

Passenger Rail in Fort Wayne Gains Support from FRA

Editor's Note: A press release follows from our friends with the Northern Indiana Passenger Rail Association (NIPRA), concerning a concrete step forward in the effort to establish modern rail service from Chicago to Columbus, Ohio, via Fort Wayne. Congratulations are due to all our colleagues in Fort Wayne! – Steve Coxhead, president, Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance.

Supporters of the proposed Chicago-Fort Wayne-Columbus passenger rail line have approval from Federal and State agencies to take the first step in establishing the new rail line. Fort Wayne Mayor Tom Henry and members of the Northern Indiana Passenger Rail Association (NIPRA) were joined by mayors and representatives from dozens of communities along the proposed route Monday, December 19, at the Baker Street Train Station in Fort Wayne.

They announced the recent engagement with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to conduct an Alternatives Analysis and Public Input process that are required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) under federal law to begin the project.



Ft. Wayne Mayor Tom Henry speaks at a press conference held at Fort Wayne's Baker Street Station on December 19.

"I'm encouraged by our collective efforts to develop innovative plans to make Fort Wayne a point of destination," said Fort Wayne Mayor Tom Henry. "The approval from the FRA allows us to begin the process of establishing passenger rail service through Fort Wayne, northern Indiana and northwest Ohio. By working together, we're committed to making a meaningful difference by bringing more transportation options and economic development opportunities to our region."

"This is the result of years of hard work and dogged determination on the part of many of us," said NIPRA spokesperson and Fort Wayne City Councilman Geoff Paddock. "The return of passenger rail to Fort Wayne will be a huge boost for economic development in Fort Wayne and Northeast Indiana. It will add momentum to our booming downtown and help revitalize neighborhoods that surround the train station. It is gratifying that the FRA and INDOT see there is an untapped market for rail service in Fort Wayne. We thank them for working with us over the past few years to reach this moment."

The Chicago-Fort Wayne-Columbus corridor would provide high-quality passenger rail connections to 100 Midwest cities through a regional rail network that offers safe, comfortable (*cont'd*)

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("Passenger Rail in Fort Wayne..." continued from page 1) and reliable service with amenities such as Wi-Fi and food service. Initial plans are for trains to travel at a maximum speed of approximately 75 miles per hour and eventually travel at 110 miles per hour. In many communities along the route, scheduled stops would take place at existing historic train stations, such as the Baker Street Train Station, 221 W. Baker St., Fort Wayne, IN 46802.



NIPRA board members pose at the press conference in Fort Wayne.

The Alternatives Analysis and Public Involvement Process is an investment of \$350,000 and will examine the preliminary engineering, technical analysis, service planning and environmental impacts along the proposed route. The study, along with the public input process, will start in early January 2017 and is expected to be completed by late fall. The FRA will provide technical assistance throughout the process. The analysis is being paid for with funding from cities and businesses along the corridor.

Once the analysis is complete, engineering and design to upgrade the existing tracks can begin, pending funding. Supporters of passenger rail are optimistic limited service could begin by 2020.

A 2013 rail corridor feasibility study concluded that approximately 2.1 million riders would use the Chicago-Fort Wayne-Columbus route in 2020, with that number growing to more than three million in 2040. The study also estimated that for every \$1 of investment, \$1.70 would be generated in economic return through job growth and increased property taxes. More information can be found at www.niprarail.org or by reading media stories listed below. (Click the title to be taken to the story.)

[Journal Gazette, Dec. 20, Passenger rail closer to reality](#)

[Journal Gazette, Dec. 20 A hopeful announcement on rail-service restoration](#)

[WOWO, Dec. 19, Passenger rail update](#)

[News-Sentinel, Dec. 19, Study boosts chance of restoring passenger rail service to Fort Wayne](#)

[Inside Ind Bus, Dec. 19, Optimism about passenger rail](#)

[WANE, Dec. 19, Feds support passenger rail line through Ft. Wayne](#)

Riding the Rails

By Donald Yehle

State Rail Story Brings Strong Local Reaction --

Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA) members had strong reactions to an early December article on the *Hoosier State* train. Said President Steve Coxhead: "The problem highlighted in the article (Hoosier State Train: a chicken and egg problem) is a good example of how absolutely essential that a way be found to both add frequencies and upgrade the physical plant.

