

Appendix B: North Dakota's Passenger Rail System

ROLE OF INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL IN NORTH DAKOTA

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Intercity passenger rail service in North Dakota has been provided by Amtrak since May 1, 1971, when the national passenger railroad began operating a network of passenger trains across the United States that previously had been operated by individual railroads. Passenger trains had been the primary mode of surface transportation for medium- and long-distance travel in the United States since the late nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, public investments in roadways and air travel introduced new modal options for travelers. Before World War II, competition with airlines for intercity travelers was minor and some railroads even offered long-distance plane and train services where passengers flew by day and slept on the train at night. At war's end, large numbers of military transport aircraft were made available at surplus prices for conversion to passenger airliners. This permitted passenger airlines to be established, using inexpensive aircraft, to fly to a network of military-built airports throughout the country. Of greater consequence to the country, however, were the improvements to the national highway system. The interstate highway system, initiated in the 1950s, has since grown to more than 48,000 miles.

Some railroads attempted to attract and retain riders by placing new cars into service with innovative features, such as dome cars that offered panoramic views from an upper-level seating area enclosed with wrap-around windows. By the mid-1950s, three different railroads serving North Dakota had placed dome cars on passenger trains operating between Chicago and the Pacific Northwest. However, as automobile ownership, air travel, and highway construction grew, intercity passenger rail ridership and revenue continued to decline. This situation festered until the late 1960s when passenger service losses threatened the financial viability of the entire rail industry. In response, Congress passed the Rail Passenger Service Act of 1970. The act established the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, known as Amtrak, and facilitated a government-sponsored consolidation of most of the preexisting intercity passenger rail services in the U.S. Railroad participation in Amtrak was voluntary but permitted the railroad company to relieve themselves of their passenger service obligations. Only the Denver & Rio Grande Western, Rock Island, Georgia Railroad, and Southern Railway elected to continue operations of their own passenger trains. Amtrak based its business arrangements with the volunteer railroads on the following principles:

- In exchange for capital stock in Amtrak, the railroad transferred title to their passenger train equipment to Amtrak
- The railroad granted to Amtrak the right to operate passenger trains on any tracks in their system
- The railroad was granted relief from their passenger service obligations
- Amtrak paid the railroad the incremental cost of maintaining their lines over which Amtrak operated. The costs covered were those required to keep the freight tracks up to passenger track standards.
- The railroad was indemnified for most liability arising out of passenger operations

Amtrak is a federally chartered corporation that is operated and managed as a for-profit enterprise and provides intercity passenger service in the contiguous United States. Congress provides grant funding for Amtrak through the annual appropriations process. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is responsible for administering the federal grants to Amtrak. FRA is also responsible for oversight of Amtrak spending. In 2015, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act divided Amtrak's annual grant funding into two components: a Northeast Corridor grant and a National Network grant. The National Network grant funding supports two different types of Amtrak train services: Long-Distance routes (greater than 750 miles), for which Amtrak provides all financial support, and State-Supported routes (less than 750 miles), for which states assume the primary financial responsibility for maintaining service.

STATE SUPPORT FOR PASSENGER RAIL OPERATIONS

North Dakota's support for passenger rail service has been limited. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was considerable discussion among the state's leaders regarding subsidizing Amtrak service. Ultimately, no state action was taken, thus establishing a defacto policy of not subsidizing passenger rail service that has been followed to the present day.

While not specifically targeted to maintain or improve rail passenger service, North Dakota, through its department of transportation, has used its federal Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funds to make numerous safety upgrades on Amtrak's *Empire Builder* route. Upgrades included installing new protective devices, replacing obsolete protective devices, upgrading existing rail grade-crossing surfaces, building grade separations, and participating in the development of rail quiet zones.

In 2011, NDDOT received a \$10 million Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant to raise the grade of the BNSF main line between Devils Lake and Churchs Ferry. The Devils Lake to Churchs Ferry BNSF mainline grade raise project was necessitated due to the rising level of Devils Lake, which imminently threatened both passenger and freight rail service. The project raised the rail bed five feet for approximately 9 miles in the vicinity of Devils Lake. The project also included installing and continuously welding 55.5 miles of replacement rail. The situation was serious; without the improvements and flood-readiness the line would have been shut down to all rail travel and would have possibly eliminated the *Empire Builder* service. Work started in June 2012 and ended in December 2012. The \$100 million project—funded equally by NDDOT, BNSF Railway, and Amtrak—has been critically important to the continued service of Amtrak's *Empire Builder* and freight rail service to grain elevators.

The North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) prescribes the regional role of North Dakota in passenger rail transportation. Chapter 8-11.1 of the NDCC provides for membership in the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission (MIPRC). The MIPRC is a forum for a group of state leaders from across the region to advocate for passenger rail improvements. Formed by compact agreement in 2000, MIPRC's current members are Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, and Wisconsin. The State of North Dakota is a voting member of MIPRC through the Governor designee. MIPRC posts its roster at <http://miprc.org/About/Roster> showing the appointed members from the Governor. NDDOT participates but is an ex officio member. MIPRC has five objectives:

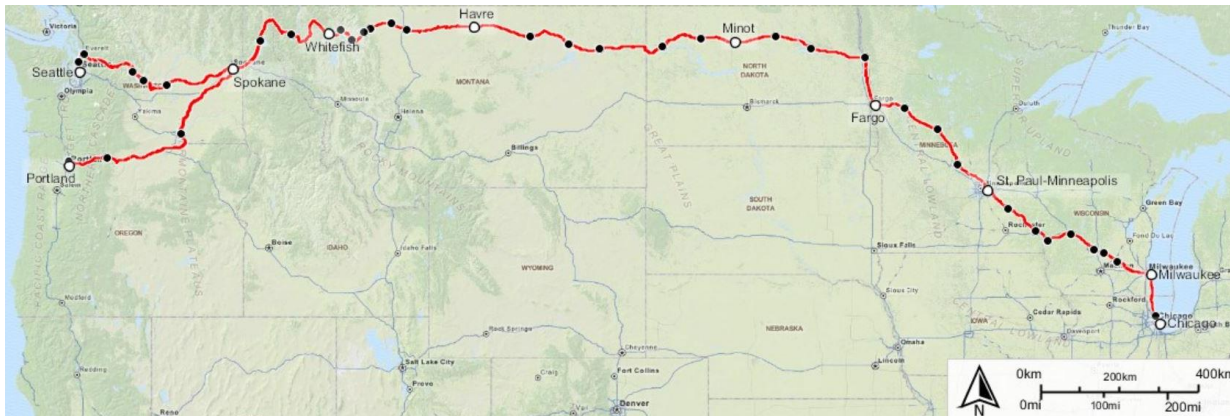
- To promote development and implementation of improvements to intercity passenger rail service in the Midwest
- To coordinate interaction among Midwestern state-elected officials and their designees on passenger rail issues

- To promote development and implementation of long-range plans for high-speed rail passenger service in the Midwest and among the regions of the United States
- To work with the public and private sectors at the federal, state, and local levels to ensure coordination among the various entities having an interest in passenger rail service and to promote Midwestern interests regarding passenger rail
- To support efforts of transportation agencies involved in developing and implementing current improvements and long-range plans for passenger rail service in the Midwest

NORTH DAKOTA'S EXISTING PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

Amtrak currently serves North Dakota with the *Empire Builder*, a long-distance train that crosses the Northern Tier of the western United States. The *Empire Builder* operates through North Dakota once a day in each direction between Chicago and two western endpoints, Portland, OR and Seattle, WA (Figure B-1). At Spokane, WA, the westbound train from Chicago is split into two separate sections that continue farther west on separate alignments to reach Portland and Seattle. The reverse occurs for the eastbound train, with the two sections from Portland and Seattle combined in Spokane to operate as a single train to Chicago. The passenger train name *Empire Builder* has been in continuous use since 1929, when the Great Northern Railway launched a luxury train between Chicago and Portland/Seattle that bore the nickname of the railroad company's founder, James J. Hill.

