

City off track for rail funds

Indiana thinks federal government more likely to back Chicago-Cleveland high-speed route

By **Chris O'Malley**
comalley@ibj.com

Indiana's biggest population center has been left at the station as the state pursues high-speed rail funding for an upstate route.

The decision to sidetrack a 110-mph Chicago-Indianapolis-Cincinnati train has received nary any attention, locally. High-speed rail could someday become an economic development engine for the metro area, but it has not gained as much attention here as improved highways or a commuter rail line from downtown to Noblesville.

There's been "tremendous" backing for high-speed rail in northern Indiana, observed Roger Sims, chairman of the Highland-based Indiana High Speed Rail Association, or IHSRA. "In Indianapolis, there's been mixed

support."

The Indiana Department of Transportation last month dropped the route through Indianapolis from its application for funding from the Federal Railroad Administration's High Speed Inter-city Passenger Rail Program.

Now it is seeking funding only for a Chicago-to-Cleveland route that would cross the northern part of the state but dip far enough south to go through Fort Wayne. The application for \$2.8 billion, supported by Ohio, if successful would pay most of the cost of building the line through both states.

The FRA has \$8 billion in federal stimulus funds to hand out toward high-speed rail projects proposed nationwide. Competition is stiff, with states filing requests totaling more than \$57

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billion.

The FRA had "extremely aggressive" rules for applications, with criteria favoring routes further along in planning and with the potential to be completed more quickly, said INDOT spokesman Will Wingfield.

The rules also favored routes that serve big chunks of multiple states. The Chicago-Cincinnati route would have gone primarily through Indiana and extend only minimally into neighboring states.

"It was very clear in the FRA guidelines that multistate projects would have a much better chance of getting funded," Sims said.

The upstate route covers broad swaths of Indiana and Ohio and would facilitate connecting the Midwest with major northeastern passenger routes, Wingfield said. Ohio has plans to link all its major cities by passenger rail and claims its rail plan could create 75,000 permanent jobs and more than \$30 billion in economic impact.

"That specific route is further along in the development process than Chicago-Cincinnati," Wingfield said. "We felt that [Chicago-to-Cleveland] stood a better chance of getting approved" for funding.

Earlier this year, INDOT filed a preliminary application with FRA seeking \$22 million to conduct environmental and engineering studies for the Chicago-Indianapolis-Cincinnati corridor.

So INDOT's not filing a final application for those funds "was a surprise to us, given that the state had filed a pre-application for that route as well," said Tim Maloney, senior policy adviser at the Hoosier Environmental Council.

HEC supports high-speed rail for several reasons, including its potential to displace automobiles and thus reduce pollution and carbon emissions.

"You do have to wonder, with the capital city of Indiana and the population, as well, why would you not keep this on the front burner?" Maloney added.

Indeed, the Chicago-to-Cincinnati line was shown in previous studies to have the potential to bring the highest return on the dollar compared with other proposed high-speed routes in the state, said Dennis Hodges, of IHSRA.

It would also be less costly: an estimated \$707 million, based on previous studies commissioned by INDOT.

"This is a personal disappointment for me because that's the one [route] I've been working for for 18 years," Hodges said. "This is really a key route for the state and it should not be ignored."

But Indiana's decision to seek funding for Chicago-Cleveland was in part influenced by broader issues of the nine-state Midwest Regional Rail System Initiative, of which Indiana is a member.

On a rail and a prayer

High-speed rail is gaining believers in the state, thanks to federal funding opportunities, as an alternative to today's pokey Amtrak service. But an Indianapolis route was left out of the state's application for the latest round of federal funding in favor of an upstate route.

Existing

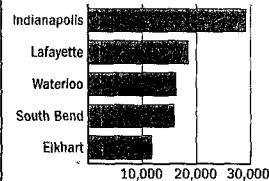
Can you get there from here?

