



KDOT Passenger Rail Service Development Plan Public Meeting #2 Winter 2024 / 2025

The Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) hosted the second Passenger Rail Service Development Plan (SDP) Update live virtual public meeting, via Zoom, on December 11, 2024. The purpose of the public meeting was to provide a project overview, analysis findings and next steps.

KDOT is exploring plans to provide rail service from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, to Newton, where it would connect with the Southwest Chief, a national route on Amtrak’s passenger rail. The Heartland Flyer currently provides daily service between Fort Worth, Texas, and Oklahoma City.

The project kicked off in Fall 2023, and the project team has spent the last several months analyzing many factors including stations and routing services, infrastructure, arrival/departure times, and layover/connection times to determine if extending the rail service is feasible. The project builds upon efforts from 2011 when KDOT completed a rail feasibility study and established a Passenger Rail Service Development Plan (SDP). Due to a growing federal interest in passenger rail services and potential funding sources, the project is now being re-evaluated.

In addition to the live virtual public meeting, a virtual open house opportunity, that included the recorded presentation and online comment form, was available for participants to review and provide comments at their convenience. The virtual open house component was active from December 11, 2024, until January 1, 2025.

Providing both a live virtual public meeting and a virtual open house component allowed for maximum participation from the broad stakeholder audience that covers a multi-state corridor. The virtual options also gave the public to most flexibility to review materials and provide feedback.

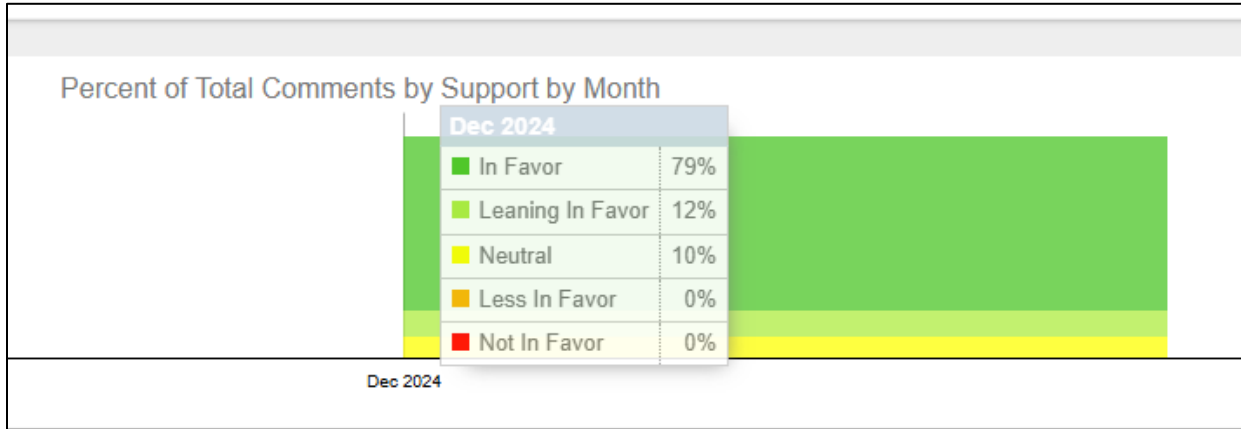
Key Takeaways

There is significant interest from stakeholders for this project with 300 participants joining the Zoom live virtual meeting or signing in to the virtual open house. Stakeholders included participants from Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas.

In addition, 47 people submitted comments online during the public meeting comment period from December 11, 2024 to January 1, 2025.

Task	Number
Live Event Participants	142
Virtual Open House Participants	168
Submitted Comments	47

The online comment form asked participants to indicate their level of support for the project. According to the dashboard report, 79 percent are “In Favor” of the project and 22 percent are “Leaning in Favor” or “Neutral”. For those that indicated that they are “Leaning in Favor”, comments suggested they are interested in the rail service if the cost is reasonable, and they expressed an interest in daytime travel times and an extension connect to Kansas City.



Meeting Promotion

KDOT distributed a public meeting flyer and a press release to promote the public meeting opportunities. The flyer was sent via email to the Advisory Group/Project Partners as well as to the KDOT Public Information Management Application (PIMA) database which includes more than 1,600 contacts.

