



**BIG SKY
PASSENGER
RAIL AUTHORITY**

REVITALIZING GREATER NORTHWEST COMMUNITIES THROUGH PASSENGER RAIL

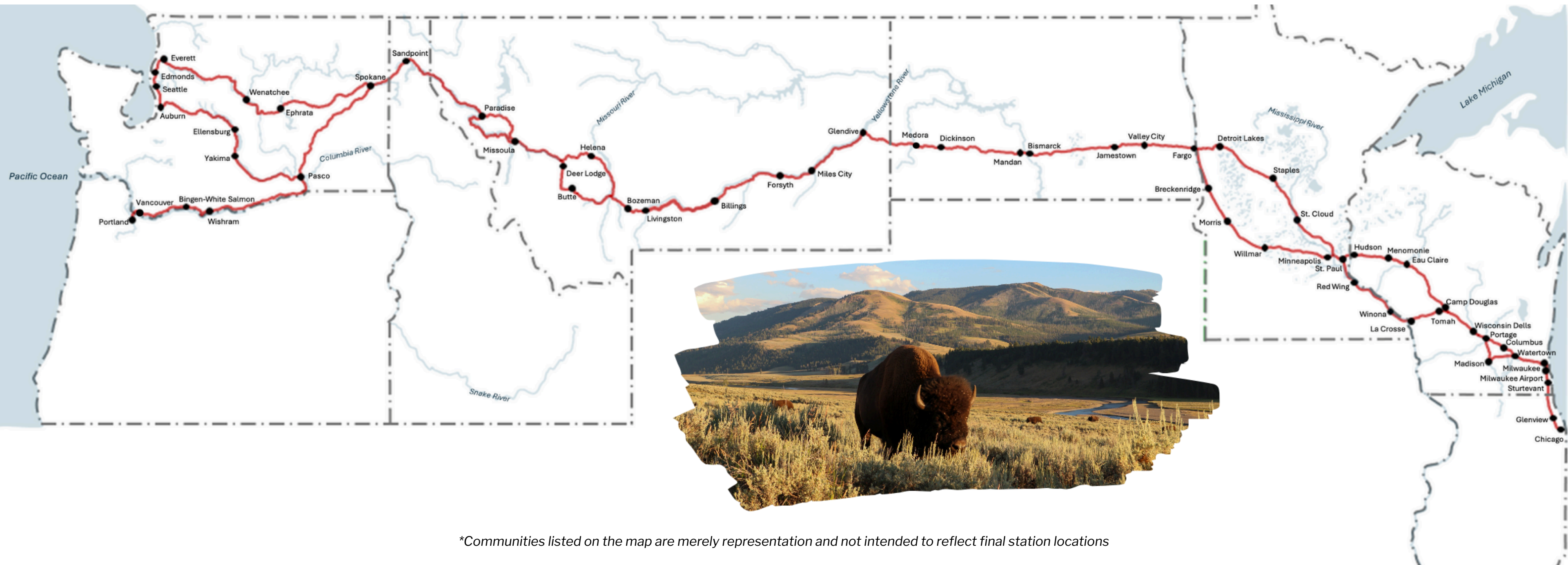
COMMUNITY NEED

For over four decades, southern Montana and the broader Greater Northwest have lacked essential passenger rail service. The discontinuation of the North Coast Hiawatha in 1979 severed vital connections among rural towns, tribal nations, and urban centers, leaving many communities isolated from reliable and affordable transportation options. This absence has hindered access to healthcare, education, employment, and tourism opportunities, disproportionately affecting low-income and tribal communities.



HOW BSPRA WILL MEET THAT NEED

The Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority (BSPRA), comprising 18 counties and three tribal nations, is leading the initiative to renew passenger rail service along the historic North Coast Hiawatha route, now called the Big Sky North Coast Corridor. Accepted into the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification and Development (CID) Program in December 2023, BSPRA is developing a comprehensive service plan to reconnect communities across eight states, from Seattle and Portland to Chicago. The route, spanning approximately 2,300 miles, presents a unique opportunity to strengthen rural economies, support tourism, and provide a resilient, sustainable mode of interstate travel.



