CHAPTER 3
PUBLIC SCOPING

The public scoping process for the Study was summarized in Section 1.3. Extensive feedback on the Study was generated through the use of the online open-house meeting from February 13 to April 16, 2012, and feedback was also collected from in-person public meetings in May 2012. Comments on the Study and Project were provided via a comment form on the Study website, email, the toll-free Study information line, a comment form at in-person public meetings, fax, and letter. The feedback has been accumulated and categorized using a database to track and document public and agency comments, public participation, and outreach and to provide participation data metrics and tracking results.

Many of the comments contained multiple issues and concerns. Each issue was identified and assigned a unique code, and subtopics were assigned as warranted; where appropriate, similar concerns were grouped into categories. For example, "economic impacts" was identified as a common topic, and subtopics for that issue included local benefits, improvement of business and job opportunities, and several others. If a comment required an immediate response, such as a media inquiry, or if a comment included questions concerning the scoping period or public meetings, a response was drafted and provided either by phone, email, or letter. A subject matter expert reviewed the issues and codes, and provided summary information to preparers of the Tier 1 Service Level EIS to ensure that the relevant issues are addressed in the NEPA document. Individual public commenters were not identified for privacy reasons.

3.1 RANGE OF COMMENTS

Table 3-1 documents the number of comments received for each issue. Because comments may contain more than one issue, the number of comments does not correspond to the number of issues. The key comments for each resource topic are summarized in Section 3.2. Expanded summaries of comments by resource topic are provided in Appendix D in bullet format; in many instances, subtopics have been combined to consolidate similar comments.

Table 3-1. Public Scoping Comments by Issue

Issue	Subtopic	Count
Agricultural Resources	General	1
Air Quality	General	1
	Passenger service reduces pollution	1
	Passenger service causes pollution	1
	Passenger service reduces emissions	28
	Passenger service causes increased emissions	1
Climate Change	General	1
Cumulative Impacts	General	13
	Causes environmental impacts	17
	Causes public impacts	2
Drugs and Crime	General	11

Issue	Subtopic	Count
Economic Impacts	General	52
	Improve business and job opportunities	25
	Local benefits	27
	Increase population	10
	Increase state income	18
	Save money/low cost	8
	Negative impacts	5
	Study considerations	2
Elderly	General	19
Energy Use	General	14
	Alternative	11
	Reduce use	28
	Efficient use	12
Environmental Justice	General	2
Funding of the Project	General	19
	Questions about study/issues	12
	Don't use taxpayers' or state's money	33
	Needs to be self-supporting/no subsidies	15
	Alternate use for passenger service funds	4
	Funding suggestions	10
	Use a government subsidy	11
	Funding Project for Route Alternative1 or 2	2
	Funding Project for Route Alternative 4	12
	Funding Project for Route Alternative 5	3
General	General	92
	Opportunity to the state for development	6
	Historical rail system	3
	Publicize for ridership	2
Health	General	2
Jobs	General	2
	Project will bring jobs	36
	Project will negatively impact jobs	1
Mailing List Request	General	42
No-Build Alternative	General	2
Noise	General	3
Oppose the Project	General	17
People with Disabilities	General	3
Project Need	General	13
Project Purpose	General	3
Property Acquisition	General	4
Public Involvement	General	23
	Survey	3
	Assist or participate with Project	6
	Online public meeting	1
	Meeting materials	12
Rail	General	1
	Freight Rail-General	18
	Freight Rail-Route Alternative 2	14
	Freight Rail-Route Alternative 3	1
	Freight Rail-Route Alternative 4	11
	Freight Rail-Route Alternative 5	4
	Improvements	28