KDOT also sent reminder messages following the live meeting and during the last week of the comment period to provide links to the webpage and virtual open house links.

KDOT distributed a [Media Release](#) on Dec. 4, 2024. The distributed information generated interest among multiple media channels which

KDOT
Passenger Rail Service
Development Plan

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ATWORK

Visit the project webpage for the latest information:
www.ksdot.gov/passrail/

Join us at an upcoming

LIVE VIRTUAL MEETING
Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2024
1 - 2 p.m.
[Click here to join](#)

There will be a brief presentation and the public will have the opportunity to submit questions and comments for a response from the project team.

VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE
Following the live meeting, a virtual open house will be available until Jan. 1, 2025, and feature a recording of the presentation and an online comment form. Participants can access online at their convenience.
[Click here to access the virtual open house.](#)

Two opportunities to attend. Both meetings will share the same project information.

ADD YOUR VOICE

Please join the Kansas Department of Transportation to discuss the Passenger Rail Service Development Plan (SDP) Update. KDOT is currently exploring plans to provide rail service from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, to Newton where it would then connect with the Southwest Chief, a national route on Amtrak's passenger rail. The Heartland Flyer currently provides daily service between Fort Worth, Texas, and Oklahoma City.

KDOT kicked off the SDP Update in the fall of 2023 and spent the past several months conducting analysis on the feasibility of extending the rail service to Newton. The purpose of the meeting is to provide an overview of the project, analysis findings and next steps.

The live virtual meeting will be hosted via Zoom and KDOT will provide a presentation in real-time followed by a question and answer session, where participants can ask questions or provide comments and KDOT will respond. The virtual open house will feature a recording of the live presentation and participants can leave comments through the online comment form. The virtual meeting will be available 24/7 through Jan. 1, 2025.

Both opportunities will provide the same content including project overview, SDP analysis updates and next steps.

Meeting information can be made available in Spanish and accessible formats upon request. Contact the KDOT Division of Communications, 700 SW Harrison St., 2nd Fl West, Topeka, KS 66603-3745 or dial 785-296-3383 for voice. Dial 7-1-1 for the speech/hearing impaired. Submit request at least five days before the meeting.

Kansas
Department of Transportation

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helped promote the meeting as well as provided coverage of the content covered during the meeting.

Media Coverage

There were several stories covering the Live Virtual Public Meeting, both promoting the upcoming meeting and providing coverage after the live event. The list of media include:

- [KSN](#) – *KDOT to give update of Passenger Rail Development Plan*, November 25, 2024
- [KSAL.com](#) – *Update on Passenger Rail Service Planned*, December 4, 2024
- [KFDI 101.3](#) – *KDOT to provide update on passenger rail plan*, December 10, 2024
- [Lawrence Journal World](#) – *KDOT officials provide update on passenger rail proposal that would connect Kansas and Texas by 2029*, December 11, 2024
- [Kansas Reflector](#) – *KDOT pegs cost of closing gap in Oklahoma, Kansas passenger rail service at \$311 million*, December 11, 2024
- [KAKE](#) – *Project to restore passenger rail service in Kansas to cost estimated \$573 million*, December 11, 2024
- [KAKE](#) – *Wichitans excited about return of passenger rail, as \$570 million project discussed*, December 11, 2024
- [KFDI 101.3](#) – *KDOT looking for funding to expand passenger rail service*, December 11, 2024
- [The Wichita Eagle](#) – *Passenger rail could come to Wichita in the next several years*, December 11, 2024
- [Railway Age](#) – *Transit Briefs: KDOT, Metro-North, CTA, DART*, December 12, 2024
- [Wichita Business Journal](#) – *Amtrak extension through Wichita could be operational by 2029, KDOT says*, December 12, 2024
- [Newton Kansan](#) – *KDOT pegs cost of Flyer extension to Newton at \$311 million*, December 12, 2024

Public Meeting Overview

Live Virtual Meeting

The KDOT Passenger Rail SDP Update live virtual public meeting was held on December 11, 2024, from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. via Zoom. The meeting included a 20-minute presentation, followed by 40 minutes of questions and answers. The presentation topics included:

- Project Overview
- Purpose and benefits of the project
- Service Development Plan Update analysis and findings
 - Stakeholder Engagement
 - Service locations
 - Timetable
 - Infrastructure costs
 - Operation costs and ridership projections
- Next Steps



There were 142 attendees who signed in to Zoom for the live virtual public meeting. After the formal presentation, the team addressed questions and comments verbally and through the chat function.

