



# MEETING MINUTES

Illinois High-Speed Rail Commission  
Meeting | February 10, 2025

## Location:

IDOT Headquarters, 2300 S. Dirksen Parkway, 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, February 10, 2025

11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

## Attendance:

### Commission Member Attendees:

*\*Asterisk indicates attendance in-person*

- Tim Butler – Illinois Railroad Association\*
- 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\*
- Bria Scudder – State of Illinois\*
- Brian Shanahan – Transportation Communications Union\*
- Senator Steve Stadelman – Senate
- Bogdan Vitas Jr. – Illinois Municipal League
- James Wild – East-West Gateway Council of Governments\*

### Commission Members Not in Attendance:

- Erin Aleman – Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
- James Derwinski – Commuter Rail Board
- Senator Don DeWitte – Senate
- Michael Paul Dunn Jr. – Region I Planning Council
- Representative Martin J. Moylan – House
- Cassandra Rouse – Illinois State Highway Toll Authority

- P.S. Sriraj – University of Illinois Chicago
- Brian Vercruyse – Illinois Commerce Commission

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

- Carrie Cooper – Illinois Department of Transportation\*
- Aaron Gold-Stein – 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\*
- David Kralik – Metra\*
- Julia Hiatt – Quandel Consultants\*
- Charles Hoppesch – Quandel Consultants\*
- Charles Quandel – Quandel Consultants\*
- Victoria Fullbright – Images, Inc.
- Janet Henderson – Images, Inc.\*
- Berenice Alvarez – Morreale Communications
- Diane Bustamante – Morreale Communications\*
- Asabea Kirkland – Morreale Communications\*
- Mary McIlvain – Morreale Communications\*
- Jonathan Garcia
- Roger Huff
- Alan Mammoser
- LJ Pemberton
- Elliot Prien

## **OVERVIEW OF MEETING**

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

Vice Chairman Tim Butler began the meeting at 11:00 a.m. The meeting proceeded with the roll call of Commission members. A quorum was met with 8 Commission members present in person at either the Chicago or Springfield Illinois Department of Transportation offices. In addition to in-person attendees, 3 Commissioners were present in the virtual meeting room.

### **II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The January 15, 2025, Commission meeting minutes were supplied with the agenda prior to the meeting. Vice Chairman Butler 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 and outreach and engagement tasks.

### Project Timeline

The first virtual public event is approaching, and Quandel Consultants is working toward starting the service analysis.

Commissioner Osborn asked if there was an estimated completion date.

Mr. Hoppesch stated it is expected to be finished by December 31 of this year.

Commissioner Harnish asked about the final outcome and whether it would include the three service options.

Mr. Hoppesch responded that the project team envisions a report providing an overview of the work completed, along with information on the different routes, service options, and the pros and cons of the options.

Vice Chair Butler asked how the public will be informed about the meetings and encouraged to attend.

Janet Henderson from Images, Inc. stated the public meetings would be virtual and available via the project website. The meetings would remain open for two weeks, allowing the public to review the materials, watch a video and complete the public survey. Meeting information will be shared through social advertising and email notifications. Ms. Henderson noted that the first public involvement Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting was great, and the participating partners are eager to use their channels to maximize outreach.

Vice Chair Butler asked if the public meeting was scheduled for March.

Ms. Henderson confirmed that it was.

Charles Quandel from Quandel Consultants added that stakeholders in communities where stations are located will be engaged. Quandel Consultants has already reached out to Metra and Amtrak. In addition to the public involvement, stakeholder engagement will take place both in person and some virtually.

### Alternatives Analysis

Mr. Hoppesch reviewed updates from the previous meeting, including the study and route development process, a summary of preliminary city pair evaluation and ongoing stakeholder engagement.

The feasibility study evaluates the routes and determines which services can operate on them. The services drive the investment needed to construct and implement the system.

The analysis is currently in the middle phase of the process, focusing on determining the access to cities, railroad alignment geometry and feeder networks.

### *Network Spine Identification*

To advance the city pair evaluation, potential rights-of-way are being identified and the horizontal railroad geometry is being laid out.

Mr. Quandel noted that the key is to keep costs down and consider potential public-private partnerships. Like Brightline West, the project team was able to design a project for \$12 billion. The private sector is contributing \$9 billion, and the public, through the infrastructure bill passed a few years back, is contributing \$3 billion. The project team is looking at disturbed areas, or areas where the route is along a disturbed area. Disturbed areas are highways and township lines. If the route is above ground, costs are reduced. Quandel Consultants wants to identify potentially viable routes and determine if they are feasible with the capital costs, ridership and keeping the operational cost down. The goal is to maintain the schedule and have the final report by December 31.

### *Feeder Network Development*

The Chicago to Rockford passenger service is slated to begin in 2027, with construction starting this year.

Studies have been conducted on the Peoria to Chicago corridor, which has been accepted into Phase 1 of Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Corridor Identification and Development Program (CID).

In 2011, Amtrak studied a connecting line from Chicago to Peoria and identified a Peoria/Bloomington rail link, connecting a two-seat ride from Peoria to Bloomington to St. Louis or Chicago.

### *Stakeholder Coordination*

Quandel Consultants held a stakeholder meeting with Amtrak on January 16, 2025.

St. Louis Metro (MetroLink) will be the next stakeholder to be engaged.

### Market Analysis

The Illinois Department of Transportation has been preparing requests to administer the survey at various locations across the state to inform the ridership model. Additionally, IDOT is assembling the different route characteristics needed to help form the questions being asked and the ridership model as a whole.

### Outreach and Engagement

The first public involvement TAC meeting was held on January 30, 2025.