Figure B-1: Amtrak's Empire Builder Route

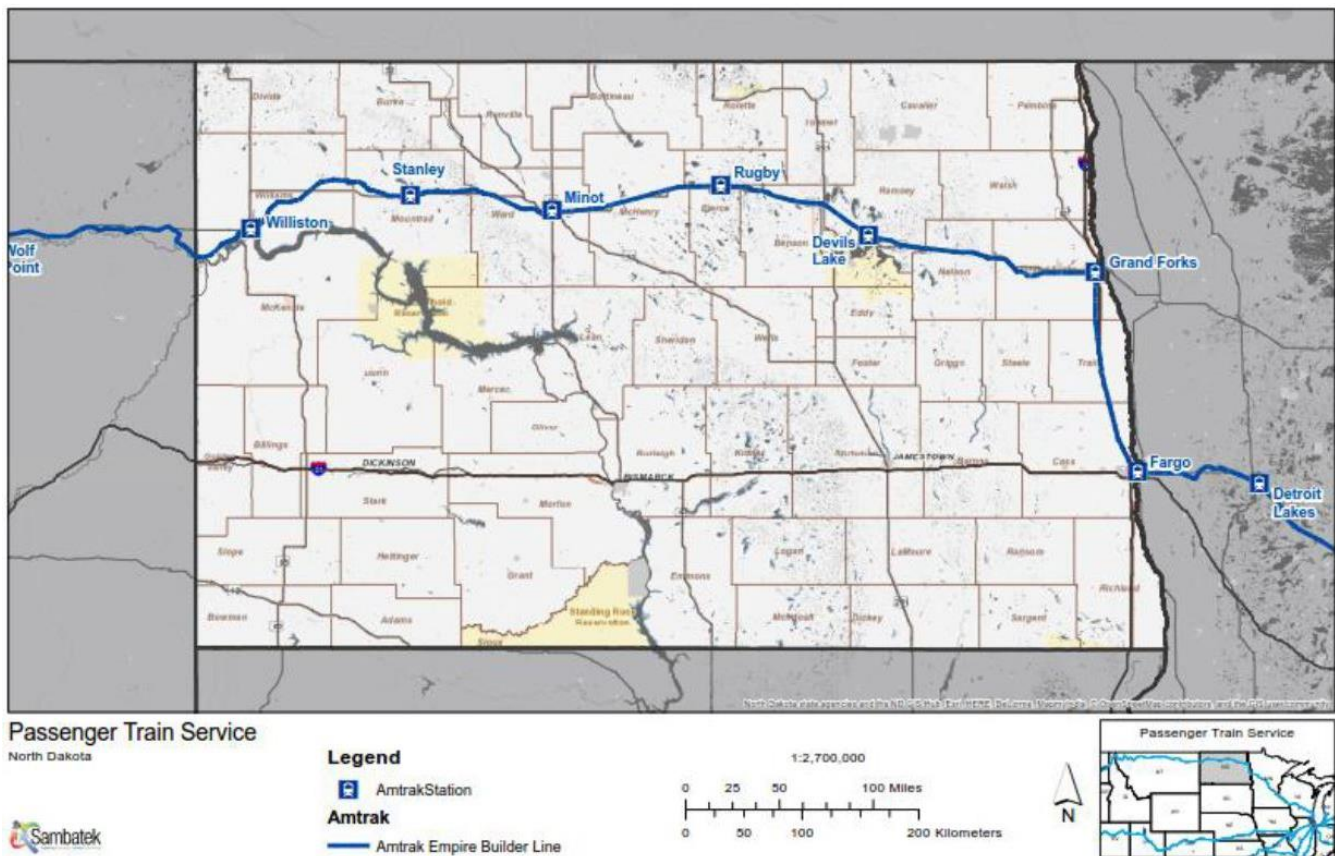


Source: Amtrak

STATIONS AND SERVICES

The *Empire Builder's* 2,205-mile journey between Chicago and Seattle has a scheduled trip time of approximately 46 hours in each direction, and the 2,255-mile trip between Chicago and Portland is similarly timed at approximately 46 hours each way. In North Dakota, the *Empire Builder* operates over BNSF Railway tracks between Fargo on the Minnesota border, and Williston, before continuing to Havre in Montana. The *Empire Builder* serves seven stations in North Dakota: Fargo, Grand Forks, Devils Lake, Rugby, Minot, Stanley, and Williston. Figure B-2 shows the location of North Dakota's passenger rail stations. No passenger service is provided to Bismarck. The westbound and eastbound *Empire Builder* trains offer coach and sleeping car service, along with a dining car serving sit-down meals and a Sightseer Lounge car with panoramic windows and a café for the convenience of customers. Checked baggage service is provided at Fargo, Minot, and Williston. Those three stations also have staffed ticket offices.

Figure B-2: North Dakota's Amtrak Stations



Source: Amtrak

The general service pattern of the *Empire Builder* has remained relatively unchanged since Amtrak's inception in 1971. The westbound train (No. 7 to Seattle and No. 27 to Portland) serves North Dakota principally during the morning, while the eastbound train (No. 8 from Seattle and No. 28 from Portland) crosses the state at night. Station departure times stayed constant from 2016 until July 11, 2022, when Amtrak placed a new schedule into effect that shifted the operation of the westbound train approximately 1 hour later and shifted the departure time of the eastbound train at North Dakota stations between 22 and 82 minutes later. The new schedule also lengthened the

dwelling time of the train at the Minot station to 45 minutes each way. (Minot is a crew change and servicing location for the train.) Table B-1 shows the times that the *Empire Builder* serves North Dakota’s passenger rail stations, according to the schedule that took effect on July 11, 2022.

Table B-1: Amtrak’s Empire Builder Schedule

Train: Number	Williston	Stanley	Minot	Rugby	Devils Lake	Grand Forks	Fargo
7 / 27 Westbound (read right to left) Operates Daily	11:59 AM	10:46 AM	Arrive 9:06 AM Depart 9:51 AM	7:53 AM	6:59 AM	5:34 AM	4:13 AM
8 / 28 Eastbound (read left to right) Operates Daily	7:21 PM	8:22 PM	Arrive 10:08 PM Depart 10:53 PM	11:49 PM	12:44 AM	2:10 AM	3:21 AM

Source: Amtrak

POPULATION SERVED

The seven Amtrak stations served by the *Empire Builder* provide access to many of the large population centers in the state. Along the *Empire Builder* route, two of the top 10 stations by ridership in 2019 were in North Dakota, Williston and Minot. Forty-seven percent of the population of the state is less than 25 miles from a station. Sixty-three percent of the population is less than 50 miles from a station. The least accessible large city is the state capital of Bismarck, located about 110 miles south of Minot. The population in proximity to each passenger rail station is shown in Table B-2. Because the average distance between stations in North Dakota is approximately 66 miles, an overlap of population counting in proximity to stations will occur at the 50-mile radius. In addition, the service areas of the Fargo, Grand Forks, and Williston stations include populations in neighboring states.

Table B-2: Population in Proximity of a North Dakota Amtrak Station (2019)

Station	Population Within 25 Miles	Population Within 50 Miles
Devils Lake	15,969	32,591
Fargo	206,822	271,121
Grand Forks	75,884	133,757
Minot	59,562	77,656
Rugby	6,185	36,992
Stanley	3,992	51,274
Williston	20,464	41,586

Source: Rail Passengers Association

Table B-3 compares the number and percentage of population in North Dakota and neighboring states within proximity to a passenger rail station served by the *Empire Builder*. As the table shows, North Dakota has a high level of population accessibility to passenger rail stations when compared with neighboring states. Only Minnesota, with its larger metropolitan areas, exceeds North Dakota.

