



CITY OF ARKANSAS CITY, KANSAS

Chair Senator Mike Petersen
Senate Transportation Committee
Hearing on SB 349 Passenger Rail Service Program (K.S.A. 75-5089, as amended)
Written Testimony by Arkansas City Ks Mayor and Commissioners
2/7/2024

Dear Chair Senator Petersen and Members of the Senate Transportation Committee,

We are writing to express the strong support of the City of Arkansas City Mayor and City Commissioners, for SB-349, "An Act Concerning the Kansas Passenger Rail Service Program." This legislation is critical for the successful development of the Heartland Flyer Extension to Newton, Kansas, and we believe it holds significant benefits for our community and the entire region.

The proposed extension of the passenger rail service through Arkansas City is not only a vital transportation initiative but also aligns seamlessly with our ongoing efforts to promote tourism and cultural awareness. We are particularly excited about the positive impact this project will have on the development of the Etzanza Visitors Center, a \$7 million facility that will serve as a cultural hub highlighting the rich history of the native American community that thrived on the site of present-day Arkansas City.

The Etzanza Visitors Center is poised to become a final destination tourism site, attracting visitors from around the world. The Etzanza Conservancy is diligently working towards obtaining UNESCO World Heritage Site status, a designation that has the potential to draw tens of thousands of people annually, boosting economic growth and fostering cultural exchange.

The success of the Heartland Flyer Extension project relies on a strong partnership between the states of Kansas and Oklahoma, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and Amtrak. The timely passage of SB-349 is crucial at this juncture, as it establishes a practical funding mechanism necessary for the startup and operation of the extended passenger rail service.

We are pleased to report that the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) has diligently worked on the project, and their application for project recognition under the FRA Corridor Identification and Development Program was approved on December 8, 2023. KDOT has committed to using public and state funds to meet the cost share requirements for qualifying for the federal share of total costs for the Corridor. Passage of SB-349 is imperative to fulfill the federal requirement for operational funding, utilizing the Passenger Rail Revolving Fund established in the original legislation passed in 2010.

City Hall / 118 W. Central Avenue / Arkansas City, Kansas / 67005-0778
(620) 441-4414 / Fax (620) 441-4426 / rfrazier@arkansascityks.gov
www.arkansascityks.gov

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As we understand, there are 68 other similar project proposals in the Corridor ID Pipeline. Due to the collaborative efforts of KDOT and ODOT on preliminary study, planning, and development, the Heartland Flyer Extension is ahead of many other projects across the country. We must emphasize the urgency of advancing this legislation to ensure that our bi-state project is not preempted or eliminated due to any delays in meeting project pipeline milestones.

Furthermore, this infrastructure project has garnered immense public and community interest, impacting numerous legislative districts along its route. Over 36 city councils and county commissions have voiced their support for expanding Amtrak service in Kansas, reflecting the widespread enthusiasm for this initiative. With the federal grant program covering 80% of the development costs, it is crucial that we seize this opportunity to enhance our state's connectivity with Amtrak.

In conclusion, we respectfully urge the Senate Transportation Committee to advance SB-349 out of committee, allowing Kansas to finally establish the much-anticipated connection with Amtrak. This legislation not only benefits the Heartland Flyer Extension but also contributes significantly to the cultural and economic growth of our region.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.


Sincerely,



Mayor




Commissioner



Commissioner



Commissioner



Commissioner

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