Ms. Henderson noted it had been scoped and discussed with the TAC to host potential events throughout the state, and the project team can meet with people in person; however, the team was discouraged from doing so based on the meeting with the public involvement folks. Since it's a statewide project, it is better to focus on social posts and target advertising. The project team wants to ensure the County Boards and nonprofit organizations are reached.

The public meeting and interest survey will be released in late March.

Commissioner Vitas asked if the intention was to share the details of the approach before it's launched.

Ms. Henderson confirmed that the project team will draft a memo to submit to the Commission.

Commissioner Vitas followed up by asking if the memo would include how the outreach will be done and where it will take place, so the Commission knows it is widespread across the state.

Ms. Henderson replied that the project team would draft a toolkit containing all of the materials and share it with the partners to distribute the information.

David Kralik from Metra asked if there was an update on the timing or the next steps for the start of a technical TAC.

Mr. Quandel answered that the technical TAC will start in late April. More work needs to be done on specific routes to have more detailed conversations.

Vice Chair Butler asked how the Chicago to Bloomington corridor connects or separates to form a Peoria to Chicago route, which is not a Bloomington to Peoria route.

Mr. Hoppesch responded that this is something that could be addressed in the far future, but it doesn't impact the other studies underway. The travel times are equal to those of intercity buses between the two cities, and it informs the ridership model. It's not intended to work with or replace any other study connecting Peoria to Chicago.

Commissioner Osborn stated that under the Corridor ID program, there are numerous corridors. Peoria is one of them, and Quad Cities corridor has advanced to the engineering phase. From a technical standpoint, it is unclear how it will feed into the ridership model.

Commissioner Osborn asked what would be included or excluded of the ridership model.

Mr. Hoppesch responded that the point of the study was to envision both the high speed rail line and a feeder network. The previous studies could be used to inform the ridership model.

Mr. Hoppesch added that this is part of stakeholder engagement. The project team will reach out to stakeholders to further assess ridership. Step one includes identifying the ridership, and step two is to determine how the ridership will be done. The project team will query and see if the information is valuable. There is a potential connection from Peoria to Bloomington, which was studied by Amtrak. It will be included as part of the final report.

It was stated during the meeting that the Peoria to Chicago study would be independent of the work here. There was a RAISE grant issued to study an intercity bus between Bloomington and Peoria, which can factor into the feeder network consideration. It's a discretionary grant, which has not been approved yet. Hopefully, the study will be underway by the time the information is needed. It is an express bus study.

#### **IV. PUBLIC COMMENT**

The meeting was open to public comment.

Commissioner Harnish asked if Chad Edison was on the agenda for the next meeting.

Vice Chair Butler stated the Commission is coordinating with Mr. Edison, and details are not finalized yet.

Commissioner Harnish asked when the Commission should consider other presenters, like Brightline West, and how it should be arranged.

Vice Chair Butler said that if there are ideas for speakers, they should be brought to the Commission to coordinate.

Mr. Quandel suggested hosting an industry day, whether it's a cement or equipment supplier. Brightline West is one potential, and there may be others that would be interested.

Commissioner Harnish clarified that Brightline West is a private company and not an agency.

Mr. Quandel confirmed that they are not an agency but could be potential bidder on the project.

It was clarified that it was more of a policy discussion and bringing in policy experts.

Mr. Quandel stated that governance is part of the scope, and the governance of the system will be addressed.

LJ Pemberton, a member of the public and resident from Decatur, shared that Decatur is sometimes included on the maps, and sometimes it's not. Some people in Decatur would love to be a part of the system, whether in a feeder or mainline capacity, and wants to ensure Decatur is not forgotten.

Alan Mammoser, a member of the public, stated that one leg of what the FRA has planned is the Midwest system, with Chicago as the hub of the Midwest. He asked if the scope of the study considers all the feeder effects or network effects that will be impact ridership on the Chicago to St. Louis corridor as part of the larger Midwest high speed rail network.

Vice Chair Butler answered that the legislation and creation of the Commission was specific to high speed rail for the St. Louis to Chicago corridor.

Mr. Quandel added that there are other studies examining the potential contribution from outline areas, such as Chicago to Detroit or Chicago to Milwaukee, to the high speed rail system. The information will be reviewed by Quandel, and the ridership consultant, WSP, will determine the potential impact. This will be included in the report but may not be included in the potential ridership study.

Elliot Prien a member of the public and a resident from Farmer City, said that when considering routes in central Illinois, there are a lot of wind turbine fields and asked whether this has been considered, since there are clearances and requirements to remove the blades, which can be expensive.

Mr. Hoppesch said the project team has seen them but hasn't completed any evaluation of them.



Mr. Prien asked if wildlife or density is taken into account when doing cost calculations in certain regions that might have more woodland or a higher deer population.

Mr. Hoppesch answered there is an environmental component, and there plans to complete the analysis once the routes are further narrowed down.

Mr. Prien asked what data would be collected and analyzed regarding the areas of Champaign, Bloomington, or Decatur, such as crime statistics, gross domestic product or industrial capabilities.

Mr. Quandel responded the project team would look at development opportunities and economic development when looking at the routes.

Mr. Prien asked if the project is intended to be public only or if it is considering bringing in a private partnership or ownership in the future.

Mr. Quandel noted that it would be a future decision. The project team is setting it up to gather information on any enticement for the private sector. This includes ridership, capital costs and operating costs, and whether they can make a profit. The private sector looks for the associated development opportunities along the corridor.

## **V. ADJOURN**

Vice Chairman Butler called for a motion to adjourn. A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 11:43 a.m.

## **VI. ACTION ITEMS**

The Commission will continue to coordinate with Chad Edison on finalizing logistics for him to speak to the Commission.