ILLINOIS HIGH-SPEED RAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY

Newsletter

Moving the Study Forward

The Illinois High-Speed Railway Commission is continuing a study on the potential for high-speed passenger rail between Chicago and St. Louis.

Since spring, potential routes, service options, and ridership forecasts have been developed to show what high-speed rail could look like in Illinois and the benefits it could bring statewide.

How Routes Are Being Studied

A key task in this phase of the study is looking at different ways a train line could travel between Chicago and St. Louis. To do this, "city pairs" — major cities along the way, like Springfield, Bloomington/Normal, Peoria, Decatur, and Champaign/Urbana were identified. Then, eight possible routes were identified that connect those cities.

These routes fall into three general categories:

Along interstates: Using the space in or next to existing highways. This approach makes use of a corridor that already exists, but curves and bridges may slow trains down.

New ("greenfield") routes: Building new rail lines across open land. These are straighter and allow for faster trains, but would require buying land and could have greater environmental impacts.

County road/township line routes: Following long, straight rural roads. These minimize property splits but mean local road crossings would need to be rebuilt.

By comparing these types of routes, the study will show how each option balances travel times, costs, and community impacts.

Service & Investment Options

Service scenarios that show how often trains could run and what types of infrastructure would be required are being developed.

- **Train service:** Assumes 32 trains per day — about one per hour in each direction.
- **Infrastructure needs:** Includes track, stations, rail facilities, and equipment.
- **Cost estimates:** Planning-level costs are being prepared using lessons from other high-speed rail projects.

These analyses will help identify what types of investments are needed to deliver a safe, reliable, and competitive high-speed passenger rail service.

Big Midwest Impact

A Midwest high-speed rail network could connect 60 million people — *that's like linking the entire population of California and Texas combined!*

Ridership Forecasting

A key part of the study is estimating how many people would use high-speed rail. Forecasting looks at:

- Current travel demand between cities.
- Expected growth in trips over the next 20 years.
- Traveler choices, such as whether people would switch from driving or flying to high-speed rail.

Once complete, ridership forecasts will also be used in a benefit-cost analysis that evaluates time savings, roadway safety, emissions reduction, and long-term economic benefits.

How Fast Could We Go?

The Power of Speed

The study is focusing on electric-powered trains because they offer the fastest travel times, smoother rides, and the cleanest energy profile.

Diesel: Up to 125 mph (familiar but slower).

Battery or Fuel Cell: Cleaner, but limited range and speed.

Electric (catenary): 220+ mph — the gold standard worldwide.

What's next?

The eight routes will be refined and evaluated, and service and investment options will be developed. Results will be shared in a side-by-side comparison so tradeoffs can be seen clearly. **A final report will be presented at the Spring 2026 public meeting.**

It's important to remember that this study is still in the feasibility stage. The outcome of this study will help determine whether this concept should be evaluated further.