Issue	Subtopic	Count
Rail (continued)	Operations-General	18
	Operations-Passenger preference over freight	4
	Operations-Reliability and schedule	50
	Operations-Route Alternative 4	6
	Speed	52
	Upgrades-General	3
	Upgrades-Signaling	1
	Upgrades-Route Alternative 2	2
	Upgrades-Route Alternative 4	3
	Upgrades-Route Alternative 5	11
Routes	Alternative Route-General	18
	Alternative Route-Other connections	21
	Alternative Route -Parallel I-80	8
	Alternative Route - Ames/Des Moines	10
	Alternative Route -Atlantic	1
	Alternative Route -Cedar Rapids/Iowa City	23
	Alternative Route -Clinton	1
	Alternative Route -Dubuque	6
	Alternative Route -Waterloo	4
	Location Specific-Ames	24
	Location Specific-Ankeny	1
	Location Specific-Atlantic	6
	Location Specific-Burlington	21
	Location Specific-Cedar Falls	1
	Location Specific-Cedar Rapids	38
	Location Specific-Chicago	20
	Location Specific-Clinton	17
	Location Specific-Council Bluffs	5
	Location Specific-Creston	1
	Location Specific-Des Moines	112
	Location Specific-Durant	1
	Location Specific-Ft. Madison	1
	Location Specific-Galesberg	2
	Location Specific-Grinnell	104
	Location Specific-Iowa City	120
	Location Specific-Joliet	1
	Location Specific-Kewanee	1
	Location Specific-Marshalltown	3
	Location Specific-Maxwell	1
	Location Specific-Mt. Pleasant	2
	Location Specific-Newton	6
	Location Specific-Omaha	16
	Location Specific-Osceola/Ottumwa	4
	Location Specific-Quad Cities	41
	Location Specific-Slater	1
	Location Specific-Waterloo	1
	Location Specific-West Liberty	1
	Location Specific-Woodward	1
	Route Alternative 1-General	3
	Route Alternative 1-Select	30
	Route Alternative 1-Do not select	9
	Route Alternative 2-General	3
	Route Alternative 2-Select	21

Issue	Subtopic	Count
Routes (continued)	Route Alternative 2-Do not select	5
	Route Alternative 3-General	2
	Route Alternative 3-Select	21
	Route Alternative 3-Do not select	5
	Route Alternative 4-General	10
	Route Alternative 4-Select	394
	Route Alternative 4-Do not select	3
	Route Alternative 5-General	7
	Route Alternative 5-Select	31
	Route Alternative 5-Do not select	12
	Route Alternatives 4 and 5-Select	8
Routing Process	General	12
Safety	General	11
	Grade crossings	2
	Public	10
Schedule	General	17
Station Facilities and Upgrades	General	32
	Location Specific-Ames	2
	Location Specific-Burlington	4
	Location Specific-Clinton	1
	Location Specific-Council Bluffs	2
	Location Specific-Des Moines	2
	Location Specific-Grinnell	22
	Location Specific-Iowa City	3
	Location Specific-Kewanee	1
	Location Specific-Omaha	3
Support the Project	General	244
Train Amenities	General	4
	Food service	2
	Bicycles	2
	Wi-Fi	5
Transportation	General	2
	Not an alternative mode	4
	Alternative mode	320
	Bus Service-General	8
	Bus Service-Is sufficient	10
	Bus Service-Shows need	11
	Current Train Traffic-General	13
	Current Train Traffic-Current service insufficient/inconvenient	48
	Current Train Traffic-California Zephyr	35
	Current Train Traffic-Other rail service	24
	Highway congestion	69
Use of the Project	General	5
	Personal use	284
	Ridership	182
	Student use	86
	Won't get enough use	9
Water quality	General	1

3.2 KEY COMMENTS

Very few public comments expressed concern with potential impacts on the natural and physical environment, either from not constructing the Project or from constructing and operating the Project. The majority of commenters supported development of the Project and cited a variety of reasons for their support, including fuel efficiency, reliability, safety, comfort, competitive cost, and economic development. Those not in favor of the Project gave several reasons, including that current bus service is sufficient and that taxpayer funds should not be used for the Project. However, there were several commenters indicating support for the Project if no taxpayer funds were used. Commenters identifying themselves as retirees and/or college students typically supported the Project. Key comments by issue are identified below:

