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Governor Wolf: Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Allows PennDOT, Norfolk Southern to Move Toward Improved Freight and Passenger Rail Service in Western Pa.

Pittsburgh, PA – Governor Tom Wolf and Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) Deputy Secretary for Multimodal Transportation Jennie Louwerse were joined by Federal Railroad Administration Administrator Amit Bose, Norfolk Southern (NS) Regional Vice President Rudy Husband and local officials today to announce that the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) has paved the way for movement toward improved freight and passenger-rail service between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh.

“Freight rail is a core piece of Pennsylvania’s infrastructure, and this is the rare opportunity to improve an important rail corridor while laying the groundwork for more passenger-rail service in the future,” Gov. Wolf said. “Western Pennsylvania has wanted more passenger-rail service for years and I’m excited that we can immediately leverage the federal infrastructure plan for mobility and economic benefits in the communities served by this rail line.”

Due to the BIL’s passenger-rail investments, PennDOT and NS will now collaborate on the operating agreement and finalize the improvements required to increase passenger-rail service on the NS-owned corridor west of Harrisburg. The engineering and construction will stem from a NS [operational feasibility study](#) identifying improvements required to eliminate eight chokepoints and to allow freight and passenger trains to operate without conflicting with each other.

“We are excited to move to the next phase with Norfolk Southern and make these important improvements happen as quickly as possible,” Louwerse said. “The federal infrastructure law plugged a significant hole in our ability to meet these critical freight and passenger needs.”

The improvements can begin when PennDOT and NS finalize an operating agreement including the project scope, how freight and passenger operations will both safely use the corridor, compensation for the use of NS’s assets, and adequate liability protection. PennDOT will fund the agreement by redirecting state Multimodal Transportation Fund dollars because part of the BIL’s funding is intended to replace train sets on the Amtrak passenger-rail network. PennDOT had been setting aside funding to meet requirements from a 2008 federal law which would have required approximately \$350 million from Pennsylvania toward train set costs.

“This public-private partnership is the kind of collaboration necessary to maximize Bipartisan Infrastructure Law investments to improve and expand passenger rail service while also strengthening supply chain fluidity,” said FRA Administrator Bose. “Freight and passenger rail has and can co-exist to move goods and people, resulting in meaningful benefits to local economies and communities.”

After an agreement is finalized, work could begin on several improvements anticipated to be completed over an estimated five years of construction. The additional service will begin after these improvements are made.

“NS has had an outstanding partnership with PennDOT over the years, and we hope to be successful adding a second round-trip passenger train between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh,” said Mike McClellan, senior vice president & chief strategy officer for Norfolk Southern. “Many critical issues must be resolved before this new service becomes a reality, including the preservation of our ability to serve present and future freight customers, which translates directly to jobs and economic development opportunities in Pennsylvania.”

The Harrisburg, Lewistown, Huntingdon, Tyrone, Altoona, Johnstown, Latrobe, Greensburg, and Pittsburgh train stops are on NS’s Pittsburgh Line, which is part of the Premier Corridor, a main artery for double-stack intermodal traffic moving between Chicago and metropolitan New York. It is one of the busiest and fastest links on the railroad’s network, with major terminals in Toledo, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Harrisburg and the Lehigh Valley. In a typical year, more than half of NS’ time-sensitive parcel and less-than-truckload shipments use the route at some point. NS trains deliver or pick up freight at 140-plus stations along the corridor, serving more than 800 customers.

“Our railways are vitally important to Southwestern Pennsylvania’s economy—transporting goods to the rest of the Nation and connecting people to the Commonwealth,” said U.S. Senator Bob Casey. “Thanks to the infrastructure law, we’re going to be able to make critical improvements to both freight and passenger rail. This news is a win for travelers and businesses who rely on our railways.”

“I strongly supported the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in Congress because I knew the investments in infrastructure it would make would greatly benefit Pennsylvania,” Congressman Michael Doyle said. “Our economy depends on rail to move thousands of passengers and millions of tons of cargo a year, and the investments announced today will improve Pennsylvania’s railroad capacity significantly in the coming years. I’m also pleased that the new infrastructure law will result in more round-trip rail service between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg.”

“Most people just think about roads and bridges when we talk about infrastructure and that’s important - but the Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal is so much more,” said Senate Democratic Leader Jay Costa. “It includes every mode of transportation and invests in a multi modal system across this country. I’m looking forward to seeing these projects come to fruition in Western Pennsylvania and the whole state, as someone who travels it frequently.”

“The citizens of Pennsylvania are once again the beneficiaries of President Biden’s ability to deliver on his promises,” said Senator Wayne Fontana. “Maximizing this once-in-a-generation investment in our infrastructure will require coordination at all levels of government, along with industry and Pennsylvania’s quality union workforce. Robust rail infrastructure in Pennsylvania, and specifically Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania, is essential to our 21st century economy.”

Pennsylvania has 65 operating railroads – the most of any state in the country – and ranks fifth in total track mileage with more than 5,600 miles. The [2020 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan](#) reported that in 2017, 193.5 million tons of freight in 4.9 million railcars moved over the state’s rail transportation system.

More information on PennDOT's efforts to improve intercity passenger rail in Pennsylvania is available on the [Plan the Keystone website](#).

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