

Submitter: Betz Mayer
On Behalf Of: HB 4109 - 4
Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation
Measure: HB4109

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 4109 Amendment – 4. My name is Betz Mayer, I am the assistant director for the Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER)'s U.S. DOT funded Regional Infrastructure Accelerator program.

PNWER is a multi-state non-profit organization, representing the 5 Canadian provinces and territories, and 5 US states, including Oregon and Idaho. Our team has decades of experience working with freight and passenger rail partners across our 5-state region. Through the RIA program, we have been providing technical assistance to communities to help them navigate the vast number of funding opportunities now available after the passage of the BIL/IIJA.

Based on this experience, I wanted to take a moment to clarify a few terms and definitions: Under the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), there are two main types of passenger rail routes. The one you're most familiar with is a State-Supported Route like the Amtrak Cascades. These are routes under 350 miles and operate using state subsidies. There are also Long Distance Routes like the Empire Builder. These routes are longer than 750 miles and operate using federal subsidies. To clarify, states do not pay operating subsidies for the long distance routes that serve their states.

Currently the FRA is conducting a long-distance service study to provide recommendations to Congress about which routes should be designated as long-distance routes. Restoration of the Amtrak Pioneer route is included in this long distance restoration list. The proposed route would serve many eastern Oregon communities, including Hood River, The Dalles, Hinkle, Pendleton, La Grande, Baker, and Ontario.

However, there are currently no resources tied to this FRA long distance study. Once the report is delivered to Congress, there is no guaranteed funding or clear next steps on how the study translates into projects or future funding opportunities.

The city of Boise and other Idahoans have championed bipartisan efforts to restore the Pioneer route to reestablish passenger rail service on the Pioneer route to the intermountain west. They are applying to FRA grant opportunities and receiving Technical Assistance to get a proactive jump-start on investing time and money into their piece of the Pioneer corridor.

The vision of expanded passenger rail service is to invest in infrastructure that increases community safety, moves freight more effectively, and provides

transportation options to rural communities and Tribal members. We support the amendment and its mission to facilitate more collaborative work between ODOT and the State of Idaho for restoration of the Pioneer.