

FRA Awards \$6.4 Million CRISI Grant for National Rail Workforce Development, Led by WTI in Partnership with BSPRA

FRA awards \$6.4M to MSU WTI and BSPRA to lead a national rail workforce program connecting students, educators and industry.

BILLINGS, MT, UNITED STATES, October 7, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Federal Railroad Administration has awarded the Western Transportation Institute (WTI) at Montana State University a \$6.4 million Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant to establish a workforce development initiative that will enhance rail education and employment opportunities nationwide. The Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority (BSPRA) will play a vital role in the five-year program, receiving \$630,000 and providing \$210,000 in in-kind contributions to steer regional workforce strategies and ensure Montana communities are integrated into this national initiative.



Montana State University Western Transportation Institute logo, lead recipient of the FRA's \$6.4 million rail workforce development grant

Supported by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the 2023 and 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Acts, with additional match contributions of \$1.6 million from project partners for a total of \$8 million in project funding, the initiative will develop and provide rail education for K-12 schools, universities, and technical training institutions in Montana, Tennessee, and California.

"This project is one of the most exciting opportunities I have encountered in my career," said Dr. Kelvin Wang, Director of the Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University. "By

collaborating with colleagues in California and Tennessee, along with the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority, we are establishing a national model for rail education. This initiative will engage students early, broaden career opportunities, and ensure that the economic and community benefits of rail investments are achieved across the country."

"This CRISI award is about preparing people for great rail jobs — building a skilled workforce in Montana and across the country, from rural and Tribal communities to metropolitan regions," said Dave Strohmaier, Chair of BSPRA. "By investing in students today, we are laying the foundation for a sustainable and connected passenger & freight rail system tomorrow."

WTI will lead the program in partnership with the University of Memphis, California State University Long Beach, and BSPRA. Labor and tribal leaders, including the IAM Union Rail Division, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, have endorsed the initiative, highlighting its broad national and regional significance.

What the Grant Will Deliver:

Faculty Rail Fellows Program: Training 18-30 educators annually across three states in rail-related topics.

Summer Rail Academies: Introducing hundreds of K-12 students to rail topics and career paths.

Collaborative Curriculum Development: Project-based rail learning modules integrated into coursework, engaging thousands of university, technical college, and K12 students.

National Dissemination Platform: Resources hosted via the National Network for the Transportation Workforce, ensuring scalability and replicability.

Regional Rail Working Groups: Permanent multi-sector councils in Montana, Tennessee, and California that connect industry, labor, education, and economic development.

About the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority

The Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority (BSPRA) is Montana's first regional passenger rail authority and a multi-jurisdictional government agency representing counties, cities, and tribal nations along the Big Sky North Coast Corridor. BSPRA is committed to renewing and expanding long-distance passenger rail service to reconnect communities, boost economic growth, and enhance regional tourism. The Authority actively participates in the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor ID Program and is leading efforts to bring modern, sustainable passenger rail back to the Greater Northwest. For more information, visit www.bigskyrailmt.gov.

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