

CHAPTER 7: PUBLIC AND INDUSTRY OUTREACH

The KYTC chose to pursue a targeted approach in the solicitation of public and industry opinions on identifying needs in the rail infrastructure and operations in Kentucky. While seeking input, however, the KYTC also needed to make clear the limitations faced in funding projects and encouraging changes in operations. In Kentucky, rail transportation is largely the responsibility of private rail companies, intermodal shippers, and others involved in the industry. The KYTC has no authority over the management or disposition of the private assets of those companies. Also, any funding that is made available is typically pass-through money from the federal government or is obligated from the Kentucky General Fund and competes against other statewide needs. As discussed in **Chapter 1**, the state highway fund is constitutionally mandated to be used only on highways. There is no dedicated funding source for rail projects.

A special effort was made to involve members of the railroad industry and the general public to obtain responses and comments on the draft 2015 Kentucky Statewide Rail Plan. Efforts included presenting information at the Kentuckians for Better Transportation (KBT) conference in January 2014, and soliciting feedback from attendees, holding two public meetings in February 2014, and meeting with a group of rail industry stakeholders in May 2014. Also included was a 45 day review and comment period in August and September 2014. These activities and the feedback received are summarized in this section and detailed in **Appendix C**.

7.1 KENTUCKIANS FOR BETTER TRANSPORTATION

The KBT 2014 Kentucky Transportation Conference was held January 9-10, 2014, in Lexington. The KBT is a statewide association advocating for improvements in all modes of transportation (highway, rail, waterway, air, and transit) and has 240 members including air, highway, and rail carriers, industry associations, chambers of commerce, city and county governments, contractors, suppliers, academia, engineering firms, and riverports. A summary of the Kentucky Statewide Rail Plan effort was presented at a breakout session at the conference.

Issues / Problems / Needs

Surveys seeking information on the role of the rail industry in Kentucky were distributed to the audience and 14 were returned. Of those who responded to the survey, one was a current or former railroad employee, two were shippers that use railroad services, and seven have current or former jobs related to rail. Most respondents saw value in the rail industry in Kentucky, wanted it to grow and be healthy, and wanted to expand opportunities for both freight and passenger rail.

Comments regarding opportunities for freight rail and passenger rail expansion focused on:

- Expanding auto industry and potentially more shipments via rail;

- Coal shipments, their potential decline;
- Rail shipments and expansion related to the Panama Canal;
- Potential for the return of Amtrak's Floridian; and,
- Potential for passenger rail from Lexington to Louisville and to Northern Kentucky.

Comments regarding rail system efficiency focused on:

- Double tracking;
- Welded heavy rail and elimination of at-grade crossings;
- Bypassing Lexington and Louisville;
- Provide a high speed railroad bed north of Louisville to tie into Midwest high speed rail north of Kentucky; and,
- Establish a higher speed rail crossing into Indiana from Louisville.

Comments regarding rail policy changes focused on:

- A rail construction and maintenance organization similar to Illinois Department of Transportation;
- Partnerships; and,
- State money to help subsidize Amtrak's *Floridian*.

Comments regarding capital improvement needs focused on:

- Tax breaks for rail construction and maintenance; and
- Investment in improved rail beds and welded rail.

Next Steps

Many of the comments were general, given the audience and long term nature of the draft plan. The comments primarily focused on the potential for a rail renaissance in Kentucky. Most comments are addressed in **Chapter 8**, particularly those dealing with preservation and economic development.

7.2 PUBLIC MEETINGS

Two public meetings were held to solicit feedback on the 2015 Kentucky Statewide Rail Plan, one in the eastern portion of the state in Ashland, Kentucky, and one in the western portion of the state in Fulton, Kentucky. In addition to their geographic location, these cities were selected due to the presence of passenger rail service via Amtrak. The meetings were held on February 25, 2014 (Ashland), and February 27, 2014 (Fulton).

7.2.1 Ashland Public Meeting

The meeting in Ashland was held at the Ashland Transportation Center, the location of the Amtrak station and public bus terminal, from 4 to 7 p.m. In addition to the consultant team and the KYTC central office and district staff, there were 14 attendees. One survey form was returned at the meeting.

