

## 2010 Montana Rail Plan Update - Draft Comment Summary

### Commentary Received on Draft Rail Plan (August - October, 2009 and October 2010)

Theme	Comments
<b>A. Passenger Rail -Southern Route</b>	
Connectivity to Amtrak Empire Builder & National System (26 references in comments)	Multiple comments that the existing Empire Builder stations are not convenient or accessible for a majority of Montanans for connectivity to the train. Have to travel too far to get to Northern stations. Want stations in Missoula, Garrison, Helena, Bozeman that would connect to Empire Builder to connect to the East and West Coast and areas in-between (mentioned: Spokane, Seattle, Minnesota, North Dakota, Chicago, Denver, Oregon). Direct connection Seattle to Billings to avoid driving.
Passenger Rail versus other modes of travel Air, automobile (11)	Multiple comments that due to age and desire not to drive long-distances, would prefer train travel as an option to flying or driving a car. (For travelers leaving the state and for those traveling to MT). Preferred mode of travel in bad weather.
Economics - Affordability(4)	Several comments that train travel is more economical with the cost of air travel out of Montana and the rise in personal vehicle fuel costs.
Economics - Boon to Montana Communities(5)	Several comments that the resumption of a southern rail route would boost the local economy in the communities the train would travel through (stops). Bring tourism dollars into Montana.
Passenger Rail should be Subsidized (2)	Several comments that like highways and air travel, passenger rail transportation needs to be subsidized and supported for the energy savings and an alternate form of transportation. Take individual vehicles off the road that travel vast distances in rural areas.
Passenger Rail should be self-supporting (1)	A comment that after the initial infrastructure is in place, would like to see less government subsidy and more supported through its income.

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North Coast Hiawatha Reinstatement (5)	Several comments supporting the reinstatement of the entire North Coast Hiawatha route. Some remember the prior service and commented on the connectivity to the east and west coast. One comment that resumption of service just within Montana would "not be very useful". One comment on providing train travel as an alternate for students coming to both universities. Several comments on the importance of passenger trains keeping schedules to attract ridership.	
Environment (4)	Several comments that rail is more environmentally responsible way to travel, less energy consumption - more energy efficient than other modes of transportation "should become a priority as it is in Europe." Save fossil fuels, much more efficient than individual cars.	
In- state service (1)	One comment supported development of same-day schedules within Montana, stating that "through" Montana Rail service did not benefit Montana economically. "Separate State Service" to serve Montanan's travelling within the state. "If the Southern line route will provide workable service for travelling Montanans, then it will act as an economic generator within, but if it will only mainly serve as a conduit for 95% "through" travel to the West Coast...then it will not benefit Montana, or be used." Use train for recreational opportunities (Take bike, fishing, Griz Games in Missoula)	
Different Southern Route Proposal (1)	One comment proposed to extend the Billings to Missoula scenario to Spokane to connect with through service to the Empire Builder. This route may receive some financial support from Washington state as Spokane could benefit from more visitors and additional workforce associated with the new train. Also, from a logistical standpoint Spokane has existing Amtrak facilities, personnel and infrastructure to help maintain Spokane to Billings service. If the reinstatement of the North Coast Hiawatha should fail requested a serious study examining the feasibility of instituting passenger service from Spokane to Billings or Laurel be undertaken. The vast majority of this well maintained route is operated by Montana Rail Link – a progressive railroad with an innovative management team; one likely to view passenger traffic as a source of additional revenue, not as a hindrance to moving freight.	
<b>B. Other topics</b>		

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Historical/Cultural Resources not considered (1)	One comment that the report does not take into consideration rail and other historical resources that may be impacted by redevelopment of existing rail lines. Asking for professional survey and analysis of such impacts, and the involvement of SHIPO. <b>Note: the Rail plan is not an environmental document, nor project specific and would not be the appropriate venue for this type of analysis.</b>	
Scope of Passenger Rail Feasibility Study (1)	Comments on the limits or perceived shortcomings of the scope of the Amtrak two-tiered study of passenger rail resumption on a southern route in Montana. Commentator emphasized that retaining the Empire Builder service remain a priority for the state. The commentator found the scope of the study inadequate to address the feasibility of reinstating passenger rail service to southern Montana due to its limited focus on intrastate service. Stated the Billings to Missoula route studied has useful data for the future, but lacks viability due to the truncated route. The Tier 2 analysis of Williston, ND to Sandpoint, ID does not provide the detailed cost analysis as that contained in Tier 1, the route does not reflect the "preferred" North Coast Hiawatha route, it could have provided a better picture of connectivity to points west and east of Montana, but lacks the analysis. Some personal opinion on the content was expressed.	
Light rail between Hamilton and Missoula (1)	One comment that a light rail system from Hamilton to Polson through Missoula should be developed.	
<b>C. Editorial Comments</b>		
General edits to Draft text (2)	Comments submitted by an individual to the draft plan included that the proposed Tongue River Rail line should show on the rail map and that the Bull Mountain (Signal Peak) rail was not operational. Corrections to some of the text were suggested. Some personal opinion on content was expressed. Edits were made to the draft plan as deemed appropriate by staff. Additional comments were received on Chapter 4 with textual edits, asking for some fact checking on historical rail information, Empire Builder ridership data, personal opinion on content of Chapter 4, suggestions that investment be made by the state in improving stations on the Empire Builder route.	

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Industry Comments: BNSF	<p>BNSF submitted a letter that outlined areas that they felt the plan was lacking. BNSF stated the plan used "outdated" information, not the current 2009 information for BNSF, (MDT used the available information at the time the draft was completed.) BNSF questioned the validity of some of the R.L. Banks studies cited in the plan as being out dated, they call out the Christensen study, the AAR study, (note: the draft plan cites multiple studies by R.L. Banks) and refers to their relative frequency. These studies are discussed in the plan. BNSF asked that the rate arbitration agreement process be included in the plan, MDT has added a section that discusses this recent (January 2009) agreement. BNSF states the plan excludes reference to BNSF's 2-26-09, two page press release responding to the Attorney General's Railroad Rate Report. MDT will address these issues as appropriate and has prepared a response to the BNSF letter.</p>	