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# Greater Northwest Rail Working Group

— Columbia Gorge Commission —  
7/13/2021

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# Greater Northwest Working Group

- Overview

- “Much of rural America is underserved by long-distance intercity passenger rail options, including portions of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The Greater Northwest Passenger Rail Working Group, modeled after the congressionally established Gulf Coast Working Group, will be convened by the Secretary of Transportation to study and develop service development plans for restoring the North Coast Hiawatha, Pioneer, and other routes within the Greater Northwest region as determined by the Working Group. The Working Group will also develop plans to implement the restoration of routes within the region that are funded by the 117th Congress. The ultimate goal of the Working Group is to further the economic and social wellbeing of rural America while providing enhanced connectivity for the national long-distance passenger rail system, thereby making the overall system more robust and resilient.”

(People do live here....)

- Amtrak National Network
- New Services
- Enhanced Services
- Service Suspended

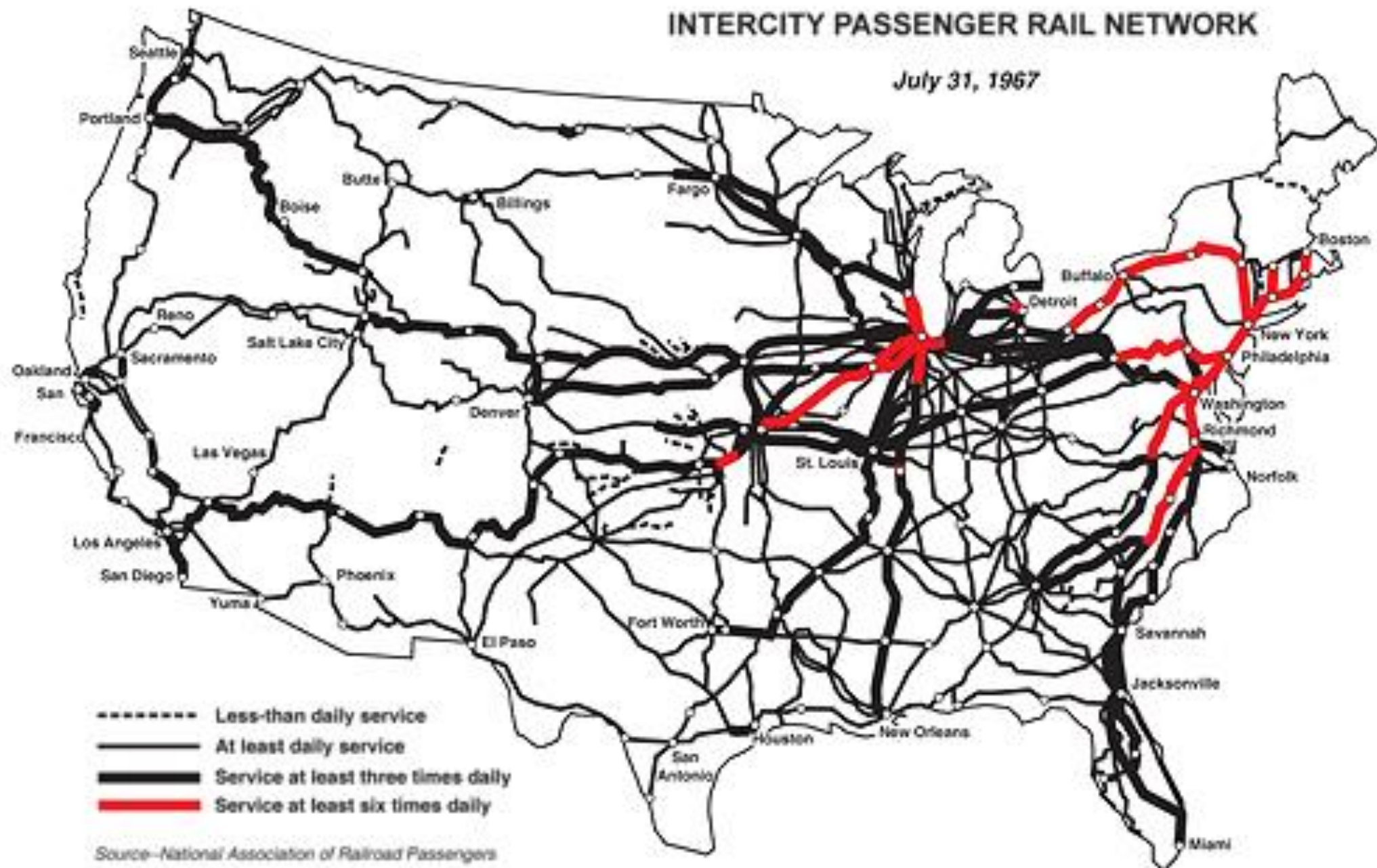
(Not all stations are shown)



April 2nd, 2021

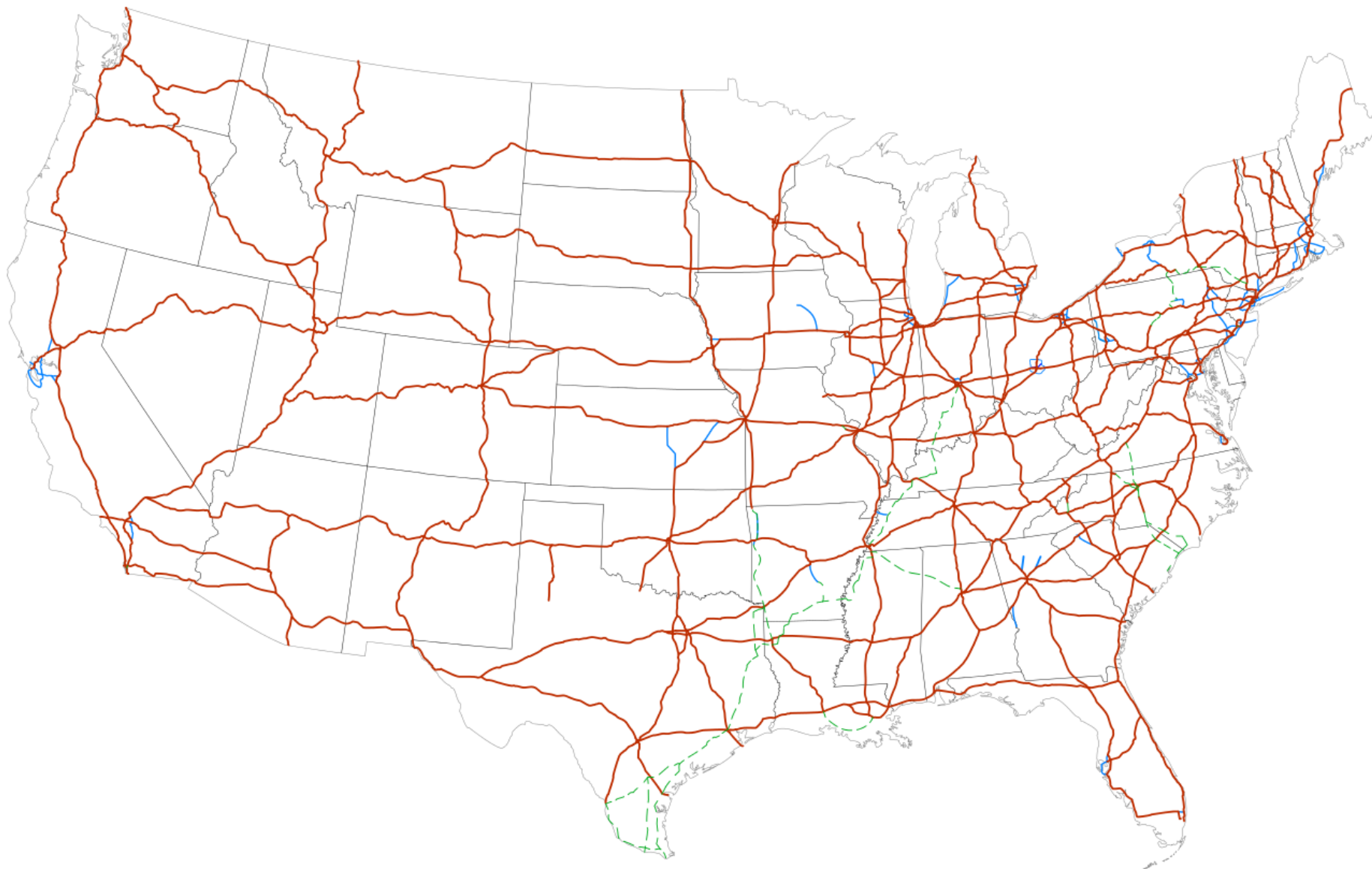
# INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL NETWORK

July 31, 1967



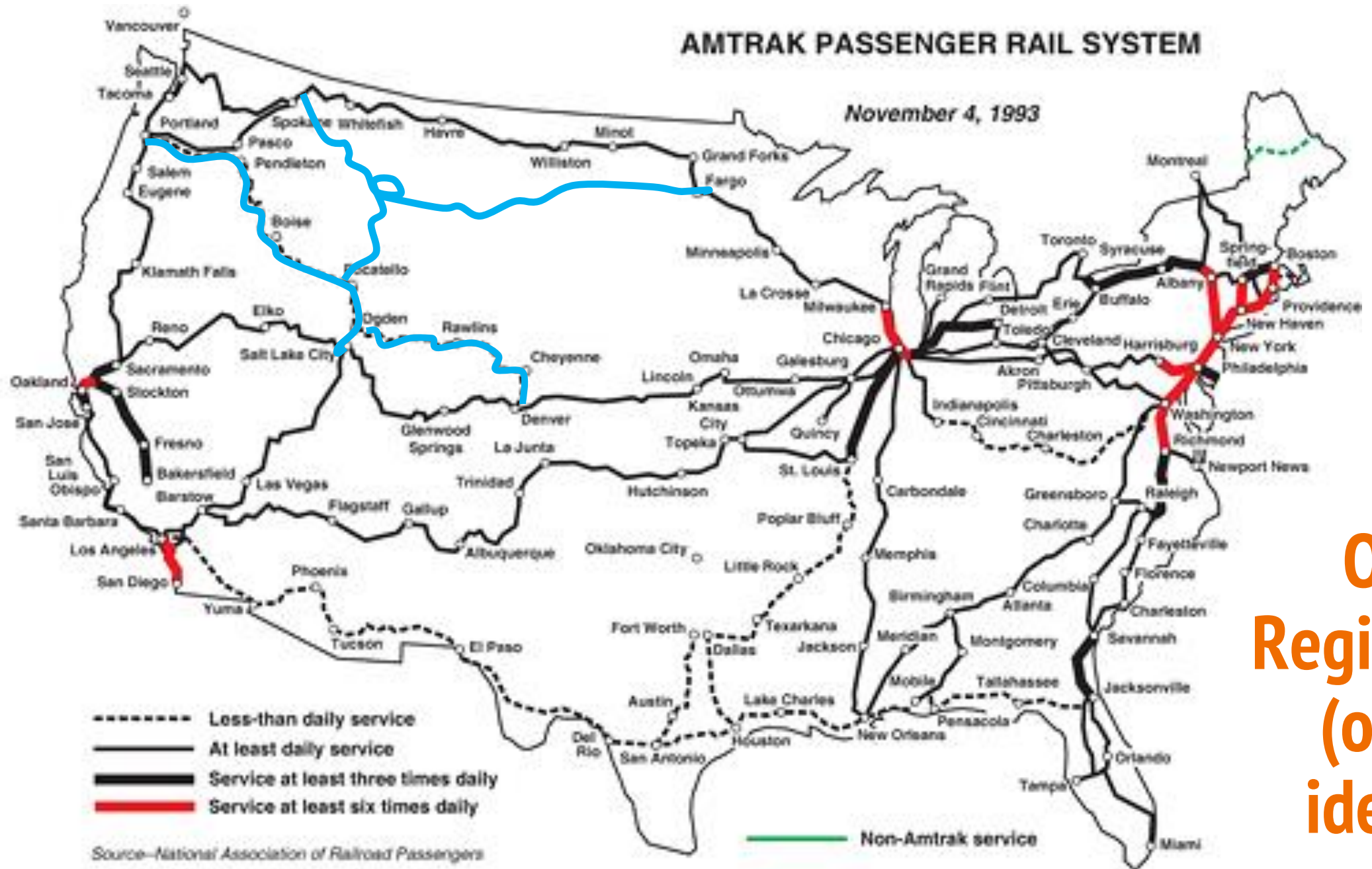


# US Interstate Highway System



# AMTRAK PASSENGER RAIL SYSTEM

November 4, 1993



Our  
Region  
(one  
idea)



# Conceptual Higher Speed Rail *STEEL INTERSTATE SYSTEM*



# New Approach, Partner Organizations

- All Aboard Washington
- All Aboard Minnesota
- Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates, La Grande
- Big Sky Rail Authority
  - COMPASS, City of Boise
  - Utah Rail Passengers Association
- Rail Passengers Association
- Transportation for America
- **Other People, organizations, businesses and localities.**



# “You are here” .....

- There is no current established mechanism to realize the full intercity passenger rail system that is possible for the Greater Northwest Region; a state-level focus (siloed) is limiting, non-efficient, and will be less-competitive at the Federal level.
- This [Greater] Regional level is the best-positioned to coordinate, act-on, and realize the latent potential for passenger rail that is in our vibrant and diverse region; to the benefit of towns small and large.

