

## BSPRA Member Counties

Big Horn  
Broadwater  
Butte-Silver Bow  
Carbon  
Custer  
Dawson  
Gallatin  
Granite  
Jefferson  
Lake  
Mineral  
Missoula  
Park  
Powell  
Prairie  
Rosebud  
Sanders  
Stillwater  
Wibaux

## Ex Officio Members

Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes  
Crow Tribe  
Northern Cheyenne Tribe  
Amtrak  
BNSF Railway  
Montana Department of Transportation



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September 17, 2022

Amit Bose, Administrator  
Federal Railroad Administration  
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Administrator Bose:

We applaud the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for its timely actions implementing the historic passenger rail provisions of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority (Authority) is a regional rail authority established under Montana law (7-14-1601-39, MCA). It is committed to expanding passenger rail in Montana and surrounding regions that connects to and extends the reach of the entire national passenger rail system.

This letter expresses the interest of the Authority in participating in the FRA's Corridor Identification and Development Program (Docket Number FRA-2022-0031). At this initial stage of the program, the priority interest of the Authority is the restoration and enhancement of passenger service from Chicago to Seattle via southern North Dakota and Montana along the corridor of the North Coast Hiawatha (NCH) formerly operated by Amtrak but discontinued in 1979. Parallel to the Corridor ID Program, the Authority will also actively support and provide information for restoring and enhancing passenger service along this corridor in the Long-Distance Study authorized by Section 22214 of the IIJA.

In developing this corridor, the Authority intends to work with the FRA, state, tribal and local governments, metropolitan planning organizations, Amtrak, host railroads and other interested parties on detailed, local routing options, service plans and other design and development issues. In doing so, the Authority will take account of historic passenger service patterns and current or emerging local needs and conditions. Further, because of the scale, diversity, and national significance of this corridor, the Authority intends to work with the FRA, Amtrak and all interested parties in making this corridor a national model for the future of enhanced, long-distance passenger rail service in the United States.

The resumption of the passenger service to the NCH corridor will also add major connectivity to the national passenger rail network, creating a significant, measurable impact on ridership throughout much of the Amtrak system. That impact should be fully measured as corridors are evaluated for restored passenger rail service.

The Authority also anticipates identifying additional corridors serving Montana and the Greater Northwest region for the Corridor ID Program in the future. Once restored, the NCH corridor service from Chicago to Seattle will be a catalyst for reviving passenger rail in a vast region that is currently unserved or underserved by rail. Adequate passenger rail service has been long-absent from this region, and its restoration will make evident how passenger rail can and will positively transform the economy and quality of life in the region. Indeed, the prospect for the restoration of the NCH corridor has, by itself, generated considerable discussion of future passenger service corridors throughout the West.

Compared to highways, passenger rail is safer and more reliable (particularly during the winter), more cost-efficient, and friendlier to the environment. Rail service will create new economic opportunities, especially in smaller communities. It would provide tribal nations, rural communities, the elderly, resettled refugees, veterans and others life-changing access to health care, education, and other civic resources. It will also enable Americans from the rest of the nation, and global visitors, to visit and enjoy the American West and the Rocky Mountains year-round in ways that can only fully occur by rail. For these reasons and more, a restored NCH line will stimulate and become a backbone for additional passenger service in years and decades to come. These future corridors for expanded rail service in the West will include connections to the Southwest and to major Canadian cities.

Although not the primary focus of the Authority, another corridor in the Greater Northwest Region that we support is the route of Amtrak's discontinued Pioneer, connecting Salt Lake City and Portland, Oregon, via Boise, Idaho. This route, combined with a restored North Coast Hiawatha, would form the basis of a truly connected Rocky Mountain region, and would set the stage for future north-south connectivity.

The contact persons for this program will be David Strohmaier, chair of the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority, [dstrohmaier@bigskyrail.org](mailto:dstrohmaier@bigskyrail.org), and Jason Stuart, vice-chair of the Authority, [jstuart@bigskyrail.org](mailto:jstuart@bigskyrail.org).

We are pleased to answer any questions about the restoration of passenger service as outline here. Most importantly, we look forward to working with the FRA in creating the nation's 16<sup>th</sup> long-distance passenger rail line along the NCH corridor.

Again, thank you for your leadership and that of Secretary Buttigieg and the fine work of your staff in moving forward the Corridor ID Program and the Section 22214 Long-Distance Study. These are exciting times for passenger rail development in our nation, and we are pleased to join in these efforts.

Sincerely,



David Strohmaier, Chair

Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority