

The Southwest Chief

As of January 1, 2016, one of several things will have happened to Amtrak's Southwest Chief:

The tracks from Newton KS to Lamy NM will get a much-needed upgrade to passenger Rail (80 mph) standards, saving the SW Chief as an efficient train service;

The tracks will not get this upgrade, as a result of which the Southwest Chief will run slower and slower, losing more and more business;

The above-named segment of the Chief's itinerary will be re-routed to an alternate route via Wichita, Woodward OK, Amarillo and Clovis, making Albuquerque harder to reach;

The Chief will be discontinued or broken into two shorter routes with a long awkward bus connection between Newton KS and probably Belen.

Our first wish is to see both the current and the alternate routes served by passenger Rail. Our second is to keep the Chief running where it is.

The required track upgrade cost is about \$200 million or maybe less; about half for the upgrade to 80 mph, and half for top-grade maintenance for 10 years. We consider this a Federal responsibility, but a proposal is in the air to share the burden among Amtrak, the BNSF Railway, Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico. "Burden" is a little too strong a word; \$4 million per year per stakeholder for 10 years. Consider what we routinely fork over to keep up our streets, highways, airports and probably waterways.

Killing the Chief would be a serious setback, not only for the people along the affected route but for the rebuilding of a full American passenger Rail network (which we like to call the "Rail Interstate").

There's a piece of good news on this front. State Rep. Roberto Gonzales (D-Taos)

has introduced two bills related to the SW Chief, HB 116 and HB 117. These bills face a journey not unlike that of a salmon in spawning season, but they are a real step in the right direction and deserve your loud and strong support.

To us, the long-term solution to the security of the Chief is to make sure it has some company on those tracks. Although the Chief alone is a good enough reason to keep the tracks up, the necessary funding would certainly be easier to come by if the tracks someday host a lot more than two trains a day.

Rail Transit For Albuquerque

Nothing new, sorry to say. We're still trying to promote our "Yard Bird" proposal, which would be a Modern Streetcar starter line from the Alvarado Center to the Rail Yard, assuming Railyard redevelopment progress continues.

For University Blvd and other transit improvement zones, the Bus Rapid Transit juggernaut is building up speed. Since Modern Streetcar and Light Rail Service still look a long way off for Albuquerque (as opposed to most other major cities in the West), we're hoping that they'll at least design the Rapid Bus lanes so as to be easily convertible to Rail as the busses wear out and this town decides to join the rest of civilization in modernizing our transit.

Urban Rail costs a lot more to start up than does better bus service, and we need better bus service (such as more neighborhood small-vehicle transit), but once installed, the Rail mode pays everybody back damn near forever (well, 50-100 years).

Please go to <http://www.cabq.gov> and <http://www.bernco.gov>, look up your Councilor and Commissioner and let them know you support Urban Rail, in addition to the Rail Runner and more "pervasive" bus service.

Get Active. It Still Works Sometimes

As a 501-c-3 tax exempt corporation, Rails Inc can't spend much time and energy politicking. We need you to do it. Here are some suggestions how:

* Contact your US Senators and Congress Members, telling them the SW Chief, its tracks and Rail transit for Albuquerque are excellent long-term investments for environmental, social, economical and business reasons.

* Same with your NM legislators (in particular Rep. Gonzales) and the Governor.

* Pass our bulletins around as much as you can.

* Do all this more than once.

Please feel free to consult our Web site and its Linked organizations as you see fit for information to back up your assertions.

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