The participants were well-informed and asked technical questions, in particular they wanted to understand the next steps in terms of funding. Overall comment themes include but are not limited to: funding, legislative support, extension to Kansas City, economic impacts, scheduling, and infrastructure/amenity improvements.

While the public is interested in moving this project forward and making as many improvements as possible, KDOT consistently noted that the project is in the early stages of the development. The initial step is to provide an operating service from Oklahoma City to Newton by 2029.

The Adobe PDF version of the presentation is attached.

Online Open House Component

The KDOT Passenger Rail Service Development Plan virtual open house component was available from December 11, 2024 – January 1, 2025. This option provided the public an opportunity to access the same information about the project, including a recording of the live event presentation and an online comment form, at their convenience. A total of 168 participants signed into the virtual open house component.

Online Comments (November 8 – 30, 2023)

As part of the online open house, participants were able to submit online comment forms. There were 47 comments received during the comment period. Comments are in line with overall themes, including but not limited to the following topics:

- Support of the project
 - Want to see KDOT secure funding to help the process move forward
 - Expressed interest in using the service
- Accessibility
 - Want to see the route extended further north
 - Desire to include daytime train routes
 - Would like amenities added such as sleeper car, bike storage, business commuter options, beautification of the cars and stops

Next Steps

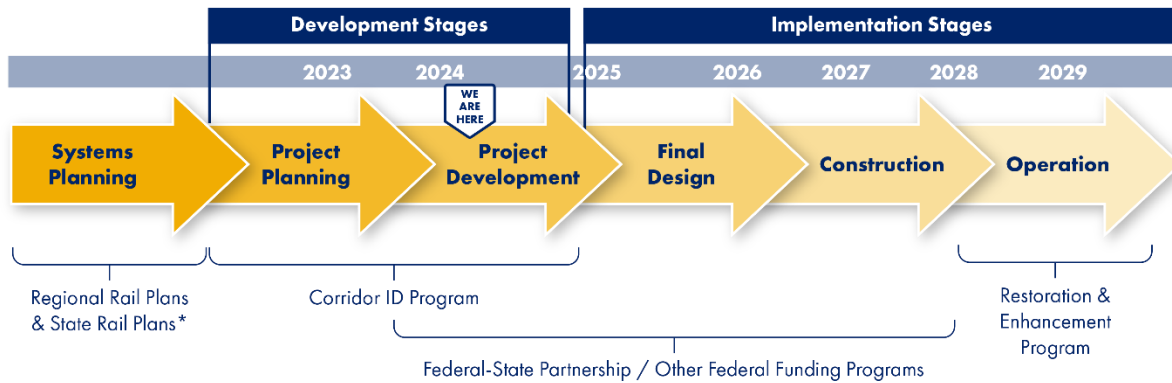
There are a number of stages a project must move through prior to construction and operation. KDOT is currently in the Development/Project Planning stage. If selected by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for continuation in the Corridor ID program the next steps will be an environmental review, followed by preliminary engineering, design and construction. The targeted for operation and services is 2029.

KDOT is aware of the widespread support of the rail extension from Oklahoma City to Newton and will continue to update stakeholders at key milestones. In addition, the comments received

from the public will be considered, as applicable, in the future stages of the project development.

The graphic below provides the FRA Project Lifecycle Stages and the steps a project must take to get to operation.

FRA Project Lifecycle Stages - Corresponding FRA Funding Programs



*Regional Rail Planning and State Rail Plans may be funded through other FRA funding programs.

Comments

Below are a list of comments and questions, verbatim, received from the online comment form.