- **Agricultural Resources**—The use of existing right-of-way (ROW) should be maximized in order to minimize the use of farmland for other purposes.
- **Air Quality**—More use of rail service would maximize fuel efficiency while minimizing impacts on air quality. Buses are reported to have a higher rate of passenger mileage per gallon of fuel than passenger trains and fewer emissions of carbon dioxide.
- **Climate Change**—Passenger rail service would slow climate change.
- **Cumulative Impacts**—Economic, environmental, and social pros and cons should be considered. In addition to assessing impacts of constructing and operating the passenger rail system, the following should be assessed: reduced highway and airport congestion, improved transportation safety, and the resulting public and private development.
- **Drugs/Crime**—The Study should address potential increases in drug use and crime at station stops and along the route alternative.
- **Economic Impacts**—The Study should evaluate not only costs of the Project but also the direct and indirect cost benefits, such as reducing highway traffic, improving transportation safety, reducing airline rates through competition, and stimulating the economy. In addition, quality of life improvements for those who cannot afford their own vehicles should be evaluated. A Project benefit would be better commuting and interconnection of young professionals to help reduce out-migration. In addition, high-speed rail service would better link cities' economies. Noted concerns are that the Project could pull money from Iowa to spend in Chicago and that the Project is not affordable given the current budget deficit.
- **Elderly**—Passenger rail service would be useful for seniors who cannot drive or do not want the stress of driving in congested traffic, especially for rural residents traveling to cities.
- **Energy Use**—Passenger rail service would be more energy efficient, less dependent on foreign oil, and cleaner than individual vehicles that often have only one occupant. Buses offer more miles per passenger per gallon of fuel than trains. Passenger rail with fuel is not as energy and carbon efficient when compared to Europe's use of electric power for rail operations.

- **Environmental Justice**—The passenger rail service should be accomplished without affecting the route for the California Zephyr, which goes through some of the poorest counties in Iowa and would be economically detrimental if the Amtrak service were adversely affected.
- **Funding of the Project**—Because private railroads are the main beneficiary of an upgraded, shared route, they should help fund the Project. The Project would need to be subsidized, would not likely meet its ridership estimates and goals, and would lose money. Funding should be focused on one route based on its existing infrastructure. Passenger rail needs better funding from the Federal government, which spends much money to support the airport and highway systems.
- **General**—This Project would help revitalize a system that worked more than a century ago and works well in Europe. The passenger rail system should be planned to account for existing rail operations and local transit systems. In addition, community support for stations should be considered during system planning.
- **Health**—Public transportation betters public health and transportation safety.
- **Jobs**—In addition to construction jobs, the passenger rail system would lead to permanent jobs both directly and indirectly. Regional connectivity would be improved and would allow young professionals in Iowa to stay in the state while developing local careers. Businesses will want to be near station depots, and the stations would assist in recruiting potential employees to an area.
- **No-Build Alternative**—The alternative to not build the passenger rail system is the appropriate option because of the current deficit.
- **Noise**—Trains are loud and would increase noise levels along the selected route, which is a disadvantage for those living along the route.
- **Oppose the Project**—The Project should be privately funded or not constructed. Do not use tax dollars to fund the Project; use tax dollars for better uses, such as education. The use of a bus system is a better option. The Project would transport problems from Chicago to rural areas and should not be developed.
- **People with Disabilities**—As a nation, we have done little to accommodate people who cannot drive a vehicle.
- **Project Need**—There is no need for a system that cannot support itself without tax dollars. There is a need for affordable, regional travel beyond what is available from expensive airline fares. A commuter-type service is needed between the most populated parts of Iowa, including Des Moines (the state capital). Given existing bus service, there is no need for passenger rail service.
- **Project Purpose**—There is no purpose for the Project because passenger rail service is not needed.
- **Property Acquisitio**n—Available ROW should be used to the maximum extent possible to minimize property acquisition. A dedicated, direct route requiring acquisition by eminent domain may be the only solution for an efficient passenger rail system. The rail system should be located along existing interstate ROW.
- **Public Involvement**—The public involvement website is easy to use and informative, with good visuals. The displays on the public website are difficult to read. A demonstration train should be used for operations to allow the public to better understand the passenger rail concept.

