

Wisconsin Wins Corridor ID Grants To Study Five New or Expanded Rail Routes

Studies will design routes to Madison, Green Bay, Eau Claire and expand existing service

By Terry Brown, TCMC Newsletter Editor

This story includes portions from Urban Milwaukee By [Jeramey Jannene](#) - Dec 6th, 2023

December 8, 2023 – After much anticipation throughout the year over the potential awards Wisconsin could win for the beginnings of expanding passenger rail, an announcement this past Wednesday by Wisconsin Senator Tammy Baldwin came with great relief and joy for many passenger rail advocates within the State of Wisconsin.

The state will receive \$2.5 million relating to five Corridor ID proposals to study new services to Madison, Green Bay through the Fox Valley, and Eau Claire. The trains would connect with Milwaukee and Chicago through existing Hiawatha Service, and the Twin Cities to the west. WisDOT will also receive grants to support studying expanding service that includes the Empire Builder corridor, including a third daily round trip between Chicago, Milwaukee, and the Twin Cities. The third daily train, an expansion of the TCMC proposal, could include stops in Madison and Eau Claire.

“Passenger rail helps people get to work and school safely, boosts tourism and recreation, and grows our local economies, and I am proud to deliver funding to help expand it in Wisconsin,” said Baldwin in a press release announcing the awards. “I voted for the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to move our economy forward and get Wisconsinites where they need to go efficiently and safely, and I am excited to see these plans for passenger rail move forward.”

The TCMC acronym above is derived from the endpoints with Milwaukee in the center: Twin Cities, Milwaukee, and Chicago. The current TCMC project, not connected with the Corridor ID program, will add one daily round-trip Intercity train between these cities and serve all current Empire Builder stations in-between plus the Milwaukee Airport Station and Sturtevant. This train service could begin in the first half of 2024.

The Milwaukee to Green Bay service would function as an extension of the existing Amtrak Hiawatha service between Milwaukee and Chicago. Several Amtrak Northeast Corridor states including Virginia and a few New England states utilize the NEC Regional Trains as extensions for their own state services. The Commonwealth of Virginia uses three NEC trains continuing south from Washington DC as extension service trains to Fredericksburg and Richmond. This service does not use the high-speed Acela trains.

The Madison service would also function as a Hiawatha Extension train. Initially this service would have trains run west from Milwaukee directly to Madison and return to Milwaukee. Proposals have been considered for routing the train north from Madison and either rejoining the existing Empire Builder corridor or routing the train directly to Eau Claire. All of these new proposals, existing plans and routings will need to be examined with the current awards.

Both Green Bay and Madison trains would use existing freight rail corridors. The Green Bay service proposal should include stops in Fond du Lac, Oshkosh, and Appleton. City leaders in Pewaukee and Watertown have signed letters of support for the Madison service, hoping to have this train schedule stops in their towns as well.