**Communities listed on the map are merely representation and not intended to reflect final station locations*



THE GOAL

The Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification and Development Program (CID) – Step 2 will begin in 2025 and requires grant applicants to raise a 10% match for federal dollars. Based on planning projections, the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority will need to raise \$1.1 million from non-federal sources to meet this requirement.

This 10% match will cover the cost of preparing a Service Development Plan (SDP), which details how a chosen passenger rail corridor will be implemented throughout the region.

WHY INVEST NOW?

- There is an opportunity to **leverage nearly \$10 million in support** from the FRA Corridor Identification and Development Program - Step 2 to plan and build the line from 2025 to 2030.
- The route will serve **25 million people**, including 20 metro areas.
- **Rural communities are underserved** by current transportation networks.
- The proposed rail line is one of 15 preferred routes **recommended to Congress** for restoration in the Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study.
- There is **growing national interest** in rail as a low-emission, efficient travel option.
- Travel becomes **more accessible, convenient, and affordable** for commuters and tourists alike.

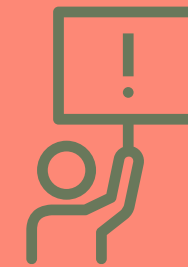
IMPACT



Economic Development & Tourism

A passenger rail line along the Big Sky North Coast corridor would boost local economies along the corridor with jobs in rail operations and maintenance, promoting transit-oriented development, and bolstering tourism. It would encourage regional investment and workforce mobility, attract visitors to national parks and rural destinations while providing access to healthcare. Both research data and community engagement sessions indicate that rural communities can expect a better than average growth in jobs and economic vitality from the renewed passenger rail service. Revitalizing rural areas, in turn, will improve the quality of life and health for citizens of communities often left behind the prosperity enjoyed elsewhere.

The Empire Builder, which Amtrak operates in northern Montana and North Dakota, generates \$327 million annually. In every category – jobs, spending, tourism dollars, and infrastructure savings – Montana communities see significant gains from the passenger train. Case in point: In 2023, 12.5 million visitors to Montana spent \$5.45 billion.



Historical Precedent & Public Demand

Since 1979, when the North Coast Hiawatha was discontinued, communities from Seattle to Chicago have consistently voiced their desire for renewed service. Recent surveys by the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority and bipartisan support from state and local governments reflect strong and growing momentum. To date, dozens of communities have endorsed the line and 17 are members of the Authority's government partners program. To learn more about our survey, click: [Public Engagement Report](#)

IMPACT



Improving Access to Healthcare for Low-Income Families and Native Tribes

Healthcare access is challenging in rural communities across America. Contributing factors include the vast size of the states along the corridor and low population density. This leads to long distances between communities and healthcare facilities, limited availability of providers, and difficulties in accessing specialist care. Transportation barriers are significant, particularly for low-income families and Native American tribes.

Between May and July of 2023, and with the support of the Montana Healthcare Foundation, BSPRA and its primary partner, Montana State University (MSU) Extension, conducted meetings in six locations across Montana to facilitate conversations about passenger rail. These meetings included three reservation communities, the North Cheyenne Reservation (Lame Deer), Ronan (Flathead Reservation), and Garryowen (Crow Reservation). It is of note that, particularly for participants living on reservations, the opportunity to more readily, safely, and easily access medical care was a driving factor in their support of passenger rail. Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority is working collaboratively with tribes across the corridor to plan the proposed rail line.



Sustainability

Passenger rail travel emits significantly less CO₂ than cars or planes. Passenger rail also gives residents and visitors diversified transportation options in case of fuel price spikes or airline service reductions. In a region of the country known for extreme weather and rugged terrain, it would also provide vital mobility when snow, ice, and extreme winds block vehicles from mountain passes and high plains.

THANK YOU

Contact Information

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