

(July 28, 2008) Lipinski: Metra to Develop Proposal for Weekend Trains on SouthWest Service

[CHICAGO] Congressman Dan Lipinski (D-IL), a member of the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, announced today that Metra has agreed to develop a proposal by October 1, 2008 for a demonstration project to run weekend trains on the SouthWest Line.

pictured above, Steve Schlickman, Executive Director of the RTA; Phil Pagano, Executive Director of Metra; Congressman Dan Lipinski (IL-03); and Chuck Allen, Superintendent of Norfolk Southern Railroad's Chicago Transportation Coordination Office.

Lipinski convened a meeting in Bridgeview today to discuss options for increasing service on Metra's SouthWest Service. The meeting was attended by Phil Pagano, Executive Director of Metra, local elected officials, freight railroads, and the Illinois Department of Transportation. The SouthWest line currently provides weekday commuter rail service from Chicago's Union Station to Manhattan, including stations in communities, such as Ashburn, Wrightwood, Oak Lawn, Chicago Ridge, Worth, Palos Heights, and Palos Park.

"Metra's SouthWest Service serves a rapidly growing population and I have heard from my constituents and others who live along the line about the desire for weekend service," explained Lipinski. "With the high price of gas in Chicagoland, even more people are looking for affordable and convenient ways to get to downtown Chicago on the weekends. Unfortunately, residents who live along the SouthWest line who have a station practically in their backyard may have to drive 20 to 30 minutes to another Metra line. This is impracticable; there has to a workable solution."

Metra's SouthWest Service has grown substantially over the past decade. Annual ridership grew from 1.6 million in 2000 to 2.4 million in 2007, and it has grown more since then. In 2006, the line was extended from Orland Park to Manhattan with financial assistance from the Federal Transit Administration.

"I commend Phil Pagano for agreeing to take a serious look at weekend trains," said Lipinski. "And I look forward to seeing Metra's October 1 proposal. It will help bring weekend service one step closer to reality for many of my constituents. The history of the SouthWest Service shows that if you build it, they will come. There is no doubt in my mind that with weekend trains for Metra's SouthWest Service, if you run it, they will also come."

Congressman Lipinski has been a leader in Congress to increase funding for public transportation. He was an original cosponsor and helped author H.R. 6052, Saving Energy Through Public Transportation Act of 2008, a bill that would authorize \$1.7 billion over two years for national public transportation needs. Illinois would stand to receive \$200 million in federal transit funding over two years. H.R. 6052 passed the House on June 26, 2008 by a vote of 322-98 with Congressman Lipinski's strong support.

Local leaders attending the meeting included -

- IL Senator Edward Maloney
- IL Senator Christine Radogno
- IL Representative Jack McGuire

- Mayor Ed Gudziol, Worth
- Mayor Bill Borgo, Manhattan
- Joseph Clary, Director of Public and Intermodal Transportation, IDOT
- Stephen Schlickman, Executive Director, RTA
- Larry Deetjen, Village Manager, Oak Lawn
- Paul Grimes, Village Manager, Palos Park
- Patricia Jones, Village Administrator, Palos Park
- Marian Gibson, Village Administrator, Manhattan
- Jim Ford, Belt Railway
- Patrick O'Brien, Belt Railway
- Earl Wacker, CSX Railroad
- Chuck Allen, Norfolk Southern Railroad
- Jim Roots, Indiana Harbor Belt Railroad