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Senator Carolyn McGinn
Chair, Ways & Means Committee
Capital Office
Room: 545-S
Topeka, KS 66612

January 23, 2018

Dear Senator McGinn:

Since its organization in 2008, The Northern Flyer Alliance continues to support and advocate for the Heartland Flyer Expansion from Oklahoma City north to Newton, KS as well as the maintenance and improvement of the Southwest Chief with economic benefits accruing to Lawrence, Topeka, Newton, Hutchinson, Dodge City and Garden City. Initially with resolutions of support from 90 communities and civic organizations from Kansas City 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.

Closing the 200 mile Service Gap from Newton, KS to Oklahoma City, OK through Wichita, Arkansas City and points south in Oklahoma will not only bring proven economic expansion and job growth to Kansas, but will be instrumental in the future sustainability of the Southwest Chief through significant increased ridership that will reduce the total annual support for that corridor. Ridership growth will also bring improved economic prosperity as well as much needed transportation options and connectivity to all Kansas communities with stops on the Southwest Chief and the Heartland Flyer Extension.

Both trains will grow and survive if they provide a needed connection to where people want to travel. 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, TX.

In order to prepare for the future, passenger rail connections need to be implemented and strengthened. 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.

Best Regards,

Deborah Fischer Stout
President
The Northern Flyer Alliance, Inc.



INTRODUCTION

Northern Flyer Alliance, Inc. (NFA) is an advocate for the reintroduction of passenger rail service from Kansas City, Missouri through Wichita, Kansas to Fort Worth, Texas. 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.

The Northern Flyer Alliance, Inc. is the only Kansas-based organization supporting the reintroduction of passenger rail service in Kansas.

Background & Organizational Accomplishments

The NFA has been in existence as an official non-profit organization since 2008. The effects of a multi-year educational outreach effort in which twenty-four thousand people received face-to-face information, and countless others educated through the media, has been significant. As a result, 90 resolutions have been passed by governing bodies and civic organizations (including MARC and WAMPO) supporting the reintroduction of passenger service along the I-35 corridor. Sixty-five of those resolutions from community governing bodies have been sent to Governors and Secretaries of Transportation.

Prior to incorporation, the Northern Flyer Alliance, Inc. began advocating with the Kansas Department of Transportation to complete a Feasibility Study; a required step for any passenger rail service expansion. The study was completed in 2010 and provided an estimate of costs and ridership. In 2010, the Northern Flyer Alliance, Inc. advocated for KDOT to apply for a Federal grant to complete a State Rail Plan as well as a Service Development Plan for the Heartland Flyer corridor and its extension north. The Service Development Plan provided much more detail and a more defined estimate of costs than the original Feasibility Study. Funding was granted and the study began in mid-summer 2010 and completed in the fall of 2011.

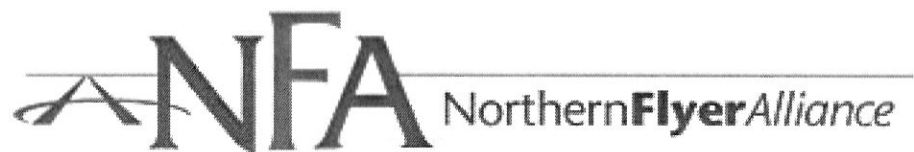
Through legislative advocacy by the Northern Flyer Alliance, two bills were passed in 2010 by the Kansas Legislature with super majorities (95%). Co-sponsored by Senator Dick Kelsey, Senate Bill 49 eliminated the "Constitutional Prohibition" that disallowed investment in rail and passenger rail in Kansas and at the same time empowered KDOT to enter into contract agreements with Amtrak and other authorized service providers. Sponsored by Representative Jo Ann Pottorff, House Bill 2552 permitted Kansas to become a member of Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission which coordinates a regional plan and strategy for intercity passenger rail expansion in the Midwest.

Service Development Plan

Known as the North Flyer or the Heartland Flyer Extension, the extension from Oklahoma City to Newton would directly connect the Heartland Flyer with the Southwest Chief, effectively closing the 200 mile service gap that currently exists in the center of the country between Oklahoma City and Newton. By closing this gap and connecting Kansas City to Dallas/Fort Worth through Topeka, Newton, Wichita, Arkansas City and points south in Oklahoma, ridership estimates jump from 70,000 on the Heartland Flyer to over 200,000 annually.

KU Return on Investment Study

Completed in 2009, the study found an after-tax 3.2:1 economic benefit to Kansas.



Interim Study Committee

The 2012 legislative efforts of the NFA, including testimony to the Kansas House and Senate Transportation Committees as well as a Symposium held April 6, 2012 at KC's Union Station culminated in the approval of an Interim Study Committee on passenger rail by the Kansas Legislative Coordinating Council. Wichita and Western Kansas committed to sending business and civic leaders to testify in Topeka on why passenger rail is vital to the economic growth and vitality of the state's primary gross domestic product generators: agriculture, manufacturing and its metropolitan areas.

2013 & 2014

The passage of Senate Bill 49 paved the way for Kansas to invest in the Southwest Chief via the successful TIGER grant applications of 2013 and 2014.