



MEETING MINUTES

Illinois High-Speed Rail Commission

Inaugural Meeting | April 11, 2023

Location:

- IDOT Headquarters, 2300 S Dirksen Parkway, Room 347, Springfield, IL 62764
- Virtual Webex Webinar Meeting option available

Meeting Date: Tuesday, April 11, 2023

Time: 10:00am – 12:00pm

Commission Member Attendees:

- Erin Aleman – Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
- Gia Biagi – City of Chicago
- James Derwinski – Commuter Rail Board
- Senator Don DeWitte – Senate
- Michael Dunn – Region I Planning Council
- Karl Gnadt – Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District
- Robert Guy, III – SMART-TD
- Richard Harnish – High Speed Rail Alliance
- Raymond Lai – McLean County Regional Planning Commission
- Jason Osborn – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Cassandra Rouse – Illinois State Highway Toll Authority
- Brian Shanahan – Transportation Communications Union
- P.S. Sriraj – University of Illinois Chicago
- Brian Vercruysse – Illinois Commerce Commission
- James Wild – East-West Gateway Council of Governments

Non-Commission Member Attendees:

- Berenice Alvarez – Morreale Communications
- Holly Bieneman – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Ellen Bruce – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Barb Clauser – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Mark Bonne – City of Rockford
- Shane Cullen – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Brad Franke – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Roger Huff



- Mary McIlvain – Morreale Communications
- Elliot Ramos – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Abigail Robinson – Illinois Department of Transportation
- DeAnna Smith – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Scott Speegle – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Todd Popish – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Michael Vanderhoof – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Janel Veile – Illinois Department of Transportation

Commission Members Not in Attendance:

- Representative Marty Moylan – House
- Senator Steve Stadelman – Senate

Overview of Meeting

I. Welcome and Introductions

Michael Vanderhoof from IDOT welcomed everyone in-person and online through the virtual meeting. Mr. Vanderhoof introduced himself and the extended Illinois Department of Transportation staff.

II. Commission Ethics Guidance

Ellen Bruce from IDOT formally presented on Commission meeting ethics guidance with an overview on required training for Advisory Board Members, the Open Meetings Act, and the Freedom of Information Act.

- Ms. Bruce reminded the Commission to follow the open meetings act rules, including following the published agenda and sharing the work being completed with the public.
- Ms. Bruce also reminded the Commission that there are required trainings they must participate in annually, which includes Ethics and Harassment training. The board liaison will coordinate the trainings.
- Other reminders included not inadvertently creating a quorum by Commission members speaking to each other at other events and remembering to provide opportunities for public comment during meetings.
- Ms. Bruce opened the presentation to questions. Two questions were asked.
 - Mr. Vanderhoof asked that since the legislation acts as a charter, if the group wants to meet remotely, would the Commission need to establish bylaws that could allow for a quorum hybrid or remotely?



- Ms. Bruce – The way it's written, once the declaration expires in May, we need to make sure people can choose what's most convenient for them and also follows the Open Meetings Act.
- Mr. Vanderhoof – We have example bylaws; can you review them?
 - Ms. Bruce – Yes and can provide templates.
- Commission member – If you have done the training previously does it count?
 - Ms. Bruce – yes, but you still must complete the extra training on the Open Meetings Act. The Ethics and Harassment training is required on an annual basis and the Open Meetings Act is only required once.
- Lastly, there was confirmation that the presentation will be circulated, and Ms. Bruce's contact information was shared with the group.

III. Introductions and Vision for the Commission

Attendees gave introductions and commented on their vision for the Commission. The summary below highlights members who shared their vision for the Commission, others shared brief introductions of themselves.

- Rick Harnish shared his vision, noting that he hopes this will result in the first draft of what he would call an integrated rail plan, like what is being done in California who by 2040 hopes to connect the entire state through High-Speed Rail, regional rail, local rail, and buses all on an integrated system. Hopefully, we can create a vision so we can build a consensus, discuss funding, and expand bus and rail. This would make it possible to not only travel to meetings like this, but also travel by train instead of car to many Metro areas.
- Bob Guy shared his vision, noting that he would like to see the Commission move Illinois' freight investment capacity to a point where we are addressing, creating, and improving passenger rail throughout the Midwest.
- Brian Shanahan validated Mr. Harnish and Mr. Guy's visions. He also added that he hopes the group grows and we see a project or plan like what California has.
- Brian Vercruysse shared his vision of looking forward to seeing how the integrated plan works. He mentioned that their focus will be on the safety aspect and how it ties into our existing network and where we have our challenges. He is also interested in seeing how this relates to the University of Illinois 2013 study.
- Cassaundra Rouse shared her vision constructing a statewide plan. She is looking forward to seeing how this applies from their agency's perspective and how they can assist in the planning.
- Erin Aleman provided an overview of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's work. He highlighted that as we know there are many people in the Chicago region who would use and benefit from a High-Speed Rail network to places across the state.
- James Derwinski shared that as this is the most complicated rail network, we need to make decisions that benefit many and hurt none.