Topic	Comment
Access	How many stops in Wichita?
Access	I would seriously consider using this service if it was accessible and the cost was reasonable.
Access, Economic Development	Heartland Flyer needs to happen. Long overdue! Rail travel is economic development in almost its purest form
Access, Economic Development	A connector bus to Stillwater would be great to visit my little brother who is a student.
Access, Economic Development, Expanded Local Programs	Will rail road service open wichita to dallas?
Access, Economic Development, Expanded Local Programs	So excited to finally ride a train again that will connect the plains again to dreams again

<p>Access, Economic Development, Expanded Local Programs</p>	<p>The connection to Wichita/Newton and OKC and the Dallas/Fort Worth area is greatly needed. Please upgrade the train tracks so the trains can begin. Also, it would be nice to have a second train run daily with the Southwest Chief. It would be nice to have it come by at 2 PM as well as the 2 AM time. Increase the number of trains and availability and the number of passengers will increase.</p>
<p>Access, Economic Development, Expanded Local Programs</p>	<p>I think this proposal is a good start though the schedule is not ideal. If this is to be an overnight train it should have a sleeper option. The route seems to be just a bit too long to not offer overnight stops so that if understandable, even desired if the schedule can be adjusted to put the "red eye" portion between two major destinations. More importantly, service needs to be extended to Tulsa. Rail travel is my preferred method but the current lack of parking options or support for those driving into OKC to catch the Flyer dissuades me from doing so since I can fly from TUL. Oklahoma has a state senate bill that has been approved to extend rail travel to Tulsa but sadly this has not been accomplished yet. I very much would like to see Tulsa included in this extension. Thank you</p>
<p>Access, Economic Development, Modernization & Expansion</p>	<p>As a resident of the Oklahoma City Metro, I am strongly in favor of this proposal to connect the Heartland Flyer line to the rest of the country via a northerly corridor through Kansas in Newton. As it stands, railway transit to any state other than Texas is costly and time-consuming. As I understand it, a passenger rail connection north will all but eliminate these issues and make travel by train more affordable and convenient. I strongly support this proposal and wish it rapid success.</p>
<p>Access, Economic Development, Modernization & Expansion</p>	<p>I believe it is very important to add a connection along the Southwest Chief line (Newton) that goes through Wichita and Oklahoma City. There are tons of people who live in Southwest KS who drive to Wichita because they have no choice. Introducing that rail connection would give people more options.</p>
<p>Access, Expanded Local Programs, Modernization & Expansion</p>	<p>The current option is very exciting. I am looking forward to considering this as a way to connect to family in Dallas from Kansas City. An extension of the service to KC will be preferred and access many more clientele than just access to the Southwest Chief, so I would support the study of an expansion. If there are any timelines available to share, I would appreciate knowing that (when it's presented to KS legislature, if approved, anticipated start and end of construction and anticipated start of service).</p>
<p>Access, Flexible and Responsive</p>	<p>I fully support this project and would use it occasionally. We live a few miles east of Oklahoma City.</p>
<p>Access, Flexible and Responsive, Modernization & Expansion</p>	<p>My wife and I travel to the Dallas/Ft Worth area from Wichita several times a year. We would prefer to travel by rail instead of by car.</p>

Access, Schedule, Expanded Local Programs	I strongly favor the Amtrak extension between Oklahoma City and Newton, with a stop in Wichita. I have traveled the Amtrak route between Wichita and Fort Worth multiple times (currently with a bus connection between OKC and Wichita). I have also traveled multiple times on the Southwest Chief and have used the Amtrak bus connection between Wichita and Newton. Amtrak ridership is increasing, and Kansas should invest in it. I am one person who would use it more if there were daytime connections to the northeast (to KC), to the west, and to OKC.
Access, Schedule, Modernization & Expansion	Would love to see this. It would also be great if it eventually connected to KC.
Access, Schedule, Modernization & Expansion	I support expanding passenger rail nationwide and would like to see at least 2 round trips daily.
Bike/Ped, Economic Development	Both KDOT and ODOT should be willing to put in enough funds to make this happen. The economic output is worth it. The trains should have space to be able to bring a bicycle along as well.
Bike/Ped, Safety	In transporting myself and my bicycle, will this be available at all locations or just certain locations?
Economic Development	If the federal funding is there, I think it is a major win every community in the proposed rail network, from Fort Worth up to KC, for this plan to take place. As a Wichita resident, There is nothing I'd love more than to be able to easily travel this corridor without needing to use my car - which would help reduce road usage, saving money for all three states.
Economic Development	I am contacting you regarding passenger railways. In particular a route through Girard, KS 66743. Girard is going through a revitalization program, and having a passenger train make stops there, would increase the economic development, which is the goal for this project. Girard, KS is the County Seat with a beautiful, historical town square built around a 100+ year old stone Courthouse. There are several other historical sites, within the city limits of Girard, KS, for train passengers to visit. Thank you, Kathi Cooper
Economic Development, Expanded Local Programs, Flexible and Responsive	I am supportive of this plan both personally and professionally. I drive from Ponca City, OK to Topeka, KS at least every other month and am getting older and would like another option to travel in lieu of private vehicle. Professionally, we travel quarterly quarterly to industry conferences and would prefer to use rail over personnel vehicle or air. I am the transit director for the rural public transit program and we regularly receive requests for residents to travel out of our communities. Currently, there is no option for those who do not drive, have a vehicle and Greyhound does not provide reasonable times or opportunities to be a viable option. City of Ponca City is working to renovate the local depot in Ponca City to make it a multi-modal facility and will be a viable facility to serve the purpose of the plan.
Economic Development, Expanded Local Programs, Modernization & Expansion	1: yes, please move ahead with the project. 2: Please also work to connect with and extend the Missouri River Runner train (now from St. Louis to KC) from KC through Lawrence to Topeka.

