



KDOT Passenger Rail Service Development Plan Public Meeting Fall 2023

The Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) hosted the first Passenger Rail Service Development Plan Update live virtual public meeting, via Zoom, on November 8, 2023. In addition to the live public meeting, a virtual open house option, that included the recorded presentation and online comment form, was available for participants to review the materials and provide comments at their convenience. The virtual open house component was active from November 8, 2023 – November 30, 2023.

KDOT is currently exploring plans to expand the Amtrak Heartland Flyer passenger rail opportunities to provide rail service from Oklahoma City, OK to Newton, KS. The purpose of the public meeting was to provide an overview of the development plan, highlight the considerations and show next steps in the process. Providing a live virtual public meeting and a virtual open house component allowed for maximum participation from interested parties for this large corridor and the most flexibility for the public to review materials and provide feedback. This document summarizes the public meeting opportunities and comments received.

Key Takeaways

By the numbers

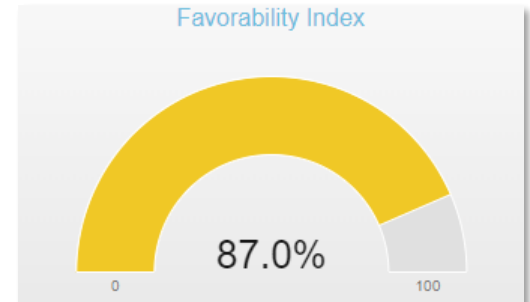
This project generated lots of interest and is widely supported with over 123 individuals signing into the live public meeting, 169 attending the virtual open house, and the database grew from approximately 200 to more than 900 stakeholders after the live public meeting.

In addition, 433 comments were provided online during the public meeting comment period from November 8 - 30, 2023.

Task	Number
Live Event Participants	123
Live Event Comments/Questions	50
Virtual Open House Participants	169
Online Comments	433
Total Public Meeting Participants	292
Total Comments	483

Support

A majority of the comments received stated support for the Amtrak extension and the project has continued to receive supportive comments following the comment period. Commentors are asked to identify their support level and the dashboard reports show the Favorability Index is currently at 87%. However, some individuals noted they are not supportive on the online comment form, but their comments indicate they are in favor of the Amtrak extension but would like to see it extended even further or provide additional travel times during the day.



Common Themes

A total of 483 comments were received during the public meeting comment period, with 50 comments and questions during the live public meeting event and 433 via the online comment form. A complete listing of the comments is attached. Common themes and example quotes are included below:

- **Route** - Stakeholders would like to see the line extended to Kansas City and additional northern cities versus extend only to Newton.
 - o *“Would love to see the Heartland Flyer come to Kansas City! Or better yet to Lawrence, KS! Would definitely take trips to Fort Worth and OKC from here.”*
 - o *“Please consider extending the Amtrak Heartland Flyer on to Kansas City. This will increase ridership, lower congestion (and the cost of dealing with traffic accidents) and reduce pollution.”*
 - o *“If you're going to develop passenger rail options in Wichita, then ideally linking the north half of the state to the South is ideal. Connecting with a line that also connects Topeka-Lawrence-Kansas City all to the Newton and Wichita areas would be a must given the volume of traffic and economic opportunities that this kind of travel has.”*
- **Travel times** - People would like and may prefer travel times during the day.
 - o *“I would very much like to see expansion of rail service between Oklahoma City and Newton, but it needs to be daylight service in order to be beneficial.”*
 - o *“While a connection to Newton is essential for interconnection between existing passenger rail services. The fact that it occurs in the dead of night I feel negates the benefits of this service. More over that you will have to transfer trains to continue onto any other destinations. The solution to this is a daylight run from Kansas City to Fort Worth daily, I believe this would grow not only ridership but support for passenger rail across the State of Kansas.”*
 - o *“I would love a connection between KC, Wichita, and Dallas. A stop in Topeka would be amazing too, but none of it would probably get much traffic without being a daylight connection.”*
- **Implementation schedule** - There is a desire for the extension to be operational before 2029.

