

WREX 13 NEWS

Commuter Rail Line Selected

By Laura Gibbs
13 News

ROCKFORD - In order to get this train in motion one group had to decide. The Northern Illinois Commuter Transportation Initiative or NICTI selects a commuter rail route.

Out of four options, the group selects the line with the most potential riders.



NICTI votes unanimously for Commuter Rail 6. It's a Union Pacific line where more than a million people could catch a ride. But this comes with a \$247-million price tag.

The route takes commuters from downtown Rockford through Belvidere heading east to Marengo, Huntley and ending at the Big Timber Station in Elgin.

Rockford Mayor Larry Morrissey says, "It really made sense especially with the amount of folks we can get behind it in our local region but also politically to just get it done."

Even with that decision this group's stuck. Typically the Federal Transportation Authority kicks in 50% of the funding but not this time.

Winnebago County Board Chair Scott Christiansen says, "The analysis as far as ridership shows FTA funding is not a possibility. We've all suspected that for some time so in essence we lost time thinking that the FTA portion was going to work."

That means 100% of the money has to come from Rockford area support, the State of Illinois and federal grants. Some funding is already secured through a Federal Transportation bill as long as the state matches the money.

Christiansen says, "We've got to get a capital plan passed. The governor needs to get ahold of this issue and get that plan passed or the money in that transportation bill could be lost and without that I don't see that this is feasible at all."

So the NICTI's Governing committee's next challenge, find ways to cover costs.

NICTI Chairman Dave Taylor says, "The executive committee decided to meet with state and federal legislators in the very near future to advise them on where we are on this and to look at what our options might be."

Someone mentioned a sales tax as a way to pay for the line but that idea didn't go over very well. Another option, teaming up with Amtrak. That means even more riders without increasing costs.