

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

FEBRUARY 5, 2015

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CITY OF GARDEN CITY, KANSAS

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing my testimony to be presented regarding passenger rail service—specifically as an update on the Southwest Chief and TIGER Funding. I am Matthew Allen, City Manager of Garden City, Kansas.

For over a century passenger railroad service has transported the citizens of Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico to locations around the country. Currently those three states are linked by Amtrak service along the Southwest Chief route, which operates between Chicago and Los Angeles on Burlington Northern Santa Fe's (BNSF) rail lines.

In 2011 representatives from Garden City, along with interested rail groups and communities along the Southwest Chief route, attended a meeting in La Junta, Colorado, where we were informed that Amtrak, citing maintenance costs and budget priorities, was contemplating abandoning passenger service through western Kansas, eastern Colorado and northern New Mexico. The City of Garden City, along with Dodge City, Hutchinson, and Newton, Kansas and Lamar and La Junta, Colorado formed a coalition—the Southwest Chief Rural Rail Partnership—to begin working together to preserve the Southwest Chief through our communities.

The following spring (April 2012) Garden City hosted a summit inviting officials from affected communities, the State, Amtrak, BNSF, and federal representatives to begin discussing the issue. At the summit, Amtrak and BNSF explained track conditions and budget shortfalls, and indicated they would need state and local funding to support maintenance and upgrades.

Since the summit nearly three years ago, we have worked closely with the State including our elected representatives and the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT). We've testified before an interim legislative budget committee, a special committee on transportation, and the House Transportation Committee. The State has been very involved in the discussion and search for funds to help preserve passenger rail through Kansas and improve the lines upon which Kansas prospective and existing businesses send and receive rail freight.

However, just as cities are financially strapped we've understood the State has many demands for financial assistance and specifically the state rail fund has very limited dollars available for rail projects. That was a driving force for the formulation of the Southwest Chief

Rural Rail Partnership, which worked together to bring the matter to the attention of federal officials in Washington and at Amtrak.

We worked with the Kansas congressional delegation to help explore federal funding options. With their help, and with the assistance and guidance of Senator Bob Dole's firm Alston & Bird, we decided to target the federal government's TIGER Grant program as a potential funding source for track repairs. After unsuccessful TIGER Grant applications in 2012 and 2013 we engaged the Washington, D.C.-based firm The Seneca Group to assist with the 2014 TIGER Grant application.

The 2014 TIGER Grant application was successful in securing a TIGER grant in the amount of \$12,469,963. The grant will be combined with \$9,300,000 of State, local, and private funds and used to restore 54.9 miles of the 158 miles of bolted rail sections between Hutchinson, KS and Las Animas, CO to FRA Class IV condition with continuous welded relay rail, new turnouts, and panelized grade crossings. We believe the TIGER grant will make a substantial difference to the quality of rail passenger service in Kansas and southeastern Colorado, arresting the decline in route conditions.

The Kansas Department of Transportation was a highly involved and valued partner in the TIGER grant application process and has agreed to administer the grant on behalf of the Southwest Chief Rural Rail Partnership. We're currently working with KDOT to modify their standard format State/City agreement for highway work for a railroad project. We're also awaiting a draft agreement between BNSF and the City of Garden City (as the TIGER grant recipient.)

Although making a significant improvement, the TIGER investment does not fully address the rehabilitative needs of the route. It does address the most urgent needs of the route. Portions of the route still fall to 30 MPH in the 20-year benefit analysis; however, they are delayed by ten years. The TIGER investment saves each Amtrak Southwest Chief train a peak 2.4 hours of transit time in the final six years of the analysis. This results in benefits associated with economic competitiveness, quality of life, and safety. The improved right-of-way and the subsequent BNSF maintenance commitment to Class IV standards resulting from the TIGER grant greatly increase the state of good repair. The award of the grant also demonstrates the public and private commitment to begin the restoration of this important intercity transportation link.

Please note the benefits of this improvement are not limited to passenger rail. Improved lines increase the efficiency and cost for all users, including freight rail.

I would like to again express my appreciation to this Committee, the Senate Committee on Transportation, Governor Brownback, Secretary King and his team at KDOT, and the Kansas Congressional delegation for all of the encouragement and support as we've successfully achieved the award of a TIGER grant for our State.

Items of note for the Committee

Timeline of important events:

- November 2011 – Meeting in La Junta
- April 2012 – Summit in Garden City
- April 2012 – Hired Alston & Bird
- 2012 – Applied for TIGER IV funding
- October 2012 – Testimony before the Interim Legislative Budget Committee
- October 2012 – Testimony before the Special Committee on Transportation
- January 2013 – BNSF Charter Train from Topeka to La Junta
- 2013 – Applied for TIGER V funding
- 2013 Hired Seneca Group
- February 2014 – Testimony before the House Transportation Committee
- July 2014 – Train ride/ “Whistle Stops” with Amtrak President/CEO
- 2014 – Applied for TIGER VI Funding
- September 2014 – Notified of grant success
- 2014 – Meeting with BNSF & KDOT officials in Topeka regarding administration of the TIGER Grant, the various relationships, and the agreements required.
- 2015 – Complete contracts
- 2015 – Commence and complete project

Project partners (all have pledged matching funds to the TIGER grant application):

- Amtrak
- Kansas Department of Transportation
- BNSF Railway
- City of Garden City, KS
- City of Dodge City, KS
- City of Hutchinson, KS
- City of Newton, KS
- Bent County, CO
- Las Animas County, CO
- Otero County, CO
- Prowers County, CO
- Pueblo County, CO
- City of Lamar, CO
- City of La Junta, CO
- City of Trinidad, CO
- I-25 Coalition, CO
- Colorado Rail Passenger Association