distance routes, including with specific attention provided to routes in service as of April 1971 but not continued by Amtrak.

As part of the study, FRA is engaging with State Departments of Transportation (DOTs), Amtrak, Class I Railroads, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), regional passenger rail authorities, and local officials and listening to stakeholders, including transportation and rail partners, federally recognized tribes, and the broader stakeholder community, as we evaluate how to better connect people with long-distance rail services.

So far, FRA has hosted three of four total rounds of regional working group meetings across the United States, in six separate regions, to engage these stakeholders. This third round of meetings was held in February 2024, with the Midwest regional meeting taking place on February 14. The purpose of this round of meetings was to brief stakeholders about the progress of the study; inform participants of the methodology for developing routes, route schedules, and cost estimates; review preferred routes; and receive feedback on prioritization concepts for implementation timeframes and ongoing collaboration and planning.

The meeting was held both in person in Kansas City, Missouri, as well as online for virtual participants. Each regional working group meeting followed a similar agenda, which is summarized below:

- Welcome and Introductions
- Study Overview – What We’ve Heard So Far
- Route Development and Evaluation Methodology
- Discussion of Route Development and Evaluation Methodology
- Identification of Routes
- Discussion of Route Identification
- Approach for Development of Route Service
- Development of Capital and Operations & Maintenance Cost Estimates
- Prioritization and Implementation Feedback
- Ongoing Collaboration and Planning

This summary provides both an overview of the information shared at the Midwest regional working group meeting and an overview of meeting attendee feedback and conversations that occurred throughout the day.

2. Welcome and Introductions

The Midwest regional working group meeting began with a welcome from FRA, followed by a review of housekeeping and safety information. Next, in-person and virtual attendees introduced themselves, and the

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study team reviewed the meeting agenda and objectives. Regional working group participants in attendance, both in-person and virtually, are listed at the end of this summary.

Figure 1. Participants at Midwest Regional Working Group Meeting 3 on February 14 in Kansas City, Missouri



3. Study Overview and What We've Heard So Far

FRA began by providing meeting attendees with an overview of the study scope and what had occurred since the last round of regional meetings in July 2023. FRA detailed the legislative direction for the study, which will result in a report to Congress that includes recommendations for preferred options for restoring or enhancing long-distance service, a review of funding options, estimated costs and public benefits of long-distance service enhancement or restoration, and a prioritized inventory of capital projects to restore or enhance service. The overview gave an opportunity for participants to understand the study's objectives and FRA's vision for using their feedback in the future.

Next, the study team provided a summary of feedback received during the second series of regional meetings and the comments received from the study website. The study team gave an overview of comments as they pertained to geographic and service priorities.

4. Route Development and Evaluation Methodology

Next, the study team presented attendees with the methodology used to develop and evaluate potential routes. This was approached in three sections. First, the team discussed the methodology used to develop potential new long-distance routes, followed by a description of the methodology used to evaluate them.

The methodology for developing potential routes was informed by the four IIJA legislative considerations that guide the study: link and serve large and small communities, advance the economic and social well-being of the United States, provide enhanced connectivity, and reflect public engagement and local and regional support. Routes were developed to address metropolitan area travel flows, rural accessibility, and geographic

coverage/network connectivity. The methodology also considered stakeholder input and discontinued long-distance routes. This resulted in a range of route options for evaluation.

To evaluate route options, the team utilized criteria that aligned with the legislative considerations, including:

- Metropolitan Area Travel Flows
- Rural Accessibility
- Geographic Coverage/Network Connectivity
- Stakeholder Input

The study team also leveraged knowledge and experience of rail planning and considered the previously discontinued routes to evaluate routes.

5. Discussion of Route Development and Evaluation Methodology

One attendee asked for clarification about the rural considerations that the study team made, noting that localities won't benefit simply from a train passing through. They also asked how large the rural catchment areas were in the analysis. The study team clarified that communities were counted as being served if they were within a 30- or 50-mile catchment area, depending on whether the existing station or former station location was located in a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) or a non-MSA area. For entirely new segments where long-distance passenger rail has not operated previously, a 30- or 50-mile catchment area was placed around the segment, depending on where the segment is in an MSA or non-MSA area.

