



City of Racine, Wisconsin
AGENDA BRIEFING MEMORADUM

AGENDA DATE: Finance and Personnel Committee, May 8, 2023

SUBJECT: Communication sponsored by Mayor Mason, on behalf of the Transit & Mobility Director, requesting permission to accept \$5,000,000 from the Federal Transit Administration through Congressionally Directed Spending for a Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee Regional Passenger Rail – Corridor Study Update, Preliminary Engineering, and Environmental Review.

PREPARED BY: Trevor Jung, Transit & Mobility Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee (KRM) Regional Passenger Rail project would significantly enhance travel between Milwaukee and Chicago. The development of passenger rail in the corridor would provide access to jobs, educational opportunities, and essential needs for over 120,000 residents within a mile of planned stations (and substantially more residents who could connect to the service via existing transit systems) by providing a fast, frequent, and high-quality transit service in the corridor. The KRM corridor is not near existing freeways, and therefore passenger rail as an alternative mode of transportation would be an effective way to encourage economic development in historic urban centers that have long struggled with disinvestment.

This phase in the project is a first step to revive the implementation of this effort, which was last studied in 2010. Accepting funding for an update to the past planning study will allow for assumptions to be revised, station locations to be studied and revised if needed, and would set the stage for the project to pursue preliminary engineering and environmental review. Preliminary engineering and environmental review are necessary steps to prepare for project implementation, and would include substantial public involvement, refinement of project costs and details, and reviewing, assessing, and identifying any environmental impacts through a NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) process. Following this stage, additional funding would be pursued to produce construction documents and initiate construction.

The City of Racine was awarded \$5,000,000 in congressionally directed spending for this corridor study update, preliminary engineering, and environmental review.

The amount apportioned is authorized under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, enacted as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Pub. L. 117-58) and is based on funding made available under the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022.

BACKGROUND: In the absence of any funds available to advance the KRM Rail project since 2010, no progress has been made to get this vital service closer to connecting the communities along the corridor. The historic centers of the communities that would be primarily served by the KRM are typically four to nine miles from the nearest interstate highway (I-94), which has hampered their ability to attract development, particularly new and higher paying jobs to neighborhoods that need investment, revitalization, and enhanced access to opportunities. The awarded federal funding will enable the City of Racine to take a concrete step toward implementing this needed transit service.

The specific phase that these dollars fund include a completed revised feasibility study for the KRM effort (including a revised locally-preferred alternative), completed NEPA documentation, and preliminary engineering on the locally-preferred alternative. In addition, momentum will be built to identify and secure funding sources for the succeeding phases of the project. Identifying a revised locally-preferred alternative will involve substantial public involvement, including action by the boards

and councils of counties, cities, and villages along the route, demonstrating interest and support for the project's full implementation.

The value of building transit infrastructure and implementing passenger rail service in this corridor is evident. Within a mile of the ten previously planned KRM stations, there are 130,000 jobs and 120,000 residents; 22% of residents experience poverty, and 39% are people of color. Of the 48,000 households in the corridor, 13% do not have access to a car, and 43% have only one car. Nearly 50% of households in the corridor have incomes less than \$50,000. It is also significant to note that KRM passenger rail would provide increased access to over 400,000 jobs, all within 30 minutes by transit. (SEWRPC, 2021)

A KRM regional passenger rail line would:

- Provide a necessary and desirable transportation alternative in a heavily traveled corridor that has limited opportunities for additional roadway capacity
- Spur private investment and promote transit-oriented development
- Contribute to efficiency in the transportation system, including reduced highway traffic, congestion, air pollution, and energy consumption
- Provide travel-time competitive service along the corridor, as most stations are several miles from the nearest limited-access highway
- Help meet the travel needs of a significant portion of the population without access to a vehicle
- Enhance economic development by improving regional access
- Enhance quality of life by providing choice of travel mode and allow households to reduce expenditures on transportation
- Better connect Southeastern Wisconsin with Northeastern Illinois
- Promote economic and population growth in the KRM corridor and Southeastern Wisconsin
- Attract and retain a skilled workforce
- Improve accessibility to and enhance Milwaukee Mitchell International Airport; arts, culture, and entertainment venues; and colleges and universities

This phase of the project funding (project refinement, preliminary engineering, and environmental review) does not require additional Federal funds beyond those requested here to be completed. However, the succeeding phases (construction documents and actual construction), in addition to sustaining ongoing operations of the rail transit service, would require additional federal funds. It is anticipated that the benefiting local entities will avail themselves to any future competitive grants or formula funds that are available via USDOT to pursue completion of the project and support its ongoing operations.

BUDGETARY IMPACT: 5,000,000 in Federal Congressionally Directed Spending with no local match required.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: That the Mayor and City Clerk be granted permission to accept \$5,000,000 from the Federal Transit Administration through Congressionally Directed Spending for a Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee Regional Passenger Rail – Corridor Study Update, Preliminary Engineering, and Environmental Review.