



IDAHO TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT

P.O. Box 7129
Boise ID 83707-1129

(208) 334-8000
itd.idaho.gov

September 30, 2009

Jonathan Hutchison
Government Affairs Director – West
Amtrak
530 Water Street; 5th Floor
Oakland, CA 94607

RE: PRIIA Section 224 Pioneer Route Passenger Rail Study (Amtrak Pioneer Restoration study)

Dear Mr. Hutchison:

The purpose of this letter is to submit the Idaho Transportation Department's (ITD) comments on the Amtrak Pioneer restoration study. First of all, we would like to thank Amtrak and its consultant, J.L. Patterson & Associates, Inc. (JLP), for the cooperation and open communications with the Pioneer states, Congressional delegations and others in conducting the Pioneer study. ITD supports reintroduction of the Pioneer route to the national Amtrak system and we plan to work further with Amtrak, the Idaho Congressional delegation, the other Pioneer state partners and other involved parties to explore the many options to return intercity passenger service to the citizens of southern Idaho and other locations along the route.

Our specific comments are as follows:

- Portland to Salt Lake City (SLC) service is essential to southern Idaho. Existing connecting Amtrak service is already at these locations, and this would be a good first step in reinstating service. The operational schedule Options one and three appear to work best for the states of Idaho, Oregon and Washington for arrival/departure times, generating higher Passenger Miles/Train Mile ratios and much lower Capital/Implementation costs. However, we would not be opposed to some variation of Options two and four if the Pioneer could go to SLC from/to Ogden, or excellent connections could be made with the Utah Transit Authority. Whatever option is chosen, criteria should include maximizing connectivity to other Amtrak routes and local transit authorities.
 - The ridership projections in the study should be reconsidered for the final report. As the study points out, the populations of the states served by the former Pioneer are among the fastest growing in the United States (41% versus 19% nationally over the past 17 years). The study also addresses the fact that air service to/from major cities along the route has improved. However, air and intercity bus service to smaller cities along the route has actually declined, as the study states (many years ago Greyhound essentially pulled out of Idaho but there are several other firms that are providing some services). In light of all this,
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we recommend that the ridership projections be increased by 10-20%, which would result in projections still lower than or similar to the peak years of FY 92 and FY 93. This would make the fare box recovery ratios more favorable.

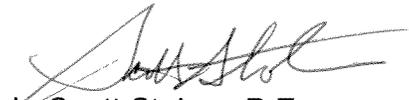
- All future options should include a stop in Boise. Although using the Boise cutoff adds a few miles and some time to the schedule, it is important to realize that Boise is the largest metropolitan area between Portland and SLC, a distance of almost 800 miles.
- The timeline for reintroduction seems excessive. Amtrak could utilize Superliner cars rebuilt with American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus funds or new Viewliner cars for the Pioneer fleet rather than waiting four years to build new Superliner cars.
- Reinstating Pioneer service would restore a key central corridor link between the Midwest, Intermountain West and Pacific Northwest, facilitating travel amongst the most rapidly growing regions of the U.S and connecting existing routes thereby creating system efficiencies. Pioneer service would provide transportation options to rural populations with few modal choices, which is critical; multiple markets (e.g., purpose and/or vacation trips) can be served this way; more alternatives would be available; and essential new service can be provided for those without existing nearby air service and limited bus services. New Pioneer service would also enhance economic benefits, consistent with Idaho's desire to grow and diversify investment across the state.
- A very important point is that a reintroduced Pioneer should be included in Amtrak's Long-Distance Intercity Passenger Network, like the Empire Builder and the Coast Starlight. The concept of the Pioneer as a state-supported train is not likely to work or would be awkward at best. This is because as many as six states would be involved in providing the necessary state capital and operating funding. If at least one state doesn't join the compact, or withdraws support at some point, the whole system could break down.
- We are willing to work with Amtrak, the Federal Railroad Administration, Idaho cities with potential Pioneer stations and other parties to try to obtain future funding through the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA) (Public Law 110-453), the High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program or other sources to help fund capital improvements to stations and other infrastructure. Idaho cannot commit any state funding for operations and capital improvements at this time, especially given the current and projected status of the state's budget.

We agree with Amtrak's statement that the Pioneer study presents a preliminary, high level set of information, findings, opportunities, and challenges due to the costs involved, and there would need to be more thorough analyses to fully understand service, capital and economic requirements of any particular option.

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Again, we look forward to working further with Amtrak, the Idaho Congressional delegation, the other Pioneer states, and other involved parties to explore the many options to return intercity passenger service to the citizens of southern Idaho and other locations along the route. Please contact Ron Kerr at 208.334.8210, ron.kerr@itd.idaho.gov with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Scott Stokes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

L. Scott Stokes, P.E.
Acting Director

cc: Idaho Congressional Delegation
City of Boise-John Brunelle
COMPASS