



CITY OF NORMAN, OK STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 05/10/2022

REQUESTER: Taylor Johnson, Transit and Parking Program Manager

PRESENTER: Shawn O'Leary, Director of Public Works

ITEM TITLE: CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL, REJECTION, AMENDMENT, AND/OR POSTPONEMENT OF RESOLUTION R-2122-115 A RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORMAN, OKLAHOMA, SUPPORTING THE EXISTING HEARTLAND FLYER RAIL SERVICE AND THE EXPANSION OF AMTRAK PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE IN OKLAHOMA AND KANSAS.

BACKGROUND:

Passenger rail service was re-established between Oklahoma City and Fort Worth, Texas on June 15, 1999 and ended a 20-year absence of passenger train service between Oklahoma City and North Texas. As part of its legislative agenda, Oklahoma City has maintained support for this service over the past several years.

In June of 2021, Amtrak released the Amtrak Connects US plan to develop rail service across America. As part of this plan, a passenger rail connection would extend north from Oklahoma City to Newton, Kansas. With the enactment of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in November of 2021 at the federal level, there is an excellent opportunity to bring this connection to fruition.

The 2035 Vision is part of the Amtrak Connects US plan and identifies expansion and enhancement of corridor routes that offers economically viable, frequent, reliable and sustainable passenger train service. The 2035 Vision proposes adding 160 additional communities to the national rail network.

An organization called the Northern Flyer Alliance is working to create the intercity passenger rail expansion between Fort Worth and Kansas City through Oklahoma City and Wichita. They have been working with cities along the potential route and with the legislatures in Kansas and Oklahoma to build support for this project.

Amtrak has identified an extension of the Heartland Flyer as an economically viable train for a connection with the Southwest Chief at Newton, Kansas that will improve the performance of both the Heartland Flyer as well as the national network.

DISCUSSION:

Economic analysis from Kansas University and Texas Transportation Institute have shown that an extension of the Heartland Flyer would have a positive return on investment and a positive impact on the Oklahoma and Kansas economies at both the state and local levels.

An extension of the Heartland Flyer between Oklahoma City and Newton, Kansas would add the cities of Edmond, Guthrie, Perry, Ponca City, Arkansas City, Wichita and Newton to the passenger rail schedule.

Advance planning, study and development has already been accomplished for this extension. The Departments of Transportation of Oklahoma and Kansas are currently updating State Rail Plans. The Oklahoma Legislature passed HCR 1003 in 2021 to support a Heartland Flyer Extension. The Kansas State Senate passed SR 1716 and the Kansas State House passed HR 6017 to support the Heartland Flyer Extension.

The Federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (IIJA) has given decision-making authority to the Federal Railroad Administration as it pertains to the development of new passenger rail corridors.

The IIJA has targeted \$66 billion for Rail:

- \$22 billion for Amtrak
- \$36 billion for FRA Passenger Rail
- \$8 billion for FRA Rail Safety

The attached resolution outlines the benefits of passenger rail and expresses support from the City of Norman for the Heartland Flyer and its expansion extending north through additional stops in Oklahoma to Kansas. If approved, staff will assist the Northern Flyer Alliance in building support for this project by providing a copy of this resolution, which is one of 27 collected so far, and keeping open lines of communication for future updates. It does not require any funding from the City.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that City Council approve Resolution R-2122-115 supporting the existing Heartland Flyer rail service and the expansion of Amtrak passenger rail service in Oklahoma and Kansas.