



C O M M E N T A R Y

***RAIL Magazine's* Priorities for Passenger Rail in the Midwest**

In our previous edition of RAIL, we outlined a series of concepts that we considered fundamental for any community working to build a passenger rail operation. Here, we have formulated a set of bidirectional recommendations based on our observations of passenger rail in Chicago and the Midwest. They are bidirectional in that we believe them to be important concepts that will continue to advance the progress of rail in that region, while also acting as crucial underpinnings of passenger rail success elsewhere.

1

First, proper recognition must be afforded to **the states of Illinois and Wisconsin and their officials** at various levels and departments for their **support of passenger rail in all forms**. Not only was Illinois the first state to provide investment in Amtrak's intercity passenger rail network in 1971, but they have also provided key contributions to the Chicago Transit Authority and Metra to serve communities in and around Chicago. As a result of their leadership and investment, passenger rail – intercity, commuter and rapid transit – is flourishing in their state. They have also teamed with State leaders in Wisconsin to support the successful *Hiawatha* service between Chicago and Milwaukee, a testament to the idea that passenger rail is most effective when it crosses boundaries.

2

Additionally, the way that passenger rail is thought of in the Midwest provides a sure footing for its long-term prospects. **Rail here is designed, constructed and sustained as a permanent resource**, one that will serve many generations and act as a lynchpin around which cities, villages, towns and communities are structured. With that mindset, passenger rail projects are deployed as longstanding investments, not conditional experiments. That means they have the necessary time to be acclimated and integrated into the lifeblood of the community, and it ultimately translates into success over decades and centuries, rather than months and years. The story of the North Shore line should serve as a powerful exemplar of this idea, especially considering the extraordinary lengths to which communities and their leaders fought to ward off its termination. Other areas, agencies and bodies making decisions on passenger rail would do well to incorporate this crucial understanding into their plans and priorities.

3

The **stations, terminals and depots of the Midwest are community assets**, and are recognized as places worthy of architectural distinction. Chicago is as well known for magnificently-designed and constructed buildings as it is for its railroading history, and as such, stations that have hosted train service for more than a century and a half to those just now on drawing boards are held to the highest standards. Stations that are maintained, designed or restored with a focus on grandeur are also those that are the most functional, intermodal, and, influential for rail-oriented development.

4

Passenger rail here is interconnected with air travel as anywhere else in North America. Chicago's airports – O'Hare International, one of the world's busiest, and Midway – are both served by direct connections to the Chicago Transit Authority's rapid transit network. Milwaukee's Mitchell Airport is connected to Amtrak's *Hiawatha* trains to Chicago and downtown Milwaukee, and the Chicago South Shore Line ends its route at the regional South Bend Airport in Indiana. Meanwhile, officials with Metra, Amtrak and the Illinois Department of Transportation are advancing plans to build better linkages to the region's airports for their operations. No longer should rail and travel be seen as competing modes of conveyance, but rather complementary parts of one network – one whose single goal is to provide the best mobility options.