

AMTRAK Southwest Chief Service to Colorado In Doubt

Background Information

- ❖ **Amtrak's Los Angeles to Chicago *Southwest Chief*, currently operated over BNSF in New Mexico, Colorado and Kansas, faces an uncertain future.**
 - At issue is the future cost of track work, bridges and signals maintenance necessary for passenger train operations.
 - The 2200-mile route diverges from the BNSF main "Transcon" line at Newton, Kansas and continues west through Kansas, southern Colorado and New Mexico.
 - This segment is 686 miles long.
- ❖ **Within Colorado the route goes from Lamar through La Junta and Trinidad to New Mexico over Raton Pass. It continues south on BNSF and State of New Mexico track through Albuquerque and turns west on BNSF-owned track to Los Angeles.**
 - Within Colorado, BNSF has few freight shipments except for the portion of the line from La Junta to Las Animas. On the balance of the route, it owns and maintains the track and signals under contract for Amtrak, the only user.
- ❖ **The line's future is in doubt because of several factors:**
 - First, the line is wearing out and it is now time to undertake much needed, long-term maintenance.
 - BNSF has told Amtrak that the 10-year capital needs for the 632 miles of the line in need of repair are approx \$94.4 million, one time and \$11.6 million annually. It is unlikely that Amtrak can fund given their current budget.
 - The Colorado portion of the line (Lamar to Raton Pass) is 182 miles. Specific details for Colorado are difficult to estimate as new shippers may come on line, e.g. the Elk Grove Coal mine, reducing the Amtrak costs for the Colorado portion, but \$3.8 million per year is a reasonable estimate for the present.
 - Second, Amtrak/BNSF contract renegotiations come due in 2015. The BNSF cost estimates may be part of their preparations for contract renegotiation.
 - Third is the fact that the State of New Mexico and BNSF are currently in a standoff over completion of the state's purchase of the BNSF Raton Pass line. BNSF/Amtrak negotiations and the New Mexico/BNSF standoff are separate issues. However, how each is resolved will affect the other.
- ❖ **Current Situation:** A multi-state effort is needed to prevent discontinuance of the Southwest Chief over the Raton Pass line and its eventual abandonment by BNSF.
 - A coalition has formed in southeast Colorado and Kansas to support continuance of the *Southwest Chief*. This is an important first step.
 - La Junta, Lamar and Trinidad city officials are represented in this coalition.
 - Representatives from cities and counties in Kansas and New Mexico are also represented.
- ❖ **For additional information, contact the Colorado Rail Passenger Association :**

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