TO: City Council
FROM: Michael Zuzel, Mayor’s Office
RESOLUTION NUMBER: R-232-09
DATE: August 4, 2009
SUBJECT: Support for return of inter-city passenger rail service to Boise

ACTION REQUIRED: Adoption of non-binding resolution expressing the City of Boise’s support for the resumption of Amtrak passenger rail service along the Pioneer line through Boise; offering to assist Idaho’s representatives in Congress and other interested parties in effecting the Pioneer’s return; and calling upon the federal government to make passenger rail an important part of the nation’s transportation system.

RECOMMENDATION: Approve resolution as proposed.

BACKGROUND: Amtrak discontinued the Pioneer line in 1997 for financial reasons, leaving Idaho’s capital city with no regularly scheduled inter-city passenger rail service. Congress recently appropriated $13 billion over five years for passenger rail around the country, including a feasibility study for restoring the Pioneer line. This resolution outlines the wide range of benefits generated by passenger rail and expresses the City of Boise’s support for resumption of that service to our community.

FISCAL IMPACT/BUDGET IMPLICATIONS: The City of Boise currently leases its portion of the Boise Cut-Off rail line to Union Pacific for storage of rail cars. The lease generates $40,656.00 per month in revenue. The rail line would no longer be available for this use if Amtrak were to utilize the line for passenger service. However, staff continues to explore opportunities for utilization of the line for other revenue-generating activities, including freight and passenger traffic.

ATTACHMENT: Resolution.
RESOLUTION NO. ____________

BY THE COUNCIL: BISTERFELDT, CLEGG, EBERLE, JORDAN, SHEALY AND TIBBS

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BOISE, IDAHO, SUPPORTING THE RESUMPTION OF AMTRAK PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE ALONG THE PIONEER LINE THROUGH BOISE; OFFERING TO ASSIST IDAHO’S REPRESENTATIVES IN CONGRESS AND OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES IN EFFECTING THE PIONEER’S RETURN; CALLING UPON THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO MAKE PASSENGER RAIL AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE NATION’S TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

WHEREAS, beginning in 1977, trains operated by the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, doing business as Amtrak, carried passengers along Routes #25 and #26, a line dubbed the Pioneer that eventually spanned 2,422 miles, connecting Seattle, Portland, Boise, Salt Lake City, Denver, Omaha and Chicago, with daily service through much of the ensuing two decades; and

WHEREAS, Amtrak discontinued the Pioneer in 1997 for financial reasons, leaving Idaho’s capital city, most of the rest of the state, and major portions of other Western states with no regularly scheduled inter-city passenger rail service; and

WHEREAS, passenger rail provides an essential transportation alternative for residents of small, isolated communities that have little or no bus or airline service, and serves an important economic development function for communities and regions of all sizes; and

WHEREAS, in the 12 years since the Pioneer suspended operations, passenger rail has become increasingly popular in the United States, with Amtrak posting six consecutive years of record ridership and revenue across a system that currently serves more than 78,000 passengers riding on as many as 300 trains per day, or more than 28 million passenger trips a year; and

WHEREAS, U.S. Sen. Mike Crapo helped pass legislation in October 2008 appropriating $13 billion over five years for passenger rail around the country, including a feasibility study for restoring the Pioneer line that is scheduled to submitted to Congress no later than Oct. 16, 2009; and

WHEREAS, the City of Boise owns the Boise Depot and has preserved the facility for
use as a passenger terminal at such time as Pioneer service is reactivated, and also owns 18 miles of track at the eastern end of the Boise Cut-Off, the former Pioneer route; and

WHEREAS, according to the U.S. Department of Energy, passenger trains are more environmentally friendly than many other forms of transportation, consuming 17 percent less energy than airplanes and 21 percent less than automobiles per passenger mile while producing 60 percent less carbon dioxide emissions than cars and half the carbon dioxide of planes per passenger mile; and

WHEREAS, during a time of higher fuel prices, increasing concern about greenhouse emissions and efforts nationwide to improve air quality, the people of Boise and the state of Idaho deserve to have access to a successful nationwide rail network that already, serves more than 500 destinations in 46 states on 21,000 miles of routes;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE MAYOR AND COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BOISE CITY, IDAHO:

Section 1. That the City of Boise supports the resumption of Amtrak’s inter-city passenger rail service through Boise at the earliest feasible date to serve the citizens of Idaho’s capital city and the region.

Section 2. That the City of Boise offers its assistance to Sen. Mike Crapo and other members of the Idaho Congressional delegation, Sen. James Risch and Congressmen Mike Simpson and Walt Minnick, and all other interested parties and entities in bringing the Pioneer back on line, and further urges other local governments throughout the former Pioneer service area to make known their support for swift re-establishment of the route.

Section 3. That Federal officials continue to make passenger rail and its adequate funding a strong component of any future planning for the nation’s transportation system.

APPROVED by the Mayor of the City of Boise, Idaho, this 11th day of August, 2009.
ADOPTED by the Council of the City of Boise, Idaho, this 11th day of August, 2009.

APPROVED: ________________________________________  ATTEST: ________________________________________

_____________________________  ___________________________
MAYOR     CITY CLERK