

# Montana Rail Planning Focus: Passenger Rail Service

Revenue and  
Transportation  
Committee  
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Helena, Montana





# Passenger Rail in Montana

## Topics

- **Montana Rail Plan update (draft)**
- **MDT / Amtrak Southern Route Study (in progress)**
- **Amtrak North Coast Hiawatha study**
- **Federal PRIIA and the Preliminary National Rail Plan**

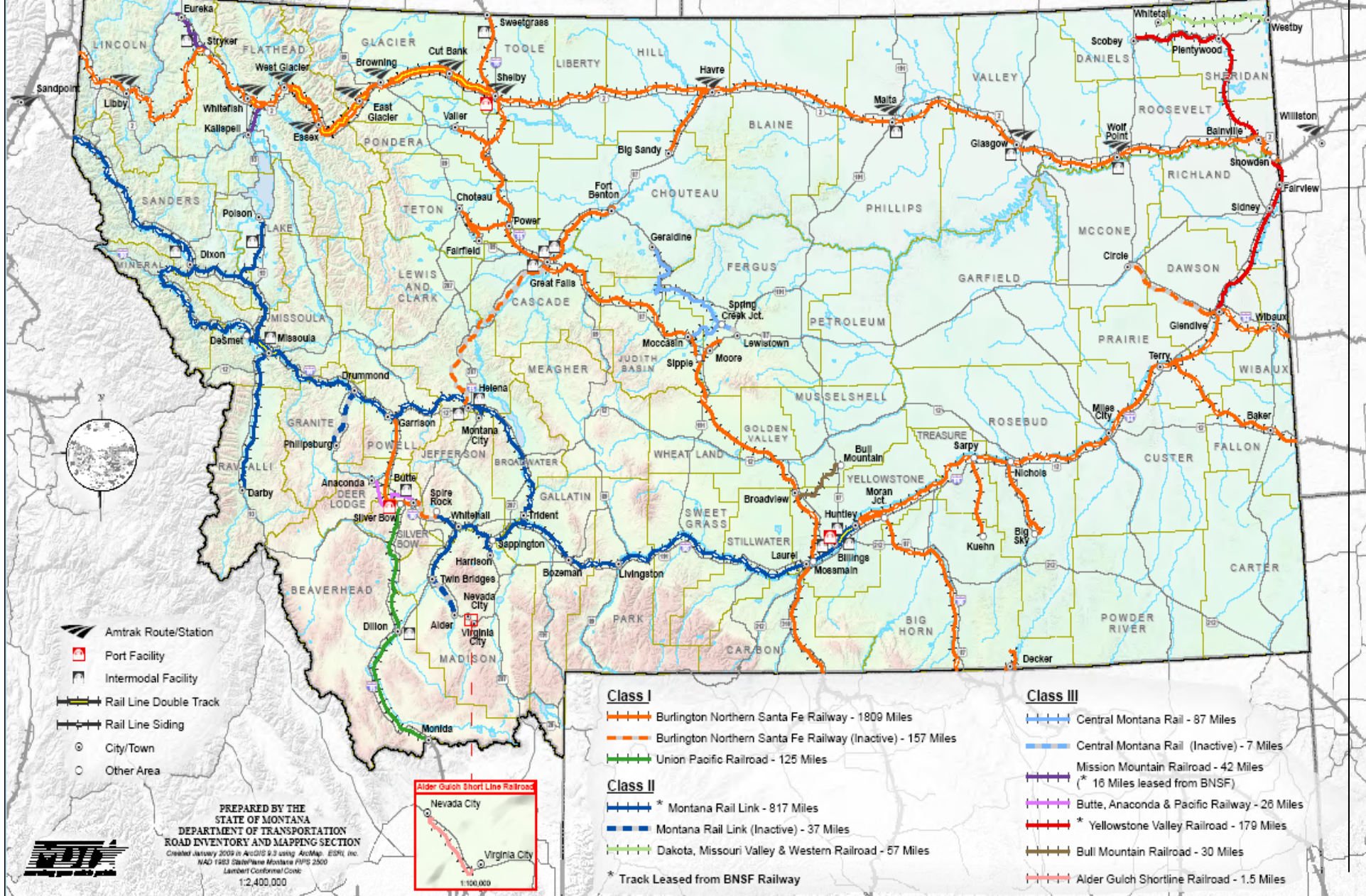
A passenger train is shown traveling through a mountainous landscape. The train is moving from the foreground towards the background, following a track that curves through the terrain. The mountains in the background are covered in snow and have a rugged appearance. The sky is a clear, light blue. The overall scene is bright and scenic.

