Connecting the Greater Northwest: Senator Sheehy, Federal Transportation Officials Join 2026 Rail Summit in Helena

U.S. Senator, federal transportation officials, national rail organizations and Tribal Nations gather in Helena for the 2026 Greater Northwest Rail Summit.



2026 Greater Northwest Rail Summit, August 25–27, 2026, in Helena, Montana, co-hosted by the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority and PNWER Regional Infrastructure Accelerator.

HELENA, MT, UNITED STATES, August 19, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Federal transportation officials, freight and passenger rail leaders, state and local officials, Tribal Nations, and transportation advocates from across the country will gather in Helena August 25–27 for the 2026 Greater Northwest Rail Summit, co-hosted by the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority (BSPRA) and the Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER)'s Regional Infrastructure Accelerator.

The three-day Summit will focus on freight and passenger rail investment, federal rail policy, regional and cross-border collaboration, workforce development, tourism and mobility, and opportunities to strengthen the rail connections that support communities and economies nationally and across the Greater Northwest. The program will also highlight ongoing work to restore passenger rail service along the eight-state Big Sky North Coast Corridor, connecting Chicago and the Great Lakes with Seattle and Portland via southern North Dakota and Montana.

Featured speakers include:
* U.S. Senator Tim Sheehy (R-Mont.) who will participate in Wednesday's “fireside” chat with Billings Mayor Mike Nelson.
* Karen Hedlund of the federal Surface Transportation Board, who will deliver the Thursday morning keynote.

* Senior U.S. Department of Transportation officials Michael Giordano, Senior Advisor to U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, and Michael Rutherford, Assistant Secretary of Transportation for Multimodal Freight, will participate in the Summit's freight and passenger corridor discussion alongside Will Resch of the USDOT Build America Bureau.

“The Greater Northwest has an extraordinary opportunity to strengthen the rail connections that tie our communities and economies together,” said BSPRA Chair Dave Strohmaier. “Bringing federal leaders, railroads, Tribal Nations, state and local officials, and passenger rail advocates together in Helena allows us to move beyond talking about what is possible and focus on what it will take to deliver it.”

“This annual gathering brings passenger and freight rail interests together in common cause to advance the infrastructure investment needs of the Greater Northwest,” said Bruce Agnew, Director of PNWER's Regional Infrastructure Accelerator. “With state and federal leaders, railroads, ports, shippers, communities and transportation experts all at the table, the Summit provides an important opportunity to identify shared priorities and advance cross-border cooperation on the rail connections that support our communities and regional economy.”

Additional speakers include Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of the Rail Passengers Association; Rebecca Higgins, Vice President of the Eno Center for Transportation; and Art Guzzetti, Vice President of the American Public Transportation Association, along with representatives from the Northwest Seaport Alliance, Mountain Line and BSPRA Crow Tribe Director Luella Brien, among others.

Big Sky North Coast Corridor
BSPRA serves as project manager for the Big Sky North Coast Corridor, an eight-state, approximately 2,300-mile effort to restore passenger rail service between Chicago and Seattle/Portland through southern North Dakota and Montana. The corridor is advancing through Step 2 of the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification and Development Program, with route, service and ridership development underway.

BSPRA will also unveil new public-information materials during the Summit designed to help communities understand the corridor, the federal development process and the mobility, economic and community opportunities associated with restored passenger rail service.

Registration and Summit Information
Registration options range from single-day to full Summit passes, with virtual participation available.
Full agenda, speaker biographies and registration are available at:
bigskyrailmt.gov/2026-gnwrs-bspra-annual-meeting

Media Access
Working press are invited to attend the 2026 Greater Northwest Rail Summit in person or

virtually at no cost. Media may register using code MEDIA at the Summit registration page. Registrations are subject to review, and BSPRA reserves the right to decline credentials that do not appear to be from a working press outlet. Members of the media interested in arranging interviews with speakers or BSPRA leadership should contact Kim Whittemore at the information below.

About the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority
Established by Montana counties in 2020, the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority is a multi-county regional transportation district working to restore long-distance passenger rail service through the Big Sky North Coast Corridor while strengthening regional mobility, economic opportunity and community connectivity. BSPRA serves as project manager for the eight-state Big Sky North Coast Corridor under the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification and Development Program.

About PNWER
The Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER) is a public/private non-profit organization established in 1991 and representing Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington, and the Canadian provinces and territories of Alberta, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan and the Yukon. PNWER's mission is to increase the economic well-being and quality of life for all citizens of the region, identify and promote “models of success” and serve as a conduit to exchange information. PNWER's Regional Infrastructure Accelerator (RIA) is funded by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Build America Bureau and supports project delivery through technical assistance and identification of innovative financing solutions. Learn more at www.rianorthwest.org.

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