Ridership on the region’s state-supported passenger rail routes has increased on almost every line over the past decade, according to Amtrak ridership data tracked by the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission.

More recently, between fiscal years 2016 and 2017, the Chicago-St. Louis and Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac corridors had the steepest gains in ridership (7.6 percent and 11.5 percent, respectively), a sign that passengers have returned after construction projects for higher-speed trains had wreaked temporary havoc with schedules.

That high-speed service is now available on a portion of the Wolverine route connecting Chicago and Detroit, with trains able to go 110 mph between Porter, Ind., and Kalamazoo, Mich.

Seven years of track work undertaken by the state of Illinois will soon allow for trains to travel at that speed on parts of the Lincoln service connecting Chicago and St. Louis (110 mph trains already are allowed on a stretch between the Illinois towns of Dwight and Pontiac).

The Wolverine and Lincoln are two of the Midwest’s nine state-supported passenger train services: Amtrak routes of less than 750 miles that receive financial support from state governments. Combined, the number of passengers on these nine routes was 20 percent higher in FY 2017 than in FY 2007 to FY 2017.

Among the other findings:

1. The Missouri River Runner (St. Louis to Kansas City) led in long-term growth, with ridership jumping 49 percent over the past decade;
2. The Hiawatha (Chicago-Milwaukee) offers the most daily round trips (seven) and has the most riders among the nine state-supported routes (more than 829,000 in FY 2017); its 10-year growth rate in ridership was 40 percent.
3. The only services with ridership declines between FY 2007 and 2017 were the Pere Marquette (Chicago-Grand Rapids, Mich.), which dropped 11 percent; and the Illini/Saluki (Chicago-Carbondale, Ill.), which fell 5 percent, including a one-year, 4 percent decline from FY 2016 to 2017. The Pere Marquette may have turned a corner, however; ridership on that line registered a one-year, 4.4 percent increase from FY 2016 to FY 2017.

By:
Friday, February 23, 2018 at 04:11 PM

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