

Merle Hay Centre
 6200 Aurora Avenue, Suite 300W
 Urbandale, IA 50322-2866
 Phone: 515.334.0075

The MPO Wants to Know: Passenger Rail

In an effort to better understand public views, the MPO has launched a series of online surveys about various transportation-related topics. The survey results will help the MPO develop plans and projects for the future. The responses also will be shared with appropriate roundtables and policymakers. For a list of available surveys, please visit the MPO website at <http://www.dmampo.org/user/survey.html>. Below are the results of a survey related to passenger rail, which has been the focus of numerous efforts as of late.

Question 1. Do you support passenger rail in the Des Moines metropolitan area?

Yes96.0%
 No.....4.0%

Question 2. If you answered yes to question 1, what is the primary reason for your support?

Congestion avoidance6.2%
 Improved mobility and connectivity70.4%
 Job creation and economic development14.2%
 Potential shift in development patterns5.6%
 Reduced environmental impacts3.7%

One individual pointed to the cost savings associated with passenger rail, while others noted that more transportation choices would mean less time in personal automobiles and result in better use of their time. Passenger rail could serve as a low-cost feeder to airlines as well. Other respondents want passenger rail in order to put Iowa on par with Illinois and to minimize the driving hassles when traveling to Chicago.

Question 3. If you answered no to question 1, please explain.

While the results of question 1 demonstrate overwhelming support for passenger rail, some individuals do not support this initiative. Several of these individuals are concerned about the costs of passenger rail. It would be a “waste of money on something that will not be profitable and will cause more government involvement and expense.” Another respondent noted that the “potential ridership will never justify the cost” of passenger rail. According to another individual, “passenger rail service in the

Midwest has not been economically feasible for decades and will not be economically feasible for the next decades... The rails would need a lot of upgrading to support any higher speed, and it does not make sense for the taxpayers to pay for that upgrade.”

Some are concerned about the demand for passenger rail in the Des Moines metropolitan area. “We do not have congestion in Des Moines and can improve our current street network to make it more bicycle and pedestrian friendly. Expanding the bus system is much cheaper than creating passenger rail...” One individual feels that passenger rail would be “nothing more than a novelty.”

Others are concerned that the proposed passenger rail is not high speed and that travel times would be too lengthy; “it needs to be the right passenger rail system (efficient/modern/high speed).”

Question 4. For what purpose would you predominantly utilize passenger rail service?

Business	20.8%
Leisure.....	76.3%
I would not utilize passenger rail service.....	2.9%

Question 5. The MPO’s Des Moines Area Passenger Rail Station Feasibility Study recommends the former Rock Island Depot, located at 100 4th Street in Des Moines, as the preferred site for a passenger rail station for future service through the region. What do you think of this location?

Overall, respondents are pleased with the MPO’s recommendation. They feel that it is an “excellent downtown location” that “seems reasonable;” the former Rock Island Depot is “the best option for practicality, history, location, and parking.” Many others echoed this sentiment; the downtown location is accessible and would “get people into a vibrant part of Des Moines.” The site also is near the Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority’s (DART) planned intermodal facility.

Others are excited about the reuse of the former Rock Island Depot. The site offers “nostalgia and functionality;” it is “the perfect blend of logical placement and historical relevancy. It also would bring more development to the southern edge of downtown.” One individual noted that “reusing a building and reviving history would be great for the city.”

While most respondents are enthused about this recommendation, others are concerned about parking options, congestion at rush hour, and the impacts on people who live next to the tracks. One individual suggested utilizing the airport for a passenger rail station, while others recommended combining the rail station with DART’s new facility.

Question 6. Please rank the following long-distance travel modes from your most preferred to your least preferred mode.

<u>Mode</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
Airline	43.9%	23.7%	22.5%	9.8%
Automobile	26.0%	33.5%	35.3%	5.2%
Intercity Bus	0.0%	5.2%	13.9%	80.9%
Passenger Rail	30.1%	37.6%	28.3%	4.0%

Question 7. What concerns do you have about passenger rail in the Des Moines metropolitan area?

Respondents expressed a variety of concerns about passenger rail. Some are concerned about its connectivity to other modes of transportation as well as its proximity to food establishments, hotels, and public transportation. One respondent stated that “it needs to connect the communities and allow for intermodal use.”

Several others are concerned about the costs associated with passenger rail. Some wonder if it is economically feasible and if there will be enough riders to support it. Rates must be competitive in order to foster use; it “needs to be affordable *and* dependable.”

Many are concerned about why it is taking so long to bring passenger rail to the area. They feel that it “needs to happen sooner rather than later” and fear that it will not become a reality. While some desire passenger rail in the Des Moines metropolitan area no matter the speed, others feel that officials need to make sure that it is high speed passenger rail; this will help encourage more riders. It also will make riding the train a good alternative to driving.

Still more individuals feel that generating support for passenger rail in the Des Moines metropolitan area may be a challenge. Similarly, others are concerned about a lack of use; reliability, frequency of trains, and arrival and departure times, as well as travel times to major cities, will profoundly impact the success of passenger rail.

Despite the aforementioned concerns, other respondents simply are “thrilled to think passenger rail is being considered.” One individual stated that “it will bring jobs, connect the area with other large cities, and alleviate congestion on Interstate 80.” Another respondent noted that “it would be a wonderful alternative for all demographics, and it could be a stepping stone for further advancement around Iowa.”