



## 1.0 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

This report summarizes the results of the Kankakee County Commuter Transit Phase II Feasibility Study (KACOT-II). The study is the second project in the overall KACOT Program which is centered around a corridor from University Park on the north, 31 miles due south of downtown Chicago, Illinois, to the southern limits of the City of Kankakee, Illinois, on the south. That corridor has three parallel main transportation facilities:

1. The CN Railway has a generally 200 foot wide, unusually straight, right of way (ROW) for its heavily traveled freight and Amtrak mainline railroad that links Chicago to New Orleans.
2. For much of the corridor length Illinois state route 50 is immediately adjacent and to the east of the CN utilizing an old mainline of an electric interurban railway.
3. An interstate highway, I-57, which links Chicago to Memphis, roughly parallels the CN that entire route and is a few miles to the west of the CN at the north end of the KACOT corridor, crosses over the railway at Bourbonnais, is a few miles east around the City of Kankakee, and rejoins the railroad south of the City.

The CN is clearly the geographical and development spine of the corridor. The original facility was built as a land grant railroad and in the century and a half since has proven to be an exemplary fulfillment of what might be called a 19<sup>th</sup> century transportation supportive land use planning tool: land grant railroads.

Kankakee County is now seeing the overall metropolitan growth of the Chicago region having impacts that are reaching south into the municipalities along this corridor. As a result, the County is asking if corridor transportation can again be used in planning commuter transit service to help accommodate the impacts of this growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Because it is the spine of the corridor and is generously wide and straight, the CN ROW offers the greatest promise for high performance commuter service, and quickly became the initial focus of the County's interest. That interest resulted in an initial feasibility study for commuter rail transit (Reference 39). The Phase II feasibility study reported herein not only built on that Phase I rail feasibility work, but



also sets the stage for consideration of other transit modes, particularly bus rapid transit (BRT) that might use any or combinations of the three corridor transportation facilities discussed above.

Because the CN ROW is owned by a for-profit corporation and the tracks are a very active high speed freight and intercity passenger railroad, plans to use any part of that ROW for commuter service represents a significantly different issue than using public highways. Furthermore, an excellent commuter rail service is currently operated by Metra starting at University Park and running 31 miles north into the heart of downtown Chicago. Any discussion of commuter transit service in the Kankakee corridor must understand and interface with that Metra service. For those reasons, the remainder of this Background and Introduction chapter focuses on the history of the CN railway and the Metra service to the north. It then concludes with an overview of the previous Kankakee study, other related area projects and a disclaimer statement concerning the railroads.

## **1.2 HISTORY OF THE PRIVATE RAILROAD LINE**

[The following two sections are taken largely from the previous project of the KACOT program, the Phase I rail feasibility study for this service (Reference 39). The material has been updated with more recent historical information and minor edits have been made.]

In 1851, the U.S. Congress gave the newly chartered Illinois Central Railroad a land grant of 2,595,000 acres within Illinois to build a freight railroad within four years from Cairo to Galena with a branch from Centralia to Chicago. A railroad-sponsored steamboat line connected Cairo with New Orleans and other southern ports on the Mississippi River. The Illinois Central Railroad eventually replaced these steamboats with rail lines.

In 1856, the Illinois Central Railroad initiated commuter rail service on what is currently the Metra Electric District Main Line. This service ran and continues to run just west of the Illinois Central's existing freight tracks. Its success led to commuter rail service on the present day South Chicago Branch in 1883 as well as on the present day Blue Island Branch in 1892.

In order to reduce coal emissions along Chicago's lakefront, the Illinois Central Railroad electrified its commuter rail tracks and its commuter rail rolling stock in 1926. It allowed the Chicago South Shore and South Bend Railroad to use its tracks into Chicago when that railroad converted to a 1500 volt direct



current system. Prior to that time, Chicago South Shore and South Bend trains terminated at Kensington Station in what was then Pullman, Illinois.

In 1972, the Illinois Central Railroad merged with the Gulf, Mobile & Ohio to become the Illinois Central Gulf. The Illinois Central Gulf extended its main line commuter rail service to Park Forest South (the present day University Park) in 1977.

A detailed discussion of the land grant aspect of the railroad along this corridor is provided as an Appendix to the Independent Rail Alternative chapter of this report. That discussion is made from an historical and legal perspective.

