

# Rockford to Dubuque Passenger Rail Extension

## Appendix A – Focus Group Meeting Summaries

### Rockford to Dubuque Passenger Rail Feasibility Study

#### May 2021 Focus Groups Summary

Focus Group meetings were included as part of the Rockford to Dubuque Passenger Rail Feasibility Study. Key stakeholders were identified by the Passenger Rail Committee and supplemented by the consultant team through local research. A total of 68 individuals were identified and invited to participate. A survey containing 15 day/time options was sent out requesting participants availability, 28 responses were received. Of those, 3 focus groups were formed accounting for 22 respondents. An additional survey offering 6 new dates and times were offered. Seven persons responded to this survey and 1 additional Focus Group meeting was scheduled accounting for 5 respondents. One individual expressed concern in attending a virtual event due to poor internet service. He was offered an individual meeting via telephone with members of the team. This call took place on May 18<sup>th</sup>.

Four Focus Group meetings were held during May 2021, including May 11 at 1:00 pm, May 12 at 2:00 pm, May 20 at 10:00 am, May 26 at 6:00 pm. One individual meeting was held on May 18<sup>th</sup>. A total of 22 individuals participated.

The purpose of the Focus Groups was to gain insight into the public's perspective on bringing new passenger rail service to Dubuque, IA from Rockford, IL. The events were facilitated by Dave Simon of Quandel Consultants and Janet Henderson of Images, Inc. Each event started with a brief presentation to provide information on the Study scope and corridor information. The discussions were centered on three main topics, Rail Service, Economic Development and Issues and Goals.

Comments provided during the events included:

#### Use:

- Use to commute to neighboring communities.
- Use for trips to Chicago for events and conferences.
- Leisure travel only – too much travel time for a business trip.
- Seminary and 3 colleges have many students that would use the train.
- Medical professionals living in Freeport would use to work in Chicago.
- Use for day trips to Chicago.
- Train supporters.
- Families
- Business travelers.
- Get to nature, connect to trails for hiking and biking.
- Sporting events in Chicago and Rockford.
- Long term travel.
- Train to Chicago then connect to train to O'Hare airport.
- Boy Scout camp.
- Run a wine train, bike, or ski club train.

- Special trains for sporting events – especially Baseball and Hockey games.
- Special trains to ski resorts.
- Casino boats coming to Dubuque.
- Rockford to Dubuque for weekend trips.
- Travel to casino, waterparks, museums.
- Connection to Viking Cruise Line Service in Dubuque.
- Field of Dreams, Dyersville – provide bus service from station.
- Educational trips with kids – lock and dam, Mississippi River, Lake Michigan, trails, nature, etc.
- Trains connecting people to Illinois State Parks – such as Apple River Canyon State Park.

#### **Travel time:**

- Quicker is better than having more stops.
- Have more stops and a few express trains.
- Have small town stations as flag stops so delays are minimized.
- Higher speeds are more desirable.
- Cheaper than air travel and time spent driving, parking and through security at airports adds to time.
- More stops are more efficient than driving, will not add much time.
- Needs to be 5 hours or less for trip from Chicago to Dubuque.
- Should eliminate stops or have express train, keep travel time to no more than 3 ½ hours.
- Train could end in Galena until travel time could be improved beyond there.
- Maximum travel time from Chicago to Dubuque is 4 hours.
- Get new lighter and lower cars that can operate at higher speeds.
- Have fewer stops during the week for improved travel time and more stops on the weekend for leisure travelers.
- Positive Train Control and safer crossings might allow higher train speeds.

#### **Stations:**

- Station locations should have easy access to roadways.
- Close to walkable destinations.
- Gets the community names on the map to attract tourism.
- Need long term parking.
- Freeport, Galena, Lena, Est Dubuque, Dubuque, Warren, Council Hill (west of Scales Mound),
- Cost to communities.
- Lena has architectural study of station, purchased land, and were looking at grants until they were told they could not have a station.
- Consider tradeoff between number of stations and travel times.
- Old Freeport depot now privately owned.
- Create train observation platforms for people to watch the trains.

### **Economic benefits:**

- Rockford is the biggest economic driver to the area.
- Good for Galena tourism.
- Opportunities for new jobs and grow tourism in Dubuque.
- Mostly would be for Chicago tourism.
- Fill hotels, vacation rentals, and B&B's that are walkable from the station.
- Build housing/apartments near stations.
- New businesses such as coffee house and shops near stations.
- Use development model Normal II used for development near the station.
- More weekend visitors.
- More condos and vacation rentals.
- Boost to local economy not Chicago.
- Manufacturing
- Provides an additional transportation option.
- Increase residency of executive level staff.
- Improved quality of life.
- Dubuque River Walk – huge employment growth.
- Buffer growth.
- Trips to Chicago would save on parking and tolls.
- Revitalization – people moving out of big cities post-Covid.
- New residents were all a visitor first.

