

Detroit-Chicago 'bullet' train gains momentum

By Kevin Brown
staff writer

With some observers predicting the eventual failure of Amtrak's Detroit-Chicago service, a group of state lawmakers is studying the possible start-up of "bullet-train" service in that corridor.

At 1 p.m. today in Ann Arbor, the Michigan House of Representatives Ad Hoc Committee on High Speed Rail service was scheduled to open a public hearing on the proposed privately funded rail line. It's the last in

a series of hearings presented along the proposed train route.

Supporters say that unlike publicly subsidized Amtrak, a privately run high-speed rail line could show a profit, as in Britain, France and Japan where similar rail service is flourishing.

Projected to race at an average speed of 120 mph, the system would cut travel time from Detroit to Chicago, now nearly six hours, to less than half that. And supporters say reduced travel time would encourage ridership.

"The problem with Amtrak is it wasn't timely, it wasn't fast, it wasn't comfortable, and it wasn't competitive," says state Sen. Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield. Fessler, who has been working with the committee, offers support for the proposal if no public subsidy is required.

SINCE 1981, an Advanced Rail Consortium, joined by several American corporations, has planned development of high-speed rail service in the Detroit-Chicago corridor, as stated in the ad-hoc committee's interim report published in March. The group proposes running 12 diesel-powered trains per day, mainly using existing track.

Nancy Maciag, aide to the house committee, said the projected cost for the consortium to develop the project is "right around \$1 billion."

Fessler says that besides the cut in travel time, a private system would leave promptly at published departure times, further encouraging commuters to ride. And taking the train

would be cheaper than traveling by airplane, which could also encourage express mail and light freight carriers to use high-speed rail.

Supporters predict economic benefits to the projected six depot stops along the route. Fessler said that with other sections of the U.S. also making tentative plans to begin high-speed rail service, Western Wayne County could benefit if area auto-makers build train engines and rail cars.

Currently, the rail consortium is negotiating with the Electro-Motive Division of General Motors to provide the power cars for their operation of a Detroit-Chicago line, according to the interim report.

Among drawbacks to the plan, Fessler said "it will take time to put it together (two-three years); things could intervene."

Also, more than 300 road crossings would have to be graded or made to run under surface roads, he said.

"ANOTHER QUESTION is, what in fact is the federal government

going to do with Conrail and Amtrak — shut it down or sell it?" Fessler said. And if the government shuts down these carriers, it could sell off portions of track necessary to the success of the high-speed line, he added.

And while no public subsidy of the rail line is suggested, government would pay for closing of certain roads and redirection of motor traffic to accommodate the high-speed route, Fessler said.

Further, the committee report states that Michigan, Indiana and Illinois state legislators would have to agree on establishment of a tri-state commission to oversee the project.

The Advanced Rail Consortium will likely submit a draft plan by the fall, Maciag said.

U-M, Marygrove plan will benefit minorities

A program that will allow students to earn a liberal arts degree from Detroit's Marygrove College — and a second degree in an academic area offered at The University of Michigan but not at Marygrove — was announced last week.

Marygrove College for prerequisite courses (usually 90 semester hours).

• Collaboration during the Marygrove residency with participating U-M units, including a probable summer term on the U-M Ann Arbor campus.

• Guaranteed admission to participating academic units at the U-M for students who have completed the prerequisite courses and performed according to predetermined standards.

In announcing the program, Shapiro said:

"The agreement between Marygrove College and The University of Michigan is an example that collaborative and cooperative arrangements between institutions of higher education can create new and exciting opportunities."

U-M President Harold T. Shapiro and Marygrove President John E. Shay Jr. said the Two-Degree Opportunity Program (2-DO) is targeted — but not limited to — urban, minority high school graduates who have successfully completed a college prep curriculum.

Participating U-M units include dental hygiene, engineering, natural resources, nursing and pharmacy. Other U-M schools are expected to participate in the future.

According to Shapiro and Shay, basic features include:

- Enrollment and residency at

CORRECTION NOTICE

The Designer Depot advertisement which appeared in the May 15th issue ran with no addresses or hours listed. The following are the locations and hours:

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Daily 10-9; Sunday 11-5

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