

Revitalizing Communities Building Sustainable Economies is theme of Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority June 7th Conference

The Annual Conference takes place on June 7th at the Missoula Public Library

BILLINGS, MONTANA, US, May 30, 2024

[/EINPresswire.com/](https://EINPresswire.com/) -- The award-winning Missoula Public Library is the backdrop for the [Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority](#) (BSPRA) Annual Meeting with the theme "Revitalizing Communities and Building Sustainable Economies" on June 7th. Preceded on June 6th by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Amtrak Long-Distance Service Study Meeting in Missoula, MT, passenger rail advocacy organizations, federal, state, local, and tribal officials, and industry experts will convene to discuss exciting updates about the North Coast Hiawatha route, hydrogen fuel cell technology, and the region's rail renaissance at the conference.



The theme of the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority Annual Conference is Revitalizing Communities and Building Sustainable Economies

BSPRA is a state government subdivision and the largest transportation district in Montana. It was formed to re-establish safe, reliable, and sustainable passenger rail service across southern Montana. It comprises 19 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. The passage of the Federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in late 2021 created the first opportunity in decades to expand and improve passenger rail access. No region of the country needs that expansion and improvement more than the Greater Northwest. BSPRA was poised to take action to pursue restoring and revitalizing passenger rail. Much progress has been made and will be shared at the conference.

Dave Strohmaier, Chairman of the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority, indicated that the Federal Railroad Administration's long-distance study examined the potential to reopen discontinued routes or new ones of 750 miles or more. That study wraps up this summer and identifies the North Coast Hiawatha, connecting Chicago to Seattle through southern Montana and a north-

south line to Billings from El Paso or Denver, as preferred. “This is a big deal for the state of Montana and something that has been over four decades in the making,” Strohmaier said. “In addition, the North Coast Hiawatha is the only new long-distance route in the Corridor Identification and Development Program, which is the FRA’s project development pipeline for intercity passenger rail projects. This, too, is a huge win for Montana,” he said, “and will connect urban and rural communities in the American West.”

A welcome reception takes place from 5 - 7 p.m. at the Residence Inn Missoula Downtown on Thursday, June 6th, following the FRA Working Group Meeting. The conference will commence at 8:30 a.m. on Friday, June 7th, and features FRA Deputy Administrator Jennifer Mitchell, Rail Passengers Association President & CEO Jim Mathews, Director of PNWER Regional Infrastructure Accelerator Bruce Agnew, and a panel discussion about hydrogen fuel cell technology. During our luncheon, the Founders Award will recognize the three legislators who crafted HB 541 during the 1993 Montana legislative session. This bill, signed into law, authorized the creation of regional rail authorities in Montana. Representative Linda Nelson introduced HB 541, and co-signers Senators Dennis Nathe and Mike Halligan were co-sponsors. Senator Nathe passed away in 1993, and his award will be given to his family posthumously.

The conference concludes with a banquet from 6 – 8:00 p.m. at the Payne Native American Center, University of Montana. Assistant Secretary for Tribal Affairs (USDOT) Arlando Teller will deliver the keynote address.

To learn more and [register for the conference](https://www.bigskyrail.org/events), visit <https://www.bigskyrail.org/events>. Virtual attendance is also available.

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 19 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 45 years ago with the loss of Amtrak’s North Coast Hiawatha, and the BSPRA is working towards its renaissance. Learn more at [bigskyrail.org](https://www.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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Kim Whittemore
Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority
+1 781-258-1116

KWhittemore@bigskyrail.org

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