Table B-3: State Population in Proximity of an Amtrak Station (2019)

State	Within 25 Miles	Percentage of Total State Population	Within 50 Miles	Percentage of Total State Population
North Dakota	318,870	47%	424,622	63%
Minnesota	3,126,014	59%	4,279,522	81%
Montana	143,290	14%	219,050	22%
Idaho	82,342	5%	194,879	12%

Source: Rail Passengers Association

RIDERSHIP HISTORY

The *Empire Builder* carried more passengers in 2019 (before the COVID-19 pandemic) and in 2021 than any of Amtrak’s other long-distance trains. In 2020, the *Coast Starlight* carried just 4,714 more riders than the *Empire Builder*, marking the first time since 2015 that the *Empire Builder* was not Amtrak’s top long-distance train. Significant changes in ridership, however, have marked recent history on the route.

In 2012—when high gasoline prices prompted many travelers to avoid driving, and the population in the state’s oil-producing region was rapidly growing—ridership reached a peak, with North Dakota station activity increasing by more than 40 percent from the year before. Across the Northern Tier states, ridership also rose by nearly 20 percent from 2011 to 2012. By 2021—as the COVID-19 pandemic continued to suppress demand for travel—ridership in North Dakota had declined 71 percent from 2012. Table B-4 shows the station boardings and alightings by fiscal year (ending September 30) at each of North Dakota’s passenger rail stations between 2012 and 2021 (station ridership data was not available for 2020).

Table B-4: North Dakota Ridership by Station

Station	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Devils Lake	5,505	5,142	3,555	3,512	4,223	4,506	4,217	4,128	N/A	2,287
Fargo	20,304	22,497	23,314	22,939	21,586	20,232	18,695	18,556	N/A	10,510
Grand Forks	20,271	19,422	14,168	12,139	13,882	13,891	13,346	12,807	N/A	5,618
Minot	37,169	41,615	35,521	32,108	29,829	30,405	29,854	27,281	N/A	11,591
Rugby	7,057	5,637	4,053	4,254	4,161	4,027	4,102	3,968	N/A	1,676
Stanley	10,234	9,411	7,036	6,514	5,133	4,594	4,297	4,463	N/A	1,739
Williston	54,324	51,076	44,013	38,621	28,062	26,195	29,013	29,916	N/A	11,529
Total	154,864	154,800	131,660	20,087	106,876	103,850	103,524	101,119	N/A	44,950

Source: Amtrak

Other factors impacted ridership during this time period as well. On-time performance fell to 31 percent in 2013 and 21 percent in 2014. Any number below 80 percent is considered substandard. As a result, ridership in 2014 declined by 15 percent in North Dakota and by an equivalent percentage for the entire route. Freight volume increases, weather conditions, and ongoing capital improvements throughout 2015 also compounded performance challenges on the route. Delays caused an imbalance of equipment and personnel, and public reports indicated Amtrak canceled trains multiple times in one week in order to recover. By the end of 2015, on-time performance had improved. In October and November 2015, nearly three out of four *Empire Builder* trains arrived on time.

The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the significant ridership declines seen after fiscal year 2019, as many Americans limited or refrained from traveling and the number of *Empire Builder* train departures per week was cut by more than half. By the time the company released its preliminary fiscal year 2020 financial results on November 23, 2020, systemwide ridership and revenue on Amtrak was approximately 25 percent of pre-COVID levels.¹ During the pandemic, Amtrak initiated precautions to ensure the health and safety of passengers and employees on board its trains, including limiting reservations to less than half of a train’s capacity to allow for social distancing. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which was signed into law on March 27, 2020, included \$1.04 billion for Amtrak to supplement revenue shortfalls from reduced ridership and to continue operations in the short term. When the funding expired at the end of the federal fiscal year, Amtrak began reducing the service levels of the *Empire Builder* and other long-distance trains. On October 19, 2020, the operation of the *Empire Builder* was cut back from daily to three days per week in each direction. An additional \$1 billion in federal funding that was made available to Amtrak in The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 allowed the company to recall more than 1,200 furloughed employees systemwide and restore the *Empire Builder* to daily operation effective May 24, 2021.² By the end of fiscal year 2021, Amtrak ridership had reached approximately 70 percent of its pre-COVID levels.³ Nevertheless, the reduced service levels in 2021 resulted in a lower annual ridership on the *Empire Builder* than in fiscal year 2020. When the Omicron variant caused a new increase in COVID cases in early 2022, Amtrak initiated another service reduction, curtailing the operation of the *Empire Builder* from daily to five days per week. Departures from the originating stations of Chicago, Seattle, and Portland were suspended on Thursdays and Fridays from January 27 until May 23, 2022, when daily operation resumed.⁴ Table B-5 compares ridership on the *Empire Builder* with ridership on all Amtrak long-distance services for each fiscal year between 2014 and 2021.

Table B-5: Amtrak Empire Builder and Long-Distance Services Ridership

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Empire Builder	450,932	438,376	454,625	454,465	428,854	433,372	253,486	220,681
Year-over-year change	-15.9%	-2.8%	+3.7%	+2.7%	-5.6%	+1.1%	-41.5%	-12.9%
All Amtrak Long-Distance Services	4,543,199	4,488,542	4,655,599	4,698,458	4,513,474	4,420,844	2,689,499	2,238,050
Year-over-year change	-4.5%	-1.2%	+3.7%	+0.9%	-3.9%	-2.1%	-39.2%	-16.8%

Source: Amtrak

¹ Amtrak news release, Amtrak Fiscal Year 2020: Prioritized Customer Safety, Advanced Infrastructure, and Fast-Tracked Technology, November 23, 2020. Retrieved from: https://media.amtrak.com/2020/11/amtrak-fiscal-year-2020-prioritized-customer-safety-advanced-infrastructure-and-fast-tracked-technology/#_ftn1

² Amtrak news release, With Increased Demand and Congressional Funding, Amtrak Restores 12 Long Distance Routes to Daily Service, March 10, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://media.amtrak.com/2021/03/with-increased-demand-and-congressional-funding-amtrak-restores-12-long-distance-routes-to-daily-service/>

³ Amtrak news release, Amtrak Fiscal Year 2021: Amidst Continuing Coronavirus Pandemic, Grew Ridership and Revenue, and Introduced New Projects and Initiatives for the Future, December 13, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://media.amtrak.com/2021/12/amtrak-fiscal-year-2021-amidst-continuing-coronavirus-pandemic-grew-ridership-and-revenue-and-introduced-new-projects-and-initiatives-for-the-future/>

⁴ Cut Bank Pioneer Press, Amtrak announces temporary service reductions for Empire Builder servicing Montana, February 2, 2022. Retrieved from: http://www.cutbankpioneerpress.com/cut_bank_pioneer_press/article_12367d2a-83c1-11ec-96d6-b3c412015fba.html

TRAVEL CHARACTERISTICS

North Dakota passengers on the *Empire Builder* have a long-distance journey, typically greater than 500 miles. Among the top city pairs by passengers in 2019 (see Table B-6) before the pandemic curtailed travel, eastbound passenger trips from Minot, Williston, Grand Forks, and Fargo to St. Paul, MN and from Minot, Williston, and Fargo to Chicago, IL, were important ridership generators. The top westbound passenger trips were generated from Williston, to Whitefish, MT and Spokane, WA, and from Minot to Whitefish, MT.

