

INDOT – INDIANA STATE RAIL PLAN Passenger Rail User Group Interview Questions

GENERAL INFORMATION

Date of Interview: October 16, 2020

Subject Name: Northern Indiana Passenger Rail Association

Location: Fort Wayne (Interview via webex)

Subject Representative: Fred Lanahan, President

QUESTIONS

1. What does your organization do? How many employees and/or members does your organization have?

We're a nonprofit organization, comprised of volunteers and managed by a 15-member board of directors, of which 5 seats have to be filled. We have almost 300 subscribers among our Email followers, including representatives from the City of Fort Wayne. Our group's goal is to restart passenger rail service between Chicago, Fort Wayne, Columbus, and Pittsburgh. Our group has been involved in commissioning studies and securing funding and political support for the Chicago-Fort Wayne-Lima segment. The Columbus, Ohio-based MPO (MOPRC) is involved in the studies and funding for the Lima-Columbus-Pittsburgh segment.

2. What makes people in Indiana decide to take a passenger train instead of driving or taking a bus or something else? What conditions would be necessary to convert more trips to passenger rail trips?

A big determining factor is the road congestion around Chicago. It is a detriment to driving. Many Indiana residents go to Chicago, but the long traffic delays, and the high cost of parking in downtown Chicago make the driving experience unpleasant. You could take a train from Indianapolis or Fort Wayne to Chicago and spend less on the ticket than you would to park downtown. Rush hour traffic makes those conditions worse, and adds even more time, cost, and stress to the trip.

Fort Wayne had passenger rail service until 1990. Then the train shifted routes and Fort Wayne residents had to drive to Garrett, about 20 miles north of Fort Wayne. Then the train shifted routes again. Now Fort Wayne residents have to drive to Waterloo if they want to take a train. However, the service uses a busy freight line with no room to add more passenger trains on it.

Younger people would prefer to take the train so they can use their phones and computers while traveling instead of having to drive. Older people would prefer to take the train and avoid the stress and hassle of driving, especially in bad weather.

Offering amenities such as Wi-Fi and food service also will help draw travelers to passenger trains. By creating an environment that allows travelers to do things they cannot do if they are driving, such as work, read, have a snack, etc., the public will start to see that the train provides productive time. Let the environment of the train be an attribute.

Driving I-65 between Indianapolis and Chicago or US #30 between Fort Wayne and Chicago is a battle. Travelers would much rather take the train if a service existed and was made convenient.

3. What are the most important reasons for Indiana to have passenger rail service?
(e.g. provide alternative to driving for shorter trips such as intercity commuting; provide alternative to driving for longer trips out of state; other)

Indiana is a car-centric state, and will continue to be. However, having another travel alternative for Indiana residents will be a positive change. It will bring back an alternative that had been successful in Indiana before.

Our group's goal is to reinstate passenger rail service between Chicago, Fort Wayne, and Columbus. The rail line that this service would use goes through the downtowns of many Indiana communities. The routing for this service would be Chicago to Gary Airport to Valparaiso to Plymouth to Warsaw to Fort Wayne to Lima and Columbus. We hope the service will connect with the South Shore Line or with Norfolk Southern or CN lines into Chicago Union Station.

The service we want to see in Fort Wayne would be additive to existing services, not a replacement for existing services.

4. What are the most important aspects of a passenger rail service to you?
(e.g., frequency of departures, trip time, reliability, station stops)

Frequency is most important. You need at least 2 trains per day each way at a minimum for the rail service to draw travelers.

On-board amenities are important.

5. Is there enough awareness of existing passenger rail services in the state? If not, how should these services be promoted?

It needs to be better promoted. Our group would like to see INDOT take a promotional role in passenger rail service.

Indiana is auto-focused, and INDOT is highway-focused and bridge-focused. Yet most people don't understand how much the public pays for roads and airports. Changing the mindset about passenger rail, and the value and benefits it brings, is important. Highways cost \$20 million a mile to build. We could upgrade the tracks for the Chicago-Fort Wayne passenger service for just \$3.5 million to \$5 million a mile. That's a significant value.

Passenger rail would promote economic development and keep downtowns alive.

Our group has held allies to support the reinstatement of Chicago-Fort Wayne passenger service. Both Republicans and Democrats in Northern Indiana have pledged their support for the service. Passenger rail transportation is a bipartisan issue.

6. How has the recent COVID-19 pandemic changed user trends for passenger rail?

Ridership is down.

7. Within what timeframe do you anticipate passenger ridership will return to pre-pandemic levels? Or do you foresee that certain travel patterns will move away from rail as a result of the pandemic?

Travel will rebound in time, and travelers will want more options other than cars. If rail shows itself to be safe, people will come back to it. Having amenities such as Wi-Fi and food service also will help, too.

8. Where should Indiana be focusing future passenger service improvements? (e.g., more frequencies on existing routes; improved amenities/performance; new routes; station improvements/connections)

The focus should be on passenger rail services that connect downtown areas and multimodal transfer facilities (such as combined bus and rail terminals). We have a downtown Baker Street Station in Fort Wayne that would provide a convenient gateway for rail travelers.

9. Are there travel corridors or point-to-point trips that you would like to use rail for or see value in having rail service for, but currently cannot make?

Fort Wayne is the second largest city in Indiana. It is also the second largest city in the Midwest without passenger rail service. Having a passenger rail alternative is important for this metropolitan area.