"Acknowledging that this will be a difficult budget year, we must be creative about presenting the case for funding (the *Hoosier State*), he said.

The *Journal and Courier's* article included a photo of an Iowa Pacific's train at Lafayette's train depot. It began "Although ridership on the *Hoosier State* Train is up – way up – the line is unlikely to see the addition of trains or a reduction in journey lengths anytime soon."

Iowa Pacific's Sales and Marketing Manager Heather Hice is quoted that revenue was up 80 percent one month. Ridership numbers this past October (2016) over the previous October (2015) was up 22.3 percent. September's year over year ridership numbers were up 46 percent.

In the article, the Indiana Department of Transportation's (INDOT) Will Wingfield explained his organization has called on railway consultants to "assess and propose future improvements to the line."

A Civil Engineering professor from Michigan Technological University in Houghton was quoted. *Journal and Courier* readers learned from Tech's Paul Lautala that public transportation has a chicken and egg battle of what comes first, strong ridership or frequency of trains.

As seasoned passenger rail observers understand, freight railway companies are looking for financial rewards before they're willing to upgrade or replace track and make additional infrastructure improvements such as changing a manual switch to remote control near Crawfordsville, the paper said.

Other topics discussed in the copyright article included drastic improvement in on-time arrivals, marketing campaigns, and as Crawfordsville Mayor Todd Barton said in the December 2016 issue of *All Aboard Indiana* (AAI), millennials value the *Hoosier State*.

Frequent public transportation user, IPRA board member, and AAI contributor Bill Malcolm of Indianapolis added this view upon reading the story: (continued)

(*"Riding the Rails"* continued from page 2)

"The train could go 500 mph and I still wouldn't like the shabby Indy bus rail station, the 6 a.m. departure time, nor the route through the Union Pacific maintenance yard," Malcolm said.

Dennis Hodges, IPRA's vice president, business relations, also commented on the story: "It's unfortunate that IP (Iowa Pacific) will not consider a morning train south to Indianapolis."

To read the complete story, go to www.indystar.com/story/money/business/2016/12/04/hoosier-state-train-chicken-and-egg-problem/94750536/

Cardinal, Hoosier State ridership up in October –

Ridership on four of five trains passing through Indiana was strong in October 2016 versus the previous October. The **Lake-shore Limited** was up 6.9 percent (31,955); the **Capitol Limited** was up 2.8 percent (18,975); the **Cardinal** was up 1.0 percent (9,990), and the **Hoosier State** was up 22.3 percent (2,805). Ridership on **The Wolverine** was off 25.1 percent (27,286).

Extensive track repairs, on the **Wolverine** line, led to extensive service disruptions, which led to decreased ridership, passenger rail advocates say.

Enthusiasm continues for 7-day Cardinal –

Charleston, West Virginia, Mayor Danny Jones is a train travel enthusiast, making trips across the country on Amtrak several times a year.

So you can imagine his position on the possibility of Amtrak's **Cardinal** line, which has several stops in West Virginia, increasing its frequency from three trips a week to seven....Jones has been part of a groundswell of



Chad Weaver, a Michigantown resident, doesn't worry about work when he takes to the rails. Chad (pictured above on the **Hoosier State**) made an Amtrak trip to Colorado his 2016 vacation. A bus driver by profession, Mr. Weaver relaxed in and at the hot springs of Glenwood Springs. "I enjoyed myself" on the train, said Weaver, who has ridden Amtrak since 1987.

support for increasing the frequency of the **Cardinal**, which along its path between New York and Chicago serves West Virginia stations in White Sulphur Springs, Alderson, Hinton, Prince, Thurmond, Montgomery, Charleston and Huntington. <http://wvmetronews.com/2016/11/27/amtrak-eyes-daily-service-along-west-virginia-routes/>



Pictured is the new Chicago Integrated Rail Operations Center.

