

To: All Members of the Southwest Chief Coalition - New Mexico Section

From: Ford Robbins

Re: Next Steps

Last week, the federal government announced the award of a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation in the amount of \$12.5 million to the states of Kansas and Colorado to upgrade the track in the two states.

The Southwest Chief Coalition - New Mexico Section congratulates those citizen groups, elected officials and city and county governments who worked for and pledged matching funds for this grant.

While this is very good news in the short-term, the future of the Southwest Chief on its route through Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico remains cloudy. The TIGER funding will only address some of the issues.

Contrary to the opinion of many, including pundits, New Mexico remains an active partner in the continuance of the Chief on its current route. There has been considerable work done over the past several years to move toward a solution that includes New Mexico.

Thanks in large measure to the work of Coalition members, awareness of the importance of the Chief to New Mexico's economy and transportation options for the state's residents has been raised significantly. We will continue this educational effort and will work with key organizations to pass resolutions in support of the Chief.

In early 2014, The New Mexico Legislature, on a strong bipartisan basis, moved funding legislation that started in the House to the point of final committee action in the Senate. The Bill failed because the need for a budget became the greater priority in a 30-day session whose primary focus was the budget. Instead, funding for needed studies (primarily managed by NMDOT) was included in the Budget Bill. The fact that the Funding Bill died does not mean no effort was made or the case was lost.

The findings of the three studies -- expected in October or early November -- will have a significant impact on the thinking of the State's elected officials as we move into the critical 2015 legislative session.

This is not the time to ease up on the Southwest Chief Coalition's work. In fact, our actions in support of the Southwest Chief may be even more critical as we move forward.

We will continue to monitor what is happening, and develop strategies to support the Chief as the situation evolves.

For more good news, please see the attached PDF file. At the federal level, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee reported out its proposed Amtrak Reauthorization Bill on September 11th. If (and it is a big if) the proposal survives reasonably intact through the legislative process in a Congress bent on opposition, it will signal a new positive way Amtrak is funded and should bring relief to the beleaguered western trains.

Thank you for your continued support of the Southwest Chief and the Coalition. And, again, congratulations to all who worked tirelessly for the TIGER grant.

