



MEETING MINUTES

Illinois High-Speed Rail Commission
Meeting | December 16, 2024

Location:

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:

Monday, December 16, 2024

10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Attendance:

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*
- Robert Guy, III – SMART-TD*
- Karl P. Gnadl – Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District*
- Richard Harnish – High Speed Rail Alliance*
- Jason Osborn – Illinois Department of Transportation*
- 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
- James Wild – East-West Gateway Council of Governments

Commission Members Not in Attendance:

- Senator Don DeWitte – Senate
- Michael Paul Dunn Jr. – Region I Planning Council
- Raymond Lai – McLean County Regional Planning Commission
- Representative Martin J. Moylan – House

- Cassaundra Rouse – Illinois State Highway Toll Authority
- Bria Scudder – State of Illinois

Non-Commission Member Attendees:

- Holly Bieneman – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Aaron Gold-Stein – Illinois Department of Transportation
- Hannah Martin – 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*
- Jonathan Garcia – Office of the Illinois Governor
- 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*
- Mary McIlvain – Morreale Communications*
- Nicholas Clifford*
- Roger Huff
- David Phillips*
- Peter Williams

OVERVIEW OF MEETING

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 10 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, 3 Commissioners were present in the virtual meeting room.

II. MINUTES APPROVAL

The October 21, 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

Charles Hoppesch from Quandel Consultants provided an update on the technical assistance support work including the project timeline, alternative analysis, market analysis, outreach and engagement, and draft annual report.

Project Timeline

The website is being developed, and the operation and alternative analysis are in progress.

Alternative Analysis

Areas to avoid, such as historic sites, state and national parks, utilities, wetlands and woodlands, were mapped out for the Greenfield Route. An algorithm is used to identify route combinations with minimal environmental impacts, helping calculate potential run times and build schedules for the ridership model. The Highway Right of Way focuses on assessing alignment feasibility, identifying available land in the existing right of way, and addressing any obstacles with mitigation strategies. Train performance calculations will also be collected.

Mr. Hoppesch noted that the consultant team met with David Kralik of Metra to discuss potential Chicago access.

The next steps include holding Technical Advisory Committee meetings, assessing station locations, and evaluating feasible service headways. Additionally, draft schedules will be created using train performance calculations, feeder network times will be estimated, the ridership model will be updated, and plans will be made to present the latest high-speed rail technology to the public.

Market Analysis

The market analysis model will take input from the technical work and a preference survey to inform ridership.

Outreach & Engagement

Janet Henderson from Images noted that the members have been identified to form a Public Involvement Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The first anticipated meeting is planned for January, and their assistance will be requested for the public survey and stakeholder list, as well as to identify and support outreach events.

Ms. Henderson noted that the website is now live (www.ILHighSpeedRail.org). The next steps include the Public Involvement TAC meeting in January and the public meeting and survey results planned for February.

Draft Annual Report

The draft annual report is in development. The draft encompasses the work accomplished by the Commission.

Chairman Derwinski asked if land acquisition is considered when considering all the different paths for the Greenfield route.

Mr. Hoppesch confirmed that land use is considered.

Charles Quandel from Quandel Consultants noted that the alignment will be looked at to find the most optimal alignment, the Greenfield route, and the least cost in terms of environmental impacts. The land acquisition will be considered later in the study.

Chairman Derwinski asked to clarify “low-cost paths.” Mr. Hoppesh stated that the general name for the process is least-cost because different companies use it to minimize cost. However, for the purpose of the study it looks primarily at the lowest impacts on the environment and not necessarily dollar costs.

Chairman Derwinski asked if there is a technical TAC. Melanie Johnson from Quandel Consultants noted that it is planned for the first quarter of 2025. Commissioner Richard Harnish asked what type of decisions are made. Mr. Hoppesch noted that an important part of the TAC is coordinating with the appropriate agencies that are developing projects throughout the state.

