

Executive Summary

ES.1 Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study Requirements

Congress directed the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to conduct the Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study (the Study) in Section 22214 of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021 (Pub. L. 117-58). The Study evaluated the restoration of daily intercity passenger rail (49 U.S.C. 24102(4)) service along Amtrak long-distance routes that occur on a non-daily basis or have been discontinued. Long-distance passenger rail service is defined by statute as routes of more than 750 miles between endpoints operated by Amtrak (49 U.S.C. 24102(5)).

Terms presented in **bold** and *italics* are defined at the beginning of this report in the Definitions section.

Congress also directed FRA to evaluate potential new Amtrak long-distance routes, with specific attention to routes in service as of April 1971 but not continued by Amtrak, when considering expansions of long-distance service. For potential new routes, the legislation directs FRA to consider whether new long-distance routes link **large and small communities**, advance the well-being of **rural areas**, provide **enhanced connectivity**, and reflect public engagement and support for restored passenger rail service.

In conducting the Study, FRA was required, through working groups or other forums, to consult with Amtrak, states along relevant routes, regional planning organizations, municipalities and communities along relevant routes, host railroads, organizations representing onboard Amtrak employees, nonprofit organizations representing Amtrak passengers, relevant regional passenger rail authorities, and federally recognized Indian Tribes.

Section 22214 directs FRA to submit a report to Congress not later than 2 years after the date of enactment of IIJA (November 15, 2021). FRA has worked on the Study since 2022, completing the required analyses for the Study and conducting 24 regional working group meetings with stakeholders in 21 cities across the country. The Study received over 50,000 stakeholder and public comments, the overwhelming majority of which indicated strong support for long-distance services and/or passenger rail in general. FRA developed an Interim Report to Congress as an overview of progress and findings for the Study as of June 2023, which was submitted to Congress in January 2024.



The Study received over 50,000 stakeholder and public comments, showing strong support for passenger rail.

This document is the Final Report to Congress. This report includes:

- Preferred options for restoring, enhancing, or expanding long-distance service.
- Prioritized inventory of capital projects and other actions that are required to restore, enhance, or expand the service, including high-level cost estimates for those projects and actions.
- Potential federal and non-federal funding sources to restore, enhance, or expand the service.
- Estimated costs and public benefits of restoring, enhancing, or expanding intercity passenger rail transportation in the region impacted for each preferred option.
- Recommendations for methods by which Amtrak could work with local communities and organizations to improve public use of intercity passenger rail service along each route.

More details on the report requirements can be found in Chapter 1.

Consistent with IIJA Section 22214, the Study focused solely on new or restored Amtrak long-distance services and daily service on the two Amtrak long-distance routes that currently operate with less than daily frequencies (Cardinal and Sunset Limited). It did not consider changes to service for existing daily Amtrak long-distance services, Amtrak state-supported service, Amtrak Northeast Corridor (NEC) service, high-speed rail, or other types of passenger rail service.

ES.2 Study Opportunities and Challenges

Opportunities

FRA is building the foundation for a long-term rail program, bringing world-class passenger rail service to regions across the country and growing a safer, cleaner, and more equitable rail system. Long-distance services are an important component of these goals, but they are only one piece of an integrated and enhanced passenger rail system. Along with other passenger rail programs and efforts, including those established in IIJA, there are more opportunities to develop passenger rail than ever before, including opportunities to grow essential connections to heavily populated areas, and opportunities to strengthen connections with small and rural communities that have borne the burden of past passenger rail service reductions.

Long-distance services are an important component of bringing world-class passenger rail service to regions across the country, but they are only one piece of an integrated and enhanced passenger rail system.

Long-distance passenger rail service reductions over the past 50 years have resulted in some communities losing passenger rail transportation options, as well as the related economic and social benefits of those connections. Some previous studies have examined restructuring routes or eliminating services in the attempt to reduce federal operating financial support for Amtrak long-distance services (DOT 1979). The Study, as required under IIJA, instead looked at options for restoring, enhancing, or expanding long-distance service.

Through the Study, FRA identified preferred long-distance route options consistent with the requirements of IIJA. The preferred long-distance route options reflect current travel demand, as well as opportunities to increase passenger rail access to **rural areas** and **transportation-disadvantaged communities**, increase connectivity with existing and future passenger rail services, consider the impacts of previously discontinued long-distance passenger rail service, and address significant stakeholder input over the life of the Study.

