Board of County Commissioners
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Prairie County
Montana

March 27, 2024

After long discussions, the Prairie County Board of Commissioners have unanimously voted to opt out as a member of the Big Sky Rail Authority (BSRA). This notification letter could just stop here, but we feel a need to explain because of our respect for the other members of the authority.

All traveling and commerce infrastructure in Montana is somewhat subsidized by Federal dollars. The Prairie County Commissioners feel that additional mass transit, like (BSRA) passenger rail, may very well start clashing with other Federally funded means of transportation causing more hardship in the future due to competition for Federal aid from limited resources. In other words, we feel that in the future some means of Federally subsidized transportation will loose out. Maybe it will be the northern route of Amtrak. Or maybe it will be Cape Air from Billings to Havre, Glasgow, Wolf Point, Glendive and Sidney. Or maybe even the southern route.

We are an older community that uses medical hubs frequently and that would be the top priority to get to and from. It's just over 2 hours and 175 miles to a regional medical center by car. If one wanted to take the train it would cost $45 for round trip ticket. Uber to medical facility from depot $10. Uber to motel because you would probably have to stay overnight $10. 3 meals at state rate $33.50. Room $170 because no "same day" round trip. Uber to train $10. Minimum cost: $278.50 or 80 cents a mile and 2 days.

Now by car. 350 miles round trip and 2 meals ($25) = $259.50 (state rates) or 70 cents a mile and 1 day.

The math speaks for itself and the above is all assuming that Amtrak is "on time".

In conclusion, the opportunity costs are to great.

Todd Devlin: Chair, Prairie County Commissioners

Christine Keltner: Member, Prairie County Commissioners

Dennis Teske: Member, Prairie County Commissioners