

**Testimony Before the Kansas Senate Ways & Means Committee
In Support of the Heartland Flyer Extension
Presented by City of Ponca City, Oklahoma 6 February 2025**

Chairperson Billiger, Vice Chair Claeys, Ranking Member Pettey and members of the Senate Ways & Means Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of the Heartland Flyer Extension. This critical infrastructure investment will bring profound economic, educational, and social benefits to the state of Kansas and Oklahoma. By extending passenger rail service north from Oklahoma through Wichita we unlock an opportunity for job creation, economic growth, increased tax revenues, and a much-needed boost to our state's higher education institutions.

Economic Growth & Job Creation

Expanding the Heartland Flyer will generate significant economic impact, both in the construction phase and long-term operation. The rail extension will:

- Create new construction and maintenance jobs, stimulating local economies along the corridor.
- Generate indirect jobs in hospitality, retail, and tourism as more travelers visit Kansas and Oklahoma communities.
- Attract businesses looking for increased connectivity and transportation options, bolstering commerce and investment in both Kansas and Oklahoma.

A study by Amtrak and regional transportation organizations has shown that expanding passenger rail service can yield a return on investment through increased economic activity and improved mobility for workers and businesses.

Boosting Tax Revenues

The Heartland Flyer Extension will also provide a substantial return to state and local governments through:

- Increased sales tax revenues from tourism and travel-related expenditures.
- Higher property values along the rail corridor
- Expanded business development near stations, contributing to local economic vibrancy and growth.

Supporting Higher Education & Workforce Development

Kansas colleges and universities are facing an enrollment cliff, with declining student populations threatening the sustainability of our institutions. Improved transportation options can:

- Attract new students from Oklahoma, Texas, and Missouri who may have otherwise overlooked Kansas schools due to accessibility concerns.
- Provide safer, more affordable travel options for students commuting to and from home, especially for those without vehicles.

- Strengthen partnerships between universities and businesses by improving connectivity for research collaboration, internships, and employment opportunities.

Enhancing Rural & Urban Mobility

Reliable passenger rail service benefits both rural and urban populations by:

- Providing affordable transportation for seniors, students, and workers who may not have access to a vehicle.
- Reducing highway congestion and maintenance costs by shifting some travel demand to rail.
- Offering a more sustainable and environmentally friendly alternative to car and air travel.

Conclusion

Investing in the Heartland Flyer Extension is a forward-thinking decision that will pay dividends for generations. By enhancing mobility, stimulating economic growth, supporting education, and generating new tax revenues, this project aligns with Kansas' long-term strategic goals. I urge this committee to support funding and policy initiatives that will make this extension a reality for the benefit of all Kansans and Oklahomans.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Homer Nicholson

Mayor

Ponca City, Oklahoma

580.767.9096