IV. COMMISSION LEGISLATIVE DISCUSSION

Commissioner Harnish highlighted important considerations for interpreting the legislation, including that a broader feeder network would be necessary for an increase in ridership, a demonstration of statewide benefits, and inter-city bus service in coordination with the rail line.

Commissioner Harnish emphasized the Commission's responsibility to consider current Amtrak and Metra services. He then discussed network planning and analysis by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), referencing city pairs to demonstrate the benefits of connectivity. He noted that the FRA's analysis should be considered, although it is not included in the legislation.

As an example, Commissioner Harnish discussed Carbondale and how high-speed rail will benefit offline cities in terms of travel times. California was another example, highlighting county-to-county ridership demand, benefits and interconnectivity.

Commissioner Jason Osborn noted that there will be an alternative analysis TAC, that will take a look at the modeling assumptions. Inter-city bussing is challenging for the whole transit industry. The TAC is a good starting point for discussing these points.

Commissioner Erin Aleman noted that the broader infrastructure throughout the state is important to consider in a final product, and on a policy level, there is an opportunity to consider bigger recommendations that may be wrapped into the report.

The Commission further discussed the interpretation of the legislation outlining the duties of the Commission.

Commissioner Karl Gnadt noted a general agreement to attempt to consider the larger connectivity issues.

Commissioner Aleman asked if the Commission should consider a larger scope to better understand the total cost so that when funding decisions are made, the economic value is understood. She noted that quantifying some of it will be important for connectivity and economic mobility but is still far away from the vision presented today.

Commissioner Brian Vercruysse emphasized the importance of public input.

Commissioner Harnish suggested that the Commission talk to Chad Edison, the Chief Deputy Secretary of Rail and Transit from the California State Transportation Agency.

The Commission discussed transit oversight, roles and responsibilities, and how it relates to the Commission.

V. 2025 COMMISSION MEETING SCHEDULE

The draft Commission meeting schedule was supplied with the agenda prior to the meeting. Chairman Derwinski mentioned potential changes to the meeting location for 2025, which will still take place in Chicago and remain open to the public. Chairman Derwinski asked the Commission if there were any requested changes to the draft schedule. With no requested changes, a motion to approve the 2025 Commission meeting schedule was made. The meeting schedule was approved and passed with no objections. The 2025 Commission meeting schedule will be posted on the website.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

The meeting was open to public comment.

Nicholas Clifford, a recent University of Chicago graduate and active railroader, presented several comments to the Commission:

- Many people are unaware of the Commission's work. Few were aware of the project, even in online transit discussion spaces, but he is glad to hear that more outreach will be conducted.
- He emphasized the importance of engaging the younger population and university corridors, highlighting the role transit plays in student travel. He shared examples from his own experiences as a university student and the need for improved interconnectivity between university locations.
- He noted that people will take the train if it is available, convenient and affordable and that many students are unaware of how cost-effective rail travel can be.
- He expressed his appreciation for the work being done today.

Commissioner Sriraj asked where he found information on today's meeting. Mr. Clifford noted the difficulty in finding information and is glad to hear a more accessible website is underway. Commissioner Sriraj emphasized the importance of delivering information to reach different audiences, such as social media. The Commission talked about communication outreach and how to inform the public about high-speed rail. Mr. Quandel stressed the importance of public knowledge and awareness of high-speed rail, which will be tied into the state of preference surveys.

David Phillips provided a public comment, including the following points:

- He expressed concern about how alignments are being presented.
- He also expressed concern about changing to Metra at University Park. It should be assumed that the service goes downtown and beyond downtown to O'Hare because many people come to Chicago to go to O'Hare.

- From a station point of view, a couple of stations exist or will exist that have to be hit specifically (Champaign, Illinois terminal station), not just the metropolitan area, to support an activity like this.

VII. ADJOURN

Chairman Derwinski called for a motion to adjourn. A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 11:33 a.m.

VIII. ACTION ITEMS

Commissioner Harnish will follow up and bring more information to the Commission regarding availability, cost and logistics to having Chad Edison speak with the Commission.

The draft annual report will be sent for review to the Commission.