Rail Operations Center Big Plus for the Windy City --

The Midwest High Speed Rail Association has its Cross Rail Chicago vision. This idea, featured in the December 2016 issue of **All Aboard Indiana**, is not to be confused with CREATE – the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program. CREATE is applauding the freight industry for establishing an integrated rail operations center to monitor and facilitate efficient rail operations going to, from, and through the Chicago region, which will see a nearly 150 percent increase in the volume of imported and exported goods transported via rail between 2010 and 2040.

John Langdon, governmental and public affairs coordinator for the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, reminds us that in December 2015 the Chicago Integrated Rail Operations Center (CIROC) was opened. The U.S. Department of Transportation is credited with providing information about the expected huge spike in freight rail transportation by 2040.

In a CREATE-generated story, the president and CEO of the Association of American Railroads (AAR) is quoted. "Chicago is the epicenter of the nation's freight and passenger rail system with about 25 percent of all freight rail traffic going through the region," says AAR's Edward R. Hamberger.

"Freight railroads have long taken steps to identify critical factors impacting rail operations in the area. Coordination between Chicago railroads is key to achieving the benefits of the extensive planning, particularly during challenging winter weather," he continues.

America's rail network is 140,000 miles long – and Chicago is a big part of that network. CIROC improves "visibility, metrics, and measurements that work as early warnings for (continued)

(*"Riding the Rails"* continued from page 3) potential (rail) problems. This equips railroads to better communicate on an ongoing basis, review train schedules and routing protocols and improve the ability to have the necessary equipment, materials and personnel in place to keep trains moving," the story said.

Union Station slowly moving into 21st century --

Chicago's Union Station is an iconic but creaky machine for moving people — equal parts Roman grandeur and rat maze. From crowded train platforms to foul-smelling air, the station regularly foists indignities on its passengers. It even metes out injury, like the one suffered by a woman whose head was bloodied by a chunk of concrete that fell from an office building above the station in September.

So last month's reopening of the station's former Women's Lounge — a handsomely-restored, high-ceilinged room that has been turned into an event space — is cause for celebration but demands to be put into perspective: It is one small step on the long and painfully slow road of bringing the 91-year-old station into the 21st century. And that road is full of potential potholes. [Kevin Brubaker of the Environmental Law and Policy Center highly recommends reading the entire essay at <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/columnists/ct-union-station-future-kamin-met-1127-20161125-column.html>

Ohio hurts when America doesn't invest in rail --

Layoffs are seldom good, especially at Christmas. Some 400 workers at Alliance (Ohio) Castings heard the news last month that they'll be without jobs effective January 31. Indiana could be next ... Muncie ... Columbus. So asks Phil Streby, IPRA board member and treasurer. Phil and many other passenger rail advocates hope not. For more, see <http://businessjournaldaily.com/alliance-castings-says-mass-layoffs-to-begin-jan-31/>

In an effort to share the Midwest High Speed Rail Association's vision with more people, the organization is bringing back the Midwest Rail Report. The latest edition has stories focusing on new stations in the Midwest, exciting high-speed rail projects around the world and details of how the phased network approach can be used to bring high-speed rail to the Midwest.

You can find the full newsletter [here](#).

The Northern Indiana Passenger Rail Association

(NIPRA) continues to work hand in hand with local and regional governments—including the City of Fort Wayne—as well as private entities across northern Indiana and Ohio. NIPRA's mission is to make regular passenger rail trips available from Chicago to Gary, Valparaiso, Plymouth, Warsaw and into Fort Wayne and on to Lima, Ohio and eventually on through

to Columbus, Ohio and Toledo, Ohio. Significant funds have already been committed by multiple private and public entities to create a sound foundation for funding the required federal environmental approval process, which is anticipated in the near future.

Here's the latest over on-time performance -- [STB adopts final rules for Class I performance metrics, Amtrak cost disputes](#)

Representative Truitt, IPRA says thank you --



Rep. Randy Truitt (left) and Steve Coxhead

board meeting in Lafayette.

