

LOCOMOTIVE

BY DAVID LUSTIG

Iowa Interstate gets ES44ACs

Heir to Rock Island's Chicago-Omaha main line joins ranks of regionals rostering big, new power



Prior to their inaugural revenue trip, Iowa Interstate ES44ACs 502 and 510 pose beside the former Rock Island station at Iowa City, Iowa, on Sept. 19. TRAINS: Andy Cummings

The first two of Iowa Interstate Railroad's dozen new General Electric ES44ACs arrived at the railroad's Iowa City, Iowa, shops on Sept. 19. The units will supplement the Interstate's existing EMD road fleet, which includes GP38-2s, SD38-2s, and Geeps rebuilt by Illinois Central Gulf.

The new units, Nos. 500-511, were acquired to handle a forecasted growth in traffic. The purchase price is somewhere north of \$2.2 million per copy.

Interstate management says it considered both EMD and GE products, with the purchase decision ultimately determined by a

combination of financial, performance, product support, and emissions considerations. Although the railroad did not host demonstrators, it did contact a number of Class I railroads that roster both manufacturers' products to get their opinions.

The new units are planned for heavy-haul service on Iowa Interstate's Omaha, Neb.-Chicago main line, plus its trackage rights over Cedar Rapids & Iowa City Railway to Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The inclusion of distributed power capability will enable fewer locomotives to pull heavier trains. That's especially important for the climb out of the Mississippi River Valley at Davenport, Iowa, and the steep grades surrounding the Iowa River Valley on the CR&IC near Amana, Iowa. GE conducted a training program to familiarize crews with the new GEVOs at its Erie, Pa., assembly plant.

Features include extended-range dynamic brakes, steerable trucks, and old-style control stands in place of desktop controls.

Iowa Interstate, founded in 1984, operates more than 500 miles of former Rock Island track in Illinois, Iowa, and Nebraska. Headquartered in Cedar Rapids, it's a subsidiary of Railroad Development Corp., a privately held, Pittsburgh-based railroad management and investment firm.