Passenger Rail Service

# Montana Rail Plan Update



# Montana Rail System





# State Rail Plan Update

## Rail Plan Update

- First developed in 1970's, last updated in 2000
- Key purposes include: multimodal system coordination, abandonments and loan programs, passenger rail
- Technical information about Montana's rail system
- Identifies key challenges for Montana, such as
  - Impacts of 110-car grain shuttle loading facilities
  - Southern Montana passenger rail route
  - Freight rail funding sources
- See the draft Rail Plan at <http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/railplan/>



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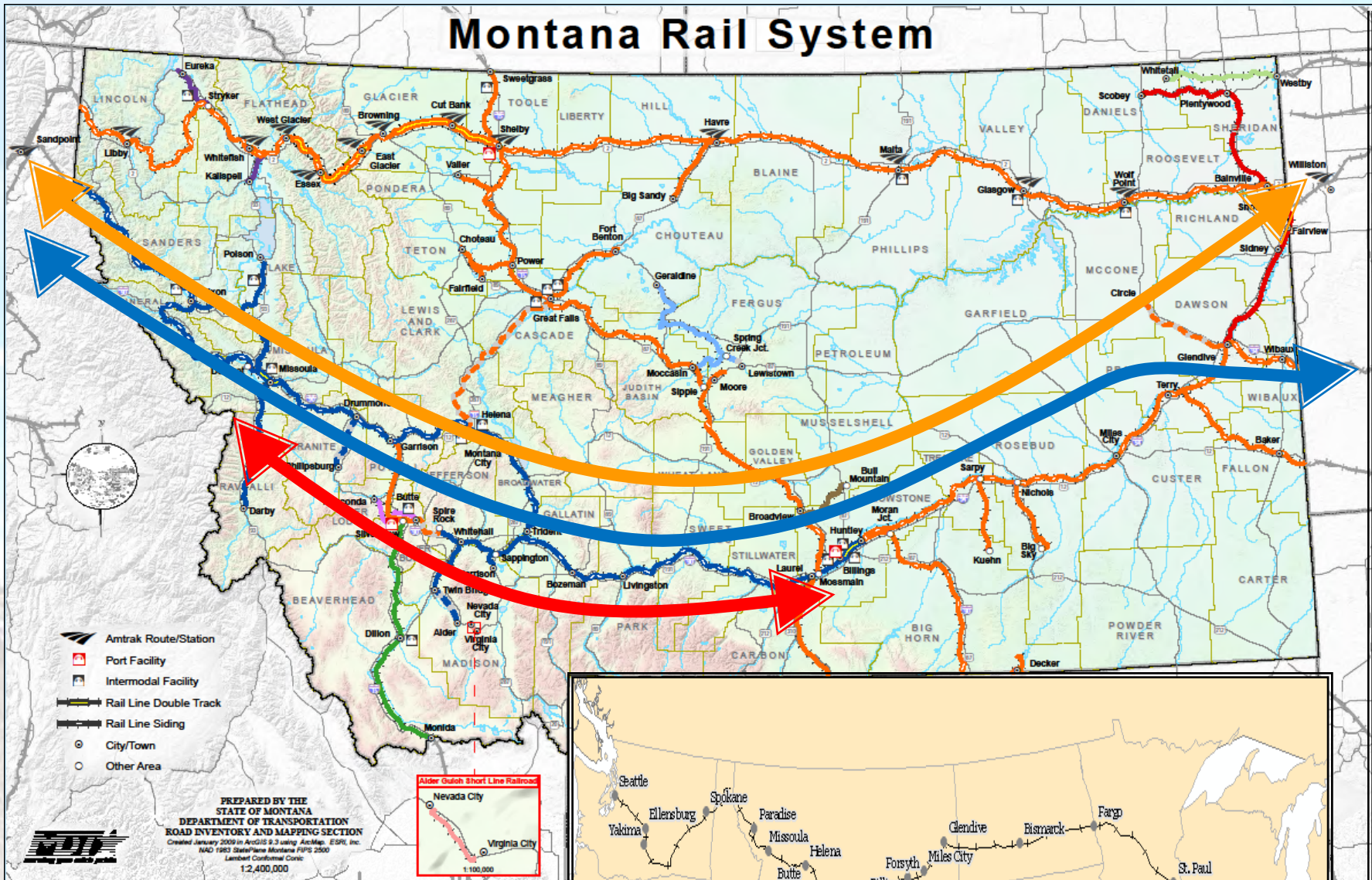
Montana Southern  
Route

