

## **1) Amtrak's Southwest Chief:**

As you may know, the present alignment of the SW Chief is not assured beyond the next couple of years. At risk is the segment that runs from Newton, KS to Lamy, NM (636 track miles). The BNSF Railway, which owns these tracks, does not need to operate on this route (when they do at all) faster than 45 mph. This means they don't have to keep the tracks up to the 80 mph standard desired by Amtrak for passenger trains. Which in turn means that the SW Chief is slowly getting slower and slower.

Somebody needs to come up with about \$ 90 million to restore the track to 80 mph ("Class 4") standards and a few more million a year to keep them that way. I say a few more because rails last a lot longer and require much less repair than do roads and highways.

Since this track segment is presently used for very little besides two SW Chief trains a day, a lot of sensible people (and their political leaders) might reasonably wonder, why the hell spend this kind of money just to keep two trains a day running — especially since an alternate route through Wichita, Northwest Oklahoma, Amarillo, Eastern NM and Belen will be available for rerouting the Chief should the need arise.

Besides the fact that the Chief is an all-important transportation resource to the three states in question, Rails Inc feels that those tracks are a very attractive resource for anybody — private or public — who owns and is willing to upgrade them and who can imagine more than a couple of years (or an election cycle) into the future.

Here's what we mean:

(Adapted From the Rail Users' Network National Newsletter, Spring 2012):

Several cities and towns along the (Newton-Lamy) route have passed and are passing resolutions supporting their desire to keep the Chief running where it is, citing the many benefits the train confers on their communities. A New Mexico branch of the SW Chief Coalition (based in La Junta CO) is putting itself together. The purchase by the State of New Mexico from the BNSF of the Raton Pass-Lamy track segment is still in limbo, where it has resided since the Martinez administration took over.

While we don't believe the tracks are in imminent danger of being torn up and scrapped, Rails Inc has taken the position that to save the Chief we save the tracks, and to save the tracks we demonstrate what attractive resources they are. So "with a little help from our friends", we've compiled a list of uses for these tracks — beyond the important function of hosting two Amtrak trains a day. Here they are: Anybody got any to add ?

- 1) Hosting the SW Chief, of course.
- 2) Hosting future Amtrak Superliner (or similar) service from El Paso to Denver and points North, via Albuquerque, Raton and Pueblo (see our "Rocky Mountain Flyer" material at [www.nmrails.org](http://www.nmrails.org) or Rail magazine, #25).
- 3) Establishment or expansion of commuter and regional Rail in the three affected states.
- 4) Restoration of rail freight and express. The costs of fuel, tires and asphalt are not dropping. Private haulers, short lines and entrepreneurs might find this an acceptable risk if they don't have to buy and own the tracks. Truckers don't have to own the roads they run on.
- 5) Excursion trains, both modern and vintage. Besides their educational and cultural value, they can make pretty good money.
- 6) Hosting the field testing of new Rail safety components and other Rail products.
- 7) Hosting BNSF trains again, if anything happens to the Transcon.
- 8) Not to forget: Promoting the increased economic development, core-city renewal and tourism (with their considerable employment and tax revenues) that improved Rail transportation always pulls in. This should be especially attractive to the towns and cities in the parts of Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico we're concerned with, and to their leaders.

It has also been suggested to us that advocates should compile a list of potential users of

these tracks (towns, cities, schools, ranches, tourist attractions, transportation companies, excursion trains, etc) and ask them how permanent and reliable access to said tracks might improve or expand their operations. From this, revenue estimates might be put together to increase the attractiveness of the segment to either private or public potential ownership.

In the short haul, like seeds and range land, we need to “bank” these tracks till we can put them to the full use they deserve. If we’re short-sighted enough to let them go, it’ll be like the late 40’s all over again. Conventional, High Speed or Mag Lev, the future of this right of way should always be Rail.

## **2) National Train Day**

On Saturday, May 12 (10 AM), said day will be celebrated at the Wheels Museum, 1100 2nd SW, Albuquerque. Rails Inc will have a table there, primarily to add a Rail Future aspect to an event primarily celebrating Rail Past.

We hope to use this event (which we support anyhow), and the upcoming Rail Yard redevelopment initiative (yes, folks, this may finally be happening), to call attention to the long-stifled issue of Rail transit for Albuquerque. We’re not anti-bus here at Rails Inc, we’re anti-bus-only.

## **3) Regional Transit Progress**

Actually, there is some. The Regional Transit District (“Rio Metro”), an arm of the Mid Region Council Of Governments (MRCOG) which operates the Rail Runner, is engaged in a long-term transportation planning process. The good news is that they have fully embraced both the Rail Runner and the idea that we can no longer solve our transportation, energy and land use problems with more and more roads and more and more cars. They are paying close attention to the importance of transit to a civilized and “sustainable” New Mexico. The bad news is that their planning is oriented almost entirely toward faster and better bus service rather than more Rail transit (Light Rail and Modern Streetcar). There’s no evil here that we can detect; just some people trying to achieve the politically possible.

Let’s help them out: Contact the MRCOG and let them know you support Rail transit in

central NM beyond just the Rail Runner.

As usual, we urge everybody to pass this material on to your friends and acquaintances and to your political leaders. Public pressure still counts for something, if actually applied for long enough by enough people. Please be active, ladies and gentlemen.

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