

Bluegrass Passenger Rail Corridor

City of Winchester, KY

2023-03-26

Corridor Title: **Cincinnati to Knoxville segment of proposed “Bluegrass” Cincinnati to Atlanta passenger line**

Applicant: **City of Winchester, Kentucky**

Was a Federal Grant Application Previously Submitted for this Corridor?: **No.**

Other sources of Funding for the Corridor? **No.**

Cities, States Where the Corridor is Located: **Cincinnati OH, Erlanger KY, Georgetown KY, Lexington KY, Winchester KY, Richmond KY, Berea KY, Livingston KY, London KY, Corbin KY, Williamsburg KY, La Follette TN, Knoxville TN, projected extension to Atlanta GA.**

Congressional District(s) Where the Corridor is Located: **KY districts 4, 5, and 6; TN districts 2 and 3**

Is the Corridor currently programmed or identified in State rail plan, or regional or interregional intercity passenger rail systems planning study? **Not in state rail plan, but a similar route was studied in 1999.**

Is the applicant working with other entities in support of the Corridor? **Yes, City of Berea and City of Livingston.**

II. Corridor Summary

Kentucky and Tennessee form a large populated region with essentially no passenger rail service. Intercity rail from Cincinnati to Knoxville, ultimately to Atlanta, would link the Great Lakes and Piedmont Atlantic megaregions. The proposed Corridor would restore passenger rail service that was available until the 1970s, connecting the I-75 corridor through central Kentucky and east Tennessee to the rest of the United States.

Many people frequently travel 30-60 mile distances along Kentucky's Interstate 75, which the proposed rail Corridor would generally parallel. The region has a long and proud tradition of rail heritage, especially along the historically and economically significant Louisville & Nashville line. Several former stations on the L&N are now rail museums, and there is a strong interest from the public in maintaining and revitalizing these stations. The Corridor would be an enormous boon to an area that stands ready to capitalize on it, building on local pride to increase transportation equity, supporting outdoor and arts tourism in a region that is world-famous for it, reducing emissions and pollution, greatly increasing transportation efficiency in America's heartland, and bringing a natural reduction in traffic fatalities and harm to an overburdened highway system.

III. Corridor Funding

The City of Winchester's effort to restore passenger service to central Kentucky and east Tennessee is in concert with a citizen coalition named KYPATH (Kentucky Passengers Advocating for Trains Here). Their effort is officially supported by both the City of Berea and the City of Livingston. Working together with KYPATH, Berea, and Livingston over the next year, the City of Winchester will develop a collaborative network of municipalities, businesses, and passenger rail advocates on the Corridor to support service development planning and encourage inclusion of the Corridor in Kentucky and Tennessee's state rail plans. Winchester will collaborate and coordinate with Amtrak, track owners and operators, the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, and the Tennessee Department of Transportation to develop the Corridor's service development plan.

Several expected participants in the regional collaborative are eligible entities. After the award of Step 1 funding and the completion of the first year of this project, the City and its eligible partners will raise at least 10% of the Step 2 award and 20% of the Step 3 award with grant funding, in-kind contributions, and financial contributions. Some Step 1 grant money is expected to support identification and application for non-Federal share funding for subsequent steps in the process.

Among other agencies, municipalities invested in the Corridor are expected to approach the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). The proposed Corridor passes through two distressed counties that qualify for 80% ARC share of funded

projects, two at risk counties (70% share), and four transitional counties (50% share). It crosses distressed areas of non-distressed counties, including the City of Knoxville. These areas also qualify for 80% ARC share of funded projects.

IV. Applicant Eligibility

The City of Winchester meets eligibility criteria for this award because it is a political subdivision of the state of Kentucky.

V. Detailed Corridor Description

(1) Basic Corridor characteristics

For the Corridor to fulfill its objectives, it must serve those people from Cincinnati to Knoxville who travel for work or for recreation. This includes travelers between northern Kentucky and Cincinnati, between central Kentucky and the Cincinnati airport, and between central and south-central Kentucky. The volume of each geographic market's road travel is described below in section V(7). The proportion of road travelers who would prefer to take passenger rail along the Corridor requires study.

