

Commuter rail makes sense for Milwaukee

On the subject of whether the Metra commuter rail line should be extended from Kenosha into Milwaukee, let us point out that this proposal is not light rail. It's also not some liberal, namby-pamby "green" effort to steal Wisconsinites' personal vehicles from our motorists' clenched grips.

Taking the train would be purely voluntary, and building the infrastructure relatively inexpensive. The concept has

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the support of business groups, including the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce, the Greater Milwaukee Association of Realtors and Racine Area Manufacturers & Commerce. Major employers including Miller Brewing, CNH, We Energies, GE Medical Systems and

S.C. Johnson are on board. It's also backed by Republican Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker.

So, yes, we join that chorus to support the concept of commuter rail.

It would provide the Milwaukee area with one more transportation link to our big economic brother to the south, Chicago, and several points in between. It would spur development in Racine County and southern Milwaukee County. It would add another element to the "transportation hub" at the planned upgrade of the Milwaukee Amtrak sta-



tion. It would give employers another bargaining chip in recruiting professional-level staff to the Milwaukee area because spouses of those professionals could work anywhere with access to the Metra line.

The commuter rail issue is merging into the public's consciousness because an advisory committee to the South-eastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission issued its recommendations in mid-December. The committee proposes seeking federal funding to cover 80 percent of the estimated \$152 million cost to improve the Union Pacific freight tracks and build enough

trains to carry seven round trips per weekday. The next step will be public hearings on the study and final recommendations.

Then comes the difficult part: determining local and state funding sources and amounts. After accounting for income from fares, the Kenosha-to-Milwaukee extension will cost an estimated \$15 million per year to run.

It's a small price to pay for the benefits derived, and the state of Wisconsin, financially strapped as it is, should view this as a project with regional — not just local — benefits.

Did we mention it's not light rail?