October 1, 2020

Lewis and Clark County Commissioners  
City County Building, Rm. 345  
316 N. Park Ave.  
Helena, MT 59623

cc: Mayor Collins and City Commissioners  
City County Building, Rm. 323  
316 N. Park Ave.  
Helena, MT 59623

Dear Lewis and Clark County Commissioners,

The Helena Citizens Conservation Board, an advisory board to the Helena City Commission, has become aware of efforts to establish the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority, to consider revival of a southern Montana passenger rail route.

We are also aware that Broadwater, Jefferson, and Silver Bow County Commissioners have already passed the joint resolution to establish the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority. They, along with six other counties, have already surpassed the minimum of two counties required to establish the Authority. Two other counties along the potential passenger rail route have expressed interest in joining the Authority.

There are myriad benefits associated with reestablishing a southern Montana passenger rail route. These benefits include providing a transportation connection between most of Montana's major cities for those unable or unwilling to drive, supplementing or replacing intercity air travel in decline, providing new jobs—directly and indirectly, increasing investment near stations, increasing tax bases, increasing tourism, and increasing the attractiveness to potential residents of communities along and adjacent to the route.

Of primary interest to our Board—beyond all these benefits to our community—are the carbon emission savings associated with passenger rail transportation. One recent estimate* is that passenger rail emits from about a quarter to a half of the CO2 emissions per passenger as driving a single-occupancy vehicle, and about one third to two thirds of a short-haul domestic air flight (not accounting for secondary additional effects from high-altitude emissions).

We believe that Lewis and Clark County should be involved from the beginning in the formation of the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority, so that as decisions are made about route, systems, costs, and fares our County is represented, and Montana’s Capital City is explicitly a stop and desirable destination on the route.

To that end, we urge you, our Lewis and Clark County Commissioners, to indicate an interest in joining the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority, and quickly begin a public process of gathering input from County citizens leading to a decision on passing the joint resolution to become a member county.
Sincerely,

Richard Sloan
Richard Sloan, Vice Chair