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## FAQs



# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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### What is the Illinois High-Speed Rail Program?

The overall purpose of this Program is to enhance the passenger transportation network within the Chicago to St. Louis corridor, resulting in a more balanced use of the modal components. The current Chicago to St. Louis corridor operates on only one set of track; however, future visions for this corridor include the full build-out of an additional second track. The full build-out of an additional second track was determined in the Tier 1 Study by combining technical analysis and stakeholder input. This Program intends to establish a more balanced modal use of the transportation network by improving rail service. Three Tier 2 Studies began in 2014 to provide more detailed engineering and environmental analyses for the Preferred Alternative.

### Who is responsible for this Program?

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) are acting as joint lead agencies on this Program.

### What are high-speed trains?

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) defines high-speed trains as those operating at speeds over 90 miles per hour. The Chicago to St. Louis high-speed passenger trains will operate at a maximum speed of 110 miles per hour, where safe and practical.

### How is high-speed rail funded?

On April 16, 2009, President Obama announced a new vision for developing high-speed passenger rail in America. The vision called for a collaborative effort among the federal government, states, railroads, and other key stakeholders to help transform America's transportation system through the creation of a national network of high-speed rail corridors. To achieve this vision, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) launched the High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) Program in June 2009, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). On January 28, 2010, Illinois was selected for a \$1.2 billion federal award to bring high-speed passenger rail service to Illinois by 2015-2017. In addition, the Illinois Capital bill has appropriated \$400 million for high-speed rail.

Illinois also was selected for federal funds through the Federal Railroad Administration HSIPR Grant under the ARRA. Illinois received \$1.1 billion for corridor improvements between Dwight and the St. Louis area. In December 2010, an additional \$42.3 million was received for construction upgrades between Dwight and St. Louis. In January 2012, \$186.3 million was received for corridor improvements between Joliet and Dwight. The overall package of improvements included matching funds from the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), local municipalities, and the Union Pacific Railroad.

### What are the next steps for implementing high-speed trains?

- Illinois (along with other Midwest states) had a vision for high-speed rail beginning in the 1990's, and in 2003, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) developed an environmental clearance document referred to as an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The result of the EIS was a federally approved project that then was eligible for federal funding; and the result was documented in a Record of Decision (ROD).
- The Chicago to St. Louis Corridor ROD was approved in 2004 and allowed IDOT to be well-positioned for federal funds. The ROD approved upgrades to the existing Chicago to St. Louis corridor, but only allowed improvements to the existing line from Dwight to the St. Louis area.
- Continuing with IDOT's commitment to build a world-class high-speed rail corridor, the Department completed a second EIS (the Tier 1 EIS) to study a full build-out (adding a second track and other improvements) of the corridor and to decide on a route between Chicago to Joliet, Alton to East St. Louis, and in the Springfield corridor.
- The Tier 1 EIS was completed in October 2012, and the Record of Decision was issued in December 2012.
- A 15-mile demonstration run was conducted between Dwight and Pontiac, operating at speeds up to 110 miles per hour on October 19, 2012.

#### Has any construction been completed?

##### Construction Overview

The State of Illinois has ensured that the Chicago to St. Louis corridor remains at the forefront of passenger rail development.

In September 2010, one of the first construction projects in the national High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) program began along the Chicago to St. Louis route to prepare it for future train operations at up to 110 miles per hour.

On April 1, 2011, the second round of construction began to upgrade approximately 96 miles of existing track from Elkhart to Dwight. An additional 18 miles were also constructed between St. Louis and Lenox. Construction was completed August 23rd.

Construction work for 2012 began in April. Improvements in preparation for higher speed travel were concentrated between Wann and Godfrey and from Pontiac to Joliet. Work included building new sidings and second track, upgrades to bridges and culverts, drainage improvements, installation and upgrades to signal and wayside equipment and continued crossing and approach improvements. Work was completed in August.

Work has continued throughout the Chicago to St. Louis Corridor, including siding reconstructions, grade crossing improvements, fencing installation, utilities and signal improvements, and bridge construction/modifications.

In 2018, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) will complete work to have infrastructure improvements in place to support speeds of up to 110 mph.

#### What are the benefits of past construction?

- Significant milestone in preparing the Chicago to St. Louis rail corridor for service with speeds up to 110 miles per hour.
- Improved track construction contributed to enhanced on-time performance of existing passenger service.
- Provided better connectivity between Chicago and St. Louis.
- Safety improvements with the installation of four (4) quad gates and new signals

#### What were the improvements resulting from the construction?

- Installation of new premium rail, concrete ties, and stone ballast that supported the new rail and ties.
- Railroad turnouts were replaced with larger switches that allow trains to run through them at a higher speed, and certain curves were re-aligned to support future higher speeds.
- Rail/highway crossings were refurbished with new concrete road surfaces and improved adjacent roadway approaches.

#### Will any grade crossings be closed?

During construction, most rail/highway crossings will be temporarily closed to enable the work to be performed. Any permanent closures of a grade crossing will involve a negotiated process with the landlord, county, and/or local municipality. For a current list of closed grade crossings, visit the project website at [http://www.idothsr.org/2010\\_const/closures.aspx](http://www.idothsr.org/2010_const/closures.aspx).

