



Illinois in line to get \$1.2 billion for high-speed rail

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SPRINGFIELD — Illinois is in line to get \$1.2 billion in federal funds to improve passenger rail service between Chicago and St. Louis.

In an event today in Florida, President Barack Obama is expected to announce the awarding of \$8 billion in federal stimulus funds for high-speed rail projects across the nation.

Illinois had asked for \$4.5 billion in federal stimulus funds to bring faster service to the corridor connecting Chicago and St. Louis. It also requested money to study a high-speed line that would include Decatur and Champaign-Urbana.

But, according to a preview of Obama's announcement, Illinois will receive about one-quarter of that amount.

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin of Springfield said he's pleased the state received a share of the federal dollars, given the heavy competition from states like Florida and California.

"The good news is that Chicago, which has historically been the rail hub of America, will be the high-speed rail hub of America," Durbin said.

It wasn't clear Wednesday how much other states had received. But, because Obama and Vice President Joe Biden are announcing the plan in Tampa, Fla., it is expected that the Sunshine State will be getting at least some of the money.

California also has asked for federal funds to bring high-speed passenger rail service to an 800-mile-long route between Sacramento and San Diego.

U.S. Rep. Debbie Halvorson, a Crete Democrat, said high-speed rail is important to her district, which includes Chicago's south suburbs and Bloomington-Normal.

"I am hopeful Illinois will obtain some of this funding announced tonight as it will create jobs and improve the infrastructure system," Halvorson said in a statement issued earlier Wednesday.

Durbin said a job estimate was not available Wednesday.

But, he said, "We're obviously glad to have the jobs and the economic development which will come from this. It couldn't come at a better time."

For Illinois, the money would help finance construction of additional track along the current Amtrak route between St. Louis and Chicago, with stops in Dwight, Pontiac, Normal and Lincoln.

Most of the money would go toward improving train speeds between Alton and Dwight.

The additional track would allow passenger trains to get around slower moving freight trains, which are often blamed for delays. Currently, Amtrak trains run at a maximum speed of 79 mph. The additional tracks and crossing improvements would boost that average to 110 mph.

Federal money also will help pay for the construction of railroad bridges in the Chicago area to help eliminate delays where Amtrak trains cross lines with commuter trains.

Durbin said the state continues to work on securing federal funds to add passenger rail service between Chicago and the Quad Cities and Chicago and Rockford. Both of those lines would continue west for passengers heading into Iowa.