

United State Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

2/23/2016

Thank you for your service to our great nation.

The old adage “This nation was built by trains” is as important today as it was back when our nation was being built. The nation is still being built and with the changes that we will see over the next few decades, America will need a better passenger rail system. Everyone knows that times are not as good as they use to be. Money is hard to come by and we need to cut back on federal spending. When this great nation was built, we had fewer resources and less technology than we enjoy today and our forefathers put together a system of rail that served our communities for both freight and passengers.

Amtrak connects towns’, employs residents, and serves as an engine for economic development in La Junta and the West.

Five years ago, Amtrak’s contract with the BNSF was due to expire in 2016 and we could lose Amtrak’s Southwest Chief from Newton, Kansas west to Albuquerque, New Mexico, if \$100 million of rail infrastructure wasn’t bought back up to passenger rail standards. The train would be relocated along the Transcom line to the south.

The City of La Junta initiated a three State coalition to help save Amtrak through our region. We formed the Southwest Chief coalition along with Communities and Counties in Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico. Our first attempt was to secure funds form Tiger V, but failed. We did learned how the process worked and with the help of the Colorado delegation along with the Kansas and New Mexico’s delegation, we have been successful with our Tiger VI and VII applications.

With the TIGER Grants and working with BNSF and Amtrak we have reduced this amount to about \$38 million dollars left to be replaced. After the Tiger VII is complete we will have 127 contiguous miles of new infrastructure helping Amtrak achieve the speeds needed to stay on their schedule in Kansas and

Colorado. And in New Mexico a critical section by Lamy, trains speeds will increase from 30 mph to 79mph improving service.

We also are working with the State of Colorado, BNSF, Amtrak, and bus Companies to develop a multi-modal facility. This is an effort to create tourism in our area. There are similar efforts going on throughout the region.

The City of La Junta is currently working on Tiger VII with all Three States, Communities and Counties and the FRA to complete this task. I have found that we have dedicated people working hard together to complete this partnership work. The FRA has been great to work with as has been the three States Departments of Transportation.

When asking for matches for Tiger VII, we have Communities that didn't have an Amtrak stop in their communities, but provided matches for the grant. The message was consistent that we needed to save this route in our area, so we can have access to this great nation. We see a movement, where more people in the Cities are using Mass Transit and we want to be connected to this network.

Thank you for the FAST Act. The grant opportunities for the 25% set aside for rural areas in the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements is deeply appreciated. We feel that partnerships are the way to get these improvements done. Long distance trains provide our intercity travel. Whether I'm going to Santa Fe, New Mexico or to Dodge City, Kansas, this is the way to travel. When traveling, I meet tourist from all over the world. From young working families to the Amish, they tell me how this is how they travel.

I feel like the little engine going up the big mountain saying "I think we can, I think we can". Then, I think about how important passenger trains are to us as a community for Economic Development, Tourism, and mobility. So, I know we have to make it up that mountain with you as our partner. Passenger Rail is an important part of our nation's and region's future.