Table B-6: North Dakota Top Amtrak City Pairs by Ridership (2019)

Rank	Station Pair	Distance
1	Minot to St. Paul	522 miles
2	Williston to St. Paul	643 miles
3	Williston to Whitefish	565 miles
4	Grand Forks to St. Paul	319 miles
5	Fargo to St. Paul	244 miles
6	Minot to Chicago	940 miles
7	Williston to Spokane	818 miles
8	Williston to Chicago	1,061 miles
9	Fargo to Chicago	662 miles
10	Minot to Whitefish	686 miles

Source: Rail Passengers Association

PASSENGER RAIL PERFORMANCE

Average fares are highest in North Dakota, Montana, and Idaho among the Northern Tier states, reflecting the longer average trip lengths made by passengers in those states. Table B-7 depicts average trip length and fares in 2019, the last year of service before the pandemic. The coach fare for North Dakota rail passengers is \$105 on average. The lower coach fare in Minnesota reflects the shorter average trip length.

Table B-7: State Financial Performance, Amtrak Empire Builder – Average Trip Length and Fares (2019)

Station	Average Trip Length	Average Fare
North Dakota	643 miles	\$105
Minnesota	548 miles	\$96
Montana	727 miles	\$131
Idaho	653 miles	\$102

Source: Rail Passengers Association

Table B-8 compares key service and performance measurements for the *Empire Builder* over the previous five fiscal years. The *Empire Builder* performs moderately well, typically ranking in the top third or middle third among Amtrak's 15 long-distance trains in measurements of on-time performance and customer satisfaction. From a low point in 2018, service has improved although it faltered a bit in 2021. The most common causes of delay to the *Empire Builder* for the past five years have been commuter train interference, slow order delays, and freight train interference.

Table B-8: Amtrak Empire Builder Service Measures

Measurement	Target Threshold	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Customer On-Time Performance (passenger arrivals)	80%	n/a	44.6%	45.8%	64.4%	59.3%
All-Stations On-Time Performance (station arrivals)	80%	53.4%	46.1%	46.1%	65.5%	58.0%
Endpoint On-Time Performance	80%	59.4%	57.3%	64.0%	81.6%	75.5%
Customer Satisfaction Index Score (4th Quarter of FY)	82	78	56	71	74	81
Customer Service Failure (4th Quarter of FY)	Score Below 80	Information, Comfort, Cleanliness, Food service	Personnel, Information, Comfort, Cleanliness, Food service	Information, Comfort, Cleanliness, Food service	Information, Comfort, Food service	Cleanliness, Food service

Source: Amtrak and FRA

STATIONS AND MULTIMODAL PASSENGER CONNECTIONS

Amtrak’s *Empire Builder* train route runs along a corridor with little to no bus or air service, no parallel interstate highway for much of the route, and extreme winter weather conditions that frequently close highways and airports. The train connects rural communities in North Dakota, Montana, and Eastern Washington to larger urban centers with essential services (e.g., hospitals) such as Minneapolis, Spokane, Portland, Seattle, and Chicago.⁵ Three of North Dakota’s seven Amtrak stations are located in cities with fixed route bus service—Minot, Grand Forks, and Fargo—but the bus routes in these cities do not connect to the Amtrak stations. Taxi and Uber service is available at each station. Table B-9 is a profile of the passenger rail stations in North Dakota and the amenities available at each.

Table B-9: North Dakota Stations and Amenities

	Williston	Stanley	Minot	Rugby
Address	1 South Main Street, Williston ND 58801	Main Street & Railroad Avenue, Stanley, ND 58784	400 1st Avenue S.W., Minot, ND 58701	201 West Dewey Street, Rugby, ND 58368
Service Frequency	Empire Builder: Daily	Empire Builder: Daily	Empire Builder: Daily	Empire Builder: Daily
Station Location	Rural (small town)	Rural (small town)	Urban (medium town)	Rural (small town)
Platform Ownership	BNSF	BNSF	BNSF	BNSF
Structure Ownership	BNSF	BNSF	BNSF	BNSF
Shelter	Station Building with Waiting Room	Station Building with Waiting Room	Station Building with Waiting Room	Station Building with Waiting Room

⁵ Amtrak, PRIIA Section 210 FY12 Performance Improvement Plan (Auto Train, City of New Orleans, Coast Starlight, Empire Builder, Southwest Chief), September 2012

	Williston	Stanley	Minot	Rugby
ADA Accessibility	Facilities fully wheelchair accessible; wheelchair available; wheelchair lift available	Facilities not fully wheelchair accessible; accessible platform and parking; wheelchair lift available; no accessible restrooms, waiting room, water fountain	Facilities not fully wheelchair accessible; accessible platform, parking, waiting room, restrooms, and water fountain; ticket sales office not accessible; wheelchair available; wheelchair lift available	Facilities not fully wheelchair accessible; accessible platform, parking, restrooms, and water fountain; waiting room not accessible; wheelchair lift available
Depot Hours	10:30 AM – 7:30 PM Daily	8:55 AM – 8:30 PM Daily	7:00 AM – 10:15 PM Daily	6:00 AM – 8:00 AM and 9:00 PM – 11:00 PM Daily
Baggage Service	Checked baggage service available; bag storage and baggage carts available; baggage assistance available by train crew	No checked baggage service, bag storage, or baggage assistance	Checked baggage service available; bag storage and baggage carts available	No checked baggage service, bag storage, or baggage assistance
Restrooms	Accessible restrooms	Available, not accessible	Accessible restrooms	Accessible restrooms
Ticketing	Ticket Sales Office; No ticketing kiosks	No ticket sales office or ticketing kiosks	Ticket Sales Office; No ticketing kiosks	No ticket sales office or ticketing kiosks
Shared Uses	None	None	None	None
Parking	Same-day and overnight, accessible	Same-day and overnight, accessible	Same-day and overnight, accessible	Same-day and overnight, accessible
Wi-Fi	Yes	No	No	No
Transit Connection	N/A	N/A	Minot City Transit buses nearby on 6th St. SW and Broadway	N/A
Intercity Bus Connection	No	No	No	No
Active Transportation	No bike rack/locker	No bike rack/locker	No bike rack/locker	No bike rack/locker

	Devils Lake	Grand Forks	Fargo
Address	Railroad Avenue and Third Street, Devils Lake, ND 58301	5555 DeMers Avenue, Grand Forks, ND 58201	420 4th Street North, Fargo, ND 58102
Service Frequency	Empire Builder: Daily	Empire Builder: Daily	Empire Builder: Daily
Station Location	Rural (small town)	Urban (medium town)	Urban (large city)
Platform Ownership	BNSF	BNSF	BNSF
Structure Ownership	BNSF	Amtrak	BNSF
Shelter	Station Building with Waiting Room	Station Building with Waiting Room	Station Building with Waiting Room
ADA Accessibility	Facilities not fully wheelchair accessible; accessible platform and parking; wheelchair lift available; no accessible restrooms, waiting room, water fountain	Facilities fully wheelchair accessible; wheelchair and wheelchair lift are not available	Facilities fully wheelchair accessible; wheelchair available; wheelchair lift available
Depot Hours	5:30 AM – 7:00 AM and 10:30 PM – 12:30 AM Daily	11:00 PM – 8:00 AM Daily	12:00 AM – 7:30 AM Daily
Baggage Service	No checked baggage service, bag storage, or baggage assistance	No checked baggage service, bag storage, or baggage assistance	Checked baggage service available; bag storage and baggage carts available; baggage assistance available by station staff
Restrooms	Available, not ADA accessible	Accessible restrooms	Accessible restrooms
Ticketing	No ticket sales office or ticketing kiosks	No ticket sales office or ticketing kiosks	Ticket Sales Office; No ticketing kiosks
Shared Uses	None	None	None
Parking	Same-day and overnight, accessible	Same-day and overnight, accessible	Same-day and overnight, accessible
Wi-Fi	No	No	No
Transit Connections	N/A	No	MATBUS Route 11 stops two blocks from depot on Broadway and 4th Ave. North
Intercity Bus Connection	No	Jefferson Lines/Greyhound (does not serve Amtrak station)	Jefferson Lines/Greyhound (does not serve Amtrak station)
Active Transportation	No bike rack/locker	No bike rack/locker	Bike rack available; no locker

Source: Amtrak and Great American Stations

PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE OBJECTIVES

North Dakota’s passenger rail service objectives are the following:

- Amtrak to continue to operate the *Empire Builder*.
- Amtrak to continue to work with BNSF Railway to improve on-time arrivals.
- Amtrak to improve the quality of its on-board service.

