

All Aboard NORTHWEST

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FRA Amtrak Long-Distance Service Study Workshop

Response by All Aboard Northwest, October 11, 2022

Question 1

As covered in the presentation, statute mentions that “When considering potential new long-distance passenger routes and service, the study must consider whether those routes would:

- a) Link and serve large and small communities as part of a regional rail network*
- b) Advance economic and social well-being of rural areas of the United States*
- c) Provide enhanced connectivity for the national long-distance passenger rail system*
- d) Reflect public engagement and local regional support for restored passenger rail service.”*

What do you think about each priority, what does it mean to you? Are there any other priorities you think we should consider?

We believe all are important and why we advocated for their inclusion in this Section. We note, however, that priority “D” requires proactive engagement by the team to ensure success.

The National Network needs to be inclusive and equitable; provide accessible service to people no matter where they live. A comprehensive network of long-distance routes needs to be built that facilitates travel north-south and east-west, with all routes having enough frequencies to provide at least one departure during daylight.

Simply putting out a “public solicitation notice” will not suffice for gauging public interest. In order to conduct proper stakeholder engagement and honestly gauge public interest for restored or new passenger rail routes, the team must proactively reach out to communities and stakeholders, inform them of what modern day passenger rail is, what the opportunities are available for them to be included in

today's passenger rail network, and solicit their feedback. We in the Greater Northwest have done extensive and ongoing outreach to communities and potential stakeholders and have garnered numerous letters and resolutions of support and interests.

A well-designed and comprehensive community outreach effort can tap into the extensive interest we have seen in passenger rail, and overcome skepticism from local leaders that small communities will continue to be left out of the passenger rail network.

All Aboard Northwest is willing to reach out to communities and groups and educate them about modern long-distance passenger rail and the opportunities we have before us with Sec. 22214.

FRA should provide two types of funding resources and technical assistance:

- Assistance to communities that may benefit from new, restored, or enhanced long-distance passenger rail.
- Assistance to advocates to reach out to communities and interests.

We must take a 50-state strategy to ensure that all states, especially the continental 48, are included in a robust network of federally-supported long-distance routes. This network should form the backbone to which regional and local services can be built and enhanced. Key consideration must be ensuring that Wyoming and South Dakota are again included on the long-distance national network. Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico have unique geographical considerations, but they should also be provided with national support.

For example, if the team strives to connect the three largest cities of the state to the national network the other communities they pick up along the way (with prudent spacing on station stops) the ensuing network will inherently open up more possibilities and accessibility and fulfill priorities "A" through "C".

Question 2

**How would you like to be involved and/or informed in the progress of the study?
What is the best way to communicate and engage with you?**

We would like to be kept informed every step of the way so that we can offer feedback and engagement during the process.

We would especially like to be a part of discussions laying out the concept and criteria for a true National Network and to propose conceptual long-distance routes that the

team should explore. We may be able to highlight data the team can incorporate into its analysis. We can describe how the traveling public thinks about travel through the region and how proposed routes would fulfill their needs.

The team has been charged with promotion and growth of the long-distance passenger rail national network. Therefore, the team must make as compelling a case as possible for many restored and new long distance routes, in order to serve as much of the nation as possible. The team should evaluate routes individually, and in light of how they impact and benefit the overall national network.

The FRA and listening team should conduct listening sessions throughout the nation to describe how communities think about travel through the region, challenges, hardships, opportunities for collaboration with freight interests and so on. Advocates can help with outreach for such events if provided the resources to do so.

Question 3

Statute also included the directive to “develop recommendations by which Amtrak could work with local communities and organizations to develop activities and programs to continuously improve public use of intercity passenger rail service along each route.”

What do you see as important tools to encourage the use of intercity passenger rail? What have you found the most effective in communicating with your communities and constituencies?

The most important feedback we can provide is to push Amtrak leadership to meet people in person in their communities, in order to learn about their needs and develop the tools, resources, and customer support that attracts and retains them. People need to travel, eat, and sleep in well-maintained surroundings; have enough equipment; and reasonable-cost fares.

Please see commentary by Transportation for America, and former Amtrak Chairman, John Robert Smith for a succinct description of what Amtrak leadership should be doing in regards to the long-distance services.

<https://t4america.org/2022/09/21/jrs-amtrak-success/>

Question 4

As FRA is required to complete significant outreach for this study, are there any specific local or regional stakeholders you are aware of that would potentially like to participate in the study? If so, please provide the entity's name and contact information below.