### **1.3 METRA COMMUTER RAIL SERVICE**

In 1974, approval of a referendum in Northeastern Illinois' Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will Counties led to creation of the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), which was originally designed to subsidize operating deficits of the seven private commuter rail operators that then existed. With possible loss of commuter rail services on the Norfolk and Western and Heritage Corridor and with looming bankruptcies for the Milwaukee Road and Rock Island Railroads, commuter rail services in Chicago were threatened. The RTA's responsibilities were therefore expanded to include acquisition and operation of public transportation carriers as well as authority to enter into service contracts with private commuter rail operators.

In 1981 the RTA started its first commuter rail operations when it took over commuter service of the bankrupt Rock Island Railroad through the Northeast Illinois Railroad Corporation (NIRC).

In November 1983, the State legislature substantially amended the original RTA Act to place all operating and fare responsibilities under three service boards and to give the RTA increased financial responsibility and budget oversight over its new service boards. These service boards became:

- Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) running heavy rail and bus operations focused on the city of Chicago
- Pace, a new transit authority consolidating the various suburban bus operations



# FINAL REPORT

- Metra, a new transit authority consolidating all commuter rail operations in the six county RTA district. The Metra name and logo were officially adopted in July 1985.

In 1987, Metra acquired the Illinois Central Gulf's commuter rail operations, equipment, and rights-of-way. By 1990, The Illinois Central Gulf returned ownership to its individual shareholders and restored the original Illinois Central name. The CN, a Class I railroad under the ownership of the Canadian National Railway Company, bought the Illinois Central soon after and continues to run its freight lines.

Since its inception, Metra has restored and upgraded many of the Chicago area's commuter rail services and has aggressively expanded its system. In 1992, Metra initiated FAST, the Future Agenda for Suburban Transportation<sup>1</sup>, which suggested extensions of its existing lines and creation of new commuter rail lines. Among the several projects that have come out of FAST are two extensions of the SouthWest Service, implementation and expansion of the North Central Service, and extension of the Union Pacific West Line to Elburn. Since then, several other rail line extensions have been or are being planned or designed.

#### 1.4 KANKAKEE COUNTY COMMUTER TRANSIT PROJECT

In late 2002, Kankakee County was instrumental in creating a Kankakee County Commuter Rail Task Force consisting of representatives from Aroma Park, Bourbonnais, Bradley, Kankakee, Manteno, Monee, Peotone, Kankakee County and Will County. The Illinois Department of Transportation is represented on the Task Force as a non-voting participant.

In July 2003, on behalf of the Task Force, Kankakee County solicited responses from consultants to determine whether commuter rail service to Kankakee was physically, operationally, and financially feasible. The scope of that study followed the general, flow-chart guidelines distributed by Metra in the mid 1990s for Phase I studies of new commuter rail lines. In February 2004, Parsons Brinkerhoff was selected to perform that study and the final Phase I report was published in January 2005. It is available on the web site for this project at [www.kacotstudy.com](http://www.kacotstudy.com) on the Resources page, and reference material from that Phase I study has been incorporated into the project files of this Phase II study.

<sup>1</sup> Metra, Future Agenda for Suburban Transportation, Chicago, IL, April 1992,



**FINAL REPORT**

Very generally, the Phase I study covered the following:

- Four rail modes were considered:
  - Extension of the Metra Electric District (MED)
  - Conventional Metra locomotive hauled trains connecting to MED
  - Dual mode (electric-diesel-electric) locomotive hauled trains running through to downtown Chicago
  - Diesel multiple units (diesel powered, self-propelled passenger cars) connecting to MED
- Station locations were identified
  - Seven locations were recommended after consultations with municipalities
  - Included Metra’s preferred 20 acres of parking, where practical
- Two service levels were identified
  - Minimum Operable Segment (MOS) to keep essentially within the RTA district
  - Full Build Out (FBO) to extend through the southern-most anchor city of Kankakee to an intercept station location adjacent to Interstate 57, 3 miles south of Kankakee.
- Projected the costs and ridership shown in Table 1-1.

