



March 5, 2024

Deputy Administrator Amit Bose
US Department of Transportation
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Deputy Administrator Bose,

The City of Box Elder is writing to express its strong support for a major investment in rail transportation infrastructure. We hereby provide full support while formally requesting the US Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, and Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Deputy Administrator Amit Bose create a formal FRA Working Group focused on the Greater Northwest Region of the United States.

Box Elder, South Dakota is a community nestled at *The Gateway to the Black Hills*. Founded in 1907 as a whistle stop for the Chicago & North Western Railroad line, Box Elder is home to Ellsworth Air Force Base. Currently, Ellsworth hosts the 28th B-1B Lancer Bomb Wing as well as the 89th Attack Drone Squadron and the Air Force's Financial Services Center which provides support to 400,000 personnel worldwide. In March 2019, Ellsworth Air Force Base was selected as the home for the new B-21 Raider stealth bomber training unit along with two operational squadrons.

Already one of the region's fastest-growing communities, Box Elder's growth has skyrocketed following the announcement of the B-21 Raider stealth bomber mission. Construction is booming in the community for housing, commercial, educational, and support facilities for the new expanded mission. What began as a quick railroad stop has now become the 10th largest city in South Dakota (2020 Census, 2023 est.). Box Elder is the fastest-growing city in South Dakota with a population of over 12,500. With all this activity, it is estimated that our population will be near 16,000 by 2029 (this does NOT include the 8,500 Ellsworth AFB personnel and their families currently *and* the additional 3,000 B-21 bomber personnel to be assigned in the future).

But that's not all...as *The Gateway to the Black Hills*, Box Elder and its surrounding communities see nearly 4 million visitors each year traveling to our area. These visitors spent more than \$1.8 billion in the region in 2021 (National Park Service, SD Department of Tourism 2021). This constitutes almost half of *all* visitor spending in the state.



Much of rural America is underserved by long-distance intercity passenger rail options, this is particularly true for the entire state of South Dakota. The Greater Northwest Passenger Rail Working Group, modeled after the Congressionally established Gulf Coast Working Group, should be convened to study, and develop service plans for restoring passenger rail service within the region. The goal of the Working Group is to further the economic and social well-being of rural America while providing enhanced connectivity for the national long-distance passenger rail system thereby making the overall system more robust and resilient.

The City of Box Elder believes it is time to strengthen our local, state, and national economies with better transportation mobility. Fast, frequent, and affordable trains create strong social, family, and business ties by making travel easy and productive. Trains give people a safe way to move around at a low cost - and with a small carbon footprint. Trains create a more enjoyable and prosperous life by supporting walkable and more financially viable cities and towns. The routes to be considered should link and serve common communities, large and small, across states within the Greater Northwest Region. We believe that such service will be transformative, and will provide major economic, environmental, and equity benefits to our community while also connecting the tribal nations of South Dakota.

Our community is excited to learn what passenger rail service can bring to our area. As we continue to grow our economy along with our population and its diversity, mobility options and transportation equity necessitate multiple alternative modes of transportation. We request that you support the next steps required to provide passenger rail service by forming this FRA Working Group to develop cost-benefit and economic impact analyses and service plans.

Sincerely,

Larry Larson
Mayor
City of Box Elder