FEDERAL FRAMEWORK FOR PASSENGER RAIL PLANNING AND FUNDING

PASSENGER RAIL INVESTMENT AND IMPROVEMENT ACT

The passage of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) in 2008 created a fundamental shift in how intercity passenger trains were funded, which continues to have implications for future expansion. Under Section 209 of PRIIA, the responsibility for funding the operation of intercity passenger trains on routes of 750 miles or less was shifted from the federal government to the states, effective October 2013.⁶ As a result, the operating and maintenance costs not covered by passenger revenues of such shorter-distance trains is now provided by the states served by the route, under a cost allocation formula developed by Amtrak in consultation with state partners. North Dakota's *Empire Builder* has a route exceeding 750 miles and as such is considered a long-distance train. Under PRIIA, the costs for long-distance trains not covered by passenger revenues are paid for by Amtrak through the annual federal appropriations it receives from Congress.

However, PRIIA also hampered the possibilities for future expansion of long-distance services by limiting the National Network funding appropriations received from Congress to include only those long-distance routes that were operated by Amtrak when the PRIIA legislation was enacted.⁷ Therefore, the operation of any new Amtrak long-distance routes would either require a different funding mechanism or a change to the PRIIA legislation that would enable the new route to be eligible for National Network funding from Congress. The potential for such changes has been made possible under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021, which includes provisions that could enable a potential expansion of the Amtrak long-distance network.

⁶ U.S. Department of Transportation, The Implementation of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008, March 11, 2011. Retrieved from: <https://www.transportation.gov/testimony/implementation-passenger-rail-investment-and-improvement-act-2008>

⁷ Railway Age, Ninth and Final in a Series (Renamed from "Farewell, Long-Distance Trains?"): It's Time for Congress to Get Busy, May 1, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.railwayage.com/passenger/intercity/ninth-and-final-in-a-series-renamed-from-farewell-long-distance-trains-its-time-for-congress-to-get-busy/>

BIPARTISAN INFRASTRUCTURE LAW

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), which was signed on November 15, 2021, contains significantly increased levels of federal funding for transportation, including rail freight, intercity passenger, commuter, and transit services. The BIL includes \$102 billion in total rail funding (for freight and intercity passenger rail), comprised of \$66 billion in advanced appropriations, and \$36 billion in authorized funding for U.S. Department of Transportation rail programs administered by the FRA.⁸ Money provided for FRA grant funding will be made available through the following five programs:

- Amtrak—which includes the annual Congressional appropriations for Amtrak’s National Network trains
- The Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Grant Program—which will provide the federal share of funding for capital projects and pre-construction planning to expand or establish intercity passenger rail services
- The Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Grant (CRISI) program—which provides funding for projects that improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of intercity passenger and freight rail
- The Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant (RCE) program
- The Restoration and Enhancements Grant Program—which will provide operating assistance to initiate, restore, or enhance state-supported intercity passenger rail services

The BIL also requires the U.S. Secretary of Transportation to establish a program to facilitate the development of intercity passenger rail corridors (Section 22308). In response, FRA established the Corridor Identification and Development (Corridor ID) Program to serve as the framework that will guide the planning of future intercity passenger rail corridors developed with federal project planning support and federal capital investments.⁹ The following types of routes are eligible to participate in the Corridor ID Program:

- A new intercity passenger rail route of less than 750 miles
- The enhancement of an existing intercity passenger rail route of less than 750 miles
- The restoration of service over all or portions of an intercity passenger rail route formerly operated by Amtrak
- The increase of service frequency of a long-distance intercity passenger rail route. 49 USC (USC Code) 25101(h)

Corridors selected for inclusion in the FRA Corridor ID Program will be eligible to receive federal funding for up to 80 percent of the cost of pre-construction planning activities, including the preparation of Service Development Plans (a requirement under the program), the identification of capital projects needed to establish to expand the service, and the preparation of preliminary engineering and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) studies, for the ultimate purpose of advancing the corridor for implementation (comprising final design and construction activities). The BIL also requires FRA to submit annually to Congress a project pipeline that identifies and prioritizes projects to advance the development of intercity passenger rail corridors selected for implementation.

⁸ Federal Railroad Administration, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Information from FRA. Retrieved from: <https://railroads.dot.gov/BIL>

⁹ Federal Register, Vol. 87 No. 93, Establishment of the Corridor Identification and Development Program, May 1, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2022-05-13/pdf/2022-10250.pdf>

In addition, Section 22214 of the BIL requires the FRA (under delegation from the Secretary) to conduct an Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study to evaluate the restoration of daily intercity rail passenger service along 1) any Amtrak long-distance routes that have been discontinued, and 2) any Amtrak long-distance routes that occur on a non-daily basis. The legislation also provides FRA with the option of evaluating potential new Amtrak long-distance routes, including those that were in service as of April 1971 but not continued by Amtrak.

INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL PLANNING INITIATIVES

AMTRAK FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Each year, Amtrak releases a five-year strategic plan to satisfy requirements under Section 11203(b) of the FAST Act. In April 2022, Amtrak released its Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 “Five Year Line Plans,” which outline strategic five-year initiatives for each service line and asset line between FY 2022 and FY 2027.¹⁰ These plans do not identify initiatives for individual trains but focus on overall improvements that benefit particular types of services, including long-distance trains, regardless of location. Amtrak’s five-year plan does not identify the establishment of new long-distance routes as a strategy or initiative. It does, however, include the following overall service strategies for existing long-distance trains, such as the *Empire Builder*:

- **Sustain the company:** Amtrak continues to control costs and protect employees by adjusting the size of long-distance train operations and service requirements, balancing the reduced demand for travel during the pandemic with the need to provide service. Service reductions enacted during the pandemic played an essential role in sustaining the company by reducing operating losses during a period of uncertain federal funding for Amtrak.
- **Gain New Customers:** Strategies to gain new customers through promotional campaigns and new technology:
 - Emphasize the benefits of private sleeping compartments as an accommodation that offers physical distancing space, privacy, comfort, complimentary meals, priority boarding, and more. Efforts to promote these benefits include new promotional media campaigns, new experiential travel landing pages on Amtrak.com, and flash sales offering free companion travel.
 - Improve features on the Amtrak.com website and Amtrak app to enhance travel planning and fare finding by presenting a seven-day calendar of available fares on the proposed date of travel as well as up to three days prior and three days later. This feature will improve the way in which long-distance customers can find available travel dates on trains operating less than daily service.
 - Install Wi-Fi equipment on the Superliner cars used on long-distance trains in the Western United States. Free Wi-Fi is already available on the Superliner-equipped *Auto Train* in the East and on eastern long-distance trains that use single-level equipment.
- **Fleet Planning and Acquisition:** The acquisition of new locomotives and passenger cars will provide the opportunity for Amtrak to accomplish several goals, including:
 - Modernizing equipment and amenities to match updated service models and improve customer satisfaction

¹⁰ Amtrak, Five-Year Service and Asset Line Plans Fiscal Years 2022-2027. Retrieved from: [Service & Asset Line Plans FY22-27 \(amtrak.com\)](https://www.amtrak.com/service-asset-line-plans-fy22-27)

- Redesigning train configuration to match passenger demand, create operating efficiencies, and reduce capital needs
- Reducing car and locomotive maintenance and turnaround costs
- Reducing engine and car related mechanical delays to improve on-time performance
- Reducing fuel consumption and emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants
- **Address Reliability and On-Time Performance:** Continue to use a data-driven approach to address host railroad and Amtrak-related delays, and work with the host railroads to understand the causes of host railroad and Amtrak responsible delays, opportunities to mitigate them, and the actions required to improve on-time performance. The strategic plan states that the release of revised Metrics and Standards for measuring the performance of Amtrak services by the FRA in FY 2021 and the requirement of all host railroads and Amtrak to either certify the viability of Amtrak operating schedules is providing a framework for enforcing Amtrak’s right of preference over freight transportation and offers a path for addressing on-time performance issues.