Economic Development, Flexible and Responsive, Modernization & Expansion	1. Would some of the equipment from the Flyer be switched to the Chief at Newton? Sometimes existing seats are sold out on the Chief, meaning that the connection at Newton could not be made on those dates. 2. Why is work on the OKC layover facility being included since the train will no longer lay over there?
Economic Development, Modernization & Expansion	I support the proposed Amtrak line between Oklahoma City and Wichita and Newton, and will regularly take Amtrak between Austin and Newton on completion. Thank you!
Environmental Concerns, Access, Economic Development	I am part of the general public and also a California State Council Member to the Rail Passengers Association (RPA) in Washington, DC. As a member of the general public, I ride the Heartland Flyer infrequently, but would choose it as a route more frequently if there were a direct run to Newton, KS. A while back I took it to Oklahoma City and transferred to a bus to Newton. I had to meet my sister-in-law, who was traveling on the Southwest Chief. When arriving in Oklahoma City, the depot was nearly deserted and there was nobody available to tell us where to transfer to the bus. I finally found it and made my connection. As a member of the RPA, we are always advocating for "more trains for more people in more places." This project is definitely on our radar. Thank you for allowing me to comment. Gary Moline
Environmental Concerns, Access, Flexible and Responsive	Please extend the railroad, wichita is a huge city that needs to be connected for easy transport to topeka / kc
Environmental Concerns, Schedule, Economic Development	I support this project. Please consider this a phase 1 with future phases to include additional day time trips between OKC and KC.
Expanded Local Programs, Modernization & Expansion	I would value a train option so much. I wish there was somewhere near Caney, KS too that I could hop on, but I would gladly drive over to wherever the track station nearest to me is for ease of travel. If there was train service within an hour of my house, I would probably use it with my family 6-8 times per year. If there was service from Caney, KS, I would probably use it 15-20 times per year.
Funding options	The original Service Development Project was completed 13 years ago so it is way overdue to do something so we can prove to the people that something good can be completed by state and federal government. It is a much need service and federal passenger rail money is available now! Lets get this done.
Funding options, Schedule, Modernization & Expansion	Comment?? I just got started here.