#### Will I experience any Amtrak service changes?

Yes. Amtrak will announce temporary service changes and substitute express bus services that will replace train service during construction, as well as provide reports via Amtrak's website ([www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com)). Passenger Service Notices will be posted at stations and will be displayed as part of the booking process on [www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com).

#### What about trains traveling 220 miles per hour?

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) is taking an incremental approach to implementing high-speed rail in the state, similar to how many European countries have implemented high-speed rail service. The 110 miles per hour service on the corridor has the necessary environmental documents, and construction began on September 1, 2010. The public got its first glimpse of higher speed passenger service between Dwight and Pontiac on October 19, 2012.

IDOT embraces the idea that a network of different but connecting rail services operating at up to both 110 miles per hour and 220 miles per hour may best serve the state's travel and economic development needs. IDOT recently submitted a grant application to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for an Alternative Analysis and environmental studies for 220 miles per hour service.

However, the application was not selected for funding. Trains operating at 220 miles per hour will be subject to a higher level of safety standards, which require grade separations for any rail/highway crossings, dedicated right-of-way, and fencing. The development of such a system will take a considerable length of time. Illinois is currently funding a study of 220 MPH service from Chicago to Champaign.

#### When will high-speed service begin?

Illinois High-Speed Rail Chicago to St. Louis corridor improvements have been underway between the Joliet and the East St. Louis area since 2010. Significant infrastructure improvements will be constructed to support in 2018.

#### How can I keep informed about this Program?

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) has a number of contact points for information on this project. Visit [www.idothsr.org](http://www.idothsr.org) or [www.facebook.com/illinoishighspeedrail](https://www.facebook.com/illinoishighspeedrail) for more Program specific information and to comment on the Illinois High-Speed Rail Program. In addition to the websites, we encourage stakeholders to sign-up for the mailing list to receive newsletters and invitations to meetings, as well as to e-subscribe to website updates.

#### Who can I contact about this Program?

You can direct questions and comments to us via <http://www.idothsr.org/comments/>. Written correspondence can be sent directly to the Illinois Department of Transportation, Division of Public & Intermodal Transportation, 69 West Washington, Chicago, IL 60602. A hotline has also been established for receipt of comments, 1-855-IDOT-HSR (436-8477).

#### Who can I contact about safety presentations to our community organizations or schools?

The Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) has developed an Illinois Rail Crossing Safety Program in conjunction with Operation Lifesaver. Contact the ICC to schedule a crossing safety program for your community. Contact Chip Pew at (312) 636-3034, [cpew@icc.illinois.gov](mailto:cpew@icc.illinois.gov)

#### Will faster trains cause safety concerns?

As part of the Program to accommodate trains operating at speeds up to 110 miles per hour, there are several safety enhancements to the corridor underway. A major portion of the investment in the Chicago-St. Louis corridor is to improve safety systems. The track will be upgraded to premium rail and other components, which supports safer operations. All of the rail/highway grade crossings will undergo an extensive field review (referred to as a field diagnostic) to determine necessary improvements and warning devices at the crossings will be upgraded. The majority of the public crossings will ultimately be equipped with four gates at each crossing (4-quadrant gates) to better restrict vehicles from entering the path of a train. All private crossings will also be equipped with gates to restrict access to the tracks. Finally, a Positive Train Control (PTC) system will be implemented on the corridor which both helps to keep trains separated from each other as well as identifying roadway vehicles on the tracks at crossings, enabling actions to be taken to avoid an incident.

#### Will new trains be bought for the high-speed rail service?

Yes – as part of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) funding selection for the Record of Decision (ROD) package of improvements, six new sets of equipment (trainsets) capable of operating at up to 110 miles per hour will be purchased for use on the Chicago to St. Louis corridor. Each trainset is expected to consist of five cars including new coach and business class seating, as well as premium amenities, such as food service and Wi-Fi. Two new high horsepower diesel locomotives will likely be used on each trainset. Specifications for the new equipment are being developed by a national consortium of State departments of transportation (DOTs), equipment suppliers, and other industry experts. They are drawing on international best practices in the development of these specifications. A higher level of comfort and safety is being specified in the new equipment. Any equipment purchased for the new high-speed service will undergo extensive performance testing and simulated operations on the corridor prior to the start of passenger service.

#### How does a community establish a Quiet Zone?

In 2005, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) issued a rule requiring that locomotive horns be sounded as a warning to highway users at public highway-rail crossings. To mitigate the effects of train horn noise, federal regulations provide public authorities the opportunity to establish quiet zones in their community, as long as certain safety measures are in place and the crossing accident rate meets FRA standards. Communities wishing to establish New Quiet Zones must submit Notices of Intent and Establishment in accordance with the rule. For more detailed guidelines on establishing quiet zones refer to the [Final Rule](#).

#### **Did You Know?**

Communities wishing to establish new Quiet Zones must follow guidelines established by the Federal Railroad Administration. Details on the process can be found at Guidance on the Quiet Zone Creation Process at [www.fra.dot.gov](http://www.fra.dot.gov).