- **Rail – Freight Rail**—Passenger rail must be given priority over freight operations to be efficient. Route Alternatives 1 and 4 have relatively little freight traffic, whereas Route Alternatives 2 and 5 have heavy freight traffic that could interfere with passenger traffic. A separate, dedicated passenger rail line should be installed to avoid conflicts with freight trains.
- **Rail – Improvements and Rail – Upgrades**—Vast improvements and upgrades to tracks, sidings, signals, and other infrastructure would be required. Route alternatives with more, current upgrades could be more economical to modify than antiquated routes. Costs to upgrade, reconstruct, or build new bridges need to be considered. In addition, upgrade of tracks to the highest possible speed during initial construction needs to be considered. Slower service is fine because it would require fewer upgrades and cost less to get the Project going.
- **Rail – Operations/Speed**—The most important operational issues are reliability and cost, followed by scheduling. Air travel is more vulnerable to terrorism than rail travel. Overnight travel would be good between Omaha and Chicago, and an early morning departure would also be recommended. The faster the trains can operate, the more efficient and attractive the system would be compared to air, bus, and single vehicle travel. The schedules for this passenger rail service and the Amtrak's California Zephyr should be integrated.
- **Routes – Alternative Route / Locations**—While planning this system, the potential for a north-south intersecting route such as Minneapolis-Des Moines-Kansas City should be considered. Recommend include service to Sioux Falls. Instead of this Project, a light rail running from Iowa City to Waterloo should be considered. The service should be expanded from Omaha to Lincoln. A combination of route alternatives should be used, such as Route Alternatives 4 and 5 with a connection in Wyanet, or Route Alternatives 2 and 3 with a connection between Cedar Rapids and Ames. Include both Iowa City and Ames on the selected route. Because there is already Chicago to Omaha service, the route should run from Chicago to Kansas City. The route should be created from Chicago to Dubuque to Cedar Rapids to Iowa City to Des Moines to Omaha.
- **Routes – Route Alternative 1**—Route Alternative 1 would come close to many of the largest population centers and would provide service to the University of Northern Iowa.
- **Routes – Route Alternative 2**—Route Alternative 2 could be the least expensive route alternative for upgrade based on improvements by Union Pacific. Route Alternative 2 would help transit at multiple colleges and includes depots that could be reused.
- **Routes – Route Alternative 3**—Much of Route Alternative 3 would have to be replaced and would not be an economical option, requiring much property acquisition. The Illinois portion of the route alternative has much freight traffic, making it an unattractive option.
- **Routes – Route Alternative 4**—Route Alternative 4 would be along major population centers and near I-80, which would facilitate quick access to stations. The route alternative would travel by many colleges, which would make this route alternative convenient. Des Moines, as the Iowa state capital, would be a key city along the Route Alternative 4 as would the Quad Cities area and Iowa City.

