

# JOURNAL GAZETTE EDITORIALS

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## Northern Indiana Passenger Rail Association



### Five questions for Richard Joram, President

*The Northern Indiana Passenger Rail Association advocates for development of a passenger line between Chicago and Columbus, Ohio. NIPRA and, HTNB, an engineering and environmental consultant, will be having informational meetings along the proposed route next month. Joram, 70, is a Fort Wayne resident.*

**Q. You are a retired superintendent for Norfolk Southern. Please tell us how you got into that line of work. What's the biggest change in railroading since you started?**

**A.** My father worked in city transit management his entire life and, as a child, I found transportation fascinating. While working a summer job at a transportation consulting firm in Philadelphia, I was assigned to a civil engineer who had retired from a career with the Reading Company, a commuter-heavy railroad in eastern Pennsylvania. He thought I would do well in the railroad environment. I hired on the railroad at an entry-level position as a towerman, and, after the Reading was absorbed by Conrail, was promoted to management positions and continued my career with Norfolk Southern when Conrail was divided.

In my 35 years of railroading, there were many technological improvements, but the most significant change was the continuous improvement in customer service and safety. Railroads today are much more customer-focused and are among the safest industries in America.

**Q. Most Americans seem to love trains, but fewer seem to actually use them. Do you think the time is finally right for passenger trains to become popular again?**

**A.** Actually, Americans do use trains every day – most are just not aware of it. Many of the packages that arrive at their front door, the automobiles they drive, their appliances, raw materials that go into consumer goods, their food and fuel all travel on freight trains for part of their journey. Passenger trains are particularly popular for travel between cities in the northeastern U.S. and on the West Coast as well. Many cities have robust commuter train operations, too.

And, yes, I think that the time is right for modern passenger trains to become more popular. Highway travel is becoming less and less pleasant and reliable, while the cost of constructing and continuously maintaining highways continues to escalate. Modern passenger trains offer a relaxing environment for travel that people traveling are eager for.

**Q. What advantages do trains offer passengers and commuters? How would society benefit if trains became a dominant mode of travel?**

**A.** Modern trains can offer passengers a pleasant alternative to other methods of travel. Think about your last driving trip to Chicago. How enjoyable was it? How much extra time did you allow for congestion, delays and finding a place to park? Train seats and aisles can be spacious; there is the opportunity perform work or read, use social media, or to get up and walk around. Folks can socialize in a cafe car, even enjoy a meal while they travel. Increasingly, bicycles are welcome on trains, too. With the proper infrastructure, train travel is very reliable in all weather conditions.

Society benefits from less land being wasted on ever-expanding highways and parking facilities. When train usage reaches moderate levels, the cost of providing the service goes down. Rail transportation offers air quality and fuel consumption advantages as well. Reconstructing existing railways and building modern passenger cars and locomotives would create high-paying jobs here in Indiana. Rural areas, towns and cities that are served all reap economic development benefits from the increased connectivity.

**Q. Your organization, NIPRA, wants to see a passenger rail line implemented from Chicago to Columbus, Ohio. Besides the fact that the line would come through Fort Wayne, what's the allure of that route?**

**A.** A large portion of the proposed route connecting Chicago, Fort Wayne and Columbus was formerly a double-track main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad that hosted numerous fast passenger and freight trains. There are few curves and grades.

Although the line is a single track now, the original right-of-way remains intact, so there is opportunity to add the additional track and stations required to reintroduce passenger trains. Compared to other freight rail lines in our area, this line is relatively lightly used today. We should be able to create an environment where passenger trains can coexist with the freight carriers – in fact, we could coordinate improvements that would expedite the movement of freight traffic along with the passenger trains.

Also part of the allure is the connectivity that trains would bring to other underserved cities along the route. Lima, Warsaw, Plymouth, Valparaiso and Gary would all be connected with each other, with Fort Wayne, and with the major destination endpoints. Folks in Lima or Warsaw, for instance, could enjoy a trip to events in Fort Wayne. Or, a family from northwest Indiana could do a weekend at a downtown Fort Wayne hotel, go to the zoo and a ball game, maybe the theater, a museum or the library, and enjoy the ride.

**Q. Two Fort Wayne City Councilmen, Democrat Geoff Paddock and Republican John Crawford, asked Gov. Eric Holcomb to consider dedicating \$20 million from new Toll Road funds to development of the Chicago-Columbus route. What would you say to persuade Holcomb that would be a good investment?**

**A.** Our city government has the vision to encourage establishing passenger train service here, and Geoff Paddock has been a tireless advocate over the years. The suggestion that Geoff and John Crawford made to Gov. Holcomb is a good one. Gov. Holcomb has shown interest and support for improving the frequency and reliability of the Hoosier State passenger train connecting Indianapolis and Chicago, and for the NICTD South Shore commuter rail line.

I would suggest to him that the route across northern Indiana that NIPRA is advocating has solid ridership potential, would connect Hoosiers who are presently underserved, and has the ability to start service with a reasonable amount of engineering and construction cost. Modern, convenient passenger trains would deliver substantial economic benefits to the counties and cities that it would serve, which is what Next Level Connections is all about.