

Information about the...

# Amtrak Expansion Feasibility Study



A study sponsored by the Kansas Department of Transportation in cooperation with the Oklahoma and Texas departments of transportation and conducted by the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak)

December 2008



The State of Kansas wants to answer an important question, “What are the potential implications of state-supported passenger rail service in Kansas?” To help provide answers, the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT), in cooperation with the Oklahoma and Texas departments of transportation (ODOT and TxDOT), asked Amtrak to study the feasibility of new expanded passenger rail service between Kansas City, Oklahoma City, and Fort Worth. BNSF Railway will conduct a route capacity analysis as part of the study.

### **Current Information Needed**

The study is needed to provide current information on which to base decisions about expanding Amtrak service in Kansas and Oklahoma. The study won't make recommendations about the service. The results will help officials determine if new service should be considered.

### **Issues to Explore**

The study will explore issues such as:

1. Connection logistics in Kansas City, Oklahoma City, Fort Worth and Newton
2. Potential ridership based on the cities served and train schedules
3. Projected annual operating costs
4. Estimated annual state contract cost
5. Track improvements and associated capital costs
6. Feasible train schedules
7. Train set configuration
8. Route capacity constraints and mitigation costs



Amtrak expects to complete the study in 2009.

### **Interest in Passenger Rail**

There is increasing national and regional interest in passenger rail as well as grassroots support for new passenger service in Kansas and Oklahoma. Supporters point to the success of the *Heartland Flyer* service between Oklahoma City and Fort Worth. Ridership on Amtrak trains has been increasing nationwide, due in part to gasoline prices.

This also is an opportune time for Kansas to study new passenger rail service. The state is facing decisions about the future of its transportation system. The state's Comprehensive Transportation Program (CTP) passed by the Legislature in 1999 ends in 2009. The CTP funded a number of improvements to the state's transportation system but didn't include support for passenger rail. Funding priorities after 2009 will have to be carefully considered in light of increasing demands on the state budget from all modes of transportation. Passenger rail service will have to compete with many other transportation needs around the state.



KDOT has budgeted \$200,000 for the study.

## Federal Funding Prospects

If the states decide to support expanded passenger rail service, they will pursue any federal funding for which they are eligible. Recent federal actions have provided funding, or the prospects of funding, for passenger rail services:

► On October 1, 2008, the U.S. Senate passed the \$13 billion Federal Railroad Safety Improvement Act. The House approved the legislation on September 24, 2008. It reauthorizes Amtrak and authorizes significant federal funding for intercity passenger rail service and corridor development.

Among other things, the bill creates a new State Capital Grant program for intercity passenger rail projects. The bill provides \$1.9 billion (\$380 million per year) for grants to states to pay for the capital costs of facilities and equipment necessary to provide new or improved passenger rail. The federal share of the grants is up to 80 percent. The grants would be awarded on a competitive basis for projects based on economic performance, expected ridership, and other factors.

President Bush signed the bill on October 16, 2008. Congress must now pass annual appropriations bills to provide the funding levels authorized in the bill.

► On September 30, 2008 the Federal Railroad Administration announced it had awarded 15 grants distributing \$30 million in 50/50 matching grant funds made available in 2008 legislation.

Amtrak state-supported service to St. Louis waiting to depart from Kansas City's Union Station

► On July 29, 2008 U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) introduced the Train CARS Act intended, among other things, to promote the replacement and rehabilitation of Amtrak's fleet of passenger cars and revive the train car industry in the U.S. Durbin's legislation includes the following actions:

1. Create a new matching grant program for Amtrak and states to rehabilitate existing equipment and purchase new, American-made equipment. It also authorizes Amtrak to issue up to \$2.8 billion in qualified bonds over four years to finance train car projects.
2. Allow states to receive a dollar for dollar match on any equipment fee they impose to buy new domestically produced train cars.
3. Create a trust fund to give Amtrak and the states a source of capital funding to replace the nation's train cars. The legislation would transfer one-quarter cent of the per-gallon motor fuels tax into the new Rolling Stock Trust Fund for three years generating approximately \$400 million/year.



# Study Scope

The primary purpose of expanded passenger rail would be to carry travelers along a potentially 606-mile corridor in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas that connects to the national rail system. The goals of new service would be to:

1. Offer an attractive alternative to driving
2. Provide reliable, comfortable and convenient service
3. Improve the mobility of travelers who cannot drive, cannot afford or do not have other public transportation options
4. Encourage good potential ridership

Sound forecasts depend on studying realistic scenarios that are likely to meet the goals for the service. Amtrak officials and interested stakeholders helped develop portions of the scope and state DOT officials selected the station stops for study purposes.

