

**Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph C. Szabo
Remarks as Prepared for Delivery
Meeting of the Southwest Chief Commission
Pueblo, Colorado
October 9, 2014**

Good morning. It's a pleasure to be with you today to discuss the future of the Southwest Chief and its importance to the Nation's passenger rail network.

Let me begin by thanking Senator Udall for his leadership on rail issues and to the Governor and members of this Commission who worked side-by-side with the State of Kansas to successfully win a \$12.5 million TIGER grant that will help ensure trains continue to run the Southwest Chief route.

Southwest Plan and Emerging Markets

People are once again recognizing the importance of passenger and freight rail as part of a sustainable solution for moving people and goods.

Rail's benefits will become even more evident as our transportation system has to move an additional 100 million people by 2050 and the travel habits of the public continue to change.

Younger citizens are driving less and using public transportation more.

Railroads have always been a barometer for economic expansion. Today is no different.

Both freight traffic and passenger rail are growing – Amtrak has set new ridership records in ten of the past eleven years.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, every \$1.00 of rail infrastructure investment generates \$3.00 in economic output and job creation.

And each \$1 billion of rail investment creates an estimated 20,000 jobs nationwide.

That's why it is so important to invest in rail assets like the Southwest Chief. This long-distance route crisscrosses more than 1700 miles between Chicago and Los Angeles, with more than 30 stations along the way providing connectivity for more than 100 communities.

Communities—large and small—have a critical passenger connection to the Nation's rail network, while benefitting from the important role rail service plays in supporting their economies.

Our comprehensive vision for passenger rail is predicated on the visions of local communities, states and regions. It is built upon market forces that demand higher levels of safety, reliability, efficiency -- and reduced travel times.

By working with partners like this Commission, we will achieve that vision and help deliver exactly what regional and local markets require.

Soon, we will publish the Southwest Multi-State Rail Planning Study—a multi-state effort with a regional perspective. It is the first step in a cohesive, long-term passenger rail vision for the Southwest. Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah all had significant input on that plan.

At the heart of this plan is connectivity and emerging markets.

As we connect regional transportation centers—like the Southwest Chief does, between Chicago and Los Angeles—it is important to maximize the line’s existing potential, and explore options to improve connectivity.

The Southwest Plan begins the process of considering all options and thinking differently about planning. We look forward to working with the Commission and state departments of transportation in harnessing that vision and potential.

Grow America

Here in Pueblo, and along many segments of the Southwest Chief, and many other parts of the country, we haven’t invested in the passenger rail connections that travelers deserve.

Applications for our TIGER grant program continue to outpace available funds.

During the most recent round of TIGER funding, DOT received 81 applications for rail-related projects totaling \$1.25 billion—more than 18 times the amount we were able to commit.

Unless we change the way we fund transportation, in the future we won't be able to support efforts, like reviving the Southwest Chief.

This is why the Administration sent a multi-year surface transportation bill to Congress called the GROW AMERICA Act.

Among its provisions, it will invest \$19 billion over four years in rail safety programs and rail development projects. But it does even more than that.

For the first time ever, it would provide rail projects with predictable, dedicated funding – just like we have for all other transportation modes.

It will provide States, regions, and communities with the Federal policy and funding certainty they need to continue investing in train stations and higher-performing service.

By simply providing more transportation choices, we can also revitalize neighborhoods, incentivize business growth, and just improve the overall quality of life.

With support for the GROW AMERICA Act, that is exactly what we'll continue to do. Thank you.