Yes, there are numerous groups and organizations you should reach out to for participation in this study. National, Regional, and State advocates are the conduits to local communities, stakeholders, and other interested parties. The team should not rely solely on State DOTs, or "Public Meeting Notices". The FRA needs to provide financial assistance to state and regional advocates to cultivate the stakeholder feedback for Sec. 22214 to be beneficial.

Greater Northwest Regional Stakeholders

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National Organizations

[Rail Passengers Association](#)

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Question 5

Are there existing studies or analyses that FRA should be aware of that may help inform the analysis of potential Long-Distance routes? Please provide any input below.

Yes, there are numerous studies and research, namely from The Rail Passengers Association, Transportation for America, and the High Speed Rail Alliance. We work closely with all of them and appreciate their reports, analysis, commentary, and support.

We also highlight and emphasize the Brief of Greater Northwest regional support we have previously supplied to the FRA (attached to this document) to highlight the interest in being considered for passenger rail; including communities that have not had passenger rail service prior to Amtrak. Also available here:

<https://allaboardnw.org/our-work/resolutions-and-letters-of-support/>

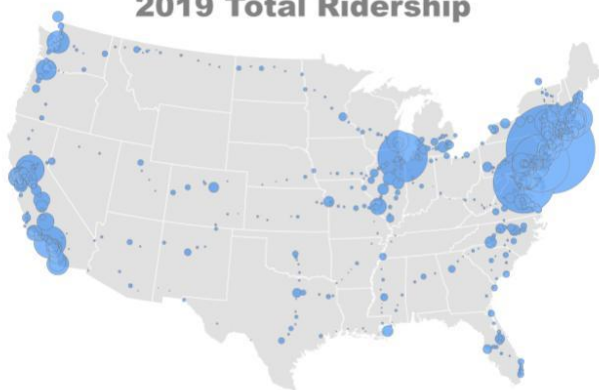
“Long-distance” services are essential services. Where available, they are heavily used, and the primary market for them isn’t end-point to end-point but the dozens of communities between them. People are quite literally turned away even from existing long-distance services by a shortage of equipment and lack of frequencies.

Look beyond ridership to passenger utility



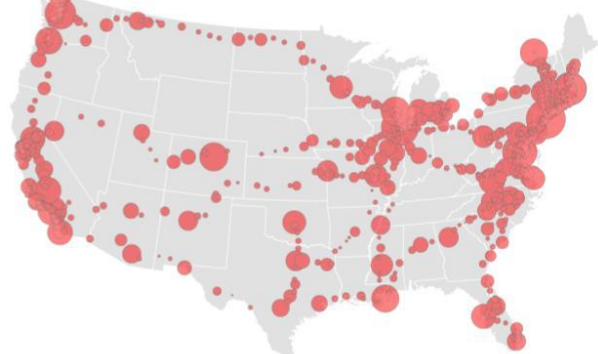
RAIL PASSENGERS
ASSOCIATION

2019 Total Ridership



Myth: ‘Trains Only Make Sense In Big Cities’

2019 Riders per Departure



Reality: When Available, Trains Are Heavily Used!

For more, go to <http://www.railpassengers.org/ridership>

Research, Analysis & Public Testimony

National

[“A blueprint for Amtrak success”](#) from T4A Chair John Robert Smith, Transportation for America, 2022.

[Long-Distance Night Trains](#), High Speed Rail Alliance, 2022. “Long-distance night trains represent America, connecting cities and distant rural areas, serving higher-ticket tourists and budget-minded commuters, and uniting elected leaders of every political persuasion.”

[Will Congress hold Amtrak accountable for providing essential passenger rail service?](#), Transportation for America, 2020.

[Passenger Trains do make money](#), Rail Passengers Association, 2019.

[NO TRAINS FOR YOU: THE DANGERS OF ZERO-SUM THINKING](#), Rail Passengers Association, 2019.

[“Our chairman advocates for long-distance rail”](#), Transportation for America, 2019.

[DEFENDING PASSENGERS' RIGHTS BEFORE CONGRESS](#). Rail Passengers Association, 2019.

[“Amtrak can’t cut its way to success”](#), High Speed Rail Alliance, 2018.