## Station Stops

Stops are important for meeting the goals of the service. Thirteen cities in Kansas and four in Oklahoma expressed interest in being in the study for the portion between Kansas City and Oklahoma City. However, the more often the train stops, the longer the trip – thus lowering the potential ridership.

Ridership forecasts are based on feasible schedules – the cities served and when the train stops there. The DOTs identified the cities for the study so Amtrak could develop schedules to forecast ridership. The ridership at a station depends on factors such as:

1. Population
2. Per capita income and employment
3. Lodging and dining options

4. Travel generators, such as colleges, business and government centers, and high-demand tourist destinations
5. Connecting transportation services with outlying communities
6. Local transportation options
7. Potential to serve key travel markets or groups of cities

Considering these and other factors, the DOTs identified these intermediate cities for the study:

1. Lawrence, KS\*
2. Topeka, KS\*
3. Emporia, KS
4. Strong City, KS
5. Newton, KS\*
6. Wichita, KS
7. Winfield/Arkansas City, KS
8. Ponca City, OK
9. Perry, OK
10. Guthrie, OK
11. Edmond, OK
12. Oklahoma City, OK\*\*
13. Norman, OK\*\*
14. Purcell, OK\*\*
15. Pauls Valley, OK\*\*
16. Davis, OK
17. Ardmore, OK\*\*
18. Gainesville, TX\*\*

\* Current stops for the Southwest Chief (part of the Amtrak national network)

\*\* Current stops for the Heartland Flyer (state-supported by Oklahoma and Texas)

**NOTE:** A city's use in the study is not a commitment by the city or the states for the city to host a station if expanded service is approved.

## Route Segments

The study envisions these alternate scenarios:

- A. A night-time roundtrip between Newton and Oklahoma City to connect with the eastbound and westbound Southwest Chief by extending the Heartland Flyer using the existing trainset.
- B. A night-time roundtrip between Kansas City and Fort Worth via connections at Newton and Oklahoma City. It would not connect to the Southwest Chief and would use the existing Heartland Flyer between Oklahoma City and Fort Worth and a new service between Kansas City and Oklahoma City. This option would require an additional trainset to supplement the *Heartland Flyer* equipment.
- C. A daytime roundtrip between Kansas City and Fort Worth via Newton and Oklahoma City using a new, stand-alone service and two new trainsets for the entire route.
- D. A daytime roundtrip between Kansas City and Oklahoma City using a new, stand-alone service and two new trainsets for the entire route.

The *Heartland Flyer* makes a daily round trip between Fort Worth and Oklahoma City and the *Southwest Chief* operates daily between Chicago and Los Angeles. Their schedules do not change in the study scenarios.

## Equipment

The study envisions using coach cars and a provision for food service.

## Food Service

The travel distance doesn't justify full dining service so the study envisions using a car with snacks and light meals, called a "Café Car." It could be able to offer local and regional foods and beverages.

## Speeds

The study will assume the trains could travel at top speeds of 60 and 79 mph where feasible, though the average speed will be lower. The average speed depends on local speed restrictions, track and route conditions, congestion on the track, and how often the train stops or slows for stations.

The top speed for the *Heartland Flyer* is 79 mph in Oklahoma and 59 mph in Texas. The average speed is about 50 mph for both the *Heartland Flyer* over its route and the *Southwest Chief* in Kansas.

The distance between the train stations in Kansas City and Oklahoma City is about 400 rail miles via Topeka, while the most direct highway route via I-35 bypasses Topeka and is about 50 miles shorter, so rail travel can take more time. There are about 606 rail miles and 546 highway miles between the stations in Kansas City and Fort Worth.

## Station Staffing

Station staffing issues depend on train schedules, station facilities, and the availability of paid staff or volunteers. The study envisions no additional paid staff other than the current paid staff at Newton and Topeka, and envisions using ticket machines and local volunteer staff. The *Heartland Flyer* has one staffed station, located in Fort Worth.

## After the Study

The study report will be available to the public. If the study shows evidence that state-supported Amtrak service should be considered, the affected state legislatures must decide if their states should support the service. The states would have to pay their shares of the operating costs that exceed ticket revenues and the costs of buying trains and improving tracks, sidings, and crossings (Partial federal help might be available. See Federal Funding Prospects, next page).

