

Great River Rail Commission

Approved 2026 Work Plan and Budget

Strategic Planning

Conduct strategic planning to potentially confirm or revise commission goals and identify activities and measures against those plans.”

Passenger and Freight Rail Advocacy Activities

The Great River Rail Commission (Commission) will work with the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Amtrak, state and local government stakeholder partners, and others to continue the advancement and development of more frequent and faster passenger train service between Chicago and Saint Paul along the *Borealis* and Amtrak *Empire Builder* passenger rail corridor. To accomplish this, the Commission will do the following:

- Facilitate meetings of the Business Roundtable groups in the Twin Cities, Red Wing, Winona, and La Crosse to assist in their development into a marketing and advocacy subcommittee to the Commission.
- Monitor the quality of the *Borealis* service perhaps through the development of a dashboard of information regarding on time performance and other measures of service quality.
- Monitor progress, offer guidance and provide a means for public engagement on the development and implementation of other passenger rail service initiatives and studies that would add service in the *Borealis* and Amtrak *Empire Builder* passenger rail corridor.
- Monitor progress and offer guidance on freight rail studies that impact the *Borealis* and Amtrak *Empire Builder* passenger rail corridor and rail activities in the United States that could have an impact on the *Borealis* service.

General activities will be led by Commission staff working with agency staff to advise the Commission on when its involvement is needed.

Legislative Advocacy and Coordination

As needed, the Commission will continue to develop policy positions and work cooperatively with the Minnesota Department of Transportation and other passenger rail stakeholders to continue the advancement and development of more frequent and faster passenger train service in *Borealis* and Amtrak *Empire Builder* passenger rail corridor. To accomplish this, the Commission will do the following as needed:

- Lobby the Minnesota legislature and the Governor’s Office in support of Minnesota Department of Transportation passenger rail project and program funding requests and policy initiatives, or to write separate bills.
- Develop advocacy materials and messaging to support Minnesota Department of Transportation passenger rail project and program funding requests and policy initiatives, or separate bills written by the Commission.
- Lobby the Minnesota legislature and Governor’s Office in opposition to funding cuts or policy initiatives that could be detrimental to the Commission’s position on passenger rail in the *Borealis* and Amtrak *Empire Builder* passenger rail corridor.
- Attend legislative hearings and arrange for Commission members to testify.
- Advocate for rail crossing improvements and other improvements that improve speed, safety and reliability of passenger and freight trains.
- Advocate for customer service staff and capital investments at stations to provide a better customer experience.

- Coordinate lobbying efforts and advocacy efforts with government affairs staff from the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Amtrak, state and local government stakeholder partners, and others.
- Consider membership in similar advocacy organizations such as the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission and Rail Passengers Association.

Advocacy and legislative coordination activities will be led by Commission staff working with the Chair to identify which items merit Commission involvement. If Commission involvement is merited and time allows, the items will be brought to the Commission for discussion. If time does not allow, the Chair will determine whether the Commission shall be involved. In all instances, the Chair shall be the first option as spokesperson for the Commission.

Public Engagement

The Commission's public engagement activities will be developed to promote and increase public awareness of the Borealis and any future phases of work, the larger Midwest Regional Rail Plan as it connects to and complements passenger rail service in the *Borealis* and Amtrak *Empire Builder* passenger rail corridor, and the importance of investing in more frequent and faster passenger rail service. These activities will be separate from but often coordinated with the public engagement activities by Minnesota Department of Transportation, Amtrak and others. Specific Commission activities will include:

- Promote the Borealis service to build awareness of the service and boost ridership.
- Promote the implementation of proposed passenger rail service in the *Borealis* and Amtrak *Empire Builder* passenger rail corridor that is shown in the Federal Railroad Administration's Midwest Regional Rail Plan, Amtrak's Connects US plan and the Federal Railroad Administration's Long-Distance Service Study.
- Maintain a Commission website, social media channels. Send e-newsletters to a list of key stakeholders and news releases to media.
- Develop advocacy materials for distribution to legislators, key stakeholders, and the public.
- Revise the Strategic Communications Plan as needed.
- Assist in planning and holding special events, including presentations to civic and community groups throughout the River Route.
- Support for similar organizations (e.g. All Aboard Minnesota).
- Media recognition of Commission meetings and events through print, radio, and public access television.

Public engagement activities will be led by Commission staff working with the Commission's public communications consultant. Public engagement strategies will continue to be discussed with the Chair before being brought to the Commission.

Management, Policy, and Administrative Activities

Commission activities will include but not be limited to the following:

- Prepare and adopt the 2027 Work Plan and Budget.
- Review insurance needs and procure appropriate insurance.
- Provide Commission and staff administration.
- Manage Commission finances and expenses.

Management, policy, and administrative activities will be led by Commission staff. The deliverables will continue to be brought before the Commission for their approval.

2026 Budget/Expenditures

Expenditure Category	Amount
Advocacy and Legislative Coordination	
- Materials	\$900
- Special Events/Mileage ¹	\$100
Subtotal	\$1,000
State Legislative Lobbying	\$15,000
Public Communications Assistance	
- Implement 2026 GRRC Work Plan	\$32,500
Management/Administration	
- Insurance	\$1,250
Contingency	\$250
Total	\$50,000

¹ Travel to out of state events/conferences would be the responsibility of each individual member.

Note: Multiple Financial Parties currently have contracts with federal and state lobbyists. These lobbyists may provide federal and state lobbying services as an in-kind contribution of the Financial Party members to the Commission.

2026 Revenue

Revenue Source	Amount
Federal Appropriations	\$0
State Appropriations	\$0
Use of Unspent Funds	\$ 10,000
Subtotal	\$10,000

Financial Party	Percentage ¹	2025 Contribution
Goodhue County	11.5%	\$4,600
La Crosse Area Planning Committee	14.7%	\$5,880
Ramsey County	41.0%	\$16,400
Winona County	12.9%	\$5,160
Wabasha County	4.7%	\$1,880
Washington County	15.2%	\$6,080
Financial Party Total	100.0%	\$40,000
Grand Total		\$50,000

¹ Per the Amended and restated Joint Powers Agreement (adopted 2017) and rounded to the nearest tenth, the Financial Parties' contribution is based on the following formula: 50% based on the proportionate share of population among all Financial Parties; 10% based on the proportionate share of corridor mileage among all Financial Parties; 31% based on the location of existing or planned passenger rail stations within the Financial Parties' jurisdiction; and 9% allocated equally among the Financial Parties.