Ladies and Gentlemen:

I The Southwest Chief:

The impasse continues over funding the track and bridge improvements necessary to keep the Chief running in Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico and to return it to Class 4 status (80 mph maximum) after 2015.

This impasse concerns whether the necessary $200 million over 10 years should be covered by the states of Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico (along with Amtrak and the BNSF Railway) or by the federal government. There is a good case to be made for either course, but none of the entities, except possibly Colorado, appears to be much in the mood to realize what a great investment they'd be making. So the Chief is still in trouble, along with what connectivity we still possess among our long-distance passenger trains.

As this is written, word comes from the Denver Post that the office of Colorado US Senator Mark Udall has announced a $12.5 million grant from the US Dept. of Transportation to assist in keeping the SW Chief running. If this is so, and if it's a yearly grant, this is exciting news. We'll keep you up on this.

We have maintained from the beginning of this crisis that the best way to save the Chief (long term) is to save and upgrade the tracks, and the best way to do this is to present to interested parties how said tracks can be put to work beyond hosting two Amtrak trains a day, and just what a great long-term investment these tracks would be for any entity (preferably public) smart enough to snap therm up.

II The Issue Behind The Other Issues:

Whether we all succeed in saving the Chief next year or not, almost nobody is addressing what we believe to be the underlying cause of all these continuous and depressing struggles for passenger Rail.

Actually, the true underlying causes are auto and highway dominance, vested interests and American short-sightedness. But what might be called the underlying

“manifestation” of these is addressed in the attached article, which appeared in the latest Rail Users Network Newsletter, but is not yet posted at their Web site, http://www.railusers.net (please check the site out anyhow and consider joining the RUN).

Please read this article carefully, comment to us as you see fit, and pass it around to your friends, associates and political leaders, both state and federal.

Root Causes
(A Not-So-Modest Proposal)

We Americans have long borne a bad habit of scrambling our private and public policies (our Capitalism and Socialism if you will) so that we miss out on the best of both. An example near and dear to us rail advocates is the way we operate passenger Rail service at the national level. Consider these:

One: Our passenger Rail model is insanely upside-down in comparison to that of every single other mode of transportation in America. That is to say, one erratically managed, under-funded and ethically flabby passenger train corporation, neither properly private nor properly public,operating as a barely-tolerated intruder on privately owned infrastructure.

Two: All our other passenger transportation modes (and some of our freight modes) feature both private and public moving parts operating more-or-less reliably and serving just about everyplace, on publicly owned infrastructure.

Three: There exist private operators, with proven “track” records, who could make a go of passenger (and express) Rail service on our under-served track segments, or on segments yet to be restored, if our passenger Rail operating model were right side up. Airlines, truckers, bus companies and boat owners don’t have to own and maintain their rights-of-way.

Four: We just plain don’t have enough tracks to serve all our Rail needs.

So Rails Inc urges all passenger Rail advocates to get behind these:

1) Establishment of a publicly-funded “Rail Interstate” system (tracks, bridges and signalling) which would re-connect abandoned and under-served areas once fully served by passenger Rail, and bring new service to most cities and sizable communities built after the ascendancy of the automobile. Station stops should be a local responsibility, and sold accordingly.

2) Opening up of long-distance passenger rail service to reasonably-regulated competition, both private and public. It’s obvious that Amtrak, if it deserves to exist at all as a national carrier, could use it.

To further explain:

* Much of this trackage can be located right alongside our existing freight tracks, sharing right of way and maybe some signalling.

* We’re not recommending the confiscation or seizure of any freight tracks. After all, the Class Ones and many short lines are doing a pretty good job of hauling their stuff. But the major freight tracks are getting crowded and Big Freight is no friendlier to passenger Rail than it ever was. Much can be done with modern train control, but we need more public track capacity.

* In addition to building new track, the nation should start snapping up under-used and at-risk track segments between significant destinations. Lamy-Raton Pass NM and Belen-Anthony NM are but two of many that come to mind. These tracks could then be leased for a reasonable fee to any operator willing to keep them busy and well-maintained.

* We’re not talking “High Speed Rail” here. Not yet. Class 4 (80 mph) is good enough until after the “Rail Interstate” starts generating ridership and revenue. After that, track speeds can be boosted with grade crossing separation, advanced train control and Talgo-style rail car design. We consider it more important to go

everywhere anytime at highway speeds than to go a few places super fast.

* A bonus benefit to our proposal would be to inform and clean up our never-ending discussions and arguments over “Subsidy”, cost-vs-benefit and return on investment; arguments that by present definition compare five or six apples and one lemon.

In short, let’s make our passenger Rail network like all our others: Socialism below the wheels (or keels) and Capitalism above. Let the taxpayer fund the infrastructure, not the vehicles. Transportation infrastructure is a public good, like libraries, police and fire departments. These don’t make money, they save it. Not that the above-mentioned leasing fees wouldn’t be a pretty good deal for the taxpayer either.

This article constitutes a kind of intro, or dreaming out loud. We’re working on the more realistic cost-benefit aspects of this proposal, how it can fit in with existing initiatives, etc. We have a long way to go on this. Stay tuned.

JW Madison

III Rail Transit For Albuquerque:

You may recall our “Yard Bird” starter Modern Streetcar proposal and the efforts of ourselves and Councilor Benton to make some version of this happen. This process has sat still for several months, but is moving again, in the form of collecting the solid cost and benefit estimates we need to sell this thing to the City Council and the general public.

As we’ve said before, once any modern Rail transit line goes in, it becomes a rock star almost instantly. The “Yard Bird” should be no exception, as long as it’s considered a starter line for a future Albuquerque Rail transit system and not just a cute evoke-the-past tourist thing. We don’t need a few giant busses. We need Rail

and lots of small busses.

IV A Useful Tool For Rail Activists:

Our JW recently met with Mike Garey of Arizona, who introduced him to the idea of a corps of citizens who would keep an eye on local train stations and report both good and bad findings to local officials.

If you're getting this through the Post Office, please study the enclosures and contact us if you would like to get involved in this. We'd like to organize some "Champions" for the Albuquerque and Santa Fe area. If you already commute via the Rail Runner and / or bus connections, you could do this without eating up too much of your spare time.

If you're getting this via e-mail, go to this Web site: http://www.OurTrainStations.net and then contact: rails@nmrails.org.

If you want to get active for passenger Rail, this might be a great way to be so without going to meetings or following policy debates. This is Hands On activism and it won't cost you a dime

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