Another attendee asked the study team to elaborate on the extent of their tribal engagement, and how discussions with tribal stakeholders informed their evaluation. The study team responded that they have invited tribal representatives to each regional working group meeting. They noted that FRA has hosted a series of briefings with tribal representatives that had expressed interest based on previous outreach. The attendee suggested that FRA collaborate with state governments for further tribal outreach, which would allow the team to leverage states' existing relationships with federally recognized tribes. Another attendee also asked the study team if they had a record of the number or percentage of federally recognized tribes that the study team had contacted. The study team responded that they have kept track of all communications and have made multiple attempts to reach to tribes but did not have the estimate during the meeting.

An attendee asked the team to provide more information about how the team quantifies their engagement feedback. The study team responded that after each series of regional meetings comments from stakeholders and the public are gathered, reviewed, and categorized.

6. Identification of Routes

After discussing methodology, the study team presented the proposed network of preferred routes map to the working group. The map showed the proposed preferred routes illustrated on top of the baseline map of existing service. The restoration of daily Cardinal and Sunset Limited passenger rail service was assumed when identifying the proposed network of preferred routes. The 15 proposed preferred routes were:

- Chicago - Miami
- Dallas/Fort Worth - Miami
- Denver - Houston
- Los Angeles - Denver
- Phoenix - Minneapolis/St. Paul
- Dallas/Fort Worth - New York
- Houston - New York

- Seattle - Denver
- San Antonio - Minneapolis/St. Paul
- San Francisco - Dallas/Fort Worth
- Detroit - New Orleans
- Denver - Minneapolis/St. Paul
- Seattle - Chicago
- Dallas/Fort Worth - Atlanta
- El Paso - Billings

The study team then outlined key takeaways from the comparison between the baseline network and preferred network, which included:

- 45 million additional Americans reached by rail
- 61 additional Metropolitan Statistical Areas served
- 91% of all U.S. higher education institutions served
- 75 total National Parks, Recreation Areas, and Preserves served
- 43% increase in rural and transportation-disadvantaged populations served
- 74% of previously unserved populations on tribal lands served
- 23,200 long-distance route miles added
- 86% of all U.S. medical centers served

Please see the regional working group presentation at <https://fralongdistancerailstudy.org/meeting-materials/> for additional information and data descriptions related to these takeaways.

7. Discussion of Route Identification

During the presentation of the preferred routes, the working group discussed and provided feedback on the routes.

After presenting the identified route from Dallas/Fort Worth - New York, an attendee asked why the route does not go farther north to provide service to Newton, Kansas, and Kansas City, Missouri, which would reinstate a segment of the Lone Star route. This could provide a north south connection from the Midwest to Houston. The study team responded that the preferred route was chosen based on the evaluation criteria – it best addresses the evaluation criteria for travel demand and rural accessibility. The attendee also noted that the proposed network of preferred routes does not provide an east-west route connection within the Midwest region except for connecting routes through Chicago.

Another attendee asked why the proposed Dallas/Fort Worth - New York route goes east from Columbus to Pittsburgh instead of northeast through Cleveland. The study team responded that the route option through Cleveland was considered, but that route did not perform as well considering the evaluation criteria. Several meeting participants advocated for a corridor that connects Cincinnati, Columbus, and Cleveland in Ohio.

An attendee asked the study team whether their data included any projected revenue income from the different routes. The attendee noted that having an idea of what each route's revenue per dollar invested would be could help to prioritize routes. The study team responded that the study's route selection was based on potential travel demand data, not ridership/revenue forecasting. Ridership and revenue data will be considered in the future prioritization process.

Another attendee asked whether, in addition to the criteria that centers on broadened rail service coverage, the study factored in the buildability and practicality of implementing routes. The study team responded that constructability and implementation were not considered in the evaluation criteria. An engineering review was conducted for the selected routes to confirm feasibility. The team added that the preferred routes were based on

the North American Rail Network where eligible tracks are main line track, branch line track, or disused track. However, more coordination and analysis with host railroads would be needed to fully understand different infrastructure needs to support operations as part of further analysis after the completion of this study.

During the presentation of the Denver - Minneapolis/St. Paul route, an attendee noted that the route was one of the most important in terms of rural rail service. They asked whether FRA would take the lead on developing the corridor as opposed to the state governments. The federal government provides support for long distance rail, and future planning efforts could review additional corridor development stakeholders and needs.

An attendee noted that the section of the Denver - Minneapolis/St. Paul route between Sioux Falls and Minneapolis/St. Paul appears to follow a BNSF route, but that they think there are more alignments that could provide service to more metropolitan areas. The attendee requested that the team consider different alignments for that segment.