Amtrak’s five-year strategic plan does support the introduction and expansion of regional, state-supported passenger rail corridors of up to 750 miles in length. The plan also includes ridership projections through FY 2027. Table B-10 depicts the projected ridership on the Empire Builder as well as the Long-Distance Service Line as a whole. The projections assume that train capacity will return to pre-COVID-19 levels by FY 2023, and revenues will return to pre-COVID-19 levels by FY 2024, followed by continued growth.

Table B-10: Amtrak Empire Builder Ridership Projections by Fiscal Year (millions)

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
Empire Builder	336.8	385.1	433.5	437.5	441.6	445.7
Year-over-year change	+52.6%	+14.3%	+12.6%	+0.9%	+0.9%	+0.9%
Amtrak Long-Distance Service Line	3,617.8	4,080.9	4,552.3	4,595.6	4,639.1	4,683.4
Year-over-year change	+61.6%	+12.8%	+11.6%	+1.0%	+0.9%	+1.0%

Source: Amtrak

EQUIPMENT ACQUISITIONS

Amtrak’s five-year plan also outlines initiatives to purchase new cars and locomotives and overhaul additional equipment. The plan notes that in early FY 2022, Amtrak had approximately 220 road diesel locomotives owned or leased, 66 electric locomotives in regular service and 15 more in reserve, 1,335 railcars, and 20 high-speed trainsets. Amtrak also operates one regular service of 49 Alstom Surfliner railcars jointly owned with the state of California, as well as 88 locomotives and 146 railcars solely owned by state partners. The plan notes that the average age of railcars that Amtrak owns or leases is 35 years old, and the average locomotive or trainset is more than 22 years old.

In February 2022, the *Empire Builder* became the first train to operate in revenue service with the first new diesel-electric passenger locomotives purchased by Amtrak in more than two decades. The engines are part of an \$850 million order placed by Amtrak with Siemens in December 2018 for 75 new diesel locomotives with the model

designation ALC-42 (for “Amtrak Long-distance Charger 4,200-horsepower”).¹¹ Built in California, the ALC-42 locomotives will replace older P40 and P42 model passenger locomotives delivered in the 1990s and used on Amtrak long-distance and state-supported trains. The Amtrak-owned Chargers are similar to other Siemens-built passenger locomotives acquired by state and commuter agencies for use on state-supported intercity passenger rail services or commuter trains.

Figure B-3: Amtrak ALC-42 Locomotive



The ALC-42 locomotive model (Figure B-3) has a larger fuel tank and increased power-generating capabilities to supply heat, light, and ventilation to passenger cars to better accommodate the characteristics of long-distance service and equipment. The new locomotives feature cleaner Tier 4 emissions technologies that reduce nitrogen oxide by more than 89 percent and particulate matter by 95 percent and reduce fuel consumption. The locomotives can operate at up to 125 mph (15 mph faster than the P42 locomotives) and accelerate 30 percent faster. Amtrak projects the entire fleet to be in service by 2025. In June 2022, Amtrak ordered an

additional 50 ALC-42 locomotives, bringing the total fleet to 125 units, which will fully address the locomotive needs of the existing long-distance service line and allow for future planning. The contract for the full 125-unit order has a value up to \$2 billion, which includes the original contract for \$850 million, and incorporates both the manufacturing as well as a long-term service agreement for technical support, spare parts, and material supply.¹²

Between 2014 and 2021, Amtrak took delivery of a 130-car order of new single-level equipment that is primarily being deployed on long-distance trains serving the East Coast but included baggage cars that have been used on passenger trains systemwide. The order for new Viewliner II cars, built in New York State by CAF USA, consisted of 70 baggage cars, 10 baggage-dorm cars, 25 food-service cars, and 25 sleeping cars. The new Viewliner II cars allowed for the retirement of 60 (plus)-year-old equipment, including baggage cars, which has reduced maintenance costs, improved reliability, and improved customer satisfaction.

Amtrak’s five-year plan notes that a key future goal for the Long-Distance Service Line is to replace the fleet of bilevel Superliner long-distance cars used in service on the *Empire Builder* and other Western long-distance trains. The plan notes that Amtrak has 227 Superliner I railcars, built between 1979 and 1981, which are nearing the end of their useful service lives, and 163 Superliner II railcars built between 1993 and 1995.

STATION IMPROVEMENTS

The five-year strategic plan also documents Amtrak’s initiatives to improve the customer experience at passenger rail stations and make stations accessible in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. Key objectives for Amtrak stations include:

- **Provide safety and protection during the pandemic:** Adapt station protocols and practices as needed to meet the challenges of the pandemic while keeping customers and employees safe

¹¹ Amtrak news release, Amtrak Prepares for New Diesel Locomotive Fleet, August 5, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://media.amtrak.com/2020/08/amtrak-prepares-for-new-diesel-locomotive-fleet/>

¹² Siemens news release, Amtrak orders 50 more Charger Locomotives from Siemens Mobility, June 23, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://press.siemens.com/global/en/pressrelease/amtrak-orders-50-more-charger-locomotives-siemens-mobility>

- **Deliver consistency in station image and behavior:** Improve the identity and recognizability for customers of Amtrak stations across the network through consistent branding, furnishings, and customer service, with a focus on signage, restroom and interior cleanliness/conditions, seating, access, lighting, and building conditions
- **Standardize the designs and elevate the offerings of all station lounges:** Major stations have Metropolitan Lounges for use by customers traveling in first-class accommodations or with higher-tier loyalty program memberships. Standardizing lounge designs and offerings will help enhance the customer experience with the current and next generation customer in mind
- **Offer personalized and connected services:** Enhance customer experience in stations with personalized touches through push notifications and custom coupons or upgrades. This also improves Amtrak’s ability to understand customer patterns and preferences for future trips
- **Reduce operational inefficiencies:** Improve operational practices such as ticket sales, baggage handling, and boarding through process re-engineering, automation, and station design upgrades where possible

In addition, key efforts in the plan to meet ADA requirements at stations include improving station platform accessibility for people who use wheeled mobility devices at the stations where Amtrak has ADA responsibility for platforms; installing or improving Passenger Information Display Systems (PIDS) and audible public address systems at stations for which Amtrak has ADA responsibility; and improving accessibility to or within station buildings at stations where Amtrak has ADA responsibility. Out of the 516 train stations in the U.S. used by Amtrak trains, Amtrak has sole ADA responsibility at 147 stations and shared ADA responsibility at another 238 stations.

Amtrak has full ADA responsibility for the structures, platforms, and parking areas at all seven of its passenger rail stations in North Dakota. The five-year strategic plan includes \$15.6 million for the construction of accessibility improvements at North Dakota’s stations. These projects are anticipated to improve path of travel accessibility to stations, construct new train platforms, upgrade restrooms and doorways, and improve lighting and signage at Devils Lake, Fargo, Minot, Rugby, Stanley, and Williston.