- Jim Wild added that he is looking forward to discussing how we can make the connection from Illinois to Missouri.

Following introductions and although no bylaws have yet been established, Mr. Vanderhoof confirmed that the meeting meets quorum.

IV. Purpose of the HSR Commission

Mr. Vanderhoof continued the meeting with an overview of the Commission's purpose. During his presentation, he provided background information, including the legislation of the Commission, Illinois Board, Commission, Task Force, Council List, and where to locate more information on the IDOT website.

Mr. Vanderhoof further explained the purpose of the Commission with three main objectives.

- Create a statewide plan for a high-speed rail line and feeder network connecting St. Louis, Missouri and Chicago, Illinois that includes current existing Amtrak and Metra services, connects the cities of Rockford, Moline, Peoria, and Decatur, and uses inter-city bus service to coordinate with the rail line.
- Conduct a ridership study and make findings and recommendations concerning a governance structure, the frequency of service, and implementation of the plan.
- Report to the General Assembly and the Governor no later than December 31 of each year.

Mr. Vanderhoof opened by asking the Commission if they have any comments or questions on the duties.

- Rick Harnish discussed that we have spent many years thinking about either what people have said is fixing Amtrak or an alternative. California finally figured out how to bring it all together in one system. He further commented that we can determine how the state interacts with each other within the state if we create this bigger system. Most recently he saw a discussion about how the state is having a challenging time finding staff and how that could potentially change if there was an easier way to travel. He reiterated that he hopes we can create that vision.
- Jason Osborn acknowledged that while this list of objectives is short, there are many tasks within these.
- Erin Aleman asked the questions of how we are staffing this technically. What are the Department's plans for supporting the Commission? What is the estimated time frame? Can we produce a report by December of this year? Does the Department have a team leading this with an estimate of when this report should be complete or is that something we will discuss today?
 - o Mr. Vanderhoof replied that regarding the Technical Support side, the Bureau of Planning has put together a scope of work that will be published any day now in



the Professional Transportation Bulletin to hire a consultant to provide technical support for this rail commission. We wrote this scope figuring it is going to be a various-various or indefinite delivery so we can write work orders. It will take several months to get that procurement into place. Over the next 3-4 months while that procurement process is playing out, this Commission will be discussing initial scoping and what we want those activities to be while we wait for a consultant to come online. There are also other items we can be working on such as gathering information, looking at California, and using our staff at the Bureau of Planning for provide support.

- Mr. Vanderhoof continued that Morreale is also onboard to help with the administration of the Commission.
- Mr. Osborn mentioned that in terms of timeline, we should be reporting back annually. But given the amount of funding presented at the Federal level, the appropriate amount of time to get it right is necessary. Mr. Osborn's expectations are that we will establish our bylaws, understand how we want to handle the Commission and how frequently we want to meet. The legislation says we need to meet quarterly, therefore creating working groups might be a way we have more frequent meetings so we can have more targeted discussions on certain topics. This will need to be supported by staff as well. A good goal may be to have a plan in place within six months with a tentative timeline. There is a lot of work that needs to be done in those areas.

V. Discussion Commission Organization

Jason Osborn of the Illinois Department of Transportation provided an overview of how commissions are structured.

- Mr. Osborn continued that this leads to the discussion of structure. Do we want to discuss identifying the chair and vice-chair now? Mr. Osborn's thought was that we may want to have bylaws in place first. These will help determine what the Chair and Vice-Chair will be charged with doing. He opened this conversation to the group if anyone had initial thoughts on chairs or bylaws.
 - The comment to Jason's question was that they recommend Mr. Osborn and others circulate draft bylaws and discuss the Chair and Vice-Chair later.
 - Mr. Osborn confirmed that they will get draft bylaws, share them with everyone, and be prepared to discuss them at the next meeting. Our goal will be to discuss the bylaws and how we want to elect Chair, and Vice-Chair at the next meeting. Mr. Vanderhoof affirmed the next steps of circulating draft bylaws and gave examples of what could be included.
- There was a second call for questions or comments.
 - Rick Harnish said there is federal funding available and that if we could have done the Commission sooner, we could have some plan accomplished, but the coordination will take time. The question asked is if Mr. Osborn has ideas on how the Commission can help with shorter term needs while they work on the longer-term vision is planned.