### **Issues:**

- Train will not compete with airports, attract different travelers.
- Ability to get around when they get off the train.
- No rental cars available.
- How to keep the momentum going for economic benefits.
- How to pay for improvements and rail service.
- Iowa does not want to contribute financially.
- Too much freight traffic on the BNSF section along the river.
- Rail expansion will bring Chicago crime to the area.
- Rural communities want funding spent on new or improved roads not trains.
- Not all communities support this service.
- Issues with road and bridge weight limits are an issue for truck traffic, this should be addressed before spending on rail.
- Cost burden should not be on businesses or property owners.
- High cost.
- Railroads should pay to install PTC.
- Waiting for this since 2007.

- Should be high speed, the rest of the world is ahead of us.
- Cheaper to drive.
- Need sufficient parking and train frequency.
- Commuting is not an option.
- Jo Davies County is opposed to service.
- Ridership numbers that are defendable.
- Gaining support due to costs.
- Community costs for stations.
- Freight traffic delays.
- Savannah and East Dubuque have too many freight trains to fit in passenger service.
- Train can only average 65 mph.
- Cannot agree on what is sufficient marketing.
- Need more trains per day, service levels drive ridership.
- Need to travel at high speeds to reduce travel time.
- Potential impact to air travel.
- US trains not designed for success.
- Too many slow zones, need improved signal system.
- More trains may create safety problems at crossings.
- Business travelers will prefer to drive due to flexibility, time savings, and control.
- Train was fast in the 1970's.
- Working with host railroads can be challenging.
- Freight and passenger rail conflicts.
- High cost of infrastructure.
- Environmental clean-up of sites.
- If too many people come to Galena, the roads will need to be expanded and do not want 4 lane roadways there.
- Unexpected issues cause delays and increase cost.
- Some communities do not have Uber/Lyft services yet.

**Goals:**

- Train would expand the suburbs.
- Improve the economy through tourism growth.
- Increase ridesharing services so people could get around towns.
- Extend the route through Iowa.
- Remove cars from the roads to limit the number of accidents.
- Get funding from Washington, D.C.
- Attract young people to live in these communities.
- New amenities.
- Add high tech job residents since they can work from anywhere.
- Produce a defendable document with true costs and benefits.
- Complete project and have train operating in 5 years.

- Make a firm decision to move ahead or not.
- Develop so return on investment benefits all communities and the region.
- Stations and service need to be appealing.
- ADA compliant.
- Service that continues to Waterloo.
- Add additional mile-long sidings to help with passenger/freight train movements.
- Create partnerships with community colleges.
- Include Park and Ride lots in Dubuque.
- Travel time must be compatible with the automobile.
- Ride quality must be acceptable.
- Lay out next steps.
- Present simple fact sheet to legislators with details on feasibility, costs, ridership, schedule.
- Need multimodal transportation – include other services at stations.
- Education on benefits of rail travel for the economy and environment.
- Include Iowa DOT.

**Miscellaneous:**

- List of 60,000 signature petition in mid-2000 to support the service.
- There was controversy over the Zephyr costing IL \$12M.
- Wisconsin role with proximity to state line.
- Dubuque is the ideal location for a layover facility.
- Marketing is critical for successful service.
- This route is included in the Iowa State Rail Plan.
- Consider throughway bus service instead of rail from Moline to Iowa City.
- Highway 20 is in terrible condition and must be fixed before funds are spent on rail.
- Poor condition of Highway 20 may make train service more desirable.
- Trains are the main form of transportation for people in Chicago, not out west.