Figure B-4: Rugby Station



In 2021, Amtrak completed a \$4 million project to enhance accessibility at the Grand Forks station. The project included construction of a concrete new station platform 1,100 feet long and 12 feet wide, with a detectable warning system along its edge. In addition, new signage, lighting, and canopy upgrades were installed, and two wheelchair lift enclosures were relocated. The project also included exterior improvements around the depot, such as upgrades to the accessible parking area, a new passenger drop-off area in front of the building, and upgraded walkways around the depot and to parking areas.¹³ Another recent project

improved accessibility at the Rugby station (Figure B-4) by constructing accessible pathways with curb cuts from public parking areas and walkways to reach the station platform and depot, and improving the accessible spaces in the parking area for better visibility and access. In 2017, Amtrak completed upgrades to other station parking lots in Grand Forks, Minot, and Stanley. Previously, the Fargo station had received \$1.3 million in improvements to its

¹³ Great American Stations, Grand Forks, ND (GFK). Retrieved from: <https://www.greatamericanstations.com/stations/grand-forks-nd-gfk/>

platform, doorways, bathrooms, water fountain, and other areas. The parking lot was also redone, and the ticket counter was lowered for wheelchair users.

AMTRAK NORTH COAST HIAWATHA PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

Section 224 of PRIIA mandated that Amtrak undertake a series of studies regarding the improvement and expansion of intercity passenger-rail service nationwide. Two former Amtrak routes were studied for reinstatement: the *North Coast Hiawatha* and the *Pioneer*.

From this effort came Amtrak’s *North Coast Hiawatha Route Passenger Rail Study*, released in 2009.¹⁴ The study analyzed service, performance, and financial aspects of reinstating daily passenger rail service between Chicago and Seattle on a route through southern North Dakota and Montana that previously had been served by Amtrak’s *North Coast Hiawatha* until that long-distance train’s cancellation in 1979. The reinstated service proposed to follow the route of today’s *Empire Builder* between Chicago and Fargo, then cross the southern tier of North Dakota, serving Valley City, Jamestown, Bismarck, Mandan, and Dickinson. The route would then cross through southern Montana, passing through Billings, Helena, and Missoula, to reach Sandpoint, Idaho. From Sandpoint to Pasco, the service would follow the route of today’s *Empire Builder* Portland Section, then cross Washington State via Stampede Pass to reach Seattle. Figure B-5 shows the proposed North Coast Hiawatha route (in red) and the *Empire Builder* route (in blue).

Figure B-5: Map of Proposed North Coast Hiawatha Route



Source: Amtrak, *North Coast Hiawatha Passenger Rail Study*

As part of the study, Amtrak consulted with host railroads Metra, Canadian Pacific, BNSF Railway, and Montana Rail Link to identify an initial set of infrastructure improvements needed to support the reinstatement of daily *North Coast Hiawatha* service between Chicago and Seattle. These improvements would enable the passenger train to maintain its schedule while minimizing conflicts with and delays to other commuter, intercity passenger, and freight trains along the route. The study identified potential service and routing options and contained preliminary estimates of ridership, revenue, capital costs, and operating costs. The study noted that the projected ridership,

¹⁴ Amtrak, *North Coast Hiawatha Passenger Rail Study*, October 16, 2009. Retrieved from: https://gnwwg.org/site/assets/files/1021/amtrak_north_coast_hiawatha_study.pdf

revenue, and operating costs would produce a farebox recovery of 58 percent, which was more favorable than the average farebox recovery of Amtrak’s existing long-distance service in FY 2008 (51.8 percent).

The study concluded by stating that restoration of the service would generate significant ridership, enhance Amtrak’s route network, and produce public benefits—notably in North Dakota and Montana where air and bus travel options were limited—but would also require large expenditures for capital costs and ongoing operating costs not covered by passenger revenues. Because PRIIA did not provide a mechanism for funding capital or operating costs of additional long-distance trains and the route was not a component of a federally designated high-speed-rail-corridor, federal and state policymakers would bear the responsibility for future planning and funding of the service.

Since the release of the study, considerable support has been voiced by state and local governments and prospective riders for returning passenger service to the route, particularly in North Dakota and throughout the “Greater Northwest” region. North Dakota DOT sent a letter to FRA expressing its support for the proposed service. However, no funding sources, service commitments, or operating agreements have yet been secured. The Rail Passengers Association reanalyzed the findings from Amtrak’s 2009 report in a 2021 study, incorporating updated population and income data and travel demand forecasts, and projected that a daily *North Coast Hiawatha* service could have a farebox recovery of 66 percent and generate \$271 million each year in economic benefits to the seven states along the route.¹⁵

MONTANA’S BIG SKY PASSENGER RAIL INITIATIVE

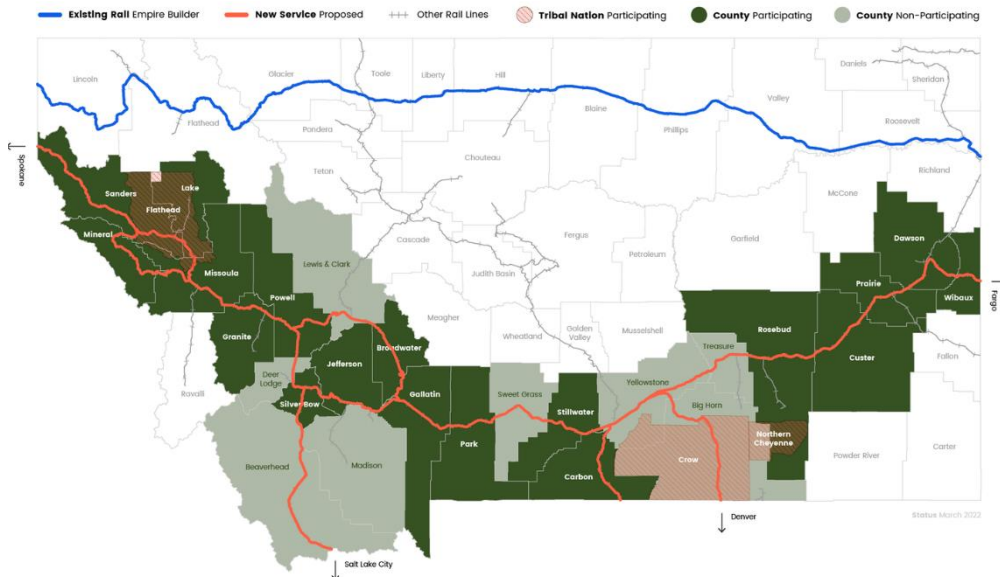
West of North Dakota, a concerted effort has begun in Montana to establish new intercity passenger rail service on routes linked with neighboring states. In July 2020, several Montana counties began laying the groundwork to establish the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority (BSPRA), a regional rail authority with a governance structure to study, seek, or accept funding for, and facilitate the implementation of, passenger rail service across southern Montana. BSPRA was formally established on November 18, 2020, pursuant to Montana state law, and now has 18 participating counties.¹⁶ BSPRA has an independent governing board with members appointed by county commissioners. BSPRA serves as a coordination point among government, Amtrak, host freight railroads, and private partners. In addition, BSPRA has the authority to partner with other states in any future multi-state compact or regional rail authority established to support regional passenger rail networks in the Intermountain West.

The vision of the BSPRA is to lead the expansion and enhancement of passenger rail service throughout Montana and the greater northwest region for the development of economic, environmental, social, and comprehensive benefits, now and into the future. According to its website, the authority supports the implementation of intercity passenger rail service across southern Montana, where the majority of the state’s population resides, and an extension eastward through North Dakota to Fargo, where the route would connect with the existing Amtrak *Empire Builder* service. It is also willing to explore north-south links connecting Montana with Denver and Salt Lake City. Figure B-6 shows the participating Montana counties in the BSPRA along with the existing *Empire Builder* route (in blue) and potential intercity passenger rail routes (in red) in Montana.

