



May 2, 2025

RE: Support for the Amtrak *Heartland Flyer*

The Honorable Robert Nichols, Senator, District 3, Senate Conferee

The Honorable Brent Hagenbuch, Senator, District 30, Transportation Committee

The Honorable Armando Walle, Representative, District 140, House Conferee

The Honorable David Spiller, Representative, District 68, Chair, S/C on County & Regional Government

Dear Senators and Representatives,

On behalf of a coalition of stakeholders from Gainesville and Texoma—we write to express our strong support for Amtrak’s *Heartland Flyer* and to respectfully urge your support for full funding of the Texas Department of Transportation’s (TxDOT) commitment to this critical service in Senate Bill 1.

The *Heartland Flyer* serves as a vital transportation link between Fort Worth, Gainesville, and Oklahoma City along the Interstate 35 corridor. It offers a dependable, energy-efficient, and affordable travel option for both business and leisure passengers, while helping to reduce congestion on one of the state’s busiest highways. Notably, of *Heartland Flyer*’s ridership (FY24 80,371), approximately 30% of passengers connect to either the Trinity Railway Express (TRE) or Amtrak’s *Texas Eagle* in Fort Worth (including Texas OU Weekend), reinforcing the service’s importance as part of a larger, integrated regional and national rail network.


Gainesville is a key access point on the *Heartland Flyer* line, connecting Texoma residents and visitors to one of the nation’s fastest-growing metro areas—and vice versa. Fort Worth, with its \$3.5 billion tourism economy, and Gainesville, with its vibrant, emerging downtown and beautiful historic BNSF Santa Fe Depot (Amtrak station), both benefit directly from strategic transportation services like the *Heartland Flyer*. This service enhances job access, workforce mobility, tourism, and regional economic development. It is specifically recognized as a community asset in the Texas Downtown Association’s 2024 *Downtown Gainesville Assessment* and is a central component in our forthcoming Comprehensive Plan, Downtown Master Plan, and Parks & Trails Master Plan: *Guiding Gainesville 2040*.

Further supporting this corridor, Amtrak has approved \$1.9 million in funding for ADA improvements at the historic Santa Fe Depot in Gainesville (GLE) in fiscal year 2026. This investment will ensure greater accessibility and continued service quality for passengers of all abilities.

We respectfully request your support in securing continued state funding for this essential service by adopting the House language in Article 11 of Senate Bill 1, which includes \$7,056,238 in State Financial Support for the *Heartland Flyer*.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration. We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss the *Heartland Flyer's* positive impact on regional transportation, economic development, and quality of life across North Texas.

Sincerely,



William Myers, Executive Director

Gainesville Economic Development Corporation

In partnership with our community stakeholders

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Downtown Gainesville Alliance
Suzanne Canon, President

Ripples Gainesville
Michelle Seegers, Chief Steward
Tavia Evans, Chief Relationships Mgr.
Reese Evans, Chief of Operations

Attachment: Amtrak Heartland Flyer and Texas FY 24 Ops

The Heartland Flyer: Oklahoma City – Fort Worth



The Heartland Flyer, an Amtrak State-Supported train, provides one round trip daily between Oklahoma City and Fort Worth via five intermediate stops. The route is jointly funded by the Texas and Oklahoma state governments.

Map



Route Overview

Key Statistics

Ridership (FY 24)	80,371
Revenue (FY 24)	\$7.9 million
Operating Cost Recovery (FY 24)	82%
Frequency	1 round trip daily
On-Time Customers (in 12/24)	77%
Funding Partners	TxDOT & ODOT
Host Railroads (Major)	BNSF

Big Community Benefits

- **Good, Well-Paying Jobs:** Supports Ft. Worth crew base & commissary (50 employees)
- **Major Economic Benefits:** \$5.3M in direct benefits plus \$23.7M in economic activity
- **Valuable Connections:** 19% of passengers boarding or alighting in Ft. Worth also travel on connecting service

Strong FY 24 Performance

- **Record Ridership:** +11% YOY (+8,000) & 17% higher than plan (+11,800)
- **Record Revenue:** +11% YOY (+\$802,000) & 9% higher than plan (+\$623,000)
- **Strong Cost Recovery:** +6pp YOY, +21pp vs. plan, & above national State-Supported average (82% vs. 77%)

Partners express interest in expanded service, including possible extension to Newton, KS, via Wichita.



