



**WEST CENTRAL
WISCONSIN
RAIL COALITION**

June 15, 2020

The Honorable Ronald L. Batory
Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Administrator Batory,

This letter is in support of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and Minnesota Department of Transportation joint application to the Federal Railroad Administration's Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) program for funds to support the capital improvements for the Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago Intercity Passenger Rail (TCMC) Project.

The West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition is a non-profit educational organization providing leadership and coordination to develop passenger rail service through west central Wisconsin as part of a regional strategy to ensure a balanced transportation system for long term sustainable economic growth.

In the attached resolution, we endorse the implementation of the TCMC project, and encourage WisDOT to implement the shuttle connection it is considering as part of the project from Eau Claire to Tomah. TCMC will provide important new travel options for citizens, students and visitors to our communities locally and throughout Wisconsin and Minnesota.

We strongly encourage this CRISI Grant Program application be approved.

Sincerely,

Scott Rogers, Chair
West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition
rogers@eauclairechamber.org
715-858-0616

Enclosure: Resolution

West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition
RESOLUTION
Proposed Chippewa Valley-Black River Falls-Tomah Amtrak Shuttle Connection

WHEREAS, passenger rail service, as part of an integrated multimodal transportation system, is increasingly being recognized as a critical modal choice for small, medium and large communities, providing reasonably priced, safe, accessible transportation to complement other modes, as well as a desirable transportation asset for communities to be economically competitive and attractive to skilled talent; and

WHEREAS, the West Central Wisconsin business community sees the value of passenger rail service as critical to efficient travel for employees, allows productive use of time during travel, and increases the attractiveness of West Central Wisconsin as a business location and tourism destination; and

WHEREAS, the West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition has worked since 1999 to obtain passenger rail service for area communities including Hudson/River Falls, Baldwin, Menomonie and Eau Claire/Chippewa Falls, currently developing a public-private partnership to establish an initial corridor between St. Paul and Eau Claire with future extension eastward to Milwaukee and Chicago; and

WHEREAS, both the Wisconsin State Rail Plan and the Minnesota State Rail plan include the West Central Wisconsin corridor in long-range plans for passenger rail service; and

WHEREAS, Tomah is among the closest stations to the corridor with current passenger rail service with the Amtrak Empire Builder train once daily in each direction on a route linking Tomah to the Wisconsin communities of La Crosse, Wisconsin Dells, Portage, Columbus and Milwaukee, as well as Chicago, Winona, Red Wing and Minneapolis-St. Paul in neighboring states. Amtrak provides direct passenger rail service from Tomah to 45 cities and towns all the way to the Pacific Northwest, and connections with more than 400 domestic and Canadian destinations; and

WHEREAS, many residents and visitors to West Central Wisconsin currently drive on I-94 to park and use the Amtrak station at Tomah to access the Empire Builder and Amtrak's national network, but there is no direct dedicated shuttle connection from West Central Wisconsin to meet the train. Additionally, Black River Falls currently has no intercity public transportation; and

WHEREAS, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, like 17 other U.S. states, has an operating contract with Amtrak to supplement service along the existing Chicago to Milwaukee route with 14 additional train departures six days per week with and twelve on Sunday, because travel utility and demand is best served with multiple frequencies (departures and arrivals) each day providing competitive travel service that prompts motorists to opt not to drive and expanding the capacity of the existing transportation network between Milwaukee and Chicago with seats on trains; and

WHEREAS, the departments of transportation of the states of Wisconsin and Minnesota are working with Amtrak on the TCMC (Twin Cities Milwaukee Chicago) project to consider adding a second daily frequency between St. Paul, Milwaukee and Chicago to serve the additional demand for passenger rail transportation in the corridor; Implementation of this service provides an opportunity to expand its usefulness by connecting significant off-line markets via dedicated shuttle service; and

WHEREAS, the inclusion in the TCMC project of a direct shuttle service between the Chippewa Valley (including downtown Eau Claire), Black River Falls and the Tomah Amtrak station to meet trains would significantly enhance the utility of these rail improvements for West Central Wisconsin. This would open up more travel opportunities for area residents and visitors to connect to/from Milwaukee and Chicago via Tomah, and would especially provide improved mobility for students, seniors and others who cannot or do not want to drive 80 miles to access the service; and

WHEREAS, the City of Eau Claire is constructing a new Transit Center, and it would be beneficial to broaden the offerings available there to travelers in the community to include the Amtrak shuttle to and from Tomah, providing access to the national intercity passenger rail network; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Federal government appropriated \$1.4 billion for rail-specific, competitive grants available for states to implement passenger rail improvement projects, making this mode a priority for the nation's mobility; and

WHEREAS, communities in West Central Wisconsin want to experience the economic and mobility benefits made possible by a better connected, more functional multimodal transportation network that includes more frequent passenger train departures, such as that being experienced by communities on 28 Amtrak-state partnered passenger rail corridor services across the U.S; and

WHEREAS, implementation of the shuttle connection to Tomah would be a step towards, and be complementary to, the future implementation of direct passenger rail service to West Central Wisconsin;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition requests the State of Wisconsin to work with Amtrak, the Canadian Pacific Railroad, Minnesota Department of Transportation and other communities along the route to implement one additional passenger train frequency each day between Chicago, Milwaukee, and Saint Paul, via Tomah, and to include dedicated shuttle service between Tomah, Black River Falls and Eau Claire to meet the arrivals and departures of both the new train and the Empire Builder. Including a similar Columbus-Madison shuttle to meet these trains would also provide additional travel options to reach the state's capital city.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Scott Rogers', is written over a horizontal line.

Scott Rogers, Chair
West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition
January 23, 2020