Leaders from Oswego, Yorkville, Montgomery, Plano, Sandwich and Kendall County recently gathered together to solidify their message on the need for Metra commuter services in the county.

Oswego Village President Gail Johnson is leading the effort to renew talks with the governing board of Metra. Oswego's residential population is now 33,429. Trustees are prepared to conduct a partial special census to show the village has grown by another 2,200 people in just the last five years. Oswego officials believe its growing population, and that of Kendall County, makes the area prime for commuter rail service.

"We had an excellent meeting and I fully expect our momentum to continue," Johnson said Friday about the gathering of Kendall County leaders.

Johnson called the area's elected officials for a meeting Thursday at Oswego Village Hall to discuss their next move concerning Metra train service.

"Each of our communities recognizes the importance of public transportation to our residents," she said.

Oswego has already demonstrated its commitment for commuter rail service. Earlier this year the village acquired a 15-acre parcel for a future Metra commuter parking lot at the northwest corner of Orchard Road and Mill Street. The land purchase was as part of a planned unit development agreement for 98.3 acres of land located on the west side of Orchard Road north of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway.

Oswego's 2015 Comprehensive Plan, recently supported by village trustees, designates high-density residential uses near the proposed Metra station site and recommends construction of a pedestrian tunnel under the tracks to connect to future development to the north.

Johnson said she hopes to create a task force made up of elected officials and staff to begin the process of communicating to Metra that the far western suburbs are in need of Metra commuter rail service.

"We, at the very least, deserve a feasibility study to be conducted," Johnson said.

The proposed Metra station is listed as a high priority on a list of upcoming projects in Oswego. Johnson reached out to the mayors in Yorkville, Montgomery, Plano and Sandwich, as well as elected officials in Kendall County, to convince Metra's board of directors on the need to act.

Metra Board Chairman Martin Oberman recently called himself neutral on the extension of service, but he said, "there are quite a few hurdles that need to be overcome."

The Metra Board recently voted to conduct yet another study for extending the service, largely because the study was already funded.
Back in 2004, then-Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert included about $7.5 million as an earmark in a federal transportation bill to study the extension. A little more than $2 million of it has been spent, and Metra Board members recently agreed to spend more that would bring that total spent to about $3 million.

The study is designed to give officials a better idea of what the prospects are of extending service to Oswego, Yorkville and maybe even Plano.

The nearest Metra commuter rail service that connects Oswego to the greater Chicago area is three miles to the north in Aurora on the BNSF Railway line, and the nearest Amtrak inter-city passenger rail service is available nine miles to the west in Plano, nine miles to the northeast in Naperville or 16 miles to the southeast in Joliet.

The village’s comprehensive plan supports a Metra BNSF line extension and other railway line extensions for the region with the statement that reads in part: "The village of Oswego should continue to support the efforts of Metra and (Illinois Department of Transportation) to bring new forms of public transportation services to the village."

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, whose focus is land use and transportation planning, has projected Oswego’s population will increase to 48,000 by 2025.

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