

# Feds support passenger rail line through Fort Wayne

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FORT WAYNE, Ind. (WANE) A planned passenger rail line from Columbus, Ohio to Chicago – with a stop in Fort Wayne – has been awarded federal and state approval, officials announced Monday.

The Federal Railroad Administration has green-lit an Alternatives Analysis and Public Input process for the Chicago-Fort Wayne-Columbus line, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act under federal law. Members of the Northern Indiana Passenger Rail Association and mayors and representatives from dozens of communities along the proposed route, including Fort Wayne Mayor Tom Henry, announced the milestone Monday at the Baker Street Train Station in downtown Fort Wayne.

“This is the result of years of hard work and dogged determination on the part of many of us,” said NIPRA spokesperson and Fort Wayne City Councilman Geoff Paddock. “The return of passenger rail to Fort Wayne will be a huge boost for economic development in Fort Wayne and Northeast Indiana. It will add momentum to our booming downtown and help revitalize neighborhoods that surround the train station. It is gratifying that the FRA and INDOT see there is an untapped market for rail service in Fort Wayne. We thank them for working with us over the past few years to reach this moment.”

The Chicago-Fort Wayne-Columbus passenger rail line would make connections to 100 regional cities including Lima, Ohio, Warsaw and Valparaiso, between Columbus, Fort Wayne and Chicago. The rail network would offer “safe, comfortable and reliable service with amenities such as Wi-Fi and food service,” according to NIPRA. Trains would travel at a maximum speed of approximately 75 mph and eventually travel at 110 mph.

A 2013 rail corridor feasibility study concluded that approximately 2.1 million riders would use the Chicago-Fort Wayne-Columbus route in 2020, with that number growing to more than three million in 2040. The study also estimated that for every \$1 of investment, \$1.70 would be generated in economic return through job growth and increased property values.

Henry said the rail line will make Fort Wayne a “point of destination.”

“I’m encouraged by our collective efforts to develop innovative plans to make Fort Wayne a point of destination,” said Fort Wayne Mayor Tom Henry. “The approval from the FRA allows us to begin the process of establishing passenger rail service through Fort Wayne, northern Indiana and northwest Ohio. By working together, we’re committed to making a meaningful difference by bringing more transportation options and economic development opportunities to our region.”

Monday’s announcement is just the beginning, however.

The \$350,000 Alternatives Analysis and Public Involvement process (paid through funding from cities and businesses along the corridor) will examine the preliminary engineering, technical

analysis, service planning and environmental impacts along the proposed route. The study, along with the public input process, will begin in early January 2017 and is expected to be completed by late fall.

Once the analysis is complete, engineering and design to upgrade the existing tracks can begin, assuming further funding is realized. Supporters of passenger rail are optimistic limited service could begin by 2020.