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Sam Brownback, Governor

**TESTIMONY BEFORE
2012 SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
REGARDING THE SOUTHWEST CHIEF AMTRAK SERVICE**

October 29, 2012

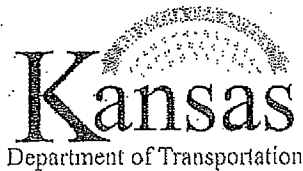
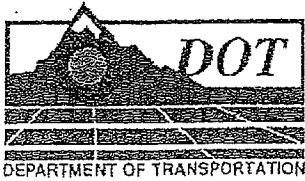
Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

As the department had reported previously, in April 2012 a meeting was held in Garden City to discuss the future of the Southwest Chief service through New Mexico, Colorado, and Western Kansas. The meeting was held to discuss needed track improvements on the route.

Burlington Northern Santa-Fe (BNSF) Railroad currently owns the track that needs improvement. They currently have only limited freight traffic on the line, and do not need to maintain the track at the same level that passenger trains require. The impacted portion within Kansas currently serves 18,300 riders per year and includes station stops in Hutchinson, Dodge City, and Garden City. Assistance for track improvements is not needed east of the current Newton stop as that portion of BNSF's rail infrastructure continues to be maintained by BNSF at a level that is consistent with conventional passenger rail service needs.

Amtrak and BNSF representatives presented to the group in April that a \$100 million investment, between the three states, would be needed over ten years to upgrade the track to maintain existing service. In addition, an annual investment of \$10 million annually to be shared by the three states, BNSF, and Amtrak, would be necessary for ongoing maintenance. As presented to the agency, if the investment commitment could not be identified by the end of the 2014 calendar year, Amtrak would consider moving the route south to BNSF's transcontinental line. A map of the current service and the alternative route along the transcontinental line is attached. The Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) representatives were asked to begin discussions by reaching out to the NM and CO transportation departments to gauge their interest in the proposed Amtrak solution. The attached letter was the consensus that was reached following those conversations.

Secretary King and KDOT staff will continue to be active in discussions with Amtrak, BNSF and affected stakeholders so that whatever decision is made regarding the long-term future of the Southwest Chief is one that has considered the appropriate social and economic factors.



July 20, 2012

Mr. Ray Lang
Amtrak, Director of Governmental Affairs-Midwest
500 West Jackson Blvd., 2nd Floor
Chicago, IL 60661

Dear Mr. Lang:

Amtrak's Southwest Chief passenger rail service in Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico is a vital link for communities in our three states. The Southwest Chief provides an important alternative for citizens who desire a safe, efficient mode of transportation. In addition to local citizens and businesses in our states that rely on the Southwest Chief service, Boy Scouts from around the country use the service to transport them to a lifetime experience at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico.

Unfortunately, as you have advised, the passenger rail service on the current alignment now faces a significant financial challenge. Because BNSF has shifted its freight operations from the current Southwest Chief route, the railroad no longer has a business reason for maintaining the line to a condition suitable for passenger rail operations. Without intervention, the Southwest Chief will likely be rerouted south at Newton, Kansas bypassing stops along the current route in western Kansas, southeastern Colorado, and northern New Mexico. We want to thank you for bringing this situation to our attention and for proposing a financial solution to address the situation.

Your proposal for the states to provide \$100 million for capital improvements over the next 10 years and to share \$10 million per year equally between Amtrak, BNSF, and all three states beginning in 2016 would require a significant investment by all of the proposed partners. Unfortunately, our states are unable to commit to the capital improvement or the ongoing maintenance of the Southwest Chief service at this time. We greatly value the service that the Southwest Chief provides to our citizens. However, all three states are facing budgetary challenges that prevent us from taking on additional commitments at this time.

Because the Southwest Chief is an Amtrak long distance train service funded by the U.S. Congress, we have contacted our U.S. Senators and Representatives of the affected communities to advise them of this situation. We will work with those Senators and Representatives to determine if another solution, including funding through Reauthorization of the Multi-Year Transportation Act, can be found to preserve service on the current alignment of this nationally important passenger rail service.

Thank you again for bringing this important issue to our attention. Please keep us informed, as we continue to seek a solution to this vital issue involving the routing of the Southwest Chief in our states.

Sincerely,

Donald Hunt
Director of the Colorado DOT

Mike King
Secretary of the Kansas DOT

Alvin C. Dominguez, P.E., Executive
Cabinet Secretary of the New Mexico DOT

c: Mr. D.J. Mitchell, BNSF Assistant Vice President of Passenger Operations

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