

ColoRail Passenger

September-October-November 2012

Issue #69

Looking to the future:

ColoRail returns to Boulder for September 22nd general meeting

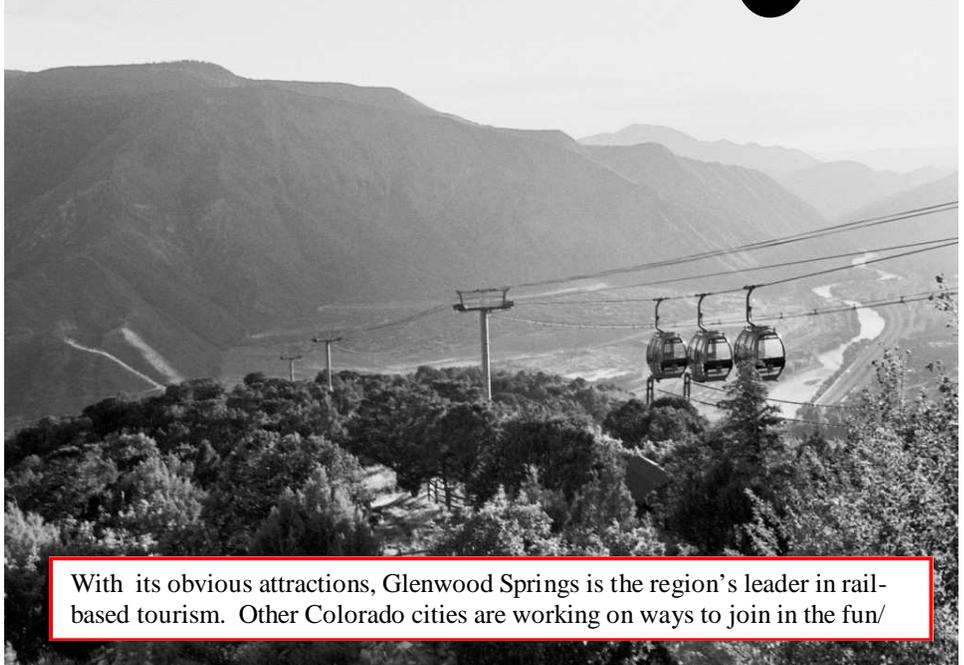
FasTracks and High Speed Rail - where do we stand?

A college town in September: autumn colors, leaves turning, the crunch of ideas, and... curiosity about the future! Two well-informed speakers will be featured in the 10:00 a.m. ColoRail general meeting to be held in the Boulder Creek Room of the Boulder Public Library.

"FasTracks and the Northwest Line - Current Plans" will be covered by **Richard F. Clarke**, Assistant General Manager, Capital Programs, RTD. The meeting format, with a pizza break at noon, allows ample time for questions and answers.

Following the break, Professor **Andrew Goetz** of the University of Denver will cover "High Speed Rail - Where Do We Stand?" His topic will also offer an opportunity for questions and answers.

The library, at 1001 Arapahoe Avenue, is a short walk from the focal point of RTD local Boulder routes. Regional Rte BV from Denver and Westminster stops on Broadway one block from the library. The meeting is open to the public.



With its obvious attractions, Glenwood Springs is the region's leader in rail-based tourism. Other Colorado cities are working on ways to join in the fun/

Getting tourism on track

RAIL BASED TOURISM IN COLORADO COVERED IN FORUM

June 12, 2012, ColoRail convened its Spring General Meeting in Westminster. Primary topic of the meeting was rail based tourism in Colorado. A panel, headed up by State Tourism Director **Al White** provided insights on the current and potential rail based tourism market in Colorado. Panelists included **Matt Abbey**, General Manager of the Rio Grande Scenic Railroad in Alamosa; **Steve Kaverman**, General Manager, Royal Gorge Route Railroad in Canon City; **Rick Klein**, City Manager of La Junta, Colorado; **Marc Magliari**, Media Relations Manager at Amtrak's Chicago offices; and, **Doug Spinn**, principle of LA Rail, a private rail car excursion operator in California.

