

SYNOPSIS

Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee Corridor Transit Study Preliminary Draft Report

KENOSHA-RACINE-MILWAUKEE COMMUTER RAIL EXTENSION

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In 1998, the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) completed a feasibility study of extending the Metra commuter rail service to Milwaukee on existing rail right-of-way. The study concluded that the commuter rail extension was both financially and technically feasible. The next study phase, the detailed planning study and alternatives analysis, followed shortly after. SEWRPC has released the preliminary draft report for that study: Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee (KRM) Corridor Transit Study.

The preliminary draft reports just released by SEWRPC are the final draft reports in a series of reports prepared for the Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee Corridor Transit Study. These final three draft reports summarize findings of draft chapter reports that address organizational and management options, costs, funding, financing and alternatives evaluation including performance, impacts, and costs and benefits of the alternatives, project schedule, and other issues.

The study looked at several alternatives. The three final alternatives include:

- 1). Commuter rail (high level of service and medium level of service),
- 2). Combination bus and rail (high level of service and medium level of service), and
- 3). Commuter bus.

Commuter rail alternative would be operated as an extension of Metra's Union Pacific North line that currently ends in Kenosha. The new service would operate over existing freight rail lines and end at Milwaukee's Amtrak station after stopping in Kenosha, Somers, Racine, Caledonia, Oak Creek, South Milwaukee, and Cudahy-St. Francis.

The combination bus and rail alternative would operate as an extension of Metra from Kenosha to Racine where the train would end. The service between Racine and Milwaukee would be an enhancement and expansion of the existing express bus service. It would travel on STH 31, STH 32, and STH 794 and I-794 9 (Lake Parkway).

The commuter bus alternative would enhance and expand the existing express bus service in the area, coordinating service with the Metra trains that stop in Kenosha and Waukegan, IL.

Of the three final alternatives presented, the SEWRPC study report illustrates that commuter rail is clearly the most viable transit option for the Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee corridor. The commuter rail alternatives were concluded to best serve the needs of our businesses and citizens by providing:

- The largest opportunity for the greatest variety of no-transfer trips of all the alternatives, attracting the most passengers and providing significantly higher comfort, speed, productivity and reliability for passengers;
- The greatest economic development, workforce development and land use benefits;
- The highest perceived value which will increase the value of our communities;
- The best at serving low income and minority populations;
- Access to the most jobs;
- The best overall impact on highway traffic reduction;
- Better efficiency in increasing capacity when needed; and,
- The study objectives and Federal funding criteria are better or equally served with the commuter rail alternatives.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

On December 11, 2002, the study advisory committee voted to recommend commuter rail at the medium level of service with management by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. They also agreed to proceed to public hearings to be held in March and April in each of the three counties that the train will serve. The remainder of this synopsis will focus on the commuter rail alternatives, both the high and medium level service.

KEY POINTS IN STUDY REPORT

- Commuter rail is a key component in developing Milwaukee-Chicago economic corridor.
- 147,500 existing jobs are within 1/2 mile walking distance of train stations in Wisconsin alone.
- Commuter rail is important as a marketing and workforce development tool. It increases mobility for all, draws business and new jobs and helps expand the labor force by attracting new talent.
- Commuter rail is comparable in costs and service levels to other new systems (operating costs).
- Serves minority, low income and mobility impaired populations well.
- Commuter rail will assist in implementing the regions land use and transportation planning goals.
- Costs are affordable and funding is doable with 80% of the capital costs coming from federal programs. Additionally, a new funding source was identified: FTA 5307 formula funds for fixed guide way in urban areas over 200,000 in population.
- No funding sources will divert funds from existing transit services.

- Adding passenger capacity is very efficient and cost effective. Unexpected or temporary swells in ridership are easily absorbed.
- Would reduce peak hour traffic on the area highways from 4.1% - 12.2%, depending on the specific highway being addressed.
- Commuter rail provides good ridership, is simple to navigate and has a high perceived value.