- **Routes – Route Alternative 5**—Route Alternative 5 has several disadvantages as it has the least number of urban centers and a high amount of freight traffic with no dedicated passenger lines, and it already has passenger rail service. The southernmost route would likely have less winter weather impact than the more northern routes. A commuter-type service is needed on this route alternative.
- **Routing Process**—One route should be selected based on what has already been improved for the route, and funding should be obtained for the entire route. Routing should be used that would increase frequencies to maximize investments in present infrastructure. Analysis should be conducted on where people both in and out of state live and will most likely want to travel.
- **Safety**—There are concerns with high-speed rail passenger trains sharing tracks with freight trains. Very good grade separation crossings should be provided. Passenger rail service should reduce highway traffic accidents by reducing congestion, provide an alternative safer method for winter travel, and decrease drinking and driving incidents and distracted drivers. Something like the Transportation Security Administration should be provided to address security issues for safe travel of the public.
- **Schedule**—The Study should be completed and the Project should be constructed and operating. Iowa is several years behind Illinois in the planning and construction of passenger rail service.
- **Station Facilities and Upgrades**—The Study should consider better/fewer station stops at key population centers, convenient access, secure stations and parking with free or low-cost parking, amenities at and around the stations, and convenient access to rental cars and mass transit. The passenger trains should support transit of bicycles. The service should have sufficient stops beyond those for major cities. Reuse/upgrade of existing station facilities should be considered, as should station locations in areas near current mass transit centers.
- **Support the Project**—Many support passenger rail service because it would be dependable, fast, safe, progressive, efficient, and greener compared to other modes of transportation. Although buses provide a relatively inexpensive travel option, they are often late due to traffic and can be crowded. The younger generation is in favor of transit options because of the capability to use laptops, cell phones, etc. Regional passenger rail service would provide options for business trips and vacations, commuting, and travel by college students, senior citizens, and travelers who cannot afford a car.
- **Train Amenities**—Trains are more comfortable, roomy, and frequently more suited to community access than other forms of transportation. Trains need working restrooms, food and beverage service, a variety of seating arrangements, tables, and Wi-Fi for Internet users. People should be able to take more luggage than on an airplane and have the option to store bicycles on the train. There should be multiple departure times and on-time service.
- **Transportation – General**—Instead of passenger rail, it would be better to invest in a mode that people will continue to use, such as highways. The passenger rail service should be developed, and inter-urban rail or bus rapid transit should connect with other population centers to help reduce congestion on our highways.

Compared to Europe, our passenger train system seems outdated and needs to be improved to become a viable service. The rail system should be electrified.

- **Transportation – Bus Service**—Funds for rail would be better spent on upgrading our busing system to make buses more energy efficient. Efficient bus service would make choosing passenger trains less likely. Buses are crowded, uncomfortable, and make too many stops. Buses have a better on-time record than Amtrak with less carbon dioxide output than trains. The rail option is too expensive for families compared to buses. If passenger rail is developed, it should tie into convenient bus service from passenger rail stations to other cities not served by rail.
- **Transportation – Current Train Traffic**—The ongoing conflict between Amtrak operations on freight routes suggests a certain incompatibility and inefficiency between freight and passenger rail services. Amtrak, an existing passenger rail service, should be invested in rather than a new system. Amtrak is unreasonably priced, takes too long, is not reliable, and does not serve the main population centers in Iowa. Potential impacts on the California Zephyr system as a result of implementing a regional passenger rail system should be considered; any new system should be accomplished while maintaining the existing service.
- **Transportation – Highway Congestion**—The majority of college students in Iowa are from out of state and only have automobiles for traveling between home and college; providing rail service would reduce roadway congestion. Congestion in the Chicago area is a disincentive to driving; people in Iowa would more likely travel to Chicago via passenger rail. With the main population centers along I-80, providing a passenger rail service in this area should help alleviate highway congestion.
- **Use of the Project**—The Study should review the demographics around stations and along route alternatives to help select the route alternatives and stations for the most use. The passenger rail system could be used most regularly by commuters, but also by college students, retirees, vacationers, patients visiting hospitals, and people attending sporting events and traveling on holidays. The system would get more use in the future as other connections are established. Use of the system could increase during the winter when driving and airline travel are restricted. Use would likely be highest for the route along the largest population centers. If the travel times, costs, and stops are not reasonable, do not build it because there would not be enough use to justify the costs.
- **Water Quality**—The passenger rail system would be a good environmental and economic move to reduce energy expenditures and environmental impacts on air and water quality.

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