ColoRail President **Jim Souby** opened the meeting with a brief description of the topic. Rail based tourism in Colorado includes Amtrak which provides intercity transportation to destinations in Colorado on the *California Zephyr* and *Southwest Chief*, scenic lines which provide their passengers with Colorado's majestic scenery and glimpses into the state's historic communities and rail services; and, rail museums such as the Colorado Railroad Museum in Golden and the Glenwood Railroad Museum in Glenwood Springs, preserving everything from memorabilia from Colorado's historic railroads to actual equipment, some of which is still in operation. Rail based tourism also serves related venues which range

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"A Voice for Colorado's Rail Passengers"

Volunteers make friends for Colorado

Thanks for volunteers

Summer travel started off with a busy Memorial Day weekend for ColoRail station volunteers at the temporary Denver facility. Volunteers were asked to assist on the Labor Day weekend, too. A special surprise was a letter acknowledging the work of a volunteer.

"Never in all my travels around this fair world have I met such a cheerful and helpful person as you," wrote **Gerry Dyck**, "I shall always think of you as the Friendly Finn. I have told your story of volunteerism to several people, including my Norwegian wife Helga, and we both admire you greatly." Dyck was traveling between Massachusetts and New Mexico in pursuit of "astronomical adventures."

"It's not unusual for folks to thank the Amtrak Volunteer hosts for the hospitality we offer," observes coordinator **Don Zielesch**, "but this is the first time I have seen anyone put anything in writing." Don congratulated **Ron Kaminen** for making such a good impression. Ron is a former Amtrak engineer on the Milwaukee - Chicago *Hiawatha Service*.

Also volunteering on that weekend were **Mike Cronin**, **Vince Szafanko**, **Tom Peyton** and Don Zielesch.

Don says that if readers are available to help out anytime from Friday eve-

ning to Tuesday of holiday weekends, they could either e-mail **Jay Jones** at:

sunjones.railguy@gmail.com

Or Don at:

dwz1@juno.com

to set up a time, or call Don at **303-934-4949**. When Jay will be out of town, I'll fill in for him. "The evening slots are usually the hardest to fill," reports Don, "and if any of you can volunteer evenings that would be very helpful."

According to Don, both morning and evening trains have been running pretty much on time, but even though the train sometimes does run late, it does help to have us there to answer questions and try to calm the anxious impatient riders. You can use your own discretion whether or not you want to go down when the train is seriously late. It's always

good to call the local number (303-534-2812 or the 1-800-872-7245 national number) to check the train's status.

"And," Don adds. "if you would please sign in on the sheet provided in our "office" at the temporary station it will help us to determine who is eligible for a free Volunteer Host Shirt."

ColoRail Board and Colorado NARP Council Members:

(with telephone numbers and <e-mail addresses>

Jim Souby, President, NARP Council Member (303-355-7985). <jsouby@comcast.net>

Bob Brewster, Board Member, Boulder, <railbob@q.com>

Edie Bryan, Vice-President, Lakewood, <twobryans@aol.com>

Helen Bushnell, Board Member, Lakewood, <sunhelen@fastmail.net>

Gary Carter, Board Member, Pueblo <pueblsilver@yahoo.com>

Elia Fisher, Secretary, Denver, <eliafisher@yahoo.com>

Jay Jones, Treasurer, Denver, <sunjones@earthtones.com>

Jay Jones, NARP Council Member, Denver. <sunjones.railguy@gmail.com>

Joan Shaffer, Board Member, Loveland, <joantshaffer@silverliningsstrategies.com>

Ira Schreiber, Board Member, Aurora, <ischreiber@aol.com>

Robert Rynerson, Newsletter Editor, Denver. (720-570-0647) <rw.rynerson@att.net>

ColoRail, the Colorado Rail Passenger Association, is in correspondence and coordinates with NARP, the National Association of Railroad Passengers. Membership in both organizations is encouraged.