An attendee requested that the study team review a previously discontinued route between Fargo and Minneapolis/St. Paul through Willmar, Minnesota. The first attendee also observed that the route does not provide strong north-south connections, which would lead to individual states having a responsibility to provide those connections.

While the group reviewed the Denver - Houston route, an attendee noted the lack of service to Wichita, Kansas – the largest city in that state. The study team noted that Wichita is circuitous for a Denver-Houston route.

An attendee suggested that the team consider opportunities to split routes and allow them to go to multiple different endpoints. The study team responded that at this point in the study the preferred routes do not have split service. As these routes are further developed, split service could potentially be included in service in the future as part of further analysis after the completion of this study.

8. Approach for Development of Route Service

Once the study team reviewed the preferred routes, they presented the development of conceptual run times, which will eventually inform conceptual schedules. These conceptual run times and schedules will be used to inform cost estimation, travel demand estimation, and future investment analysis. The study team then gave an overview of the conceptual run times developed for each preferred route.

One attendee asked whether acceleration and deceleration times were factored into the team's analysis of run times. The study team said that the average speed was calculated from actual Amtrak schedules for station-to-station travel times for long-distance routes. More specific speeds and dwell times could be analyzed on a route-by-route basis as part of future service development plans after completion of this study.

During the presentation of the Phoenix - Minneapolis/St. Paul route, an attendee noted that there is a strong desire in Arizona for rail connections with Tucson and Phoenix. They also brought it to the group's attention that there is currently a potential bill in the Arizona House of Representatives that, if passed, would prevent the state from accepting any federal funds for rail. Another attendee asked why the route didn't pass through Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and instead went straight from Amarillo, Texas, to Wichita, Kansas. The study team responded that the selected route restores the discontinued San Francisco Chief between Albuquerque and Wichita and that a route connecting Amarillo and Oklahoma City would be circuitous. The attendee advocated for a review of the route in order to consider a connection to Oklahoma City.

An attendee suggested that the study team share the benefit of the smaller trips that make up the longer routes, because most riders will not be riding an entire long-distance route end-to-end. Two attendees also suggested that the run time from Minneapolis/St. Paul to Kansas City may be shorter than what the study team had calculated.

An attendee urged the study team to review connections with existing passenger services with complementary capacity when creating conceptual schedules, in addition to ensuring that schedules adequately serve the most-

populous city pairs. The attendee also asked the study team to look at existing service times to better align daytime service.

9. Development of Capital and Operations & Maintenance Cost Estimate

Next, the study team gave an overview of the methodology used to develop capital cost estimates in addition to operations and maintenance (O&M) estimates.

The overview of the capital cost estimate methodology included a description of different types of passenger service-specific project costs associated with implementing new long-distance routes. Cost estimates will be developed using the FRA Budgeting Tool's Standard Cost Categories (SCC) system, which classifies different types of costs into different categories. The methodology to estimate capital costs was developed to provide high-level order-of-magnitude capital costs to support early project planning. Capital cost estimates include 35% allocated contingency to address project risks. Capital cost estimates will include passenger-service-specific project costs, including track upgrades, stations, maintenance facilities, and signaling/communications/positive train control, and rolling stock. It does not include capacity improvement projects.

To estimate O&M costs, the team used Amtrak Performance Tracking statistics for fiscal year 2019 and applied weighted average unit costs for existing long-distance routes to preferred routes with the same number of nights and days operated per week. The O&M cost estimates will also be reported as a range. The low- and high-range of cost estimates for O&M will reflect the variation in marginal unit costs by operating statistic of existing long-distance routes.

10. Interactive Session: Prioritization and Implementation Timeframes Feedback

After the presentation of cost estimate methodology, the meeting transitioned to an interactive activity using Mural, an online interactive tool. The activity allowed meeting attendees (both in the room and participating online) to provide input on route prioritization, and which considerations they thought were the most important. Prioritization considerations were sorted into five categories: public and rider benefits, capital cost estimates, O&M cost estimates, complexity in development and implementation, and consistency with intercity passenger rail projects.

During the interactive activity, attendees placed dots onto virtual sticky notes that listed the categories for consideration, allowing for a visualization of which categories attendees thought were most important. The attendees were also asked to share other examples of considerations that they thought were important.

The interactive activity revealed that the Midwest regional working group participants viewed “public and rider benefits” and “complexity in development and implementation” to be the two most important categories to consider when prioritizing implementation of routes.

