**Wednesday, March 13th, 2019**

TFIC continued its regular briefings with lawmakers building up to a new capital bill on Wednesday, March 13, with an insightful look at the future of high-speed rail in Illinois.

Rick Harnish, executive director of the Midwest High Speed Rail Association, walked the group through what he believes are the top three priorities for high-speed rail this year:

·         Deal with the significant infrastructure needs of Metra and Union Station in Chicago to bring it to a state of good repair, and complete the 110 mile an hour project for high-speed rail around Illinois and get the service to new communities such as the Quad Cities, with a price tag of about $1.5 billion

·         Create an integrated rail plan statewide, where all transit systems are investing in a coordinated way – from Chicago O’Hare all the way into downstate

·         Start the planning process for building a 220 mile per hour line connecting St. Louis and Chicago, that can get passengers from Springfield in 30 minutes and from Champaign in 45 minutes to Chicago

Harnish acknowledged delays in getting high-speed rail on upgraded rail lines up to 110 mph have been frustrating, although he insists the money has been well spent to make surrounding crossings and roads safer.

Legislators and TFIC officials in attendance discussed the massive investment needed for 220 mph service, but also the tremendous benefits – including nearly $800 million in annual, accumulating savings from having more people ride trains to work and school/college. There was general agreement there needs to be a detailed plan in place and someone taking ownership of the process before real movement on it will happen.