Meeting Notes
Amtrak Heartland Flyer Expansion Feasibility Study
March 14, 2008 – 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm
Eisenhower State Office Building – Topeka, KS

Ron Kaufman, Bureau Chief of Public Involvement, KDOT, welcomed attendees as well as Amtrak officials and Oklahoma Department of Transportation officials who attended via telephone conference call. KDOT staff will prepare an attendance list with contact information and distribute to those who attended.

Chris Herrick, P.E., Bureau Chief of Transportation Planning, KDOT, provided opening remarks and reviewed the purpose of the meeting. Mr. Herrick also discussed that the purpose of the feasibility study would be to identify the potential impacts of extending the Heartland Flyer route from Oklahoma City, OK to Kansas City, MO. He noted that the study would provide a solid basis from which to make informed decisions about the potential of expanding passenger rail service in Kansas via the Amtrak Heartland Flyer. Mr. Herrick also reviewed study components and the need for the in-depth evaluation of all components and that the feasibility study needs to be based on reasonable assumptions.

John Maddox, Freight and Rail Unit Program Manager, KDOT, reviewed the feasibility study process with stakeholders. Mr. Maddox reported that KDOT submitted a formal study request to Amtrak on February 11, 2008 and that request puts KDOT "in the queue" along with other state DOT requests for studies. The expected project start date for the KDOT study is late summer 2008 with a target completion date of late summer/early fall 2009. Mr. Maddox continued by stating that the cost of the study would be $150,000 to $200,000 and would be funded by KDOT. The study will evaluate factors such as capacity issues, infrastructure improvements to mitigate delays caused by rail passenger service to the BNSF Railway, train set equipment issues, potential station stops, ridership and revenue forecasts, trip frequencies, operating schedules and connections with existing Southwest Chief and Texas Eagle services, food service, operating subsidies, and crossing/safety issues.   Upon completion of the study, Amtrak will prepare a draft report with release of the final report expected in late summer/early fall 2009.

Discussion with the stakeholders followed. Topics included the need to examine both daylight and overnight service, connections with existing Amtrak long distance trains, potential station stops and the fact that the more station stops there are on a route the more time it takes for the trip and expenses increase, station staffing issues, the shortage of train passenger cars in storage and the time required to build new passenger cars (up to three years), funding issues at both the state and national levels, connecting bus service to station stops, and the need for KDOT to coordinate with officials from the DOTs of Oklahoma, Texas and Missouri.

Route segment suggestions included Oklahoma City to Newton, Oklahoma City to Kansas City, and Oklahoma City to Newton with an extension to Kansas City.

Schedule suggestions included night service to connect with the Southwest Chief at Newton and daylight service for an Oklahoma City to Kansas City route.

Meal service was briefly discussed and Amtrak officials suggested a café car, noting the route is too short for full dining service.

Potential station stop suggestions for the Kansas portion included Arkansas City/Winfield, Wichita, Newton, Emporia, Topeka, Lawrence, and Kansas City. It was noted that other cities may be interested, including Strong City, Osage City, and Mulvane.

KDOT staff indicated that input from the stakeholders would be taken into account as the final scope of work for the feasibility study is prepared. It is expected that the final scope of work would be completed within sixty days.

Mr. Kaufman and Mr. Herrick thanked the stakeholders for attending the meeting and offering the insight and input regarding the feasibility study.

Prepared by John Maddox, Freight and Rail Unit Program Manager, Kansas Department of Transportation