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News

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U.S. Department of Transportation Announces More Than \$22 Million in Grants to Restore and Enhance Intercity Passenger Rail Network

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) today announced more than \$22 million in grant funding to three projects that collectively span eight states. Funding is provided through FRA’s Restoration and Enhancement (R&E) Grants Program to initiate, restore, or enhance intercity passenger rail service around the country. All three grants will be awarded to projects located in Opportunity Zones.

“This \$22 million is another example of the President’s continued investment in infrastructure to help connect communities as our economy recovers,” said U. S. Transportation Secretary Elaine L. Chao.

The Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act authorized the Fiscal Years 2018-2020 R&E Grants Program, which provides operating assistance to initiate, restore, or enhance intercity passenger rail transportation through eligible projects that may include adding frequencies to current services, extending current services to new markets or station stops, offering new on-board services, initiating new service, or restoring a previously operated service.

Funding under this program was made available by the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020, and the Consolidated Appropriations Acts of 2019, 2018, and 2017.

“This funding will make a significant contribution to passenger rail-related operating assistance projects in our communities and ultimately make a big difference in people’s lives,” said FRA Administrator Ronald L. Batory.

The Fiscal Year 2018 – 2020 Restoration and Enhancement Grants Program awards are as follows:

Connecticut Department of Transportation
CTrail- Hartford Line Rail Enhancement Project
\$4,395,616
New Haven, CT, to Springfield, MA

The project provides two additional weekday trains between New Haven, Connecticut, and Springfield, Massachusetts, on the *CTrail* service, which began operations in June 2018. It also includes adding a customer service representative in Hartford Union Station to enhance and ease passengers' experiences with ticket vending machines and access to and from the platform. These additional frequencies to a well-served existing corridor will provide an early northbound departure from New Haven (7:35 a.m.) and a mid-morning departure from Springfield (9:55 a.m.) and allow for more connections with Metro-North and Amtrak trains. Currently there is a one hour and 44-minute gap between the morning trains departing from Springfield and a one hour and 40-minute gap between morning New Haven departures. *CTrail*, which is operated by TransitAmerica Services, currently runs eight weekday trains between New Haven and Hartford with three trains continuing to Springfield (Amtrak operates an additional weekday train through this corridor).

Southern Rail Commission

Restoring Intercity Passenger Rail Service along America's Gulf Coast

\$5,450,000

New Orleans, LA, to Mobile, AL

The project restores intercity passenger rail service along the Gulf Coast with state-supported Amtrak service from New Orleans, Louisiana, to Mobile, Alabama. It will serve regions that are underserved and the project is expected to foster economic development, enhance connectivity, provide other non-transportation benefits to the Gulf Coast region, and fill a critical geographic gap in Amtrak's National Network. The Gulf Coast region was previously served by Amtrak's tri-weekly Sunset Limited long-distance service. Amtrak suspended service between New Orleans, Louisiana, and Orlando, Florida, in August 2005 due to Hurricane Katrina, which caused extensive damage to the rail infrastructure over which the service operated. The two daily round trips will make six station stops in New Orleans, Louisiana; Bay St. Louis, Mississippi; Gulfport, Mississippi; Biloxi, Mississippi; Pascagoula, Mississippi; and Mobile, Alabama.

Wisconsin Department of Transportation

Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago Intercity Passenger Rail Service Project

\$12,569,200

Chicago, IL, to Saint Paul, MN

The project adds a second daily roundtrip passenger train between Union Depot in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and Union Station in Chicago, Illinois. These endpoints are currently served along Amtrak's Empire Builder long distance service. This additional train will provide travelers with more reliable service at convenient times between Saint Paul and Chicago, as poor on-time performance from the eastbound Empire Builder currently results in unreliable daily passenger service from Saint Paul. The proposed service will make 12 station stops in St. Paul, Minnesota; Red Wing, Minnesota; Winona, Minnesota; La Crosse, Wisconsin; Tomah, Wisconsin; Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin; Portage, Wisconsin; Columbus, Wisconsin; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Sturtevant, Wisconsin; Glenview, Illinois; and Chicago, Illinois. The project supplements the existing Empire Builder and Hiawatha routes with passenger rail service approximately four to six hours apart from the existing Empire Builder schedule and increases intercity transportation options and connectivity for rural communities between St. Paul and Milwaukee.

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