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SB32-08/09: Supporting Senate Bill No. 166 in the 2009 Montana Legislature

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Whereas, The University of Montana reports that 75% of its incoming students are Montana residents; and

Whereas, according to 2007 U.S. Census Bureau estimates, nearly 50% of the population of Montana lives in Missoula, Lewis and Clark, Gallatin, Park, or Yellowstone County; and

Whereas, there is currently no passenger rail service to these counties; and

Whereas, Amtrak has been mandated by the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 to study the feasibility of returning rail service to these counties; and

Whereas, such attempts to restore rail service are typically not successful without significant state investment; and

Whereas; the purpose of Montana’s Coal Tax Trust Fund is to “develop a stable, strong, and diversified economy which meets the needs of Montana residents both now and in the future while maintaining and improving a clean and healthful environment as required by Article IX, Section 1, of the Montana constitution.” (MCA 17-6-303); and

Whereas, according to the American Public Transportation Association, public transportation, including passenger rail service: creates permanent jobs; reduces greenhouse gas emissions and conserves energy; reduces consumption of foreign oil; eases highway congestion and improves air quality; fosters healthy, active lifestyles; provides safety and security; and saves travelers, commuters, and students time and money;

Whereas, public transportation, including passenger rail service, is an affordable alternative to vehicle ownership; and

Whereas, the mission of the ASUM Office of Transportation is to promote and provide transportation options to The University of Montana community; and

Whereas; in a survey conducted by The University of Montana’s Bureau of Business and Economic Research, students overwhelmingly supported restoration of passenger rail service in southern and southwestern Montana; and

Whereas; Therefore, ASUM will encourage fellow students at Montana State University—Bozeman, Montana State University—Billings, The University of Montana—Helena College of Technology, Carroll College, and Rocky Mountain College to support Amtrak likely share the same sentiment.

Therefore, Let It Be Resolved that The Associated Students of The University of Montana support the passage of Senate Bill No. 166 and Senate Bill 283 in the 2009 Montana Legislature, entitled, “An act authorizing the Board of Investments to make loans to local governments from the Montana Permanent Coal Tax Trust Fund for the development and maintenance of the infrastructure needed to expand rail passenger service; and amending section 17-6-308, MCA,”
as well as Senate Bill No. 283 “An act requiring update of the Montana State Rail Plan by the Department of Transportation for the purpose of complying with public law 110-432 Division B.”

Therefore, Let It Be Further Resolved that ASUM encourages other student governments and associations to support Senate Bill No. 166.

Passed by Committee: January ___, 2009
Passed by the ASUM Senate: January ___, 2009

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Committee Chair                  Chair of the Senate
Andrew Dusek                      Siri Smillie