

The Honorable Amit Bose
Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: Amtrak Heartland Flyer Extension-Corridor Identification Designation

Dear Administrator Bose:

The Northern Flyer Alliance, Inc. is contacting you to express our emphatic support for re-connecting passenger rail service between Oklahoma City, OK and Newton, KS and ensure the I-35 corridor from Ft. Worth, TX to Newton is included in the Corridor Development Plan. This extension is a long-held economic development and transportation objective to re-connect numerous Oklahoma and Kansas communities north to the national network via the Southwest Chief at Newton, Kansas, and points across the nation.

The long-awaited, full re-connection of this corridor in America's Heartland would provide increased transportation choices and economic opportunity for rural and urban residents and businesses alike. With its long-term value of enhancing economic growth within the I-35 Corridor megaregion, and near-term benefit for improving the Amtrak National system, this Corridor Designation is the first step in this vital 400-mile re-connection.

This corridor falls within the I-35 Megaregion which is centered along an 1100-mile corridor with a resident population of forty million in four states. (See Figure 1)

Restoring the Heartland Flyer between Texas and Kansas is also an important means of fully connecting the nation's fastest-growing economic development corridor located along Interstate 35 (Laredo, TX – Kansas City, MO) boasting over 40 million population, 10 million jobs, and a 28 percent growth rate. Currently, the gap in rail service between Oklahoma City and Newton must be addressed to ensure we take advantage of the opportunity to enhance our links with this enormous and growing economic super-region.

The Heartland Flyer Extension has already undergone extensive preliminary study and planning over the course of 15 years as a group of states infrastructure development. In this regard, significant prerequisite preparation has been accomplished.^{1, 2}

We believe this is a historic moment, given the unprecedented funding levels included in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, to make the case for restoring passenger rail service. While Wichita has grown to the 48th largest city in the nation⁴, Oklahoma City has grown to the 22nd⁴ and is one of the six cities in the nation to have grown by more than 100,000 residents in the last decade. ***This level of growth justifies increased transportation options.*** Moreover, as a region with many rural areas and regional cities, we believe having the ability to better connect urban, suburban and rural Kansas and Oklahoma is critically important. Many of these communities would benefit from the re-development of train depots and downtown areas, and the option for residents to use passenger rail to travel for business, work, pleasure, and to medical appointments.

¹[Texas Transportation Institute Heartland Flyer Benefit Study, 2010](#)

²[Kansas Service Development Plan, 2011](#)

³IJA 25101(c)(11) (IJA 3684.pdf (northernflyeralliance.com))

⁴[Largest cities in the United States by population - Ballotpedia](#)

⁵[IJA 25101\(c\)\(7\)](#)

⁶[Carter Burgess | Kansas University ROI | Texas Transportation Institute Heartland Flyer Benefit Study](#)

⁷[Microsoft Word - 2010 TRP Chp 4 Passenger FINAL 111010WG page 4-48.docx \(northernflyeralliance.com\)](#)

We propose the re-connection of this corridor based on the following criteria:

1. The Fort Worth, Texas to Newton, Kansas Corridor Designation would open federal funding possibilities for the Heartland Flyer Extension that would connect the existing Heartland Flyer that ends in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma with the Southwest Chief in Newton, KS. **(See Figure 3)**
2. In addition to the above, the Amtrak Heartland Flyer Extension corridor integrates into the Amtrak national rail passenger transportation system connecting the Southwest Chief and Texas Eagle/Sunset Limited trains with the potential effect of more than doubling current ridership, positively impacting ridership across the Midwest and beyond.²
3. The connection benefits and improves the connectivity and efficiency of other modes as the rail corridor parallels a heavily trafficked and stressed Interstate-35 corridor. **(See Figure 1)**
4. The Heartland Flyer Extension connects six of the fifty most populated cities in the US, satisfying a current IIJA requirement:³
 - a. San Antonio, TX (#7)⁴
 - b. Dallas, TX (#9)
 - c. Fort Worth, TX (#13)
 - d. Oklahoma City, OK (#21)
 - e. Wichita, KS (#48)
 - f. Kansas City, MO (#35)
5. The Heartland Flyer Extension enhances regional equity and geographic diversity of intercity passenger rail service by closing a modest 200-mile service gap in the middle of the country that has substantial existing rail infrastructure in place. **(See Figure 3)**
6. The Heartland Flyer Extension will add rail services to historically unserved or underserved and low-income communities or areas of persistent poverty with direct new benefit to an additional six rural communities, satisfying another IIJA requirement.⁵
7. The Heartland Flyer Extension is identified in at least TWO FRA-approved State Rail Plans (Kansas and Oklahoma), and previously identified as part of several regional and interregional intercity passenger rail system planning studies – FRA’s Midwest Regional Plan Network and the Kansas Service Development Plans of 2011 and 2022. **(See Figure 2 and *ibid.*²)**
8. The Heartland Flyer Extension is expected to mirror results found in the Heartland Flyer Benefit Study completed in 2010 by Texas Transportation Institute which identifies positive regional economic and employment impacts.¹ These benefits include, but are not limited to, development in the areas near passenger stations, historic districts, and other opportunity zones. While all corridor communities intend to restore their stations,

