



Date: April 26, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

All Aboard Minnesota, a non-profit citizen group advocating and educating for more passenger rail service in Minnesota and the Upper Midwest representing Amtrak passengers, is writing to provide our recommendations for routes to include in the current FRA long distance rail passenger study.

There are two key additional routes to Amtrak's long-distance service that would serve the Upper Midwest states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, and Missouri, providing north-south connectivity throughout the Upper Midwest and Mid-South, and going to the Pacific Northwest and Southwest. These two routes meet all four criteria of the FRA long distance study, and provide a strong foundation on which to build more corridors.

Route #1: Twin Star Rocket – Lone Star-Texas Chief:

- Would serve end points starting in the north in at Minneapolis, St. Paul, MN extending through the heartland of the Midwest with southern endpoints of Houston, and San Antonio.
- We would propose that the train could be split at Fort Worth, with one leg running through to San Antonio. At Fort Worth, the other leg of the train would run south to Dallas-Houston.
- Other major metropolitan areas served by this route would be Des Moines, Kansas City, and Oklahoma City, along with service to many medium sized communities such as Albert Lea, and provide additional service on the Heartland Flyer corridor.
- This route would enable the populations along the Minneapolis, St. Paul –Kansas City corridor direct connections with the California Zephyr, serving Denver and San Francisco, and the Southwest Chief, serving Albuquerque and Los Angeles, without having to backtrack to Chicago. This route would also connect with the Sunset Limited, serving Tucson, Phoenix, and Palm Springs, strengthening ridership for that route.
- Because it would connect with three other major long distance Amtrak routes and other corridors, it would be a major feeder and connector throughout the Midwest and Mid-South. This train historically had a steady level of business year round rather than seasonal variations.
- UP rebuilt the main line in 2015 from Minneapolis, St. Paul to Kansas City, which has relatively low levels of freight traffic, providing good infrastructure for passenger traffic.

- We believe the Lone Star-Texas Chief portion of this route was discontinued in 1979 for political reasons, not ridership reasons. The portion of the route between Minneapolis- St. Paul to Kansas City was discontinued in July 1969, despite good ridership by the Rock Island Railroad, which was in a weak financial position.

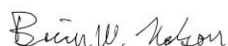
Route #2 – North Coast Limited:

- Chicago to Seattle, running on the same route as the Empire Builder from Chicago- Minneapolis, St. Paul to Fargo, ND on a complementary schedule from the 2009 Amtrak study, providing twice a day service in this corridor. Serving southern North Dakota (Jamestown, Bismarck, Dickinson) and southern Montana (Billings, Livingston-Yellowstone National Park, Bozeman, Helena, Missoula).
- Note, we propose the route run through Helena, not Butte, due to existing railroad infrastructure. Connecting the Empire Builder and North Coast Limited at Spokane is simply not practical when trains are late. We propose running to Spokane to Seattle via Portland.
- This route once had extensive air and bus service, which has now been greatly cut back. The only real mobility option is to drive, which does not work well in harsh winter months. The route would serve major tourism destinations in southern North Dakota and Montana.
- An Amtrak 2009 study stated this route would have the second highest ridership of all Amtrak long distance routes, with a farebox recovery ratio in the top three.
- Before Amtrak, the Empire Builder and North Coast Limited handled almost equal amounts of business. We believe the reason the North Coast Hiawatha was discontinued in 1979 was that Amtrak routed customers to the Empire Builder, ran the train tri-weekly, and consistently short changed coach and sleeper capacity.
- Gary Erford, former Empire Builder route manager, stated there would be no cannibalization of ridership on the Empire Builder with a restored North Coast Limited, as Amtrak has repeatedly turned away business, and with limited air travel options these trains would be heavily used.

These two routes alone would provide connectivity for millions of Midwesterners, and provide a needed mobility option for those that cannot or do not want to drive or fly. In addition to the Twin Star route connecting with three other long distance trains, both routes would feed into to other corridors such as St. Paul to Fargo/Moorhead, Kansas City to St. Louis, and Oklahoma City and Ft. Worth, TX.

We appreciate you allowing us to make these initial comments into the FRA Long-Distance Study, and look forward to the stakeholder meetings ahead.

Sincerely,



Brian W. Nelson

President – All Aboard Minnesota

www.allaboardmn.org

email: allaboardminnesota@gmail.com