Issues / Problems / Needs

Comments gathered from the meeting included the following:

- Encourage railroads to maintain and improve tracks and other infrastructure in an effort to make rail a more attractive option and attract more industry to Kentucky; and,
- Encourage Amtrak to offer more service on *The Cardinal*.

Next Steps

The survey comment suggested additional investments in infrastructure. Recommendations to address this comment are identified in **Chapter 8**.

7.2.2 Fulton Public Meeting

The meeting in Fulton was held at the Pontotoc Civic Center from 4 to 7 p.m. In addition to the consultant team and the KYTC central office staff, 17 people attended the meeting. Fulton is served by Amtrak's *City of New Orleans* train. One rail system comment was received.

Issues / Problems / Needs

The comment received from Fulton identified the following needs:

- A larger structure with more amenities, better roadway access, staffing, ticketing, and additional Amtrak service is desirable.

Next Steps

Like the meeting in Ashland, the Fulton comment had to do with infrastructure investments, namely the station in Fulton, which is located on leased land. Recommendations to address this comment are identified in **Chapter 8**.

Additional information about the responses from both meetings can be found in **Appendix C**.

7.2.3 Additional Feedback

In addition to the public meetings, comment forms were received from the Kentucky Indiana Rail & Transit Advocates, a Kentucky Council Member from the National Association of Railroad Passengers, and a rail enthusiast. The submitted comments can be found in **Appendix C**.

Issues / Problems / Needs

Below is a summary of comments and recommendations received from these groups:

- Encourage Amtrak to expand service throughout the state;
- Provide bus service to existing Amtrak stations in other states to allow for easier connections to national passenger rail networks;
- Explore feasibility of commuter rail service between Lexington and Louisville; and,
- Restore and preserve rail lines in Louisville for future commuter service.

Next Steps

Many of the comments advocate changes or expansions of the current passenger rail services provided in Kentucky. Recommendations included in **Chapter 8** address these comments, and in particular those related to economic development and transportation planning.

7.3 INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDER MEETING

A meeting with rail industry stakeholders was held at the KYTC central office in Frankfort, Kentucky, on May 14, 2014, at 9:30 a.m. Meeting attendees included representatives from various railroad groups and companies including Bluegrass Railroad Museum, CSXT, Norfolk Southern, Paducah and Louisville Railway, and the R.J. Corman Railroad Group. Additionally, a representative from BNSF joined via video conference. Citizens with rail trail interests, representatives of the KYTC, FHWA, KBT, and the consultant team were also present. Prior to the meeting, a copy of the draft plan and a survey were sent to all invitees. The survey was also made available online with a link provided in the meeting invitation.

Issues / Problems / Needs

Eight surveys were returned with suggestions to improve passenger rail transportation, transit, and freight transportation, including:

- Expand or increase support for rail investment;
- Develop and hold a freight rail forum;
- Develop and fund a rail rehabilitation and access program; and,
- Recommend and fund improvements in rail safety.

Meeting minutes for the stakeholder meeting and the project team meeting, as well as survey responses from attendees and other invitees not present at the meeting are included in **Appendix C**.

Next Steps

Many of the comments advocate changes in current rail services, infrastructure or funding. Others were specific to making the freight rail system competitive with the freight highway system. The recommendations in **Chapter 8** identify policy level suggestions to consider for further action.

7.4 KENTUCKY LONG-RANGE STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION PLAN – PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

As part of the public engagement process for the development of Kentucky’s 2014 Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plan (LRSTP), an on-line survey was used to gather feedback.

Issues / Problems / Needs

Twenty-two survey responses were returned to the KYTC that contained comments and suggestions about passenger rail transportation, transit, and freight transportation, including:

- Expand or restore these systems to their former status;
- Efficiency of freight rail versus trucks, efficiency of passenger rail versus motor vehicles, and a need for public rail investment commensurate with European countries; and,
- In urban areas, trains passing through block vehicles at crossings and limit the movement of adjacent vehicles, especially when they pass through downtown areas.

Next Steps

Many of the comments advocate changes regarding the status and investment in systems. **Chapter 8** includes recommendations and limitations facing the KYTC in addressing these comments.

More information about the responses can be found in **Appendix C**.