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Ponca City, Oklahoma has secured a \$2 million-dollar federal grant to restore its train station to service level operation with an additional \$1 million dollar set-aside by the City of Ponca City. Wichita, KS has already restored its Union Station terminal with additional plans contingent on service level operations.

9. The Heartland Flyer Extension anticipates environmental, congestion mitigation, and other public benefits as identified in three existing economic impact studies.⁶
10. As further evidence of the outsized importance of the I-35 Megaregion corridor, Texas is developing plans for more passenger rail options for the public on the southern end of the Megaregion from Oklahoma City to South Texas. The 622-mile corridor from Oklahoma City to South Texas includes the cities of Dallas/Ft. Worth, Waco, Austin, San Antonio, Laredo, Corpus Christi, and Brownsville. The planning activities to be funded under the HSIPR Program and related deliverables include conducting a feasibility study, developing a Service Level NEPA document, and finalizing the Service Development Plan for the passenger rail corridor from Oklahoma City to South Texas. Included in this study will be the proposed “LStar” service between Georgetown and San Antonio. TxDOT anticipates completing the planning process in 42 months, at a cost of \$14 million. This portion of the corridor has been studied for over 10 years.” **Further rail development along the southern segment of the Megaregion is additional evidence of the overall importance of connecting the northern end with the southern end of the I-35 Megaregion corridor via passenger rail.**

Therefore, based on the preponderance of evidence presented above, we respectfully request Designated Corridor identification from Fort Worth, Texas to Newton, Kansas.

Respectfully,

The Northern Flyer Alliance, Inc.
Deborah Fischer Stout, President
Mark Corrison, VP & Secretary
Gary Lanman, VP Oklahoma
Dan Wancura, Kansas City Area Director

Cc: Governors of KS and OK
DOT Secretary Lorenz, Kansas
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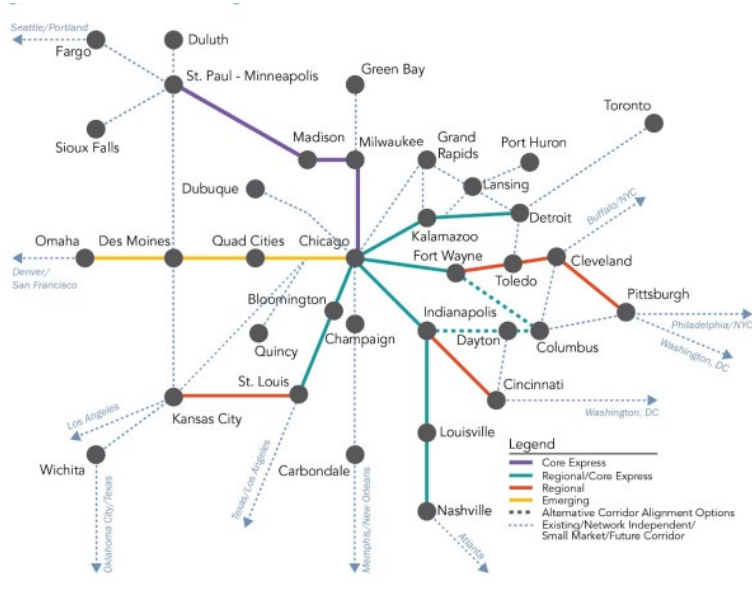
Figure 1:

I-35 Megaregion



Figure 2:

Midwest Regional Rail Plan Network:



¹[Texas Transportation Institute Heartland Flyer Benefit Study, 2010](#)

²[Kansas Service Development Plan, 2011](#)

³[IIJA 25101\(c\)\(11\) \(IIJA 3684.pdf \(northernflyeralliance.com\)\)](#)

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Figure 3:



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