

All Aboard **NORTHWEST**

206-222-3735 / 541-568-6700 / 208-600-1096 / allaboardnw.org

FRA Section 22214 LDR Study Feedback - Round 3

March 8, 2024

TO: To the Federal Railroad Administration and Consultant Team

RE: FRA Sec. 22214 Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study, Round 3 Feedback

Here is All Aboard Northwest's feedback for Round 3 of the Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study. We've tried to be as succinct as possible, but please let us know if anything is unclear, or if you have any questions.

All Aboard Northwest is pleased to be participating in the Long-Distance Service Study.

We applaud the team's commitment and ambition to thoroughly casting a wide net, focusing on the rural, and proposing an inclusive and far-reaching vision for passenger rail in the United States. We are pleased to see how the study is shaping up and the 15 new routes of the "Proposed Network of Preferred Routes" to be developed on top of the existing National Network.

Dan Bilka
President
All Aboard Northwest
dan@allaboardnw.org

Cc:
Rail Passengers Association
Transportation for America
High Speed Rail Alliance
Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact
Amtrak

["Focus on the Rural": Rural Prioritization and Implementation](#)

[Priority and Timeline](#)

[Network System Planning, Management and Evaluation](#)

[National Long-Distance Rail Commission](#)

[FRA Long-Distance Management](#)

[Recommended Improvements to the 15 Routes](#)

[Nashville - Memphis - Little Rock](#)

[South Dakota and Wyoming](#)

[Washington and Oregon](#)

[Colorado](#)

[Greeley](#)

[Wray](#)

[Conclusions](#)

"Focus on the Rural": Rural Prioritization and Implementation

We emphasize the importance of prioritizing funding, construction, and implementation in rural areas in the Project team's implementation recommendations to Congress.

While the current study focuses on long-distance passenger services, improvements needed on the 15 proposed routes should be planned to also benefit current or potential freight and state-supported passenger services.

Priority and Timeline

It is imperative that these routes become ***national priorities*** to be implemented quickly, since they will generate significant benefits to the economy, to the environment, and to equity – that is, they will provide service to underserved geographic regions, and to the 30% of the population that does not drive.

For the 15 routes to come to fruition, the infrastructure and equipment needed must be fully authorized and funded.

Our country must commit to completing all 15 routes in much less time than is currently being proposed. **10 years** should be the target date for implementation of these nationally-critical services from the date Congress passes an authorizing and funding act. We can and must do better than the 30+ year timeline currently being proposed by the team.

Network System Planning, Management and Evaluation

National Long-Distance Rail Commission

We applaud and support the idea of a *Long Distance Public Committee*. Additionally, separate from Amtrak, we need Congress to create a new Federal entity that is charged with service development planning, construction, and implementation of the long-distance network in conjunction with Amtrak (as the operator for long-distance services) and host railroads.

Interstate Compacts

We also need Congress to create (and fund) Interstate Rail Compacts for the entire nation (or at the very least, for the contiguous 48 states).

FRA Long-Distance Management

The project team should recommend creation of a Long-Distance Passenger Rail Director, a new position within the Federal Railroad Administration. This person would act in both a leadership role to enhance oversight of Amtrak's on the National Network services and as an Ombudsman role to Congress, the Federal Railroad Administration, and the President, for communities most reliant on these essential national services. This position would have the authority to step in to enforce standards, and to conduct oversight over Amtrak's Officers if they continue to fail to address congressional directives.

In addition to individual calculations of how each proposed route contributes to the National Network, there should be evaluations of how the 15 routes facilitate network effects between the proposed routes and existing long-distance routes. The team should evaluate how much economic activity is lost if one route is not carried forward with the rest. Just as there are benefits from completing the Proposed Network of Preferred Routes, it must also be recognized that there have been real economic losses to states and communities from not having Amtrak services.

Recommended Improvements to the 15 Routes

Segments of the "Conceptual Enhanced Network" have not been included in the 15 new Preferred Routes. We recommend that the following be added to the network.

Nashville - Memphis - Little Rock

South Dakota and Wyoming

The Long-Distance Study Team should thoroughly research and analyze the [Special Transportation Circumstances](#) Grants Program and quantify the economic impact of these states not having passenger rail service.

The conceptual long-distance routes being proposed through South Dakota have awoken ample interest. Our friends at the *South Dakota Searchlight* had the following observations:

*"Our story, the one with [SD on the map](#), is officially the most-read story we've ever published as of late February 2024. Which is wild, because we didn't pay to boost it on social media.... **There's way more interest in this than I would've expected.**"*

Washington and Oregon

Similarly, publicity surrounding the proposed network has generated significant support among elected officials in support of the Spokane - Tri-Cities - Yakima - Stampede Pass - Seattle route, as well as the Seattle - Yakima - Boise - Salt Lake City - Denver route.

<https://www.aawa.us/news/posts/aawas-comments-to-the-fra-long-distance-study/>

Colorado

Greeley

Inclusion of the line through Greeley may improve the chances for Front Range Passenger Rail to move forward.

<https://www.thenocooptimist.com/news/greeley-city-council-agrees-front-range-passenger-rail-project-is-a-bad-deal-for-greeley-taxpayers-heres-why>

Wray

Wray has "all the right stuff" to be considered as a stop on the California Zephyr service. Wray is almost dead center between McCook, NE and Fort Morgan, CO (92 miles and 89 miles respectively).

Conclusions

We thank the project team for their broad approach. Our needs for long-distance passenger rail far surpass those of 50 years ago and are crucial for our nation to continue moving forward. We applaud the 15 Proposed Preferred Routes.

The project team's results will empower Congress to act quickly on these recommendations. We call on Congress to act quickly, authorize the full system, and assign the Federal Railroad Administration to quickly construct and implement these critically important national services.

"People live here!"

Dan Bilka
President, All Aboard Northwest
Coordinator, The Greater Northwest Passenger Rail Working Group