

To: Lee Adams-Director, Southcentral Michigan Planning Commission
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John Egelhaaf-Director, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
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From: Ron DeCook
DeCook Governmental Policy & Strategies

Date: August 14, 2019

Subject: 2019 Southwest Michigan Prosperity Grant Proposal

Gentlemen,

I am submitting a Prosperity Plan proposal for your consideration to receive funding by the Southwest Michigan Prosperity Region.

Project Description

The project I'm submitting for your consideration would support a study to determine the location and cost for connecting the Pere Marquette passenger rail corridor to the Wolverine passenger rail corridor in or near the City of New Buffalo or New Buffalo Township.

The location of the current New Buffalo rail station supports the Detroit and Lansing/Port Huron higher speed rail lines to Chicago. While New Buffalo added higher speed train service and a connection to the Detroit, Lansing/Port Huron rail lines; access to the higher speed service and a connection to St. Joseph, Bangor, Holland, and Grand Rapids was discontinued.

Beyond putting New Buffalo back on the Chicago-to-Grand Rapids route, the proposed connecting track has regional implications on a far-greater scale. Routing the Pere Marquette through New Buffalo will provide Amtrak passengers, between Grand Rapids and St. Joseph, with connectivity to the rest of the Amtrak network in Michigan. Under current operations, passengers must take a train from Grand Rapids into Chicago before connecting to points east such as Kalamazoo, Battle Creek, Detroit, Lansing, and Port Huron. A connecting track from the current route will also promote passenger rail travel from Detroit, Port Huron/Lansing, Kalamazoo, Battle Creek to Benton Harbor/St. Joseph, Bangor, Holland, and Grand Rapids.

Such an increase in service, will help support other developments such as track improvements along the current Pere Marquette rail line which would increasing the speed, and reducing travel time, to allowing the double tracking of the rail line between Kalamazoo and Niles.

If this proposal is adopted by the Southwest Prosperity Region, it will impact the updated goals/opportunities expressed in the Southwest Michigan Prosperity Region – Volume 2 in the following areas:

Education – Encourage infrastructure development and interconnectivity to better support education, training, and employment

Community Development – Improve the livability of our region's communities to attract and retain talented workers.

1. Create a more diversified transportation system by encouraging new transportation patterns that support efficient multi-modal transportation option and;
2. Support community development that is transit-oriented.

3. Support sustainable development – Develop infrastructure that can be sustained financially and environmentally over the long term.

Infrastructure - Encourage expansion and improvement of regional infrastructure

1. Advance the effective and efficient transportation of goods.
3. Advance the effective and efficient transportation of people.

Counties in which a project will take place: Van Buren, Berrien with a later phase to double track the rail line from just north of Dowagiac to Niles.

Organizational Description

MDOT will be the lead agency to oversee the study if we are successful in getting federal funds. They will hire the engineering firm and follow all State and Federal requirements. Amtrak will also play a major role as a partner in this project. If the grant is awarded, additional engineering firms will be involved who are listed as qualified under MDOT guidelines.

Partners

The partners will be MDOT, Amtrak, specialized engineering firms, local governments and planning organizations along the Pere Marquette corridor.

In 2018 I was able, with MDOT's approval to get \$250,000 in the 2018 State Supplemental Budget bill in support of a rail study to evaluate possible connections between the two rail lines in the New Buffalo area. Several years earlier, Amtrak had done a rail study which was shared with MDOT. The cost of the study was based on 50 percent of the funding coming from the State and 50 percent match from the federal government. Under the current administration in Washington, the State/local match requirements have changed.

The federal government now requires State and local governments to compete for projects by committing more than the 50% match. Based on Amtrak's calculations, we will need to raise a total of approximately \$500,00 for the study.

Additional partners are those communities and organizations who are pledging funds in support of this project.

I have been organizing and have begun reaching out to communities asking local governments, local chambers of commerce, tourism organizations, community foundations, non-profit organizations, regional planning agencies, county boards of commissioners, and others in an effort to pledge funds dedicated to this project. I have asked these various organizations to pass a resolution in support of the project and to commit an amount of funding to go towards this project.

I have received pledges of: \$10,000 -New Buffalo(city), \$10,000-New Buffalo Township, \$5,000 City of Bangor, \$5,000 Bangor DDA, Bangor's city manager has also requested that we work together to get \$5,000 from Van Buren County's EDA. I am asking for a pledge of \$10,000 from Southwest Michigan Prosperity Committee. I will also provide a draft of a local resolution that you can use, and modify, pledging the \$10,000. I will be traveling for the next several months reaching out to communities, foundations, chambers of commerce, tourism organizations and others in support of this effort.

Project Timeline

There is no project timeline at this time until the federal funds are dedicated early in 2020.

Budget

I am requesting \$10,000 as a pledge that will be part of the proposal submitted, by MDOT, as a funding request for a CRISI(Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements) program grant from the federal government.

Your pledge will be listed as part of MDOT's overall application request and will not be needed unless a CRISI grant is awarded.