### Identified Focus Group Participants

<b>Date Attended</b>	<b>First</b>	<b>Last</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
	Mark	Arnold	Ride the Rail
	Jim	Baranski	Baranski Hammer Moretta
	Beth	Baranski	Sheehy Architects
	Brandon	Behlke	Galena Gazette
	Pam	Bernstein	Galena City Council
	Aaron	Booker	Winnebago County
5/11/2021	Ann Marie	Cain	Winnebago/Boone Farm Bureau
	Mike	Casper	Jo Carroll Energy
	Janet	Checker	Jo Daviess County
	HR	Cook	Five Flags Center
	John	Cook	Ride the Rail
5/20/2021	Todd	Dalsing	Dubuque Airport
5/20/2021	Rob	Davies	Local Development Authority
	Angela	DeVere	Galena Chamber of Commerce
	Mark	Diddens	Owns business in Elroy, County Board
5/26/2021	Jason	Duba	
	Frank	Eubank	Village of Winnebago
	Tom	Ford	Ride the Rail
	Kathy	Gable	Jo Daviess County
	Teri	Goodman	City of Dubuque
5/12/2021	Molly	Grover	Dubuque Chamber
5/20/2021	Rick	Harnish	Midwest High Speed Rail
5/11/2021	Kirstin	Hinds	Freeport
	Dwight	Hopfauf	Hotel Julien
5/12/2021	Phil	Jackman	
	Larry	Jogerst	Stephenson County
5/20/2021	Steve	Keeffer	Jo Daviess County
	James	Leamy	Lena Depot Gang
5/12/2021	Emily	Legel	Northwest IL Economic Development
	Dan	Lobianco	Dubuque Main Street
	Kevin	Lynch	Net-Smart
	Laura	Maher	City of Rockford
5/11/2021	Amiee	Martelle	Riverport Railroad
5/20/2021	Amanda	Martin	Iowa DOT
	Marc	McCoy	Galena City Council
	Steve	McIntyre	Elizabeth
	Karleen	Merchant	Seward

5/12/2021	Jodi	Miller	Freeport
	Mark	Mullen	Village of Nora
	Merle	Neises	Ride the Rail
	Rose	Noble	Galena Country Tourism
	Robert	O'Connor	Jo Daviess County
	Tom	Ohms	Apple Canyon Lake
5/11/2021	David	Overby	Ride the Rail
	Brad	Petersburg	Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation
5/16/2021	Gerold	Podraza	
5/11/2021	Keith	Rahe	Travel Dubuque
	Wayne	Raisbeck	Warren
	Cheryl	Reitz	Hanover
	Mark	Robinson	Ride the Rail
	Colin	Sanderson	Eagle Ridge
5/26/2021	Roger	Schamberger	Lena Depot Gang
	John	Schroeder	Ride the Rail
5/11/2021	Ryan	Sempf	Dubuque Chamber
5/12/2021	Doug	Spyrison	Ride the Rail
	Steve	Stadel	Scales Mound
	Patrick	Stiefel	Village of Apple River
	Tom	Stoval	community leader
	Kurt	Strand	America's River Museum
	Lynn	Sutton	community leader
5/11/2021	Eric	Tison	Jo Daviess County
5/26/2021	Sydney	Turner	Region 1 Planning Council
	Alana	Turner	Galena Downtown Business Association
	Dave	Wahlert	Ride the Rail
5/12/2021	Dennis	Waltman	Ride the Rail
	Lynn	Werner	Ride the Rail
	Mark	Williams	Greater Freeport Partnership
	Dave	Winters	Ride the Rail

## Rockford to Dubuque Passenger Rail Feasibility Study

### March 2022 Focus Groups Summary

Focus Group meetings were included as part of the Rockford to Dubuque Passenger Rail Feasibility Study. Key stakeholders were identified by the Passenger Rail Committee and supplemented by the consultant team through local research. A total of 68 individuals were identified and invited to participate. A first round of meetings was held in May 2021 and 22 individuals participated. All identified individuals were again invited to participate in the Focus Group Round 2. Invitations were sent through email notifications.

Five Focus Group meetings were held during March 2022, including Monday, March 21 at 2:00, Monday, March 21 at 5:00, Tuesday, March 22 at 9:00, Tuesday, March 22 at 6:00, and Monday, March 28 at 1:00. A sixth event was offered for Monday, March 28 at 4:00; however, there were no RSVPs for this event. A total of 16 individuals registered for these events and 12 participated. One attendee was not on the list of identified participants but joined as a staff member from Region 1 Planning Council.

The purpose of the Focus Groups was to provide a summary of what we learned at the first round of meetings and to provide an overview of the results of the feasibility study. The virtual events were facilitated by Dave Simon of Quandel Consultants and Janet Henderson of Images, Inc. Each event included approximately a one-hour presentation. Participants were invited to ask questions throughout the presentation and an open session was held at the end for any additional comments or questions.

