



Scott O. Arneson
County Administrator
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509 West 5th Street
Red Wing, MN 55066

August 20th, 2024

The Honorable Amit Bose
Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Administrator Bose,

I am writing to you in support of the joint application submitted by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), and Amtrak to the Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) Restoration and Enhancement Grant Program for funds to support the operation of the Borealis passenger rail service. An award would enable the continued initiation of the Borealis and further establish the route within Amtrak's Midwest network so it may efficiently serve business and recreational travelers for years to come.

The partner states, in coordination Amtrak, embarked on the Twin Cities–Milwaukee–Chicago (TCMC) Intercity Passenger Rail Project in 2012 to address the limited passenger rail access provided between the Midwest's first (Chicago) and third (Minneapolis–St. Paul) most populated metropolitan areas and lack of service to smaller rural communities. Service modeling undertaken during the TCMC Project identified infrastructure improvements necessary for the efficient operation of a second-daily round trip on what has become the Borealis corridor. As a result of the states' investments and actions, the Borealis is now the newest passenger rail service operated by Amtrak, the first service expansion in Wisconsin in over 20 years, and first expansion of intercity rail service in Minnesota since 1975.

Prior to the Borealis launch on May 21, 2024, the only passenger rail service that operated between the Twin Cities and Chicago was Amtrak's Empire Builder which provided long-distance service between Chicago and the Pacific Northwest. The once daily round-trip of the Empire Builder service has limited capacity and provides limited passenger schedule options between Chicago Union Station and Union Depot in St. Paul. It also suffers from delays caused largely by freight train interference and speed restrictions west of St. Paul. The Borealis expands transportation options for those not traveling by personal vehicle between communities within the corridor. While commercial bus and airline services are available, they do not fully serve the smaller rural cities that have travel demand to and from the larger cities.

The Borealis is needed to expand non-automobile transportation options, fill regional transportation system gaps, respond to increases in population and economic growth, divert automobile trips to rail, provide additional schedule choice, and increase capacity by continuing to initiate daily round-trip passenger rail service between Chicago and St.

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Paul. The strong ridership on the Borealis during the first few months of services shows this need.

The Borealis is a collaborative, multi-partner effort with prior project phases including significant participation from various entities including WisDOT, MnDOT, IDOT, Amtrak, Canadian Pacific Kansas City, the La Crosse Area Planning Commission, Metra, and the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority. Support for expanded passenger rail transportation options aligns with long-range plans developed by Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Amtrak, as well as regional planning agencies along the service corridor. Benefits of the service, including economic development and expanded access to safe and efficient transportation, are felt across communities of all sizes through the Borealis corridor. Beyond servicing the major population centers of Chicago, the Twin Cities, and Milwaukee, Borealis trains provide much needed access to smaller communities in rural areas.

Federal funding would greatly reduce the barriers to continue the successful initiation of the state-supported Borealis service as the partner states study new and expanded passenger rail services through the FRA's Corridor ID program. This service poses limited risk as requested funding would only be used to supplement initial operation costs. On behalf of Goodhue County, I respectfully request that the Borealis passenger rail service be given full and thoughtful consideration for a Restoration and Enhancement grant award.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott O. Arneson".

Scott Arneson
Goodhue County Administrator

Cc:
County Board of Commissioners

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