Ron Kaminen (right), ColoRail Station Volunteer, enjoys a moment off his feet, conversing with traveler Gerry Dyck..

'Curse of oil' hits *Builder*

Will other routes suffer?

Observers reporting on the impact of oil discoveries in Third World countries use the phrase "Curse of oil" to describe the economic distortions that result when what appears to be a wealth-producing boom harms other parts of the economy.

These distortions - labor shortages, inflation, supply shortages, sometimes act as a brake on the oil development that is causing the boom.

One characteristic of the Third World oil boom is the inability of governments and businesses to adjust to the new situation. So, it was not surprising when the Sidney, Montana *Herald* reported that "U.S. Senators Max Baucus and Jon Tester, D-Montana, are urging Amtrak to increase capacity on the *Empire Builder* to help energy-impacted communities take full advantage of the Bakken oil and gas boom."

"We are hearing from our constituents that Amtrak passenger capacity for Montanans, tourists and other passengers trying to travel through eastern Montana and western North Dakota can be 'extremely limited,' wrote the senators.

Amtrak's service is often the best way to reach the small cities along

the northern route and has long been used for a sort of long-distance commuting by workers who live in dorm-type housing and go home from time to time. This traffic co-existed for generations with tourism.

Now Amtrak is in a tough spot. Decades of neglect by politicians of both parties have left it critically short of long-distance equipment and only

"...capacity for Montanans, tourists and other passengers... can be 'extremely limited.'"

indirect improvements planned (new Viewliners and regional-type cars should release some of the aging Superliners that are being used inappropriately on Eastern and short-haul trains.)

Demand on the *Builder* for tourist travel has been boosted by gasoline prices and by elimination of parallel trains (the *North Coast Hiawatha* and the *Pioneer*). An hour with Amtrak reservation computers around holidays often shows Chicago - Portland and Chicago - Seattle travel selling out at higher rates than travel on the longer California routes.

The situation is risky for other Super-

liner routes, as Amtrak may be tempted to cut cars from other trains in order to respond to the conflicting political signals that tell it to dismiss proposals for western transcontinentals, defer replacing Superliners, but to respond to marketplace demands.

If cars are cut from other trains, they risk the "Pioneer treatment" in which sell-outs occur at low levels of capacity and then the consequent lower ridership and revenue figures lead to targeting the train for discontinuance.

One of the ironies in this situation is that Amtrak in 2010 contracted for studies that claimed that ridership on a restored *Pioneer* or *North Coast* train would be lower than it was when those trains were operating.

The problems created by the oil economy spill over into other familiar areas. The north-south BNSF line through Boulder and Longmont lines up directly to the Bakken energy play, raising its potential freight traffic value, as RTD learned recently.

The next time you read a condescending article about a Third World country that cannot get its infrastructure sorted out, it may be about us.

Cheapest fares bypass Bakken

Rail coach fares from Chicago on next day, Sunday, September 9, 2012

To Seattle on Train 7 = \$354 - all sleeper space sold out

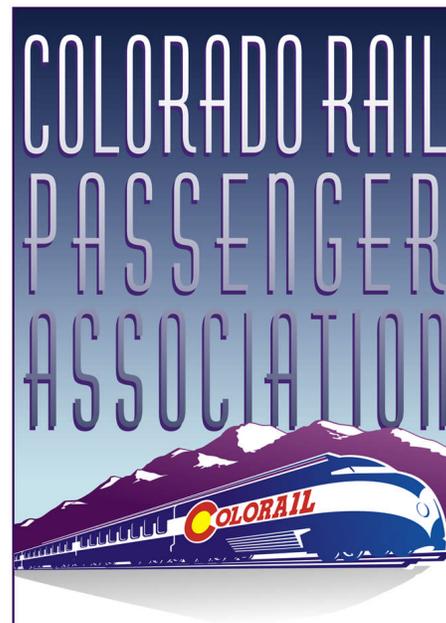
To Seattle via Sacramento on Trains 5/14 = **\$348**

