

Commuter-train, bus-rider survey to be revealed Wednesday

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ROCKFORD —

Transport consultants probing publicly-owned rail or bus service from Rockford and Belvidere to Chicagoland will unveil results of their ridership study at 10 a.m. Wednesday at a meeting of NICTI, the Northern Illinois Commuter Transportation Initiative.

It happens at the Rockford Mass Transit District office, 520 Mulberry St.

"They'll present information on four alternative services," NICTI Chairman Dave Taylor said. Two are rail routes from downtown Rockford that connect to Chicagoland's Metra rail system. The first line runs through Belvidere and Huntley, the second through Davis Junction and Genoa.

NICTI members might decide Wednesday which of the four plans to pursue.

Two bus plans were studied, both using Interstate 90. One features buses using regular lanes, the other has bus-priority signaling and buses running on shoulders in certain places, Taylor said. Buses would start in downtown Rockford, wind their way out to I-90, then to Belvidere, and finally to the Big Timber commuter rail station, Taylor said.

Taylor said NICTI will use the survey results to decide which plan to pursue, and whether to seek federal funding through the "First Starts" program, where dollars are scarce, or go for local funding. He estimates that a rail or bus service would cost about \$200 million for engineering, capital and operating costs.

NICTI member Mark Williams said he's optimistic about the meeting.

"I'm hopeful that a locally-preferred alternative is identified and selected at the meeting. I think it will be eye-opening," said Williams, director of Growth Dimensions, Boone County's economic development agency.

Kansas City, Mo.-based TransSystems is the lead consultant on the NICTI project. A second consultant, Parsons-Brinckerhoff, whose founder designed New York City's subway, did the ridership survey, Taylor said. NICTI's consultants are paid from \$3.2 million in federal and state grants.

NICTI is made up of elected officials from Rockford, Belvidere, Boone and Winnebago County; transportation planners and economic development leaders.

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