



In August of 2021, Jeff Pontius (President of Penn Valley Railroad, LLC), Jeb Stotter (President & CEO of the North Shore Railroad Company & Affiliates), and Jeff Stover (Executive Director of the SEDA-COG Joint Rail Authority) met to discuss tentative passenger trips for 2021.

After much careful consideration, due in large part to concerns that the COVID-19 pandemic is not yet over, evidenced by current outbreaks in variants of the virus, such as the Delta variant, all three parties felt it was in the safest and best interest of the public, and the volunteer staff, to cancel the proposed trips this year. The parties have also been wrestling with some other still insurmountable issues that put the trips in jeopardy this year, in addition to the COVID-19 resurgence.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continues to recommend avoiding large events and gatherings, defining large gatherings as **bringing together many people from multiple households in a private or public space**. The CDC requests organizers to review the CDC guidelines and recommendations regarding hosting large gatherings, based on current conditions, and arriving at a conclusion on whether to postpone or cancel large events and gatherings.

The challenges we jointly face are: we cover a large, geographical area with various COVID rates and spikes; most of the passenger equipment we use does not offer the CDC's recommended, proper ventilation for a contagious virus; passengers would not be able to properly social distance; each trip lasts longer than 15 minutes; many different households interact during these trips; and there is no feasible way to enforce the use of facemasks. Furthermore, there is a concern that much of the ridership present for the seasonal trips is below the age that is able to be vaccinated at this time.

Due to the fact the passenger trips cannot safely accommodate the CDC's guidelines, the three parties have unitedly arrived at the conclusion that this year's trips should be cancelled.

This type of decision is not made lightly, and many other organizations are arriving at the same conclusion. We apologize for the inconvenience this might pose, and we are hopeful that next year we will be able to, once again, offer safe and enjoyable excursions.

Thank you for your patience and understanding.

Jeff Pontius
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