**Table 1-1. KACOR-I Projected Costs and Ridership**

	Capital Cost	Annual O&M Costs	Ridership
Minimum Operable Segment (MOS)	\$ 190 m	\$ 2.3 m	3200 daily rider
Full Build Out (FBO)	\$ 298 m	\$ 4.6 m	5800 daily riders

In October 2005 the local bus agency in Kankakee County, the River Valley Metro Mass Transit District, started 6-day week express bus operations from the northern Kankakee area to the MED University Park Station, with an intermediate stop in Manteno. This service runs along Illinois 50 which generally parallels the railroad on an old interurban right of way. It roughly emulates the commuter service being studied by the work reported herein.

In December 2005, again on behalf of the Task Force, Kankakee County issued a Request for Letters of Interest and Qualifications (RFLIQ) for a Phase II study. The RFLIQ was sent to 14 pre-qualified Illinois consulting firms and required submittals by January 23, 2006. The scope of that RFLIQ also followed the Metra flow-chart guidelines for Phase II studies of new commuter rail lines.



During the proposal writing period, the CN sent a letter<sup>2</sup> to the Task Force with its response to the Phase I study. It said, in part:

“...at this time CN would not be agreeable to any type of passenger service that would involve the shared use of our existing physical plant, or the addition of any capacity to the existing railroad that would result in a shared use of operating environment. We would however be open to further discussion surrounding the extension of the Metra Electric District over unused portions of CN right-of-way so long as the two lines remain separate from each other, and that our own operations would not be affected in any way as a result of the new service.”

In July 2006, Earth Tech was selected to perform the study. More information on the structure and scope of that contract is described in Chapter 2 of this report. This document is the final report from that work.

At the first meeting of the Task Force with the Earth Tech team on August 15, 2006, the Task Force changed its name and the name of the project by replacing “Rail” with “Transit.” This was intended to reflect the more general scope of transportation planning appropriate for the corridor, and specifically to include bus alternatives in the work.

In parallel with the KACOT-II project, the Kankakee County local bus transit agency, River Valley Metro, purchased an empty industrial site, renovated it, and moved into it in May 2007. The site is northwest of the grade crossing of St. George Road and the CN at the northern edge of Bourbonnais. This new facility provides a new main office and bus garage for the agency. The site is on the far north side of the three municipalities that form the most populated metropolitan area in the County, Bradley, Bourbonnais and Kankakee, and also represents a convenient north central location for the more rural areas of the County. Because of this location, it is an excellent location to become a regional park-and-ride transfer center serving the majority of the County for bus commuting to the north. The site is also immediately adjacent to the CN Railway and was identified in the KACOR Phase I study as the preferred rail station site for Bourbonnais, which would make it a true multi-modal transit station. A siding from the railroad serves the site. Although the site is located at approximately the mid point of the corridor studied by this project, the co-location of River Valley Metro offices, bus garage, and potential for a regional multi-modal transit station makes this the current best prospect for a KACOT rail or BRT maintenance facility.

## 1.5 OTHER RELATED AREA PROJECTS

<sup>2</sup> CN Passenger Operations, Letter Arkin (CN) to Lammey (Kankakee County), January 12, 2006.



A number of other moderate to major sized projects are being discussed in the area that could impact this project. These other projects are in various stages of planning or engineering. Future phases of work on this KACOT project will need to monitor the progress and commitments of these projects, remain flexible to respond to these impacts, and provide inputs to them to ensure that KACOT alternatives are not foreclosed unnecessarily by the actions of others.

These other projects include the following:

- **South Suburban Airport (SSA):** The Illinois Department of Transportation has been studying a new major airport for the Chicago region for nearly 20 years. This new airport is intended to supplement and disperse the air traffic load on one of the world's busiest airports, O'Hare, which is on the opposite (northwest) side of the greater Chicago region. The site that has been selected is immediately adjacent to and on the east side of the CN.
- **Metra Electric District (MED) Extension:** Metra has recently added new cars to its MED fleet which provide on-board toilet facilities for the first time in the history of the line. Metra does not have adequate facilities to maintain these toilets efficiently at its aging and crowded current MED yard in downtown Chicago so has been planning a new facility at the outer end of the line. In addition, the MED is the shortest of Metra's eleven lines, barely entering into Will County. That combined with political support for the SSA has lead Metra to consider extending the MED past the SSA to a new yard and end of line state near Peotone.
- **Metra SouthEast Service (SES):** Metra is concluding an alternatives analysis phase on a proposed SouthEast Service (SES) between downtown Chicago and Balmoral Park, which is immediately northeast of the SSA. It would run on the UP/CSX freight railroad line which runs parallel to and a few miles west of the Illinois-Indiana state line. The KACOR Phase I study reviewed the possibility of the Kankakee service passing through the SSA and connecting with the SES. Metra is not currently considering serving the east side of the airport with the SES.
- **East-West Freeway:** A major east-west highway connecting Interstates 57 (Chicago to Champaign-Carbondale-Memphis) and 65 (Chicago to Indianapolis-Nashville) is being discussed as part of a developing new second highway beltway around Chicago. One alignment for this highway has been dubbed the Illiana.



