

**NEW MEXICO SECTION
SOUTHWEST CHIEF COALITION
UPDATE
SEPTEMBER 1, 2014**

Boardman Visit Reveals Grassroots Support for Southwest Chief

[We are repeating this news item for the benefit of those who may not have seen it and to add some additional information received since our last Update.]

Amtrak President Joe Boardman visited Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico July 11 and 12 on a special train. Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM) and BNSF Chairman Matt Rose joined Boardman for segments of the trip.

According to Bob Johnston in the October edition of Trains magazine (who paced the train in a rental car), "Making the case for preserving a skeletal network of long-distance trains with elected officials from grassroots to the national level has become a necessity for the chief executive of an enterprise controlled by ideology-driven appropriators." Boardman did meet with a number of elected officials, as well as leaders and scout-members at the Philmont Scout Ranch (northern New Mexico's largest single employer).

Despite the lack of any significant announcements from either Boardman, Heinrich or Rose, or extensive notification of the trip taking place, the greatest take-away from the visit was the number of citizens who turned out at each of the stops to support the Chief. Kimberly Adams of the Raton Comet wrote on July 17: "Nearly 150 Southwest Chief supporters greeted Amtrak President and CEO Joe Boardman with signs that said, 'Save Our City -- Don't Take Our Southwest Chief; It's Our Blood!'" Lupita Gonzales of the Las Vegas Optic wrote on July 15: "An enthusiastic crowd ranging from 60 to 80 individuals gathered at the Amtrak station in Las Vegas Saturday to greet Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-NM, who has expressed his support for continuation of the railroad line which includes Las Vegas and Raton."

Ford Robbins of the Southwest Chief Coalition joined 80 - 100 citizens in Lamy and was impressed by the number of people who remained, despite the fact that the special train was running over two hours behind schedule. The Santa Fe New Mexican carried an editorial on July 19 ("Our View: Amtrak support growing stronger"): "Seeing hundreds of people wait at a train station for hours, signs in hand as a show of support, would gladden the heart of any politician -- especially in an election year. That was the scene on a recent train tour, but not because of the politicians on board. No, the crowds were there to support the train itself . . ."

This level of grassroots support -- with no obvious well-organized campaign operating in the background -- is a testimonial to the importance of the Southwest Chief to New Mexico citizens. The public is willing to take the time to turn out to support the Chief, reflecting a full understanding that, again in the words of the New Mexican, "That decision [to abandon the route] would cost Northern New Mexico passenger rail, leaving people with fewer transportation choices and pulverizing an already fragile economy."

Southwest Chief Studies Move Ahead

As quoted in the Santa Fe New Mexican's editorial on the future of the Southwest Chief (see above), NM DOT Chief Tom Church (who rode the Boardman special) may have opened the door a tiny bit on possible state support for the train: "Church made it clear that he understands . . . the importance of the Southwest Chief to Northern New Mexico. 'This is not a political issue. We're just finding out the costs'

What's more, [Church] told The New Mexican, 'Our goal is to save it. If it really goes onto the chopping block, the state needs to step in.'

In the meantime, the NM DOT is managing three important studies that will have a significant impact on the future of the Chief:

-- Private legal counsel is studying the impact of the "Anti-Donation Clause" in the NM State Constitution which prohibits the state from contributing tax monies to private companies. The NM DOT mentioned the Anti-Donation Clause frequently in the drafts of the State Rail Plan that was submitted to the Federal Government earlier in 2014 as prohibiting any support for passenger rail.

-- Cambridge Systematics -- a Boston-based consulting firm that has, according to Frank Sharpless, NM DOT Transit and Rail Director, "Extensive passenger rail and economic analysis experience" -- is conducting two studies: one on the economic impact of the Southwest Chief and the costs associated with keeping the train on its current route or moving it to BNSF's southern transcon.

All three studies are expected to be completed by early October, although in recent letter Mr. Sharpless stated that a preliminary study to identify "the origins and destinations of riders to and from the current New Mexico Southwest Chief stations as well as projecting the origins and destinations of passengers to and from the potential new stations in Belen, Vaughn and Clovis" was expected to be completed by the end of July. The NM DOT has not revealed if the public will have any input or to review any of these studies before they are released.

Significant Resolutions Passed by New Mexico Organizations

August saw a flurry of resolutions passed by important New Mexico organizations -- resolutions that will have a significant impact on the upcoming discussions in the State Legislature.

The **New Mexico Association of Counties** passed a resolution at their annual meeting in June in support of the Southwest Chief and subsequently approved as a "Commissioners #1" resolution by the association's Board of Directors at a meeting on August 7 - 8. The resolution ("Keep Southwest Chief -- Amtrak") will serve as one of eight top priorities for the association in the 2015 legislative process.

The **New Mexico Municipal League** passed a resolution on August 28th supporting the Chief. The League is a nonprofit, nonpartisan association representing and serving 105 New Mexico cities, towns and villages.

Also on August 28th, the **Santa Fe Metropolitan Planning Organization** -- responsible for creating a forum for transportation decision making in the Santa Fe metropolitan planning area -- adopted a resolution in support of the Chief. The MPO directed that the resolution be delivered to state and federal authorities as well as members of the NM Legislature.

Each of these resolutions was drafted with input from members of the Southwest Chief Coalition Legislative Committee, and will help shape the dialogue preparing for -- and influencing -- the 2015 New Mexico legislative session.

Trackwork *Does Not* Reflect BNSF Support for Southwest Chief Route

Several comments on railroad-related internet discussion boards in August highlighted scheduled trackwork this fall on the Southwest Chief route in Colorado and Kansas, including this posting: "Heard the LaJunta sub getting 2 gangs in October. Las Animas JCT to Garden City, KS. Ties first then rail behind. Guess the Chief will survive."

While this trackwork *may* help the Southwest Chief's timekeeping due to numerous slow orders, the work *does not* reflect any change in BNSF's position on the future of the Chief. Coalition members are urged to counter any rumors that this work has any significance beyond basic, minimal maintenance.

Colorado Rail Passenger Association Celebrates 25th Anniversary

The Colorado Rail Passenger Association (ColoRail) will celebrate its 25th anniversary of passenger rail advocacy on Saturday, September 27, 2014 from 9 a.m. to approx. noon at the recently renovated Denver Union Station. ColoRail Founders and Regional Transportation District General Manager Phil Washington are expected to speak. ColoRail will release a vision for future passenger rail and transit at the meeting. And, of course, we expect good conversation over welcome refreshments. You are invited to attend.

The Southwest Chief Coalition is a group of city, county, and state elected officials, business leaders and private citizens who understand the importance of the Southwest Chief to New Mexico's current economy, future economic development, and the transportation options available to the state's residents. The Coalition's focus is to work with the State of New Mexico, citizen groups in Colorado and Kansas, the BNSF Railway and Amtrak to maintain the Southwest Chief on its current route through Gallup, Albuquerque, Lamy, Las Vegas and Raton. Please send any questions, comments or suggestions about the Southwest Chief Coalition to: swcnml@gmail.com.