Retiring Indiana State Representative Randy Truitt (R-West Lafayette) was honored November 17 by our alliance for his contributions to keep the **Hoosier State** afloat and now, very much alive. The recognition came during a

Bullets from the Board Meeting of November 17

By Steve Coxhead

The IPRA Board met on November 17th, at the offices of the Greater Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, in Lafayette. Much of the meeting was devoted to an in depth discussion of the state of our efforts, and passenger rail in general, in our state, as the year draws to a close. Highlights include the following:

- State Representative (Ret.) Randy Truitt was presented with a plaque representing IPRA's gratitude for his efforts in making a strong case for the **Hoosier State** in the legislature and with the Indiana Department of Transportation. Representative Truitt spoke briefly, thanking IPRA for the honor and indicating that his replacement on the Midwest Interstate Rail Passenger Commission, Representative Sharon Negele (R-Attica) would also be a strong champion for modern passenger rail. (*continued*)

("Bullets from the Board Meeting" continued from page 4)

- About 80 attended the **Cardinal** meeting, held in Cincinnati. There were very preliminary discussions about what it would take to operate a daily **Cardinal**. There was no discussion of funding mechanisms. Legislation may be introduced into the West Virginia legislature to kick start some variety of interstate commission to coordinate the effort.
- A Board and membership meeting of the Rail Users Network (RUN) was held in Lafayette in October. About 30 attended. Remarks were made by Mayor Roswarski (Lafayette) and Mayor Dennis (West Lafayette). Additional presentations were made by Arvid Olson (IPRA), Ed Ellis (Iowa Pacific), Marc Magliari (Amtrak), Win Winfield (INDOT), and Dylan Hayward (MWHsRA).
- Discussion continues regarding funding mechanisms necessary for widespread hard copy distribution of the newsletter.
- INDOT has solicited public input into the state's 2017 Rail Plan. IPRA was present at both the Vincennes and Indianapolis public meeting, and also submitted a summary of its views to INDOT, in writing. Statements were made supporting both the **Hoosier State** and the proposed service from Chicago to Columbus, Ohio, thru Fort Wayne. It is anticipated that the plan will be published in April of 2017.
- It was observed that while it is too early to speculate on what the Trump administration might do, the President-Elect did make several statements during the campaign to the effect that he would place a great deal of importance on new heavy infrastructure projects. On at least one occasion, he observed that China has better passenger rail than the United States, and that it was his intention to change that.
- We have received no comment from Senator-Elect Todd Young's office in response to inquiries as to his stand on passenger rail.
- The Board was reminded that the Vice-President Elect, Mike Pence, had been helpful in the effort to preserve and improve the **Hoosier State**.
- It was noted that several key members of the State House and State Senate appear to be more positive about support for the **Hoosier State**, and the need for improved passenger rail.

- It was resolved that the next Board meeting would be held on 1/19/17, in Indianapolis.

As we begin the New Year, please remember that your IPRA annual dues of \$30 are due, and payable in January. Dues can most easily be paid by going the "Join" tab on the website. The direct link is: <http://www.indianahighspeedrail.org/join.html>. Payment can be made by major credit card.

IPRA Comments on State 2017 Rail Plan

By Steve Coxhead

The Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) has solicited input in preparation of the 2017 Indiana state rail plan. The Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA) has supplied comment to INDOT both in writing and at the public meetings that were held. To see the statement submitted by IPRA, please go to our website (www.indianahighspeedrail.org), and click on the button labeled "2017 Rail Plan".

As we receive more information from INDOT, it will be posted to the website. Once the rail plan is completed, it too will be posted to the site.

Train Rumblings from the Lafayette Train Depot

By Joe Krause

Rail passengers – especially students – flock to the Lafayette station during holidays, to return to the Windy City and beyond. For instance, on November 22-23, passenger count going north was 87 and 96, respectively, those two days before Thanksgiving.

Passengers enjoy access to a clean and warm waiting room

with restrooms. The Amtrak ticket machine is still at the City Bus Transfer Center.



Passengers wait to board the train in Lafayette.

No railings have been added to the pedestrian ramp on the West side of the tracks. The Riehle Depot area is very nicely lighted with Christmas trees and lighted "icicles" hanging from the Big 4 Depot.

