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Chicago on the low end of high- speed rail

New study predicts \$6.1 billion annual boost from faster passenger service

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Getting Around

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The nation's mayors were scheduled to release a report Monday claiming huge economic benefits from developing high-speed passenger rail service, despite more questions than answers so far about how the faster trains will be designed, financed and operated.

Chicago stands to reap up to \$6.1 billion annually in new business and up to 42,000 new jobs if plans for trains traveling at up to 220 mph across the Midwest are completed over the next 25 years, according to the four-city study conducted on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

But Chicago will lag behind **Orlando, Fla.;** **Los Angeles;** and part of **upstate New York** in terms of how much tourism and business-travel revenues are generated by high-speed rail, said the study, which was prepared by the Economic Development Research Group and sponsored by Siemens Industry Inc.

By 2035, when a mix of 110 mph and 220 mph trains presumably would be running over some routes in the Midwest, the high-speed service would add roughly \$42 million in new spending in the Chicago area by rail passengers, the report said, citing both tourists and business travelers.

Among the four cities, Orlando would gain the most — \$255 million — from tourists and business people who travel by rail spending additional money at hotels, restaurants and stores, the study said. The projected increase in train travelers is projected to generate an extra \$147 million in **Los Angeles** and more than \$100 million in the **Albany-Saratoga** area of New York, the report said.

Chicago's share of new tourism and business dollars would be lower than the three other cities studied because Chicago is "already a very well-developed and mature urban center that has good connections with air travel," said Steven Fitzroy, director of operations at the Economic Development Research Group, based in Boston.

Still, Midwest high-speed trains operating through a Chicago hub would help the downtown by spurring more mixed-use, high-density development near **Chicago Union Station**, the report said. It noted that plans to expand Union Station include building an 18-story tower over the station.

Faster trains would also expand the circle of commuters working in Chicago who are drawn from places like Milwaukee and Madison, Wis., the report said, as well as shortening the travel time from University of Illinois research centers in **Champaign-Urbana**.

Travel times of about three hours are possible on the proposed 220 mph Chicago-Minneapolis route, according to research accompanying the report. Both **St. Louis** and **Detroit** would be about a two-hour train ride from Chicago. Those are only estimates, and the times are certain to change based on routings selected, average train speeds based



on the number of intermediate stops and other factors, officials said.

Travel times would exceed three hours each way for 110 mph trains traversing between Chicago and Detroit (3 1/2 hours), St. Louis (more than four hours) and Minneapolis (about 5 1/2 hours). The report noted that high-speed rail's potential impact on job creation and business activity is the greatest when travel times between cities are under three hours.

Oliver Hauck, president of the mobility division at Siemens, said that whether it's 110 mph or 220 mph, the key is to continue the momentum created in January when the Obama administration awarded \$8 billion in startup funding for high-speed trains. Illinois received about \$1.23 billion. The state has separately committed \$400 million.

"We've got to get some service starting soon," Hauck said. "You cannot talk about this for 10 years. Public interest and the support of the government will be gone."

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