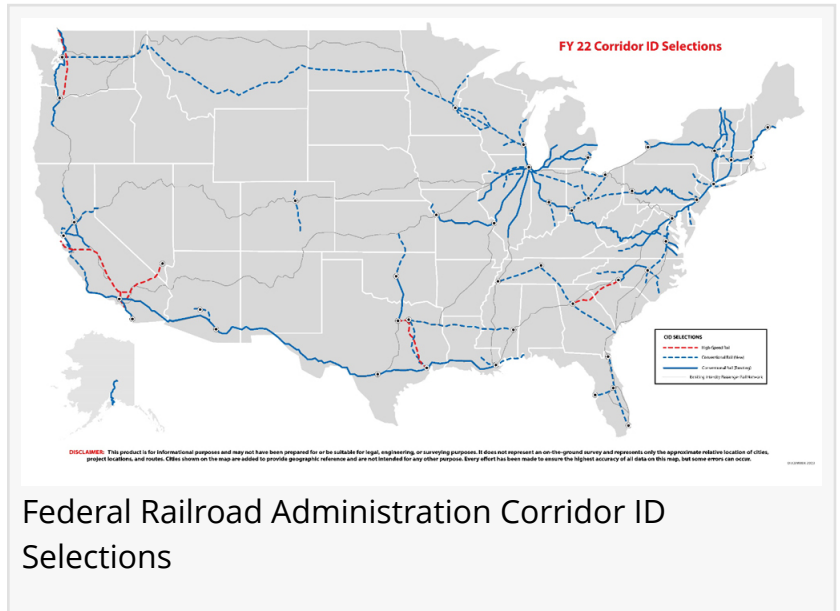


ALL ABOARD MONTANA - Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority is chosen for the Federal Corridor ID and Development Program

BILLINGS, MT, UNITED STATES, December 8, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Federal Government will provide \$500,000 in seed money to help kick-start construction of Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority's (BSPRA) North Coast Hiawatha route revitalization between Chicago and Seattle/Portland and connecting communities like Fargo, Bismarck, Billings, Bozeman, and Missoula. Formerly known as the North Coast Hiawatha, and before that the North Coast Limited, the route existed from the 1890s through the late 1970s when cuts to Amtrak ended the service. According to the Federal Railroad Administration, BSPRA "would enter Step 1 of the program to develop a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for preparing, completing, or documenting its service development plan."



BSPRA's inclusion in this program also brings with it a commitment to additional major federal funds over the coming years as the project moves closer to reality. BSPRA Chairman, Dave Strohmaier, believes this project will transform the economy and quality of life in Montana more than any other single project in recent memory, and will serve to revitalize rural and tribal communities. It is important to note that this project is the only new long-distance route among the 69 Corridor ID routes announced today, and at 2,200 miles is by far the longest new route being funded.

Today's announcement also addresses Amtrak's rail infrastructure in and around Malta, MT, along the Empire Builder route, which will soon see upgrades thanks to the \$14.9 million newly secured for the project through the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Grant Program. BSPRA and Amtrak were co-applicants in securing these funds which reflects BSPRA's commitment to maintaining a strong Empire Builder and efficient freight operations along Montana's Hi-Line.

There are many to thank who have been instrumental in our achievements to date, including Senator Jon Tester who helped write and pass the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the 20 member counties of BSPRA, our 17 municipal partners, 3 tribal councils, BNSF, Montana DOT, and Amtrak. We have also been bolstered and supported by our major business partners and sponsors including Xplorer Maps, Clearwater Credit Union, Siemens, KLJ Engineering, and all the individual donors and citizen volunteers who tirelessly support our efforts. The Montana Healthcare Foundation, Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWR), and MSU Extension have been instrumental collaborators and advocates. Strohmaier noted, "We are grateful for the broad community support from within Montana and beyond, which helped ensure that the North Coast Hiawatha would be selected for development by the Federal Railroad Administration."

As part of the Corridor ID study efforts, BSPRA will be inviting state, local, and tribal governments in Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, Idaho, Washington, and Oregon to consult in the planning process for the route. BSPRA will also welcome new member counties and municipal partners who will want to be involved in the decision-making. More announcements will be forthcoming over the next week.

"It should be clear from looking at both the Corridor ID selections and Federal-State Partnership beneficiaries that the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority is making a significant impact in a VERY short time. The developments going on across the country are mostly in states that touch oceans or are among the 15 largest states. We are thrilled to represent the Greater Northwest, which has been underserved by public transportation for far too long," said Chairman Strohmaier. "It's about time that the rural American West is reflected in federal passenger rail investments."

ABOUT THE BIG SKY PASSENGER RAIL AUTHORITY (BSPRA)

The Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority is a subdivision of the state government and the largest transportation district in Montana. It was formed to re-establish safe, reliable, and sustainable passenger rail service across southern Montana and comprises 20 member counties and ex officio membership of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai, Crow, and Northern Cheyenne tribes, Amtrak, Montana Department of Transportation, and BNSF Railway. Passenger rail service through southern Montana ended 43 years ago with the loss of Amtrak's North Coast Hiawatha and the BSPRA believes that together we can bring it back. Learn more at bigskyrail.org.

For questions or interview requests, please contact BSPRA Chairman Dave Strohmaier at 406.529.5580 or dstrohmaier@bigskyrail.org; or BSPRA Executive Director Jess Peterson at jess@wssdc.com or by phone at 406.850.1592.

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