More progress is seen (*cont'd*)

(*"Train Rumbblings..." continued from page 5*) daily at the Old National Bank site, adjacent to the Depot. Many construction workers show. Steel work is going up. Concrete is being poured on the ground floor of the multi-use facility, which will include apartments.

On one occasion in early December, Iowa-Pacific had an engine problem, so it bused passengers to Chicago Union Station. On another occasion, 40 passengers boarded in Lafayette after 84 had boarded in Indianapolis. Those individuals were very grateful having a train take them to Chicago rather than slipping and sliding (on and off) of I-65.

Meet Board Member Dennis Hodges

By Bob Garity

Born and raised in Gary, W. Dennis Hodges lived in Chicago, IL, for 20 years and Paris, France, for three years. In 1975, he received degrees in English and history from Valparaiso University. Combined together, Dennis' education and residency set the stage for his professional life, which included doing market research for the multinational Club Med resorts. From these experiences, he learned the profession of hosting and organizing corporate events for foreign diplomats.

In his travels, Dennis has frequently ridden the high-speed passenger rail systems of Europe and found them to be an enormous convenience to the traveler. For this reason, he was among those who organized, in 1992, the Indiana High Speed Rail Association (IHSRA), now the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA) of which Dennis is Vice President – Business Relations. This brought Indiana into a national debate around synergistic high-speed rail transportation issues through Golden Spike seminars. Dennis and IPRA continue to advocate funding and implementing the Midwest Regional Passenger Rail System (MWRPS), a nine-state, 3,000-mile passenger rail system.

Dennis has been very focused on bringing high speed rail to Indiana. In his many years after the organization of IHSRA (now IPRA), the Golden Spike seminars were organized by bringing world class speakers from many countries and the United States as well as manufacturers and complimentary businesses that were involved in operating or furnishing equipment that



Dennis Hodges gained a passion for high-speed passenger rail while traveling.

operated in countries like France, Spain, Germany, and Japan. This arguably was the longest running event series in the United States on the passenger rail transportation.

An upgrade of America's (and Indiana's) rail passenger service is long overdue. With the help of Dennis, IPRA, and other organizations in Indiana and the Midwest, America's heartland will be a driving force in bringing rail passenger service into the 21st Century. The states of Illinois and Michigan are bringing rail passenger service closer to IPRA's goal and that of MWRPS.

Dennis also reorganized the Northwest Indiana World Trade Council, which became the Northwest Indiana World Trade Alliance in 2014, and which advocates improved international trade between Indiana and foreign countries. He has been a member of the Gary Chamber of Commerce board of directors, and its economic development and public policy committees.

NARP's Mathews Appointed to US DOT Travel Committee

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Anthony R. Foxx appointed National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) President and CEO Jim Mathews to serve on the U.S. Transportation Dept.'s newly commissioned National Advisory Committee on Travel and Tourism Infrastructure (NACTTI). Mathews will provide the committee insight on how passenger trains drive tourism and economic growth, and how rail development can produce a more efficient transportation system.

"It is a great honor to be given the chance to serve on this Committee as a voice for passengers," said Mathews, who is the only rail industry executive on the 25-member committee. "I anticipate that NACTTI will help tackle the enormous challenges we face in rebuilding our aging transportation infrastructure to connect America with multiple travel modes, to create jobs, and to foster economic growth everywhere in America, including 'flyover country.'"

The NACTTI, created by the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, brings together some of the nation's top transportation and tourism experts from both private and public sectors.