Amtrak's current routes in Indiana

Train	Route	Time
Capitol Ltd.	Chicago through northern Indiana to Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C.	18 hours
Cardinal	Chicago to Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Charleston, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and New York	26 hours 30 minutes
Hoosier State	Chicago to Indianapolis	5 hours
Lake Shore Ltd.	Chicago through northern Indiana to Cleveland, Buffalo and to Boston or New York	19 hours 30 minutes to 22 hours
Michigan service	Chicago to Grand Rapids or Chicago to Detroit or Pontiac	6 hours 30 minutes

Who's riding?

Amtrak riders in 2007, by station



Future

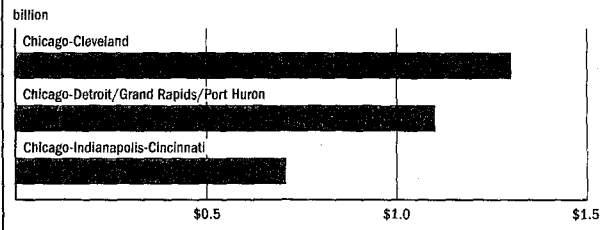
Travel time savings

High-speed trains would be quicker than driving or taking existing trains.

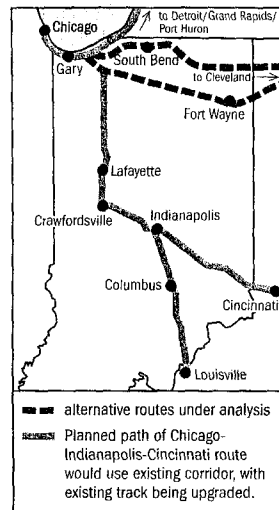
Route	Current service	High-speed train	Auto
Chicago-Fort Wayne	none	1 hour, 53 minutes	3 hours, 17 minutes
Fort Wayne-Cleveland	none	2 hours, 55 minutes	3 hours, 33 minutes
Chicago-Indianapolis	5 hours	2 hours, 55 minutes	2 hours, 57 minutes
Indianapolis-Cincinnati	3 hours, 7 minutes	1 hour, 32 minutes	1 hour, 55 minutes

Pricy proposition?

Cost to purchase trains and build or upgrade track for high-speed rail, in 2002 dollars



IB/Empire/Brian Turner & Chris D'Allely



Sources: Amtrak, Cambridge Systematics Inc., Midwest Regional Rail Initiative

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Tim Maloney, Hoosier Environmental Council

"I don't think there's much doubt high-speed rail can provide an economic boost as well as convenience. There are also political realities," said Roland Dorson, president of the Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce.

The chamber has been focused on bringing commuter rail and other potential mobility improvements to the metro area.

Hodges said he's confident, after years of advocating for rail in the region, that there's a solid base of support here for high-speed rail. Beyond the improvements to regional mobility rail could bring, there's the economic development potential, particularly around train stations.

The Chicago-Cincinnati route would mostly use existing right-of-way used by Amtrak and by freight railroads. Track and signals would be upgraded to accommodate trains running at 110 mph.

Though INDOT is not seeking funding at this stage for the central route, it

did file a second application with FRA for \$71.4 million to make track improvements in northwestern Indiana that should ease the bottleneck there that slows existing Amtrak service between Indianapolis and Chicago, Wingfield said.

"That has been cited as the most delay-prone passenger rail segment in the United States ... It would make such a difference for all the Amtrak trains that run through that area, as well as freight trains" that share the track, he said.

Wingfield said INDOT anticipates that an upcoming federal transportation bill will provide additional funding opportunities for high-speed rail, which could be a source of money for the Indianapolis route.

Sims said the state would do well to offer matching funds to leverage its future federal funding strategy. He said neighboring states such as Illinois are far ahead of Indiana in that regard. His group is hoping a funding mechanism can be passed in an upcoming session of the Indiana General Assembly that can divert more tax revenue to rail.