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# Three Mayors, One Voice on Passenger Rail

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## OKC, KCMO and Wichita join forces; grant application pending

An unprecedented statement of regional support for expanded passenger rail service through Wichita was released Friday, May 10, during a press conference at the Union Station building, 701 E. Douglas.

A joint letter of support signed by the mayors of Wichita, Oklahoma City and Kansas City, Mo., was unveiled by Wichita Vice Mayor Pete Meitzner. Vice Mayor Meitzner was joined by other local and state officials for this historic announcement. (Mayor Brewer was returning from an international travel assignment and was unavailable.)

The press conference was convened in recognition of National Train Day, which will be celebrated nationwide on Saturday, May 11.

“Although Wichita doesn’t have passenger rail service now, we are hopeful that our day is on the horizon,” Vice Mayor Meitzner said.

The primary objective for passenger rail supporters is the closing of the “service gap,” the 185-mile stretch from Oklahoma City to Wichita. Closing the gap and creating daily passenger rail service between the two cities would strengthen the existing regional network throughout the Interstate 35 corridor stretching from San Antonio, TX, to Kansas City, Mo.

In addition to the release of the mayors’ letter, Vice Mayor Meitzner also announced that the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) had authorized the City of Wichita to pursue federal funding for passenger rail service expansion from Oklahoma City to Wichita.

The KDOT offer of assistance will allow the City of Wichita to pursue a joint application for federal funding with Oklahoma City. KDOT will contribute \$3 million in state match and technical support for the application process.

The KDOT funding is conditional on the State of Oklahoma providing \$2.3 million as its share of the cost. That funding formula was recommended last summer by a Kansas Legislative Interim Committee.

The state funds would contribute towards a total project cost estimated at \$90 million, according to a previous KDOT study. A federal funds application by Wichita and Oklahoma City would rely on those cost estimates.

Although no formal agreement is currently in place between the two cities, officials of Wichita and Oklahoma City have had preliminary discussions showing support for the process.

“A regional perspective to economic development is absolutely essential if we are going to compete with the other megapolitan areas around the country,” Vice Mayor Meitzner said. “Transportation infrastructure is one of the key foundations for economic growth, and passenger rail is a vital ingredient in a comprehensive strategy to grow and sustain our economy.”

Vice Mayor Meitzner cited the recent announcement of Southwest Airline service from Wichita as another example of the importance of transportation infrastructure for the growth of the community and the State of Kansas.

“Our economic competitiveness depends on multi-modal transportation options for the public and the business community,” Meitzner said. “Passenger rail service through Wichita would complement affordable air service and our excellent Interstate highway system.”

The next objective for passenger rail supporters is to solidify the regional support among the public and elected officials. That educational effort will highlight a new perspective that focuses on the economic benefits of passenger rail service.

“The letter from the three mayors clearly identifies a new business model for passenger rail,” Vice Mayor Meitzner said. “It recognizes changes in technology, demographics and commerce that add value to passenger rail service.”

Download the 3 Mayor Letter of Support for Passenger Rail - Kansas City, Wichita, Oklahoma City.