

Mark Corrison
October 4, 2018
Local Input Section (12:30-3pm)

Rail Passengers Association
JLTV Task Force Meeting
Written Testimony

913-406-0827
Newton, KS

I am Mark Corrison speaking in my capacity as Kansas Council Member of the Rail Passenger Association (formerly known as NARP-National Association of Rail Passengers)

I was going to begin with a request that the JLTV Task Force (Joint Legislative Transportation Vision Task Force) contact Senator Moran, Senator Roberts and Kansas Congressional Representatives to retain the Senator Moran/Udall language (S-3665) protecting the Southwest Chief and pass the HR 6147 into law with the funding levels and provisions agreed to by the House and Senate transportation committees. However, there has been a new development. Congress has passed a Continuing Resolution that has sidelined the \$50M infusion into maintenance and restoration of the SWC. Deborah, when she speaks next will outline what we are requesting of the Task Force and other state agencies.

Kansas State Rail Plan:

KDOT prepares a State Rail Plan every ten years with an interim update that profiles rail operations in the state. A major section addresses passenger rail operation, the key component of which is Amtrak's Southwest Chief that transits Kansas between Kansas City and Garden City, serving 6 cities. Although KDOT does not exercise great oversight over passenger rail operations, this transportation system is a component of state transportation infrastructure in which stakeholder cities have a significant economic interest.

10 year evolution of changes:

Several Acts became law over the last 10 years addressing everything from On-Time-Performance, to service expansion, and funding in the form of Tiger Grants (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery). KDOT has been sponsor, or a party, in several rounds of Tiger Grants.

A significant investment has been made to improve the rail corridor in Kansas, including station upgrades, platform improvements, and crossing safety. Track improvements have eliminated bad track to about few dozen total miles, out of 500.

Current Status:

Alarmingly, the latest Tiger Grant is being withheld. At a recent listening tour in Garden City, Senator Moran explained that "When Amtrak announced that they weren't going to keep their commitment, a \$3 million contribution that certainly caught our attention, my attention. I just believe that when people say they are going to do something, they ought to do it," Moran said.

In recent years there have been ongoing rumors of draconian changes, such as rerouting the Southwest Chief southwest through Oklahoma and Texas and eliminating service west of Newton.

This summer, Amtrak announced that "a bus-bridge service" is being developed that would eliminate through-service between Dodge City and Albuquerque, some 550 miles.

There will be horrible consequences. Garden City will be eliminated as a rail stop, and all of the millions of dollars in track, station and platform improvement over the past several years will have been wasted. The same consequences affect every city served by the Southwest Chief in

Colorado. This is why Senator Moran, and 5 other senators, including Senator Roberts rushed through an amendment committing **\$50 million** for maintenance and safety improvements and exemption from immediate Positive Train Control requirement on the corridor, as safety concerns are minimized due to Amtrak being the only regular train on 200 miles of this corridor. Without Amtrak, the route can almost be considered abandoned.

Future Challenges:

Ridership, key to perceptions of profitability will surely plummet. To quote Senator Moran again: “No one will ride this train from Chicago to Dodge City, pack up and get on a bus to Albuquerque and then continue their journey.”

The organic law that created Amtrak in 1970 had three components: State Service, Long Distance service and Amtrak owned Northeast corridor. This alarming trend may result in Amtrak operations only in the Northeast Corridor. Stakeholders see this as a first step towards abandoning the Long Distance network, a network that is fundamentally interdependent.

Consider how many fewer people will board in Lawrence or Topeka, for travel that effectively ends in Dodge City. The end result is that the remaining service on both the eastern and western end will decline. Will Amtrak then announce an end to the Southwest Chief for those reasons, in much the same way that Lone Star service was cancelled abruptly in 1979? In consequence, the Missouri State service will suffer from the loss of transfer ridership to and from the Southwest Chief. The impact reaches far beyond Kansas. Mayor Pritchard said that the city of Galesburg, Illinois is not sure how much the city would be affected, but that Amtrak’s proposal, if it were to go into effect, would create an economic loss for the city and surrounding communities.

“Once they take apart the Southwest Chief, we’ll never be able to put it back together,” Pritchard said of the proposed change. “The ridership, I think a good deal of it, will disappear.”

This radical change will effectively interfere with years of effort to create expansion and connecting service with the Heartland Flyer, and Colorado’s Front Range service. Colorado loses all of its station stops on the Southwest Chief

Senator Moran sent a letter to Amtrak and then met personally with Amtrak’s CEO Richard Anderson. He said that the response to the letter was bad, and the meeting even worse.

Last month Amtrak engineers and operations officials began planning turn around, and terminal operations in Dodge City. Bus bridge service is rumored to begin January 1, 2019, unless it is stopped by some form of Congressional order or injunction. The involvement of this task force, the KS legislature, the Governor and every affected KS community is very critical.

Due to the critical nature of the fate of Southwest Chief service in KS, it is imperative that KDOT and the JLTV formally contact the KS Congressional delegation and Amtrak in support of the maintenance of the Southwest Chief in its current form. Deborah will be outlining our specific request.