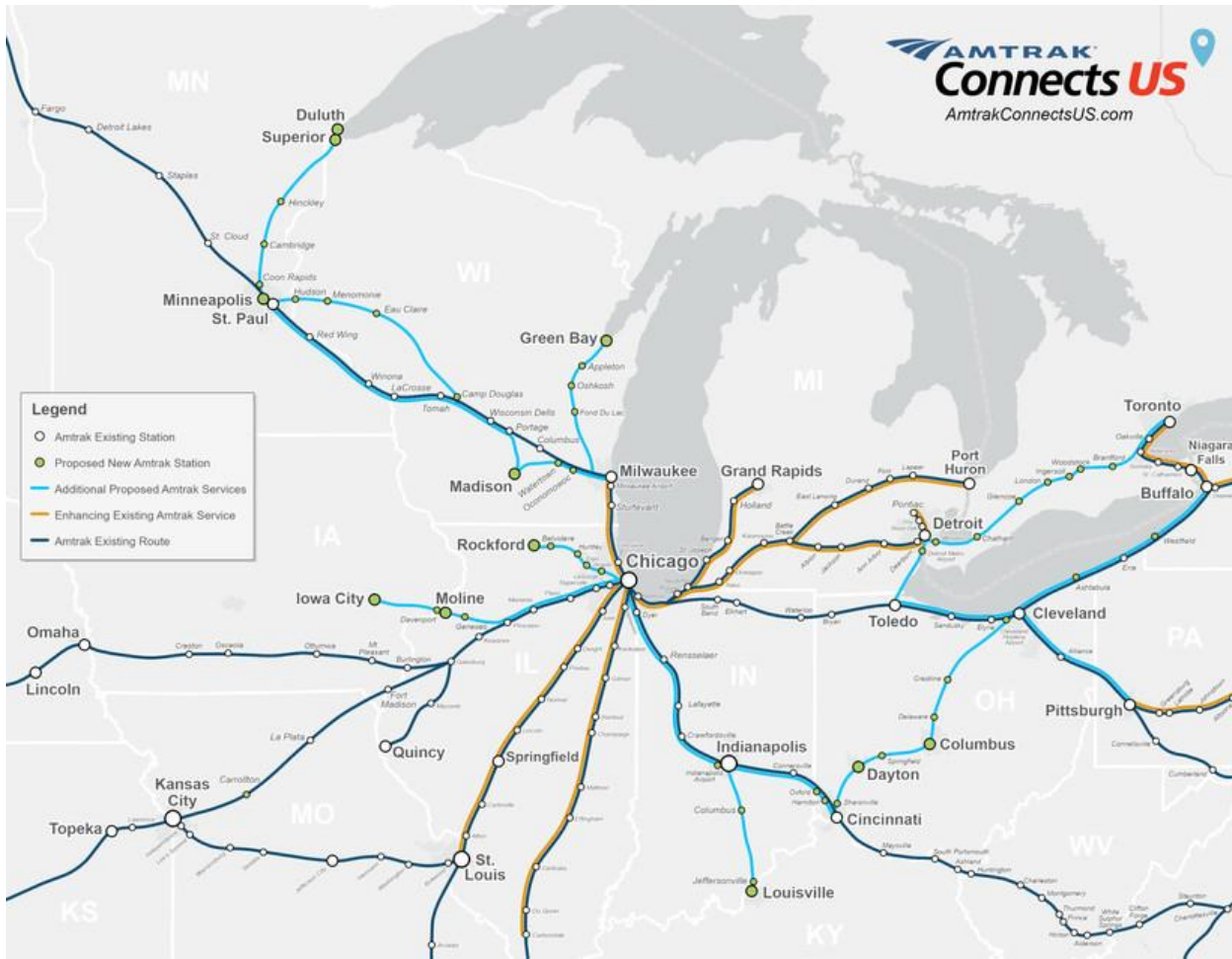
“The last passenger train left Madison on July 21, 1961,” said Madison City Transportation Director Tom Lynch in an interview with the Wisconsin State Journal. “Since then, rail has not been an option to travelers to Milwaukee, Chicago, the Twin Cities or the nation.”

The **Corridor Identification and Development** (Corridor ID) Program is a comprehensive intercity passenger rail planning and development program that is administered by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). This program will help guide intercity passenger rail development throughout the country and create a pipeline of intercity passenger rail projects ready for implementation. Currently, the definition of an Intercity train is one that travels less than 750 miles from end to end. This standard was originally set in the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008.

“We support the expansion of passenger rail service in high-potential Wisconsin corridors as a needed and worthwhile investment for the economic future of our state,” says Scott Rogers, on behalf of a coalition of Chambers and Businesses within the State of Wisconsin that have banded together to advocate for the expansion of passenger rail within the state. “Frequent service to more cities will help attract and retain business and the talent critical to its success; provide a convenient, economical, and environmentally friendly alternative to driving. It will accelerate economic growth opportunities; improve quality of life; increase tourism; and add resiliency to our transportation system.”

Rogers represents numerous organizations that support passenger rail. He is the Vice President Governmental Affairs for the Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce. Rogers also Chairs the West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition and is involved in other Eau Claire Area organizations as well.

“The Corridor ID Program is part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill (BIL) that was passed in 2021 to provide funding and guidance for proposed passenger railroad routes,” says Susan Foote-Martin, Vice President Public Relation for the Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers. “The \$500,000 for the planning of each route is entirely paid for by the Federal government.” Foote-Martin further explains the five routes accepted into the program include Milwaukee to Green Bay, Milwaukee to Chicago (expanding Hiawatha service), Milwaukee to Madison to Eau Claire, Eau Claire to the Twin Cities and Chicago thru Milwaukee to La Crosse and on to St. Paul, the current Empire Builder route.



The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law included \$66 billion for rail investments, including \$36 billion for competitive grants and \$22 billion directly for Amtrak.

This map details possible Amtrak expansions in the Midwest, including potential connections to Madison and Green Bay. Map courtesy of Amtrak.

This story is sponsored by the Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers. Printed copies of this story may be available at select passenger stations within the State of Wisconsin along the Empire Builder route. *No content in this story was created with Artificial Intelligence.*

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