To Portland on Train 27 = \$354 - all sleeper space sold out

To Portland via Sacramento on Trains 5/14 = **\$327**

To Emeryville (SF Bay Area) on Train 5 = \$243

To Los Angeles on Train 3 = \$195



Ties between rail lines to

(Continued from page 1)

from national parks and historic sites to hotels and restaurants. Souby closed by emphasizing that tourism was an important economic contribution of passenger rail. It needs to be a part of the business case for rail expansion in the state.

The eight scenic railroads, their route miles and websites are:

Cripple Creek and Victor Narrow Gauge Railroad, 4 miles, <http://cripplecreekrailroad.com>

Cumbres & Toltec Railroad, 63 miles, www.cumbrestoltec.com

Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge, 45 miles, www.durangotrain.com

Georgetown Loop Railroad, 4 miles, www.georgetownlooprr.com

Leadville Colorado & Southern Railroad, 22 miles, www.leadville-train.com

Manitou and Pikes Peak Railway Co. (cog railroad), 9 miles, www.cograilway.com

Rio Grande Scenic Railroad. 62 miles, www.coloradotrain.com

Royal Gorge Route Railroad, 12 miles, www.royalgorgerroute.com

Al White, State Tourism Director and long time resident led off the panel discussion with what must be a familiar story for Coloradans – arriving in Colorado by rail. In Al's case, he came from Illinois and his first stop was Denver Union Station. He later boarded a local mail train to the Yampa Valley where he made his home. "The point of the story is that rail service has deep roots in Colorado," said White. White also emphasized the growing importance of tourism in Colorado, now the second largest industry in the state. He pointed out that international tourists from Europe, Asia and South America have all discovered Colorado, first, of course, for the world class skiing but now more and more for

the summer season attractions. Scenic and historic rail travel will be attractive venues for these markets in the future.

Travelers from these markets are extremely important to Colorado because they have come a long way and tend to spend more money in the state. It is important for the state and individual venues to make their trips as smooth as possible. To that end, the Colorado Tourism Office is working to ease the visa process for these travelers, most recently for those from Brazil.

Amtrak's Marc Magliari followed with some additional thoughts about the importance of passenger rail in the West. He agreed that the business case needs to be strengthened and that that includes business travel as well as tourism. Many businesses are finding rail travel can be very productive compared to air and auto trips due to the fact that the travel time can be spent on work rather than waiting in lines or driving. He also noted that high rural air fares, diminished air and bus service are increasing Amtrak's importance as a basic transportation alternative.

"Amtrak is now the primary way for many folks in many small towns to get to other places including larger cities." Magliari said. "This is an important part of our business case." Unfortunately, Amtrak has had to cut back on its marketing activities. He encouraged ColoRail and others at the conference to step up their efforts.

Matt Abbey, likened tourism to a renewable resource. "We just have to clean up afterwards and we are back in business! But we have to remember that tourism development is not an instant affair but more like a rising tide," he said. Partnerships with communities are extremely important, critical to success in serving and recruiting passengers of any description (foreign or domestic) and helping businesses develop and ex-

pand. He cited the example of Iowa Pacific Holdings car shop in Alamosa is a good example as the local government expedited permits without any sacrifice of public values. The shop which refurbishes rail rolling stock including passenger cars now employs 60 people.

"Colorado has been an inspiration for passenger rail travel throughout its history," according to Steve Kaverman. First, as the only convenient way to get to and from mining communities, later as the inspiration for the dome car in Glenwood Canyon, and now with its scenic rail lines. The Royal Gorge Route Railroad generates more overnight stays in Canon City than any other attraction including the park and suspension bridge. The park and bridge tend to attract day trippers who don't leave a lot of money behind.

