

**TESTIMONY BEFORE
SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**

REGARDING KANSAS PASSENGER RAIL SERVICES

January 31, 2013

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am Lindsey Douglas, Chief of the Office of Governmental and External Affairs for the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT). The department has been engaged in discussions concerning two passenger rail services. Both services were discussed with the 2012 Special Committee on Transportation in October.

Heartland Flyer Extension

During the 2012 Legislative Session, Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) representatives presented the findings of the Service Development Plan (SDP) that analyzed extending the current state-sponsored Heartland Flyer service from Oklahoma City to Newton. The SDP also studied a new service option from Fort Worth, Texas to Kansas City, Missouri. A map of the studied options as well as the cost matrix developed from the SDP is attached for your information.

We have had discussions over the interim with several stakeholders to answer questions about the project and discuss potential next steps. The City of Wichita, spearheaded by City Councilman Pete Meitzner, has engaged in discussions with business leaders in the area, as well as local government officials in Oklahoma. We have also had dialog with the Oklahoma DOT and the Federal Railroad Administration regarding the next steps for the proposal.

As presented during the interim committee meeting, the next step in developing the Heartland Flyer extension project would be to conduct two required National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) analyses for the service and the track improvement projects, and also complete some preliminary engineering work. The estimated cost for the two NEPA analyses and enough preliminary engineering work to conduct the environmental reviews would be \$5.3 million. Kansas' share of this cost is estimated to be approximately \$3 million.

In order to continue developing either project, agreement would need to be reached with Oklahoma and the other impacted states. KDOT Secretary Mike King has had several conversations with the Oklahoma Transportation Secretary, Gary Ridley to discuss these projects. He has affirmed in the conversations that Oklahoma has other priorities for its limited resources and is unable to invest in the next required steps at this time.

KDOT will continue to discuss the viability of this project with Oklahoma, City of Wichita representatives and other stakeholders.

Southwest Chief

In April 2012, City officials in Garden City hosted a meeting with legislators, city officials and state officials from Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico to allow Amtrak and Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) to present information on the track condition and future routing of the Southwest Chief.

Burlington Northern Santa-Fe (BNSF) Railroad owns the track that needs improvement. They currently have only limited freight traffic on the line, and do not need to maintain the track at the same level that passenger trains require. The impacted portion within Kansas serves 18,300 riders per year and includes station stops in Hutchinson, Dodge City, and Garden City. Assistance for track improvements is not needed east of the Newton stop as that portion of BNSF's rail infrastructure continues to be maintained by BNSF at a level that is consistent with conventional passenger rail service needs.

Amtrak and BNSF representatives presented to the group in April that a \$100 million investment, shared between the five stakeholders (KS, CO, NM, Amtrak & BNSF), would be needed over ten years to upgrade the track to maintain existing service. In addition, an annual investment of \$10 million to be shared by the five stakeholders would be necessary for ongoing maintenance. The ongoing maintenance expense would last for a 20 year commitment. As presented to the agency, if the investment commitment could not be identified by the end of the 2014 calendar year, Amtrak would consider moving the route south to BNSF's transcontinental line. A map of the current service and the alternative route along the transcontinental line is attached.

Secretary King recommended to Amtrak that a special train ride be organized to provide stakeholders a first-hand look at the improvements that are needed to continue service on the current route. Amtrak and BNSF agreed, and officials arranged the trip from Topeka to La Junta early in January 2013. It served as a wonderful opportunity to see the improvements needed on this stretch of the route, and discuss potential solutions to the needed improvements.

Secretary King and KDOT staff will continue to be active in discussions with Amtrak, BNSF and affected stakeholders regarding the long-term future of the Southwest Chief.