¹⁵ Rail Passengers Association, *North Coast Hiawatha Restoration: A Solid Return for Taxpayers and Business*, September 30, 2021. Retrieved from: https://www.railpassengers.org/site/assets/files/5819/v3_final_north_coast_hiawatha_restoration_a_solid_return_for_taxpayers_and_business_1.pdf

¹⁶ Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority. Retrieved from: <https://www.bigskyrail.org/>

Figure B-6: Existing and Potential Intercity Passenger Routes in Montana



Source: Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority

MIDWEST REGIONAL RAIL VISION

In October 2021, the FRA released the Midwest Regional Rail Planning Study, a multi-state planning effort to develop a strategic, integrated 40-year vision for the Midwest’s passenger rail network.¹⁷ Representatives from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin, along with the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission comprised the study’s lead stakeholders and provided intensive feedback and guidance. The goal of the Midwest Regional Rail Planning Study was to produce a framework for expanding and improving the intercity passenger rail network in the Midwest, including a prioritization of corridors and investment projects, a governance structure, and a funding strategy. The study built on established rail initiatives as well as other ongoing state planning efforts and is intended to support existing plans. The study is part of a national passenger rail planning effort led by FRA that included the development of the Southwest Multi-State Rail Planning Study in 2014 and the Southeast Regional Rail Plan in 2020.

The study used the FRA’s CONceptual Network Connections Tool (CONNECT), which serves as the analytical foundation for FRA-led regional passenger rail planning studies, to develop an initial network of potential corridors where intercity passenger rail could provide a feasible passenger transportation alternative. The study established three “service tiers” to define the types of service frequencies, service characteristics, and infrastructure levels proposed for each corridor. The service tiers can be summarized as follows:

- **Core Express:** Core express service would operate on corridors serving major metropolitan centers. Trains would operate under electric power on dedicated tracks except in terminal areas at speeds of 125 mph or higher, with frequent service provided.

¹⁷ FRA, Midwest Regional Rail Plan, October 2021. Retrieved from: <https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2021-10/Final%20Report-MWRRP%20with%20Appendices%20PDFa.pdf>

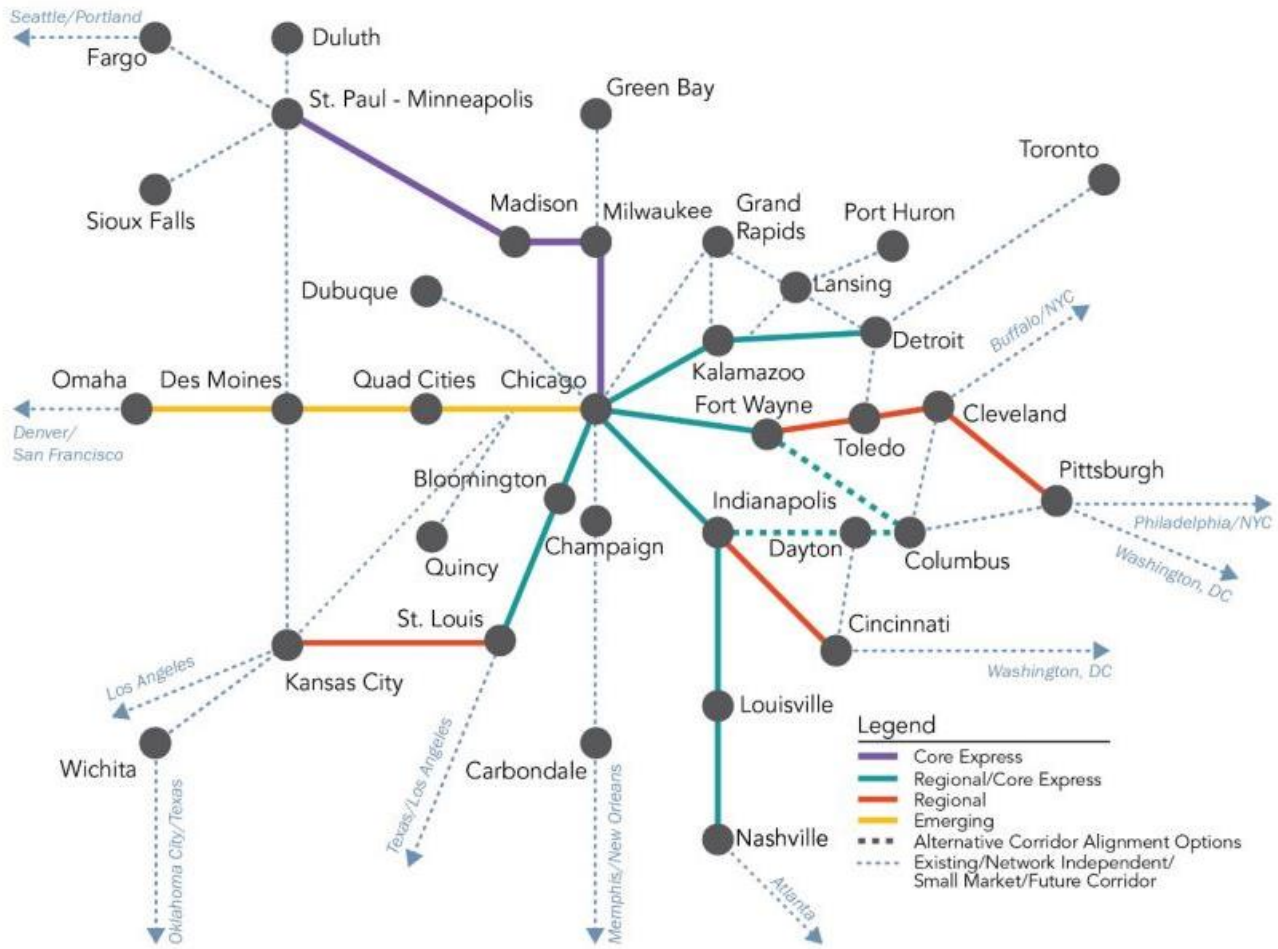
- **Regional:** Regional services would operate on corridors connecting mid-size urban areas with each other or with larger metropolitan areas. Trains could operate under electric or diesel power, using both dedicated and shared tracks, at speeds between 90 and 125 mph, with frequent service provided.
- **Emerging:** Emerging services would operate on corridors connecting mid-sized and smaller urban areas with each other or with larger metropolitan areas. Trains would operate on shared tracks at speeds of up to 90 mph.

The study's initial set of corridors and proposed service levels are shown in Figure B-7. The study did not identify specific routes or alignments for each corridor, however, future project prioritization activities are expected to identify feasible alignments and intermediate markets to be served, as well as refine the corridor's proposed service characteristics.

The plan includes a proposed corridor between Fargo and St. Paul-Minneapolis that is identified as a Network Independent/Small Market/Future Corridor. This route and others like it (including a proposed route from St. Paul-Minneapolis to Sioux Falls, SD) were recognized by FRA as corridors that could be developed to meet local transportation needs in smaller markets independent of the buildout of other Midwest regional rail corridors. Under the plan, the corridor from Fargo could connect with a high-performance rail service between St. Paul-Minneapolis and Chicago providing frequent departures and higher operating speeds than existing services.

The plan recommends advancing and elevating the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission, of which North Dakota is a member, "as a governance structure with the clear authority, responsibility and mandate for overseeing and implementing the outcomes of the Midwest's intercity rail planning initiative."

Figure B-7: FRA Midwest Regional Rail Plan Network



Source: FRA, Midwest Regional Rail Plan

NORTH DAKOTA'S ROLE

The future role of North Dakota is one of supporting improvements in existing Amtrak service and evaluating the benefits to the state of new services. To that end are the following potential North Dakota State and Freight Plan strategies:

- Work cooperatively with Amtrak and Amtrak communities to ensure that station facilities are in a state of good repair and have adequate lighting and parking for the safety of passengers and the public
- Support efforts to ensure all passenger stations are ADA-compliant and provide connectivity for all population groups
- Encourage Amtrak and Amtrak communities to work together to establish or improve modal connectivity at stations
- Expand the availability of rail travel information to promote passenger rail transportation
- Explore new passenger rail initiatives including those being promoted by the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority