

**Statement of Arun Rao, Chair of the States for Passenger Rail Coalition, Inc. (SPRC)
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Railroads and Harbors Section**

to the

**Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
The Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials**

**Submitted for the record of the December 9, 2021, Hearing:
"Leveraging IIJA: Plans for Expanding Intercity Passenger Rail"**

The States for Passenger Rail Coalition (SPRC) is an alliance of 23 State and Regional Transportation Officials and Passenger Rail Authorities across the United States. SPRC's mission is to promote the development, implementation, and expansion of Intercity Passenger Rail as part of an integrated national transportation network.

SPRC members supporting and operating intercity passenger rail are vital partners in providing passenger rail service throughout the nation. SPRC members sponsor a combined twenty-nine intercity passenger rail routes serving 296 communities across America. In the year leading up to the pandemic, the State Supported trains carried over fifteen million passengers, representing over 47% of Amtrak's total ridership, the largest source of ridership among the three Amtrak business lines. They also contributed nearly \$750 million to Amtrak by combining \$521 million in passenger revenue plus \$225 million in contract payments.

SPRC appreciates this opportunity to provide input as the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee considers the possibilities for expanding intercity passenger rail due to the enactment of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). SPRC Members and our colleagues in other states stand ready to help accomplish the attainable passenger rail mobility goals set out in the IIJA.

The SPRC States and Joint Powers Authorities recognize the opportunities provided by the IIJA to make affordable, accessible, safe, efficient, and environmentally beneficial passenger rail service a fully realized part of an integrated transportation network. Over the past several months, SPRC Members have sought to identify essential components for advancing the expansion of intercity passenger rail. I am pleased to share with the Committee six (6) "key themes" that we believe will be important to consider as we move forward:

- 1) *Work with the Host Railroads, Amtrak, and the Federal Railroad Administration on enabling equitable, shared access for both new and expanded passenger rail service.*** The unprecedented level of federal rail investment along with insightful Congressional policy directives requires an equally exceptional level of collaboration among passenger rail entities and the host freight and commuter railroads. SPRC and its member agencies look forward to participating in forthcoming discussions that will ensure the advancement of passenger and freight rail. We will work collaboratively with the freight railroads and Amtrak to allow for expansion of passenger rail. SPRC members actively work in partnership with freight railroads as part of state rail planning and believe that we can work to identify opportunities for investment that can expand passenger rail, while strengthening the nation's critical freight rail network. In some cases, there is also a need for a federally defined and collaborative process for adding passenger trains on host railroads.
- 2) *Corridor Identification and Project Delivery.*** Section 22308 of IIJA requires the USDOT to establish a program to add and improve intercity passenger rail corridors. The policy directs the

USDOT and the relevant States to prepare plans outlining capital projects needed to improve and expand passenger rail service.

The SPRC has produced an extensive list of potential capital projects and planning endeavors that can serve as a springboard for assisting the USDOT in jumpstarting this program. In a joint effort with the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), SPRC reached out to States to produce a list of passenger rail projects that are ready for final design and construction funds or are in the planning/scoping phase. States play a critical role in the long-term strength of the program, similar to the highway and transit programs, and would benefit from sustainable Federal support in the planning and development of projects.

This "Projects in the Pipeline" list identifies 170 projects with total funding needs of \$58.7 billion. The list consists of 88 projects that are ready or close to ready for final design or construction with a cost of \$17.4 billion, along with an additional eighty-two planning projects costing \$41.3 billion.

Completing these projects would result in at least seventy-five additional daily round trips and more than thirty new cities served by passenger rail. There would also be significant improvements to over seventy stations, more than 150 new or refurbished locomotives and passenger rail cars, and nearly 400 grade crossings with significant safety, reliability and capacity issues would be upgraded or have access changes. These improvements would be transformative for passenger rail and improve the reliable movement of freight rail as well. An updated project list with additional details on each can be found at <https://bit.ly/SPRC-Projects-Dec2021>.

- 3) ***Role of Interstate Compacts.*** Section 22306 of IJIA establishes a competitive grant program to provide Federal funding for interstate rail compacts. Grants awarded would cover the costs of administration, systems planning, and operations coordination. One of the key functions of SPRC is to facilitate coordination and cooperation among state officials and between the public and private sector at all levels (federal, state, and local.) SPRC looks forward to assisting the FRA in supporting the extension of this dialogue and collaborative activity across state boundaries to facilitate the development and success of the interstate rail compact partners.
- 4) ***Long Distance Service Investment and Expansion.*** Section 22214 of the IJIA directs the USDOT to conduct a study to evaluate the restoration of daily intercity passenger service along Amtrak long-distance routes that provide less than daily service. Additionally, Section 22210 prohibits Amtrak from discontinuing, reducing the frequency of, suspending, or substantially altering the route on any segment of any long-distance route if Amtrak receives adequate funding for the route.

SPRC applauds Congress in its clear, unwavering support for long-distance passenger rail service. Many of SPRC's States are hosts to and are actively involved in Amtrak's long-distance routes. We look forward to supporting the USDOT in the study efforts to ensure the ongoing viability and the expansion of reliable passenger rail service connecting rural and urban areas.

- 5) ***NEPA Streamlining and Standardization of Process.*** Complying with the federal requirements associated with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is essential in ensuring that passenger rail projects come to fruition. With the influx of significant federal funding over the next several years, it is vital that these investments fully comply with NEPA requirements. Streamlining certain steps in the NEPA process can help advance intercity passenger rail projects that produce a net benefit for climate change and equity.

Over the past several years, the USDOT and FRA working with the States and local governments have sought to identify actions that would support simplification of the process steps while

ensuring full compliance with the environmental requirements on NEPA. SPRC looks forward to continuing the ongoing dialogue for advancing passenger rail projects with efficient use of resources and in a timely manner.

- 6) ***Developing a Sustainable Workforce in the Rail Industry.*** Converting federal grant funds into rail projects will require more railroad specialists in the workforce and the infrastructure-related talent pipeline in state and local governments must be expanded to meet the need. SPRC supports planning for an industry-wide campaign with the FRA, Amtrak, the States, rail advocacy groups, educational entities, the trades, and other stakeholders to develop an outreach campaign that will highlight the job and career development opportunities within the rail industry.

In summary, SPRC Members look forward to working with Congress, the Federal Railroad Administration, Amtrak, the host Railroads, and all stakeholders in advancing initiatives which improve and enhance the movement of people and goods by rail throughout our nation.

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