

Feds approve Wisconsin's high-speed rail plan

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By Pete Millard

The **Wisconsin Department of Transportation** was notified Jan. 27 its high-speed rail proposal will be one of 13 applications approved by the Federal Rail Administration as part of the \$8 billion rail initiative contained in the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Wisconsin rail planners will receive \$810 million for the 85-mile, high-speed rail corridor connecting Milwaukee and Madison with stops in Brookfield, Oconomowoc and Watertown. Wisconsin DOT had requested \$817.7 million for the project from the federal stimulus fund.

In addition to Wisconsin receiving \$810 million to build high-speed passenger rail service between Milwaukee and Madison, the state also will receive \$12 million to install crossovers between Chicago and Milwaukee to improve service on this highly popular Amtrak route. The project is estimated to create thousands of jobs in Wisconsin in fields like construction, engineering, design and supply firms.

Minnesota's Department of Transportation has received \$1 million to make final determinations on a route between Wisconsin and the Twin Cities. The study is the next step toward connecting Chicago, Milwaukee and Madison with the Twin Cities.

Construction of the Milwaukee-Madison line is scheduled to begin by the end of 2010, and should be completed by January 2013, said Gov. Jim Doyle at a press conference held at the Milwaukee Intermodal Station Thursday afternoon.

Wisconsin also will purchase two additional Talgo USA state-of-the-art train sets – for four total new sets – that will be assembled and maintained in Wisconsin. In addition, the state will invest in eight new energy-efficient locomotives that will be built in the United States – hopefully in Wisconsin.

In July, Gov. Doyle signed an agreement with the Spanish train manufacturer Talgo to put two Talgo train sets into service in Wisconsin and to establish new assembly and maintenance facilities in the state. The rail car assembly plant will support the delivery of Talgo trains throughout the country.

The state Department of Transportation's railroad bureau was so confident that its high-speed rail application, submitted to the Federal Railroad Administration last summer, would be approved in the first quarter of 2010 that meetings with engineers, contractors and disadvantaged

businesses were held in early January and proposals outlining companies' interest in the project were due to be sent to DOT by Jan. 13.

DOT is aggressively planning the work so the corridor can be operating by Jan. 1, 2013, said John Oimoen, the agency's project manager for the Milwaukee-Madison, high-speed rail line. The Milwaukee-Madison high-speed rail corridor is one of three projects approved for the Midwest that run partly on Amtrak rail corridors. The Federal Railroad Administration also approved upgrades for the Chicago-St. Louis corridor and the Chicago to Pontiac, Mich. route that runs through Detroit.

The Milwaukee to Madison line will use existing Amtrak rail lines from Milwaukee to Watertown. The high-speed rail will run on the state-owned Wisconsin & Southern from Watertown to Madison.

"This is a very exciting development, but we have to remember it's only one component of improving our transportation network — not a panacea," said Craig Thompson, the executive director of the **Transportation Development Association of Wisconsin**.

Thompson said adding high-speed rail service from Chicago to Minneapolis through Milwaukee and Madison will be even more important to Wisconsin than the Milwaukee-Madison line.

"Finishing the line to Minneapolis will be a game changer for the state in terms of recruiting and retaining talented workers in the future," said Thompson.