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## Buses or trains: Work begins on \$3M transportation study

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ROCKFORD — Work began Wednesday on a \$3 million study to find out whether it makes sense to have commuter trains or buses for one of several routes linking Rockford and Elgin.

TranSystems, a Kansas City, Mo., firm with offices in Chicago, will do the work, which will take two years. The consultants will analyze routes, gauge public opinion and examine environmental factors, all to find the most efficient, affordable way to transport commuters to and from Chicagoland.

John J. Dobies, senior associate and TranSystems vice president, said the Federal Transportation Administration requires this “corridors alternatives analysis” to be done before it determines whether to OK engineering and building a commuter transportation system. TranSystems will work with contract partners Parsons Brinckerhoff and several other firms.

The study is being done for the Rockford Area Transportation Study, the federally mandated transport planning body in Winnebago and Boone counties, in association with the Northern Illinois Commuter Transportation Initiative, which is made up of economic development groups and governments in the two counties.

Although commuter rail advocates in Boone and Winnebago counties worked in the late 1990s to bring Metra trains to the area, the alternatives analysis could propose buses running on the Illinois Tollway or a “rapid bus” system using a dedicated right of way, widening the tollway or doing nothing.

TranSystems will study at least three rail routes: the Union Pacific line coming out of Elgin to Belvidere and Rockford; the Canadian National line through Genoa and Rockford; and the Iowa, Chicago and Eastern line from Elgin to Davis Junction and then up to Rockford.

Although the federal government theoretically can fund 80 percent of a commuter rail project, “these days they’re typically funding no more than 50 percent” because of intense competition for new commuter rail projects, Dobies said.

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