

Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority

633 Court Street, Reading, PA 19601-4310



July 15, 2022

Document Management Facility
United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
West Building Ground Floor, Room W12-140
Washington, DC 20590-0001

Re: Docket No. FRA 2022-0031

To whom it may concern:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an expression of interest on this docket, pertaining to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)'s Corridor Identification and Development Program (CIDP), as established by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (P.L. 117-58).

The newly-formed Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority (SRPRA) submits this expression of interest in participating in the CIDP to advance the restoration of passenger rail service from the City of Philadelphia, PA to the City of Reading, PA, with service to New York City and Washington, D. C. along the existing Northeast Corridor.

The Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority

The Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority was created in 2022 by Berks, Chester, and Montgomery Counties to facilitate the restoration of passenger rail service to Reading from Philadelphia, with stops in Phoenixville and Pottstown. The creation of a new authority, with initial operating funds of \$100,000 per county, demonstrates the commitment and public support for the restoration of this passenger rail service.

The creation of the authority is the culmination of efforts by a wide range of people and communities in all three counties to see passenger rail service restored.

Need for Service

Passenger rail service will greatly improve the transportation system in this rapidly growing and congested corridor by offering an alternative to driving. There are few, if any, public transportation choices in this corridor, and Reading has been relatively isolated from the wider public transportation system that would connect it to other cities.

In addition, the proposed stations for this intercity passenger rail service will be located in old, industrial communities with a higher share of minority and low-income households. The City of Reading, for

example, has a population of 95,000 people, with the majority non-white and 31% of the households living in poverty. The Reading metropolitan area has a population of 419,000 people.

Feasibility of Service

There have been a variety of studies and plans demonstrating that service from Philadelphia to Reading is feasible, with trains using existing SEPTA tracks from Philadelphia to Norristown and Norfolk Southern tracks from Norristown to Reading. This service is listed in the *2020 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan*. PennDOT then followed up with a specific analysis of this corridor in its *2020 Reading to Philadelphia Passenger Rail Analysis*, which showed that intercity passenger rail can be restored fairly straightforwardly since the service will be using existing, active rail lines.

We know that using the Norfolk Southern rail lines will create the need for a feasibility study demonstrating there is capacity for both freight and passenger rail. Fortunately, the Norfolk Southern lines that would be used are not a major route for the railroad. In addition, we are happy to note that \$750,000 was set aside in the federal spending bill for this analysis and any necessary environmental assessments.

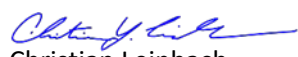
The SRPRA looks forward to engaging the FRA on next steps with the CIDP, providing additional information regarding the proposed SRC corridor(s) for the program and how they:


- Have been actively considered and identified as part of regional planning documents;
- Advance environmental, roadway congestion mitigation, equity, emergency response, and other notable benefits to the interstate region;
- Develop a competitive transportation mode and market that is sustainable to be managed by the interstate compact;
- Cultivate economic, social, cultural, and labor opportunities;
- Increase rural and marginalized community connectivity to the region's multimodal transportation network; and
- Advance the vision of Amtrak's national rail network.

The SRPRA looks forward to being invited to submit a corridor(s) proposal, once the FRA has prepared supplemental guidance in applying to be in the CIDP. The SRPRA can be contacted via Christian Leinbach, chair, at CLEinbach@CountyofBerks.com or 610-478-6136 Ext. 3/Ext. 6127

We look forward to submitting a full proposal in the near future.

Sincerely,


Christian Leinbach
Chair, SRPRA
Berks County Commissioner


Marian Moskowitz
Vice-Chair, SRPRA
Chester County Commissioner


Kenneth Lawrence
Treasurer, SRPRA
Montgomery County Commissioner