

**Testimony Before the Kansas Legislature's Special Committee on Transportation
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Chairman Hayzlett, Members of the Special Committee on Transportation, thank you for allowing me to speak to you today about the reasons Kansas should join the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact.

My name is Laura Kliewer, and I am the director of the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission, the organization created to carry out the compact's objectives when the compact language was passed by three states – Indiana, Minnesota and Missouri – in 2000. Current membership in the commission includes those three states, plus Illinois and Iowa (both joined the compact this year), Michigan, Nebraska, North Dakota and Ohio – a total of nine to date. All 12 Midwestern states are eligible to join.

Why should Kansas join the compact?

- First of all, joining the MIPRC will help Kansas ensure that rail continues to grow as a viable transportation alternative for the people of this state.
- Secondly, intercity passenger rail development is predominantly a *multi-state* pursuit, and the Midwest must have a unified voice to plan and advocate at the federal, state and local levels for frequent, convenient and cost-effective passenger rail service.
- Third, development of passenger rail needs to become a true federal-state partnership – lack of dedicated federal funding for passenger rail development has left most of the burden for any type of expansion on the states.

What has the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission done to achieve these goals? Briefly . . .

- We have been a leading voice for rail improvements since 2000.
- We have been effective in educating Members of Congress from member states on the importance of passenger rail development, as well as in explaining why the creation of a federal-state partnership (similar to other modes of transportation) to fund such development, is critical.
- The MIPRC has taken leadership roles in formulating and articulating joint principles for passenger rail development.
- At a time when our existing passenger rail system is in jeopardy, the MIPRC is also working to ensure that our national passenger rail system remains intact and funded while reforms and improvements are being made.
- The keystone of our advocacy efforts is presenting a unified voice on the importance of passenger rail as part of a balanced national transportation system.
- Also, the commission is a leader in state elected officials' advocacy of the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI) and the Ohio Hub, which would bring more frequent, efficient passenger rail service to our region. As you may know, Missouri currently has state-supported frequencies between St. Louis and Kansas City twice a day. The MWRRI would increase those roundtrips to six, as well as make improvements to bring speeds up to 90 mph.

This fiscal year, the MIPRC is working with our member states to help state elected officials, in conjunction with their DOTs, develop state-specific passenger rail developments plans and to move forward practically with those plans.

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But why pursue passenger rail development in the first place? MIPRC member states have decided that passenger rail can be an important part of the transportation solution for the future. Intercity passenger rail development will complement other modes of transportation by providing a necessary middle-distance way to travel. Passenger rail is significantly more energy efficient than either commercial airlines or cars, and less expensive than building or expanding airports or roads. Rail could serve as a vital resource if disaster strikes, and is crucial to managing traffic from other modes of transportation that might be shut down.

It will bring great economic benefits. In the Midwest, there are currently two, complementary multi-state plans for significantly improving passenger rail service, the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative and the Ohio Hub. These plans have the potential to reap tremendous economic returns and job creation while connecting 150 communities across the Midwest. The MWRRI recently updated its economic analysis of the benefits that the fully-implemented plan would bring to the region. The new projections show a benefits-to-cost ratio of 1.8 – \$1.80 in return for every dollar invested – one of the highest for any regional rail system in the U.S. In addition to generating \$23 billion in overall benefits, the system would generate nearly 58,000 permanent new jobs and \$5.3 billion in increased earnings over the construction period. When Rep. Schlottach, the commission's chair testified before this committee in August, pamphlets on the MWRRI's latest economic impact analysis were made available, along a smaller leaflet showing the specific benefits this development will bring to your neighbor, Missouri. I've brought a few with me today in case anyone would like another one.

Lastly, Americans are taking the train in record numbers, and we have seen that there is strong passenger response when service is added. Fourteen states provide direct operating subsidies to Amtrak for increased passenger rail service, including Illinois, Michigan, Missouri and Wisconsin in the Midwest. While ridership on Amtrak's service overall has been growing (The Southwest Chief's ridership, as you probably know, has grown at a little under two percent annually over the past several years), the rise in the number of those taking the train on shorter, regional routes has been particularly dramatic. In the Midwest, ridership on these shorter routes increased 20 percent overall between FY 2004 and FY 2006 (and I can give you information from specific states if you like). Over half of the states in the nation are now developing or implementing significant regional passenger and freight rail plans.

Many others view the continuance of what passenger rail service they do have as a vital concern. Kansas is fortunate to have passenger rail service that is accessible to much of the state's population, and the MIPRC is committed to seeing that service continue. But, as part of the long-distance *Southwest Chief*, that service coming through in the middle of the night is not very handy for Kansans wanting to move across the state. I know that there is growing interest in new and/or expanded service in Kansas. The Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission, comprised of state elected officials and their designees, would like to partner with you in the Kansas Legislature, as well as with the governor, to help keep the rail service you have and to help plan and fund any further developments. Joining the compact by passing enabling legislation is a vital step.

It is critical to have state leaders working together to advocate for the federal commitment and state planning that is necessary to see passenger rail initiatives become a reality, and the MIPRC is the vehicle for state leaders to work together to do just that. As a region, in partnership with the federal government, the Midwest can become the nation's leader in offering viable, economically-feasible and efficient passenger rail travel.

I would be glad to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for your consideration.