Historical, Funding options, Schedule	The proposed capital costs for this service represent a non-starter; likely inflated to ensure the project does not happen. Consider the capital costs from the 2011 Service Development Plan for the proposed Oklahoma City - Newton Southwest Chief connection were \$132.5 million (Page 95) and the full Kansas City-Wichita-Oklahoma City-Fort Worth route at \$368.2 million (Page 97). Further, the omission of a daylight route between Kansas City and Fort Worth from the 2024 study also shows neglect to consider a more efficient service, especially considering the abysmal projected ridership for the overnight service. I recommend a legislative investigation of all parties involved in the production of this study. The result are frankly absurd. Evan Stair President Passenger Rail Oklahoma Passenger Rail Kansas
Modernization & Expansion	What are the plans/potential for converting or adding a bullet train along this route in the future?
Modernization & Expansion	Support extension of heartland flyer
Modernization & Expansion	I traveled from Wichita to Fort Worth yesterday. Can't wait for it to be 100% train instead of half bus/half train!
Other	Observation car would be great to attract more riders. When it was on the train for the 25th anniversary it was awesome to ride in.
Other, Schedule	I no longer live in Kansas but I was born and raised in Wichita. I travel up fairly often due to family and friends from Texas and I've seen the traffic worsen each time I drive up. In order to get ahead of massive congestion problems I would plead for y'all to implement a rail line that connects Kansas to Texas. I know that the heartland flyer already goes from fort Worth to OKC, and that would be a good start. There also needs to be more than one stop (each way) per day. In a perfect world a highspeed rail that runs a minimum of once per hour. But a good start is extending the heartland flyer, then make the service at least twice daily.
Other, Schedule, Modernization & Expansion	Thank you for pursuing this project! A connection to Tulsa would be wonderful. Overnight cars with cabins would also be ideal due to the length of this trip. Renting a cabin would also be great to bring pets.
Safety, Economic Development, Modernization & Expansion	I am a resident from Sedgwick County who lives just south of Wichita, in Derby. I was wondering how this will help the City of Wichita and its suburbs like Derby, as the City of Derby is also planning to renovate along K-15 by Nelson Dr across from the tracks that I would think would be part of this new Amtrak line. My second question is how would the line between Wichita & Ark City be updated for the new passenger rail traffic in addition to normal rail traffic?,
Schedule	Too many stops, for example Edmond, you don't even leave the OKC Metro before stopping...This needs to be an express route from KC to Dallas.
Schedule	Hoping that the service plan will be feasible.
Schedule	Absolutely NO. That subdivision is already a disaster when A3/4 roll through. Four railroads on single track will not work.
Schedule, Economic Development, Modernization & Expansion	Extending passenger rail from Oklahoma City to Newton, KS is long overdue.

Schedule, Expanded Local Programs, Modernization & Expansion	I love the train. I love talking the train. The train is great. This will increase the usefulness of the current infrastructure and should've been implemented like twenty years ago. I also wish the train ran more often, but that is not what this project is about.
Schedule, Modernization & Expansion	This is a fantastic opportunity for Kansas - however this service should be scheduled during daytime hours and should continue directly to Kansas City to give the maximum return on investment for Kansas. Surely if KDOT is willing to gather investment to reopen this service, it would be worth the extra investment to make a significantly better service for many more Kansans. It would likely bring several times more local riders by providing a faster and more accessible direct route between Wichita, Topeka, and Kansas City, directly linking the largest metropolitan areas in the state including the capitol. The current scheduling has the service running near the middle of the night throughout Kansas which will severely lower the number of people willing to ride. That is only made worse with the horrible 1 ½ hour to 2 hour layover in Newton with the Southwest Chief which severs the journey between the largest population centers in the state. This brutal layover is the worst aspect of the current proposal. In short, scheduling this service during better daytime hours and continuing it directly to Kansas City would be a much more beneficial deal for the state of Kansas. It would likely provide several times more local ridership and provide the maximum return on investment to Kansas. If it must be the current proposal, then the 1.5 hour to 2 hour layover in Newton needs to be shortened as it severs the journey between Wichita and Kansas City, and all stops between. There is no reason Kansas shouldn't have a modern and high quality rail transportation system across its largest population centers (which lie in a perfect line with much existing infrastructure) and unfortunately the proposed service is a compromise from that. This is a fantastic and rare opportunity to greatly improve mobility throughout Kansas, and it is deeply disappointing that it is on track to be far less than what Kansas deserves.
	Hello.i would ride the heartland. It would be better.to come to wichita. For some people ,that can't drive to newton.at 1am.and worry about their vehicles.
	This project needs to be not just highly considered, but accelerated and expanded to include daily service to/from Union Station in Kansas City. The intentional hamstringing of the route by having a middle of the night connection in newton to the Southwest Chief is a textbook example of planning failure. The cost of a single interchange in Olathe is going to cost the state and taxpayers over \$300Million. Pretending that the cost to expand rail access in some insurmountable obstacle when weâ€™re willing to spend that on a single interchange that provides no NEW infrastructure is laughable. Please evaluate and consider these factors objectively, and get this improvement in alternative transportation going!
	I highly support this project!

