

WISCONSIN'S RAIL TRANSIT COMMISSIONS

**WHAT ARE RAIL TRANSIT COMMISSIONS?
WHAT DO RAIL TRANSIT COMMISSIONS DO?
WHAT BENEFITS DO RAIL TRANSIT COMMISSIONS PROVIDE?**



“INFORMATIONAL PACKET”

PRESENTED TO:
GOVERNING BOARDS OF MEMBER COUNTIES
GOVERNING BOARDS OF PROSPECTIVE COUNTIES

RAIL TRANSIT COMMISSIONS
--ORIGIN AND INITIATIVE--

Formation by Law: Rail Transit Commissions were created under the provisions of Wisconsin Statutes 59.968 and 66.30, for the purpose of providing for the continuation of branch line rail service. This includes acquisition and rehabilitation of branch lines; operation and maintenance of these lines; lease of lines to a private railroad operator; or contract with any railroad operator to use these lines.

Economic Opportunity: This initiative was a direct response to preventing the abandonment of several miles of rail lines, which was proposed in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Under the leadership of the counties of the State of Wisconsin, freight rail service has continued to thrive and bring positive economic benefits to shippers, communities, counties, and the state of Wisconsin. Under WI Stat. 59.968 and 66.30, counties are given the opportunity to make policy with regards to freight rail service. Many counties took advantage of this opportunity in the late 1970's and early 1980's when abandonments appeared inevitable. Those counties interested in making policy became members of a rail transit commission, which then became the governing body.

Ownership: Under WI. Stat. 59.968 and 66.30, the rail transit commission and its member counties took ownership of all track and improvements currently in place within a specified geographic area (usually within the boundaries of their member counties). This includes rail line, ties, ballast, bridges, and all other associated improvements. The land underneath the improvements, however, was retained and owned by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. Nevertheless, rail line track currently under the ownership of a rail transit commission is considered public infrastructure and is available for public transportation of goods and products, people, etc.

Freight Rail Service: Most of the rail transit commissions in existence today have hired and contracted with a private railroad company (such as WSOR), to provide freight rail service to their counties, communities, and shippers. As of today here in the State of Wisconsin, there are approximately 7 active rail transit commissions representing a total of 18 counties.

Project Funding: All rail transit commissions are eligible recipients of grants from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation for the cost of acquiring track and structures, as well as the cost of line rehabilitation. Grants from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation are an 80/20 funding split with the 20% coming from the rail transit commission and/or the private railroad company. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation also offers low-interest loans to eligible recipients for rehabilitation and expansion of existing railroad facilities, as well as construction of new railroad facilities.

RECENT REHABILITATION PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN

Wisconsin River Rail Transit Commission
1989-90 - Madison to Janesville Rehab Project



Wisconsin River Rail Transit Commission
1995-96 - Madison to Middleton Rehab Project



Wisconsin River Rail Transit Commission
1999 - Sauk City Railroad Bridge Alternates Study



Pecatonica Rail Transit Commission
2000 - ICG Interchange Removal Project – Monroe, WI



Pecatonica Rail Transit Commission
2002 – SuperSoy Siding Project – Brodhead, WI



Pecatonica Rail Transit Commission
2002 – Monroe to Janesville Track Rehabilitation



Wisconsin River Rail Transit Commission
2002 - Sauk City Railroad Bridge Demolition Project



RAIL PRESERVATION – A LOCAL, REGIONAL, & STATE BENEFIT
--BENEFITS OF RAIL PRESERVATION--

Without question, some of the noted benefits in acquisition & rehabilitation of branch lines in Southern Wisconsin include the following:

- Preservation of both freight and passenger Rail Service
- Increased economic opportunities for Wisconsin Businesses/Shippers
- Increased transportation efficiency by encouraging multi-modal uses
- Preservation of historical railroad structures & infrastructure
- Increased local participation in local and regional transportation issues

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For further information on Rail Transit, you can contact:

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