- *“I believe this service should be running well before 2029, unless we are not serious about it ever occurring at all. I think the goal should be to get it rolling before the World Cup in KC.”*
- *“Please expedite this timeframe, this project is long overdue and must be implemented quickly.”*
- *“Fast-tracking this project is necessary. As numerous commenters noted yesterday, 2029 is way too far in the future for completion, especially since we've been waiting on this connection since 1999.”*
- **Amenities** - Train car and stop amenities are important include bike accommodations and potential sleeper cars.
 - *“Please make sure there is bike access or ability to bring bikes and strollers across the transition from SW chief to the Heartland Flyer.”*
 - *“Amtrak passengers really only want rail cars that are in excellent working order and the most comfortable.”*
 - *“Upgrades need to be made at the Newton Amtrak station. Lighting inside and out is terrible, with mercury vapor interior lights, and minimal lighting on the station platform. Seating is also bad. New signs should be posted, letting customers know where long term parking is located, short term parking, and the location of the waiting room. Station train platforms are crumbling and need to be replaced.”*
- **Modal connections** - Stakeholders noted that the timing of local bus routes would be beneficial to coordinate to get where they need in a timely manner, such as connections to airports, colleges, etc.
 - *“It may be a good idea to organize local bus networks to also have stops at the train stations as well, to maximize the benefit of the train stops reach to communities. Truly I don't even know where the train stops are, or if I'd have to drive there like I do the airport, I believe having private interests such as car rentals available near train stops may be of interest.”*
 - *“Having safe long term parking would be a priority as well as a robust public transportation option to and from the stations. Do it right the first time to avoid the boondoggle effect.”*

Meeting Promotion

KDOT distributed a public meeting flyer and social media posts to promote the virtual public meeting opportunities. The flyer was sent via email to the Advisory Group/Project Partners as well as to the KDOT Public Information Management Application (PIMA) database. The original database started with approximately 200 stakeholders and has grown to more than 900 contacts. The project team also sent reminder social media posts and messages

Kansas Department of Transportation
November 8

Happening today! Join KDOT for a live Zoom meeting from noon to 1 p.m. to discuss new Amtrak Heartland Flyer passenger rail opportunities in central Kansas. Visit <https://www.ksdot.gov/passrail/> and click on the Virtual Meeting link to join!

KDOT PASSENGER RAIL

Live Virtual Meeting 12 – 1pm on Nov. 8
Learn more at:
<https://www.ksdot.gov/passrail/>

Kansas
Lawrence
Topeka
Garden City
Dodge City
Newton
Arkansas City
Tulsa
Oklahoma City
Ferry
Guthrie
Norman
Purcell
Pauls Valley
Fort Worth
Gainesville
Dallas

following the live meeting and the last week of the comment period to provide the webpage and virtual open house links.

Media Coverage

There were several stories that covered the KDOT Passenger Rail Public Meeting. The list of media include:

- [KSN News](#) – “Heartland Flyer subject of virtual public meeting”, October 23, 2023
- [KWCH 12 News](#) - “KDOT to host public meeting on possible Amtrak route expansion”, October 31, 2023
- [KAKE](#) – “KDOT gives update on potential Amtrak expansion into Wichita”, November 8, 2023
- [KSAL](#) – “KDOT Provides Amtrak Update”, November 9, 2023
- [KFDI 101.3](#) – “KDOT provides update on restoring passenger rail service”, November 9, 2023
- [Trains](#) – “Kansas DOT holds public meeting on Heartland Flyer extension”, November 10, 2023
- [KOSU/NPR](#) – “Officials say they’re optimistic Kansas-Oklahoma rail route is on track for federal funding”, November 10, 2023
- [KSN Wichita](#) – “Bringing Amtrak back to Wichita – KDOT wants input”, November 27, 2023

KSN News and KWCH 12 News published their article about the potential expansion of the Heartland Flyer prior to the public meeting to promote and encourage engagement. The other identified media outlets published their stories after November 8th, providing a project update based on the public meeting and promoting the online open house opportunity.

