

Another step for possible passenger rail service in Fort Wayne



FORT WAYNE, Ind. (WPTA 21) – Monday December 19, 2016

Imagine being able to hop a train from Fort Wayne to Chicago, or east to Columbus, Ohio.

That's now a step closer to becoming a possibility.

For 26 years, people have been fighting to bring passenger rail service back to Fort Wayne.

And now they're celebrating what they see as a green light from the federal government.

"What it would do, not only for the status of our community, but for jobs and economic development," says Geoff Paddock, a Fort Wayne city councilman and spokesman for the Northern Indiana Passenger Rail Association.

NIPRA raised \$350,000 from cities, counties and businesses along US30 to begin a required environmental and engineering study, which is the first major step in re-establishing train service here.

Doing that is expected to create 26,000 jobs over 30 years in Indiana, Ohio and Michigan, including 500 in downtown Fort Wayne.

"When you have these transportation centers, they drive apartment living for the millennials, they drive business, they drive people who want to use these services into that area. They want to live close enough to be able to do it. You're seeing it all over the country, East coast, West coast, Texas. We're going to see it here," says NIPRA president Fred Lanahan.

"With more trains and people coming in and out they're going to need places to shop and eat and maybe work, live. Places not only for dining, but for hotels. We think it would do a lot for our sporting events and Parkview Field is just a block and a half away," Paddock says.

In addition to making the summit city a point of destination, the mayor of Lima, Ohio says the rail line from Columbus to Chicago provides a global gateway for the region by

providing access to international airports in those cities providing business opportunities outbound and inbound.

He says the rail corridor also provides a major marketing opportunity for the 150 colleges and universities within 60 miles of it and their 850,000 students who need to get there and back home again.

"Being able to say to parents we can connect your student from wherever you live in the world to our place here in Indiana or Ohio in a very practical way, I think that gives a parent a decided level of comfort about what they're doing when they put their kid on the bus or the plane to come to school here. So I think the opportunities are the same for business and industry," Mayor David Berger says.

"I think frankly it's a great opportunity to market our airport. If we have trains from Warsaw and Lima, even Plymouth, coming to Fort Wayne and they can board a bus and go to the airport, we can maybe offer some good marketing tools there," Paddock says.

The environmental study should be complete late next year.

After that, there would be a look at estimates for how much the project would cost.

If it's approved, train service could begin in the early 2020's.

The last passenger train out of the Baker Street station was in 1990.

If passenger service happens, an estimated two million people a year are expected to use the rail service between Chicago and Columbus.