



# MEETING MINUTES

Illinois High-Speed Rail Commission  
Meeting | October 21, 2024

## Location:

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IDOT Headquarters, 2300 S. Dirksen Parkway, Room 347, Springfield, IL 62764

IDOT Office of Intermodal Project Implementation, 69 W. Washington Street, Suite 2100,  
Chicago, IL 60602

Virtual Webex Webinar Meeting

## Meeting Date and Time:

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Monday, October 21, 2024

10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

## Attendance:

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### Commission Member Attendees:

*\*Asterisk indicates attendance in-person*

- Erin Aleman – Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning\*
- Tim Butler – Illinois Railroad Association\*
- James Derwinski – Commuter Rail Board\*
- Karl P. 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\*
- Bria Scudder – State of Illinois\*
- Brian Shanahan – Transportation Communications Union\*
- P.S. Sriraj – University of Illinois Chicago\*
- Senator Steve Stadelman – Senate
- Brian Vercruysse – Illinois Commerce Commission\*
- Bogdan Vitas Jr. – Illinois Municipal League\*

### Commission Members Not in Attendance:

- Senator Don DeWitte – Senate
- Michael Paul Dunn Jr. – Region I Planning Council

- Representative Martin J. Moylan – House
- James Wild – East-West Gateway Council of Governments

#### **Non-Commission Member Attendees:**

- Holly Bieneman – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Hannah Martin – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Tim McMahon – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Kaitlyn Mitchum – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Elliot Ramos – Illinois Department of Transportation\*
- Shoun Reese – Illinois Department of Transportation
- DeAnna Smith – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Michael Vanderhoof – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Janel Veile – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Julie Reschke – Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
- Virgine Amerlynck – WSP USA
- Julia Hiatt – Quandel Consultants\*
- Charles Hoppesch – Quandel Consultants\*
- Melanie Johnson – Quandel Consultants\*
- Charles Quandel – Quandel Consultants\*
- Victoria Fullbright – Images
- Janet Henderson – Images\*
- Berenice Alvarez – Morreale Communications\*
- Diane Bustamante – Morreale Communications\*
- Roger Huff
- Alan Mammoser
- Peter Williams
- Ian Wright

## **OVERVIEW OF MEETING**

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### **I. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Commission Chairman Jim Derwinski began the meeting at 10:30 a.m. The meeting proceeded with a roll call of Commission members. With 14 Commission members present in-person at either the Chicago or Springfield Illinois Department of Transportation offices, a quorum was met. In addition to in-person attendees, 1 Commissioner was present in the virtual meeting room.

### **II. MINUTES APPROVAL**

The September 23, 2024, Commission meeting minutes were supplied with the agenda prior to the meeting. Chairman Derwinski asked the Commission if there were any requested changes to the minutes. With no requested changes, a motion to approve the minutes from the previous meeting was made. The minutes were approved and passed with no objections.

### III. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SUPPORT UPDATE

Melanie Johnson from Quandel Consultants led the technical assistance support update, which included the project timeline, alternative analysis, market analysis, outreach and engagement, technical advisory committee and draft annual report.

#### Project Timeline

The project timeline details a parallel track that includes stakeholder engagement and aligns with the study track, including technical work elements. As shown on the timeline graphic, the technical assistance support team is analyzing route options and developing the website. An upcoming milestone is a virtual public meeting expected in early 2025.

#### Alternative Analysis

At the previous Commission meeting, route alignments within highway medians were being developed, and environmental constraints were being considered. Route options include analyzing physical constraints, environmental screening, existing market demand, and travel time. Following route options analysis, service and investment options will be considered, and the alternatives matrix will be summarized.

The highway median alignment design is being examined, including a greenfield alignment showing layers such as historic sites, environmental constraints, utilities, etc. Following the alignment design, initial train performance will be calculated for several segments. Calculating and refining travel times is an iterative process. This will help identify areas with speed-limiting curves needed for the next route and service analysis phase. Ms. Johnson noted that this is a comparative tool between segments.

Commissioner Harnish expressed concern about the medians and asked if the possibility of running alongside the highway median is being considered.

Ms. Johnson noted that there are existing services that operate in highway medians and have success and that are planning on operating in highway medians. Ms. Johnson stated that the user experience, such as rider comfort, will be looked into from these existing services. Ms. Johnson noted that what is also being examined is if the right of way itself is appropriate and whether running adjacent to highways is a potential as well as adjacent to utility right of ways.

Commissioner Harnish noted that he was unaware of an existing high-speed line in the middle of the highway median and that Brightline I-15 was a different design.

Commissioner Sriraj noted that although it is early in the process, running a straight line to one of the smaller patches of ground is hoped to be kept open.

Ms. Johnson said it's more about identifying the constraints.

#### Market Analysis

Virgine Amerlynck from WSP led the discussion on market analysis. Ms. Amerlynck provided an overview of the initial data presented at the September Commission meeting, the methodology used to forecast high-speed rail ridership and the corridor analysis process.

The initial market analysis aims to identify intermediary cities with the greatest potential demand for route selection. The method consists of county-to-county and city-to-city passenger trips. The estimate of demand is sourced from Replica and the Illinois statewide model.

Commissioner Harnish referenced Carbondale to demonstrate potential ridership.