We had two rallies for our proposed Chicago-Fort Wayne-Columbus passenger rail project. The first one attracted 800 people and the second one attracted 1,000 people. The rail line that the

service would use is beautifully engineered, flat, and has a wide right-of-way that could accommodate additional tracks. Steam-powered trains once ran over it at 100 miles per hour. Now it's leased from CSX by a shortline railroad that runs 5 to 7 trains per day.

10. What about stations? Are there enough on the existing routes, such as the Cardinal and the Lake Shore Limited or the Michigan trains? Are the facilities and transit connections adequate for the travel needs?

The stations on the existing routes do not serve the large population centers of Indiana.

Indianapolis, the largest city, has a train but it only runs three days a week.

There are two daily trains to Waterloo (1,400 people), Elkhart (50,000), and South Bend (100,000). But the combined population of those three towns is still 50,000 people less than Fort Wayne.

Some South Bend area residents that want to go to Chicago will drive north to Niles, Michigan, which has better service, with 8 trains a day.

The stations that continue to be used for rail travel should be well maintained to attract travelers.

11. What is your impression of the services that are currently provided? How effective are they? Are there specific improvements you have thought about for these services that you would like to see implemented (bottlenecks, service deficiencies)?

The service right now is minimal. The Cardinal only runs three days a week. Its schedule is slow. People could drive to Chicago faster than the train. If you've got the time, it's a relaxing trip, but the service is infrequent, and the times are not convenient for most travelers. Fort Wayne, the second largest city in Indiana, with 270,000 people, does not have any passenger rail service and that needs to change.

12. Did you ride the Hoosier State when it was in operation? What did you like or dislike about that service? If service is on that line is reinstated, what would you like to see happen to make it better than before?

I did ride the Hoosier State.

If that service were reinstated, it should have a higher travel speed, a faster trip time, and more frequencies.

There should be at least 2 trains per day each way, at a minimum, between Indianapolis and Chicago.

The speed needs to get better. Right now, people from Indianapolis can drive to Chicago faster than they could travel by train. The route into downtown Chicago is particularly slow and requires the train to stop at multiple points to wait.

The schedules need to be more convenient and timed for reasonable arrival and departure times that allow for daytime trips, not arrivals in the middle of the night.

Station services and facilities need to be attractive and inviting for travelers. Indianapolis has a magnificent train station that could be an inducement to more train travel if it was restored.

13. What other travel corridors that currently have limited service or no passenger rail service at all that would most benefit from the introduction of regularly scheduled passenger trains? Why are these corridors important?

We see Chicago-Fort Wayne-Lima-Columbus as a priority that will serve a viable travel corridor.

Other routes that also should be considered for passenger service are Indianapolis-Chicago and Indianapolis-Louisville.

14. Are there any state regulations or policies impacting passenger rail service? If so, what changes would you suggest?

We are encouraged by the state's financial support of NICTD's expansion projects. The state and federal governments have provided about \$1.2 billion in funds for the South Shore double track and West Lake projects. That amount is equivalent to the original cost projection for the Chicago-Fort Wayne service implementation. The state is beginning to exhibit a willingness to provide significant funding for passenger rail projects. We would like to see that precedent continue with funding made available for other passenger rail expansion projects, such as the Chicago-Fort Wayne-Lima service.

Our group raised \$500,000 for various studies of the Chicago-Fort Wayne-Lima service. However, we would like to see INDOT or the state government take the lead in the future on expanding passenger rail service in the state and establishing new passenger rail corridors. We're hoping INDOT will help our group continue their efforts.

Specifically, we are looking for INDOT's support as we apply for federal grants to restore the line for passenger service. We will need INDOT to help encourage host railroads and service providers to support the project and support our grant applications. Without the support and approval of the host railroad and freight operator, we risk eligibility for federal funding.

We need help from the state to get CSX to work with our group. We could have a good service.

The state should also work with communities on developing, upgrading, and maintaining passenger rail stations in the state so they encourage rail travel.

We also want the state to support legislation establishing an Indiana Passenger Rail Commission that would actively support and work on developing new and expanded passenger rail services. The commission would work with INDOT and have authorization to receive funds and spend funds on passenger rail.

15. Are the improvement plans for passenger service that are being pursued by the state in line with what you'd like to see? Do they make sense to you? If not, what would you like to see changed?

The state is talking about converting U.S. 30 to a limited access highway that would go around downtown areas to serve new warehousing districts used by trucks. While those roadway changes are occurring, it will take travelers away from downtowns. Our group would like to see passenger rail service added to provide new travel options into the downtowns, and serve people, not goods movement.

See our response to question No. 14 as well.

We need support and advocacy from the state and from INDOT for the Chicago-Fort Wayne-Lima passenger rail project. We need support from INDOT for the grant applications we will submit to fund planning and capital improvements to reinstate the service.

16. Are you optimistic, neutral, or pessimistic about the future of passenger rail service in Indiana, and why?

I am very optimistic about the future of passenger rail service in Indiana. I think it's a matter of waking up the powers that be.

There is a lot of passenger rail expansion and activity in other states, such as California, Florida, Texas, and Virginia.

You can only build so many more lanes of highways, and once you do, they immediately fill up and congest. Adding more highway lanes doesn't adequately solve the congestion problem. Passenger rail is a transportation alternative that can help.

17. May we include the name of your organization as one of the subjects we talked with in the INDOT Passenger Rail stakeholder interviews, or alternatively, would you prefer that we identify your organization by the type of agency it is, or would you prefer that your organization remain anonymous?

Yes, feel free to include the name of our organization as one of the subjects talked with in INDOT Passenger Rail stakeholder interviews.

Northern Indiana passenger Rail Association (NIPRA)
Fred Lanahan, President