DESCRIPTION of PROPOSED COMMUTER RAIL SERVICE

KRM Commuter rail was studied as a 33-mile extension of Chicago-based Metra service from Kenosha, where the route currently ends, to Milwaukee. Stops are proposed in Kenosha, Somers, Racine, Caledonia, Oak Creek, South Milwaukee, Cudahy, St. Francis, and Milwaukee (Amtrak station). Service would be provided in peak periods, mid-day, and evening in both northbound and southbound directions. Commuters could travel either northbound or southbound at convenient peak travel times in the morning or in the afternoon and evening.

LEVELS of SERVICE

- High - 15 round trips per weekday
- Medium - 7 round trips per weekday

TRAVEL TIMES (examples)

Milwaukee-Chicago 154 minutes

Milwaukee-Racine 42 minutes

Milwaukee -Oak Creek 26 minutes

Racine-Chicago 100 minutes

Racine-Lake Forest 50 minutes

Racine-Evanston 75 minutes

PASSENGER FARES (examples of single ticket purchase price, discounts would be offered for multiple ticket purchases)

Milwaukee-Chicago \$8.20

Milwaukee-Racine \$3.40

Racine-Chicago \$6.60

Racine-Lake Forest \$4.60

Racine-Evanston \$5.80

RIDERSHIP

4,100 to 5,100 passengers per weekday or 1.1 to 1.5 million annually. These projections are admittedly conservative per Federal guidance.

COSTS

Capital Cost

\$152 million (medium service level) to \$225 million (high service level) (vehicles 65%, tracks/signals/crossings 30%, stations 5%).

Net Operating Cost (total less passenger fares)

\$15.4 million (medium service level) to \$22.8 million (high service level) annually.

Fare box recovery rate of 15 to 20 percent.

The potential capital, total operating, and net operating costs are admittedly conservatively high. Additionally, the net operating and maintenance costs include the costs of providing service within the southeastern Wisconsin region and new service within northeastern Illinois. Some of the new service within Illinois is reverse-commute service, including the morning outbound from the Chicago Loop and inbound to the Chicago Loop in the afternoon. About \$6.0 million (high level of service) or \$4.5 million (medium level of service) of the annual total operating and maintenance costs are from services provided entirely within northeastern Illinois. It is important to note that the farebox revenues from trips made entirely within northeastern Illinois on the new service have not been estimated or included in the net operating figures, but the costs of providing the service has been included. Allocating the costs of the new commuter rail service to northeastern Illinois or including farebox revenue from the new service entirely within northeastern Illinois would reduce Wisconsin state and local cost shares and increase farebox recovery rates from 15% - 20% to 20% - 25 %.

Also affecting the capital and operating costs is the necessary equipment to accommodate peak passenger loads along the entire length of the route. Trains running from or to Racine and Milwaukee will be sized for demand in northeastern Illinois where there is the highest peak demand is. Trains running north of Kenosha will include a significant amount of excess seating capacity because of the much higher demand south of Kenosha. The cost of acquiring and operating this equipment over the 33-mile long route extension adds significantly to the capital costs and operating costs.

ORGANIZATION and MANAGEMENT

Two alternatives for organization and management structure are proposed: state or local implementation and management

1). State

- State (through WisDOT) would negotiate and contract with Metra for commuter rail service.
- The State has the ability, as they are the lead for Milwaukee-Chicago Amtrak service and high speed rail engineering and implementation.
- Commuter rail serves longer distance trips as would be carried on State highways, and the Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee commuter rail line serves interstate travel. State highways are funded through the state.
- State legislation may be needed for WisDOT to implement commuter rail and to provide funding.

2.) Local implementation and management

Multi-Government Cooperative or Transit Authority

- Kenosha, Racine, and Milwaukee Counties and/or Cities would jointly contract for implementing and managing service, and create a small staff for implementation and management (staff could be attached to one of the sponsoring counties or cities).
- Local governments have stated that dedicated non-property tax funding source for commuter rail will be necessary (State legislation needed).
- One option would be a multi-county transit or commuter rail authority, which would require state legislation.