Comments provided during the events included:

- Notice that there are USDA grants available to low population areas for train stations.
- Amtrak provides funding to bring backstopped service.
- Integration of road and rails should be considered as a way to reduce vehicle crashes.
- A train could be used for evacuation in case of emergency, especially in Galena where there are only a few ways in or out of town.
- Private railroads provide funding to the University of Illinois to research rail issues.
- The government should not pay for upgrades to freight railroad infrastructure.
- CN is improving grade crossings in Jo Daviess County including the installation of lights and gates.
- Noted that the mayor of Seward is interested in passenger rail service since there is a campground nearby.
- An old siding was removed near the Rt 20 bridge past Grand Park north of the depot.
- The old Rockford station on Main Street, east of the Rock River would be a good location for a station since it is in a neighborhood.
- The cost of roads should be compared to the benefits gained.
- Letters should be written to senators to get federal funding for this project.
- Could money be saved if the train terminated in Galena instead of Dubuque?
- Consider ending the corridor in East Dubuque unless Iowa shares the cost.
- Iowa would need a legislative decision to spend any money on this project.



- Iowa could do some passenger rail planning with 2009 funds, however, Moline to Iowa City is the first priority.
- Iowa DOT worked with Illinois on the Dubuque station location for the 2010 grant application.
- Two trains are a good place to start.
- Using the spur in Dubuque is a good idea since it is owned by the city. It may be possible for the train to stay there overnight.
- Specialty trains should be offered for Boy Scout troops, and ski trips.
- Believe Iowa will not contribute funding. There is lack of political interest.
- In the 1950's the train between Chicago and Dubuque took three hours, it should be able to be faster now.
- The train should continue further into Iowa, not terminate at Dubuque.
- Should explore other options for train sets. Some are lighter which allows them to speed up and slow down faster which will improve the travel time. Perhaps use DMUs (Diesel Multiple Units).
- What are the costs to the communities for rail terminals?
- Bill Gates has an ownership stake in the CN, maybe he would agree and support passenger rail trains.
- With gas prices going up, people want to ride the train.
- Think there should be more than two trains between Chicago and Rockford.
- Concerned about last-mile transportation.
- Will there be high- or low-level platforms?
- A more in-depth look at the benefits of rail to the climate should be addressed.
- When will the service be operational?
- Two round trips are wasteful of the crew's time. Three round-trips should be the minimum. There is enough time to run a third roundtrip between the other two roundtrips.
- What happens if CN refuses to allow passenger trains?
- Parking shown in Freeport is not sufficient for the estimated ridership.
- Who pays for the needed subsidy? Where does the money come from?

### Identified Focus Group Participants

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	Mark	Arnold	Ride the Rail
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	Beth	Baranski	Sheehy Architects
	Brandon	Behlke	Galena Gazette
	Pam	Bernstein	Galena City Council
	Aaron	Booker	Winnebago County
	Ann Marie	Cain	Winnebago/Boone Farm Bureau
	Mike	Casper	Jo Carroll Energy
	Janet	Checker	Jo Daviess County
	HR	Cook	Five Flags Center
	John	Cook	Ride the Rail
	Todd	Dalsing	Dubuque Airport
	Rob	Davies	Local Development Authority
	Angela	DeVere	Galena Chamber of Commerce
	Mark	Diddens	Owns business in Elroy, County Board
	Jason	Duba	
	Frank	Eubank	Village of Winnebago
	Tom	Ford	Ride the Rail
	Kathy	Gable	Jo Daviess County
	Teri	Goodman	City of Dubuque
	Molly	Grover	Dubuque Chamber
3/28/22	Rick	Harnish	Midwest High Speed Rail
	Kirstin	Hinds	Freeport
	Dwight	Hopfauf	Hotel Julien
3/22/22	Phil	Jackman	
	Larry	Jogerst	Stephenson County
	Steve	Keeffer	Jo Daviess County
	James	Leamy	Lena Depot Gang
	Emily	Legel	Northwest IL Economic Development
	Dan	Lobianco	Dubuque Main Street
	Kevin	Lynch	Net-Smart
	Laura	Maher	City of Rockford
3/28/22	Amiee	Martelle	Riverport Railroad
3/21/22	Amanda	Martin	Iowa DOT
	Marc	McCoy	Galena City Council
	Steve	McIntyre	Elizabeth
	Karleen	Merchant	Seward

3/28/22	Jodi	Miller	Freeport
	Mark	Mullen	Village of Nora
	Merle	Neises	Ride the Rail
	Rose	Noble	Gelena Country Tourism
	Robert	O'Connor	Jo Daviess County
	Tom	Ohms	Apple Canyon Lake
3/22/22	David	Overby	Ride the Rail
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	Lynn	Werner	Ride the Rail
	Mark	Williams	Greater Freeport Partnership
3/22/22	Dave	Winters	Ride the Rail
3/22/22	Jacob	Doro	Region 1 Planning Council