

Herald News

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By Cindy Wojdyla Cain

Joliet—Illinois Secretary of Transportation Gary Hannig will meet with Union Pacific Railroad officials today in Omaha, Neb., to talk about using the freight company's rail line for high-speed trains heading from Joliet to St. Louis.

"We want to make sure that we can get the trains to arrive and depart on time," he said Wednesday at a Joliet Regional Chamber of Commerce luncheon at Harrah's Casino.

"We also need a commitment from Union Pacific that those tracks will be maintained and that we can run 110 mph high-speed rail up and down the line," he said.

The Illinois Department of Transportation and Union Pacific will have to work out an agreement on signals and dispatching issues, too, Hannig added.

The federal government has given Illinois \$1.1 billion to get the project moving.

The high-speed rail will stretch from Chicago to St. Louis with several stops along the way. The first stop out of Chicago will be in Joliet.

High-speed trains will use Canadian National freight lines from Chicago to Joliet, but Union Pacific lines from Joliet to St. Louis, said Joliet City Manager Tom Thanas.

Thanas said he was happy to hear the project is moving forward.

"I think it will open up tremendous economic development opportunities for downtown Joliet," he said. "Companies make money by saving time."

Thanas said businesses will want to locate near the high-speed rail line, which could mean more development and jobs for the city.

IDOT wants to have the line up and running by 2012, Hannig said. Initially there will be five trains on the line with a possible expansion to eight.

Hannig said the trains will run at 110 mph at first then increase to 220 mph in the future, which is the speed European and Asian high-speed trains travel

I-55 Improvements

Also Wednesday, Hannig announced that the Arsenal Road interchange improvements at Interstate 55 will be completed on time by the end of 2011

Thanas said he had heard that was the case, but having Hannig announce it publicly was further confirmation. That means the interchange will be in place by the time the city's new intermodal rail yard, Centerpoint North, is completed east of the intersection.

"It was good news for us," Thanas said.