- Mr. Osborn mentioned that many Commission members are involved in Cranes? and having conversations with Amtrak. We do not know at this point if we need to formalize the Commission's efforts and outside efforts but many people here are involved in that program.
- The conversation continued with additional examples of projects. An example being the urgent need to get rail to O'Hare. The comment concluded this should not just be about the plan for building High-Speed Rail, but there are other urgent needs we should be considering too.
- Mr. Osborn also mentioned an urgent need for inter-city bus planning that has changed post-pandemic and that many agencies are struggling. He mentioned that we rely on these agencies, especially when it comes to Amtrak and using buses for connections.
- Commissioner Biagi commented on prioritizing the Union Station project, which other municipalities and the State of Michigan have signed onto. She reassured the group it is a priority and many agencies, including those at the City and Amtrak, are helping push forward. The Commissioner also asked how we generate deliverables we want to be ready for funding that comes down the line? She would be curious for the group to answer this question, not for today, but while waiting for consultants to get on board so we can show progress and an angle towards projects that could use years of collaboration that we may be able to expedite. She encouraged the group to think about that.
- Mr. Osborn continued the conversation while encouraging Commission members to give thought to how we think about the short-term and long-term visions of the plan.
 - He commented we should consider offering support for some of the visions already out there, such as Amtrak. As we move forward with responsibilities of the general assembly, the Governor's Office for that long-term vision, we can lend support for that vision. We can lend support to other stakeholders that have a vision in place, so we are also not being duplicative in our work and then forming everything into a long-term vision for high-speed rail.
 - The conversation continued with comments made about connectivity issues throughout the state.
 - Ms. Aleman commented that the conversation is good and perhaps we should be thinking about this as a "double track". We need a framework for unlocking funding for those enabling projects to pursue federal funding and have that state prioritized list of existing assets that will be the keys to enabling high-speed rail. At the same time, we can be working on the larger needs. She acknowledged that we could spend 18-24 months developing a plan but, in the meantime, we have missed opportunities to advance good projects we have on the ground. If it is any help, the process we led to develop a prioritized list of projects to pursue for infrastructure funds here in Northeastern Illinois. That could be something we do to help develop that framework of projects that should be competitively



funded. Also, think about how the consultants can help us support that long-range visioning that can take more time than it feels like we have now.

- Mr. Siraj asked: Are we referring to high-speed rail as in higher speed rail or is it the true high-speed rail? Should we be talking about that distinction? Does Illinois have a path forward to getting to high-speed rail? Those questions might be a good perspective for the Commission to understand where we are headed and how we are moving things along.
 - Mr. Osborn commented that he thinks it's worth noting that the network starts at a basic 59 mph and then with certain improvements you can establish a 79 mph threshold, with more improvements you can get to 90, with more improvements you can get to 110 mph and that's about the end of the road when it comes to mixing traffic with freight. After 110 you are looking at dedicated right of way just for the passenger rail. When you are thinking about the next, including the inter-city bus, all those pieces are in our toolbox. The way I see high-speed rail in terms of the network, how can we best maximize what we have in our toolbox to get to get as efficient as possible.
 - Mr. Siraj acknowledged Mr. Osborn's comments and asked how we can scale it from 110 to 220, if at all? We cannot have both running concurrently. It seems like 220 mph is a separate issue.
 - Mr. Harnish provided clarification that states the legislation for this Commission reads that the purpose is to create a high-speed rail line between Chicago and St. Louis and how that has positive benefits for the state. A high-speed rail line is dedicated to light-weight trains moving faster than a certain mph. The first Commission was created in 1964/1965 and we have done studies and learned a lot.
 - The conversation regarding this topic continued with Mr. Harnish discussing the example in California and how we can create that framework.
 - Mr. Osborn continued the conversation with the ridership piece of this being one KPI. He also mentioned that we have room to be bold.
 - Mr. Vercruysse commented on the agenda items and highlighted that we should not get too far ahead of the bylaws conversations, but a lot of the conversations started today can also be had in sub-committees that are formed.
 - The Commission revisited the agenda items for the present meeting to revisit next steps.
 - Mr. Vanderhoof turned the meeting over to Scott Speegle and Elliot Ramos to discuss the history of high-speed rail in Illinois.

VI. Background of HSR in Illinois

Scott Speegle of the Illinois Department of Transportation presented on the history of High-Speed Passenger Rail in Illinois. The presentation is available for further viewing.



Following Mr. Speegle's presentation, questions were collected.

- Mr. Osborn - The new cars, the max speed of those by design is 125 mph?
 - Mr. Speegle – yes that is correct. He also confirmed the max speed of the new locomotives is 125 mph.
- Mr. Osborn also asked if the duration was a 10-year capital project.
 - Mr. Speegle confirmed.
- Mr. Osborn also asked for high-level budget figures.
 - Mr. Speegle confirmed \$1.5 million in federal funding and \$400 million in state funding.

VII. Public Comment

The meeting was open to public comment. No public comments were made.

VIII. Next Steps

Next steps were reviewed in terms of action items summarized below. The next meeting date was tentatively discussed for six-weeks out, and a poll will be circulated to Commission members.

Action Items:

- Circulate and review a variety of bylaws
- Focus on defining subcommittees that should be considered
- Gather more information on initial passenger rail history regarding overall history and speed
- Compile literature and case studies of other similar initiatives
- Consider ideas for short-term deliverables

The meeting adjourned at 12:00pm