

**Remarks Prepared for FRA Administrator Amit Bose
Borealis Service Kick Off Celebration
St. Paul, MN
Tuesday, May 21, 2024**

Good morning, everyone.

Thank you to Amtrak and the transportation departments of Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin for inviting me and organizing this event.

To your respective leaders Commissioner Daubenberger, Secretary Thompson, and Secretary Osman, we appreciate our collective partnership.

On behalf of the Federal Railroad Administration, congratulations on the official start of the new Borealis service.

FRA is proud to support expanded passenger rail service between St. Paul and Chicago via Milwaukee.

Investments in rail have long helped Midwesterners and the region's economy.

This new service will mean additional passenger rail access for people traveling between Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois—opening up new possibilities for regional travel and regional economies.

For Midwesterners without a car or those looking for an alternative to congested highways, this service provides an environmental-friendly transportation alternative—one that will take dirty emissions out of our air and cars off those congested highways.

Amtrak projects that more than 200,000 passengers will utilize Borealis service in the first year alone. This comes at a time when passenger rail demand is high.

Across America, passenger rail travel is approaching – and in some cases, surpassing – pre-pandemic ridership numbers.

Last year, Amtrak provided 28.6 million customer trips, a more than 24% increase over 2022.

Amtrak's Hiawatha route between Chicago and Milwaukee served more than 636,000 Americans, nearly 27% higher than the previous year.

Ridership on long-distance routes benefiting this region, like Amtrak's Empire Builder, went up 15% over the same period.

In 2020, before the Biden-Harris Administration took office and amid a pandemic, passenger rail funding at the federal level was a question mark, essential projects were left withering, and service was being suspended.

Now, we are not only talking about passenger rail expansion; we are seeing progress first-hand that will help deliver the world-class passenger rail Americans need and deserve.

I cannot stress enough how strong partnerships, like the one demonstrated between Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Amtrak, and host railroad Canadian Pacific Kansas City, contribute to progress.

And, I cannot overemphasize the impacts of President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in communities across the Midwest and the country.

I want to recognize all the Senate and House members across the three states in attendance today who supported this legislation as well as regional leaders working to advance rail efforts in local communities, whether that be through State DOTs or organizations like the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission.

With funding in the President's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, FRA announced more than \$28 billion in grant awards to nearly 170 rail projects nationwide last year.

This includes grants through FRA's Fed-State National Program to modernize Chicago Union Station and help set the stage for future growth.

Last year, thanks to a new program in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law called the Corridor ID Program, FRA also identified 69 passenger rail corridors across 44 states for future development.

The inaugural round of selections include potential new service between the Twin Cities and Duluth, Minnesota and proposed upgrades throughout the Midwest Chicago hub corridors that could mean:

Daily, multi-frequency service from Chicago to Indianapolis

Increased frequencies from Chicago to Milwaukee to the Twin Cities, with an extension to Madison, Wisconsin

A comprehensive plan for the Chicago terminal and service chokepoints south of Lake Michigan benefiting all corridors and long-distance trains south and east of Chicago.

These passenger rail investments are in addition to five grants through FRA's CRISI Program to improve the safety of freight rail operations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois, and another six grants through FRA's Railroad Crossing Elimination Program to reduce collisions and increase safety at local highway-rail grade crossings.

With five years of total funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, there are still more investments to be made with more opportunities to fund safer, more modern infrastructure and advance efforts that meet the needs of 21st-century travelers.

I also know today is just the beginning.

I look forward to continuing to work closely with so many of you as we continue to modernize rail across the country, tackle long-standing infrastructure needs, and deliver the world-class passenger rail Americans deserve on time, on budget and safely.

Today is another win for passenger rail expansion in America. It is a win for the Midwest, and it's a win for a growing number of Americans in this region and nationwide who rely on and benefit from passenger rail.

Congratulations again.