At least one train each way along the 4-hour route between Knoxville and Cincinnati is desirable. When this route was served by the L&N Railroad, the No. 33 "Southland" left Cincinnati at 8am, stopped in Knoxville at 3pm, and arrived in Atlanta at 7pm. The No. 32 "Southland" left Atlanta at 10am, stopped in Knoxville at 1:10pm, and arrived in Cincinnati at 9:30pm. While it traveled at half the speed of Amtrak trains on Class 1 track with freight volume and freight speeds similar to the Corridor's, the Southland's timetable is a model for Corridor characteristics that meet the needs of family and pleasure travel. More frequent trains would be required to serve commuters. Commuter needs will be investigated, but they are not the primary impetus of the project at this time.

Improvements along the route would include new station platforms in Lexington KY, Winchester KY, London KY, and Knoxville TN; and renovations to make existing stations in Erlanger KY, Berea KY, Corbin KY, and Williamsburg KY ADA compliant. Bridges and tunnels near Ford KY, between Berea and London KY, and between La Follette and Knoxville TN should also be evaluated.

I-75 does not parallel either of Central Kentucky's north-south railroad lines. It parallels the Cincinnati Southern/NS line to Lexington, and the CSXT line starting in Richmond. The lines connect via the former east-west CSXT "Old Road" from Louisville to Hazard through Lexington and Winchester, now owned and operated by RJ Corman RR.

(2) Readiness to enter into planning and development

The City of Winchester's readiness to enter into planning and development is at an early stage. The grant award will allow the City to bring dedicated

professional resources to bear on the planning and development process. The city will develop a strong working relationship with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet to guide planning and development and avoid expected pitfalls.

(3) Completed or ongoing eligible activities

No eligible activities have been completed. Initiation of Corridor development has been carried out through volunteer efforts by citizens of Clark, Madison, Fayette, and Rockcastle counties.

(4) Intended operator

Amtrak is the intended operator of passenger service on the Corridor. Trackage proposed for use by the Corridor is owned by the City of Cincinnati from its northern terminus to Lexington KY (leased by Norfolk Southern), RJ Corman Railroad from Lexington to Winchester KY, and CSXT from Winchester to Knoxville TN.

(5) Capability and capacity of Winchester, KY and its partners

Winchester is a home-rule class city and the county seat of Clark County. Its 2020 census population was 19,134. In 2022-23 it raised \$18,669,028 in revenue and spent \$18,374,523 (\$6,675,500 on capital projects). The City owns the site of the former railroad station (1 Depot Street), and operates a farmers market on the site. CSXT and RJ Corman Railroad trackage connect in Winchester.

Volunteers working with the City to advocate for the Corridor's development have experience in local and state government, community development, environmental engineering, public-private partnerships, participatory research, and program evaluation. Several involved volunteers previously led a grassroots collaborative process to identify and engage stakeholders in five counties to design a subsequently implemented 400 mile, three-state segment of US Bicycle Route 21. USBR 21 runs within five miles of the proposed Corridor for 80 miles, from Corbin to Winchester.

Planning and developing an interstate passenger Corridor is beyond the current capability and capacity of the City. It intends to use this grant to increase its capacity to anchor a process that leverages the City's location and drive to restore passenger rail to engage and collaborate with the relevant state agencies, other municipalities along the Corridor, track owners and operators, Amtrak, and federal agencies. Support and funding to implement and operate the Corridor are expected to come from multiple sources, not solely the City of Winchester.

(6) Challenges the Corridor aims to address

- Congested traffic in northern KY;
- Development of KY and TN arts and outdoor tourism;
- Climate and safety impacts of frequent long-distance travel along I-75;

- Significant gap in Amtrak service coverage.

(7) Expected users and beneficiaries of the Corridor

Track is owned by the City of Cincinnati (leased by Norfolk Southern), RJ Corman Railroad, and CSXT. Trains will be owned and operated by Amtrak. In addition to Union Station in Cincinnati, stations are proposed to be restored or built in Erlanger (also serving Florence), Lexington, Winchester, Richmond, Berea, London, Corbin, Williamsburg, La Follette TN, and Knoxville. These cities would benefit through increased tourism, job creation, and, especially in the critical Northern KY/Cincinnati area, decreased traffic congestion.

Expected users would include weekend travelers, tourists, college students, those visiting family or traveling with family, people traveling to and from airports, bicycle travelers, and a limited but exceedingly reliable segment of commuter traffic. The Corridor approximates the same path as Interstate 75. Average annual daily traffic (AADT) on I-75 in 2020-21 was measured at 116k vehicles in northern KY counties Boone and Kenton, 48k vehicles in Grant and Scott counties, 77k vehicles in Fayette county, 64k vehicles in Madison county, 46k vehicles in Rockcastle and Laurel counties, and 39k vehicles in Whitley county. As part of Corridor planning, the City will support a study to estimate how many of these drivers would take passenger rail instead.