3). A hybrid option would be State implementation and management with local participation in funding.

FUNDING

Capital Costs

- Federal programs are expected to cover 80% of the capital costs: \$122 million (medium level of service) to \$180 million (high level of service).
- State/Local governments are required to match the Federal investments with 20% of the total costs: 20%--\$30 million (medium level of service), \$45 million (high level of service).
- With State implementation and management, the State would fund 100% of the non-federal share. With local implementation and management, or the hybrid option, State and local governments would share funding equally.

Annual Net Operating Costs

- Federal: \$5 million of FTA formula funds annually for capital related operating costs (new money to SE Wisconsin).
- State (assuming State management): \$11 million (medium level of service) to \$18 million (high service level) annually.

- State (assuming local management): \$9 million (medium level of service) to \$12 million (high service level) annually.
- Local (assuming local management with State funding assistance): \$2 million (medium level of service) to \$6 million (high level of service) annually.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

The proposed implementation schedule for the medium level of service for commuter rail has design being completed in 2005, construction in 2007, and vehicle procurement in 2009 with service beginning in 2010. This schedule is very conservative. SEWRPC has stated that there are many opportunities to significantly shorten the time for implementation if the state and local motivation is strong.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IMPACTS

Commuter rail is shown to promote land redevelopment and development in station areas. Many commuter rail communities use their station as a focal point for redevelopment. Several communities that will have a commuter rail station on the proposed Metra extension to Milwaukee are planning to use the train station as a focal point of their downtown revitalization. The Racine Economic Development Corporation's strategic economic development plan prioritizes commuter rail between the Milwaukee and Chicago areas as a catalyst for economic and population growth for the Chicago-Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee corridor, and specifically for Racine County. Easy, reliable, convenient access to a large and well-developed labor pool is essential to business success. Commuter rail is shown to help to attract and retain talent. Major employers in the area have stated that commuter rail linking the Racine and Milwaukee and Chicago areas is essential to employee recruitment efforts, and therefore to their continued viability and growth.

The draft study report specified that commuter rail would:

- Connect cities in the corridor, an important component for developing our regional economy.
- Assist in revitalizing city centers by attracting businesses, residents, events, and related services.
- Play into the revitalization plans of downtowns all along the proposed extension.
- Improve property values locally and community-wide in commuter rail communities.
- Act as a powerful marketing tool in competing with other regions.
- Provide regional access to existing and new jobs near stations. 147,500 existing jobs within 1/2 mile of the proposed stations.
- Attract businesses and new jobs to area because of access to talent and customers.
- Help develop a more sound and sustainable land use pattern.

COMFORT, RELIABILITY AND PRODUCTIVITY

Commuter rail is comfortable with wide aisles, seats, headroom, unrestricted room to move (especially for disabled or mobility impaired), good legroom and interior lighting. It provides a high level of productivity including electrical outlets, smooth ride, reduced stress, and reliability. Each passenger coach will have a wheel chair lift.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

No negative equity or environmental justice impacts were identified. In fact, minority and low income populations are well served by commuter rail by improving mobility and accessibility to jobs, education and service for those in neighborhoods near train stations. High concentrations of jobs are available near the train stations. Of the 174,100 people that live within 1/2 mile of a proposed train station, 38% are minority, while 24% of the region's population is minority. Out of a total of 30,700 families living within 1/2 mile of a proposed train station, 5000(16%) are below the poverty level, while about 7% of region's total is below the poverty level.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Due to the use of existing rail right-of-way, commuter rail will have minimal displacement and negative environmental impacts and is compatible with existing land use plans. Positive environmental impacts include a modest reduction in regional hot summer day transportation system ozone-related air pollutant emissions. Re-directed population densities will help to curb urban sprawl and create denser communities that are easier to serve with transit and shorter auto trips. Historic sites will have no direct negative impacts.