## FINAL REPORT

- **Amtrak Service:** Amtrak operates two types of service on the CN in this corridor. Three trains make one trip daily in both directions with all trains stopping in Kankakee. The City of New Orleans provides cross-country service between Chicago and New Orleans. The Illini and Saluki are sponsored by the State of Illinois and offer intra-state service between Chicago and Carbondale, servicing two major Illinois university towns along the way. The Saluki is a new service that was initiated on October 30, 2006. Future additional intra-state service is possible.
- **Brookmont Boulevard Underpass:** Brookmont Boulevard is a major east-west artery on the border between the City of Kankakee and the Village of Bradley. It passes under the CN where the railroad has interchange yards with other railroads on both sides of the CN mainline. The KACOT rail service is intended to thread between the mainline and west side yard, while the proposed high speed rail connection to the SSA would make the northwest quadrant connection from the NS to the CN immediately south of this underpass. The Boulevard has a single lane in each direction in this underpass, but two lanes in each direction to the east and west of the underpass. Preliminary plans are underway to rebuild the underpass and widen the road. The Phase I study had selected this location for the Bradley station. However, during this Phase II work the Village of Bradley indicated a preference for a station location further north at Broadway, considerably simplifying, but still not totally solving, the rail congestion issues at this underpass.
- **High Speed Rail North From Kankakee:** High speed rail in the Midwest has been studied for several years by a nine-state consortium<sup>3</sup>. One alignment being considered<sup>4</sup> involves diversion of the St. Louis-Chicago service from the Union Pacific mainline at Dwight, IL eastward on Norfolk Southern tracks to the junction with the CN on the north side of the City of Kankakee, and north on the CN to the SSA before continuing on the CN to downtown Chicago. The northwest quadrant connection between the NS and the CN is complicated by a multiple track interchange yard, the Brookmont Boulevard underpass to the immediate north, and the KACOT right of way which is proposed to thread between the CN west interchange yard and the CN mainline.
- **Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program:** CREATE is a \$1.5B program funded by six Class I railroads, Metra, the Federal Railroad Administration, the State of Illinois and the City of Chicago. It involves 78 railroad improvements in the greater Chicago region aimed at improving freight and passenger train flow and reducing

<sup>3</sup> Midwest Regional Rail Initiative, Midwest Regional Rail System, Executive Report, WisDOT, Madison, WI, two issues: February 2000 and September 2004.

<sup>4</sup> USDOT, FHA, FRA, IDOT, Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Chicago-St. Louis High-Speed Rail Project, Springfield, IL, June 2000.



delays. The planned improvements include signal and track improvements along five corridors, six rail-rail grade separations, 15 improved connections between railroads, and 25 road-rail grade separations. The CN is one of the Class I railroads involved, so traffic on the railroad's line through Kankakee may be impacted by this project.

## 1.6 RAILROAD INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

The CN Railway and Metra have provided information for both phases of these broad-based feasibility studies. In addition, copies of selected reports have been sent to them and, increasingly in this Phase II study, informal meetings have been held with them. However, in general, the consultant teams have performed these works independently of those railroads. Because of the preliminary nature of the results and the several other outside factors that can significantly impact the project, the railroads have not been asked to formally approve the results of these studies.

In particular, during this Phase II study the CN was asked to review an early draft of the Independent Rail Alternative, Chapter 5 and the related Appendices of this report. They have provided feedback on it and that feedback has been incorporated herein. However, nothing herein should be construed as a binding commitment on the part of Metra or the CN to accept any of the concepts developed to date by this project. Those commitments will be sought if and when the project reaches a preliminary engineering phase.