

MIDWEST RAIL PLANS & IJJA

By Terry Brown, TCMC Newsletter Editor

Heard the latest? There's a significant amount of federal grant money available right now for passenger rail projects across the United States. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is the gatekeeper of this money, and the path for getting a grant is through an application spelling out your reason for desiring the money and path going forward on how it's going to be completed.

It is a somewhat complex process that when handled by someone with previous successful experience applying for federal grants, increases the chances of being awarded some federal funding. All applications must show some local money being available in partnership with the federal grant. No grant will be considered 100 percent of the funding necessary to complete the project.

Heard the latest? There are how many different maps of proposed passenger rail service expansions in the Midwest that show a train connecting Milwaukee to Green Bay? They all go around the west side of Lake Winnebago connecting Appleton, Oshkosh, and Fond du Lac. Perhaps the map gaining the most notoriety is the Amtrak Connects Us plan, but there are other Midwest maps like the one produced by the FRA, and they all show a train route to Green Bay.

If only it were that easy: Show a copy of one of the maps to your local US Representative, wait for the next round of funding and a train will soon magically appear at the Titledown Brewery Station in Green Bay. Sounds a little bit like what Madison expected in 2010. We all know how that story finished.

Heard the latest? IJJA is the current acronym to pay attention to. IJJA stands for Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act, signed into law by President Biden on November 15, 2021. There are significant amounts of money for the Northeast Corridor (NEC) and Amtrak in general, but there's money specifically designated for Amtrak Long-Distance trains and Intercity Passenger Rail operations. This could be an incentive for the Fox Valley area and Green Bay to coordinate efforts to speed up the initial stages of new train development.

The 21st Century history of passenger rail funding began in 2008 with the passage of PRIIA, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act during the George W. Bush administration.

Jump ahead to March 9, 2022, where a celebration in LaCrosse, WI. was over a \$31.6 million construction grant for the Twin Cities- Milwaukee- Chicago (TCMC) train. This grant was part of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act of 2015, signed into law by President Barack Obama. This construction grant fell under the CRISI funding, or Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Program. This application was submitted during the summer of 2020 by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT), approximately 20 months ago.

As part of the conditions for the federal TCMC funding, Amtrak contributed \$5 million, the State of Minnesota contributed \$10 million, and Wisconsin contributed \$6.5 million. These were all necessary before the FRA would release their portion of the construction funding.

It's understandable that all the above programs for funding, conditions for applying and keeping your alphabet soup acronyms straight begins to make the average person become disoriented. There are a host of seasoned experts available within WisDOT and Amtrak that are eager to create and facilitate well drafted and planned funding applications.

On the web search for more information at < Amtrakconnectsus.com >.
Search Wikipedia for [IJJA](#), [Fast Act](#) and [CRISI Program](#).

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