

Missoula County Media Release

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Missoula County to Host Virtual Summit on Restoring Passenger Rail to Southern Montana

Missoula County will host a virtual Montana Passenger Rail Summit on Thursday, Sept. 17, to educate and advocate for the restoration of passenger rail service to southern Montana.

The summit is open to elected officials, government staff, business and tourism professionals, and anyone interested in restoring passenger rail service to southern Montana and increasing rail connectivity across the region.

Organizers are still finalizing the agenda, but confirmed speakers include:

- Elaine Clegg, city council president, Boise, Idaho
- Robert Eaton, director, State Supported Service and Government Affairs, Amtrak
- Jordan Hess, councilman, City of Missoula
- Jim Mathews, president and CEO, Rail Passengers Association
- Roger Millar, secretary of transportation, Washington State Department of Transportation
- Andrea Olsen, representative, Montana House
- Beth Osborne, director, Transportation for America
- John-Robert Smith, chairman, Transportation for America
- John Spain, vice chairman, Southern Rail Commission
- Dave Strohmaier, commissioner, Missoula County

“Restoring passenger rail service to southern Montana would be transformative for the state — economically, socially and environmentally,” Strohmaier said. “As we recover from the effects of COVID-19, it’s more critical than ever to make smart transportation investments that further community resiliency. Passenger rail is key to realizing that vision, and there is no reason why Montana shouldn’t be a leader in making this a reality.”

Strohmaier, with the support of the Missoula Board of County Commissioners and others, has spearheaded the current renewed effort to restore passenger rail service to the southern part of the state, similar to the North Coast Hiawatha Amtrak route that served Montana until 1979. In addition to providing long-distance transportation within the state, passenger rail restoration would provide for greater connectivity regionally, with possible connections to Seattle, Chicago, Denver and Salt Lake City.

State statute allows for counties to create a regional rail authority as a framework for administering and funding passenger rail service. Earlier this month, Missoula County commissioners finalized a resolution to create the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority, and commissioners from Dawson, Park and Sanders counties have expressed their intent to join.

“Bringing passenger rail back to southern Montana would be a game changer for our state, but it is no small task,” Hess said. “We need broad support and coordination from cities and towns across Montana. The summit will be an opportunity to add to the growing chorus of voices supporting passenger rail.”

Pre-registration for the virtual summit is now available at <https://montanapassengerrailsummit.org/>. Participants who pre-register will receive an email update when summit details are confirmed and full registration is available. The summit was originally scheduled to take place in-person in April but was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For more information, contact Strohmaier at 406-529-5580 or dstrohmaier@missoulacounty.us or Hess at 406-552-4050 or jhess@ci.missoula.mt.us.

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