[AMTRAK’S ROUTE ACCOUNTING: FATALLY FLAWED, MISLEADING & WRONG](#). 2018: Rail Passengers Association. The team should work to ensure that Amtrak Accounting and reporting is corrected, as has been directed by Congress, to give an accurate reflection of costs of these services.

[Multipurpose Mobility Machines](#), 2012: The High Speed Rail Alliance (Midwest High Speed Rail Association) and the Rail Passengers Association (National Association of Railroad Passengers)

[Grid & Gateway Communications Plan 2007](#). National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP, today’s Rail Passengers Association) proposal for National Network Expansion.

[Amtrak Study of New Service](#) (1992)

Midwest

[Lakeshore Corridor Study](#), 2015: The High Speed Rail Alliance (Midwest High Speed Rail Association) and the Rail Passengers Association (National Association of Railroad Passengers) The [Lakeshore Rail Alliance](#) project exemplifies how so-called long-distance services serve markets and city pairs between the endpoints in a way other modes, or shorter routes, cannot.

[Integrated Network Approach](#), 2022. High Speed Rail Alliance. “Upgrading existing freight lines is a great way to serve hundreds of cities and towns quickly.”

Northwest

North Coast Hiawatha [Research Note](#). Rail Passengers Association, 2021.

Southeast

1990 Floridian Study (not yet available)

Southwest

The Southwest Chief performs well even compared to NEC services, it just lacks the resources to put into it. Rail Passengers Association, 2018.

<https://www.railpassengers.org/happening-now/news/blog/rail-passengers-letter-in-response-to-amtraks-sw-chief-announcement/>

Virginia

[Virginia Rail Banking “Rails with Trails” Policy Paper](#), Virginia Rail Policy Institute, 2022.

Washington State

[Feasibility of an East-West Intercity Passenger Rail System for Washington State](#), Legislative Joint Transportation Committee, 2020.

[Central Washington Stampede Pass Study](#), Central Washington University, 2017.

West

[Feasibility Study for Amtrak Passenger Service from El Paso, Texas to Denver, Colorado \[and north to Montana\] \(1994\)](#)

Corridor ID Program RFIs (May, 2022)

[ND, SD, MT, WY, & ID DOTs Joint Statement](#) : "We suggest, however, that to advance a truly national program, FRA must adopt a program structure that is welcoming to new participants and regions, particularly as this new program is principally one of developing plans that could be funded by other programs."

[The US Department of Defense \(DoD\)](#): "In general, a travel corridor that is served by an interstate highway would also likely be well served with a rail route. In most cases, infrastructure improvements that enhance Amtrak should also be viewed as opportunities to improve rail freight movement."

[FRA Regional Rail Plans](#)

We highly suggest, as the team is conducting the study, that they not only evaluate potential routes on the merits of them stand-alone, but also how they impact and add value to the national network and increase connectivity and travel options. A connection that alone seems "low-performing" may actually be what brings other connections and the network at large into feasibility.

Amtrak History

[Amtrak at 50: How McKinsey Designed A National Railroad](#), Eno Center for Transportation, April 2021.

[Amtrak at 50: The Rail Passenger Service Act of 1970](#), Eno Center for Transportation, October, 2020.

"All Aboard Amtrak", 1991, by Mike Schafer. The Railpace Company Publishing, all rights reserved.

"Journey to Amtrak", 1972, Edited by Harold Edmonson. This includes the narrative as well as a comprehensive list of all services operating just prior to Amtrak and if they were carried over by Amtrak. Scans of the cover and pages of routes before and after Amtrak took over are available to the team upon request.

Conclusions

Thank you for the opportunity to provide early feedback to the project team on these nationally-important and critical studies.

1. For public engagement, don't rely solely on impersonal "Public meeting notices" or "Public solicitation requests". Instead, provide resources to advocates so that they can reach out to the communities and other stakeholders with which they are already connected. We must work together to go beyond studies and construct a compelling vision and case for passenger rail expansion all over the country.
2. Build a holistic vision that includes all 50 states. The team must build a compelling case for serving the entire nation with long-distance passenger rail services. Look beyond what existed in the past. Today's needs require new long-distance routes and connections.
3. Emphasize the true economic, environmental and equity value of what long-distance services provide to communities of all sizes. A seamless network provides service for endpoints and for the dozens of communities in between.

Please contact us if you have further questions or comments. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Dan Bilka

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Director and Former South Dakota Representative, Rail Passengers Association

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