An attendee said that it is important to let real benefits (better community connections, economic development) drive the conversation as opposed to “manufactured” benefits like increased construction jobs.

One of the attendees suggested that it may make sense to implement segments of the routes as opposed to entire routes, to allow for quick benefits to riders.

Another attendee stressed the importance of communicating with the public that projects will be implemented no matter where they sit on the priority list, and to approach implementation in a way that signals to the public that the projects have been truly committed to, no matter where a route sits on the prioritization list.

An attendee spoke about a concern that there are route hubs in cities like Cheyenne and Dallas/Fort Worth, but not in the Midwest, where more rail connection to the east is needed. They suggested more routes originating in Kansas City.

During a discussion about potential timeframes for implementation, an attendee pointed out that many people will probably be disappointed in the length of time it takes to implement new passenger rail, especially older people who are advocating for services. Another attendee added that, even if the proposed implementation timeline is not widely popular, it is a reasonable timeframe. The first attendee agreed that it was reasonable but cautioned that the public will still likely be disappointed. Another attendee said that because the projects will be utilizing existing rail some routes should not take as long. In response, an attendee suggested that the timeline estimates should be filtered through an analysis that determines the relative complexity of each unique route. There was also a recommendation to prioritize specific segments as opposed to whole routes.

After being asked by an attendee if some timelines can be shortened due to the use of existing tracks, the study team noted that, although the tracks are already in place, the design and planning process will still include significant upgrades to tracks, stations, and other infrastructure. The study team also explained that the scope of the study is high-level and that they do not have detailed information on unique planning needs for each route.

Outcomes of the interactive activities are available on the [project website](#).

11. Ongoing Collaboration and Planning

After the interactive activities, the study team presented ideas for ongoing collaboration and interaction with other organizations and stakeholders. In the last meeting series, participants were asked how FRA and Amtrak could coordinate with stakeholders about current and future long-distance services. The team presented the themes that arose during the conversation, including community and rider engagement as well as coordinated planning. They also reviewed potential models of governance bodies.

Following this review, FRA introduced the idea of a new Long-Distance Public Committee. The committee could serve several functions and focus on ongoing feedback for long-distance service.

The study team also introduced an idea for a recurring, high-level long-distance planning process, potentially updated approximately every 5 years. The process would document existing long-distance service, trends and forecasts, proposed rail programs and investments, as well as the status of previously proposed long-distance passenger rail plans, projects, or other programs.

One attendee asked whether the study team has an impression about the division of authority between Amtrak and FRA as planning continues. The attendee noted that Amtrak is already participating in planning processes similar to the committee proposed and suggested that Amtrak report their findings to FRA on a regular basis. The study team responded that FRA could take a “sponsor” role in the future and bring together stakeholders in the planning process, but that they will also consider reviewing existing Amtrak planning.

Another attendee asked whether engagement for low-income or disadvantaged communities would change under these newer models. The study team responded that they are eager to include stakeholder input from those groups, but these planning models are still very early in development.

An attendee asked what the focus of a committee would be and if they would play a role in prioritizing route implementation, stressing that their feedback shouldn't be put on a shelf and forgotten. The study team responded that the committee would be focused on existing service and how to improve it.

12. Conclusion

The Midwest regional working group meeting concluded with a look ahead at the future of the Long-Distance Service Study, which will include one more round of regional working group meetings in the spring. FRA outlined study next steps, including identification of preferred routes for near, mid, and long-term implementation. Future rounds of regional working group meetings will include costs and public benefits of the

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preferred routes, presentation of the implementation schedules for the preferred routes, and presentation of the recommended actions of the study.

Attendees

- All Aboard Minnesota
- All Aboard Northwest
- Amtrak
- Bismarck-Mandan Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
- City of Indianapolis
- Corridor Rail Development
- Environmental Law and Policy Center
- FRA
- Illinois Department of Transportation
- Indiana Department of Transportation
- Indianapolis Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Kansas Department of Transportation
- Kentucky Transportation Cabinet
- La Crosse Area Planning Committee
- Louisville Metro Government
- Michigan Department of Transportation
- Mid-America Regional Council
- Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission
- Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission
- Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Missouri Department of Transportation
- North Dakota Department of Transportation
- Northeast Indiana/Fort Wayne Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency
- Ohio Rail Development Commission
- Rail Passengers Association
- South Dakota Department of Transportation
- United Rail Passenger Alliance
- Wisconsin Department of Transportation