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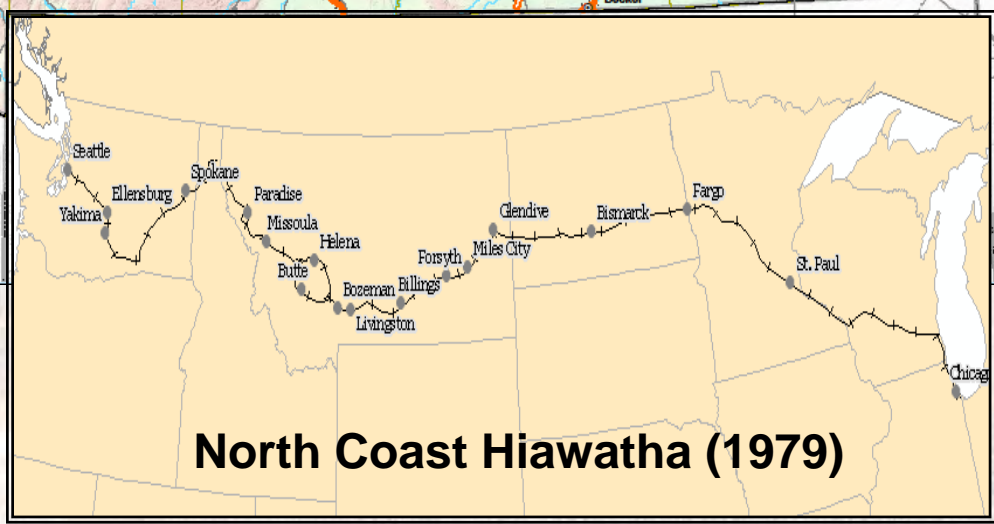
Amtrak's North Coast  
Hiawatha Study



# Montana Rail System



- Tier I: Billings-Livingston-Bozeman-Helena/Butte-Missoula. Approx 355 miles
- Tier II: intersects with Empire Builder at Williston and Sandpoint. Approx 865 miles total
- North Coast Hiawatha route: Chicago to Seattle





# North Coast Hiawatha Passenger Rail Study



# Amtrak's report to Congress

## Key Findings

- **Seven-state route from Chicago to Seattle**
- **Up front capital and other costs: \$1.04 Billion**
- **Projected ridership is 359,800 passengers per year**
- **65,800 (\$8 million in fares) diverted from the Empire Builder**
- **Annual operating loss projected at \$31.1 million for the entire seven-state route**
- **Farebox recovery: 58 percent**
  - **Empire Builder's cost recovery rate is 66 percent with a loss of 33.8 million annually.**
- **Montana 2007 population of served counties: 460,348**

# Amtrak's report to Congress

## Amtrak concludes:

- The North Coast Hiawatha would enhance Amtrak's route network and produce public benefits.
- Would require large expenditures for initial capital costs
- Amtrak would work with Federal and state partners to restore the service if policy makers decide to reintroduce and fund the Hiawatha route.
- 48 to 60 months implementation

## Amtrak recommends:

- Federal and state policymakers determine if intercity passenger rail service along the former North Coast Hiawatha route should be reintroduced and, if so, that they provide the required levels of capital and operating funding to Amtrak.



A passenger train is shown traveling through a scenic mountainous landscape. The train, consisting of a white locomotive with a blue roof and several silver passenger cars, is moving along a track that curves through a valley. The background features large, rugged mountains with patches of snow under a clear blue sky. The foreground shows a mix of dry grass and bare trees, suggesting a late autumn or winter setting. The overall scene is bright and clear.

Passenger Rail Service

Other Federal  
Activities

# Other federal Initiatives

## Passenger Rail Investment & Improvement Act of 2008

- Multi-year authorization bill
- Required Amtrak analysis of North Coast Hiawatha Route
- Projects require a 20% non-federal match
- States are waiting for federal guidance (due by October 2010)

## The American Recovery & Reinvestment Act

- Programs favor high speed rail and congested passenger rail corridors
- Funding for Montana unlikely as program favors high speed rail

## TIGER Discretionary Grants Program

- Awarded by USDOT on a competitive basis
- Grant awards between \$20 - \$300 million
- Capital investment projects in highway/bridges; public transportation; passenger and freight rail and port infrastructure
- Priority to projects that are expected to be completed within 3 years of ARRA enactment



# Conclusions

- **Under current federal law, states carry costs of new routes, including the Montana southern route**
- **We are still awaiting the Montana Southern route analysis from Amtrak**
  - **Most costs are still unknown**
- **Montana may pay a higher percentage of support for the Missoula – Billings service alone**
- **Planning for long-distance, national passenger services may be best option**
- **North Coast Hiawatha could bring about 300,000 more people yearly to Montana by rail – and reduce Empire Builder riders by 65,000**