Steve is optimistic about the future, which may include creative draws like the Cristo project as well as the everlasting scenery. He noted that the road's seasonal payroll is over a million dollars, and everything possible is sourced locally. Scenic lines are major attractions but their passengers then discover other venues. The scenic lines and other venues "feed off and feed on each other." Other tourism programs like helo tours, hotels, rafting companies, all help each other: e.g. "raft and ride", "cable, planks and trains" tours in and around the Royal Gorge.

Kaverman noted that there have been some unfortunate rail tourism developments such as diminished private car capacity at DUS. This situation calls for a private car facility elsewhere with good access to Denver. Steve emphasized that the private car operators and passengers brought a lot of money Denver and bought a lot of local services. He also said that Denver RTD has to continue to improve its ability to handle tourists with more day passes, and other conveniences.

enhance Colorado tourism

Rail fleet needs added cars

Doug Spinn continued on the private car topic. According to Spinn, private car excursions target retired persons with money. They generally serve 40-50 passengers per consist, yielding 1000's of passengers per season. These passengers spend a lot of money on the train and at their destinations. The private car excursion business even expanded during the recession. For example, LA Rail has had a private car operating on every weekend Amtrak train out of LA.

Doug is currently assessing the possibility of excursions to Colorado on the Southwest Chief. The passengers would operate out of La Junta for starters, with bus and van transportation to local venues such as Bents Old Fort. Anchor attractions for the trip would include scenic lines on a two or three day circuit into the mountains by bus. The bus would then return passengers to either La Junta, Trinidad or Albuquerque depending on the final excursion design and itinerary.

ColoRail Board Member **Gary Carter** described how the circuit might work with the Rio Grande Scenic Railroad and the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad. That example would include an overnight in Alamosa. Another excursion idea would have Amtrak Vacations packaging similar trips for passengers on its two trains through Colorado.

Rick Klein concluded the panel presentations with a description of La Junta's efforts to grow tourism. The community's efforts have included the passage of a Lodging Tax to help fund infrastructure improvements and city events that make the city more attractive and convenient for residents and tourists. The city is currently working with the Colorado Department of Transportation and the BNSF Railway to site and fund a new passenger rail depot. The facility would have a spur track to accommodate private rail cars from

excursions such as those discussed. The La Junta Economic Development Council has been working with ColoRail on planning for excursion rail tours later this year or next spring.

Finally, Rick has been working with colleagues along the route to protect the Southwest Chief and its line through western Kansas, Colorado and Northern New Mexico. Freight service on much of the line has diminished and therefore BNSF Railway no longer maintains the line sufficient for higher speed passenger service such as Amtrak's Southwest Chief which can operate at speeds up to 79 miles per hour.

Amtrak contracts with BNSF to cover its share of maintenance on the line. That contract expires in 2015. BNSF estimates that to restore and improve the line so it can support that train speed it will cost \$100 million dollars for immediate capital improvements on the roadbed, bridges, culverts, grade crossings and other items, and another \$11 million dollars annually for maintenance so that level of service can be maintained. Amtrak does not have the money in its current budget.

Communities along the line are seeking support from Congress. Klein thanked ColoRail for its early efforts to make leaders and the public aware of the looming issue. Loss of the train would have cause serious economic losses and would foreclose many of the tourism opportunities discussed at the meeting.

While specific information on the economic impacts of these tourist venues have not been researched in detail, general ridership estimates on the scenic lines exceed 250,000 persons per year. Lines like the Royal Gorge Route Railroad have payrolls of over a million dollars a year in their home communities and generate additional economic activity. This occurs as a result of their own expenditures for supplies and the

related activity their riders generate for hotels, meals, sundries and souvenirs. This activity is extremely important as the scenic lines operate in small communities in rural Colorado.

