



High Speed Rail Alliance

December 12, 2024

To: Illinois High Speed Railway Commission

From: Rick Harnish, Commissioner

Re: Scope of Feeder Network

The Commission should direct Quandel Consultants to expand the feeder network used in their analysis in the following three ways:

- 1) Include all “existing Amtrak and Metra services,” as stated in the Commission’s enabling legislation.
- 2) Include all existing intercity bus routes to meet the legislation’s “uses inter-city bus service to coordinate with the rail line” requirement.
- 3) Take the connecting high-speed lines proposed by the Midwest Regional Rail Plan into account.

This directive will ensure that we build a stronger financial case for the investment and fully describe the project’s benefits for all of Illinois.

Benefits to the whole state: If properly integrated with expanded train and bus routes, the high-speed line will open up thousands of new trip combinations.

For example, the fastest bus and train combination from Carbondale to Springfield is currently twice the time of driving, and it departs Carbondale at 4:40 a.m. High-speed rail would cut that trip time nearly in half—to 2 hours 45 minutes. It would also cut the Carbondale - Chicago trip to 3 hours 15 minutes. The additional ridership would justify expanding bus service from one early morning departure to multiple departures throughout the day, making bus trips to St. Louis more attractive.

In this way—by providing offline communities access to more places, and by adding volume to existing services—an integrated network will make it viable to add frequencies and pursue steady improvements.

Making this clear will be critical to persuading the state to make such a large investment in the high-speed line.

Financial success: On the flip side, expanding the market shed for the high-speed line will make it much more useful to many more people. As a result, there will be more ridership and revenues

to support the capital and operating costs. So, the financial case for building the line will be much stronger.

Showing the potential impacts on surrounding states by adding the Midwest Regional Rail Plan will help build the case for the federal funding component.

Currently, California is the only state with a plan that integrates rail, bus, and other transportation modes. Its first plan, introduced in 2018, projected a 10-fold increase in train and bus trips— from 110,000 in 2010 to more than 1.3 million in 2040. The network will spike ridership in densely populated areas as well as remote northern California counties distant from the most popular train lines.

The first segment, from Bakersfield to Merced, is a key example: Frequencies will double on all bus and train routes that connect to the line when it opens. At the same time, state subsidies will decline because ridership and revenue will rise faster than the cost of operating the system.

Building a new high-speed line is an important and extremely ambitious undertaking. It is essential for the Commission to identify the full range of benefits by defining the proper feeder network.

Even if it is not possible to create the needed model within the existing scope of work, any analysis done by Quandel should be defined by this broader network.