The selected preferred route options could increase access to intercity passenger rail for millions of Americans and create a more robust integrated network. They could create new and increased connections with Amtrak intercity passenger rail, including other long-distance routes, state-supported routes, and NEC routes, as well as other modal options. More details on the identification of selected preferred route options can be found in Chapter 5.

FRA received significant stakeholder feedback related to the existing long-distance network as well as on other intercity passenger rail expansion efforts. This feedback and interest highlight an opportunity to develop a broader intercity passenger rail vision that assesses all potential market and service needs, including corridor services, through an integrated national network. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the feedback received. Chapter 10 provides details on potential future opportunities to promote a more integrated, cohesive vision for rail service that includes analysis of multimodal transportation needs and opportunities in rural and small urban areas.



The selected preferred route options identified in the Study could increase access to intercity passenger rail for millions of Americans and create a more robust integrated network. They allow for new and increased connections with Amtrak intercity passenger rail, including other long-distance routes, state-supported routes, and NEC routes, as well as other modal options.

Challenges

FRA identified significant challenges in implementing the selected preferred route options identified in the Study. These challenges include:

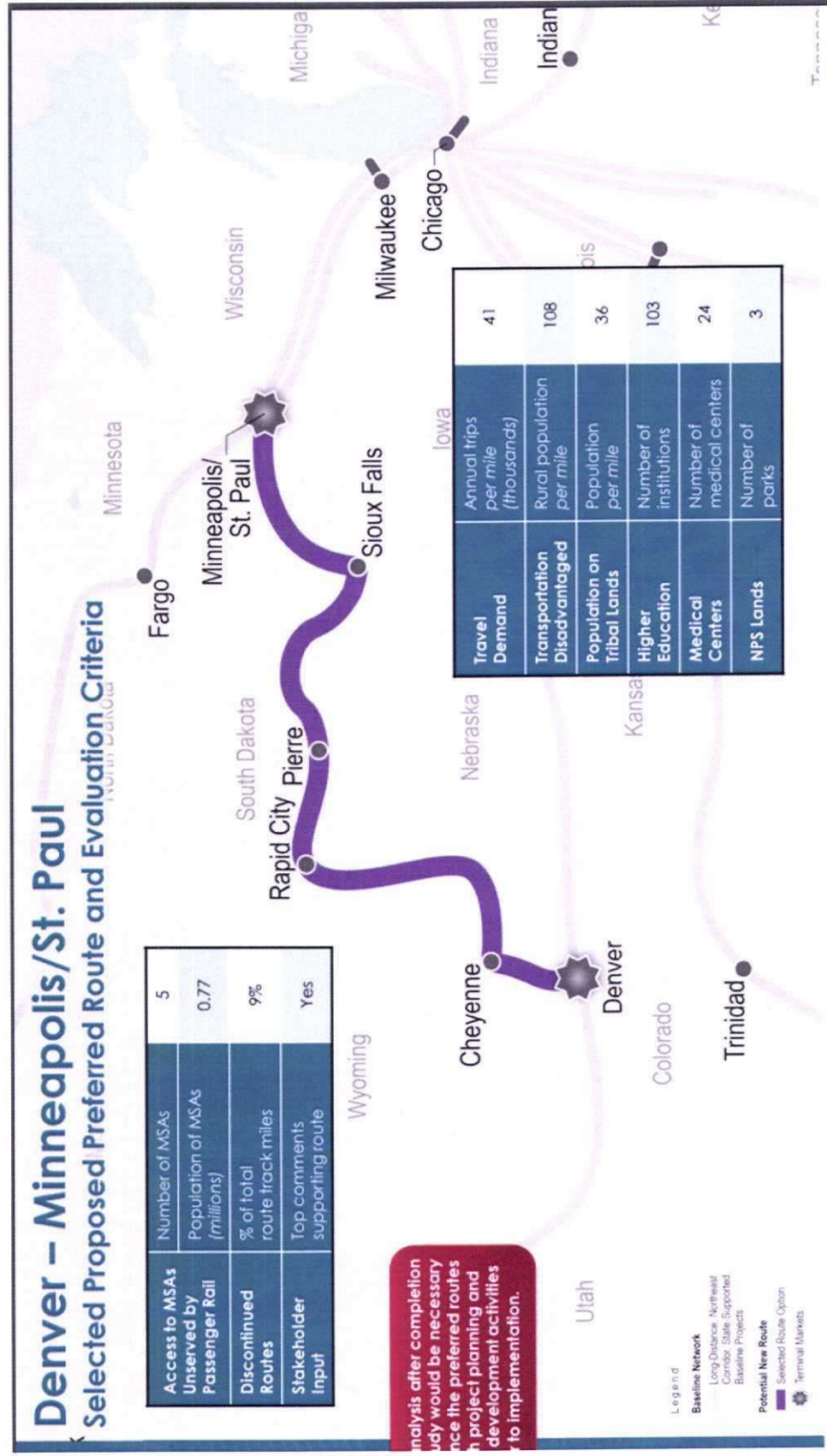
- **Planning Challenges:** The Study fulfills a crucial early step to identify actions needed to restore or enhance long-distance service or expand the long-distance route network. But further analysis would be necessary to advance selected preferred route options through project planning, including time-intensive detailed engineering work and cost estimates for capital and infrastructure projects needed for new passenger rail service. In this Study, FRA identified capital cost estimates for selected passenger service-required capital projects. However, FRA did not quantify the full range of capital projects that may be needed, including potentially significant projects related to track capacity and grade crossing improvements. Although the Study meets the requirements of Section 22214, this effort should not preclude other planning efforts that may assess long-distance service changes.
- **Funding Challenges:** Existing intercity passenger rail grant programs could potentially fund limited capital or infrastructure projects associated with restoring, enhancing, or expanding long-distance routes. However, the scope and scale of these passenger rail grant programs are insufficient to fund capital needs for the existing national network and are not structured to meet the significant funding needs associated with new long-distance passenger rail service. Further, the current operations of long-distance routes do not receive any state or local contributions for operations and require significant federal funding, and the federal government would need to commit to ongoing operations funds for new routes, on an annual basis.
- **Governance Challenges:** Through financial support for operations, as well as many related statutory requirements, the federal government is the primary sponsor of Amtrak's long-distance services, and Amtrak is responsible for operations and related business decisions. Unlike state-supported services, states do not participate in any cost-sharing for the operations of long-distance routes. Additionally, unlike NEC and state-supported services, long-distance service does not have a committee to serve as a forum for stakeholders to provide feedback for the purpose of improving Amtrak long-distance service, including opportunities for planning and service efficiencies. The Amtrak long-distance network has not changed significantly for several decades; the roles and responsibilities for long-distance network changes or expansion need to be established and/or clarified, including identifying the parties responsible for planning, funding, and construction related to new service.

