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Local Input Section (12:30-3pm)

Northern Flyer Alliance, Inc.  
JLTV Task Force Meeting  
Written Testimony

913-827-8380  
Newton, KS

### **BACKGROUND:**

My name is Deborah Fischer Stout and I am speaking today in my capacity as President of The Northern Flyer Alliance, Inc. (NFA) which is an advocacy organization for the reintroduction of passenger rail service from Kansas City, Missouri through Wichita to Dallas/Fort Worth. NFA is a coalition of 49 cities, six counties, and 19 Chambers of Commerce along the I-35 corridor that have joined together to promote passenger rail service in their communities.

### **HISTORICAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND PAST INVESTMENTS:**

I would like to begin by sharing Historical Accomplishments and Past Investments. This year, 2018 marks the 10 year anniversary of the inception of The Northern Flyer Alliance as a 501(c) 4 organization, and eight years since the passage of the Passenger Rail Program Act in 2010 in Kansas for which we wrote and advocated. Initially with resolutions of support from 90 communities and civic organizations from Kansas City (KC) to Dallas/Fort Worth; later through the passage of two bills, Senate Bill 49 and House Bill 2552 as well as the funding of numerous passenger rail studies and a state rail plan in 2010, The Northern Flyer Alliance has been an effective voice for the economic growth of Kansas through passenger rail connections. These studies as well as the investment of several million dollars in TIGER grants 2014, '15 and '17 represent significant state funding in studies, planning, and capital improvements that would appear to have been effectively wasted should the SWC service become compromised.

### **CLOSING THE GAP:**

There is a 200 mile gap in service from Newton to Oklahoma City (OKC). Closing that gap (see figure below) will connect the Southwest Chief (SWC) to the Heartland Flyer Extension (HFE) and will not only bring proven economic expansion and job growth to Kansas, but will be instrumental in the future sustainability of the SWC through significant increased ridership that will effectively reduce the total annual support for both corridors. Both trains and their associated communities will benefit once connected, just as a connected highway network is more productive than separate highways that do not connect. Ridership growth will also bring improved economic prosperity as well as much needed transportation options and connectivity to all Kansas communities with stops on those two trains.



**CURRENT STATUS:**

Since 2010, the efforts to restore passenger rail service to South Central Kansas has gained considerable momentum with Wichita being the driving force behind the recent Tri-State interest. During this time, the BNSF has been consistently investing in the tracks on the Midcon from Wichita to Oklahoma City, and in June 2017 an Amtrak Inspection Train traveled from Fort Worth to KC and found that very little investment is needed to close the gap from Oklahoma City to Newton.

**WHY INVESTMENT IS IMPORTANT:**

Of course investment in these corridors will improve the economic vitality of an already existing megaregion that starts in Kansas City, MO, ends in San Antonio, TX and includes the metropolitan areas of Lawrence, Topeka, Wichita, Oklahoma City and Dallas/Fort Worth and all stops in between.

And finally, Kansas must compete regionally and globally if we are to grow our economy. We must prepare not only for current and near term needs but also for the future. Implementing and strengthening all modes of transportation including passenger rail connections are essential. Therefore, we support and advocate for investment in the Heartland Flyer Extension and continued investment in the Southwest Chief to complete the establishment of these vital links in Kansas and the region.

**THE SOUTHWEST CHIEF IS IN PERIL:**

Unfortunately, the SWC is now in jeopardy as Mark Corrison has described and requires immediate action and involvement.

**WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE:**

- 1) Via letters and phone calls, KS Congressional leaders AND Amtrak officials need to hear from KDOT, the Legislature, the Governor and community leaders in KS with stops on the SWC and potential stops on the HFE. To...
  - a. **Request an intercession:** Due to the Continuing Resolution that has sidelined the \$50M infusion into maintenance of the SWC, stakeholders must ask Congress to intercede in Amtrak's plan to break up this long distance route with bus service between Dodge City and Albuquerque. This would be a violation of the spirit and intent if not a clear violation itself of Amtrak's contract with Congress, and to continue their obligation to preserve service in its current form.
  - b. **Tell Amtrak why their plan harms KS:** Stakeholders should join other voices across the country to implore Amtrak to change course, and to explain how vital this link is to rural areas, as well as its economic benefit to the state.
- 2) Once the SWC is secure, the state needs to be ready to invest in the HFE, including but not necessarily limited to annual operational support which would be split between KS, OK and TX. Since January, KDOT has been conducting a study to determine necessary investment, and should provide a report in early 2019.

This concludes our testimony. We are now open for questions.