In Kansas, approval of expanded passenger rail service would require an extra step. Article 11, Section 9 of the Kansas Constitution prohibits the State from making improvements off the state highway system unless both houses of the Legislature, by vote of not less than two-thirds of their members, approve such expenditures. The Kansas Legislature would have to take this step to provide operating support for passenger rail, in addition to approving the funding.

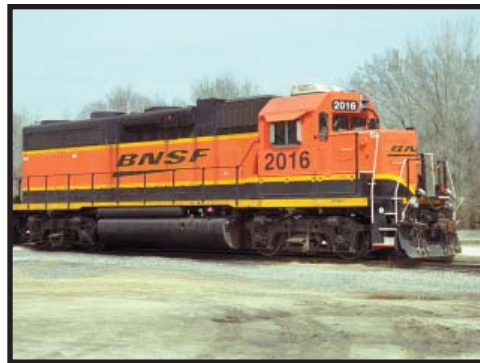
Fourteen states support Amtrak trains that supplement the national network. State and regional agencies pay most of the cost, reimbursing Amtrak for direct expenses. Continued operation of these

state-supported routes is subject to annual contracts and state legislative appropriations, along with Amtrak financial participation. In addition to operating funds, many of these states also provide funds for infrastructure or other capital improvements.

If approved by the state legislatures, a number of things would have to occur before the service could become a reality, including:

1. Update the study to further refine the information
2. Develop a passenger rail plan
3. Study, design, and build needed track infrastructure improvements
4. Develop and secure funding for rail improvements, annual operating subsidies, and maintenance
5. Find and procure railcars and locomotives
6. Develop a rail crossing safety plan and budget to address needed improvements
7. Negotiate the operation of the passenger service over freight lines owned by BNSF Railway Company

Expanded passenger service will have to share tracks owned by BNSF Railway Company. BNSF will conduct a route capacity analysis as part of the study.





## After the Study: Potential Host Cities

The Amtrak study will not evaluate station facilities. If the states decide to support expanded service, they may need to restudy the selection of host cities. With state-sponsored services, host communities are asked to be responsible for the costs of planning, upgrading and maintaining their depots. Selected cities – if they agree to do so – would need to:

1. Study and identify needed station improvements and develop cost estimates
2. Determine, based on their study results, if they want to host a station

After their local station study, cities still wanting to host a station would need to:

1. Fund and develop improvement plans
2. Fund construction of the improvements
3. Develop a plan for station staffing and costs
4. Budget and fund annual station maintenance and operating costs

The states understand that funding local station studies and improvements will be a challenging issue. Potential state or federal funding assistance for these efforts is uncertain at the time of this writing. Help might be available through a competitive federal highway program administered by the states called the Transportation Enhancement (TE) Program. Under the program, matching grants might be available to help fund improvements to railroad stations. The outlook for funding federal highway programs concerns many in the industry. Competition for TE grants is fierce with no guarantee the program will be funded in the future.

## Not a Commitment

*The cities used in this study are included solely as part of a “What If?” scenario.*

*A city’s use in the study is not a commitment by the city or the states for the city to host a station.*



Wichita has not been served by Amtrak since the 1979 discontinuance of the *Lone Star* due to federal budget cuts.

This information in this document can be made available in alternative accessible formats upon request. For information about obtaining an alternative format, contact the KDOT Bureau of Transportation Information, 700 SW Harrison St., 2nd Fl West, Topeka, KS 66603-3754 or phone 785-296-3585 (Voice) (TTY).

## The Study Team

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Congress created Amtrak in 1971 through the Rail Passenger Service Act of 1970. Amtrak has posted six consecutive years of growth in ridership and revenue, carrying more than 28.7 million passengers in the last fiscal year. Amtrak provides intercity passenger rail service to more than 500 destinations in 46 states on a 21,000-mile route system.

For schedules, fares and information, passengers may call 800-USA-RAIL or visit Amtrak.com.

The *Heartland Flyer* makes one round trip daily on a 206-mile route between Fort Worth and Oklahoma City. The service was started in 1999. It is managed and funded by the Oklahoma and Texas departments of transportation.

In Amtrak fiscal year 2008, the *Heartland Flyer* carried 80,892 riders, generating ticket revenues of \$1,682,088. In Amtrak fiscal year 2007, it carried 68,246 riders, creating ticket revenues of \$1,260,579.

Visit [heartlandflyer.com](http://heartlandflyer.com) for more information.