Many destinations and infrastructure that support use of passenger rail exist along the Corridor. For example, Berea is a celebrated destination for arts and adventure tourism, and the Berea train station is located in the heart of the arts district. Adjacent to the station is a cab service with \$5 fares to anywhere in the city and all cabs are wheelchair-accessible vans. A Greyhound bus terminal is also next to the station. Businesses in Berea offer e-bike rentals, kayaks with shuttles to and from the reservoir, and limited bus service.

Most of the towns along the line hold festivals, fairs, concerts, and other large public events. Several are certified trail towns. Tourism is economically important to central and southeast Kentucky. Large factory and warehouse employers are located in Georgetown/Lexington/Winchester (Toyota, Xerox, Lexmark, Lockheed-Martin, Amazon.com, UPS, Trane, Link-Belt), and Berea (auto parts manufacturing). These and other employers draw workers from along the I-75 corridor, particularly from the economically distressed counties to the south. Hospitals in Cincinnati, Lexington, London, and Knoxville and colleges and universities in Cincinnati, Lexington, Richmond, Berea, Williamsburg, and Knoxville draw workers, patients, and students from along the corridor.

Nine of the 13 proposed Corridor counties are served by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). It is adjacent to three of the 10 poorest counties in the United States, and connects two of the 70 biggest cities in the US. The Corridor will create and support existing jobs in the region.

(8) Phasing and scaling opportunities

Partial implementation of the Corridor will benefit target geographic markets. Project phases may include the segment north of Lexington KY, The Lexington-Winchester link, and the segment south of Winchester. Scaling may include working with Tennessee and Georgia to extend the line to Atlanta, increasing served communities along the line with new station construction, and expanding capability to meet commuter needs.

(9) Other corridors

The City of Winchester is not submitting applications for multiple Corridors.

(10) Additional information justifying the Corridor

- 1999 regional planning study, *Examination of I-75, I-64 and I-71 High Speed Rail Corridors*: <https://transportation.ky.gov/MultimodalFreight/Documents/Examination%20of%20I-75,%20I-64%20and%20I-71%20High%20Speed%20Rail%20Corridors%20-%201999.PDF>

VI. Cities to be served by the route, populations, and station locations:

- Cincinnati (pop 309k) - 1301 Western Av (Union Terminal)
- (*Ohio River - Cincinnati Southern Bridge*)
- Erlanger KY (pop 18k, also serving Florence, pop 23k & CVG airport) - 3313 Crescent Rd
- (*Walton, pop 4k*)
- (*Georgetown, pop 37k*)
- Lexington KY (pop 323k, also serving LEX airport) - 133 Buchanan St? (RJ Corman Yard)
- Winchester KY (pop 18k) - 1 Depot St (site only)
- (*Tunnel*)
- (*Kentucky River bridge at Ford, KY*)
- (*2 Tunnels*)
- (*Otter Creek bridge*)
- Richmond KY (pop 36k) - 711 E Main St to 704 E Irvine St (site only)
- Berea KY (pop 15k) - 3 Artist Circle
- (*Kings Mountain tunnel and 3 Sinks tunnels*)
- (*Livingston, pop 226*)
- (*Tunnel #6*)
- London KY (pop 8k) - Railroad St near Flowers Bakery, or Laurel County Library, 120 College Park Dr (sites only)
- Corbin KY (pop 7k) - 101 N Depot St
- (*Cumberland River bridge in Williamsburg*)
- Williamsburg KY (pop 5k, also serving University of the Cumberlands) - 530 Main St

- *(Tennessee border)*
- *(11 bridges across Clear Fork, tunnel north of Morley)*
- *(La Follette TN, pop 7k)*
- *(Cove Creek bridge east of Caryville)*
- *(4 tunnels: Caryville Ridge, Vasper, and 2 in Oak Ridge)*
- Knoxville TN (pop 191k, also serving TYS airport) - Safety City Park area or industrial site on S. Concord if next leg planned through Chattanooga; 2560 University Commons Way or 2200 Volunteer Blvd if next leg planned through Etowah (sites only)