

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 31, 2021

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue Southeast
Washington, D.C., 20003

Secretary Buttigieg:

We write in support of Amtrak's proposal to expand service of Amtrak's Southwest Chief line as you assume the duties of Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Consistent with President Biden's promise and history of support for Amtrak, my colleagues and I applaud Amtrak's long-range report that supports expanding service of the Southwest Chief. The Southwest Chief provides transportation access for over four million riders in 325 communities across 40 States. From Chicago to Los Angeles, and to our home in Kansas in between, the Southwest Chief is an affordable link for Americans to travel across the country. Investing in expansion of this route offers an opportunity to provide much-needed jobs and lift up rural communities that are devastated by job losses as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

The Southwest Chief is an economic driver in Kansas, making stops across the entire state, including Lawrence, Topeka, Newton, Hutchinson, Dodge City, and Garden City. In Kansas' Fourth Congressional District, Newton serves as the state's busiest station along the Southwest Chief. In Fiscal Year 2019 (FY19), Amtrak spent over \$9 million on procurement of goods and services in Kansas and increased ridership in the state from FY18. The route contributes an affordable transit option across rural and urban communities in Kansas and throughout national rail passenger network. As a cost-effective alternative to the highway system for elderly, disabled, and lower-income Kansans, we encourage continued collaboration between the state, localities, Amtrak, and the federal government to preserve and improve the Southwest Chief.


In Congress, developing surface transportation reauthorization legislation is expected to be at the forefront of our agenda. As we work in a bipartisan manner to craft this legislation, we will continue to advocate for Amtrak to fulfill its purpose when it was created by Congress in 1970—to preserve intercity passenger rail service while relieving private railroad companies of the obligation to provide passenger service. As you work with President Biden and Congress to reform and rebuild our nation's infrastructure, we urge you to support funding to expand the Southwest Chief.

My colleagues and I look forward to working with you on strengthening the long-distance passenger rail service in coming months. The Southwest Chief is a critical engine of economic activity and growth, and as we continue to recover from the pandemic, we hope you look to the Southwest Chief as an opportunity for Americans to get back to work and travel.

Sincerely,



Ron Estes
Member of Congress



Tracey Mann
Member of Congress



Sharice Davids
Member of Congress



Jake LaTurner
Member of Congress