▪ Operational Challenges

- **On-Time Performance:** Long-standing issues related to on-time performance and delays on Amtrak long-distance routes have reduced reliability for passengers and increased operating costs. These service challenges would likely need to be addressed in the implementation of potential new long-distance service.
- **Nighttime Only Service:** Since all Amtrak long-distance routes are over 750 miles in length and have schedules that exceed 12 hours, some communities are only served by long-distance routes during the night. Although long-distance routes might be the only intercity passenger rail service for some communities, that benefit is minimized in communities with only nighttime service.
- **Access and Infrastructure Improvements to Host Railroad Lines:** Amtrak long-distance routes primarily operate on host railroad tracks, which Amtrak does not own. Except in emergency situations, Amtrak services have preference over freight transportation using a rail line (49 U.S.C. 24308(c)). The existing framework for Amtrak and host railroad engagement regarding access and responsibilities regarding infrastructure improvements is not always clear, which can complicate implementation of new long-distance service.
- **Fleet Availability and Industry Capacity:** The existing Amtrak fleet of vehicles is insufficient to undertake a significant expansion of long-distance service. Additional funding and staffing would be required to build, operate, and maintain an expanded network and to provide additional vehicles.

An expanded discussion on the Study's opportunities and challenges can be found in Section 1.5.

Comparison of Two Corridors within the FRA Study



Chicago – Miami

Selected Proposed Preferred Route and Evaluation Criteria

Analysis after completion would be necessary to determine if the preferred routes for project planning and development activities implementation.

Travel Demand	Annual trips per mile (thousands)	151
Transportation Disadvantaged	Rural population per mile	1,617
Population on Tribal Lands	Population per mile	22
Higher Education	Number of institutions	317
Medical Centers	Number of medical centers	69
NPS Lands	Number of parks	16

Access to MSAs Unserved by Passenger Rail	Number of MSAs	16
Discontinued Routes	Population of MSAs (millions)	6.96
Stakeholder Input	% of total route track miles	15%
	Top comments supporting route	Yes

- Legend**
- Baseline Network**
 - Long Distance, Northeast Corridor, State-Supported, Baseline Projects
 - Potential New Route**
 - Selected Route Option
 - Terminal Markets**

