



TO: Great River Rail Commission

FROM: Staff

DATE: August 29, 2024

RE: Final 2025 Work Plan and Budget.

ACTION: Approval

The Commission discussed a draft 2025 Work Plan and Budget at its June meeting. The Commission has typically been focused on advocating for funding and support of the Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago Second Train. That service is up and running as the Borealis service and no new passenger rail projects in the River Route are underway, so the Commission's focus will shift toward promoting the Borealis service and watching the development of future routes:

- Working with area business roundtable groups to promote passenger trains as convenient and affordable access to their communities.
- Developing a "speakers bureau" of Commission members and staff who are willing to make presentations to civic groups and others to share information and promote the Borealis service.
- Monitoring the Borealis quality of service, including support for local funding requests to improved infrastructure along the route and in and around stations, and provide community-level service suggestions to the states and Amtrak.
- Staying informed about several federal planning grants to develop additional passenger rail service that were awarded to Minnesota and Wisconsin.
- Following progress on the possible development of Long-Distance Service Study released by the Federal Railroad Administration in February 2024.

The 2025 Work Plan and Budget includes:

- More funds for materials, as the banners, fact sheet and pocket cards distributed at events are dated.
- No funding for lobbying as there are no pressing legislative issues at this time.
- Funding for communications and community outreach described in the work plan.
- Funds for liability insurance estimated at 125% of the previous year amount, and
- Contingency amount of 5%.

At the May Commission meeting, staff was asked whether the fund balance amount of \$11,424 could be applied to the 2025 budget to reduce the dues applied to the Financial Parties. Staff has prepared a budget that does apply the fund balance to offset dues for 2025, in addition to one that does not.



Great River Rail Commission 2025 Work Plan and Budget

- **Passenger and Freight Rail Advocacy Activities**

The Great River Rail Commission (Commission) will work with the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Amtrak, state and local government stakeholder partners, and others to continue the advancement and development of more frequent and faster passenger train service between Chicago and Saint Paul along the *Borealis* and Amtrak *Empire Builder* passenger rail corridor. To accomplish this, the Commission will do the following:

- Facilitate meetings of the Business Roundtable groups in the Twin Cities, Red Wing, Winona, and La Crosse to assist in their development into a marketing and advocacy subcommittee to the Commission.
- Monitor the quality of the *Borealis* service perhaps through the development of a dashboard of information regarding on time performance and other measures of service quality.
- Monitor progress, offer guidance and provide a means for public engagement on the development and implementation of other passenger rail service initiatives and studies that would add service in the *Borealis* and Amtrak *Empire Builder* passenger rail corridor.
- Monitor progress and offer guidance on freight rail studies that impact the *Borealis* and Amtrak *Empire Builder* passenger rail corridor and rail activities in the United States that could have an impact on the *Borealis* service.
- Provide comments on the draft Minnesota State Rail Plan during its update cycle.

General activities will be led by Commission staff working with agency staff to advise the Commission on when its involvement is needed.

- **Legislative Advocacy and Coordination**

As needed, the Commission will continue to develop policy positions and work cooperatively with the Minnesota Department of Transportation and other passenger rail stakeholders to continue the advancement and development of more frequent and faster passenger train service in *Borealis* and Amtrak *Empire Builder* passenger rail corridor. To accomplish this, the Commission will do the following:

- Lobby the Minnesota legislature and the Governor's Office in support of Minnesota Department of Transportation passenger rail project and program funding requests and policy initiatives, or to write separate bills.
- Develop advocacy materials and messaging to support Minnesota Department of Transportation passenger rail project and program funding requests and policy initiatives, or separate bills written by the Commission.
- Lobby the Minnesota legislature and Governor's Office in opposition to funding cuts or policy initiatives that could be detrimental to the Commission's position on passenger rail in the *Borealis* and Amtrak *Empire Builder* passenger rail corridor.
- Attend legislative hearings and arrange for Commission members to testify.
- Advocate for rail crossing improvements and other improvements that improve speed, safety and reliability of passenger and freight trains.
- Advocate for customer service staff and capital investments at stations to provide a better customer experience.



- Coordinate lobbying efforts and advocacy efforts with government affairs staff from the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Amtrak, state and local government stakeholder partners, and others.
- Consider membership in similar advocacy organizations such as the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission and Rail Passengers Association.

Advocacy and legislative coordination activities will be led by Commission staff working with the Chair to identify which items merit Commission involvement. If Commission involvement is merited and time allows, the items will be brought to the Commission for discussion. If time does not allow, the Chair will determine whether the Commission shall be involved. In all instances, the Chair shall be the first option as spokesperson for the Commission.