Public Meeting Overview

Live Virtual Meeting

The KDOT Passenger Rail Service Development Plan Update live virtual public meeting was held on November 8, 2023, from 12 p.m. – 1 p.m. on Zoom. The meeting included a 20 minute presentation, followed by 40 minutes of questions and answers. The presentation topics included:

- Why KDOT is leading the study
- An overview of the Service Development Plan Update
- Purpose and benefits of the project
- Schedule and next steps
- How to stay engaged

There were 123 attendees that signed in to Zoom for the live virtual public meeting. After the formal presentation, the team took questions and comments verbally and through the Zoom

chat function. The project team received 50 questions and comments. Due to the nature of the chat function, several questions were repeated but in line with the overall comment themes, including but not limited to potential service route hours, upgraded train cars and amenities, Amtrak rail extension to Kansas City, overall schedule to begin operations, etc.

The Adobe PDF version of the presentation is included in the Appendix.

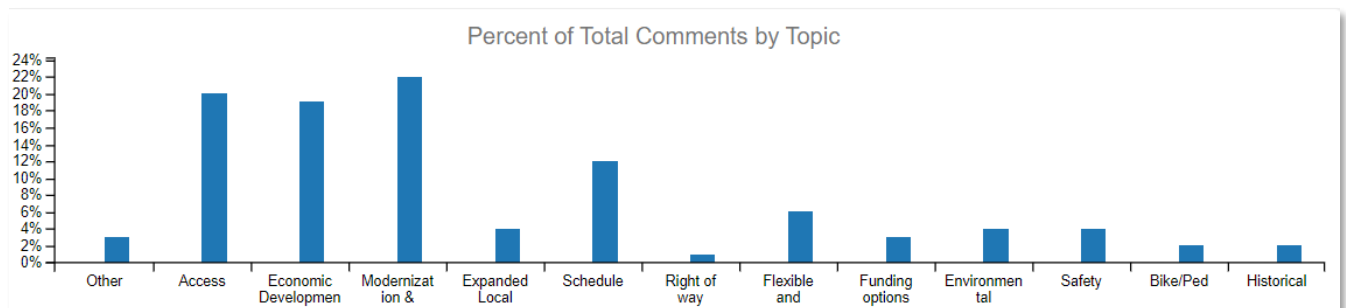
Online Open House Component

The KDOT Passenger Rail Service Development Plan Update virtual open house component was available for 23 days from November 8 – November 30, 2023. This option provided the public an opportunity to access the same information about the project, including a recording of the live event presentation and an online comment form, at their convenience. One hundred sixty-nine participants signed into the virtual open house component.

Online Comments (November 8 – 30, 2023)

As part of the online open house, participants were able to submit online comment forms. There were 433 total comments received during the comment period. Comments are in line with overall themes, including but not limited to the following topics:

- Support of the project.
 - Want to see KDOT secure funding to help the process move quickly and surpass the current operational year of 2029.
 - Expressed the preference to take the train versus drive.
- Accessibility for all using the service.
 - Want to see the route extended further north.
 - This would be beneficial for students, elderly and disabled.
 - Desire to expand the route and add daylight train routes.
 - Ensuring people are able to make connections/have access to bus routes between stops.
 - Would like amenities added (sleeper car, bike storage, business commuter options, beautification of the cars and stops.
- Connections to local bus services is important to get to destination.
- Focus on safety.





Next Steps

The participants were notified that KDOT is currently in the Project Planning stage of the project lifecycle. There are several stages the project must go through before the Heartland Flyer extension would be operational. KDOT will host a second public meeting in the spring of 2024 to present the Service Development Plan and gather input.