

Ideas or comments?

Contact Steve Lund, editorial page editor

(262) 656-6283,

after 9 a.m. or e-mail: slund@kenoshanews.com

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Editorials

Commuter rail extension crosses another hurdle

Every step of the way will probably produce a ceremony, or at least a press conference, but we'll put up with a little bit of grandstanding from politicians if it means the commuter rail line eventually goes north as well as south.

Friday another ceremonial step was taken — in front of the TV cameras, of course, — toward extending the Metra commuter rail line from Kenosha through Racine and to Milwaukee. The county executives from the three counties and the mayors of the three cities signed an agreement that allows advanced planning and environmental studies to begin, and they all pledged to work together on the rail project. Some business leaders were also on hand to lend moral support.

The project will be expensive for the region, even with the major part of the building and operating costs coming from the state and federal governments. It is estimated that the rail line will cost more than \$150 million to build and more than \$15 million a year to operate.

There is little question that this line would be a great economic benefit to Kenosha. Instead of being the end of the line for a Chicago commute line, Kenosha will be in the middle of a rail line that connects two of the country's biggest cities. It will create new opportunities for workers and probably stimulate urban real estate development in Kenosha, Racine and Milwaukee.

If this project comes to fruition, and we hope that it does, it will take regional cooperation. That may be one of the side benefits. If the cities and counties of the region can cooperate on something like this, they might find other cooperative projects that serve the public interest.

At this point, a commuter train heading north from Kenosha is still a long ways off. Phil Evenson, executive director of the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, said he hoped it would be completed by the end of the decade. That seems optimistic, but if the later stages go as well as generating regional cooperation has gone, perhaps there is good reason for optimism.