# What is the need for GNWWG?

- The right people are **not** currently talking and coordinating for the work that needs to be done in order to realize the necessity and demand of additional intercity passenger rail in the Greater Northwest Region.
  - Facilitator, not the decider (regional control, native effort).
- Existing state structures focuses are on a plethora of other issues.
- Existing structures and institutions are **ill-equipped and unready** to conduct the [specific] work that needs to be undertaken (i.e. GNCC is a great regional asset, but focused on freight commodities shipments, not people and mobility).
  - Existing institutions are not in a position to directly apply for federal passenger rail funding.
  - Instead of foisting a burden of more work on a reluctant existing institution (that may not do the best work since their heart is not in the project), a creation of a new autonomous entity is required.

# Passenger Trains: Economic Engines for Growth

Rail is a ***proven*** economic engine in the communities it serves.

The nationwide cost of highway gridlock has grown to \$179 billion a year, or \$1,080 per commuter.

The cost isn't just in dollars; the average commuter spends 54 hours per year stuck in traffic.

**Amtrak's interconnected services in the Northeast Corridor, the long-distance National Network and the dozens of State-supported Amtrak routes return between \$7 billion and \$8 billion each year to our Nation's GDP – four times what we typically invest in the service.**

| Selected Economic Benefits Assessments (FY 2019) |                     |                |                 |                 |             |          |
|--|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|----------|
|  | City Of New Orleans | Empire Builder | Silver Services | Southwest Chief | Texas Eagle | Crescent |
| Cities Served                                    | 20                  | 46             | 36              | 38              | 44          | 33       |
| States Served                                    | 5                   | 8              | 11              | 8               | 7           | 13       |
| Ridership  | 235,670             | 433,372        | 743,461         | 338,180         | 321,694     | 295,180  |
| Annual Federal Investment                        | \$17.9m             | \$57.5m        | \$76.2m         | \$47.0m         | \$25.4m     | \$33.7m  |
| Annual Economic Return                           | \$133.8m            | \$595.2m       | \$381.8m        | \$484.8m        | \$555.3m    | \$232.8m |
| Return on Taxpayers' Equity                      | 7.47X               | 10.35X         | 5.01X           | 10.31X          | 21.86X      | 6.91X    |

Source: Rail Passengers Association modeling estimate

\*Indirect effects include community-level effects such as sales taxes, real-estate, local employment and other similar factors