As these markets expand, ColoRail has called for state support for marketing activities, particularly overseas, and continued grant and loan support for public infrastructure and private venue improvements. We have also raised the idea of acquiring "Colorado" passenger cars for exclusive service on Amtrak's Southwest Chief and California Zephyr. These cars could rotate seasonally for summer and winter tourism in Colorado, or be leased to other lines as appropriate. ColoRail has also raised the idea of linking the Southwest Chief and California Zephyr in Denver in the future, re-establishing Front Range passenger rail to the south from Denver.

As this 1999 photo of an 80 mph speed restriction on the then 90 mph *Southwest Chief* route shows, the line through southeastern Colorado has the potential to provide easy access to tourism points if it is maintained.



Project had no
set-aside

Amtrak back "FASTER"

From ColoRail's **Edie Bryan**, *Items of interest from the Denver Union Station Project Authority Board of Directors meeting August 2, 2012 after no meeting in July.*

- √ Moving AMTRAK back into the Historic Denver Union Station as quickly as possible is a top priority. This includes areas for train boardings, extended tracks and waiting room facilities. They anticipate this should happen by January or March 2014. This sounds like a long time off, but lots has to be done before that. They do now have \$5 million to move AMTRAK back that they received from Colorado Dept of Transportation FASTER funds. The original budget for DUS did not have any funds for moving AMTRAK back. No mention of the heating and cooling system which was not originally budgeted either.
- √ This early relocation of AMTRAK to the historic Denver Union Station building could be complicated, and must be coordinated with the developer of the station, a coalition called, "Team USA." [Union Station Associates] They need approval from the United States Department of the Interior, National Parks System for proposed modifications that they plan to make to the interior.
- √ One question was, "What happens if they cannot get this approval?" The answer from RTD attorney **Marla Lien** was that RTD would have to restart the entire process over again, with public meetings, etc. In the meantime, Mike Sullivan of Trammel Crow presented a proposal for building a "Building inside a Building" and getting a Certificate of Occupancy only for this temporary structure inside the historic building. The difficulty here is getting approval
- from the Denver Fire Department, and a temporary fire alarm system. Therefore, the historic building part of the project is only 8% complete.
- √ The entire Denver Union Station project is now 68% complete overall. Since they have used a little less than 67% of the contingency funds, they feel that they are in good shape. Three environmental items that have been owner's risk problems are now all remedied: Contaminated soil, asbestos, and the high water table. Of course, they could encounter additional problems such as contaminated soil, or settlement of the historic building, which is being monitored with inclinometer instruments.
- √ Kiewit [general contractor] has gone 365 days without any reportable injury accident, which is a major accomplishment for a project of this size. The redesign for the pedestrian bridge has been a project issue. Now it has been moved, coming from a landing on the B block [near Wewatta Street] to a landing on a train platform. The DUS project has exceeded the goals set for Disadvantaged Business Enterprises in a report submitted June 22, 2012.
- √ Bond Rating: "Fitch affirms Denver Union Station Project Authority Senior Notes at "A" rating, which is considered to be "investment grade" and with "Outlook Stable." This is because they are backed by annual payments of \$12 million from RTD. This is one grade below the AA rating for RTD FasTracks bonds which have additional backing from fare box revenue. Maintenance and programming costs for DUS were being worked out that same day between AMTRAK officials who had come to Den-
- ver and RTD, as reported by Marla Lien. No RTD board member attended.
- √ The artist for the required art at the station, **Kevin Curry**, described a major change from his previous design, to focus on the Mizpah Arch. He had done considerable research on it; it was built in 1906 and dedicated by Denver Mayor **Robert Speer** to be there forever, with a Biblical verse of blessing on the traveler. But it was removed just 25 years later because there was not room enough for auto traffic to go through it. So the artist had a totally new proposal to replace the previous plan of 5 different installations at various corners of the plazas.
- √ The new design has the original cast iron floral designs copied on the floor, with a glow to highlight them from below. Then there will be "WELCOME" and "MIZPAH" lettering about 3 feet high which is in scale of the original overhead signs. Estimated cost is \$288,000 of an original budget of \$300,000. The board did not actually approve this new plan, awaiting additional information on the 1/8 inch lip on the cast iron grill above the surrounding surface. Would this meet the required ADA standards? There were also questions on the longevity of the installation with effects of weather, ice, etc. (The "Mizpah" is supposed to mean farewell.)
- √ The redesign of the pedestrian bridge: it will be from a landing on the B block platform to a landing on a train platform now. This redesign was approved by the Union Station neighborhood organization, but not shown to other members of the public.