- **Public Engagement**

The Commission's public engagement activities will be developed to promote and increase public awareness of the *Borealis* and any future phases of work, the larger Midwest Regional Rail Plan as it connects to and complements passenger rail service in the *Borealis* and Amtrak *Empire Builder* passenger rail corridor, and the importance of investing in more frequent and faster passenger rail service. These activities will be separate from but often coordinated with the public engagement activities by Minnesota Department of Transportation, Amtrak and others. Specific Commission activities will include:

- Promote awareness of the *Borealis* service to boost ridership.
- Promote the implementation of proposed passenger rail service in the *Borealis* and Amtrak *Empire Builder* passenger rail corridor that is shown in the Federal Railroad Administration's Midwest Regional Rail Plan, Amtrak's Connects US plan and the Federal Railroad Administration's Long-Distance Service Study.
- Maintain a Commission website and social media channels. Send e-newsletters to a list of key stakeholders and news releases to media.
- Develop advocacy materials for distribution to legislators, key stakeholders, and the public.
- Revise the Strategic Communications Plan as needed.
- Assist in planning and holding special events, including presentations to civic and community groups throughout the.
- Support for similar organizations (e.g. All Aboard Minnesota).
- Media recognition of Commission meetings and events through print, radio, and public access television.

Public engagement activities will be led by Commission staff working with the Commission's public communications consultant. Public engagement strategies will continue to be discussed with the Chair before being brought to the Commission.

- **Management, Policy, and Administrative Activities**

Commission activities will include but not be limited to the following:

- Prepare and adopt the 2026 Work Plan and Budget.
- Review insurance needs and procure appropriate insurance.
- Provide Commission and staff administration.
- Manage Commission finances and expenses.

Management, policy, and administrative activities will be led by Commission staff. The deliverables will continue to be brought before the Commission for their approval.



2025 Budget/Expenditures

Expenditure Category	Amount
Advocacy and Legislative Coordination	
- Materials	\$1,500
- Special Events/Mileage ¹	\$250
Subtotal	\$1,750
State Legislative Lobbying	\$0
Public Communications Assistance	
- Implement 2025 GRRC Work Plan	\$35,000
Management/Administration	
- Insurance	\$1,250
Contingency	\$2,000
Total	\$40,000

¹ Travel to out of state events/conferences would be the responsibility of each individual member.

Note: Multiple Financial Parties currently have contracts with federal and state lobbyists. These lobbyists may provide federal and state lobbying services as an in-kind contribution of the Financial Party members to the Commission.

Note: As of August 28, 2024, the Commission has \$32,500.41 available in unspent revenue. This amount will be reduced by expenses incurred through December 31, 2024.



2025 Dues Revenue without offset

Revenue Source	Amount
Federal Appropriations	\$0
State Appropriations	\$0

Financial Party	Percentage ¹	2025 Contribution
Goodhue County	11.5%	\$4,600
La Crosse Area Planning Committee	14.7%	\$5,880
Ramsey County	41.0%	\$16,400
Winona County	12.9%	\$5,160
Wabasha County	4.7%	\$1,880
Washington County	15.2%	\$6,080
Total Dues Contributions	100.0%	\$40,000

¹ Per the Amended and restated Joint Powers Agreement (adopted 2017) and rounded to the nearest tenth, the Financial Parties' contribution is based on the following formula: 50% based on the proportionate share of population among all Financial Parties; 10% based on the proportionate share of corridor mileage among all Financial Parties; 31% based on the location of existing or planned high speed passenger rail stations within the Financial Parties' jurisdiction; and 9% allocated equally among the Financial Parties.



2025 Dues Revenue with offset

Revenue Source			
Federal Appropriations	\$0		\$0
State Appropriations	\$0		\$0

Financial Party	Percentage ¹	2025 Contribution	2025 Offset	2025 Adjusted Contribution
Goodhue County	11.5%	\$4,600	\$1,314	\$3,286
La Crosse Area Planning Committee	14.7%	\$5,880	\$1,679	\$4,201
Ramsey County	41.0%	\$16,400	\$4,684	\$11,716
Winona County	12.9%	\$5,160	\$1,474	\$3,686
Wabasha County	4.7%	\$1,880	\$537	\$1,343
Washington County	15.2%	\$6,080	\$1,736	\$4,344
Total Dues Contributions	100.0%	\$40,000	\$11,424	\$28,576

¹ Per the Amended and restated Joint Powers Agreement (adopted 2017) and rounded to the nearest tenth, the Financial Parties' contribution is based on the following formula: 50% based on the proportionate share of population among all Financial Parties; 10% based on the proportionate share of corridor mileage among all Financial Parties; 31% based on the location of existing or planned high speed passenger rail stations within the Financial Parties' jurisdiction; and 9% allocated equally among the Financial Parties.