Ms. Johnson noted that the initial analysis is of the spine and will overlay feeder networks to include the cities in the legislation to see the overall impact of ridership.

Commissioner Harnish noted that the presentation he submitted to the Commission lists the cities that are in the legislation.

Commissioner Aleman noted that the data analyzes an average Thursday, assuming it indicates the highest ridership day, it would be interesting to see a range from low to high.

Commissioner Sriraj noted that when looking at travel intensity, Tuesday-Thursday is normally looked at, while Monday and Friday are considered outliers. Commissioner Sriraj noted that the survey data will be crucial.

Ms. Johnson emphasized that this is more of a baseline understanding.

Commissioner Sriraj noted that it would be helpful to understand how all of the data is layered.

Ms. Johnson noted that it includes the county-to-county trips, looking at existing demand on a city pair level, which will provide a look at the routes and cities where people travel today. Then, the survey and statewide model will be used to build on top of that.

Chairman Derwinski asked if older data points can be looked at to see how it's shifted from 2023.

Commissioner Sriraj recommended the 2012 study.

Commissioner Lai asked about the method of capturing county-to-county data.

Ms. Johnson noted that county-to-county data is being used to examine where people are going and what the most demand is.

Commissioner Sriraj asked if Cook County accommodates the greenfield option. Ms. Johnson noted that the various options will be looked at.

Commissioner Harnish asked how O'Hare fits into this. Charles Quandel from Quandel Consultants stated that it will all be answered as the study progresses.

Ms. Amerlynck presented the data on the purpose of trips from Cook County to selected counties, including work trips.

Ms. Johnson emphasized that the ridership demand modeling will be more precise about the city stations' locations and travel times and will consider how people get to the stations.

The Commission discussed Replica and how it identifies work trips.

The next steps for market demand analysis include city pair analysis, reviewing the statewide travel demand model and analysis results, and understanding growth patterns in Illinois.

## Outreach and Engagement

Janet Henderson from Images provided an update on the progress and the next steps. Members of the Public Involvement Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) are being identified, and letters of invitation will be sent. Members will likely meet three to four times over the course of the study.

A public meeting and public interest survey will likely take place in January.

The TAC will assist with supporting the public survey and outreach events.

Commissioner Rouse asked about the timing of outreach events. Ms. Henderson noted that the information gathered affects the technical project timeline. A boots-on-the-ground effort will likely be made in the Spring.

Commission Sriraj noted that when conducting various survey recruitment efforts, they rely on those with survey experience. He offered help from the transportation center.

Ms. Henderson clarified that it is more of a public interest survey than a technical survey.

Commission Sriraj noted that stated preference surveys have a certain nuance to them.

The next steps include continuing the stakeholder list. The Stakeholder Engagement Plan and website are under review, and the Public Meeting and survey release are anticipated in January.

## Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

The initial TAC purpose, members and structure were discussed at the September Commission meeting.

The TAC will be referred to as the "Project Delivery TAC," in which IDOT Highways personnel are being identified to be involved. An outline for the first TAC workshop will be developed in the next three months. These are the initial TACs needed, but there may be future TACs.

## Draft Annual Report

The 2024 draft annual report will be worked on in November.

## **IV. COMMISSION LEGISLATIVE DISCUSSION**

Chairman Derwinski opened the discussion. Commissioner Harnish stated that the legislation and the definition of the feeder network are unclear. The legislation says the feeder network includes four cities in addition to Chicago and St. Louis. Commissioner Harnish stated that there should be an analysis of today's existing routes and missing ones. Commissioner Harnish noted that the more nodes in a network, the more valuable each segment is. The importance of this is it makes the high-speed line financially and politically viable. Commissioner Harnish provided Carbondale as an example of a significant region.

In accordance with the Open Meeting Act, Chairman Derwinski noted that Commissioner Harnish may present the PowerPoint presentation he submitted to the Commission regarding feeder networks at the next meeting.

## V. 2025 COMMISSION MEETING SCHEDULE

To draft the 2025 Commission meeting schedule, Chairman Derwinski reminded the Commission to submit their availability. The draft 2025 Commission meeting schedule will be presented and voted upon at the next Commission meeting in December, as the Commission will not meet in November.

## VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

The meeting was open to public comment.

Mr. Ian Wright, Will County resident and rail advocate, provided a public comment.

- Americans are realizing transit options in the US are limited compared to other countries.
- Political will for a high-speed rail system is lacking.
- Incremental improvements won't catch America up to Europe and Asia.
- High-speed train operators should also run the dispatch.
- Freight rail lines impeding service is a major issue for rail transit. New rail lines are needed to prioritize passenger travel.
- Mr. Wright is a proponent for a direct Joliet to Champaign Urbana corridor.
- Conservation areas and hazardous sites should be considered but should not impede progress. Mr. Wright referenced a 2016 war service document called *the "Midewin National Tall Grass Prairie Travel Analysis Report."*

Mr. Wright reiterated that this is foundational work.

## VII. ADJOURN

Chairman Derwinski called for a motion to adjourn. A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The meeting was adjourned at noon.

## VIII. ACTION ITEMS

Chairman Derwinski noted that Commissioner Harnish may present the PowerPoint presentation he submitted to the Commission at the next meeting.

The draft 2025 Commission meeting schedule will be presented and voted upon at the next Commission meeting in December, as the Commission will not meet in November.