(Continued on page 7)

with CDOT funding

“What happens if...?”

(Continued from page 6)

The North wing elevator design has been approved. Sixteenth street should be open the middle of September.

√ Parking: They have received "some relief" on the 150 public parking spaces required in the original Environmental Impact Study. When I questioned how this could be done without re-opening that study, I was told that they are very aware that the entire project is "Under Parked" and that they are looking at a variety of options to deal with

t h a t p r o b - l e m . D U S P A v i c e c h a i r - m a n **Jerry Glick** is working on that search for additional parking. Each office building will presumably have its own parking, of course, but presumably those would not be available to the public or only at specific times. Some \$1.2 million spending for that is "deferred."

√ From: *Edie Bryan*
√ Vice President, ColoRail

But first... before the 2014 target dates at Denver Union Station, the West Line light rail service is due. The opening ceremonies are set for April 26, 2013, with scheduled service and bus connections starting on Sunday, April 28th. Progress this year is due to be celebrated with the September 15th "Tour de FasTracks" bicycle event on the path paralleling the new tracks, starting at Oak Station.



ColoRail Membership

1550 Larimer St., Ste. 271
Denver, CO 80202

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Postal Code: _____

Telephone, with area code: _____

E-mail address, fax number or other contact information: _____

\$15 PER YEAR
pays for 2013 mailings,
printing, publicity

"No resources" is
chief reason

States unwilling to pick up tab

From: Dennis Slimmer
[mailto:Dennis@ksdot.org]

Sent: Thursday, August 30, 2012

Subject: Amtrak's Southwest Chief passenger rail service

To: Southwest Chief Stakeholders:

In April, staff from the Kansas Department of Transportation attended a meeting in Garden City that was held to discuss potential impacts of deteriorating rail conditions to passenger rail service on Amtrak's *Southwest Chief* in Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico. During the meeting officials from Amtrak and BNSF indicated that without significant financial investment to improve the rail condition the Southwest Chief would likely be rerouted and discontinue passenger rail service in western Kansas, southeastern Colorado, and northern New Mexico. A financial solution requiring the three

states to provide \$100 million for capital improvements and \$2 million each in annual operating subsidies was presented by Amtrak Director of Government Affairs-Midwest, Ray Lang.

At the Garden City meeting KDOT officials indicated that appropriate staff in the Colorado and New Mexico DOT's would be contacted to further discuss the situation. In fact, KDOT Secretary Mike King spoke with transportation secretaries in Colorado and New Mexico regarding Amtrak's proposal. Unfortunately, despite the importance of the Southwest Chief route to the three states, it was determined that there are no resources to commit to the proposal made by Amtrak.

Following that determination, the three states prepared a joint letter (see attachment) notifying Amtrak and BNSF of their inability to commit

to Amtrak's proposal. In the letter the states indicated that members of their congressional delegation representing station stop cities would be contacted to advise them of the situation and work to find other solutions. KDOT has also asked Amtrak to keep us informed as other solutions are considered.

If you have any questions or need additional information you can contact me at 785-296-3865.

Dennis R. Slimmer, P.E.

Chief of Transportation Planning
Kansas DOT

The states are in an awkward situation. While in theory they have important responsibilities, the Transportation Act of 1958 and the 1970 act creating Amtrak took away most of their authority, but their funding is still sought.

ColoRail Passenger

1550 Larimer St., Ste. 271
Denver, CO 80202
