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GULF COAST PASSENGER RAIL RECEIVES FEDERAL OPERATING FUNDS Grant Bolsters New Orleans to Mobile Passenger Rail Operations

BATON ROUGE, LA, August 29, 2019 — In an announcement by Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao, passenger rail restoration efforts along the Gulf Coast received a \$4.36 million award through the Restoration and Enhancement (R&E) Grants Program. This federal grant will fund operating expenses for the first year of service along the new rail line and leverages commitments of approximately \$1.4 million from the states of Louisiana and Mississippi.

This award follows a recent \$33 million federal grant award through the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) program to complete major infrastructure and capital improvements necessary for service restoration. Together, these investments confirm the importance of restoring passenger rail service between New Orleans, LA and Mobile, AL and show confidence in expected strong ridership.

Securing operating funds for the restored passenger rail line has been a bipartisan effort of the Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama Southern Rail Commission (SRC) members, the populace of the states, Governors Phil Bryant and John Bel Edwards, and Congress. The SRC submitted the successful R&E grant application with the assistance of Transportation for America.

Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant voiced his continued support for regional passenger rail, noting, "This service will provide jobs, economic development opportunities, and improved connections for residents and additional travel options for tourists. If implemented properly, passenger service will not only create economic success for the Gulf Coast states but will bring connectivity and build communities...I am very encouraged by the possibilities passenger rail service may provide for Mississippi and the entire Gulf Coast."

Governor John Bel Edwards reiterated Louisiana's investment in the project: "This restored service will continue the economic recovery of communities devastated by Hurricane Katrina, enhance corridor mobility and safety, and allow for safer and more efficient hurricane evacuations by providing a daily passenger service that is business and tourism friendly."

SRC Chairman John Spain celebrated the R&E award announcement, saying "Since the demise of passenger rail service in 2005 due to Hurricane Katrina, the State of Louisiana and its citizens have dreamed of a day with restored passenger service along the Gulf Coast. This dream got one step closer to reality thanks to the FRA's award of the FY17 R&E grant. The Southern Rail Commission must acknowledge the hard work of the Transportation for America team to see that we were well-positioned to receive this award. With continued federal, state and local support, the Gulf Coast states will soon enjoy the benefits of high-quality, daily passenger rail."

Mississippi Commissioner Knox Ross praised his state's commitment to passenger rail restoration, saying: "We owe this strong federal support for Gulf Coast passenger rail to Mississippi Senator Roger Wicker and his hard work to create and authorize the R&E grant program. I also want to recognize the contributions of the late Senator Thad Cochran for his repeated appropriations support for the R&E program and others. His legacy of support is continued by the work of Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith, who also appropriated funding to the R&E program. Today's grant would also not be possible without the financial commitments made by the Mississippi Department of Transportation, led by Commission Chairman Dick Hall and endorsed by Governor Phil Bryant."

The SRC hopes the state of Alabama will support passenger rail restoration by providing matching funds for the next grant cycle so service can be extended to downtown Mobile. Wiley Blankenship, SRC Commissioner from Mobile, AL noted, "Alabama's Southern Rail Commissioners welcome this positive affirmation for the restoration of passenger rail service between New Orleans and my home of Mobile. I look forward to working with my fellow commissioners

and Alabama state leadership to provide the necessary support to leverage additional federal operating funds to make Gulf Coast rail a reality.”

Dick Hall, Chairman of the Mississippi Department of Transportation Commission, said, “We’re thrilled that Mississippi’s sustained commitment to passenger rail along the Gulf Coast received this strong financial support from the FRA. Restoring passenger rail between New Orleans and Mobile will continue the economic recovery of Mississippi communities devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Daily passenger rail service will greatly improve mobility, safety, business and tourism up and down the Gulf Coast.”

Tom King, Mississippi’s Southern District transportation commissioner, said, “I am so pleased to receive another affirmation from the federal government that signals their support for passenger rail in my home district. The importance of connecting Mississippi cities like Bay St. Louis, Gulfport, Biloxi, and Pascagoula by rail speaks to the vibrancy of these fantastic places. I’m excited for Mississippians to benefit from passenger rail and for tourists to discover the beautiful Gulf Coast.”

John Robert Smith, the chairman of Transportation for America and former mayor of Meridian, MS, said of the R&E award, “Investment in passenger rail reaps outsized benefits—not just in cities connected to rail, but across entire regions. We hope that the success of Gulf Coast passenger rail will serve as inspiration and a model to potential passenger rail projects across the country.”

The SRC also recognizes the support of Amtrak, which has shown tremendous support for Gulf Coast passenger rail restoration and has been a critical partner in these efforts. “This grant demonstrates the national priority being given to new Amtrak service along the Gulf Coast,” said Joe McHugh, Amtrak Vice President for state-supported services. “Momentum is building and Amtrak is working with the SRC, elected officials in the three states and other stakeholders to get the service from the drawing board to the tracks.”

About the Southern Rail Commission

Created by Congress in 1982, the Southern Rail Commission (SRC) was designed to engage and inform public and private rail interests to support and influence Southeast rail initiatives. The SRC is led by governor-appointed commissioners from Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, and promotes the safe, reliable and efficient movement of people and goods to enhance economic development along rail corridors; provides transportation choices; and facilitates emergency evacuation routes.

About Transportation for America

Transportation for America is an alliance of elected, business, and civic leaders from communities across the country, united to ensure that states and the federal government step up to invest in smart, homegrown, locally-driven transportation solutions — because these are the investments that hold the key to our future economic prosperity. T4America is a program of Smart Growth America. www.t4america.org