Southwest Chief Coalition – New Mexico Section

Update – February 8, 2015

It has been a busy six weeks to keep the SW Chief passenger train on its current route and provide necessary supportive funding.

We are making major progress though recent articles and editorials in the press would lead you to believe otherwise.

The many communications and meetings by email, telephone and in person can be summarized as follows.

On February 5, 2015 the Amtrak CEO, and the Secretary of NMDOT were scheduled to discuss the final terms of an agreement going forward. The general outline of that agreement is:

* According to our sources, if an agreement is reached, The SW Chief will continue to run on its current route.
* Amtrak will not make a request for annual maintenance funding help during the 2015 Legislative Session. Amtrak may need maintenance funding help from New Mexico at a later date.
* Instead, Amtrak will join New Mexico communities and counties and the NMDOT to apply for a TIGER grant under the Federal grant program when USDOT opens it for 2015. The grant request will cover New Mexico's one-time capital investment. Those costs are currently estimated at $6.7 million. The grant request may be more if Colorado and Kansas join the application.
* Another possibility is a capital outlay request to the Legislature for direct funding.

The NMDOT will co-sponsor the TIGER application. NMDOT may cover any matching funding need. To do so, it will need a bill either authorizing the use of existing funds within NMDOT or a new appropriation. We have favorable support for this plan in discussions with the Legislature.

We will release a further update when the results of the February 5th meeting are made public. Again, thank you all for your continued efforts in support of the Chief.