Amtrak in Texas Fiscal Year 2024



Amtrak is America's Railroad,[®] created by Congress to "provide efficient and effective intercity passenger rail mobility consisting of high quality service that is trip-time competitive with other intercity travel options." In FY 2024, the company's 22,000+ employees operated an average of almost 300 intercity trains per day along 47 permanent routes, serving a record 32.8 million passengers. Amtrak's network includes 524 regularly-scheduled stops across 46 states, 3 Canadian provinces, and Washington, DC. Partner-operated Thruway routes offer connecting service to additional communities, typically via bus.

Service & Ridership

In FY 2024, Amtrak operated an average of **5 intercity trains per day** on 3 permanent routes serving Texas, with **397,248 total passengers** boarding or alighting in the state.¹ Service was provided via the following routes:²

- **State-Supported Trains**
 - **Heartland Flyer** — Ft. Worth - Gainesville - Oklahoma City (*1 round trip daily*)

- **Long-Distance Trains**
 - **Sunset Limited** — New Orleans - Houston - San Antonio - El Paso - Tucson - Maricopa (Phoenix) - Los Angeles³ (*3 round trips weekly*)
 - **Texas Eagle** — San Antonio - Austin - Ft. Worth - Dallas - Little Rock - St. Louis - Chicago (*1 round trip daily, with thrice-weekly through-service from / to Los Angeles; cars detach from / attach to separate Sunset Limited trains*)

As a **State-Supported route**, the *Heartland Flyer* is operated in partnership with the **Texas Department of Transportation** (TxDOT) and Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT). Outside the Boston-to-Washington Northeast Corridor (NEC), Section 209 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) requires that short- and middle-distance Amtrak routes (i.e., those less than 750 miles in length) be State-Supported; in other words, sponsoring partners fund the majority of those routes' costs and make decisions about schedule, frequency, and other aspects of service. In FY 2024, sponsoring partners funded a total of \$5.3 million in operating payments for the *Heartland Flyer*, helping support a total ridership on that route⁴ of 80,371.

Thruway Connections

Some Amtrak routes offer partner-operated Thruway connecting service and/or other interline connections to additional communities (including in Texas), via either bus or other modes of

¹ Total equals sum of all boardings and alightings at in-state stations.

² Not all stops shown. Note that certain frequencies may not serve every station listed.

³ *Sunset Limited* service is currently suspended east of New Orleans.

⁴ Unlike state- / station-specific ridership, total *route* ridership equals sum of all boardings and alightings divided by two.



transportation. Many such services are sponsored by one or more of Amtrak’s State-Supported partners, or by other public entities; these connections can be vitally important in certain markets. Tickets are purchasable through Amtrak; detailed, up-to-date information on available connections can be accessed via the booking tool on Amtrak.com.

Stations

During FY 2024, Amtrak intercity trains made scheduled stops at 19 locations in Texas:

Station (Code)	Ridership (Ons + Offs)	Amtrak ADA Responsibility	Amtrak ADA Compliance	Amtrak ADA Investment ⁵
Alpine (ALP)	3,887	Sole	Complete	\$1,505,521
Austin (AUS)	39,695	Sole	FY 26	\$10,723,644
Beaumont (BMT)	3,028	Partial	Complete	\$47,184
Cleburne (CBR)	3,975	Partial	FY 27	\$2,462,426
Dallas (DAL)	54,313	None	N/A	—
Del Rio (DRT)	2,196	Partial	Complete	\$3,719,428
El Paso (ELP)	13,822	Partial	FY 29	\$4,321,642
Ft. Worth (FTW)	123,236	Partial	Complete	\$303,294
Gainesville (GLE)	6,815	Partial	FY 26	\$1,932,296
Houston (HOS)	17,669	Sole	FY 28	\$4,603,799
Longview (LVW)	26,128	Partial	Complete	\$5,351,074
Marshall (MHL)	7,580	Sole	FY 26	\$7,228,958
McGregor (MCG)	4,011	Sole	Complete	\$4,349,745
Mineola (MIN)	7,539	Partial	FY 28	\$6,355,940
San Antonio (SAS)	55,671	None	N/A	—
San Marcos (SMC)	8,463	None	N/A	—
Sanderson (SND)	257	Sole	Complete	\$2,957,043
Taylor (TAY)	5,308	Sole	FY 29	\$2,399,323
Temple (TPL)	13,655	Partial	Complete	\$4,985,103
Total:	397,248	16/19	In Progress	\$63,246,418