# Environment and Rail

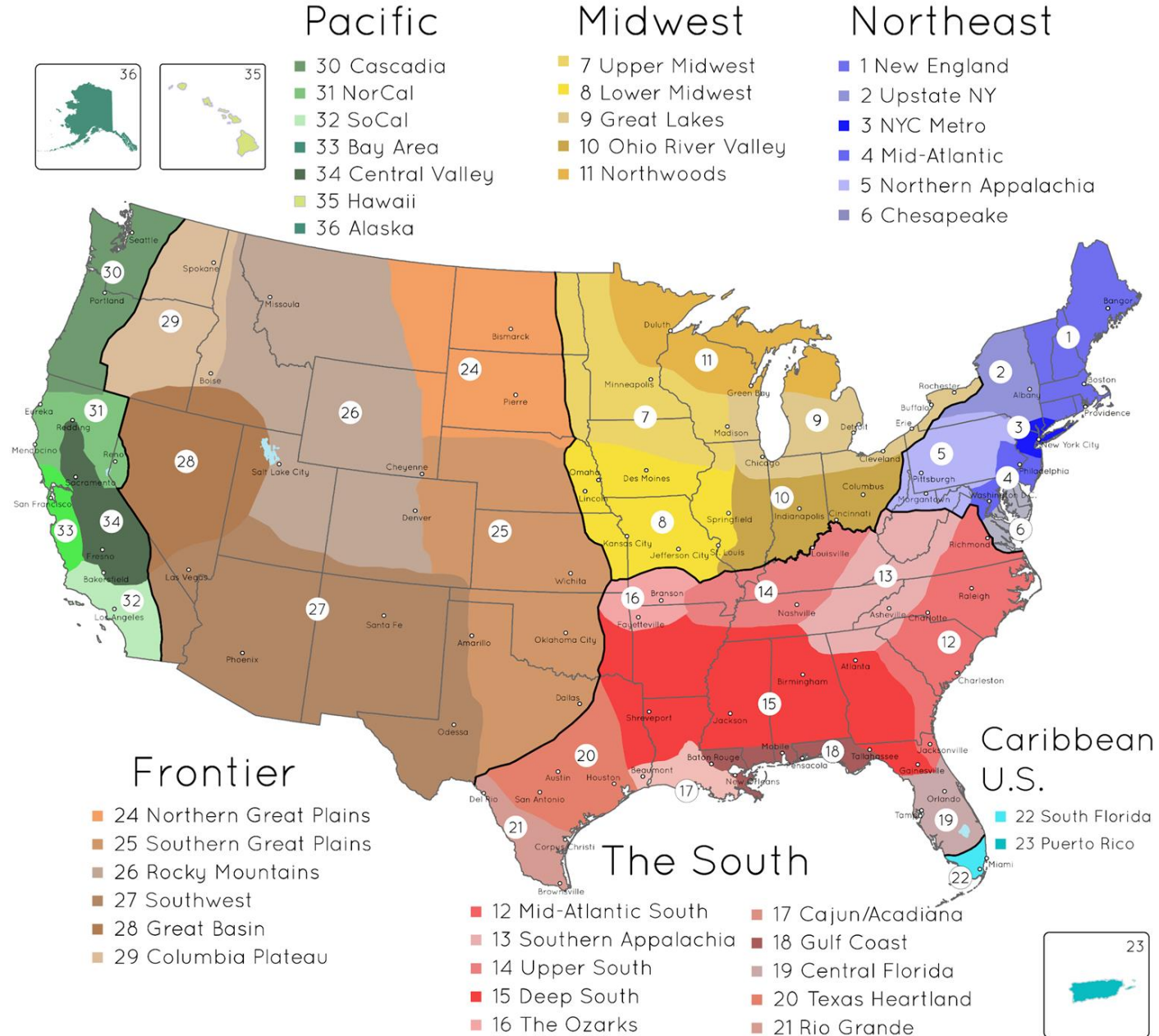
- Transportation represents a large portion – about 29 percent – of U.S. emissions, and the share has been rising in recent years.
- Data show that rail has a significantly lower energy footprint than trucks and passenger cars.
- Passenger rail is around three times more efficient than a car on a passenger-mile basis at current occupancy levels. The lower energy consumption leads to lower greenhouse emissions.

# Economic and Environmental benefits of Rail

All Aboard Minnesota in conjunction with the Rail Passengers Association recently conducted a study containing some of the key benefits, economic, mobility, and environmental of adding more rail service.

- The new train will result in **new visitor spending** in Minnesota making an estimated total impact of \$2.8 Million.
- It is estimated that 90,000 people who would otherwise use personal automobiles be taken off the roads, saving \$32 Million dollars across the region in **highway maintenance costs**.
- Trains are 17 times safer than personal automobiles, meaning that the region will save \$1.8 Million dollars due to **traffic accidents avoided**.
- Trains are among the greenest modes of ground transportation, which translates to saving in excess of \$120,000 dollars due to **pollution savings** that will no longer be emitted when the train starts to run.

# Cultural Regions of America





# GNWWG Congressional Interest

- Information disseminated to the regional Congressional Delegations: Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, North Dakota, South Dakota & Minnesota.
- Recognition of potential sponsors on-going with good signs.
- Language for Regional Rail Compacts/Commissions (the next step after this proposed Working Group) introduced by [Rep Cohen \(TN\)](#).
- Local support strong and growing. Engagement with:
  - Dickinson, ND; Morton Co, ND; Bonner Co, ID; Kootenai Co, ID; Laramie WY; Pennington Co, SD; and more.

# Three-Legged Stool: Potential Action Items

1. Clause added to Senate version of Surface Transportation Reauthorization to Secretary of Transportation to study discontinued routes and less than daily routes and determine if any should be added back into the national system and/or moved to daily service. (*Sec. 2214. Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study*)
2. Enabling Legislation for establishing interstate rail compacts to implement rail expansion and infrastructure plans. (Regional Rail Commissions).
3. Expanded funding in all bills and the agreed upon infrastructure proposal 5-15 times greater than recent historic spending caps. New funding source specifically authorized for passenger rail enhancement and expansion.

# Our Ask:

- Support for adding Section 2214 into the final conferenced version of the Surface Transportation Reauthorization
- Support for Oregon to join and Interstate Compact
- Support for expanded rail funding

Specifically:

- Contact Oregon congressional members to show support.
- Pass a resolution outlining support.



# The End

Questions?