

December 6, 2022

Paul Nissenbaum
Associate Administrator
Office of Railroad Policy and Development
United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue Southeast
Washington, DC 20590

Re: Federal Railroad Administration Docket No. FRA-2022-0031: Expression of Interest in the Corridor
Identification and Development Program

Dear Administrator Nissenbaum,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit an expression of interest to participate in the new Corridor Identification and Development Program under Federal Railroad Administration Docket Number FRA-2022-0031, as established by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (Public Law 117-58). This new program provides an unprecedented opportunity to establish new, intercity passenger rail service to connect rural and urban America.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation is charged with planning for Minnesota's multimodal transportation system. Our mission is to: *Plan, build, operate and maintain a safe, accessible, efficient and reliable multimodal transportation system that connects people to destinations and markets throughout the state, regionally and around the world.* As part of this mission, MnDOT is partnering with the FRA, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Illinois Department of Transportation and Amtrak to initiate a new, state supported intercity passenger rail service next year between the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota), Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Chicago, Illinois. Participation in the CIDP will enable MnDOT to continue collaborating with our partners to plan and develop new, intercity passenger rail services to achieve the multimodal vision for Minnesota's transportation system and connect it to the world.

With this letter, MnDOT is formally expressing its interest in including the following corridors in the CIDP:

- **Minneapolis, Minnesota, to Duluth, Minnesota–Superior, Wisconsin (Northern Lights Express):** This corridor is identified in the *Amtrak Connects US Vision* (Amtrak 2022), *Midwest Regional Rail Plan* (FRA 2021), Wisconsin State Rail Plan (WisDOT 2014) and Minnesota State Rail Plan (MnDOT 2015). In 2017, the FRA issued a "Finding of No Significant Impact" for the selected alternative for this corridor. Under the CIDP, MnDOT, in coordination with WisDOT, plans to update the service development plan and environmental documentation, so planning can advance to final design.
- **Twin Cities, via Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to Chicago, Illinois (TCMC):** The TCMC corridor connects three of the 40 largest metropolitan areas in the United States. It is identified in the *Amtrak Connects US*

Vision, Midwest Regional Rail Plan and Minnesota and Wisconsin State Rail Plans. Under the CIDP, MnDOT and WisDOT intend to submit joint and/or coordinated proposals for the following:

- **Saint Paul, Minnesota to Minneapolis, Minnesota:** This extension of the TCMC corridor, from the Union Depot in Saint Paul to Target Field Station in Minneapolis, would provide an intercity, passenger rail connection between the two primary cities within the 16th largest metropolitan area in the United States. This extension is identified in the *Amtrak Connects US Vision*, which also identifies Minneapolis as a proposed, new Amtrak station location. It is also the key piece that is needed to connect all the corridors identified in this letter and establish a regional hub in the Twin Cities, as called for by the *Midwest Regional Rail Plan*.
- **Enhancement of existing service:** Increase service frequency by initiating a third, daily, round trip along the existing route used by Amtrak's Empire Builder long distance train and the forthcoming state supported TCMC train. MnDOT also supports WisDOT's corresponding expression of interest for enhancing this service.
- **Travel time reductions:** Implementing capital improvements to increase operational speeds and/or capacity to reduce travel time along the existing route used by Amtrak's Empire Builder and the forthcoming state supported train. MnDOT also supports WisDOT's corresponding expression of interest in these improvements.
- **Route through Madison, Wisconsin:** The *Midwest Regional Rail Plan* and the Wisconsin State Rail Plan call for establishing a route through Madison, which is one of the nation's 100 largest metropolitan areas. The *Midwest Regional Rail Plan* identifies this route as a "Core Express" corridor and as one of four "pillar corridors" recommended for the "initial service tier." MnDOT supports WisDOT's expression of interest in studying this alternate route alignment for a third, daily train or an entirely new service.
- **New route via Eau Claire, Wisconsin:** This route follows a more easterly route between Milwaukee and the Twin Cities. MnDOT also supports the corresponding expressions of interest submitted by WisDOT and the Chippewa-Saint Croix Rail Commission for service on this alignment.
- **Twin Cities, via Des Moines, Iowa, to Kansas City, Missouri:** This corridor connects three of the 100 most populated metropolitan areas in the United States and would establish an important, new north-south connection between multiple existing Amtrak long-distance and regional trains west of Chicago. This corridor is identified in *Midwest Regional Rail Plan*, Iowa State Rail Plan and Minnesota State Rail Plan. MnDOT intends to work collaboratively with the Iowa DOT and Missouri DOT to study this corridor and supports their corresponding expressions of interest for this corridor.
- **Chicago, Illinois, via Minnesota, to Seattle, Washington (North Coast Hiawatha Corridor):** MnDOT supports the expression of interest submitted by the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority for restoring and enhancing long-distance service along Amtrak's former North Coast Hiawatha corridor between Chicago and Seattle, via the Twin Cities, and southern North Dakota and Montana. This corridor connects five of the 100 largest metropolitan areas in the United States. The segment through Minnesota is identified in the *Midwest Regional Rail Plan* and Minnesota State Rail Plan. MnDOT also supports the IJA

Section 22214: Amtrak Daily-Long-Distance Service Study, which is also looking at restoring long-distance service along this route. MnDOT looks forward to working with the lead agency to plan the Minnesota segment.

- **Twin Cities to Fargo, North Dakota–Moorhead, Minnesota:** This corridor connects the largest metropolitan area in Minnesota with the largest metropolitan area in North Dakota. It is identified in both the *Midwest Regional Rail Plan* and Minnesota State Rail Plan.
 - **Fargo–Moorhead to Winnipeg, Manitoba:** This extension of the Twin Cities to Fargo-Moorhead corridor is identified in the Minnesota State Rail Plan and connects the 16th largest metropolitan area in the United States with the 10th largest metropolitan area in Canada.
- **Twin Cities to Sioux Falls, South Dakota:** This corridor connects the largest metropolitan area in Minnesota with the largest metropolitan area in South Dakota. It is identified in both the *Midwest Regional Rail Plan* and Minnesota State Rail Plan.
- **Twin Cities to Sioux City, Iowa:** This corridor is identified in the Minnesota State Rail Plan. The segment between Sioux City and Le Mars, Iowa, is also identified in the Iowa State Rail Plan as part of a proposed Sioux City to Chicago corridor.

MnDOT looks forward to participating in the CIDP and continuing to collaborate with the FRA and Amtrak to plan and implement intercity, passenger rail service to better connect Minnesota with the region and nation. If you have any questions, please contact Greg Mathis, State Planning Director, Passenger Rail, MnDOT, at greg.mathis@state.mn.us. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Nancy Daubenberger, P.E.
Commissioner

cc: Shelly Meyer, MnDOT
Dan Krom, MnDOT
Frank Loetterle, MnDOT
Greg Mathis, MnDOT
Todd Clarkowski, MnDOT
Jennifer Witt, MnDOT

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