Importantly, Amtrak is working to ensure that its stations are fully accessible to individuals with disabilities. Most Amtrak-served stations are decades old; many were served by other railroads before the company ever existed. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), enacted in 1990, requires that U.S. stations be made accessible; in response, Amtrak developed an ADA Stations Program (ADASP) to bring station components for which the company is responsible into full ADA compliance. ADASP aims to ensure Amtrak provides the best possible service in the shortest possible timeframe; the program will ultimately invest a total of \$1.8 billion in 385 communities nationwide, including a **\$63.2 million investment in Texas**. All Amtrak-responsible work is targeted for completion by the end of FY 2029.

⁵ “Amtrak ADA Investment” describes Amtrak’s projected total investment in compliance work over the lifetime of ADASP.



Detailed profiles of every permanent Amtrak station stop, including current information on accessibility, can be found on the Great American Stations website: <https://www.greatamericanstations.com>.

Additional Footprint

Amtrak trains are supported by **turnaround maintenance locations** in Ft. Worth and San Antonio (both Amtrak-staffed), which service locomotives and passenger cars.

Additionally, Amtrak maintains **crew bases** in El Paso, Ft. Worth, and San Antonio. The company also maintains a **commissary** in Ft. Worth.

Host Railroads & On Time Performance

Outside the NEC, most Amtrak trains must travel over other “host” railroads’ tracks—and hosts generally control dispatching decisions on the tracks that they own. By law, Amtrak trains are supposed to receive preference over freight trains (i.e., priority in dispatching), but many host-dispatched trains arrive late at their destinations, and many routes do not meet on-time performance (OTP) standards established by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)—affecting millions of passengers per year.

Listed below are the Amtrak routes that operate in Texas, along with each route’s major in-state host railroad(s) and full-route customer on-time performance (C-OTP)⁶ in FY 2024:

Route	In-State Host(s)	C-OTP
<i>State-Supported</i>		
<i>Heartland Flyer</i>	BNSF	69.6%
<i>Long-Distance</i>		
<i>Sunset Limited</i>	Union Pacific	60.0%
<i>Texas Eagle</i>	BNSF, Trinity Railway Express, Union Pacific	62.5%

Procurement

Amtrak’s procurements are subject to “Buy America”-style domestic preference requirements, which the company is proud to meet or exceed. Nationally, Amtrak paid nearly \$4.5 billion for goods and services in FY 2024; 99% of that amount was spent domestically, and **\$88.3 million** went to vendors in Texas:

⁶ C-OTP measures the proportion of customers traveling on a given route who arrive at their destinations on time. Suppose that passengers board a train scheduled to make two stops, and suppose that train is on time at the first stop, but arrives late at the second. If all passengers alight at the first stop, C-OTP for that train is 100%; if all passengers alight at the second stop, C-OTP is 0%.



Community	Amount
Dallas	\$27,669,722
Austin	\$18,578,177
Plano	\$16,847,694
Ft. Worth	\$8,016,925
Houston	\$4,168,193
Grapevine	\$3,529,056
Plainview	\$2,758,526
Hurst	\$1,559,417
Southlake	\$1,364,762
Irving	\$818,132
Willis	\$387,844
Lubbock	\$365,619
Sugar Land	\$275,773
San Antonio	\$239,744
Georgetown	\$227,643
Bacliff	\$214,472
Frisco	\$150,000
Rockwall	\$139,614
Grand Prairie	\$120,580
Rosenberg	\$113,070
Killeen	\$112,421
All Others < \$100K	\$643,898
Total TX Payments:	\$88,301,680

The single largest in-state payment category was **information technology services**.

Employment & Compensation

At the end of FY 2024, **164 Amtrak employees** worked in Texas, and the company had paid out a total of **\$15,026,125 in base wages and salary** in-state. Nationwide, Amtrak employed more than 22,000 active workers; total base wages and salaries for the year exceeded \$2.1 billion.

Current Amtrak Routes in Texas



(Texas Eagle through-cars operate as element of Sunset Limited trains between San Antonio & Los Angeles.)