

Madison Passenger Rail Station Location Study

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of the Passenger Rail Study is to determine the city's preferred location for a future intercity passenger rail station. A potential station location must be on existing rail lines, meet Amtrak operational requirements, be within close proximity to multimodal transportation options, provide space for interfacing with intercity bus service, and provide short and long-term parking.

Will Amtrak be extended to Madison at the conclusion of the study?

While both Amtrak and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) plans have identified Madison as underserved by passenger rail services, there is currently no commitment to bring passenger rail service to Madison. However, historic levels of Federal funding has been set aside for the establishment of new passenger rail service through the Infrastructure and Jobs Act, and the corresponding Corridor Identification and Development Program (Corridor ID), which is administered by the FRA. Identifying a station location will make it easier to advance Amtrak's recommended Hiawatha Extension – linking Madison to Milwaukee and Chicago - into the Corridor ID program.

When will more detailed information be available about specific sites?

The initial public engagement meetings focused on presenting locations along the existing rail corridors that may be suitable for locating a passenger rail station. Many of these locations were selected due to being studied in previous planning efforts, while others were added or expanded due to land use changes in the time since previous study efforts concluded. We are currently reviewing public engagement feedback as well as high-level screening criteria to determine which stations will receive more detailed study. More detailed site-specific information will be available in February/March 2023, along with rationale for eliminating specific station locations.

Who decides where the station will be?

The City of Madison is taking the lead role in determining a recommended station location. The City will be working closely with several stakeholders to choose an appropriate site, including Amtrak, WisDOT, the railroads, and potentially affected property owners and stakeholders. Public input will be also be used to form a recommendation. The selection will be guided by the Transportation Policy and Planning Board and Common Council. Amtrak will need to endorse the location as it meets their criteria for providing service.

What factors are being considered to determine a location?

The project team is developing a list of factors including rail operations, site suitability for constructing a station, transportation access and multimodal connectivity, site ownership/control, adjacent land uses, environmental impacts, and equity. Further, the station should not preclude the availability to expand service to the Twin Cities in the future, should funding become available. These factors will be used as high-level screening criteria, and more detailed criteria under these broad categories will be used to rank specific sites that pass the screening criteria.

What exactly is required at a station?

The station will need an indoor space with a waiting area, ticketing, bathrooms, and staff quarters. It will also need a platform that is about 700 feet long that serves at least one, but possibly two or more tracks. In addition, Amtrak is anticipating that some trains may end in Madison, and they may need space and facilities to inspect and perform minor service on the trains. Long-term parking and space for inter-city buses and taxis will also be needed at or near the station.

How will people get to the station?

People will walk, bike, take the bus, drive, and be dropped off or picked up at the station. All of these modes require accommodations at a potential station location.

Can multiple stations be in Madison?

The City will only have one intercity passenger rail station providing a full-range of amenities. Only one location will be identified and recommended as part of this study. However, it may be possible to add suburban reliever stops with few amenities or stops that provide event-specific service once rail service has been established.

How is equity being considered?

The City will strive to make access to the station and rail service accessible to all Madison residents, including people with low incomes, people of color, and people who do not have access to cars. To that end, quality access using the transit network from all parts of the city are crucial. The project will also make sure that any negative impacts do not disproportionately affect low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. Staff will host meetings in different neighborhoods to make it easier for people to engage with the project, and provide up-to-date project information on its website for those that are unable to make it to in-person meetings.

How can people find information, ask questions, submit feedback, and stay informed about future meetings?

The best way is to visit our [website](#), submit feedback to amtrak@cityofmadison.com, or join our project mailing list so you will be notified of future meetings.

Hiawatha Extension FAQs

What is the Hiawatha Extension?

The Hiawatha Extension is a proposed extension in Amtrak's Connects Us plan of the existing Hiawatha Service that currently runs between Milwaukee and Chicago with stops in between. The service currently runs as seven daily round-trips; however, this would be expanded to 10, with branches of the service extending to Green Bay and Madison. Amtrak recommends extending three or four daily round trips between Milwaukee and Madison, with three trips extending between Milwaukee and Green Bay in future phases of expansion.

What route would the extension to Madison use?

The service would utilize existing freight rail tracks between Milwaukee and Madison for the service, with stops in Watertown, Pewaukee (area) and/or Oconomowoc, and possibly others. Targeted track improvements would be necessary to improve the safety, speed, and efficiency of operations along the corridor. These improvements would benefit future passenger service as well as existing freight rail that use the corridor.

How much will tickets cost?

This is unknown at this time, but for reference, an Amtrak ticket between Milwaukee and Chicago currently costs about \$25.

How would the project be funded? What is the projected cost?

If the project were accepted into the FRA's Corridor ID program, the FRA would provide \$500,000 in 100% federal funding to kick off initial planning and environmental efforts. Funding beyond that would be 80% federal funded, 20% locally funded. Local funding can come from a variety of sources.

Is this high-speed rail? How long will a typical trip take?

This is not high-speed rail. This is an extension of an existing, successful, Amtrak route. The route is expected to operate at up to 79 miles per hour, yet it will run slower than that through Madison where there are frequent crossings and tight curves. While specific travel times are not yet available, it would take roughly 1.5 hours to get to Milwaukee, 3 hours to Chicago, and 5 hours to the Twin Cities. In the future, upgrades to tracks and crossings could allow higher train speeds.

Will train tracks be grade-separated?

No. Grade separation eliminates street crossings improving safety and allowing trains to travel faster. However, grade separation of tracks is very expensive and it is unlikely that any rail-street crossings will be grade separated with this project.

Will street crossings of the train tracks be closed?

The general intent of the City is to maintain as many crossings because they provide for neighborhood connectivity. While no crossings will be unnecessarily closed, the central Madison area has a very high number of rail-street crossings compared to similar urban areas. As a result, some crossing closures may be considered to facilitate station platforms or to public safety while most crossings would be improved with warning lights or gates.

How will traffic be impacted?

The project will look at traffic impacts, but they are expected to be minimal with most station sites. A downtown station would not necessarily create worse traffic impacts than a north or east side station. Most additional street crossings in the isthmus, such as Baldwin Street, Ingersoll Street, and Paterson Street, carry very low traffic volumes and do not experience traffic congestion. If a station location is chosen at the Monona Terrace, several trains per day would cross Blair Street, which does experience traffic congestion, but some East Washington and Johnson Street crossings would then not occur. In any station location, the trains are expected to pass through quickly and crossings will only occur a few times per day. These crossings have lower impacts than freight trains, which are longer and move slower through the crossings.