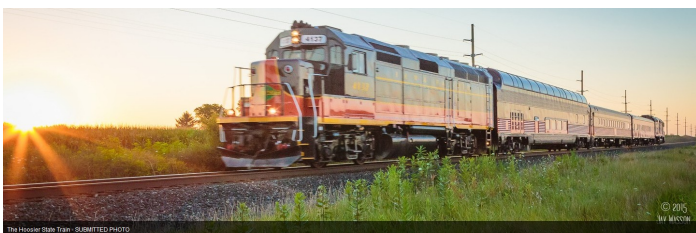
Signed into law in December 2015 by President Obama after passing with overwhelming majorities in Congress, the FAST Act provides long-term funding for transportation infrastructure and transit projects in rail, buses, aviation and more. As a result, the NACTTI was created to provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Transportation on infrastructure pertaining to travel and tourism within the United States. (continued)

("NARP's Mathews Appointed..." continued from page 6) As a newly appointed representative to the NACTTI, Mathews will serve two years from the date of his appointment. As a member of the NACTTI with expertise in passenger rail service, Mathews will aid in the development of a wide umbrella of responsibilities to assist in expanding the U.S.'s travel and tourism industries. Additional information on the responsibility of the committee can be found at the U.S. Department of Transportation's website.

The NACTTI held its first meetings on December 8-9, 2016, at the Federal Aviation Administration headquarters, where members discussed the current condition of the transportation and tourism industries.

Other transportation and tourism experts joining Mathews on the Committee include:

- Chair: Rossi Ralenkotter, President & CEO of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority.
- Vice Chair: The Honorable Mark Begich, President & CEO of the Northern Compass Group, LLC.



The Hoosier State Train

By Dan Grossman

Editor's Note: The following article (and accompanying image, above) originally appeared in *NUVO Newsweekly* and is reprinted with permission. To learn more about NUVO, go to www.nuvo.net

At 5:45 a.m. on Friday, Sept. 9, I walk into Union Station in downtown Indianapolis. I'm here to take the Hoosier State Train to Chicago, a train that just a few years ago seemed headed for the scrapyard due to lack of ridership and lack of funding. But the train, like *The Little Engine That Could*, has surpassed all expectations. I'm here to check out the service and to find out whether it can survive for the long term. The train departs promptly at 6 a.m., per the schedule. Many might see the early departure time as a downside. Then there's the five-hour travel time. The upside is, well, that you're on a train. This particular train has Wi-Fi. There will be breakfast, freshly prepared and served on white tablecloths by the onboard steward. I order the chef's special: an omelet.

This, you might ask, is Amtrak? Well, sort of. Actually, it's a public-private partnership between Amtrak and Iowa Pacific — responsible for adding the refurbished 1950s dome car — that commenced service on Aug. 7, 2015.

What's more, this is actually the first such public-private partnership in the country. You can thank the Passenger Rail and Investment Act for making this arrangement necessary. This law, passed by Congress in 2008, went into effect in 2013. It mandated an end to federal support of passenger rail lines under 750 miles in length, putting the Hoosier State Train in the crosshairs as it didn't generate nearly enough revenue to be self-supporting. While the Republican-dominated state legislature wasn't about to raise taxes to support this train, there were many other interested parties who were looking for creative ways to keep the rail line operating.

A Partnership of Communities

Will Wingfield, the Director of Communications at the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT), says that the Indiana towns and cities along the rail line played a major role in keeping the service alive. "The communities made it clear to INDOT that they felt this service was important for their place-making and their economic development, so they partnered with the state to provide financial support," he said. "So as of today, INDOT, the city of Crawfordsville, the cities of Lafayette, West Lafayette, Rensselaer, as well as Tippecanoe County, jointly fund the service."

Once INDOT had secured this source of revenue from these municipalities and counties, they started to look into private sector sources of funding for the rail line, which they viewed as a way to both increase ridership and revenue, according to Wingfield.

"So we did a request for proposals in April, 2013," he said. "We had four companies respond; ultimately we went with Iowa Pacific. The contract arrangement is unique: Amtrak is still the operator of record of the service. They do the ticketing, they're responsible for the train crews and for working with the host railroads. There's a separate contract with Iowa Pacific. They provide the train equipment; they provide the on-board service. They also market the service."

Heather Hice, the Hoosier State Train Sales and Marketing Manager, notes that the dome car business class option is a hit with riders, as well as a good revenue generator.

"We do promotions for families, we do promotions for business travelers," says Hice. "We actually have business programs where businesses can have their traveling employees get an employee discount. I think the key to our success is continuing the awareness drive that I've been doing for the past year. There were a lot of people prior to our taking over who had no idea there was even a train."

The numbers Hice cites seem to suggest that her efforts are bearing fruit. *(continued)*

"The Hoosier State Train" continued from page 7)

"In May, June, and July ticket revenue has been 60 percent plus over 2015," she said. "Last month [August, 2016] it was actually 70 percent over the prior year number for ticket revenue. We're steadily increasing ridership. (The ridership is up 25 percent in August 2016 compared to August 2015, according to Wingfield.)

The jumps in revenue have happened despite considerable challenges with the rail line itself. Perhaps the biggest is that the *Hoosier State* runs on a freight rail line, and priority is given to freight traffic. The line is mostly run and maintained by CSX Transportation Company.

If there were to be upgrades to significantly improve the speed of the train, according to Wingfield, the state would have to make the financial investments in capital improvements, he says, but INDOT has been doing what it can to improve on-time performance.

"[This means] just operationally, keeping an eye on the dispatchers, improving when the crews get on and off and when their hours time out," he says. "And those improvements have been free or low cost."

Heather Hice agrees that any improvements in the rail line itself are ultimately up to the legislature.

"What we're trying to do as a company is to show those legislators that we're doing better than we've ever performed," she says. "Our on-time performance is somewhere in the realm of 90 percent. Before we took over it was much lower than that."

Beyond the Status Quo

Steven Coxhead, the president of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance, sees the public private partnership as a positive step that proves that there's a market for top-notch service. But he sees room for improvement.

"You really have to improve the schedule," he says. "And that means more trains. That means higher speeds. ... It's well within Indiana's capability to work with CSX Transportation ... to bring the whole corridor up to an 80-mile-per-hour standard."

He wants to see the travel time from Indy to Chicago reduced down to three-and-a-half hours. He also wants to see multiple departures and arrivals to and from Indy and Chicago on any given day. Currently the *Hoosier State* makes a round trip only one time per day on the four days a week on which it runs, and it arrives back in Indianapolis at midnight. (On the other three days of the week you can get to Chicago on the Amtrak **Cardinal** Train, which runs three days a week from

New York City to Chicago and stops in Indianapolis.)

The current contract with Iowa Pacific ends in June 2017. State Representative Tim Brown (R-Crawfordsville), Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee as well as the Budget Committee, wasn't able to say definitively whether or not service would continue past that point.

"What's happening right now is that the different agencies of state government are putting together their final plans to submit to the budget organization," he says.

He's waiting for INDOT to give a presentation before the legislative budget committee and for a revenue forecast due Dec. 15.

"So as far as what's in the INDOT budget right now, I have no idea," says Brown. "I will say that a couple of years ago I was more skeptical, and as we go forward I'm more pleased with the performance. A lot of people are pleased with the progress ... so there's a lot more momentum than there was a couple of years ago."

Former Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels was also one of those who was once more skeptical of passenger rail — when he was in office. But now, according to Coxhead, he's on board in the effort to keep the train on the tracks. That is because, as Purdue University president, he must respond to the needs of a large number of commuting students dependent on the train.

"This is not a partisan issue," says Coxhead, acknowledging the fact that both Democratic and Republican politicians in communities up and down the rail line are supporting the train financially.

The comfort of the ride

The return trip on the train starts at 5:45 p.m. After my meal of beef tenderloin on new potatoes, washed down with beer from the open bar, I go down to the dining car to pay the chef compliments. The chef, 60-year-old Paul Zirkle, can barely fit in his tiny kitchen but he's able to work efficiently in it.

Zirkle, for one, loves the train, as he loves his job.

"This really brought me back to my roots, what I enjoy doing, which is preparing the food. I love catering; that's my favorite thing to do," Zirkle tells me. "So when I do catering, I can get really with the people."

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Midwest High Speed Rail Association – Dylan Hayward

National Association of Railroad Passengers – Staff reports

NUVO Newsweekly – Dan Grossman

For More Information

All Aboard Indiana is a monthly publication of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA), formerly the Indiana High Speed Rail Association (INHSRA).

To learn more about IPRA, visit www.indianahighspeedrail.org

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Discounts

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